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Cartography of Xicana Desire

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Cartography of Xicana Desire

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Cartography of Xicana Desire

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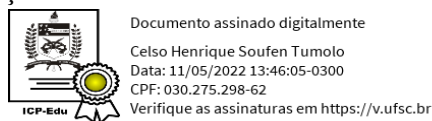
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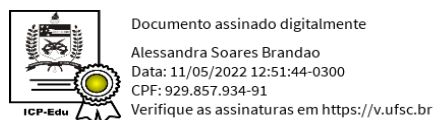
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May we do work that matters. Vale la pena, it's worth the pain.

(ANZALDÚA, 2015)

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I mapped out desire as a transformative force, capable of moving geographical, social, and emotional Borderlands. The enmeshment of the erotic, language, and movement creates what I am calling a cartography of Xicana desire. In the chapter “Nomadic Desire: Mobilizing epistemologies in the Borderlands”, I develop the concept of nomadic desire from a Xicana perspective, through the analysis of Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* (1983), “Queer Aztlán” (1993), and *Native country of the heart* (2019), and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* (2007). The nomadic desire also shifts other epistemologies related to space, such as “return” and “home”. In “Click, click, click: The colonial presence and the defying desire”, I focus on the concept of (un)safety as a paradoxical and fractured locus where desire builds bridges to defy the impositions of coloniality. The works *Cabañuelas* (2019), by Norma Cantú, *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009) and *Electra’s complex*, by Emma Pérez, participate in this discussion. Lastly, in “‘Indians are everywhere’ or ‘Eu não tenho minha aldeia’: Indigeneity and desire in the search of ancestral roots”, the focus is on the presence of Indigenous women in the use of desire as a route to ancestral connections. In here, I return to two texts already analyzed in this dissertation, Moraga’s *Native country of the heart* (2019) and Pérez’s *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009), and I bring one more novel, Ana Castillo’s *So far from God* (1994). My movement from the epistemological shifts created by the nomadic desire, passing through the fractured locus that produces safe, albeit unstable, spaces in the construction of bridges against the colonial presence, to the connection between land and Indigeneity provides mobility without abandoning the impulse of seeking one’s roots. What makes these literary works relevant to think Xicana movements through desire is exactly that they do not ignore the ever presence of coloniality while also not subjecting themselves entirely to its rules. By living their pleasures, despite and against repressive colonial ties, as part of their multiplicities, the subjects presented in these texts construct a cartography of desire that is geopolitical, space related, and historically engaged. These literary works create the possibility of residing on the bridge, in transit, in the encounters among worlds. By living desires in and against the colonial/modern gender system, the friction of residing and resisting forces the continuously reconfigurations of spaces and subjects implicated in the process.

Keywords: nomadic desire; decolonial studies; Borderlands; Chicana literature; mobility.

RESUMO

Nessa tese, eu mapeio o desejo como uma força transformativa, capaz de mover geográfica, social e emocionalmente as *Borderlands*. O enredamento do erótico, linguagem e movimento cria o que estou chamando de cartografia do desejo de Xicanas. No capítulo “Desejo nomádico: mobilizando epistemologias nas *Borderlands*”, eu desenvolvo o conceito de desejo nomádico de uma perspectiva Xicana através da análise de *Loving in the War Years* (1983), “Queer Aztlán” (1993), e *Native country of the heart* (2019), de Cherríe Moraga, e *Borderlands* (2007), de Gloria Anzaldúa. O desejo nomádico também desloca outras epistemologias relacionadas a espaço, como “retorno” e “casa/lar”. Em “Click, click, click: a presença colonial e o desejo desafiador”, eu foco no conceito de (in)segurança como um local paradoxal e fraturado onde o desejo constrói pontes para desafiar as imposições da colonialidade. Os trabalhos *Cabañuelas* (2019), de Norma Cantú, *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009) e *Electra’s complex*, de Emma Pérez, participam dessa discussão. Por último, em “‘Índios estão por todo lado’ ou ‘Eu não tenho minha aldeia’: Indigenismo e desejo na busca por raízes ancestrais”, o foco é na presença da mulher indígena no uso do desejo como uma rota para conexões ancestrais. Aqui, eu retorno para dois textos já analisados nessa tese, *Native country of the heart* (2019), de Moraga, e *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009), de Pérez, e trago mais um romance, *So far from God* (1994), de Ana Castillo. O movimento a partir das mudanças epistemológicas criadas pelo desejo nomádico, passando pelos locais fraturados que produzem espaços de segurança, mesmo que de forma instável, na construção de pontes contra a presença colonial, até a conexão entre terra e indigenismo oferece mobilidade sem abandonar o impulso de se buscar suas raízes. O que faz desses trabalhos relevantes para pensar o movimento Xicano através do desejo é exatamente porque eles não ignoram a constante presença da colonialidade enquanto também não se submetem completamente às suas regras. Ao viverem seus prazeres, apesar e contra amarraduras repressivas coloniais, como parte de suas multiplicidades, os sujeitos apresentados nos textos constroem uma cartografia de desejo que é geopolítica, relacionada ao espaço e historicamente comprometida. Esses textos literários criam a possibilidade de se residir na ponte, no trânsito, nos encontros entre mundos. Ao viver desejos no e contra o sistema colonial/moderno de gênero, a fricção entre residir e resistir força a reconfiguração dos espaços e dos sujeitos implicados no processo.

Palavras-chave: desejo nomádico; estudos decoloniais; *Borderlands*; literatura chicana; mobilidade.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICS OF SPACE IN THE BORDERLANDS

What does it mean to think about space from the perspective of desire? How and where one craves for something shape both the how and the where. Desire moved me intellectually and geographically. The fact that I am writing about Xicana¹ literature, about desire in Xicana literature, about desire and space in Xicana literature, comes partly from being a lesbian professor who moved to four different cities in the period of five years. I did not move by force, my choice in each of the times that I went from one city to another came from longing more for myself, personally, professionally, romantically, and socially. I had to change methodologies, houses, perspectives, jobs. I know the privilege that is to have the opportunities I had. I could experience that which I read in texts about gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, literature; I can write informed by those texts and by my own experiences, conscious of my position as a white woman from the South of Brazil and from the Global South (two completely different concepts of “south”²). I, who have trouble with hot weather and bugs, see home when I think of Marabá-PA, see passion when I think of distance, and see displacement when I think of home. I have had the chance of making my choices factoring my desires. I consider myself a nomadic subject, as defined by Rosi Braidotti, and I consider my desire also nomadic, in terms that it “allows me to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges” (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 4). Xicana literature, for me, was love at first sight since I read Gloria Anzaldúa’s “*La Conciencia Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*” in a class in college. I loved the way her text was so personal, so passionate, so different from the theoretical materials I was used to reading. I am passionate about literature, researching, working, teaching, touching, eating, and this work comes from a place of passion, although still respecting the partial objectivity required by academia.

I am interested in understanding how desires and spaces constitute each other in a never-ending recursive process and how this process creates the potentiality for new expressions of

¹ I choose to use the term Xicana, with “X”, instead of Chicana, following some authors who I will discuss in this work, for this is an epistemological shift that underscores the relevance of a decolonial perspective in the context of the Borderlands.

² While the term “Global South” emerges, from a decolonial perspective, as a form of questioning the geopolitical arrangement of the world that marginalizes knowledge, cultures and countries outside the Euro/North-America regions, in Brazil, the Eurocentric colonization of the country privileges knowledge and cultural assets from the South, with a xenophobic, racist, and discriminatory discourse that marginalizes regions such as the North and Northeast of the country. From within Brazil, cardinal directions have opposing meanings when analyzed from a Global or Local perspective.

desires and new possibilities for reading and interacting in spaces. Crossing borders is one, if not the main, characteristics of Xicana literature, first by breaking the limits of genres, such as literature and theory, prose and poem, fiction and non-fiction; secondly, by dealing with different language codes (English, Spanish, and Nahuatl); thirdly by transitioning from different cultural and social set of rules, developing stories drawing from indigenous, Mexican, and North-American background; and/or finally, by rewriting myths, histories, and legends. Considering that “[e]very increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing” (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 70), the crossings of and in the texts also cause crossings in meanings. As the texts move in-between, beyond and within borders, the constitution of desires and sexualities move as well.

1.1. Decolonial perspective

I am writing this work from a South-to-South perspective, changing the assumption that subjects from the Global South are continuously perceived as the object to be analyzed instead of the producers of knowledge³. However, being Brazilian and writing from within the borders of this country does not necessarily provide me – although it gives me a pretty good start – with the decolonial perspective that is required for a work that intends in decolonizing desire and space both in imaginary and effective terms. This work considers Maria Lugones’ argument that to take the coloniality of power seriously, it is necessary to understand gender, heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification as intrinsically connected to each other (2007, p. 187). Moreover, it is imperative to understand history as a fictive past that has real effects in the lives and bodies of marginalized subjects. This is not to enter a postmodernity spiral that denies any level of reality; rather, this is to establish the importance of understanding the process, as Emma Pérez affirms, of writing Xicanas into history, so relevant for a decolonizing perspective on Xicana literature.

The impositions of colonialism onto colonized subjects, as (un)conscious and material processes, were analyzed in depth by the theorist Frantz Fanon. The Martinican author discusses the violence of oppression and of resistance in *The Wretched of the Earth*, first published in 1961. He opens the book stating that “decolonization is always a violent event” (FANON, 2005, p. 1). As he theorizes the effects of colonialism, he examines the necessity of wars of liberation and the mental disorders caused by this oppressive social relation. The

³ Some of the authors who question the Western perspective about the Global South and the subject/object binary are Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” (1984), Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” (1988) and Larissa Pelúcio, “Subalterno Quem, Cara-Pálida?” (2012).

materiality of colonialism restricts mobility and keeps subjects in figurative and sometimes literal chains. Yet, the violence of the colonial world is not restrained to its materiality. It also constructs, discursively, a relation of power where on one side of this binary is located the colonist, with their values and civilized society, and on the other, there is the colonized, considered deprived of any kind of values, barbaric, inferior. As Fanon puts it, “the colonist is not content with physically limiting the space of the colonized, i.e., with the help of his agents of law and order. [...] The native is declared impervious of ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values” (2005, p. 6). These relations of power pervade the imaginary, unconscious, and the construction of subjectivity.

Colonialism and the fight against it impact the minds of those in such war. In this Manichean relationship between colonist and colonized, the latter is dehumanized to the point that exploitation becomes justifiable. Those suffering under colonialism believe, reinforce, and impose the very same set of values that inferiorize them. Because this power relation digs deep into the unconscious, Fanon defends that there is no decolonization without violence, since liberty requires destabilizing the order of societies. By the end of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon states that, in this scenario, mental health, for the colonized, is when he “thoroughly fit into a social environment of the colonial type” (2005, p. 182). As the war for decolonization takes place, mental disorders surge. Thus, colonial forces dominate not only by force, law, and order, but also through ideology, discourse, and the unconscious.

This construction of the subject within and against colonial discourse is the basis for Lugones’ debate on the colonial/modern gender system. The effects of colonialism continue informing the power relations across the world even after the independence of former colonies. For Lugones, these power relations are enmeshed⁴ with the Eurocentric perspective of race and gender. According to the author, the colonial/modern gender system constructs women of color in different terms from white bourgeois women, for instance. The former is considered inferior and deprived of femininity or hypersexualized while the latter is delicate, in need of protection, pure, and passive, although both are banned “from the sphere of collective authority, from the production of knowledge, from most control over the means of production” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 206). The Eurocentric discourse about the world became pervasive for the extension of their colonial power, forcing this colonial gender system in societies where before colonialism the

⁴ I use the term “enmeshment” as theorized by Lugones (2003) instead of “intersectionality”, as coined and discussed by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991). Crenshaw’s methodological tool is still highly relevant for the analysis of women of color’s social position. However, Lugones’s debate, within a decolonial perspective, reinforces the inseparability of race and gender in investigating the interlocking of oppressions. For Lugones, race and gender are so enmeshed that is impossible to separate them into distinct vias that intersect.

relations of gender, sex, and sexuality were different, often with references to same-sex relationships, many times without hierarchy, other matriarchal, some rendering non-binary gender and sex as positive. Michel Foucault has already argued, in the *History of Sexuality* (1978), that (homo)sexuality as we know now is a Western recent invention dating the 17th and 18th Century, so each of these pre-conquest societies, in the Americas, in Africa, and in Asia, had their own take on gender, sex, and sexuality, with their own epistemologies and beliefs. Lugones reinstates the force of the ideologies about gender in the colonial discourse by reinscribing the gender system as constituted by and constituting the coloniality of power through examples of the devastating effects that the colonial gender system had on women, men, culture, and social organizations of a myriad of societies that previous to colonialism had different gender dynamics. Heterosexism, as the organization of the Eurocentric dynamics of gender and sex, in its biological fiction, compulsory and perverse characteristics, becomes key to understanding the operations of the colonial power and the intersection of race and gender.

The Eurocentric knowledge about the world that effectively produces reality, then, is gendered, racialized and heterosexist. The fact that Anibal Quijano accepts the hegemonic relations of gender, sex, and sexuality as a given is, for Lugones, the main problem of his theorization about the coloniality of power. While the invention of race by the coloniality of power subjects people of color – men and women – to an inferior, primitive⁵ position, the colonial gender system goes further and constructs women of color as inferior both to men of color and white women. Therefore, Lugones affirms that “only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color” (2007, p. 193). By taking seriously and working together two different frameworks – the intersection of gender, race, colonization as theorized by women of color and Quijano’s concept of coloniality of power – Lugones asserts that the colonial/modern gender system does not affect only one area of the human existence, that of “sex, its resources and products”; rather, it is pervasive in the coloniality of power itself, constituting and being constituted by coloniality.

Still according to Lugones, the role of nonwhite men in undermining women’s position comes from their cooptation into the patriarchal dynamics: “It is important for us to think about these collaborations as we think of the question of indifference to the struggles of women in racialized communities against multiple forms of violence against them and the communities”

⁵ According to Anibal Quijano, “the model of power based on coloniality also involved a cognitive model, a new perspective of knowledge within which non-Europe was the past, and because of that inferior, if not always primitive” (2000, p. 552). Geographical locations, then, become associated to time, in which development is a characteristic of Europe, while belatedness is related to the Americas.

(2007, p. 200). As a form of holding to any kind of power that was still available, nonwhite men adhered to the inferiorization of women brought by the colonial gender system. This position guaranteed the infiltration of the system into all aspects of the human life. Even though the colonial gender system and the coloniality of power permeates every sinew of the modern world, Lugones also reinforces that the other dynamics that once existed in different societies has not totally disappeared and being aware of them is a form of disrupting the indifference to the struggles of women of color.

In an attempt to disrupt the impositions of coloniality, Emma Pérez argues for the emergence of decolonizing the imaginary to find voices once silenced through history. Like Lugones, Pérez works in the enmeshment of gender, class, and race to criticize the Eurocentric process of constructing a fictive historical past that renders women of color invisible and silenced. While Lugones criticizes Quijano for accepting the Eurocentric view of gender to organize sex from a fictive biological perspective and claims that it is impossible to effectively work through a decolonization of lives and discourse without abandoning an affirmative perspective of the colonial/modern gender system, Pérez, by the same token, criticizes Chicano scholars who accepted an assimilationist agenda that moved toward sameness, ignoring the importance of gender differences in regard to violence and the development of communities. From a class perspective, for instance, she criticizes the view that some research on labor would analyze Chicanas under the category of “workers”, “early immigrant/labor studies [that] accentuated the worker’s condition, a genderless, sexless, social condition” (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 18). Hence, she argues for a decolonial imaginary methodology to “rethink history in a way that makes Chicana/o agency transformative” (1999, p. 5).

If colonial imaginary silences women of color, working in a linear, historical approach that considers valuable the Eurocentric modern system of knowledge and knowing, the decolonial imaginary works in the fractures of the encounter between the colonial and decolonial to disrupt the Western logic. Without denying the real effects of coloniality, the decolonial imaginary looks deeply into the interstitial gaps to listen to the voices of marginalized subjects. Pérez describes the imaginary, in Lacanian terms, as the mirror stage where “coloniality overshadows the image in the mirror” (1999, p. 6). In this sense, in the in-between of the subject and object lies the shadows of the decolonizing potentialities. According to Pérez,

Women’s activities are unseen, unthought, merely a shadow in the background of the colonial mind. Yet Chicana, Mexicana, India mestiza actions, words spoken and unspoken, survive and persist whether acknowledged or not. Women’s voices and actions intervene to do what I call

sexing the colonial imaginary, historically tracking women's agency on the colonial landscape. (1999, p. 7)

Hence, telling the stories found in in the gaps, from in-between spaces, third spaces, interrupts the traditional/colonial perspective of history and opens the possibility of telling a “gendered history” (1999, p. 22). This is a form of negotiating between colonial and decolonial spaces that allows that we listen to once silenced voices, and see the agency of subjects once considered passive.

Pérez' concept of a gendered history takes technologies of desire and sexuality as central to work the decolonial imaginary, which she sees as a possibility to “move beyond woman as an essentialist category” (1999, p. 23). I will develop this point further later in this work. Now, it is important to reinforce that Pérez sees desire as a source of colonial power which also needs to be decolonized to unveil women's own agency. Thus, desire is, at the same time, a site for colonial power and a potent weapon against coloniality. When Pérez affirms finding the Oedipus complex in the relationships of the Americas, she also finds relevant to explain that it does not mean this system is universal; on the contrary, she states that colonialism brought and installed this Eurocentered Oedipus relations (1999, p. 107). In other words, desires are embodied, racialized, and colonized in and against the coloniality of power and the modern/colonial gender system.

