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**“I AM WHAT I AM, TAKE IT OR LEAVE ME ALONE”
TRANSLATING CHICANANESS WITH THE *AYUDA*
OF LA MALINCHE**

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“I AM WHAT I AM, TAKE IT OR LEAVE ME ALONE”¹
TRANSLATING CHICANANESS WITH THE *AYUDA* OF LA MALINCHE

Michaela Höller

¹ Rosario Morales, “I Am What I Am.”

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Hay tantísimas fronteras
que dividen a la gente,
pero por cada frontera
existe también un puente.

— Gina Valdés, *Puentes y Fronteras: Coplas Chicanas*

Out of corn, water, and lime the *tortillera* makes the *masa* of her identity.

—Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “Tortillerismo,” 962

Si somos espejo de Cada una,
Soy Malinche,
Soy La Virgen de Guadalupe,
Soy Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,
Soy Frida Kahlo,
Soy Mujer.

[...]

I have come to knock at your door,
A Decirte,
“NO MAS!”

WE ARE THE REVOLUTION!

— Lydia Camarillo, “Mi Reflejo”

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Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar
(*Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks*)
— Gloria Anzaldúa, “Foreword to the Second Edition” of *This Bridge Called My Back*

PREFACE



Although U.S. Latinas/os² constitute a crucial part of the American population, they are frequently pushed to the margins of society and defined as the cultural other. The experience of Latinas/os is marked by a constant feeling of in-betweenness, as they have to negotiate various identities and are constantly forced to defend themselves against multiple forms of oppressions from the outside (see Kaminsky 22). In addition to the feeling of cultural alienation, Latina women are also confronted with sexual inequalities inherent in their culture, which converts them into the eternal inferior ‘Other.’ This constant notion of otherness dominates the entire lives of people of colour and has a decisive influence on their self-perception.

The focus of this thesis is put on fictional texts written by women of Mexican American descent. Since the mid 1970s and early 80s publications by Chicana³ writers have increased and have grown into a considerable body of fiction. While the 1980s marked the beginning of a plethora of publications, Chicana women have produced numerous other texts before this period. However, Chicanas were often relegated to the background and silenced by their own communities (see Rebolledo, and Rivero 22). Despite various difficulties, Chicana writers managed to create a flourishing corpus of texts, which allowed them to openly express their thoughts and

² For a very long time governmental institutions, among others the U.S. Census Bureau, have tended to use the term “Hispanic,” exclusively, despite the fact that the more neutral term “Latina/o,” has long been preferred. Since 2000, people whose country of origin is Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America, or the Caribbean can classify themselves as “Spanish, Hispanic or Latino.” This category is further broken down into “Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano,” “Puerto Rican,” or “Cuban.” Those who are from different countries than the aforementioned, are asked to indicate to be “other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino” and to specify the respective country. For further information, see the homepage of the U.S. Census Bureau <<http://www.census.gov/>> where the questionnaire of the 2010 census can be found. While the inclusive term Latina/o is a widely accepted label, it does not distinguish between the different groups, but rather subsumes an extremely heterogeneous group of people of Latin American descent under a generic term (see Niemann xii).

³ As the introductory chapter of this thesis will clarify, the terms Chicana/o and Mexican American refer to people of Mexican descent and are used by many writers interchangeably. Nevertheless, usage may considerably differ in terms of political perspectives; as a result this study generally prefers the former (see Messinger Cypess, *Malinche* 4). As my focus will stress feminist texts, the generic ‘Chicano’ has been replaced by the female ‘Chicana,’ unless explicitly referring to men. The terms *mexicano* or Mexican are used when specifically referring to first generation immigrants who do not define themselves as American. When dealing with non-Latinas/os, the term Anglo or Anglo American is employed.

concerns. Apart from ethnic and class oppressions, issues of gender and sexuality were foregrounded (see Reboledo, and Rivero 23)⁴.

This thesis will look at two contemporary Chicana literary texts and analyse how the female protagonists try to surmount the difficulty of being neither the one nor the other, but both at the same time, in order to create their individual Chicana identities. Here, the book *Borderlands/La Frontera* by the Chicana/Tejana theorist and writer Gloria Anzaldúa plays a crucial role. In her collection of essays and poems, she promotes the destruction of narrow categories and suggests border spaces as fruitful places where cultures meet and clash and new hybrid identities can be formed (see *Borderlands* 25). Her poem “To live in the Borderlands means you” emphasises the necessity to “[...] live *sin fronteras* / be a crossroads” (41-42), encouraging a different consciousness which is marked by multiple and continually shifting subject positions. This request to destabilise borders will be essential for the analysis of my selected Chicana texts, because it promotes a multifaceted notion of identity which is marked by inclusion rather than exclusion. Identity will be understood as something fragmentary which undergoes constant change. Therefore, instead of looking for a ‘true’ Chicana identity, the aim will be to point towards the existence of multiple and continually changing identities.

My study has been motivated by an interest to show how the concept of translation has been used in Chicana literature as a strategy to articulate the protagonists’ Chicananess. Their realities are shaped by a plethora of different linguistic and cultural codes which require them to function as translators. However, the analysis will show that the protagonists have to realise that rather than adapting their identities to the needs of others, they have to adapt the multiple elements that form their realities to their own needs. The notion of translation is used to help the protagonists to gain a voice by integrating the past into their present and by transforming patriarchal norms into something new (see Simon, *Gender* 134). As I will show, translation is vital for the protagonists to create new hybrid identities, which are simultaneously part of both worlds and of none. These acts of translation

⁴ For a more detailed overview of Chicana literature, see Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. River’s anthology *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature*.

convert them into active agents in the formation of their individual Chicana identities.⁵

The chapter titled “The Importance of Language(s) in Chicana Literature” will reveal how Chicana writers manage to create narratives that mirror this multiplicity and encourage the blurring of borders. Sometimes this myriad of identities may seem contradictory; however, this plurality is essential, as it allows an open definition of what Chicaneness means for the individual Chicana. Here, it is important to note that this study does not want to provide a sociological or anthropological account of Chicanas, but it deals exclusively with the different expressions of Chicaneness presented in fictional texts.

The body of my thesis will be devoted to the study of two fictional works written in English by two contemporary Chicana authors. My main endeavour is to analyse how María, the female protagonist of Josefina López’s play *Simply Maria, Or the American Dream*, and Leticia, the first person narrator of Felicia Luna Lemus’ novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, struggle to define themselves by mediating between the different parts that shape their identities. Instead of functioning as translators for their families or American society at large, they have to question imposed norms and translate them into their specific circumstances. Only by integrating and adapting the past to their present, can they create their individual Chicana identities. In these instances, it will be analysed in how far class, race, ethnicity, and in particular gender and sexuality play a crucial role. The main focus of my analysis is on Leticia and María’s inner conflict, which is grounded in the different cultural perceptions of womanhood.

Basing my theoretical formulations on the explanations of cultural identity by Stuart Hall, the chapter “Cultural Identity(ies)” will offer a broad overview of his definitions. His findings are crucial for an analysis of the perception of ethnic identities in the above mentioned texts. It will be interesting to find out, whether Leticia and María’s interpretations of cultural identity agree with the concept of their

⁵ My understanding of Chicana identity is based on Astrid M. Fellner’s concept of “articulating selves.” In her book *Articulating Selves: Contemporary Chicana Self-Representation*, she relies on the notion of articulation coined by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and then further developed by Stuart Hall. Fellner defines the concept of “articulating selves” as the “ethnic articulation of the past which is achieved through a performative act of genealogical alignment establishing links between the different parts of the selves” (*Articulating* 27).

families or in how far the two women need to mediate between a desire to belong to a specific cultural group and an urge to break free from the confines imposed on them by this particular group.

Linguistic translation will be the starting point from which a more open concept of translation will be developed. The chapter titled “Linguistic Translation” will provide a concise definition of ‘translation’ as well as a short summary of major translation techniques used in Chicana literature. Besides commenting on the ideal form of translation, contextual translation (see Cutter 195), or even the decision to not translate certain terms will be mentioned. These techniques, as well as the untranslatability of certain terms (see chapter on “The Notion of Untranslatability”) indicate that a more open and less restrictive concept of translation is needed. In addition, the analysis of the primary texts will reveal that traditional ways of translating from a source language into a target language are impossible for the protagonists. The characters’ realities are marked by a constant crossing of linguistic as well as cultural borders, resulting in highly hybrid and constantly changing realities where certain parts of their identities become untranslatable.

Sherry Simon’s theoretical formulations of cultural translation, mentioned in her work *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, will be crucial for the analysis of the selected Chicana texts. Apart from explaining the different parts of one’s identity(ies) to others, translation is interpreted as a means of construction. María and Leticia’s in-betweenness is not perceived as a stigma, but as a possibility to access different spheres which provide them with new perspectives and allow them to question imposed frames of references (see Wyatt 260). By integrating elements of different cultures and adapting them to their present circumstances, they disrupt borders and enable the formation of multiple identities which are subject to constant change. Therefore, the idea of “translating Chicaneness” has been specifically chosen for this thesis and is understood as a re-writing or a re-articulation of patriarchal norms and categories, allowing the protagonists of the selected literary texts to be more than one ‘thing’ at the same time (see Simon, *Gender* 134).

This study will mainly focus on how the female protagonists of *Trace Elements* and *Simply María* try to free themselves from the incarcerating concepts of womanhood imposed on them by patriarchal society. Here, in particular the traditional female/male dyad, which is deeply ingrained in Mexican tradition and the dominant categorisation of women into good versus bad girls, as exemplified by the virgin/whore dichotomy, are of great interest. Consequently, it is inevitable to deal with the three metaphorical mothers of Chicana culture, namely La Malinche, La Llorona and La Virgen de Guadalupe, who are used to illustrate appropriate or inappropriate behaviour, decisively influencing the self-definitions of Chicanas (see Zygałło 148). The chapter “Female Role Models” will provide a general overview on these mythical figures, and discuss how they are used in literary texts to describe the control of Chicana women by both Chicanos and Chicanas respectively. Here, particularly patriarchal interpretations of these figures will be foregrounded, which establish La Virgen as a desirable role model, in contrast to La Llorona and La Malinche, who are defined as the epitomes of bad girls. Furthermore, this chapter also deals with Chicana writers re-readings and re-articulations of dominant (his-)stories of their metaphorical mothers in order to convert them into powerful role models.

My aim is to disclose existing similarities between the protagonists of the selected texts and La Malinche, the sixteenth century interpreter, who especially during the nineteenth century and the Chicano Movement of the 1960s was stigmatised by patriarchal society as a whore and a traitor due to her openness to the foreign (see Franco 59). In order to reveal these parallels, a detailed description of the historical account and common interpretations of La Malinche will be vital.

However, the principle endeavour of my study is to disclose how the female protagonists of two selected literary texts manage to define themselves without being forced into restrictive categories. Therefore, it will be important to find out, how the (in)famous mythical/historical translator can help them to claim their powerful voices. Here, I will suggest feminist re-readings of La Malinche’s story as a possible way to destroy the virgin/whore dichotomy and consequently the stigmatisation of Chicanas who embrace the multiple parts of their identities as sell-outs. As will be shown in the chapter “(Re)member HERstory: Feminist (Re)vindications of La Malinche and Her *Hijas*,” Chicana feminists foreground Malinche’s linguistic skills

and her extreme intelligence, converting her into a figure of empowerment (see Dröscher, and Rincón 7-8). Revised stories of La Malinche depict her as an essential guide for Chicanas and convert her into a crucial pillar to help Chicanas construct bridges, and thus their own identities. Regardless, whether Malinche is perceived in a positive or negative way, her voice echoes throughout Mexican and Chicana/o culture and must not be ignored. This necessity of accepting La Malinche's voice will become apparent in the analysis of Pat Mora's poem "Malinche's Tips: Pique from Mexico's Mother."

The feminist re-readings and re-writings of Malinche's his-story, allow Chicanas to (re-)claim both the voice of their frequently vilified metaphorical mother, as well as their own voices (see Maldonado 57). Similar to the feminist translations of Malinche's stories, it becomes apparent that also the protagonists of *Simply María* and *Trace Elements* must realise the necessity to translate their past into their present. Thus, Malinche will serve as a "conceptual spring board" (Birmingham-Pokorny qtd. in Bandau 177), encouraging the questioning of patriarchal notions of womanhood and the active engagement in the construction of one's Chicananess (see Birmingham-Pokorny ref. to in Bandau 177).

CULTURAL CONTEXT



Theoretical Considerations

Before entering into a detailed analysis of two Chicana literary texts, revealing that the descriptions of experiences of in-betweenness are dominated by images of translation, it is crucial to first clarify certain terms and concepts, thereby establishing the historical background knowledge necessary for a deeper understanding of the specific circumstances of the protagonists. This overview will be followed by a broad outline of Stuart Hall's explanations of cultural identity, allowing for an investigation of the different perceptions of ethnic identity presented in Josefina López's play *Simply María, Or the American Dream* and Felicia Luna Lemus' novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*.

Terminology

She has this fear that she has no names that
she has many names that she doesn't know her
names [...]

— Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 65

[...] there are as many names as there are namers [...]

— Norma Alarcón, "Chicana Feminism" 379

A variety of names are used to refer to people of Mexican descent living in the United States, ranging from terms such as Hispanics, Latinas/os, *La Raza*, Mexican, Mexican American, Spanish American, Chicanas/os, *Xicanas/os* to Tex Mex, *Indias/os*, *Pochas/os*, etc. Each term carries with it distinct symbolic connotations, referring to a particular class, region, political consciousness or level of integration into mainstream U.S. American life (see Vázquez, and Torres 3).

This thesis uses the initially pejorative expression Chicana/o⁶ which during the sixties and seventies was transformed into a kind of trademark, stressing the importance of *lo mexicano*, the Mexican culture. Within this new understanding, the label Chicano/a has come to denote the feeling of living between two cultures (see Thelen-Schäfer 7). Here, it is important to stress that this study focuses on Chicana literature, thus the generic ‘Chicano’ has been replaced by the female ‘Chicana’.

The abundance of linguistic variation, which sees many different names used to refer to Chicanas, reflects a similarly heterogeneous group which greatly varies in terms of ethnic identity, language and attitudes. Some Chicanas are bilingual speakers, others are monolingual English or Spanish speakers, some of them might more strongly identify with the U.S., others with Mexico or even Spain (see Mirandé, and Enríquez 11). Therefore, instead of looking for a unified Chicana identity, it is essential to adopt a “contextual, nonstereotypical understanding of Chicanas’ experience” (Niemann viii). In her “Introduction” to the article collection *Chicana Leadership: The Frontiers Reader*, Yolanda Flores Niemann claims that in order to understand the specific context of Chicanas it is necessary to realise that

(1) Chicanas are women who function in a patriarchal society, (2) Chicanas are overrepresented in the lower socioeconomic and poverty categories in a capitalistic system, (3) Chicanas are racial minorities who lack representative and economic power within the United States, and (4) Some Chicanas are lesbians in a predominantly heterosexual society. (viii)

As this quote shows the experiences of Chicanas are characterised by multiple forms of oppressions that cause a feeling of being the ‘Other’ who is pushed to the margins. Therefore, this notion of otherness will serve as a paradigm for my paper, constituting the basis for a detailed literary analysis of selected primary texts. While addressing the multiple oppressions resulting from marginalisation, it is my primary goal to investigate the role of strong female characters who free themselves from pre-established categories in order to dismantle monolithic forms of identity, whether in terms of class, gender, or ethnicity. In the following section, I will provide a brief

⁶ A variety of theories surround the origin of the word ‘Chicana/o’, some of them reaching back to the Aztecs’ language, Náhuatl. One plausible explanation for this suggests that the word is an American derivation of the Spanish word ‘mexicano’. Influenced by an Indian pronunciation of the [c] as a [s]; ‘mexicano’ most likely evolved into ‘meshicano,’ a shift which was later shortened and distorted by Anglo American pronunciation to ‘chicano/a’ (see Thelen-Schäfer 9).

insight into the difficult relation between Mexico and the United States, as a rubric through which to clarify the specific cultural context of Chicanas.

A History of Colonisation: Relations and Border Spaces (In-)Between Mexico and the USA

To live in the Borderlands means you
are neither *hispana india negra española*
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-
breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run
from.

— Gloria Anzaldúa, “To live in the
Borderlands means you”

In their book *Latino/a Thought: Culture, Politics, and Society* Francisco H. Vázquez and Rodolfo D. Torres claim that U.S. Latinas/os constitute a major political, economic, and cultural force (see 1). The highly heterogeneous group of Latinas/os are a large and growing labour force mainly engaging in menial work. Current studies forecast that by 2050 one in three workers will be Latino/a. Despite their considerable contribution to U.S. economy, they remain widely underprivileged (see Catanzarite, and Trimble 149). Primary to this is the role of colonisation, which has inscribed Chicanas/os history within a paradigm of privilege and power.

Indeed, the entire history of Chicanas/os is marked by colonisation, causing an enormous impact on their lives (see Shirley 296). Beginning in 1519, with the original Spanish conquest of Mexico, the spectre of colonisation remained a fixture till the nineteenth century when they were internally colonised by the United States (see Mirandé, and Enríquez 2). This latter involvement had a tremendous influence on Mexican and later on Mexican American’s self-perception, as it caused a transformation from a colonising force into a colonised subject (see Mirandé, and Enríquez 68). Even though many Anglo Americans fail to acknowledge Mexican Americans/Chicanas/os as colonised subjects, historical empiricism would tend to deny the argument that they remain victims of internal colonisation in the U.S. as

their culture, values, and language(s) hold little legitimacy within mainstream U.S. society (see Mirandé, and Enríquez 10).

Since the nineteenth century, the situation between Mexico and the United States of America has been dominated by power struggles. The latter adopted an expansionist policy in an attempt to draw great parts of Mexico under their control, resulting not only in the annexation of Florida in 1819, but also of large areas of the American Southwest. Pursuing a policy of expansionism, Anglo Americans proceeded in expanding their territory which, after the purchase of Texas, culminated in the U.S.-Mexican war from May 13, 1846 until March 10, 1848 (see Mirandé, and Enríquez 6-8). Proclaiming sole ownership of an increasing number of territories, Anglo Americans began annexation of vast areas which formerly constituted northern Mexico, also known as Aztlán, the mythical cradle of the indigenous Mexican people (see Shirley 296). This culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo which determined the purchase of the present-day states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada and parts of Colorado and drew an artificial border (see Shirley 298). The arising dilemma for Chicanas/os is clearly expressed by Joel Garreau:

[The] Anglo world is the latest invader of these parts, not the Indian, Mexican and Spanish. It's the borders that have moved, not the founding cultures. There are great numbers of Hispanics in the Southwest who can't be told by ignorant Anglos to go back where they came from. They *are* where they came from. (qtd. in Shirley 299)

Within one year Mexicans were forced to choose between being Mexican, and leaving their former country or staying and integrating into American life. Only about 2,000 left as the remaining trusted in the U.S. government's guarantee of equal rights for all Mexican citizens, a promise that was ultimately neglected (see Shirley 299). Even nowadays, Mexicans are frequently called 'greasers' or 'illegal aliens' and they feel "[a]s refugees in a homeland that does not want them" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 34).

This paradoxical relationship of inclusion and exclusion was to prove characteristic of Mexican-U.S. relations well into the twentieth century. Mexicans were actively encouraged to come to the U.S., simply because they served as cheap

source of human labour. Yet, when the country's economy faced severe losses during the Great Depression, Mexican workers were perceived as an economic burden and sent back to their 'native' country. The situation was complicated further as many Mexicans had at that time begun raising U.S. born children. In a clear violation of the minors' citizenship⁷ rights, these children were firmly encouraged to leave with their parents (see Balderrama, and Rodríguez 242).

An analysis of the United States' de facto 'colonisation' of Mexico and its impact on both countries reveals many of the reasons for the later development of the border as a space of constant legal and illegal crossings from the South to the North. 'The Tortilla Curtain,' 'La Línea,' 'La Frontera' or 'The Dividing Line' are only some of many expressions used to refer to a quintessentially artificial border. Such a space had developed not only geographically but socially, politically and culturally as well. Gloria Anzaldúa states that "[t]he U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (*Borderlands* 25), insinuating the severity of the annexation of former Mexican territory to the United States in 1848. Comparing the border to an open wound⁸ inscribed on Anzaldúa's body, she stresses the lingering severity of the attacks that caused the separation of previously unified Mexican lands and culture. Moreover, attention is drawn to the direct effect such schisms hold for Chicanas, who are left wounded in a cultural, geographical and political sense.

Artificial lines meant to distinguish 'us' from 'them', the 'legal' from the 'aliens,' thus create an in-between space, the borderlands, whose inhabitants are,

[t]he prohibited and forbidden [...] *Los atravesados* [...] the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25)

⁷ For more detailed information, see Francisco E. Balderrama's article "Epilogue from *Decade of Betrayal*" published in Francisco H. Vázquez and Rodolfo D. Torres's *Latino/a Thought: Culture Politics, and Society* or Carl R. Shirley's "Chicano History" published in Francisco A. Lomeli and Carl R. Shirley's *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol.82: Chicano Writers*.

⁸ The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines a 'wound' as an "[...] injury caused deliberately to part of the body by cutting, shooting, etc, esp. as the result of an attack" (s.v. wound).

Chicanas neither completely identify with Anglo nor Mexican cultural values. Rather as, Pat Mora expresses in her poem, “Legal Alien,” bilingual and bicultural Chicanas are “an American to Mexicans / a Mexican to Americans / a handy token / sliding back and forth / between the fringes of both worlds” (14-18). Chicanas become simultaneously part of both countries and of none, they are the product of the borderlands which create something new - the “mongrel [...] the half-breed” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25), the hybrid,⁹ the mestiza.

In order to reach a deeper understanding of the multiple realities Chicanas face, the contemplation of the two worlds constituting them seems to be of utmost importance. However, besides merely dealing with the physical borderlands between the USA and Mexico, Anzaldúa stresses the necessity to also focus on the “psychological [...] sexual [...] and [...] spiritual borderlands” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 19) which are created when people of different races, sexualities, classes, etc. meet. These transitional spaces offer their inhabitants different contacts and affiliations which are no longer defined by ancestral roots and history, but rather by constant movement and continually changing notions of belonging (see Simon, “Hybridity” 219). They are spaces of translation which are highly productive places “merging to form a third country – a border culture” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25) where new hybrid identities are continually constructed.

⁹ Cultural hybridity has long operated at the heart of postcolonial theory. Originally derived from Latin, it refers to the biological phenomenon of cross-breeding between two different species. From the nineteenth century onwards, the term was used as a cultural metaphor playing a significant role in Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Homi K. Bhabha’s theories (s.v. Hybridität). Bhabha, the foremost theorist of hybridity, stresses the importance of a liminal space which is characterised by fluidity, border crossing and the transcending of dualism (see 5). He refers to it as stairwell, stating that “[t]he interstitial place between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5).

Cultural Identity(ies)

“Chicana identity is something to be discovered rather than passively inherited“

— Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, “And, Yes...” 37

As the analysis of the primary texts will show, the notion of belonging plays a crucial role in the lives of María, the protagonist of López’s play, and Leticia, the first person narrator of Lemus’ novel. Both women form a crossroads where cultures meet and clash and new meanings are formed. The main endeavour of this thesis is to show how these two young women manage to articulate their ‘Chicaneness’ by mediating between various identities and cultural realities. While their parents or grandparents believe in a ‘true’ Mexican identity, María and Leticia (sub)consciously long for change and an active involvement in the construction of who they are or will become. In order to understand these different interpretations of ethnic identity, it is important to provide a detailed theoretical background concerning cultural identity. Stuart Hall’s definitions of cultural identity form the theoretical basis of this study and in particular his notion of interpretive cultural identity, as a continually changing process rather than a product, will be foregrounded.

In his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall argues that there exist at least two different ways of conceiving of ‘cultural identity.’ The first, defined through collectivity sees identity as a matrix of relations, with each Self¹⁰ operating, “inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (224). Here, one’s identity reflects a common historical experience stored in the group-specific cultural memory¹¹.

¹⁰ I write the nouns ‘Self’ or ‘Selves’ with a capital ‘S’ to emphasize that the female characters in my selected works need to summon their strengths and articulate their identities, freeing themselves from any form of oppressions. The capital ‘S’ stands for powerful women that question binaries and self-confidentially acknowledge their multiple and sometimes contradictory identities, and thus “transform the small ‘I’ into the total Self” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 105).

¹¹ ‘Collective memory’ was first mentioned in the 1920s by Maurice Halbwachs (*mémoire collective*) and Aby Warburg. But it was not until the 1980s that it was again put into the centre of attention within cultural studies. The term ‘cultural memory’ (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*) was coined by Aleida and Jan Assmann. Their systematic and theoretically grounded analysis of the relation between culture and memory gained international recognition (see Erl 13-14). Assmann and Assmann stressed the importance of myths and the continual re-enactment of rituals in order to secure cultural memory. Yet, their theories went much further, suggesting that myths and rituals originate from cultural memory,

Identical cultural codes thus operate as ‘cultural scripts’¹² making it possible to have a stable and unaltered image of oneself, even though the surrounding may constantly change. These blueprints function as a guide and define the “who, what, when, where and why” (Plummer xiv) of any action. To believe in a ‘true’ identity evokes a feeling of safety, as the primary aim seems to be the discovery of one’s core identity.

Applied to the characters of my selected literary texts, this theory suggests that they must simply follow prevailing hegemonic scripts as a pathway towards ‘finding’ their Selves. Yet, such a model ignores the fact that social scripts are subject to constant change and, as such, must continually be adapted accordingly. The fact that identity is in no way fixed, and instead is continually dependent on each individual being, is powerfully illustrated in Cherríe Moraga’s anecdote about her sister turning into her complete opposite, even as she “slept, ate, talked, cried, worked, fought with [her]” (“Preface” *Bridge* xvi). Similarly, the protagonists of *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* and *Simply María, Or the American Dream* realise that they have to be open to change. As will be illustrated in the second part of this thesis, María soon understands that she has to create her own world and self-image instead of chasing after an idea which is de facto her parents’ dream. One’s stubborn reliance on established roles does not offer an answer to the omnipresent question, “Who am I,” continuously present in the human mind. As such, Hall’s first notion of identity is insufficient at explaining the complexity of the human experience described.

In contrast, Hall’s second explanation acknowledges a certain degree of similarity between Selves, but argues that the image of selfhood present at any given point creates a significantly different image of ‘what one is/becomes.’ Here, identities are constituted by continually shifting positions which are not as transparent and unproblematic as they are often perceived (see “Diaspora” 222).

which shows a strong interconnection between the individual elements involved and the circular structure of memory itself. The myths stored in the cultural memory provide, among other things, role models which influence identity formations (see Ertl 28-29). For further information on ‘cultural memory,’ see Astrid Ertl’s *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung* and Jan Assmann’s “Kollektives Gedächtnis und Kulturelle Identität.”

¹² This thesis will see certain events and actions as part of following cultural scripts stored in the cultural memory of Chicana/o society. For further information on culture as an act of performance, see Norman K. Denzin’s *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*. The use of the “drama metaphor” to refer to the actions of social life was already known before. John H. Gagnon and William Simon, however, transferred it to the sexual domain (see Plummer xiii). For further detailed information, see John H. Gagnon and William Simon’s *Sexual Conduct: The Social Source of Human Sexuality*.

