

THESIS

“I FEEL, THEREFORE I CAN BE FREE”:
BLACK WOMEN AND CHICANA QUEER NARRATIVES AS DIFFERENTIAL
CONSCIOUSNESS AND FOUNDATIONAL THEORY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a literary analysis of queer Black women and Chicanas within the fictional and semi-autobiographical texts of “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” (2003) by ZZ Packer, *What Night Brings* (2003) by Carla Trujillo, “Spice” (1997) by Mattie Richardson, “La Ofrenda” (1991) by Cherrie Moraga, “Mamita te extraño” (1991) by Karen T. Delgadillo, and *Corregidora* (1975) by Gayl Jones. This is an assessment of dislocation, of trauma within relationships both matrilineal and otherwise, and how status as outsiders affects and heightens senses which moves queer women of color in these narratives into deeper levels of consciousness and allows for them resistance and freedom that is independent from binaries and is differential and disidentified in composition. I build this work upon the varying ways in which violence and erasure occur towards Black and Chicana lesbians in literature. This includes physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence and also literary violence and invisibility. Through revealing the sources of pain and abjection within narratives I discuss how these queer women gain empowerment and freedom by maintaining differential and creative consciousness as they navigate the world. And finally, I offer the practice of reading and writing narratives through lived experience as a basis on which new queer women of color theories can be imagined.

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CHAPTER ONE:

“Sometimes You Have to Create Your Own”: An Introduction to Queer Black and Chicana Narratives

Introduction

This thesis is a literary analysis of queer Black women and Chicanas within the fictional and semi-autobiographical texts of “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” (2003) by ZZ Packer, *What Night Brings* (2003) by Carla Trujillo, “Spice” (1997) by Mattie Richardson, “La Ofrenda” (1991) by Cherríe Moraga, “Mamita te extraño” (1991) by Karen T. Delgadillo, and *Corregidora* (1975) by Gayl Jones. This is an assessment of dislocation, of trauma within relationships both matrilineal and otherwise, and how status as outsiders affects and heightens senses which moves queer women of color in these narratives into deeper levels of consciousness and allows for them resistance and freedom that is independent from binaries and is differential and disidentified in composition. I build this work upon the varying ways in which violence and erasure occur towards Black and Chicana lesbians in literature. This includes physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence and also literary violence and invisibility. Through revealing the sources of pain and abjection within narratives I discuss how these queer women gain empowerment and freedom by maintaining differential and creative consciousness as they navigate the world. And finally, I offer the practice of reading and writing narratives through lived experience as a basis on which new queer women of color theories can be imagined.

My Narrative

I am a black queer body sprung from another black queer body. The matrilineal relationships in my family have overwhelmingly been wrought with unrest. The relationships my great-grandmother has with my grandmother and mother are damaged, the love they have for one another is internalized and externally resembles respect but not necessarily tenderness. The relationship between my mother and me has been just as complex and often times barren. I feel as though I resemble the things within herself that she cannot unleash because of age, because of culture, because of respect, because of fear. Queerness has never been foreign to my life—and neither has blackness. As I grew up in a predominantly white town, my mother made sure that I knew I was different than other kids. But it was not to my detriment. She wanted me to be proud of who I was but she also wanted me to remember that my pride and difference would also be a source of unnecessary pain in my life. She surrounded me with people from a myriad of races and ethnicities, most were young students with families, like she was. We were an unspoken collective in the 1990s. One of my friends' parents would walk into a restaurant or store with us dragging behind, our ethnic rainbow of faces surprising the white public. We were not normal. We were not only non-white but our varied races and ethnicities represented the dislocated masses. We were the unheard because we were the unseen and unimaginable. And although we were only children with one mother leading our way, we were united, and how terrifying that must have been for white others to see.

And within this ethnic and racial smorgasbord queerness was also present in every corner and crevasse. The 1990s were somewhat of a lesbionic blur. The stereotypical haircuts, the softball and basketball games, the potlucks, the quick-paced relationships in and out of my mother's life, the music and television. I will always remember watching a season of *The Real*

World sitting on the floor between my mother's legs getting my hair braided. Pedro was an open gay Latino with AIDS on the show. I remember seeing him speak to people about who he was and my mom taping these episodes to share with her students. My home was a queer space, a *disidentified* space (Muñoz, 1999, p. 1-8) where I observed all of my mother's performances and rituals of queer identity. Through this I learned subversion and resistance to heteropatriarchal dominance through my mother's personal physical and social interpretations of who she wanted to be. I became comfortable in a home that was constantly producing counternarratives to everything I experienced when I walked out the door.

There was never a moment when I was not aware of what my life was, what my familial structure was, and what that meant in the world. Yet public secrecy and silence were also a part of my childhood. My mother's female relationships were ones I held close to my heart but would not allow anyone outside of my home to dig into. My grandmother and I would talk in circles. Mentions of my mother's "roommates" were frequent but always uncomfortable because I knew they were lies. My grandmother now acknowledges all of the relationships my mother has had, specifically one that lasted the longest in my life. One woman, who practically raised me as my mother could not and would not provide for me more than financial support, my grandmother is extremely thankful for. To this day my grandmother tells me, at the verge of tears occasionally I can tell, that this woman is responsible for my thriving not my mother.

But as quiet and distant as my relationship has been with my mother I believe I have boiled down the source of our disenchantment with each other. I am loud and she is not. And, I mean this in every way. She would remind me when I was young to use my indoor voice, walk into my bedroom at night and hush me as I read out loud to myself or held conversations with myself recounting the day. When I cut my hair off in my late teens and swore to her that I would

never wear ‘girl clothes’ again unless it was to church or family functions, she agreed, uninterested, that it was my choice. And when I made my relationships public knowledge, “be careful” were her only words. A privilege of her silence is my loudness, my directness, my courage. Whatever trauma and pain her body and mind endured to foster my survival was strategic yet stifling. She cannot label herself as anything other than her own person not out of hatred for labels but out of the inability to speak internally and aloud her sexual otherness. I have always been able to communicate the growing ideas, urges, identities, and desires that well up beneath my skin. And some of the pain or trauma I feel or have felt is a result of her unrecognized Black queerness that settles and dies as my own Black queerness thrives from the same seed. My pain is my grandmother’s suffering at the hands of an abusive man. The hold on my throat is the trauma of my great-grandmother cleaning the house of a rich white man for decades, the hours I spent watching her clean his filth.

And as much as I will never forget my great-grandmother’s house cleaning I only remember pieces of my grandmother working. She worked in social security in Chicago for some twenty or thirty years. Whenever I would visit my grandparents when I was a child she would go to work and drop me off at my great grandmother’s house on the West side for the day. This was a pattern my grandmother continued starting with my mother and my uncles and ending with me. I remember her a few years ago telling me that she wished she had gone to something more than a junior college. And that she had mixed feelings about dropping her children off at her mother’s house so that she could work all day. Working fragmented her from her family, but it was necessary to their economic survival. My mother did what my grandmother could not. She got out of Chicago. She went through high school and college as an athlete and scholar and

obtained her Master and Doctorate before I turned ten. My tenth birthday cake was a joined cake: a Happy Birthday side for me and a Congratulations Dr. Middleton side for my mother.

And that Doctorate title brought privilege as it did cake. We moved to the opposite side of town, into a newly constructed neighborhood, and into schools that were whiter and richer. Teachers monitored their behavior around me because they knew who my mother was. And if the oblivious teacher decided that she or he wanted to treat me poorly, underestimate my potential, or talk down to me, they would be guaranteed a call from my mother or a teacher's lounge scolding from other faculty gasping "don't you know who her *mother* is?" My mother's professional title afforded us security, not only monetary security, but social respect. When I sit and ask myself why I am drawn to academics this fact comes to mind. It is not that I believe holding a degree is necessarily an avenue to social respect but it is the fact that my mother, a Black woman, had and has immense amounts of respect in the overwhelmingly white community in which I grew up. However silent my mother is about sexuality and labels when it came to school and teaching her presence can shake walls.

My mother is *heard* in the academy and that reminds me of all of the women of color who were never heard. The women who spoke, who yelled, who died from being ignored, and who wrote but who were never heard outside of small social circles or even outside of their own minds. Being raised by a mother whose voice has weight and who actively engages and expands her voice through her students has transformed my voice from one of unmanaged loudness to groomed preciseness. I am in the academy because I enjoy learning, because I enjoy uncovering what has been buried and banished from academic tables and texts. But I also seek the space and voice academia provides for me. Because I want to someday have a daughter or son whose mother is *heard* in a space, and in a community, where she was not supposed to be heard.

Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis draws from women of color feminist theoretical frameworks, the majority of the frameworks directly emanate from Black and Chicana feminisms. I incorporate multiple theoretical concepts including: Kimberle Crenshaw's Intersectionality (1993); Audre Lorde's (2007) and M. Jacqui Alexander's (1997) uncovering and uses of erotic power; Gloria Anzaldúa's mestiza and borderland consciousness and 'La Facultad' sensitivity to discuss the healing powers of psychic control and stability (2007); Patricia Hill Collins' self-definition as resistance (1990; 2000); Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* for new strategies of oppositional consciousness and resistance (2000); bell hooks' commodification of otherness (1998); Carla Trujillo's analysis of Chicana lesbian betrayal (1991); Darlene Clarke Hines' politics of dissemblance (1989); Jacqueline Martinez's Chicana experience, identity, and phenomenological production (2000) as the foundation on which I base my work.

Authorial Note

Articulation of Position.

In *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* edited by Carla Trujillo (1991), Trujillo explains in the introduction, "this book is a shock wave. It not only validates our existence, it also speaks of often difficult subjects addressed in the context of our roles in society, our culture, relationships with other women, and of course, with ourselves (pp. x)." Similarly, *Does Your Mama Know? An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories* edited by Lisa C. Moore (1997) begins with Moore's declaration, "it is my hope that this book will get black people talking, and remembering that we are yet another layer of richness in the black community. I also hope that this book will be a starting point for black women who are just

coming out and need to know that we're out here. We *are* out here. I only wish you could have heard us sooner" (pp. iv). Both of these women grasp the heart of my argument, which is that creating visibility and validity requires those of us who can speak and write publically to do so and to build theory off of our lives that we articulate through narrative form.

To speak as both Black and/or Chicana and queer is not only to 'validate our existence' but is also to overturn the violence done by keeping hidden queer female bodies in all facets of life, including literature. Erasure prevents communities from knowing their history and from knowing that each other exist. Erasure is predicated on the idea that keeping communities docile, hopeless, and dead—socially, politically, physically, and mentally, will someday completely wipe out the unwanted. This thesis is my small contribution to the body and theory of Black and Chicana queer work. I have taken an semi-autoethnographic approach to this project meaning that I write and work through my own subject position and personal experiences while connecting them to larger cultural counternarratives, resistance struggles, and pains (McClaurin, 2001, p. 65-67). As much as I come back to the text and experiences of the characters and authors I analyze, I also come back to myself and then I move forward into theory and consciousness in a cyclical fashion that privileges all aspects of self, community (text), and theory, equally and holistically.

For example, I alleviate my trauma and pain around race and sexuality through reading and writing the words of queer black ancestors. I prevent suppression of feeling, of love, by ingesting other stories of pain. But this is not masochistic. By holding and remembering pain close to the heart I know where my power lies. Through the analysis of the selected texts, through the arduous and repeated bleeding of images both historical and intergenerational, I will discover moments of freedom and of survival. When Ursa Corregidora (*Corregidora*) learns to

have relationships that do not hurt, she breathes life back into herself. When Marci Cruz (*What Night Brings*) and her younger sister find the courage to protect their mother and insure that their father will not abuse any of them anymore, they reclaimed their safety.

These stories have individual breaking points; exact moments when the swirling cries of autonomy and pain finally meld together into conscious motion. And the characters are able to *feel* something. Audre Lorde writes in her essay “Uses of Anger: Women responding to Racism”:

Women of Color in america have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. And I say *symphony* rather than *cacophony* because we have had to learn to orchestrate those furies so that they do not tear us apart. We have had to learn to move through them and use them for strength and force and insight within our daily lives. Those of us who did not learn this difficult lesson did not survive...(p. 129).

Lorde makes clear this delicate balance between pain and healing, between survival and destruction. Our renewal from trauma is our realization that change is possible. It is the creative energy that if honed correctly can transform our relationships with one another and within ourselves. My goal here is to uncover pain and to pull free the antidotes of our annihilation.

Creating History and Reading Texts Through Queer ‘Consideration.’

Cheryl Dunye’s *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) ends with Dunye’s words “Sometimes you have to create your own history. The Watermelon Woman is fiction.” I refer to this quote each time I write my own history and read and reflect upon others. As lesbian/queer women of color with lost histories and occasionally unsure futures we create our present as we create and recover the past. We alter and rewrite cultural narratives, myths, and characters. We write into the past as deeply as we feel a disconnection to it and we are always in a position of building, living, and recovering voices. Dunye’s *Watermelon Woman* was fictional in that she created this film in the present, but the Watermelon Woman existed and exists in many other Black lesbian narratives. She was a composite of stories and people pulled together to create a symbol of what we are and could have been. Dunye filled in the gaps and gave her voice a platform on which to express a Black lesbian standpoint, to which I also incorporate my stories and my retellings.

I articulate this because the narratives I have chosen for this project are a part of our historical recovery. These texts do not have to be labeled as lesbian nor do they have to contain a ‘lesbian of color’ aesthetic. As readers we bring forth our own interpretation of texts and our identities create the lens of discovery if we chose to apply critical theoretical readings to the texts. I desire to read these texts from a lesbian of color standpoint. My knowledge of Black and Chicana feminist epistemologies encourages me to examine what has been tucked away, deemed unimportant, traitorous, and dangerous. This means reexamining texts for what possibilities *could* have been and theorizing a new world (i.e. the space of this project) in which these possibilities *do* exist.

The Words We Use.

Throughout this thesis a few critical terms emerge that I would define as second nature in women of color feminist discourses and within some of our lives. Here I briefly define their meanings for clarity, impact, and full understanding. I switch between using the words lesbian and queer purposefully within the following chapters. The narratives I have selected use the word lesbian to describe characters' and authors' identities. Therefore I honor their usage and maintain uniformity when discussing the texts. Also, when I refer to myself I use the word lesbian because I believe it is truest to my identity, my politics, and my matrilineal connections (Clarke, 1995 & 2006). However, I also use the term *queer* as expanded by my integration of Gopinath (2005) and Lorde (1982) in chapter three as having multiple meanings. I do not assume character or author sexuality if it is not explicitly stated; therefore, queer is a better term to describe their lives and actions as counternarratives to dominant discourse.

Black and Chicana feminist thought, 'knowing', and ways of knowing are defined by epistemological creativity and knowledge. When I use the term *epistemology* I imply and often ask how have communities acquired self-knowledge and what significance lived experiences as marginalized people has brought. The term *marginalization* refers to the status of oppressed people. bell hooks describes identities that are outside of the scope of white exploration and importance as marginalized identities because the lives, knowledge, history, and visibility are due to orientation in the margins of society instead of at the center of society where white individuals occupy space (hooks, 2000; pp. xvi-xvii). Furthermore, as part of the marginalization queer women of color face it has been important to develop self-consciousness or the ability to be self-aware and self-reflexive of multiple realities in order to create and resist psychic harm and oppression (Anzaldúa, 2007). It is also crucial that women of color be *self-*

defined or able to create meanings and definitions within the self while rejecting harmful definitions placed upon them to obtain control over their lives (Collins, 2000). This thesis works with narrative production, or counternarratives (narratives that resist stereotypical and oppressive narratives about our lives), as forms of freedom, psychic (the body, mind, spirit connection) control, and decolonization (the undoing of colonization which imprisons marginal bodies and minds as being subservient to white, patriarchal, heterosexist culture). To queer Black and Chicanas writing can be freedom-building. Writing as sexual and racial *Others* (or marginalized peoples) has multiple purposes. Writing is for the self, for communities, and for white culture to understand and visualize marginalized existence.

The Chosen Ones.

The fictional texts I have chosen for this project are the short-story “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” (2003) by ZZ Packer, the novel *What Night Brings* (2003) by Carla Trujillo, the novel *Corregidora* (1975) by Gayl Jones, and the short story “La Ofrenda” (1991) by Cherrie Moraga. I have also chosen the semi-autobiographical short-stories “Mamita te extraño” (1991) by Karen T. Delgadillo, and “Spice” (1997) by Mattie Richardson. Two main factors went into my choosing of these texts. First, I chose these texts because I found them all to have significant images, symbols, repeated passages or events, conflicts, and interesting familial structures that I needed to know more about. For example, *Corregidora* is so entrenched in memory and repetition I felt that it spoke to the way in which I remember my past and the pain associated with my past, my identities, and my family. Or I chose “Spice” because the last sentence of the narrative utterly disturbed me and reminded me of Black (queer) women’s continued exploitation and psychic violence. I knew that the 3-page narrative deserved the space to be opened up and

heard. Or I chose *What Night Brings*, “Mamita te extraño,” and “La Ofrenda” because pieces of each story resonated with relationships I had with previous romantic partners, or my mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. Secondly, I chose these texts because they spanned about a decade or so and I felt was representative of generational growth within Black and Chicana feminist traditions, literary writing, autobiographical prose, and social events. I start with *Corregidora* which does not claim queerness directly, possibly because of the time period it was written in. And then we end with “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” and *What Night Brings*, which both have a different approach to talking about queer issues.

My goal in this project is to extend the work already created by queer Black and Chicana feminist scholarly and literary writers; therefore, I wanted to quietly map progressions in my literature review in chapter two and my text discussions in chapter three and four. Ultimately, I felt that it did not matter when my texts were written, what mattered was the new twist and the new insight I brought to these narratives. I mix autobiographical and fictional works to blur the lines between what is ‘real’ and ‘true’ with what is ‘constructed’ and ‘imagined’ because they all have similar beginnings. Whether the authors write about themselves, write partially about themselves, or completely create from scratch, these are narratives that wish to occupy space where more queer women of color voices and stories are needed. And this writing is always deeply personal and connected to larger narratives of multiply marginalized people. I believe I must write my history, present, and for those who could not be heard. Both autobiography and fiction keep the process of writing anew, recovering and reimagining stories as a process that breathes between genres, time periods, and closeness (autobiography) and distance (literary fiction).

Chapter Summary

Uses of *Us* and *We*, Community, and Future Survival.

Throughout this thesis I provoke a conversation with a community. In general, this thesis is written for everyone, but the “we” I reference is specifically queer women of color. I speak to those who overlap identities because we need it the most. We have been written for and about the least. Our histories have been deemed too dangerous to be imagined and at times too complex to even be thought about critically. Those of us in academics need to be both critical and insightful writers as well as readers; therefore, I write this thesis as a small example of the places we can take our perspectives, the thoughts we can inspire, and the beauty we can bring to any conversation. This thesis *is* a conversation with other projects, other texts and other authors. As cathartic as writing is for me as an individual I feel that I write in order to be seen and in order to add to the already beautiful knowledge base that queer women of color produce. This work is my offering to us; therefore, I will always, out of respect and love, speak directly *to* us.