Another Xicana author who claims the necessity of decolonizing mind and body is Cherríe Moraga. She is aware of the colonial forces in devaluing the traditional set of knowledges of the Américas (writing as Moraga uses the term) that constructs the Eurocentric way of knowing and being as the only possible way of existence:

I have observed, over and over again, the ways in which the authors and transmitters of the Euro American imagination deny us the authority to imagine outside of their cultural constraints. What we know does not matter. How we came to know does not matter. The language, gesture, and voice we use to express what we know do not matter. In the end, we disavow what we know. We come to the training ground of writers empty of knowledge. We spend a lifetime trying to imitate what we never knew. This keeps us very busy and unoriginal. We do not transgress. (2011, p. 82)

The author uses the embodiment of materiality, present in language, gesture, and voice, to argue that a decolonial perspective can give women of color the originality and transgression needed to write and exist. More than that, this passage also demonstrates the interstitial gaps argued by Pérez. In colonial terms, those who have authority – in other words, the gatekeepers of the Euro-American knowledge – consider the traditional ways of the Américas not valid, forcing the colonial subjects into the cultural constraints of coloniality. Yet, when they try to imitate

these imposed models, they become unoriginal, so deprived of value. These dynamics highlight one cruel side of the coloniality of power, that is its way of trying to tie the colonized into a hierarchy in which she is immobilized. That is where imagining, inventing, and borrowing become imperative to untie and mobilize these subjects in new possible manners. Moraga is calling for decolonizing the mind in order to listen to voices that the coloniality of power forces into silence. However, the issue must not only be localizing such attempts of cultural erasures but understanding the history of these voices and finding ways for the colonized subjects to pass through the cracks between colonial and decolonial struggles so that we are not subjugated nor forgotten.

Based on the pervasiveness of the colonial/modern gender system and the coloniality of power, although not drawing her theorizations from Lugones or Quijano, the Xicana author Ana Castillo, coins the term “Xicanisma.” According to Castillo, a Xicanista is a Chicana feminist who excavates a self-definition about herself from beyond the impositions of colonization. Spirituality, land, and collective memory are central to the women Castillo calls Xicanistas. For her, spirituality is not related to institutions and religions; rather, it comes from the experience of daily life and intuition that refuses to follow the Western Cartesian concept of knowledge: “Spirituality is an acutely personalized experience inherent in our daily lives” (2014, p. 11). Moreover, she connects her spirituality, as a Xicanista, to land⁶, ancestors, and colonized peoples: “The collective memory that I share with other *indigenas* and mestizos and mestizas makes me yearn to claim these territories as my spiritual homeland” (CASTILLO, 2014, p. 18, original emphasis). Castillo, like the decolonial authors hereby discussed, claims for a recovery of cultural codes that coloniality tries to silence and erase:

The omission in most literature of the history and presence of millions who inhabited these lands long before European occupation forces us to read between the lines. If reading between the lines was what white feminists had to do with the “classics,” U.S. Mexic Amerindians/U.S. Latinas had to become excavators to begin their work as Xicanistas. (CASTILLO, 2014, p. 5)

For Xicanistas, in this view, should both excavate the past and envision possibilities of different future, Castillo asserts that they “must simultaneously be archaeologists and visionaries of our culture” (2014, p. 226). Future and past, here, work both as the linear time of the hegemonic

⁶ Land must not be confused with country. Castillo considers herself a countryless woman, for “in my own nation of birth and citizenship, as a mestiza born to the lower strata, at best, I am often mistaken for an immigrant, at worst, as a nonentity”, while still being a foreigner in Mexico and Europe (2014, p. 17-18). However, “[n]ationhood aside, there is a visceral connection within me for the land of my ancestors” (2014, p. 18). In this sense, she connects herself to land through her indigenous ancestors, who do not divide territory in terms of country as colonialism imposes in the world.

temporality that must be questioned and the point of escape from the Eurocentric traditional concept of development. In the recovery of this silenced past, the Xicanista finds the possibility of an envisioned future.

The term Xicana, with an "X", marks an epistemological shift in a decolonial standpoint. The term highlights a close connection to Indigenous and Mexican communities, while still reinforcing a feminist perspective. The shift in the signifier brings this intersectional approach closer to marginalized subjects. Moraga explains that she uses the term Xicana "with an X (the Nahuatl spelling of the "ch" sound) to indicate a reemerging política⁷, especially among young people, grounded in Indigenous American belief systems and identities" (2011, p. xxi). According to Francisco Rios, another difference between Chicano/a and Xicana/o is that "[t]he former is rooted in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, while the latter has its roots in the transnational, globalized, and neoliberal policies of the early years of the 21st Century" (RIOS, 2008, p. 2). I consider that this term acknowledges and articulates the decolonial thinking in relation to and against the coloniality of power and the colonial/gender system, focusing on an insurrection and resistance from the specific context of the borders between Mexico and the U.S.. I believe that this choice of using "Xicana", instead of the term with "ch", is already locating myself in a specific standpoint, that of a decolonial field that questions the geographical and colonial hierarchies of knowledge. Although I am using the term Xicana, some of the authors who appear in my research use the term with ch. For this reason, when I am discussing their ideas, I write the term as they do in their works. Nevertheless, when my voice appears among their discussions, I choose to use "Xicana".

1.2. Historical Background

The term Xicana used as self-identification has a political connotation since it reinforces gender, racial, class, and ethnic identities. Initially a derogatory term against lower class Mexicans, the words "chicano" and "chicana" were reclaimed by the Chicano movement in the 1960s who started using the term as a form of proud self-identification. As the movement privileged males, marginalizing women, the latter eventually felt the necessity of partially detached themselves in order to give emphasis on gender issues that were previously subjugated. However, as the feminist hegemonic movement at the time were not addressing the issues concerning women of color as well, they constituted a movement of their own. Thus,

⁷ The term política is not italicized in the original for the author argues that "Spanish words are neither translated nor italicized (unless for emphasis) in order to reflect a bilingual Xicana sensibility" (2011, p. xxii). Thus, I will leave as she did in respect of her choice.

Chicana feminists, while still connected with the struggles of their communities, also confront the problems related to being a brown woman in a white male imperialist hegemonic society. The writings of the Chicana feminists take their historical contexts and experiences into account and cross borders, connecting their ancient history, related to their Indigenous heritage, with political movements to which they and/or their families were involved, at the same time connecting them to the constitution of their own subjectivity. Nevertheless, in order to access their own history, they need to (re)invent, (re)write, and remember that which was left aside in official versions of their own story.

In order to contextualize Xicana history, it is important to briefly examine the conditions that led to the surfacing of the Chicano movement from the 1960s. According to David Montejano, the "movement of the mid-sixties was fueled by essentially the same provocations that had fueled the Black civil rights movement since the early fifties: segregation, poverty, and racism," also adding to this list police brutality and lack of political representation (2010, p. 2). Under the leadership of Dolores Huerta and César Chávez, the farmworkers' strikes that took place in 1965-66 were the trigger for the organization of the movement:

The specific spark was set off by the California and Texas farmworker strikes of 1965-1966. These strikes—known as "la causa," or "the cause"—struck a resonant chord among urban Mexican American college students, most of whom were only a generation removed from the fields. They joined the support committees, acquired experience, and elaborated ideas about equality and justice. In a short time, these politicized students left the farmworker cause and created new organizations focused on other issues facing Mexican American communities. (MONTEJANO, 2010, p. 2)

Still maintaining Huerta and Chávez as iconic leaders, the movement expanded its actions from the farmworkers to the struggles of other working-class Chicanos. In a variety of cities with greater numbers of Chicanos, such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, Albuquerque, and Chicago, activists were organizing the movement. Although fighting against a diversity of forces that oppressed Chicana/o communities, the role of women in the core of the movement and in the family was not one of the issues male militants were willing to address.

The Xicana movement had to raise its voice against a complex system of oppression coming from different groups of which these women are part. The use of the feminine qualifier (-a) marking the term *Chicana*, refusing the male term as a universal one, reinforces the focus on women issues while still positioning them into a Latin American tradition, more specifically one of a Mexican descent, connected to their community. The shift from Chicana to Xicana brings one more epistemological shift. As part of the Chicano community, white normative cultures oppress them; as working class, they face poor jobs and working conditions, having to

deal, also, with poor educational systems; as women, they are oppressed by white cultures, alongside the pressure of *la familia*; their Indigenous heritage is jointly undermined by both Mexican and Anglo-American cultures; queer Xicanas also have to contend with the oppression against their non-normative sexuality. In the community, it would be expected that women obey the male figure in their lives, nurture the house, while combating the white culture oppression they all face: "[s]he must fight racism alongside her man, but challenge sexism single-handedly, all the while retaining her 'femininity' so as not to offend or threaten *her man*. This is what being a Chicana feminist has meant in Chicano-defined terms" (MORAGA, 2000, p. 98-99). The fragmentation of these struggles added up in building the movement.

In terms of knowledge production within official means, Debra Castillo also reinforces that the path into academia was not uncomplicated for Xicana scholars. In the 1970s and 1980s, when Chicano studies were already a still-in-the-beginning-but-paving-its-way into the institutionalized programs, journals, and presses of the academic tradition, women of color were still facing "the strong anti-institutional thread and oppositional rhetoric in much of the most of the well-known Chicana feminist thought" (Debra CASTILLO, 2008, p. 16). According to Emma Pérez, "Chicana history, or Chicana studies, constructed, theorized, enunciated, and redirected the questions asked by Chicano/a historians in the 1970s and 1980s" (1999, p. 22). The rupture from the Chicano movement and the search for a differential theoretical pathway, thus, come as forms of reinforcing the feminist struggles that permeate these women's experiences within and outside the community, whilst still not perceiving the hegemonic feminist movements as a site for their issues.

In the 1980s, three works mark the struggles confronted within and outside the Chicano movement: Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years*, in 1983, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, in 1987, and the anthology edited by both Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colors*, in 1981. If nowadays women of color cannot be ignored in the field of Chicana/o studies, it is partly because of the struggles of this "first wave of Chicana writers", as Naomi H. Quiñones calls them. Xicanas were participating in the Chicano movement during the 1960s and 1970s propelled by the Civil Rights Movements, but they were continuously relegated to secondary roles. As Quiñones discloses, in the article "Re(ri)ting the Chicana Postcolonial: From Traitor to 21st Century Interpreter," about the time when she was in college in the 1970s: "I embraced a Chicano identity while questioning the marginalization of women from the Chicano Movement, which, in turn, aided me in understanding the importance and necessity of

feminism” (2002, p. 130). For Quiñones, Chicana writers in this period were “motivated to write as a result of increased political awareness and a commitment to the cultural ideals of the Chicano Movement. These ideals included linking the purpose of art and culture to the struggle for socioeconomic and political change” (2002, p. 131). Likewise, Ana Castillo also acknowledges the legacy afforded by the women from this period:

The new generations of women that followed have these *obreras culturales* as unprecedented models. The young Xicanista (not just Chicana, not activista for La Raza, not only a feminist but Chicana feminist) now has documentation of her particular history in the form of books, plays, murals, art, and even films that the culturalists have produced. (2014, p. 100)

In this sense, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's works, in the 1980s, were not the first ones on the topic of Xicana struggles, but they made the existence – and necessity – of a feminist movement within the Chicano Movement one impossible to ignore.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave feminism broadened their actions, making themselves visible, and promoting debates about a diversity of issues that had women as protagonist. However, the spaces for women of color to discuss the specificities of their issues were still restricted in the feminist movement. In the introduction of *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa and Moraga tell how being a woman of color in the feminist movement continuously gave them an outsider status, the feeling of not-belonging. Their experiences, thus, moved them to write the book: "What began as a reaction to the racism of white feminists soon became a positive affirmation of the commitment of women of color to our own feminism. [...] *This Bridge Called My Back* intends to reflect an uncompromised definition of feminism by women of color in the US” (ANZALDÚA; MORAGA, 2002, p. ii-iii). *This Bridge* crosses genre borders by dealing with poems, journals, letters, academic essays, and other forms of texts, and constructs bridges between different minorities in the US, with materials by black, Xicanas, Chinese, and a myriad of women with different backgrounds for the constitution of their own feminism. The border crossing of genres is emblematic of these authors' literature. Both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands* transit from prose to poem, from literary to academic language and format. The same way they, and other Xicana authors, also cross the borders of language using Spanish along with English and borrowing terms from Nahuatl as well.

These works focused, to a certain extent, on demystify some cultural assumptions about Xicanas. To do so, one of the strategies they used was revisiting some myths wherein women had relevant roles and rewriting them from a decolonial feminist perspective. For instance, Anzaldúa returns to the Aztec deities to reinterpret some female figures seeking to understand

the contemporary relationships between Mexican and Xicanas. In this process, she develops the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative, a continuing method of acquiring consciousness that goes through stages of dismembering, re-membering, recognizing, and facing traumatic experience. Dismembered by her brother *Huitzilopochtli*, *Coyolxauhqui* comes to represent, in Anzaldúa's terms, "the 'me' tossed into the void by traumatic events [...] A plurality of souls splits my awareness so that I see things from a hundred different viewpoints, each with its own intelligence" (2015, p. 50). *Coatlicue*, *Coyolxauhqui*'s and *Huitzilopochtli*'s mother, is also rewritten as the *Coatlicue* state. First appearing in *Borderlands* as representative of the process of acquiring the necessary consciousness to realize and break free from oppressive relationships that women undergo, *Coatlicue* reappears in her posthumously work, *Light in the Dark*, as one of the stages of the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative. The *Coatlicue* state happens in dark moments of depression: "[w]hen I reach bottom, something forces me to push up, walk toward the mirror, confront the face in the mirror" (2007, p. 70). This moment in which *Coatlicue* visits her psyche and she must face herself, Anzaldúa calls a "prelude to crossing". The metaphor of a painful journey as a form of acquiring knowledge about ones' own position endows *Coatlicue* with a powerful meaning as the goddess of life and death.

As history shows, when questioned, criticized, and rearticulated, instead of taken the official version as unquestionable truth, both oppression and resistance are part of Xicana lives and experiences. They use their writings as an act of remembering and creating new possible readings of their own history, constituting themselves through and against different cultural backgrounds that form the Borderlands. History, writings, and mythology are, therefore, intertwined for Xicanas. Their forms of questioning limits may put forth the arbitrariness of categories and divisions of desire, gender, genre, and geography that constitute social hierarchies.

1.3.Borderlands

In the context of Xicana studies, this research discusses space through the lenses of Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the Borderlands⁸. The Borderlands are sites of struggle, where different cultural and social codes contradict one another while they all work as constitutive of the subjects living in this in-between space. These subjects, she calls *mestizas*. For the author,

⁸ I use Borderlands with a capital letter as a reference to Anzaldúa's theorization, in which this is an epistemological concept transiting among geographical and psychological positions constituted in the meeting point between distinct geopolitical and cultural locations; differently, the term borderlands in its more broaden meaning is generally the overlapping of two or more elements.

The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. [...] [T]he lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who [...] go through the confines of the normal. (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 25, original emphasis)

The Borderlands encompass complex intertwining geographical and psychological spaces. Their contradictory and complex relations challenge any simplistic system of binary oppositions, forcing an intersectional perspective that takes into consideration a myriad of connections, both within one's own self and in relation to others. As Anzaldúa states, "*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (2007, p. 100, original emphasis). If the borders work in constructing a separation between *us* and *them*, then people living in the Borderlands are not *us* nor *them*, at the same time that they are both. Thus, in this space of contradictions, ambivalences, and struggles, the constant state of transition, the tolerance for ambiguity, the inner war a *mestiza* undergoes result in the possibility of a new consciousness – "a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*" (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 99, original emphasis). As Anzaldúa explains, "within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture" (2007, p. 100). Adding to that, there are also the commonly held beliefs of cultures in relation to gender and sexuality which attack women and queer people. Xicanas, politically conscious of the contradictory position they inhabit, build themselves from this specific position of confrontation, ambiguity, and transition.

The concept of the Borderlands dialogues with the political definition of space defined by Doreen Massey. According to the geographer, in her work *For Space* (2005), spatiality is constituted while it constitutes the subjects in the interrelations, multiplicities, and internal negotiations within space. The author states three propositions to discuss the politics of space:

First, that we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny [...]. *Second*, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality. Multiplicity and space as co-constitutive. *Third*, that we recognise space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between,

relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. (MASSEY, 2005, p. 9, original emphasis)

Through this concept, Massey argues, exists the possibility of a political use of space, in which both history and future are open. Thus, spaces are constituted by the encounters of multiple and heterogeneous trajectories, always in relational perspectives. Still, according to Massey, Postcolonial studies (and I would include Decolonial studies as well) break with homogeneity of space when scholars in the field question the geographical relations of power and the colonial homogeneous histories which focus their official versions on the white Eurocentric perspectives of any event: “Not only should the European trajectory be 'decentred' it could also be recognised as merely one [...] of the histories being made at that time” (MASSEY, 2005, p. 63). Therefore, retell stories from the periphery of hegemonic power destabilizes assumptions about center/margins, developed/underdeveloped (binary relations that imply the superiority of one side in detriment of the other) and bring to the fore the multiplicities of trajectories and knowledges embedded in geographical locations.

For Xicanas, territory and land are literal spaces that inform and propel their struggles. Indigenous land demarcation and reservations, the Mexican-US war, in the 19th Century, that changed the border between Mexico and the United States, and immigration and border crossing are issues that (in)form their works. The materiality of these issues is present in the constitution of the Xicana subjects. The hegemonic historical version of these conflicts produces erasure and the construction of stereotypes, which affect the real embodiment of the subjects living in the Borderlands.

Although literal spaces operate an important role, their metaphors also inform Xicanas' literary works. The concept of the Borderlands itself functions in both cases, being defined as the physical area along the Mexico-USA borders and as part of the psychological border of the mestizas, whose constitution are informed by different cultural codes. Another example of the metaphorical use of spatial and geographical definitions is the concept of *nepantla*, which, according to Anzaldúa, is a space of transition for those in a journey through knowledge, for those who live in-between cultures. The author argues that “[i]n the transition space of *nepantla* you reflect critically, and as you move from one symbol to another, self-identity becomes your central concern” (2015, p. 127). By the same token, in two books that discuss the coalition between feminist women of color, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), edited by Anzaldúa and Moraga, and *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002), edited by Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating, the metaphorical space of the bridge comes as a form of discussing the connections

between different oppressed groups and their forms of resistance. In the former, the embodiment of the metaphor brings in it the materiality of the relation between space and body. These women's backs are the bridge between them in metaphorical terms, but the pains and weight they must contend are real and they feel the effects of oppression in their bodies, symbolized by the “back”. In the latter, home is the space being reconceptualized, losing its fixity and becoming a bridge, a connection.