Cultural identity [...] is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But [...] they undergo constant transformation [...] they are subject to continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity [...]. (Hall, “Diaspora“ 225)

As Hall states, the focus should not be put on returning to the roots but rather on following different routes suggesting constant movement (see Hall, “Who Needs Identity?” 4). Campbell and Kean echo Hall’s emphasis on continual change by arguing that ‘routes’ imply a “multiple, fluid formation of identity through contact, motion, diaspora and hybridity” (18), suggesting that the cultural surrounding does not so much reveal one’s identity as it influences its construction. The focus is therefore, on the process rather than the product, a point which agrees with Chabram-Dernersesian’s statement that “Chicana identity is something to be discovered rather than passively inherited” (37). Taking this approach as a starting point, one might suggest that identity is never simply received, but rather that Chicanas must actively take part in the construction of their identities. Consequently, Hall’s second explanation, focusing on the continuous reshaping of identity, helps to understand the necessity of many Chicanas to break free from traditional images due to ongoing changes in their cultural surroundings, without necessarily suggesting a complete estrangement from their cultural roots. De facto to slavishly follow pre-established identity categories firmly grounded in the past hinders Chicanas to literally live their lives. Traditions and the past in general need to function as layers which can be adapted accordingly.

The multiple layers that shape the identity(ies) of an individual may constantly change. While Leticia or María feel at times the need to foreground certain elements of their identities, at other times they may prefer to push them into the background of attention. Nevertheless, every layer is constantly present and cannot be ignored as they influence who they are. To visualise the idea of layers, I suggest the image of an onion.¹³ Taking a closer look at the structure of an onion, it becomes apparent that it

¹³ The image of an onion was derived from Ana Castillo’s fifth book *Peel My Love Like An Onion*. Transferring the idea of peeling ‘love’ like an onion into the notion of peeling ‘identity’ like an onion also insinuates the idea of layers.

is composed of various thick layers which are subdivided into very fine almost inseparable sub-layers. The centre of an onion consists of many extremely thin layers, dissecting them leaves one with nothing. Applying this structure to the notion of 'cultural identity' suggests there is no 'true Self' but rather an accumulation of various layers/Selves. Here, answer to the question of "Who am I" requires multiple answers referring to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc. Furthermore, temporal and spatial factors as well as cultural values and ideas have a high impact on the answer.

Traditional social scripts function as layers which cannot be taken away as new ideas and interpretations have developed out of former points of view. However, instead of merely copying the past, the idea of "facing The New, dreaming The Old" (Villanueva, "Mestiza" 23) needs to predominate. In order to follow new routes, one has to translate the past into the present and adapt it accordingly.

As will become apparent in the course of this study, these acts of translation are complicated undertakings. Both, Leticia and María, try to construct their identities by mediating between the multiple elements that influence their realities. As the following section will show, the struggle for a distinct voice is also a struggle for language(s), because each language carries a special meaning and is linked to one's identity. Consequently, to be neither Mexican nor American entails to be neither at home in English nor in Spanish (see Rebolledo 157). It will be interesting to show how Chicana writers mirror the multilingual and pluricultural realities of Chicanas in their writings. The immense heterogeneity of Chicana culture and the problematic of language(s) must be taken into account when analysing *Simply María* and *Trace Elements*.

Translation: Building One's Own Bridge

The Importance of Language(s) in Chicana Literature

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestizaje, the subject of your burla. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically somos huérfanos – we speak an orphan tongue.

— Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 80

The constant negotiation of Mexican and Chicano writing set alongside the resulting fission and fusion evoked by the continuous crossing of borders creates a distinct language of Chicana writing, which is marked by an infinite heterogeneity – a quintessential border language. Frequently, texts possess a linguistic interplay of styles and languages mirroring the multilingual reality of Chicana discourse as well as their cultural in-betweenness (see Arteaga 69). Poetry, in particular, frequently moves between Spanish and English. However, more and more novels, short stories and plays include Spanish in the predominantly English text. Illustrative examples of this hybridity are Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* or Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* in which poems, essays and short stories are mixed, alongside a constant and predominant code-switching.

Additionally, the language of Chicanas may deviate considerably from Standard English, a result not solely attributed to their Spanish speaking background alone, but rather to the unique position they inhabit. Numerous Chicana authors “achieve linguistic multivalence and polysemous communication, [...] while maintaining a monolingual surface” (Tymoczko 148-149). Although they may write in English, the surface structure is reminiscent of Spanish. For instance, a Spanish sentence structure is adopted or Spanish sayings and phrases are literally translated into English (see Rudin 96). The non-Spanish speaking audience may perceive this English, full of foreign elements, as either unorthodox or incorrect. Sandra Cisneros's novel *Caramelo* is full of instances in which the character speaks semantically English but

in reality thinks syntactically in Spanish, as for example the statement “and what am I, painted?” (55). Cisneros manages to illustrate the very distinct language of the borderlands or in Mary Louise Pratt’s terminology, of the contact zone,¹⁴ where interlingualism and translation predominate.¹⁵

Besides deviations from Standard English, there are many Chicanas who have either very little or no command of Spanish. In her poem, “Mi Problema,” Michele M. Serros comments on the problem of being unable to speak Spanish or only with an English accent, despite being of Chicana descent. As she suggests, a poor command of Spanish may fill Chicanas with a deep sense of shame, as they may be accused of not being a ‘true’ Mexican and consequently a traitor to the own race. Throughout, the voice of Serros’s poem states that one day “I’ll be a perfect ‘r’ rolling / tilde using Spanish speaker. / A true Mexican at last!” (40-42).

Categorising somebody as ‘true Mexican’ or ‘true American’ due to her/his accent or general language skills may put Chicanas/os in a difficult position. The disapproval of one’s linguistic competence, for example, referring to Chicana Spanish or Chicana English as a “linguistic aberration [...] linguistic *mestizaje*” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 80), constitutes a personal attack. It is a fact that language and identity are interconnected to such an extent that the two appear mutually interdependent. As Anzaldúa writes, “I am my language” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 81). This intimate relationship between language and one’s identity is also visible in Jurí Lotman’s statement concerning the deep connection between language and culture, “No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language” (qtd. in Bassnett 22).

Language is a crucial instrument to make sense of things and of oneself as it produces identity (see Spivak 179). Taking this quality of language in consideration, it becomes clear that with the help of language the construction of a certain self-

¹⁴ The term ‘contact zone’ was coined by Mary Louise Pratt as “[...] social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination [...]” (Pratt 4). For further information see “Introduction: Criticism in the Contact Zone” in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

¹⁵ For further information on different translation techniques used in Sandra Cisneros’s novel *Caramelo*, see Bill Johnson González’s article “The Politics of Translation in Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo*.”

image and the positioning in society are possible. Accent, choice of vocabulary and language choice in general are only some means to express one's identity and underline group affiliations. Numerous Chicana writers consciously create texts which are marked by multiple languages and cultures to mirror their polymorphous identities. This idea is also expressed by Alfred Arteaga, who comments on the multilingualism of Chicanas, claiming that "[s]he [Chicana] articulates, therefore she is; she speaks differently, therefore things are different" (Arteaga 42). Keeping the connection between language and identity in mind, it is understandable that many Chicanas defend the creation of a very distinct mode of expression which is outside of any category and frees them of the feeling of being an "embarrassment to both groups" (Moraga, *Loving* xiii) as their group belonging is grounded in this specific mode of expression. Gloria Anzaldúa describes the language of Chicanas as a

[...] language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the reality and values true to themselves, a language with terms that are neither *español nor inglés*, but both [...] a forked tongue, a variation of two languages. (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 77)

Only when Chicanas learn to accept and appreciate their "forked tongue" may they feel at home in their language and be proud of the unique identity their interlingualism¹⁶ produces. The polyglot discourse of Chicanas defies an imposed monolingual identity marked by notions of centrality and domination of one language, namely English. The monologue is turned into a dialogue (see Arteaga 73), or even a polylogue, by constant code-switching as well as the integration of cultural elements and personage of Chicana heritage and mythology into Chicana texts (see Rudin 25). Similarly, Felicia Luna Lemus and Josefina López create organic narratives which are marked by a linguistic interplay of styles and languages as well as the inclusion of various cultural elements, in order to underline the protagonists' bilingual and bicultural realities.

The result of the Chicanas' polylogue is a hybrid 'text' which can be seen as "a product of a voluntarily incomplete translation process" (Simon, "Hybridity" 217). The use of "'translation effects' to question the borders of identity" (Simon,

¹⁶ Juan Bruce-Novoa refers to Chicanas as interlingual speakers. He describes interlingualism as a mixture of two or more languages, putting one "[...] into a state of tension which produces a third, an 'inter' possibility of languages" (qtd. in Cutter 177). Martha J. Cutter sees a strong link to translation and claims that interlingualism comes into being within and by translational processes (see 177).

“Hybridity” 217) consequently postulates a new ‘border identity.’ In the course of this thesis, it will be continually stressed that any kind of border, whether sexual, racial or national, is a site of translation (see Cutter 236). The protagonists of the primary texts that I have selected to analyse, are in constant movement going “beyond this either-or choice” (Cutter 125), blurring boundaries and categories and therefore enabling a constant rebirth and rearticulating of what or who they are.

Consequently, readers have to become border crossers who are able to live with ambiguity and blurred divisions. It is crucial to accept that no general conclusion on what Chicaneness signifies can be drawn, as the personal identities of the individuals involved vary as widely as their personal circumstances. In order to fully understand Chicana literature and the pluralistic vision of identity Chicana writers postulate, borders need to be seen as fruitful sites of translation, creating new identities outside of any category. Due to the importance of translation, it is interesting to take a look at literary translation in general and on some common translation techniques in Chicana texts. Linguistic translation will be the starting point, from which a more open concept of translation will be developed.

Linguistic Translation

Theoretical Considerations and Techniques

The OED defines the word ‘to translate’ as follows: “express (sth spoken or esp written) in another language [...] in simpler words, [...] in a different [...] form” (s.v. translate). As can be inferred from this definition, the aim of translation is not to write a new text but rather to transform a source text into a secondary text by transferring meaning of “one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of the dictionary and grammar“ (Bassnett 21). As such, translation requires extra-linguistic knowledge to transfer meaning between the two regimes of expression involved. Although the target audience must be considered, the traditional understanding of translation demands the transmission of the original message to be as accurate as possible without alteration of the content (see Wills, s.v. decision making in translation). The preference for a word for word translation which

strictly adheres to the original explains the predominant description of translation as a passive task. Not only the target text but also the translator is of secondary importance.

Due to the lack of agency associated with translation, the fact that political and economical minority groups have been the main interpreters¹⁷ throughout history does not seem surprising (see Baker xviii). Transferring this historical fact to the context of gender relations, Sherry Simon argues, “[t]he original is considered the strong generative male, the translation the weaker and derivative female” (Simon, *Gender* 1). This statement agrees with stereotypical gender roles, where the man is granted the active role of the writer and the woman occupies the secondary role of messenger passively repeating the original (see Simon, *Gender* 11).

According to Douglas Robinson, the sixteenth century is the beginning of the ‘feminization’ of translation where the voice of the ‘*translatress*’ is heard for the first time. As this role grew, more and more women seized the opportunity to gain a public voice with the help of translating texts produced by men (ref. to in Simon, *Gender* 45). For the first time they could not only participate in literary culture as consumers, but also as producers. Whether this opened up public discourse for them, even though under the pretence of mere repetition, or rather further strengthened their position at the margin of cultural production is a widely debated question (see Simon, *Gender* 46). However, it is true that generally translations open new perspectives and promote dialogues. As early as 1817 Madame de Staël was able to claim with contention in her essay, “De L’Esprit de Traductions,” published in her *Oeuvres Complètes*, that translations are very enriching for literary creation, as they make a work accessible to a larger audience (ref. to in Simon, *Gender* 65).

The body of this thesis is devoted to a study of literary texts analysing women who function as mediators in the widest possible sense of the word, translating not only their words but themselves as well, breaking free from pre-established gender or ethnic labels. La Malinche, one of the most powerful female interpreters in history,

¹⁷ This thesis uses the terms ‘interpreter’ and ‘translator’ interchangeably. Opinions differ greatly as to whether they fulfil the same function or not. For more detailed information, see “Conference and Simultaneous Interpreting” by Daniel Gile published in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*.

whose influence reverberates throughout Chicana texts, serves as a powerful role model in this regard. Here, translation is understood as a means of empowerment opening new possibilities.

Yet, before concentrating on a metaphorical level of translation, it is interesting to deal with common translation techniques. Due to the cultural and linguistic diversity of many Chicana texts some readers unfamiliar with Spanish or Chicana culture might feel entirely alienated and excluded from the narrative. Whether the author provides a translation and explanation of non-English contents varies considerably. As this is not an extensive study of literal translation techniques, but rather serves the purpose of sensitizing the reader for the heterogeneity of voices present in Chicana texts, I will provide only a very short overview with illustrative examples of literal translation in literary works by Chicana writers.

Numerous authors offer the reader English ‘equivalents’¹⁸ of Spanish expressions within the text which are frequently only divided by a comma or a full stop. For example, Sandra Cisneros in “Never Mary a Mexican” sometimes directly puts the Spanish word in English, “I touched the fabrics. *Calidad*. Quality” (81). In a similar way Carmen Tafolla integrates the translation of ‘chingada’ into the discourse of her poem “La Malinche.”

they called me --- *chingada*

Chingada.

(Ha---¡Chingada! ¡Screwed!)”
(6-8)

Other writers prefer to provide a translation in footnotes or in a glossary as does Josefina López in her plays *Unconquered Spirits* and *Simply María, Or the American Dream*. Especially, if there is a glossary at the end of a book, the reader is forced to go literally back and forth between the pages. This movement mirrors the constant crossing of national, cultural and sexual borders involved in translation (see Cutter 203).

¹⁸ Whether a full equivalent exists or not will be dealt with at a later point. For further interest, see Roman Jakobson’s “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation.”

Contextual translation is another technique which allows the audience to decode the meaning from the context (see Cutter 195). For example, in Felicia Luna Lemus' novel *Trace Elements* the author does not put Spanish expressions into English, but naturally blends them into the English language, mirroring the first person narrator's multilingual realities which form part of her identity(ies). When Leticia tells the reader about her first date with her future girlfriend K, she states, "I whipped up our faux strawberry shortcakes with as much cariño as I had in me [...]" (TE 78). The reader does not need to literally understand the Spanish expression in order to grasp the general meaning. Similarly, also Leticia's description of K, "Good crush material, maybe some sex, but wáchale, girl, keep your emotions down [...]" (TE 66) allows the reader to deduce the meaning of "wáchale" from the context. In this way, contextual relations can serve the role of replacing direct translation, providing a more organic unity.

Nevertheless, while the literal meaning of Spanish expressions may be deduced from the context, the non-Latina/o reader may often not understand the full meaning of certain words. Leticia states on the first page of *Trace Elements*, "Buckle up, doll. I promise I'll try not to tangle your quinceañera dress. We'll get to the ballroom soon enough" (TE 3). Although, the Anglo reader may deduce from the context that a "quinceañera dress" is some kind of ballroom dress, she or he may not be aware of the full cultural implications of the term.

The decision whether to give a translation or not varies even within the work of one author. Gloria Anzaldúa, for instance, sometimes provides translations, on some occasions; however, she deliberately leaves words, phrases or entire passages without a translation. Also Sandra Cisneros decides to include non-English messages to La Virgen in "Little Miracle, Kept Promises" without further commenting on them.

Such produced silences may not always cause a loss of additional information as sometimes the unintelligibility of a passage and the difficulty of translation are the core message of a text (Cutter 213). bell hooks claims that especially speakers of the 'oppressors' language' may learn "from spaces of silence as well as spaces of speech" (300), as they realise that they are suddenly not the one in charge. They are confronted with voices which are outside of their understanding. hooks calls this moment of unintelligibility a "space to learn [...]" the opportunity to listen without

‘mastery,’ without owning or possessing speech [...] but also the experience of hearing non-English words” (hooks 299). It is up to the reader to “take part in the translational process” (Cutter 176) and to “travel that extra distance” (Cutter 203) or rather to skip over certain parts of a text.

The Notion of Untranslatability

As has already been shown beforehand, besides deliberately not giving a translation, there are many incidences when it is impossible to find an exact equivalent in another language. As linguistic and cultural translator for her grandmother, Celaya, the young protagonist of Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo*, gradually comes to realise that translation is not always possible (see Johnson González 14-15). As the following quote illustrates, certain concepts and phrases may not exist outside the source language or evoke different associations: “[...] I must insist on using the word, *lunares*, literally “moons,” but I mean moles, or freckles, or beauty spots, though none of these words comes close to capturing the Spanish equivalent with its sensibility of charm and poetry” (103).

John C. Catford distinguishes between linguistic and cultural untranslatability. The former refers to the absence of a lexical or syntactical unit in the target language. Detailed considerations of that phenomenon are beyond the scope of this chapter, as the analysis of the literary works I selected to analyse mainly reveal incidences of cultural untranslatability which deals with the absence of a certain concept in the target language culture (see Bassnett 38).

The young protagonist of *Caramelo* struggles with the translation of the Spanish word ‘lunares.’ The literal meaning of the word is ‘moons;’ however, it is normally used to refer to freckles or beauty spots. Therefore, Celaya has to deviate from a word for word translation and search for an expression in the target language with a similar meaning.

Even so, Celaya realises that the English equivalents for “lunares” do not capture the Spanish “sensibility of charm and poetry” (Cisneros, *Caramelo* 103). Here, Roman Jakobson’s statement in his article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” comes to mind, stating that there is no full equivalent of any word in another

language since every expression contains different connotative associations. The meaning of a message might be considerably changed or even lost in translation, if one merely substitutes one language for another (see 139).

The lack of an exact equivalent in another language is, besides the total absence of culture-specific concepts outside a particular group, another example of cultural untranslatability. As has been pointed out, even though an expression for a certain word can be found in the target language, its full meaning may not be brought across, as there is no “total equivalent *between* cultural systems” (Jakobson 136) [emphasis added] and even not *within one* cultural system.

As the body of this thesis focuses on how the protagonists of the primary texts, *Trace Elements* and *Simply María*, construct their Chicana identities by mediating between the multiple parts that shape their realities, the difficulty of translating their identities within Anglo but also Mexican or Chicana/o culture will be critically studied. As will be shown, sometimes certain shades of María and Leticia’s identities may seem to be non translatable and require cultural mediation. The absence of a certain concept in a target language makes it impossible to transfer the meaning from one language into another. Therefore, in order to deal with the untranslatability of Leticia’s homosexuality and María’s longings for independence, an open concept of translation is required which allows the creation of something new, outside of traditional norms.

Cultural Translation

In the late 1970s and 1980s Sherry Simon among others adopted the idea of cultural translation in the Canadian context. French-language feminists at that time suggested that translation formed an active component of cultural production itself heavily influenced by the rising importance of gender studies and feminism. Here, translation was seen as a kind of prestigious re-writing (see *Gender* viii), giving women a voice in patriarchal society and enabling minority groups to integrate their past into the present (see Simon, *Gender* 134).

Constantly Explaining Herself: The Chicana as Bridge

I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister
My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists
The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the
Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends' parents ...

Then
I've got to explain myself
To everybody

— Donna Kate Rushin, "The Bridge Poem"

Transnational relations characterise globalisation where intercultural exchange and migration predominate. Due to these current trends, culture becomes an extremely heterogeneous concept which needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the primary texts and focusing on the specific circumstances of the protagonists. Bhabha's understanding of challenging "the idea of culture as an envelope which securely binds all the members of a national community within the same coherence of meaning" (ref. to in Simon, *Gender* 152), is increasingly mirrored in contemporary life. Here, every cultural site, whether on a transnational basis or within one nation, is a "crossroads and meeting place" (Simon, *Gender* 134) requiring mediation. Concepts like nation, culture, language, identity, etc. are no longer stable entities but are rather marked by difference and constant negotiation. As such, there emerges no homogeneous culture, because continuous mixing between different cultures causes each culture to be hybrid in itself (see Simon,

Gender 152). This offers an argument strongly defying accusations of betraying one's culture, as the purity of a culture as such is already a long out dated notion.

The idea that cultures are marked by heterogeneity and hybridity, requiring constant translation, can be extended further to suggest that the necessity of translation is also present within one person who struggles between two or more worlds and languages. In this understanding, Chicanas not only inhabit a cross-cultural or 'trans-cultural' world, but rather are a crossroads where different cultures meet and clash, just as the poem of the African American writer Donna Kate Rushin mirrors the reality of people who are marked by a similarly characteristic in-betweenness. Chicanas are literal and cultural translators for everybody, not only mediating between various cultures but also within their own culture, wherein they are constantly forced to explain themselves. Consequently, the definition of the translator's primary task as a "passive act of transmission" (Simon, *Gender* 11) may no longer be accepted. Instead of merely copying an 'original,' the translator must actively mediate between two or more parts. The result is a translated text which is at once both, the same as and divergent from the source text. Consequently, the translation expresses its own point of view, while still "sound[ing] like an original piece of work" (Bastin, s.v. adaptation).

Owing to the difficulty in navigating this divide, some critics interpret adaptation and translation as two completely different techniques, whereas, others claim that translation covers "all types of transformation" (Bastin, s.v. adaptation). For the purpose of this thesis I have chosen to see adaptation as a necessary part of translation, as translation is understood in the widest possible sense of the word, mediating between different parts of one's identity and allowing somebody to be more than one 'thing' at the same time.

Consequently, Chicanas emerge as the fertile spaces of translation, a kind of third possibility, establishing a dialogue between their multiple identities, and enabling them to simultaneously exist as Mexican, American, feminist, lesbian, etc (see Cutter 197). Though this notion may resolve certain issues, due to the constant need to function as mediators between cultures and the necessity to live up to often contradictory expectations, Chicanas may be fed up with constantly having to

explain themselves to everybody. Rushin expresses this notion in her poem “The Bridge Poem” published in *This Bridge Called My Back*:

I've had enough
I'm sick of seeing and touching
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody (1-4)

Exhausted by the attempt to be the bridge mediating between two or more worlds, the narrator describes the difficulties of bridging. Cherríe Moraga expresses a similar notion, “I cannot continue to use my body to be walked over to make a connection” (“Preface” *Bridge* xv). Being constantly traversed feels like an abuse; at the same time, assimilation may be the preferred alternative escape from hybridity.

Assimilation, however, risks negating one of the multiple parts which constitute the Chicana and consequently hinders the search for her individual Chicaneness. Similar to cross-cultural translation which focuses on differences, the ability to live with possible silences and ambiguities is required to retain the bridging mentioned above. Though bridging may be extremely exhausting, it is essential in order to create distinct heterogeneous identities. If a translator adapted all the foreign and culturally different terms to the needs of the audience, certain meaning would be lost (see Dingwaney, and Maier 303).

This Bridge Called the New Mestiza

The bridge I must be
Is the bridge to my own power
I must translate
My own fears
Mediate
My own weaknesses

I must be the bridge to nowhere
But my true self
And then
I will be useful

— Donna Kate Rushin, “The Bridge Poem”

In his *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha states that translation creates something new rather than merely serving as a bridge between two parts (ref. to in Simon, *Gender* 152). This dismissal of translation as a mere bridging between two poles is also expressed in “The Bridge Poem.” Here, the narrator no longer gives in to the pressure of constantly explaining oneself. S/he realises that only when one is “[...] the bridge to nowhere / But [one’s] true self” (51-52) the act of translation will be useful. It is necessary to focus on the bridge, the translator as her/his action is a “foundational activity” (Simon, *Gender* 152) creating identity(ies).

Similar to identities, bridges are always created, never found. The anti-essentialist mindset¹⁹, stressing the fact that every truth is culturally constructed negating an essential ‘true identity’ (see Barker 21) is already suggested in the nature of bridges and borders as both are places of constant movement and transgression,

[t]o bridge means losing our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. [...] we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. (Anzaldúa, “Preface” *Home* 3)

¹⁹ Post-structuralism focuses on anti-essentialism, claiming that truth, identity, etc. are constructed by language. Due to the fact that language has no stable referents there is no essential truth (see Barker 20). For further detailed information, see Chris Barker’s *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*.

The living “[...] *sin fronteras*” (“Borderlands” 41) as well as the openness to the unknown are a prerequisite to survive the borderlands. To recognise difference is significant not only for Chicanas but for Americans in general. To look for any ‘oneness’, any true ‘Americanness’ must no longer be the main aim (see Campbell, and Kean 36). Instead of trying to fit into narrow categories, ‘bridge figures’ are constituted by various, often ambiguous, elements and function as translators.

Focusing on the historical aspect, it becomes clear that Chicanas function as bridge figures, as their entire history is marked by *mestizaje*.²⁰ Already during the conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century the mixing of different races took place. Even though fraternization with Indian women was disapproved by the Spanish crown, a high mestiza/o population resulted out of such unions²¹. As time progressed, it came to further continuous ‘mixing’ with Anglo Americans and other ethnic groups in the American Southwest (see Mirandé, and Enríquez 57).

Chicanas’ history of *mestizaje* suggests that the mestiza body has been heavily overwritten by history and is therefore not a site of absence, but rather of over determination. A great number of discourses take part in the dialogues which charge the body with many different meanings. Due to their complexions Chicanas may look like Mexican women, consequently people expect them to speak Spanish, even though they might never have learned it (see Pérez-Torres, “Chicano Ethnicity” 171).

Keeping in mind that members of a specific cultural group tend to perceive their own culture as ‘normal’ and others as ‘alien,’ raises the question of the cultural implications of Chicanas. As Rebolledo’ and Rivero’s anthology of Chicana Literature *Infinite Divisions* indicates in the title, the identities of Chicanas are constituted by a complex and divided mind. Individuals are at the same time American, Indian and Mexican and consequently placed in the dichotomous role of oppressor and oppressed simultaneously. Obviously this can create a very unsettling

²⁰ Paul Allatson, among others, calls ‘mestizaje’ the Latin American synonym of ‘hybridity,’ drawing special attention to a “mixed European and indigenous ancestry” (s.v. mestizo/a, mestizaje). However, nowadays the terms ‘hybridity’ and ‘mestizaje’ are used almost interchangeable as both refer to a racial mixing.

²¹ The historical and mythical figure La Malinche who conceived a child with the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés is symbolically represented as the first mother of the mestizo race.

feeling for Chicanas as they may be longing to belong to one culture instead of being lost in an in-between space.

Edén Torres mentions two common strategies individuals take in dealing with loss among Chicanas: they may either become “hyper-Chicano or *Indio Supremo*” or “try to discard any remnants of Mexican or indigenous identity” (15-16). The analysis of primary works will illustrate possibilities outside of this either/or choice, enabling the articulation of multiple identities to be a defence strategy against attacks from outside one’s culture but also from the inside. Chicanas often “cultivate needles, nettles, razor-sharp spikes to protect [themselves] from others” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 67).

Besides trying to fight against multiple forms of oppression, Chicanas frequently believe that these personal attacks are grounded in their in-betweenness, converting them into the eternal ‘Other’ who does not fit into any category. As Anzaldúa states,

[a]s a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something “wrong” with us, something fundamentally “wrong.” (*Borderlands* 67)

Instead of thinking that one is ‘weird’ and blaming oneself, it is vital to try to see that hybridity is enriching and not as often portrayed by dominant culture a disadvantage. Chicanas have to start loving themselves and fully acknowledge the multiple parts of their identities. As “[n]othing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 109), it is essential to be able to live with the resulting contradictions and to see the infinite divisions as an opportunity to create something new.

Anzaldúa also claims that only by acknowledging all the different, often contradictory, parts of one’s identity can the creation of a third possibility, the “new *mestiza* consciousness” (*Borderlands* 99), be possible. Here, the painful experience of feeling lost in-between two dichotomous experiences is a necessary step towards a new consciousness, “another culture, a new story to explain the world [...] a new value system with images and symbols that connect [Chicanas] to each other and to

the planet” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 103). She suggests the *Coatlicue*²² *State* as a strategy for Chicanas to be able to live with the multiple layers of their identities liberating them from imposed narrow categories which continuously make them feel inadequate (see Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 65).

