RECONTEXTUALIZING INSUBORDINATION: CHICANA LESBIAN AND QUEER FEMINIST THEORIZATIONS

Alicia Arrizón
UC Riverside

ALICIA ARRIZÓN is Professor Emerita in the Department of Gender and Sexuality at UC Riverside. She is the author of *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2006); *Latina Performance* (Indiana University Press, 1999); and co-editor of *Latinas on Stage* (Third Woman Press, 2000) and *Sensualidades* (2008), a special issue of *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory.* Some of her peer-reviewed articles have appeared in *The Drama Review: The Journal of Performance Studies, Theatre Journal, Theatre Research International, Ollantay,* and most recently, book chapters in *Oxford University Press, Routledge* and *Two Shores* (Mexico). Currently, she is working on a book-length project that aims to reconceptualize and recontextualize queer and feminist ethnographies in borderlands and border theory.

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ABSTRACT

If we understand the notion of insubordination as an act of disobedience that challenges authority, Chicana feminist epistemologies tracing lesbian desire and the queer body must be considered as the most critical paradigms of conceptual rebelliousness. The notion of insubordination, as I intend to theorize in this essay, not only defies the “Anglo-American” monolith signifier, but also represents the possibilities of cultural heterogeneity embedded in the struggles against the tyranny of hegemony and heteronormativity. As demonstrated in the much-acclaimed theories of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and the digital art of Alma López, the insubordinate body must convey an urgent sensibility of rebellion to dismantle the structures that make them feel invisible and powerless. While insubordination and its related signifiers — oppositional knowledge and resistance— are not necessarily new markers in theorizing Chicana sexuality and feminist epistemologies, the concepts are fundamentally essential to revisit and unpack the voices/subjectivities articulating the urgency to “decolonize” from repressive systems of domination.
KEYWORDS: insubordination, oppositional consciousness, women of color, *Bridge,* decoloniality, Chicana subjectivity, La Virgen de Guadalupe, Coatlicue, lesbian-queer, *Our Lady.*

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In this essay, I suggest that insubordinate bodies represent the possibilities of cultural heterogeneity embedded in the struggles against the tyranny of cultural hegemony and heteronormative sites. As demonstrated by many Chicana scholars, writers and artists, the insubordinate body must convey an urgent rebellious sensibility to dismantle the systematic structures that censored, silenced, or marginalized it. Although in general terms, I intend to engage with Chicana queer-feminist theories, the focus will connect with the much-acclaimed theories of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga while juxtaposing in the analysis, the digital work of Alma López. The three of them embody compelling counternarratives of resistance that formulate discursive acts proposing radical social and cultural transformations in Chicanx culture. First, the works of Gloria Anzaldúa in connection with Cherríe Moraga is paramount in this trajectory. I consider them foundational to the emergence and development of Chicana lesbian and queer epistemologies in Chicana feminism. In the context of Chicana queer epistemologies, the transcultural mediations of mystical sensual bodies in the digital creations of Alma López will be integrated in the analysis. Her radical digital interpretations of the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe alter the notions about static definitions of art while maintaining a critical position to multiple heteronormative spaces. I intend to approach her work in general terms, however, I am most interested in discussing her artwork *Our Lady* (1999), which provoked much protest from the Catholic community in Santa Fe, New Mexico when it was shown as part of the exhibit "*Cyber Art: Tradition Meets Technology*" at the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA)[1].

Acts of insubordination and the knowledge proposed since the first publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* (hereinafter *Bridge*) as I intend to demonstrate, continue to be relevant today[2]. Though great progress is evident in areas of the Chicana feminist movement, lesbian subjectivity must continue the path of rebelliousness in the 21st century, in particular in the wake of the wars against critical race theory, LGTBQ people and the Supreme Court's reversal of Roe v. Wade. The cultivation of a deep and necessary consciousness of resistance and survival against heteropatriarchy and hegemonic representation, which is fundamental in the works of López, Moraga and Anzaldúa, I contend, is paramount in today's society.

1. LA HIJAS DESOBEDIENTES: AGAINST THE TYRANNY OF TRADITION

> …[A]s Chicanas, we grow up defined, and subsequently confined, in a male context: daddy's girl, some guy's sister, girlfriend, wife, or mother. By being lesbians, we refuse to *need* a man to form our own identities as women. This constitutes a "rebellion" many Chicanas/os cannot handle (Carla Trujillo ix).

When Carla Trujillo's *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991) came out, I was just beginning my first year as an Assistant Professor in Ethnic Studies at UC Riverside. The collection was an inspiration to me and to my lesbian students, all of us were feeling eager to stage the Chicana lesbian as the main protagonist in the larger context of Chicano Studies. As a Chicana lesbian scholar, I had the mindset to make central any approach that would challenge the implication of heteronormative/homophobic structures in Chicanx Studies. As Trujillo points out, this defiant attitude was necessary to "impose a reclamation of what we're told is bad, wrong, or taboo, namely, our own sexuality" (Trujillo x). When exploring Latinx sensuality and sexuality, paradoxical knowledge is imperative. While *Chicanidad* can be recognized as a naturally sensual culture, sexuality is traditionally a taboo subject going against centuries of enforced sexual repression. The effects of *marianismo*, *machismo* and the "whore-virgin" dichotomy are embedded in a cultural legacy shaped by the entrenchment of Christian values and patriarchies in Latinx cultures. These interrelated concepts define powerful values and constraints, strengthening the subordination of the female body in Chicanx culture, in particular, when dogmatic Catholicism is implicated. These "values" have heightened the tension between tradition and the subordination of women. As a lesbian feminist, I personally confronted these tensions since I was a teenager.