This thesis is broken down into three main chapters. The first chapter is a historical review of both Black and Chicana feminist epistemologies that are specifically concerned with the use of written narratives as a form of survival and strength. These feminist epistemologies are also concerned with sexual ‘otherness’ as a political stance and counter to dominant oppressive societal structures. In chapter three, I analyze relationship trauma(s), public and private, with men and women, family and non, for moments of tension, dislocation, and liberation with a focus on the creation of new power dynamics. In chapter four, I turn towards internal spiritual consciousness with a focus on the knowledge gained from living and speaking through the senses. Liberatory and revolutionary thinking begins when we exit the known and move between imprisoning binary spaces that dictate to us what we are and what we can do in

our lives. Therefore, we must examine the in-between spaces, think critically and anew, and rely on our physical, emotional, and spiritual sensitivities with passion. And in chapter five, I conclude with narrative recovery and lived experience as the basis on which women of color queer theories can be created.

To be clear, this thesis is more than identity politics and essentialistic work. While I recognize and live a life that exists because of my intersecting and marginalized identities I do not believe that there is anything inherently biological about my experiences as a queer woman of color. I do think that I have realities or truths that have been replayed due to institutional and sociopolitical dominance that makes my experiences similar to other people sharing the same identities. Therefore, our modes of individual mental and physical freedoms are often similar. However, widespread freedom of all marginalized people will, for one, require cooperation based on ideas of resistance that we all share. And two, will require a mental shift in each of us that bases individual identity definitions on something more than oppression and reactions to oppression. This will require new language and new ways of critically reading and writing about our lives. If we cannot do this and if we remain silent we risk being swept aside in public discourse, dislocated from others in our communities and mentally, economically, and physically alienated and oppressed. And if we continue to keep hidden and keep quiet the lives of queer racialized people within our communal and literary narratives we have erased some of the depth, beauty, and possibility for freedom that we share as communities. Therefore this thesis is about recovery and speech as forms of survival and community outreach.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Women Who Birthed Us: A Literature Review of Queer Black Women and Chicana Feminist Thought and Life

Black and Chicana Lesbians and Feminist Epistemologies

Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) writes:

A community of Black women writers has emerged since 1970, one in which African-American women engage in dialogue among one another in order to explore formerly taboo subjects. Black feminist literary criticism has documented the intellectual and personal space created for African-American women in this emerging body of ideas (Washington 1980, 1982; Tate 1983; Evans '84; Christian 1985; O'Neale 1986). (p. 120)

Clearly one of these taboo subjects was and is queer sexuality. Barbara Smith's "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" (1977) calls for Black feminist critics to focus on integrating intersectional analyses into their work. Within her article she expands on the need and existing presence of black lesbian characters and writers. She analyzes Toni Morrison's book *Sula* for its possible 'lesbian content.' She writes, "Despite the apparent heterosexuality of the female characters, I discovered in re-reading *Sula* that it works as a lesbian novel not only because of the passionate friendship between Sula and Nel, but because of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward the heterosexual institutions of male/female relationships, marriage and the family" (p. 417-418). Smith redefines 'lesbian' as a term that encompasses

more than the personal, physical and emotional relationships between women into larger, political identities that work to constantly cast off the oppressive system of heterosexist power.

Heterosexist power and domination has connections to other forms of domination and exploitation, such as economic exploitation, racism, and sexism. Sonia Saldivar-Hull (2000) claims that “Chicana “feminism on the border” demands that we deal with all these important issues in all their nuances. Life as feminists on the border means recognizing the urgency of dealing with the sexism and homophobia within our culture; our political reality demands that we confront institutionalized racism while we simultaneously struggle against economic exploitation” (p. 34). Black and Chicana feminist epistemologies both claim that the intersections between identities cannot be ignored nor can these identities be liberated without recognition of intersecting realities.

Carla Trujillo, in the introduction to *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991), writes that “our own existence imposes a reclamation of what we’re told is bad, wrong, or taboo, namely our *own* sexuality” (pp. x). Chicana voices have overwhelmingly been silenced in literature and likewise, writing that showcases Chicana women’s sexuality, heterosexual or non, has also been absent. Trujillo promises that the book “expresses the vitality of our existence, our strength, and the perseverance of our struggles. It examines issues that are “difficult to talk about,” yet need to be discussed so that we may delve further into the process of our own self-definition and discovery” (pp. xii). Coming into identity is never easy, it is never neat, nor is it overwhelmingly pleasant. True to her word, *Chicana Lesbians* is a seminal literary work because of its ‘realness’. Queer women of color have not had enough time, literarily, to explore ‘difficult to talk about’ subjects, nor show pain and healing in any true manner. This is a result of invisibility and annihilation. Therefore, what is written now, in some respects, still has

to be painful, has to be raw, and does not necessarily have to have pain-free conclusions as many queer women of color have not reached nor written there yet.

In a similar vein, Cheryl Clark in “Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance” (1995) transforms the definition of lesbianism into a political identity of resistance. According to Clarke, Black women, regardless of their ‘true’ sexuality, can reject heterocentric and patriarchic domination and instead value the relationships of women to each other. Clarke declares, “lesbianism is a recognition, an awakening, a reawakening of our passion for each (woman) other (woman) and for same (woman). This passion will ultimately reverse the heterosexual imperialism of male culture” (p. 242). Later Clarke adds her personal source of lesbianism: “for me personally, the conditioning to be self-sufficient and the predominance of female role models in my life are the roots of my lesbianism” (p. 247). Although this personal reasoning does not claim to be an all-encompassing definition of lesbianism, it does offer an expansion on the simple definition.

Lesbianism becomes about self-sufficiency and finding power and solace through female relationships. Once these self-sufficient, self-consciousness building female relationships are formed the relationships incite tangential worldviews and new spaces where theory (work) can develop. And based upon marginality, in these spaces, wholeness and holistic bodily and psychic healing are possible for queer women of color. Saldívar-Hull (2000), on Cherrie Moraga, states, “This desire for wholeness leads Moraga to theorize lesbian politics and center on sexuality as a legitimate site of theory. As a Chicana lesbian, asserting a sexuality that rejects the Chicano traditions of compulsory heterosexuality, Moraga risks being “outcast” from her “culture”” (p. 50). Therefore, as queer women of color work to develop new theories as we live, we also risk being pushed further from the center, from our ‘cultures’, and from ‘stability.’ Our desire to build anew and away from ‘normality’ or dominance is rebellious but ever necessary.

Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) asserts, “For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality” (p. 41). Like Clarke, Anzaldúa recognizes the immediate counterstance to male-dependency and oppression that lesbianism enacts. The Chicana lesbian is rebellious; she is political by simply existing. And she validates her own existence by discovering her sexuality and loving women the same as she loves herself. Trujillo writes, “Loving another woman not only validates one’s own sexuality, but also that of the other woman, by the very act of loving” (pp. 187). Thus lesbianism is a communal identity in that one’s own ability to love another woman is based upon one’s own ability to love herself. In both Black and Chicana communities women’s sexuality is regulated by and based upon men’s desire, which in turn can lead to invisible, internalized female sexuality that lacks power and of course, visibility. Ana Castillo (1991) writes, “Sexuality, in whatever form, has been regulated and shaped by men to serve men’s needs. It is only validated with regard to woman’s reproductive abilities and the development of surplus oriented systems. To this day, our sexuality has not been “liberated” from these constraints. That is, our bodies do not belong to us” (p. 30). Lesbianism incites a taking back of the body. Black and Chicana lesbians are marginalized and erased from both literature and sociopolitical spheres. Taking back our bodies is more than an ownership struggle, it is also clearly a struggle to be humanized and seen. Not only are our bodies not ours but our bodies continue to be nameless, faceless, powerless entities. We must both humanize and own our bodies through speaking, writing, and living.

Black and Chicana feminisms and Black and Chicana lesbianism join at the point of political and social visibility. Thus Black and Chicana feminist writing becomes crucial for the creation of space. The Combahee River Collective puts forth their philosophy regarding Black

Feminist Thought in *A Black Feminist Statement* (1995). They write that their inception began as a study group for the support and sharing of Black female voices, struggles, and joys:

At the beginning of 1976, when some of the women who had not wanted to do political work and who also had voiced disagreements stopped attending of their own accord, we again looked for a focus. We decided at that time, with the addition of new members, to become a study group. We had always shared our reading with each other, and some of us had written papers on black feminism for group discussion a few months before this decision was made...We feel that it is absolutely essential to demonstrate the reality of our politics to other black women and believe that we can do this through writing and distributing our work. (p. 238)

In my opinion, the creation of Black and Chicana feminist epistemologies by Black and Chicana queer women has to include both the politics of Black female and Chicana life as well as a creative compilation of life stories that inform and inspire the sharing of all Black and Chicana stories so that we will not face further erasure.

Black and Chicana Lesbian Writers and Silence

Audre Lorde's famous poem *A Litany for Survival* (1978) states that "when we speak we are afraid/ our words will not be heard/ nor welcomed/ but when we are silent/ we are still afraid" (p. 31). It is important to examine the silence of black sexuality within black communities and the extreme silence of black queer sexuality. Mattie Richardson (2003) argues that "Black women in the United States found themselves caught in a frame-work in which their

very physicality equated them with hyper-femininity, mutant masculinity, and deviant sexuality” (p. 64) thus creating a protective silence to outsiders for self-preservation. Evelyn Hammonds (1997) writes, “Black feminist theorists have almost universally described black women’s sexuality, when viewed from the vantage of the dominant discourses, as an absence,” an absence created by both internal and external forces (p. 171). Black women have been silent, publically, about sexuality for self-protection as white dominant discourses/culture have failed to give accurate representations of Black female sexuality that are non-exploitative, hypersexual, and heterocentric (Hine, 1989, p. 916). In regards to lesbianism Hammonds states, “certain expressions of Black female sexuality [such as lesbianism] have been rendered as dangerous for individuals and for the collectivity,” thus casting down and casting out those self-identified individuals (p. 181).

Just as dangerous as Black female sexuality is, so is Chicana lesbian and queer sexuality. Chicana lesbians have been described as “counter-revolutionary” (Trujillo, 1991, p. 189) to Chicano/La Raza, religious, and familial (motherhood) goals for uplift. Trujillo explains that for Chicanas “as a lesbian she does many things simultaneously: she rejects “compulsory heterosexuality”; she refuses to partake in the “game” of competition for men; she confronts her own sexuality; and she challenges the norms placed upon her by culture and society, whose desire is to subvert her into proper roles and places” (p. 189) and as Chicana lesbians move further away from heterocentric and patriarchal control they move closer to literary invisibility and violence. Ana Castillo (1991) speaks to the exclusion Chicana women face by writing about sexuality, “At that time [the 1970s], for a woman to speak about sexuality was to betray the collective cause, which was about economics and racism and so forth, and which was defined by men. If you talked about sex as a woman we knew that was to trivialize yourself, to make

yourself out to be a wanton woman” (p. 116). Silence and shame around sex and the body has prevented (or at least cautiously informed the ways in which) Chicana writers write about sexuality. Both Black and Chicana writers have had to battle arguments over lack of racial/ethnic solidarity if they chose instead to write about gender or sexuality ‘issues’ (God forbid, homosexual ‘issues’). Intersectionality and the inability to truly voice intersectional identities is a type of violence and repression that excludes the production of honest literature based on complex and meaningful life experiences. If writing is invisible or sterilized or generalized or single-identity-based then consumption of that literature is minimal and does not feed the populations that need it the most: queer women of color.

Yolanda Chavez Leyva (1998) in “Listening to the Silences in Latina/Chicana Lesbian History” asserts, “for lesbianas Latinas, silence has been an enigma, a survival strategy, a wall which confines us, the space that protects us” (p. 429). Silence offers power and the agency to decide what parts of ourselves are seen and which are not, which prevents exploitation of our communities. But silence also prevents us from discussing the hardest parts of our lives such as sexuality, or abuse, or racial/cultural rejection. Consequently, silence also prevents queer women of color from connecting to other queer women who need to hear our voices. Therefore, those of us who *can* speak arguably occupy a space of privilege that is economically and often (academically) stable therefore reducing the risk of violent recourse and exclusion for our sexuality because we are outside of our racial and ethnic communities and instead are in academics or middle and upper class communities.

For example, the academic position from which some of us have the possibility to speak makes everything we produce extremely important because we are the select few voices in academia (and in publishing, for example) that will be heard by mass amounts of people. We

have the ability to be incomparably honest and inspiring if we let outsiders into our lives and our narratives; or we also have the option of continued shielding of identity by selectively revealing what we feel can and should be shared. Black and Chicana lesbian writers are redefining, and expanding, 'Blackness' and 'Chicananess' and their relationship with sexuality through our personal narratives and fictional narratives of our creation. Leyva writes, "...naming ourselves, occupying our spaces fully, creating our own language, is essential to our continued survival, particularly in these times of increasingly violence against us as Latinas and lesbianas" (p. 432). Therefore, occupying space in this world, which was not built for us, requires us to break silence. We must name ourselves through speech, through art, through writing, through every public and private avenue to make abundantly clear that this space (any space we desire) is our space. Reina Lewis in *The Death of the Author and the Resurrection of the Dyke* (1992) writes that lesbian criticism is a project of re-discovery (p. 17) therefore this too is a project of rediscovery, of situating contemporary Black and Chicana lesbian literature in a position of not only visibility but in a position to be critically listened to.

Jewelle Gomez (1983) speculates, "the inadequate representation of black Lesbians among literary characters (and in the writing sorority itself) is a reflection of their social and cultural invisibility and their subsequent failure to be identified as a profitable market" (p. 115). Gomez (2005) also states that the invisibility of Black lesbian literature is an "epidemic" and therefore we must express ourselves truthfully and outwardly even as we are considered the least valuable members of society (p. 290). While Gomez's contention is accurate, it could also be argued that some of the inadequate representations of lesbian characters and writers are also due to lack of acceptance and outward proclamation of sexual identity. Cherrie Moraga explains in "La Güera" (1979) that her silence and lack of acceptance of her lesbianism came from her

mother instilling whiteness into her. As a light-skinned Chicana, Moraga's mother pressed Moraga to pass as white and unspoken heterosexual so that life would be easier. Moraga writes, "I had known for years that I was a lesbian, had felt it in my bones, had ached with the knowledge, gone crazed with the knowledge, wallowed in the silence of it" (p. 26). When Moraga was able to distance herself from her mother and to decide for herself who she was, Moraga was then able to outwardly accept and proclaim the (sometimes grim, such as lack of economic security and physical safety) lesbian realities of her life.

Moraga's personal silence around identity has a literary tradition discussed in Black feminist work explicitly. *Dissemblance* (Hine, 1989) for example, or hiding parts of the self for preservation from scrutinizing outside communities, prevents Black lesbian characters for example from emerging in narrative writing. The fear of community exclusion clearly keeps writing about Black lesbianism at a minimum. And in general, battling against compulsory heterosexuality is difficult (Richardson, 2003; Rich, 2003). Those of us who cannot accept queer sexuality are battling colonization on many fronts: colonization of gender and gender roles and reliance on male power, colonization of heterosexuality and the social and economic security of heterosexual lifestyles, and heterosexual privilege, which may be for some of us the only privilege we have as women of color (Clarke, 1995).

Fortunately, texts such as *Does Your Mama Know?* (1997) break silence and resist compulsory heterosexuality by proclaiming queer sexual identity. This is a critical step towards visibility and away from fear. However, we should keep in mind the voices present that are within the anthology as well as those that are not. These women were in a privileged position when they were included. *Does Your Mama Know?* contains voices from Black female academics and women with connections to a specific queer Black women network. These

writers took risks in submitting their writing for publication. Their jobs, families, social lives may have all been affected negatively for their speaking out, yet they still chose to speak. They resisted the idea that Black lesbians do not exist and they prevented the present and future from being as barren as the past when it came to public Black lesbian literature.

Chicana writers resist this same exclusion from literature. Rita Sánchez in “Chicana Writer Breaking Out of the Silence” (1977) writes that “The Chicana writer, by the fact that she is even writing in today’s society, is making a revolutionary act...In the act of writing, the Chicana is saying “No,” and by doing so she becomes the revolutionary, a source of change, and a real force for humanization” (p. 66). The Chicana writer is a revolutionary. As she humanizes her life experiences she validates the importance of the personal being the political and not only ensures her own survival and the survival of others like her; but she also creates a pathway for other queer narratives to pass through. And when I use the word queer in this sense I do not mean only queer sexuality. I am referring to all narratives that break out of patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterocentric, capitalistic, and linear modes of storytelling and experience.

Audre Lorde (2007) claims that for Black women literary production is not a luxury. It is in fact “a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought” (p. 37). Poetry is not a luxury for women of color in the way that it may be for white women. Women of color have neither economic security nor leisure time to write poetry about topics that are not directly related to life experiences; we have never had this luxury. Writing is not a sign of our privilege; it is proof of our existence. Writing is an exercise that when repeated strengthens the fight for survival. Rita Sánchez (1977) writes that “breaking the

silence, subjective as it may appear, becomes a monumental and collective act because it signifies overcoming, freeing oneself from the confines and conditions of history” (p. 67). Thus, writing is a process of reinscribing meaning to existence. It both undoes and rewrites violent and exclusionary history. We write so that we can remember and be remembered and we write as a resistant action to being unremembered. Lorde writes, “the white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free” (p. 38). As long as we have a connection to writing and to poetry freedom is possible. Each word we breathe onto paper has the potential to unhinge our bodies from colonization and replaces that spot with love of our own creation. Our writing is not a luxury; it is sheer necessity.

Suzan-Lori Parks, a Black female playwright, wrote a play entitled, “The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World,” (1995) which recorded the continuous cycle of abuse and extermination of black culture through the repeated and creative killing of ‘the last black man in the whole entire world.’ The play consists mostly of repeated lines and phrases by a handful of characters, one of which—Yes And Greens Black-Eyed Peas Cornbread—repeats the phrases “you should write that down and you should hide it under a rock” and “you should write it down because if you dont write it down then they will come along and tell the future that we did not exist” (p. 102-104). This is in reference to Black collective history which needs to be protected and written down so that there is a written trace of Black culture when the ‘last death’ occurs. This captures the importance of writing Black lesbian and queer literature as well. As the threat of a violent erasure of race, gender, class, and sexuality rage on, we, as holders of these identities, must hide our work ‘under a rock.’ But not under a rock as in an invisible inscription of our existence, but under a rock that is protective yet moveable, visible and inviting.

Academics and Economics

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) maps out the role of Black feminist theory as a body of work that fosters self-determination, self-definition, group cohesion and collation building (p. 39-41). Mainly, Black feminist theory is about liberatory speech and action that relieves and dismantles societal structures that dehumanize and silence Black women. bell hooks similarly states that education then has to be ‘the practice of freedom’ for Black people making “the world more rather than less real, one that enables us to live life fully and freely” (hooks, 1989, p. 64-65, 72). In turn, one of the jobs of Black and Chicana feminist scholars in academia is to bridge the gap between what is written and what is lived while also promoting self-efficacy. Sonia Saldívar-Hull (2000) expresses the same desires for Chicana academics and adds that a Chicana’s role in academics is to look “into the gaps, lapses, and absences in the masculinist discourses that have written women out of their historical agency. Contemporary Chicana feminist writers are playing an important role in contributing to this historical project” (Saldívar-Hull 53). Historical projects of recovery mean that our writing is and has to be political. Cheryl Clarke (2006) writes, “I consider essay writing a political responsibility, not a labor of love, rather a labor of labor” (p. 138). Historical recovery and visibility assurance require diligence. Queer women of color communities do not have the ‘luxury,’ as Lorde (2007) would put it, to write simply for the sake of writing. I write to prove that my identities matter and more importantly, *exist* even though dominant ideologies and histories have attempted to exclude and politically, socially, and on paper wipe out my voice and voices from the past.

