CHICAN@ SCHOLARS: NARRATIVES OF SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

by

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the spiritual activism of seven Chicana@ higher education faculty through a Chicana feminist epistemological framework. Through this framework, spirituality is identified as an epistemological source that grounds the professors' scholar activism. This work is in response to two main barriers to the visibility of Chican@ feminist spiritual activism: the marginalization of Chican@ activist praxis and the marginalization of spirituality in spaces of higher education. The argument is that both of these issues stem from a silencing of knowledges other than that which originates from the White Western male positivistic perspective, or in other words, the domination of Eurocentric Western epistemology/knowledge. The narratives in this project draw attention to the creative and transformative ways Chican@s challenge positivistic notions of epistemology and activist praxis based on Eurocentric principles of objectivity, rationality, and scientific rigor.

The study employs the Chicana feminist methodology of pláticas y encuentros—conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces, and which are, according to Gonzalez, a "way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations." In this particular study, pláticas took place in various sites across California and were used as the actual method of collecting the professor's stories.

The pláticas focused on the pedagogical and curricular strategies, research and

community projects, and publications of the seven professors in order to identify the various ways their own spiritual epistemology manifested in their work. The pláticas revealed varied academic and teaching interests amongst the professors, yet a similar foundation to their work—one rooted in their spiritual epistemology and a commitment to activism. The personal narratives presented here showcase the professors' academic projects, which expand our ideas of epistemology and of spiritually-minded praxis by highlighting the necessary component spirituality plays in their making sense of the world, and by underscoring the creative ways spirituality is employed in academic settings and the transformative potential of this. These narratives highlight the central role of individual and community well-being in the struggle for equity and justice—a particularly necessary component of activist struggle given our current political climate.

This dissertation and my entire educational journey are dedicated to my Apá, Reynaldo Ochoa (1930–2002), and my Amà, Esther Ochoa, the very foundation of my perseverance, and to my most precious creations, Paloma and Benicio.
I love you both to Coyolxauhqui and back.

ritual…prayer…blessing…for transformation

"Then, with feather, bone, incense, and water you attend the spirits' presence
Spirit embodying yourself as rock, tree, bird, human, past, present, and future,
you of many names, diosas antiguas, ancestors,
we embrace you as we would a lover.

You face **east,** feel the wind comb your hair, stretch your hands toward the rising sun and its orange filaments, breathe its rays into your body, on the outbreath send your soul up to el sol, say"
Aire, with each breath may we remember our interrelatedness
see fibers of spirit extend out from our bodies
creating us, creating sky, seaweed, serpent, y toda la gente.
"El alma prende fuego," burns holes in wall separating us
renders them porous and passable, pierces through posturing and pretenses
may we seek and attain wisdom

Moving sunwise you turn to the **south:**
Fuego, inspire and energize us to do the necessary work, and to honor it
as we walk through the flames of transformation.
May we seize the arrogance to create outrageously
soñar wildly—for the world becomes as we dream it.

Facing **west** you send your consciousness skimming over the waves toward the horizon, seamless sea and sky. Slipping your hands into el ojo del agua
you speak to the spirit dwelling here en éste mar:
Agua, may we honor other people's feelings
respect their anger, sadness, grief, joy as we do our own.
Though we tremble before uncertain futures
may we meet illness, death and adversity with strength
may we dance in the face of our fears

You pivot toward the **north,** squat, scoop sand into your hands"
Madre tierra, you who are body, who bears us into life, swallow us in death
forgive us for poisoning your lands, guide us to wiser ways of caring for you.
May we possess the steadfastness of trees
the quiet serenity of dawn
the brilliance of a flashing star
the fluidity of fish in our element
Earth, you who dream us, te damos la gracias.

Contemplating the circle, retornas al centro, look down to the underworld:
May the roaring force of our collective creativity
heal the wounds of hate, ignorance, indifference
dissolve the divisions creating chasms between us
open our throats so we who fear speaking out raises our voices
by witnessing, find connections through our passions
pay homage to those whose backs served as bridges.
We remember our dead:
Pat Parker, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara
Cameron, y tanta otras.

You raise your head to the **sky:**
May the words and the spirit of this book, our "giveaway" to the world,
take root in our bodies, grow, sprout ears that listen
may it harm no one, exclude none
sabemos que podemos transformar este mundo
filled with hunger, pain, and war
into a sanctuary of beauty, redemption, and possibility
may the fires of compassion ignite our hands
sending energy out into the universe
where it might best be of service
may the love we share inspire others to act.

You walk back along the circle, erase the lines en la arena, leave a
tortulla to symbolize
feeding the ancestors, feeding ourselves, and the nurturing shared in
this book.
Qué éste libro gather in our tribe—all our tribes—y alze nuestras
voces en canto.
Oh, Spirit—wind sun sea earth sky—inside us, all around us,
enlivening all
we honor tu presencia and celebrate the spirit of this *bridge*
we call home

We are ready for change.
Let us link hands and hearts
Together find a path through the dark woods
step through the doorways between worlds
leaving huella for others to follow,
build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our
"home"
si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos.

Now let us shift."

Anzaldúa, 2002, now let us shift…the path of conocimiento…inner works, public acts

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CAPÍTULO[1] 1

INTRODUCTION

It is 9:30 on a Sunday night and Hien—my sisterscholar, colega, and housemate—comes upstairs for our weekly nail 'party'. Amongst all the pressure and responsibilities of graduate school, we take these breaks to remind us of the creativity that thrives within us. Hien is a creative and imaginative artist, and once a week my nails get to be but one canvas of hers. We talk about her weekend in Las Vegas where she has just visited her family to celebrate the Vietnamese and Chinese New Year's. I fill her in on the Superbowl Party at a professor's house she was unable to attend, though I mostly fill her in on the Bruno Mars halftime performance. Hien and I are in the dissertation proposal writing stage and we both teach in our university's Gender Studies program. Hien also teaches in our education department and I also teach psychology at the local community college. Our conversation flows effortlessly from jokes and jest regarding my love for PBS masterpiece classics and our pedagogical struggles in the classroom. These are conversations we have had before, and which often take place amongst seemingly mundane tasks of our everyday lives—prepping dinner, getting ready for the gym, or, as

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[1] As a politically conscious move (Saldivar-Hull, 2000) to draw attention to issues of language and power and to legitimize and center my own bilingual tongue versus that of the monolingual English speaker (Anzaldúa, 1987) I choose not to translate throughout this text.

in this case, painting our nails and watching television. In our 6 years in the Ph.D. program we have worked as teaching assistants and/or taught a combined 11 courses and have often been each other's source of support. Whether it is deciding on best readings for a particular topic, choosing a documentary, or handling the tension between students, we often seek each other for pedagogical advice.

Tonight's conversation regards a White student in Hien's class who continuously states she "knows she is white" and is basically done with talking about it. Last week she stayed after class to talk to Hien and ended up crying about how difficult is it for her. Hien, a Vietnamese Chinese woman, feels exhausted by this student, and while she wants to offer her support, she also has to protect herself from the pain and anger that results when White folks tell folks of color how difficult it is to be White. We discuss what we have done in the past when working through these tensions. We identify pedagogical strategies that may help move the discussion away from individual feelings and opinions to critical discussions of the readings. We recognize the balance act that this is. While we want to validate all of our students' experiences, we do not want to allow the guilt of more privileged voices to continue silencing the reality of marginalized individuals. Hien and I spend the next hour sharing our concerns, hopes, frustrations, and passion for teaching. The truth—we both decided to pursue the Ph.D. because of our love for teaching. We believe the classroom is a space of transformative possibility and activism. We approach teaching through our lived experiences as women of color in an educational system that does not value the space of love and hope we work from. We work in an education system that tells us, and shows us, that there is no time for either hope or love and they are futile in the struggle against oppression. Instead, we are told to objectively

approach topics of discrimination so that students do not see us as biased. We are told that we should focus more on research and less on teaching. We are advised not to give too much of our time to students, lest our 'individual' scholarship suffers. Essentially what we hear is, "teaching is not important."

We began the Ph.D. process because we understand ourselves as educators and we believe teaching is but one form of activism and scholarship. When we are advised not to spend too much time on teaching or when individuals scoff at our centering of love in the classroom, we are essentially being told that who we are and how we know the world and ourselves is irrelevant. While Hien refers to her pedagogical approach as one coming from a place of love, I often discuss my approach as being grounded in spirituality—a belief in something larger than what we observe with the eyes and a connectedness to the world around me that highlights our accountability to each other. I know and understand reality through this spiritual lens, and it guides my pedagogy and scholarship, including this project. Yet, our very bodies and ways of knowing as women of color are devalued in favor of more objective, less 'emotional' approaches to teaching. We are asked by a White, male dominated institution to put who we are and how we know aside. Thus, our classroom struggles become not only issues of pedagogical technicalities, curricular approaches, or culture clashes between ourselves and students, but of epistemological battles as well.

Hien and I know our experiences are not isolated. Women of color instructors, whether they are graduate students or Ph.D.-holding professors, face unique academic and pedagogical struggles in the institution, and classroom more specifically, based on their racialized and gendered positionalities (Gay, 2004; Lewis, 1990; Waring &

Bordoloi, 2013). Despite the minor improvement in the number of women faculty of color in higher education, we continue to be statistically and epistemologically marginalized. This marginalization occurs as the result of students' racialization and politicization of our bodies and resistance to its presence in the academy (Chavez, 2002), student resistance to discussions of race and racism (Brown, 2002), and a belief that women of color bodies and course content are signs of 'suspicious' and 'biased' teaching (Luthra, 2002). Our very skin color renders us politically and ideologically biased, and therefore incapable of teaching, of knowing, of creating (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

Despite the low representation of faculty of color, and more specifically women of color, books like Vargas's (2002) *Women of Color Faculty in the White Classroom* and Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, González, and Harris's (2012) *Presumed Incompetent: The intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, both of which focus on women of color teaching and learning in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), draw attention to the power and resilience of women faculty of color in the midst of the historical trauma they have experienced as students and now professors. The narratives in these books highlight faculty commitment to pedagogy that is critical of oppressive ideologies and challenges students to move beyond Eurocentric models of thinking, learning, and being. In addition, the work of educator scholar Luis Urrieta highlights the educator activist role of Chicanas and the unique epistemological stance from which they work (Urrieta, 2007; Urrieta & Méndez Benavídez, 2007). These are but two examples of the way one's understanding of the world influences the way classroom teaching is approached. For example, in Urrieta and Méndez Benavídez's work (2007),

professors' identification with Chicanismo, an activist consciousness grounded in pride of Mexican-American cultural identity and self-determination, influenced activist commitment to research and teaching including raising students' social awareness and discussing equity issues. The professors' commitment to alternative epistemologies, including their own, guided the goals and approaches of classroom practice.

For Hien and me, these are examples of educators whose pedagogy and academic endeavors are guided by their view of the world and their knowledge of it—much like our own approach. When she says that she teaches through love or I say I teach through spirituality, we are claiming a holistic vision of education (Rendón, 2009), believing that it is necessary to nurture the development of the student and person sitting in our classroom. It is here that the discussion of spirituality can be fruitful. Spirituality as an epistemological source connected to scholar activism is understudied, despite scholars' belief in the liberatory, healing, and transformative possibilities of its exploration and incorporation into activist work (Hernandez, 2005; Perez, 2005). As a self-identified Chicana whose own pedagogical approach and research interests are grounded in a spiritual worldview influenced by spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002), or spirituality for social change (Keating, 2006), I am especially drawn to examine spirituality as an epistemological source of the scholar activism of Chican@[2] higher education faculty. My own research on Chicana feminism highlights spirituality as a significant component of

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[2] My use of the commercial at sign (@) at the end of the word Chican@ is an attempt to challenge the gender binary and hierarchy of masculine/feminine of the Spanish language. When the masculine *o* or feminine *a* is used, it is because I am either referring to myself (I identify as Chicana), I am discussing already identified/named research (for example, Chicana feminist theory), or I am using the preferred term used by authors whose research I am discussing.

one's epistemological standpoint (Facio & Lara, 2014; Lara, 2005). In addition, Chican@ praxis is activist praxis, seeking to challenge systems of oppression and transform our understanding of knowledge (Elenes, 2011; Tijerina Revilla, 2004). However, there is a dearth of research regarding if and how spirituality influences activist praxis for Chican@ scholars. The aim of this project is to highlight this connection.

Key Research Questions

1. What are the sources of Chican@ spirituality for the professors in this project and how does it relate to their epistemology?

2. What role does spirituality play in the academic lives of the professor*s* in this project, especially as it relates to activism?

3. How do the narratives of the professors in this project expand our understanding of spiritually minded scholarship, including research and pedagogy, and spirituality as epistemology?

4. What are the implications of this project on my own spiritual and academic journey and how might this allow me to enhance the conversation regarding Chicana feminist methodology?

In what follows, I begin with an examination of the multiple factors that render spirituality and Chican@s invisible within the academic space of higher education. It is my goal to draw attention to the necessity of this project, which seeks to highlight the spiritual activism of Chican@s in higher education. I proceed with a discussion of spirituality and social justice scholarship as epistemological struggles of transformation and liberation. I continue with a discussion of the term spirituality. My goal here is not to

provide a fixed definition of the term, for it is my hope that the contributors in this project will show the dynamic fluidity of spirituality and the various definitions and interpretations that exist. Instead, it is my goal to differentiate between religion and spirituality and discuss my own understanding of spirituality, which guides this work.

Statement of the Problem

My focus here is on two main barriers to the visibility of Chican@ feminist spiritual activism: the marginalization of Chican@ activist praxis and the marginalization of spirituality in spaces of higher education. My argument is that both of these issues stem from a silencing of knowledges other than that which originates from the White Western male positivistic perspective, or in other words, the domination of the Eurocentric Western epistemology/knowledge. The narratives in this project draw attention to the creative and transformative ways Chican@s challenge positivistic notions of epistemology and activist praxis based on Eurocentric principles of objectivity, rationality, and scientific rigor. The Westernized model of knowledge production, teaching, learning, and researching continues to marginalize the efforts of Chican@s in higher education and invalidate their experiences, and undermines spirituality as an epistemological framework. Instead valued scholarship in North American institutions of higher education, which are grounded in white supremacist ideology and rationality, is based on modern and positivistic understandings of knowledge construction. The invalidation of both Chican@s and spirituality in the academy has perpetuated notions of both as inferior to the logical Western and White male scholar (Perez, 2007) and has kept discussions of spirituality at the margins of academic discourse (Dillard & Ezueh

Okpalaoka, 2013) and the scholarship of scholars of color at the margins of educational institutions (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

Gloria Anzaldúa's and Cherríe Moraga's (1981) edited volume, *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, was one of the first responses to the silencing of women of color, both in feminist circles and activist circles. Each of the contributors of this book wrote not only in reaction to marginalization, but to affirm their varied ways of being, knowing, and living as women of color feminists (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Nine years later, Anzaldúa (1990) edited another book that included the writings of feminists of color. In *Making Face/Making Soul*, Anzaldúa argued, "…it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow whitemen and women solely to occupy it" (p. xxv). With this edited volume, Anzaldúa and the contributors drew attention to theory that was constructed on the perceptions of feminists of color. In addition, the book highlighted the continued silencing of the academic contributions of women of color. Despite these books being published over 20 years ago, the work of feminists of color, and in particular, Chicana feminist continues to be marginalized.

A large reason for this marginalization can be traced to the body/mind split that occurs as a result of Western epistemology, which defends the mind as the seat of reason and logic. However, various Chicana feminists have argued that we 'know' largely through our intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), our spirituality (Lara, 2005), and our brown bodies (Cruz, 2001). As Laura Rendón (2009) argues, this allows for a view of experience, knowledge construction, and meaning making as inner and outer endeavors. For example, Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) notes that Chicana feminist epistemology stems from cultural intuition, defined as a personal quality of a scholar that arises from

unique communal, familial, and cultural history that guides the work one does, how that work is approached, and the purpose of that work. Her work, along with that of other scholars (Dillard, 2006), identifies the ways in which some women of color navigate the academy based on how they understand and make sense of life around them, which requires the bodymindspirit (Lara, 2005) connection.

Spirituality is one such factor that influences the worldview of women of color (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgadillo, 2011) and which influences their work in the academy (Dillard, 2006; Tisdell, 2003). Unfortunately, fear of conservative and violent religious zealots has silenced discussions of spirituality in favor of objective 'truths,' despite a differentiation between religion and spirituality (Fernandes, 2003; Speck, 2007). Faculty and staff are forced, by the "colonialist and supposedly rationalist intentions and constructions" (Abdi, 2011, p. xii) of institutions of higher education to dichotomize the coherent whole self into a private spiritual self and public secular self in order to successfully navigate the academy (Brown & Olson, 2000). For feminists of color, whose work is informed by spirituality, the forced dichotomy creates a challenge for how one participates as a spiritual activist (Anzaldúa, 2002) in the academy, and, as such, little is known about what it looks like to practice spirituality as a component of one's work in higher education (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2013). Because secular institutions of public higher education do not make space for the incorporation of spirituality, it is important to consider the ways Chican@s navigate the ivory tower in a way that makes space for spiritual understanding of the world and self.

Like the history of feminist epistemology, with this project I highlight the "struggles of [scholars] to have their understandings of the world legitimated and the

commitment of traditional philosophy to various accounts of knowledge—positivist, postpositivist, and others—that have consistently undermined women's claims to know" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 2). As previously mentioned, the struggle is born of a resistance to a one-dimensional understanding of what constitutes knowledge, leading to a dichotomy of the whole individual in which the mind produces knowledge and the soul, heart, or body produces feeling. Hence this project explores the spirituality of Chican@s in higher education whose scholar activism is grounded in a social justice approach in order to highlight the continued epistemological battle experienced by these professors and the creative, transformative reimagining of a politics of spirit.

Significance

Why write a dissertation on the spirituality of Chican@ scholars? I choose this path because I believe in the positive influence of spirituality for social justice movements and in the lives of every individual, particularly those whose daily work involves confronting various systems of oppression. As an epistemological spiritual inquiry, this project is important for its emphasis on redefining and broadening knowledge production (Keating, 2010), its centering of a decolonial spirituality (Fernandes, 2003; Rendón, 2010), and an emphasis on the spiritual and emotional aspect of Chican@ scholars lives and academic work.

Drawing attention to the spirituality of higher education faculty highlights spirituality as another avenue of meaning making, teaching, and learning, encouraging us to broaden our ideas of knowledge production (Tisdell, 2003). As noted by Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, and Tyson (2000):

> Many scholars and activists involved in the reformation of the academy have worldviews deeply embedded in the spiritual. The heretofore silencing of the spiritual voice through privileging the academic voice is increasingly being drowned out by the emphatic chorus of those whose underling versions of truth cry out, "We are spiritual people!" (p. 448)

What this points to is the need to recognize non-Eurocentric worldviews that express the epistemologies of spiritual beings.

In addition to highlighting spirituality as epistemology, this project focuses on the varied expressions of spirituality, particularly as these expressions relate to a reclamation of ancestral knowledge. As Lara (2005) has argued, women's sexual and spiritual agency has for centuries been deemed as witchcraft in an attempt to control bodies and souls. Christian and Western worldviews have negatively impacted the lives of women by encouraging, at times forcing what Gloria Anzaldúa (2000) calls desconocimientos (Lara, 2005). According to Anzaldúa (2002) conocimiento is a way of knowing the world that encompasses mental, spiritual, instinctive, emotional social, political, and lived experiences. Desconocimientos are the opposite, or "not knowing, either by willful intention…or default" (p. 177). What Lara (2005) argues is that they are the result of patriarchal religious institutions that render women's intuition dangerous. Hence, to reclaim and redefine our spirituality based on our conocimientos is a transformative and liberatory effort at the epistemological level (Perez, 2007). It is a reclamation of spirituality as a way of knowing and being in the world which obliges us to look to historical knowledges, cultural knowledges, traditional ancestral knowledges, and intuitive bodily knowledge.

Studying the spirituality of Chican@ faculty also can highlight the potential of spirituality for healing. The professors in this project, and the majority of self-identified

Chican@/Latin@ scholar activists are in daily exchange with systems and institutions of oppression, and are committed to resisting these through their personal and scholarly endeavors. However, this work can be exhausting, causing emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical strain on the body. As a result, social activists have turned to religion and/or spirituality in order to be able to maintain their work. In her study of Chicana art, Laura Perez (2007) found the spiritual work of the artists to be psychically healing. Through their artwork, the Chicana artists were able to reimagine spiritual traditions while connecting these traditions to social justice, resulting in "conscious acts of healing the cultural *susto*: the "frightening of spirit from one's body-mind in the colonial and neocolonial ordeals" (Perez, p. 21). The healing properties of spirituality for scholars and activists in spaces of higher education have also been studied by Lindholm and Astin (2006). In their interviews with faculty the authors found high scores on spirituality to be related to a positive outlook on life and a healthy life style. As Dillard (2006) noted, spirituality is not only beneficial for faculty, but students as well. Her quest for spirituality in higher education was a result of the confusion and hopelessness she saw in her students, which she believed could be healed through a spiritually centered pedagogy. Dillard believes that a spiritually open learning and teaching space draws in the inner and outer life of both students and faculty, offering the potential to heal from various traumas.

While my initial feelings to write a dissertation on spirituality in spaces of higher education, particularly as it pertains to social justice work, were plagued in doubt and fear, I quickly learned that various scholars were engaging with similar topics. Together, these works and this project highlight the significance of spirituality for its emphasis on alternative ways of knowing, transformative and liberatory possibilities, and healing

potential. My hope is that this project, particularly the narratives of the professors, can expand our understanding and belief in spirituality as a tool for social justice projects.

Reimagining Spirituality and Scholar Activism

Inside and outside of the academy there is a need to reimagine the transformative potential of a political spirituality and a spiritualized activist movement (Fernandes, 2003). As the narratives in this project show, the reimagining of spirituality and scholar activism is possible when Western, patriarchal Eurocentric understandings of both are challenged and critical feminist thought and ancestral knowledge are incorporated. While I discuss the importance and implications of incorporating spiritual epistemology into higher education in Chapter 6, here I expand on what I mean by a politicized spirituality and spiritual activism.

To politicize spirituality means to challenge the patriarchal, fundamentalist religious movements that have come to control mainstream understanding of religion. These movements, which rest on imperialism, power, and hierarchy, have silenced religious and spiritual approaches that seek to challenge injustice and oppression, and through violence and domination have delineated dichotomous borders between religious and secular. To move towards, reclaim, and politicize spirituality "as a transcendent sense of interconnectedness that moves beyond the knowable, visible material world" (Fernandes, 2003, p. 10) that result in practices of love, compassion, ethics, and truth (Fernandes, 2003), is not only a resistance to cultural and religious imperialism, but also a transformation and reimagining of our relationship to the sacred. A political feminist spirituality incorporates everyday lived experiences, cultural, familial, and ancestral

knowledges, and epistemological and ontological struggles against oppression (Hull, 2001; Perez, 2007).

To spiritualize social justice scholarship means to root one's activism within a politics of spirit, or *all that is* (Dillard, 2008). Spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002), or spirituality for social change (Keating, 2007), is about challenging the existing dichotomy between the political and personal (Collins, 1982) and highlights the ways scholar activists "survive within the constructs of a world antithetical to [our] intuition and knowledge regarding life's meaning" (Castillo, 1994, p. 148). A spiritualized approach to social justice scholarship challenges the positivistic model of the academy with its focus on rationality and objective knowledge (Anzaldúa, 1987; Perez, 2005). Spiritual activism challenges scholars to work within notions of interconnectedness, compassion, humility, and love (Anzaldúa, 2002; Dillard, 2006; Fernandes, 2003) and centers the spiritual epistemology and ontology of scholar activists.

Despite the marginalization of non-Western worldviews in higher education and the secularization of the academy in favor of 'unbiased' research and teaching, scholarship by feminists of color has continuously highlighted the spiritual aspect of social justice work, and have openly decried White, Western, male-dominated positivistic ways of knowing that attempt to separate the body, mind, and spirit connection (Ackerlsberg, 1998; Anzaldúa, 1987; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). This work encourages scholars to rethink activism as a spiritual project (Anzaldúa, 2002; Dillard, 2006; Fernandes, 2003; Spretnak, 1982). In spite of the accepted and dominant view among critical or progressive scholars that religion and spirituality serve only as oppressive institutional systems, feminists of color, and in particular Chicanas continue to write

about the transformative—both for community and self—possibilities of spiritualized social justice movements (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Coleman, 2008; Delgadillo, 2011; Lara, 2005). In regard to pedagogy, C. Alejandra Elenes (2011) has named a pedagogical approach grounded in decolonial struggles, Chicana epistemology, and spirituality. Border transformative pedagogies include an examination of history, and particularly the history between the United States and Mexico and the power relations that exist there, a creation of alternative epistemologies, Chicana feminist subjectivities, spiritual activism, and a challenging of dichotomous boundaries. For this project, I did not find one way of incorporating spirituality into activist scholarship; instead I have been better able understand the relationship between spirituality and activist scholarship. In addition, the narratives draw attention to liberatory, healing, and transformative possibilities of a spiritually influenced academic career.

As a woman whose concept of self, community, and activism is embedded within a spiritual framework, I have been especially drawn to understanding the role of spirituality in the activist scholarship of Chican@s. I agree with Leela Fernandes (2003) that the conservative right has colonized religion, faith, and spirituality and connected it to Western expansion through proselytization, greed, and power, and I recognize and appreciate feminist scholars who have discussed and written about the importance of spirituality as a component of activism and well-being (Anzaldúa, 2002, 1987; Dillard, 2006; hooks, 1994; Keating, 2007). As a commitment to the study of critical and transformative endeavors, this project aims to highlight the work of Chican@s in higher education whose scholarship is grounded in a politicized feminista spirituality and a

spiritualized social justice approach. To examine the relationship between spirituality, epistemology, and scholar activism[3] I position this project within the Chicana feminism theoretical perspectives including borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 1987), decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 1999), Chicana feminist spirituality (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgadillo, 2011, Pérez, 2007), and borderlands muxerista praxis (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2008; Elenes, 2011; Tijerina, Revilla, 2004). As I will discuss later, together these distinct but interconnected theoretical perspectives signify spiritual epistemology and ontology connected to a life of activism and provide a lens that highlights the everyday as spiritual and the resistance and agency of Chican@ faculty who transform spaces of higher education into spiritual activist borderlands.

Spirituality and Religion

I begin this section by stating that my objective is not to provide a fixed definition of spirituality. The term spirituality is difficult to define, for its definitions are varied and fluid. My goal in this project was to explore the varied understandings and practices of spirituality by Chican@ feminists in higher education, and how these influence their work. My objective for this section is to differentiate between how I am using the terms spirituality and religion throughout this project. I begin with the premise that institutionalized religion and spirituality are not the same (Anzaldúa, 1987; Fernandes, 2003), though for some people they may be interconnected. Religion in this project is

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[3] I use the terms scholar activism and social justice scholarship interchangeably to denote involvement in spaces of higher education, including but not limited to teaching, research, leadership, mentorship, that is grounded in the principles of equity and anti-oppression.

understood as an "organized community of faith that has written doctrine and codes or regulatory behavior" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 29). While religion is often thought of as signifying a hegemonic organization of the world based on prescribed racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative understandings, there are certainly forms of religion that seek to liberate devotees from oppression. Mujerista theology, Black Liberation theology, and Womanist theology are some examples of religious practices that are still grounded in an organized institution, yet seek to challenge racist and/or patriarchal teachings.

In contrast, spirituality "denotes, on one hand, a connection to the sacred, a recognition of worlds and realities beyond those immediately visible and respect for the sacred knowledge that these bring and, on the other hand, a way of being in the world, a language of communication and interrelations embodying this understanding and one's response to it" (Delgadillo, 2011, p. 4). Spirituality is not grounded in any one teaching or religion. Though defining spirituality is an intangible endeavor, I draw on the following seven assumptions of spirituality proposed by Elizabeth Tisdell (2003) to provide some guidance:

1. Religion and spirituality are not the same, though they can be interconnected. Tisdell argues that spiritual experience can take place outside religious context, and certain experiences of organized religion are not related to spirituality.

2. Spirituality is awareness and honoring of wholeness. Awareness is related to interconnectivity—a mindfulness of our connections all that lives.

3. Spirituality is about how we make and attribute meaning in our lives.

4. Spirituality is always present. In this way, spirituality is not only about our private individual lives, but concerns all manners of communication and interactions we

have.

5. Spirituality implies movement or shifting toward knowing ourselves and defining ourselves, particularly in relation to others. This does not assume that we can or will reach an end point of authenticity, but instead that we are always moving towards new knowledge about ourselves.

6. Spirituality is about knowledge construction, which can occur through symbolic processes. In other words, we make meaning through symbols, image, music, and art.

7. Spiritual experiences happen in moments of wonder. In these moments of spiritual experience we catch glimpses of the interconnectivity and wholeness of life.

By separating religion and spirituality I do not mean to imply that one is more critical or acceptable to professors in this project. I simply mean to acknowledge that a difference exists. As previously mentioned, there are numerous religiously based theologies that provide an example of active creation of a religion and spirituality informed by the everyday lives of its followers and is rooted in a belief against institutional injustice. However, I do want to make clear that this project is rooted in a belief that religion and spirituality are separate, and one need not be present in the life of an individual for the other to be present as well.

Overview of Chapters

In this chapter, I have introduced the project topic and introduced my research questions. I discussed the statement of the problem this project attempts to disrupt and the significance of studying spirituality and activism in higher education. In Chapter 2, I

introduce and expand on the various theoretical frameworks that guide this project, paying particular attention to the purpose of each of them. I use select Anzaldúan borderland concepts, Emma Perez's decolonial imaginary, and Chicana feminist spiritualities to work through spiritual narratives. I combine borderlands scholarship and the Muxerista framework of Anita Tijerina Revilla (2004) to conceptualize critical feminist praxis.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology I employed in this project, outlining Chicana feminist cultural intuition and endarkened feminist epistemology. I also offer a statement on researcher positionality, which includes the impetus to write a dissertation on spiritualty and activism in higher education. This chapter also includes a detailed discussion of plática methodology as a Chicana feminist methodological approach. I conclude the chapter with a brief introduction of the contributors.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I present the 'data' of this project. In Chapter 4, I present snapshots or narratives of each of the contributors and answer question one regarding spirituality and epistemology. The (re)presentations of the pláticas in narrative form allowed me to highlight the connection between the contributors' understanding of the world and approach to being in the world with their spiritual experiences. In Chapter 5, I focus on questions two and three, describing the academic work of the contributors and excavating the spiritual components of their work. This excavation and description are then used to argue that these contributors are indeed examples of spiritual activists whose work further expands our understanding of spiritually minded scholarship.

Chapter 6 focuses on the benefits of incorporating spirituality into higher education, both for faculty and students. This chapter also argues for the importance of

incorporating Indigenous spirituality and epistemology in higher education. I conclude Chapter 6 by answering the fourth research question regarding the implications of this project on my own spiritual and academic journey and how this can help scholars enhance the conversation on Chicana feminist methodology.

CAPÍTULO 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

To guide my approach to this project and my understanding of the spiritual journeys of the contributors and their spiritually guided scholarly work, I situated this project within a Chicana Feminist theoretical framework, generally, and more specifically within Anzaldúan borderlands framework, Emma Perez's decolonial imaginary, Chicana Feminist spirituality, and borderland muxerista praxis. Below, I begin with a brief discussion of Chicana Feminism largely because each of the aforementioned theoretical perspectives emerges from the work of Chicana scholars. I continue with a more detailed and specific discussion of how Anzaldúan borderlands, Emma Perez's decolonial imaginary, Chicana Feminist spirituality, and borderland muxerista praxis provide the analytical lens to situate and understand how the Chican@ professors in this project navigate academic borderlands whilst not only maintaining spirituality but also incorporating it into their scholarly work. The chosen theoretical perspectives enabled me to focus on the epistemological positions from which the contributors enact agency, focusing on the transformative possibilities of a self-defined spirituality and spiritually guided scholarly work.

Chicana Feminism

Ethnically, a Chicana is a self-identified woman of Mexican American decent. Politically, ideologically, and epistemologically, a Chicana is a self-identified woman who believes in blurred boundaries of identification, who resists systems of marginalization, and who is committed to the liberation and transformation of their community. The second conceptualization makes space for individuals of other ethnicities and mixed race/ethnicities to identify as Chicana because of their political and ideological orientations. For example, scholars such as Sofia Villenas, Kathleen Pendleton Jimenez, and Cinthya Saavedra identify as Chicana feminist despite their various ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds. Chicana is a nonneutral term that is not simply a decision regarding labels, but a "coming to perceive concretely one's self in relation to others and the world as fundamentally different than one had previously" (Martinez, 2000, p. 35). To identify as Chicana means to live in opposition to racial, sexual, gender, class, and language norms, and to create new understandings of the self and community that do not fit within pre-established categories. It means that:

> We are beginning to realize that we are not wholly at the mercy of circumstance, nor are our lives completely out of our hands. That if we posture as victims, we will be victims, that hopelessness is suicide, that self-attacks stop us in our tracks. We are moving slowly past the resistance within, leaving behind the defeated images. (Anzaldúa, 1984, p. iv)

To position one's work using Chicana feminist theory signifies continued commitment to moving from patriarchy and heteronormativity into new constructions of gender, sexuality, spirituality, and gender relations built on deconstructed categories of woman/man, oppressor/oppressed. Chicana feminist theory is about resistance, creativity, and survivance. To write from a Chicana feminist standpoint means to take a political

stance and "move discourse beyond binaries and toward intersectionality and hybridity" (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Nájera-Ramírez, & Zavella, 2003, p. 2). Chicana feminist theorists research, teach, and write from an understanding that they speak from physical and symbolic borders, and these borders constitute a multiplicity of identities and power relations. Chicana feminist theory is also about embracing difference (González, 1998) and using that difference to build bridges (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Despite Chicana feminists' critique of institutionalized religion, and in particular the Catholic church, Chicana feminist writers, scholars, activists, and artists have historically embodied, nurtured, and worked from a spiritual standpoint (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1994; Gaspar de Alba & López, 2011) though this work has not always been widely acknowledged or validated. Recently, spirituality has been loudly reclaimed as a necessary element for the wellbeing and survival of the self and community (Elenes, 2011; Facio & Lara, 2015; Pérez, 2007) and as such has become a central component of Chicana feminist epistemology. As I will show in the next sections, Chicana feminisms' focus on the spiritual, epistemological, and intersectional make possible a transformative understanding of spiritually guided scholarship. The subsequent specific Chicana feminist theoretical perspectives I discuss each contributed distinctive but interconnected concepts from which to view the spiritual journeys and scholarly work of the Chican@ professors in this project.