I was raised Catholic, growing up extremely unhappy at my mother's idea that I was going to marry "the man of my life" one day, a man who would take me to the altar, support me economically and become the father of her grandchildren[3]. Many times, I was reminded that all I needed was to find "*un hombre decente, bueno y trabajador*," like my father. I started resisting that idea early in my adolescence. I couldn't understand these traditional views and refused to accept that marrying a man was my only choice. I continually expressed my feeling against the "marriage" option, condemning the heteronormative structures I was symbolically being asked to embody and accept. One day, my mother said that no man would accept a rebellious and insubordinate woman like me. I remember clearly what she said, "*no seas rebelde mija: para que te quieran los hombres tienes que portarte como una señorita buena y recuerda que calladita te ves más bonita*"[4]. For her, I was too opinionated to find the man of my life.

I was growing unhappy contemplating my surrounding, seeing most girls of my generation in my neighborhood easily conforming and accepting the norms. Many of my "home girls" were marrying and having children after high school. Some of them even got pregnant while still in high school. Many times, I repeated to myself and my mother, "*estoy segura que hay otras opciones.*" My mother would respond "*pues búscalas porque yo no tuve opciones.*" However, it was not difficult to convince my mother that there were alternatives to marriage, in particular, when I decided to attend college. After I graduated from college and started my Ph.D., I knew that she was not only convinced that education was a great substitute to marriage but she was proud of who I was becoming. During my school breaks, I would visit my parents, and friends or family members would ask my mother in front of me, "*¿cuando se casa Alicia? Tanto estudio y no puede encontrar marido.*" On one occasion, one of my aunts stated out loud in a family reunion, "*la mujer sin hombre no tiene valor,*" while looking directly at me. My mother interjected that I was different, unconventional and against tradition. "*Ella es felíz así,*" she stated proudly. Her reaction was empowering to me because I felt that she finally understood who I was. I felt that she was connecting with what she understood as my "nonconformity," or what in theory and practice I conceived as my lesbian feminist subjectivity and queer identity.

My adolescent narrative is not unique, but it is a predominant story in Latinx and Chicanx cultural contexts. I look back at my teenage years and see a young woman refusing to conform to the norms and "values" dictated by religion and tradition. I may have been called many times "*una rebelde sin causa*," *indócil y desobediente*, but in the pursuit of self-determination, docility and silence had to be conquered. When Anzaldúa discusses her own ostracism in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*[5], she asserts that "culture is made by those in power-men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (Anzaldúa 16). In Chicanx culture, she maintains, women are expected to follow a limited number of paths in life, with motherhood viewed as the most admirable and important one. Women who do not marry or have children are judged as "incomplete." Many times, pejoratively, the "*solteronas*" would be called *machorras* or *marimachas*. Responding to the marriage question, Anzaldúa sardonically recalls an experience:

> "*¿y cuándo te casas, Gloria? Se te va pasar el tren.*" *Y yo les digo, "Pos si me caso, no va ser con un hombre." Se quedan calladitas. Si soy hija de la Chingada. I've always been her daughter. No 'tés chingando*" (Anzaldúa 17).

Anzaldúa links her rebelliousness to the "Shadow-Beast" as part of her inner-self that defies any attempts to control it. For her, the

"Shadow Beast" defies tradition, she asserts, "it is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities" (Anzaldúa 16). While the Shadow-Beast is representative of counterhegemonic subjectivities posed against heteronormative ideals, it represents the aspects of a woman's liberated sexuality that at once excites and frightens men. For Anzaldúa, the Beast is not just a rebellion against heteronormativity, but it is the rage that challenges oppressive systems. While describing herself as a queer Chicana, she speaks of the fears of heterosexuals: "We try to make ourselves conscious of the Shadow-Beast, stare at the sexual lust and lust for power and destruction we see on its face, discern among its features the undershadow that the reigning order of heterosexual males project on our Beast" (Anzaldúa 20). The ultimate rebellion of her inner Shadow-Beast is through her opposition to heteronormativity and patriarchal structures. She states, "[b]eing lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, *I made the choice to be queer* (for some it is genetically inherent). It is an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts" (19). Anzaldúa embraces queerness while claiming that it was a dynamic personal choice. For her, the lesbian-queer is the path to reconcile the dualities within herself, "I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within" (16).