Furthermore, Black and Chicana feminist thought has always been concerned with the combination of ‘traditional’ academic writing and knowledge and the knowledge of lived experiences as Chicanas, as Black women, and in many cases as queer subjects. For example,

Patricia Hill Collins describes the cyclical and communicative relationships between Black female intellectuals and Black female community members:

This special relationship of Black women intellectuals to the community of African-American women parallels the existence of two interrelated levels of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The commonplace, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African-American women growing from our everyday thoughts and actions constitutes a first and most fundamental level of knowledge. The ideas that Black women share with one another on an informal, daily basis about topics such as how to style our hair, characteristics of “good” Black men, strategies for dealing with White folks, and skills of how to “get over” provide the foundations for this taken-for-granted knowledge. (p. 38)

Collins’ unfolding of community knowledge and sharing is key to many Black women’s sense of identity and is the basis for many epistemological and theoretical thoughts and yearnings. Naturally, daily live stories become part of the knowledge and sharing aspect of community that also then is folded into academic work. But the space it takes for women of color to freely and honestly write about experiences knowledge, and theory requires safety. Patricia Hill Collins explains that safe spaces are spaces in which “Black women [can] freely examine issues that concerned us” (p. 121), and the current depoliticization of these spaces in realms of academics and art. She writes, “Contemporary African-American musicians, writers, cultural critics, and intellectuals function in a dramatically different political economy than that of any prior generation. It remains to be seen whether the specialized thought generated by contemporary Black feminist thinkers in very different institutional locations is capable of

creating safe spaces that will carry African-American women even further” (p. 122). It is fair to say that the institutional safe spaces in which women produce work are much more visible than ‘everyday’ Black women’s communal safe spaces.

Anthologies are one example of mobile safe space production as they combine academic voices from various fields speaking together about specific issues. The editors of *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (2003) claim that the anthological space is meant to “constitute a project by “native” scholars engaged in theories, methods, and practices with broad political implications, where the representation of Chicanas and analyses of their conditions constitute sites of struggle” (p. 6). The academic space and freedom allowed through anthological text-building is privileged space; however, it ensures that our lived experiences are validated through publishing and allows for other academics or aspiring academics and non-academic writers to engage with our texts and continue furthering our ideas, theories, poetry, and methods of consciousness.

However, to even discuss women of color in academics I have assumed level of privilege, and more specifically, economic mobility that allows for the nurturance of voice and access to and dissemination of liberatory feminist work. Cherrie Moraga refers to lesbianism as a poverty (Moraga, 1979, p. 26) meaning that the social and structural inequalities one faces for being a sexual outcast results in real economic poverty. And by adding racially marginalized identities and female identities to an already marginalized body only creates more economic hardship for those of us who are queer, female, and of a racialized minority. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Black Justice Coalition reported in 2005 after reviewing the 2000 Census Data that “Black female same-sex couples report a median income of \$10,000 less than Black married opposite-sex couples” and “Black female same-sex

couples report a median income of \$21,000 less than White female same-sex couples” (Dang and Frazer, 2004, p. 6-7). Also, Black lesbians have a 21.1% poverty rate compared to White lesbian poverty rates of 4.3% (Moodie-Mills, 2012, p. 18). The Center for American Progress reports that Hispanic lesbian couples earn a combined income of around \$41,000 a year as opposed to heterosexual Hispanic couples which earn around \$44,000 a year (Dunn & Burns, 2012, americanprogress.org). The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law reports, “while just under 6% (5.7%) of non-Hispanic lesbians are poor, that rate is more than tripled (19.1%) for Hispanic lesbians in couples” (Albelda et al., 2009, p. 8).

Monetary income levels for single Black and Chicana queer women are lower and vary depending on the state of residence. However, it is clear that lesbianism is indeed a poverty and social violence and once women of color decide to cohabit with another woman of color income and associated access to healthcare, schooling, food, and safety is severely affected. So lesbianism is not just only a literal poverty, it is an economic and structural punishment for sexuality that we face if we choose to live our lives openly. Furthermore, queer women of color in the academy who obtain professional degrees and choose or are invited to publish our works must again weight the impact of being open about our lives with the very real consequences of deeper poverty, racism, heterosexism, and possible job discrimination (Bennett-Alexander, 1997, p. 15-22).

Themes of Black and Chicana Sexuality

Evelyn Hammonds (1994) focuses on three main themes of Black female sexuality as seen throughout history; I am specifically using the themes here in reference to the (publically silent) history of Black and Chicana literature. Although every aspect of Black female sexuality

cannot completely be deemed the “same” as Chicana sexuality, I argue that these themes are malleable categories that relate to all marginalized women’s sexuality in that they are concerned with invisibility and silence, exploitation, and resistance. The themes include: 1) the construction of the Black female as the embodiment of sex and the attendant invisibility of Black women as the unvoiced, unseen everything that is not white; 2) resistance both to negative stereotypes of their sexuality and to the material effects of those stereotypes on their lives; and 3) the evolution of a “culture of dissemblance” and a “politics of silence” by Black women on the issue of their sexuality (p. 142).

This first theme, hypersexuality, spreads across to both Black women and Chicanas alike. Black women have historically been seen as hypersexual deviants. Angela Davis (1995) writes that during slavery “the white master could endeavor to reestablish her femaleness by reducing her to the level of her *biological* being. Aspiring with his sexual assaults to establish her as a female *animal*, he would be striving to destroy her priorities towards resistance” (p. 212). Black women’s sexuality and therefore their being was reduced to biological reproduction. We were breeders without a concept of true personal sexuality. Sadly, not only has this association remained in the minds of non-Black women, we have also internalized hypersexual stereotypes to the point that some of us cannot express any type of healthy sexuality.

In “Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power” (1984) Audre Lorde writes “we have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society” (p. 53). Abuse has made Black women afraid to understand and use the power of the erotic, the power of knowing and expressing our sexuality in empowering ways. And if we further this argument to include black lesbian sexuality then not only are we talking about a repression of female sexuality but also of the stigma and perceived deviancy of homosexuality. Lorde continues “As

a Black lesbian feminist, I have a particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought...But this erotic charge is not easily shared by women who continue to operate under an exclusively european-american male tradition...Only now, I find more and more women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic's electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange" (p. 59). The idea of discovering one's own sexual charge and sharing it with another woman takes deep introspection and acceptance of a self that is not supposed to feel or desire. Carla Trujillo in "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community" (1991) asserts that, "not loving our bodies [as Chicanas] affects how we perceive ourselves as sexual beings. As lesbians, however, we have no choice but to confront our sexuality before we can confront our lesbianism" (p.187). Women must be able to understand their erotic power as a woman with sexual autonomy and then be able to understand our power (and identity) as it relates to loving other women.

Chicana lesbians' struggle is deeply entrenched in the same exploitative and repressive roots as black women's; however, many Chicanas engage with Catholicism and images and myths of sexual purity also. Patricia Zavella (2003) writes, "feminists have long critiqued the Mexican cultural framework regarding sexuality that poses oppositions of proper and shameful sexual practices for women, known as the virgin-whore continuum" (p. 228). To be holy and heterosexual meant to be silent about sexuality, to not desire sex or know about one's own body, and to be obedient to patriarchal control (Trujillo, 1991, p. 190-191). Betrayal of culture, race, religion, and patriarchal control is a major theme when discussing Chicana sexuality on a whole and lesbianism is considered an ultimate betrayal to the race and to the Church. Marta Navarro, in an interview with Ana Castillo (1991) quotes Castillo as saying, "In a homophobic world,

“coming out,” or establishing a relationship that is seen by and large by a religion and then by law as perverted, is taking away everything, it’s suicidal” (p. 122). Natashia López elaborates on the destruction/death of being a Chicana lesbian in her poem “Trying to be Dyke and Chicana” (1991) when she writes “call me Dyke/ race destroyer” (p. 84). Real and theoretical/metaphorical violence occurs when a Chicana decides to identify as lesbian. Her purity is shattered and being that her sexual connection to men is broken she is counterproductive to advancing the community that puts males at the center. Also at the center is family. And when a Chicana is a lesbian the idea of family crumbles. Trujillo (1991) notes “the point of view that we are not complete human beings unless we are attached to a male is further promoted by the attitude that we are incomplete as women unless we become mothers” (p.189) and “...for many Chicanas, motherhood is still seen by our culture as the final act in establishing our “womanhood” (p. 189); therefore, lesbianism (which is never associated with motherhood) can be seen as a permanent suspension of womanhood and clearly a deviation from any sort of ‘traditional’ familial structure.

The second theme of Black and Chicana sexuality is practiced resistance to stereotypes about our sexuality. *Dissemblance*, coined by Darlene Clark Hine (1989), is the act of “black women [protecting] themselves by creating the “appearance of openness and disclosure but actually [shield] the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors,” includes the shielding of all sexual identity to remain in the realm of heterosexual respectability (Richardson, 2003, p. 65; Hine, 1989, p. 915). Richardson continues by stating that “dissemblance is an effective way to understand how Black women obscure the details of their sexual lives from the historical record and how historians elide and omit Black women’s sexuality as a strategy for history” (Richardson, 2003, p. 65). While dominant historical narratives erase specific

marginalized identities in order to keep communities oppressed and invisible, our own dissemblance strategies of erasure have positive psychic possibilities. Hine writes, “Only with secrecy [practicing dissemblance], thus achieving a self-imposed invisibility, could ordinary Black women accrue the psychic space and harness the resources needed to hold their own...” (p. 915). Psychic stability is not promised or easily obtained by women of color in a world that excludes our economic, physical, sexual, and racial movement. Therefore, dissemblance and other silencing strategies that bring about psychic calm and the possibility for greater psychic consciousness must be discussed with care, respect, and alongside of other empowering and resistance strategies.

This coincides in part with the assertion in this thesis that silence placed externally upon ‘us’ should not be the sweeping generalization for the absence of our visible literature. Richardson’s expansion on the uses of dissemblance creates an active role for Black female writers in silencing themselves. Therefore we must ask historically and contemporarily how much of our silence is self-induced. Hammonds (1994) points out that “silence itself suggests that black women do have some degree of agency” (p. 148) so as we have the ability to cover up that which we do not want exposed, we also have the ability to re-expose that which has never received critical attention: Black lesbian literature. A question to ask is: is our ability to find a listening audience compromised by our precautions around who is *allowed* to listen. Whom we grant permission to is not to be taken lightly. As queer women of color without any privileges audience selection is adamantly held onto. I would argue that the main purpose of literature is to be community serving and empowering; thus our audiences should be those of us who need it the most. However, the academic tradition stifles some of the literary transference as the rules for

academics, including Black queer academics, may instill domination and silences as it simultaneously produces personal and community based literature.

Violence

This thesis is built upon the varying ways in which violence occurs towards Black and Chicana lesbians in literature. This includes physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence but also literary violence. The act of erasing or leaving out a group's past from literary work is an act of violence in that it gives the impression that they never existed and will never exist because there is no recordable, tangible evidence. Rita Sánchez (1997) writes that when Chicana women write the "act of self expression shared in writing with others like herself she is saying what she feels and who she is; every time she puts down on paper her words; and every time those words are read by another Chicana, she has defined further who we Chicanas truly are" (p. 66). Because exclusion of both black and Chicana work has been so profound, contemporary writers must re-write their history and know that every pen stroke is powerful and will leave a mark forever. Sánchez continues by stating that "the new Chicana poet, writer, the new voice you are hearing is not new at all. It has encompassed us since time immemorial only to have revealed itself in a more profound and real way" (p. 67). With this she claims that the Chicana literary presence has always been here but now has a louder voice. Similarly, Lisa C Moore, in her introduction to *Does Your Mama Know? An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories* (1997), claims that black lesbians were always speaking, were always present but she laments that up until now they were not widely heard (pp. iv).

Sonia Saldivar-Hull, in the second edition introduction to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (1997), claims that Anzaldúa labels the new mestiza as "a woman without an official history and

the woman who constructs her own historical legacy” (p. 7). The mestiza’s state of social dislocation from cultural and ethnic homelands allows for a history that negates any harsh linear historical timeline that might be present with dominant or ‘full-blooded’ Mexican or Indian people. The ability to recreate history as the present continues is a cyclical process for marginalized groups, such as Anzaldúa’s new mestizas or Black lesbians. Jewelle Gomez (2000) comments that “the Black Lesbian writer must throw herself into the arms of her culture by acting as student/teacher/participant/observer, absorbing and synthesizing the meanings of our existence as a people,” which again asserts this notion of creating a cyclical historical past and present (p. 122). We write history as we live it and as we dialogue about our identities to others we are able to refine our own self-definitions.

Literary Trauma and Oppressed Communities

Trauma, as used here, refers to overwhelming memories and feeling of stress and pain, that linger within individuals or groups of individuals after a violent act has taken place (Suleiman, 2008, p. 276). Trauma can affect present interactions, present thought processes, and present decision making within individuals so severely that their quality of life (and mental/emotional health status) is compromised unless some sort of interventional healing plan is implemented. One major component of trauma that some theorists believe in is dissociation. Rubin Suleiman (2008) writes that to theorists such as Judith Herman and Bessel van der Kolk “the more horrific and prolonged the trauma, the more the subject has a tendency to dissociate” (p. 277). Here, Suleiman is specifically focusing on the trauma that stems from sexual abuse and recovered memories from the events. However, I am expanding the basic tenets to include all types of abuse, not simply sexual violence.

Susannah Radstone (2007) writes about trauma theory and memory recovery of the events that, “this act of ‘recovery’ takes place in relation to a *witness*. Testimony...refers to a relation of witnessing between the subject of trauma and the listener. According to Felman and Laub, testimony (to trauma) demands a witness and it is only within the context of witnessing that testimony to trauma is possible” (p. 20). The recollection of pain becomes realized through physical and verbal interaction with others. Therefore, pain, healing, and memory are never an individual acts but communal conversations. Violence and trauma affect races, classes, ethnicities, sexualities, and families. Cathy Caruth (2005), credited for coining the term trauma theory, writes in “an introduction to trauma, memory, and testimony” that testimony, in this context, is not simply a form of eyewitness account or historical recording but rather, more fundamentally, the attempt to make accessible the historical traumas that have shaped, but remain outside the possession of, twentieth- and twenty-first-century historical consciousness” (p. 1). As theorists and scientists attempt to understand trauma and its after-effects they insist that although the events of the past are outside of our current tangible consciousness, testimony fills the gap mentally and emotionally that our bodies physically cannot.

Caruth continues, “the temporality of trauma—the delay of the event that always returns elsewhere, in another place and time—in this sense implies an experience that exceeds individual grasp and that cannot be thought within the framework of a stable individual or collective identity” (p. 2). This is not to say that a collective group cannot feel similar trauma due to an experience that affected many individuals; rather that trauma itself is too complex and too mobile to be categorized explicitly to one type of event or mode of violence. When trauma appears in literature, language and the ability or inability to communicate through language becomes crucial to understanding the pervasiveness of trauma. Caruth writes, “The demand to find a language

for trauma is thus a paradoxical obligation to speak without burying the silence at the heart of the story, to find a language that bears within it, although it does not submit to, the silencing power of the event” (p. 2). Thus, responding to a traumatic event (through the use of language) is more than just overcoming the silencing effects of the trauma, it is an attempt to find words, to find language for an event that lacks any and all immediate language in the first place. To put simply, speaking is necessary but becomes increasingly hard to do when language does not exist to explain or fill the silence previously present. Megan Obourn (2005) on trauma theory discusses the relationship between traumatic memory and language, claiming that “traumatic memory is not entirely without speech/language” (p. 223), rather that trauma narratives are often “expression...without the necessary structural principles that could “explain” or “organize” it in a way that would be rationally accessible for both speaker and listener. In other words, it lacks the appropriate syntax, plot, time frame, and affective mode of expression that would constitute a true narrative” (p. 223). I argue that “true narrative” frames are western, patriarchal, Eurocentric, assumptions about how narratives should be structured and therefore do not hold up when discussing the work of marginalized voices. However, we can still recognize narratives of trauma that exceed the boundaries of even our own open-minded comprehension.

Obourn expands on this issue of language by asking “What happens when one lacks access to a coherent language of representation for experience not because a traumatic event has caused a break between language, experience, and culture, but because there simply are no “meaning structures”—i.e. preexisting, socially intelligible, culturally-coded narratives—through which to “grasp and recall” that experience?” (p. 224). She claims that Audre Lorde’s work can be classified in this manner. Lorde’s work is a response to trauma in that it presents language and ‘knowing’ outside of ‘traditional’ recognizable structures. I argue that all of the texts of

analysis in this thesis fall under this same explanation. Not only does the stigma and violence associated with racism affect Black and Chicana women and the way in which we communicate our work but homophobia adds another complex layer. I argue that all Black and Chicana lesbian literature is traumatized in that its erasure is traumatic. And merely the fact that we are creating (and re-creating) language, history [for example, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) and similar recreations of history], and theory in which to express our silence is proof that there was not a ‘racial and sexual’ language to express ourselves. How do we explain what has been continually repressed and snuffed out? How can we be heard when we speak and who do we want to hear us? How can we reconcile identities that were never meant to be reconciled? And how do we make sense of this reconciliation when it occurs?

Phenomenological Experiences, the Erotic, and Differential Consciousness

Jacqueline M. Martinez, in *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience & Identity: Communication and Transformation in Praxis* (2000), argues that Chicana lived experiences bring forth the possibility of transformative consciousness and communication. The philosophy of phenomenology is concerned with how experiences create consciousness and what can be gained from those conscious experiences (p. 93). Chicanas’ unique way of *sensing* or experiencing the world provides resistant counternarratives and conscious resistant strategies to the harsh silencing and erasure of culture due to colonization. The resistant counternarrative begins once Chicanas become conscious, self-reliant individuals. Martinez writes, “If, by virtue of such a realization, one directs one’s own conscious awareness toward their own conscious experience, we have a “practice of self-consciousness” where it is possible to exert a counterforce against the prevailing sensibilities of culture” (p. 18). Martinez is referring to the

conscious awareness that can develop within Chicana lesbians, women who may develop a borderland consciousness and learn to move in and out of social and cultural spaces all while presenting the possibility for transformation. Martinez states that, “the Chicana lesbian [is] the “site of radical ambiguity” and “transformative praxis” (p. 28) because she [the Chicana lesbian], by virtue of being herself, has broken down binarisms within race, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality and has given proof of the saliency between all identities. Anzaldúa would agree that a borderland consciousness erases the rough edges of stagnant identities and blasts open infinite possibilities for identification and movement.