Anzaldúan Borderlands

In one of the most influential Chicana texts, Borderlands/*La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) wrote about the idea of metaphorical borderlands, affected by the

geographical Mexico/United States border. According to Anzaldúa, "a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (p. 25). While Anzaldúa was not the first to identify a place of contradiction where opposing worldviews meet as a result of geographical borders[4] where two countries convene, she was the first to identify a woman-centric understanding of borderlands as well as a symbolic understanding of borderlands (Elenes, 2011). It is through this understanding of the metaphorical borderlands that Anzaldúa began to name an epistemology based on one's sexualized, politicized, racialized, gendered, and embodied experiences, which often overlap cultures and languages. The overlap of cultures, languages, and varied experiences results in contradiction of which Anzaldúa wrote about. Specifically, she wrote of the contradiction she felt growing up Chicana in a nation that devalued her language, her gender, her sexuality, her ways of knowing, and her very being. Anzaldúa's purpose was not merely to draw attention to the tensions caused by the unnatural boundaries, but to highlight the manner in which she enacted agency within borders, particularly in the ways she disrupted binaries—binaries that hierarchically organized male, Western thought and knowledge above that coming from spaces of marginalization, like the borderlands.

The concept of the borderlands as a space of both tension and possibility has been taken up largely by Chicanas in higher education to highlight the way academia often attempts to create binaries. Specifically, Anzaldúa's concept of nepantla, a liminal space

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[4] Alejandra Elenes (2011) cautions the interpreter of the borderlands not to forget that the metaphorical borderlands discussed by Anzaldúa would not have been possible without the geographical borders, specifically the border between the U.S. and Mexico, which is the context from which Anzaldúa writes.

of multiple realities (Gutierrez, 2008), is used to more fully describe academia as a contradictory space where Chicanas both participate in and challenge the "colonizing gaze of academia" (Calderon et al., 2012). In nepantla, there can be a lot of turmoil and ambiguity, both of which Anzaldúa valued for their possibility to thrust us into new knowledges. By recognizing and validating ambiguity, Anzaldúa contradicted dichotomous ways of being and understanding that have resulted from the colonizing west's attempt to create systems of binaries. Instead, Anzaldúa recognized ambiguity and ambivalence as part of being in the world, and as possessing transformative potential. It is this transformative potential that has drawn Chicana scholars to expand on traditional notions of academic scholarship by drawing on personal stories, Chicana feminist epistemologies, and research and teaching methodologies that acknowledge multiple ways of knowing, learning and relating (Diaz Soto, 2009; Diaz Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villareal, & Campos, 2009; Elenes, 2001; Villenas, 1996).

A large part of this transformative potential comes from the spiritual aspect of Borderlands/*La Frontera*. Although the spiritual component of Anzaldúa's seminal work was initially largely ignored (Keating, 2007, preface), spirituality as a borderlands and Chicana Feminist element has more recently come to the forefront of Chicana Feminists' activist work. Borderlands/*La Frontera*, as argued by Ana Louse Keating in the 2007 preface, is not only about cultural, linguistic, and psychological borderlands, but about spiritual borderlands as well. Throughout Borderlands/*La Frontera* Anzaldúa discussed the tension she felt with Catholicism as a result of her queer identity and Catholicism's condemnation of the female body. In addition, she wrote about the way 'otherworldy' or supernatural knowledge and/or feeling was not to be discussed, in fact it was not to be

believed in. Anzaldúa felt that the spiritual nature of all things was feared by a conservative patriarchal religion. Because she believed that spirit lived within her and within all things she could not follow a religious doctrine that forced her to ignore parts of herself. Spirit, as Anzaldúa argued, brings together the bodymindspirit (Lara, 2002) connection that institutionalized religion and academic spaces have attempted to separate and provides an epistemological framework from which we understand the world and a politics of activism rooted in spirituality. There are multiple Anzaldúan concepts that draw attention to the spiritual aspect of her work and which were helpful for understanding the spiritual journeys and spiritual scholar activism of the professors in this project. I discuss these concepts below.

La Facultad

In an interview with Christine Weiland Anzaldúa describes la facultad as the "cultivation of an extra sense" (Keating, 2000 p. 122) that allows the marginalized "to see in the surface phenomenon the meaning of deeper realities" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 60). La facultad articulated in this way draws attention to the importance of other ways of knowing that are marginalized by a belief that the mind is the most rational and knowledgeable part of the body. La facultad challenges this by drawing attention to the body, psyche, and spirit as ways of being in and knowing the world.

Other scholars have identified la facultad in the production of identity within a world that attempts to homogenize for the creation of easily identifiable labels. For example, Chang (2014) discusses the importance of la facultad in the lives of multiracial students attempting to enact agency in the production of a multiracial identity. As Chang

states, “multiracial figured worlds operate within a racial borderland, an alternate, marginal world, where improvisational play and facultad become critical elements of survival” (p. 27). Using the term multiracial facultad, Chang argues la facultad develops as a result of being a part of various racial borderlands and a feeling of being ostracized because one does not fully “fit” in any one racial category. Multiracial facultad emerges as a survival mechanism or a sixth sense in “response to others’” racism, homophobia, sexual violence and general intolerance. In this case, facultad becomes a navigational tool that allows the students to move fluidly to and from differential spaces. It also is a tool of perception, enabling students to perceive when they are in an uncomfortable or unsafe space and act accordingly. Finally, it is a tool of agency, supporting students in the production of a multiracial identity. Although Chang states the reality that students still worked with constructed and limiting understandings of race, they used la facultad to traverse various spaces, perceive the thoughts and feeling of others, and create a multiracial identity that made sense for them.

Like Chang, Johnson, Brown, Carlone, and Cuevas (2011) identified la facultad as an important component of one’s identity production. In their use of la facultad, the authors recognized it as the “child of both structure and agency” (p. 362). In other words, its emerges because of the realities of structural and oppressive barriers that create a necessity to possess survival tactics. However, they also saw it as a faculty of agency or “the ability to quickly navigate that structure in the safest way possible, under the circumstances” (p. 362). The authors made the argument that la facultad emerges when one is conscious of inequity and identifies with a cultural background, thus drawing attention to both the social forces and individual power that are involved in the

emergence of la facultad. With this "epistemic privilege" (Moya, 2011 as cited in Johnson et al.), women of color have the potential produce an identity that facilitates their survival in hostile spaces.

Clearly, these examples draw from Anzaldúa's notion of la facultad. Like Anzaldúa, Chang (2014) and Johnson et al. (2011) articulate la facultad as a sixth sense, an awareness that emerges from one's marginalized identities and invalidation because of those identities. However, they also highlight agency as an important component of la facultad. Through one's agency, one is able to make use of the various knowledges that are gained through la facultad. In addition, la facultad enables one to move through spaces that may be uninviting, hostile, and violent. For this project, la facultad was an important tool of analysis that helped to make sense of how the professors in this project incorporate spirituality into their activist praxis as a necessary component for survival in the academy.

Conocimiento

Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento is another borderlands concept that draws attention to the spiritual and transformative nature of her work. Conocimiento describes an "overarching theory of consciousness, of how the mind works. It is an epistemology that tries to encompass all dimensions of life, both inner—mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer—social, political, lived experiences" (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 177). Later, Anzaldúa (2002) writes about conocimiento as a journey or path. The path of conocimiento is meant to be a description of the multiple ways we gather information related to emotions, memories, dreams, and lived experiences

(Keating, 2006). On this journey the viajer@ experiences seven occasions, beginning with el arrebato, or earthquake, and ending with spiritual activism. Along this journey that begins with a difficult rupture that challenges everything we know, and ends with a call to ground ourselves spiritually and take action for social justice, the viajer@ passes through occasions, not necessarily in a linear order, that require deep self and community reflection, and can involve both pain and joy. Throughout the constant rupturing and shifting that takes place along the path of conocimiento, the viajer@ has the space to think critically and "develop[ment] [of] deep reflective consciousness that questions conventional knowledge while fostering a less defensive and more inclusive personal and collective identity" (Fránquiz, 2010, p. 94). It is important to understand the theory of conocimiento is not a "how-to" for transformation, nor is it a definitive, step-by-step process to go from torn and shattered soul to enlightened and free spirit. Instead, the path of conocimiento is a perpetual process of rupture and shifting.

The concept or theory of conocimiento has been taken up by Chicana scholars as pedagogical possibility (Fránquiz, 2010; Méndez-Negrete, 2014) and as way to highlight their own journey of coming to understand themselves and their purpose in resisting systems of oppression (Gutierrez, 2012; Sánchez, 2009; Tang, 2006). As pedagogy, Maria Fránquiz (2010) focuses on what teachers do and say in a classroom with Latin@ students to foster conocimiento. Specifically, she examines the way the use of two books by Gloria Anzaldúa facilitate self and community reflection for the students by connecting to students' home lives and drawing from their funds of knowledge. By reading the story, writing reflective pieces, and sharing with other students, the classroom became a space where everyone listened to and heard each other. The stories, which came

from students who shared similar cultural backgrounds, also highlighted the differences among them, whether in regards to language fluency, migration stories, or familial and schooling experiences. In this way, students' previous knowledge about others was challenged. While differences did exist among them, the sharing of stories also highlighted interconnections. Fránquiz argues that this assignment facilities conocimiento—a "consciousness in which we walk in 'others shoes, love others, empathize and sympathize with others, and listen carefully" (p. x).

Conocimiento is also discussed as an academic journey students and faculty of color embark on when they enter academic spaces. On this journey, there are various challenges, or ruptures, which cause one to question all they know. For example, in her discussion of science curriculum and classes, Gutierrez (2012) identifies a singular, Eurocentric definition of science, which does not validate the experiences and knowledges students bring to class. Instead, who they are, what they know, and how they know is marginalized. In this space of marginalization is the possibility of coming to greater awareness of the relational aspect of knowledge, its fluidity, and its messiness.

Together, these examples of the use of conocimiento highlight three important aspects for this project. First, conocimiento is a relational journey. Though the viajer@ may be on an individual journey of meaning making, that journey is filled with people whom we experience life with and hence, make meaning with. This is particularly important for the academic space, as meaning making takes place amongst of plethora of social actors, who influence or attempt to influence one's academic quests. Conocimiento is an awareness to all that surrounds us a "multileveled" attention that includes "emotional reactions to other people and theirs to you" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 542). In other

words, we do not experience the world alone. When we embark on an 'individual' journey of conocimiento we are surrounded by "larger frames of reference, connecting personal struggles to those of other being on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself" (Anzaldúa, p. 522). Second, that meaning making can take place within moments of turmoil is especially important. Because academia, especially for faculty of color, can be hostile, conocimiento can help draw attention to the way the Chican@ professors in this project make meaning of their spiritual and academic journeys as they come upon barriers to both. Finally, the examples above highlight the nature of knowledge as fluid. As Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) argues, we have been taught to view the world via one perspective. Conocimiento not only requires a shift in perception, but an understanding that knowledge changes depending on multiple perceptions. By incorporating spirituality into their everyday lives as professors, the individuals in this project elevate spirituality to a valued form of knowledge.

Spiritual Activism

On the seventh and final step of Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento the viajer@ acts out a vision of spiritual activism, or spirituality for social change. According to Anzaldúa (2002) one is ready to take up the work of spiritual activism when the "sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all being" (p. 558) is recognized. When interconnectedness is realized, healing and spiritual activism begin. On the seventh step on the path of conocimiento, Anzaldúa identifies a shifting of realities and acting out of spiritual activism as the beginning of transformation for the self and others.

Keating (2006), who defines spiritual activism as "a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics—a way of life and a call to action" (p. 11), argues that it is Anzaldúa's most comprehensive theory, as it includes multiple of her other concepts that combine social activism with spiritual vision. What becomes especially important for Keating is that Anzaldúa was not writing about an individualist or inner spirituality. Instead, spiritual activism is an outer activism, one that connects personal spiritual beliefs to outer spiritual acts towards social change. To engage in this communal spirituality, one must combine self-reflection, self-growth, and compassionate acts directed towards others (Keating, 2006). Based on Anzaldúa's and Keating's writings on spiritual activism, I believe that spiritually influenced social justice work, whether that work is research, teaching, mentoring, or administrating, is a form a spiritual activism that connects inner and outer worlds.

Based on this understanding of spiritual activism, I believe that all of the work of the contributors—whether in the classroom, or in their mentoring, research, or community work—is indeed an example of spiritual activism. Some of the contributors were very direct in their belief that yes, they are spiritual activists. For example, during our plática Irene said she identifies as a spiritual activist, which for her means "approach[ing] [my] life and experiences and interactions, decisions, from a spiritual activist approach—being present and aware with whole self." For Maria, her one-on-one conferencing with students highlights the presence of spiritual activism. Others, like Luz and Sandra, were not as familiar with the term spiritual activism, and hence did not necessarily feel that they would call themselves a spiritual activist. However, as I show in Chapter 5, that their scholar activist work is grounded in spiritual epistemology, and that

their work challenges the various mental, physical, material, and spiritual effects caused by the trauma of colonization, is indeed the spiritual activism that Anzaldúa calls us to—a spiritual activism that combines inner spirituality with outer public acts of social justice.

While it may appear that the notion of a metaphorical borderlands ignores, silences, or downplays the lived realities of those who live and work at the 2000-mile geographical border that attempts to separate the United States from Mexico, as Alejandra Elenes notes, metaphorical borderlands "would not have been possible if the border did not exist" (p. 23). It is the existence and history of this border that defines and separates not only individuals from the two sides, but those within the borders as well. What the geographical border does is create a boundary to determine who is 'in' and who is 'out' and places values on the bodies, languages, epistemologies, experiences of those individuals, with those in the 'out' group being worth less. Unfortunately, this systemic categorization and devaluation does not stop at the border, but discharges to the multiple neighborhoods, schools, work places, health offices, universities and other institutions in the United States. Within these spaces, an 'in' and 'out' group is created influenced by the very same categorization at the geographical border, in which a devaluation of the brown body, and specifically the brown female body, takes place.

An Anzaldúan borderlands theoretical perspective and its accompanying concepts were particularly useful for understanding the spiritual journey and praxis of the professors in this project. First, borderlands as a metaphorical place of difference helped to highlight the university context as not only a borderland space, but also a space that creates and perpetuates a border mentality. Within these spaces certain bodies of knowledge are accepted as truth and more valid over others (Delgado Bernal &

Villalpando, 2002). This separation marginalizes epistemological contributions of faculty and students of color, identifying them as biased and subjective. This separation also identifies that which is 'learnable' knowledge and appropriate ways to teach and conduct research. This critique of university institutions and classrooms provided an understanding of the contexts in which Chican@ professors teach. In addition to providing a context from which to examine the space of higher education, borderlands Theory provided a theoretical grounding in which to situate the spiritual journeys of the professors between opposing 'objective' and 'rational' academic spaces and spiritual worlds they create in the classroom. In other words, borderlands theory allowed me to view the scholarly choices of the professors as grounded in action and transformation. We might say that the professors work and live within unnatural separations in university settings, and enact spiritual and scholarly agency to create a space that is effective for them. A borderlands approach acknowledged the traversing of these metaphorical borders, affirmed everyday experiences as systems of knowing and ways of being, and highlighted the agency enacted within the borderlands space to create new spiritual scholarship (Elenes, 2011). Borderlands theory was pivotal for helping to reexamine the spiritual journeys and professional journeys of the contributors in this project, encouraging us to "change the way [we] perceive reality and [our] relation to the world" (Elenes, p. 52) as well as provided the tools to reimagine how spirituality can be practiced in the higher education spaces.

Decolonial Imaginary

While borderlands provided a tool from which to examine the context the Chicana professors in this study teach in, the agency enacted in those spaces, and the importance of spirituality as epistemology, Emma Perez's (1999) decolonial imaginary focused on the specific activity occurring in the interstitial spaces and how professors of color create and live in spaces that are most important for their survival and the resistance of oppression. The decolonial imaginary highlighted the creative and transformative ways Chican@ professors create and enact their own systems of thought based on their knowledge of the world and how they disrupt Western, patriarchal, and European systems of thought that attempt to constitute and control Chican@ ways of knowing and teaching. In addition, the use of decolonial imaginary provided a lens from which to examine the spiritual agency of the professors, within secular spaces of higher education and against patriarchal dogma that dominate religion. With a goal of "sexing the colonial imaginary" (p. 7), Perez centers the experiences of women, using the decolonial imaginary, as "a tool for uncovering the hidden voices of Chicanas that have been relegated to silences, to passivity, to that third space where agency is enacted" (Peréz, p. xvi). For this project, the decolonial imaginary became a necessary tool for accomplishing the task of uncovering Chican@ epistemology, spirituality, and activism within the spaces of higher education.

In her 1999 book, Emma Perez argues that it is only within the decolonial imaginary that women can enact a differential consciousness (Sandoval, 2000), which allows for a movement of various identities amongst various power differentials, and which results in women creating history within interstitial spaces. For example, Perez lays out a genealogy of Mexican women's activity in El Partido Liberal Mexicano

(PLM). As she highlights, while the PLM and its members were supportive of women's political activism, the role women were expected to play still relied on patriarchal, binary definitions of men and women's roles. For instance, women's duties were relinquished to "help[ing] the man; to be there when he suffers; to lighten his sorrow; to laugh and to sing with him when victory smiles" (*Regeneracion* as cited in Perez, p. 62). While the PLM and its most formative members espoused equality between men and women, they believed the woman's domain to be the home, denounced feminism, and essentialized the role of women based on the 'intrinsic' nature of their sex. However, Perez discusses that despite this attempt to confine women, those involved in the PLM and Mexican Revolution engaged in third space feminist activities. Women smuggled supplies across the border, risked their lives for the party, and published their own newspaper. Perez argued that these activities represented a dialectics of doubling "in which on one hand they agreed with the male revolutionaries and their (inter)nationalist cause, but as feminists, on the other hand, they intervened with their particular agenda" (p. 65). A dialectic of doubling draws attention to the way women may represent or imitate patriarchy, or other systems of oppression, while also resisting it (Davalos, 2008). Together, the decolonial imaginary and a dialectics of doubling narrow in on the resistance of women who work within spaces of that attempt to overcome their agency.

Dolores Delgado Bernal, Enrique Alemán, and Andrea Garavito (2009) provide an example of the decolonial imaginary in education. The authors use Emma Perez's work as a way to draw attention to Latina/o undergraduates' agency in the creating and shifting of identity. The authors make use of the decolonial imaginary as a third place where multiplicity is negotiated and where Latina/o undergraduates explore and produce

that which makes sense for them. Similarly, I view the decolonial imaginary as a place of agency and creativity where negotiations take place.

My goal in including decolonial imaginary was to provide a tool from which to excavate two aspects of this project. First, I explored the varied ways the Chican@ professors in this study experienced spirituality and have come to an understanding in which their voices matter. Knowledge of both religion and spirituality are often written from a White, male perspective. While there are various texts from the standpoint of White feminists (Fiorenza, 2001; Trible, 1978) and feminists of color (Hull, 2001; Isasi-Diaz, 1993; Townes, 1995), and while these authors are critical of patriarchal religious institutions, there is still a marginalization of those who speak from spiritual places not connected to a specific religion. Instead, Chicana Feminist spirituality speaks from the body, the erotic, the heart, and soul and includes both religious and nonreligious understandings of spirituality (Facio & Lara, 2014). What decolonial imaginary allowed for is an excavation of these spiritual narratives that highlight the active and resistant ways Chican@ professors define spirituality for themselves.

Also used as a tool for excavation, decolonial imaginary took me into the space of higher education to assess the ways contributors work. Similar to domains of religion and spirituality, the voices of Chican@ professors have been marginalized in regards to research and teaching approaches, despite their contributions to the field (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Ek, Quijada Cerecer, Alanis, Rodriguez, 2010; Tijerina Revilla, 2004). In regard to teaching, the patriarch perspective has dominated critical pedagogies relegating feminist and spiritual contributions to the margins (Elenes, 1997). Utilizing decolonial imaginary narrowed the lens to Chican@

feminist and Indigenous agency and creativity in the classroom and beyond. It allowed me to draw attention to the way meanings had shifted, "desire as love and hope for different kind of future" (Perez, p. xix), which in turn guided scholarly choices. The decolonial imaginary highlighted the ways Chican@ professors enact and create their own "*sitio y lengua*" (Perez, 1991, p. 161), a space and language that forces us to know both the source and agency of Chican@ epistemology and academic work.

Specifically, for this project sitio y lengua came to be the actual spiritual spaces created by the professors and the spiritual practices enacted in those spaces. These spaces, as I discuss later, were classrooms, online social media spaces, or mentorship spaces. Using sitio y lengua allowed me to unearth the unknown spiritual discourses and actions employed in the university setting. I illustrate, based on pláticas with the professors, what they do both explicitly and implicitly as it pertains to spirituality in the classroom, research, and/or community. Using sitio y lengua as a theoretical tool draws attention to the way epistemology is related to the language and space that is enacted and created in the classroom. Together, Emma Perez's decolonial imaginary and sitio y lengua provided a lens for excavating epistemology and pedagogy born of a spiritual journey.

Chicana Feminist Spiritualities

In Chapter 1, I have discussed the difference between religion and spirituality. Here I write specifically of Chicana feminist spiritualities as a theoretical perspective that guided this project. It is not my intention to provide a strict or all-encompassing definition of Chicana feminist spiritualities, but to provide an initial conceptualization

that includes a connection to the sacred, a way of being in the world as an interconnected being, or a way of knowing. I would like to use this section as a description of how I understand spirituality, not defining it, not boxing it, not limiting it. I want to be clear that I see the conceptualization of spirituality as a process—the continual shifting of how I understand spirituality, see myself as a spiritual being, and live in the world and act *on* the world as a spiritual being. I do not seek to define spirituality for the reader, but provide them with a moving foundation that guided this work. I was more interested in shifting through the messiness and complexity of the professors' lives and spiritual epistemology than I was in providing a definition. As such, what I provide in this section is not a definition of spirituality but a kaleidoscope view of my spiritual understanding, largely influenced by Chicana feminist texts.

Chicana feminists discuss spirituality as a connection to the sacred, a way of being in the world as interconnected beings, or a way of knowing (Anzaldúa, 1999; Perez, 2007). These ways of understanding spirituality are not separated from each other, and they stem from a larger belief that our material lives are connected to the realms of the divine and sacred. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) writes about her connection to that which is not of this world. Anzaldúa identifies the state of nepantla as that space between the spirit world and the material world, acknowledging that to speak of this connection is frowned upon by the institutionalized church. However, for Anzaldúa spirituality goes beyond that which is governed by (wo)man to worlds beyond those in which we live. Recognition of the material self as connected to divinity and sacredness is in part related to an understanding of the self as embracing body, mind, and spirit (Fernandes, 2003). In other words, there exist connections between our physical beings and our spiritual beings.

Chicana feminists also write about spirituality as "a way of being in the world, a language of communication and interrelations embodying this understanding and one's response to it" (Delgadillo, 2011 p. 4). These relationships are nurtured by love, compassion, ethics and truth, which strengthen "a sense of interconnectedness" (Fernandes, 2003, p. 10). In her work with rural communities in Mexico, Ruth Trinidad Galván (2006) identifies spirituality as, "their [campesinas] way of knowing and being in the world and their source of their strength and sobrevivencia" (p. 163). Spirituality for these mujeres is about what they do in their everyday lives, and how they survive their daily challenges. Alejandra Elenes has also identified the struggles of everyday as part and parcel of one's spirituality, claiming that spirituality is "the quest for social and gender justice and for women to express their agency as complete beings" (p. 111). Thus, one's way of enacting agency—of being in the world—is part of the process of spirituality.

Chicana feminists also describe spirituality as another way of knowing the world. Largely connected to the first two conceptualizations of spirituality, this definition positions spirituality as epistemology. Perhaps because spirituality is a connection to the divine and a way that we live in the world, it also becomes a way that we know the world. As previously mentioned, Gloria Anzaldúa discusses nepantla as a space that connects us to the divinity or sacredness of the world, those aspects that cannot be observed with the five senses. In an interview with Karen Ikas (1999) she also talks about nepantla as "a way of reading the world…a way of creating knowledge and writing a philosophy, a system that explains the world "(p. 237). In her later works Anzaldúa (2002) writes about the process of conocimiento, which she identifies as a part of our

spirituality. Conocimiento, as described earlier, is a way of knowing, a form of spiritual inquiry, and a desire to know. Spirituality therefore is identified as a valuable way to know (Anzaldúa, 2002).

I was especially inclined towards Leela Fernandes' (2003) definition of spirituality because it encompasses each of the three components above. Fernandes is also explicit, like the Chicana writers discussed thus far, that spirituality is not the same as religion, nor is it a requirement to be informed by an institutionalized religious doctrine. Instead, she views spirituality as "a direct, unmediated, ongoing, and always changing relationship with the divine" (p. 117) requiring a dismantling of the wall that exists between ourselves in the material world and ourselves in the spiritual world. For Fernandes spirituality is a process, not necessarily an outcome or thing to gain or to have, but an active engagement with doing—with being in the world and knowing the world. This description of spirituality encompasses the work of Chicana feminist writers who define spirituality as a connection to the sacred, a way of being in the world including interconnectivity, or a way of knowing. This conceptualization encompasses my understanding of spirituality and guided this project to examine the influence of spirituality on activist scholarship for Chican@ professors in higher education.

Imagination or being able to imagine is also a central feature of Chicana feminist spirituality. In her book, Theresa Delgadillo (2011) makes the claim that Anzaldúa's spiritual mestizaje remains an underexamined concept calling on an exploration of the spiritual imagination of Chicana feminists. Delgadillo defines spiritual mestizaje as "a transformative renewal of one's relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-reflexive critique of oppression in all its manifestations and a

creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred" (p. 1), arguing that the imagination becomes a pivotal marker of spiritual mestizaje. In her words, "to imagine spiritual mestizaje is in some ways, to enact it" (p. 2). Spiritual imagination and spiritual mestizaje are about active practice—participating in a new consciousness (p. 2), a process of transformation (p. 7), and a conocimiento allowing for the enactment of bridge building (p. 9).

Tensions with Chicana Feminist Spiritualities and Catholicism

A discussion of Chicana Feminist spirituality would not be complete without a discussion of the tensions between Chicana feminism and religion, particularly the Catholic Church. As Ana Castillo (1994) so succinctly argues, the Catholic Church, with its history of colonialism and domination, is mostly influenced by a male-dominated perspective. The patriarchal and hierarchical order of the church has historically meant that women were expected to live a life of submission, purity, and sanctity. Traditional values of the church relegated women to the home and family, defining women's roles in terms of wife and mother. Perhaps the most severe consequence of this gendered view has been the ideological virgin/whore dichotomy, in which the Virgin Mary or Guadalupe, is seen as the ideal role model of young Latinas. To behave in a way contrary to the Virgin relegates one to a whore (Lara, 2008), though this is never an expectation of men (Cisneros, 1996).

A major consequence of the virgin/whore dichotomy has been the erasure of women's body, which is seen as innately immoral or in need of control (Lara, 2008). It is the body that tempts men to sin and which has led to betrayal and temptation. For this

reason, the body for many Chicana/Latinas is viewed as a source of shame and insignificance. Hence, it is not viewed as an epistemological source from which we come to know the world (Anzaldúa, 1987). As Gloria Anzaldúa argues, "the Catholic and Protestant religions encourage fear and distrust of life and of the body; they encourage a split between the body and the spirit and totally ignore the soul" (p. 59).

Despite the attempt by the Catholic Church to disregard women's bodies and spirituality, Chicanas/Latinas remain spirituality grounded (Castillo, 1994) largely due to an active approach at resculpting a spirituality that gives meaning to their daily lives and reaffirms the bodymindspirit connection (Lara, 2005). Reclamation of La Virgen de Guadalupe has proven pivotal in these acts of resistance and agency.

La Chicana Guadalupe

To counter the patriarchal, oppressive constructions of womanhood via La Virgen (Elenes, 2011), Chicanas have (re)imagined and (re)constructed her images and meaning. This reclamation has been especially evident in artistic representations. Chicana artists such as Ester Hernández, Alma López, and Yolanda López have all reproduced images of La Virgen that speak back to patriarchy, sexism, racism, and colonization. These representations counter the image of Mary as docile, pure, and asexual, as well as provide the space to dialogue about the multiple interpretations of La Virgen.

Ester Hernández's groundbreaking piece, La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo Chicano Rights (Figure 1), is an etching of a young Chicana in martial arts garb, surrounded by the starry mantle and sunrays. The woman is not standing submissively, but actively fighting against social injustice. Similarly, Yolanda López paints portraits of

La Virgen that show her in action. In Lopez's work, La Virgen is Yolanda's mother working in the factory as a seamstress (Figure 2), and she is la Virgen herself, showing her strong legs while she runs (Figure 3). These pieces draw attention to La Virgen de Guadalupe that exist within each Chicana, the woman who is supposed to accept suffering and heed to male authority. Yet, López's pieces also draw attention to the ways Chicanas are actively resisting marginalizing systems by working to take care of their families and selves.

One of the most controversial Chicana images of La Virgen is "Our Lady" (Figure 4) by Almá López. In this piece La Virgen stands in a bikini of roses, carried by a bare-breasted (and pierced) angel. She stands assertively, in contrast to the solemn Virgen with her eyes cast down and her hands in prayer position. Instead the woman in Our Lady looks straight ahead at the viewer, hands resting on the hips in defiance and ready to contest the injustices of racism, sexism, poverty, and homophobia (Calvo, 2011). In 2001 López presented this piece at the CyberArte: Tradition meets Technology exhibit in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The piece was heavily criticized by community activists and church representatives months before the show opened, and for months after the opening community members held protest rallies and prayer vigils (Gaspar de Alba, 2011). Opponents of the piece criticized the artist for oversexualizing the pure and virgin mother of God. López unfortunately received hate mail, including death threats.

In response to the negative criticism, Almá López and scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba decided to edit a book titled *Our Lady of Controversy*, which provided a space for Chicanas scholars, artists, and activists to speak back to those who dismissed the artwork as blasphemous. Each of the writers in the book discusses the importance of López's

artwork, and also the influence and meaning of La Virgen for their own lives as Chicanas in the United States. Each chapter highlights the omnipresence of La Virgen in the lives of Chicano/as, and each writer discusses the importance of *Our Lady* as the refusal to "indulge in the disavowal of the body that informs conventional, religious representations of the Virgin" (Calvo, 2011, p. 98). Both *Our Lady* and the resulting book reinforce the role of La Virgen for Chicanas in the United States. Each author writes about the presence of La Virgen in their daily lives, and the necessity to articulate their own understanding of her role in their lives and the lives of their community. While each of these aforementioned artists and book contributors represents La Virgen de Guadalupe in their own particular style based on their own understanding and interpretation of her, they each promote similar themes of resistance to traditional, oppressive views of women's, and particularly Chicana's, roles. As a feminist figure, La Virgen articulates women's "rights not to be discriminated against and exploited because of their gender and sexuality" (Elenes, 2011, p. 134).

Both the tension and reclamation of La Virgen de Guadalupe were especially important to consider when engaging in conversation with the Chican@ faculty in this project. My first line of inquiry was related to the spiritual journey of the professors, which included occasions of conflict with a religious tradition that runs counter to their activist ideals as Chican@s committed to challenging oppression. In addition, my research on Chicana spirituality identified La Virgen de Guadalupe as a figure of empowerment, agency, and feminism making it important to understand her role in the spiritual journey and spiritual praxis of the professors in this project.

Each of the seven contributors in this project experienced religion differently.

They did not all grow up in a religious environment and if they did, they did not all necessarily experience religion as oppressive. Sandra is very clear that she had a positive experience with Catholicism largely due to the progressive nature of the churches and schools she attended. However, Lara attended Catholic elementary school where the nuns were discriminatory of Latina@ students and uncaring of students. This had a major effect not only on how she felt/feels about Catholicism, but on the kind of educator she strives to be. Then there is Alejandra, who now writes about La Virgen as a symbol of feminism, but who once felt that her image and meaning were detrimental and oppressive to women. What became clear from these narratives is the transformative power in working through/with these tensions to develop/nurture/practice a spiritual worldview that liberates and empowers each of these individuals. Like the artists discussed above, who have reimagined La Virgen in such a way that empowers them and their community, the contributors in this project reimagine and develop a spirituality that inspires their scholar activist practices.

Borderland Muxerista Praxis

One of the main inquiries of this project was how spirituality influences the activist or social justice praxis of Chican@ faculty. In this section, I describe in more detail what I mean by activist or social justice praxis. I do not do so in order to define the work of the contributors in this project, but merely to provide the reader with a roadmap of how I was thinking about activist or social justice praxis that stems from the work of Chican@/Latin@ faculty. I call this work borderland muxerista praxis because I believe it navigates the complex often constricting borders of academia while also drawing

attention to those borders through pedagogical and research practice. In addition, this work is rooted in the Muxerista framework laid out by Anita Tijerina Revilla (2004). A Muxerista framework includes the following nine characteristics:

1. Commits to challenging all types of oppression, including racism, sexism, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia, and nativism.

2. Addresses the holistic needs of the Chicana/Latina/o community.

3. Draws attention to the intersectionality of identity and experience.

4. Opposes traditional research paradigms as the only legitimate paradigms that theories and advocates for a "theory in the flesh" that connects lived experience to academia (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1984)

5. Opposes ranking oppressions

6. Acts proactively in redefining, reconstructing, and reempowering ideological constructions that have been historically used against women.

7. Focuses research, pedagogy, and practice on the Chicana/Latina/o experience and draws strength from these experiences.

8. Suggests liberatory and transformative solutions to the plight of Chicanas/Latinas/os.

9. Takes an interdisciplinary approach to analysis and practice, drawing from ethnic studies, women studies, social sciences, humanities, law, and history.

Based on the published work of the contributors in this project, I believe that their work aligns with the features and goals of a borderland muxerista praxis, and as such I used this term to guide the way I was thinking about activist or social justice praxis. The work of various Chicana/Latina scholars provides examples of differing types of

borderland muxerista praxis.

The interdisciplinary scholarship published in the journal Chicana/Latina Studies published by Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) falls within the category of borderland muxerista praxis due to its emphasis on "scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives that examine, describe, analyze or interpret the experiences of Chicanas/Latinas and Native women" (MALCS website, 2014). For example, in their Fall 2012 issue Hortencia Jiménez examined the involvement of Chicana/Latinas in the Austin Immigrants' Rights Coalition (AIRC). Jiménez argued that White males have often defined leadership, thus making invisible the various ways Chicanas/Latinas engage in leadership. To speak back to these limiting definitions of leadership Jiménez conducted open-ended semistructured interviews with community members involved in the immigrant rights marches in Austin, Texas. What she found was Chicanas/Latinas engaging in three types of leadership: shared leadership, leadership behind the scenes, and leadership as a service to community. Jiménez's argument was that traditional models of leadership that focus solely on individual attributes of 'leaders' fails to recognize leadership as a shared practice. Hence, the stories of Chicanas/Latinas in her study disrupt patriarchy and masculinity in leadership.

Additional examples of borderland muxerista praxis come from the edited book *Chicana/Latina education in everyday life: Feminista perspectives on pedagogy and Epistemology* (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). This volume includes the work of mujeres who discuss, among other things, the agency of young Latinas as they navigate educational policies and practices (Godinez, 2006), Chicana experiences of graduate school (Bañuelos, 2006), collaborative pedagogies of sisterhood

(Burciaga & Tavares, 133), and mother/daughter pedagogies (Villenas, 2006). Each of these authors, and the others in the volume, link Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives and education to focus on the unique worldviews of Chicanas/Latinas and how their "unique experiences of oppression and survival form a theory, method, and praxis for building solidarities amongst diverse peoples" (Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, & Elenes, 1996, p. 1). For example, Karleen Pendeleton Jiménez develops pedagogy of the land, drawing connections to the Chicanas/os and Mexicanas/os who daily toil in agricultural fields, gendered relations to the land, and epistemology. With a Chicana pedagogy of land, Jiménez draws on the unique experiences of those who work on the land and the ways those experiences form a theory of survivance and community memory.