Anzaldúa's lesbian-queer sensibilities are dialectically posited, suggesting constructs of bodies mediated by counter-discourses while subverting the "cultural norms" of regulatory practices that privilege heterosexual over queer, men over women, and white over brown. "For the "the lesbian of color," she manifested, "the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior" (Anzaldúa 19). The imagining of the rebellious Chicana lesbian as the ultimate model of the insubordinate body emerges as an epistemological shift of the theoretical subject implicit in the signifier "lesbian of color." In Anzaldúa's terms, the lesbian category is problematic and thus must be differentiated within a cultural context, which in her theories is derived from *mestizaje* functioning as a form of transculturation. She purposely employs different cultural signifiers in Spanish that may substitute for the contestatory lesbian category, while proposing alternative ways of understanding the specificity of certain gendered-queer categories:

> "Lesbian" doesn't name anything in my homeland. Unlike the word "queer," "lesbian" came late into some of our lives. Call me *de las otras*. Call me *loquita*, *jotita*, *marimacha*, *pajuelona*, *lambiscona*, *culera* – these are words I grew up hearing. I can identify with being "*una de las otras*" or a "*marimacha*," or even a "*jota*" or a *loca porque* – these are the terms my home community uses. I identify most closely with the Nahuatl term *patlache*. These terms situate me in South Texas Chicano/*mexicano* culture and in my experiences and *recuerdos*. These Spanish/Chicano words resonate in my head and evoke gut feelings and meanings (Anzaldúa, To(o) Queer the Writer, 263).

The many signifiers used by Anzaldúa to reconfigure the gendered queer body – *marimacha*, *pajuelona*, *lambiscona*, *culera*, *jota*, etc. – make up a politics of oppositional representation that subverts the dominant English "lesbian" that she finds problematic[6]. From the Spanish term *marimacha* to the Náhuatl term *patlache* (dyke), Anzaldúa marks a body suggestive of linguistic and cultural translations. Being a "lesbian" is a totally different experience from being a *marimacha* or a *tortillera.* Significantly, *tortillera,* has been used derogatively in Spanish alluding to women making love as analogous to the making of tortillas. In reclaiming the meaning of *tortillera*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba celebrates the act of making tortillas by referring directly to the "clapping" motion, in which the love of women by women is symbolically imagined in her poem "Making Tortillas":

> clap-clap
> thin yellow moons –
> clap-clap
>   still moist, heavy still
>   from last night's soaking
> clap-clap
>   slowly start finding their shape
> clap-clap…
> (Gaspar de Alba 355).

Gaspar de Alba's poetic configurations celebrate the act of making tortillas by referring directly to the "clapping" motion, in which the act of making tortillas parallels lesbian desire. This "*tortillerismo*" or lesbianism allegorizes the need to authorize articulations of resistance by the enactment of difference and cultural survival[7]. As with Anzaldúa's cultural markers of the lesbian body, Gaspar de Alba's use of *tortillera* focuses exclusively on the cultural resignifications of desire. The linguistic codification of the term *tortillera* not only reconfigures a particular location of the subject but also makes it possible to reclaim *tortillera* as a model to politically challenge the dominant figures of normativity while subverting the "lesbian" as a predominant category of female queer sexuality. The particular identifications and figurative affinities associated with these cultural signifiers propose alternative queer representations, expanding and resisting the categorization of lesbian as it is known in the dominant language. This is so critical because I often hear discussions among Chicana undergraduate and graduate students, who cannot find the right language to talk to their parents about their queer sexuality. As I pointed out in my book, *Queering Mestizaje*, a significant part of such negotiations is the misguided idea that lesbianism as an issue that relates only to the "white" dominant culture. Although I find it difficult to imagine a Chicana lesbian coming out to her parents as a *tortillera* or a *marimacha*, the space these terms produce is a reminder that the body is closely connected with language and cultural experience. The frame of reference through which language and cultural experience operate develops a consciousness of queer resignification deployed to represent identifications and desires denied by heteronormative culture and by the dominant language of that system.

2. DISCURSIVE EMANCIPATION

Oppositionality and resistance represent the most influential signifiers in the many narratives imprinted in *Bridge*. The theoretical subject implicit in *Bridge* urges an emancipatory movement in which the insubordinate body as the site of knowledge resides in resistance to contending forces. Anzaldúa writes in *Bridge* with an insurgent urgency: "[t]the Third World woman revolts. We revoke, we erase your white male imprint" (Anzaldúa 167). She is addressing these remarks to third world writers in her epistolary essay, "Speaking in

Tongues: A Letter to Third World Writers"[8]. Anzaldúa's epistolary utterances represent an urgent call for social action while imagining a liberatory process embracing the potentiality of collective creativity. She writes in the letter, "[we] cannot allow ourselves to be tokenized. We must make our own writing and that of Third World women the first priority" (168). From a theoretical perspective, Anzaldúa is underscoring the significance of a politics of allegiance between women of color. She speaks of the necessity of maintaining "their" self-autonomy while avoiding being tokenized within mainstream society. Her letter strives to form coalitions among women who identify with a common context of subordination and domination. Anzaldúa's pressing utterances envisions the act of writing as the tool to insubordinate because it is the very act of writing that must reveal "the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression" (171). While suggesting the intersectional method years before intersectionality became a dominant theme in the academy, Anzaldúa was challenging women to think about their subordination by asking them to confront in their creativity their multiple sources of oppression[9]. To think of intersectionality in Chicana and Latina feminisms is to put into evidence the experience of our social reality as multilayered. Chicana writers and theorists have identified the ability to perceive and translate different social realities. For Cherríe Moraga, multiple social realities were expressed in her *Loving in the War Years*: *Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983). This discussion took form while discussing the urgency of identifying oppression within contextual signifiers: "lesbianism is a poverty—as being brown, as being a woman, as being just plain poor. *The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression*" (Moraga 52).