Black women share similar transformative power as labeled ‘otherness’ has produced an outsider perspective that places both our blackness and womanness into new states of articulation. Audre Lorde claims in “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (2007) that “the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (p. 53). Once we tap this erotic power, this power untouched by western (white, male, heterosexist, etc) thought, we can learn to *feel* again. The sharing of lived experiences as Black queer women builds consciousness around our internal and psychic power. Recognizing erotic power and being able to speak about erotic autonomy (Alexander, 1997) is revolutionary in that we learn, as individuals and as a community, how to put our deepest feelings/desires into language we were told was impossible. Lorde writes, “Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives,” therefore implying that erotic consciousness shifts our lives into holistic understandings where internal and external, emotional and physical, public and private dilemmas and loves are seen in connection with everything else (p. 57). Erotic power has a

balancing effect. If queer women of color are to create a phenomenology or epistemology based on lived experience we must document lived experiences and communications so that we can create greater modes of resistance from within ourselves that will extend self-reliance.

Resistance requires a shift in consciousness that is *oppositional* to colonizing forces such as economic instability, biological and sexual control, and racial discrimination. Chela Sandoval (1998 & 2000) outlines five categories of oppositional consciousness in organization. Sandoval defines oppositional consciousness as “a specific methodology that can be used as a compass for self-consciously organizing resistance, identity, praxis, and coalition under contemporary first world, late-capitalist cultural conditions (Sandoval, 1998, p. 358).” In short, oppositional consciousness is the shift in thinking for marginalized people that takes us from knowing we are oppressed to acting (resisting and creating) in order to survive and thrive as people of our own creation (Sandoval, 1998, p. 358). Within oppositional consciousness the fifth mode is ‘differential consciousness,’ which “represents a strategy of oppositional ideology that functions on an altogether different register” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 44) and “this kind of kinetic and self-conscious mobility of consciousness was utilized by U.S. third world feminists when they identified oppositional subject positions and enacted them differentially” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 54). Differential consciousness brings the other four modes of oppositional consciousness into mobility and away from “modernist and hegemonic activity” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 58). The other four modes of consciousness reproduce oppression and hegemonic ideology even if previously oppressed groups are forming their own consciousness-inducing routes to ‘freedom’. Sandoval argues that the only path to freedom from all forms of domination is differential consciousness (Sandoval, 2000, p. 63). Differential consciousness’ fluidity in thought and mode of production

is based upon new power relations and self-consciousness that seeks inspiration outside of ‘normalized’ repeated language and thought discourses.

In chapter six, entitled “Love as Hermeneutics of Social Change, A Decolonizing *Movida*,” Sandoval discusses the emancipatory power of love and ‘falling in love’. The space in which we ‘fall in love’ is an ‘abyss,’ a space where we allow our connections to earthly domination and man-made binaries fizzle, and instead we fall into this unknown, unprotected area of consciousness, consciousness that is more directed by *feeling* rather than reason, morals, or fear (p. 141-142). This type of love is revolutionary and decolonized, “this form of love is not the narrative of love as encoded in the West: it is another kind of love, a synchronic process that punctures through traditional, older narratives of love, that ruptures everyday being” (p. 142). Narratives that produce and reproduce separation, oppression, fate, and morality must end. Instead Sandoval argues for Roland Barthes’ (1977) “drifting” theory, which moves bodies “outside and between narrative forms, where meanings live in some free, yet unmarked and wounded space, a site of shifting, morphing meanings that transform to let [us] in” (p. 143). Individuals would be in constant motion, bodies and minds, states of rest and fixed identity avoided, oppressor versus oppressed hierarchies broken down and transformed into relative states of existence.

I argue that counternarratives produced by queer women of color (specifically in this case, but truly by any counter-hegemonic group) practice the action of ‘falling in love’ again and again as they resist stagnation and labeling by simply existing. These (counter)narratives exert raw emotion and *feeling* that compels readers and authors (as they reflect, relive, re-remember, and re-traumatize) drift in spaces of the unknown. These narratives are so much about love, loss, separation/isolation, reunification, colonization, and freedom that there is no discernable ‘start

and finish' this or that inherent dualism. Narratives are shared from the point of past, present, and future and these women live as they tell their stories so that the stories are never-ending. Narratives collide in places where the senses connect, where violence overlaps, where contact between women pulls in and pulls apart in ways that have been experienced and will continue to be experienced. In short, narratives transcend dualistic power relations, they are differential, they are erotically charged, and they float in unnamed spaces. Narratives transform language and symbolism in hopes of new definition. What can be 'learned' and 'analyzed' from narratives is not how oppositional they are from Western/hegemonic narratives but how cultural narratives create their own space free from reactive comparison.

Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Transcendence

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) is credited with coining the term *intersectionality* in the 1990s in her legal work around Black women and our marginalized and multiple identities. Black women, many of us who are economically marginalized hold multiple and concurrent identities. If another layer is added, queer sexuality, then the intersections increase. It is impossible to discuss one oppression without taking into account other oppressions. Intersectionality describes the spaces where identities collide. It is the job of those who understand intersectionality to speak, write, and advocate for intersectional spaces/identities that have been historically ignored and devalued. Women of color have been pressured to show allegiance to race rather than to gender or to gender rather than to sexuality (Lorde, 1990, p. 322-324) but when intersectional consciousness is taken into consideration we are making an effort to acknowledge that hierarchies of oppression and 'allegiances' are invalid, exclusionary, and incomplete.

Although the term intersectionality developed within Black feminist and legal circles, its function and reality permeate all marginalized group identities. Queer Chicanas, queer women of color in general, face potential exclusion and erasure from racial and ethnic communities, or female communities, or heterosexual communities based upon the inability (and resistance to) one sole identity group. Crenshaw explains that “intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (p. 1926), meaning that this approach to identity both complicates and extends relatively static identity groups such as the categories of “Black” or “Chicana/o” or “lesbian.” Intersectionality allows for flow between identity groups and suggests expanded coalitional opportunities based on shared identity fluidity and methods to empowerment and liberation.

As briefly mentioned in the introduction my work resists essentialist claims as I am not arguing for change, liberation, and consciousness through the use of identity politics. However, I do argue that identity matters, community matters, and shared ‘truths’ are in existence. Crenshaw discusses the balance between identity celebration, ownership, and intersectionality and essentialism. She writes, “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (p. 1242); therefore, identity politics is a limiting remedy for collective practices of liberation for marginalized peoples. As I would put it, identity politics has its place. It creates group cohesion, pride, safety, and ‘home,’ but as academics who wish to always build upwards from what has been done, we must see beyond identity politics. Crenshaw gives us the tool of intersectional consciousness so that we can continue coalitional building and binary reduction.

Borderland Identity and Outsider Status

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2007) situates itself between physical and spiritual borderlands she sees Chicanas passing back and forth and in-between. Sonia Saldívar-Hull, in the introduction to the second edition states, "while estudios de la frontera (border studies) certainly were not invented by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands*, this book signaled new visibility for academic programs on the study of the U.S.-Mexico border area" (p. 12). Anzaldúa dedicates borderland consciousness to the consciousness obtained from being a racialized body drifting between American and Mexican nationalisms, languages, politics, and physical territories (lands). She writes, "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (p. 19). She places herself and her identities in the middle. She writes, "from this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an "alien" consciousness is presently in the making—a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (p. 99). She recognizes that her racial, ethnic, national, identity is a mixture of Mexican, European, and Indigenous, and that her class and sexuality also places her in state of alienation, fluidity, and new consciousness.

Individuals living in the borderlands become experts at 'border-crossing,' at moving between cultures, nations, and sexual discourses while redefining, blurring, and erasing hegemonic boundaries. Anzaldúa writes, "Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element....And yes, the "alien" element has become familiar—never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not

comfortable but home” (p. 19). This space that we occupy is unstable, ‘alien’, and yes, at times uncomfortable, but it is where we constantly find ourselves living because our multiple identities make us oxymoronic to current binaries and power relationships.

Audre Lorde and bell hooks make similar assertions about Black women and Black queer women and the space in which we live. Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* (2007) explores her position as a Black lesbian (and as a mother and cancer-inflicted person) who often finds herself as an outsider within Black communities because of her sexuality. In her essay from *Sister Outsider* entitled “Scratching the Surface: Some notes on Barriers to Women and Loving” (2007) Lorde mourns, “While a piece of each Black woman remembers the old ways of another place – when we enjoyed each other in a sisterhood of work and play and power – other pieces of us, less functional, eye one another with suspicion. In the interests of separation, Black women have been taught to view each other as always suspect, heartless competitors for the scarce male, the all-important prize that could legitimize our existence. This dehumanizing denial of self is no less lethal than the dehumanization of racism to which it is so closely allied” (p. 50). She continues on to discuss the recent attack “upon lesbians in the Black community” and our rejection from racially-based (and some woman-based) liberatory struggles. We have become ‘outsiders’ to what used to be familiar.

We still stake our claim as Black women, as sisters, even if others reject us. We’ve added rich contributions to Black feminist epistemology because of our outsider status and we continue to blur the lines between seemingly irreconcilable identities. hooks explains that “living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole

universe, a main body made up of both margin and center” (hooks xvi). We have knowledge from every place we have been positioned and we have the potential to be transcendent bodies. Whatever terms we use to identify ourselves, our standpoint(s), and our theories—it is clear that we are on the edge, the border, the outside and the outskirts. What we do with our marginality is our choice but the possibilities are endless.

CHAPTER THREE:

Strengthening Survival: Familial Relationships, Erotic Recovery, and Queer Transcendence

Introduction

Generational familial relationships in Black and Chicana/o communities are a basis for cultural survival, pride and strength. Similarly, the freedom of women of color, and more immediately, queer women of color, to redefine and transcend previous familial and romantic relationships that may be abusive and repressive of female desire has often required and resulted in dislocation of female subjects from racial and familial homes and people. In this chapter, I explore the following texts: Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* (1975), a novel centered around a young black woman and her traumatic and frequent relived memories of past sexual abuses to her maternal kin and her struggle to overcome the past and create her own memories not clouded in domination and pain; Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings* (2003); a novel about a young lesbian named Marci Cruz, her frequent bouts with her abusive father, and her path to freedom encouraged and helped by her grandmother; ZZ Packer's "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" (2003), about a young reclusive Black woman named Dina attending Yale and her turbulent relationship with a white lesbian named Heidi; and Karen Delgadillo's autobiographic 'Mamita te extraño' (1991), about the death of her inspiring, poetic, and supportive grandmother.

I will reveal the journey that the main queer character heroines travel in order to be individuals of their own definition. Accordingly, this chapter is concerned with the relationships between daughters, mothers, and grandmothers and the passing of cultural and familial memory, the repetition of past male domination and violence on present queer female bodies, and the fear

and potential freedom of being self-defined through the realization of erotic autonomy and recovery in the form of genuine emotional and physical touch.

Strengthening Survival

Black and Chicana feminist epistemologies focus on reclamation of female bodies through decolonization of racial, sexual, and emotionally oppressive institutions and ideologies (hooks, 2000, p. 159-166; Clarke, 2006, p. 36; Lorde, 2007, p. 59; Moraga, 2001, p. 53-54; Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 99-100; Sandoval, 2000, p. 42) Our self-agency and self-knowledge of the body comes from understanding the physical and psychic power within us; the erotic. Audre Lorde, in *Sister Outsider* (2007), writes that “when [she speaks] of the erotic, then, [she speaks] of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (p. 55). It is necessary to reclaim erotic energy because it has been forced out of women’s bodies by being mislabeled as destructive and betrayal to ourselves and our cultures. Cherrie Moraga writes (2001), “Chicanas’ negative perceptions of ourselves as sexual persons and our consequential betrayal of each other find their roots in a four-hundred-year-long Mexican history and mythology” (p. 39) which paints women who have sought out bodily independence and knowledge as being traitors of the heteropatriarchal race. It is seen that to desire erotic autonomy is to decolonize mind and body in such a way that distance from male control and connection is evitable and thus dangerous.

Erotic power is just as ‘dangerous’ to women as it is to men. Lorde writes, “for so long, [Black women] have been encouraged to view each other with suspicion, as eternal competitors, or as the visible face of our own self-rejection” (p. 49). As Black women and Chicanas we have

been taught to fear our own self-control, self-knowledge, and control over our reproductive capabilities and our love for one another as women. What we cannot accept or willingly learn about ourselves, such as control over erotic energy, we despise in other women (Trujillo, 1991, p. 187-188, Collins, 2000, p.181). There is an incredible need to restore the power of the erotic, for restoring erotic autonomy surely assures that women of color stay self-defined, empowered, and together as women fighting against interlocking oppression and violence. Barbara Smith (2000) agrees that “sexual repression, coupled with blatant sexual exploitation, has contributed to a complex psychological mix. Who knows what we think and, more importantly, feel? But it is up to us, with each other’s help, to find out” (pp. xvii). Female relationships and knowledge, matrilineal or otherwise, are keys to survival. Erotic energy brings up what he have suppressed for far to long. Understanding erotic power, pulling it out of the ‘deviant’ norm, and sharing it with others, guarantees it will never be hidden again.

Relationships between mothers, grandmothers, and queer daughters and ideas of motherhood in general within *What Night Brings*, *Corregidora*, “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere”, and “Mamita te extraño” are situated between acceptance and uses of erotic and denial and dislocation between generations where erotic power is misunderstood or not understood at all. Motherhood provides a basis for either the suppression or exclamation of erotic power and freedom. And since motherhood has been so tied to womanhood within theses stories, generational survival through matrilineal connection becomes of utmost importance. From cultures rich in oral tradition the importance of children or generations is immense. Keeping a record of marginalized histories and passing stories on is an act of resistance that ensures survival by validating existence.

Oral tradition as well as stories and images that show people of color as self-defined and active people helps us wholly to resist the dehumanization that comes from outside labeling and outside penetration of culture. Women stand as the main passers of oral tradition and cultural memory (Collins 2000; Sinha, 2010, p. 224). Thus, Black women and Chicanas as mothers ensure that cultural memory will always ‘pass’ onto someone who can tell our collective truths. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) writes that “motherhood can serve as the site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women’s empowerment” (p. 191). In short, motherhood allows women to create self-defined identities in relation to children. However, Collins also notes that physical affection may not be present between mothers and daughters but that this is not a sign of mothers not loving their daughters; instead affection may seem as a luxury item that mothers of color do not have time to provide (p. 202). Dislocation then is not necessarily a sign of complete rejection or abandonment, rather an action encouraging self-sufficiency and strength.

Another reason for lack of physical affection and dislocation may lie in daughters’ stressed path to gain acceptance and love from their mothers. Moraga (2001) asserts that Chicana mothers give sons more love because “through her son she can get a small taste of male privilege, since without race or class privilege that’s all there is to be had. 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” (p. 41) and when daughters are queer or infertile, as they are in these narratives, they cannot offer their mothers comfort that is connected to heteropatriarchal power.

Ursa Corregidora's of *Corregidora* (1975) definition of motherhood shifts after she is pushed down a flight of stairs by her husband Mutt and has to get a hysterectomy. The novel follows her life after the 'fall' (p. 4) as she enters a new romantic relationship with a man named Tadpole. However, Ursa's life is complicated by reoccurring memories, traumatic memories at that, of her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother and the sexual abuse they encountered at the hands of her great-grandfather, Corregidora. Ursa, after receiving the hysterectomy, cannot bear children. She repeats through her dreams and memories and to others that she cannot "make generations" (p. 22) thus truncating the oral mothering process indefinitely by having a 'useless' womb.

In a memory Ursa has a voice that tells her, "the important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn the conscious, Ursa" (p. 22). This makes a fertile womb a witness to past and present familial atrocities. Sirene Harb (2008) writes "[the Corregidora women's] message presented this memory as the exclusive tool allowing one to "leave evidence"" (p. 123) and the mind becomes a source of power and knowledge as tangible evidences such as paper will eventually be destroyed and lost. Jennifer Griffiths (2006) writes "After the accident, [Ursa] grapples with the internal witness created by this dichotomy, struggling to form a testimony that incorporates the complexity of her experience" (p. 359). Thus Ursa must reconcile the loss of her womb and of 'traditional' motherhood literally and symbolically even as her mind and memory are strong enough to remember the past, incorporate it into her present, and express her complexities. Memory recollection and retelling of familial history has the possibility of being a form of motherhood in and of itself. Ursa cannot birth children but she can birth or make visible the existence of past matrilineal abuse. If her other female family members cannot or choose not to talk about generational sexual abuse, Ursa can

bring into the world the gift of *speaking* (about abuse) and reclaim the power abuse has over their lives. In this manner, Ursa has still contributed to motherhood's goal of cultural survival; even if no physical generations of people exist, the stories always will.

The next novel, *What Night Brings* (2003) by Carla Trujillo follows the life of a young Chicana named Marci Cruz. Marci begins her narrative with daily prayers to God to make her father disappear and also for God to make her male so that she can defend herself against his abuse and so that she can love girls (Danielson, 2009, p. 63). About her abusive father Marci reasons that, "the easiest thing would be for my dad to meet another lady and go away with her because my mom goes crazy whenever he looks at anyone else. The minute Mom catches him sneaking a look, she cusses in Spanish, tells him she's leaving, then walks across town to buy a pack of cigarettes. When she comes back, she sits in the living room smoking every one of them till the pack is gone" (p. 1). Marci's mother turns to physically destructive isolating means of coping with the pain Marci's father Eddie inflicts on the family. Instead of leaving Eddie or fighting back against him, Marci's mother smokes and suffers in silence.

Marci recognizes her mother's fear suffering and reflects, "Whenever [mother] sits still and looks like she's thinking, [her] brown [eye] crinkles up like she's looking in the sun. Mom acts like she's afraid to see anything for herself. I don't know if she does it on purpose, but whatever she sees or thinks seems seen or thought by my dad first" (p. 3). Marci's mother has little agency. Every movement is done with male pleasure and approval first. Chicana feminist writers discuss Chicanas' reliance on male power and the learned dependency on oppressive institutions and people that deny female empowerment and independence (Zavella, 2003, p. 239-242; Casteñeda, 1998, p. 310-319; Pérez, 1991, p. 168-169; Saldívar-Hull, 2000, p. 72-73). We immediately see the differences between Marci and her mother. Marci describes herself as a girl

who turns into “Supergirl” at night, a girl who is “stronger and smarter” than the real Superman (p. 5). Her confidence far surpasses her mother’s. And Marci’s desire to be stronger and smarter than men is recognition of her independence to think and feel for herself. Marci has some erotic consciousness. Marci needs no permission to dream and be who she desires, while her mother appears like she is afraid to move without Eddie’s permission. While her mother is simply concerned with staying alive and not angering Eddie, Marci wants to stay alive *and* get out from under Eddie’s patriarchy. Marci’s defiant attitude becomes a source of stress and distance between her and her mother.

Marci recalls the first time her mother rejects her. They were in mass and Marci was caught mimicking a woman sitting next to them. Her mother told her to behave and later when Marci tried to rest her head on her mother’s shoulder her mother jerked away. Marci mourns, “My mom never hugs or kisses me. She used to but not anymore. When I was little she used to kiss me and let me put my head on her whenever I wanted. But not now. I remember the exact day she stopped letting me touch her” (p. 44-45). Something happened this day. Marci’s mother no longer could be physically affectionate with Marci. Part of the dissipation of physical affection may be due to mothers of color instillation of strength and independence within their daughters, which can result in lack of physical comforts but not necessarily lack of love (Collins, 2000, p. 202).