The use of La Virgen as a pedagogical and research instrument in borderland muxerista praxis can also be found. In *Transforming Borders*, scholar Alejandra Elenes (2011) discusses the use of La Virgen as a pedagogical tool of resistance and transformation. Defining border/transformative pedagogies as pedagogies that are concerned with examining issues of power, knowledge construction, social justice, and transformation, Elenes argues that pedagogies of La Virgen include the construction and validation of knowledge and provide the space to develop "alternative Chicana feminist systems of knowledge" (Elenes, p. 520). By viewing La Virgen as transcending stereotypical notions of womanhood and femininity she offers Chicanas a view of themselves that can also transcend stereotypes. As transformative/border pedagogy, La Virgen de Guadalupe also encourages scholars and students to reclaim a spirituality of the bodymind connection. This connection encourages us to focus on knowledge through the body, not only that of 'intellect' and 'reason'.

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of scholarship that falls under borderland muxerista praxis, it does provide examples of social justice or activist praxis. Similar to the published work or projects of the professors in this project, the preceding scholarship is committed to challenging various types of oppression and silencing by focusing on the experiences of the oppressed. In addition, it seeks to challenge traditional knowledge forms and theories about marginalized individuals by focusing on the resistance and agency enacted. Jiménez's (2012) research on Chicana/Latina leadership opposes traditional idea of leadership by drawing attention to the women who are redefining that role. In the chapters of *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2011) the women draw on the experiences of Chicanas/Latinas both as sources of both research and pedagogy. This work connects the everyday lived experiences of Chicanas/Latinas drawing attention to how these experiences are indeed "theory in the flesh." I chose the contributors to this project because I believe their work falls in line with borderland muxerista praxis—aligning with some if not all of the Muxerista characteristics as outlined by Anita Tijerina Revilla (2004). In describing their work, I connected their academic narratives and borderland muxerista praxis to their spiritual narratives.

Figure 1. *La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo Chicano Rights*, 1976.

Figure 2. *Margaret F. Stewart: Our Lady of Guadalupe*, 1978.

Figure 3. *Portrait of the Artist as La Virgen de Guadalupe*, 1978.

Figure 4. *Our Lady*, 1999.

CAPÍTULO 3

METHODOLOGY

In the introduction to her book, *Feminism and Methodology*, Sandra Harding (1989) differentiates methods, methodology, and epistemology in order to challenge the notion that there is a distinctly feminist method. According to Harding (1989), "methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (p. 3). Methodology differs from methods, or the techniques for collecting data, and epistemology, which are theories about knowledge. Harding acknowledges the connection between them, but cautions against using 'methods' to define all three, as methods does not take into account the political and ethical agendas or positionalities of those who ask the questions. Both Harding (1989) and Delgado Bernal (1998) discuss methodology as moving beyond an examination of how one answers questions, to understand why and from what position one asks questions. I used this understanding of methodology to uncover the particular sites from which I traversed the research landscape. As an educational and spiritual endeavor, the very foundation, frameworks, and content of this project were nurtured by various personal, communal, familial, and academic factors. This included the methodological processes devoted to the contributors' stories and understanding of their knowledge production and scholarly practices. Because every choice I made at the various junctures of this project was guided

by my epistemological grounding, I begin here with an excavation of it. Below I discuss Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2006). A discussion of these feminists of color paradigms highlights the various ways my spiritual worldview guides my "principles and beliefs about what research is and what it is not" (Dillard, p. 31) and will hopefully make explicit the ways I made sense of the contributors' spiritual and scholarly stories.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology

A Chicana feminist epistemological (CFE) framework was first conceived by Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) as a response to epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997), which came as a result of the epistemological erasure of Indigenous communities and communities of color. A Chicana epistemology concerns itself first and foremost with knowledge by and about Chicanas. As a methodological framework, CFE is grounded in the history of Chicanas, starts from their epistemological standpoint, examines the intersectional identities based on immigration, sexuality, citizenship, class, language, gender, and religion, and does not dichotomize the mind, body, soul connection. In addition, CFE views borderlands as "geographical, emotional, and/or psychological space occupied by mestizas" (Delgado Bernal, p. 561). As an approach to methodology, Chicana feminist epistemology centers the experience of the researcher as a driving force in the research inquiry and the participants as active knowledge producers in the research process. These characteristics became particularly important for my project as I sought to understand how Chicana scholars discuss the relationship between spirituality and epistemology and how this influences their scholar activist praxis. Below

I discuss four sources that guide CFE, called cultural intuition, which provide a unique perspective to the research process (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Cultural Intuition

Delgado Bernal (1998) defines cultural intuition as a unique perspective that guides the research process, or a "personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data" (p. 563). Together these four sources provide the foundation of CFE in research.

1. Personal experience: The first source includes a personal background check of who we are and where we come from, which is important for the collection and analysis of contributors' stories. As I will discuss in my section on researcher positionality, I have a somewhat fragmented relationship with spirituality and am in a process in which I understand that how I know the world is through my relationship with spirituality. However, this relationship is not an individual one. It is embedded with cultural and familial religious tradition, gender expectations, and a history of religious colonization. As such I already entered the research process with knowledge about religious gender expectations, colonial legacies, and cultural traditions. I also entered with an understanding of spirituality and social justice as intertwined, in fact I see them as inseparable, and as such this belief guided the very foundation of the questions I asked and knowledge I excavated.

2. Existing literature: As has been highlighted in Chapter 2, previous works by women of color feminists guided how I navigated this research process. My understanding of Chicana spirituality and transformative academic praxis provided me

with an insight into the topics I was interested in. Existing literature is but one piece in the making of this bridge between spiritual epistemology and social justice orientated praxis. It allowed me to more generally understand how Chican@ enact agency when redefining spirituality and engaging in scholarly work. In addition, it highlighted more specifically how the stories of the contributors in this project add to what we already know and fill gaps of what we do not.

3. Professional experience: Despite still being in graduate school and not yet landing a full-time job, I have had the opportunity to teach two different courses at my university. Both courses are diversity requirements for my university and as such can be difficult when students view the course as one to hurriedly and effortlessly 'get over'. In these classes, I center discussions of privilege and discrimination. Teaching has proven to be very challenging, especially when discussing topics of racism in a predominantly White class. These experiences have prompted me to seek transformative pedagogies in the readings of bell hooks, Ana Louis Keating, Paulo Freire and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others. Within the pages of these books I have read and felt the spiritual component of the authors' social justice orientation and have tried to enact spirituality as a pedagogical approach. This guides my interests in the spiritual stories of other Chican@ scholars, specifically as these stories relate to their academic endeavors.

4. Analytical research process: As noted by Delgado Bernal (1998) the analysis portion of research provides a space to make comparisons, ask questions, think about what we have heard, and engage in narrative formation. One way of undertaking this responsibility is to include contributors in the analysis portion. While all Chican@s have community and educational experience they can share and analyze, the Chican@

professors in this project have the professional experience and academic language to grasp research methodology and the dissertation experience. Together, our cultural intuition will resist traditional research paradigms that do not include the 'subject' in the research analysis process. I was particularly sensitive to the narrative formation portion of this project and sent each of the contributors a copy of their narrative and other quotes that I used throughout. I did this in order to assure that I would represent each of them as they would represent themselves.

Together, these four sources, or cultural intuition, contributed to how I proceeded with my research project. In addition, I drew on the work of others who have used a CFE framework. The work of Dolores Delgado Bernal has been foundational to the work of Chicanas/Latinas in the academy, and has been expanded to reveal additional sources of cultural intuition, adding to what I have described above, and drawing attention to the decolonial possibilities of CFE methodological framework (Calderon et al., 2012). For example, in their review of scholarship that uses CFE, Calderon et al. found that Chicana/Latina scholars draw from multiple sources to disrupt binary thinking, rearticulate the body and place using queer and decolonial studies, and challenge the bodymindspirit (Lara, 2005) split. In addition, Calderon et al. discuss the importance of spiritual activism amongst the work of Chicana/Latina scholars using a CFE framework. Summarizing various work by Chicana scholars, Calderon et al. highlight the way Delgado Bernal's sources of cultural intuition have grown to include intuition that stems from spiritual experience, experiences of the body and sexuality, and from violence inflicted on the body, mind, and spirit by Western notions of knowledge and knower. These epistemological insights guided my purpose and goal, and the very choices I made

in regard to how the research was conducted.

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

In her seminal book, *On Spiritual Strivings*, Cynthia B. Dillard (2007), conceptualizes an endarkened feminist epistemology rooted in Black feminist thought. She chooses the word 'endarkened' to counter the 'enlightened' view of knowledge, which does not include knowledge produced by Black women. Dillard argues that a shift in the epistemological starting points lead to a shift in how to understand research itself. In particular, research shifts from objectivity and 'truth seeking' to *research as responsibility*. In this way, the researcher must be accountable to the very persons and communities it seeks to engage. This metaphor of research as responsibility was particularly important for this project, as I understand the connection between spirituality and social justice to include a responsibility of service to others. Also important for the research project that works from an endarkened feminist epistemology is the way in which I have written, shared and discussed the contributor's stories. Dillard uses life notes (Bell-Scott, 1995) to share a holistic vision of African American women leaders and scholars. My choice to use narratives is based on my belief that stories of Chican@ scholars are themselves knowledge productions. Below I discuss the six assumptions of Dillard's endarkened feminist epistemology and discuss the way each contributed to this research project.

Assumptions of Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

In her conceptualizing of the assumptions that guide an endarkened feminist epistemology, Dillard is sure to caution against the perils of "outlining" assumptions and how this can lead to a reductionist view. Yet, she argues the necessity of identifying the cultural and historical roots of our reality. In addition, she argues that expressing these assumptions highlights power relations inherent to the research process and challenges the false idea that there is only one way to know.

1. Self-definition forms one's participation and responsibility to the community: I identify myself as a Chicana, spiritual being, educator activist in training, and community member. Each of these intersecting and fluid identities mattered for the purpose and goals of this research project. In this way I felt responsible to each of these communities, both to represent in an ethical and fair manner and to provide a useful approach to how we understand spirituality, knowledge and academic practices. In addition, I felt a responsibility with the contributors, each of whom I may share similar choices of self-identification and academic goals, to create a narrative that centered their voice and that which they find important and wanted to share. Although one may argue that the contributors in this project, as full-time higher education faculty, are in a higher position of power than me, as the researcher inquiring about their lives and hoping to cocreate narratives, I was in a position in which I determined what was most important for the goals of this project and how that was presented. In this way, I had responsibility to honor the contributors' voices.

2. Research is both an intellectual and spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose. Endarkened feminist epistemology foregrounds spirituality as alternative knowledge and

the "uncovering and construct[ion] of truth as the fabric of everyday life" (Dillard, p. 20) as a spiritual pursuit. Dillard identifies three components required in this process. First, there is a sense of purpose in the research process. Second, the research space is one of vulnerability. Third, care and reciprocity are part of the research process. Each of these components guided not only my own research methods and purpose, but also the way I approached the stories of the contributors. I purposefully sought Chican@ scholars who have a strong spiritual identity and who work with/from a transformative academic approach. Hence, I entered this process with a personal and academic understanding of social justice oriented praxis as a spiritual pursuit concerned not only with the academic and intellectual achievement of students and research communities, but with their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being as well. This influenced the questions I asked and the role I saw each of the Chican@ scholars playing. As a spiritual pursuit this project was not just about extracting data for the sake of a dissertation. I have been heavily interested in learning about academic strategies that I could use in my own classroom, research, or praxis, learning about and getting to know the contributors and also opening myself up to questions that arose. I envisioned the building of friendships—either personal or professional—and the beginning of something new, versus the ending of something (the graduate school process).

3. Only within the context of community does the individual appear and, through dialogue, continue to become: This assumption becomes particularly important for this project as the way I planned to collect stories for the creation of narratives is through the Chicana feminist method of pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; González, 2001). While I discuss the details of this methodology in detail later, for now it is important to

understand this method as a reciprocal dialogic process focused on the entirety of the individual. By the former I mean to say that I too engaged in a process of vulnerability and sharing. The latter signifies my intent to not just capture the thoughts and experiences of the Chicana scholars that are 'relevant' to this project (i.e., spirituality and transformative pedagogy), but an understanding that these are not separated from family and community history, educational and religious experience, and ethnic, racial, class, gender, sex, and language experience. Communal processes of knowledge production and inquiry emphasized our discussions.

4. Concrete experience within everyday life form the criterion of meaning, the "matrix of meaning making" (Ephraim-Donker, 1997 as cited in Dillard, 2006, p.6): One of my goals in this project was to understand the meaning that Chican@ scholars give to their academic work. As this fourth assumption notes, the everyday forms this meaning, of which spirituality is considered. As lo cotidiano (Isasi-Diaz, 1995), spirituality is the everyday fabric of life and is embedded within everyday activities. For Chican@ scholars, this includes their work. I approached our meetings with this understanding that meaning is founded on the everyday experience.

5. Knowing and research are both historical (extending backwards in time) and outward to the world. To approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness: My purpose in discussing both spirituality and praxis with Chican@ scholars was to highlight the active meaning making involved in defining, identifying, and creating their own spaces. For too long, literature has ignored the academic contributions of Chican@s, focusing instead on the oppressive nature of the university space. However, what I show with this project is the creative and active ways

Chican@ scholars engage their spiritual epistemology for transformative academic strategies. Additionally, Chican@ agency has been erased the in dominant literature of religion, identifying a submissive and powerless community in the struggle against religious colonialism. An endarkened feminist epistemology understands that history has been written by a White male dominated perspective and together with Chicana feminists' arguments (Perez, 1999) identifies the agency of Chican@s within the silent spaces under the context of attempted erasure.

6. Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on structure gender, race, and other identity relations within research: The sixth and final assumption of endarkened feminist epistemology recognizes the hierarchically organized structures inhabited by Chican@ scholars. Particularly for this project, the classroom space, situated within a White and male dominated university space with traditionally positivist ideology and ideas about knowledge, becomes a space of negotiation. That the contributors to my project actively engage in developing their own spiritual epistemology, grounded in transformative and Indigenous knowledge, and that they bring that epistemology into their academic work disrupts the power structures that attempt to silence them and their work.

Together, these six assumptions along with the four characteristics of Chicana feminist epistemology were the foundation of this project. That is, they were the strands of the trenza that is the strength and beauty of this project—guiding the very way I think about these topics. I do not see scholarly work as a content focused attempt to teach students that which they do not know, or research as disconnected from the contributors' own lives and community experience, but as a transformative approach at making

academic and personal connections. I also do not view spirituality as a private or separate characteristic of Chican@ scholars' lives, but an everyday act of meaning making, which informs academic practice. I view the research process as a collaborative process in which I too am a research participant or contributor. I do not merely seek information, but share it. Both Chicana feminism and endarkened feminist epistemology focus on the voices, stories, and meaning making of women of color. To honor the various methodological approaches used by scholars who employ Chicana feminism and endarkened feminist epistemology, I emphasized the spiritual and academic narratives of Chican@ scholars. My goal was to grasp a holistic picture of the various factors that have influenced spiritual epistemologies and how these in turn inspire particular academic narratives. In order to collect these narratives, I employed the Chicana/Latina method of pláticas y encuentros.

Pláticas y Encuentros

Despite Sandra Harding's (1998) argument regarding the nonexistence of a feminist method, Wanda Pillow and Cris Mayo (2012) argue that feminist methods exist in education settings. Though they speak specifically about feminist ethnographies when they argue that new knowledge is uncovered by looking at "what is missing, what is passed over, and what is avoided" (p. 179), I argue here that pláticas y encuentros, or personal and group conversations (Gonzalez, 2001), can also be regarded as a feminist method, and more specifically a Chicana feminist method. In this section I outline pláticas y encuentros as a Chicana feminist method by detailing how it is different from plática methodology that exists in early sociological research on "Hispanic" and/or Latina

communities. I then discuss six elements of pláticas y encuentros which I believe make it a Chicana Feminist method.

Because I was interested in the spiritual and academic experiences of Chican@ professors I was drawn to a method that illuminated their voices and stories. I sought a method that did not merely extract information from the contributors, but one which viewed meaning making as part of knowledge sharing (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002), and which required reciprocity. I was not merely a researcher in this process, but I was also a witness to shared memories and stories. In addition, I contributed my own meaning making based on my experiences as a Chicana Ph.D. student working through/with spirituality. For all these reasons, and more, which I will discuss, I chose pláticas y encuentros (Gonzalez, 2001) as my data collection method. Used in combination with borderlands theory and decolonial imaginary, pláticas y encuentros allowed me to focus not only on recorded understandings of spirituality and praxis, but of the very way that these stories are told in resistance to attempted silencing and academic marginalization. In addition, pláticas y encuentros required reflexivity and reciprocity from the researcher, both of which I believe were necessary when asking individuals to discuss personal and complex stories about spirituality and professional academic experience. Before discussing pláticas y encuentros as a Chicana feminist method, I first examine pláticas as they were used in sociological research with Latino populations. My goal is to identify the ways Chican@ feminists engaged this early work on pláticas and have continued to develop it from within a Chicana feminist epistemological location.

Pláticas in Latino Focused Sociological Research

Researchers conducting studies with Latina/o populations recognize the limitations of traditional interview models. In response to cultural and general limitations of interview research methodologies, Valle and Mendoza (1978) identified la plática as a more culturally appropriate form of engaging with the Latino/o population. Valle and Mendoza identify la plática as a "friendly, intimate and mutualistic manner" (p. 33) of engaging in dialogue. According to the authors, pláticas are a more appropriate methodology with Latina/o populations because of their focus on the cultural formalities of the interview process. This process begins with la entrada, which includes some sort of discussion of how the interviewer has been linked to the interviewee. Usually this includes discussion of a mutual contact. The process continues with an amistad interview, made up of the 'proper' interview and informal "conversation byplay" (p. 25) that takes place before "getting down to business" (p. 25). The informal portion may include verbal and nonverbal culturally sanctioned modes of communication and sharing of information not especially relevant to the interview protocol. Finally, la despedida incorporates a display of appreciation by both parties and may also include additional conversation of a more personal characteristic, sharing of family and home relics by the interviewee, and sharing of gifts. Together, these three phases constitute a plática methodology to employ when working with Latina/o populations. Other researchers identify plática methodology as "friendly, informal conversation" requiring the initial establishment of confianza, respeto, y personalismo (Applewhite, 1995). Marín and Marín (1991) and McKean-Skaff, Chesla, de los Santos Mycue, and Fisher (2002) see plática less as an actual method of data collection and more as small talk before the 'real' interview.

While the use of plática in these studies does take into consideration the particularities of culture, there are a couple of limitations that can be identified. First, culture is understood as a very essentialized and static entity. It is certainly true that one needs to be mindful of the tensions that may arise when researchers enter and conduct inquiries on populations of which they are not a member. However the importance of confianza y respeto are not discussed for this purpose. They are discussed more as an understanding of cultural difference, not as power differential. The aforementioned researchers who employ a plática methodology do not discuss the tensions inherent in research conducted on marginalized populations and why it is important to build trust. In addition, not all self-identified Latinas/os may subscribe or identify strongly with 'the Latina/o culture'—as if there is just one Latina/o culture. Will a plática methodology be necessary here? Another problem I see is the invalidation of plática as a legitimate form of method. Instead, plática is viewed as an initial nicety, important to set up the interview process, but not actually valid enough to use as a research method. This view of plática sees the talk of everyday, the talk of how one is doing, how family is, etc. as unimportant and separate from that which the research is about. In this way, the 'small talk' is seen as second tier to the research project.

Pláticas y Encuentros in Chicana Feminism

Chicana feminist scholars have taken up pláticas in a more nuanced manner. It is this research method that guided the way in which I collected stories. In her research with young Mexicana students Francisca González (2001) designed a qualitative research methodology called trenzas y mestizaje—a multimethodological approach of which

pláticas y encuentros are a part. Pláticas y encuentros, according to Gonzalez, are conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces, and which are a "way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations" (p. 647). In this particular study, personal pláticas took place during lunch while encuentros, or group gatherings, took place on two different occasions. In this way, pláticas y encuentros were used as the actual method of collecting the young students' stories. Many other Chicana/Latina scholars have cited Gonzalez's discussion and use of pláticas y encuentros. However, like Gonzalez's piece, none of these authors outlines the unique elements of a pláticas y encuentros method or methodology. In order to delineate it as a Chicana Feminist method, I identify five elements of pláticas y encuentros shared by Chicana/Latina research, in which it is used as a method and/or methodology.

First, the research I reviewed in which the authors employed a pláticas y encuentros method was grounded in theory that centers the experiences of marginalized individuals. In addition, theories were chosen for their power in drawing attention to the multiple ways systems of oppression effect the daily navigations of some people, to the benefit of privileged others. For example, in their retelling of the Ph.D. journey as Latina students, Espino, Muñoz, and Marquez (2010) drew from Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to the authors, CRT allowed them to center racialization as a process that structures the graduate school experience for students of color. In addition, CRT focused on the intersectionality of identities that influenced the oppression and resistance of the mujeres. Finally, CRT made necessary the centering of experiential knowledge, providing a space for the authors' testimonios. Plática, as "a collaborative process

comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities" (p. 805) in combination with CRT, provides a methodological approach that gathers the narratives of study contributors and rigorously evaluates them for their theoretical contributions.

Another example comes from the work of Saavedra, Chakravarthi, and Lower (2009), in which they discuss current practices in linguistic diversity, while reimagining new possibilities through a feminist transnational lens. In this article the authors participate in a plática amongst each other, which becomes the essence of a critical reflexive process and the 'data' they write about throughout the article. Using Chicana, postcolonial, and U.S. feminist epistemologies as a theoretical framework the authors' engagement in pláticas became a way to produce their own transnational feminist space for theorizing and reflecting on their linguistic diversity training and research. According to the authors, their use of feminist theories allowed them to frame their concerns and issues in such a way as to resist the notion that scientifically based knowledge is the only legitimate knowledge. The authors' combination of pláticas with feminist theories contributed to a different way to view linguistic diversity training and research.

The second element of a pláticas y encuentros method focuses on the contributions not only of the researcher, but also of those involved as participants in the research project. More specifically, the participants are viewed as contributors and coconstructors of the meaning making process. For this reason, I refer to research 'participants' as contributors. For example, in their participation in an organization of Latinas who work or study at a Utah university, Flores and Garcia (2009) discuss the impact of a 'Latina space'. The authors argue that in their sharing of personal and

academic experiences during pláticas y encuentros, Latina students and faculty enact the knowledge making process about Latina educational experiences. Additionally, they contribute to the sense making and theory building of Latina educational experiences.

Similarly, in Godinez's 2006 work with young Mexicanas, she finds that the young contributors shaped the research process, and in turn the knowledge that is produced, by engaging in conversations in which their own interests and concerns emerged. Calling them las pensadoras, Godinez highlights the young Mexicanas not merely as informants, but thoughtful makers of meaning and knowledge. Likewise, Guzman (2012) identifies the pláticas that took place between her daughters and herself as moments in which her daughters contributed to the understanding of Latina mothering. For example, though Guzman lives and works from a feminist standpoint, she finds herself asking her daughter to change into more modest clothing so men will not get the 'wrong' idea. Immediately, she apologizes to her daughter who responds, "Mom, I know you can't shake the old school." What Guzman realizes, and what is particularly important for pláticas y encuentros, is that her daughter is not only highlighting the complexity of motherhood, which involves layers of cultural and political socialization, but she is also contributing to a definition of motherhood that is always evolving. While traditional interview and focus group methods view research participants as merely informants of stories and experiences, the aforementioned examples of Chicana/Latina pláticas y encuentros scholarship highlight the role of participants as contributors to the meaning making and knowledge producing aspect of research.

In addition to viewing 'participants' as knowledge producers, pláticas y encuentros research engages a more holistic view of both research and contributors,

making this the third element. This means researchers understand contributors not merely as research subjects, but as individuals whose lived experiences influence the research process. Instead of ignoring or minimizing lived experiences as if they do not relate to the research inquiry; a pláticas y encuentros method draws them in as part and parcel of research inquiry. For example, Flores and Garcia (2009) began a Latina convivio (Villenas, 2005) group because of the lack of support for women of color at their PWI. While pláticas began as discussions about educational experiences, they quickly included topics such as family, language, sex, and gender. Understanding that none of these social and institutional categorizations exists in isolation from each other, Flores and Garcia (2009) welcomed these conversations as factors that influence one's educational experiences.

In another example, Espino, Munoz, and Marquez Kiyama (2010) engage in a plática to discuss their transition from doctoral students to faculty. While the focus of the article is on the challenges of this transition, it becomes apparent quickly that the authors' lives as scholars are not separated from their lives as mothers, sisters, partners and community members. Instead, the plática provides the space to engage how these various roles influence their roles as scholars. For example, one of the authors is in the midst of deciding on a job offer. When asked what she had decided, the author centers family as a major focus of the decision process.

As both of these examples show, when plática is used as a research method its informal conversational format allows for more fluid discussions. Unlike an interview, exact questions are not known prior to the plática. Instead, a researcher's interests and themes guide the plática, which allows the contributor to discuss those topics that matter

for them, and which pertain to the research themes. Moreover, when used from a Chicana feminist method the holistic life forces of contributors matter for the research inquiry and are not only welcomed, but also understood as necessary.

The fourth element of a pláticas y encuentros method is its potential to provide a space for healing. Used as a method of therapeutic practice by curandera Elena Avila (1999) who defines a plática as "a deep heart-to-heart talk that continues for as long as it needs" (p. 143), a plática is believed to be a cathartic treatment. As discussed by Avila, in Aztec tradition pláticas served as a space that allows the curandera to learn about their client while also educating or providing healing remedies. During a plática, a curandera listens to the stories of their clients attempting to understand the cause of one's illness. By nature, the plática is a spiritual act, for the very power to listen fully with all five senses and heal comes from the curandera's own spiritual connections, and as such discussions of client's spirituality or religiosity are also a part of the plática.

The work of Elena Avila has been taken up by scholar Adela de la Torre, who views a plática as a "conversation[s] that allows us to self-discover we in relationship to ourselves and others" (p. 44). In her work, de la Torre focuses on the plática as a tool used by her family to discuss ailments and provide support to each other, and to address trauma and ways to heal from that trauma. de la Torre believes pláticas are coping strategies for illness and disease. Similarly, Espino et al. (2010) begin with an "unburdening" of pláticas—a discussion of the challenges and tensions that exist for them as newly minted faculty trying to balance the demands of academia and family. The pláticas flow from past stories of pain and trauma, current negotiations, and future hopes. As is displayed in their article, a sense of raw openness and vulnerability is needed to

nurture the plática and those involved. Such researcher and contributor vulnerability provides the potential for the plática to be a space of healing through self-reflexivity.

The fifth and final element of the Chicana feminist method pláticas y encuentros is related to the role of the researcher. As noted by Avila (1999), "the most important ingredient in the plática is trust" (p. 150). I believe that trust can only exist if the process is reciprocal. In other words, the researcher must be willing to share that which they ask of their contributors. Unlike the interview that involves the researcher asking questions of the contributor without space for any questions to be asked of the researcher, the conversation set-up of a pláticas y encuentro method allows for a talking back and forth. In this way, the contributor can ask questions and the researcher can also share similar experiences.

Reciprocity also involves researcher reflexivity. While some researchers use pláticas as a method to engage with outside contributors, others use the method as meaning making process between two scholars. Preuss and Saavedra (2014), in their reexamination of Preuss's earlier research findings, engage in pláticas y encuentros as a tool to retheorize the lives of women in earlier studies. Through pláticas y encuentros the authors were able to question each other while attempting to make meaning of the lives of other women. In another example of pláticas used as researcher reflexivity, Michelle Espino, Susana Munoz, and Judy Kiyama share in their article the pláticas they had regarding academic life, and personal and family life. Through these pláticas, which they defined as "a collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities in an effort to enforce strong bonds" (p. 805) the authors combined narrative and explanation to unpack multiple

identities.

The expansion of pláticas y encuentros by Chicana feminists supports my use of pláticas y encuentros in this project. I sought to use a method that would carefully embed itself within rich, analytical theory, view contributors as essential parts of the meaning making process, draw on their life experiences and provide a potential space for healing. Perhaps more importantly, I sought a method that would hold me responsible to the contributors. In other words, the space I hoped to create required that I too was open to share my own stories and be vulnerable as I was asking each of the contributors to be. The Chicana feminist plática y encuentros method allowed for this, in fact, it necessitated this. Despite believing that the pláticas y encuentros method will work best with this project, I still had some concerns regarding my position as a graduate student researcher, inquiring about such a complex and intimate topic as spirituality. Below I discuss my positionality and these qualms.

Researcher Positionality

This work is guided by my own spiritual quest to make sense of the tensions I feel between spirituality and academic praxis. I grew up in a conservative Catholic family. My mom was committed to raising us Catholic and committed to our education, which she felt would be best nurtured in a private school. Everything I knew about religion and spirituality came from my educational and familial experiences. I learned very early that injustices exist, though I understood this as mostly an issue of poverty. I also learned very early on that God, as I understood the meaning of the word then, had a very particular purpose for each of us and just as he had committed his life to service, I too was expected

to be of service for my community. I did have some issues with Catholic teachings, particularly when I got to high school and my body and sexuality were seen as sinful. However, I ignored these controlling aspects of the church believing that most important was that I was a good person and kind to others. Fundamentally, church dogma did not seem overly contradictory to me.

In my fourth year of undergraduate studies I studied abroad in Rome, Italy. I knew the trip would give rise to major changes in my life but I was not fully prepared for all I was about to encounter. I remember feeling most excited about the trip as a way to strengthen to my faith especially because I was in a bad place in my life and I felt that I needed to nurture my relationship to Christ, to faith, to spirituality. Vengo de esa tradición—A Mexican Catholic tradition and a Catholic God that never turns us away. A faith that grows more fervent in times of need. Mi amá, my grandma, lives this, and so I learned that in times of need Dios me cuidará. With esperanza y fe en mi corazón I flew 6000 miles from home to find peace. I did not find peace in the City of the Seven Hills, but rather a historical account of the coloniality, violence, and patriarchy of the church. It was an especially challenging time for me. I had gone to Rome with such high hopes of reconnecting con mi fé and what I found out instead was that my faith was based on an ideology of intolerance, oppression and colonization. Learning about the politics of the Catholic Church, its oppressive ways and atrocious acts caused me to completely resist it. I slowly disconnected from religion, and because I thought they were synonymous, from spirituality as well.

In the past couple of years, my experience as a graduate student in a critical education program has challenged me to rethink the purpose of spirituality and its power

as a tool for social justice. Though scholars have argued that the spiritual aspect of Anzaldúa's work has been largely ignored (Delgadillo, 2011; Fernandes, 2003; Keating, 2006), for me it was this component of her writing that initially drew me back to thinking about the possibility of spiritualized antioppressive social justice movements. During my second year of graduate school I found myself in a predominantly White and Mormon classroom as a teaching assistant for preservice teachers. Though my personal and graduate school experience prepared me with language to articulate the many faces of institutional oppression, I had not been taught pedagogical strategies that would enable me to have conversations about them with students. The experience of dealing with students' racist, classist, and sexist views left me emotionally, mentally, and spiritually exhausted. How could I endure this for a lifetime of teaching? I was committed to challenging the inequitable schooling experiences of queer, poor, undocumented youth of color, but how could I sustain this work with a debilitated soul? At this time, I still was disconnected from spirituality. However, my experience as a teaching assistant necessitated a different way of being in the classroom and understanding of my relationship to students. The writings of feminists of color, and particularly the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Louis Keating, and bell hooks showed me the possibilities of reimagining a transformative spirituality as a force for social change and well-being.

Despite these works I still felt that I could not openly discuss spirituality in my classes or with my colleagues. I was so nervous that I would be viewed as uncritical and supportive of oppressive ideologies. Spiritual ruminations took place outside of the academy, within private moments between friends and myself. There they remained until I was hired to teach one of diversity requirements for the college of education.

Considering my earlier experience as a teaching assistant for the course, I knew I wanted to create a space that did not leave me and students feeling emotionally fatigued. I turned to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Louise Keating for a spiritual approach. I still felt, however, that critical scholar activists would not be supportive of my work. It was not until my preliminary examinations that I began to recognize the possibility of a politicized feminista spirituality and its transformative effects on both social activism and the self. This project stems from a personal and academic desire to present examples of spiritual activism and draw attention to their transformative and healing possibilities. It is a project that has been guided by the very spirit that is in all of me (Anzaldúa, 1987)—spirit that is nurtured by my familial, personal, and educational experiences, and which is in constant movement as it tries to seep into spaces of possibility.

In spite of my belief that spirituality matters in the academy and that a pláticas y encuentros method makes space for spiritual aspects of research, I still felt a slight sense of discomfort regarding how to approach both the actual pláticas y encuentros and the interpretation of the data. Though I had previously met some of the professors who contributed to my research, I knew them only via professional conferences and their scholarly work. I did not know them personally. I was nervous that this lack of personal connection would influence the process and outcome of our pláticas y encuentros. I was nervous that I had no business asking them about their spiritual life journeys. Because of this, I wanted to make myself completely open and vulnerable to the research process. I shared a short letter with each contributor explaining who I was and how I had come to this research. Although this did not take the place of years, or even months, of communication and friendship, I do believe it worked to give the contributors a glimpse

of who I am. Hence, I did not arrive as a complete stranger to our plática.

I was also concerned about interpreting such a complex and fluid topic as spirituality. I wanted to be sure to honor the spiritual and academic stories of the contributors. I was confident in the theoretical constructs I had chosen, and my ability to use them in such a way to share the compelling and pertinent stories of these Chican@ scholars. However, I also wanted to be sure to relate the dynamic nature of a topic like spirituality. There have certainly been no answers or solutions to these tensions, yet by writing them down I was able to recall them and be conscious of them as I interpreted the contributors' narratives.

Contributors

Because I was interested in a very particular population I used a purposeful snowball sampling method. Purposeful sampling is a nonrandom selection of contributors whose identity is particularly important to the research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Snowball sampling is a sampling where already identified contributors recruit or inform the researchers of additional contributors that would work well with a particular project. This method of sampling works particularly well when working with smaller populations and when attempting to recruit contributors from a particular geographical space. I was not particularly concerned with the limitations of purposeful or snowball sampling, mainly because my goal here was not necessarily to generalize conclusions to a specific population. Instead, I sought to understand in depth the rich nuances and stories of teaching through a critical and spiritual lens as a Chican@ professor in a secular space.