In order to enter the *Coatlicue State*, both the “breaking free from routine and the intent to [strip] the flesh from the bone” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 65) are required. The healing process can only begin when the Chicana acknowledges and appreciates her differences. She must be willing to “reach herself” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 65) even if this means to be called a traitor and consequently be shunned by her own people. Without any doubt, to follow established pathways without questioning certain traditions may suggest a feeling of security, but at the same time paralysis is holding oneself back from finding one’s ‘voice’. To learn and create something new implies crossing over borders, conquering the “fear that [one] won’t find the way back” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 65) as well as to encounter oneself in the position of being an “alien in a new territory” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 70).

The blurring of borders not only includes ethnic categories, but also gender and sexual borders. As previously stated, Chicanas can be Americans and Mexicans, but also lesbians and Chicanas without feeling lost and selling out to their people. As representation is linked to power, in order to construct their own identities women have to gain strength, influencing “[...] whose voice is ‘normally’ heard in culture [...]” (Campbell, and Kean 12). Those in charge, who are often male, decide what is acceptable. Consequently, many Chicanas long for a culture on their own:

I [Anzaldúa] want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face [...] to fashion my own gods out of my entrails [...] I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – *una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture. (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 44)

²² Coatlicue is an important female deity dating back to Pre-Columbian time. She is a highly ambiguous Náhuatl goddess symbolising the fusion of contradictions: “goddess of love and of sin, she created life/devoured life, she was the symbol of ambivalence of all human life, personification of awesome natural forces [...] beginning and end [...] represents birth and death [...] of [...] dual nature and [...] a cyclical figure” (Anton qtd. in Rebolledo and Rivero 190). Chicana writers frequently take her as a role model as she mirrors their own dividedness.

The hybrid culture, “*una cultura mestiza*,” integrates different elements. “History and tradition are part of our present *and* our future” (Edén Torres 39). Therefore, Chicanas have to acknowledge their past and be strong enough to live with it but also to criticise established role models, etc. Many Chicana writers already realised that “[...] acknowledging the loss, the disgrace, and the pain in our lives – and learning to trust – is a major step toward eradicating the kind of vulnerability that grows out of dysfunction” (Edén Torres 39). They have to gain enough strength to construct their own her-stories. The following sub-chapter will focus on the construction of a her-story which is understood as a form of translation crucial for the creation of distinct identities.

HERstory versus His-story

[r]e-view
folklore typology
and then reread
hisstory

— Pat Mora, “Malinche’s Tips:
Pique from Mexico’s Mother”

As previously indicated, the main aim of this study is to show how the female protagonists of Lemus’s novel and López’s play create their distinct identities by translating between the multiple elements that shape their realities. The idea of “translating Chicaneness” is understood as a re-writing or a re-articulation of patriarchal norms and categories. Here, in particular, the re-readings of mythical figures will be foregrounded, as they constitute an essential part of every culture and are often used to illustrate appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

The great influence of myths on one’s life is also expressed by Roland Wright who postulates that “myth is an arrangement of the past [...] in patterns [that] create and reinforce archetypes so taken for granted, so seemingly axiomatic that we live and die by them” (qtd. in Campbell, and Kean 9). Myths function as stories which guide one through daily life “[...] thus making the world seem simpler and more comfortable for us to inhabit” (Campbell, and Kean 9). However, cultural studies scholar John Storey among others points out that it is important to question the

established narratives as they are obviously shaped by the dominant group (ref. to in Campbell, and Kean 9).

In the context of Chicana/o literature specifically, phallogentric interpretations of female mythical figures are used to categorise women as either good or bad, as “the lover (‘whore’), the devoted and unsexed mother, or the untouchable Holy Virgin” (von Flotow-Evans 17), leaving out the female perspective. As the American feminist Annette Kolodny, among others, stresses women have to write their “her-story” opposed to the dominant his-story exclusively representing the male view (ref. to in Bressler 151). Sticking to established interpretations may no longer be satisfying; new views and re-articulated role models are required. In the beginning of the 1970s, an increasing number of Chicana writers began to reread these cultural symbols in a way which granted them additional agency. They realised that Chicanas have to stand up for themselves and their *hermanas* and they have to strive for education and reveal their inequity to others. Above all, Chicana feminists are no longer willing to be silenced they change, like Sandra Cisneros’s character in her short story “Woman Hollering Creek,” from a ‘wailing woman’ to a ‘gritona’ whose voice is clearly heard. Similarly, in her poem “Mujer de la Raza,” Dorinda Morena highlights this necessity to “shout out.” Only by claiming their voice, can Chicanas liberate themselves and cause change (see Chabram-Dernersesian 47-48). Their voices enable them to “chisel [their] own face[s],” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 44) to deconstruct myths²³ and translate them into their present. This thesis views Chicana literature as a means of emancipation, which serves as a form of translation that helps Chicanas to appreciate their border identities. Chicana writers manage “to transform the small ‘I’ into the total Self” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 105) by reinterpreting history, using new symbols and creating their own her-stories.

This study will put a main focus on La Malinche, as this figure is most clearly connected to cultural translation. The re-articulated her-story of La Malinche will serve as a paradigm to allow the protagonists of my selected literary texts to free

²³ Chris Barker defines ‘myth’ in his glossary as follows: “Story or fable which acts as a symbolic guide or map of meaning and significance in the cosmos. After Barthes, the naturalization of the connotative level of meaning” (387). Through a circular structure stories become myths, because ritualistic repetition of an act naturalises an action and consequently causes its constant performance.

themselves from imposed categories and to realise that his-story is constructed by patriarchal society.

La Malinche

La Malinche²⁴ represents an actual historical figure of Mexico's factual past. Even so, the accounts surrounding the sixteenth century Malinalli Tenépal differ greatly. Her key role in the struggle between the Aztec and Spanish empire during the conquest of Mexico²⁵ gave rise to a variety of myths reverberating throughout Mexican and Chicana psyche (see Zygodlo 106). Contemporary US American as well as Mexican and Latin American authors continually re-read and re-write the story of La Malinche²⁶. Furthermore, music and visual arts are inspired by Malintzin/Malinche, creating new versions of her tale.²⁷ It is obvious that her voice echoes through the realities of Mexicans and Chicanas/os and cannot be ignored.

The extensive investigation of Josefina López's *Simply María, Or the American Dream* and Felicia Luna Lemus's novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, in the second part of this thesis, will analyse how María and Leticia mediate between their individual longings and their desire for belonging to a particular cultural group. Dominant patriarchal interpretations of the story of La Malinche play a fundamental

²⁴ This thesis uses the name 'Malinche' in reference to the figure as cultural symbol, whereas the names 'Marina, Malinalli, Malintzin, etc.' have been reserved in reference to the actual historical figure.

²⁵ For further detailed information on the conquest of Mexico and Malinche, see Hernán Cortés's *Cartas de Relación*, Francisco López de Gómara's *La Historia de la Conquista de México* and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Códice Florentino: General History of the Things of New Spain* which were painted and written in Náhuatl accompanied with the Latin alphabet. An extensive indigenous perspective is provided by the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, which is similar to a tapestry offering detailed insights into Marina's story.

²⁶ A very promising book by the Mexican author Fanny Del Río was published in Mexico in September 2009. Her *La Verdadera Historia de Malinche* allows Marina to tell her version of her life and the conquest of Mexico. For detailed information, listen to the interview with Fanny Del Río on Radio Sarandi by Jaime Clara, <http://www.radiosarandi.com/temasAgenda_ver.asp?idTema=5124>

²⁷ Antonio Ruiz, Rosario Marquardt, Santa Barraza, Delilah Montoya are only some examples of visual artists who depict their own version of the story of La Malinche. In addition, numerous songs in the USA and Latin America evolve around Malinche, for instance Los Tigres del Norte's "Mis Dos Patrias," Amparo Ochoa's "La Maldición de La Malinche" or the Uruguayan group, Los Zucara's version of "La Maldición de La Malinche." In the San Francisco Bay Area a performance artist calls himself 'La Malinche.' In his performances he tries to transcend the dichotomies of virgin versus whore, as well as male versus female with the help of Flamenco dance. For further information, see <www.lamalincheflamenco.com>.

role. In order to understand the immense influence of Malinche's narrative on María and Leticia respectively, it is inevitable to offer a general historical overview of La Malinche. Accordingly, I will first provide the necessary historical information about her life and highlight the lack of evidence, resulting in her apparent mystification. Then the focus will be on the literary reception of La Malinche. After addressing patriarchal interpretations, I will finally move towards feminist re-readings of her story, encouraging her-stories. Pat Mora's poem "Malinche's Tips: Pique from Mexico's Mother," will allow for an investigation of the importance of reclaiming the voice of La Malinche and consequently, the voices of Chicanas in order to accept, but simultaneously question the past. In addition, it is important to roughly deal with La Llorona and La Virgen de Guadalupe, as patriarchal interpretations of these mythical figures have a tremendous impact on the lives of Leticia and María.

From History to Myth²⁸

Yo soy la Malinche.

My people called me Malintzín Tenepal
the Spaniards called me Doña Marina

I came to be known as Malinche
and Malinche came to mean traitor.

—Carmen Tafolla, "La Malinche" 1-5

The names "Malinal, Malintzin, Malinche, Marina, Ce-Malinalli, doña Marina [...]" (Herrera-Sobek 112) all refer to the same person, the (in)famous Malinche. Through the sheer variety of names used to denote her, the multiple often contradictory descriptions of her role emerge "[s]he was Malinali²⁹ – the slave; Malintzín – the princess, Doña Marina – the Christianized lady, and la Malinche – the traitor" (Maldonado 35). Her Náhuatl name, Ce-Malinalli was given to her at birth. Among the first indigenous women to be converted to Christianity, Spanish conquerors baptized her Marina. In many instances, Malinalli was reverently called 'Malintzin' by the Indians and 'Doña Marina' by the Spanish, indicating her special

²⁸ The heading is taken from Sandra Messinger Cypess's extensive study *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*.

²⁹ Besides the variety of names referring to Malinche also the spelling differs greatly.

status among both groups. The name ‘Malinche,’ however is the one most frequently used throughout history (Karttunen, *Worlds* 5). A variety of theories surround the origin of this appellation. One plausible explanation is that since indigenous pronunciation did not distinguish between ‘l’ and ‘r’ ‘Marina’ may have been changed to ‘Malina.’ Adding the referential morpheme ‘-tzin’ possibly caused a further distortion by the Spanish who pronounced the Náhuatl ‘tz’ as ‘ch’ resulting in the famous appellation ‘Malinche’ (Karttunen, *Worlds* 1). Besides referring to Marina as Malinche, Díaz del Castillo claims that the Indians also used to call Cortés “el capitán de Marina y para más breve le llamaron Malinche³⁰” (Díaz del Castillo 126). The usage of one name for both the female indigenous slave and the white male conqueror suggests that Marina hold an extremely influential position in the conquest.

The detailed knowledge about the plethora of names for Marina was offered by various historical records. One of the most extensive accounts on Doña Marina is provided by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, an eye-witness to the events of 1519 in his *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*. His report along with the correspondence between the Spanish Crown and the conquerors as well as a variety of codices are principal sources of information³¹. The different depictions of Malintzin are clearly influenced by each author’s distinct cultural background and political motives. While Spanish descriptions underline her loyalty to the Spanish empire, indigenous paintings represent her either as a dependant of Cortés or a figure of equal status (see Dröscher 17). Due to Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s immense influence in the transmission and mystification of Malinche’s story, it is worth dealing with his version, even though it is apparent that he sometimes lacks evidence.

The chronicler refers to her as “Doña Marina” and describes her as an excellent person, a “gran dama” (“great lady”) (74) descending from a noble family called Tenépal. According to him, Malinalli was born in 1502 to the lord of a town called Painala, at the north end of Yucatan Island. When her father died, her mother remarried and had a son. Since he was supposed to be the sole heir, her mother and

³⁰ “the captain of Marina and to shorten it they called him Malinche” [my translation]

³¹ In her essay “In Search of La Malinche: Pictorial Representations of a Mytho-Historical Figure,” Herrera-Sobek gives an extensive analysis of the codices and other visual representations of Malintzin, ranging till contemporary paintings.

stepfather feigned Malinalli's death and sold her into slavery. After she had been given to Indians of Xicalango, she was handed over to Tabascans and later presented to Cortés whom she served as a loyal interpreter throughout the conquest of Mexico (see Díaz del Castillo 74). The chronicler underlines her outstanding linguistic skills, her important role in the conquest and her good nature, as she even forgave her mother for her horrid abandonment. According to him Malinalli had no regrets, was absolutely loyal to Cortés and a devoted Christian (see Díaz del Castillo 75).

Although Díaz del Castillo continually stresses that he was an eye-witness to the actions, it is apparent that his account is an objective reconstruction of the events. Barbara Dröscher's essay "La Malinche: Zur Aktualität der Historischen Gestalt für die Lateinamerikaforschung" provides a concise summary of concrete facts. Dröscher underlines that very little evidence about Malinalli's life and sudden disappearance exist. In reality, Malinalli was first mentioned in April 1519 when she was given to Cortés along with other female slaves as a present or possibly in exchange for something else. Numerous depictions of Malinalli with the traditional dress of the Huipil suggest indigenous roots; however, no concrete proof about her supposed noble lineage and exact date of birth can be given (see Dröscher 19). Furthermore, historical sources reveal that she was baptized Marina by the Spaniards and had sexual relations with Cortés out of which union was born Martín Cortés. Regarding her status as slave, an asymmetrical relationship between Malinalli and Cortés can be assumed (see Dröscher 20). In contrast to the lack of concrete evidence concerning the nature of their relationship, official Spanish documents verify her marriage to Juan Xaramillo/Jaramillo as well as her position as interpreter by referring to her as 'lengua,' the Spanish term for translator. Several accounts reiterate that in the beginning Malinalli worked at the side of Jerónima de Aguilar, who translated from Spanish to Maya and Malinalli from Maya to Náhuatl. After rapidly acquiring the conqueror's language, it is said that she acted as sole interpreter. However, Dröscher, among other scholars, questions the quality of Marina's translations, as she came from a completely different cultural background than the conquerors (see 21-22).

The resulting uncertainty about the concrete figure causes varying interpretations as well as continual new renditions of Malinche in popular culture as well as in

literature (Zúñiga 47). In particular, her literary reception has decisively shaped the different images of La Malinche and has transformed the historical figure into a literary sign open for interpretation regardless of actual facts (see Messinger Cypess 2). Within this new understanding, La Malinche is seen as a person/symbol that adapts to every new surrounding and stands in for what is needed in a particular setting. Thereby all transcendentality is negated, leading the way to a localized form of ‘meaning’ that adapts to as many meanings as there are localities. Malinche as a symbol is continuous even in its difference because its continuity is tied to its being there and not its being one thing. As a result, a plethora of continually changing representations has developed. During the conquest, Marina was predominantly portrayed in a positive light depicting her as a princess, a converted Indian or a translator, possibly trying to justify her enormous influence and intimate relationship with Cortés. Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s account almost elevates her to the status of the Blessed Virgin, highlighting Marina’s good nature. Only later in the nineteenth century, during independence movements in Latin America as well as in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, was she frequently vilified by society as foreign influences were increasingly deprecated. However, in general, twentieth-century interpretations were extremely diverse, ranging from describing her as a translator, a woman soldier, the mother of the new mestizo race, a victim to the Mexican Eve, La Chingada, to an object of sexual desire or a traitor who sold out her own people (see Franco 59).

His-story of the ‘Innately Evil Female Traitor’

Patriarchal society has constructed the image of the malicious Malinche who caused the destruction of her own people by helping the Spanish in the conquest of Mexico. Not only her body, or more precisely her vagina, accepted the foreign but also her tongue devoured the conqueror’s language (see Rebolledo 125). Her actions are described as the great betrayal of Mexico and reveal women as being innately evil and open to the foreign (see A. Del Castillo 139). Even though, not every woman has directly heard of her, “[t]here is hardly a Chicana growing up today who does not suffer under Malinche’s name” (Moraga, *Loving* 92). Her vindication as a sell-out serves to reinforce the schism of good versus bad women and is consequently an extremely influential tool to control Chicanas.

The negative image of La Malinche as the evil female betrayer is even mirrored in language. Still nowadays the term ‘malinchista’³² is part of colloquial Spanish in Mexico. Octavio Paz describes a ‘malinchista’ as somebody who is open to the foreign, who prefers “tendencias extranjerizantes [y] que México se abra al exterior”³³ (95). As a consequence, Chicanas who try to free themselves from imposed gender roles, who long for more than just being a mother and wife, who want to live out their sexuality, who adopt Anglo culture or who maybe even have relationships with Anglos, are frequently called Malinche or *malinchistas*, betrayers of their own culture (see Keller, and Röhrig 204).

Although the focus of this study is not on the Mexican reception³⁴ of Malinche, it is important to mention the Nobel Prize winning Mexican author Octavio Paz. His *El Laberinto de la Soledad (The Labyrinth of Solitude)* includes the crucial chapter “Los Hijos de La Malinche,”³⁵ revealing the connection between Malinche, “[e]l símbolo de entrega”³⁶ (94) and La Chingada, the fucked-one, which significantly affects women’s lives. Even though he was not the first to make a scathing remark on La Malinche, his essay greatly influenced a variety of Mexican as well as Chicana/o texts and gave rise to numerous re-writings of Malinche’s story (see Messinger Cypess 11).

Alongside the literary quest for Mexican’s identity, dealing with the predominant inferiority complex as a result of Malinche’s (in)actions, Paz defines women in general as embodying “la fecundidad [y] la muerte”³⁷ (73). Their duality makes them dangerous and threatening. He describes the characteristics of women and men with the help of the popular colloquial expression *chingar*, which categorises Mexicans in *chingadas* or *chingones* (see 86). This violent verb is not only used in Mexico but also across South America as well as in Spain, triggering slightly different associations. In general, the expression insinuates aggression, sexuality, rape or failure. According to Paz, *chingar* is a strong word associated with masculinity as it empowers the male, *el chingón*, “[...] chingar es hacer violencia sobre otro. Es un

³² It is interesting to note that the term ‘malinchista’ can also be used to refer to men who are drawn to the foreign.

³³ “foreign tendencies [and] that Mexico opens up to the outside” [my translation]

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of La Malinche’s representation in Mexican popular culture and literature, see Claudia Leitner’s *Der Malinche Komplex: Conquista, Genus, Genealogien* and Sandra Messinger Cypess’s *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*.

³⁵ translated as “The Sons of La Malinche”

³⁶ “a symbol of surrender” [my translation]

³⁷ “fecundity [and] death” [my translation]

verbo masculine, activo, cruel [...] provoca una amarga, resentida satisfacción en el que lo ejecuta [...] es activo, agresivo y cerrado”³⁸ (85). Opposed to the female, *La Chingada*, who involuntarily receives the aggression, because she is passive, open and has no control over herself, “es lo pasivo, lo inerte y abierto” (Paz 85).

Given the vilification of *La Chingada* due to her passivity, it is a paradox that Mexicans tend to expect ‘good’ women to be passive and to obey their husbands, fathers or brothers. They are supposed to follow the role model of the passive *Virgen de Guadalupe* who puts her own needs aside. This leads to the question why *La Virgen*’s passivity is worth striving for, whereas *La Chingada* represents the negative role model whose passivity is despicable, “[s]u pasividad es abyecta” (Paz 94)? Paz justifies this claim with the *Chingada*’s openness to the foreign and her consequent identity loss resulting in nothingness, she is “la Nada” (Paz 94). He relates *La Chingada* to *La Malinche*, the prime example of a ‘bad woman,’ whose female ‘weakness’ resulted in the downfall of the Aztec empire. In light of this, the male needs to execute his power: control, oppress as well as penetrate women to prevent destruction (see Paz 85).

Paz’s description of *La Malinche* reduces her to a passive, sexualised object, who is Cortés’s mistress or more derogatory his whore. Both, her passivity as well as her uncontrolled desire for a foreign man, serve as explanation for her betrayal. Seemingly, another femme fatal is responsible for the expulsion of her people from paradise. *Malinche* is only one sell-out in a ‘long line of vendidas.’ Her metaphorical daughters, the *Chicanas*, are also seen as abjectly passive or extremely lustful women who give rise to destruction when not controlled. In regard of this description, an inferiority complex, the repression of female sexuality as well as the negation of the *Chicanas*’ mother are likely effects. Instead of rejecting their mother, *Chicanas* need to accept their legacy as *Malinche*’s daughters and realise the great influence her story has on their own realities.

³⁸ “[...] chingar means to use violence against somebody else. It is a masculine, active, cruel verb [...] provoking a bitter, spiteful satisfaction in the person who engages in it [...] it is active, aggressive and closed” [my translation]

(Re)member HERstory: Feminist (Re)vindications³⁹ of La Malinche and Her *Hijas*

[...] history would call *me*

Chingada.

But Chingada I was not.

Not tricked, not screwed, not traitor.

For I was not traitor to myself –

—Carmen Tafolla, “La Malinche”

Negative patriarchal interpretations are apparently also part of the legacy of La Malinche. Rather than entirely ignoring the stigma attached to La Malinche, Chicanas need to analyse it critically. Their border position can help them to access more than one reality and to choose from a set of signifiers (see Wyatt 260). Poststructuralism, feminist and postcolonial theory re-read Malinche’s story and interpret her as a figure of empowerment, a border crosser and a cross-cultural mediator (see Dröscher, and Rincón 7-8). In the 1970s, an increasing number of Chicana feminists turned to their indigenous past, using La Malinche as a “paradigmatic figure” (Alarcón, “Traductora” 57) to reveal that race, class, and gender are inseparably linked (see Nolacea Harris ix). To raise people’s consciousness about the strong connection between racism and sexism, forces them to realise that oppressions do not only come from the outside but also from the inside of the own culture (see Nolacea Harris x). Chicanas face triple oppressions, embodying the ‘Other’ opposed to Anglo and Mexican men as well as white women. With the help of La Malinche⁴⁰ and the re-reading of other archetypal figures they might be able to translate themselves into being and create a ‘space on their own’ outside of patriarchal influence.

³⁹ The expression ‘(re)vindication’ combines the English ‘vindication’ and the Spanish *reivindicación*/*reivindicar* meaning ‘to reclaim.’ It is used to describe Chicana feminists’ attempts to render Malinche’s story anew in order to serve as a suitable role model.

⁴⁰ Some examples of Chicanas rereading and adapting Malinche’s story are Flor Saíz, Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Lucha Corpi, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Lupe A. Gonzáles, Pat Mora, Cherríe Moraga, Carmen Tafolla, Demetria Martínez, etc. In *Articulating Selves*, Fellner analyses Martínez’s novel *Mother Tongue*. She highlights the parallels between the protagonist María and the figure of La Malinche, who are both bridge figures, uniting different cultural spheres. Similar to numerous feminist re-writings and re-readings of the historical and mythical figure, Fellner emphasises Malinche’s role as a linguistic interpreter, enabling the character of Martínez’s novel to articulate a polymorphous Latina identity (see 138).

Adelaida R. Del Castillo was among the first Chicana critics to deconstruct a male imposed interpretation of La Malinche. In her revolutionary essay “Malintzin Tenépal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective,” she blames patriarchal society for inventing Malinche as a scapegoat and reducing her to a sexualised being. Even though Del Castillo’s attempt to rewrite history sometimes seems to lack concrete facts, her mystical re-reading of Malinche’s story vindicates her and triggers new interpretations.

Del Castillo depicts Malinche as being entirely devoted first to the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl and after her baptism to Christianity’s God, which agrees with Díaz del Castillo’s account of Malintzin as a committed Christian (A. Del Castillo 132). To reason that her primary motivation for helping the Spanish was her deep spiritual commitment and not her uncontrolled lust for the conqueror refutes repeated accusations of being a weak woman driven by her sexuality.

Furthermore, Del Castillo strengthens her argument by highlighting that the population of Mexico was extremely diverse. Malinche was not disloyal to her own people, but rather fought against the oppressive Aztecs, who were fiercely ruling the country and thoroughly despised by a great number of indigenous groups. She must have believed in a better future free of Moctezuma’s bloody rule (see A. Del Castillo 133). By highlighting Malinche’s faith as well as the prevalent inequality across the Aztec empire, Del Castillo intends to create an objective view of facts. A more sympathetic interpretation of La Malinche as a survivor is not expressed in mitigation of the Spanish’s horrid deeds during the conquest, but to free her from continual vilification (see Moraga, *Loving* 93).

In addition, Adelaida Del Castillo’s and Gloria Anzaldúa’s argumentation see La Malinche as the betrayed rather than the traitor, because “[n]ot me [Malinche/Chicana] sold out my people but they me” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 44). Along with a great number of historians and critics, Del Castillo states that Malintzin was betrayed by her mother who sold her into slavery. Furthermore, Chicanas/os commit treason against her by putting the blame for the downfall of an entire empire on her. Chicanas who negate La Malinche and consequently their own cultural past and identities, can be accused of disloyalty to their metaphorical mother. Malinche forms an essential part of their cultural background and is a prime example of an

intelligent woman who was vilified by society because she did not conform to patriarchal norms. (see Briante 262).

Influenced by Adelaida Del Castillo's new interpretation, Chicana feminist writers of the 20th century realised that in order to free themselves from misogynist categorisations they had to start defending their indigenous 'mother'. Regarding the strong connection between Malinche and Chicanas, the former's hateful depiction as a whore and traitor turns the latter into daughters of a despicable person, inevitably leading to a negative self-image. Instead of condemning Malinche, a great number of female writers⁴¹ use the idea of "Malintzin-translator and Malintzin-procreator" (Alarcón, "Traddutora" 59) as an empowering tool to (re)vindicate her and their own position.

Despite frequent reductions of Malinche to her vagina and tongue (see Glantz 72), Chicana feminists managed to claim Malinche's entire body with the help of her voice. She is repeatedly interpreted as an extremely intelligent person with excellent linguistic and political skills, mediating between two utterly disparate cultures. Her body is seen as a symbol of cultural encounter, forming a crossroads where different cultures meet. Both her voice and her entire body actively create a bridge for the mestiza, and *La Raza*. Since Malinche served as a cultural mediator, she did not merely repeat what Cortés told her but adapted his words to her indigenous interlocutors' needs. In sight of her position as a slave, her extraordinary strength and influence is revealed, as female slaves were normally seen as powerless objects and not granted the power to speak (see Messinger Cypess 25). Chicana writers have focused on these aspects and (re)claimed La Malinche's voice in order to enable her to speak for herself and to tell her side of the story. Following the model of their metaphorical mother, her daughters also need to be able to mediate between the different interpretations of Malinche and their needs. Only when they find out what she means for them personally and translate her into their present, can she serve as a suitable role model to help them articulate their identities (see Maldonado 57).

⁴¹ It is important to note that not every Chicana deals with La Malinche as an empowering figure. There are many Chicana authors who describe her as a traitor, a sexualised being or a victim. This thesis focuses on La Malinche as a symbol for female empowering.

(Re)claiming Malinche's Voice: "Malinche's Tips: Pique from Mexico's Mother"

Pat Mora expresses this new understanding of La Malinche in one of her poems and gives the (in)famous interpreter the opportunity to "represent herself, to become the subject of her representation" (Alarcón, "Traddutora" 71) in order to re-envision her past and consequently the present and future of Chicanas. Already the title of Pat Mora's poem "Malinche's Tips: Pique from Mexico's Mother," suggests an angry or annoyed Malinche, who is the mother of the mestiza/o. La Malinche tells her story in 25 stanzas, including giving ten pieces of advice frequently switching between English and Spanish. Not only the number of tips but the overall message of loving and honouring one's mother suggests a parallel with the Ten Commandments. However, it is important to note that they are 'tips' and not rules. Furthermore, extensive references to Eve, a serpent and a garden, presumably the Garden of Eden, reveal Malinche's frequent interpretation as the Mexican Eve.