However, Marci’s sexual difference may also be the source of their displacement. It is possible that Marci’s mother senses Marci’s exploration of the erotic and fears what this may mean. Moraga (2001) explains that, “the potential accusation of “traitor” or “vendida” is what hangs above the heads and beats in the hearts of most Chicanas seeking to develop our own autonomous sense of ourselves, particularly through sexuality” (p. 42). And since lesbianism

and other queer female sexualities are seen as threats to the heterosexual family (Moraga, 2001, p. 46-47; Lorde, 2007, p. 48-49), Marci's mother's discomfort with Marci (and what Marci represents) may be tied to her fear of losing connection to heterosexual familial power. Marci's mother also distances herself from being labeled a traitor to men and to the race. Subsequently, distance also accumulates between she and Marci an autonomy-seeking, erotically conscious, queer daughter.

Now I discuss the present granddaughters and grandmother relationships within the texts. Queer granddaughters become powerful and transcendent bodies when empowered by strong and dynamic grandmothers. The close relationship between grandmothers and granddaughters, possibly fictitiously exaggerated, is a relationship historically aligned with feminist movements for equality. Astrid Henry, in *Not my mother's sister: generational conflict and third-wave feminism* (2004), discusses feminist daughters' attempts at distancing themselves from their mother's generation of feminist women in order to continue and transform feminist ideas. Henry writes, "these imagined familial relationships position second-wave feminists as feminism's heroic daughters gaining wisdom through their connection to the past—their figurate 'grandmothers,' the suffragettes" (p. 72). While Henry is referring to non-familial relationships, we can apply the same basic tenets to our narratives here. Grandmothers for 'rebellious feminist (grand)daughters' (p. 74) are the roots of feminist practice. In order for granddaughters to feel free to carry on feminist thought they need an imagined and/or powerful relationship with foundational women much more than they may need a relationship with the immediate older generation, their mothers. However, it is important to keep in mind that Henry is specifically discussing generational White feminism, which differs from women of color feminist histories.

But I argue that longings for foundational beginnings is a desire that stretches across race and ethnicity.

Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez (1981) write that grandmother/granddaughter relationships appear in Chicana/o literature as an expression of extended family bonds that are common in Chicana/o culture. They also expand on the importance of the relationship:

“Whereas mothers and fathers must all too often respond to the daily rigors of life, grandmothers are more removed from such pressures and can provide a different experience for their granddaughters” (p. 194), which often comes in the form of emotional support and self-identity development and encouragement. Denise Segura and Jennifer Pierce (1998) add to the power of grandmother relationships with Chicana granddaughters when they state “Chicanas are sometimes as close, if not closer to grandmothers or godmothers as they are to their own mothers” (p. 304).

Segura and Pierce also note Norma Alarcón’s statements on granddaughter/grandmother relationships:

Norma Alarcón (1985) also discusses the closeness of grandmother/granddaughter relationships, particularly regarding culturally gendered role expectations. Grandmothers, by virtue of their age and long relationship with the family, are honored by others in the kin network. The grandmother/granddaughter relationship is less tense than that of mothers and daughters. Mothers are directly responsible for teaching their daughters how to be Chicanas knowledgeable in cultural traditions and behaviors that signal their gender and ethnicity. Their transmission of a culture overlaid with patriarchal prerogatives can be hotly contested by their daughters, situated generationally in a

different social and historical setting. Grandmothers stand one step away from the mother/daughter identity process; they offer granddaughters love and support without dramatically altering cultural messages (p. 304).

Therefore, grandmother non-judgmental attitudes coupled with their lack of direct instillation of gender and ethnicity norms make grandmothers a perfect support system for granddaughters, and more specifically queer granddaughters. Where mothers may desire to make their daughters heterocentric patriarchy-abiding young women, grandmothers may instead simply support whatever decision granddaughters make in regards to gender and ethnicity. They may not give messages to granddaughters that are radically different than ‘traditional’ cultural messages, as Alarcón states, but grandmothers may foster the idea of survival in different ways (i.e. survival is not only staying alive but thriving). If survival and happiness are familial and cultural goals then this grandmothering style not only keeps granddaughters emotionally comforted but inspires them to create new definitions of self.

Marci Cruz and her grandmother Flor are an example of this close-knit grandmother/granddaughter relationship. When Flor comes to visit Marci, her sister, her mother, and her father on one occasion, Marci says “I couldn’t believe my eyes. There she was, sitting with Tío Alfonso right next to her. Grandma Flor owned the car but always made Tío drive it. She said she was a princesa and that was just the way it was” (Trujillo, 2003, p. 89). This is a reversal of gender dynamics Marci usually witnesses within her home. Flor controls the men in her life and that is part of Marci’s attraction to her. Marci states that Flor was “taller than [her] dad” and that “...the muscles on her arms and legs were hard,” reflecting her strength and ability to go toe to toe with Eddie. Marci describes an incident where her grandmother stabs her

grandfather because of his abuse. She does not receive jail time for stabbing him and everyone in town knows her story (p. 90-1). Marci's grandmother wants to take Marci, her mother, and Corin on vacation but Eddie objects. Flor, who dislikes Eddie, tells him that his wife and kids are not his slaves and that he does not own them and then sets her switchblade on the table to show her seriousness (p. 95).

At the end of the narrative Marci and Corin run away to Flor's house after Corin has a violent standoff with Eddie and shoots him. It is here, in the safety of Flor's home, that Marci is able to reflect on her father's violence and be at ease with her gender and sexuality. Flor tells her "...god doesn't grant wishes. [Grandma Flor] said *you* have to be the one to make things happen" (p. 239). Flor meant this comment on several levels. First, if Flor had 'saved' Marci, Marci's mother, and sister from abuse by immediately removing them from Eddie's violence it would have disempowered Marci's autonomy, at least in Grandma Flor's eyes. Flor is no one's 'savior,' she instead encourages Marci to survive on her own, as independence and self-discovery are crucial elements in women's survival. Furthermore, Flor truth Marci and Corin enough to leave them with knives, knowing and hoping that they will make their own way out.

In terms of Marci's gender and sexuality, Flor's 'you have to be the one to make things happen' also applies. Marci realizes that she cannot pray to God to change her body, rather Marci herself can change her sense of power, gain agency, and become comfortable in her queer body. When she is able to accept herself, that is the moment when 'things happen.' While staying with her grandmother, Marci meets a girl, Robbie, who is a lesbian and who talks about it openly with Marci. Marci tells her friend that she believes she was "born that way", a lesbian and is finally at peace with it (p. 240). The girls hold hands, "we were quiet again. Then slowly, softly, she reached out and touched my hand. It felt good. Really good, like an electric wire

running from the tips of my fingers to the end of my spine” (p. 241). Robbie kisses her and Marci internalizes, “I didn’t know what to do or think. But for once I could say I felt so good it didn’t matter” (p. 242). This experience of feeling *good*, of recognizing erotic power for the first time, is a dramatic shift from Marci’s previous fearful and disempowered feelings. Flor’s home and words allow for these changes to occur. Marci can finally “speak and think freely” in Flor’s home (Danielson, 2009, p. 89). Flor’s love for Marci, whether or not Flor knows Marci is a lesbian, allows Marci to *feel* and be free.

The last narrative I analyze is Karen T. Delgadillo’s “Mamita te extraño” (1991) (translation: ‘Grandmother I miss you). “Mamita te extraño” is an autobiography about Delgadillo’s relationship with her grandmother. Delgadillo opens the narrative with a whimsical description of her grandmother. She writes, “I remember being lulled to sleep beneath the mulberry trees, the last image being Mamita’s gentle face, with my hands in hers, as an occasional car drove along the desolate road that greeted the front of her house and waved with a breeze” (p. 16). Her memories of her grandmother are reaffirming and comforting of identity and erotic and spiritual power. When Delgadillo’s grandmother is dying, she expresses the trauma of losing her grandmother. She writes of being by her bed, “Mamita was very tired and rather yellow as she looked out into the noon desert and said nothing to the shadows. She only nodded and blinked deeply as her body grew hollow. I felt so far away from my grandmother, distanced by the dark hills of family between us” (p. 16).

Delgadillo’s diction is mournful, the brightness and warmth she uses previously in the narrative is momentarily suspended. As Delgadillo’s grandmother dies it seems that Delgadillo also loses a part of herself to death. She writes, “Although my time with her was brief, it felt endless. Time had stopped for us as it did before...” (p. 17). The enormity of loss sends

Delgadillo into the memory of her grandmother and the travels they took when they both were younger. As Delgadillo re-remembers her grandmother, the rest of her family (standing around her in the grandmother's room) cries as soon as the grandmother slips away. Delgadillo completely disconnects from the present and finds refuge in memories of her grandmother and memories of the past. Delgadillo does not directly write about the pain of her grandmother's death; instead she keeps her entire narrative a series of memories about her grandmother's life, not death. She writes, "her death has allowed me to keep her more alive in vivid memories..." (p. 17). Therefore Delgadillo continues generational survival through the recovery and retelling of her grandmother.

Delgadillo explains her spiritual connection to her grandmother when she writes, "my grandmother understood who I was as a child, and probably would have understood me as an adult. She was the one who encouraged me to draw, and listen to the orange poetry painted by the evening desert sky" (p.17). Like Marci Cruz's grandmother, Delgadillo learns independence from her grandmother as well. Her grandmother teaches her the poetry of the world, teaches her how to *feel* and how to connect with everything around her. Delgadillo's grandmother provides psychic cathartic release and the consciousness-raising power of getting lost in thought. Poetic expression for Delgadillo is a positive means of expressing *feeling* and matrilineal stories. Later, Delgadillo writes explicitly about her sexuality, "I know that [Mamita] would have probably understood my choices in life, of woman and not man, porque tenía tanto corazón" (p.17). Delgadillo's grandmother encouraged her to make decisions based on what feels right for her, therefore it is understandable that her grandmother may have been more understanding of Delgadillo's sexuality. Delgadillo claims that her parents did not know the bond she had with her grandmother, they could not even begin to know the depth of their relationship (p. 17). It is

clear that Delgadillo's relationship with her grandmother is one of the strongest relationships she has had and that perhaps without it she would not have been empowered to be who she is or be inspired to express beauty through artistic, erotic, and spiritual expression.

In these narratives the distance between generations allows for the connection between granddaughter and grandmother to be strong, and these relationships are [occasionally] an attempt on the grandmother's part to correct what she could not pass to her daughter. Marci's mother lacks the strength of Grandma Flor. She lacks the sexual agency and power to resist abuse from the men in her life. And she also lacks self-defined sexual power that would allow her to connect with Marci on physical and emotional levels. In Delgadillo's case it seems like her grandmother wants to restore calm to Delgadillo's life. Her grandmother desires her to wedge herself between non-creativity and creativity and life and death to find a fluid power space that makes her consciously aware of how world interacts with itself and how things *feel* to the body. I argue that within these texts the grandmother/granddaughter relationships are 'queer' (counter) relationships. Grandmothers' empowerment of granddaughters is queer in that they counter mother/daughter relationships. These relationships are also queer because grandmothers pass down power and independence to their granddaughters rather than shame, obedience, and silence that may/often come from mothers. They are 'strange' relationships, self-affirming and encouraging of self-sustenance/self-definition which is revolutionary love and healing.

Suzanne Bost (2010), writing on Cherrie Moraga's motherhood narrative *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of Queer Motherhood* (1997), refers to the process of motherhood, at least Moraga's process of becoming a mother, as being queer in that it "goes beyond [Moraga's lesbian sexuality] (and the "queer" process of insemination involving two female lovers, one male friend, a mason jar, and a syringe) to "queer understandings of birth, life, family, body and

medicine” (Bost, 2010, p. 120). What we can take from Bost’s analysis of Moraga’s queer motherhood are broadened definitions of what motherhood and grandmotherhood can be. As stated in above sections, one purpose of matrilineal lineage is to insure survival of stories, of culture, and of people.

Institutional racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism have encouraged women of color to perish. Our survival is resistant and is *not* supposed to be. Women of color should not thrive or understand the erotic or be lesbians or be psychically stable; there is an inherent contradiction and queerness about our survival. Put simply, there has always been something queer about our mothers and grandmothers instilling in us the will to survive. Furthermore, strong mothers and grandmothers within narratives bring about the possibility for queer existence in past mother and grandmother generations. Audre Lorde writes in her biomythography *Zami*, “As a child, I always knew my mother was different from the other women I knew, Black or white...*Different how?* I never knew. But that is why to this day I believe that there have always been Black dykes around—in the sense of powerful and women-oriented women—who would rather have died than use that name for themselves. And that includes my momma” (Lorde, 1982, p. 15). Queer possibility exists if the definition and expression of queerness is opened up in the way that Lorde describes.

Lorde implies that her mother’s queerness is built upon her mother’s power and connection to other women and not on sexual relationships that her mother may or may not have had with other women. My definition as well as Lorde’s queer definition is based on this *imagining* and expansion of queerness that is necessary in discussing racial and ethnic cultures and generations of people who chose to be or were forced to be silent about sexuality. Accordingly, ‘powerful and women-oriented women’ who could not in the past label themselves

as anything other than heterosexual now have the opportunity to have their queerness assessed, respected, and imagined, as new generations of queer feminist of color readers and theorizers prioritize the existence of past queer subjects.

Furthermore, my definition of *queerness* is also inspired by Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005), in which she defines multiple meanings of queer perspectives. Queer is not only a form of sexuality but queer is also what is also queer or strange about diasporic cultures in general. There is something inherently queer and counternarrative about diasporic cultures of color. Mainly, diasporic queerness comes from the fact that they are not 'authentic' home nations. For Gopinath, suturing "queer" to "diaspora" communities thus recuperates those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries (p. 10-15). Therefore my definition of queer encompasses the unimaginable relationship, the strange and strained relationship, the queer daughter creating new generational narratives, and the erotically conscious subject speaking knowledge of her own creation.

In *Corregidora*, *What Night Brings*, "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere," and "Mamita te extraño" matrilineal relationships are about what gets passed down and what gets revised through the generations. Similarly, relationships between queer women and heterosexual men, most times familial heterosexual men in the case of these narratives, are repetitions of patriarchal domination and violence being passed down and battled against by the main characters and authors. In accordance, the next part of this chapter is concerned with understanding male and female relationships within the narratives and the sources and re-livings of pain and/or dislocation.

First, I must point to a source of stress and violence for men of color which in turn becomes a source of stress and violence for the women of color they interact with. Cherrie Moraga (2001) and Emma Pérez (1991) explain the effects of colonization on Chicano males. Pérez explains that “within a racist society, the mestizo male is a castrated man in relation to the white-male-colonizer father... moreover, he must repudiate *la india y la mestiza* for fear that he could be like her, a weak, castrated betrayer of his people.” Therefore in repudiating the Chicana he oppresses parts of himself that he fears and wishes he could destroy (p. 168). In line with Pérez, Moraga writes, “[The Chicano], too, like any other man, wants to be able to determine how, when, and with whom his women—mother, wife, and daughter—are sexual. For without male imposed social and legal control of our reproductive function, reinforced by the Catholic Church, and the social institutionalization of our roles as sexual and domestic servants to men, Chicanas might very freely “choose” to do otherwise, including being sexually independent from and/or with men” (p. 46). This again asserts the perceived dangers by men of erotic control and violent male responses to women who seek control.

Men of color also struggle to control their own repressed feelings of love and of masculine definition. Or, in other cases, men of color refuse to examine their repressed feelings and continue exploitative patterns of abuse against women of color (Collins, 2000, p. 168). Audre Lorde (2007) writes, “Men who are afraid to feel must keep women around to do their feeling for them while dismissing us for the same supposedly “inferior” capacity to feel deeply. But in this way also, men deny themselves their own essential humanity, becoming trapped in dependency and fear” (p. 74) and resulting in violent and horizontal burst of anger towards women and our desires to *feel*. White capitalistic heteropatriarchy ensnares men of color in the

same web where men of color oppress and violate women of color and women of color must rise up against White men and men of color.

Ursa's painful and semi-abusive sexual intercourse with men brings up memories of the past violence towards her matrilineal kin. Goldberg writes, "Still, even consensual heterosexual sex in *Corregidora* is rarely, if ever, figured outside of this historical economy, always descriptively echoing the rape/enforced prostitution of Great Gram and Gram, with emphasis on the "magic" of the female genitalia, described alternately as a "gold piece" (profit) or as a "hole" (pleasure), and sex boiled down simply to a woman "getting fucked" (Goldberg, 2003, p. 450-451). Thus, Ursa's overall displeasure in sexual experience is not only historically rooted but actually a clue to the fact that, to some extent, Ursa wants to break free from her 'historical economy' and have sexual contact that does not echo.

As Ursa has sex with Mutt and Tadpole she practically wills herself to stay connected to the action as her mind drifts to past memories. In one instance Ursa's mere thoughts regarding 'fucking' and her loss of womb sends her into a memory about when she was anally violated by a boy when they were both very young (p. 42). The past incident with the young boy and the present violation with Mutt complete the circle of bodily abuse, a circle in which she cannot escape but instead must experience (p. 75). However, when Ursa is with Mutt she tells him that he is hurting her, unlike the time with the young boy in which she says nothing. Griffiths writes, "The repetition both overwhelms and numbs Ursa" (p. 361). Her experiences with Mutt are relived and revised but still emotionally and physically painful.

Another source of Ursa's relived sexual pain is her matrilineal kin's abuse due to colonization and slavery. Great 'Gram' was the slave of Corregidora in Brazil (p. 10-12) and as her body was literally colonized and forced into slavery, so were Gram's and Mama's bodies and

minds: colonized by the sexual abuse they shared from Corregidora. Angela Davis (1995) writes, “the act of copulation, reduced by the white man to an animal-like act, would be symbolic of the effort to conquer the resistance the black woman could unloose.” Thus it is no surprise that Ursa’s great grandmother, grandmother and mother were trapped in the viscous cycle of rape and dehumanization (p. 213). With this, the contemporary colonized body lacks self-definition, true agency and the freedom of sexuality (Jordan, 1995, p. 410-411) and Ursa is to some extent the embodiment of a colonized soul. As men penetrate Ursa and she derives no pleasure from the act her body is forced into a position of non-feeling. She is used and receives no appreciation of her bodily and emotional contribution. For example, when Mutt pushes Ursa down the steps her ability to enact agency (i.e. the choice to reproduce) was taken from her for someone else’s (Mutt’s) benefit (his anger). Colonization is an awful legacy of ‘taking’ without returning and Ursa’s body is constantly taken from.

Eddie Cruz from *What Night Brings* colonizes and terrifies his family by being verbally and physically abusive. Marivel T. Danielson (2009) writes that Marci’s abuse, “transforms Marci’s childhood home into a space of constant threat” (p. 73). Marci is belittled and antagonized while she is frequently verbally and physically abused. Eddie frequently refers to Marci as ‘little man’ and hijo (p. 108). In one instance, after Eddie has been gone for months, he returns upset that dinner is not on the table. Marci tells him that he no longer lives there so it is none of his concern. He replies, “Qué hombre! I didn’t know I had me un hombrecito. Here I was thinking you was my little girl. And goddamn if my dick didn’t squirt out a boy” (p. 108). Their interactions are far more combative than other relationships in the Cruz household. Eddie views Marci’s power as a challenge to his own masculinity and as Marci’s desire to be masculine-bodied. Danielson explains Marci’s masculine desire by stating, “Marci views

masculinity and the male body as a site of gendered power that might help her shed her role as helpless victim and vulnerable child” (p. 78). Subsequently, Marci’s desire to feel safe (and sexually accepted) in her home and in her body that propels her to pray to God to change her body.