Purposeful sampling was particularly important for this project as I was searching

for professors who identity as Chican@s, whose work is embedded in the spiritual, and who teach, research, and/or write through a critical lens. Ethnically, a Chican@ is a person of Mexican American decent. Politically, a Chican@ is a person of who believes in blurred boundaries of identification, who resists systems of marginalization, and who is committed to the liberation and transformation of their community. Chican@ is a nonneutral term that is not simply a decision regarding labels, but a "coming to perceive concretely one's self in relation to others and the world as fundamentally different than one had previously (Martinez, 2000, p. 35). In regard to spirituality, I sought individuals whose work is embedded in the spiritual, but who do not necessarily subscribe to any formal religion. While I understand that spirituality may be influenced by a religious tradition, I did not expect the individuals to follow religious formalities. Instead, I sought individuals who drew from various religious and spiritual traditions and were active in creating their own spiritual worldview. I also sought those who were active in their spiritual practice, either personally, academically, or both. Because my goal was not to define this spiritual practice or spirituality, I simply asked for individuals who engaged in practice that they felt nurtured their spiritual worldview. These practices may be individual, communal, meditative, or active. Finally, I sought Chican@ faculty who teach, research, or lead through a critical lens. By this I mean that the professors, regardless of discipline, center conversations of various forms of discrimination with the goal of creating a classroom environment where critique of oppressive structure, practices, and ideologies are discussed and alternative ways of being and knowing are introduced.

At the 2014 National Association of Chicana/o Studies (NACCS) conference I

had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Lara Medina, professor of Chicana/o Studies at California State University Northridge, whom I had been in contact with via email over the past couple of years. I shared my dissertation topic with her and to my pleasant surprise she offered to be one of the contributors for the project. In my conversation with her, Lara suggested I visit the dissertation work of Jennie Luna, as she could be a possible contributor. Upon reading her dissertation, I felt strongly that Jennie's focus on Danza as a spiritual and academic subject would make her a fitting contributor to the dissertation. I emailed her and she agreed to participate. At NACCS I was also able to talk with Dr. Irene Lara, associate professor of Women's Studies at San Diego State University, and Dr. Alejandra Elenes, associate professor of Women's Studies Arizona State University. I shared my dissertation idea with both of them and they agreed to participate. After reading her chapter in the book *Fleshing the Spirit* I reached out to Maria Figueroa about participating in my project. I felt that her focus on spiritual pedagogy and her position as a professor at Mira Costa Community College would provide a much-needed focus on teaching through/with spirituality. I emailed her and she agreed to participate. A few years back when browsing the internet using the phrase "Chicana Spirituality" I came across the academic biography of Dr. Sandra Pacheco, professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies. I emailed her about her work and she responded with a description of her focus on altares and curanderismo. When I made the decision about my dissertation topic, I knew I wanted to engage in a plática with Sandra. I reached out about her participation in my dissertation project and she agreed. Finally, I had been following Dr. Luz Calvo's Facebook page titled 'Decolonize your Diet' for about a year when they visited Westminster College in Salt Lake City, UT to give a talk. I reached out to them

about meeting to talk about their work. After meeting with them, I felt that they would be a powerful participant and fortunately, they agreed. During my meeting with Luz they mentioned Sandra Pacheco and Jennie Luna as individuals who would be great contributors to my dissertation. Having already been thinking about them and wanting to reach out to them, I felt like things really came together in regard to who I was meant to include in this project.

In the next chapter, I go into more detail about each of these contributors and their stories. For now, it is important to note that I reached out to each of them because I knew their work was embedded within the spiritual and also was focused on social justice. They each teach at a different university and in various departments, and they each engage in different types of community work, which for them has also become part of their academic work. Although their area of expertise varies, the way they work is similar, as I have come to learn through our pláticas. They each incorporate the spiritual, as it is a part of the personal from which they cannot separate from the professional. Their spiritual identity organically seeps into their work, though they do admit that at times reading others' work or even engaging in a plática is a reminder to work and live with intent. After confirming participation with contributors, I sent them my accepted dissertation proposal so they could get a better and fuller sense of my work. From there, I waited for IRB approval before moving forward with scheduling the pláticas.

Below is the email I sent to each of them:

> Hello all!
> First, I would like to thank you for your willingness to contribute to my dissertation. I am so excited to meet you in person and get the chance you talk with each of you. I just wanted to send a quick update. I have officially passed my dissertation proposal and submitted to IRB. As soon as I get IRB approval, I will be in contact about setting up a time/place to meet. As mentioned in previous

> emails/conversations, my goal is to set up these meetings for mid-January to early-February. Also as mentioned, I will be traveling to you. There are a couple of variables that may change some things—mainly that I will be giving birth in mid-November (according to my due date!). So, as long as labor goes well and baby and I are doing well, then mid-January to early-February is my goal. I am attaching my proposal in case you would like to glance it over. Please feel free to email or call with any questions you have. Once again, Thank you so much!!

I wanted to include this email because though the reader goes from an introduction of the contributors to the logistics of the pláticas that I had with each of the participants, so much more took place in between real time. As I mentioned in the email, I was preparing to give birth in mid-November with the plans of conducting pláticas in January of February. My daughter arrived 10 days late and with some unexpected health issues. For a few months we waited in fear, and hope, and back to fear to find out what was wrong with our daughter.[5] I find this important to include because there was quite the intermission in my dissertation work and I was not able to begin pláticas until April, 4 months later than I had planned. I include this here to break up the seamlessness of a dissertation, or the expected seamlessness, because I believe that is what each of the contributors does—break up the expected of academia and higher education.

The Pláticas

I engaged in a one-on-one plática with each of the contributors, traveling to wherever they lived or worked. These pláticas took place in various locations, such as work offices, homes, or hotel lobbies. Each plática was recorded and transcribed, and the transcription later shared with each contributor. I did not arrive to the plática with set

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[5] Thankfully, her resilient little body worked everything out and she is completely healthy.

questions (except for the initial question that I asked everyone), but I did have general themes I brought up. These themes included early experiences with religion and spirituality, separation (if any) from religion and/or spirituality, spirituality and activism, teaching and research approach and goals, activism, connection between praxis, activism, and spirituality. To start these plática, I asked each of the contributors how they had reached their current academic position or research/teaching/community work. For example, I asked Sandra how she got involved with curanderismo and then how it eventually became a topic of teaching. Similarly, I asked Luz to share with me the impetus for starting Decolonize your Diet. From that question, I engaged in a rich conversation with each of the contributors about their spiritual and academic trajectories. I also asked the contributors to share any academic materials—such as teaching philosophy, research statements, syllabi, and published work—that would allow me to develop a greater understanding of their praxis.

I conducted an individual follow-up with four of the contributors—Sandra, Luz, Maria, and Irene. All of these follow-ups took place in person. The purpose of these follow-ups was to ask clarification questions regarding the first plática. All of the follow-ups took place at the contributors' offices, except for Luz's. I had the honor to visit Luz's house and conduct our second plática in their and their partner's garden. After careful reading and transcribing of Alejandra's, Lara's and Jennie's plática, I felt that their publications, including dissertations, syllabi, and teaching philosophy, provided me with sufficient information. In the next chapter, I provide detail about my travel to each of these pláticas.

(Re)Presenting Pláticas

What I (re)present in the following chapters are descriptive narratives of each of the contributors personal and academic spiritual activist journeys. I have chosen to write out our plática as a narrative story using the details shared with me about family, education, career, community, and spiritual endeavors. My approach to the creation of narratives was influenced by the portraiture method of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997). After the contributors shared their stories with me, I organized the stories around themes in order to illuminate the main subjects of each story and the parts of the story that each contributor obviously felt was important to share. From these thematic organizations, I began to write individual narratives using themes as templates and moving from/within the pláticas. In the narratives I am not saying anything new, but instead I worked with the "autobiographical themes" (p. 186) shared by the contributors and (re)presented these to the reader. From the narratives I pulled those parts that would allow me to make connections to spiritual epistemology. Keeping my research questions in mind, I turned to the narratives to answer the question about the connection between spirituality as epistemology, again allowing the words of the contributors to guide me.

For Chapter 5, I further excavated pláticas, syllabi, teaching philosophies, and published work in order to uncover the obvious and indistinct parts of the contributors' work that was influenced by their spiritual epistemology and their critical consciousness. Again, I wanted to "trace connections" (p. 187) between spiritual epistemology, activism, and scholarly endeavors based in order to highlight the spiritual activism of the contributors. My intention was not to speak for the contributors, but to (re)present our

pláticas in a way that allowed me to (re)tell a story that was shared with me.

I sent each of the contributors a copy of their finished narrative. I also included other quotes from our pláticas that I used throughout the writing of this project. I did this because I wanted to be sure that I represented each of the contributors and their narratives in a way that honored and respected the stories they shared. Below is the message I sent:

> I wanted to share with you the narrative I wrote and the quotes I am using from our platica(s). I would love and appreciate any and all feedback/suggestions/preferences that you have to offer. I used first names, but please let me know if you would like to be referred to in any other way. Also, please let me know if I have used the incorrect pronoun and if you have a preference for another pronoun. Finally, if you would like a copy of our transcript(s) or if you would like anything in hard copy, please let me know and I will get that to you ASAP.

I heard back from three of the seven contributors. These three individuals provided clarification regarding what they shared with me. These clarifications included minor edits such as spelling changes and more significant edits such as adding or changing details of their narratives. Sometimes words were changed, which to me signified an important part of this collaborative process, which is wanting to be—as a contributor to a project—represented in a particular way. I, as the author of this dissertation then assessed and analyzed these narratives and interpretations based on the theoretical tools I chose, but when it came to the narratives they were not mine and hence I had to be open to changes to the details of a story that belonged to someone else. I discuss the implication of this experience in Chapter 6 where I write about my personal spiritual and academic journeys and particularly how they influence my understanding of Chicana feminist methodology.

CAPÍTULO 4

THE CONTRIBUTORS

In this chapter, I introduce in detail each of the contributors and their academic work. In preparing to research an academic topic for a dissertation project and when finally making the decision to pursue an examination of Chican@ professors, spirituality, and scholar activism, I thought constantly about my journey—both my spiritual journey and my academic journey, and the eventual coming together of these. How had I gotten here? Why this topic? Why and how had spirituality become an important part of my work and my eventual dissertation topic? These were the same questions I was interested in when thinking about each of the contributors, and so when I first sat to talk with each of them, this was the first question I asked: How did you get here? From there we moved onto a conversation about how a personal, familial, and communal spiritual, and often times religious journey, led to an academic subject or area of focus or teaching. Below I address my first research question: What are the sources of spirituality for the professors in this project and how does it relate to their epistemology? First, I share their stories, focusing on the particular people, places, or events that had an effect on their spiritual quest and also on their academic work. In order to share the full beauty of each story, I dedicate a section to each contributor. Within each section, I also discuss in detail each of their projects—ranging from class topics to research and writing projects. In the

proceeding section I focus on the relationship between spirituality and epistemology by further examining the ways spirituality is not merely a practice of these professors' lives, but a way of life—of understanding the world and being in the world. My goals in this chapter were to share the beautiful narratives of each of the contributors and to examine the connection between spirituality and epistemology. The writing of the narratives and examination of the contributors' academic work allowed me to more fully comprehend the influences and development of their spiritual worldviews.

Sandra Pacheco

My connection to Sandra was formed long before I had a dissertation topic in mind. Connected, as many of us are now, via the comforts of our computers. In preparation for my preliminary exams in the fall of 2012 I took to Google to search for resources on Chicana spirituality. After the first couple of results pages, Sandra's academic profile appeared. It was a short biography, stating her position at California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), where she still serves as an associate professor, and listing her research interests as Chicana feminist spirituality. I emailed her immediately asking her if she could provide me with more detail about her work and if she had any publications I could reference. She responded shortly thereafter, stating that most of her work was focused on applied projects in community and presented at the Anzaldúa conference and incorporated into her teaching and theorizing. Among projects she listed the use of altars in the classroom, altars as form of resistance, altars as narrative, and incorporating Curanderismo in the classroom. I continued with my prelims, not knowing that I would eventually come back to Sandra as a potential contributor.

About a year later I attended a talk by Luz Calvo at Westminster College in Salt Lake City (I will get back to the specifics of this day later). I met with Luz after their talk and shared with them my dissertation topic. They mentioned Sandra as someone who would make a fantastic contributor to my project and I knew that I had to contact her. When I arrived home, I sent Sandra an email detailing my dissertation topic and asking her if she would consider contributing. Seven months later, I was looking for parking on a busy downtown San Francisco street to engage in a plática with Sandra. That morning felt particularly hectic. I had traveled to San Francisco with my spouse and our 5-month-old in order to attend the National Association of Chicana/o Studies (NACCS) conference and conduct a plática with both Sandra and Luz, who also works and resides in the San Francisco Bay area. I was anxious about leaving the baby and having enough time to pump and park before having to meet Sandra. CIIS is right in the center of downtown and parking is, well typical city parking. After a few laps around the area, I found parking and, running late already, jogged over to the CIIS building, arriving flustered and nervous. Entering CIIS is like entering into a completely different world than the busy San Francisco city world you simply leave behind by entering the building. It's a calm space, with white walls, a proper check in desk with an administrator checking all who enter without a CIIS identity label. There was also, at the time I visited, student art being showcased. I did not have time to look at the art closely since I was running a little late, but the whole scene helped to lower my heart rate just enough to settle me down for the plática. The anxiety and nervousness was the same anxiety and nervousness that plagued me in all the pláticas: Would I ask the 'right' questions? Would I be able to write a 'good' and 'clear' dissertation from this? Thankfully, Sandra shared wonderful stories

with me and I soon forgot I was writing a dissertation and just listened and asked questions that would help me to know her a little better and understand how spirituality came to be the focus of her academic work.

The main emphasis of Sandra's work is around Curanderismo—both as a professor and community member. Sandra was initially exposed to Curanderismo through her family. Her grandmother, Margarita Flores or Doña Mague as she was called, learned from her mother, who was actually her Aunt Cayetana. Both women came from the Guamares people of Guanjuato. Sandra remembers her grandmother Doña Mague preparing teas to cure an aching stomach, preparing of herbs in tincture format, and the use of an egg for limpias. However, she never learned Curanderismo directly from her grandmother, as her own parents were resistant to the practice. According to Sandra, "internalized oppression as a result of colonization and immigration" caused her parents to view Curanderismo as "locuras, tonterias, and brujerias. However, she continued examining with intrigue her grandmother's jars filled with plants, alcohols, and teas. She watched with curiosity her grandmother give limpias with eggs. Sandra felt deeply connected to the work her grandmother did. Sandra kept one foot in the world of Curanderismo, but never fully committed to the practice. She recognized that she experienced years of "ins and outs," largely influenced by access to the practice. In 1989, Sandra moved from Los Angeles to Santa Cruz to pursue graduate studies. It was there, in Santa Cruz, that she felt a real possibility to connect to her Curanderismo roots, initially through the practice of herbalism, which was strong in the area. Because she was so busy balancing graduate studies with children and a spouse, she was not able to fully delve into the study. However, she continued with the use of herbs, mainly as remedios

for her kids whenever they took ill.

Later in her life when she experienced a deep trauma, Sandra returned more deeply to Curanderismo for healing. She says of that experience, “I knew where I needed to go, and it was not to a psychologist and it was not to a doctor. It’s through my practice, it’s through ritual sweating, and it’s through limpias that healing would happen.” The realization of what she needed to get through this crisis pushed Sandra to further realize that other people were in need of the practices and services of Curanderismo and helped her to realize, “this is in me. I need to do this.” Entering in and out of the practice also helped her delineate the difference between learning and growing with Curanderismo, and coming to Curanderismo later in life as a student, which she stated she is. Sandra’s first teacher was Ataya Garcia Swiecicki from Oakland. Ataya was a student of Estela Roman from Temixco and Doña Enriqueta from Oaxaca. Estela was Sandra’s second teacher who would visit from Mexico to conduct workshops. Together, Estela and Ataya organized 9-day intensive study retreats in Mexico, which also included study with Doña Enriqueta. Sandra has participated in the workshop and retreats and also visits Mexico regularly on her own to study with different Curanderas. Recognizing herself as a student of Curanderismo—and thinking of students in the very Western manner—Sandra recognizes that she is approaching the study and hence learning in a very different way than if she was an apprentice. Because she works with different Curanderas, she is also learning different styles and eventually must decide which style suits her best. Sandra admits that coming to Curanderismo with a scholarly approach or “academic head” presents challenges. She says, “there are a lot of things getting in the way of trying to let go and just be…it’s getting your head out of the way so you can do what your spirit needs

to do."

Sandra has really noticed an increase in interest in Curanderismo, both in and out of the academy. Though she cannot say for certain what this increase is attributed to, Sandra speculates that folks may be frustrated with what is taking place politically and are in "need of spirit in some way." Or, she said, perhaps it is "resistance to mainstream modernization." In regard to an increase of Curanderismo in the academy, Sandra believes it's a sign that people are "push[ing] back or react[ing] and reclaiming this [Indigenous] knowledge." The increased interest in Curanderismo has made her community project successful. Curanderas sin Fronteras, is a nonprofit grassroots organization cofounded by Sandra. She and her comadres purchased a small vintage hitch trailer and from there they travel around the Bay area to different cultural community events offering limpias and/or various herbal remedios. The first event Curanderas Sin Fronteras participated in was a Cinco de Mayo celebration in the Fruitvale area of Oakland, California, that turned out to be very successful. Sandra said she was "blown away" by all the people who came to receive a limpia and how enthusiastic the participants were. For Sandra, the success of Curanderas Sin Fronteras is a sign that the tending of the spirit is a necessary component of social justice work, whether that work is taking place in the community or the classroom.

It is important to place Sandra's Curanderismo practice in the context of her early religious and schooling experiences. Sandra, like many Chican@s, grew up Catholic—largely the reason her parents opposed Doña Mague's practices. It was not just that she went to Catholic schools, but that she attended an "extremely progressive" all-girls Catholic high school. Taught by feminist nuns who taught the old testament in terms of

mythologies and cosmologies, Sandra learned how intimately connected she was to others, including the land and the importance of taking care of the land. She also learned to meditate through dance and movement. These became important teachings when thinking about spirituality as Sandra learned about interconnectedness and that her body was a vessel from which to pray and think from and about. Sandra still identifies as a Catholic and attends church every once in a while. She recognizes that she had a very different experience as a Catholic, mainly because of the schools she attended and how embracing the nuns were of difference and encouraging of students to develop the tradition that felt best for them. The Catholic communities that Sandra has practiced in since then have been progressive and "committed to contemplative practice." She has participated in spaces that center social justice and a liberatory religious experience. Because of this, she has felt a general sense of peace with Catholicism, and that she has been able to develop a belief system that incorporates her principles of social justice. Despite what she sees as her unique experience, she recognizes the systemic oppressive beliefs and practices the Catholic Church has historically and continues to espouse. Still for her, she is "very thankful that it has gotten [her] through so much" in which she had a place to go in the "most difficult of times." Although Sandra still considers herself a Catholic and acknowledges and knows of the connections between Curanderismo and Catholicism, she does not believe her Catholic beliefs influence her Curanderismo practice, though it can help her connect to a client who is coming from a very religious place.

Sandra completed her doctorate work from the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) in cognitive psychology. I was especially interested to learn of how her

academic trajectory had led her to CIIS and teaching about/with/through spirituality because her dissertation work was focused on bilingualism and second language acquisition. She was well aware that her passion, her heart's work was elsewhere, but as she explains, "I was being a good Chicana." Sandra had received a 5-year fellowship from the NIH to study in the cognitive psychology program and as she says, "I wasn't about to turn it down to study something else." After graduating with her Ph.D. from UCSC Sandra felt there was no reason why she could not "reinvent herself" as a scholar. Recognizing the personal, spiritual, and political importance of this work, Sandra took her work on altares to California State Monterrey Bay (CSUMB), where she was working in the interdisciplinary Social and Behavioral Science Program. Due to the interdisciplinarity of the program plus the fact that the university was only its in second year and figuring out its place, Sandra was able to operate under the radar—reinventing her scholarship and "repackaging herself." She then began to present in her mentor's, Aida Hurtado, Chicana feminist classes on altares and was working with the idea of sacred objects. Altares became an important part of Sandra's pedagogical toolbox.

At CIIS, Sandra assigns students in her Self and Society and Gender Studies courses an altares assignment, in which they are to make their own altars as a way to examine their racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities. For Sandra, altares are a powerful and personal way to really examine and make connections regarding the complexity of identity. She states, "The altars would hold the energy that dealt with the space to experiment with the complexity of identity. It is being held in sacred objects as we work through the processes. It's meditative, it's political, it's subversive." Sandra recognizes the emotional and spiritual work that goes into the altar project and because of

that she prepares her students before they begin. She knows she is not conducting a limpia on them, but she is "giving them an opportunity to have an experience in the privacy of their home where they are going to release." She is very clear with students that they must complete the assignment at home, alone, and with ample time (at least 3 hours) to dedicate to their altar. Students are to think about their gender and identity and gather objects that represent that for them. Once they have gathered the objects in a box, students are expected to sit with their objects and think about the ways gender, sexuality, and identity are reflected in the objects and why. The altares assignment is very much a healing assignment and has transformative power for Sandra's students. As she states, "It's a very powerful experience. I don't think I have ever had a student get through it without crying because it's a release. That is the part where the Curanderismo comes in."

In addition to her altares project, Sandra also invites her students in her weekend classes to a short smudging ceremony before class starts. She will set aside 30 minutes before class to this, and have her students meet her on the roof of the CIIS building. The average age of Sandra's students is mid-30s. Most of them are employed full time, many are activists in one form or another, and some of them are directors of nonprofit organizations who are returning to complete their bachelor's degree in the intensive weekend program. She recognizes that each of her students has an amazing life story, some more heavy and complicated than others—but all carrying "heavy energy." She also recognizes that it is difficult to engage in an intensive academic weekend when carrying such heavy energy, and so provides the smudging ceremony before class as a way for students to release some of the energy and ground themselves. In her intensive weekend courses, Sandra also sets up an altar that students may add objects to and which

she hopes will allow them to set their intentions for the weekend as they work together. Another part of her pedagogy, which Sandra says is highly influenced by the nuns she learned from in high school, is to make the learning and teaching experience "somatic and experiential." She will often start her weekend classes with meditative work, which her students are open to lead, or even some yoga. In this way students attune to body, mind, spirit, and prepare to engage all faculties for learning.

Initially, I had asked each of the participants if they would share their syllabi with me. During our first plática, Sandra admitted that looking at her syllabi would not necessarily highlight the various ways spirituality is incorporated in her teaching. For Sandra, "a lot of it is actually narrating [her] own philosophy and pedagogy using Curanderismo as a continual metaphor." For example, she might say to her class, "In Curanderismo energy gets stuck and we are trying to get it to move, and things are uncomfortable and that's where the growing edge is." Part of that for Sandra is making her students uncomfortable by presenting them with counter narratives that subvert hegemony and the taken for granted knowledge they have internalized and continue to hold on to. This, argues Sandra, is part of the learning process of transformative education, which her institution and colleagues support and also work towards. Her manner of working is informed by spirituality, and specifically Curanderismo.

While teaching is certainly an important space for Sandra to incorporate spirituality through Curanderismo, she also presents at academic conferences and creates a space that welcomes spirituality. At the 2015 summer MALCS institute (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social) Sandra and the MALCS chapter from CIIS presented on "Central Indigenous Knowledge," which included a very integral and active process

called Trenza Process. Sandra describes it as such: "it brings in theory, lived experience, performance, and spirituality…seamless weaving in and out." To begin Sandra and the other panelists set up an altar, and started in such a way that they were speaking back to the traditional (read: Western and White) theorists that had been forced on them, and who were positioned as "grand theorists." The panelists felt that such 'traditional' knowledge disregarded and dishonored the ancestral and Indigenous knowledge they carried. Thus, each panelist spoke back creating a performative piece and ending each presentation by holding up a picture of each of their grandmothers. Sandra said that many of the audience members were left in tears and a beautiful conversation opened up about the various knowledges and lessons grandmas had shared. For Sandra, the circle sharing process that emerged from MALCS highlighted the importance of discussing colonization and what it means to engage in decolonizing practices, including what it means to have a place for spirituality and ritual. Sandra's future goal is to continue working on the presentation, perhaps adding more pieces to it, and sharing the presentation at other conferences.

The weaving of spiritualty and activism, in both the academic setting and the community setting is not always seamless for Sandra, and the struggle to move from theory to practice is challenging. For Sandra, spiritual activism feels "lopsided," mainly because the integration of the two is difficult. In her claim of this, Sandra recognizes that spiritualty, activism, and theory have been set up in such a way that the mental, bodily, and spiritual faculties to think through each of them have been separated. For example, to theorize comes from the mind, and theory has been heavily connected to activism. However, spirituality is not a subject that has been heavily theorized, and is viewed as an 'escape' from reality. Hence, the incorporation of these in practice—the theoretical, the

spiritual, and the activist—are not always so easy to bring together because we have been taught by Western education and knowledge to think of them as separate and not belonging together. She argues that spirituality and religion tend to be conflated and consequently when working in public institutions the topic needs to be carefully addressed, deconstructed, and situated. Sandra feels that "language is limited in the sensation of it, or the experience of it, so maybe with the limited linguistic system maybe it's not capturing it." Again, the challenge of this expected seamless transition is made difficult when moving from the academy to the community, two spaces which require different ways of being and thinking. It is the same challenge Sandra faces when attending Curanderismo seminars in Mexico, where she must "untrain" herself to ask questions the way the Western U.S. academy has taught her to ask questions.

Sandra recognizes that she is in a very unique space, which allows her to incorporate her spirituality with her activist academic work. At the California Institute of Integral Studies students can receive a master's or doctoral degree in areas such as Integral and Transpersonal Psychology, Ecology, Spirituality and Religion, Anthropology and Social Change and Women's Spirituality. The CIIS mission statement highlights the goal to "embody spirit, intellect, and wisdom in service to individuals, communities, and the earth" (CIIS website, 052616). Hence, that spirituality is an integral part of the work Sandra does is not uncommon. However she does recognize that she is in a predominantly White space and therefore what is subversive may not be the spiritual component but her inclusion of diversity and culture, and pushing back on cultural appropriation at a PWI. As I argue in the next chapter, all together Sandra's incorporation of Curanderismo and altares in the classroom provides an example of the way her

spiritual activist's work disrupts traditional notions of both spirituality and pedagogy, even in the CIIS space.

Luz Calvo

I was familiar with Luz's well followed Facebook (FB) page, Decolonize your Diet, before I actually knew who was behind the fantastic and much needed page. Though I had not actually attempted any of the recipes posted on the FB page, I often took some time scrolling through the delicious pictures of food and also reading the articles posted—articles about ancestral foods, responsible farming, and the benefits of various health foods. Still, I did not know nor had I thought to investigate some more about who was behind the creation of such an informative and delicious page. It was not until the spring of 2014 that a professor at Westminster College asked me to circulate a flier for a talk being given at the college by none other than the cofounder of Decolonize your Diet, Luz Calvo. A quick search of their name led me to the Decolonize your Diet website where I learned a little bit more about the goal of the project. I was particularly struck by the following quote by Winona LaDuke that the authors of the website have under their 'About section': "The recovery of the people is tied to recovery of food, since food itself is medicine—not only for the body but also for the soul and the spiritual connection to history, ancestors, and the land" (Decolonize your Diet website). I wanted to know more about this spiritual connection and why this was an important connection to food. I set up a meeting to talk with Luz after their presentation at Westminster.

I remember the day quite clearly. It was a beautiful late summer day and my spouse and I had just moved into our new home—walking distance to Westminster

College. I was about 7 months pregnant and decided to walk over to enjoy the weather and add some exercise to my day. Luz gave an important and beautiful presentation on the Latin@ health paradox and the importance of looking to the native and ancestral diets of Latin@s to improve health outcomes. Luz spoke very particularly about one such food, quelites or lamb quarters, a fast growing weed with many health benefits. I remembered my mom telling me that my grandfather ate quelites and I began to think about and remember my grandpa's diet. When I began to think about it, I realized that my grandpa had a very healthy and clean diet—eating mostly beans, lentils, corn tortillas, fruits, and fresh meat he obtained from being a butcher.[6] I also remembered that the individual who completed the autopsy on my grandfather said he was very healthy and would have likely lived a long life.[7] I knew immediately that his diet and health were connected and I began to think about how connected I felt to him at that moment, thinking about the way he fed and nourished his body with the foods that he had grown up with in Mexico. The remembering was visceral, emotional, and spiritual, though I could not quite explain it then. I knew that I wanted to talk to Luz more and ask her to contribute to my dissertation. Thankfully, they not only shared with me the names of other scholars who would make wonderful contributors, but also agreed to participate in my project.

I met with Luz during the same visit to San Francisco where I first met Sandra. Since I was in town for the NACCS conference, Luz and I decided to meet at the

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[6] I use the term butcher loosely. My grandmother and grandfather sold meat in the garage of their property in Los Angeles, CA. I remember going to the farms with my grandfather, likely out in the San Bernardino area. For many years, they provided their immigrant community with healthy, fresh meat.

[7] My grandpa died in an unfortunate car accident in January of 2002.

conference hotel. The lobby was loud and busy, and I was worried about whether I would capture what I 'needed'. I was so anxious from the previous day's plática with Sandra—not because it had not gone well but because I felt more certain that I had no idea what I was doing and worried that having come into the pláticas without a set of questions was the most novice idea yet. But, I was there and Luz was there and so I began just the way I had begun with Sandra—how did Decolonize your Diet begin? Was that your initial interest? From there a lovely and calming conversation ensued.

Luz was "trained" and received her Ph.D. in the History of Consciousness program at the University of Santa Cruz (UCSC). They state that it was a "high theory" program that was very much focused on working "in the mind." Luz's own work was on critical race psychoanalysis and looking at Chicana lesbian art and semiotics. After graduating from UCSC, Luz and their partner moved to the Midwest where they both obtained jobs at Ohio State University, a research I institution. They found the job to be really competitive and felt isolated in their new state and academic space. Fortunately, a few years later they both obtained jobs at Bay area colleges and Luz began at California State University East Bay. To add to the good fortune, they found a great home to live in that allowed them the opportunity to revel in the beautiful California sunshine. As Luz says, "everything was wonderful. We were so happy. We were really smug, kind of." The good fortune was interrupted by a breast cancer diagnosis for Luz. Everything changed. "There really were no words to describe the jolt to my spirit and my system of that diagnosis. I was so scared. I was just really, really, scared." Luz elected to have a double mastectomy and only 3 weeks after their diagnosis the surgery took place. Unfortunately, the woes did not end there. Just 10 days after surgery, Luz lost their brother to an

overdose. Combined, the two events had a profound traumatic effect on Luz. As they said, “I was so shaken to the core. I was just a shadow of myself.” After a summer of chemotherapy treatments Luz was left spiritually, emotionally, and physically exhausted. Luz believes that they experienced un susto, “The way I understand it is your spirit disconnects from your body. I was physically present and trying to survive and going through the routines of being alive. I was really just not there.”

The cancer diagnosis led Luz to conduct research on cancer causes and remedios. That was when they came across information on the Latino Paradox, “which shows that [Latin@] immigrants have better health overall that U.S.-born Latinos.” After more research, Luz came to understand the impact of a Standard American Diet (SAD), made up of processed sugary foods, on Latin@s, whose own native and ancestral diets are plant-based. Wanting to heal from the SAD diet that had been forced on them, Luz and their partner Catriona decided to build an urban farm on their property. With the help of students from University of California, Berkeley they built a cancer fighting garden. One of the first things Luz planted was an herb spiral with various healing herbs. Luz believes that the physical work they put into building their garden is what healed them from the susto. They said, “I started building those beds and just slowly by slowly, just spending hours and hours out there working over the next three years. I say that those three years after my diagnosis, I had susto. Finally, after three years, which was one whole year of working in the garden, I felt like I cured myself of the susto by literally just having my hands in the soil and getting connected to the spirit of the garden.” Luz also believes that their garden has a strong spirit because of various reasons. One of those reasons is that already growing in the garden where some healing plants, like comfrey, a natural

fertilizer and an aid in quicker composting. The other reason is that when Luz and Catriona first moved into their home, their neighbors were a couple, and the man was a Holocaust survivor. They also had a garden, which because of the hill they live on looked right into Luz's and Catriona's garden. He often shared his produce with Luz, passing them over the fence. When they first moved in, the man came over and said to them, "I just want you to know that we're very accepting of all people. The same people that hate you hate us. We just want you to feel welcomed here." The man has since then died, but Luz very much still feels his spirit.

When listening to Luz speak about their garden, and working in the garden, you know it is a spiritual practice of so many connections. In describing what it is like to create compost, Luz says, "I'll also put yarrow, which I grow. Which is another medicinal herb. That's also a compost accelerator. Then I'll just gather flower petals, and I'll put them, and mint. I build my compost in this kind of ceremonial way. I swear to God, it's the most magical thing, the last time you sift the compost, and then you stick your hands in the compost. It's like the richest soil you've ever felt in your life…. It's soft and it's crumbly, and it's black. It's just so beautiful." The making and continual care of their garden is a healing practice for Luz. It is also equally powerful to listen to Luz talk about what they were healing from. They were strong and healthy physically, which really allowed them to beat the cancer and get through the surgery and chemotherapy, though it was physically draining. However, the shock of their diagnosis and brother's subsequent death shocked their spiritual core and left them spiritually bereft. As they state, "It was a shock to my spirit." And so, it was their spirit that gardening helped heal. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the healing of the spirit, damaged by years of colonization

and oppression is often not discussed or centered when talking about social justice and social transformation. However, as Luz shows, the spirit is also damaged and hence in need of healing.

So how does a very personal journey become a social media phenomenon, a cookbook, and a class topic? In the midst of their "healing plan" Luz was walking through campus and saw some of their students selling Krispy Kreme donuts for a club fundraiser. Luz said they walked up to the students and said, "You are selling the colonizer's food! What are you doing?" Their students immediately defended themselves, attempting to make a case that these particular donuts were not as bad and they had "no trans-fat." Luz began to think about the lack of education and the misinformation regarding healthy foods. Around the same time, another student of Luz's approached them stating they did not know how to cook, but wanted to learn how. To help the student get started with cooking, Luz set up a Facebook group just for the two of them, where they posted one recipe a week. They began with a simple "old school" recipe of pinto beans. The student would share her cooking with Luz, and the following week a new recipe would follow.

The exchange went about in that way for a while until Luz's student asked if her friends could also join the group. That is how the Decolonize your Diet Facebook page came to be, followed by a website and a cookbook. The group, which started with one student asking for simple healthy recipes, now has over 20, 000 followers. The 'About' section of the page states, "Our ancestors ate a healthy plant-based diet of nixtamalized corn, beans, squash, wild greens, herbs, and fruits. Reclaim our food heritage!" (Decolonize your Diet FB page). For Luz, the purpose was/is simple: "To educate people

about really healthy food like nopales, quelites, verdolagas, corn, and other plant-based foods." Essentially, the FB page is a resource page for Luz, Catriona and their followers to post various food recipes, invites to food workshops, and general information about agriculture and farming and particularly how it effects communities of color. And of course, there is a plethora of information shared on the health benefits of many ancestral foods and how the reclamation of foods is intimately connected to a reclamation of culture and knowledge. As Luz stated, "It's a part of a bigger cultural reclamation. It's healing our communities from colonization."

Eventually, Luz began teaching a class at California State East Bay, where they are a Professor in the Ethnic Studies Department, titled *Decolonize your Diet: Food Justice in Communities of Color*. A few of the Student Learning Outcomes are as follows:

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of and ability to accurately apply Ethnic Studies disciplinary concepts to the study of food, including: (a) explain and use decolonial frameworks; (b) define and use key disciplinary terms: food sovereignty, food justice, food, deserts, sustainability; (c) explain and critique the slow food movement.