Always under construction, space is subjected to changes according to the interrelations to which it is part, and in its turn also change the interactions of the multiplicities it abides. Mary Pat Brady analyzes the constitution of the borders from a discursive perspective, pointing to the real effects promoted by discourses. For her, the ideological cartography makes an alchemical machine out of the border, capable of transforming subjects into aliens, defining two nations into socio-political and socio-imaginary terms, to what she calls an “abjection⁹ machine” (2002, p. 50). In her research, Brady concurs that the Xicana literature presents, then, a countercartography for it acts as a counterdiscourse to the hegemonic construction of the border. In this literature, a diversity of meanings surfaces from the border, breaking the idea of this space as immobile and working against the border as abject machine (BRADY, 2002, p. 51-52). In this sense, “Chicana literature questions rigid meanings of space as performative, refusing the binary between the material and the discursive” (2002, p. 6). The concept of space as rigid, fixed, and unchangeable hides the relations of power operating in the interactions that constitute space. Thus, taking the performativity of space into account cooperates to contradict the discourse of its homogeneity and to unveil the complexities of the interrelations between spatiohistorical concepts and the subjects who participate in its creation and demystification.

In the production of the border as a clear divisive space between here and there, us and them, there is also the production of temporal geographies, which transforms the border crossing into a logic of passing from one temporality to the other. According to Brady, “built into the loose term border is a static, modernist concept of difference that depends on the veiled separation of time and space” (2002, p. 50). Thus, in a normative linear temporality, the space belonging to Mexico is considered belated, while the U.S. defined as the modern side of the divide, becomes advanced. Eliana Ávila, in theorizing what she calls “temporal borderlands”, discusses how hegemonic narratives construct Latin America as backwardness and, thus, how

⁹ The abject is not part of the divide subject/object, for this binary asks for opposition, a relatedness, that the abject cannot purport. Kristeva considers the abject an ambiguity, for it is still connected to the subject while threatening this very same subject. In this sense, the abject is the waste, repressed, threatening the very existence of the “I”, thus, deserving to die. The abject causes aversion, repugnance, horror. The fear and violence in the presence of the abject is corporeal, felt and materialized in the body (KRISTEVA, 1982).

“[t]he challenge of Latinx literature is therefore to expose and confront the compulsion to reproduce the anachronism inherited from colonial and eugenicist discourses in what is often euphemistically characterized as the 'price' of empowerment within US society” (ÁVILA, 2018, p. 732). She also criticizes the queer normative temporality, which considers that a “queer immigration to the North operates within contexts in which homophobic and Latin American tend to be conflated, assigned to a spacetime of abjection in a remote, obsolete past, a site of prior immobility finally transcended in a triumphalist here and now” (2018, p. 717). In this sense, Western (hetero)normative temporality imposes a perspective of development that only works to entrap marginalized and colonized subjects in a discourse of an anachronized past.

Ávila goes further in Anzaldúa’s concept of the Borderlands to queer the linear temporality that, in Brady’s terms, constructs the border as an alchemical machine: “The de-anachronizing paradigm I refer to is that of the temporal borderlands, a chronoqueer dimension implicit in Gloria Anzaldúa’s borderlands theory which both recognizes and unhinges the geotemporal borders by which coevalness has been effectively denied” (ÁVILA, 2018, p. 713). In the Borderlands, the juggling of cultural codes and, by consequence, of temporalities, complicates the geopolitical divide, opening a crack in the (hetero)normative temporality where both a counterspace and a counterdiscourse may appear. Concurring with Brady, Ávila also sees in Latin@ literatures one possible way for counter the geopolitical discourse inserted in the construction of space. For her, the idea of backwardness may be disrupted by queering the temporal linear narratives that constructs Latin America as traditional, hence belated, and the crossing as advancing towards a (post)modern temporality.

Jackie Cuevas seeks to further complicate the concept of Borderlands by including in the debate genderqueer subjects who disrupt any possible coherence in the category of “woman”. For her, one impasse in the theorization of the Borderlands is that Anzaldúa – and Moraga – “tended to rely on the concept of *mujer*/woman to shore up a coherent Chicana lesbian feminist subject” (CUEVAS, 2018, p. 10). Analyzing nonnormative genderqueer characters, she coins the term “post-borderlandia”:

In the post-borderlands world, characters may be suggested to be Chicana but do not necessarily struggle with what that may mean to them. They are also queer but do not necessarily struggle much with that either. Their struggles tend to coalesce around issues of nonnormative gender expression or gender identity; they thus disidentify with Chicanidad and queerness through resignifying the relation between the two at the intersection of gender variance and genderqueerness. (CUEVAS, 2018, p. 11)

The term acknowledges the emergency of the Borderlands and their relevance in the subjects who abide these crosscultural spaces but adds to the discussion nonnormative genderqueerness in the constitution of Xicana subjectivities. In crossing gender variant critique to the discussion of Xicana community, Cuevas “offers a perpetually unfolding map of liberatory potentialities” (2018, p. 139). In this process, identification and disidentification play the part of constructing relationalities beyond the ones already argued by Anzaldúa. Cuevas’ goal is to expand the understandings around Borderlands to encompass an intersection that was not much explored by the “first wave of Chicana writers”, using Quiñones definition.

In expanding understandings about the Borderlands, Cuevas criticizes the potential celebratory perspective that the mestiza may inherit. Drawing from José Esteban Muñoz, Cuevas concurs with him that Anzaldúa’s mestiza can be “too celebratory of queer diversity” (CUEVAS, 2018, p. 11). While I do agree that a view of the mestiza as a solution for all hierarchies of power that reinforces racism, misogyny, homophobia, and marginalization is problematic for it may erase hierarchical differences that are part of our societies, I consider that Anzaldúa’s constitution of the mestiza brings forth these oppressive interrelations. What may be considered celebratory, however, is, in my view, Anzaldúa’s development of a way forward that, still considering the relations of power and the violence of oppressions, provides more than a way of survival, but a way of living. The *Coatlicue* state, which would be a prelude to crossing (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 70), is an instance of the potentiality for recovery and healing when under oppression. Marking the darkest moments of oppression and depression, the *Coatlicue* state is also a moment of acquiring knowledge. The language Anzaldúa uses to describe the mestiza brings forth the painful relations that do not abandon the coloniality of power that marginalizes the subject. The border as an open wound, the constant juggling of prejudices, the oppression that constructs the mestiza’s tolerance for ambiguity are all culturally located, painful and not without consequences. Still, the mestiza consciousness, as described by Anzaldúa, keeps open the possibility for new crossings, new paradigms, and their breaking. Instead of a celebratory view of the mestiza, Anzaldúa envisions new possibilities. Otherwise, without new possible ways, marginalized groups would be entrapped into oppressive relations. Because Anzaldúa envisions new possibilities and keeps her theorization open, Cuevas post-borderlandia is possible both in dialoguing with Anzaldúa’s Borderlands and expanding its concept.

Ellie D. Hernández also discusses the risk of using the Borderlands and the mestiza as a search for wholeness and unity. In this sense, “[she has] also criticized the idealization of the

'borderlands,' which may just as easily be a space of deracinated incoherence as of celebratory heterogeneity" (2009, p. 53). She emphasizes that "the borderlands, though they offer opportunities to rethink and reshape identities, cannot be construed as a space of free play" (HERNÁNDEZ, 2009, p. 53). Anzaldúa's theorization as bridges to discuss relations of power in a variety of contexts works only up to the point that it does not consider all differences the same. Hernández suggests a way out of the trap of hybridity by keeping the materiality of differences and historical and local knowledges always in sight. This way, conflicts and contradictions participate in the construction of the Borderlands and of the subjects who inhabit them. Historical contexts and hierarchies of power, then, are not erased in detriment of a coherent hybrid subject. This is how the Borderlands can continue being a potent force for theorizing marginalized groups.

The Borderlands as literal, psychological, and metaphorical space is a specific location that works with the existence of multiplicities without following into a celebratory definition of difference as "everybody is different, so everybody is the same." Their openness allows for authors to expand understandings of the concept, such as Ávila's "Temporal Borderlands" and Cuevas' "Post-Borderlandia". I concur with the theorists hereby discussed who see these spaces as a realm of possibilities to the production of counterdiscourses that complicates the coherent constitution of the border as a modern/colonial, belated/advanced, us/them, here/there, alien/citizen divide, regarding that we are aware of the Borderlands as discursive as they are real. It is imperative to acknowledge the celebratory and utopian discourses about their complexities in order to effectively theorize the subjects of the Borderlands. I argue, though, that stating the openness for possibilities does not entail that any space and subjectivity produced in the Borderlands are automatically disrupting the coherence of the border discourse. I choose to work with literary productions that somehow bring counternarratives and new paths to the consciousness of the mestiza because I read these texts as giving us tools and meanings that make possible to think of a different relationality from the ones imposed by hegemonic discourses. However, even the texts that may bring complications on one hand, might erase differences on another. These contradictions are also part of the Borderlands and must be considered in the debate.

1.4.Desire

If desire is about pleasures, affects, that which we feel in our body, an energy that moves us, so theorizing about it should be physically felt as well. I am not using desire here as a

metaphor; rather, I believe theorizing and its debates are actually a turn-on. Expressions of (dis)agreement, of surprise, goosebumps, even fear and disbelief that we cannot restrain come along the act of theorizing. Knowledge is not built alone, but through the constant exchange of ideas, experiences, touchings, feelings, and affects. When I theorize, my theorization is embedded in all the relationships that I live as a lesbian, a feminist, a woman, a professor. As an instance of this enmeshed relationship, I have had long excited and enthusiastic conversations about these themes, in bed, with my wife¹⁰. Epistemologies come to be questioned on the spur of the moment. The exchange of passionate looks when one says something incredibly challenging or defiant connects theories with my daily routines and desires.

For me, the hardship of writing about desire comes from the academicist filter that exists in me, a person well trained in the structures of academia. It is like this filter takes over as soon as I sit to write and transforms the pleasure, the joy, the sensual part of the theorization, into a sequence of authors and concepts. It deprives my text of feelings and makes it into a stiff, well coherent, but still, stiff, academic work. When I read Audre Lorde's words – “the erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person” (LORDE, 1984, p. 56) – it hits me: this is how I feel when I talk to my life partner about our projects. Our discussions are passionate and full of pleasure, and these feelings help us to accomplish our work with joy. When I am stuck in this academicist machine that empties my words of joy and pleasure, she is the one I run to for guidance. We talk, we discuss theories, frustrations, desires, and it helps me to find my voice again; the voice that is full of satisfaction – because I do love my work and I “feel in doing” (LORDE, 1984, p. 54). When I write with pleasure, I feel the joy in my body, and it leaks into the texts. Theorizing is sensual. I crave for this kind of desire; the one that does something more, that moves us forward.

As Emma Pérez's affirms, "women's desires have been archaeological silences" (1999, p. 125). By the same token, the desire for literary theorization that defies and disrupts canonical perspectives of universal theories has been an archaeological silence. I hope to excavate desires as potency for change in the literary works I analyze. For that, it is imperative to articulate sexuality and discourse, as discussed by Pérez. It is important to understand how specific

¹⁰ I use the term “wife” as a political sign. As a civil right that was recently extended to non-heteronormative relationships, I feel compelled to affirm that I am legally married to the woman I love and with whom I choose to share my life. However, I also have issues with this term for it reinforces a (homo)normativity that continues separating that which is the norm from what falls out of social acceptance in society. In general, my partner and I call each other “namorada,” the Brazilian term that would be translated as “girlfriend.”

cultural bodies feel and interpret desires. For Pérez, desire is a habit or knowledge of the body and is constituted along with memory and history (1999, p. 107). I agree with Emma Pérez when she argues that desire can decolonize the imaginary. I also agree that desire itself needs to be decolonized. As a technology that might explore new routes and possibilities of being, construct new subjectivities and, as is important for this work, alter the constitution of spaces, it is imperative to understand its formation and expression in normative and non-normative fashion.

Audre Lorde calls us to use the power of the erotic, to listen to our internal desires instead of following external imposed rules:

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. (LORDE, p. 58)

Because we are taught to follow rules and norms that are internalized as natural, listening to “external directives” become a way of colonizing desire. If the Eurocentric male dominant organization of societies is seen as the only possible way of being, this is the model that we would follow. Judith Butler argues that social norms create the idea that the rules and the social practices are, to a certain extent, coherent. However, “the norm only persists as a norm to the extent that it is acted out in social practice and reidealized and reinstated in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life” (BUTLER, 2004, p. 48). Hence, when we refuse to feel and do what the social norms, external to our bodies, mandate us, we open the possibility for reidealizing our own desires.

In this work, I hope to scrutinize desire from a perspective that Michel Foucault calls *ars erotica* (1978). The Latin term is discussed by the French author in comparison to the *scientia sexualis*. From the 19th Century on, sex and sexuality, in the terms that are familiar today, began to be defined through the medical discourse that was becoming prominent in this period. Categories, pathologies, indicative of healthiness are developed in the fallacious light of science as the truth about sex and sexuality. On the other hand, *ars erotica* would be another form of “producing the truth about sex”:

In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul. (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 57)

Against the pathologization and categorization of sex, the erotic art, in Foucault's terms, is concerned with pleasure and its action on the body. I seek to perceive desire more from its effects as a drive that moves people towards pleasure, an energy that is felt in the body and soul, an impulse that reconfigures the self and the surroundings, that which a person cannot ignore. Desire has the power of transformation, and, even if it cannot exist completely out of the scientific discourses, it finds the fractures in which pleasure escapes.

Although the *scientia sexualis* dominates the discourses about sex and sexuality, Foucault affirms that it is still possible to find signs of the *ars erotica* in Western society, including in the very scientific medical discourse that seeks to strip pleasure out of sex in search of a supposed objective neutrality. In a way, a different kind of pleasure emerges: "pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth" (1978, p. 71). *Scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica* dispute their space in the discursive arena. Normative and counternormative discourses (in)form our truth about desire. I am, thus, more interested in the latter, although constantly dealing with the effects of the former in the constitution of desire.

The normative idealization of desire as an imposition and its social iterations put it into the realm of the discursive practices. Emma Pérez argues about the importance of the symbolic order in the constitution of that which gives us pleasure. However, desires continually bring a level of affectivity that escapes the linguistic realm. There, where words fail our feelings, we can see the limitations of language, we can see that there is something else beyond the linguistic borders. As soon as I describe my desire, something is lost. It is not coincidence that the poetical language so hard tries to cope with the impossibility of translating desire into words. For Rosi Braidotti, the pre-discursive forces engaging in the process are related to the unconscious and to the preconscious. These feelings participate in the affectivity that, "in this scheme stands for the preconscious and for pre-discursive; desire is not only unconscious but it remains non thought at the very heart of our thought, because it is that which sustains the very activity of thinking" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 14). In this sense, desire as that which originates our thoughts has a powerful affective degree. Both Lorde and Braidotti argue for the use of the desire as potency to liberate the subjects and as a force that emanates from within the subject. Part of that which are preconscious and pre-discursive, desires may function as a source for a force that propels the subject into new and alternative directions, creating new paths. This perspective is liberatory for it gives an escape route from the possibilities already present in the world. The subjects not only can break with normative impositions in the sex/gender/sexuality matrix, but

else can find new possibilities beyond the non-normative that, as resistance, still responds to the norm.

The fact that liberatory desires focus on “internal knowledge and needs” and on the pre-discursive affect does not mean that it follows solely an ontological drive. As Pérez affirms, history and memory constitute our desires. In the sense that the “body conditions the memory. The memory conditions the body” (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 109), coloniality, race, gender, class, and other intersectionalities participate in this production. Racialized bodies desire and are desired differently. We are trained, to the level of the unconscious, to respond to “external directives”. The success of the modern/colonial gender system, and the indifference of non-white men to the hierarchical gender relations of power are some instances in which it is possible to see the colonial effects of the discursive constitution of desires. Understanding these onto-epistemological components allows us to effectively use such cravings in a decolonizing fashion.

As a symbolic construction of the colonial desire, Pérez develops the “Oedipal-conquest-triangle” (1991, p. 168). In this relationship, the mestizo is the bastard son of the white colonizer, represented by Cortés, and La Malinche, the indigenous woman who was to be blame for the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards. The mestizo son aligns himself with the white father against the mother for fear of being associated to her. However, his skin color and his language separate him from the father. Even when he is the father, he cannot be the white father. As the son desires the powerful phallus of the colonizer, which he fears and envies at the same time, he inferiorizes and distances himself from the indigenous mother. Pérez continues by saying that “[i]t is a metaphor which dictates sociosexual-racial relations. That the Oedipal moment is historically inaccurate is not the issue here” (PÉREZ, 1991, p. 69). What is relevant is that this “psychodrama”, a colonial production that works within the colonial/modern gender system, reverberates in Chicana/o communities as a misogynist relation.

According to Pérez, it is necessary to break with this relationship to find a place and a language that fully express the subjectivity of the mestiza. Finding a route that does not follow the Oedipal-conquest-triangle creates another *sitio* and *lengua* for the expression of women desires: “Our challenge is to rebel against the symbol of the white father and affirm our separation from his destructive ideology to create a life-affirming *sitio*” (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 169). In this sense, performativity of desires that reiterate non-normative idealizations of how women should feel embodies these new routes and inserts them in daily life. It creates the openness for

the existence of reidealized desires. These new routes moved by the erotic evades the sexual desire while still immersed on it and pervades all stances of our lives. Although we cannot alienate desire from sexuality, it participates in the bridges we build, the works we do, the choices we make. Factoring desires from within our lives in our decisions change the routes we make and take.