However Marci gets a taste of power when she is given a knife to protect herself (p. 145-156). This dominant, possibly phallogocentric symbolism proves that Marci can be masculine without being biologically male—her power/masculinity has been earned and developed through receiving a knife (phallus) rather than biologically endowed and this is threatening to Eddie (I expand on knife symbolism in the next chapter). Therefore, Eddie needs to prove to Marci that he is in charge by being even more aggressive with her in order to break down any shred of masculine energy she may have and restore his own. Danielson writes, “[Marci’s] battle can be understood as an insistence on her possibility—she is possible—in spite of her father’s inability or refusal to see her” (p. 73). Eddie attempts to erase Marci physically and psychologically; however, Eddie to some extent does see Marci as a masculine queer subject because he *is* willing to acknowledge her masculine strength as something threatening to his own.

In the narrative “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” Dina’s relationship with heteropatriarchal power leaves Dina without validity and power as her household abuse has had isolating and introverting effects on her present life. During a beginning session Dina’s psychiatrist, Dr. Raeburn, asks her how she feels about her ‘dad’. She tells him “My father was a dick and my mother seemed to like him...I hate my father almost as much as I hate the word ‘Dad’” (p. 123). His abuse had destroyed and killed her mother, and there was nothing left of him to love. She visits him on one of her breaks and asserts that they did not speak very much because “he knew what [she] thought of him” (p. 140). Dina replays the abuse of her mother each time a triggering

event in her present life happens. She and her friend Heidi find a mouse in the cafeteria they work at. Dina decides that there is nothing more to do with it than break its neck. Heidi replies with “You’re one heartless bitch” (p. 129). Dina is sent back into the memory about her mother’s death. Dina says, “My mother had died slowly. At the hospital, they’d said it was kidney failure, but I knew, in the end, it was my father. He made her so scared to live in her own home that she was finally driven away from it in an ambulance” (p. 130). Dina wishes that death for all living beings should be quick and painless, like the breaking of a neck, instead of slow and crippling as her mother had died. Death is humane freedom from abuse, and furthermore, from captivity. The fear Dina’s father instilled in her mother was lethal and lingering.

One night Dina dreams about her deceased mother: “I’d come home from a school trip to an aquarium, and I was explaining the differences between baleen and sperm whales...I awoke remembering the expression on [my mother’s] face after I’d finished my dizzying whale lecture....Her response was to nod politely...to nod and save herself from the knowledge that she would never be able to get where she wanted to go” (p. 135). According to Dina, her mother ‘saved herself from the knowledge’ or the realization of her potential for power and freedom from captivity that she will never have. For Dina’s mother there was no escaping abuse or mental terror when physical abuse has subsided. By disallowing internalization of ‘knowledge’ Dina’s mother also disallowed her erotic autonomy and gives up. And while Dina’s mother could not imagine herself going ‘where she wanted to go’, Dina response to witnessing violence is to constantly imagine that she is elsewhere (p. 144). She is elsewhere at her mother’s funeral, elsewhere when she is in therapy and around Heidi, and elsewhere in her own psyche.

Hyper-vigilance to the threat of abuse is a reason for erotic suppression and communal and romantic distance. *Corregidora* and “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” both feature main female

characters who reclaim their erotic power by understanding what *feeling* means in their own self-made definitions through experiencing positive internal feelings for others and for themselves.

Ursa Corregidora must reclaim the erotic, and feel real feeling, as Lorde insists, in order to be an empowered, self-defined woman (Lorde, 2007, p. 58). And this perhaps is the most challenging task we see for Ursa throughout the novel. She replays memories of past abuses ad nauseam and as she does so she loses the desire and sensation for present physical, sexual and emotional contact from her partners. At other times when she has sexual encounters they truly are painful instead of pleasurable, leading her to wonder what *feeling* actually is.

I argue that by the end of the novel she begins to feel or at least acknowledge that she has the capacity to *feel*. And by *feel* I mean feel the complete joys of life (Lorde, p. 57) instead of the pain Ursa grew accustomed to. In Ursa's sexual relationship with Mutt and erotic relationship with Jeffy, Ursa is for the first time forced to confront the erotic longings within her. For example, Tadpole, on several occasions, asks Ursa "does it hurt?" when he has sex with her (Jones, p. 49). Although this question may be one of genuine concern for his own ability to affect her, the phrasing of the question, does *it* hurt may also be a broader question as in: *can* you feel pain or *what* does hurt you? Tadpole's question asks Ursa to recognize her erotic power and painful memories and articulate them out loud.

Ursa's interactions with Jeffy also trigger Ursa's erotic feeling. Her violent reaction to Jeffy touching her while they are sharing a bed one night (p. 39) is a negative response towards the emotion of truly *feeling* something. This is not to argue that Ursa has confusing sexual feelings for Jeffy but that Jeffy's touch is the first touch that has not been backed by patriarchal rule or violence. About this asserts, "Ultimately, as revealed in these consuming expressions of fear, Ursa is unable to imagine (sexual) pleasure apart from pain, as the traumatized subject is

unable to imagine survival outside of the frame of the traumatic event” (p. 467). As much as Ursa wants to feel pleasure and feel something –anything–she is not prepared to *feel* from anyone, especially non-male sources. And Ursa is also not ready to let go of pain for the possibility of pleasure because pain has become so normalized to Ursa and her matrilineal kin. Furthermore, when Ursa runs into Jeffy in the future Jeffy tells her “You *know* it felt good that time” to which Ursa only mildly takes notice to Jeffy’s assertion before walking away (p. 178). I assert that Jeffy is a symbol of sorts; a symbol of feeling that Ursa cannot embrace and therefore must flee. And her fleeing and rejection of Jeffy is out of fear of what she could be. Jeffy reflects what Ursa could be; free from the binds of heterosexuality or simply free from the binds of pain.

For Dina, her fear of opening up to Heidi, a white lesbian she reluctantly befriends, has similar roots as Ursa’s. Within minutes of their first conversation Dina asks Heidi if she is a lesbian because “she fit the bill. Short hair, hard, roach-stomping shoes. Dressed like an aspiring plumber. And then there was the name Henrik. The lesbians I’d seen on TV were wiry, thin strips of muscle, but Heidi was round and soft and had a moonlike face. Drab henna-colored hair. And lesbians had cats. “Do you have a cat?” I asked” (Packer, p.122). Heidi tells Dina she is not a lesbian and then asks Dina if she is one. Offended, Dina replies, “Do I look like one?” but Heidi does not respond (p. 122).

Later in the narrative Dina later observes Heidi at a ‘Coming Out Day’ event on campus and realizes that Heidi is in fact a lesbian. Up until this moment they maintained a close relationship. Heidi frequently slept over at Dina’s house and after they showered together one night after they finished working their mutual job Dina thinks, “I began to love Heidi that night in the dish room, but who is to say that I hadn’t begun to love her the first time I met her?”

(p.138). But after Dina receives confirmation about Heidi's sexuality the relationship turns cold and Dina begins to pull away. One day Heidi tells Dina that her mother has died and invites Dina to come with her to the funeral. Dina agrees but on the day they are supposed to leave they have a fight. Dina basically informs Heidi that she is not a lesbian and is not going to try to sleep with her. Confused, Heidi says, "Try to? We slept together all winter!" (Packer, p.145). Dina denies that moment of intimacy and of any other contact between them and storms out. They do not speak to one another again but Dina later imagines what it would be like if Heidi visited her.

Dina imagines that "There are no psychiatrists or deans, no boys with nice shoes or flip cashiers. Just me in my single room. [Heidi] knocks on the door and says, "Open up." (p.147). When Heidi first arrived at Dina's door Heidi waits outside the door but talks to Dina within. Their confessional-style conversation begins when Heidi tells Dina "let me in." and Dina responds "not a chance" (p. 120). This first exchange is repeated and desired by Dina at the end of the narrative. Heidi's plea of 'let me in' is both a literal request and an internal longing as Heidi wants to be let into Dina's room, and into Dina's soul. Dina cannot handle the closeness. A similar situation occurs when she rejects a polite, well-dressed boy who attempts to help her with her groceries (p. 132-133), and in every conversation Dina has with Dr. Raeburn. There is no written explanation of Dina's first traumatizing experience that makes 'letting someone in' so dangerous and uncomfortable, but readers can see Dina's re-reactions to trauma and hypothesize about her discomfort.

Dina's inability to 'open up' to Heidi and others suggests trauma and silence around sexual expression. But first it is important to remember the historical exploitation (specifically sexual and physical) of Black women in the United States that has made many Black women feel skeptical about 'letting anyone in' especially if those people are white people with power.

Therefore, distance between Dina and Heidi runs deep. Still, Dina is in denial of erotic feelings whether or not she has romantic feelings for Heidi or anyone else. Lorde (2007) writes, “to refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd” (p. 59). Dina speaks in circles during therapy sessions and no doubt seems distressed to her doctor and probably others. Arguably, if Dina understood what her feelings meant and what her past familial abuses meant she could begin to piece together an independent self-identity that does forget memory but does not let memory and past enslave the present. Dina’s continued solitary and depressive state only articulates the historic and cultural silence and pain around race and sexuality.

Both Dina’s and Ursa’s restrictions of letting people in is protective. They cannot risk any more pain. The re-injury they face by dismissing pleas of ‘let me in’ or ‘how does that feel’ has the possibility of being transformative. Dina and Ursa’s first instances of trauma may have forced them to let others in, or forced them to carry matrilineal scars, but by the end of their narratives they slowly learn to have the agency to say ‘not a chance,’ or this feels right to me in relationships. Marci gains erotic freedom by accepting her body as female and as in relation to other women’s bodies and erotic energy. Delgadillo affirms her erotic autonomy through her poetic remembrances of her grandmother. Her promise to her grandmother to always live with love and *feeling* guarantees that Delgadillo’s psychic and spiritual connection to the world is one of transformation and creativity through the consciousness of *feeling*. And this connection is one all of these women must *feel* to obtain.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses familial relationships with queer daughters in *Corregidora*, *What Night Brings*, *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*, and “Mamita te extraño.” Generational survival, repetition and removal from male abuse, and understanding the erotic are dependent on what transcendence queer daughters can bring to their present lives. Remembering abuse and fighting back against abusers as in *What Night Brings* frees Marci from the binds of heteropatriarchal domination. Matrilineal support, in the form of a grandmother, empowers Marci to create her own narrative, her own generational survival that exists outside of the patriarchal home. Delgadillo’s (“Mamita te extraño”) grandmother, even in death, inspires Delgadillo to always create and get lost in *feeling*. This idea of *feeling* is part of holistic reclamation of erotic energy (as defined in the previous chapter) by women of color, and furthermore, queer women of color.

In chapter four, I expand on the idea of *feeling* and the privileging of the senses as reclamation of self and as resistance to oppressive structures and people within narratives. But in this chapter, *feeling* is explored and unexplored through characters reclamation or suppression of erotic energy. Ursa Corregidora learns how to hold on to her matrilineal stories without allowing the pain and trauma to overpower her. And as erotic power has been suppressed for generations she also struggles to define what *feels* right for her from both men and women. Dina (*Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*) encounters the same difficulties in her journey to reclaim erotic power and separate herself from past familial abuses. Whether these women feel dislocated from or connected to their families, friends, and possible romantic partners, their identities present possibilities for new relationship patterns. How they interact with others determines the types of narratives they continue to create, remember, and re-remember in hopes of starting new relationships based on decolonized and erotically charged and positive foundations.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Differential Consciousness and Resistance: Living and Writing in Sensory Spaces

Introduction

This chapter situates itself between the conscious and the unconscious. It is my attempt to travel with the writers into their narratives to explore the internalization of multiple identities. In this chapter I search narrative monologues for deeper meaning and attempt to bring to the surface what these women may not be able to imagine within the texts but that I have the possibility to explore within this project. Often when we articulate pain and joy, language has a tendency to fail us. And when we belong to communities that suppress our native tongues and spiritual utterings, language can be both oppressive and not enough. So, in moments where language fails there can be a turn towards the senses. The communities I explore in this thesis write in metaphor and in sensual description with the purpose of communicating the unintelligible and unimaginable experiences that are relatable to those who can hear and feel the senses and those who can ‘speak in tongues,’ (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 75-86).

Therefore, as I explored the writings of queer Chicana and Black feminists I not only theoretically analyzed these texts but I also felt for patterns and emotional connection that depended on the powers of the senses. I found that within each narrative there was a reference to specific smells, sounds, sights, tastes, and touch which were deployed in order to articulate a deeper expression of the author’s subject position. And these senses guided how the narrators and characters internally understood their subject positions, and in turn also guided how I was able to theorize, remember, and heal myself as an active and communal (inside) reader. I begin this chapter by extending Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of ‘La Facultad’ through Cherrie Moraga’s

short narrative “La Ofrenda” as components of this consciousness. I do this in order to highlight the importance of understanding the power of the senses within “La Ofrenda” and all of the main texts in this thesis for queer women of color. In moments of great pain and dislocation, these texts explore how spiritual energy manifests itself through the senses and pulls us in and out of states of consciousness. As queer women of color we experience ourselves and each other in ways we are not ‘supposed to,’ it is crucial that we learn to articulate these experiences as deeply as possible.

I then turn to *What Night Brings* to rethink symbolic power and dominate interpretive frameworks when it comes in the form of a tangible item. In this story Marci Cruz’s pocketknife can and does exist outside of phallic comparison if I reimagine the knife’s symbolic meaning as neither dependent on male affiliation nor the upholding of oppressive structures, both mental and physical. Marci’s freedom and leaving home is based on more than reaction and resistance to her abuse. Her actions express her desire to heal and free herself rather than to get revenge on her abuser. I end this chapter with the autobiographical short story “Spice” and the sense of sight. Here I theorize the unfolding of visual objectification, dehumanization, and consumerism. I utilize bell hooks’ essay “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” (1998) to explain the relationship between the author Mattie Richardson and her white girlfriend Jen and how racialized *and* sexualized identities add to the ‘spice’ of marginalized exploitation.

Part One: “La Facultad” and the Senses

Powerful Perspectives from Beings in the Borderlands.

Anzaldúa (2007) describes ‘La Facultad’ as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface...the one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world” (p. 60). The rawness of being able to examine the world from a position of marginality, from a position of invisibility, from a position of survival allows those possessing and utilizing ‘La Facultad’ sensitivities to feel and to sense things within their lives that bring about transformation and consciousness that is world-shifting and powerful. Anzaldúa continues, “Confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad*” (p. 61). Anzaldúa argues for consciousness and change that rips us from our temporal, dualistic, and moralistic worldly perspective and places us deep within our spiritual selves where *feeling* and bodily balance take hold of our conscious minds.

Everything ‘unsafe’ (p.61) and ‘dark’ is embraced as positive realms of energy collection; every pain and fear is confronted and deconstructed for deeper meaning. As border-crossing, queer women of color, we continually confront our deepest fears. The unsafe is reality, and the safe is a theoretical space that is obtainable only when we shut ourselves off from the harshness of daily life. We not only have Anzaldúa’s sensitivity, many of us cannot ignore our soul’s ability to process what we feel, see, smell, hear, and taste as exceptional, inspirational, and monumentally groundbreaking experiences of freedom and captivity. The moment when we share the experiences that tingle our senses and awaken our bodies we deconstruct and reformulate ideas about how our bodies are supposed to act and how we are supposed to feel as people lacking sociopolitical power. Cindy Cruz (2001) explains, “the deconstruction of the

body may offer the possibility of revealing how identities are discursively created and how the brown body is constructed through the narratives and the social mores of our communities” (p. 664). Paying particular attention to the bodily senses and how we enact them through narrative inscription assists in our learning about what is difficult to convey, what is suppressed, and what has been deemed dangerous—mainly knowledge of the brown or black female body. Simply, if we hope to gain bodily and psychic freedom through writing and reading narratives we must not be afraid to listen to and unpack our everyday sensualities.

The first time I felt another woman’s body my senses were ecstatic. I remember every detail of the encounter more deeply than I have ever remembered any other experience. I remember the way her skin felt, how it smelled, the pitch of her voice, the taste of her lips—everything I was never meant to experience in a society that praises compulsory heterosexuality and vilifies sexual deviancy. Audre Lorde, in her biomythography, *Zami* (1982), speaks of a sexual experience she had with a woman named Ginger. Lorde poetically speaks, “I never questioned where my knowledge of her body and her need came from...the sweetness of her body meeting and filling my mouth, my hands, wherever I touched, felt right and completing, as if I had been born to make love to this woman, and was remembering her body rather than learning it deeply for the first time” (p. 139). Placing sensual remembrance at the center of discussions around identity and experience open up theorizing about queer of color subjectivity. Lorde feels Ginger’s body as deeply connected to her own already present internal pleasures instead of as a disconnected body that then became connected during sexual activity.

When we speak, when we share stories—whether our life stories or our imagined narratives—we are raw writers and dreamers. The text is our body and the page our skin. Many queer women of color writers use this metaphor of writing and the body. Cruz (2001) on Cherríe

Moraga argues, “reclamation begins with the body that houses multiple identities. Each component of the brown body has its own story to tell—the lesbian mouth, the bent back in the fields, the dismembered daughter—and its deconstruction is a necessary process of reclaiming and re-imagining the histories and forms of agencies of women who are unrepresented and unheard” (p. 663). Reclamation of the body requires an embodiment of the writing and speaking we do. We embody our texts to undo the erasure of the past. And we embody our texts because not embodying them would state that there is no connection between body, mind, and spirit—that what we write is distanced enough from us that it does not hurt and that it does not have an immediate connection to our psyches.

Robina Josephine Khalid (2008) inspires a way of destabilizing body versus mind (or theory, writing, or reason) hierarchies so that imagined spaces where body and mind equally flow to and from and each other is possible (p.706). Accordingly, if we regard written word and the body as equal and conversive entities and neither privilege written word over bodily speech (i.e. the way experiences effect our senses, pain, illness, joy) nor claim that bodily knowledge can be completely independent of writing, then we have created the possibility of mending the space between theory and lived (phenomenological) experience and the hierarchy that dominates and suppresses community speech or everyday knowledge produced by communities of queer women of color.

Our pain on the page must be taken seriously and must be examined through a lens that is influenced by ‘La Facultad’ sensitivity. In an effort to extend Anzaldúa’s theory and utilization of ‘La Facultad’ I pay special attention to the senses within these narratives. The energy exerted and felt from cultural and familial dislocation is specific. The violence and attempted eradication of our lives is specific. And the moment of woman-to-woman connection, both physical and

emotional, is specific. These occurrences are multifaceted and spiritual. We must *feel* all aspects of our lives if we hope to radically alter the way we process sensitivity and how we challenge the notion that our viewpoint is insignificant, irrational, improvable, and apolitical. And then we must translate our sensitivities, spiritualities, and politics, onto the page permanently. Deborah K. King in “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology” (1995) states that “As black women, we decide for ourselves the relative salience of any and all identities and oppressions, and how and the extent to which those features inform our politics...It is in confrontation with multiple jeopardy that black women define and sustain a multiple consciousness essential for our liberation, of which feminist consciousness is an integral part” (p. 312). Therefore, feminist of color consciousness becomes political by way of our very navigation of multiple oppressions. Our knowledge base of social, sexual, and racial/ethnic devaluations makes our feminist epistemologies acts of political resistance to main narratives that lack recognition of our existence.