2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of and ability to effectively conduct of plan research focusing contesting food injustice and/or on the recovering, reclaiming, or nurturing the health of communities of color in the US.

3. Analyze data about the availability of healthy food in communities of color.

4. Students will explain in writing, using examples, how communities of color have struggled to maintain their culture and their health using ancestral knowledge.

Required texts for the class include *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* by Michael

Pollan, *Food as Medicine* by Winona La Duke, and *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*. I get to the importance of these particular texts in the next chapter, though for now it is important to note that emphasis on both decolonization and health, both of the body and the spirit, as themes that are important to the Decolonize your Diet project. While the entire class is focused on the benefits of a healthy diet, Luz dedicates a week of class time to the topic: Food is Medicine. Students read a blog post by Lorena Hernández and Vanessa García titles, "Mujeres, Healing and Autonomy: Reclaiming our bodies means restoring Indigenous wellness and practices" and Luz invites a curandera to guest lecture in their class. Cooking demonstrations are also a part of Luz's pedagogy, and for the week focused on food as medicine they demonstrate and discuss medicinal teas. In it interesting and telling to look through Luz's syllabus, noticing the way the class is set up as a semester of communal sharing and learning, and a healing place. On the first day of class, Luz begins with introductions and an opening ceremony/palabra in which students share about a food that reminds them of their family/culture. This very direct way of naming such introductions as ceremony/palabra makes the students aware of the ritual and cultural significance and purpose of the course.

The success of the Facebook page has also led to the publication of a Decolonize your Diet (2015) recipe book. The book gorgeously features plant-based recipes of Mexican cuisine, and the artwork of Chican@ artists. The entire book, from the introduction, to the recipes, to the artwork is centered on themes of indigeneity, cultural and knowledge reclamation, and decolonization. One of the main goals of the book is "to encourage individuals in our communities to use food in order to regain physical health and nurture a spiritual connection to themselves, each other; and Mother Earth" (p. 17).

Both Luz and Catriona share their stories around food and wellbeing. In addition, an entire chapter is dedicated to the topic of decolonization, with a brief history of how the Standard American Diet (aptly having the acronym SAD) has contributed to the Latino American Paradox, and the importance of reclaiming native foods for both physical and spiritual wellbeing. Throughout the book, Luz and Catriona center the importance of love, as "the most important ingredient" (p. 39). According to the authors, "The secret ingredient is the love that you put into preparing your food. Whether you are the cook, or part of the clean-up crew, please know that your labor is sacred and that somewhere the ancestors are smiling, knowing that you are taking an active role in healing your friends and family from the ravages of the Qué SAD! diet" (p. 39). For Luz, Decolonize your Diet is a project born of struggle and love and is a continual commitment to decolonization of body, mind, and spirit.

Jennie Luna

Unlike all of the other contributors, Jennie was the one I knew least about. I had seen her name in conference pamphlets, or social media had suggested that Jennie might be someone I know. I did not, not yet at least. I met with Lara Medina, professor at California State University Northridge (CSUN) at the 2014 NACCS conference in Salt Lake City. I was meeting with Lara to chat about my dissertation and whether she could possibly be a member of my committee. Unfortunately, Lara could not commit to that, but she did offer to participate as a contributor. In addition, she shared the names of other professors whom she felt would be good examples of the spiritual activist work I was seeking to examine in my dissertation. One of these individuals was Jennie Luna. I

quickly went home that evening and Googled Jennie's name, learning briefly about her dissertation work. I thought it could possibly work but did not think to contact her right away. The next day at the NACCS conference I attended a panel by some of the authors of the book, *Fleshing the Spirit*. Jennie was among the audience—I was able to identify her with the help of my previous night's Google search—but I was too shy to approach her (I never quite know how to approach and interrupt a professor at a conference who is in conversation with someone who is also likely talking to and admiring them for their work). Instead, I just made a mental note of what she looked like and went about my participation in the conference. A couple of weeks later, I sat down to look through Jennie's dissertation and felt immediately that her focus on Danza would be a wonderful space from which to examine the weaving of activism and spirituality. I contacted Jennie via email and she agreed to contribute to my project.

I was pretty anxious the day I drove to see Jennie—mainly because I was leaving my daughter for the first time for an extended period of time and I would have to find places throughout the day to pump and express milk. I purchased a car charger for my milk pump specifically for that day, as I would be driving a couple of hours to see Jennie, then to see Lara, and finally back home. My mind was a little at ease knowing that my daughter would be taken care of by my mom. The drive from my parents' home to Cal State Channel Islands (CSUCI), where Jennie is an Assistant Professor of Chicano/o Studies, is a long one, but not unfamiliar. It took me through downtown Los Angeles and into the San Fernando (SF) Valley, places and freeways that are known to me as I received my masters from Cal State Northridge, which is in the SF Valley. However, just a few more miles north of my CSUN exit on the 101 freeway and I found myself in a

quieter and calmer area, and exiting in the freeway I almost felt like I was not in Southern California anymore—traffic was nonexistent nor were massive stores and billboards trying to sell me on those massive stores. From the freeway exit to the actual campus is a quiet road with agricultural fields on both sides. For a while I thought I was headed the wrong direction and that I may be lost. But soon enough, I came upon a gentle set of buildings. I say gentle because often when arriving to a university campus, the buildings are large and taking of all the space that surrounds them. CSUCI seems to fit perfectly in its surroundings, without disruption. Buildings are neither huge nor made of a material that screams for attention. Their crème color puts you at peace quite immediately. There are also no large parking structures, only flat small parking spaces—a problem for students I am sure. I park, remove the pump that has been on my breasts since I left my parents' home and on since I passed downtown Los Angeles. I make my way over to Jennie's office building, asking for directions along the way. When I enter the building, her office door is the first one I see but she has not yet arrived. I make myself comfortable on the couch in the common area just outside her office and think about how my daughter is doing, since I left before she even woke up. I also sit thinking about how hungry I am, as I miscalculated the length of time it would take me to get to CSUCI and did not have time to stop for breakfast.

The same joviality that greeted me in Jennie's email when she agreed to contribute to my dissertation greets me as she enters the office building. She is warm and smiley and apologetic for being late. "I have only been waiting for a few minutes," I say, "don't worry about it." She invites me into her office as she finishes up with conversation with a friend, who I later find out is there to work on a mural she is painting just outside

of Jennie's office in the common area I was just sitting in. Before we begin, she gathers herself and offers me an egg burrito. My grumbling stomach thanks her profusely and we begin. Like many of the pláticas so far, she begins by asking me how my daughter is doing. I had written to all contributors a few months prior asking to postpone the pláticas because my daughter had been hospitalized as a newborn. We briefly discuss her health as I move into asking Jennie about Danza, the topic of her dissertation.

I find Jennie's youth to be so interesting and exciting, perhaps because it is so unlike my own in many ways. Jennie grew up in San Jose amongst the excitement of the Chicano Movement and the Third World Liberation Front Movement. With grandparents who were migrant workers, she was also well aware of the United Farmer's Workers grape and Safeway boycotts. Jennie was raised by her mother, a devout Catholic, who instilled in her a pride of their Mexican heritage and according to Jennie, "feminist ideals," which meant encouraging educational and careers trajectories with no limits. While in high school Jennie was tuned into a radio station put on by San Jose State University (SJSU) called "Radio Aztlan," focused on Chicano culture and identity. Around the same time, Jennie's male friends who attended an all boy high school formed a club called "La Raza Unida." Wanting to be a part of a similar group, Jennie formed a group at her all girl school called, Chicanas/Latinas Unidas. While in high school, Jennie attended Raza Day at SJSU, which had a profound effect on how Jennie thought about indigenismo and her own identity. The keynote speaker for the event was Señora Angelbertha Cobb, or known simply as Señora Cobb. Jennie ended up talking with her about Mexican/Aztec Indigenous identity and was left profoundly impacted. As Jennie writes in her dissertation, "I had no idea that my first encounter with this woman and this

entire experience would transform my entire life path" (Luna, 2011, p. 15). This event led Jennie to conduct her own research on Chicanismo and indigenismo. Around the same time she also became involved in various Chicano youth organizations and attended the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project. She met many Chican@ youth during this time and one particular friend invited her to attend a Danza practice. It was there, hearing the sound of the drum, that Jennie knew she was where she "had always belonged" (Luna, 2011, p. 17). At the University of California, Berkeley (Cal) where Jennie attended undergrad, she joined the Danza group. Also during undergrad, Jennie had the opportunity to study abroad in Mexico. While there, she explored various Danza groups and attended ceremonies. Later in her master's program at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York, Jennie and her friend would start the first Danza group in New York.

Her increased involvement in Danza led Jennie to pursue a Ph.D. in Native American Studies. For Jennie, Danza had been the very formative piece in her life that inspired her to be heavily involved in activism and to pursue the doctorate, and hence there was no doubt in her mind that her academic career would be dedicated to studying Danza. As she said during our plática, "I absolutely knew this [that she would study Danza]. That's all I ever wanted to do. It was for selfish reasons. It wasn't like I wanted to share Danza knowledge with the world. I wanted to know it for myself. To have a deeper understanding of why I felt the way I did toward Danza." Part of the strength and importance of Danza for Jennie is its emphasis on both recovery and healing. In regard to recovery, Jennie believes that through Danza memories and history are recovered. As she said, "It's building our place in society, that we have a connection, we have a history."

Danza can also be a space of healing in both a personal and community sense. According to Jennie, "It's healing from decolonization. It's healing from what is happening right now. Not just the historical trauma, but what's happening in our communities—the gang violence, the drugs/substance abuse, domestic violence, poor education system. It's healing from that in a very contemporary real live sense right now." There is also a personal aspect of healing that Danza offers. Each person, as Jennie notes, has their own intentions for participating in Danza and wanting/needing a space to heal from the personal injuries they experience.

The road to/in Danza has not always been easy for Jennie. In her early years of coming to a place of critical consciousness, Jennie began to question the role of institutional religion, and particularly the Catholic faith that she had been raised in. She was still in high school, but she found herself questioning religious teaching. It was in college that Jennie "separated" herself from the Catholic Church. She was especially influenced in this decision by her time abroad in Mexico, and in particular by a book titled, *El Mito Guadalupano*, which documents various myths associated with the apparition of the Virgin Mary. When her mother visited her in Mexico during her time studying abroad, Jennie did not want to visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe—a national shrine of Mexico—with her. But the resisting of Catholicism was not an easy thing to do, as it was a faith that her family followed and had cared for Jennie in. As Jennie says, "my whole identity was tied to my upbringing because I grew up at this church and this community and the school, and that was my whole sense of identity." It was hard to go against the teachings and practices that her grandparents and mother so wholeheartedly believed in and followed. Jennie said, "It was also saddening, because I

look back and I feel it must have been sad [for her mother], because that's what she had to give me and offer me and then I was rejecting it." For a while, both Jennie's mother and grandmother tried to encourage her to remain a faithful Catholic, but they now understand and respect her position. Jennie will at times attend church with them, more as a time of spending with family than as any dedication to Catholicism as a religious institution. Being involved as an activist and a Danzante was about creating her own space and her own identity, an act that is not easy to do.

Aside from her research focus and practice in Danza, Jennie also is a trained doula and part of her teaching focus is on women's health, with a focus on indigeneity. Her class, titled "Indigenous women: health, body, mind, and spirit," takes a holistic approach to the examination of Indigenous women's health issues. According to the course description the class "explore[s] how Indigenous women's health interweaves body, mind, and spirit." Course learning outcomes include:

1. Students shall be able to describe Indigenous and crucial issues, particularly in regard to women. These issues include, health, sex, reproductive rights, decolonization, intergenerational trauma, violence, and resiliency.

2. Students shall be able to describe historical, social, political, institutional and economic processes that have impacted Indigenous women, particularly in the areas of equality and structured inequalities in the United States.

3. Students shall be able to describe social-political movements which had led to greater equality and social justice, as well as ongoing issues important to Indigenous women globally.

As far as readings go, Jennie assigns *Speaking from the Heart: Herstories of*

Chicana, Latina, and Amerindian Women by Rose Mary Borunda and Melissa Moreno, *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, and Activism* by Devon Abbott Mihesuah, and *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* by Patrisia Gonzales. As part of class requirements, students are expected to participate in class, write a research paper, participate in community events, and watch three films and write critical reviews of each. An initial overview of Jennie's syllabus looks pretty straightforward in regards to class expectations, assignments, attendance policy, etcetera. However, as I discuss in the next chapter, that students can take a class that connects and centers spirituality as a part of wellness is transformative in and of itself and part of what makes Jennie's work spiritual activism.

Perhaps more telling of the way Danza and Indigenous epistemology are incorporated in her pedagogy is *how* she teaches and interacts with students. Jennie grounds her teaching in "Xicanista (Xicana feminist), Indigenist, decolonial approach to knowledge" (Luna, p. 1). In her teaching philosophy, Jennie writes, "My teaching philosophy is based on creating a sense of personal autonomy while building a learning community" (Luna, philosophy, p. 1), and cites the work of Sandy Grande's Red Pedagogy as a way to teach with Indigenous values. With Indigenous values at the core of her teaching, Jennie engages her students in "envision[ing] different realities from the ones which they know" (Luna, p. 1). Another core value of Jennie's teaching is respect. As she writes in her teaching philosophy, "Similar to Native practice of storytelling, both speaker and listener are essential, active participants" (Luna, p. 1). In this way, both student and professor become active agents to the transformative learning process Jennie hopes to create in her classroom.

In all of her work, there is a "spiritual guiding source" that is at the core of Jennie's work. As she said during our plática, "The end goal isn't a spiritual act buts it's ubiquitous, it's present all the time." As an example, Jennie shares a story of two students who recently came to her for guidance. The cochairs of the student organization Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA) at CSUCI had a disagreement that led to an eventual falling out. One of the students was very open in their spirituality, and so they asked Jennie to mediate. Jennie took out her eagle feather, sage, and tobacco—items she keeps in her office—and lit them. Together, the three of them sat in Jennie's office and talked about what was going on. She ended by smudging them to close their time together. She also let them know that just because she had closed that talk, did not mean that they could not and should not continue their conversation. The idea of closing, as in closing ceremony, is a part that Jennie incorporates into her teaching as well. For example, she might close her class at the end of the semester by having her students drink a glass of water, conducting a sunrise ceremony, or burning sage. These actions are welcomed by Jennie's mostly Chican@ students who she says, "are hungry" for transformative and decolonial ways of learning. As I show in the next chapter, Jennie's work is an example of a spiritual activist praxis that is disrupting traditional ways of teaching and learning, as well as thinking and being.

Maria Figueroa

When I first read Maria's chapter in *Fleshing the Spirit*, I knew I wanted to ask her to contribute to my dissertation. She so directly named and wrote about the importance of a spiritual pedagogy and what that looked like for her. I was also especially

excited to have a plática with Maria because she is an English professor at Mira Costa Community College in Oceanside, CA with a career mainly focused on teaching and the classroom. What does/can spirituality look like in this space? I was excited to learn. I wake up early to prepare for the day trip out to Oceanside. It is an hour and a half drive from my parent's home and this time my mom and the baby are coming with me. At this age, Paloma hates her car seat, so I am feeling a little worried about the drive. We arrive safely, with no major tantrums or cries. The campus is slightly on a hill and the day is hot. We park on a main road close to Maria's office and sit in the car while I nurse Paloma before handing her to mom to care for while I conduct the plática with Maria. I leave them sitting in a nice shaded spot and walk over to the bungalows where Maria's office is. I am nervous, as I always when I head into meet a new professor, especially one who is a contributor to my dissertation. I enter Maria's office and am put immediately at ease. She stands and greets me warmly with a hug. Before I begin asking her questions, Maria asks me about Paloma and I share a little about the health issues we confronted at birth. I share with her that I am nervous about my dissertation timeline now that I am feeling 'behind' and she assures me that I will get it done. When she says it, I believe it.

Since her undergraduate years at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), Maria had aspirations to be a professor. As an undergraduate McNair scholar, her mentor, Dr. Jorge Huerta, especially influenced this aspiration. To Maria he was funny and charismatic, and had a way of making students feel, believe, and know that they very much mattered and so did their educational, career, and life goals. Although Maria wanted to be a university professor, she did not quite know what that requires. Maria pursued a Master's degree, but without the aid of a graduate school mentor she did not

know how to cross that bridge from masters to Ph.D. Maria then thought about the idea of teaching at the K-12 level and took the test to get her emergency credential. Both unfortunately and serendipitously Maria did not pass the test by one point, leading her to teach at the community college level instead.

I begin our plática by asking Maria to share with me how she got involved as a Danzante, something I learned about her from reading her chapter in *Fleshing the Spirit*. Maria comes from a family of Danzantes. Her tios were Matachines in Juarez, a society of North and South American-Indian dancers who perform ritual dances, and she remembers visiting and watching them dance. As a youth Maria saw and understood only the visual art aspect of Danza, what she calls the peripheral aspect of the practice. It was not until college that she began to learn about the spiritual and cultural aspect of Danza. As a first-generation college student Maria participated in the Summer Bridge Program at UCSD. For cultural night, the program brought in various cultural dancers, of which Danza Azteca was a part. Like the performances of her tios, the dance awed her. Maria states that though she had been very familiar with the dance styles, she knew less about the ways that dance was ceremonial and ritual. It was after the performance of Danza Azteca that Maria decided she wanted to be more involved in the practice, both as art and cultural and ceremonial practice. In 1995 she committed to Danza, by giving her Palabra. Maria still dances now in a mostly all-women's group, of which a few men and the women's children are a part of. They are a group of Coatlicue Cemilitzli, which means "in harmony with mother earth."

Maria views her Danza identity and spiritual identity as working together simultaneously. Maria says, "I feel like I always carry my identity as a Danzante," which

means that traditional Danza protocols of awareness and ways of knowing and thinking are always with her and inform her work, particularly her teaching. Indigenous knowledge becomes an especially important component of this. Part of this comes through in a very specific assignment of Maria's in which she has students interview family members and conduct research about ancestors. Maria calls this the Antepasados Project. She assigns the project to students in her Puente class, a year-long writing experience program with the goal of getting all students to transfer to a University of California (UC). The Antepasado writing assignment is to be a descriptive essay about a deceased family member. Students are expected to interview other family members to learn what they can about the deceased individual. The assignment is assigned just after students learn about Dia de Los Muertos. For this unit, Maria has the students read a couple of short stories and historical pieces about Dia de los Muertos. This unit prepares students and provides context for their Antepasados essay. Maria is very purposeful in her incorporation of both Dia de los Muertos and the Antepasados assignment. She knows that she could just as simply have the students write a descriptive essay on any historical figure, but by asking them to think about a loved one and also engage family in the interview/writing process, the assignment becomes more than just a writing assignment. She says, "it invites students to talk about a loved one, a personal experience through narrative. It allows them to also heal in the process…you remember the beautiful things or just the complexities of this person."

To accompany their writing assignment, students also build an altar, which has a very spiritual aspect to it. Maria says that students get really involved in this aspect of the project. For the students "art is another way of creation and creativity. It's linked to

creator and something spiritually larger than life. It's also very much a spiritual act itself. Those that really invest the time, you can tell it's super therapeutic for them." Part of the goal of this assignment, and others that require students to share their work with the class, is to build a community in the classroom. This is an essential component of student success, according to Maria, as it centers camaraderie, collegiality, and cooperative learning. In her classrooms, Maria calls student groups familias and uses the metaphor of the tree of life. Marias says, "We all grow together. We're rooted somewhere…in origins." She believes that like family, students in her classroom and especially the sharing of personal and familial stories, will shape students and what and how they learn in her classroom.

Maria names her pedagogical approach Spiritual Borderlands Pedagogy (Figueroa, 2014, p. 36), and it is the focus of her chapter titled, Toward a Spiritual Pedagogy along the Borderlands in the edited book, *Fleshing the Spirit*. Believing that "teachinglearning [is] a spiritual sacred act [as] ceremony put into motion" engages spirituality as both a political and historical aspect of her classroom pedagogy. In her chapter, Maria shares an example of how she has very directly incorporated spirituality into her classroom practice. In her "La Chicana" class Maria included an entire unit focused on spirituality, Chicana Indígena Spirituality. The goal for Maria was not only to address the "outer landscape" of Chicana experiences and subjectivities, but also to address the "inner landscape" called for by the course outline. To do this, Maria included lessons on Danza Azteca and curanderismo. She writes candidly in her chapter of her trepidation to include these topics in her class, uncertain as to how students would react. Part of the trepidation was that both Danza Azteca and curanderismo were personal for

Maria as she had been raised as a Danzante and with her grandmother's Indigenous healing practices. Maria's goal was to "unveil [her] personal relationship with Chicana Indígena Spirituality so that [her] students could potentially identify with their own" (p. 39). Essentially, Maria was revealing her own spirituality. Maria invited two Danzante comadres to her class to discuss Danza traditions. To start this particular class session Maria lit the copal as is customary and along with her comrade, danced to the drumming by her other comadre.

While I have provided two examples how Maria incorporates spirituality into her work, perhaps it is her view on teaching that really highlights the importance of spirituality for Maria's work. For Maria, teaching is her "sacred purpose." The work is sacred because "[she] is a sacred person as are [her] students." One component of teaching as a sacred purpose is that is also holds the potential to be a healing space. Maria recognizes that some of her students may enter her classroom space with various wounds—whether those are larger societal wounds caused by institutional oppressions or personal familial wounds. Though not all students will share immediately or at all, Maria chooses texts that will encourage students to reflect on their pain and trauma. For Maria, when a student admits that they are struggling with a text because of the wounds they carry, she believes this is where the learning and exchange take place. Another part of the healing comes in the form of Maria's very own presence as a brown Chicana professor. For many of Maria's students, she is the first non-White teacher they have had, and thus she embodies someone who "sounds like them, who looks like them." Their ideas and knowledge are validated, and their names are pronounced correctly. As Maria states, "on a very basic level, that's humanizing. It's healing." As a sacred purpose, teaching is about

viewing students as full beings and honoring and valuing them. In the next chapter, I focus on the holistic aspect of Maria's work, specifically in her use of Danza epistemology. It is this emphasis on holistic education, which is about students' minds and spirits, that highlights the spiritual activist nature of Maria's pedagogy.

Lara Medina

I first came across the work of Lara in my second year of the Ph.D. program. I was just beginning to think about what a spiritually influenced pedagogy/research career could look like. At the time, I was still thinking very much in terms of Catholicism and was encouraged by a professor to look into liberation theology. From there I came across Lara's book *Las Hermanas* (1998). To say I was I spellbound by the book would be an understatement. I was so excited to learn of feminist nuns in the Catholic Church and the progressive work they did. I read the book twice that summer and decided that I wanted to know more about Lara and her work. From there, I eventually came across more of Lara's work and particularly her work on nepantla spirituality. I knew I had to meet her. Lara is a professor of Chican@ Studies at California State University, Northridge. Since my parents are also in the Southern California area, I emailed Lara asking her if we could meet to talk about her work. I also wanted to share with her some of my ideas—at that time pertaining to liberation theology and Chicana spirituality as viable resources to teach from/with. We met at a coffee shop near her home in Pasadena, CA and talked about her work and also what my goals are for teaching. She offered me great advice for protecting myself when teaching and offered to keep our line of communication open. I continued to read Lara's writings on nepantla spirituality and also continued to see her at different

academic conferences. When it came time to organize my dissertation committee, I asked Lara if she might be able to serve as a committee member. Due to her travel schedule and academic priorities, she could not commit to sit as a member, but she did offer to be a contributor. Given what I already knew about her work, I knew she would make a wonderful addition to my project.

For our plática, I drove over to Lara's house as soon as I was done with my plática with Jennie Luna. It was a far drive, taking me back into the Los Angeles area. Once again, I plugged myself into the breast pump and made my drive from CSUCI to Pasadena. Again, I arrived with just a few minutes and not enough time to grab lunch. I stopped at a 7-11, bought a water bottle and a granola bar, and hoped that it would be enough to get me through the plática and on the road home to my baby girl before the madness of Southern California traffic began. Lara's home is a large Craftsman home in a historical district of Pasadena. I arrived just in time.

Like many Chican@ children, Lara grew up in a devout Catholic family. Also having been raised with a devout Catholic mother and grandmother, I imagine that this requires not only a faith filled belief in Catholic teachings, but a moral and ethical, very gendered composure. As a youth, Lara attended mass with her mother before the school day and also attended Catholic school. Her early schooling experiences were not positive ones, as Lara experienced discrimination at the hands of her teachers, French Catholic nuns. These experiences, combined with her developing Chicana identity in her young adult years prompted Lara to leave the Catholic Church, as it "no longer had meaning" for her.

Years later, Lara returned to the church seeking support and answers regarding

personal difficulty she was experiencing in her life. During this time, Lara explored different types of Christianity, as that was what was known and familiar. Eventually, she returned to the Catholic Church because that is where she saw the Chican@-Mexican@ community. Lara became very involved with the church at this time, largely influenced by a progressive Chicano priest she had met. He served a community oriented church with a more inclusive approach to the church organization. For example, the church architecture was circular with the altar in the middle, as opposed to the altar being in the front which emphasizes centralized authority. Around the same time, Lara's good friend began studying theology at Santa Clara University, a private Jesuit university. Lara found her friend's coursework interesting and decided to take a class for her own personal enrichment. She enrolled at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, CA at a time when both liberation and feminist theology were beginning to make their way into schools of theology. These new perspectives were really exciting and "liberating" for Lara and made her believe that change to the patriarchal nature of the church was possible. While at the Franciscan school, one thing became clear: There was a need for Chicano theology, and so Lara decided that she would contribute to writing Chicano theology. What had a begun as a journey of personal enrichment turned into a master's thesis titled The Chicano Community and the Sacred, which incorporated both feminist and Indigenous thought.

After receiving the master's, Lara worked for a few years for the Catholic Church as a lay minister at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). While there, Lara was especially focused on Chican@ students who felt marginalized by the church, much like Lara had been years prior. She was also especially focused on incorporating

culturally relevant ritual and indigeneity into the Chican@ Catholic experience. In fact, Lara was the first person to begin the Día de los Muertos celebration at UCLA. Aside from her own ministry work at UCLA, Lara was influenced at this time by other Chicanas she was connecting with. The group of women was exploring Indigenous and feminist spirituality, and together they would pray and create ritual. Lara's spirituality began to "go in a different direction" as she became more involved with a group named Calmecac in Los Angeles—a group of Indigenous identified Chican@ psychologists and therapists who were working together to create Indigenous based ritual for Chican@ youth and families. Lara incorporated all of these experiences and what she was learning into her work as lay minister at UCLA. Perhaps it was the fact that her activities were never strictly Catholic that the ministry center did not fully support all of Lara's activities and she was eventually "politely let go." The dismissal was especially hard on Lara and she blamed herself. With the help of a counselor she was seeing at the time, Lara came to understand that she was not let go because of her work performance, but because of the "patriarchal, racist institution" that did not know what to do or how to 'handle' what Lara was doing. The event left open the possibility of pursing a doctorate, which until then had not been possible because of her full-time job with campus ministry.

Lara attended Claremont Graduate School where she received her Ph.D. in American History. Her book on Las Hermanas was actually her dissertation work. Her first mentor, Dr. Tim Matovina, had also written about Las Hermanas but suggested the topic to Lara for her dissertation as many of the organization's documents and just been archived and a complete history of their work had not yet been written. Lara had actually met some of the members of Las Hermanas during her masters program and was very

interested in their work. With the guidance of her graduate mentor at Claremont, Dr. Vicki Ruiz, for both history and oral history, it ended up being a perfect dissertation topic. Lara's subsequent book, *Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious-Political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church,* is a rich and detailed account of the emergence of a feminist organization resisting and speaking back to the patriarchy and racism of the Catholic Church in the United States. Among the issues of concern to Las Hermanas have been sexuality, moral authority, and the omission of women in positions of power.

Though Lara no longer officially associates with the Catholic Church, she did decide to send her daughter and son to Catholic school. As to why she decided this Lara states, "We had them in public schools up until fourth grade, and I realized they were not getting any social justice formation at all. There was no sense of service to the community or to those in need…I knew they would get it in a Catholic school." The complexity and ins and outs experienced by Lara in regard to the Catholic Church led her to develop what she calls "nepantla spirituality." After writing her dissertation on Las Hermanas, Lara was "ready to focus beyond the institutional church" as her own spirituality had grown over the years and was now heavily influenced by Indigenous spirituality and Eastern spiritual thought and practice. This, plus her earlier experiences in the feminist prayer circle with other Chicana women and her participation in Calmecac prompted her to think about the ways Chican@ who were raised Catholic were negotiating a critical conscious around Chican@ identity along with an incorporation of indigeneity, and a critical view of the Catholic institution. She was also heavily influenced by the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa. Lara says, "What I saw happening amongst those led me to try to name what was going on for Chican@s who were raised

Catholic but could not reconcile with all of it. But they wanted to find a middle way, a way to merge or bridge diverse spiritual influences. That's how I developed nepantla spirituality."

Lara applies the word nepantla to describe "a center space that is fluid, that is shaped by diversity, and that gives me and other 'mixed raced' persons the power to choose critique, integrate, and balance our multiple cultural and biological inheritances" Lara, 2014, p. 170). It is the spirituality that emerges "from the middle, from the center" (2014, p. 70) that Lara calls nepantla spirituality. In her earlier work on nepantla spirituality, Lara descriptively traces her use of the word nepantla, a Nahuatl term to refer to a state of being in the middle—between Indigenous spiritual beliefs and the imposed Catholic traditions and beliefs of Spanish missionaries (colonizers). While Spanish priests understood the term to assume that the people of Mexico were in conflict with the two belief systems, Lara uses the work of Gloria Anzaldúa to highlight nepantla as a "space composed of complementary opposites: obscurity and clarity." Instead of nepantla signaling only a traumatic space it also holds transformative power. Nepantla spirituality, therefore, allows seemingly conflicting traditions, beliefs, and practices to coexist as each person makes meaning for themselves. She also stresses that the use of the Nahuatl term privileges the Indigenous worldview that values inclusivity over rigid boundaries.

Lara has continuously expanded her work on nepantla spirituality and published it in various anthologies. Aside from writing Lara also incorporates spirituality in her classroom teaching. Part of her work in the classroom is to help students figure out what it means for them to be spiritual. Based on her teaching experience, Lara believes that the millennial generation is a generation that claims to be spiritual, but not religious, even

though oftentimes they are not sure of what this means for them. Understanding that many students do not support institutional religion because of the forceful way it has been imposed on them, she wants them to come a place where they understand that religion and spirituality are different, and just because one no longer wishes to be religious does not mean that it is necessary to stop being spiritual. The spirituality component that becomes especially important for Lara in this regard is that of relation and interconnectivity. Students, Lara believes, are taught in our Western educational system to be very individualist and lack the "communal responsibility" to care about others beyond family. Lara tries to "shift their [students] thinking to being in relationship, based on interdependence and reciprocity." Lara tells her students, "these are Indigenous values…they challenge the Western world view that we are all raised with in this country and what it takes to walk a different path [and] to make different choices." Relationship, then, becomes a very important component of Lara's teaching. While academic knowledge is important, Lara also wants to be sure to create a space that "develop[s] their [students] sense of being interconnected humans," again with an emphasis on relationality with each other. She so beautifully states, "My focus is really a lot on affirming the student and for them as individuals, but then also as members of the class community, affirming and being compassionate with themselves. I think those parts of spirituality are really important to me because I didn't grow up with those values. I didn't grow up with a lot of affirmation or a lot of compassion. Those two things have been a big part of my own healing process in my spiritual path. I have grown to realize how important they are. The teaching that I do, that's where I come from."

One example of a class Lara teaches that very directly incorporates spirituality is

"Healing Traditions in Chican@ communities." The course is designed to "provide students with the tools to decolonize their understanding of healing and expose them to specific Mexican/Chicana/o healing traditions with an emphasis on the distinct epistemologies that drive culturally specific preferences for healing" (course syllabus, p. 1). The framework for the class comes from ancient Mesoamerican spiritual and philosophical knowledge. The class is organized around various themes including "nepantla spirituality," our relationship to nature, creative journaling, Curanderismo, and working with spiritually conscious energy and light. Some of the course objectives are:

1. Explore the important role of culturally based healing traditions for the present and future to challenging the growing fragmentation between mind, body, spirit, and land.

2. Enable students to understand the integrity and applicability of Mesoamerican spirituality and philosophy as healing knowledge for contemporary settings.

3. Collectively and individually articulate the "face and heart" or the values and worldview of Chicana/o contemporary urban Indigenous identity and spirituality for the wellbeing and prosperity of Chicana/o communities.

Over the course of the semester students engage in readings that not only introduce them to spirituality as epistemology, such as Ana Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers*, but that encourage and challenge them to think about the way a spiritual epistemology is vital for a bodymindspirit connection and how that in turn promotes healthy and well-balanced Chican@ individuals and communities. As part of the healing component, students are invited to attend a sweat ceremony or temazcal, which again serves as a way to teach students about Mexican Indigenous healing traditions, and also

to introduce them to the different ways that they too can engage in healing traditions for their own personal and communal wellbeing. In this way, spiritual wellbeing, and an integrated bodymindspirit is forefronted as vital to the survival of our communities.

Of course the incorporation of spirituality into the classroom and students' openness and willingness to engage with it is not an easy process. Lara's students are majoring in various fields, and often their main concern is "getting a degree and getting a job," thus making spiritualty "harder to sell." The process of engaging students is a constant attempt at figuring out best practices. For example, Lara recently incorporated spoken word, art, performance, activism or SWAPA. SWAPA, developed by Dr. Chela Sandoval, is "a way of communicating and creating connections between people that is based on older rituals where councils of people came together to experiment, to speak truths that they are then able to share, transform, and reshape the collective changes and grow…SWAPA is a technology for truth and reconciliation" (interview, 1994, p. 94). For Lara, SWAPA as a pedagogical tool is useful for the way it can promote relationality and meaningful exchange between students and professor.

Fortunately, Lara has felt supported at CSUN, and even considered creating a spirituality track in Chicano/a studies. Though her proposal was initially not fully welcomed, mainly by a veteran faculty member who did not believe that there was enough literature on the topic, Lara has been able to pursue her academic and personal interests and incorporate them into her teaching, both as spiritual and political acts.

Irene Lara

I was first introduced to the work of Irene through her "Bruja Positionalities" (2005) article in the *Journal of Chicana/Latina Studies*. I remember being especially drawn to the way she critically examined the ways women are positioned as 'bad evil women' with powers that can damage others. I have often felt positioned as a 'bad woman' because I have never wanted to conform to the rigid expectations of me as a young Chicana. My mom even told me once that I was remembered as a malcriada. Apparently, I had too much to say and that is characteristic of a bad woman. I also recall in my dating years as a college student being told by men that women could really get whatever they wanted by seducing. I immediately made connections to Irene's work. Additional research on Irene's work led me to her dissertation, focused on the spirituality of Chicana/Latina women. At the time I was not yet thinking about my dissertation topic, but I continued to think about Irene's work. When *Fleshing the Spirit* was published and I read Irene's chapter, I knew I had to ask her to be a contributor to my dissertation. I met with her at the NACCS conference that took place in Salt Lake City, and we had a wonderful conversation about her work and my potential dissertation topic. She could also not commit to participating as a member of my committee, but she did agree to participate as a contributor.