An instance of these paths of pleasures is Cherríe Moraga's connection between her lesbianism-writing and her family. She states that "[i]t is difficult to separate in my mind whether it is my writing or my lesbianism which has made me an outsider to my family. The obvious answer is both" (2000, p. xi). She continues, "sex has always been part of the question of freedom to want passionately. To live it out in the body of the poem, in the body of the flesh" (MORAGA, 2000, p. xi). However, the very same passion for women and for writing that takes her away from her family is what brings her back to them, but now through a different route. As a Xicana, woman, and lesbian author, writing is also a journey back home, a connection to her family. For her, "even as my writing functioned to separate me from them (I cannot share my work with them), it has freed me to love them from places in myself that had before been mired in unexpressed pain. Writing has ultimately brought me back to them" (2000, p. xii). Her political consciousness about her position, her understanding about her own pleasures, gives her back the possibility of loving those who, otherwise, would be apart from her. Understanding herself as a writer and a lesbian constructs an alternative path of love back to her family.

For Xicanas, Indigeneity and Mexican heritages are ways of returning home while still approaching a nomadic desire. For it is constructed through language and pre-discursive forces, the action that the object causes in the body of the one who desires can be both de/colonized, repressed, or instigated. However, in a decolonized, transformative perspective, desire is only fulfilled when object and subject engage with each other, in relationality, breaking the binarism, with both becoming active and passive at the same time. I must let myself go in the hands of the other if I intend to listen to my body, at the same time, I am accountable for the body of the other who is also in my hands. In desire, object is an active position. The object does something to the materiality of the subject. In Xicana literature, desire, then, is used to reconstruct their position within society and history. Because they take on the complex position of being subject and object at the same time, they mobilize their surroundings to explore spaces where the colonizing impositions would not undermine their connections. The problem is that the pervasive of the colonization discourse and impositions rarely allow these spaces to exist for a long period of time. This is the moment when nomadism comes in hand and works by

moving the subjects to the next possible space to be occupied, transformed, rewritten, and reconfigured.

We shall not fear our desires. Audre Lorde is right when she claims that “the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough” (1984, p. 54). Desire is power, is movement, is connection, is a drive that can move one’s forward. The eager to learn and understand come from the desire to know. Thus, thinking is a product of desire. Such a powerful weapon must be kept dominated to colonize, and for this same reason we must work in decolonizing it. So, I intend to focus on these powerful feelings and how they are explored in Xicana literature. As onto-epistemological construes, they will be considered as such.

1.5. Methodological Movements

My analyses of the Xicana literary works consider the differential movements taken from an oppositional consciousness perspective. The collective of the works under scrutiny here forms a literary cartography that maps out routes constructed through desire. To trace such a map, I rely on the guidance of the nomadic subjects, who see home as flexible and movement as positive. I do not let go of the materiality and effectiveness of theorization. Thus, theories inform my readings of the corpus the same way my corpus shape and move theories as they negotiate meanings. I try to break with a supposed hierarchy of theory and practice, bringing the daily living experience of resistance to the realm of theorization, as is recurrent in the works of the authors I analyze. My intention is to discuss their works in dialogue with them, without losing sight of their interests and objectives. The spatiality of the streets constructs resistance to intermeshed oppression as worldly, as Maria Lugones calls it, allowing the analyzes of tactics that create different ways of expressing desires.

The use of differential movements to a nomadic theorizing perspective is twofold. From this perspective, texts are not considered isolated unities; rather they complete each other, forming one possible cartography of Xicana desires. First, as stops are made during a nomadic movement, in my research I stop in specific passages of texts to develop close readings that allow negotiations, analyses, and possibilities of finding new paths and exits different from the ones already traced. Second, while the proximity of the close readings reveals details of a creative approach to desire, a broader view of the connections between texts and paths give the opportunity to see the strategical moves leading to conscious choices of tactics of resistance.

So, I move back and forth from the specifics of the works to the general connections between them.

With these methodological movements in mind, before moving to my selection of possible corpus and clearly stating my research questions, I need to run through the theorizations that help me observe this cartography I am proposing. I am interested in three main works that will construct this methodological perspective: Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (1999), Maria Lugones's *Pilgrimage/Peregrinaje: Theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions* (2003), and Rosi Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994). Their theorizations will shed light on some of the epistemological turns that my work may follow. They are, sometimes, in consonance with each other reconfigurations of epistemes, and other moments, they take different paths, which will be elucidated as I walk through them.

Departing from the cognitive mapping as "a 'cartographic' proficiency [that] requires the skill of knowing how to chart or map social and cultural territories in consciousness or imagination as one is moving across them" (SANDOVAL, 2000, p. 29), Sandoval develops her concept of differential method: "when understood as a technical, political, aesthetic, and ethical practice, [the differential method] allows one to chart out the positions available and the directions to move in a larger social totality" (2000, p. 30). In order to work with the differential method, it is necessary to understand that oppositional consciousness is not a characteristic of any specific context, rather is the ability to read the maps of oppression to oppose the diversity of forces that marginalize different groups of subjects. Thus, this is an unfixed, mobile, and dynamic strategy of resistance. Sandoval reminds us that the fragmented experience brought forth in postmodernity is not new for marginalized groups, so theory and method that seek destabilizing dominating forces should look at the experiences and theorizations of those people as a methodology of the oppressed – a methodology of emancipation. For her, the coalition united to fight against the neocolonial condition takes form under the term "feminists of color" or "Third World feminists".

Maria Lugones also focuses on coalitional forms of resisting oppression. In *Pilgrimage*, she seeks to reconceptualize a variety of epistemes in order to forge a praxis of possible resistances and disruption of dominant powers. For her, like for Sandoval, resisters need to map out the spatiality of oppression and resistance to convey meanings against the grain. By doing so, she develops a theorization that is flexible, worldly, and collectively constructed. The "I", then, becomes a "we", since, for her, the resister is not an individual in the modern

conceptualization of the term; rather, she is an active subject living in the transitional hyphen of I-we, in the company of others. Because Lugones continuously disrupts meanings, she complicates the very act of writing about her work. Trying to write about her theories exacerbates the feeling that meanings are always escaping as if the word signs are never enough to convey what she intends to theorize. The challenge, then, resides in finding terms that live in-between mainstream understandings and resignifications of resistance.

In the constant transition between oppression and resistance, multiple realities come to exist, that are spatially, historically, and materially different while still simultaneous. For Lugones, these different realities convey different worlds. Usually, people who live under oppression can travel between these worlds, recognizing and knowing the rules and values that form them. While the world formed by mainstream rules and values may consider it the only world possible (universalization is the issue here), those who do not abide by the same set of rules may acquire what Lugones calls double-vision – that is not necessarily related to recognizing two worlds but recognizing the fact that different worlds coexist in conflicting juxtaposition. Traveling to other worlds allow people who are oppressed to recognize and identify different forms of oppression, working in a coalitional manner. When a person travels from one world to another, she carries her memories of who she is, even though she produces new selves when participating in new worlds. Lugones' theorizations, here, are in consonance with Anzaldúa's theorizations of the Borderlands and of the *mestiza*. For Lugones, the *mestiza* epitomizes the multiple subject. Moreover, juggling cultural codes may as well be related to travel in-between worlds.

For Lugones, dichotomic fragmentations used against marginalized groups for domination turn invisible the multiplicities of the subjects. By resisting homogenization and fragmentation, multiplicity emerges as a form of resistance. This theorization breaks dichotomies such as theory/practice and tactic/strategy. She begins by disrupting the idea of the theorist as a detached subject, at a distance, theorizing from a height position. For her, a theory of resistance may be constructed from a vision of the street level, engaging in a body-to-body action with the intermeshed oppressions. Her argument is that "[o]ne does not have to keep social relationality 'at a distance' if one is to see into its depth" (LUGONES, 2007, np). This form of theorizing conceives strategies of resistance from the spatiality of the streets. Moving from hangouts to hangouts, defying and resisting the structures of domination is then strategic. The spatial practice of hanging out is "a tactical strategic activity that informs space against the construal of bounded territories of mythologizing sameness. [...] Hangouts are

highly fluid, worldly, nonsanctioned, communicative, occupations of space, contestatory retreats for the passing on of knowledge" (LUGONES, 2007, np); this is "a spatial politics that emphasizes difference" (2007, np). This epistemological shift proposed by Lugones forces the theorist to rethink and resignify one's own theorization, which is constructed from a daily practice of facing resistance and oppression.

Facing the challenge of creating new possibilities to theorize the subject from daily living experiences, Rosi Braidotti re-figures the notion of subjectivity from a nomadic perspective. In this sense, it is possible to argue that, while Lugones theorizes the importance of movements between and among worlds constructed by the conflicts between resistance and oppression, Braidotti theorizes the constitution of the subjects who participate in such movements. Thus, according to the author, the nomadic subject is constituted through new and creative figurations of feminisms, always already sexed/gendered, non-logocentric, necessarily considering the politics of location and the materialist embodiment, "tak[ing] corporeality seriously" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 3). The subject, in this case, is multiple and multilayered, not fixed, nor a product, but a constant process of becoming constituted in-between the social, empirical, and symbolic order, in-between experience and language. Differences become a positive characteristic of such process, as opposed to its colonized view as "less than", based on exclusions and reduced to inferiority. The nomadic subject works with/in three levels of sexual differences that coexist: "differences between men and women", "differences among women", and "differences within each women". This critical and creative project needs to reinstate the real life of women in the position of discursive subjectivity in a way that reconnects theory and practice through embodiment and desire (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 158).

For the sake of this work, it is relevant to connect nomadism to two important issues: desire and aesthetics. The former is connected to the nomadic theorization through its affective force. The nomadic aesthetics, on the other hand, is relevant for the process of writing as forms of "successive adaptation to different cultural realities" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 16). For aesthetics and political choices are not separable, writing may generate enormous possibilities of transgressions as "a process of undoing the illusory stability of fixed identities, bursting open the bubble of ontological security that comes from familiarity with one linguistic site" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 15). At this token, Moraga encourages women of color to write against the grain, against that which colonizes the imagination and forces oppressed groups to disregard their own knowledge in favor of the mainstream, dominant ideologies. So, what does that mean to write against the grain of desire? To write new, creative forms of pleasure? In this

sense, writing desire in a literary form generates the creative, never-ending process of producing new paths for mapping the very same affective desire that is being written.

The nomadism proposed by Braidotti is different from the one criticized by Lugones. In the work from the latter, she goes against the forms of travels made by colonizers, conquerors, and explorers usually present in the proliferation of criticisms that appropriate travel metaphors. For her,

the modern and the postmodern discourses of displacement that center on nomadism, exile, tourism, and expatriation hide [the] discourses' ties to domination. So, [she thinks] it is important to unveil their ties to domination by making clear that these personages of modern and postmodern displacement do not travel epistemically to different realities but are rather involved in narcissism. (LUGONES, 2007, np)

Braidotti's nomadic theorization, on another note, does travel epistemically, working more in agreement with concepts as hangouts and "world"-traveling, developed by Lugones. Nomadism, as is hereby discussed, also moves away from the "various nomadisms that rehearse the romance of travel, where privileged visitors destabilize other people's spaces without attention to the power relations that construe the spatial occupation" (LUGONES, 2007, np). The hangouts, working with nomadism, in the terms explored here, function as places and spaces where the nomadic subject may create and recreate their homes, based on the possibilities for new coalitions and interconnections. Instead of being oblivious about power relations, these nomads choose their paths because they are conscious of them.

The nomad does not stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity. (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 22)

Thus, although they take different routes, the theorizations of these two authors do dialogue with each other. If the nomad is "the antithesis of the farmer", because she "gathers, reaps, and exchanges but does not exploit" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 25), Lugones' worlds are the materialization of the hangouts where this mobile subject can act in connection with other subjects who are also traveling different worlds.

Some of the works I analyze transit from the theoretical framework to the literary corpus, and, as so, they are going to contribute as both. Anzaldúa states that any borderline, any limitation we must draw, are, to a certain extent, arbitrary, but still some boundary is needed. The choice of these works, thus, took into consideration books published from the 1980s on. My borderline around the selection of the corpus considered the decades in which

groundbreaking works, such as Anzaldúa's and Moraga's, were published as the starting point and ends in the 21st Century. This period allows me to see the movements that desires take into their relationship with spaces. As ever-changing epistememes, perspectives on spaces and desires may be depicted differently from one to the other, sometimes still connected and other, breaking apart from former theorizations.

This work has three main analytical chapters. The first chapter is called “Nomadic Desire: Mobilizing epistemologies in the Borderlands” wherein I develop the concept of nomadic desire from a Xicana perspective. In the second, “Click, click, click: The colonial presence and the defying desire”, I focus on the concept of (un)safety as a paradoxical and fractured locus where desire builds bridges to defy the impositions of coloniality. The last analytical chapter, “‘Indians are everywhere’ or ‘Eu não tenho minha aldeia’: Indigeneity and desire in Xicana’s search of ancestral roots”, focuses on the presence of Indigenous women in the use of desire as a route to ancestral connections. Lastly, I end this dissertation by acknowledging the erotic bridges Xicanas construct to connect their nomadic routes to their roots, in the conclusion “Building erotic bridges.”

For Xicanas, nomadism requires a certain connection to their origins and ancestries so they can live their multiplicities without erasure. Returning to their families, communities, or hometown become strategical acts of resistance against hegemonic powers. They create new and unfixed routes so they can pursue these acts of returning. In their movements, they change their paths, their places of origin, and their own understandings of their histories. As I turn my attention to the use of desire in the construction of journeys, I call them nomadic because they are (in)formed by movements while also (in)forming the trajectory of the subjects. Desire surfaces in the texts in literal and metaphorical forms of movements. In the chapter “Nomadic Desire”, I investigate the works of two authors: Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. In the analysis of three of Moraga’s works, she employs different strategies to return home, sometimes using her literature as a route back, other times literally moving back, and in other moments by constructing a utopian perspective that allows her to return to the movements of her community without leaving behind fragments of her self. I analyze, thus, the cross-genre book *Loving in the war years* (1983), the essay “Queer Aztlán” (1993), and the memoir *Native country of the heart* (2019). In Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* (2007), I focus on how Leyla, a character in the poem “Interface”, reconstructs epistemologies of home, creating distinct places where the speaker and Leyla can abide with all their complexities. The character of the poem crosses the border of genre to rearticulate concepts like “home”, “homophobia”, and “feminist

architecture” that emerges in the theorizations unveiled in the essay section of *Borderlands*. These texts together demonstrate how movements may occur within one work and among different works, expanding the possibilities of reading forms of nomadic desires and the cartography they create.

As nomadic desire constructs a cartography where Xicanas navigate, the issue of (un)safety becomes prominent. The pervasive of coloniality is always already endangering the safety of their existence. What follows in the next chapter, “Click, click, click”, demonstrates how Xicanas use desire to build bridges in which they can safely defy coloniality. The instability of these “safe spaces” renders them the idea of unsafety, at the same time. This paradoxical relation opens the possibility of the fractured locus, where colonial and noncolonial discursive practices meet. The “Click, click, click” of the title stands for the constant underlying presence of colonial power in the metaphor of *el Cucuy*, the monster that haunts people. In Norma Cantú’s *Cabañuelas* (2019), the meeting of the protagonist and her lover constructs new Borderlands between Laredo and Spain, wherein concepts like imperialism, colonizer/colonized, and the wish of leaving and staying are revisited and complicated. On the other hand, the historical novel *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009), by Emma Pérez, remembers the presence of queer Xicanas in history and constructs (un)safe spaces in a changing geographical location where violence and danger against women of color is ever more present. Her queerness connects her along her journey to people that protect her, or allow the feeling of safety to surface, even if only for a short time. Because (un)safety is constantly changing, nomadism is her only way of surviving. Still by Emma Pérez, *Electra’s complex* (2015) takes a completely distinct approach from that of *Forgetting*, while also depicting a queer woman of color protagonist. In a more humorous tone, Electra defies the spaces of the university, seeking to decolonize an institution traditionally connected to the Western production of knowledge – and she does so through an erotic narrative. It is evident, in these works, how desire mobilizes the connections between danger, safety, and (de)coloniality in the construction of bridges.

My last analytical chapter discusses the presence of the Indigenous woman as the desired object, which articulates the characters to a search of self-identification and a connection to ancestry. In here, I return to two works already analyzed in this dissertation, Moraga’s memoir *Native country of the heart* (2019) and Pérez’s *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009), and I bring another novel - Ana Castillo’s *So far from God* (1994) – to scrutinize the relationship between desire, land, and roots. The complexities of enmeshing belonging and mobility emerge in these texts through the construction of a desire marked by the presence of

Indigenous characteristics. The huipil, as a garment that infers some link to Indigeneity, becomes a trigger for affect and a political sign wore on the body. Mythology and present-day issues meet in yet another paradoxical space in order to reclaim an ancestry that is continuously on the verge of being erased. The desire to re-member these roots is enmeshed to the desire the protagonists feel for their respective others.

I conclude this part of the journey by connecting these chapters in one cartography of Xicana desire. In “Building erotic bridges”, I have one last attempt to formulate how this map does not seek to define routes nor construct fixed roads to purist or authentic idealizations of “home”, “return”, “ancestry”, “history”, “space”, and so on. Instead, I summarize how bridges can be formed through desire and how desire can be the bricks of a feminist architecture and form a map that leads to new (con)figurations of subjectivities. There are many ways of defying coloniality, of counter normative discourse, of creating new configurations of spaces where non-normative queer subject can live. I choose to map out how Xicana literary texts use desire as a form of mobility that defies coloniality and rearranges spaces.

2. CHAPTER 2
NOMADIC DESIRE:
MOBILIZING EPISTEMOLOGIES IN THE BORDERLANDS

“We need fresh terms and open-ended tags that
 portray us in our complexities and potentialities.”
 (ANZALDÚA, 2015)

This chapter investigates how desire mobilizes epistemologies in the contradictory and diverse space of the Borderlands. As material and emotional spaces, the Borderlands have the potential to transform both the subjects and the epistemologies inserted in their dynamics. For marginal subjects, hegemonic concepts of identification are, often, insufficient. In literary texts, fiction and non-fiction, the realization of such insufficiency may initiate the process of creating alternative epistemological forms of transiting among and within spaces. I analyze these figurations from a decolonial and feminist standpoint, wishing to articulate them with the specificities of the Xicana subjectivity. To do so, this chapter focuses on analyzing the intersection of space and desire in the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. I chose these authors for they are considered foundational of the Xicana studies, and their works are deeply enmeshed, from their inception, in discussions of both space and desire.