However, it is a battle to become speaking women who dig from our unconscious the desires and experiences that ache in our bones. Nonetheless, repression of feeling, of love, and of pain, has driven some us to turn violent upon ourselves. To erase ourselves and our stories from communal passage, to destroy that which we cannot and have not been able to understand and nourish either physically, spiritually, emotionally, or sexually, thus literarily killing and repressing pieces of ourselves. We may get lost in this space created by dominant rule that disallows us to grow and acknowledge our strength, or it can also be a place of discovery, of transition to higher modes of conscious living. Anzaldúa deems this space as the *Coatlicue* state.

Anzaldúa (2007) states, “in order to escape the threat of shame or fear, one takes on a compulsive, repetitious activity as though to busy oneself, to distract oneself, to keep awareness

at bay. One fixates on drinking, smoking, popping pills, acquiring friend after friend who betrays; repeating, repeating, to prevent oneself from “seeing” (p. 67). The wavering hope of ‘sight’ is made possible in the coatlicue state as also it is the compulsion of repetitious pain. “These activities or *Coatlicue* states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The *Coatlicue* state can be a way station or it can be a way of life” (p. 68). What either pulls us into destruction or pulls us into knowing has to be managed or ignored in this transitional state.

I argue that repetitious, painfully sensitive and raw writing has the potential to represent this psychic battle inherent in Coatlicue states. Whether the authors or characters emerge from pain and manage their border-crossing otherness is a question of importance. Anzaldúa claims that if “I escape conscious awareness, escape “knowing”, I won’t be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. “Knowing” is painful because after “it” happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before” (p. 70). Discomfort and mobility must become synonymous with conscious advancement in our lives. Comfort denotes a false reality in which nothing bothers us, nothing grasps us at our hearts or encourages us to progress. Knowing *is* painful because it is a deeply internal process that leaves individuals alone with themselves. Pain and desire speak and we are forced to hear them newly. And if we truly listen, we are bound to find new ways to articulate pain and desire. Stories on paper can be our skin to the rest of the world so we must learn how to understand our senses, how to emerge from the Coatlicue state.

Colonization has taught us to fear ourselves, has taught us to remain trapped in Coatlicue states that prevent the process of decolonization and re-tellings of our pasts and present as sexual and racial others. Speaking even when our words are broken, new, and jumbled leads to conscious action and cathartic psychic release, which is crucial within a feminist of color discourse. In “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” (2008), Lorde writes, “we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us” (p. 44). The dark depths of self-discovery and self-reflexivity, however frightening and bare, must be deconstructed and spoken ferociously until our whole bodies are hoarse yet soothed.

Cherrie Moraga’s “La Ofrenda” is an example of sensory reliance, “body privileging” (Yarbro-Bejarano, 2001, p. 93) and the struggle to exist in and survive a Coatlicue state or a ‘drifting’ stage as similarly theorized in Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed*. I suggest that these stages, though they can be traumatizing, offer great possibility. Chela Sandoval (2000) refers to the act of ‘falling in love’ as a state of in-between. In this state of uncertainty, between individualism and couple-hood, between binaries and certainties, the possibility for differential consciousness becomes possible. Sandoval writes, “To fall in love means that one must submit, however temporarily, to what is “intractable,” to a state of being not subject to control or governance” (p. 142). Therefore, ‘freedom’, specifically freedom of the psyche, is realized. Moraga’s narrative is about literal love (unrequited at times) and the space of a loss the main character, Lola, inhabits after she loses Tiny her unrequited lover to cancer. The entire narrative takes place within a space of psychic instability, in which Lola can only mourn her relationship with Tiny and express her anger at disease and its (perceived) connection to

sexual deviancy or purity. “La Ofrenda” records the action of ‘falling in love,’ both literally and theoretically, which leads me to briefly hypothesize about what can be revealed during unstable spaces of falling in love.

From childhood the main character, Lola, has been in love with Tiny, but for most of their adolescence and young adult life Lola’s love is unrequited. Lola’s love for Tiny borders on idolization as she claims, “Yeah, I loved Tiny probably more than I loved any human being on the face of the earth. I mean I loved her like the way you love familia, like they could do anything—steal, cheat, lie, murder and you’d still love them because they’re your blood. Sangre. Tiny was my blood” (Moraga, 1991, p. 4). However, Tiny navigates life without afterthoughts. She loves Lola but often lacks the same concerned tenderness as Lola.

Lola’s love for Tiny is mobile and transcendent; it is deeply woven into spiritual, generational connections Lola has to her family and culture. The blood metaphor is repeated throughout the narrative. Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano (2001) discusses the repetitions in “La Ofrenda” as being a way for Lola to bring her past into the present. (p. 93). Lola’s relation of Tiny to Lola’s ancestral past is a way for Lola to carry generational closeness and love into the present and future. Lola says “there was blood on my hands and not from reaching into those women, but from Tiny’s hide. From my barrios hide...” (p. 4). Lola cannot resist speaking in metaphors when discussing Tiny. Tiny is not just her unrequited lover or her family but her neighborhood, her home, and the soil that gave birth to her. Later in the narrative when Lola and Tiny are in their thirties they (finally) have a sexual encounter. After Lola and Tiny sleep together Lola exclaims, “I would’ve married Tiny myself if she would’ve let me. I would’ve. I swear to it. But, I was relieved when she put on her pants and told me to get out. I was relieved

because I wouldn't have to work for the rest of my life loving someone. Tiny" (p. 8). Lola is constantly ready to stay whereas Tiny is always in the process of moving, of leaving.

The narrative ends with Tiny's death. Lola says "Tiny knew she wouldn't last that long. She was already telling me in her thirties how tired she was, fighting. And then I read it, right there in the L.A. Times. All these women, lesbians who never had babies, getting cancer. They never mention Tiny's name, but Tiny was there, among the childless women, among the dead. I thought, what's *this* shit? Women don't use their breasts like biology mandates, and their breasts betray them? Is this the lesbian castigo? AIDS for our brothers, cancer for us? Hate thinking like this, hate thinking it's all a conspiracy to make us join the fucking human race" (p. 8). Lola's anger is deep. She lost the most important woman in her life. But Lola also injures and loses her connection to this community/history of branded women through Tiny's death. As she is reminded of the fragility of human life she is simultaneously reminded that pain and trauma have deep roots within Chicana lesbianism.

Smell is a major part of this story (Yarbro-Bejarano, p. 93). The narrative begins with "...Smell is very important. Your eyes can fool you. You can see things that aren't there. But not smell. Smell remembers and tells the future. No lying about that...Smell is home or loneliness. Confidence or betrayal. Smell remembers" (p. 3). Lola remembers how Tiny smells just as deeply as she remembers any other detail about her. And when Tiny dies Lola burns copal as an offering and as remembrance. "I burn copal. Her name rising up with the smoke, dissolving into the ash morning sky. Her flesh, softening like the sap turned rock, returning liquid to the earth. Her scent inciting...memory" (p. 8). Smell is triggering, overpowering at times, and healing. The spiritual action of burning copal, of letting smell become the main sensory attraction, is the in-between. It incites mourning and memory of trauma from a space far

enough away from the original experience. It is a way to keep people (Tiny) alive in non-psychical space. For Lola it is a moment where she lets go, a moment where only remembering/reliving exist. This space is uncertain and unstable because Lola's only action is *feeling*. What discoveries she makes from her mourning are unknown; she is only falling, drifting in psychic space compounded by smell and memory.

In all, as Lola burns copal for the memory of Tiny we are reminded that pain has a smell that permeates the body. And as Dina is reminded of her mother's suffering from witnessing the suffering of a rat in the kitchen we are also reminded that we often create beautiful metaphors of our pain without even being conscious of it. And when these characters have been told to open up and let others in they also have to learn that letting others in expands consciousness and creates new segments of their lives that help us to rewrite and revise history and present time. What we remember about being racial/ethnic and sexual outsiders, border-crossers, is and can be triggered by the senses. Utilization of the conscious space of sensory drifting must be honed. Audre Lorde wrote about anger, pain, and trauma and the possibility for creativity and survival through the proper honing of them (Lorde, 2007, p. 124-133). Anzaldúa wrote about being in immense pain due to her illnesses but how she forced herself to write some of the most powerful things she has ever produced due to that control of pain (Bost, 2010, p. 77-114). When we are re-traumatized and re-stricken with the same pains we are given the opportunity to overcome wellness. Wellness is a false Western concept that should be reject. Instead, when we slip in and out of spaces of trauma we should not hope for emergence into 'wellness' but emergence into the unimaginable, into new *feelings* that are not binary, a new consciousness that ever expands each time we relapse into trauma.

Part Two: Resistance and Disidentification

Knife Symbolism and Seeing Past Phallic Power and Reactionary Survival.

In this section I demonstrate that in *What Night Brings* Marci Cruz's relationship with her knife transcends symbolism about lesbian 'phallic' power (Butler, 2004) and emasculation (of abusers) by lesbian outsiders. I assert the need for us as readers and community members to see past reactionary and binary modes of resistance as I also discuss the possibility of Marci's narrative as a disidentified production. Next, I discuss the bestowal of the knife to Marci and offer a way in which we can view knife symbolism that is neither based on violence nor Marci's possible desire to obtain 'male' power. And I end with a further explanation of how Marci redefines, frees, and resists reactionary thinking by leaving her home to live with her grandmother. Her leaving repeats countless others who have left or been forced to leave 'home' because of our sexual difference; however, her agency to leave home is revolutionary and hopefully the beginning of more narratives and realities.

I reevaluate Marci's reception, use, and internalization of the knife's power as something other than phallic symbolism. Binary mindsets when discussing sexuality, even queer sexuality, can lead to less exploratory and possibly less empowering reasoning within narratives. In this case if I can only associate the knife with Marci's desired phallus or more simply, her performance of masculinity, I associate her sexuality and freedom with male domains of power only. Judith Butler, in "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary" (2004) asserts that the "phallus and penis are not synonymous" (p. 141); therefore, the way I speak about phallic possession is not necessarily in relation to Marci's possible desire to have male genitalia (although at the beginning of the novel she desires male genitalia to escape her abuse).

Rather, phallic possession is more closely related with obtaining dominant sources of power such as Lacan's phallic imaginaries. Butler continues that the 'lesbian phallus' which she also argues does not *really* exist (p. 157-160), brings forth the possibility to "[reclaim] and positively [reterritorialize]" phallic definition that is preoccupied with masculinist and heterosexual assumptions (Freud) (p. 142; p. 168-169). Therefore, lesbian usages of the phallus are transcendent as the usages change assumptions about the phallus and about who can own it. Butler writes, "when the phallus is lesbian, then it is and is not a masculinist figure of power; the signifier is significantly split, for it both recalls and displaces the masculinism by which it is impelled" (p. 171). Subsequently, I could make an argument for how Marci redefines phallic energy by possessing a symbolically phallic instrument, the knife, and for the ways in which Marci breaks down masculine assumptions by using the knife as a source of empowerment.

However, this is not my argument. As previously stated, I wish to show how Marci's internalization of the knife is somewhat independent from ideas about vengeance and violence. Our concern is with how Marci moves on from her turbulent home life through a rethinking of 'knife power' that *is not* grounded in forms of power that are dominant, privileged, and oppressive. While I agree with Butler's assertions about lesbian phallus transcendence, our need to separate phallus from literal penile associations (p. 147-148), and the phallus as an imagined entity that does not have a specific body part connection (p. 166-167), I desire a different use of diction other than 'phallus,' which by its very definition creates a dichotomy from its assumed (masculine) connotations. Although we can transform and reclaim the word, I wonder if we can also choose different words as an act of creative agency and real progression. Also, I feel that Butler's argument for phallic 'renewal' (renewal of definition that is) still argues from a position of privilege that associates phallic power with domination and dominating groups—which I do

not want to reassert. Butler, drawing from Lacan (1958), claims that the phallus is a “privileged signifier” (p. 160) in that the power we attribute to the symbolic phallus forces the phallus to become a signifier vastly more important and ‘real’ than it actually is.

Butler explains that in Freud’s conceptualization of the phallus, it is something that men ‘have’ and women ‘are.’ Therefore the lesbian phallus is subversive because it changes woman’s role from simply ‘being’ to also ‘having’ the phallus (p. 141). But control of the phallus is a privilege. I do not believe that all men ‘have’ the phallus. Men of color occupy different political and social positions than white males and their sexual identities are not built around what power they have over other groups but, around how power over men of color has caused men of color to hyper-perform masculinity or any other sexual dominance. Similarly, women of color may indeed ‘be’ the phallus more than they can ‘have’ the phallus but understanding women of color’s position as both marginally racialized and sexualized (and highly exploited and abused) bodies calls for a different relationship to power and signification.

Butler discusses the importance of signifiers, like the phallus, when deconstructing race and the power of language associated with race (p. 141-143). However, I still believe that queer woman of color analyses or theories regarding the use of power that begin with Butler’s lesbian phallus theory as a foundation are grossly ignoring the fact that the phallus is ‘imagined’ and deconstructed on white queer and heterosexual identities. Intersectional phallic deconstruction is less written about or theorized on. The phallus has the ability to signify domination as it appears to not be as concerned with intersectional identities and their relation to the phallus itself. Therefore, in an attempt to push towards the creation of new language I ponder what new words and definitions can be proposed that are more independent from the ‘phallus’ and I also argue

that Marci's desire for freedom and knife security is something other than Marci's desire to obtain power that dominates, like the phallus.

Marci's home life is a system of domination for which she desperately wants to escape, not reinstate. Cristina Herrera writes in her essay "The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About": Rejection, Redemption, and the Lesbian Daughter in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*" (2010) that "one reality Marci risks if her emerging lesbianism is discovered is violence" (p. 28) at the hands of her father's continued abuse of all of the women in the Cruz family. This prolonged violence and domination prompts Marci's grandmother, Flor, to give Marci and Corin pocketknives for protection. Marci witnesses Grandma Flor intimidate Eddie with her own knife after Eddie attempts to choke Flor. "That's all it took. He tried to choke her, but before his hands got a good grip on her neck, Grandma pulled a switchblade from her pocket and laid the tip under his ribs" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 95). Later Marci opens her gift from Flor. "Secretly I opened my present. I lifted the lid off the box and there, against black cardboard, was a flicker of turquoise and silver. My very own knife" (p. 98). Flor has given Marci her own tool of empowerment. A tool that can be used to fight off male patriarchal violence within the household.

Marci may not be 'male' nor may she ever have male genitalia (a "birdy") but this action of receiving a knife is no doubt a form of power. But is the knife a gift of dominating power or of something else entirely? I believe it is a little bit of both. In a violent encounter between Marci and her father she says "I hung on to the knife, gripping it hard. I wish I had the guts to use it on him just like Grandma Flor"(p. 107). Marci and Corin even plan on teaching Eddie a lesson by using the knife on him (p. 141). They tie Eddie up one afternoon when he is napping on the couch and make Eddie listen to everything they have wanted to say to him but never got

the chance while holding him at knifepoint. To show Eddie that they are serious they “[take][their] knives and slowly pulled the tips across each of his cheeks, cutting a thin line on both sides of his face. A small trickle of blood dripp[ing] from the cuts” (p. 154). In the end it is Corin that inflicts the most physical violence when she shoots Eddie (p. 228-229) and not Marci as perhaps would make sense if this were solely a narrative about emasculation and women finding empowerment through overthrowing and claiming heteropatriarchal masculinity. At the same time, Marci’s ability to fight back against Eddie on more ‘equal’ terms (i.e. phallus versus penis) does play to Marci’s want for power that is similar to her father’s. But Marci’s final lack of injury to her father can be read as Marci’s desire for power that does not dominate or simply *react* to domination but that chooses an alternate path where power is a personal reinstatement of self-efficacy not a tool to further domination of self and other.

Consequently, if I judge Marci’s actions in this narrative and sources of empowerment as merely reactionary to heteropatriarchal power within her home, and if I assume her freedom is dependent upon her injury of Eddie, I cut short Marci’s self-definition, her ability to act with agency, and her ability to be a queer subject independent of oppressive power relations residing in the form of male dominance. However, I do not argue that Marci is never reactionary as she does, at various points in the novel, seek revenge on her father. Nor would I argue that she is *completely* able to govern herself outside of oppressive power relations as a child (I do not believe anyone can realistically be independent of all power dominations). But if we as readers cannot dream outside of action vs. reaction within literature then we certainly cannot do so in our daily lives, and any struggle for freedom is severely diminished.

In regards to the knife’s symbolism, we can, of course, assume that it is a weapon used for defense. Marci’s knife evens the playing field with her father as it did when Grandma Flor

uses it on him (p. 95-96). Owned by a lesbian character with expressed 'masculine' desires, the knife is an addition to her performance of traditional masculinity (a masculine identity of color which has been negativity associated with violence and weaponry (Cacho, 2011, p. 73, 77, 79-80)). Or, if we scan Marci's knife through Butler's lesbian phallus theory, the knife can have a number of new meanings and bodily attachments that make up the phallus as being a source of power. So let us imagine the knife's existence/symbolism outside of retaliatory violence. A knife's basic function is to cut things, to be used as a tool for gathering and preparing food, to be a means of independence and survival. Survival has complex meanings however. Marci protecting her mother and sister from her father's violence is literal survival. And Marci's final emotional freedom from her home and peace of mind is also survival.

Without further using the knife on her father Marci has obtained freedom because the knife symbolizes independence and is the beginning point of self-nourishment. Marci desires to be an independent queer woman of color with self-sustainability and self-definition as powerful and crucial parts of her decolonized 'borderlands' identity. Perhaps her fascination with her grandmother Flor's knife 'agility' is more focused on her grandmother's independence in general rather than her ability to inflict violence. At the end of the story Marci and Corin move in with Flor. Marci meets a young lesbian named Robbie and they share a bond that is partially based on their queer sexuality. Marci's freedom, both verbal and physical, to share space with Robbie is due to the fact that Marci has been taken under her grandmother's care.

The knife gives Marci physical protection and she uses it once on Eddie though Marci is ultimately able to 'win' without using the knife. Flor's stability and independence is more powerful and more threatening to patriarchal, heterosexist rule (within the Cruz household and beyond) than the knife. When Flor leaves after threatening Eddie with her own knife Marci

describes her grandmother's exit. "She was almost out of sight when she lifted her hand up and waved like she was in a parade. She was still waving as the car sped around the corner" (p. 98). Flor exits like royalty and her image of victory is locked into Marci's consciousness. I argue that the knife scene with Flor is less about Flor's knife in Eddie's ribs and more about Flor being *imagined* as a person capable of standing up to Eddie and capable of walking away from Eddie on her own. Danielson (2009) writes, "It is in [Marci's] acceptance that [she] begins to enact a mode of creative subversion" (p. 89). Marci's final acceptance of self that she gains once she leaves her abusive home is also threatening to patriarchal rule in ways more powerful than physical violence. In the end, Marci desires more than seeing her father 'get what he deserves.' Her desire is to leave, to ride off waving like her grandmother can and does, to stand up to dominant control and accept her body and sexuality all while being able to walk away without (fatally) violent interaction.