In general, the poem is rich in literary figures and tropes which enrich the text and reveal Pat Mora's linguistic skills creating a powerful poem.

From beginning to end, the reader is confronted with the witty and strong voice of La Malinche, who tells her story. In the first stanza, she authoritatively contradicts common interpretations of her as a lustful being who must be ashamed for her (in)actions, "My face isn't red / from blushing or lust, / flush of wild, swarming / unconstructed blood" (1-4). Obviously, one of the most powerful 'lenguas'⁴² throughout Mexico's history is no longer willing to be silent and to endure the numerous terrible insults thrown at her: "I hear your sticks-and-stones: / whore, traidora, slut" (8-9). She seizes power and encourages a critical as well as active re-reading of her past.

Although she addresses all her children, Mexicans as well as Chicanos/as, "mis hijas e hijos" (120), her tips most likely only concern her daughters. The first six tips as well as the ninth piece of advice intend to reveal the subjective nature of history formed by dominant patriarchy. She encourages her female descendants to re-read "hisstory" (69) in order to cope with the present. The remaining tips remind them to

⁴² The Spanish term 'lengua' means 'tongue,' but is also used to refer to 'translator'.

think critically about what they say, because hating their mother has a direct effect on their lives as women.

Women like Eve, the "[s]nake-haired" (61) Medusa, the Mexican nun Sor Juana or La Malinche who, opposed to phallogocentric norms, summon their courage to act and speak up for themselves are represented as traitors. They are vilified by society as a result of listening to the hissing of the 'snake' or their inner voice which tells them to eat from the forbidden fruit of knowledge, instead of uncritically accepting patriarchal rule. Due to the dominant presence of the serpent in the poem, it is important to take a look on its multiple meanings.

Besides being interpreted as the evil serpent of Paradise, Aztec belief sees in it a positive symbol of life, representing the god Quetzalcoatl, also known as Feathered Serpent. The poem skilfully merges the idea of the sneaky snake of the Bible with the Aztec God in her description of the fathering of the "blesséd fruit" (32), the *mestiza/o*. The female sexual organ is described as a garden, obviously the Garden of Eden, with its "crushed flowery scent / heavy as sprawling, tangled / branches, scarlet breeze / velvetmoist with petals" (17-20). The sexually aroused Malinche, "tempting tongue" (22), wants to try the "sweet juice of / words, plural hiss / of languagessssss, (22-25) and opens her "ripe legs" (30) to be penetrated by the "serpents" (26). Here, the description of the phallus as serpents suggests a parallel between the foreign Cortés and the native god Feathered Serpent, which evokes A. Del Castillo's argument that Malinche acted out of religious conviction (see 132).

In addition to explicit references to snakes, these reptiles are also mirrored in Malinche's loose hair, which is "flowing, flowing like / snakes sizzling" (110-111) seducing men, and more importantly in her speech producing tongue. Her "tongue carrying him [Cortés] / and his men into a world smeared scarlet" (112-113) is blamed for the downfall of her own people as it is the "*rat-rattle* of [her] evil" (116), revealing necessary information to Cortés. Additionally, the hissing of her snake-like tongue is directed at her children. Onomatopoeia and alliteration are used to emphasise this idea, as, for example, in "hiss / of languagessssss, / serpents" (24-25), "Motherssss" (64) or "analysessssss, /sneaky sueños" (161-162). Like the serpent in the Bible, Malinche tries to persuade her children to taste the forbidden fruit in order to be able to objectively judge what they perceive as good or bad.

The “fruta dulce” (87) in this poem represents the unknown, especially the foreign language. Depending on the position of each individual Chicana, notions of native versus foreign language differ. Chicanas who stress their indigenous roots and the importance of Mexican culture may perceive English and the Anglo way of life as the foreign which opens new perspectives and promises a better future. Since it distances them from their tradition, they are often called traitors, *malinchistas*. As a matter of fact, they are not too weak to resist temptation, but rather embrace a crucial part of their identities, as they are both Mexican and American.

Consequently, the same is true for Chicanas who (un)intentionally distance themselves from their Mexican past and their metaphorical mother. The unknown then is Spanish, their supposed mother tongue. Although Malinche’s mother tongue was Náhuatl or a Mayan dialect, her work as translator closely connected her with Spanish. Also Cherríe Moraga associates Spanish with La Malinche. She explains her feelings when she learned Spanish and rediscovered her indigenous identity, “[r]eturning to la mujer scares me, re-learning Spanish scares me [...]. In returning to the love of my raza, I must confront the fact that not only has the mother been taken from me, but her tongue, my mother tongue” (*Loving* 131). Like Moraga’s mother, many Mexican parents decide not to teach their children Spanish and to distance them from Mexican culture, because in the Anglo world being Mexican equals being poor. A considerable part of Anglo society favours English as the only official language in the United States which dramatically influences ‘minority groups.’ English-Only policies impose the prohibition to speak Spanish in public. La Malinche in Mora’s poem explains this reality with the

‘English Only,’ fearssss
of contagion from
tangled lenguas,
of verbal interwinings,
like the uncontrollable
breedings of snakes. (94-99)

‘Mixed tongues’ create something new which seems to be no longer controllable. Feelings of insecurity and anxiety may arise in particular among monolinguals, those who lack essential knowledge to understand the complex world of bilingual and bicultural Chicanas. The speaker of the poem, however, stresses the advantage of dominating two languages and refutes narrow minded prejudices. She describes her

own experience of learning how to “roll / palabras in [her] mouth” (83-84) as trying the “fruta dulce” (87), which tastes like velvet as empowering her to enter and create a bicultural world. Malinche tries to encourage Chicanas to build a shield preventing them from attacks against their linguistic skills and consequently against their identities. Chicanas who (un)consciously ignore their Mexican roots may feel like Moraga, whose family tried

[...] to bleach me [Moraga] of what color I did have. Although my mother was fluent in Spanish, I was never taught much of it at home. [...] for to her, on a basic economic level, being Chicana meant being ‘less.’ [...] the more effectively we could pass in the white world, the better guaranteed our future. (*Loving* 43)

For Moraga, the attempt to erase everything Mexican about her identity caused a feeling of “disparity between what I was born into and what I was to grow up to become” (*Loving* 43). Chicanas need to accept both their cultures and both their languages to summon their strength. The acceptance of their bilingual and bicultural realities will enable them to break free from imposed silences, to escape from their permanent exile and to articulate their own identities.

Moraga, similar to the speaker of Mora’s poem, knows that “[n]o one else can or will speak for us [Chicanas]. We must be the ones to define the parameters of what it means to be, and love, la mestiza” (*Loving* 129). In Mora’s poem Malinche tells her children to “[w]rite / your own rumors / or hire your own historians” (34-36) they should use their mother’s linguistic skills as mediator, her strong voice to penetrate patriarchal rule and to shatter imposed stereotypes which are often reinforced by the own *hermanas*. As previously stated, Malinche did not merely repeat Cortés’s words but she had to actively mediate between different cultures. Now she uses her powerful tongue in a similar way to translate between the many parts of her identity. She creates a bridge, serving as a woman with positive and negative traits, who is no passive Virgin but an

[...] abused
woman, abuser,
no saint, human,
sold, slave, sexual
woman, raped woman, invisible
translator, mother (138-143)

A mother can be all those things even though she is no virgin and acknowledges the sexual component of reproduction. To be sexually active and to speak one's mind does not exclude being a loving mother. Humans, this poem suggests, consist of different and sometimes even contradictory components.

Mora's Malinche affectionately wants to embrace her children and to encourage them to reach their own unbiased conclusions. Instead of negating common depictions of the Mexican or Chicana woman as a "loose, treacherous, female" (A. Del Castillo 141) who originates from the sexualised translator Malinche, Mora skilfully plays with these simplifications. She acknowledges that her children were born at a time of war. Love and war are present throughout the poem by constant allusions to red, a colour which is normally associated with blood, fire, threat but also passion and desire. This rather ambivalent colour mirrors part of Malinche's reality and dominant interpretations, as well as the existence of multiple realities. Malinche seemingly wants her children to acknowledge these facts and not to venerate an idol that represents a passive silent woman. To blindly follow patriarchal interpretations will influence their own womanliness and put them into the narrow categories of being a bad 'open' girl or a good 'closed' girl.

Similar to Paz and Moraga, Mora's poem plays with the idea of open and closed in terms of sexual organ and the speech producing mouth. Young Chicanas are often told to be quiet because being a 'big mouth', a *hocicona*, is something negative. They are told that only bad girls are "[l]oose-tongued / women. Open-mouthed women. Open / women. /Whores [...]" (62-64) like Malinche whose open mouth and vagina caused the destruction of her own people. With all means, the *nanas* and 'amás' want to prevent their girls to be seen as bad girls. They believe that one must follow the ideal of "[w]omen of closed / uterus. Women / of closed / mouths. Women / of covered / hair. Women / of cloaked / bodies [...]" (66-73) to be a respectable woman. As will be analysed in the following section, La Virgen de Guadalupe is seen as the only acceptable role model for a good girl.

As previously stated, not only Chicanos but also Chicanas need to change their attitudes towards Malinche and women in general. Only then can the Chicana be "an actual force in making of history" (A. Del Castillo 125). Moraga is convinced that if

Malinche had not been vilified, there would not be any woman betraying “a sister, a daughter, a compañera in the service of the man and his institutions” (*Loving* 126). By loving your mother, she stresses, the Chicana/o movement can become stronger because, “[a]ny movement built on the fear and loathing of anyone is a failed movement” (Moraga, *Loving* 130). Only a “plural hiss / of languagesssss” (24-25), a dialogue or even polylogue, can form a bridge between different cultures, different sexes and foremost a bridge to one’s Self. Instead of rigid dichotomies, borders are blurred and various interpretations/translations are possible. Malinche’s daughters need to realise that they must not try to be a bridge for somebody else’s sake but for their own.

In the beginning Mora’s Malinche suggests that, “[i]n an unfriendly country, / wear a mask. / You will see more” (5-7). However, in the course of the poem it becomes apparent that at a certain point Chicanas have to accept who they are, even though being a Chicana means to be “open to all kinds of assaults” (Moraga, *Loving* 132). The past will always be a subliminal present because as Malinche tells her children “mirror, mirror won’t lie” (153). She is part of them, “Look. Do you see? We. / Inseparable” (154-155). Nonetheless, instead of uncritically accepting dominant interpretations of the past, the poem suggests that Chicanas need to “[a]lter / the altared women” (80-81) and to translate the past into their present in order to be proud about being a Chicana. Similar to Malinche, who states that “[...] I’m the proud / mother of mexicanos, / brown as I am” (121-123), her children have to realise that it is an asset to be brown, bilingual and bicultural. She gives her children one last almost comic tip “[f]ace it: / Hating your mother / ruins your skin” (175-177). To ignore or even hate one’s origins is to ignore a part of one’s identity.

Before entering into a detailed analysis of my selected literary texts, it will be important to roughly deal with two other mythical figures of Chicana/o culture. As Anzaldúa points out, Chicanas have three mothers, “*Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *La Chingada* (*Malinche*), the raped woman whom we have abandoned, and *La Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two” (*Borderlands* 52).

La Malinche and Her Sisters

La Virgen de Guadalupe

La Virgen de Guadalupe, a key figure of Mexican religion, remains the patron saint of Chicanas/os to this day, as well as a powerful image of contemporary popular culture (see Rebolledo 51). The Virgin is an iconographic figure which can be encountered everywhere from murals on Balmy Street in San Francisco, to a bar in Hollywood. As such, she not only constitutes an omnipresent figure in the American Southwest, but is also a recurrent image in many other areas across the United States and Mexico. Indeed, it is common for most Mexicans or Chicanas/os to have a picture of her in their houses, in their cars or even a tattoo on their bodies. This strong identification with Guadalupe among Chicanas/os may be a result of the Virgin's similar racial make-up, as she is the first mestiza Virgin merging European and Indigenous culture (see Rebolledo 50).

In 1531, the Brown Virgin (*La Virgen Morena*) miraculously appeared to an Indian christened Juan Diego on the Tepeyacac hill near today's Mexico City (see Rebolledo 50). She is said to possess all the traits a respectable woman is supposed to have: "piety, virginity, forgiveness and submissiveness. [She is a] nurturing mother offering only supreme good. Her religiosity and unselfish motherhood make her a positive model [...]" (Zygadlo 120). Although the passive Virgin is still highly venerated, her representation as the utmost good is often perceived as oppressive. Frequently, Chicana feminists claim that patriarchy co-opts her to strengthen male domination and oppress women (see Zygadlo 125). Chicana literature increasingly attempts to invert this co-option, reasserting the strength of the image for positive purposes.

A possible inversion is achieved by realising Guadalupe's various sides. As Chayo in Sandra Cisneros's "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" states, "[w]hen I learned your real name is Coatloxopeuh [...] Tonantzín [...] Coatlicue [...] When I could see you in all your facets [...] I could love you, and, finally, learn to love me" (128). Here, Chicanas are urged to free themselves from imposed patriarchal history on the grounds that the connection between the Brown Virgin and other pre-

Columbian deities are often ignored. Yet, since the location of Guadalupe's encounter was a sacred place of worship for the Náhuatl goddess Tonantzín,⁴³ the strong link between them was revealed. Understood in this way, Lupe is often seen as the 'rebirth' of "Our Mother" who is frequently associated with another important pre-Columbian Náhuatl deity, Coatlicue, who stands for death and birth, respectively (see Rebolledo 50). Precisely owing to Coatlicue's dual nature, many Chicanas have discovered her as a role model capable of mirroring their own dichotomous situation (see Rebolledo 51). Here, the close connection between Guadalupe, Tonantzín and Coatlicue weakens the influence of the binaries of 'good' versus 'bad' on Chicanas, as it reveals her as an ambiguous figure embodying dualistic qualities. Obviously, a woman can be more than either good or bad.

The Virgin's multiple facets suggest the possibility of coexisting binaries within the same identity. Acknowledging her dichotomous character enables Chicanas to translate her into their own present and to emphasise certain traits which are important for them. Guadalupe is not only decentred and de-contextualised in literature, as for example in Cisneros's short story, but also in the visual arts. For example, the artist Yolanda López plays with the image of La Virgen. Besides numerous paintings depicting regular women as Lupe, it is also interesting to mention one of her photo installations of Guadalupe called "Tablax Vivant" (1978). López takes pictures of herself in the position of La Virgen, changing her traditional clothes as well as her passive posture into a more active and powerful figure.

To portray ordinary people as the Brown Virgin and to change traditional representations, translates Lupe into regular women's lives. This demystification of the holy Virgin promotes the idea that real women are also capable of doing sacred things and elevates them to the status of the Virgin, giving both a more active and heterogeneous role. Along similar lines, there exist numerous other renditions of La Virgen, each of which bring her closer to the normal Chicana.

⁴³ The Aztec goddess Tonantzín represents female power. Her name literally means 'Our Mother,' indicating her interpretation as the Mother of Gods (see Castro 240).

La Llorona

The ‘second mother’ of the Chicana is La Llorona, the Weeping or Wailing Woman, who has her origins in Indian and Spanish folklore. Her tragedy is not only closely linked to the Medea archetype⁴⁴ (see Limón 400) but is also frequently associated with “life-giving and -destroying” Náhuatl female deities, like Coatlicue and Tonantzín (see Rebolledo 76).

As is the nature of folk legends, this tale has undergone many different interpretations over time, since it is passed down by many families, often as a cautionary tale. The predominate uncertainty about the concrete figure enables Chicanas to form their own interpretations. More traditional versions of her story associate Weeping Woman with infanticide out of revenge for her husband’s adultery or to protect her children from an impending harm. Often she is perceived as a ‘restless spirit’ who is condemned to roam the streets at night in a white or black dress near crossroads or bodies of water mourning the loss of her children (see Rebolledo 62). Another version claims that La Llorona was abandoned by her lover/husband who fled with a woman of his own class (see D. Pérez 104). As a result, she lurks in the dark, lonely roads or canals waiting for men passing by. At first sight, she appears to be a beautiful female, but when men approach her, she transforms into a hag deadly threatening them (see D. Pérez 101).

This myth has practical usage owing to Weeping Woman’s fearsome reputation of drowning children. Chicanas often warn their children about playing close to water or getting too far away from home. Influenced by gender constraints and patriarchal rule, boys are taught to perceive La Llorona as “a female temptress, [the] embodiment of a malevolent sexuality that could cause them to lose their soles or [...] their ‘real’ mothers” (D. Pérez 104). At the same time girls understand La Llorona as a symbol of negative sexuality, warning them not to long for somebody outside their own class/ethnicity (see D. Pérez 104). Similarly, her tale is meant to shun females who do not strive to be a good and self-sacrificing mother and remind them of the severe consequences of improper behaviour (see A. Castillo 186).

⁴⁴ Medea is a highly ambiguous figure of ancient Greek mythology frequently associated with magic and child murder. She has been depicted again and again until now, however no canonical version of her story exists (see Griffiths 6). For further information, see Emma Griffiths’s *Medea*.

The core message of La Llorona's story is always similar: "[A]s punishment for her conduct a young, usually beautiful woman is condemned to wander [...] forever crying, unloved, and homeless, in grief-stricken search for her lost children" (Candelaria 93). Depending on spatial and temporal necessity, certain elements of this story are foregrounded. Contemporary interpretations, for example, frequently understand La Llorona as a symbol of emptiness, a "tormented soul, wracked with guilt, searching for what has been lost, forever wandering in a physical and psychic borderland" (D. Pérez 101). Often she is positioned within an urban environment, representing political, economic, social, sexual or cultural loss. For example, Tey Diana Rebolledo sees La Llorona as a symbol of negation of Chicana/o culture, undergoing total assimilation into dominant society and consequently negating essential parts of Chicana identity (see 77). Weeping Woman also plays an important role in Felicia Luna Lemus' novel *Trace Elements*. She accompanies the protagonist Leticia on her journey to articulate her distinct identity(ies), both reminding her of her past and helping her to deal with her present. As will be shown, Leticia is often confronted with a feeling of being lost due to a constant movement back and forth between different worlds.

Besides using her to express emptiness and to remind women of the necessity to be a 'good girl,' La Llorona can also be seen as a symbol of resistance, revolting against ethnic and gender oppressions (see D. Pérez 109). A variety of Chicana authors reinterpret the story of the Wailing Woman. For example, in Cisneros's short story "Woman Hollering Creek," the author converts La Llorona into a "gritona," a screaming woman, shouting instead of mourning (see Carbonell 53). By freeing La Llorona from imposed negative interpretations, women can use her as an empowering figure, defying patriarchal binaries and gaining strength to shout out what they feel.

The use of La Llorona's powerful voice is one characteristic revealing a parallel between Weeping Woman and La Malinche.⁴⁵ In addition, both are considered negative maternal figures associated with sexuality, death, loss and sadness for their

⁴⁵ A literary example where La Malinche is fused with La Llorona is Rudolfo Anaya's *The Legend of La Llorona*. His interpretation directly connects La Malinche to Weeping Woman and inspires the playwright Josefina López's play *Unconquered Spirits* (see e-mail from Josefina López, 28 January 2009).

lost children. Besides La Llorona's obvious association with infanticide, some versions of La Malinche's story blame the interpreter for killing her son Martín out of fear that Cortés's may take him from her. Consequently, similar to Weeping Woman, she roams the streets wailing for her son's death. Another portrayal of Malinche's tale suggests that she is crying for her metaphorical children, the indigenous people who have died because of her (in)actions (see Maldonado 45).

On the one hand, La Llorona is frequently depicted as the ghost of La Malinche (see Wyatt 256). But on the other, Malinche is seen as an "extension of the pre-conquest folklore figure of La Llorona" (Maldonado 45). Obviously, as much as already each figure suggests multi-dimensional stories, it is also unclear which story existed at first. Some interpret La Malinche and Weeping Woman as one figure, whereas others do not confuse or unite them but rather depict them as close relatives (see Rebolledo 63). In *Trace Elements*, for example, La Llorona is depicted as "la Malinche reborn" (18) or as the latter's cousin. This thesis will see La Llorona and La Malinche as two powerful women who are strongly connected, which sometimes makes it almost impossible to distinguish them from each other. Against widespread vilifications, this study interprets both as alternative role models for Chicanas who try to mediate the many parts of their identities.

In the following section, I will illustrate existing similarities between La Malinche and the female protagonists of *Simply María* and *Trace Elements* respectively. As the main endeavour of this study is to show how Leticia and María manage to articulate their polymorphous identities by mediating between the multiple elements that shape their realities, Malinche will serve as a "conceptual spring board" (Birmingham-Pokorny qtd. in Bandau 177). In particular, the feminist re-readings and re-writings of Malinche's his-story will function as a paradigm to destroy existing binaries and to promote an active engagement in the creation of the protagonists' identities.

INFINITE DIVISIONS: CROSS-CULTURAL AND CROSS-GENDER MEDIATIONS



Simply María, Or the American Dream

The Playwright Josefina López and Her Writing

Before focusing on Josefina López's play *Simply María, Or the American Dream* (Dramatic Publishing, 1996), a preliminary discussion of her personal life is of great interest. Her writing frequently describes (semi-)autobiographical moments, disclosing numerous parallels between her and the lives of her fictional characters. López, who was born in México, is one of the most produced Latina playwrights in the US. At the age of five, she moved to the neighbourhood Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles. Together with her parents, she lived there illegally for almost thirteen years. Despite her father's heavy objections, she graduated from Los Angeles County High School for Arts and pursued an academic career, obtaining an MFA in screenwriting from UCLA. López wrote her first play, a satirical comedy, *Simply María, Or the American Dream*, at the age of seventeen. The Emmy award winning play was followed by a plethora of subsequent plays, like *Unconquered Spirits*, *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*, *Boyle Heights* and also *Real Women Have Curves*, which was later adapted into a film. Besides being a prolific playwright, Josefina López presently works as a screenwriter. She recently published her first novel and actively engages in teaching. Furthermore, she founded "Casa 0101 Theatre Art Space" in her neighbourhood to provide an open space for Latina/o artists (see López, "Biography").

López's efforts to give Latina/o artists the possibility of staging their works is closely related to her general urge to invent something new, outside of established categories and to give voice to those who are normally not heard. For her, writing has a therapeutic function, which enables her to heal and appropriate a new space. In an interview she states that she "decided to start writing to create roles for Latinas and

for [her]self” (“Notes” 6). Although she admires the playwright Luis Valdez, who is celebrated as the ‘Father of Chicano Theatre,’ she openly criticises his simplified representations of women, as virgins, mothers or whores. She considers her own and other women’s nature to be highly heterogeneous, embodying a combination of all three figures.⁴⁶ Through her writing, she allows a third more powerful possibility of what it means to be a woman, outside of dichotomous thinking.

Similar to the experience of numerous Latinas, López has the feeling of “living in two different worlds that [keep] clashing” (López, “Notes” 6). She describes this notion of in-betweenness as a state of uncertainty, as hearing different voices which tell her what to do, and as not knowing which to follow. For her, the difficulty of navigating this cultural divide, frequently results in a feeling of rising anger. Many Chicanas are not only filled with rage against racial injustice, but also against gender inequalities within their own cultural circles. For numerous Chicana authors, writing serves as an emotional outlet for their furies, their feelings of being lost and allows them to confront arising problems. Similarly, López states: “I was so angry [...] I had so much coraje, instead of swallowing that coraje I spit it out and put it on paper [...].”⁴⁷ Her *coraje* is visible to everybody, and encourages other Chicanas to find their inner strength to shout out their uniqueness and beauty.

Josefina López’s first play *Simply María, Or the American Dream*, is a testimony of her very early *coraje*, expressing her anger with traditional gender roles. According to her, the play is a cry for attention: “I had thought about committing suicide, but I knew I wanted to live. I just wanted so badly to get my parents’ attention and for them to understand me” (“Notes” 5). Annoyed by her father’s machismo and her mother’s unconditional acceptance of uneven power structures, the seventeen-year-old López tried to make her *coraje* more public. Instead of accepting traditional gender roles, suggesting female passivity and obedience, she aspired to become “economically independent and self-sufficient” (“Notes” 5). Her work illustrates that it is neither a “waste of time” (“Notes” 5) to become educated, nor a betrayal of one’s culture, but rather an opportunity to break free from established binaries which create a situation of domination versus subordination.

⁴⁶ see *Necessary Theatre*, 00:06:24’-00:06:54,’ <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL56dth0mj0>>.

⁴⁷ *Necessary Theatre*, 00:10:08’-00:10:21,’ <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL56dth0mj0>>.

Although some critics may claim that this work is an example of López's early feminism, which later becomes much more sophisticated⁴⁸, I deliberately choose this early play as it reveals the *coraje* of a young Latina who is convinced to be able to construct a distinct identity, a new consciousness outside of any category. Here, it is crucial to note that even though some similarities between the author Josefina and the fictional character María exist, the female protagonist remains a fictional construct in a fictional narrative.

The general focus of my analysis lies on the protagonist María, who tries to free herself from hegemonic scripts, dismantling a monolithic concept of identity in favour of a pluralistic vision. Accordingly, the first part of this section examines Carmen and Ricardo's dreams, which frequently clash with a harsh reality, requiring constant adaptation to new situations. Alongside, a critical analysis of the American dream will be provided. The second part will deal with different cultural perceptions of womanhood. In particular, the tremendous influence of the male/female dyad and the virgin/whore paradigm inherent in Mexican culture will be critically analysed. This discussion will be followed by a description of María's struggle to break free from imposed categories, seeking for self-definition. Here, I will propose feminist re-readings of La Malinche as a conceptual spring board to adapt existing gender roles. Translation will serve as a metaphor to deconstruct imposed roles and to create new identities, by mediating between the multiple elements that shape María's Self.

Utopian Dreams and Failed Promises

María is drawn between the value system of her Mexican immigrant family and American culture at large. While she strives for an education and economic independence, she is eager to live up to her parents' expectations. Her life is decisively shaped by her immigrant background and the notion of the American dream, proposing the possibility to rise from rags-to-riches and to invent oneself anew. Already the title of Josefina López's play *Simply María, Or the American Dream*, suggests a general preoccupation with dreams and pledges. Thus, in order to understand the multiple elements that shape María's identity(ies), it is crucial to deal

⁴⁸ see *Necessary Theatre*, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL56dth0mj0>>.

with the American dream and the effect of this mythical promise on her own and her parents' lives.

The beginning of the play is set in a small Mexican village and initially almost resembles the romantic tale of Romeo and Juliet. Ricardo, "*a tall, dark, and handsome Mexican man*" (SM 9) waits for his girlfriend Carmen, who stands on the balcony longing to elope with her sweetheart. After a passionate embrace, Carmen is confronted with reality. Instead of a fairy-tale-like escape on a horse, her prince charming only offers her an old bicycle. She incredulously asks him "¿Qué?! On that? No! How could you...? Everyone knows that when you elope, you elope on a horse. Not on a...Ricardo, you promised!" (SM 10). However, as she is anxious to be discovered by her parents, she accepts the unromantic escape. Carmen jumps on the bike but immediately falls off and thus is quite literally brought back to earth. The scene foreshadows a life marked by a constant clashing of reveries amid an often stark reality. Due to repeated failed promises and disappointments, she learns to be satisfied with little. As will become apparent, these experiences substantially contribute to the construction of Carmen's self-image, as well as on the way she communicates the rights and duties of a Mexican woman to her daughter María.