The concepts of third world woman and women of color developed as an oppositional reclaiming agency, not only to challenge mainstream feminism but to incorporate feminist queer of color critique into the movement. It is undeniable that *Bridge* has been central to the development of queer of color critique[10]. For Moraga and Anzaldúa, the radical woman of color critique anthologized in *Bridge*, not only challenges the white-male-dominant-queer as it evolves in mainstream culture and discourses but decenters the subordinated subjectivity of women of color in an attempt to build a broader queer feminist movement. The co-editors noted in their introduction that *Bridge* was originally conceived as a project to consolidate the third world feminist movement in the United States. While *Bridge* rejected bourgeois white feminism's attempt to include itself within universal structures of power, women of color feminism functions as a technology of resistance exposing the identity politics and liberalism of Anglo-American feminism. Consequently, the epistemologies tracing insubordinate affectivity, as Norma Alarcón has pointed out, "implies a multiplicity of positions from which [women of color] are driven to grasp and understand" their manifold subjectivities: feminist, queer, lesbian, racial, and so on (Alarcón 356).

The self-conscious effort to manifest actions expressing the sense of resistance, feeling and belonging remains vital for collective processes of identification that aims to span the multiple differences of a "silenced" community. The transformation must begin with the liberated body, giving voice to a sense of self that will at last secure entry into the social and discursive economy. In her solo-edited anthology, *Making Face, Making Soul/hacienda caras* (1991), Anzaldúa speaks passionately of the silence that must be subverted:

> For silence to transform into speech, sounds and words, it must first traverse through our female bodies. For the body to give birth to utterance, the human entity must recognize itself as carnal skin, muscles, entrails, brain, belly. Because our bodies have been stolen, brutalized or numbed, it is difficult to speak from/through them… Seal your lips, woman! When she transforms silence into language, a woman transgresses (Anzaldúa xxii).

The perseverance of overcoming silence represents the power of self-determination, an act aiming to "unshackle" body, mind, knowledge. Anzaldúa wrote in *Borderlands*, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my serpent's tongue — my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence" (Anzaldúa 59). In her discussion of the "silence" affecting the self- determination of Chicanas, Teresa Córdova reminded us that we have never been "passive nor entirely submissive to cultural constraints" (Córdova, Roots and Resistance 175), but certainly the effect of the many cultural restrictions Chicanas embody have limited their voices and determinations. These limitations have influenced

Anzaldúa who felt compelled to write against what she called, her misunderstood story. As she explains in her "Letter to Third World Women Writers," "I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you… To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit… Finally, I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing" (Anzaldúa 169).

It is through narratives of cultural "tyranny" and their counternarratives of resistance that I found inspiration to trace the notion of insubordination as a theoretical concept that marks the rebelliousness of the Chicana queer/lesbian artist. Cherríe Moraga eloquently has expressed that *"[a] writer will write with or without a movement*; but at the same time, for Chicano, lesbian, gay and feminist writers —anybody writing against the grain of Anglo misogynist culture— political movements are what have allowed our writing to surface from the secret places in our notebooks into the public sphere" (Moraga, The Last Generation 58-59). Moraga's inspiration for writing, "against the grain," or in opposition to hegemonic patriarchies, clearly invokes the desire for social and emancipatory transformation and affirmation. This has been significantly established in Moraga's theater contributions in which she has opened the doors for discussion of lesbian sexuality within the Latinx theater communities. This started since the production of *Giving Up the Ghost: Teatro in Two Acts* (1986) in which she expands earlier articulations expressed in *Loving in the War Years* about gendered and sexualized subjectivities and the effects of cultural taboos against both lesbian and heterosexual women[11]. In this play, the representation of lesbian desire is contrasted against restrictive *constructions* of gender and the effects of heteronormativity. Moraga's two-acts play represents the sexual relationship of two women, Marisa (her younger self Corky) and their lover Amalia. While the marginalization of their identities as Chicana-lesbians is central to the dramatic plot, the play challenges a targeted audience (Chicana/Latinas and women) to question their sexuality while confronting expressions of gender binary and heterosexism perpetuated by societal and cultural norms. For Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Moraga's dramatic lesbian subjectivities, were "shaped in dialectical relationship to a collective way of imagining sexuality" (Bejarano 145). Sexuality is conceptualized as symbolic acts to "decolonize" the subject's internal and external oppressions. The process of decolonization, as manifested in Emma Pérez's *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999), provides a symbolic system to expose the dominant narrative that has neglected the visibility of Chicanas, both lesbians and heterosexuals. Speaking from her own *sitio y lengua*, she argues that Chicana epistemologies "rejecs colonial ideology and the by-products of colonialism and capitalist: patriarchy, sexism, racism, homophobia, etc." (Pérez, Chicana Lesbians 161). For Pérez, *sitio y lengua* allows her to reimagine a "history" that affirms a Chicana feminist discourse and space. For Moraga, writing and producing is a personal and political journey reconfigured through the collective memory and contradictions of Chicano history, nationalism, and sexuality. In a nostalgic tone, she insists that the act of writing memorializes the past and "allude[s] to a future for which we must prepare…May we continue to make art that incites censorship and threatens to bring the army beating down our desert door" (Moraga, A Xicana Codex 58-59).