Since their first publications, these authors defy meanings and reconfigure readings on feminism, women of color, and queer coalitions. To grasp the potency of a nomadic desire, I intend to read return as an episteme on the making that is built on the structure of movements guided by desiring forces. For Moraga, understanding herself as a lesbian was her way back home through an unexpected path. Moreover, she describes her lover as the catalyst that propelled her to return home. In her works, returning home, then, gains metaphorical and literal contours. On another perspective, Anzaldúa reconstructs home from different standpoints so she can feel sheltered, safe, and welcome as a queer mestiza wherever she inhabits. Anzaldúa’s metaphor of a turtle – who carries home on her back – deals with being alienated from the different cultural codes that constitute her. She also plays with the concept of “homophobia”, translating it as the “fear of going home”. In *Borderlands*, the character Leyla, from the poem “Interface”, becomes key to read desire throughout the epistemological movements the author entails. Both authors deal with “differential consciousness”, the kind of technology that Chela Sandoval calls “methodology of the oppressed”, for they consciously work against and within

hegemonic ideologies, strategically moving in different directions to find ways of effectively resisting oppression. I call these movements nomadic desires because they cannot be constrained and, by moving, new interactions provide a new increment of consciousness, which also allows for a new decolonizing perspective.

I borrow the term “nomadic” from the theorist Rosi Braidotti, who focuses the concept on the mobility, lack of fixity, and materiality of the feminist nomadic subjectivity. Braidotti’s nomad is a polyglot subject, who recognizes the unfixity of language and “is capable of some healthy skepticism about steady identities and mother tongues” (1994, p. 12). The author draws her theory from her own experience of living in a myriad of places and from the literal nomadism of some cultures. She states that “I can say that I had the condition of migrant cast upon me, but I chose to become a nomad, that is to say a subject in transit and yet sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibility and therefore make myself accountable for it” (1994, p. 10). Thus, the nomad disrupts the illusion of purity, of coherence of the self, and the naturalization of language. By doing so, nomadic subjects retrace their paths in search of new figurations without ignoring the accountability for their historical journey.

Ricardo Vivancos Pérez has emphasized the pertinence of the dialogue between Braidotti’s concept of nomadism and Xicana feminist thought. According to the theorist, the similarities are threefold:

First, Braidotti proposes to rethink “the bodily roots of subjectivity” as the starting point of her feminism in a way that is similar to Chicanas’ focus on the specificity of their oppression; that is, an exploration of embodiment and sexual difference starting from their own experience. Second, they both focus on (sexual) difference in an optimistic way: that is, focusing on its liberatory potentialities. Third, they both understand identity formations as processes of becoming, emphasizing itinerancy and performativity. (VIVANCOS PÉREZ, 2013, p. 3-4)

The similarities between their works point out to a common concern: a search for a theorization from a specific and non-dominant viewpoint, taking into consideration experiences and focusing on a liberatory direction. However, the nomadic Italian theorist and the Xicana thought, beyond these points, take different routes, meeting and distancing in distinct moments of their journeys. The theorization of the nomadic subjects is contemporary to the development of Xicana studies. Nevertheless, Vivancos Pérez wisely points out that Braidotti does not consider the Xicana works in her theories – or any feminist of color in-depth, for that matter (VIVANCOS PÉREZ, 2013, p. 4). By analyzing Xicanas’ literary works, Vivancos Pérez states that the characters “share characteristics that are common to migrants—their narrative of origin destabilizes the present—exiles—they are forced into displacement for political reasons, for

being women who do not conform—and postcolonial subjects—their biculturalism becomes a living experience” (2013, p. 97). Thus, Xicana nomadism blurs Braidotti’s categorizations of exile, migrant, and post-colonial subjects, by challenging these divisions of concepts. Displacement and exile interact along the borders of their own nation, and migration is also part of their history even though, sometimes, they might have never crossed national limits.

Although Xicana subjectivity dialogues with Braidotti’s nomad, the characteristic of the nomadic subject of the former is not devoid of “nostalgia for fixity” as the latter emphasizes (VIVANCOS PÉREZ, 2013, p. 97). This characteristic of the nomadic subject reinforces the distinct routes these theorizations take in their development. According to Braidotti,

The nomad *does not stand for* homelessness, or *compulsive* displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has *relinquished* all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity. (1994, p. 22, my emphasis)

Braidotti develops her thought based on the choice of the nomadic subjects in becoming so. They “relinquish” the idea of fixity, there is no “compulsive” displacement. Although “[h]omelessness as a chosen condition also expresses the choice of a situated form of heterogeneity” (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 17), such heterogeneities are not enmeshed to the possibility of choice. In the Xicana context, the displacement may not be compulsive, but it often is compulsory, and they do not necessarily want to relinquish the idea of home and fixity, although their situation throws them into the nomadic route. Vivancos Pérez affirms that “it is the nostalgia for fixity what, as opposed to what Braidotti maintains with her ‘feminist nomadic subject,’ provokes arrebatos that stimulate us to initiate the path of conocimiento” (2013, p. 105). Xicana’s identities are still made in transition, the Borderlands is constantly making sure of it, both psychologically and geographically; they do need successive shifts and change of their coordinates; they recognize any essential unity and wholeness as problematic. Nonetheless, balancing the conscious choice of becoming nomadic with compulsory displacement complicates the idea of a “nostalgia for fixity”.

In the Xicana experience, the nomadic mobility is not necessarily a choice or a privilege. The contingency of a forced displacement offers a choice to become nomadic, as is the case of Braidotti’s life experience. However, when a disruption is violent, becoming nomadic emerges as the only form of escaping oppression, and, by being so, this is not a matter of choice. In these cases, a reconnection with the origins of their stories is, actually, a possibility for new figurations of subjectivities. In *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness*, Cherríe Moraga constantly calls her readers and her students to look back to family and community

histories to find one's voices. She states that the structure of the book itself dialogues with her origins: "its arrangement most closely reflects the Mesoamerican cyclical sense of time, space, and movement, in which to advance forward is to return again and again to the site of origin" (2011, p. xvii). For groups who have their origins erased from official history and collective memory, returning is transgressive: "We are told we are citizens of a country which crafted its nationhood by thieving our own original nations. We are told to forget those origins, even as we witness our migrant Native American¹¹ relations suffer a state-sanctioned racism and an abuse of civil rights unparalleled in this country since Jim Crow [...]" (2011, p. xvii). Thus, relinquishing stories about origins or connection to land and territory may function as a privilege or an assimilationist process. The search for origin, though, is not a return to the myth of purity or a homogeneous unity; rather, it is a movement to transform into multiplicities that which were denied to some groups. By looking to their past, Xicanas dis-member and re-member¹² their own subjectivities, finding, in the process, new configurations and figurations for their existence. In the case of Braidotti, she had the choice of abandoning a nostalgia for fixity, a return to origins. For the Xicanas, this same process works as part of a hegemonic agenda that erases their own becoming.

At the same time, Alicia Gaspar de Alba states that "identity must be problematized beyond place of origin, but also, place must be seen as more than a physical location or landscape" (2014, p. 85). This seemingly paradoxical relation between a "return to the origins" and the necessity of thinking of the self beyond this very same place contaminates the myth of a pure original place. Alba constructs a system of "place-based aesthetics" to read the representations of place, "a system of homeland representation that immigrants and natives alike develop to fill in the gaps of the self" (2014, p. 82). Within the "place-based aesthetics", Alba locates the Xicanas in the system of "Aztlán¹³ aesthetics," which "depicts a strong

¹¹ Using "Native American" without hyphenating the term is an author's epistemological choice "in keeping with the tradition of activist writers who emerged from the people-of-color movements in the 1960s. The writing style was an act of racial and cultural identity-affirmation, intended to distinguish us from the assimilationist agenda of mainstream America" (MORAGA, 2011, p. xxii).

¹² The term "re-membering" comes from the Xicana feminist interpretation of the Aztec deity Coyolxauqui. Both Moraga and Anzaldúa approach this indigenous mythology to emphasize the importance of fragmentation in the constitution of Xicana women. In Aztec mythology, Coyolxauqui was killed by her brother, Huitzilopochtli, the deity of war, who broke her body into pieces and threw the head onto the sky, where she becomes the moon. The dismembered deity stands for the continuous process of re-membering. Moraga relates the deity's brokenness to her own fragmentation and mentions that Coyolxauqui is a resident of Aztlán (2000, p. iii-iv). For Anzaldúa, Coyolxauqui "also represents the 'me' tossed into the void by traumatic events [...] A plurality of souls splits my awareness so that I see things from a hundred different viewpoints, each with its own intelligence" (2015, p. 50). Hence, "re-membering" is the never-ending process of bringing the pieces of the self together, while accounting for the contexts that fragment and erase the history of Xicana women.

¹³ Aztlán is a historical-mythological location that is part of the origin story of the indigenous-Mexican people.

spiritual, physical, and symbolic connection to the artist's place of origin. That place of origin, however, is not Mexico [...]. Nor is the United States the homeland, for within that territory, natives and descendants of Aztlán are viewed as foreigners, outsiders, interlopers, wetbacks, and illegal aliens" (2014, p. 91). Dealing with a place of origin that is not exactly a place nor an origin in the sense of one specific source from where to derive, Aztlán becomes symbolic of the encounter between myth and homeland. It is an "attachment to place" that is not necessarily a geographical location, but "is a representation of both territorial dispossession and cultural reclamation" (ALBA, 2014, p. 91). This place that is not only a location or landscape dialogues with the concept of "worlds" theorized by Maria Lugones.

As I argue for a return that does not fall to the myth of purity, I use the concept developed by Lugones (2003) of travel as a pilgrimage. In this sense, different worlds are formed in the multiplicity of the subjects who interact in their encounters. Traveling to other worlds allows oppressed people to recognize and identify different forms of oppression and work in coalition. When a subject travels from one world to another, she carries memories of who she is, even though she produces new selves when participating in new worlds. As Lugones theorizes a coalition that considers the importance of identification in-between worlds, she also states that these places are not pure. Purity is a fiction constructed through an ahistoric logic that reduces multiplicities into unity, which is a strategy of domination. In the fiction of purity, communities are naturally separated, unified and homogeneous within their borders. Universalism, authenticity, and purity are distinct sides of the same homogenizing hegemonic discourse. On the other hand, impurity embraces multiplicity and opens ways to liberatory practices of resistance. Impure subjects and communities create complex collectivities that resist "intermeshed oppressions [...] in the company of those with whom [to] struggle against oppression" (LUGONES, 2003, np). In this sense, when I argue for reading origins, past, and ancestry in the path of the nomadic subject, I am interested in the impure

According to Susan Kellogg, "[t]he founding legends of the group often known as "Aztecs" state that the group came from a place called Aztlan from which they migrated into central Mexico and from which the name "Aztec" comes" (2011, p. 154). However Southern migration is considered a fact amid anthropologists, the actual existence of Aztlán varies from history to mythology, and its geographical position is also a site for contradiction. Martha Menchaca explains that "when the Aztec transmitted their accounts of Aztlán, they conceived it as reality and acknowledged it as their ancient past. They claimed that Aztlán was the place of their birth as a people. No one knew where Aztlán was located; they merely indicated to sixteenth-century cartographers that it was to the north of the Valley of Mexico" (2001, p. 21). Northern Mexico and the Southwest of the United States are considered Aztlán possible locations. For the Chicano movement of the 1960s, Aztlán gains one more layer. The story continues after the settlement in Mexico City with a promise of returning home. Anzaldúa states that Chicanos "have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks" (2007, p. 33). The movement through the borders that separate Mexico and the United States is called, by her, "the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán" (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 33).

encounters of different worlds that participates, somehow, in the becoming of the subjects. For Lugones, the mestiza epitomizes the multiple subjects engendered in impure communities. Being constantly displaced confronts the idea of a coherent subjectivity. Lugones' theorizations, thus, are in consonance with Anzaldúa's thinking of the Borderlands and of the mestiza. In a way, the places of origins for Xicanas are constructed through impure communities.

Ellie Hernández is adamant when asserting that living in the Borderlands is not always a choice. The multiplicity of the Borderlands should not be based only on a celebratory idealization, for, as Hernández emphasizes, "they can mean loss without gain, the borderlands, though they offer opportunities to rethink and reshape identities, cannot be construed as a space of free play" (2009, p. 53). Thus, Xicanas as the nomadic subjects of the Borderlands embody mobility from another perspective than that of Braidotti's. As mestizas they are impure, in Lugones's terms, and as participants of the Borderlands their mobility construct potentially transformative worlds. However, if nomadism allows them to travel to distinct worlds, their historicization needs to reconstruct and rescue their own past. My use of the concept "nomadic," although based on the mobility and materiality of the term, takes into consideration the specificities of the Borderlands, which acknowledges both the origins of their stories and the historical context that influences the throwing of a subject into nomadism.

The concept of nomadism is itself nomadic in the sense that it is mobilized when negotiated in new contexts. Braidotti argues that "nomadic consciousness is akin to what Foucault called counter-memory; it is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self" (1994, p. 25). Thus, if the relevance of the nomadic thought is found in the resistance against hegemonic representations of the self, this concept allows movements to work with specific subjects in transition. Despite agreeing with Braidotti that nomadism is an affirmative concept to analyze politically informed new figurations of feminist subjects, I propose moving this epistemology further to articulate its meanings with the context of the Borderlands.

Both for the Xicana theorist Emma Pérez and Braidotti, women's desire comes as transformative in the process of decolonizing the imaginary, as discussed by the former, and in creating new figurations of contemporary subjects, as argued by the latter. Both depart from the Deleuzian perspective of the body as a surface for libidinal forces to develop their understandings of desire, body, and surface. However, from this point on, they diverge on their readings. Pérez criticizes the Deleuzian proposal of the body as a desiring machine. For her,

this perspective erases the importance of memory and history. The body inscribed by race, coloniality, sexuality, and gender cannot be understood as devoid of history if this is to be used as a transformative weapon for marginalized groups. As a historian, Pérez emphasizes the relevance of the past in the body; the past “dictates desire, its intensity and flows” (1999, p. 108). For her, the Deleuzian take eventually returns to the Eurowestern colonial perspective when it ignores the pervasiveness of coloniality – therefore, history and the past – in the process of consciously understanding and decolonizing desire.

On the other hand, Braidotti reads the Deleuzian approach as powerful to create new feminist figurations. She carefully states that “French poststructuralism is relevant for feminism not for what it has to say about women, sexuality, or the body; of rather greater importance is the redefinition of thinking and especially of the theoretical process in a creative or nonreactive manner that accompanies the poststructuralist quest for new visions of subjectivity” (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 100). If the body is a surface that acts upon desire without being a reaction to some previous activity, thus “[t]hinking can be critical, if by critical we mean the active, assertive process of inventing new images of thought” (1994, p. 101). At this active process of invention, Braidotti articulates the potential for a nomadic becoming, which is not about reproduction nor imitation (1994, p. 5), but about transformative new figurations.

Braidotti, though, disagrees with the French theorist’s perspective of a postgender approach to sexual difference, in which we should relinquish sexual differences and assume a symmetry between speaking positions of the sexes. The idea of a gender-free becoming is a problematic point in Deleuze’s theorization. Braidotti raises the issue that “Deleuze’s theory of becoming is obviously determined by his location as an embodied male subject for whom the dissolution of identities based on the phallus results in bypassing gender altogether, toward a multiple sexuality. This, however, may not be the option best suited to female embodied subjects” (1994, p. 122). Whilst Pérez favors history and memory in the potentiality of desire as a transformative affect, Braidotti criticizes Deleuze’s tentative feminist approach, while still discussing the positivity of the body as a surface for new figurations. They differ in their readings of Deleuze exactly on the potentiality for transformation in his theorization, though both agree that his approach to feminism and sexual differences is, at the very least, naïve.

Braidotti is accurate in pointing out the lack of understanding about gender and feminism in the Deleuzian thought. However, she also slips when she does not take into consideration the theorizations of women of color in her debate of sexual differences in feminist theory. She ignores the fact that the “color” in women of color is not a characteristic that comes

after women; rather, it changes the very understanding of “women,” radically altering the epistemology in its roots. Not only “the difference between the sexes is radical, and it is constitutive of the human experience” (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 131), racialization also constitutes the human experience in a radical difference. The inseparability of sexual difference and race is stated in *This Bridge Called my Back* as a “commitment of women of color to [their] own feminism” (ANZALDÚA; MORAGA, 2002, p. ii). As I already pointed out, mentioning Vivancos Pérez’s argument, Braidotti’s development of the nomadic subject does not examine in depth women of color contributions in rethinking the constitution of subjectivity. In this sense, although I do rely on Braidotti’s concept of nomadism, Pérez’s studies on decolonizing desire must be weighed in.

I propose adding another axis of analysis, from a spatial perspective, in reading the embodiment of desire. Although the body is still a surface for affect, acting critically upon touch, I consider the depth of the body, from where memory and history also work their way into surfacing. This is an epistemological movement that considers the spatiality of the body in its turn. The body as the surface of the critical action of desire also abides by Doreen Massey’s propositions (2005) to approach space. As a product of interrelations, where distinct trajectories coexist, always under construction, an investigation of the body needs more than the surface axis of analysis to become a transformative space. The simultaneity of the axis of depth and the axis of surfacing complicates the reading of the body, for the encounter of memory and history with the possibility of creating new figurations requires the constant negotiation of multiple stories and, at the same time, an openness for possibilities. This articulation allows for a nomadic desire that has, somewhat, the nostalgia for fixity expressed in a returning to a past, although constantly moving. The materiality of the touch, of the feeling, of activating a sensation in the body, meets the abstraction of the memory in the constitution of a craving.