The rather unromantic attempt to elope is only the beginning of a future marked by Ricardo's repeated failure to satisfy the dreams of his faithful girlfriend. Despite numerous disappointments, Carmen always stays with him. Already her willingness to have sex with Ricardo demonstrates a trusting, naïve nature, given that sexual relations before marriage are generally not permissive in Mexican society. Even when Ricardo does not show up on their supposed wedding day, she continues to believe in him and trusts in his promise to marry her. On their actual wedding day, he nonchalantly enters the church and hesitantly agrees to marry Carmen.

Carmen dedicates her entire life to pleasing her husband, resulting in an apparent dependency on Ricardo, which puts her into the position of the inferior 'Other.' Her behaviour suggests that she adheres to the traditional female/male dyad, describing women as passive and men as active (see Gaspar de Alba, "Revenge" 51). Carmen follows prevailing hegemonic scripts as a pathway towards happiness, interpreting motherhood and being a wife as the ultimate goal for every woman. When Ricardo

announces his departure to the United States, hoping for a better life for his family, Carmen claims the following: “I would prefer to have you than the things I don’t have” (*SM* 13). Although she dreams of living a quiet life with her husband and her child, rather than striving for personal or economic progress, she accepts Ricardo’s decision. As will be shown in the second part of this section, Carmen’s general submissive nature has a tremendous impact on her daughter’s life.

In contrast to Carmen’s modest dreams, Ricardo longs for social and economic improvement and tells his wife the following: “I must go to **el norte**, so I can find work and send for you” (*SM* 13, emphasis in the original). Like many immigrants, he sees the United States as a place of endless opportunities, which guarantees a better future for those “who are willing to risk” (*SM* 14). Ricardo’s actions echo a strong belief in the mythical promise of the American dream, interpreting America as the land of “progress, self-creation, achievement and success” (Campbell, and Kean 25) where a “fresh start, [a] new beginning” (Campbell, and Kean 26) is possible. The idea of equal opportunities, to rise from rags-to-riches through hard work, is deeply ingrained in the American mind. Thus, Ricardo risks his life, illegally crossing the border, hoping that he and his family will “have the things [they] don’t have” (*SM* 13) in Mexico.

The American dream does not only promote economic improvement, but also the ideal of inventing oneself anew, resulting in the creation of a new “‘true’ American identity” (Campbell, and Kean 57). Within this understanding, ethnic groups are supposed to adapt to the new surrounding, but are also able to sustain a distinct identity simultaneously (see Campbell, and Kean 57). However, Ricardo soon experiences that the ideal of a polyphonic America constituted by multiple identities does not correspond to reality. Already upon his arrival in the US, he and other fellow Mexicans learn the cruel truth when they overhear the Statue of Liberty welcoming the arriving European immigrants:

STATUE OF LIBERTY. I give you life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, for the price of your heritage, your roots, your history, your family, your language...Conform, adapt, give up what is yours, and I will give you the opportunity to have what is mine. (*SM* 15)

The statement of the Statue of Liberty encourages the arriving immigrants to renounce everything they have been before and to adapt to American rule in order to succeed. This demand to conform to the cultural majority promotes the idea of one shared language, religion and value system, rather than multiple cultures, which are united through their differences.

Acculturation is obviously a prerequisite to access the American dream. However, apart from a general willingness to “[c]onform, adapt, give up what is yours” (*SM* 15), also skin colour decisively influences to what degree one can take advantage of the endless opportunities the United States promise. Although immigrants share a similar experience, because “[w]hen migrants cross a boundary line there is hostility and welcome. [They] are included and excluded in different ways” (Sarup qtd. in Campbell, and Kean 61), immigrants of colour face numerous inequalities. The European immigrants in *Simply María* do not only safely arrive by boat, but are also warmly welcomed by the Statue of Liberty, whereas, Mexicans are greeted with hostility: “[t]hey run around hiding, sneaking, and crawling, trying not to get spotted by the border control” (*SM* 14-15). Apart from helicopter lights and dogs, Liberty, the ‘Mother of Exiles,’ uses her torch to detect illegal crossers, rather than lightening the arriving immigrants their way to freedom.

As has been shown, already Ricardo’s arrival in the United States is marked by a harsh environment, not holding up the promise of a culturally diverse America, where everybody is granted the same rights. Indeed, rather than embracing ethnic differences, diversity is seen as a sign of weakness. Ethnic groups are pushed to the periphery, making it difficult for them to access the American dream. These racial inequalities cause Ricardo to harbour resentments toward American culture and to hold on even harder to his Mexican roots. Hence, as will be shown, any traces of foreign influences on his daughter’s behaviour are immediately refuted.

Ricardo’s life in the US is marked by hard work and an eagerness to bring his family to America. In the meantime, Carmen tells María wonderful stories about the ‘Promised Land,’ where anything is possible. The audience does not know with certainty whether her heavenly descriptions of the US were evoked by Ricardo’s letters or by Carmen’s willingness to believe in a romantic *norte*. However,

considering her general dreamy nature, her fairy-tale-like descriptions are most likely attributed to her vivid imagination. Yet, when Carmen and María finally arrive in Los Angeles, their former dreams about the US clash with reality. Despite Carmen's reveries, the city appears like a rough place, full of strange people, illegally selling things on the street and sexually harassing her daughter. The young innocent María astonishingly asks her parents, "[w]here are the angels? And where are the clouds? And the gate? And the music... Like in the stories **Mamá** used to tell me" (*SM* 19-20, emphasis in the original).

Carmen is disoriented and shocked when she arrives in Los Angeles and cries out in disgust "[w]hat a crazy city! It's so awful! People are crazy" (*SM* 18). Although Carmen tries to hide her true feelings, it is apparent that the small flat in one of the social housing projects of East L.A., which "[n]o one likes [...] but it's cheap. '**Ta barrato**'" (*SM* 19, emphasis in the original), does not correspond to her idea of a better life in the US. Like many Mexican immigrants, Carmen and Ricardo exchanged their simple life in a small Mexican village, for a tiny apartment in the large urban area of Los Angeles, convinced that America would offer their daughter a better future. Confronted with racial seclusion and a rather harsh reality, Carmen lowers her expectations, which significantly influences her self-image and consequently, also her daughter's identity.

Even though the first impression of the USA does not correspond to Carmen's tales, María is excited about the endless opportunities this country offers her: "**Estados Unidos**, I don't even know you and I already love you!" (*SM* 20, emphasis in the original). María believes in her father's promises that in America she can be anything [she] want[s] to be!" (*SM* 20). While she is enthusiastic about the unlimited opportunities promised to her, she soon realises that it is difficult to mediate between her own longings and her parents' expectations. As the latter face numerous stigmatisations, their attitudes towards America substantially change. Their experiences display an utter disparity between dream and reality, which questions the validity of the American dream.

In the following section, María's struggle to translate her Chicananess, by integrating and adapting the past to her present will be described. The main focus

will be on her effort to break free from imposed perceptions of womanhood. Here, in particular the female/male dyad and the virgin/whore dichotomy are of great interest. In order to understand the complex situation María is confronted with, the tremendous influence of both, American and Mexican culture must be taken into account.

Multiple Murmurs Shaping a Powerful Polyphonic Female Voice

In contrast to the ideal of a “multidimensional view” (Campbell, and Kean 11) of American culture, where all voices have to be valued, as they are important agents in the (re)construction of history(ies) as well as herstory(ies) (see Campbell, and Kean 12), reality still tends to be dominated by a dichotomous thinking. As previously stated, Mexican immigrants’ distinct cultural backgrounds cause the imposition of an image created outside of their culture, positioning them as the cultural other in the United States (see Kaminsky 22). In addition to the feeling of cultural alienation, Carmen and María, two women of Mexican origin, have to face a double marginalisation, because women in phallogocentric societies are generally only defined in terms of their relations to men (see Radtke, and Stam 77). Consequently, Carmen and María are not only the ‘Other’ on a cross-cultural level, but also within their own culture, patriarchy defines them as inferior and pushes them to the margins. Before dealing with the concrete effects of this double marginalisation, a brief insight into the construction of gender roles will be provided.

Simone de Beauvoir’s ground-breaking theory that “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (qtd. in Butler “Sex and Gender” 35) claims that gender and sex are two different entities. While the latter refers to the biological condition of having male or female sexual organs, the former describes the culturally formed meaning of what it signifies to be a woman or a man (see Butler “Sex and Gender” 35).

Note that gender is embedded in a specific historical context and is influenced by various modalities, like race, class, ethnicity, sexuality or location. Although certain similarities might exist, it is impossible to assume that the nature of women is a universal one (see Butler, *Gender* 6). Consequently, no totalising view on what it

means to be a Chicana can be given. The analysis of María's experiences has to consider that she emigrates with her family from Mexico to Los Angeles and is raised within an urban American working class environment, dominated by poverty and the hope for economic improvement. These elements, among other things, decisively shape her identities.

Mexican culture has a tremendous influence on María's Self and considerably influences her conception of womanhood. Already at her baptism three angelic girls, representing Mexican tradition, introduce her to the characteristics of being a Mexican woman, which calls the widely acknowledged idea of gender as an imposed construction to mind (see Butler, "Sex and Gender" 36).

GIRL 1. As a girl you are to be:
GIRL 2. Nice,
GIRL 3. forgiving,
GIRL 1. considerate,
GIRL 2. obedient,
GIRL 3. gentle
GIRL 1. hard-working,
GIRL 2. gracious.
GIRL 3. You are to like:
GIRL 1. Dolls,
GIRL 2. kitchens,
GIRL 3. houses,
GIRL 1. cleaning,
GIRL 2. caring for children,
GIRL 3. cooking,
GIRL 1. laundry,
GIRL 2. dishes.
GIRL 3. You are not to:
GIRL 1. Be independent
GIRL 2. enjoy sex,
GIRL 3. but must endure it as your duty to your husband,
GIRL 1. and bearing his children.
GIRL 2. Do not shame your society! (*SM* 12)

As this excerpt shows, María is introduced to prevailing hegemonic scripts, which have to be followed, in order to fulfil the role of a Mexican woman. Along with duties and necessary character traits, personal preferences are determined. These instructions function as a guide to find, or rather to live up to, a beforehand established 'true' Mexican identity as wife and mother. De facto, the arrangement of

these norms in the form of steps emphasise the idea that these guidelines are key steps to a successful life.

Here, Stuart Hall's first definition of 'cultural identity,' mentioned in the chapter titled "Cultural Identity(ies)," comes to mind, which interprets identity as a common historical experience shared by a specific cultural group (see "Cultural Identity" 224). Instead of actively participating in the construction of an individual 'Self,' an imposed identity is accepted, requiring the adaptation of culturally fixed gender roles. Carmen and Ricardo's actions echo this view of a quintessential identity. Their specific perception of womanhood is inextricably linked to Mexican culture, judging any deviation from tradition as cultural betrayal. Carmen tells her daughter that even though these asymmetrical gender roles are unfair, they cannot be changed, because "[t]hat's the way it is [...] **Ni modo**" (*SM* 23, emphasis in the original).

The gender role, imposed on María by the three angelic girls, mirrors the stereotypical image of the passive *Mexicana/Chicana*, frequently depicted in literary texts. As previously stated, Mexican women are defined in contrast to Mexican men, embodying the inferior 'Other,' who seemingly cannot exist without the masculine counterpart (see Radtke, and Stam 77). The dyad of the female/male binary creates a conceptual framework, describing Mexican men as active, superior, courageous, proud and competitive, in contrast to Mexican women,⁴⁹ who are seen as passive, weak and submissive (see Gaspar de Alba, "Revenge" 51). Men traditionally provide for their women and protect them from the harsh world, whereas women's "only purpose in life is to serve [...] men" (*SM* 13), and thus to be obedient.

In accordance with traditional gender roles, Ricardo takes up the role of the strong and dominant man, who is characterised by his macho attitude, providing for his family, which among other things seems to entitle him to make all the important decisions. Carmen, on the other hand, embodies the good housewife and mother, who completely obeys her husband and devotes her entire life to pleasing him and

⁴⁹ As the focus here will be on traditional Mexican gender roles, I will refer to Carmen as Mexican woman and María as Chicana. Even though María is in fact a first-generation *Mexicana*, the clear influence of the United States on her character is particularly noticeable. In light of this, the term Chicana is used to describe her in-between status, which forces her to mediate between her Mexican and American Self, promoting the construction of a new polyphonic identity which is marked by inclusion rather than exclusion.

raising their daughter. Her attitude strengthens the dichotomy of superior versus inferior and thus perpetuates male superiority. The notion of putting the men first within Mexican/Chicana culture is openly criticised by Cherríe Moraga, who claims that she has “never met any kind of mexicano who [...] did not subscribe to the basic belief that men are better” (*Loving* 93). Due to this consciousness, men are granted unlimited possibilities and can do whatever they want to, without having to justify their behaviour (see Moraga, *Loving* 94).

In addition to male superiority, Carmen’s actions promote the traditional view that “[w]omen are to be fulfilled by fulfilling the needs of men” (A. Castillo, *Dreamers* 117). Apparently, she cannot imagine a life outside of marriage, as she always stays at Ricardo’s side, regardless of his (in)actions. Convinced that she acts in the best interests of her daughter, she indoctrinates María to believe that “[w]omen need to get married, they are no good without men” (*SM* 28). Carmen encourages her to learn how to cook and to take up responsibility in the household, rather than spending her entire time studying for school. Obviously, she agrees with the three angelic girls’ demand that women’s only “goal is to reproduce” and to “serve [...] men” (*SM* 13). By passing this notion on to her daughter, Carmen strengthens the idea that women are exclusively defined by their role as mother and/or wife (see Maldonado 18), which substantiates women’s dependency on men (see Radtke, and Stam 77).

Furthermore, Carmen’s continual repetition that women, “are no good without men” (*SM* 28), implies that the former need to be guided, or rather controlled by men. Here, Octavio Paz’s binary of open versus close comes to mind. According to Paz, women’s subordination is a necessity, not solely attributable to their passivity alone, but rather to their openness, which makes them an easy target for possible assaults (see 95). Ricardo adopts a similar misogynist attitude, promoting male domination, because according to him, women are stupid and believe everything men tell them.

As the following quotation shows, Ricardo’s machismo is almost interpreted as positive. According to Carmen, his disapproval of María’s future plans is for María’s own good: “We [Carmen and Ricardo] don’t want you to get hurt [...]. You are a

Mexican woman and you can't change that" (*SM* 28). By justifying Ricardo's actions, Carmen does not only try to convince María of her father's good intentions, but she reinforces the male/female dyad, validating the argument that women need to be controlled (see Paz 95). Hence, she hinders María from creating her distinct identity outside of established categories.

Moreover, Carmen implies that Mexican women have to be satisfied with little, affirming racial inequalities. Her own experiences have made her believe that even though the American dream proposes equal opportunities for everybody, people of colour face different conditions than white Americans, making it extremely difficult for the former to rise from rags-to-riches. Rather than fostering racial pride and the active engagement in the creation of María's female identity, the statement that María is "a Mexican woman and [she] can't change that" (*SM* 28), suggests that her sex and ethnicity require her to conform to an established role. These imposed restrictions posit that both, María's skin colour and sexual organs limit her possibilities, which contributes to the development of a negative self-image.

Despite an apparent asymmetrical relation between men and women, the lives of *Mexicanas/Chicanas* are divided into opposites, categorising them into good versus bad. Here, as previously indicated, the tremendous influence of mythical figures becomes visible. Patriarchy uses La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche to exemplify appropriate or inappropriate behaviour (see Zygodło 148). La Virgen, who is described as a "nurturing mother offering only supreme good" (Zygodło 120), is the prime role model for a respectable woman. In accordance with the image of the selfless virgin, the ideal woman is described as the heart of the home, who has to be "chaste, modest, honourable, clean, and [has] to minister to the needs of her husband and children" (Mirandé, and Enríquez 98). Rather than striving for independence and for the realisation of her dreams, the primary goal of each Chicana/*Mexicana* must be to please her father/husband/son. In contrast, women who do not conform to the ideal of the docile and submissive woman are associated with the sixteenth century interpreter Malinalli Tenépal, who is regarded as the epitome of a wicked woman. Patriarchal versions of La Malinche's tale reveal women as innately evil and open to the foreign, as, according to his-story, her actions caused the downfall of an entire empire (see A. Del Castillo 139).

Although La Malinche and La Virgen are never explicitly mentioned in the play, their continual presence and tremendous effect on the protagonists' lives are clearly noticeable. Apart from the three angelic girls, who strictly define the characteristics of a respectable Mexican woman, also Ricardo and Carmen's attitudes and actions reveal a dualistic categorisation of women. They live according to this traditional mindset and influence María's self-image, by promoting the preservation of imposed gender roles as a pathway to a prosperous life, thus denying the possibility that women can be something in-between the two extremes.

Carmen is inclined to raise her daughter as a respectable woman, and therefore constantly tells María how to behave, in order to become a good wife and mother. As time progresses, Ricardo increasingly agrees with Carmen. Rather than living up to his initial promise that in America María can be anything she wants to be, he limits her possibilities and expresses his deep concerns about her lacking housewifely skills. According to him "[n]o Mexican man is going to marry a woman who can't cook" (*SM* 25), which reinforces the belief that women depend on men.

When María asks her father, why he no longer encourages her to compete and to pursue her dreams, Ricardo pronounces the obvious, "[b]ecause...you are a woman" (*SM* 28). Apparently, María's physical development is directly related to her possibilities, as the more she becomes a woman, the more Ricardo restricts her to the domestic sphere, promoting that she should "just get married like most decent women and be a housewife" (*SM* 27). Undoubtedly, Ricardo's general conviction that women are weak creatures who are not worth being educated, as clearly visible in his claim: "**¡Tanto estudio y para nada!** It's just a waste to educate women" (*SM* 24, emphasis in the original), also applies to his adolescent daughter.

As the above quoted examples show, Carmen and Ricardo are eager to protect traditional gender roles, which are inextricably linked to Mexican culture. The consumption of Mexican food, the exclusive use of Spanish and the repeated stressing of Mexican values, suggest that they consider the acknowledgement of one's Mexican background of utmost importance. Ricardo encourages María to cherish and remember her cultural roots:

RICARDO. I don't want you to forget you are Mexican. There are many people where I work who deny they are Mexican. When their life gets better they stop being Mexican! To deny one's country is to deny one's past, one's parents. How ungrateful! (*SM* 27)

Obviously, Ricardo abhors people who deny their Mexican background, after experiencing social progress. Although upon his arrival in the United States he learned that the merging into one unified white American identity facilitates social progress, he perceives cultural conformity as a sign of ungratefulness and cultural betrayal. According to him, the negation of one's culture equals the negation of one's parents. Considering the importance of *la familia* within Mexican culture, the severity of this denial becomes apparent.

When María declares that she does not only want to be a wife and mother, but also pursue a career, her father dismisses her wishes, telling her: "Don't tell me about modern women. What kind of wife would that woman make if she's so busy with her career and can't tend to her house, children, and her husband?" (*SM* 28). A "[g]ood woman equals mother" (A. Castillo, *Dreamers* 117), which entails personal sacrifice for one's children and husband, and not the pursuance of individual aims. Therefore, María's attempt to mediate between Mexican and American culture, promoting the possibility of being more than just a wife or a mother, is perceived as cultural betrayal.

The idea of selling-out to one's culture by acting outside of imposed parameters is deeply ingrained in the Chicana/*Mexicana* psyche and is directly related to La Malinche, who, according to his-story, betrayed her own people. The patriarchal interpretation of Malinche as the evil female traitor is an influential tool to control women (see Keller, and Röhrig 2004). A woman who is disobedient, is disloyal and is consequently, considered a traitor to her people (see Alarcón, "Malintzin" 186). As María's nightmare shows, Ricardo blames the United States for her changing behaviour.

RICARDO. She was obedient when she was young, but when she came to the United States she began to think herself 'American.' ... She studied a lot, which is good, but she refused to do her chores because she thought herself above them. (*SM* 42)

While La Malinche was blamed for selling out to Spanish culture, María is accused of selling out to American culture, which Ricardo associates with arrogance and self-importance.

Carmen and Ricardo's strong inclination to protect Mexican tradition must be viewed in the context of their situation as immigrants in the United States. As has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, shortly after Ricardo's arrival in America, he realises that there is a direct relation between success and skin colour. While European immigrants are warmly welcomed, he and his fellow Mexican countrymen are confronted with hostility. Due to frequent stigmatisations within Anglo society, ethnic groups often highlight the importance of cherishing cultural values.

In the context of Mexican Americans, the tremendous influence of the Mexican family, *la familia*, must be taken into account. *La Familia* constitutes a key element of Mexican/Chicana culture and strengthens family ties, honour, masculinity, obedience, a focus on the past and conformity to traditional values (see Garcia-Bahne 40). The Mexican family provides fixed roles, and therefore, a sense of identity and belonging (see Garcia-Bahne 1). This strengthening of established gender roles is also expressed by Moraga, who points out that Chicanas/os often "believe the more severely we [they] protect the sex roles within the family, the stronger we [they] will be as a unit in opposition to the anglo threat" (*Loving* 101).

As Mexican immigrants or Chicanas/os are frequently seen as the 'outsiders inside,' any deviation from tradition is perceived as a possible assault on their already fragile culture. Thus, by being open to the 'foreign,' an anxiety dominates that Mexican culture slowly disappears and the promoted polylogue of a multifaceted America is turned into a monologue, where only the loudest voice is heard (see Bandau, "Malinche" 183). However, as Moraga points out, "[t]he strength of our [Chicana/o] families never came from domination. It has only endured in spite of it – like our women" (*Loving* 103). Although fixed gender roles may posit a feeling of security, they do not really contribute to the strengthening of the Chicana/o community, but rather increase its division. María is drawn between her commitment to her parents and her longings for independence and self-definition. By stigmatising

any gender transgression as cultural betrayal, Carmen and Ricardo push their daughter farther away from them.

As has been pointed out in the first section of this thesis, literary texts use the tale of La Malinche to describe female oppression by patriarchal society. Apart from restricting women to the role of mother and wife, by exemplifying the disastrous effects of women's openness, the story of La Malinche is also used to justify the control of female sexuality by both, Chicanas/os and *Mexicanas/os*. A plethora of texts depict her as a cultural and sexual betrayer (see Maldonado 79), causing the destruction of her own people due to her abject passivity, as well as her uncontrollable desire for a foreign man. As a consequence, women's sexuality is closely related to betrayal, and thus must be controlled, to prevent destruction (see Paz 85).

In *Simply María*, the tremendous influence of patriarchal Catholic Mexico, defining procreation as the only purpose of sexual intercourse, is clearly noticeable in the statement of the three angelic girls:

GIRL 3. You are not to:

[...]

GIRL 2. enjoy sex,

GIRL 3. but must endure it as your duty to your husband,

GIRL 1. and bearing his children. (*SM* 12)

This restriction of female sexuality alludes to the common belief that a good girl must not experience sex as something pleasurable because pleasure is considered immoral, causing women to do irrational things (see Maldonado 80). As the tale of La Malinche shows, the sexual desire of a woman can have disastrous effects. Therefore, only bad women are marked by their corporal desire and sexual lust, enjoying sex for its own sake, and not with the purpose of procreation.

The his-story of negative female sexuality also profoundly influences Carmen, as she perpetuates the idea that “[s]ex is dirty” (*SM* 23) and that masturbation is depraved. When she catches María exploring her own sexuality, she is shocked and claims that “[i]t's a sin to do that. Good girls don't do that” (*SM* 23). Upon María's question why sex is dirty, Carmen responds like she always does, “[t]hat's the way it

is. [...] **Ni modo.**” (*SM* 23, emphasis in the original). Here, Cherríe Moraga’s statement that “[t]he distortion and repression of our [Chicanas’] sexuality is so commonplace a fact in our lives that as young Chicanas we learn to accept it as ‘culturally natural’ as we grow into womanhood” (*Loving* 128), comes to mind. Obviously, Carmen does not dare to question patriarchal rule and therefore, also makes her daughter believe that women are not supposed to feel sexual satisfaction.

Carmen is concerned about María’s reputation, and thus disapproves of the latter’s careless interactions with boys. She is convinced that “[i]t’s not proper for a **señorita**” (*SM* 21, emphasis in the original) to play with boys. Owing to the unwritten patriarchal law that women need to preserve their virginity until marriage when they offer it to their husband (see Maldonado 54), Carmen insists on her daughter’s chastity. She tells María that “[w]omen should be pure. Men don’t marry women who aren’t unless they have to. **Quieren virgenes** [...]” (*SM* 22, emphasis in the original), which is ironic in light of her own past. Apart from having pre-marital sex, Carmen disrespected the holy sacrament of marriage, because Ricardo was married when she met him. However, maybe exactly her own experiences of social stigmatisations motivate her to raise her daughter as a good girl, who lives according to patriarchal rule instead of questioning it.

While the virgin/whore paradigm defines women as either passive virgins or lustrous Malinches, who openly enjoy their sexuality and thus shame their families, men are apparently subject to different standards of morality. Ricardo interprets his extramarital affairs as the most natural thing for a man, because “[...] every man sooner or later does it” (*SM* 43). Most likely, he agrees with the idea that a man who has sexual relations outside of marriage is a “gran chignón, or supermale” (Gonzales, “Chicana” 244) whereas a woman would be stigmatised as a prostitute, a Malinche (see Gonzales, “Chicana” 244). Another example of this double standard is clearly visible in Ricardo’s opinion that girls must solely be held culpable for an unwanted pregnancy, as they are stupid enough to believe anything boys tell them.

Impressions and Impositions: The Transformation of Dreams into a Nightmare

Although María is inclined to live up to her parents' expectations, her nightmare about her possible future reveals her dissatisfaction with the striking disparity between men and women within Mexican culture. One episode of her dream depicts her getting married to a Mexican man, called José. At their wedding ceremony, the priest's words openly express what María partially deduces from her parents' behaviour:

PRIEST. [...] María, do you accept [...] to love, cherish, serve, cook for, clean for, sacrifice for, have his children, keep house, love him, even if he beats you, commits adultery, gets drunk, rapes you, lawfully, denies your identity, money, and in return ask for nothing? [...] (*SM* 32)

Apparently, women must not only serve men, but they also have to accept every sort of degradation without complaining, whereas men's only responsibility is to provide for their families. Here, striking gender inequalities are further criticised, by replacing the wedding band with a leash, which puts the woman into the position of a dog. In addition, instead of a tender kiss the priest tells María's husband that he "may pet the bride" (*SM* 33). The extremely ironic description of the woman as a pet foreshadows a relation characterised by polarised roles. The audience can feel María's discontent and rage about the dualistic conception of men and women within Mexican culture, defining the latter as the inferior 'Other.'

Another episode of her dream criticises the traditional belief that the only purpose of sex is to reproduce and to please men. María's subconscious reveals a clear American influence and a heavy criticism of the stereotypical docile, passive, and obedient Mexican woman who has numerous children. Her vision about giving birth resembles an advertisement, in which a salesman advertises Mexican women as reproducing machines: "It's cheap! It cooks! It cleans! [...] It delivers up to twenty-one children. It feeds on beans, **chile**, and lies" (*SM* 36-38, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, the salesman claims that "[i]t can be used as a sex object," offering men "hours of pleasure. And if it ever does go out of control, a kick and a few punches will do the job, and it will be back to normal" (*SM* 37). Obviously, María

feels that being a Mexican woman equals being an object without an identity, rather than a human being.