Irene is a professor of Women's Studies at San Diego State University. Like our trip to Oceanside to see Maria, my mom and baby accompanied me to the plática. The drive to San Diego from my parents' is a little further than the drive to Oceanside. As is the case with most university campuses, parking was a bit of a puzzle. I also had to nurse Paloma before the plática, so by the time I arrived to Irene's office I was late. I felt

flustered for being late, as well as unorganized. Paloma comes first, there is no doubt about that. Still, there is a bit of guilt that I feel because I prioritize family over the graduate school process. This is important to share here, because Irene writes about her mothering process as it coincides with her academic process. I knew she understood why I had to be late.

Irene grew up in a Catholic family, though they were not particularly rigid in their beliefs. Irene's mom would often invite the various religious solicitors who knocked on the door to make themselves at home. Irene remembers attending bible study with Jehovah Witnesses and attending a Baptist Christian summer school in Mexico. Of these experiences, Irene says, "I had a lot of spiritual teachings, but because of the multiplicity, I think it also helped me connect with the aspects that I appreciated around community, around love, around the golden rule." Though Irene did not feel particularly constrained by a strict religions adherence, she did feel the need to "liberate from the unspoken/spoken expectations around what good womanhood is and definitely internalizing ideas around how women need to control their sexuality and [the] virgin/whore dichotomy that [Gloria] Anzaldúa talks about," which became a major theme in Irene's public works later on.

Irene attended Stanford University as an undergraduate student. It was her experience there that influenced her later work on spirituality. As she has so beautifully shared in her chapter, "Healing Sueños for Academia" (2002), undergrad years at Stanford were a traumatic experience. Irene experienced self-doubt as a young Chicana in a predominantly White school—an especially competitive school. As she writes in her chapter, "I have swallowed his racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, and capitalistic values

and definitions of success. At times, I have also regurgitated them—mostly against myself. Why can't I speak in class? Why can't I write as easily as everyone else can? Why can't I feel like this place belongs to me, too? What is the cost of these internalizations?" (p. 433). Part of the trauma in those early years of higher education stemmed from the expectation that mind and intellect would/should rule over all other faculties. The body and spirit were not to be brought into the classroom as epistemological possibilities. In addition, the competitive environment required that Irene act as a 'good' student by sacrificing her well-being, and study around the clock. This led to health problems for Irene, which the doctors could only identify as 'stress'. Her undergraduate years were filled with a lot of pain involved with work—physical pain that led to actual illness—as well as emotional and spiritual pain. Irene did not understand why the educational trajectory had to hurt so much. What she longed for was a path to connect her scholar intellectual identity and her Chicana feminist epistemology, which included spirituality.

Although her undergraduate years were difficult, they were also a time of intellectual and spiritual growth for Irene. It was during her time at Stanford that Irene began to think and dream about graduate school and a potential career as a professor. She felt nurtured and supported by some of her professors who inspired her. She was also "enthralled" by the notion of having a career that combined Chicana feminist literature, scholarship, and activism. Her Stanford years also provided a time and space from which to think about what a meant to be a Chicana/Latina with certain cultural connections and cultural wealth/knowledge, while also making sense of "what it means to be a woman of color developing an intellectual identity." The work of Gloria Anzaldúa was particularly

influential for Irene. As she states, "part of what the work did [was] help[ing] me think in a both/and kind of way and value multiplicity and be critical about binary/oppositional ways of thinking." The resistance to binary thinking especially impacted how Irene approached religion and spirituality. She admits that she had internalized ideas about religion as oppressive and felt the need to move away from it in order to challenge sexist double standards. Again the work of Gloria Anzaldúa became an important framework that helped Irene understand that way colonialism and patriarchy had silenced the liberatory, feminist, and Indigenous aspects of spirituality. For her undergraduate thesis project, Irene wrote a paper on La Virgen de Guadalupe/Tonantzin, focusing on her as a symbol of both feminism and indigeneity. Through her reflections of spirituality, Chicana feminism, and her undergraduate thesis, Irene came to view the "everyday lives of women that were around us, and valuing that. Valuing the cultural wealth of spirituality and seeing it as an asset instead of something that was going to hold us back, especially through the lens of reclaiming Indigenous world views."

Irene was strategic about her decision to apply to Ethnic Studies doctoral programs. She wanted to be in a space that lent itself to strong community activist work and valuing cultural knowledge. In her first semester of the doctorate at University of California, Berkeley (Cal), Irene wrote a paper on spirituality. In the paper, she made the argument that spirituality had always been present in Chican@ studies, but perhaps because the association of spirituality with the irrational, Chican@ studies had moved away from it. Using the work of liberation theologians and Ana Castillo, Irene highlighted the grassroots ways that spirituality existed for the well-being of the community, and the necessity to incorporate it into community and intellectual work once

again. Graduate school also provided Irene the space to think about sexuality as a perspective of spirituality. According to Irene, "spiritual worldviews have gone hand in hand with beliefs about sexuality to oppress women," and in the process of liberation it was necessary to critically assess these beliefs.

Irene's ideas began to evolve into thinking about spirituality as a more holistic body, mind, spirit, and connection. In the fall of 1997, Irene and several other graduate students formed the Chicana/Latina Studies Working Group, and collectively they organized a one-day symposium at Berkeley called Oppositional Wetness: Mujeres Living Theory. It was through this work that she and other graduate students connect with the National Latina Health Organization (NLHO). Together they decided to collaborate on another conference focused on intergenerational Latina health. Serendipitously around the same time, an opportunity to teach a class in Chicana studies opened up and the class was offered to Irene and her colleague, which they renamed: Redefining Latina Health: Body, Mindy, and Spirit.

All of this led to Irene's dissertation titled, Decolonizing Latina Spiritualities and Sexualities: Healing Practices in Las Américas (2003). Drawing from Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, and Cultural Studies, Irene "analyzed cultural productions and health activism as health practices to demonstrate the ways many U.S. Latinas resist repressive understandings of sexuality and spirituality and transform the dominant Western body/spirit binary for self-empowerment related to social change" (2003, p. 1). The goal was to show the various ways Latinas were resisting colonial and patriarchal understandings of both spirituality and sexuality, and reimaging both through the figures of Sycorax, Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui, Tonantzin, La Virgen de Guadalupe and Malinche.

In addition, Irene focused on the healing aspect of a decolonial spirituality and sexuality, that includes a mending or bringing together of both spirituality and sexuality as part of an erotic force.

Healing is a very important component of the work Irene does, both as a writer and a professor in the classroom. The healing, she says, is "healing [from] dominant white culture and its impact and ways it gets internalized by brown young, mestiza women." Another part is healing from the dualistic thinking that Western philosophy and education demands. It was Western thought, argues Irene as well as other writers and philosophers, that caused the split between body, spirit, and mind, associating the former two with irrationality and the latter with rational thinking. Her work is therefore about healing the split between spirituality/intellect and even spiritual/political, and challenging the irrational feminine and rational masculine binary.

Spirituality and healing come together in Irene's undergraduate research program, CuranderaScholarActivism, or CSA. The class is part of San Diego State's Faculty-Student Mentoring Program, which pairs a group of undergraduate students with a faculty member who teaches them about research and graduate school. The mentoring program is geared towards low-income and 'untraditional' college students. The goal is to teach them research and to create community around the expertise of the professor. Professors recruit students for the program. Irene began the CSA program in 2009 with six undergraduate students and one masters student. Irene is very clear to note that her students kept her accountable to the vision of the group. Through teaching and mentoring, Irene had met and gotten to know many Chicana and Latina students who were interested in activism. After she received tenure the students encouraged her to

submit a proposal for the Faculty-Student Mentoring Program. Of the process Irene says, "I really felt called to do it. There the students were asking for it and it was very affirming to me to take that leap." Irene vacillated through the summer, but her students continued to check in on her and in the end she submitted a proposal and created her "dream seminar": Curandera Scholar Activism.

Irene takes what she calls a holistic femtoring approach, centering the feminist aspect of the program. The goals of CSA include: "engage in a holistic femtorship model that helps us remain grounded in our communities, herstories, and bodymindspirithearts as we journey through academia as students and professors, foster femtor/femtee relationships that encourage individual and collective growth and wellness in service to social justice, and learn and teach Chicana/Latina/Indigenous Studies' theories and research methods" (Gonzalez et al., 2015, p.1). An important component of CSA is the integration of curandera epistemology and praxis so that not only is students' intellectual development being nurtured but also their individual and social traumas that require healing. In this way, students thrive within and outside of the academic setting. Irene is very explicit in her use of the word curandera as a way to signal the importance of healing connected to Indigenous and mestiza/o epistemology. Curanderismo "emphasizes the whole bodymindspirithearts and additional human capacities to feel and intuit" (Gonzalez et al., 2015, p. 2). Like other Faculty-Student Mentoring Programs on campus, CSA is modeled after graduate school seminars, rigorous in its incorporation of critical reading, thinking, and writing, research methods, the graduate school application process, presenting research, and working with other students and mentors as colleagues. The CSA model that Irene developed and offers is also set apart by the integral role of

decolonization, where students are encouraged to "recover and adapt their cultural knowledge" (p. 4)—a decolonizing process with the potential to heal internalized oppression. In addition, the CSA model values the bodymindspirithearts connection that is deemed irrational in postcolonial Enlightenment thought. In Irene's CSA model, this connection is as vital to nurture as the intellect for academic achievement.

In addition to teaching, Irene has published widely on the topic of spirituality and healing. Her most recent publication is the co-edited book titled *Fleshing the Spirit: Spiritualty and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*. The book is especially important to highlight because it is the first of its nature. It is a book entirely devoted to the spiritual activist work of Chicanas/Latinas, many of whom are in higher education. Irene shares, both in the introduction and during our plática, though the actual editing and publication process took such a long time, no other book with a similar topic was published. Irene and her co-editor Elisa Facio knew the book was necessary to not only fill the void, but also to bring attention to the beautiful spiritual work and writing being created by the contributors of the book. In addition, it was important to highlight spirituality as epistemology and necessary component of healing in the lives of Chicanas and Latinas. Finally, Irene and Elisa view the book as an insistence on the decolonizing of the academy, which dismisses spirituality in favor of a "'true' intellectual and masculine way[s] of thinking." Hence, the book becomes an important vessel from which to highlight the "commit[ment] to decolonize[ing] the academy that largely devalues or misunderstands spirituality, both as a serious academic topic *and* as an integral aspect of being alive (Facio & Lara, p. 3).

Irene's work, both as a classroom educator and a writer, showcases the

importance of spirituality in her life—on a personal and academic level. It also highlights her commitment to her students' and communities' holistic wellbeing. In the early stages of her career, Irene did not always feel free to incorporate spirituality, fearing that Western epistemology of the university would not accept or value it. However, she learned that spirituality was a necessary component of her own wellbeing and wanted to share that with her students. As she states, "There is a bigger risk at turning away from that [spirituality], than the risk of being vulnerable and being real and being where you're at."

Alejandra Elenes

I have been familiar with the pedagogical writings of Alejandra for a few years now. However, it was her book *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy* (2011) that really inspired me to think about expanding pedagogical possibilities with/through spirituality. I have had the pleasure of meeting Alejandra on a few different occasions—usually briefly. It was at the summer institute of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Sociale (MALCS) in the summer of 2014 that I had a really great conversation with her about my dissertation topic. Her enthusiasm and her own expertise encouraged me to ask her to contribute to my dissertation.

Alejandra is an associate professor in the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University (ASU). For our plática, I planned a one-day trip to Arizona—the longest I would be away from Paloma since she was born. I flew out of Salt Lake City early, packed with recording materials and pumping materials. It felt so strange traveling alone and so light in regard to luggage. It was just a backpack and me. I

landed in Phoenix, picked up my rental car and attached the pump to my breasts for the drive to ASU. Since it was summer, the campus was quiet, empty of the regular cars and students. I found parking easily and went right up to Alejandra's office.

Alejandra comes from parents of diverse backgrounds in many respects. Her Mexican father was Catholic and her White mother was raised Lutheran. Neither was willing to convert, although neither was overly religious. So, Alejandra was raised in Mexico with parents of different religions. However, being in a very Catholic country, Alejandra attended Catholic school where she learned from the nuns that being Protestant was one of the worst things ever. This of course was a difficult lesson to understand as Alejandra's mom was Protestant and Alejandra did not think there was anything wrong with her mom. In addition to these contradictory messages, Alejandra's mother was adamant that her daughters would go to college and worry about marriage later, which was the opposite of her own life. At the same time, her father would engage in conversation over dinner about reproductive rights, believing in women's rights over her body—a message starkly different from what Alejandra was learning at school. Alejandra was aware of these contradictions and aware that she need not believe or follow all Catholic teachings. There is, however, one Catholic teaching that has stuck with Alejandra and which really guides her work as a pedagogue and writer—be good to each other, and help others. Alejandra recognizes the potential for paternalistic dangers of these messages, but also views them as simple and productive ways to live and work.

It was during graduate school that Alejandra decided she no longer wanted to live with such contradictions and was especially avoidant of the church. It was for Alejandra a "time when [she] was creating [her] own path." Her decision was particularly influenced

by the events taking place in Central America and the response of Pope John Paul II. She was also influenced by the writings of Chicana feminists, which confirmed many of her feelings towards religion in general and the Catholic Church in particular. It was in graduate school that a committee member suggested La Virgen de Guadalupe as a subject of study, along with La Llorona and La Malinche. The suggestion came partly because of the Chicana feminist methodologies that Alejandra was developing in her dissertation. By this time, however, Alejandra had had enough of Catholic symbols and laughed at the suggestion. But, as she began to think about these myths more and connect them to the Chicana feminists' texts she was reading, she began to understand the importance of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and unpacking and reclaiming the myths of La Virgen, La Llorona, and La Malinche. Her initial approach to studying La Virgen was to "prove that she's made up and never appeared." Her views began to change, however. "The more I started to read about it, the more I started to read about how everyday people felt about La Virgen and started talking to different people, I realized it really doesn't matter whether she was constructed or not. What matters is the way in which people believe in her. When I had that epiphany, it changed a lot of my perspective and that is when I started to be much more open to think about it in terms of spiritual terms." This openness occurred at the same time that Alejandra was learning more about Indigenous epistemology, and spirituality as a part of that. It was then that she began to make connections to what she calls "Indigenous historical memory" and La Virgin—a figure that somehow always came back to her.

As Alejandra began to make deeper connections between spirituality and her own life, she also began to realize that the terms of feminist and transformative pedagogies

also connected to spirituality. For Alejandra, it was not just "about what is going on in the classroom" but about the real material conditions of students and communities. Alejandra felt that through her work as a feminist and transformative pedagogue she had indeed been doing the spiritual activist work that connects social justice to spiritual wellbeing. However she had not identified it as such. Hence, as she read more about spirituality she recognized the need to articulate what she was doing in the classroom and connect the dots between feminist and transformative pedagogies and spirituality from a feminist perspective. Part of the connection, according to Elenes, is that when teaching in fields like women's studies students are bound to make deep connections to course material and their own personal lives. Often, these connections can be painful. As Alejandra states, "this is one of the things about critical pedagogy…you don't just deal with the classroom as only what's happening in the classroom. That is the world outside the classroom and the classroom is part of the world…but the process of listening, of believing, of lending an ear, of bringing it to larger context that's not just individualist, it is a spiritual process as well." Alejandra shares an example of a student who came to her in tears after reading Josie Méndez-Negrete's book, *Las Hijas de Juan*, a story about incest in the author's family. Though Alejandra had prepared the students as much as she could, this particular student had experienced incest and at that moment in class told Alejandra that she could not deal with the classroom conversation and had to leave. Alejandra remembers there were other students struggling and in tears as well. Alejandra realized that some classes call for different approaches and at that moment realized that if the book needed to be closed, or students needed to cry or leave the classroom, then that is what she needed to allow to take place. Though Alejandra shares during our plática that in this particular

instance she felt inadequately prepared to handle the situation, I would argue that her approach highlights being tuned in to what students are experiencing. Though Alejandra does not specifically make spirituality a direct theme or topic of class, she says that students eventually bring it up themselves. Likely, it is because of the readings that she chooses, including writings by Gloria Anzaldúa, Jacqui Alexander, bell hooks, Cynthia Dillard, and Laura Rendón.

The connection between spirituality, activism, and social justice is especially evident in the writings of Alejandra. In her book, *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy* (2011), Alejandra expands the conversation on Chicana feminist pedagogies, epistemologies, and ontologies through the reimagining of La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and Malintzin/Malinche. Together, the reconstructing of these three cultural figures resists the patriarchal constructions that fabricate them as loss guilty mother, virgin or whore, and traitor. Instead the Chicana feminists reimagining provided by Alejandra "help[s] to construct a progressive, alternative, and radical Chicana subjectivity (2011, p. 3). Drawing on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Alejandra grounds her analysis and arguments within an epistemology of conocimiento, embedded within a borderlands and spiritual knowing. Recognizing the importance of transformative pedagogical approaches for "the formation of subjectivities that are liberatory" (2011, p. 4), Alejandra outlines the contours of border/transformative pedagogies as follows:

- Recognition and understanding of United States/Mexico border and its impact on the lived realities of people of Mexican descent on both sides of the border;
- Reconstructed pedagogies of La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe and

Malintzin/Malinche work to create "alternative epistemologies centered on feminist ways of being in the world" (2011, p. 64);

- Validation of Chicana feminist borderland subjectivities as producers of knowledge and active agents of social transformation;
- Recognition of spiritual activism as component of border/transformative pedagogies and source of transformation;
- Understanding that subjectivities are a result of multiple intersecting forms of oppression;
- An enactment of border/transformative pedagogies in multiple settings.

Through her analysis of La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe and Malintzin/Malinche, Alejandra enacts the very border/transformative pedagogy outlined above.

Perhaps most telling of the way that spirituality and activism come together is in the reinterpretation of La Virgen de Guadalupe. Alejandra descriptively outlines the story of Guadalupe's apparition and her subsequent transformation to a Catholic symbol of femininity and purity, and the effect this historically had on Chicana and Latina women. This includes the expectation of submissiveness, servility, and sexual purity. Alejandra also shows the ways that Chicanas have reclaimed both Indigenous roots and spirituality through a remaking of La Virgen as a powerful source of spiritual mestizaje and sexuality. Underscoring the artistic reproductions of Ester Hernández, Yolanda López, Consuelo Jiménez Underwood and Alma Lopez, Alejandra argues that these Chicana artists' depictions "claim[s] a historical space within the Chicano community that shows the need to alter the social structures that oppress, subordinate and produce unequal social conditions for women" (Elenes, 2011, p. 119). Feminism, sexuality, and spirituality are

reclaimed within this work. What this shows, argues Alejandra, is that the struggle for spirituality is also a struggle for social justice and gender equality, and is an act of self-determination. In the next chapter I discuss the way Alejandra's reinterpretation of La Virgen underscores the spiritual and activist influence of her work. I view Alejandra's book, *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy,* as an example of the centering of spirituality as a component of social justice and vice versa, calling attention to the powerful ways that this connection can transform and liberate from patriarchal, colonial ways of thinking and being.

Spiritual Epistemology

The narratives of each of the contributors, which include the ways their academic work is influenced by spirituality, tell us that spirituality is not merely a practice of these professors' lives, but a way of life—of understanding the world and being in the world. Like Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento, the narratives of these spiritual activists draw attention to the multifaceted ways spirituality is an "overarching theory of consciousness, of how the mind works. It is an epistemology that tries to encompass all dimensions of life, both inner—mental emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer—social, political, lived experiences" (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 177). While each contributor defines, understands, experiences and practices spirituality in their own unique way, they each share a common denominator—a life and activist praxis guided by a spiritual epistemology. In addition, as is clear from their narratives and their academic work, ancestral knowledge contributes and is a large part of their spiritual epistemology. Before discussing the importance of ancestral knowledge, I assess the ways that each of

the contributors' experiences—both positive and negative—have produced the very conocimiento/epistemology/knowledge that enables each of them to make spiritual meaning of their lives and incorporate that meaning into their scholarly endeavors.

The various ways that each of the contributors defines spirituality really speak to their unique experiences they have had growing up, navigating higher education, or working through the many matters of adulthood. The Danza practice and study that Jennie has engaged in have shaped the way spirituality is expressed in her life. It is through Danza and her "related spirituality" (p. 12) that Jennie navigates the world and her academic research and teaching. In this way spirituality for Jennie is something that she does, not just something that she thinks or discusses. Spirituality is an active engagement in the world that is always present. As she says, "There's a spiritual guiding force that's pushing me…the end goal isn't a spiritual act but it's ubiquitous. It's present at all times." For Jennie, this occurs through Danza scholarship and practice. Jennie never defines spirituality—neither in a general nor personal sense. Even in her dissertation there is never a section where Jennie is making a statement about what spirituality is, though she does write about spirituality as a piece of Danza and vice versa. I also do not want to attempt to define spirituality for Jennie. However, I do believe that her scholarship on Danza and her teaching can tell us something about spirituality. For example, when one of Jennie's students asked her for advice because the student had just broken up with her boyfriend and was having a hard time, Jennie said, "I just went through my intuition of what I did [during a previous break up]…I said, "Go get some flowers, clean yourself off and leave them in the ocean. Or go somewhere and do it for seven days or four days…go make a commitment and every time you go allow yourself

time to pray or think or do what you need to do." Jennie shared this experience with me when I asked her how spirituality guides her in the classroom. This brief but significant example highlights spirituality as intuitive, connected to nature, a component of healing, and an active practice of engagement with the world. Again, Danza epistemology and Indigenous epistemology become important foundations of Jennie's ubiquitous spirituality.

Maria is another contributor who does not define or conceptualize spirituality during our plática or in her chapter "Toward a Spiritual Pedagogy along the Borderlands" in the *Fleshing the Spirit* book. However, like Jennie, Maria's spirituality is heavily influenced by Danza epistemology. In fact, Danza and spirituality are simultaneous ways of thinking and being that Maria always carries with her. That her Danza spirituality is an epistemological component of her life makes it impossible not to bring this into the work. Maria states, "If I am a spiritual human being, if I identify as a Danzante, if this is in my ethos as an individual outside of the institutions of Mira Costa College, is that fair for me to not be able to infuse some of that into my work?" Again, though Maria does not define spirituality, I surmise from the way she embraces Indigenous epistemology that her classroom work can tell us about what are some components of her spirituality. For example, Maria embraces the philosophy of In Lak Ech, a Mayan philosophy based on the idea, "I am you and you are me." She states, "I've always embraced the philosophy of In Lak Ech in every aspect of either teaching or my relationships with family members, my children, or in community, or through art. We are a reflection of each other. I need to think about how I'm teaching you because that is a reflection of who I am. In turn, that will be reflected to me who you are. That's very much interdependent. That's very

sacred. That's about energy. That's about energetic exchange, spiritual exchange." Here is a telling example of interconnectedness as a component of Maria's spirituality, one she tries to espouse in both her personal and professional life.

Some of the other contributors are much more direct in both their definition of spirituality and in the identification of the sources of that spirituality. Though many of Sandra's students enter her class with their own sense of spirituality—which she attributes to the kinds of students that attend the California Institute of Integral Studies—she also tries to give them examples of spirituality based on commonalties across different beliefs and traditions. For example, interconnectivity is a theme across religions and spiritual beliefs that Sandra has identified as one component of spirituality. There is also a notion of nothingness "because of being in such awe of the world and of nature that there is almost a sense that we are not even a grain of sand." Finally, Sandra shares with her students that spirituality is a place "where you feel so grounded and comfortable and you know you are worthy so deeply." These are the three components of spirituality that Sandra imparts on her students, recognizing that there is space for personal meaning making. The practices and beliefs of curanderismo are also sources of spirituality for Sandra. In fact, it is the "continual metaphor" that guides her philosophy and pedagogy. Like Jennie's it is a philosophy seeped in Indigenous epistemology, which I return to later.

Luz is also very clear about what spirituality is to them and where that source comes from, which is both a connection to ancestors and a connection to the earth. Luz is able to nurture and practice both connections through their gardening and projects related to Decolonize your Diet. During our plática Luz stated, "It just seems so powerful, the

connection to that knowledge and to that practice [gardening] and to know that that practice has been going on for thousands of years. It's relatively recently in history that we've been so disconnected. To me, that's a great loss. There is something to me that like, that is my spirituality…it is such a miracle that you can take one of these kernels [showing me a kernel of purple corn] and plant it in the soil and then it grows and is a plant." Here, Luz is speaking about spirituality as both a connection to ancestral knowledge and also to a very direct physical connection to the earth. They continue, "So, being connected to the food I'm eating, to the whole process of it. I started to identify that as spirituality, to be connected to ancestors, through that process. It is spiritual connection. To be connected to Mother Earth in that really direct way is my spiritual connection to Mother Earth. That's just how I understand it." These two components of spirituality show themselves in the scholarly work of Luz—both in the theorization of a decolonized diet and the teaching and practice of it.

Lara, Irene, and Alejandra have each published widely on their work—all of which has a spiritual component to it. Through our pláticas and in my reading of their work, I have come to understand their unique definitions of spirituality and the sources that contribute to that definition. Interestingly, each of these individuals grew up in homes where religion was part of the family and in different ways that upbringing does impact their view and practice of spirituality. For example, as I wrote earlier, Irene's mother was very open and welcoming of various religious solicitors and Irene was exposed to various religions traditions via summer camps or educational experiences. Thus, a fluidity and openness to various beliefs and practices is not only part of Irene's spirituality but also a component of the healing that spiritualty enables. She states, "For

me, healing, literally the dichotomy and being able to see the fluidity or being to see the third aspect." Possibilities, knowledges, and practices that disrupt the Western focus on the binary are important to Irene's spiritualty. Another example comes from Alejandra, who feels particularly connected to the Catholic teaching of helping and caring for others. Though she recognizes that there can be paternalistic practices via this teaching, to Alejandra it is more about questions and practices of spirituality and social justice. Service to others is also a Catholic teaching that Lara finds important, such that she decided to enroll her daughter in a Catholic school—even though she does not identify as a Catholic—because she thought that the space would expose her daughter to the teachings regarding community service. The importance of such a teaching is that it highlights the relationships we carry with each other and therefore the need to care for those relationships. This is a very important component of Lara's teaching. She states, "I try to shift their [students'] thinking to being in relationship, reciprocity." The concept of relationship is central to Lara's definition of spirituality and as shown is influenced by Catholic teaching. That Irene, Alejandra, and Lara no longer identify as Catholic yet are in some ways influenced by it—as significant or insignificant as that may be—points to the tensions/contradictions of Chicana feminist spiritualities but also to the fluidity and openness to such tensions/contradictions. This is an important component of Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento—it entails meaning making in times of turmoil or tension.

The numerous publications of Irene, Alejandra and Lara also present their definitions of spirituality. In her most recent published chapter Lara writes, "My definition of spirituality at this time is one's truthful relationship with self, with others,

with nature, with the universe, with the ancestors, and with the sacred source and great mystery of life and death. Spirituality is fundamentally about being in relationship; being aware of one's interdependence or connectedness to all that can be seen and unseen. The integration of knowledge from our body, our heart, and our mind is required to be in full or complete relationship with all that is" (2015, p. 167). I ask Lara to elaborate on why "at this time" is part of her definition to which she replies, "I don't think spirituality is static…in no way do I think there's one definition or that it's the definition for all time." Alejandra also provides a definition of spirituality in her most recent publication stating, "Spirituality for me is the way I understand my position in the world in relation to larger existential questions about the meaning of life and death" (p. 43). She continues, "Spirituality is a way of understanding someone's (or a community's) position in the world by trying to make sense of unfair economic conditions and gender inequality, and to do something about it" (p. 44). As I show in the next chapter, Alejandra's spirituality and that of the other contributors are grounded in a sense of communal spirituality that involves a very active practice against systems of oppression. It is this component of their spirituality which makes their academic work spiritual activism. For Irene, spirituality is about an epistemology that brings together bodymindspirit. She writes in her Bruja Positionalities piece, "We need to listen to our hearts, intuitions, subconscious, bodies, bodymindspirit—whatever we want to call our faculties of knowledge that include but go beyond our rational minds" (p. 30). Spiritualty is thus knowledge that Western 'rational' science has deemed as unfit for the academy. Spirituality is conocimiento.

That each of the contributors is influenced by and defines/understands/practices spirituality highlights a very important aspect of spirituality—it is open and fluid and that

way able to be molded to the benefit and need of each individual. What the contributors' uniqueness does show is that spirituality is about conocimiento—a theory of consciousness, a facultad—another way of knowing, and about relationships. Keating (2006) writes about conocimiento as description of the multiple ways we gather information. Sometimes this path of consciousness and coming to knowledge is fraught with pain. However, the experiences along the path—both painful and joyous—influence what and how we know. The spiritual narratives of the contributors in this project are examples of coming to spirituality through varied experiences, experiences that have been traumatic as well as those that have produced happiness. In addition, these experiences have occurred at an outer level—social, political, lived experiences of each of the individuals, and at the inner level—the mental, emotional, and instinctive realities of each as well. Conocimiento as a continual process draws attention to spirituality as something that is actively taking place and at times changing. It is something that the contributors do in both their personal and academic lives.

It is also another way to know the world and be in the world. Epistemologically, spirituality is how the contributors understand the world and in return act on/in it. La facultad as a navigational tool (Chang, 2014) and an awareness that emerges from marginalized identities of traumatic life experiences (Johnson et al., 2011) aptly describe the spiritual narratives shared above. I think of Luz's experience with cancer, Sandra's ins and outs with curanderismo, Irene's traumatic undergraduate experience, or Lara's painful and unsupportive educational years. These experiences, among others, propelled these women to search for another way of engaging with the world, another way of understanding their lived experiences. Through this journey their spiritual epistemology,

"a vision to articulate from the margin [as] the basis for theorization about Chicana/o experience" (Elenes, 2011, p. 50), was developed/nurtured/practiced, and one could argue required to navigate life events. Spirituality as epistemology, or spiritual epistemology, or a spiritual worldview guides these professor's lives, in and out of the higher education space.

The stories and voices of these contributors prove that "spirituality is a way of understanding one's (or a community) position in the world and working toward transformation of social inequality" (Elenes, 2011, p. 52). Like the epistemological project of Gloria Anzaldúa, the narratives shared by these seven contributors demonstrate a "vision from the margin that is the basis for theorization" (Elenes, p. 50) of Chican@ spirituality and Chican@ spiritual activism. As described above, the sources and influences vary, but that spirituality is epistemology is a theme that cuts across the seven narratives. For Jennie, it is Danza that "shaped [her] epistemology and was the entrance not only to my own wisdom, sensibilities, and passion but also a motivating factor towards higher education" (2011, p. 12). For Lara, "spirituality is a tremendous source of knowledge that determines how we understand and live out our human existence" (2014, p. 167). And for Alejandra, "spirituality is an important aspect of intellectual development. From an epistemological and pedagogical perspective, spirituality is an avenue to take people's subjectivity into account as a whole and as a source of transformation" (2011, p. 56). These examples underscore the contours of a Chicana feminist spirituality that I identified through my literature research, which showed that Chicana feminists write about spirituality as a way of being in the world and a way of knowing the world. These seven contributors and their narratives validate spirituality as

epistemology.

They also demonstrate a decolonial imaginary—an interpretation of lived experiences and reimaging of the knowledge that comes from those experiences—that allows the contributors to creatively and transformatively make meaning and develop/nurture/practice a spiritual epistemology. Their systems of knowledge, which incorporate ancestral knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, and mindbodyspirit knowledge disrupts Western, patriarchal, and European systems of thought that value the mind as the golden chair of knowing. Their narratives, their experiences, and their spiritual epistemology embodies the importance of Emma Perez's (1999) decolonial imaginary as a tool for excavating the transformative agency of these contributors as they make meaning of their unique lived experiences, while also connecting those experiences to the material and spiritual realities of their families and communities.

Decolonial imaginary, as a tool of excavation, has allowed me to pull back the layers of the contributors' spiritual epistemology. Doing that shone light on Indigenous epistemologies as a foundational aspect of the spiritual epistemology of these contributors. For both Jennie and Maria, Danza philosophy is their spiritual epistemology, and as Maria says "that is Indigenous knowledge." For Jennie, coming to identify as an Indigenous individual made her realize that "we should have Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy." Danza allowed her to come to this on a personal, academic, and spiritual level. Jennie's beautiful and descriptive dissertation on Danza further exemplifies the transformative and healing aspect of a spiritual epistemology grounded in Danza epistemology. Danza is a philosophical and spiritual knowledge base that combines the knowledge of agriculture, astronomy, science, dance, and ceremony (Luna,

2011). Present participation of Danza reclaims Indigenous knowledge and views spiritual and scientific knowledge as one. In this way, Danza requires a shift in what defines knowledge. Danza is a language, expression, movement and knowledge base, strongly connected to ancestors, nature, and spirit. For both Maria and Jennie, it is this beautiful practice and philosophy based on Indigenous knowledge that makes their work both "purposeful and sacred" (Maria plática).

Indigenous knowledge is also pivotal to the work of Luz, whose Decolonize your Diet project is grounded in the ancestral knowledge of family and community. In their manifesto Rueda Esquibel and Calvo (2013) write, "We call all people of all ethnicities to connect with their elders now to recover vital cultural knowledge that we need to survive. We need to reclaim our ancestors' wisdom" (pp. 1–2). The awareness of the relationship between food, community, and mother earth as a goal of the Decolonize your Diet project is one way of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge (Calvo & Rueda Esquibel, 2015)—a knowledge that is about a spiritual connection to self, each other, and Mother Earth.

For some of the other contributors, to draw from Indigenous epistemology as a source of one's spirituality is about healing from the effects of colonization, which separated the bodymindspirit connection. In her recent chapter publication Lara writes, "For Xicanas/os, this Indigenous ancestral knowledge is key to healing historical trauma; wounds we are conscious and not conscious of; wounds that have impaired our voices and our agency" (2015, p. 168). Spirituality, which includes awareness of Indigenous knowledge and identity, "is a key component of health and must be validated as part of an academic program" (Lara plática). Likewise, Irene believes that a spiritual epistemology is about drawing from Indigenous knowledge to heal the various

dichotomies imposed by Western philosophy, such as man versus woman, spiritual versus intellectual, or political versus spiritual. For Irene, the healing is about "legitimatizing other ways of knowing that [are] just as valid" (Irene plática).

Then there is the curanderismo practice and philosophy of Sandra. Curanderismo, with is mixture of Arabic, Judeo-Christian, and Mexica influences is ancestral knowledge that heals at the material, spiritual, and mental level (Torres & Sawyer, 2014). Curanderismo, as the continual metaphor in Sandra's work, guides her teaching and community work—both of which are centered on healing. For Sandra, the reclamation of curanderismo, and its practice both inside and outside of the higher education space, are political and epistemological acts that challenge the effects of colonization. It is also about the "carrying of Indigenous ways of being and knowing from our ancestors" (Sandra, plática 2).