3. THE SUBVERSION OF MYSTICAL BODIES

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa's critical views against marginality and gender subordination were also recreated through her conceptualization of the "new mestiza consciousness," which seeks resolution to the conflicting identities that Chicanas often struggle with. The bodily inscription of la mestiza arises from a conscious rupture against oppressive traditions in the attempt to rearticulate history, "using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women, and queers" (Anzaldúa 82). While the "queering" of the mestiza body is juxtaposed against essentialism, homophobia and the search for connectivity, Anzaldúa's journey as an identified mestiza is personal and contradictory. She claims that as mestiza, she is without a country because her homeland (Chicano people) has dismissed her. But as a lesbian, she imagines herself as citizen of the world, "all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)" (80). While Anzaldúa sustains her ties to "all races" through the markings of the queer body, it is the juxtaposition of lesbian desire and queer politics that opens an innovative ideological space, providing room to be more than a mestiza. It is her "new mestiza consciousness" that also induces her to unravel a mythical space in *Borderlands* when she crosses the "borders" of what she calls, "Entering into the Serpent"(26). Anzaldúa shifts to focus on the figure of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, largely seen as a Catholic image of the Virgin Mary. Anzaldúa argues that la Virgen of Guadalupe's indigenous deity is *Coatlalopeuh* who is only one aspect of Coatlicue, or "Serpent Skirt," who possessed both light and dark aspects (27)[12].

Insubordinate bodies are symptomatic of the political and historical feminist unconscious that revolts against "the male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture [that] drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes"(27). For Gloria Anzaldúa, these processes of knowing produce the "Coatlicue state" in her Chicana "disobedient" psyche. The body of Coatlicue –and all its split subjectivities– represents the power that induces Anzaldúa's Chicana self to heal the wounds, to allay the fears of not knowing what she *must* know. For the Aztecs, Coatlicue gives and takes away life. She is both the creator and the destroyer of all life, the Mother and the Crone, as symbolized by the necklace of hearts and human hands that she wears over her bare, sagging breasts. She is the strength of her own upheaval; she is a "prelude to crossing"(48):

> I see *oposición* e *insurrección*. I see the crack growing on the rock. I see the fine frenzy building. I see the heat of anger or rebellion or hope split open that rock, releasing *la Coatlicue*. And someone in me takes matters into our own hands, and eventually, takes dominion over serpents —over my own body, my sexual activity, my soul, my mind, my weaknesses and strengths. Mine. Ours. Not the heterosexual white man's or the colored man's or the state's or the culture's or the religion's or the parents'— just ours, mine (51).

Coatlicue, like the Virgin Mary in Christianity, is said to have conceived a child without carnal contact. According to an Aztec legend, a divine messenger in the form of a bird dropped a feather into Coatlicue's lap, and so Huitzilopochtli, the hummingbird warrior of the south, was born. Coatlicue's maternal aspect is also identified with Tonantzin, a mother goddess similar to the Christian Virgin

Mother, and is referred to as *Our Lady*. Later, Tonantzin became embodied as the chaste, protective mother of the mestizo nation, disguised as La Virgen de Guadalupe.

Another deity born of Coatlicue was Cihuacóatl, the serpent goddess. Cihuacóatl's rebellious attitude represents more than the origin of womanhood. Cihuacóatl and Tlazoltéotl (another deity who sprang from Coatlicue) were disempowered and given evil attributes during the transformation of Coatlicue's good spirit, Tonantzin, into La Guadalupe. After the conquest, Tonantzin/Guadalupe was established as the "good" mother, while Coatlicue and her daughter deities Cihuacóatl and Tlazoltéotl were rendered into defiant beasts. As an opposing force, the duality represented by Coatlicue and further embodied by Cihuacóatl and Tlazoltéotl, helps to explain the whore-virgin dichotomy that has shaped gender power relations and sexuality in post-Spanish colonial sites.

This narrative properly contextualizes the bodily inscriptions of the Virgen of Guadalupe produced by Alma López, which may function as a way to vindicate and to problematize the context of colonial patriarchal history[13]. In making visible the queer-brown body, López composes distinctive artwork that integrates lesbian desire with Mexican and Chicano pop icons, urban settings, and nationalist myths. In "Lupe and La Sirena in Love" (1999), for instance, López represents a love affair between Sirena, the mermaid image on a lotería card, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the divine mother of cultural mestizaje for Mexicans and Chicano communities. In this depiction of lesbian love, Sirena and Guadalupe embrace in the company of angels. All around the two women are the Los Angeles cityscape and the U.S./Mexico border[14] . While the Virgin and Sirena appear to stand holding each other, below their figures is a Viceroy butterfly instead of the angel that holds the traditional image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The narrative of queer desire and love between La Guadalupe and La Sirena in not only unconditional, López has pointed out, but it is a miracle:

> It is a miraculous event when we meet someone to love who loves us back. Like La Virgen of Guadalupe in the sky and La Sirena in the ocean, we live in different worlds or spaces. When and where would it be possible for La Virgen and La Sirena to meet and fall in love? When La Virgen appeared to Juan Diego, she loved him unconditionally. I

> believe this was the love message the indigenous community's activists were spreading with the speech scrolls on the *tepetl* of La Virgen's dress (Lopéz and Gaspar de Alba 276).