Even though María lives in *los Estados Unidos* and has been profoundly influenced by Anglo society, her parents ponder on the necessity to conform to traditional roles, as they consider them to be quintessentially Mexican. As the following statement shows, to be a Mexican woman seems like a stigma, limiting María's possibilities and leaving no space for translation: "[...] I [María] consider myself intelligent and ambitious, and what is that worth if I am a woman? Nothing?" (*SM* 29). María is deeply inclined to please her parents, yet she feels lost and uncertain as to how to fulfil both, her own and her parents' dreams: "Don't you [Carmen] realize you expect me to live in two worlds? How is it done?" (*SM* 29).

The feeling of being torn between two different worlds is also clearly visible in the very first scene of María's nightmare, in which she meets both, her Mexican and her American Self. Mary, who represents her American voice, discloses María's unlimited possibilities in the US:

MARY. To liberation! Personal Independence, economic independence, sexual independence. We are free [...] in America you can be anything you want to be [...] You don't have to be obedient, submissive, gracious. You don't have to like dolls, dishes, cooking, children, and laundry. Enjoy life! Enjoy liberation! Enjoy sex! Be free! (*SM* 30)

As this excerpt shows, María believes in the mythical promise of the American dream, guaranteeing everybody equal rights and the possibility to invent oneself anew (see Campbell, and Kean 11). She is excited about the unlimited possibilities America offers her, and longs for independence and self-definition.

Nevertheless, as previously shown, also María's Mexican background has a tremendous influence on her identity. Her inner struggle and deep commitment to Mexican culture is mirrored in her nightmare, in which 'María 2,' her Mexican voice condemns Mary as a "bad woman [a] **puta**" (*SM* 31, emphasis in the original), who sells out to "American demon[s]" (*SM* 31). Both women begin to wrestle, echoing the everlasting struggle to destroy dual categories, which would enable women to be both, good and bad, a wife/mother and a career woman. Although María tries to help

Mary, the Mexican 'María 2' finally wins the fight. Consequently, María has to give in to established gender roles, sacrificing her entire life to her husband and children without asking anything in return.

Yet, María's in-between feeling is always subconsciously present, which causes a feeling of disorientation. Indoctrinated to believe that to criticise and to change traditional roles are signs of cultural betrayal, she puts up with her husband's macho behaviour. Nonetheless, towards the end of her nightmare, María's American Self seems to gain the upper hand. María becomes uncontrollably angry when her husband José and her parents accuse her of being a bad wife, because she does not manage to care for her six newborn baby girls and simultaneously keep the house immaculately clean. María summons her courage to shout out, "**¡Ya basta!** Enough! [...]" (SM 39, emphasis in the original). She is no longer willing to be submissive and boldly states:

MARIA. [...] I hate doing the dishes! And I hate all housework because it offends me as a woman!!! [...] That's right. I am a woman...a real woman of flesh and blood. This is not the life I want to live, I want more! And from now on I am directing my own life. Action! (SM 40)

After having been denied a voice for such a long time, she claims that she wants to be active, rather than fulfilling the role of the passive Virgin who always puts her own needs aside. María confidently asserts that she is a woman and not an object, which can be pushed around and must be at men's disposal at any time.

María's vigorous defence of her rights breaks the unwritten law of putting men first, which is interpreted as cultural betrayal and closely linked to La Malinche. Her attempt to free herself from established gender roles is forthwith thwarted, as she is standing trial for gender transgressions. Here, she does not only have to fight against men, but also against women, as the members of the jury are traditional Mexican women, who according to María "can't possibly be objective" (SM 41). Cherríe Moraga, among others, points out that Mexican women are frequently women's worst enemies as they perpetuate female subordination by repeating imposed histories (see *Loving* 90).

Although María complains about the jury, she is not given a voice. This feeling of not being heard, most likely alludes to María's relationship with her parents.

While María makes an attempt to encourage them to perceive things differently, they refuse to participate in a dialogue between the past and the present. As Carmen and Ricardo hinder María to adapt imposed models to her present needs, and thus negate any acts of translations, their present lives and dreams literally turn into María's nightmare.

María becomes aware that she has to direct her own life and not live her parents' dreams. Carmen's hopes of a fairy-tale like elopement with Ricardo and a 'happily ever after' life as mother or wife neither correspond to reality, nor satisfy María's longings. Already in the beginning of her nightmare, the idea of the strong, powerful male is ridiculed, revealing María's subconscious criticism. Myth, embodied by GIRL 2, appears dressed in a very romantic and feminine way, presenting her version of the American dream, which is closely linked to the idea of living happily ever after. However, when Myth tries to kiss her beloved, the cry of his horse causes him to run after the steed, rather than protecting the delicate princess.

PRINCE (*in a very wimpy voice*). My horse! My horse! (*He runs off to chase after his horse.*)

MARIA. What happened?

MYTH. I don't know. (*SM 30*)

The Prince's wimpy voice and his leaving without looking after his sweetheart stands in complete contrast with the ideal implied in numerous fairy tales. Instead of acting as strong male hero, he seems to lack confidence, running away at the first sound of danger and putting the needs of an animal above those of his beloved. María realises that, rather than waiting for a Prince Charming who comes to rescue her, she has to fiercely demand her rights, because fairy tales hardly ever come true.

The following chapter will focus on María's effort to translate her Chicananess. Both, Mexican and American culture, decisively influence María's identity, offering her different conceptions of womanhood. As has been shown, she frequently faces contradictory messages. On the one hand, her parents impose a clear definition of femininity on her, undermining the influence of other cultures, as well as her active participation in the construction of identity. On the other hand, Ricardo promises her that in America she can be anything she wants to be. After focusing on the different perceptions of cultural identity, translation will be proposed as a powerful means to

construct something new. Here, in particular re-readings of patriarchal tales of La Malinche and the resulting questioning of hegemonic norms will be emphasised.

Translating Chicananess

When María wakes up and overhears her parents fighting, she has an epiphany. She realises that her mother's submissive nature and her father's dominant behaviour will never allow her to break free from established gender roles. Rather than living according to fixed norms, defining the "who, what, when, where and why" (Plummer xiv) of her actions, she longs for the active construction of her distinct identity. María's interpretation of what it means to be a Mexican woman considerably differs from her parents' point of view.

As previously shown, Carmen and Ricardo believe in a core identity, which remains unaltered, even though the surroundings constantly change. They ponder on the necessity to follow prevailing hegemonic scripts as a pathway to a 'true' Mexican identity. Consequently, anything that goes against the traditional perception of being a *mujer* is interpreted as cultural betrayal. This idea of a unified ethnic identity is reminiscent of Stuart Hall's first definition of cultural identity, which is defined through collectivity and stresses a shared identity (see "Diaspora" 224).

However, in order to explain the complexity of María's experience, Hall's second notion of cultural identity seems more helpful. His claim that "[c]ultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But [...] they undergo constant transformation [...]" ("Diaspora" 225), is indicative of a continual reshaping of identities. Here, the manifold elements that shape the constantly changing surrounding of one's identity(ies) must be considered. As the cultural surroundings do not so much reveal one's identity, as influence its construction, it is crucial to roughly deal with the particular locations, shaping María's identities (see Hall, "Diaspora" 225).

María grows up in a tiny apartment in a barrio⁵⁰, in East Los Angeles. Although this neighbourhood is characterised by one of the largest Mexican communities in the United States (see Romo viii), the surrounding considerably differs from the Mexican village she and her parents lived in before coming to the US. In just a few sentences, López manages to capture the general atmosphere of this neighbourhood:

CHOLO 1. East L.A.!
TWO VALLEY GIRLS. We love it!
CHOLO2. Hey **vato**!
TWO VALLEY GIRLS. Party and let party!
CHOLO 2. ¡**Hoye mi carnal!**
PERSON 2. ¡**Viva la huelga!** Boycott grapes!
PERSON 3. Chicano Power! (*SM* 18, emphasis in the original)

This rather short scene skilfully addresses numerous crucial issues of Chicana/o culture and refers to the typical barrio population constituted by farm workers, working-class families, Chicano activists, urban gang members, valley girls who only want to party, etc. The barrio forms a separate culture, providing Mexican Americans with a safe space where they can “abandon the masks they [wear] in the Anglo world” (Griswold del Castillo 140) and thus retain their mother tongue and live according to traditional values. The preservation of Mexican culture is not only tolerated, but encouraged by valuing cultural traditions, promoting Spanish and providing separate newspapers and television programs. Besides the creation of a familiar space, where Mexicans can freely express their culture, the barrio is also dominated by “poverty, crime, illness, and despair” (Griswold del Castillo 140), indicated by the presence of numerous Mexican gangs⁵¹ and the existence of various housing projects which “[n]o one likes [...] but [are] cheap” (*SM* 19).

Obviously, María’s present considerably differs from her parents’ past. Similar to Anzaldúa’s concept of the *mestiza*, whose “dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness” (*Borderlands* 100), María moves back and forth between

⁵⁰ The term ‘barrio’ refers to a predominantly Spanish-speaking neighbourhood. For more detailed information about the development of barrio culture in general and the barrios of East Los Angeles in particular, see Richard Griswold del Castillo’s *The Los Angeles Barrio* or Ricardo Romo’s *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*.

⁵¹ For many young Chicanas/os the gang functions as a surrogate family which supports them, educates them and defends them against external assaults (see Vigil, “Introduction” 12). For more detailed information on Cholos and barrio gangs, see James Diego Vigil’s *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*.

different spheres. She forms a crossroads where cultures meet and clash, which causes a constant state of friction. Her in-betweenness confronts her with often contradictory messages, forcing her to decide on which voice to listen to. As has been shown, these inner struggles between her American and her Mexican Self, is illustrated in her nightmare, depicting an actual fight between Mary and María 2. Although she is proud of her ethnic background, she often finds it difficult to live in two worlds and to constantly explain herself within her own culture.

Here, it is essential to realise that the idea of a pure culture is long outdated, because concepts like culture, nation or identity are marked by a continuous negotiation and mixing between different cultures, resulting in hybrid cultures (see Simon, *Gender* 152). Although Ricardo believes that his 'Mexicanness' is unaltered, it is apparent that America has influenced him. Like the *barrio*, which might be a translation of the Mexican village into the American urban context, Carmen and Ricardo's identities have been shaped by American culture. The striking differences between Mexican Americans or Chicanas/os and Mexicans south of *la frontera* are highly visible when Carmen and María arrive in the US. Both women are at first shocked by the numerous unfamiliar creatures, shouting "Chicano Power"⁵² or speaking in *Caló*⁵³. These *Mexicanos* demonstrate an uncanny behaviour, which clearly distances them from the just arriving Carmen and María, revealing an apparent adaptation to the new surroundings.

⁵² The cry "Chicano Power" (*SM* 18) alludes to the presence of *La Raza* in the *barrio*. The idea of stressing one's distinct race and culture is especially prominent during the 1960s/1970s, when various cultural groups fought against assimilating policies of America, encouraging cultural pluralism (Campbell, and Kean 47). The Chicano Movement was one group that is particularly strong at that time, promoting racial pride by underlining the importance of acknowledging indigenous roots and Mexican culture. Therefore, Spanish is intentionally used to distance Chicana/o culture from Anglo culture (Bandau 174). The term 'raza' is highly connotative, bringing to mind the Chicana/o family, history and politics opposed to the neutral English term 'race.' In light of this obvious divide between 'raza' and 'race,' the untranslatability of the former becomes apparent (see Kaminsky 8). Key texts of the Chicano Movement are *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, which was adopted by the First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in 1969, Rodolfo Corky Gonzales's epic poem "Yo Soy Joaquín," as well as Armando Rendón's *Chicano Manifesto* (see Bandau 174).

⁵³ *Caló* is a creolised version of Spanish that is characterised by expressions like 'vato' and 'carnal.' This sociolect is frequently associated with Mexican gangs, such as *Cholos* (a term which refers to both the style as well as the group). *Cholos* are marked by the use of *caló*, a very distinct clothing style and the driving of special cars, known as lowriders. The members of this group define themselves as traditionalists and stress Mexican values, even though their behaviours posit a clear influence of American culture (see Vigil, "Introduction" 7). Their very distinct identities seem like a translation of their Mexican roots into the American urban context, which helps them to deal with the tumult of urban adaptation.

Drawing a parallel between the cultural transfer of María and her parents' identities into the American context and the concept of linguistic translation, it becomes apparent that a more open concept of translation is necessary. The traditional understanding of translation demands the accurate transmission of the original message without altering the content (see Wills, s.v. decision making in translation). However, the above quoted examples show that to be a Mexican in Mexico signifies something completely different than to be a Mexican in the United States. Obviously no exact equivalents between languages/cultures exist, as the translation of one's Mexican identity into the American context is not possible without adapting it to the target culture (see Simon, *Montreal* 12). Hence, there is no unified Mexican identity.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, her parents continually ask her to acknowledge her cultural roots and to act according to Mexican tradition: "You are a Mexican woman and you can't change that. You are different from other women" (*SM* 28). These demands deny María's in-betweenness. However, due to her cultural hybridity, the direct transfer of cultural values from one language/culture into another language/culture is no longer possible, as different frames of references are needed.

Towards the end of the play, María summons all her courage and decides to leave her parents. The hurtful separation from Carmen and Ricardo seems to be a prerequisite to actively construct her distinct identity(ies) and boldly claim her powerful polyphonic female voice. By reclaiming her voice and demanding the right to actively engage in the construction of her female identity, María breaks free from the passive ideal of La Virgen and is directly linked to La Malinche. Apart from the active involvement in the construction of her identity, her openness to American culture also evokes the idea of being a traitor, a *malinchista*.

Even so, her openness to American culture cannot be interpreted as cultural betrayal as both, American and Mexican culture form part of María's identity.

⁵⁴ Similarly, in Fellner's analysis of various Chicana literary texts, she stresses that no unifying Chicana identity exists. She uses Stuart Hall's interpretation of cultural identity and highlights the multiple and fragmentary character of Chicana identities. Her extensive investigation of Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, among others, suggests the necessity to deconstruct and open up imposed categories in order to create new expressions of Chicana Selves (see *Articulating* 23). For further information, see Fellner's *Articulating Selves: Contemporary Chicana Self-Representation*.

Hence, Ricardo's unjust accusation of disloyalty, by questioning imposed gender roles, must be refuted. As Cherríe Moraga points out "[t]o be critical of one's culture is not to betray that culture" (*Loving* 99). In order to translate her Chicaneness, María has to free herself from traditional dichotomous thinking and embrace the multiple parts that influence her identity(ies). De facto, to ignore one of the voices which constitute her Self is the real betrayal, as she would negate an essential part of her identity.

As has been shown, the dichotomy of good versus bad is inextricably linked to the virgin/whore binary. Even though, La Malinche is not directly mentioned in *Simply María*, her influence reverberates throughout the entire tale. Hence, apart from patriarchal stigmatisations, also feminist re-writings must be taken into account. These re-vindications of Malinche's story serve as "conceptual spring board[s]" (Birmingham-Pokorny qtd. in Bandau 177), encouraging the questioning of imposed gender roles and the construction of distinct identities (see Birmingham-Pokorny ref. to in Bandau 177). According to Pat Mora's poem, "Malinche's Tips," Chicanas have to re-read "hisstory," which uses phallogocentric interpretations of mythical figures to perpetuate female subordination. The creation of powerful her-stories encourages a pluralistic vision of reality, offering a third possibility outside of dichotomous thinking (see Kolodny ref. to in Bressler 151).

Feminist revisions of La Malinche's story emphasise that she was a strong woman, who was vilified by patriarchal society for acting outside of established roles (see Briante 262). Translations of patriarchal tales create new versions of her story, enabling Chicanas to free their metaphorical mother from dominant stigmatisations and to transform her into a powerful role model. By depicting La Malinche as a border crosser and cultural translator, her voice and extreme intelligence are foregrounded (see Dröscher, and Rincón 7-8). Like La Malinche, María has to act as a translator, moving back and forth between different linguistic and cultural codes. Due to her in-betweenness, her reality is marked by images of translations. However, akin to feminist revisions of La Malinche's story, María has to use translation as a tool of empowerment to create something new, rather than to explain herself to others.

Similar to the voice of Donna Kate Rushin's poem, "The Bridge Poem," stating that "I must be the bridge to nowhere / But my true self" (51-52), María has to stop mediating between her own and her parents' needs. Only when she uses translation to mediate between the multiple parts that shape her identities, can she create a distinct Chicana identity. María has to take advantage of the endless possibilities life offers her and follow different routes. Her breaking free of traditional images, due to a different cultural surrounding, does not suggest her complete estrangement from her Mexican roots, but rather emphasises that tradition and the past are layers of her polymorphous identity(ies). Consequently, instead of merely copying her parents' past, she has to participate actively in the construction of her Self. Thus, the idea of "facing The New, dreaming The Old" (Villanueva, "Mestiza" 23) must predominate. María must start living her life and look ahead, rather than copying her parents' past.

As María becomes aware that "Mexico is in [her] blood [...] and America is in [her] heart" (*SM* 44), she acknowledges this duality and portrays both cultures as mutually interdependent. The combination of María's American and Mexican side may form what Anzaldúa calls the "*mestiza* consciousness" (see *Borderlands* 102), a point of view which "includes rather than excludes" (*Borderlands* 101). The first step towards answering the question she asks herself all the time, "[c]an't things be different?" (*SM* 29), is to blur the borders between categories, to be open to change and consequently to bridge the divide which splits her into two seemingly contradictory parts. Only by breaking free of habits, by destroying imposed categories and embracing the multiple and sometimes even contradictory parts that constitute her Self, might she be able to "[...] create a world on [her] own. One that combines the best of [her]" (*SM* 44).

María has to become a border crosser to be able to engage in translation, because as Simon points out "[w]hat is translatable depends on much more than language; it depends on the ability to imagine beyond the borders of one's own experience" (*Montreal* 17). As the following section will show, also Leticia's grandmother must learn to look beyond the borders of her world, in order to understand her granddaughter's identity(ies). Seeing translation as a means to construct something new, allows one to deal with elements which at first sight seem untranslatable.

In the following section, I will deal with Felicia Luna Lemus' novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, and analyse how the female protagonist, Leticia, struggles to define herself, by mediating between the multiple elements that shape her polymorphous Chicana identity.

Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties

The Author Felicia Luna Lemus and Her Debut Novel

Born and raised in Southern California's Orange County, Felicia Luna Lemus graduated from the University of California, Irvine, and later received an M.F.A. from the California Institute of Arts. Her first novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003; Seal Press 2004) was followed by her second novel *Like Son* (Akashic Books, 2007). Apart from writing she also teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles and The New School, New York.⁵⁵ Similar to Josefina López, also Lemus' personal life plays a crucial role in her writing as numerous parallels can be drawn between her and the first person narrator of her debut novel. Besides various similarities, Lemus stresses that the novel is a fictional narrative which may include elements of her life, but remains a fictional construct.⁵⁶

The analysis will focus on Lemus' first novel, *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, which originally consisted of vignettes that only later were turned into a novel. The book was extolled for its extraordinary style and narrative. Among others, the American journalist and writer Dodie Bellamy, highly praises Lemus' language skills: "Her style ranges from lush and watery to tough and oddball snappy [...]. Her sentences [...] are so condensed, so packed and hot, they're on the verge of exploding [...]."⁵⁷ In addition, Lemus' narrative is described as "anything but tidy

⁵⁵ see <<http://www.felicialunalemus.com/>>.

⁵⁶ see Lemus, e-mail from Felicia Luna Lemus 15 January 2010.

⁵⁷ <http://articles.sfgate.com/2003-09-14/books/17508867_1_losangeles-lesbian-girl>.

and direct; more like a breathless, meandering recap of a party you happened to miss, or somebody's lost weekend" (Flynn 30).

Lemus' complex and twisting writing style alludes to the multitude of constantly changing and sometimes even contradictory elements, shaping the multiple identities of the first person narrator Leticia. Already on the first page, Leticia Marisol Estrella Torez, a twenty-five-year old Chicana lesbian, directly addresses the reader, warning her/him that the story is like a winding drive:

My best boy, Nolan, she says listening to me is like letting a drunk drive you to a gala event – no indicators given at turns and the windshield wipers are always on. Buckle up, doll. I promise I'll try not to tangle your quinceañera dress. We'll get to the ballroom soon enough. (*TE* 3)

As this short passage illustrates, the novel naturally blends Spanish words into the English text, without visually highlighting them or explaining their meaning. The combination of different languages mirrors Leticia's bilingual realities and suggests that both languages substantially influence her identity.⁵⁸ Even though her adult life is dominated by English, Spanish continues to play an essential role in her life, as will be shown in the subsequent chapter.

In addition to different cultural codes, various personages of Chicana mythology, as well as American popular culture are integrated into the narrative. Besides the constant presence of the folkloric figure La Llorona, a multitude of allusions to movies, television programs, politics, history, the art scene, or the punk Riot Grrl⁵⁹ culture, etc. are made. The combination of Mexican folklore, American

⁵⁸ For more information, see the section of this thesis titled "Translation: Building One's Own Bridge."

⁵⁹ The name "Riot Grrrl" refers to a loose network of feminists in the United States, which developed out of underground music communities in Olympia, Washington and Washington DC in the 1990s. It is almost impossible to describe the movement, as there are numerous different forms. The members of the bands Bratmobile and Bikini Kill are considered as the founders of this movement, which is closely associated with punk music (see Leonard 230). Influenced by rock, punk and underground music, Riot Grrrl demands the inclusion of female perspectives and calls women and girls to action (see Leonard 232). The expression "grrrl" is used to re-define the word 'girl' and to convert it into a positive term. 'Grrrl' suggests "an angry, assertive feminist who relished engaging in activity" (Leonard 232), in contrast to the common understanding of a 'girl' as a young, naive adolescent (see Leonard 232). For more detailed information on Riot Grrl networks, see Marion Leonard's article "'Rebel Girl, You are the Queen of My World.' Feminism, 'Subculture' and Grrrl Power."

urban reality and the “post-punk queer grrrl scene”⁶⁰ of Los Angeles creates a very organic text that reflects Leticia’s bilingual and bicultural identity.

The above quoted excerpt is reminiscent of oral storytelling, which is a crucial component of Mexican culture⁶¹ and forms a central part of Leticia’s life. Not only was she raised by her storytelling Mamá Estrella and Nana, but she also continues this tradition by telling her friends and the readers, numerous stories from her childhood. The audience witnesses Leticia’s present life in Los Angeles over a year and is introduced to a plethora of scenes from her childhood through a large number of flashbacks. Her story resembles an urban fairy tale of a dyke⁶² princess who meets her prince(ss) charming K and indulges in “papaya lush blush” (*TE* 86) love in her gingerbread house (see Flynn, 30). But unfortunately life is not always “sweet as rock sugar” (*TE* 164). Leticia, who moves between the “*lesbo gender expressions butch (girls who look like boys) and femme (girls who look like girls)*” (Tea 175), constantly feels the necessity to translate between her Mexican past and her lesbian present. However, she becomes aware that her continual effort to serve as a bridge does not help her to “carve and chisel [her] own face” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 44), but rather forces her to gloss over certain parts of her identity.

It is my primary goal to investigate how Leticia manages to translate her Chicana lesbian identity by mediating between the multiple elements that shape her realities. Consequently, I am to provide a brief insight into the effects of her class and racial background on the creation of her identity and then move towards an extensive analysis of how she negotiates her gender and sexuality. Her experience of in-betweenness is dominated by images of translation, as she is constantly forced to explain herself. Although both, American and Mexican culture, have a tremendous effect on her self-definition, the main focus will be put on her attempt to live up to the expectations of her Mexican *familia*. I will show how Leticia succeeds in

⁶⁰ Lemus, e-mail from Felicia Luna Lemus 15 January 2010.

⁶¹ For a general overview of Mexican American oral traditions, see John H. McDowell, María Herrera-Sobek and Rodolfo J. Cortina’s article “Hispanic Oral Tradition: Form and Content,” published in the *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States: Literature and Art* (Arte Público, 1993).

⁶² The term ‘dyke’ is used consciously, because in an interview with Rebecca Dellagloria, Lemus openly defines herself as a dyke and stresses that she prefers the former derogative term to the seemingly neutral ‘lesbian’. Here, comparable to the redefinition of the term ‘Chicana/o,’ or the attempt to free the historical figure Malinche from negative interpretations, Lemus tries to redefine the term ‘dyke’ and thus change dominant connotations (ref. to in <<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRC&u=43wien>>).

destroying imposed categories in order to dismantle monolithic forms of identity and create something new. Here, in particular the influence of La Llorona and La Malinche on her struggles to translate her Chicananess will be critically analysed.

(Be)longing: How to Claim a Voice Amid Screaming Silence

Questions of Ethnicity/Race and Class

As the African American feminists Barbara and Beverly Smith emphasise, class, race and gender are inextricably linked and have a significant influence on one's identity. Especially, women of colour from the lower social strata experience oppressions entirely different from white or middle class women, because poverty and thus oppressions are omnipresent in their lives (see 115).⁶³ Similarly, as will be shown, Leticia faces numerous stigmatisations due to her class and ethnic origin, which have a tremendous effect on her self-perception.

Leticia grows up in a pink house on Walnut Street, in a Southern Californian Mexican neighbourhood called Orange, which is “just a few steps away from where movie fantasies were made to sell” (*TE* 24). The small town life in the barrio stands in sharp contrast to the fantasies produced in the film studios in “movie land” (*TE* 24) and the idealistic principles promoted by American myths. Besides idyllic colourful houses and little stores, the reality of the barrio is characterised by poverty, crime and violence. Unemployed “grown-up gangster boys” (*TE* 15) hang out on the street, frustrated with their limited opportunities. The obvious disparity between national myths, and the reality of minorities is also visible in Leticia's comment on the patriotic song “America the Beautiful.” When she sings the song and contemplates her neighbourhood, she becomes aware that the message of the song

⁶³ Here, I want to mention Moraga and Anzaldúa's groundbreaking feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981). This revolutionary collection offers Women of Color/Third World Feminists the opportunity to exchange thoughts with women in similar situations. Apart from providing an open space for the expression of their specific circumstances, the anthology also challenges mainstream (white) feminism and frequent racist tendencies. Despite possible parallels between white and women of colour, the latter suffer from various inequalities which are outside of the former's understanding (see Anzaldúa, “Speaking” 165). For more information, see *This Bridge Called My Back* and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*.

does not refer to her working class reality. Instead of the “shining sea,” the barrio is dominated by “stretches of concrete glimmering up in the sun” (*TE* 23) and poverty.

Leticia’s life is decisively influenced by her family’s working class origin. Rather than wearing fancy clothes, she is restricted to buy dresses from Goodwill stores. Although as a child she would have often wished for better things, she learned to be satisfied with little and to cherish her family’s efforts. Her great-grandparents, Mamá and Papá Estrella, fled the poverty of rural Mexico in hope of economic and social improvement. They worked hard, believing in the American dream of “progress, self-creation, achievement and success” (Campbell, and Kean 25) for everybody and finally managed to be proprietors of their own shop. Even though, they remain rather poor, they are satisfied with what they have and encourage Leticia to work hard and to strive for a better life.

Nana and Mamá Estrella’s bedtime stories convince Leticia that she is royalty, who does not need expensive possessions, like diamonds, to be special. Trusting in the validity of these stories she openly acknowledges her working class background. While her shabby Pinto car or her “threadbare black 1940s housedress” (*TE* 63) stand in sharp contrast to the fancy dresses of her friend Amy and the latter’s girlfriend, the “catty tennis girl in her gray Prada uniform dress” (*TE* 63), Leticia is proud of her origin. She self-confidentially comments on the rich people at her friend Vivienne’s film screening: “I wove through all the beautiful people, rubbing my ragged clothes against them for fun. Enlightened their world a little” (*TE* 126-137). Obviously, she believes that rich people are both, superficial and ignorant.