Leaving is revolutionary. I recently saw a film by Dee Rees entitled *Pariah* (2011) about a Black lesbian teenager named Alike. As Alike comes into her identity as a Black lesbian she deals with her rejecting mother, her somewhat distant father, and her first sexual encounter with a girl who later seems to regret being intimate with Alike. When Alike tells her mother that she is a lesbian her mother beats her and kicks her out of the house. Between the disconnect at home and the heartbreak from her first sexual encounter Alike decides that she is going to graduate school early and move to San Francisco to attend an early college program. Alike's father, who accepts her as she is, tells her that she does not have to run away. Alike tells him that she is not running; she is choosing. She later writes a poem and ends it with the lines, "I am not broken. I am free" (Rees, 2011). She is not running from rejection or leaving home because she cannot make it there. She is choosing to live life in a way that allows her to dream outside of the

confines of her home. Her poetry and her intellect have pushed her into the unimaginable, the outsider with agency.

Marci does not “run away” from the mental and physical terror from her father, she chooses to leave. Her grandmother offers her a new place to grow and Marci, empowered with new tools of self-sufficiency and self-survival, *decides* to move forward. She no longer dreams of being male, nor does she dream of violence towards her father because she does not need to. Her life has become something beyond ‘suffering’, beyond ‘vengeance’, and beyond idolization of male power and acceptance. At the end of the novel Robbie kisses Marci. Marci thinks, “I didn’t know what to do or think. But for once I could say I felt so good it didn’t matter” (p. 242). The tangible feeling of ‘goodness’ was unobtainable before for Marci. Arguably her greatest triumph is not simply leaving from physical and mental violence, nor is it the act of leaving in general, but it is the act of *feeling*. The knife enables Marci to *feel* just as Robbie’s kiss also enables Marci to *feel* (Danielson, 2009, p. 88-91). For women who have been labeled outsiders, pariahs, deviants, who have been told that their feelings are invalid, wrong, and unreal, the act of *feeling* life in ways that they were never suppose to is psychic freedom and physical resistance. It is in this conscious space that words develop to describe this particular act of feeling and the act of freeing oneself. This is self-healing built upon new language to describe the power we have and seek, healing that does not have to be dependent upon oppressor/oppressed power relations, and healing that is so internal that when it is sought after it cannot be shaken from the individual undergoing this healing consciousness.

Spice: Breaking Ritual and Finding the Hunger Again.

Within *Spice* (1997) one of the more powerful senses is sight; it is Richardson's physical location within the world, within her campus community, within her relationship that this story unfolds. In this analysis I break down the sense of sight into several avenues. First I discuss the physical characteristics associated with lesbianism that Richardson begins to 'practice' and ritualize. Next I examine Richardson's physical space and consequent alienation and subjugation and objectification within her lesbian relationship with a White woman named Jen and within Jen's community to which Richardson believes she 'belongs'. Last, by applying bell hooks' essay "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" (1998) I discuss the metaphor within the narrative of being a "spice," an extra kick of flavor in someone's bland life –the physical consummation/commodification of identity that occurs because of her racialized sexual identity. I offer a mode of resistance, disidentification-based, that is critical of the process of 'consuming' identity as well as 'being consumed.'

Lesbian ritualistic and spiritual practices within this narrative reveal the breaking point between subjectivity (Richardson's agency to practice rituals) and otherness (the moment she is consumed). To be clear, I am using the word spiritual in secular terms. Spiritual refers to conscious or sensory freedom and fulfillment that may come from religion or from any other activity, identity, and belief that excites the psyche and produces knowledge. Richardson falls in love with Jen, a white lesbian, in college and claims that "she was the essence of lesbian for me" (Richardson, 1997, p. 225) and proceeds to mimic Jen's lesbian traits, from clothing to intellect. The idolization of Jen continues as Jen shows Richardson the ropes of lesbian life; "Jen taught me about everything that lesbians did. From her I was introduced to the world of dyke culture and history. She gave me a stack of the required reading to become a full-fledged lesbian" and

“I joined their ranks [a group of radical activist lesbians] with Jen. I borrowed a friend’s leather jacket, smoked Camels, and learned how to discuss Foucault and Fanon in diners for hours” (p. 225). Not only is Richardson immersed into lesbian culture but she also arms herself with lesbian knowledge and knowhow from the inside out.

However, Richardson reflects on the lack of Black lesbian voices and history within her ‘lesbian certification packet’ but continues to practice Jen’s lesbianism because it is the closest thing to home (acceptance) she has. Actions are repeated, made familiar within a desired reality in order to make individuals feel calm. When something becomes ingrained and when an action can be performed flawlessly we often rejoice in the comfort of stability. If we feel that we have devoted ourselves to a performance, the spiritual return is a secure identity. Richardson puts her faith and safety in Jen. Richardson finds home in Jen as she also makes stable and secure her lesbian identity through proper ritualization and devotion.

Ritualization of an activity or identity is not inherently oppressive or negative (Manodori, 1998, p. 42). Ritualization of subversive sexuality can work to empower individuals from the inside out. We need to train ourselves mentally to break free of monotonous binary thinking and imagine greater. However, this new repetition means breaking free of old repetitions, such as practicing ‘acceptable’ modes of sexuality or gender identity, such as pre-established and stereotypical images of lesbian and queer identities. As we see with this narrative, even Richardson’s stereotypical performance of sexuality ultimately does not pan out. It is false ritualism that leaves her feeling empty when she discovers that she will never be part of the white lesbian community that creates the rituals.

Sight for Richardson signals her failure in ritualism. It is not until she sees her performance of lesbianism as performance that she understands that it is all for the

commodification of someone else (Jen). On the day that Jen and Richardson break up they take pictures of each other. Jen begins to laugh as she takes pictures of Richardson in pajamas against the backdrop of Jen's room. Jen's room is full of shelved collectibles. Cultural 'items' Jen's world-traveling parents brought back for her keep in her possession. Richardson realizes the source of Jen's laughter, "It had suddenly occurred to [Jen] that I matched the room" (p. 226). It is through the camera that Jen realizes Richardson's collectible image. We can quite obviously say that through Jen's 'lens' she has captured Richardson's lack of realness. Richardson is frozen, collected in film to be gazed at over and over again as a camouflaged portrait. Arguably, all pictures have the ability to make the person within them consumable and exploitable; however, these pictures add to a historical legacy of Black female bodily exploitation. The pictures of Richardson may not be sexual or erotic in any 'visual' sense but Richardson's blendability to the knick-knack-souvenir-multicultural-environment within Jen's room is nonhuman. If we imagine Jen showing the pictures to her white friends we imagine their laughter over Richardson's likeness to the rest of the 'spices' in Jen's room. Richardson's personhood is diminished; she is an object. The situation is grotesque in the way Jen's laughter empowers white humanness, while it flattens, captures, and stifles Richardson's Black lesbian womanhood.

There is power in seeing the souvenirs of world travel and then seeing oneself as another multicolored item. Richardson ponders the issue of sight between she and Jen, "I handed myself over to a white girl who had never seen me at all. I mean, she didn't have any trouble visually seeing me, she just couldn't bring herself to visualize my existence" (p. 225). Jen cannot *critically visualize* Richardson. Critical visibility in definition is visibility beyond physical 'viewing' of others. Instead, to see someone critically, to visualize someone's existence, means

to deeply understanding their history and position in life that has made and continues to make their existence marginalized and overwhelmingly invisible. Perhaps if Jen could visualize Richardson's existence Jen would feel incomplete because it would force her to identify without the security of her appropriated cultural artifacts, her *spice*.

bell hooks discusses white culture's exploitation and consumption of Black bodies in her profound essay "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" (1998). hooks states, "The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (p. 181). Jen's commodification of the spicy items of Richardson and the other cultural souvenirs in her room appeases Jen's white desire for identity confirmation (a reminder that she is not the Other) through pleasurable relations (i.e. romantic relationships and souvenir hoarding). "When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relation with the Other" (p. 183). The relationship between Jen and Richardson is based upon domination. Jen holds the key to the 'lesbian world,' her friends become Richardson's friends, and Richardson shares her secrets with Jen and places complete trust in her (Richardson, 1997, p. 225).

Jen exerts her power as a sexual and cultural teacher to Richardson not only because she has had more experiences as an out lesbian but also because Jen has been taught by her parents and society that as a white individual she can commodify, store, and educate racial 'Others.' Commodification is pleasurable and dangerous for the one commodifying culture because

“encounters with Otherness are clearly marked as more exciting, more intense, and more threatening. The lure is the combination of pleasure and danger” (p. 186). Jen’s souvenirs represent successful travels into Otherness; the souvenirs are physical proof of her closeness to Otherness. Yet Jen’s inability and fear of visualizing Richardson is the bit of danger that makes commodification empowering to white culture. For Jen to visualize Richardson would mean that Jen would need to radically restructure the way that she views humanity and Richardson’s role in it.

On the other hand, the result for commodified individuals, like Richardson, is loss of humanity when we discover we have been commodified. hooks writes, “much of the psychic pain that black people experience daily in a white supremacist context is caused by dehumanizing oppressive forces, forces that render us invisible and deny us recognition” (p. 195). It has often been a withdrawal from white culture, either in the form of cultural nationalism (supremacy) or segregation, which has been successful at community preservation and resisting feelings of invisibility. Exploited communities battle being consumed by pulling away. Richardson’s narrative immediately ends with her realization that she is Jen’s spice. The blank page after the word ‘spice’ is metaphoric. The entire relationship and narrative stop at Richardson’s realization. As readers we do not know what is next for Richardson but we see visual blankness denoting harsh separation and pain (p. 226). There is no positive ending, no reunion, no forgiveness, and no discussion about Richardson finding herself again after her relationship with Jen, only the emptiness and invisibility commodification brings to commodified bodies.

Where do we as marginalized readers and writers move from here? How do we continue the narrative and fill in blank pages within our lives that have been placed and erased there due

to the destruction of commodity culture? I argue that we must heal the relationship between subject and object while repressing the need to commodify cultural Otherness. hooks expresses that exploitation of the Other has been successful at maintaining white supremacy and capitalist domination but that this consumer/consumed relationship has untapped potential for transformation. She writes, “Whether or not desire for contact with the Other, for connection rooted in the longing for pleasure, can act as critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance, is an unrealized political possibility. Exploring how desire for the Other is expressed, manipulated, and transformed by encounters with difference and the different is a critical terrain that can indicate whether these potentially revolutionary longings are ever fulfilled” (p. 182). To transform this relationship between white culture and Otherness both parties need to redefine what it means to consume and to be consumed. This old narrative is fixed in oppressor/oppressed terms and our desire is to stop hierarchal power relations.

José Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) places queer performance at the center for resistant politics. Muñoz, building off of feminist of color resistance strategies as presented in texts such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1984), argues that disidentification is a resistant strategy of empowerment that is different than assimilationist and anti-assimilationist standpoints. Disidentification strategies are not always the most direct or only resistance options but disidentification offers, to those who practice, ways of resisting that work “within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously” (p. 5) and may be more tangible and realistic in practice.

Muñoz writes, “disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that

continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (p. 4). As a survival strategy disidentification works on personal levels that allows individuals in daily life to resist oppressive categorizations of race, sexuality, and gender. Disidentification does not argue for a completely radical deconstruction of normative institutions, rather disidentification moves forward within the system while strategically dismantling it (p. 5, 11-12). I argue that if hook’s consumer versus consumed identities are viewed as being assimilationist versus anti-assimilationist discourse, in that if individuals become consumers of identity—even if we are marginalized people—we assimilate to normative practices and if we resist those discourse (and the status of being a consumed other) by way of being an outcast or consumed identity, then the ‘new ground’ I suggest we find may be a disidentified one that resists both paths of consumerism.

Therefore, consumers and consumed bodies need to become hungry again –not hungry for each other’s culture but hungry for our own discovery and creation of self *in* relation and in contribution to others’ discovery and relation of self. Put simply, instead of consuming each other we need stabilize ourselves in ways that makes our desire for one another independent and resistant to the perpetuation of hierarchal oppressive power. Muñoz writes, “disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (p. 31). The ‘code of the majority’ here is in hook’s argument about White culture’s repetitious consumption and Black culture’s repetitious experience of being consumed. Disidentification uses this knowledge to imagine a new way to subvert identification. In the context of “Spice” an antiassimilationist counterstance may be for Richardson to radically pull away from white culture whereas an assimilationist stance may be to

continue a relationship with Jen or any other woman while knowing that her existence as a Black lesbian is rarely *seen*. A disidentified position finds ways of taking into account all of these factors while keeping queer subjectivity and Richardson's individuality intact and resistant. What does this look like? I am unsure but its discovery will surely be the beginning of a disidentified theory of queer of color resistance in narrative practice.

Transformation begins when people with power give up mindless consumption of Others and when people without power do more than react to their consumption. There is a need to find middle space, possibly a disidentified space, where individuals are willing to find new forms of nourishment. We can have positive 'cultural' exchanges with one another that put neither of us in a position of becoming a *spice*. If we stop thinking in identity *excess*, meaning the blind consumption of others even if we have our own sustainable identities, then we can start building consciousness around *necessity*, around only the things we need to survive after we have stabilized our own identities. We need to trade with each other parts of ourselves that will not leave us damaged and malnourished; or the opposite, overfed and asleep to the exploitation we have caused.

Chapter Summary

This chapter blurs binaries and asks that we begin to dream in the unimaginable. When we record narratives organic patterns of sensory remembrance often emerge. Chapter three brings *feeling* to the surface and this chapter asks us to live in those sensory spaces. As racialized and sexualized Others our movements in this world are already resistant but the next step is to become conscious of our oppositional and disidentified resistance strategies and extend them. The next step is to open our stories to each other in ways that penetrate the psyche. As

readers and as writers and speakers the act of resistance begins when we can articulate desire on levels that inspires new motion for all of us. Whether we are rethinking symbols and their power, or breaking repetitions that support ideas of sexuality and race and ethnicity consumption, we are aiming for the area of the unknown. We are border-crossers, insiders and outsiders, women who have never written or spoken enough. If we want to hear each other then we have to let go, speak from our deepest guttural desires, and occupy the spaces in which we live between.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Journey: Our Continued Push Towards Theory and Liberation

This project is about the spaces between acceptance and abjection, and between consciousness and death (invisibility). Thus, any and all future work must continue to be the breath in-between. In chapter one I discussed the importance of writing and creating history that has been invisible and unexamined. Cheryl Dunye's idea about "creating your own history" (1996) is a reminder that every thesis, essay, narrative, and speech that I create has to expand on previous visible texts and simultaneously create new queer women of color writings. Queer women of color connections to one another are dependent upon our ability to fill the gaps in each other's stories and to break cycles of violence, silence, and fear that keep our lives withheld and internalized.

In chapter two I explained how actions such as dissemblance has been used by Black women to protect sexual identity from white heteropatriarchal scrutiny that would exploit and destroy Black self-definitions. I counter with the argument that this shielding has kept queer female sexuality hidden for much too long. I also in this same chapter bring attention to labels of blame and betrayal that Chicana lesbians face from their racial and ethnic communities, Chicanos, and religion, for knowing and loving other women's bodies as they know and love their own. And I end with the assertion that although queer Black and Chicana face expulsion from our racial and ethnic communities for our sexual difference we can use self-knowledge of being outsiders and border-crossers as sources of empowerment.

All future work I do will continue the process of narrative recovery and creation because this is where my needs are articulated, and this where I have the opportunity to listen and build

theory based on those needs. When, in chapter three, I discuss matrilineal relationships, the queerness of relationships with mothers and grandmothers, the queerness and erotic power they breathe into daughters, I laid the foundation for deeper examinations of generational survival through transformative modes of power held by queer female of color subjects. How have storytellers transformed notions of womanhood and motherhood through visible queer interjection? How has Marci Cruz from *What Night Brings* (2003) started a new narrative of strength by being queer and escaping the oppressive institution of the patriarchal home? How has Ursa Corregidora from *Corregidora* (1975) kept alive her generational abuse through the repetition of memory?

Furthermore, if Ursa, by holding onto memory, ensured that her family's story will never be forgotten and her matrilineal and community kin will never again be forced into invisibility, then how can we as individuals methodologically repeat, store, and utilize our own trauma stories to ensure that our future and past are never buried again? And finally, how do queer women gain healthy romantic and friendship-based relationships if erotic suppression, colonization, and physical and sexual abuse has hindered the ability to open up? Dina from "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" (2003) has difficulties acknowledging her erotic power because of past trauma. If Dian can somehow allow herself to *feel* and trust those feelings then healing can begin. However, I do not have an exact strategy for overcoming this difficulty. I can only assert that I will continue reading and writing stories that grapple with erotic suppression and recovery and begin to build paths between the two.

And this path-building extends to chapter four where I suggested that more time needed to be spent discussing how the senses appear in queer women of color writings. I do this so that I may continue to concern myself primarily with the lived experiences and feelings of queer

women of color. Cherrie Moraga's "La Ofrenda" (1991) and Karen T. Delgadillo's "Mamita te extraño" (1991) are narratives about queer Chicanas dealing with loss of loved ones and the way that the senses envelop people when we slip into traumatic spaces. I argue that we may need to temporarily stay in traumatic spaces while listening to our bodies and minds for transitions into new consciousness. Subsequently, another main concern of mine is in envisioning women of color queer theories that listen to the body and interpret sensual symbols, repetitions, and desires as wholly legitimate forms of communication and knowledge (Christian, 1990, p. 343). And women of color queer theories need not only be representative of the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality but of the decolonizing and cathartic process of storytelling. My future work must be in producing theories, theories organically built from the ground up that must always be a process of listening to what is written, spoken, and unspoken.

I titled this thesis project as a project engaging differential consciousness and resistance. And therefore, in chapters two and four I challenged myself and other willing queer women of color to take new approaches to how we read, write, and interpret queer narratives so that our work is self-created and resistant. I use Mattie Richardson's autobiographical narrative "Spice" (1997) to begin dialogue about new relationships between 'marginal' and 'centered' (hooks, 1989) groups that are not wholly dependent on theories of consumer and consumed identity, such as what bell hooks presents in "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" (1998). Self-stabilization of identity for both marginal and centered people is a small step in reducing the need to consume and appropriate others. I desire a disidentified and differential shift towards new ways of sharing identity, of "shuffling back and forth between reception and production" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 25) that exists without exploitation and without oppressive binaries that limit the potential for freedom and self-expression.

I have continually thought of this project as an exercise leading up to something fundamentally radical within myself. I sat in silence with narratives for far longer than I ever had before. I wrote and reflected on my personal narratives to see what I could theorize from the themes, words, and images that I so often put on paper. When I would start to theorize I found myself forming ideas that felt foreign to any previous way of thinking, to any previous theory about sexuality, or the senses, or resistance I had known. This thesis project is not about ‘getting it all right,’ as I am aware that I only included a limited number of prose narratives and only discussed certain themes that I felt resonated the most with me. However, this project is about stretching my mind to new possibilities and to realizing that what is written and how it is read it is what determines what new theories and modes of transmission can be found within written narratives.

Barbara Christian in “The Race for Theory” (1990) writes, “for people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking,” (p. 336). Through the process of creating theory or discovering and practicing techniques of differential and disidentified consciousness or uncovering the intricacies of relationships, as queer bodies, with others, our communities are always speaking, writing, reading, and creating in cyclical fashions that mirror our dynamic and complex lives. I see this project as my beginning and my small contribution to queer women of color epistemologies and theory. I leave this project then with the desire to keep my writing dynamic, shifting, and ever building off of other narratives and off of itself.

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