Anzaldúan borderlands theory allows for the naming and producing of an epistemology based on one's sexualized, politicized, racialized, gendered, and embodied experiences, and I add spiritualized experiences also. Borderlands as a space of both tension and possibility, contradicts dichotomous ways of being and understanding that have resulted from colonization. Conocimiento, as a theory of consciousness highlights the experiences of these seven contributors as ways in which they have come to make meaning of and nurture their spiritual epistemology. The meaning making paths have been relational for the contributors in that meaning has been made amongst a plethora of social actors and experiences, has taken place within moments of turmoil, and has highlighted the fluidity of spiritual epistemology that is constantly being influenced by the conocimiento path. In addition, these narratives expose the importance of a decolonial

imaginary for excavating the transformative agency the professors employ to define/nurture/practice a spiritual epistemology grounded in their lived experiences, family/cultural knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge. In the next chapter, I focus on the ways their academic work expands our understanding of spiritually-minded scholar activism.

CAPÍTULO 5

ENACTING SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

The previous chapter focused on the spiritual epistemology of each of the contributors, and specifically on the various personal, familial, and educational experiences that influenced the ways each of them thought about spirituality and how it influenced their scholarly work. In this chapter, I delve more deeply into the specific academic/community projects, teaching strategies, and writings at the center of the contributors' careers to answer research question two: What role does spiritualty play in the academic lives of the professor's in this project, especially as it relates to activism? In addition, I examine how their work expands our understanding of what spirituality minded praxis is, and can be (research question three). I provide a general description of and historical context for a few of the concepts or practices used by the contributors to highlight the way their work aligns with borderland muxerista praxis and spiritual activism. As I show in this chapter, the contributors focus on a holistic approach to teaching or research/writing that creates a 'praxis as healing' method. I end the chapter with a discussion of spiritual activism and argue that all of the contributors in this project are indeed spiritual activists.

Borderland Muxerista Praxis

As previously stated, the purpose of conceptualizing borderland muxerista praxis is not to define or name the pedagogy, research, academic or community projects of the contributors to this dissertation, but merely to provide the reader a roadmap of how I was thinking about activist or social justice praxis as I prepared to embark on this project. I also wanted to identify points of similarities amongst the various teaching and research practices engaged in by the Chican@ professors highlighted here. I chose to call this activist praxis, borderland muxerista praxis because I believe it navigates the complex often constricting borders of academia. In addition, the teaching and research practices draw attention to the unnatural borders created by academic—particularly between intellect and emotion, draw from opposing worldviews to engage students, and work with tension as possibility. I believe that the work of the contributors is also strongly rooted in the Muxerista framework laid out by Tijerina Revilla (2004), which includes a challenge to oppression, focus on holistic needs, attention to intersectionality, opposition to traditional research paradigms, disapproval of hierarchy, reconstruction of oppressive ideological constructions, a view of the Chican@/Latin@ experiences as rich and valid, liberatory and transformative solutions, and an interdisciplinary approach to understanding problems and creating/enacting solutions. The pedagogy, syllabi, publications, and projects I focused on in this dissertation, are clear examples of what I call borderland muxerista praxis. Below I identify the various features of this work that make it so.

Curanderismo

Curanderismo is a central component of the work of Sandra, Irene, and Lara. The words curanderismo, curandero, and curandera, all derive from the Spanish word “curar” which means to heal. Curanderismo embraces healing at three basic levels: the material, the spiritual, and the mental (Torres & Sawyer, 2014). Curanderismo is both a belief in the religious and the supernatural, with some people believing that all power to heal comes from God, yet also believing that some practices or rituals can indeed effect a certain outcome. Trotter, Chavira, and Leon (1997) have identified six major influences of curanderismo. First, the practice has been heavily influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs, symbols and rituals. These include biblical references to healing properties of animals, plants, oil, and wine; healing through divine intervention; the healing power of faith; belief in the soul of each individual; and the constant themes of light and darkness, good and evil, health and illness, and life and death. Curanderismo has also been influenced by early Arabic medicine and health practices, in which health consisted of a constant balance, for example “a holistic relationship between the individual and [their] total environment” (p. 30). In addition, Arabic medicinal remedies found in plants and animals also shaped curanderismo. Medieval and European witchcraft also had an impact on the practice of curanderismo. Specifically, the beliefs that the supernatural world could be controlled by humans and that there exists a source of supernatural power that could be accessed by humans through incantation, prayer, and ritual. The combination of medieval and European witchcraft with Christianity created a dual philosophical system that highlights the philosophical flexibility of curanderismo. A fourth and fifth influence on curanderismo was Native American herbal lore and health practices, specifically the

knowledge of medicinal herbs, and scientific knowledge which did impact the recognition and acceptance of diagnosis by Western medicine. Finally, curanderismo has been influenced by modern day beliefs about spiritualism and psychic phenomena, which believe in the power of spirits and the redirection of psychic energies that cause ailments. These six sources of influence draw attention to the importance of curanderismo as a practice that is concerned with "social, psychological, and spiritual problems as well as with physical ailments" (Trotter et al., p. 15).

Curanderismo as a transformative practice has been employed as both classroom and therapeutic practice. Toscano Villanueva (2013) focuses on healing as a decolonial aspect of teaching, identifying Indigenous modes of healing and the continuance of traditions as culturally responsive acts of decolonial methodology. The recovery of Indigenous knowledge through curanderismo becomes one way that the classroom is "reclaimed as a healing space centered in Chicano-Indigenous frameworks in a decolonial act" (p. 33). Similarly, Del Castillo, Wycoff, and Cantu (2012) argue for curanderismo as decolonial therapy. Defining decolonization therapy as "a healing process, a space where wounded spirits and souls from disenfranchised racial groups recover from historical trauma, racism, and other collective social ills caused by long term negative effects of colonization" (p. 2), the authors argue for the use of curanderismo as one method to decolonize our minds, bodies, and spirits. According to Del Castillo et al., curanderismo is "a spiritual cleansing process, an acceptance of self, a recognition and destruction of multiple historical identities that are often used by dominating culture as pseudo-schizophrenic states and split/dual personalities, causing consternation and self-hate" (p. 2). Curanderismo as decolonial therapy becomes a

"force" used to bring together these identities torn apart by historical trauma.

As discussed in Chapter 4, for Sandra curanderismo is both community work and academic endeavor, which mainly comes through her teaching. Not only is Sandra developing a curanderismo certificate at the California Institute of Integral Studies, but it is the "continual metaphor" that influences her philosophy and teaching. Aspects of curanderismo can be highlighted in the altares assignments she has students work on, or sometimes in the way she encourages her students to reflect on experiences that may make them uncomfortable, but which also have the potential for healing. Of course there is also Sandra's collaborative community project, Curanderas sin Fronteras, which offers limpias and yerbas to the community from a recreational vehicle trailer purchased by Sandra and her colleague. That curanderismo is an aspect of both her academic and community work, speaks to Sandra's belief that there is a need for the healing aspect that curanderismo provides, both in the classroom and in everyday lives of her community members.

Likewise, Irene has chosen to name her pedagogical/mentorship model employed in the undergraduate research program: Curandera Scholar Activism (CSA) because of its potential for healing. She has chosen to integrate a curandera scholar praxis and epistemology because she wants to focus on students' holistic development—connecting bodymindspirithearts to the academic learning process. Her integration of curandera qualities with scholar-activism "attend to individual and social healing and (re)claim ancestral healing knowledges suppressed or delegitimized by Western secular modern-colonial thought" (Gonzalez et al., p. 2). Lara also incorporates curanderismo as one of the themes in her class, "Healing traditions in Chican@ communities." Lara has also

started training within the area of curanderismo and has attended various retreats to learn various aspects of curanderismo, mainly the use of herbs and learning to do limpias. For Lara, one of the goals of her class is to reconnect her students to the healing traditional of Chican@ communities and "to provide students with the tools to decolonize their understanding of healing" (syllabus, p. 1). Though Sandra, Irene, and Lara each have different personal histories with the practice of curanderismo and incorporate it into their work in different ways, the focus on healing through curanderismo philosophy and practice is a theme that runs through each of their narratives. To comprehend the activist and healing aspect of curanderismo, it is important to look historically at the practice of curanderismo.

Curanderismo as a practice of Sandra, Irene, and Lara is a clear example of both borderland muxerista praxis and spiritual activism. Incorporating Indigenous knowledge and healing practices disrupts the epistemological oppression of knowledge other than Western science. In addition, their practice focuses on the holistic needs of students. Each of their pedagogical strategies are examples of what bell hooks calls "engaged pedagogy." hooks also writes of the importance of viewing teaching as a holistic endeavor. Engaged pedagogy highlights the need "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for souls of our students" (p. 13), and the need for educators to create a classroom space where this can take place. In her discussion of engaged pedagogy hooks encourages us to view the humanity of our students. She acknowledges that although engaged pedagogy is more demanding, it ultimately promotes the wellbeing, not just academic success of our students. Drawing from the work of Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, hooks identifies the practice of teaching as a sacred and healing practice, one

that emphasizes the wholeness of students, or the union of mind and spirit. Additionally, this space will be one where students' psyches are acknowledged and centered in the learning process. Perhaps Lara's philosophy provides the most striking example of addressing the holistic needs of students through an engaged praxis when she states, "My focus is really a lot on affirming the student and for them as individuals, but then also as members of the class community, affirming and being compassionate with themselves."

Cleary Sandra, Irene, and Lara are also drawing from the experiences of their students and working with them to uncover liberatory and transformative solutions to any historical trauma that may reside within them and may manifest as physical, emotional, mental, and/or spiritual illness. These are just some of the ways that their class material, including pedagogy, reading and writing assignments, and overall classroom objectives do indeed fall in line with borderland muxerista praxis. Decolonial imaginary allows us to view their practice and classroom space as a place of both agency and creativity—enacted by the professors *and* students. Curanderismo is by its very nature a spiritual practice, and that Sandra, Irene, and Lara center it as a feature of their academic work, particularly through teaching, points to their spiritual agency within the secular space of higher education. Their syllabi, classroom, and mentorship become the transformative space of sitio y lengua in which they enact and encourage their students to enact an epistemology grounded in their lived experiences, which also includes their spiritual experiences. One may find, by looking at each of these professors' biographies online, their research interests or even the names of the courses they teach. However, it is through our pláticas, a reading of their published work, and an overview of their syllabi that we can truly come to understand the spiritual activist nature of their work—as a

liberatory and transformative practice for themselves and their students. The incorporation of curanderismo as a practice of healing points to the trauma experienced by students and to the importance of healing that trauma through/with spirituality for continual engagement and resistance of the various factors that have caused and continue to cause historical trauma for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Danza

As participants of Danza, both Jennie and Maria incorporate Danza epistemology into their classroom teaching. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Jennie's dissertation was focused on Danza as a historical and contemporary political and spiritual practice. Her own personal history with Danza led her to pursue a doctoral degree in Native American studies, where she had always planned to focus her dissertation on Danza. Coming from a family of Danzantes, Maria also has a long history with Danza, and it is a part of her identity she feels she cannot separate from her identity as a community college instructor. To understand the significance of writing an entire dissertation on Danza and incorporating Danza philosophy into the college classroom, it is important to identify the purposes of Danza, as a cultural, political, and spiritual practice engaged in by Mexican@s/Chican@s in the United States.

According to Enrique Maestas (1996), Danza was a result of the endangered cultures of various Indigenous communities in Mexico, prohibited by the Spanish as a practice of self-sacrifice, but which continued to act as a form Indigenous resistance. Various forms of self-sacrifice were employed by Indigenous communities to "maintain the strict discipline necessary to safeguard the sacred rituals" (Maestas, p. 70). Dancing

for days on end was a part of this self-sacrificing practice. The connection between dancing and protecting sacred rituals points to the "spiritual path" (Maestas, p. 70) that is Danza Azteca. Danza as a practice in the United States was introduced in the 1960s by Maestro Andrés Segura, a dance leader from Mexico City. His groups identify as Danza Conchera and they maintain close ties to the Catholic Church. Another prominent teacher was Florencio Yescas, who brought the practice to the Tijuana/San Diego area. His dance is known as Danza Azteca Conquista, in which conquista refers to the spreading of the culture. Although much information is lacking in regard to how long the Danza practice occurred prior to the Spanish conquest, its effectiveness to resist forced assimilation, and strength of the forced Catholic oppression, what is known is that Danza has taken on multiple cultural expressions in the Mexican@/Chican@ community and that these spaces are being developed as "sacred sites for the use in the production of knowledge" (Maestas, p. 71).

With its primary purpose to reconstruct traditional ceremony as an act of resistance (Maestas, 1996), Danza has become a political and spiritual practice for Chican@s in the United States. Danza offers participants a space to honor ancestral knowledge, tradition, and spirits while connecting, mind, body, spirit (Luna, 2012). Similar to the way Danza provided a way for Indigenous peoples to mask their spiritual ways by using Christian icons and symbols in order to maintain their sacred traditions, present day participants in Danza boldly nurture their connection to Indigenous spirituality through the sacred ritual of dance. In addition, "Danza has provided a tool for decolonization, critical (re)thinking, and profound spiritual healing for the MeXicana/o community" (Luna, 2012, p. 153). This healing comes from the spiritual traditions of

Indigenous epistemology that emphasize “communal living, mutual cooperation, duality, reciprocity and balance with the natural world and creation” (Luna, 2013, p. 52).

The incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and discussion of Indigenous spiritual practices in the higher education classroom is in and of itself an act of resistance against the epistemological hegemony of Western knowledge. When incorporating the aforementioned concepts of communal living, mutual cooperation, duality, reciprocity and balance with the natural world and creation, as parts of the higher education classroom environment, it is clear that Danza as a research topic, class subject, or overall pedagogical philosophy falls in line with borderland muxerista praxis grounded in spirituality. Through her assignments that focus on ancestors and their lived experience, Maria encourages her students to honor those who have passed while also acknowledging the richness of their lives and the value of the knowledge they have imparted. Attacks on Ethnic Studies curriculum, which centers the experiences of communities of color, highlight an underlying belief that valued knowledge in the classroom should not be created by marginalized communities. These attacks also point to the reality that most high school students enter college with minimal exposure to ‘nontraditional’ reading and learning material. As Maria mentioned, for many of her students it is likely the first time they have had a woman of color professor, let alone one who incorporates Indigenous philosophy in her teaching style. Part of what Maria’s assignments do for her students is provide a space to not only challenge the oppression of their very lived experience and that of their ancestors, but they also oppose traditional teaching methods. In her classroom, Maria refers to student groups as familias, highlighting the Indigenous concepts of communal living and mutual cooperation. Here, the spiritual feature of

interconnectedness is nurtured by asking students to think about the ways their stories are similar or different from their classmates', and encouraging them to find points of connection between their familial, personal, and community histories. Like the Xicana Sacred Space (Diaz, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal, & Campos, 2009) that offers a space of sharing lived experience with the goal of consciousness-raising and decolonization, Maria's familias are a space of community and relationship that decenter Western epistemologies and ideologies and allow students from marginalized communities to exchange and create knowledge.

Though Jennie shares that her reason for creating a doctoral dissertation focused on Danza was a personal choice that would allow her to learn more about the practice and reflect its influence in her personal/political life, she also clearly sees it as a practice that should be shared with others. Not only has she started her own Danzante groups, but she also teaches a class dedicated to the historical, political, spiritual, and theoretical understanding of the practice. The significance of writing a dissertation and teaching a class on Danza is made apparent when Jennie discusses the importance of Danza to the process of healing. The healing process begins as a process of recovering memory and "recovering our history. It's building our place in society and that we have a connection, we have a history. That's part of the memory—the recovery part. The healing part is community. It's healing from colonization." Though Jennie teaches a class dedicated to Danza, the influence of Danza philosophy is evident in the indirect ways as well. For example, in the way she mediated her students' disagreement as discussed in the previous chapter. That she began their meeting with the burning of sage, though it may appear to be a minor act, speaks loudly to the importance Jennie places on Danza practice that is

grounded in Indigenous epistemology. Through this seemingly insignificant act, Jennie addresses the holistic needs of her students and opposes traditional mentorship paradigms by also taking into account the emotional, mental, and spiritual strain her students' argument may have on them and suggesting solutions to help in these arenas.

The focus that both Maria and Jennie place on healing through a Danza epistemology speaks to the holistic vision they have of their students and the importance they place on addressing intellectual, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of their students. This is spiritual activism as a classroom practice. As Layli Maparyan (2011) has stated, "spiritual activism is a set of practices designed to change 'hearts and minds' in ways that promote optimal well-being in individuals, communities, humanity as a whole" (p. 117). Incorporating a Danza epistemology in the way one teaches or interacts with students clearly seeks to nurture students' holistic well-being. As a research interest and class topic, it introduces to the larger community, and perhaps more importantly to Chican@/Latin@ students, a space from which they cannot only learn about themselves, but they can also identify the importance of healing and engage in a practice that can promote that healing. Herein lies the transformative potential of Danza, as epistemology and practice—a space from which to center ancestral Indigenous knowledge and promote the historical trauma associated with the oppression and invalidation of such knowledge. Again, it is the work of Perez and the decolonial imaginary that allows us to view Maria and Jennie's work as opposing the traditional teacher and researcher that the Western academy expects them to be—personally disconnected from their students and their work, unbiasedly teaching their students and focusing on course content. Instead, the decolonial imaginary challenges us to look closely and critically at ways that teaching

about community, and mutual cooperation, and incorporating family and personal history as well as Indigenous philosophy subvert the Western academic practice of teaching and learning that distances the personal. In addition, centering a holistic approach that addresses the spiritual—whether that is directly or indirectly done—also resists notions of higher education that identify spiritualty as too personal a characteristic to bring into the class and as separate from the learning environment. Instead, the incorporation of Danza by both Maria and Jennie boldly states, "I am spiritual and so are my students."

Dia de Los Muertos

The celebration of Dia de Los Muertos and the use of altares is a pedagogical practice used by Sandra, Maria, and Irene. For Sandra, altares is a feature assignment in her gender studies course, in which students are required to reflect on their gender development and create an altar to visualize that. In her class, Maria engages her students in a discussion of the historical celebration of Dia de Los Muertos and has students write about a family member who has passed. During some semesters, she also has students create an altar to pay homage to this family member. Finally, Lara has not only published on the importance of Dia de Los Muertos, but she was also the first individual to begin the practice at UCLA when she worked there as a lay minister. She also provides a space for a class altar and as one of her assignments, students can create a sacred space, of which an altar is an option.

The significance of Dia de los Muertos as a ritual celebration that honors the dead is about "enlarge[ing] a collective historical memory that gives life to past, present, and future generations. The public nature of the ritual and its underlying Mesoamerican

Indigenous worldview, which values the interconnectedness of life, defy mainstream attempts to silence a culture and a spirituality "forged in the struggle against domination" (Medina & Cadena, 2002, p. 73). The contemporary Dia de los Muertos celebrations that take place all over the United States have become an important piece of cultural representation, which have also come to be used as a space of political discourse (Marchi, 2006). Particularly, the altares created by participants and celebrants of Dia de Los Muertos are used to display the personal testimonios of a community that has experienced and continues to experience social, economic, educational, and criminal discrimination amongst others. Hence, altares, which trouble the lines between the living and the dead, (Medina & Cadena, 2002), "become political statements on behalf of oppressed communities and their struggles for social change and social justice" (López, 2002, p. 72).

To assign an altar as a classroom assignment, or provide the space to create a classroom altar, as done by Maria and Sandra, or provide a space for the class to come together to create an altar, as done by Lara, invites students to participate in an act that celebrates collective memory, creates spiritual continuity between the past and present, validates Indigenous traditions, and resists attempts to silence culture and spirituality while drawing attention to the political challenges of a community. The very act of creating an altar, is intersectional in its approach and outcome as a "meditative, political, and subversive act" (Pacheco, plática 1). The creation of an altar is also a healing act in that it allows students to either reflect on their ancestor or reflect on their identity markers that the assignment is calling one to focus on. For example, Sandra has her students think about the way gendered experiences have influenced the way they think about

themselves. She recognizes that reflecting on these experiences can be painful, and hence the altar assignment allows students to work through that pain. In Maria's class, the altar assignment creates a community of sharing stories that fosters connections.

Incorporating Dia de los Muertos and altares into the classroom space is a spiritual project in that it centers interconnectivity, a central feature of Chicana feminist spiritualties. Through the creation of altares, students can reconnect to loved ones who have passed away, and their memory and legacy. Sharing these stories also allows one to find connections between each other, recognizing that although personal and familial history is unique, it is also grounded in a community history of both marginalization and survival. As a political project, altares allow the creator to reimagine and reconstruct narratives of family or the self that validate the lives of those being honored or the experiences being shared. There is also validation that those lives have much to teach and offer us. Part of the transformative potential of an altar project is ability to thrust the creator in to nepantla—a space between this world and the spirit world (Anzaldúa, 1999). In nepantla, a messy space of ambiguity, social identities and family experiences of marginalization are centered and deconstructed (Calderon et al., 2014). Sometimes, the excavation of family or personal history is fraught with pain—not all family stories are stories of joy, survival, or beauty. The fact is that some are marred with ugly truths. Nepantla, as part and parcel of the spiritual process of conocimiento, allows individuals to work through the messiness of lived experiences and provides them the "power to choose critique, integrate, and balance our multiple cultural and biological inheritances" (Lara, 2014, p. 170). The transformative potential of altares comes from the space of nepantla. Viewing such an assignment through the lens of decolonial imaginary

highlights the agency and creativity enacted by the professors who assign the project and also by the students who create altares.

Food as Medicine

Luz Calvo's project on the decolonization of food is both a spiritual and political project, which they speak to in the introduction of their book. As discussed in the previous chapter, Luz began their journey to decolonize their diet after a cancer diagnosis, which left them spiritually bereft. Planting a garden and the process of growing their own food through the very active performance of putting their hands in the soil, was a vital component of Luz's recovery, not from the cancer, but from the susto of the cancer and proceeding treatments. Luz's students' interest in learning to cook traditional Mexican foods led to the creation of the Facebook page, Decolonize your Diet, with its emphasis on recovering ancestral foods. This project as both a spiritual and political act is grounded in the assumption that food is indeed both physical and spiritual medicine.

In their book, *Food is Medicine*, Winona LaDuke and Sarah Alexander (2004) write about the importance of agriculture for Native American communities. Growing one's own food was a way for Native American communities to nurture their sacred relations to the land while also maintaining healthy diets. However, as LaDuke and Alexander demonstrate, the bond to the land and also to a healthy lifestyle was disrupted by colonialism. Native American communities were violently forced off their land, reducing, and often times eliminating, their agriculture. Livestock was also slaughtered by colonists. With the forced removal of Native Americans into reservations came the

introduction of government commodity foods, which not only destroyed Native people's traditional food systems but introduced unhealthy processed foods that had a negative effect on Native people's health. The disruption of their own food systems and the introduction of commodity foods led to a spike in diabetes in Native American communities. Luz's own work with their collaborator and partner, Catriona Rueda Esquibel, similarly highlights the effects of the Standard American Diet (SAD) on the Latina/o immigrant community. Consisting of processed foods, meat, poultry, and dairy that comes from animals raised in factory farms, the SAD diet differs drastically from the food of immigrants who come from Mexico and Central America. In their home countries, these communities are more accustomed to a mainly plant-based diet that includes much fresher foods. Upon arrival to the United States, immigrants from Mexico and Central America have lower infant mortality rates, lower rates of illness including certain cancers, and lower rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease—illnesses that plague U.S.-born Latinas/os. It was in fact this research that led Luz and their partner to reevaluate and change their own diet, and encourage others to do the same.

Though the act of sharing a recipe might not seem like much of a resistant or transformative act, when grounded in the historical contexts of Native communities and the health paradox of Latin@ immigrants, this seemingly insignificant normalized act of recipe sharing becomes an act of decolonization. Decolonization, as a "resurrection of one's history and how it has contributed to the history of the world" (Graveline, 1998), allows us to the view Luz's simple act of recipe sharing and her more complicated act of growing a garden and changing their diet to a plant-based home grown diet as a

reclamation of Indigenous knowledge. It is also a reclamation of one's health, that acknowledges the way colonization of Native lands and the growth of industrial food processes and processed foods have disproportionately affected communities of color. To view these acts through the lens of a decolonial imaginary allows us to imagine what Luz's project is a response to and how their Facebook page, book, presentations, etc., provide a space to rewrite history and imagine and make real a future where communities of color reclaim their health and resist the narrative that they are unhealthy, do not care about health, or do not know about healthy ways of living/being.

As Luz's work and the work of Winona LaDuke and Sarah Alexander show, these acts of resistance are not just about physical health, but about the spiritual health of a community. Reclaiming ancestral foods is also reclaiming ancestral knowledge, itself a spiritual quest. As LaDuke and Alexander so beautifully state, "The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine—not only for the body but also for the soul and for the spiritual connection to history, ancestors and the land" (p. 33). What Luz and Catriona provide for their thousands of Facebook followers and what Luz provides for their students who take their 'Decolonize your Diet' class is an opportunity to nurture their spiritual connection to land, ancestors, and/or ancestral knowledge. It is not merely about healthy eating habits, but about the reconstructing of a narrative that identifies communities of color and low-income communities as lacking knowledge and resources regarding what is healthy. The recovery of subjugated knowledges and the potential this has for a spiritual connection to the past and spiritual nurturing of the present and future is indeed a healing act.

La Virgen

I now want to turn to the work of Alejandra, particularly her focus on La Virgen de Guadalupe as a decolonial feminist figure. Alejandra has an entire chapter dedicated to La Virgen in her book, "Transforming Borders: Chicana/o popular culture and pedagogy," in which she writes about the national significance of La Virgen and also the meaningful, decolonial, and transformative role she has played and continues to play in the Chicana feminist imaginary. La Virgen's significance in the lives of the other contributors was apparent in the way she made her appearance in office and home art. Though other contributors did not directly discuss La Virgen, I take her appearance in their homes, offices, and altares to signify her importance. In order to understand how she is in fact a Chicana feminist figure of indigeneity and resistance, I provide some historical context.

According to the *Nican Mopohua* (Laso de la Vega, 1649), the first written account of the apparitions, La Virgen appeared to a Nahuatl speaking peasant near the hill of Tepeyacac in Mexico (now Tepeyac) in 1531. Dark-skinned and speaking Nahuatl herself, the woman summoned Juan Diego to the top of the hill where she requested that he go to the bishop and ask that a temple be built on that spot in her honor. Heeding her request, Juan Diego went to the bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, to tell him what he had witnessed and of the woman's request. Not believing him, the bishop asked Juan Diego to return at another time. The following day Juan Diego returned to the place of the woman's apparitions where she awaited him. Upon seeing her, the young peasant pleaded with her to ask another person with more credibility to deliver her message. The woman assured him that he was to deliver her request to the bishop. Again, the bishop did not

believe Juan Diego and asked that the man bring him proof of the woman's appearance. Attempting to thwart the woman from seeing him again, Juan Diego decided to take another road to Ttatelolco, but the woman came to him from the top of the hill. Feeling ashamed, Juan Diego informed her that his uncle was sick and thus he was not able to come to her. She assured him that his uncle would be fine and asked him to return the following day to receive proof of her appearance. On the fourth apparition, the woman asked Juan Diego to climb the hill where he was to retrieve flowers as proof of her appearance. Juan Diego did as he was told, and was astonished to find Spanish flowers growing during that time of year and in a place of little grass and many weeds. He brought the flowers back to the woman, which she took and placed in his cloak and instructed Juan Diego to take them to the bishop. When the bishop finally came to Juan Diego, the young commoner recounted the story of the woman's apparition and the Spanish flowers. Juan Diego then laid out the flowers from his cloak for the bishop, and on his cloak was the most beautiful image of La Virgen de Guadalupe. Below is the account as stated in the *Nican Mopohua*:

> Thereupon he spread out his white cloak, in the folds of which he was carrying the flowers, and as all the different kinds of Spanish flowers scattered to the ground, the precious image of the consummate Virgin Saint Mary, mother of God the deity, was imprinted and appeared on the cloak, just as it is today where it is kept in her precious home, her temple of Tepeyacac, called Guadalupe. (Laso de la Vega, 1649, p. 85)

Finally believing Juan Diego, the bishop ordered a basilica to be built on the hill of Tepeyacac. The basilica however was not founded until 1555 by Archbishop Montúfar (Lafaye, 1976). Construction of the basilica was made possible by donations from the public, a testament to the already growing devotion to La Virgen de Guadalupe. Over time, additions have been made to the modest structure, and today a new, massive

basilica, located near the old basilica, houses Juan Diego's tilma.[8]

There has been great controversy and debate regarding La Virgen de Guadalupe's connection to Indigenous beliefs, in particular her relationship to Tonantzin, the Aztec earth goddess (Gallegos, 2010). Some argue that they are the same deity, others believe in the separateness and uniqueness of the two revered goddesses. While it is beyond the scope, and purpose, of this paper to discuss these arguments, I would like to examine the symbolic relationship between these two icons.

The appearance of a Nahuatl-speaking virgin at Tepeyac to an Indigenous peasant led to strong associations between La Virgen de Guadalupe and Tonantzin. For years, Indians of Mexico made pilgrimages to Tepeyac (known as Tepeyacac by the natives) to honor Tonantzin, where a temple devoted to her existed (LaFaye, 1976). To understand the importance of the connection with the Catholic deity and the Aztec goddess, is it necessary to know the role Tonantzin played for her followers. While varying descriptions of Tonantzin exist, is it clear that she was a central goddess, had a temple at Tepeyac, and was celebrated by people all over the country. Additionally, her name meant "our mother." Tonantzin has also been associated with numerous Aztec goddesses, including Cihuacóatl or wife of the serpent, Centeotl or goddess of maize, and Toci, mother of the gods who wore a skirt of stars. While these various associations exist, the connection between La Virgen and Tonantzin has taken precedence, as her appearance at Tepeyac continues to encourage pilgrimages to the site. Thus, it is believed by many that Guadalupe was in fact Tonantzin appearing to Juan Diego as a Catholic deity after the

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[8] Construction of the new basilica began in 1974 and was completed in 1976. The new space has seating for 10,000 people (www.virgendeguadalupe.org.mx).

evangelization of the Indigenous peoples of Mexico. There are also multiple symbolic representations on the image of La Virgen that connect her to Indigenous beliefs. While interpretations of these meanings differ, I will present some of the common interpretations here.

The first is the look of the angel below La Virgen. In most European presentations of the Madonna, the angels appear as young, White-skinned cherubs. However, the angel that appears below La Virgen is neither young nor White, signifying Indigenous blood. It has been speculated that the older dark-skinned man is actually Tezcatlipoca, the archenemy of Quetzalcoátl, who became the sun god after Tezcatlipoca.[9] While I was unable to find an explanation for the presence of Tezcatlipoca, one can speculate that the Virgen standing on him signifies the power of Quetzalcoátl over him. A second symbol is a four-petal flower on the tunic of La Virgen, the only one of its kind. This flower is believed to signify nahui ollin, or the four movements of the sun, perhaps signifying Juan Diego's four apparitions. A third symbol representing Indigenous religious beliefs is the sun rays that surround La Virgen, which are believed to signify Huitzilopochitl, the Aztec sun god. The presence of the sunrays signifies the blessing by God of La Virgen.[10] Other symbols include the starry mantle, signifying Xiuhitilmatli or the turquoise cloak worn by the most prominent tlatoanimes, again speaking to the nobility of la Virgen. The stars also signify that the woman comes from heaven and is a supernatural character. The crescent moon representing cyclical movement, destiny, and rebirth also has been

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[9] www.aztec-history.com

[10] www.olgaustin.org

interpreted as the virgin's power over the Mesoamerican god of night, signifying also the power of the sun god. There are also the Spanish flowers on the tunic and found by Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac, signifying a negotiation between the Christian world and the Indian, or Indigenous world. This symbiosis acknowledges the ability and agency of the Indigenous community to remain committed to their Aztec roots, while creating a new identity based on Christianity.

Finally, there is the image of La Virgen herself—neither European nor Indian, but a combination of the two, a mestiza signifying a new race, people, and culture. Although numerous priests and bishops criticized the adoration of La Virgen, she remained loved and revered by citizens of a Mexico who had recently been colonized and were in a state of transformation and attempted liberation. La Virgen's appearance to an Indigenous peasant only 10 years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, her own Indigenous look and connections to the Indigenous deity Tonantzin, and her presence during times of need have made her a symbol of Indigenous survival and Mexican identity. Her image was on the Franciscan banners carried by Father Miguel Hidalgo during El Grito de Dolores, which initiated the Mexican war for independence from Spain. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910 Emiliano Zapata and his Zapatistas, in their fight against Dictator Porfirio Diaz, carried the image of Guadalupe on banners, pins, medals, prints, and on their hats (Zabreska, 2000). La Virgen was also chosen as one of the main symbols of the farmworkers' strike in the 1960s (Peterson, 1992). Today, she continues to be adored by citizens of Mexico and the United States who recognize the ambiguity of their existence as 'strangers' on stolen land and the colonized in the land of the colonizers and she continues to be embraced as a symbol of both oppression and survival.

La Virgen de Guadalupe has been especially influential for Chicanas in the United States, signifying a cultural, political, and spiritual icon. While dominant constructions of La Virgen idolize her for her obedience, submissiveness, and humility, Chicana feminists argue that this view of La Virgen promotes patriarchal, oppressive constructions of womanhood (Elenes, 2011). To counter these traditional images of womanhood, Chicanas have reimagined and reconstructed images and the meaning of La Virgen. I have discussed some of the artistic reimaginings of La Virgen in Chapter 1. In her own work, Alejandra argues that the reconstruction of La Virgen into a feminist figure does the work of border/transformative pedagogies through the production of "radical subjectivities that challenge mainstream patriarchal (Colonial, Anglo and Chicano male) epistemologies" (Elenes, 2011, p. 105). As I argue in Chapter 1, the various ways Chicanas have rearticulated La Virgen to transform her from a submissive, patriarchal figure, to a symbol that transcends gendered ideas about femininity is an important decolonial act. In addition, that Alejandra has dedicated some of her scholarship to unpacking this further and to acknowledging the pedagogical significance of La Virgen further highlights the transformative and liberatory potential of this in the higher education classroom. Looking through the lens of decolonial imaginary, we see Alejandra's identification of La Virgen as a pedagogical tool as an enactment of spiritual agency in the secular space of higher education. In addition, Alejandra's work, like the decolonial imaginary, "can help us rethink history in a way that makes Chicana/o agency transformative" (Perez, 1999, p. 5). Whereas the patriarchal and colonial church has created La Virgen as a model of traditional femininity, purity, and loyalty, Chicana feminists remake her into a figure of sexuality, self-defined femininity, and self-

determination. As an example of borderlands muxerista praxis, Alejandra's writing on La Virgen as a curricular tool of border/transformative pedagogy opposes the oppressive ideological construction and highlights the liberatory and transformative potential of reconstruction La Virgen de Guadalupe. Though other contributors did not mention La Virgen directly, her significance was made apparent in the art representation of La Virgen that a few of the contributors had in their home or offices. I believe her presence in the lives of the contributors—even if only in art form in one's office—signifies a connection to the struggle for self-identification and a reclamation of spirituality and La Virgen as feminist figure.