Placing Alma López's "Lupe and Sirena in Love" in its proper context requires first recalling the ways Chicana artists, have contemplated the body of La Guadalupe. López clearly has been inspired by the work of Ester Hernández and Yolanda López, artists who have been invoking the body of the mestiza mother while sharing their personal experience since the late 1970s. In Alma López's own vision, the alterity of bodies epitomized in her art not only responds to internal and external oppressions, but also becomes the product of an insubordinate aesthetics in which the most intimate queer desires can be linked to the rebellious spirit of Coatlicue. In another digital print representing La Guadalupe, *Our Lady* (1999), Alma López portrays the Virgin wearing a rose-covered bikini and cloaked in the Coyolxauhqui stone, while posing in a bold, defiant manner. While the traditional imagery of La Guadalupe is used (i.e., the cloak, the roses, and the crescent moon), both the angel and the Virgin are substituted with photographs of the artist's friends. López introduces them in her co-edited book *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López Irreverent Apparition*: "This work features performance artist Raquel Salinas as an assertive and strong Virgen dressed in roses and cultural activist Raquel Gutiérrez as a nude butterfly angel and was inspired by Sandra Cisneros's essay, 'Guadalupe the Sex Goddess'" (López and Gaspar de Alba 13). López connects with the defiant spirit of the "Coatlicue-Lupe" (short for Guadalupe) as embodied in Sandra Cisneros's rebellious connectivity with the Virgin: "Coatlicue, Tlazoltéotl, Tonantzin, la Virgen de Guadalupe. They are each telescoped one into the other, into who I am. And this is where la Lupe intrigues me – not the Lupe of 1531 who appeared to Juan Diego, but the one of the 1990s who has shaped who we are as Chicanas/mexicanas today…" (Cisneros 50). The disobedient spirit Cisneros invokes in her embodiment of "Coatlicue-Lupe," like in López´s reinterpretation in *Our Lady*, dislocates the purity and passivity of the Mother of God. More directly, López suggests that we must remember her like the embodiment of indigenous resistance:

> When I look at the image of La Virgin of Guadalupe, I see a complex activist revolutionary cultural icon. To me, she is the poster image for the first successful act of mass nonviolent civil resistance / disobedience on this continent. Like the Aztec moon goddess Coyolxauhqui, La Virgin de Guadalupe needs to be deciphered and *re-membered*. Hundreds of years of conquest and Catholic misinformation shifted her meaning. She documents the spirit of indigenous resistance. We witness this spirit of resistance resurface throughout our Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicana/o history (López and Gaspar de Alba 257).

While invocations of the "new" Virgin reflects pure desires of cultural decolonization and renovation, the transgression of *marianismo* is explicitly marked. Modeled after the Virgin Mary, *marianismo* creates a feminine ideal of purity and passivity by which women are expected to live[15]. It is precisely the effects of *marianismo* that are being transgressed in the new epistemologies redefining the revolutionary spirit of La Guadalupe. The transgression within transgression functions to counteract an oppressive system that has perpetuated the passive role of women in colonial and Christian sites. Such a critical configuration is one of the clearest examples of a revisionist's interference in López's reinterpretation of La Guadalupe in *Our Lady*. Nevertheless, this is precisely the context in which the artwork was considered "sacrilegious," "outrageous desecration," a "blasphemy" by the organized groups that initiated a protest against the exhibition of *Our Lady* in Santa Fe, which started several months before the show opened[16].

Church officials and community leaders initiated a campaign against the piece, requesting the removal of the image from the exhibit. As a result, various meetings and rallies were organized where supporters and protestors engaged in heated debates about the artwork. While the supporters were mainly women, artists, intellectuals and academics, the protestors were primarily men, priests and some anti- feminist women. Archbishop Michael Sheehan of New Mexico accused López of portraying the religious icon as a "tart" and insisted the work be pulled from the exhibit. The Museum officials decided that the work would remain on display, but the duration of the whole exhibit was shortened by several months. López states in her website, that after the New Mexico protest, the America Needs

Fatima (ANF) organization has continually stalked and harassed *Our Lady* at the multiple venues where it has been exhibited. She says that in 2011, "ANF organized a protest at the Oakland Museum and incited conservative Catholics in Cork County, Ireland to protest the exhibition of *Our Lady* at the University College Cork" (Lopez).

In discussing *Our Lady* with López, she indicated that her objective was to portray the Virgin with a strong and defiant attitude, "very much like the women in my community"[17]. In response to the controversial debate caused by the exhibit of *Our Lady*, López also describes her interpretation of La Guadalupe as a reflection of her own identity as a Chicana, "living a tradition of Chicanas who, because of cultural and gender oppression, have asserted our voice. I see Chicanas creating deep and meaningful connection to this revolutionary cultural female image. I see Chicanas who understand faith" (14). The notion of faith, as understood and explained by López must be linked with confidence, assertiveness, and subversion. This has been clearly the message in earlier portrayals of La Guadalupe: In *La Virgen de Guadalupe defendiendo los derechos de los Xicanos* (1975) by Ester Hernandez, the passive traditional look of *la virgin morena* is replaced by an active contemporary woman in a karate suit assuming a defensive stance. Faith is also a representation of the strength that resides in her body in action, ready for combat. Similarly, Yolanda López's act of self-representation in her *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1978), takes a more dramatic turn in an installation performance where she actively poses, holding the artist's paint brushes, in front of the "halo" background commonly seen in the traditional image of the virgin. The setting is made to resemble an altar in which the artist's enactment is integrated as part of the "ofrendas" (offerings such as photos, fruits, flowers and other symbolic things on the floor). While connecting with her predecessors, in "Silencing *Our Lady,*" Alma López explains that this tradition of expressing their affiliation with the Virgin of Guadalupe is immensely personal:

> When I see Our Lady as well as the works portraying the Virgen by many Chicana artists, I see an alternative voice expressing the multiplicity of our lived realities… I see Chicanas creating a deep and meaningful connection to the revolutionary cultural female image that appeared to an indigenous

> person at a time of genocide, and as an inspiration during liberation struggles such as the Mexican Revolution and the Chicano civil rights movement (López and Gaspar de Alba 253).

As an affirming reiteration of a collective "self," this process of transgressing or reimagining the traditional portrayal of La Guadalupe becomes a feminist and queer model that shifts the subject's feelings of displacement, homophobia, and subordination. The self-conscious rejection of the dominant image differentiates the artists' counternarratives through the "flesh" and body experience, connecting with what Moraga, in the introduction of *Bridge*, has called "a theory in the flesh." If for Moraga, a theory in the flesh means the process of writing where body and embodiment connect —"our lives, our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings— all fuse to create a politic born of necessity" (Moraga 23), for López, the act of "reinventing" the narrative of La Guadalupe attests to the urgency to reclaim agency and self-empowerment. As result of the *Our Lady* controversy, López created a second edition of the artwork (a 30" x 40" acrylic on canvas). This time, she added boxing gloves and depicted Our Lady as ready for combat, ready to defend herself against those who were trying to make her disappear. López describes her *Our Lady of Controversy II:*

> …on a pink and orange background that signifies goddess colors with fading or perhaps reappearing *tepetls* from La Virgen de Guadalupe's dress. On the lower half of the background are photocopied news articles and political comics about the controversy. Viceroy butterflies flutter above the news articles and above the colorful rose arrangements growing from the butterfly angel. The Viceroy butterflies spread the message that *Our Lady* has broken free of the controversy (López and Gaspar de Alba 288).

Here again, the butterfly symbolizes the vulnerability of life demonstrated in the narrative of queer desire and love. In explaining the reasons why López selected the Viceroy and not the Monarch butterfly, which look very similar, she associates the Viceroy's vulnerabilities and survival instincts to those who are doing their best to survive their own vulnerable circumstances—immigrants, the undocumented, and the queer.

Our Lady is a queer body in process, rooted in the artist's insubordinate sensibility, while at the same time, representing a radical commitment to interconnectedness and difference. In the process of "transforming" the Guadalupe's body into *Our Lady*, queerness and feminist ideals become the resolution to this commitment. At the same time, the insubordinate body of *Our Lady* develops as the result of several Chicana epistemologies: she is the resonance of Anzaldúa's "new mestiza consciousness;" she embodies both Moraga's "theory in the flesh" and Cisnero's "Coatlicue-Lupe." *Our Lady* is the incarnation of Tlazolteotl, the goddess of sex.

4. FINAL ARTICULATIONS

The collective "we," as firmly voiced by Moraga and Anzaldúa and other contributors in *Bridge*, is unapologetically determined and unrestricted, "[w]e are the colored in the white feminist movement. We are the feminists among people of our culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight. We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories in our own way" (Anzaldúa and Moraga 23). This "bridging" metaphor represents Alma López's artistic methodology by embracing her queer self and community of friends in her artwork to represent intimate connections of La Guadalupe who in her digital depictions, "needs to be queer" (Gaspar de Alba and López 276). Moreover, López' inspiration to subvert hegemonic knowledge leads her to create insubordinate bodies through inventive processes that "reclaim terms like *malcriadas*, badgirls, and *hociconas* (laoudmouths) to refer to women who refuse to remain silent, women who express their own realities and who are therefore rebels—women who are not afraid to fight back, using our hands, our minds, and our art" (288).

The trajectory in this essay, from Anzaldúa and Moraga's theorization of insubordinate subjectivities to the radical digitalization in López's art, interrogates the arguments that have been crucial to the development of a lesbian-queer-feminist critique in Chicanx/Latinx cultures. Their counternarratives are an inspiration for the conceptual rebelliousness through acts of creativity that serve as a liberatory method: writing, theory and art become the tools for preservation and self-autonomy. López, Anzaldúa and Moraga each convey an urgent sensibility of rebellion in their respective literary/artistic trajectories. Their rebellious sensibility seeks to dismantle the colonial and hetero-patriarchal structures that censored or silenced them, and inevitably marks their compelling counternarratives of resistance and authentication. In her discussion of the anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial challenges repeatedly opposed by Chicana theorists and feminist artists/writers, Teresa Córdova summarizes the nature of their struggles:

> Chicanas write in opposition to the symbolic representations of the Chicano movement that did not include them. Chicanas write in opposition to a hegemonic feminist discourse that places gender as a variable separate from that of race and class. Chicanas write in opposition to academics who have never fully recognized them as subject, as *active agents* (Córdova, Ant-colonial chicana, 15).