This apparent aversion to rich people may have been caused by Leticia’s early childhood experiences. Already as a young girl, she is confronted with classism, revealing that life is divided into opposites. For “being some standardized test’s definition of smart” (*TE* 37), she is sent to a “fancy elementary school on the other side of the tracks” (*TE* 37). Similar to the North/South divide between Mexico and the United States, also within the States multiple borders distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them,’ creating a racial and class divide, where the “Third World grates against the first” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25). Leticia, is the only Mexican American girl in her class, and has to face a multitude of stigmatisations from her rich white peers. Due to

her family's scarce financial resources, she has no other option than supporting the prevailing classism and racism at her school, as she cannot afford turning down a scholarship, which grants her access to a better education.

Throughout elementary school Leticia is constantly reminded of being different, which makes her subject to multiple oppressions. As the following description illustrates, Leticia is perceived as the 'Other':

I was bused to their fancy elementary school [...]. Sent to a place where the people who were supposed to be my peers thought I was from outer space, 'Which planet are you from, Leteasha? My mom says you and your family are aliens. (TE 37)

Clearly, Leticia's American classmates and their parents judge any non-white person as a foreigner. They are unable to realise that Leticia is in fact an American citizen, as she is the child of a Mexican American woman and an Anglo American man. Leticia's Otherness is constantly foregrounded. Apart from her hair, and clothes also her English, which is marked by a Spanish accent, is ridiculed by her peers. Intimidated by her classmates' bullying, she quickly learns to "keep the books and ideas as best friends" (TE 39), rather than participating at school and consequently earning weird looks.

Leticia's feeling of being the eternal outsider, the "legal alien" who is simultaneously part of both cultures and of none, is reinforced by a strict separation of Spanish and English. While at school she has to speak English, at home Spanish is the only language tolerated, as can be seen in the following statement: "[...] English coming out of my mouth would get me sent to the living room corner" (TE 30). Consequently, Spanish turns into Leticia's private language, whereas English becomes the language of her public life. This schism forces Leticia to adapt her identity to the respective surrounding, preventing her from postulating a pluralistic vision of identity.

Another crucial part of her identity is her skin colour, which similar to her language does not only alienate her from the white children at school, but also from her *familia*. As her deceased father was a white American, Leticia is marked by a pale complexion, which considerably differs from her Nana's colour. Leticia recalls

an episode from her childhood when her grandmother and great-grandfather ignore her, which makes her wonder if she is “too light to be seen” (*TE* 27).

Leticia’s light skin colour and her hazel eyes constitute “another facet of her ‘Otherness’ no matter which of her many intersecting worlds she inhabits.”⁶⁴ Her in-betweenness transforms her into the eternal outsider, an “American to Mexicans / a Mexican to Americans” (Mora, “Legal Alien” 14-15). She is proof that in order to create her identity it is impossible to divide the world into binaries, as her Self transgresses different categories. Consequently, as will be elaborated, she must learn to combine the multiple and sometimes even contradictory elements that inform her realities in order to postulate a pluralistic vision of identity, which allows her to be more than one thing at a time.⁶⁵

Apart from Leticia’s class and race, also her sexuality causes her to be alienated from her Mexican family and from general American society. The following chapter deals with Leticia’s struggle to define a Chicana lesbian identity by mediating between her lesbian desire and her cultural roots, imposing a strict definition of womanhood on her. Before, focusing on Leticia’s specific situation, I will deal with common reactions towards lesbianism within Chicana culture. Here, a short overview of how homosexual Chicana writers and artists express their lesbianism with the help of art will be provided. This analysis will be followed by a short description of how patriarchal Mexican/Chicano culture stigmatises Chicana lesbians as betrayers of traditional values, revealing an apparent link between Leticia and La Malinche. I will finally move towards the investigation of different interpretations of womanhood and deal with Leticia’s efforts to postulate a pluralistic vision of identity that includes both her Mexican background and her lesbianism, dismantling imposed categories.

⁶⁴ Lemus, e-mail from Felicia Luna Lemus 15 January 2010.

⁶⁵ see Lemus, e-mail from Felicia Luna Lemus 15 January 2010.

Chicana Lesbians: A Loving in the War Years

Translated
into Spanish
and back into English
dyke
means
tortillera.
That means
you have to be good with your hands,
caress the masa
into moist passion.
[...]

— Marcia Ochoa “sometimes it’s the
little things that give you away

As previously indicated, Chicana women constitute the inferior ‘Other’ on a cross-cultural and on an intra-cultural level, facing multiple forms of oppressions from the outside, but also from the inside of their culture. Compared to heterosexual women, homosexual Chicanas are pushed even further to the margins of society, as their mere existence destroys traditional perceptions of womanhood (see Zygałło 143). Consequently, they are constantly forced to defend their love against a multitude of oppressions. This idea of being under continual attack is nicely illustrated in Moraga’s book title, *Loving in the War Years*. Her collection of essays, diary entries and poems offers a very personal account of her life and struggles as a Chicana lesbian. Her work crosses multiple borders, combining public and family histories, historical myths and narratives of Chicana culture, past and present, English and Spanish, etc. The result is a highly hybrid text, which destabilises existing categories.

Only when predominant dichotomies are deconstructed, will Chicana lesbians be able to (re)claim their space in the centre of society and to break the silence about their existence.⁶⁶ A growing number of homosexual Chicana critics and authors,

⁶⁶ After the Second World War, lesbian and gays began to organise movements in order to free themselves from subordination. Even though numerous Chicana lesbians participated for example in the *Raza* Movement of the 1970s, many of them did not openly declare their sexuality due to dominant homophobic tendencies. Any Chicana who defended feminist ideas was stigmatised as a lesbian and a sell-out to Anglo culture. Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the first lesbian rights movement of the United States, which was founded in San Francisco in 1955, only listed one Chicana lesbian member. Later, a variety of Chicana and Latina lesbian movements were created, among others

among others Moraga, Anzaldúa and Lemus, openly declare themselves as lesbians/dykes and pronounce what has been unpronounceable for a long time⁶⁷. Their writing skills allow them to make sense of the world and their identities, as expressed by Anzaldúa: “By writing I put order in the worlds, give it a handle so I can grasp it [...] I write to record what others erase [...] to become more intimate with myself [...]” (“Speaking” 169).

Similarly, various visual artists, like Maria Ochoa, openly articulate their homosexuality, trying to dismantle imposed conceptions of womanhood with the help of their art and to create a space for the expression of their lesbian sexuality. In the article, “The Lesbian Body in Latina Cultural Production,” Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano deals among others with Ochoa’s visual series “Sometimes it’s the little things that give you away.” Yarbro-Bejarano quotes part of the running text that accompanies different photographs of the artist, showing her as a butch or femme.

Ochoa’s constant movement between more masculine and more feminine ways of dressing, questions the heterosexual value system, which restricts masculinity to men and femininity to women. By combining both characteristics in one female body, the visual artist tries to destroy the rigidity of these categories, suggesting a more fluid and less restrictive notion of womanhood. Ochoa’s installation and the above quoted passage nicely illustrate the notion of translation (as well as untranslatability) adopted by this thesis. Translation is seen as a means to deconstruct imposed realities and consequently, to create something new by combining the various elements of one’s identity.

Ochoa further stresses the idea of translation by creating a link between the mouth and the vagina, as the Spanish expression ‘tortillera’ evokes both parts of the body. Ochoa’s description of the dyke/lesbian, “who is good with [her] hands / [and] “carass[es] the masa / into moist passion” (Ochoa qtd. in Yarbro-Bejarano 190),

Lesbianas Latinoamericanas (LA 1974), Las Buenas Amigas (NY), Tongues (LA), etc. (see Martínez, “500 Years” 183).

⁶⁷ Besides, a plethora of writers who openly acknowledge their homosexuality, there are numerous homosexual writers who do not seek differentiation from heterosexual colleagues. Here, Catrióna Rueda Esquibel’s categorisation of recent Chicana writing comes to mind, dividing it into “‘nonlesbian,’ ‘lesbian-friendly,’ and ‘lesbian’” (9) writing, depending on the sexuality of the authors as well as on the topics. For detailed information on Chicana lesbian literature, see Rueda Esquibel’s *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*.

alludes to both, lesbian sexual intercourse and the act of making tortillas. This link between a basic Mexican dish and lesbianism, suggests that as much as human beings need food, they need sexuality. Moreover, Ochoa, similar to Moraga, seems to perceive her lesbian desire as a Mexican desire (see *Loving* 203).

Furthermore, the combination of the mouth and the vagina, as well as the mixing of English and Spanish point towards the constant necessity to explain what it means to be a lesbian in both, Mexican and Anglo culture, revealing the predominant denial of female homosexuality.

In general, for Mexicans or/and Chicanos/as the idea of being a lesbian was/is often unthinkable. Lesbian Chicanas seem to exist “in a vacuum of unreadability and unnameability both socially and sexually” (Manzor-Coats xxii). Lilian Manzor-Coats explains this “unreadability” with Richard G. Parker’s claim that “[t]he very idea of a female sexual conduct outside of a context which is in some way or another defined vis-à-vis male sexuality, is almost unthinkable” (qtd. in Manzor-Coats xxii). Hence, as the meaning of being a lesbian cannot be decoded, Chicana lesbians are frequently ignored or described as the queer, the strange. Similarly, as will become clear in the course of the analysis, Nana Lupe’s language lacks the necessary words for Leticia’s sexual orientation. She intentionally ignores her granddaughter’s lesbianism, as it cannot be placed within traditional categories and consequently is considered unnatural.

Not only Mexican culture, but also Anglo American culture tends to ignore homosexuality, which will become apparent when dealing with the multitude of sexual stigmatisations that Leticia has to face. While both cultures reveal homophobic tendencies, this thesis will look in particular on the difficulty of lesbianism within Mexican society, as Leticia is deeply troubled by her Nana’s denial to openly acknowledge her lesbian identity. Before focusing on Leticia’s struggle to create her distinct Chicana lesbian identity, by mediating between her sexual longings and her urge to live up to her Nana’s expectations, it will be interesting to deal with the strong connection between Chicana lesbians and the figure of La Malinche.

Chicana Dyke, a.k.a. Una de Esas Bad Girls

The mere existence and coming out of Chicana lesbians disrupts traditional order, as attention is drawn to their sexuality, which is considered a taboo subject within Chicana culture (see Zygadło 143). Hence, not only their vaginas, but also their mouths are opened, pronouncing the unnameable. The close link between the mouth and the vagina is reminiscent of patriarchal vilifications of La Malinche, blaming her for opening both, her vagina and her mouth to the conqueror's phallus and language respectively (see Rebolledo 125). In addition, the idea of betraying one's culture is also apparent in the widespread belief that homosexuality has its origins in Anglo American culture (see Moraga, *Loving* 105).⁶⁸ Thus, homosexual Chicana women are frequently stigmatised as Malinches/*malinchistas*, cultural and sexual traitors.⁶⁹

The sexuality of Chicana lesbians is frequently described as “the ultimate rebellion [...] against [their] native culture” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 41). By putting women ahead of men and completely excluding him from their sexual lives, Chicana lesbians question the foundation of *la familia* (see Moraga, *Loving* 103). Contrary to the traditional belief that female sexuality must solely serve to please men and to procreate, lesbian intercourse exclusively serves to satisfy the corporal yearnings of women and includes choice rather than duty (see Moraga, *Loving* 116).

Furthermore, lesbianism allows the combination of opposites in one body, as lesbians can move between being a *chignón* and a *chingada*, both, the penetrator and the penetrated (see Moraga, *Loving* 116). This destabilisation of rigid binaries is also illustrated by Anzaldúa's statement: “[...] I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am [...] the coming together of opposite qualities within” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 41).

⁶⁸ Moraga points out that lesbian Chicanas are converted into the conspirator of Anglo men, even though they love women and not men, as numerous Chicanas/os believe that “[h]omosexuality is *his* [white Anglo] disease” (*Loving* 105).

⁶⁹ Apart from lesbians, feminists are accused of selling out to Anglo American culture. This idea is deeply ingrained in the Mexican/Chicana psyche, and already during the *Raza* Movement of the 1970s, Chicanas who emphasised women's needs were interpreted as potential traitors and stigmatised as lesbians (see Zygadło 145). Even so, also within the feminist movement, lesbian sexuality is frequently described as abnormal, which again pushes lesbians to the periphery of their own movement and therefore, converts them into eternal outcasts (see Zygadło 143).

As has been shown, the transgression of existing borders is often judged as betraying one's culture as it eradicates patriarchal categories and traditional gender roles. Similarly, Leticia's behaviour and articulation of her Chicana lesbian identity may be interpreted as cultural betrayal, converting her into a Malinche, a bad girl. Nevertheless, as will become apparent, only by destabilising existing categorisations is it possible to construct a multifaceted notion of identity, which enables the individual to be more than one thing simultaneously.

Butch and/or Femme: Is this a Boy or a Girl?

Nana's behaviour and continuous remarks on Leticia's looks suggest that she has a very clear conception of womanhood in mind, which determines character traits as well as physical appearance. In how far she tries to impose her understanding of femininity on Leti, when the latter is still a child, can be seen in the following description: "I [Leticia] had been Nana's sweet little doll in my high-glow black leather Mary Janes, white lace anklet socks, canary yellow taffeta ruffled dress, and fuzzy green yarn woven in the two braids looped into rope circles above my ears" (*TE* 37). It is evident from that comment that Nana considers a princess or doll-like appearance quintessentially feminine. Even later, when Leticia is older, she keeps criticising her looks and pleads her to let her hair "[j]ust natural and long like other girls'..." (*TE* 236) and to "[b]raid it pretty and sit like a lady" (*TE* 237).

Clearly, Nana draws an analogy between long hair and femininity as she is confused by Leticia's short bob haircut. Long braided hair, in particular, seems to be the ideal form of hairstyle for women, as everything is neat and tidy. Here, already in the act of plaiting, the idea of crafting as well as controlling is implied. The obvious parallel between arranging hair in a specific pattern and constructing gender according to social conventions is also visible in Leticia's comment: "Nana remembered my girl as well as she remembered the endless days she spent crafting its precise style" (*TE* 169). These acts of "crafting" and "braiding", bring de Beauvoir's statement that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (qtd. in Butler "Sex and Gender" 35) to mind, revealing the constructed nature of gender.

With regard to the influence of one's culture on the construction of one's identity, it becomes apparent that Leticia's lesbian Chicana identity can no longer be judged by her great-grandparents or grandmother's "frame of reference" (Simon, *Gender* 151), as their situations differ greatly from hers. While their lives are dominated by their Mexican immigrant background and an urge to uphold Mexican tradition, Leticia's life is not only influenced by her Mexican working class origins, but also by the post-punk queer grrrl scene of Los Angeles. Consequently, Leticia's interpretation of what a woman is supposed to look like considerably differs from Nana's.

For Nana long braided hair stands for femininity and reminds her of how beautiful her "little girl" (*TE* 237) was when she was young. Leticia on the other hand, does not consider "taffeta ruffled dress" (*TE* 37) and long braided hair quintessentially female. Therefore, the "tons of bobby pins jabbing [her] scalp" (*TE* 32) stand for the imposition of a rather narrow concept of womanhood. This feeling of incarceration, by imposing a certain established role on Leticia, is also apparent when she buys a bra shortly after Nana's death. Although she tries to correspond to Nana's expectations, she soon realises the following: "The pretty little bra. It really did hurt me to wear it, to be encased in such a pretty little thing" (*TE* 236). Here, Leticia's struggles to live up to Nana's expectations and her longings to break free from the latter's heteronormative ideas about womanhood, physically as well as psychologically hurt her.

The following extract illustrates Leticia's conceptual feeling of what a woman can look like, revealing the influence of her cultural surrounding on her identity. For her,

[...] bleached rust-blond bobbed hair, [...] motorcycle boots and thrift store ratty getups [...] forties-style baubles and housedresses or [...] baggy jeans, and little boys' tee-shirts, bright with ads for auto garages and tow companies, sleeves tight and high [...] (*TE* 29)

are one of many possible variants of what a female identity may entail. Apart from Leticia's short bobbed hair and "1940s housedress" (*TE* 63) she sometimes prefers to shave her head and to wear "stamping boots" (*TE* 43) or a "black vinyl cat suit" with an "electrical repairman's belt" (*TE* 49). By transforming from a fairly feminine to a

more masculine look, she questions Nana Lupe's hegemonic ideal of what a woman is supposed to look like and suggests the destruction of imposed narrow conceptions.

Likewise, Leticia's friends also reveal a broad range of variations of what it means to be a woman. All of them inscribe their lesbianism on their body, moving between femme and butch looks. Edith "smarty-pants Mission District glamour homegirl," who smells like "sweet thick crisp green lilac perfume" (*TE* 3-4), discloses the characteristics of a femme lesbian. Even when she wears men's clothes, she behaves like a super femme princess with "glossy braids [...] spit curls [and] deep red lipstick" (*TE* 135). Whereas, the Greek K and Leticia's best friend Nolan are obviously butch. Nolan, with her "movie-house-refreshment-stand boy style" (*TE* 52) is a "foxy dyke with plenty of style" (*TE* 52), who at large prefers a masculine look. K's deep voice, baggy clothes, the Old Spice she wears and her big truck foreground her masculine characteristics. Moreover, she works in a male dominated area, as she airbrushes low-rides in the garage of "Old Man Charlie [...] a retired pachuco" (*TE* 140), who at first did not believe in her skills, as "[t]hat's man's work" (*TE* 140).

Obviously, Leticia and her friends question the sex/gender dyad by adopting physical characteristics which are normally attributed to men. Their attitudes mirror the refusal to accept the idea that your sexuality defines your gender. By freeing sex from gender, a plethora of different 'genders' are possible as they are no longer mutually interdependent categories (see Butler *Gender* 10).⁷⁰ Thus Leticia, Nolan or K's female masculinity is not out of place, but rather disrupts hegemonic gender roles and offers just an example of the numerous possible versions of being a woman (see Haberstam 9).

Furthermore, regarding Butler's interpretation of de Beauvoir's statement that gender is culturally formed by both, the imposition of phallogentric norms and an active participation in the construction of gender, it can be concluded that the idea about natural and unnatural behaviour is invalid, as "all gender is, by definition, unnatural" ("Sex and Gender" 35). Therefore, a masculine woman is not any less natural than a feminine woman. De facto, as Judith Haberstam points out "female

⁷⁰ For further information, see Astrid M. Fellner's article "Other Sexes: Bridging Textual Borders," which deals with Virginia Woolf's concept of other sexes, promoting sexual multiplicity. Also Judith Halberstam's book *Female Masculinity* is of great interest because it offers a broader understanding of being a woman, by providing an extensive analysis of masculine women.

masculinity [...] affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity” (1). Patriarchal society promotes a certain ideal, even though no clear definition exists (see Haberstam 1).

In *Trace Elements* not only the borders between hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity, but also between butch and femme are constantly transgressed. Leticia moves back and forth between both categories. Her roles slightly shift, depending on whom she dates⁷¹. While the young and rather inexperienced Leticia dates Rob, a “[b]ulldagger extraordinaire” (*TE* 45), she shaves her head, wears her friend Joey’s boots and feels her “adolescent dyke dick hard all the time” (*TE* 45). Yet, she is like a princess, as Rob is “dressing me [Leticia] in her best pinstriped brushed pajamas at night and tucking me in tight under the blankets” (*TE* 46). Whereas, when she dates Edith, she describes herself as a “young gent” (*TE* 6), who does anything to please her princess Edie. Her identities constantly change and include a multitude of sometimes even contradictory elements, suggesting the destruction of finite binary structures.

In light of Leticia’s constantly shifting identity, she cannot be described as femme or butch. She states that during the 1950s bar culture when the butch/femme divide predominated the bar scene (see Case 300) she might have been defined as a ‘ki-ki,’ a “neither nor” (*TE* 169). Here, a parallel to her Mexican American identity can be drawn. Not only is she a crossroads on a cross-cultural level, but also in terms of her homosexuality she inhabits the ‘borderlands,’ the in-between. To be “half and half, *mita’ y mita’*” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 41) can be very enriching, as it opens categories and allows the construction of something new outside of traditional thinking (see Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 41). Leticia may at times foreground her masculine traits and then again her feminine traits, which positions her in a constant

⁷¹ In Lemus novel, a lesbian couple is not only restricted to butch date femme, but variations are possible as butch date butch and femme date femme (see Tea 178). The butch/femme divide does not copy the male/female binary as this would suggest that the latter is the original and therefore the natural condition. As Judith Butler points out the notion of original vs. copy is highly complicated. One cannot claim that heterosexuality is the original and homosexuality the copy, as the first always defines itself in contrast to the second, which then again presupposes the prior existence of homosexuality and thus makes it the original. Obviously, one can also invert this process, thus implying that it is impossible to determine the original or the copy (see “Imitation” 313). Heterosexuality rather repeats itself over and over again in order to appear as an original. Particularly this need of continuous repetition reveals that it is not pre-given but rather a performance (see Butler “Imitation” 315). For further information on the butch/femme divide as well as its evaluation within lesbian feminism, see Judith Roof’s article “1970s Lesbian Feminism Meets 1990s Butch-Femme.”

state of flux and allows her to be whatever she wants to be. Nonetheless, as the following analysis will show Leticia frequently feels forced to explain herself and to live up to the expectations of her respective partners. Owing to numerous sexual stigmatisations, Leticia often decides to re-enter the closet.

Homophobia or the Fear of Going Home

To be different evokes a feeling of anxiety, which is also nicely illustrated in Moraga's statement on how she felt when she openly pronounced to be a "Xicanadyke" before publishing *Loving in the War Years* in the 1980s:

I am not the first, I kept telling myself, I am not the only one to walk this road. But it felt so at the time, the danger of putting the words 'lesbian' and 'Chicana' together on the same page, within the same line. The danger of walking in the body of she who put [sic] them together. (Loving iii)

Moraga describes this experience of pronouncing the unpronounceable as a lonely and immensely threatening act. The combination of these two things, which are considered mutually exclusive, may cause the rejection and exclusion of one's family and culture. Thus, one's homosexuality is often negated and even homophobic tendencies are sometimes displayed.

Similarly, although Leticia is not ashamed of her homosexuality, she generally prefers to conceal things which deviate from Nana's traditional idea of a respectable woman. Instead of claiming her lesbian voice, Leticia frequently remains invisible so as not to hurt her Nana. Therefore, when she shaves her head for the first time, she silently agrees with Nana's conclusion that she got lice:

*All that mattered was that Nana knew only a single itchy reason that a woman would shave her head like I had done. I didn't have the nerve or heart to tell her different. And it never entered her thoughts that I did it because *I wanted to*, pure and simple. She wouldn't appreciate knowing that in two minutes I had shaved off the shining cascade she spent my childhood priming. (TE 42-43)*

Aware of Nana's inability to accept any deviation from traditional perceptions of womanhood, Leticia silently accepts her excuse. Throughout their entire relationship

silence seems to be a “survival strategy” (Chávez Leyva 429) which creates a safe space, helping Leticia and Nana to sustain their relationship. Nana can only tolerate Leticia’s difference as long as her lesbianism is not openly pronounced and consequently non-existent.

Instead of facing reality, half-truths are preferred. When Nana sees K for the first time, her “heteronormative gaze”⁷² (Pérez, “Queering” 123) is unable to interpret K’s boyish appearance as a variant of what a girl may look like. Leticia knows that Nana will try to explain K’s difference with the help of her ethnic origin: “I [Leticia] could see Nana’s wheels turning, *Do most Greek girls have hair so short and wear boys’ clothes?*” (TE 156). Similarly, when Leticia tells Nana that she moves in with K, Nana prefers to ignore reality.

‘Well, if I do, so does K.’ It was time to get brave. ‘K and I, we’re going to live together, Nana.’

Silence.

‘Nana?’

‘Yes, yes, I heard you. Look, you come pick me up [...] I’m going to help you two girls.’

‘Nana---’

‘You don’t call often enough [...]’

‘Thank you, Nana.’

That ‘Thank you’ contained level upon level of nuance.

Nana knew.

‘Don’t thank me. I’m not lifting any heavy boxes.’ (TE 154)

Only by changing the subject and not commenting on Leticia’s decision to move in with her girlfriend, is Nana able to continue believing that they are mere roommates.

Apart from evading reality, silence may also be interpreted as a “silence of knowing, of imagining” (Chávez Leyva 430). Nana’s response, “I heard you” (TE 154), suggests that she understands and silently acknowledges Leticia’s decision, but by changing the subject she implies that she is not willing to openly pronounce it. Leticia is relieved and gracious about Nana’s unpronounced blessing and consequently plays along. Analogically, when Nana Lupe helps them move, she

⁷²Emma Pérez’s idea of the “white colonial heteronormative gaze” refers to a colonial mindset which “believes in a normative language, race, culture, gender, class, and sexuality” (123), dominating general attitudes. For further information on Emma Pérez’s interpretation, see her essay “Queering the Borderlands.” I will transfer Pérez’s term in the context of a former colonised subject, namely a Mexican/Mexican American woman, judging her granddaughter’s lesbian identity, by adhering to the norms of a “heteronormative gaze” and thus eradicating the possibility of a queer Chicana identity.

shows her approval of their relationship. Although she pretends to comment on the possibility that the moving boxes get to the apartment on their own, she actually refers to Leticia and K's relationship. Nana looks at her granddaughter, nodding "her head once, a crisp move matched, thank the heavens, with a smile," (*TE* 158) and states "[t]hese days [...] anything [can] happen" (*TE* 158).

While Nana seems to approve of Leticia and K's relationship, her comparison with boxes which will "grow wings" (*TE* 157) once more discloses her difficulty to picture a woman who loves another woman. Consequently, apart from helping Nana and Leticia to maintain a harmonious relationship, silence frequently causes a feeling of oppression rather than alleviation, as it incarcerates Leticia's Self and forces her to hide an essential part of her identity. Yet, not only Nana's reticence about Leticia's sexuality but also her facial expressions reveal her obvious insecure and possibly negative attitude: "Her face smiling but her eyes ever so slightly signalling uncertainty, I had seen that look plenty of times growing up. Pretty much as soon as I started dressing myself, I saw that look on her face every day" (*TE* 159). This confused stare indicates uncertainty, as well as a lack of understanding of Leticia's sexuality. Such a (sub)conscious denial of her lesbianism can be very hurtful as it somehow forces Leticia to negate everything which does not conform to an imposed normative gender ideal. Just like the bra, the long braided hair and the bobby pins, which symbolise Nana's idea of how a girl is supposed to look like, also silence and her confused gaze can be very hurtful and cause a feeling of alienation.

In order to avoid Nana's scolding and her harsh comments on Leticia's looks, the latter stays away from the pink house. Her refusal to move back and forth between Walnut Street and her new home on Third Street is indicative of her fear of facing her Nana's rejection of her lesbian identity. Here, Anzaldúa's comment that homophobia is the "[f]ear of going home [...] of not being taken in [...] afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged" (*Borderlands* 42) comes to mind. Leticia has the urge to abandon her childhood home and to create her own safe space, outside of her Nana's oppressive frame of reference. She does no longer want to adapt her lesbian identity to the needs of her powerful grandmother, but rather wants to embrace her polymorphous Self. Her new apartment in the city, as well as the lesbian bar Chrystal's constitute a

“blessed comfort zone” (*TE* 55), where she is surrounded by like-minded people without facing stigmatisation. Even so, in order to create her distinct lesbian Chicana identity she must not ignore her Mexican background, as it constitutes an essential part of who she is.