My work considers the idea that desires are not fixed and that they are both ontological and epistemological constructs. They are ontological in the sense that this urge, this force, predates language and surfaces in our bodies. According to Braidotti, “the body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (1994, p. 4). External forces attempt to control and limit our urges. Normative impositions and their iterations are certainly in the realm of the discursive practice. Audre Lorde (1984) argues that limiting women’s erotic forces is a way of controlling them in a colonized and patriarchal society. Joy and pleasure leak from beyond sexual stances and

infiltrate all corners of our lives. Desire, in this onto-epistemological approach, comes to existence in the specificities of historical, social, and spatial contexts, while still formulated from its materiality and affect. Hence, it is not monolithic nor fixed; rather, it is multiple, adaptable, complex, and even contradictory, surging from the specificities of their own colonizing and decolonizing process. New figurations of Xicana desire surface from the depth of their history, and, through their literature, they promote routes in which they are in control of their discursive constitutions.

2.1. Nomadic returns in Cherríe Moraga's works

Returning is a recurrent theme in Cherríe Moraga's texts. This movement occurs physically, epistemologically, and theoretically, following distinct paths. The act, thus, is not a journey back to a fixed location through a fixed route. In this sense, returning is a nomadic process. The author states the importance of return in her essay "Indígena as Scribe" (2011): "The profound project of transgression can only be achieved by return" (MORAGA, 2011, p. 85). Thus, considering this assertion, I intend to analyze her acts of returning in her works as transgressive ones. I will focus on three works to analyze how the act of returning dialogues with the intersection of desire and space. The essay "Queer Aztlán" (2004), first published in 1993, returns to the debate of nationalism raised by the 1960s Chicano movement and the discussion of a Queer nation to create a utopic homeland. Then, the memoir *Native country of the heart* (2019) brings her returning to her hometown and to the history of her family through her mother. Finally, *Loving in the War Years* (2000), first published in 1983, functions, for the author, as a route back to her family through her literary writings.

In "Queer Aztlán", Moraga argues that an effectively imagined homeland for the Chicano community is only possible if the movement includes in the nation its queer members: "Chicano lesbians and gay men do not merely seek inclusion in the Chicano nation; we seek a nation strong enough to embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender" (2004, p. 235). As a place of attachment, in Alba's term, Queer Aztlán allows the construction of a homeland without a specific geographical location. Opposing to the argument that the Chicano movement is in the past, Moraga claims that "it has retreated into subterranean uncontaminated soils awaiting resurrection in a 'queerer,' more feminist generation" (2004, p. 226). For her, it is in queering the Chicano movement and nation wherein the potential for its survival lies. In the sense that "Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation, and women and women's sexuality are occupied within Chicano nation," decolonizing

land and body is necessary to seek effective liberation (2004, p. 227). Thus, Aztlán can only be a liberated territory once it is a “Queer Aztlán.” The existence of a liberatory movement in favor of land, thus, must include the participation of “racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender.” This relationship between land and desire, here represented in the queerness of the debate, is imperative and not negotiable so the movement can be reborn. Hence, “queer”, in “Queer Aztlán”, is, at the same time, a verb in the imperative form and the adjective that qualifies the nation, both giving the only direction possible for the Chicano nation to grow.

The use of agricultural terms to interpret the seclusion of the Chicano movement and the awaiting for a queerer moment to reappear reinforces the historical context of its first appearance in the 1960s and the discrimination from within the organization. The sparkle for the movement, back then, came from the farmworkers, led by Dolores Huerta and César Chávez. They organized the workers to fight for their rights, which, soon, spreaded among college students. Moraga’s description of the movement resembles a seed that “retreated into subterranean uncontaminated soils” in adverse conditions and awaits the moment to flourish. Aztlán, as representative of a Chicano nation, must be cultivated. However, the discriminations that colonize many members of this once to be born nation contaminate the movement as pesticides do to the soil, becoming the adversity that forces the seed to recoil, looking for protection in uncontaminated places. The vision of pesticides that kill that which is unwanted and as side effect contaminates the very same soil needed for growing food fits perfectly to the idea of killing those unwanted in a nation. Queerness, differently, is the organic fertilizer that helps feeding and caring for the soil, bringing the seed to flourish with all the multiplicities land can give.

Queer Aztlán is an imagined homeland in the sense that “[w]ithout the dream of a free world, a free world will never be realized” (MORAGA, 2004, p. 235). The first step into a real diverse nation is to imagine that this nation is possible and to work in its constitution. Queer Aztlán comes to existence, strategically, in a system of disidentifications, working within and against the concept of nation. José Esteban Muñoz describes disidentification as “a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (1999, p. 11). Muñoz argues that this is a survival strategy used by minority communities that interrogates some issues while still engaging with other valuable characteristics of a given identification. Hence, the first and foremost process of

disidentification in the essay is concerning the idealization of "nation"¹⁴. The adoption of this discourse by the Chicano movement attempted to create a narrative that could unite Latino working-class people in a territory that is, now, part of the United States. From an Indigenous perspective of land, the 1960s movement used Aztlán to justify their presence in this territory and to argue for the Chicano nationalism. Moraga acknowledges the problem of using "nation" to establish a connection between a group of people. She "recognize[s] the dangers of nationalism as a strategy for political change. Its tendency toward separatism can run dangerously close to biological determinism and a kind of fascism" although she advocates for "progressive nationalisms" (2004, p. 216). Nation, in this debate, falls into the ambivalence discussed by Homi Bhabha, for, as he argues, the counter-narrative that destabilizes the coherence of the nation discourse comes from "reading between these borderlines of the nation-space [...] as a double narrative movement" (BHABHA, 1994, p. 208). The nation as narration, in "Queer Aztlán", is created from the perspective of its most vulnerable people. Moraga envisions a nation that is, on its idealization, heterogeneous and formed in the breaking with the discourse of sameness and cohesion.

The Queer Aztlán nation works as a utopian geographical and affective community; as a physical nation-state, it would not hold to its promises. The racist and xenophobic struggles the Xicanas face are enmeshed to the modern concept of nation, and the separatism that Moraga herself sees as problematic in nationalism cannot be withdrawn from within the borders of a nation, for, as Benedict Anderson states, "[t]he nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (2006, p. 07, original emphasis). Thus, there is no forming of a nation, as much inclusive as it may be, that does not work in terms of alterity. Nevertheless, as a counter-narrative from the Borderlands, Queer Aztlán is imaginatively formed in the disidentification with the normative hierarchies of the hegemonic idealization of nation, valorizing, instead, vulnerability, difference, and heterogeneity.

In "Queer Aztlán", Moraga discusses how some of the dominant ideologies are also shared by vulnerable groups. The author seeks to disidentify with the Chicano movement in its homophobia and exclusion of non-normative sexualities while still engaging with the importance of the fight for a place for the Chicano community. She also disidentifies with the

¹⁴ According to Benedict Anderson, a nation is an imagined community, for "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". It is imagined as limited, sovereign, and community, constructed through the homogenizing discourse of "horizontal comradeship" (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 06-07).

prevalent whiteness of queer communities that excludes queer people of color. Disidentification as a liberatory drive opens the possibility of a utopianism connected to the real complexities of queer people of color lives. As Muñoz states, “we [...] need to hold on to and even *risk* utopianism if we are to engage in the labor of making a queerworld” (2019, p. 25, emphasis in the original). I call “Queer Aztlán” a utopian homeland, using Muñoz’s utopianism, which is centered on the idea of hope and futurity as both critical affect and methodology (MUÑOZ, 2019, p. 4). As sexuality and queerness are intermeshed in this utopian homeland, desire becomes crucial for the existence of this racialized community. In dreaming of a free world, Moraga's new figuration of a nation disidentifies with while still embedded in Chicano history. The movement does not belong exclusively to the past only because the rescue of its existence materializes in the writings of an author that attempts to harvest the important seeds planted in the 1960s, but through a critical perspective conscious of the pitfalls and shortcomings of her own communities.

The utopian homeland of Queer Aztlán is, thus, formed in the continuous process of differential mode. The nomadic desire, on its turn, is found exactly in the mobility provided by this mode of navigating that Chela Sandoval calls oppositional consciousness – an awareness of the relations of oppression that calls the subject into action against the oppressive regimes. Sandoval’s introduces a topography with five modes of social movements¹⁵: 1) the equal-rights form, in which differences that subjugate groups are external, so the subject considered inferior in the relations of power have, actually, the same essence of those in power, thus, seeking integration and assimilation; 2) the revolutionary form intensifies differences, and advocate for a restructuration of categories to value and legitimate differences; 3) the supremacist form considers that differences provide a higher evolutionary level, being biological or historical construct¹⁶; 4) the separatist form advocate for a complete separation from the dominant social order, in a form of utopian landscape (2000, p. 56-57). The fifth and last form of social movement that is part of the oppositional consciousness is the differential mode: the possibility of navigating the other four forms according to the necessity and strategies of the subject. The differential mode functions as a medium between them. This is a “tactical weaponry for

¹⁵ Ironically, Sandoval advocates for flexibility and mobility by developing well-delimited categories for engaging in social movements; even mobility is categorized under one specific form of oppositional consciousness. I make use of her important contribution in constructing a methodology of the oppressed, but I do not focus on the specific categories she creates.

¹⁶ Sandoval does not differentiate between the impact of considering differences biological and historical construct, for this is not necessarily important to her argument. However, I consider that perceiving differences as biological or historical considerably changes the perspective on this form of consciousness.

intervening in shifting currents of power” (SANDOVAL, 2000, p. 58). In this sense, traveling between groups are not disloyalty; rather, it is a way of adapting, of relocating one's own subjectivity according to the flows of power that one needs to face. If the relations of power move, thus, the forms of facing and resisting them must also move.

For Sandoval, mapping ideological spaces is necessary “to transfigure subordination into resistance” (2000, p. 55). The differential mode, argued by the author, is a form of navigating dominant and oppressive powers consciously of such relations. The subject, then, employs any strategy at hand to subvert, resist, or take other route from the ones imposed by hegemonic forces. Sandoval affirms:

All social orders hierarchically organized into relations of domination and subordination create particular subject positions within which the subordinated can legitimately function. These subject positions, once self-consciously recognized by their inhabitants, can become transfigured into effective sites of resistance to an oppressive ordering of power relations. (SANDOVAL, 2000, p. 55)

Sandoval calls this possibility of effectively transform the subject position “topography consciousness in opposition” (2000, p. 54). Consciously aware of this topographical mapping, Moraga moves from a separatist (nationalist) perspective to an equal-rights one, by constructing a nation counter-narrative that must embrace heterogeneity. She also shifts from nationalism to ethnic to gender to queer movements in order to idealize a possible queer world for people of color.

The differential mode articulates, in liberated territory, issues of ethnicity, race, and sexuality without ignoring the complexities that this intermeshing brings to the debate. This mode of strategically traveling social movements seeks distinct perspectives in a variety of sites to propel the process of disidentification, which, on its turn, reconstitutes spaces to allow the existence of desires that, otherwise, would be considered an identification to “bad objects”¹⁷. Thus, the disidentificatory maneuvers are nomadic in the sense that they work along with the differential mode, constructing the possibilities of new hangouts, where non-conforming desires are intermeshed with race and ethnicity in the constitution of a liberated territory – which Moraga calls Queer Aztlán.

¹⁷ Muñoz discusses how identification, in psychoanalysis, is considered the pathological investment of a subject to “bad object choices” (1999, p. 11). He, however, departs from this discussion to affirm that desire and identification, as wanting the other and wanting to be the other, respectively, have a blurred and interlocked correlation (1999, p. 14-15).

Moraga's term Xicanadyke portrays the intermesh of desire, race, and geopolitics. In the foreword for the second edition of *Loving in the War Years* (2000), Moraga introduces the episteme that unites space and sexuality in one term. She identifies the self who wrote the book, in the late 1970s and the first years of the 1980s, as "a young Xicanadyke, writing in exile" (2000, p. iii). Writing this piece almost twenty years after the first publication of *Loving*, she considers the movements in her literary writings to be a return from exile (2000, p. iv). In her path, she connected her self to the stories about her mother and the Chicano community as a nation. The use of the term Xicana, with the "x", instead of the "ch", as I adopt, is already locating her position in the indigenous ancestry of the Xicanas. This ancestry struggles for land differs from the concept of private territory the logocentric capitalism endows. Thus, Xicanas, as part of the Chicano nation, carry the geographical space in its episteme and connect them to their indigenous background. The term "dyke", on the other hand, reinforces the inseparability of her sexuality and geographical belongings. These connections are complicated by the fact that she writes *Loving*, in the 1970s and 1980s, in exile since she is forced outside the Chicano community and the family because of her desires. This edition, then, puts together exile and return. She demonstrates the painful separation between her Xicanidad and her lesbianism in the strong-worded sentence: "I had felt the breast of my lesbian desire amputated from the warrior loins of my cultura" (2000, p. iii). More than a separation, splitting the Xicana in her from the dyke is felt like an amputation. Using the imagery of Coyolxauqui, Moraga discusses the dangerous path in reuniting "'lesbian' and 'Chicana' together on the same page" (2000, p. iii). Nevertheless, she does more than that, not only uniting on the same page, nor in the same line, but in the same episteme, allowing a union that adds meanings.

The Xicanadyke is deeply affected by the nomadism of this episteme. Traveling from the derogatory use of both terms to reclaiming them and, then, sewing them together, the Xicanadyke – the episteme and the subject – denaturalizes predetermined categories. The term prohibits the disassociation of desire, land, and community. In order to analyze how the term "Xicanadyke" enmeshes space and desire at a discursive level, I once more rely on Sandoval's methodology of the oppressed and its five technologies. The first one is semiology, that seeks to denaturalize the relationship between signifier, signified, and sign, pointing to the existence of a second level of meanings, more complex than the primary one. This second level is the ideology, which has the appearance of natural, "rather than of a historically produced and power-laden event" (2000, p. 95). The second technology is mythology, or deconstruction, that in its turn searches for the significances in the second level of meanings to decolonize and

denaturalize ideologies. The third technology seeks to consciously add one more level of ideological meaning into the dominant system. This level works within and against ideology and Sandoval calls it revolutionary exnomination or meta-ideologizing. It works as an appropriation of the dominant ideology to transform it (2000, p. 109). The fourth one is the differential movement, which functions as a conscious flow between the other technologies, allowing for the appropriation of ideology by the practitioners of the methodology of the oppressed. Finally, the latter works as an ethical code for social justice; it is the democratics.

The inseparability of Xicanadyke goes through the technologies discussed by Sandoval to construct a new episteme that works ethically both for the subject and for the episteme. The move from derogatory terms to affirmative categories is only possible once the denaturalization between sign and definition takes place and a critique of the hegemonic perspective disrupts the ideological meaning. The reappropriation of the terms from a decolonizing perspective transforms the valorization of the terms, which play between hegemonic significances and resignification. To be called a dyke is not offensive anymore when handled from a decolonizing standpoint, and “Xicana” proudly states the connection with both Mexican and Indigenous historical contexts. More than that, the subject self-identifies as a Xicanadyke, reinforcing, as I have mentioned, the inseparability of space and desire in her subjectivity.

Moraga writes the Xicanadyke as an act of re-membering, of putting parts of the self together. When the author asserts that she “thought only of return, someday, to [her] Califas, where [she] could be all [her] fragmented parts at once” (MORAGA, 2000, p. iv), she denies the idea of individual from a Western perspective and embrace the fragmentation of marginalized subjects, who need to deal with ideology and counter-ideology, identification and disidentification at the same time. Her process of re-membering the self occurs through the connections to family and community as a quest for a self that is not based on the centrality of the individual, as the cartesian, humanist, Western perspective would consider. Rather, the movements she inhabits present an understanding of the subject as constructed in assemblage with others, never isolated, but a result of the encounters of fragmented parts. Moraga does not wish to be a whole, but all her parts at once. This is how Coyolxauhqui and the self meet. Coyolxauhqui’s re-membering is never finalized, but the journey to this process is inscribed in this imagery as a continuous action. The Xicanadyke comes together in the poems, essays, and stories of *Loving* by the attachments with others and the interactions between the writings from the 1970s and beginning of 1980s, and the ones from the 1990s. Nevertheless, the term

“Xicanadyke” travels beyond this one work and is present, even if not directly named, in other texts of the author.

In the memoir *Native country of the heart* (2019), the author tells the story of her returning to California, from New York, as a way to go further in the connections between her Xicanidad and other fragments of her self. Moraga tells her story enmeshed with her mother’s, so these two lives coming together participates in the constitution of the Xicanadyke as a subject and episteme. The four-part book finishes the first one with a phone conversation between mother and daughter that depicts the latter tacitly coming out. This chapter opens by asserting the existence of a secret between them and continues with the narrator seeing this moment as a foretelling of her exile:

“You’re leaving with a secret.”

My mother’s words grab me by the throat. The phone falls to my chest. I am twenty-three years old. And this is what I know of a black hole. Her statement foretells my exile. She is losing me. She knows it. (MORAGA, 2019, p. 82)

This passage evidences the involvement between *Loving* and *Native Country*. While the first, written in exile, as Moraga affirms, conjure mother and daughter together from afar, the latter portrays the journey that took them apart. Interestingly, the depiction of the separation comes to realization in writings only after mother and daughter become emotionally and geographically closer again – although the writings also bring them together. These roads between exile and returning knot themselves to create the geography that favors the Xicanadyke’s returning home without losing the fragments that create her.

“Satisfaction” is key to the transit between returning and exile. The narrator describes a strategic shift in her mother during this phone call. What began as a mourning for lost child turns into an accusatory tone in her voice, to the point that the mother poses this question: “How can you get *satisfaction* from a woman?” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 84, original emphasis). This question, specifically, also changes the narrator’s reaction to the conversation. Up to this point, she is talking to her mother in an apologetic tone: “I mourn the loss, not for myself, but for her. // ‘I’m sorry, Mamá.’ I cry back. ‘I’m so sorry to hurt you’” (2019, p. 83). They, mother and daughter, change strategies based on what they suppose pleasure should entail. The mother accuses the narrator of following “the wrong kind of people” (2019, p. 84). However, as soon as her pleasure becomes part of the discussion, the narrator strategically shifts the path of the conversation. The mother has crossed a line, the narrator’s desire is not up for discussion. She becomes resolved in not letting her mother interfering in this area of her life: “I had suffered too long and too hard for the right to love, and not even my mother was going to make

me feel dirty for it. [...] ‘Don’t make me choose, Mamá. Because if I have to choose between this life and my family, I have to choose my life’ (2019, p. 84). The strategy works in the sense that her mother changes her tone again and claim back her daughter. Nevertheless, the road to exile is already traced, which, in the text, materializes in the literal road that closes the chapter and the first part of the book: “The next day, I would travel El Camino Real (The Royal Road) from Los Angeles to San Francisco [...]. It was 1977 and for this MexicanAmerican once catholic daughter, Highway 101 was not royal but ‘real’” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 85). The chapter begins mentioning the foretelling of exile and closes with a literal voyage that metaphorically represents her leaving. The road leading to her exile is real and is taking her away from her family; not permanently, though, for she continues tracing new routes and some of them lead her back.