Spiritual Activists in Higher Education

While the contributors of this project have different academic and teaching interests, they all share a similar foundation to their work—one rooted in their spiritual epistemology and a commitment to activism. The professors and their work are indeed examples of spiritual activists and spiritual activism that expand the ideas of pedagogy and research. Their personal narratives and their academic projects expand our ideas of epistemology and of spiritually-minded praxis by highlighting the necessary component spirituality plays in their making sense of the world, and by underscoring the creative ways spirituality is employed in academic settings and the transformative potential of this. Based on the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa (2002), Ana Louis Keating (2006), Leela Fernandes (2003), and Layli Maparyan (2011), I argue that the contributors to this project are indeed examples of spiritual activists.

Anzaldúa discussed spiritual activism in her writings on the Path of

Conocimiento. On the seventh and final step of Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento the viajer@ acts out a vision of spiritual activism, or spirituality for social change. According to Anzaldúa (2002) one is ready to take up the work of spiritual activism when the "sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all being" (p. 558) is recognized. When interconnectedness is realized, healing and spiritual activism begin. On the seventh step on the path of conocimiento, Anzaldúa identifies a shifting of realities and acting out of spiritual activism as the beginning of transformation for the self and others.

Anzaldúa's work on spiritual activism has been taken up by others, most notable Ana Louis Keating. Keating (2006), who defines spiritual activism as "a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics—a way of life and a call to action" (p. 11), argues that it is Anzaldúa's most comprehensive theory, as it includes several of her other concepts that combine social activism with spiritual vision. What becomes especially important for Keating is that Anzaldúa was not writing about an individualist or inner spirituality. Instead, spiritual activism is an outer activism, one that connects personal spiritual beliefs to outer spiritual acts towards social change.

Leela Fernandes (2003) also takes up the discussion of spiritual activism, though not necessarily using that term. Fernandes writes about a "politicization of spirituality" (p. 101) and spiritualized social transformation" (p. 102). She cautions against thinking about spirituality without a critical lens, as this can serve to reinscribe spirituality as an "esoteric abstraction devoid of material implications" (p. 102), yet also rebukes the idea that secularism is a safe form of religious tolerance. Instead, Fernandes calls for social transformation grounded within a decolonized spirituality—a spirituality removed from

the conservative, patriarchal religions that attempt to define and control spirituality. The spirituality and spiritual practices called for by Fernandes require the willingness to challenge all forms of injustice and inequality. As Fernandes argues, "any form of spirituality that cannon confront the United States' hegemonic political, military, cultural and economic global becomes a mask for the power and privilege that stems from residing in the heart of empire" (p. 111).

Finally, there is the work of Layli Maparyan (2011) who defines spiritual activism as "a set of practices designed to change 'hearts and minds' in ways that promote optimal well-being in individuals, communities, humanity as a whole, all living kind and ultimately Planet Earth" (p. 117). Spiritual activism is about social and individual transformation rooted in a spiritual epistemology and spiritual practices. According to Maparyan, spiritual activism requires a belief in the impossible, or as she says "the demystification of the performance of miracles" (p. 121), defined as intentional transformation to produce a desired outcome—in this case social transformation. To perform the impossible, or miracles, Maparyan identifies two steps: changing the self and changing the world. This connects directly to Anzaldúa, who also believed the work of spiritual activism required inner work that leads to outer work.

Together, these four scholars provide us with an understanding of spiritual activism as social activist work that is grounded within a spiritual epistemology. They draw attention to the importance of spirituality at the individual level and community level—both of which require constant spiritual practices that forefront healing as a necessary component of social transformation. The writings of Anzaldúa, Keating, Fernandes, and Maparyan provide the lens from which to view the contributors of this

project, and their teaching, writing, and community projects as practices of spiritual activism. Some of the contributors do identify as spiritual activists or believe their work is a form of spiritual activism. For example, Maria believes her "everyday prep and presence" in a classroom and discipline taught mainly by White males combined with her spiritual epistemology that is already always present, may seem unremarkable, but is indeed a very active practice of spiritual activism for her. Irene also identifies as a spiritual activist. I quote her at length to showcase the many layers of this identity. When asked what it means to identify as a spiritual activist, she says:

> It means that I try to approach my life and experiences and interactions, decisions, from a spiritual activist approach of being present and aware with my whole self, so not just trying to rationalize something or obviously not just whatever, being distressed or angry about something, or that I try to do it in all who I am in my identity and from that place that honors my body and my mind and my spirit all at once. Especially I draw a lot from Anzaldúa's essay, Now let us shift, and how she talks about how do you deal with conflict? How do you deal with difference? How do you deal with oppression? To deal with it from a spiritual activist approach means that, like Ana Louis Keating who is also really formative, that you do it "listening with raw openness," she says, like, okay, so what does that mean to really listen and not react, but to listen and not just listen with the ears kind of thing, but what is my body telling me, and trusting it, you know. What does my spirit ... Okay, let me just close my eyes. Let me breathe. Let me take a walk outside. Let me look at the leaves in the wind. What is my spirit telling me? Being able to do things, kind of like preventive medicine or taking steps that help cultivate those skills, those "facultades," as Anzaldúa would say, in you, so that when there is conflict, when there is the trauma of what is happening all around the country with ... in Baltimore, and Ferguson... that you're able to really listen and see and be aware and not shut down, not run away, not internalize it in the sense of like an unproductive hurting inside, or a ... how do I say? You don't internalize the trauma, but yet that it's working. It's going through you. Like you see it. You're not looking away. You're going to bear witness.

Here, Irene is referring to the first part of spiritual activism: inner work. There is an emphasis on the self here to heal, to understand and work through pain, and to find ways of navigating trauma. However, this is not the end of spiritual activism. Irene continues,

> ...knowing that that's going to facilitate the quote/unquote "public acts" that I'm

> committed to also doing. It's your body, your mind, and your spirit. I love the monitos (Figure 5) that Gloria Anzaldúa draws, where she has her imagery of spiritual activism and conocimiento, and she has like a hand with a face. It's like the action of the hand and it's the face with the ears listening and then the mouth is open, and the tongue is sticking out. Sometimes there's a pen at the end of the tongue, so it's like language, voice, writing, your ears, your eyes, the hand, you know?

In the above quote, Irene is discussing the outer works, or public acts, of spiritual activism describing a hand that is active and mouth that speaks. Perhaps for some the outer works take the forms of writings, while for others it is teaching or community work, or a combination of these and other forms of activism.

As far as the contributors in this project, I view their teaching, writing, and community projects as public acts of activism that are grounded in a spiritual epistemology and praxis, which I call borderland muxerista praxis. I view them as spiritual activist, even though for some of them the term may not be one they take on so readily. For example, when I asked Luz if they consider themselves a spiritual activist, they were unsure of what the term meant and hence did not feel comfortable identifying as such. I shared with them that I was thinking about spiritual activism through the work of Anzaldúa and Keating where one's activism and spirituality come together to which they replied, "I guess in that sense, yes. It's just like that's not a word I would use but I think that's just been the direction kind of my life and even my community in the last while." Similarly, when I asked Sandra the same question she discussed feeling unsure about the meaning of the word for her now, and a need to return to some of Keating's reading to get a better understanding of spiritual activism. Her main concern was that the combination of spirituality and activism in equal parts was difficult. She said, "So for me that holds a lot of balance where sometimes my experience with spiritual activism has

been a little lopsided, and I don't know. I'm still working on it. It's something that I almost have to get back to you on cause I'd have to kind of ... kind of take some time to sit with it because it's something I've not really thought about in a while and nor is it a label that I really applied to myself."

While I certainly do not want to apply labels to individuals that they are not comfortable with, I still want to make the argument that the work of Luz and Sandra, and all the other contributors, whether they identify as spiritual activists or not, does provide examples of spiritual activism—"a set of practices designed to change "hearts and minds" in ways that promote optimal well-being in individuals, communities, humanity as a whole, all living kind and ultimately Planet Earth" (Maparyan, 2011, p. 117). Their narratives and their work, and the way they talk about their work, highlight the central role of individual and community well-being in the struggle for equity and justice. The spiritual part need not always be obvious to students in order for it to matter. As these seven contributors show, how one incorporates spirituality in higher education will look different. However that it is a constant guiding force in their work underscores its importance.

In the final chapter I turn my attention to a discussion that allows us to take the spiritual narratives and work of the spiritual activists in this project to reimagine a scholar activism that centers spirituality. I focus on the significance of spirituality for both faculty and students and implications for overall wellbeing. Finally, I write about my own personal journey with Chicana feminist methodology, focusing on how my own spiritual and academic journey have been influenced by this project.

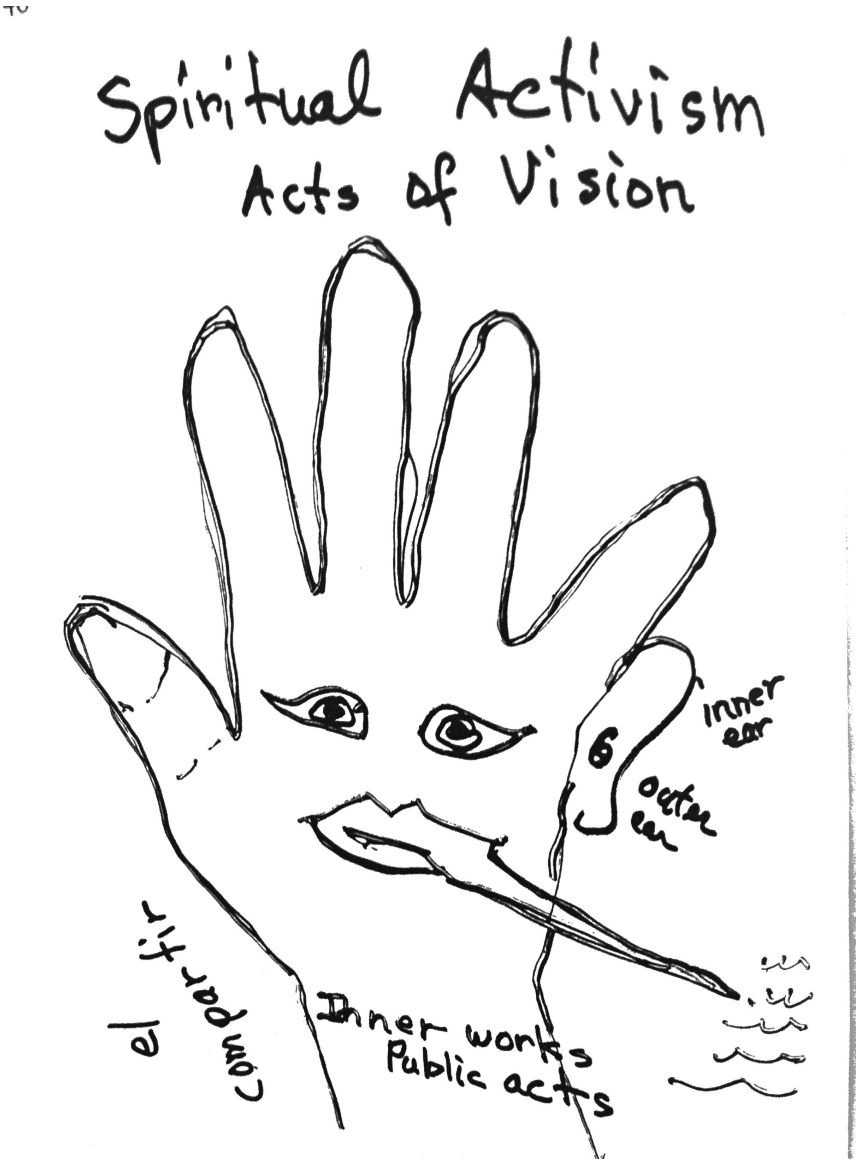

Figure 5. Drawing by Gloria Anzaldúa. Reprinted from Entremundos/Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa (p. 46), by A. Keating (Ed.), 2008, New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

CAPÍTULO 6

CONCLUSION: THE URGENCY OF SPIRITUALLY GUIDED ACTIVIST PRAXIS

The overall goal of this project was to examine the relationship between spirituality and the activist praxis of Chican@ higher education faculty. My argument was that marginalization of both spiritualty and Chican@ activist praxis stems from a silencing of knowledges other than that which originates from the White Western male positivistic perspective, or in other words, the domination of the Eurocentric Western epistemology/knowledge.

What I found is that spirituality is not merely a practice of the professors' lives, but a way of life—of understanding the world and being in the world. Like Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento, the narratives of these spiritual activists draw attention to the multifaceted ways spirituality is an "overarching theory of consciousness, of how the mind works. It is an epistemology that tries to encompass all dimensions of life, both inner—mental emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer—social, political, lived experiences" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 177). While each contributor defines, understands, experiences and practices spirituality in their own unique way, they each share a common denominator—a life and activist praxis guided by a spiritual epistemology. In addition, as is clear from their narratives and their academic work,

ancestral knowledge contributes to and is a large part of their spiritual epistemology. The narratives highlight how each of the contributors defines spirituality, influenced by their unique experiences they have had growing up, navigating higher education, or working through the many matters of adulthood.

Through the contributors' narratives I also found the contributors' pedagogy, syllabi, publications and projects to be clear examples of borderland muxerista scholarship. As previously stated, the purpose of conceptualizing borderland muxerista praxis was not to define or name the pedagogy, research, academic or community projects of the contributors to this dissertation, but to provide a roadmap of how I was thinking about the work of the contributors. Conceptualizing a borderland muxerista scholarship helped me to identify points of similarities amongst the various teaching and research practices engaged in by the Chican@ professors. By focusing on the particular components of curanderismo, Danza, Dia de los Muertos, food as medicine and La Virgen, I was able to highlight healing, ancestral knowledge, and transformative and holistic visions of teaching, mentoring, research and community work as similar approaches and goals amongst the contributors.

Due to the integration of spiritual epistemology and activist praxis of the seven contributors I identify them each as spiritual activists—individuals who connect their personal spiritual beliefs to outer spiritual acts towards social change. Spiritual activism is about social and individual transformation rooted in a spiritual epistemology and spiritual practices. According to Layli Maparyan (2011), spiritual activism requires a belief in the impossible, or as she says "the demystification of the performance of miracles" (p. 121), defined as intentional transformation to produce a desired outcome—

in this case social transformation. To perform the impossible, or miracles, Maparyan identifies two steps: changing the self and changing the world. As the narratives of the contributors' show, each has had their spirituality influenced by various internal and external events—experiences that influence how they approach their activist praxis in the space of higher education.

The work presented here becomes increasingly more important as the stakes grow higher. I began this dissertation shortly after the nation had elected its first Black president, Barack Hussein Obama, to his second term, and conclude it now under the presidential inauguration of a bigoted, sexist, and racist president. Since being inaugurated Donald Trump has issued an executive order banning travel from Muslim countries, suspended refugee admission for 120 days, and has banned all Syrian refugees indefinitely. In addition, he has issued an order to move forward with the building of a wall between Mexico and the United States, and has threatened sanctuary cities—cities that have denounced the handing over of undocumented individuals to authorities—stating that federal funds would be cut to those cities that do not cooperate with immigration officials. He has lifted Barack Obama's order to stop construction on the Dakota Access Pipeline as it violates the land rights of Native Americans in the area, threatening their water supply and dishonoring their ancestors. In short, he has, since becoming President, further divided an already precarious nation and continues to perpetuate white supremacy, bigotry, prejudice, intolerance, hate, and disrespect for others and for the very land that we live on.

Protests and marches are occurring all around the nation to show Trump that his orders of hate will not be accepted. From women's marches that took place the day after

he was inaugurated to protests taking place at various international airports, the spirit of resistance is alive. It is these actions that give me hope. It is also these actions and the reality of what the Trump era means for people from various marginalized communities that give the work of the contributors in this project more urgency. The focus on the spiritual, and interconnectivity to each other, our histories, our communities, and our planet underscores the importance and necessity of spiritual activist work as we enter an ugly, divisive, and frightening time of North American history. We need to nurture spirituality in higher education as "the spiritual quest is inherently part and parcel of liberation and resistance as well as a vital part of society and the search for holistic living and learning; it is a search for guiding visions and values within this world and for the many people who occupy this planet…spirituality is about personal empowerment, personal and collective transformation, and relationships" (Wane & Ritskes, 2011, p. xv). We need to reimagine activist praxis through spirituality, just as each of the contributors does, if we are to engage in lasting, collective transformation. The urgency of the times and the benefits of spirituality to both students and faculty make the work presented in this project leading examples of what we need more of and point to the urgency of spiritually guided activist praxis.

Spirituality in Higher Education Activist Praxis: A Necessity

In her book, *On Spiritual Strivings*, Cynthia Dillard (2006) discusses the importance of centering spirit in our scholarly praxis and challenges the reader to move from/with love that is focused on creating a new vision of what it means to be an activist scholar. Dillard highlights the importance of spirituality as "intimately woven in the ethos

of an endarkened epistemology" (p. 17) and as part and parcel of the research/teaching process. Part of spirituality in our work, according to Dillard, is recognition that there is spirit inherent in all of life. It is when this spirit becomes the center of our work that "we can create a community in love" (p. 37). To center spirit means to recognize our role in the intellectual *and* spiritual formation of our students and ourselves as activist scholars. If we are to thrive in the Trump era, we must create the communities of love grounded in spirituality that Dillard calls for, and which the contributors' work exemplifies. Under the Trump era spirituality is necessary as a new resource for politics, "by which to guide the healing of the unjustly socially marginalized and of the increasingly polluted environment" (Perez, 2007, p. 3).

Spirituality, as a resource for politics, challenges us to view activism as a holistic endeavor, one that views spiritual, emotional, and mental transformation, liberation, and wellbeing on par with political and material revolution. bell hooks (1994) challenges educators to view teaching as a holistic practice through 'engaged pedagogy', highlighting the need "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for souls of our students" (p. 13), and the need for educators to create a classroom space where this can take place. She acknowledges that although engaged pedagogy is more demanding, it ultimately promotes the wellbeing, not just academic success of students. Drawing from the work of Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, hooks identifies the practice of teaching as a sacred and healing practice, one that emphasizes the wholeness of students, or the union of mind and spirit. My argument here is that through spirituality we can partake in "engaged activism," in which we spiritualize social activism so that emotional and mental wellbeing are also central.

Research on the benefits of spirituality for students continues to highlight the importance of incorporating spirituality into spaces of higher education. In their work with Latina/o students, Cavazos Vela, Castro, Cavazos, Cavazos, and Lee Gonzalez (2015) found that students' daily spiritual experiences were a significant predictor of subjective happiness. Daily spiritual experiences included how often students felt God's presence and how often they felt inner peace and harmony. In a study with women graduate students, Soet and Martin (2007) found that students reported a reduction in distress and a greater sense of spiritual wellbeing and empowerment after having participated in a discussion group developed for those interested in exploring spiritual identity issues. Other similar findings amongst college students have been found between spirituality and positive mental health (Anye, Gallien, Bian, & Moulton, 2013) and perceived wellness (Adams, Bezner, Drabbs, Zambarano, & Steinhardt, 2000).

The importance of spirituality for historically marginalized communities is well documented (Graham, 2016). However within the space of higher education the relationship between spirituality and well-being is not as widely discussed, although writings by activist women of color are changing this (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981; Facio & Lara, 2014). In their qualitative work with Indigenous women college students, Bingham, Adolpho, Jackson, and Alexitch (2014) found amongst the participants a strong desire to pass Indigenous spiritual traditions and language on to their children as well as a desire to ease the tension between their spiritual identity and the dominant religious and secular thoughts that permeate institutions of higher education. As one student stated, "Balancing the spiritual part—the Cree—and the education is really hard because there is no room for spirituality in education. There's nothing, so they don't mesh together.

Combining those two is hard" (Bingham et al., p. 621). Universities and educators need to account for students' spiritual wellbeing and create opportunities for it to be explored and nurtured.

Despite the tension that exists between spiritual identity and academic/professional identity, scholars of color, and especially women of color, continue to practice spirituality as part of their academic work, and thrive because of it, as evidenced by the seven contributors to this project. Spirituality is a source of strength, empowerment, and healing for women of color academics (Ofahengaue Vakalahi, & Hardin Starks, 2011; Starks, Ofahengaue Vakalahi, Comer, & Ortiz-Hendricks, 2010). In fact, for many scholars who write about spirituality, it becomes a necessary component of their ability to survive and thrive in academia, an environment that is "unhealthy, demoralizing, and dysfunctional" (Facio, 2014, p. 62). The university, as a microcosm of society, presents similar sexist, racist, white supremacist, ableist obstacles that marginalized individuals must traverse. The very hateful language and actions that Trump and his administration spew onto society permeate schools at all levels. Take, for instance, Royal Oak Elementary in Detroit where just one day after Trump's inauguration students chanted "Build the wall" (Wallace & LaMotte, 2016), or the anti-Semitic graffiti, including a swastika, painted on a bus stop at the University of California, San Diego (Burks, 2016). Such incidents in educational spaces that are already "unhealthy, demoralizing, and dysfunctional" (Facio, p. 62) require attention to the spiritual wellbeing of students and faculty. I think Irene's undergraduate research program, CuranderaScholarActivism, is a beautiful and empowering example of such engaged work, as her focus is not only on her students' academic success, but on their overall

well-being as well. The importance of spaces like Irene's CSA that center students' holistic health is supported by one of Irene's students, who says "I found a safe space where I could take off the mask and be accepted as a ChicanaMestiza undergraduate scholars with CC—a space where mindbodyspiritheart could BE" (Carmen Rodriguez, p. 123).

In addition to spirituality being an important component for the wellbeing of individuals effected by their very existence in Trump's fucked up world, we need spirituality in our activist work because it challenges us to think about how interconnected we truly are. The work of each of the contributors speaks to the importance of such interconnectivity—in both physical and spiritual realms. For example, Lara Medina stresses interconnectedness as opposed to the individualism encouraged by society so that her students are aware of "communal responsibility" and how their lives intersect and impact the lives of others. Through spirituality, we can make these interconnections salient in our quest for social justice and social revolution. Through spirituality we can partake in "engaged activism" that seeks material redress, as well as emotional, mental, and spiritual remedy. Through spiritual activism we engage in a form of activism that "transform[s] all structures of hierarchy and exclusions and is based on a spiritualized understanding our ourselves both as individuals and as part of a larger interconnected world" (Fernandes, 2003, p. 17).

A Personal Journey with Chicana Feminist Methodology

Part of my goal in engaging in an inquiry about the importance of spirituality for Chican@ faculty was to validate and satisfy my own desire to bring spirituality into the

higher education space, especially in the classroom. I wanted to learn from other professors about the various ways their spirituality influenced their scholar activist praxis. I thought about my own journey and why this topic was so important to me. I recognized that my own spiritual and academic journeys had created the various paths to this very project. Hence, I knew that if I was to learn about the contributors' spiritual work, I would first have to learn the ways spirituality influenced their view of the world and themselves and what that journey was influenced by. Hearing the contributors' stories helped me to understand just how personal our activist praxis is—how what we want as an outcome of our teaching, mentoring, research, and community work is so intimately woven with who we are as people. Because we are dynamic individuals, always in process, there is constant change. This lesson has had a particularly profound influence on my spiritual and academic journey, and especially while navigating the dissertation process.

So much has taken place in the 3 years it has taken me to complete this project. My spiritual, academic and personal journey has been greatly impacted by the contributors and their stories. The laboring of this dissertation also included the laboring of two children. I have mentioned my daughter throughout this text. As I sit here beginning the sixth and final chapter, my 4-week-old son sleeps soundly in the bassinet next to me. The birthing of babies and this project have been so intimately intertwined, emotions of each spilling onto one another, making it impossible to think of one without thinking of the other. Based on the stories shared with me by the contributors, this is how I imagine they feel about their spirituality and their activist praxis—each challenging and nurturing the other. For me, the spiritual, personal, and academic have so closely been

aligned throughout this process that I have a different more intimate understanding of the role of Chicana feminist methodology, and more particularly the importance of a relational methodology like pláticas.

As far as my spiritual journey, throughout this process I have learned that spirituality requires constant practice, vulnerability, openness, patience, and the persistent nurturing of relationships. Having children has made time for self-care more challenging. Between teaching, writing, and fulfilling the various roles and responsibilities I have at home, time to reflect on my spirituality was not something I always had and because of that my spiritual practice suffered which resulted in my overall emotional and mental well-being suffering. What I learned from these seven amazing contributors is that it takes very conscious effortful engagement with our spirituality to keep it nurtured and an active presence in our lives. Both Maria and Irene talked about how working with/through spirituality serves as a reminder to take care of themselves as spiritual beings. Maria also said that writing about spirituality or discussing it with colleagues keeps her accountable to her spiritual pedagogical goals. Hearing them talk about the effort spirituality takes and remembering my own experience in those first few months of adding "mother" to my identities, I have learned through this process that I must be very active in the nurturing of my spirituality if I am to take my spiritual epistemology into the space of higher education. This nurturing must take place alongside my mothering, my teaching, and walking through life with my spouse. I must be more open with my partner about my spiritual process, more aware of how my spirituality affects my relationships, and more patient—so much more patient. I cannot expect that I will have all the answers right away, or ever. I cannot also expect that my inner spiritual practice will always result

in outer spiritual change—but I must be patient and continue practicing and working towards the goals I have set for myself and the aspirations I have of this world. I must also be more open to the emotional and spiritual support of others. A spiritual journey is not something we traverse alone. Mothering is also not a journey we traverse alone. This is most challenging for me, as I have always preferred independence to dependency—viewing the latter as weakness or unhealthy instead of recognizing it as vital to survival. The contributors have taught me that all life is relational and I must be open to that.

Academically, this project has really impacted the view I have of myself as a researcher and especially as an educator. I had so many concerns as I started on this project. A large majority revolved around the topic and whether professors would want to talk to me about a topic like spirituality and whether they would want it written up in a dissertation. I was thinking of spirituality as a personal component of one's life that they may not want to share. I was also very nervous about what type of relationship I should have with each contributor before and after the project. How well should I know each person and should they know me before engaging in a plática? What was I to expect once the pláticas were finished? If I did not become close friends with each person did this mean that I had failed in forming a relationship and hence failed at my use of a Chicana feminist methodology? These concerns plagued me throughout the research process and especially during the pláticas. After each plática I sat in fear and anxiety that I was certainly not doing research 'right'. I was certain that I would not have the proper 'data' I needed to complete the dissertation and that was because I had not correctly engaged in the data collection. Then of course there was the writing of the narratives and more nerves. Would I accurately represent the contributors' stories? Would they like it?

When I actually sat down to write the narratives I worked on letting worry subside and just listened and relistened to the pláticas, then wrote. I wrote the story as it was shared and with that I felt like I was getting to know the contributors over again, each time with a new detail added to the story. Each time I listened and wrote I also began to connect more with each of them, imagining my future educator-self. Writing these narratives showed me what I could do in the classroom providing the ánimo that I needed to truly believe in myself. I was given new energy to finish this dissertation. I was able to see myself as a valid writer and researcher belonging in the 'space' and determined to finish. This project also allowed me to experience the diversity in research processes, methods, and outcomes. Research is so often represented in linear fashion, cleanly outlined as if researchers are working towards a model. What I have learned is that the research process shifts in shape and size and moves continuously. I must not be concerned with what is written in a textbook, but with was it shared with me by contributors during the process. I learned that their stories will guide me and I must be open to that.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, I was drawn to a method that would illuminate the contributors' voices and stories. I sought a method that would not merely extract information from the contributors, but that would acknowledge and validate meaning making as part of knowledge sharing (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). As a researcher engaging in this project I knew I would be a witness to shared memories and stories. For these reasons, I chose pláticas (Gonzalez, 2001) as my data collection method. Used in combination with borderlands theory and decolonial imaginary, pláticas y encuentros allowed me to focus not only on recorded understandings of spirituality and praxis, but of

the very way that these stories were told in resistance to attempted silencing and academic marginalization. In addition, pláticas required reflexivity and reciprocity from the researcher, both of which I believe were necessary when asking individuals to discuss personal and complex stories about spirituality and professional academic experience.

Upon researching pláticas as a methodology, I was surprised to find that while various scholars identify pláticas as their methodology of choice (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Espino, Muñoz & Kiyama, 2010; Flores & Garcia, 2009), there was not a clear description of and argument for pláticas as a Chicana feminist methodology. Recognizing this as a necessary gap to fill, my advisor, Dolores Delgado Bernal, and I set out to identify the principles of a plática methodology based on the work done by Chicana/Latina scholars (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). These are not strict rules or a checklist of procedures, but rather five principles that might offer some guidance to researchers:

1. Research draws on Chicana/Latina feminist theory;

2. Participants are honored as coconstructors of the meaning making process;

3. Connections are made between everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry;

4. A potential space for healing is provided; and

5. Relations of reciprocity and vulnerability and researcher reflexivity are central.

Based on the work of Chican/Latina scholars who use a plática method or methodology I knew it was the correct choice for this project. With the help of Dr. Delgado Bernal I was more clearly able to argue why. These aforementioned five principles expand Chicana/Latina methodologies that are “more than tools for obtaining data;

methodologies are extensions of ways of knowing and being, thus are essential to the way we embody and perform research" (Saavedra & Salazar Pérez, 2014, p. 78). Plática methodology, as a methodology that honors experiential knowledge, Chicana/Latina theory, relationships, and healing confirms the principles and goals of Chicana/Latina feminist methodology which encourages us to "confront the research with our total selves" (Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012, p. 534) and subsequently allows for contributors to also participate with their total selves.

Perhaps the largest impact this dissertation has had on me as a scholar is on my teaching. It was teaching, after all, that first inspired me to think about spirituality as a serious academic topic. In the introduction of this project I shared the difficulty and tension I feel when teaching in predominantly White spaces. As I mentioned previously, I want to validate all students' experiences without allowing the guilt of the more privileged voices to continue silencing the reality of marginalized individuals. I truly believe the classroom is a space of transformative possibility and activism, and I believe spirituality is one such tool to make it so. What I have learned from Irene, Maria, Lara, Sandra, Alejandra, Luz, and Jennie is that teaching is an act of service. My investment in a successful class goes beyond that very classroom. I want to ensure that my students are prepared to work and live as interconnected individuals who feel accountable to each other and the earth. I have a responsibility to ensure that my students feel nurtured in the classroom, that I am a witness to their pain and potential growth from that pain, and that I understand my role as one of service. This is not an easy task, but one I believe is important and necessary as a spiritual praxis for my practice.

Concerns/Limitations

The ideas proposed here are not without their limitations. While I do my best to address some of those here, this is certainly not an exhaustive conversation. In addition, I do not propose any answers here. Mainly, I want to think through some of the concerns I have about spirituality as an essential component of activist praxis.

One of the most pressing concerns I have regarding spiritualizing social justice movements and incorporating spirituality into higher education is the reality that spirituality, as a component of religion, has been used, and continues to be used, in very colonizing and oppressive ways as means to achieve economic, material, and cultural power. Leela Fernandes's book *Transforming Feminist Practice* (2003) highlights the way organized religion institutes hierarchies and "harness[es] divine beliefs, faiths, truths and the deepest sources of wisdom in order to pursue secular, material, ends" (p. 107). Fernandes argues that spirituality is "colonized" by religious claims of absolute truths and moral superiority. Then, how do we engage spirituality for social change? Fernandes is explicit that spirituality is not the same as religion, nor is it a requirement to be informed by an institutionalized religious doctrine. Instead, she views spirituality as "a direct, unmediated, ongoing, and always changing relationship with the divine" (p. 117) requiring a dismantling of the wall that exists between ourselves in the material world and ourselves in the spiritual world. For Fernandes spirituality is a process, not necessarily an outcome or thing to gain or to have, but an active engagement with doing—with being in the world and knowing the world. Fernandes's decolonial spirituality, or "spiritualized social transformation" also involves "an outright rejection of connecting one's identity tightly to one's specific faith beliefs" (Antze, p. 215).

According to Fernandes we must disidentify in order to allow spirituality to permeate all we do. To be perfectly honest, I am still very much working through Fernandes's argument. Can one identify as a member of a conservative and oppressive institution, yet still claim to be an activist for individual and collective rights? It is a question I contemplate with every day as I live in a state and engage with people who present me with this dilemma regularly.

One of the ways I try to encourage students to think about their identities is to think about the way their identity is in relation to others, or is formed by relationships. It is my hope that this supports students' thinking through how their religious identification, which they often claim is the source of their spirituality, might be in fact affecting the way others are allowed or not allowed to live out their lives fully as spiritual beings. It is also an attempt on my part to disrupt the fetishizing and appropriation of spirituality—a second concern I have. What happens when the Indigenous and cultural spiritual practice gets turned into New Age mysticism? New Age spirituality, and more generally the appropriation of cultural spiritual practices, often get turned into movements toward individual improvement. As Ritskes (2011) argues, "personal spirituality is independent of other people and their spiritualities; their histories, forces and discourses at work around the individual; and independent of any realm outside of the core self" (2011, p. 20). I believe the work of the contributors challenges spiritual appropriation whose goal is only self-improvement or empowerment by making central interconnectivity and connectedness. In this way, the work of the contributors, and especially their incorporation of Indigenous and ancestral knowledge "can be used as a methodology of resistance in the academy" (Ritskes, p. 22) and challenge the focus on the self of New

Ageism.

Finally, I want to engage with the concern of doing spiritual work in higher education—often the very system that exhausts, suffocates, and makes scholar activists, including students, faculty members, and staff ill. Can spirituality in our work really be incorporated in spaces of higher education and can it nurture healing? Higher education has been a contentious space for people of color—as faculty, students, and staff. It has been particularly traumatic for women of color, as witnessed by the stories, essays, and poems in the anthology, *This Bridge called my Back* (1981), and more recently in *Presumed Incompetent: The intersections of race and class for women in academia* (2012). As Bettina Aptheker has so truthfully stated, "We prevail, but sometimes it is at enormous costs to ourselves, to our sense of well-being, balance, and confidence" (p. xi). And so, the learning institution that was historically made for White, wealthy men to learn and teach remains entrenched in the power structure that marginalizes and presumes incompetent those at the margins of race, gender, sexuality, and class. It is an institution that dismisses our very existence and knowledge. However, it is also an institution in which our community has struggled to enter and in which they have thrived. Spirituality is one such way that has nurtured the perilous relationship to academia. Both the acts of defining that spirituality, and engaging with and through it as educators, researchers, and community members are healing and empowering. As Ana Castillo (1994) states, "We will determine for ourselves what makes us feel whole, what brings us tranquility, strength, courage to face countless—not for one moment imagined—obstacles in the path on our journey toward being fulfilled human beings" (p. 147). This is precisely what faculty of color in academia, and particularly, the seven contributors to my dissertation

have done: determined for themselves the work that would bring the most personal and societal change. Resistance to the trauma experienced in higher education is defining spirituality and wellbeing, and incorporating both into ones's activist praxis. These seven contributors epitomize resistance when defined this way. The very act of being spiritual is a space that means to dichotomize is healing. In the words of Laura E. Perez (2014),

> Winding, returning, spiraling, and seemingly dead-ended jagged paths characterize the pilgrimage toward understanding that the (re)harmonization of the mind-body-spirit and the synchronizing of humanity to the rest of the natural world is sane, healthy, necessary, a craft work that is not solely, but perhaps the most pressing ideological and political work, the hearth of the decolonial. (p. 24)

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