Echoing Chela Sandoval's "oppositional consciousness"(1991), Córdova's theorizations also extend to questioning, redefining and decolonizing theory in the face of the current neocolonizing mode of globalization and hegemonic discourses. Thus, the oppositional subject embodies insurgency and defiant beliefs which are constructed and developed against structures of domination for the sole purpose of guiding the act of insubordination to undermine, reform, and subvert knowledge.

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NOTES

1 The exhibit opened on February 25, 2001.

2 *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* was co-edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in 1981. Editions of *Bridge* were also printed in 1983 and 2015. An edited Spanish translation by Cherríe Moraga with translations by Norma Alarcón and Ana Castillo was released in 1988 with the title *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda: Voces De Mujeres Tercermundistas En Los Estados Unidos.* For this study, I will be using the 1981 edition.

3 In fact, when I was born, my mother named me officially in my birth certificate María Alicia. I eliminated the name María in 1992, when I renewed my passport. My younger sister, was also named María. Her actual name still is María Aurora.

4 A rough translation: "Daughter, don't be a rebel: in order to be loved by men you have to behave like a good [passive] *señorita.* Remember that you will look prettier if you do not speak." In this case, *señorita* is related to a behavior and attitude of "purity" and "virginity".

5 In *Borderland/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa's uses her own subjectivity, as a queer Chicana born and raised in the South Texas border, to theorize not only about the borderlands as an intercultural/transcultural space, but also to apply this space as the foundation for a social justice framework embodied through the "new mestiza consciousness." For this essay, I am using the first edition by spinsters/aunt lute (1987).

6 My use of "oppositional" echoes Chela Sandoval's "oppositional consciousness." In a 1991 essay, "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," she outlined five types of oppositional consciousness: equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, separatist and differential. See Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000).

7 The notion of "tortillerismo" symbolically makes references to "lesbianism." Alicia Gaspar de Alba's "Making Tortillas" poem was written in 1983, as part of her Master of Arts creative writing thesis, later published in her first book of poetry *Beggar on the Córdoba Bridge* (1989). Her next usage of the term appeared in a review essay published in *Signs* in 1993, "Tortillerismo: Work by Chicana Lesbians." Editor's note: see the full text of the poem in Gaspar de Alba's "manifesto" in this volume.

8 The letter was drafted in 1979 and later published in *Bridge.* In the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009), brief information about this essay makes references to the 1979 draft (page 26).

9 As generally known, intersectionality is mainly linked to Kimberly Crenshaw after 1989 when she used the term as a way to understand multiple oppressions and/or discriminations and how they affect poor women, immigrants and women of color. However, earlier references to "the interlocking systems of

oppression" in *Bridge*, became commonly known as a precursor to Crenshaw's intersectional method. It is important to point out that the interlocking system of oppressions was introduced in a social movement context by the Combahee River Collective (CRC) in pamphlet form in 1977. The CRC was mainly a black feminist lesbian organization active in Boston from 1974 to 1980, of which Gloria Anzaldúa was a part. They are perhaps best known for developing the CRC Statement, a significant document in the history of contemporary black feminism. This document is also included in *Bridge* (210-218).

10 Of queer of color frameworks developed by José Muñoz in his first book *Disidentifications: Queer of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) and later, Roderick Ferguson, in *The Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2003). In *Disidentifications*, Muñoz explains that he borrows from third world feminists and radical women of color in using the term "identities-in-difference" "especially Chicana theorists, who have greatly contributed to discourses that expand and radicalize identity" (6). More specifically, "identities-in-difference" was coined by Norma Alarcón in her essay "Conjugating Subjects in the Age of Multiculturalism," in Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism* (1996).

11 I am referring to the play published and produced in 1986. The first publication was released by the West End in Los Angeles, California.

12 Anzaldúa proposes the indigenous origin of Guadalupe as Coatlalopeuh, she is the one who has dominated the serpents (27). She argues that because Coatlalopeuh sounds like Guadalupe, the Spanish saw Coatlalopeuh as parallel or identical to "the dark Virgin, Guadalupe, patroness of West Central Spain" (29).

13 For an update on Alma López's art and exhibits see Alma Lopez (myportfolio.com).

14 She explains that while she was creating images for the series entitled "1848: Latinos in the U.S. Landscape after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," she was also asked to design a flyer for a lesbian/bisexual women of color event. In the creative process, the image of the two popular figures came together on her computer screen: La Sirena and the Virgin of Guadalupe.

15 Derived from Catholic beliefs of the Virgin Mary, who after giving birth to Jesus, became the Mother of God and a role model for women, marianismo perpetuates the gender roles subjected to Christian values, in which women should be self-sacrificing while following the ideal of the Virgin Mary. And like her, women should be eternally immaculate and giving. They should be pure and if they have sexual relations, it should only be with their husband and for the sole purpose of procreation.

16 For more information about the controversy, consult edited book by Alma López and Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparition* (2011).

17 This quote is the result of one of my many informal conversations with Alma López. Originally, the angel was portrayed topless, but later prints and publications cover her breasts with a butterfly. In one of our conversations, Alma indicated that this was done upon the request of her friend Raquel Gutiérrez, who portrayed the "angel." I am wondering if her friend's request to cover her breast was the result of the controversy caused initially by the protests.