The transition from the first to the second part of the book is a pivoting moment in the text. After closing part I with the story discussed above, the text in the next part brings the encounter between Moraga and a Californian woman, in Mexico. This event prompts her to move back to California, living, once again, closer to her family. What moves her from New York back to California was the need “to go back to be Chicana” (2019, p. 102). In a confessional tone, she completes saying that “[t]he truth was I was afraid to love a Mexican woman, to suffer her cruelties, as I had my own mother’s” (2019, p. 102). The relationship with her mother influences her pleasures. The craving that moves her sexually receives notes from her culture. However, this same culture that is a source of fear, is also the motivation for her returning. Self, hometown, and family become signifiers that restructure the very concept of Xicanadyke, using desire as a thread to conduct these intermeshed relationships. “Love,” “Mexico,” and “mother” constitute a subjectivity that needs to be restructured in California.

Displacement and recognition participate in the dynamics between subject and desire. When the narrator first sees the woman who prompts her return, she emphasizes one specific piece of vestment: “Her black hair hangs to her waist, she wears a huipil” (2019, p. 99). Moraga continues explaining that “most mexicanas do not wear Native huipiles unless they are bona fide members of an indigenous pueblo or bourgeois artist types à la Frida. This woman was neither” (2019, p. 99). She recognizes the connection between herself and the woman standing before her. The “unmistakable chola California Chicana inflection” along with the huipil relates displacement, recognition, returning, and desire. The voice of the woman affects the body of the narrator: “Her voice ran through me, a fire hot enough to melt me” (2019, p. 99). “Chola” carries meanings of race, ethnicity, and class in the context of Xicanas, and the uses range from

a pride identity to a derogatory term, but in this encounter, the “chola inflection” is a source of joy. The voice carrying the specific intonation that connects to a specific episteme has the metaphorical fire that activates a desire both to the woman and to a place.

With Mexico City as the background, the setting of this encounter moves from a women's cultural center to the hotel room, where Moraga decides to return, "not to her, but through her" (2019, p. 99). The meeting at the women's cultural center is a disappointment to the narrator, who sees in it the white middle-class feminism she had abandoned in the 1970s (2019, p. 98). On the other hand, the brown woman, wearing a huipil, with the chola accent transports her to a place of desire – the hotel room. This scene uses pleasure to re-member a diversity of fragments that the narrator brings to her story. The cultural center works as a reminder of her political perspectives and her own differential movements along with her life and social involvements, while the hotel room becomes symbolic of her pleasure. Mexico itself permeates these movements – cultural center-hotel room, New York-California – as an indication of her continuous displacement as an inhabitant of the geographical and psychological Borderlands. These characteristics – political perspectives, personal desires, displacement – construct meanings when re-membered together; she is the Xicanadyke. By highlighting that the movement occurs through a woman and not into her direction, Moraga puts her lover as the catalyst of the process of her Xicanidad, which, for her, can only take place in California.

California is reconstituted as not only a hometown, but as the only space for the coming together of the narrator's Xicanidad itself. The simultaneity of stories about her community, migration, invasion, along with her familial and personal ones, compose the geographical terrain of California, and, to a certain extent, she returns to live the inseparable connections of these stories. In the case of Moraga's identification as a Xicanadyke, and her decision of returning home “through” a woman, her perspective of California as imperative for her own subjectivity belongs to the intermesh of desire and space. Interestingly, although Moraga is vehement in the inseparable connection between California and her Xicanidad, she could only construct such a relationship from moving outside this nexus. First, from living in New York, and, second, from traveling as a tourist to Mexico. The roads between exile and belonging lead her to her Xicanadyke existence.

In *Loving*, Moraga's journey takes another route. While in *Native* she literally goes back to her hometown, in *Loving* she uses literature to return to her roots. Moraga specifies that her writing as a lesbian daughter is her way of going back to her family. This course is visible in

many of the poems and essays from the book. In “La Dulce Culpa”, the speaker opens the poem by asking the rhetorical question: “What kind of lover have you made me, mother” (2000, p. 8). Moving from the bed of the mother, where she opens the space for the body of the speaker, to the violence of their relationship, this question is repeated four times. In the process, the belt, symbol of violence, is used to reshape the speaker’s world. She transforms the desireless household world, where her father could not show his passion for her mother into a place riddled with the possibility of women desire:

with the death of a man
whose touch ran
across the surface of your skin
never landing nightly
where you begged it
to fall. (2000, p. 9)

The belt, first, tries to wipe the memory of the passion of a mother for her daughter - “What kind of lover have you made me, mother // who took belts to wipe this memory from me” (2000, p. 8). However, the belt is resignified, “to whip this world // into shape” (2000, p. 9), and, by the end of the poem, the speaker can replace the belt in the hand of the mother for the passion she feels for her. The speaker fights back, but instead of the violence, she hugs her mother:

I will fight back
Strip the belt from your hands
and take you
into
my arms. (2000, p. 10)

This poem is an act of re-remembering that which the belt tries to erase, her Xicana culture, her language, and heritage:

who took belts to wipe this memory from me
the memory of your passion
dark and starving, spilling
out of rooms, driving
into my skin, cracking
& cussing in Spanish. (2000, p. 8)

The structure of this stanza reinforces the words “spilling”, “driving”, “cracking” and connects them to the last line of this stanza: “cussing in Spanish”. This structure resembles the fragmentation and materiality the speaker experiences as a Xicanadyke, daughter of a Xicana mother and an Anglo father.

In “La Dulce Culpa”, home is being reconceptualized from a space of violence and stripped of desire to a space of both familiar love and passion. It is both her love for her mother

and her craving for being sexually satisfied that answers the speaker's question about what kind of lover her mother has made her. The relationship between desire and the figure of the mother nomadically crosses from one work to the other. In *Native*, the narrator literally moves closer to the mother, who can be called one of the protagonists of the book, while in *Loving* the movement is at an affective level. This collection is full of works that bring desire and her mother together. Another instance is in "The Slow Dance", where the speaker affirms that "*I am my mother's lover. The partner she is waiting for*" (2000, p. 26, original emphasis). Desire, thus, leaks from the sexually charged connection to a family relationship without losing the craving force of sexual pleasure. Satisfaction put the speaker in the route to exile, but also connected her to the family she had to be afar.

Another characteristic of desire present in *Loving* is the power to destabilize geopolitical hierarchical forces. Geopolitics that undermine Spanish in the Borderlands are inverted and the language that was once considered inferior becomes the language of power. In the *Loving* essay "A Long Line of Vendidas", Moraga describes the power of Spanish in sex:

Yo recuerdo a Carmela – su mano trazando los círculos de mis senos around and around bringing her square small hands down, moving my legs apart, opening my lips hovering, holding me there, her light breath on my thighs. No me lame, pero espera, mirándome, diciendo, "¡Qué rica! ¡Ay mujer, qué rica tú eres!" And I can't quite believe my ears, she is talking about the taste of me *before* su boca lo sabe. She knows *before* hand and mouth make it possible. She tells me my name, my taste, in Spanish. She fucks me in Spanish. And I am changed. It is a different kind of passion... something remembered. I think, *soy mujer en español*. No macha, pero mujer. Soy Chicana – open to all kinds of assaults. (2000, p. 132, original emphasis)

There is nothing ontological in language that the pleasure of using Spanish during sex could be more powerful than in English. What language entrusts in this relationship is the spatial and historical position of the participants in the act. Being called "¡Qué rica!" envelops the pleasure in the complex relations of the border. Such complexities become evident when the narrator finishes her description by stating that she is Chicana with all the assaults that this position may bring. She is Chicana in her desire, in her sexual relationships, and in the violence that it may bring. Spanish, although still the language of the colonizer, is a form of resistance in the Anglo hegemonic world. The body re-members *becoming* Chicana and, thus, also transforms pleasure. In the geography of power, where language is under hierarchical structures, being a woman in Spanish – *mujer en español* – is a route back to her family and community through pleasure. The narrator reclaims the language of her mother, a part of her culture she had to learn in adulthood. The same language is, now, used for pleasure, in the mouth of another woman. The

connection between language and desire also reappears in other poems, such as “Querida Compañera”, where the speaker states: “la lengua que necesito // para hablar // es la misma que uso // para acariciar” (2000, p. 138). While in the passage from the essay the narrator is learning the pleasures of using language in sex, in the latter she is the one affirming the multiple uses of her tongue.

Moraga departs from the ontological forces of her desire to understand its political implications. The play with the term “*before hand*” and beforehand emphasizes the importance of this ontological force. Desire functions as a previous knowledge that anticipates the materiality of the body. Nevertheless, it is the embodiment of affectivity that realizes the feeling as potency to transform the interactions between language, structures of power, geopolitics, and affect. Because this earlier feeling is not devoid of social relations, *ser mujer en español* is not the same of being a woman in Spanish. The historical context embedded in desire is mixed to the impulse that surfaces the skin. The materialization of a feeling comes to existence in the encounter of this inner energy with the (un)conscious cultural codes. When describing the interlacing of their body (hands, breasts, legs, lips, thighs), she puts into words the feelings of the encounter, the taste of another woman – the affectivity of desire before any conscious process. It is possible to read in her words the excitement and joy of recognizing oneself in another woman’s mouth even before understanding that this recognition is part of that which guides this very same excitement. Only after feeling beyond comprehension, she impregnates this act of passion with political implications, and then she can conclude this passage by affirming her Chicana identity. As Moraga affirms in “Queer Aztlán”, “desire is never politically correct” (2004, p. 232), because the feeling is previous to conscious comprehension – “*before hand and mouth make it possible*” – so its translations into poetic words become one way of understanding the political repercussions of pleasure. Her desires may not be politically correct, but they certainly become political in her writings.

Concurrently, Moraga bases her criticism of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* precisely on the fact that the latter approaches desire from a political perspective instead of a sexual sense (VIVANCOS PÉREZ, 2013, p. 51). Although I partly agree with Moraga, I will try to demonstrate that using the poem “Interface” as key to understanding the epistemological shifts of – and caused by – desire in *Borderlands* may offer a slightly different reading. Anzaldúa herself points to this poem to oppose Moraga’s criticism (VIVANCOS PÉREZ, 2013, p. 52). From a nomadic desire perspective, Anzaldúa’s viewpoint may be metaphorical and

transcendental but is also based on the materiality of sexual pleasure, exploring, thus, other routes of differential movements. Anzaldúa is approaching desire from another perspective.

2.2. Leyla as key to reading desire in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*

Borderlands (2007), first published in 1987, is a crosscultural work, foundational to the field of Xicana studies. Enmeshing personal experiences, history, and mythology, Anzaldúa crosses borders of genres and language in her writings. The book, composed of seven essays and 38 poems, theorizes the perception of the Borderlands while also materializing in the text itself the very theorization the work is constituting. For Anzaldúa, “Borderlands” is a geographical and psychological concept that comes to terms in the in-between of crosscultural experiences. For the subjects of the Borderlands live in a constant dis- and re-placement among cultures they inhabit, they constantly resignify epistemologies when traveling between these worlds. This process of resignification takes into consideration the affective level. Reading *Borderlands* is more than getting acquainted with a theorization, it is also about getting emotionally involved.

The epistemological shifts brought forth by Anzaldúa are not devoid of the ontological depth that the onto-epistemological approach requires. AnaLouise Keating, in the editor’s introduction of *Light in the Dark*, asserts that “language does not simply refer to or represent reality; nor does it become reality in some ludic postmodernist way. Words, images, and material things are real, embodying different aspects of reality [...]. Language is a critical strand in Anzaldúa’s onto-epistemology and aesthetics” (2015, p. xxxi). In an approach that emphasizes interconnectedness and interdependence of all sorts of existence, this aspect of language breaks with the dichotomy of language/reality, reality/spirituality. Although Keating is specifically examining Anzaldúa’s posthumous work *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (2015) when she discusses this onto-epistemological approach, it is possible to notice the presence of this concern already in *Borderlands*. The use of words in a way to “shift reality (and not only our perception of reality)” (2015, p. xxxi) is evident in the work hereby analyzed. This interrelated play with language and reality enables the connection I intend to do with epistemes and experiences present both in the essays and in the poems. For the sake of this analysis, I will focus specifically on the poem “Interface” and in the essay “Movimientos de Rebeldía y las Culturas que Traicionam.” I shall read them in conversation, bridging meanings between poem and essay.

In “Interface”, the power of pleasure has the potency to bring someone else into existence. The relationship between the speaker and Leyla materializes the latter during their sexual intercourse. She is, thus, the materialization as a process of desire, instead of a final product, concluded and finalized. Leyla, at the beginning of the poem, is a presence, but she is not embodied. The materialization of the speaker's partner brings to life more than another living being; rather, connections between immigration, family, and sexual desire prevail her existence in relation to her creator, mobilizing them to continuously reconstruct the interface they abide. Stretching her presence to the essays in the book, her coming to existence embeds the epistemological shifts that occur in these other parts of Anzaldúa’s writings with the force that creates Leyla in the poem.

The interface from the poem’s title is the border encounter between the worlds of the two women, the Borderlands they both inhabit, being from different worlds while meeting each other somewhere:

At first it was hard to stay
 on the border between
 the physical world
 and hers.
 It was just there at the interface
 that we could see each other.
 See? We wanted to touch (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 170)

The interface, as the Borderlands, stands, metonymically, both for the geographical border between the US and Mexico and for the border between spiritual and physical realms. From a geographical perspective, when Leyla crosses the border to the physical world, she faces some of the issues that immigrants must confront. Leyla needs to learn the language and the whereabouts of the neighborhoods, face airport security systems, and understand cultural codes that conflict with her own (2007, p. 173-174). By the end of the poem, the speaker introduces Leyla as an alien, which also reinforces her representation as an immigrant. Her mobility from one world to the other is only possible for the specificities of her non-material presence, but, considering the conditions of her movement, it is safe to say that she is undocumented. However, the legality of her presence or existence is not discussed in the poem; this topic is a presence that is always there, occupying the room – to use the same structure of the speaker in opening the poem and first describing Leyla: “She’d always been there // occupying the same room” (2007, p. 170). For Xicanas, immigration and mobility are such relevant topics that they are pervasive of stories that, to a first glance, may not be about immigration.

Leyla makes herself present through the senses of the speaker. The vision emerges as an important one, even before the materialization. The third verse of the poem states that “it was only when I looked,” then, in the fifth one, “my eyes going wide watering // objects blurring,” and, by the end of the first stanza, the speaker affirms that “that’s when I could see her” (2007, p. 170). Nevertheless, this vision is not straight forward, present in the first layer of meanings. The speaker needs to look “at the edges of things”, sense the layers, and feel “the air in the room thicken” (2007, p. 170), to make sense of Leyla’s presence. This way of looking at things also marks the way Anzaldúa perceives marginalized stories and histories in hegemonic discursive practices. First, marginalized subjects are just a presence, we need to force our vision, blur the objects, feel the air thicken, but once we can see through the first layers of meanings, these subjects exist in their multiplicities, in and against the oppressive forces that try to hide them. Just the same, the presence of immigrant stories is also part of this poem, even though there is not any direct mention to immigration. In this sense, the intermeshing relationships between space, desire, and mobility are, literally, materialized in Leyla's existence.

Sexual pleasure and Leyla’s materialization are brought together in the same lines. The words that describe the birth of Leyla into materiality are used to describe pleasure:

A cool tendril pressing between my legs
entering.
Her finger, I thought
but it went on and on.
At the same time
an iciness touched my anus,
and she was in
and in and in
my mouth opening
I wasn’t scared just astonished
rain drummed against my spine
turned to steam as it rushed through my veins
light flickered over me from toe to crown.
Looking down my body I saw
her forearm, elbow and hand
sticking out of my stomach
saw her hand slide in. (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 172)

The flexibility of these lines highlights the mobility of the epistemologies. The line "my mouth opening", for instance, can be read as an expression of sexual joy since it comes right after stating that "she was in // and in and in", and is also an expression of astonishment for her producing of a human being out of her pleasure. To the same extent, the sensations in the body parts guide both Leyla's creation and the wave of pleasure throughout the body (A cool tendril

pressing between my legs // [...] Her finger, I thought // [...] an iciness touched my anus // [...] my mouth opening // [...] her forearm, elbow and hand // sticking out of my stomach // saw her hand slide in). While Leyla's body is *coming* into existence, she is also participating in the sexual act. These lines, thus, play an epistemological game of mobilizing meanings from creation to pleasure without the need to change context or stanzas. In the same space of the poem, meanings move, feeding at each other, to use desire as a force of creation.

The ending of the poem, with the couple visiting the speaker's family, is emblematic of a transformative moving epistemology that recognizes both the conflict of the existing terms and their impossibility to describe the couple's affectivity: "Last Christmas I took her home to Texas. // Mom liked her. // Is she a lez, my brothers asked. // I said, No, just an alien. // Leyla laughed" (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 174). This dialogue connects queer desire, home, and family. The complications of Leyla's identity are highlighted in the negative answer to the brothers' question. Negating that she is a "lez" is not a negation of Leyla's queerness; rather, it is a negation of an epistemology of sexuality that is not fit for them. The couple choose the term that fits better to the complexities of their existence, both as subjects and as a couple. Leyla's laughter, in the last line, closes the poem with the complicity they share in understanding the speaker's answer and its irony. They know what that "no" and "alien" means to them, and the reason for this answer.