Apart from facing many contradictions that arise from being a lesbian and a Chicana respectively, also American society at large seems to be in dire need of mediation. Leticia is aware that “[t]ranslation [is] necessary” (*TE* 175) whenever she encounters people who adhere to a heteronormative mindset. As her Nana always tells Leticia to treat people with respect, she neither directly confronts the shopping assistant at the drugstore, who tightens “her face in disgust” (*TE* 233), or the old lady at the Armenian bakery, who looks at her as if she were a “genderless freak cake vampire” (*TE* 175). Rather than attacking them for their cruel attitude, Leticia tries to “pour some sugar in people’s bitter cups” (233), feeling as if she had to excuse her ‘deviant’ appearance.

Clearly, homophobia is an omnipresent fact of Leticia’s life, forcing her to constantly explain herself. Therefore, when she applies for an apartment in Elysian Park, a rather conservative L.A. neighbourhood, she exchanges her boyish clothes for a very feminine outfit:

I buttoned on a classy blouse that Vivienne lent me [...] I dug out a handbag from a shoe box tucked in my closet’s far corner. I spit-shined a pair of high heels tissue-wrapped and stored away for so long that paper lint stuck permanent on the heels [...]. (*TE* 152)

Conscious about possible negative attitudes about her appearance, Leticia is willing to put on the façade of a heterosexual woman. Leticia chooses to “reenter the closet” (Sedgwick 46) in order to win approval and avoid stigmatisation. While it seems as if she locked the remnants of an imposed heterosexual life away, her holding on to these clothes mirrors the reality of many homosexuals for whom the closet plays a substantial role in their life, even though they live an openly gay/lesbian life (see Kosofsky Sedgwick 46).

While the adaptation of Leticia’s identity to hegemonic values may protect her from stigmatisations, she soon realises that, assimilation hides the risk of negating

one of the multiple elements which constitute her identity and consequently, hinders the construction of her distinct Chicana lesbian Self. Thus, in order to postulate a pluralistic vision of identity, Leticia must transgress borders and destroy categories. Apart from moving between more masculine and feminine parameters, also the re-appropriation of the traditional virgin/whore dichotomy plays a significant role. In the following paragraphs I will investigate in how far the translations of patriarchal interpretations of folkloric female figures enable Leticia to free these figures from imposed stigmas and consequently to translate her Chicananess.

How to Be Good While Being a Bad, Bad, Bad Girl

The traditional distinction between Malinche or Llorona as the epitomes of bad girls and La Virgen de Guadalupe as the idealised role model for good girls, also constitutes an essential part of Leticia's life. Leticia states that the former are

[n]ot surrounded by cherubs and pink roses like the Virgen de Guadalupe, our blessed patron mother saint. Not pasted on candles in textured tall glasses that we lit for thanks. No, the Weeping Woman and her cousin Malinche, they were bad, bad, bad girls, those two were. (*TE* 19)

As many other Mexican/Chicana children, Leticia also learned about the two negative mother figures of Mexican culture, through cautionary tales which were passed down by her grandmother to teach her something about life. As has been mentioned in the first section of this thesis, the nature of folk legends allows numerous interpretations. Hence, the storyteller can adopt them to her/his present needs (see McDowell et al. 227). Nana's version draws a parallel between La Malinche and Weeping, depicting them as cousins, who are both guilty due to their sexual longings: According to Nana, Weeping

[...] birthed a little girl whose father was a Spaniard. She cried because she had a mixed baby, one her Indian family and neighbourhood despised. That is why she threw the little girl into the river that storming night, the night when the lightning's gleam on her baby's hazel eyes finally drove her mad. (*TE* 18)

The tale has practical usage, as it warns Leticia of improper behaviour because Weeping wants "to take bad children to be her own" (*TE* 18). De facto, Nana

promotes the idea that a bad girl is open to the foreign, as her version of the Llorona legend blames Weeping's irrational sexual desire for somebody outside of her racial circle for the atrocity of infanticide (see D. Pérez 104). Her stories suggest that the preservation of Mexican values and the critical consideration of foreign influences are of utmost importance. Nana's insistence on the devastating effects of opening up to the foreign, is most likely grounded in the fact that Leticia's mother died in a car accident with her white American boyfriend. Leticia only learns very little about her parents and nothing about her "blue-eyes father" (TE 131). Nana seemingly tries to erase him from Leticia's consciousness, which is indicative of a previous conflict.

While Nana adheres to the patriarchal virgin/whore dichotomy, her concept of a 'good girl' considerably deviates from Carmen and Ricardo's ideal. In contrast to María, Leticia did not grow up in a world where she was told that women's "only purpose in life is to serve [...] men" (SM 13) or that women "are no good without men" (SM 28). Nana did not adhere to the traditional female/male binary, categorising Mexican men as active and Mexican women as passive, weak and submissive. In fact, Leticia's childhood was marked by a woman-dominated environment with two very strong female figures and a rather docile and quiet great-grandfather. While Papá Estrella sat in the kitchen of the pink house, "pushing paper clips and pens on and off carbon-layered papers" (TE 27), Mamá Estrella worked in the family shop. She was a very talkative and active woman who was "something fierce strong" (TE 24), yet still considered a "good girl" (TE 24). Obviously, women no longer need to be submissive and weak in order to be good girls, but rather politeness, respect and the devotion to one's *familia* are considered quintessential qualities of a respectable woman.

Despite Nana's efforts to raise Leticia as a good girl, warning her of Weeping and La Malinche, Leticia deliberately chooses "bad, bad, bad girls" (TE 19) as role models. While she never negates her "blessed patron mother saint" (TE 19) and interprets her as a powerful figure, she seems to believe that Weeping and Malinche are even stronger, as shown in her following statement: "Those two girls, their fierce rebel lasting power made people remember them long after they had died. They were everything I wanted to be" (TE 19). This fascination with the "wicked woman, the troublemaker" (Rebolledo, *Singing* 206), who is known for her transgressions, is

noticeable among many Chicana women. Considering that the stories of La Malinche and Weeping strongly resonate in Mexican and Chicana/o culture, they are extremely influential figures indeed.⁷³ Hence, a large number of Chicana writers depict them as women with powerful voices, who are not willing to remain silent.

Fascinated with Weeping's fierceness, Leticia develops an intimate friendship with her. As the following remark shows, she imagines her great-grandmother and Weeping as friends: "[...] I knew for sure that Mamá Estrella was hovering above, drinking tea in the good china with Weeping, both them ladies ready to slap if I showed the slightest lack of respect" (*TE* 28). Leticia compares the strong-minded nature of Mamá Estrella, who had "rural México good girl in her blood" (*TE* 24), to the haunting fierceness of Weeping, and consequently reveals her admiration for both women. By comparing these two women and depicting La Llorona as the defender of traditional cultural values, Leticia questions Nana's version of Weeping as a sell-out. Hence, the common patriarchal interpretation of La Llorona as a symbol of negation of Mexican culture and total assimilation into dominant society is destroyed (see Rebolledo 77). Rather than being afraid of Weeping, Leticia admires her and learns to value her polyphonic voice.

Apart from converting the Wailing Mother into her constant companion, who represents Mexican tradition and her past, Leticia also expresses her doubts about Malinche's status as the evil traitor and claims: "Everyone was taught to despise la Malinche because she loved a conquistador. Or so he said. As did his buddies. And the entire empire they set up" (*TE* 19). Leticia's heavy criticism on patriarchal versions of her story points at the constructed character of his-story. She posits that patriarchy frequently demonises powerful women, as they pose a threat to dominant power structures.⁷⁴

However, rather than ignoring the stigma attached to La Malinche and La Llorona, Leticia deconstructs his-story and foregrounds a new reality (see Wyatt 260). Similar to La Malinche and Weeping, who have been deprecated by society for their transgressions of patriarchal rules, Leticia's lesbianism is interpreted as an attack on traditional values. Hence, by redefining these negative maternal figures and

⁷³ see Lemus, e-mail from Felicia Luna Lemus 15 January 2010.

⁷⁴ see Lemus, e-mail from Felicia Luna Lemus 15 January 2010.

reclaiming their voices the schism of good versus bad is disrupted (see Messinger Cypess 142). De facto, these acts of translations create powerful her-stories, promoting a less restrictive concept of womanhood that facilitates the articulation of Leticia's Chicana dyke identity (see Simon, *Gender* 134). Leticia may no longer be restricted to be either a good or a bad girl, but everything at the same time, which brings Anzaldúa's idea of the "new *mestiza* consciousness" (*Borderlands* 99) to mind, combining all the different, often contradictory elements of one's identity.

Acts of Translations: Una Chicana Dyke Saliendo de Su Boca

In order to reach the "new *mestiza* consciousness" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 99) it is necessary to cope with the multiple layers of one's identity. Here, Moraga's statement, "I am a lesbian. And I am a Chicana [...]. These are two inseparable facts of my life. I can't talk or write about one without the other" (*Loving* 132), comes to mind. While it seems as if being a Chicana excluded being a lesbian, Leticia must try to combine her wish of belonging and her longings for women. As the novelist Toni Cade Bambara states in her foreword of the first edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, it is necessary to learn "listening to each other and learning each other's ways of seeing and being [...] hearing each other" (vii). Her demand to listen to what women of colour have to say can also be transferred to the idea of listening to the multiple parts that shape Leticia's Self, as they constitute an essential part of her identity.

Here, as previously mentioned, Weeping Woman plays a crucial role, as according to Leticia, La Llorona sends her gusts of wind, which trigger childhood memories. Leticia describes her "girlfriend Weeping" (*TE* 144) as a "super drama queen" (*TE* 14), who is inextricably linked to her identity, as is illustrated in the statement: "[...] I felt my girl Weeping with each breath. Her presence settled into the crevices of my body" (*TE* 11). Even so, their relationship is quite ambivalent. On the one hand, Leticia admires Weeping for her "divine self-assurance" (*TE* 40) and interprets her as a guardian angel. On the other hand, she tries to run away from her and sometimes prefers to "shut the windows" (*TE* 142). Leticia's efforts to distance herself from Weeping and also from Nana are in fact an attempt to avoid

confrontations, as she knows that her lesbianism is not acknowledged by Mexican culture and possibly judged as cultural betrayal.

Nonetheless, Weeping's haunting fierceness does not allow Leticia to forget about her past. As Anzaldúa states, the creation of a new space, "a new culture – *una cultura mestiza*" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 44) is only possible by accepting the multiple elements which constitute one's identity. Therefore, Leticia needs to acknowledge both, her sexual longings and her cultural origins. Anzaldúa suggests, the necessity to enter the *Coatlicue State* where one strips "the flesh from the bone" (*Borderlands* 65). The contemplation of the individual layers that form one's identity is necessary in order to blur borders and to embrace a polymorphous identity. Consequently, Leticia must not only acknowledge the multiple elements of her Self after deconstructing her identity(ies), but put them together afterwards.

Although Weeping's "mournful wails" (*TE* 18) help Leticia to remember her past, they do not enable her to break the omnipresent silence about her sexuality. While it seems as if the denial to pronounce Leticia's lesbianism were a prerequisite for the harmonious interaction between Nana and Leticia, it is in fact an obstacle to the full expression of her homosexuality (see Chávez Leyva 432). Leticia longs to break the imposed silence and openly articulate her lesbianism, because as Yolanda Chávez Leyva points out, "[n]aming ourselves, occupying our spaces fully, creating our own language, is essential to our continued survival [...]" (Chávez Leyva 432).⁷⁵ Leticia does no longer bear the suffocating silence and the continuous translations of her identity for the sake of harmony and thus decides to confront her Nana with the truth. Even so, the following excerpt shows that this step was quite difficult for her:

My change should have been simple, but it wasn't. Preparing the new version of myself for presentation to Nana was like I had lost the notes of a chemistry lab but was going ahead with the experiment anyway, hoping that the elements would meld without too harsh an explosion (*TE* 165-166).

Although Leticia is anxious about her Nana's reactions, she dresses in a very masculine way, creating a "visual noise" (Chávez Leyva 434), which can no longer

⁷⁵ Yolanda Chávez Leyva claims that it is important for Chicana/Latina lesbians to find a voice and to speak up but at the same time it is crucial to look at the silences and their different meanings (see 430). For further information, I recommend her article "Listening to the Silences in Latina/Chicana Lesbian History," as well as "The Silence of the Obejas" by Verónica A. Guerra.

be ignored by her grandmother: “Unlike back when I’d shaved my head in college, this time there was no way for Nana to make-believe that my new look was old-fashioned medicine” (*TE* 167).

Leticia’s physical appearance helps her to articulate who she is, without actually using her vocal cords. Clearly, looks can be like “a language without words whose meanings are found in the tough look of a Latina butch” (Chávez Leyva 432-433). This “visual noise” causes the breakdown of communication, as Nana’s “heteronormative gaze” (Pérez, “Queering” 123) does not approve of the mannish girl in front of her. Nana’s outcry ““Is this a boy or a girl?”” (*TE* 167), reveals her obvious distress and disapproval. Leticia’s boyish look cannot be categorized and seems like a betrayal of her cultural background, denying her entire upbringing. Yet, this step is important for Leticia in order to finally come out of the closet and openly acknowledge her sexuality, which forms an equally essential part of her identity.

This unpleasant encounter on Mother’s Day, is followed by weeks of unbearable silence. Leticia thinks about ways of reconciling with Nana, but the latter dies of the effects of a stroke before they can resolve the issue. Leticia blames Weeping for her Nana’s death and is furious with her: “Crying hard, really fucking serious tears, I wanted to know where the hell Weeping and her miracle sisters had been when Nana had needed their powerful protection most?” (*TE* 206). Nana’s passing away feels like a punishment, thus Leticia sends Weeping away, telling her the following: “My body entire, my voice, me, I’m shattering from ice cubes on me for too long. But you are not going to silence me. No, mujer, not you, not nobody, you are not taking my voice from me” (*TE* 208). Leticia realises that even though Weeping re-connects her with her past, her wailings do not encourage her to pronounce her lesbian identity. She struggled for a long time to gain her polymorphous voice and now that Nana is dead she is no longer willing to repress it.

Leticia learns that instead of constantly explaining herself to others, she must use translation to create something new, to break the omnipresent silence about her lesbianism. Here, the idea of “Malintzin-translator and Malintzin-procreator” (Alarcón, “Traddutora” 59), suggested by numerous Chicana feminists, may be helpful. Although Leticia only mentions Malinche once, the latter’s role as the

metaphorical mother of the new mestiza race and her skills as cultural and linguistic translator may allow Leticia to destroy hegemonic categories, to break free from the often unbearable silence about her lesbianism and to create a new identity. Feminist her-stories of the tale of La Malinche serve as a “conceptual spring board” (Birmingham-Pokorny qtd. in Bandau 177). Similar to La Malinche, who did not merely repeat the conquerors’ words, but adapted his messages (see Messinger Cypess 25), Leticia must adapt the numerous elements of her Self to HER individual needs. Hence, like Chicana feminists who created powerful her-stories and (re)claimed La Malinche’s voice in order to enable her to speak for herself, Leticia must start telling her side of the story.

As stated earlier, Leticia’s life is decisively shaped by the numerous stories her Nana told her throughout her childhood. As an adult she continues the Mexican tradition of storytelling and includes a plethora of episodes from her past into the account of her present life in Los Angeles. Hence, her stories create a link between her Mexican past and her present which is dominated by the post-punk queer grrrl scene of L.A. Towards the end of her narrative Leticia has an epiphany and realises that she must not depend on Weeping or on the punk Riot Grrrls, but be strong enough to act on her own. Therefore, rather than merely repeating what happened earlier, she comments on past occurrences and adapts them to her present. Consequently, translations are no longer passive acts of repetition, but a means to construct something new.

Leticia crosses a multitude of borders and finds herself in a constant state of flux. Her winding narrative constantly moves between folklore stories and various episodes from her childhood and her present, resulting in a highly hybrid text. It is nearly impossible to distinguish between the individual elements, as they are inextricably linked and mirror her polymorphous identity. Leticia realises that her life depends on “crossing [...] diagonally, sometimes in a winding circular pattern” (TE 169), and thus to cut across different categories, destroying them. Only when she lives “*sin fronteras*” (Anzaldúa, “Borderlands” 41) can she embrace her ‘Chicana working class post-punk queer’ identity and be “more, or less, or something different entirely” (TE 170).

CONCLUSION



This study has provided an extensive analysis of Josefina López's play *Simply María, Or the American Dream* and Felicia Luna Lemus's novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*. Focusing on the female protagonists María and Leticia respectively, my main endeavour has been to show how both young Chicanas manage to surmount the difficulty of living in-between different cultures and thus to negotiate various subject positions. I was particularly interested in their struggles to overcome predominant binary categories in order to articulate their polymorphous identities. Here, my thorough examination of the literary texts has suggested that instead of accepting a fixed model of womanhood both women have to mediate between the multiple elements that shape their intersecting worlds to create a distinct expression of Chicananess.

The close readings of these Chicana texts have revealed that identities are only provisionally constructed as they are highly fragmentary and always depend on multiple factors, like race/ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, class, location, etc. Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity has formed the theoretical basis of this study, and in particular his second explanation of interpretive cultural identity, emphasising the process rather than the product, have been foregrounded. Consequently, instead of looking for a unified 'true' Chicana identity, the focus has been put on the constructions of multiple Selves. Identities have been understood as accumulations of various layers/Selves, which are marked by continually shifting subject positions, resulting in a plethora of different articulations of Chicananess (see Hall, "Diaspora" 225).

It has been my main objective to show how the concept of translation can be used as a means to express and construct identities. In order to deal with the multiple constantly changing elements which inform María and Leticia's realities, the idea of "translating Chicananess" has been suggested. Apart from integrating the past into the present, acts of translations are meant to serve the purpose of transforming patriarchal norms and to create alternative perspectives. Here, particularly feminist re-writings of patriarchal his-stories of La Malinche have served as a "conceptual

spring board” (Brimingham-Pokorny qtd. in Bandau 177), promoting the creation of less restrictive conceptions of womanhood. Hence, translation has not only been understood as a strategy to mediate between the multiple elements of one’s identity, but also as a means to construct something new, allowing the protagonists to embrace polymorphous identities (see Simon, *Gender* 134).

It is important to realise that my study does not claim to be exhaustive but rather only offers the definitions of Chicana identities suggested by two authors and intends to highlight the immense heterogeneity of the expressions of Chicananess. Contrary to frequent claims, no monolithic Chicana/o identity exists, as a multitude of factors must be taken into account. Although Leticia and María share certain similarities, such as their working class origins, their families’ immigrant background and a predominant insistence on valuing Mexican tradition, their individual situations considerably differ, resulting in highly diverse articulations of their identities. Clearly, Chicananess can never be pinned down to one fixed identity, as identities are subject to ongoing processes of self-definitions, enabling a multitude of constantly changing expressions of identities, which refute patriarchal dichotomies.

Both, Leticia and María form a crossroads where cultures meet and clash, resulting in a state of constant fission and fusion, requiring them to negotiate various identities. Owing to their ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality both women face multiple forms of oppressions from the outside and the inside of their cultures (see Kaminsky 22). They are constantly forced to function as translators, explaining themselves to American and Mexican culture respectively.

While both, American and Mexican culture, require mediation, I have mainly focused on the young Chicanas’ struggles to mediate between their individual longings and their Mexican families’ expectations. Both protagonists are positioned within a traditional mindset, foregrounding a monolithic Chicana/o identity which is based on binaries. Here, particularly the effects of the female/male dyad and the virgin/whore dichotomy inherent in Mexican culture have been extensively analysed.

My study has shown that Leticia and María’s lives are informed by a rigid categorisation of women into good versus bad girls, not allowing them to participate in the construction of their Selves. While La Virgen de Guadalupe is proposed as an

ideal role model, La Malinche is considered as the epitome of a bad girl due to her openness to the foreign. The influence of binaries reverberates throughout both literary texts. Any deviations from hegemonic categorisations of women are interpreted as possible cultural betrayal, revealing a link to patriarchal vilifications of La Malinche as a sell-out. Here, my analysis has shown that María's longings for independence and Leticia's lesbianism may be interpreted as assaults on cultural values. Hence, they feel pressured to gloss over these parts of their identities in order to live up to the expectations of their Mexican families.

However, while María and Leticia's *familias* believe in a 'true' Mexican identity, underlining the necessity to live up to pre-established parameters to express one's Mexicanness, María and Leticia's in-betweenness makes them subjects to influences from different cultural spheres. They are part of both cultures simultaneously which negates a monolithic concept of identity and requires them to constantly move back and forth between numerous worlds. As Gloria Anzaldúa suggests, it is necessary to "[...] live *sin fronteras* / be a crossroads" ("Borderlands" 41-42) in order to reach a new consciousness which is marked by inclusion rather than exclusion.

Similarly, Leticia and María have to transgress borders. Both Chicanas constitute fertile spaces of translations where new meaning is formed, by establishing a dialogue between the different parts of their identities which allow them to be both Mexican, American, lesbian, feminist, good and bad, etc. at the same time (see Cutter 197). Due to their hybridity a dichotomous thinking is no longer possible, as they are part of both worlds simultaneously and in Leticia's words "something different entirely" (*TE* 170).

The insights drawn from my extensive analysis have suggested that Leticia and María need to acknowledge the multiple and sometimes even contradictory elements of their realities and adapt the past to their present needs. They have to (re)claim their own voices and openly articulate their identities. While both their own longings and the values of their respective cultures are of utmost importance, they have to be strong enough to acknowledge their cultural background but also to question hegemonic rules. As Anzaldúa points out, Chicanas need to make choices, they need to take control instead of being the victim (see *Borderlands* 44), only then can they be powerful.

Hence, as Leticia and María realise towards the end of the respective narratives, they must not depend on somebody else, but become active agents in the construction of their Selves. The open endings of both texts suggest that their identities are no stable entities, but rather marked by a constant movement, following different routes. Both women are eager to create their own worlds, outside of the restrictive confines of traditional conceptions of womanhood. Thus, instead of serving as a bridge for their families, they need to connect the multiple elements that inform their realities and adapt them to their present. Only then can they proudly acknowledge their polymorphous identities.

This notion is already reflected in the title of this thesis, which was inspired by the final statement of the New York Puerto Rican feminist writer Rosario Morales's poem "I Am What I Am." Morales' self-confident articulation of a multi-faceted identity illustrates a fierce demand to acknowledge one's identity without adapting even a single layer to the needs of others. Thus I want to finish my thesis with Morales's powerful statement, suggesting a self-confident woman who is proud about her hybrid identity, regardless what other people think:

"I am what I am Take it or leave me alone."⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Rosario Morales, "I Am What I Am."

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APPENDIX



Abstract

This study provides an extensive analysis of the struggles of two fictional Chicana characters to create their distinct identities by mediating between the multiple elements that inform their intersecting worlds.

The idea of “translating Chicaneness” has been specifically chosen for this thesis to interpret translations as powerful means to construct identities. Stuart Hall’s definitions of cultural identity and in particular, his notion of interpretive cultural identity as a constantly changing process rather than an inherited product, constitute the theoretical basis of this study (see “Diaspora” 225). Furthermore, Sherry Simon’s explanations of cultural translation, mentioned in her work *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* serve as a theoretical framework to encourage a more open understanding of translation. My thesis interprets translation as a powerful means to construct something new by adapting the past to the present needs of the female protagonists and by questioning and re-articulating patriarchal norms and categories (see Simon, *Gender* 134). In particular, I argue that feminist re-writings of phallogentric his-stories of the mythical figure La Malinche, who is deeply ingrained in the Mexican/Chicana psyche, serve as a “conceptual spring board” (Brimingham-Pokorny qtd. in Bandau 177), allowing an open and less restrictive concept of womanhood.

After establishing the historical background knowledge necessary for a deeper understanding of the specific circumstances of Chicanas in the United States, a broad outline of theoretical concepts and theories is provided. Furthermore, a critical overview of patriarchal interpretations of La Malinche and feminist re-writings of dominant his-stories is presented. The body of my thesis is devoted to the detailed analysis of Josefina López’s play *Simply María, Or the American Dream* and Felicia Luna Lemus’s novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*. My main objective is to show how the female protagonists María and Leticia manage to break free from the

incarcerating confines of imposed perceptions of womanhood and to summon their strength and courage to question existing binaries. Hybrid and fragmentary identities, which are marked by a constant movement and destroy existing borders, are encouraged as they give way to a pluralistic notion of Chicananess which enables Leticia and María to embrace their polymorphous identities.

German Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit liefert eine ausführliche Analyse von zwei zeitgenössischen literarischen Chicana Werken. Hierbei wird der Fokus auf zwei fiktionale Chicana Charaktere und deren Versuch eigenständige Identitäten zu erschaffen, indem sie zwischen den diversen Elementen ihrer hybriden Welten vermitteln, gelegt.

Um Übersetzung als eine Methode der Entwicklung von Identitäten zu sehen, wurde das Konzept der „Übersetzung von Chicananess“ speziell für diese Arbeit gewählt. Stuart Hall's Definitionen der kulturellen Identität und im Speziellen sein Verständnis der kulturellen Identität als einen sich ständig entwickelnden Prozess, anstelle eines vorherrschenden vererbten Produktes, bilden das theoretische Fundament dieser Studie (siehe „Diaspora“ 225). Darüberhinaus, dienen Sherry Simon's Erklärungen der kulturellen Übersetzung, welche sie in ihrem Buch *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* genauer erklärt, als theoretisches Gerüst um ein offeneres und weniger restriktives Verständnis von Übersetzung zu fördern. Diese Diplomarbeit fasst Übersetzung als eine Methode um etwas Neues zu kreieren auf. Dies geschieht indem die Vergangenheit in die Gegenwart der weiblichen Protagonistinnen übersetzt und dementsprechend neu interpretiert wird. Weiteres versteht diese Studie auch die Erneuerung und Hinterfragungen vorherrschenden patriarchalen Normen und Kategorisierungen als eine Möglichkeit neue Ausdrucksformen kultureller Identitäten zu erschaffen (siehe Simon, *Gender* 134). Im Konkreten argumentiere ich, dass feministische Revisionen phallogentrischer Darstellungen der mythischen Figuren La Malinche, welche tief in der Psyche der Mexikanerinnen/Mexikaner und Chicanas/os verankert ist, als konzeptuelles Sprungbrett⁷⁷ dienen. Diese neuen Definitionen des patriarchalen Mythos der Verräterin und Hure heben die Interpretation von Frausein in eine offenerere und weniger restriktive Dimension.

⁷⁷ “conceptual spring board” (Birmingham-Pokorny qtd. in Bandau 177).

Nachdem das geschichtliche Hintergrundwissen der Chicanas/os in den USA erläutert wurde, wird eine generelle Übersicht von theoretischen Konzepten und Theorien, die für die detaillierte Analyse der ausgewählten Primärwerken notwendig ist, gegeben. Darüberhinaus wird eine kritischer Überblick über patriarchale Interpretationen des Malinche Mythos und feministische Revisionen jener dominanten Diffamierungen präsentiert. Der Hauptteil dieser Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit einer detaillierten Analyse des Theaterstückes *Simply María, Or the American Dream* von Josefina López und des Romanes *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* von Felicia Luna Lemus. Ein Hauptanliegen ist es zu illustrieren wie die weiblichen Protagonistinnen, María und Leticia, es schaffen sich von den beklemmenden Beschränkungen auferlegter Interpretationen des Frauseins loszulösen und wie es ihnen gelingt, hegemoniale Dichotomien zu hinterfragen. Hybride und aus multiplen Elementen bestehenden Identitäten, die durch einen ständigen Wechsel zwischen diverser kulturellen Systemen und die Überschreitung von bestehenden Grenzen gekennzeichnet sind, werden bevorzugt. Dadurch wird ein pluralistisches Verständnis von Chicananess gefördert welches den Protagonistinnen ermöglicht ihre Hybridität offen auszuleben, ohne unter ständigen Stigmatisierungen zu leiden.

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