The irony of Leyla's laughter is also connected to the irony of using denial as a form of self-affirmation. Sandoval's concept of differential movement (2000) emphasizes the act of moving further into concepts to find the ideology hidden in the discursive structure and, then, using the structure to subvert this very same ideology into a transformative discourse for the marginalized subject. Denial is often associated with erasure, but, in this case, the poem mobilizes such meaning in a way that "no" becomes a way of positioning themselves instead of allowing others to position them. Adrienne Maree Brown, in her book *Pleasure Activism* (2019), reinforces the importance of saying yes in order to comprehend and fulfill the desires of your body, to find joy in life and in activism. She states that "yes is the future" (BROWN, 2019, np.), and pleasure is a sign that she is on the right track. Brown opposes the affirmative movement that guides her in the right track to the use of "never" as that which encloses pleasure. However, from the beginning, she emphasizes that "*your no makes the way for your yes*. Boundaries create the container within which your yes is authentic. Being able to say no makes yes a choice" (BROWN, 2019, np., original emphasis). The speaker and Leyla use negation as a discursive apparatus to transform derogatory labeling. They are in control of their

identifications, denying becoming objects of others' categorizations. Negation becomes a positive self-affirmation.

This is not the only time that Anzaldúa criticizes the term "lesbian" as a category to describe her. In the article "To(o) Queer the Writer", Anzaldúa elaborates on the term "lesbian" used to identify her, a Xicana brown woman:

For me the term lesbian *es un problema*. As a working-class Chicana, mestiza – a composite being, *amalgama de culturas y de lenguas* – a woman who loves women, "lesbian" is a cerebral word, white and middle-class, representing an English-only dominant culture, derived from the word lesbos. I think lesbians as predominantly white and middle-class women and a segment of women of color who acquired the term through osmosis much the same as Chicanas and Latinas assimilated the word "Hispanic." (2009, p. 163)

As an alien, the epistemologies of the new place where Leyla lives are not enough to describe her in the same way that "lesbian" is complicated as a term to categorize a queer working-class Xicana. The geopolitics of the term "lesbian", for Anzaldúa, erases the multiplicities of encounters that the subjects of the Borderlands undergo. Similarly, the speaker, in "Interface", refuses being named and categorized by a man, although a man who is part of her community and family, in a way that would, otherwise, erase their process of subjectivity.

The negative answer rejects both the categorization of Western society and the Chicano community, which are sources of oppression against women's desires, and affirm a name that is often related to a group of people who cannot speak up because of their legal situation. Margaret Franz argues that "citizens are made 'alien' in part through their discursive construction as *feeling* 'alienated' from the national body" (2015, p. 185, original emphasis). Also, for Franz, "illegality is [...] a discursively constituted position [...] that is racialized as non-white and sexualized as deviant" (2015, p. 184). Anzaldúa constructs her separation from the term "lesbian", both in "To(o) queer the writer" and in the end of "Interface", as a form of demonstrating her feelings of alienation from bodies that do not represent her in all her multiplicities. The statement of being an alien, in the poem, while acknowledging the connection with sexuality, national issues, race, and marginalization also questions imposed categories. The speaker and Leyla play with their position in society without accepting the impositions of its categorizations.

The constant epistemological turns of the poem convey transformative potency. By playing with pleasure and materialization, "Interface" incorporates intersectional issues about desire and space. Nevertheless, when crossing the poem with some of the concepts involving sexuality from the essay part of *Borderlands*, a new range of conflicts appear. The connection

between these two separated parts further complicates the epistemological movements of the texts. The poem section is divided into six parts, and "Interface" is inserted in the "Crossers y otros Atravesados". As much as Leyla is herself an *atravesada*, she is also able to cross the limits of the genre and the chapter to dialogue with other sections of the book. Leyla chooses the position she materializes, but it is important to reinforce that this is not always the case for those in displacement. Ellie Hernández emphasizes the danger of idealizing the Borderlands. For her, "we are not all *mestizos* now. Some choose to enter the borderlands, but others are irrevocably there, whether they like it or not" (2009, p. 53). If, for a moment, Leyla can be perceived as celebratory of the Borderlands – passing when desirable, choosing to live in this world – reading the poem considering her an alien immigrant and in the light of the essays, and vice-versa, complicates both texts.

In "Interface", going home to a homophobic community becomes an act of resistance and love. The concept of homophobia in the essay "Movimientos de Rebeldía y las Culturas que Traicionam" is transformed in the "[f]ear of going home. And not being taken in" (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 42). This definition comes from a student's misconception about the meaning of homophobia, which Anzaldúa finds appropriate. In the process of reconceptualizing homophobia, she also transforms the concept of home. In this sense, the prejudice against queer people carries meanings about violence and acceptance at home. In this reconceptualization, the queer subject is "afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us" (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 42). More than reconceptualizing home and homophobia, this shift in meanings also shifts the position of the subject. If in the traditional sense of homophobia, the queer citizen is passive and receives the prejudicial violence, in Anzaldúa's interpretation, homophobia is an affective feeling from the queer subject against violence. Home encompasses violence, but also belonging. The subject craves to be part of her culture, but she cannot accept its discrimination. Therefore, Anzaldúa reorganizes this concept, so she still acknowledges its violence but constructs a way of safely returning home.

Often, home is conceptualized as a place of safety, comfort, connection, and peace. Feeling at home, making oneself at home, are expressions with positive connotations, for instance. Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, considers home "our first universe" (1994, p. 4). The author connects the house, more specifically the childhood house, with comforting "memories of protection" (1994, p. 6). By going further in the poetics of the house, he affirms

that “[t]hrough poems, perhaps more than through recollections, we touch the ultimate poetic depth of the space of the house”: “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (1994, p. 6). Bachelard's idea of home is very comforting and protective of the daydreamer. For him, the attic is representative of consciousness, whilst the cellar is where the fears of the unconscious are hidden; the spaces in-between are for living. The house of the childhood brings more intimacy and affect than any other: “we know perfectly that we feel calmer and more confident when in the old home, in the house we were born in, than we do in the houses on streets where we have only lived as transient” (1994, p. 43). What he does not take into consideration is the specificity of the home he is theorizing, from the spatiality of a, at least, three-story house, to the feeling of safety one has about the childhood home. He does not consider that, for marginalized subjects, going back to a childhood home may become more of a nightmare than a dream.

From a nomadic perspective, comfort, safety, and the poetics of a house are emphasized in the transient life more than in the fixity of the childhood one. Thus, the importance of theorizing the routes allowing movements back and forth. In the Borderlands, more specifically, the house itself may become transient. As Bachelard affirms, “[a] house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space” (1994, p. 47). Experience transforms space, and vice-versa. Thus, if experiencing trauma affects the constitution of home, the fixity of a childhood house is more complex than the place of calm and confidence of the daydreamer. However, instead of giving up the importance of home, marginalized subjects rethink this concept and create new routes so they can visit this space circumventing the oppression and violence that it can entail. In “Interface”, the speaker goes home, but in her own terms, rejecting the epistemological violence of her brothers. The final answer in “Interface” becomes, then, a way of safely going back home and a form of epistemological resistance.

I bring Bachelard's theorization because it illustrates the limitation of one fixed image of home and because this is the basis for the development of another Xicana work. Interestingly, Sandra Cisneros's discusses the realization she came upon by reading *The Poetics of Space* in one of her graduate school classes, which led her to write *The House on Mango Street*, first published in 1983. Cisneros mocks the idea of multiple store house, with cellar and attic. She questions Bachelard's understandings of a house: “What was this guy Bachelard talking about when he mentioned the familiar and comforting house of memory? It was obvious he'd never had to clean one or had to pay the landlord rent for one like ours” (2015, p. 127).

Cisneros realizes that the voices of normativity, of power, does not work for her, does not contemplate her experiences. Reverberating Moraga's call for "writing against amnesia" (MORAGA, 2011, p. 85-86), Cisneros creates a representation of home and of house that opposes common knowledge about these terms and disrupts Bachelard's theorization. In this sense, *Borderlands* also reorganizes these concepts, rebuilding them in a more mobile fashion.

Anzaldúa settles her house in her back, like a turtle, giving this supposed concept of fixity a much more transient context. The production of a safe space for a non-normative self for women of color may lie in the separation from home, which does not mean separation from her culture: "Yet in leaving home I did not lose touch with my origins because *lo mexicano* is in my system. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry "home" on my back" (2007, p. 43). The turtle is a powerful symbolism against the fixity of home as a concept. Without mentioning Anzaldúa or a turtle as a metaphor, Rosi Braidotti also considers the mobilization of "home" for the concept of nomadism: "As an intellectual style, nomadism consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere. The nomad carries her/his essential belongings with her/him wherever s/he goes and can recreate a home base anywhere" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 16). A fluid and nomadic concept of home breaks loose from traditional definitions which are not appropriate for nomadic subjects. Leyla is the materialization of desire in the personification of an alien. She is learning a new culture, a new language, but carrying with her the characteristics that make her an alien. As Anzaldúa affirms, "[f]or the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior" (2007, p. 41). Thus, to reconcile home and non-normative sexuality, the speaker and Leyla construct another epistemic route that brings them back home without minimizing either their rebellion and their culture. The rebellion and betraying from the title of this essay play the movements that bring the speaker and Leyla home without abandoning her desires. What, in some contexts, may be read as betraying is the differential mode into action.

Sharing some cultural codes allows the speaker to make the differential movements that resist and subvert the homophobia they might suffer at home. The poem, by expressing so overtly desires by women of color, defies what Anzaldúa calls the moral prohibitions against sexuality and homosexuality (2007, p. 41). The structure of the poem, through its metonymy, irony, and the junction of geographical issues and desires constructs a "feminist architecture" that abides the lesbians of color depicted in the text. According to the author, "if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – *una cultura*

mestiza – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture” (2007, p. 44). “Interface”, then, is one of these new spaces, constructed in the encounter of different cultures. Metaphorically, desire is the brick in the construction of this nomadic architecture, that builds homes in the backs of their inhabitants.

As in “Interface”, where the couple goes back to the speaker’s home on their own terms, in the essays, Anzaldúa ends this section returning to South Texas. She does so after restructuring her own architectural space, after reconceptualizing the epistemes that otherwise would oppress her. This movement connects her back to her familial bonds, but as she does with Leyla, on the condition that she may exist in all her multiplicities. She talks to her family, she cares the land, they reminisce about the past, about the struggles of the present and she finishes reinforcing the future and history of the land: “This land was Mexican once // was Indian always // and is. // And will be again” (2007, p. 113). Returning, thus, is a form of acknowledging one’s own history and belonging, but this process cannot occur through the common / normative paths, for it would return to oppressive means. These final verses reverberate Anibal Quijano’s perspective that “[t]he future is an open temporal territory” (2000, p. 547). Anzaldúa concludes her essays with a summarization of temporality condensed in space, what was, is, and will be, depends on the participation of those who construct the space, and this participation reworks language and space so they can live as multiple subjects. The future and the past are both open spaces always becoming. Anzaldúa’s epistemological journey allows her to return to South Texas and to exist there in her own terms.

The differential mode in Anzaldúa’s texts emphasizes the importance of “la facultad”, of being conscious about one’s own social position: “*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities” (2007, p. 60, original emphasis). The importance of awareness in Anzaldúa’s theorization is pervasive in her works. In *Borderlands*, the new *mestiza* consciousness reinforces the relevance of breaking paradigms and straddling different cultures to disrupt dualistic thinking. “Home” does not stand to one meaning. The signifier supports changes, returns, contradictions, and transformations. This is what she calls the future of the *mestiza*, “a *mestiza* consciousness” (2007, p. 102). Leyla, can be read as the materialization of desire in the *Borderlands*. She lives in-between spiritual and material worlds, constantly learning, altering herself to negotiate her knowledge as an alien with the configurations of this new, impure, world. Against the myth of purity, epistemologies are contaminated and become impure, so they can be mobilized in the *mestiza* architecture. When associating poem and essay, Leyla ends up participating in the epistemological shifts between

belonging and fear of going home. The different in-betweennesses that Leyla occupies as a subject of the Borderlands enmesh desire as a force that constitutes a subject and as a political understanding of home and Xicanidad.

To be called nomadic, a desire must be (in)formed by the movements of the subjects, at the same time that it also moves the subject to new directions. Movement, here, is not the simple dislodgement from point A to point B; rather, nomadic desire is the force to epistemologically mobilize affects, although it may materialize in the effective movement from one place to another. The nomadic desire of the speaker in “Interface” moves the existence of Leyla, transforming a presence into materiality. In Moraga’s autobiography, on the other hand, desire is the force literally moving her from New York to California. A Xicanadyke desire is more than the desire felt and/or expressed by a Xicana: it is the desire that carries within the craving, the feeling, the social, spatial, and historical characteristics of the Borderlands. This desire is materialized in the complications and implications of being Xicana, in the nomadic crossings of gender, race, and class, that increase their effect when meeting in the intersection of the different cultures that occupy the same space. This desire is nomadic, for it moves both consciously and unconsciously, literally, psychologically, and metaphorically the subjects and the spaces they occupy. In the differential movement, the shifts work as a strategy to accommodate political beliefs, ideological subversions, and sexual cravings.

The “attachment to place”, as discussed by Alba, gains nomadic contours through the constant mobility of the subjects. In agreement with Alba’s statement that “*familia* becomes the primary signifier for place of origin, and place of origin amalgamates mother’s womb, barrio or neighborhood, and regional landscape—all of which constitute the lost and living homeland in the Chicano imagination” (2014, p. 92, original emphasis), the authors hereby studied mobilize epistemologies of spaces so they can return to a place of origin that accept their multiplicities. In these mobilizations, family, homeland, and even regional landscape enmesh with desire so these very same epistemes do not become the source of immobility.

Sometimes, the movement of desires is not necessarily only for the fulfillment of cravings, but for the survival of the subject. This is the case of reading homophobia as the fear of going home, which propels the subject to the construction of a mobile home with a feminist architecture. The figure of the turtle is, in itself, a nomadic image, since it relates the home to movement, without leaving behind the cultures that form the nomadic subject. It is also an example of how place does not necessarily mean geographical location. The body becomes a

home and the culture is carried in the back. Home is resignified, losing fixity and the notion of safety. In Braidotti's nomadic subject, "[t]he nomadic style is about transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands" (1994, p. 25). However, there is in the nomadic aesthetic of the Borderlands an intention in recuperating a lost homeland, which is associated with the lack of choice in the nomadic journey and the erasure of some subjectivities from the hegemonic imaginary. Nevertheless, the concept of home – and land – is restructured and distanced from its traditional understandings. Desire produces subjects, spaces, and relationships. This production may be metaphysically represented, as is the case of Leyla, or materially represented, as the Xicanidad of being a woman in Spanish. In this sense, Anzaldúa's concept of feminist architecture is necessary for the construction of the Queer Aztlán envisioned by Moraga, a mythological and imaginary place that serves as a political stance.

The works analyzed approach desire from the specificity of the Borderlands in an onto-epistemological fashion, although they do so by taking distinct routes. Analyzing Moraga's work, the importance of returning to a nomadic reading of Xicana desire surfaces. Returning does not offer an escape to a fixity of origin, nor a return to a purist, authentic, root, but proposes a conscious form of multiplying the movements of going back. When part of a culture that is constantly trying to be erased and diminished by hegemonic forces, looking back and reconnecting to a past is transgressive. On the other hand, Anzaldúa transforms language so she can realign desire, home, and cultural belonging. As Xicana authors reconcile in their literature the act of returning home with the cultural adjustments that safety requires both within and outside their own culture, they create material and epistemological movements that transform both their desire and the space they occupy.

3. CHAPTER 3
CLICK, CLICK, CLICK:
THE COLONIAL PRESENCE AND THE DEFYING DESIRE

“Click. Click. Click. The Cucuy’s on the other side of the door.
 Click. Click. Click. I can hear the Cucuy breathing. I can’t
 scream. If I scream, the two-snake-man will come and hit me. I
 can’t scream. Go away, Cucuy, go away and leave me alone.”
 (SILVA, 2013)

My first drafts of this chapter had focused mainly on safe spaces and their constitution in Xicana literature. It had called my attention how easily a space could go back and forth from unsafe to safe in the narratives I was reading. Feeling safe somewhere was momentaneous; rather than an intrinsic characteristic of a place, these feelings could be broken in a glimpse. My first questions were: How do these shifts occur? What triggers them? (Un)Safety is constructed in relationality. As the research takes a path of its own, it walked through the direction of paradoxical space – and I followed down the rabbit hole. For I still write these words in quarantine, this paradox could have never been so close – or even cloistered. In the pandemic, my home is safe, where I can be protected and protect others from the virus, but it is also my cage; it is a case of public health that jeopardizes mental health. I decided to study the topics of this work years previously to the pandemic. Still, this so recent experience questions my own understandings of space and forces me to face my research under new circumstances – which also reinforces my position in relation to the nomadic thinking. As the movement continues, paradoxes led me to the fractured locus, a moment, or a place where the ambiguity of colonial and non-colonial presences forces new configurations of subjectivities and spaces. Thus, in the next pages, I ended up connecting (un)safety, paradox, and (de)coloniality through desires that defy normative assumptions, repressive practices, and the colonial thinking.

Decolonial thinkers have discussed how the pervasiveness of coloniality has reached societies in such a deeply way that is difficult to find spheres of the daily life in which its presence does not exist (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2000; Lugones, 2007 e 2010). Geopolitics, race, and gender and power relations are some of the ways coloniality shows its presence.

Although seeking homogenization and erasure of difference, enforcing a relationship in which Europe stands for the norm and the rest must be controlled, the presence of coloniality is constantly facing resistance. The non-colonial exists and uses the cracks of discourse to open the fracture that allows difference to continue existing and multiplying. The paradox of intertwining the colonial and the non-colonial surfaces, in the literatures to be analyzed here, in the bridges that allow (un)safe spaces in the fractured locus. I use the term “(un)safe” exactly because of its dialectical existence, which, in turn, becomes paradoxical for the need of abiding opposing meanings. In this sense, it is only possible to think of safe space, if considering them (un)safe.

In the light of (un)safety, this chapter investigates how desire defies the presence of coloniality to build bridges, which are unstable and paradoxical, where, even if only for a moment, marginalized subjects can feel protected to construct configurations and interactions that decolonize the very same spaces they occupy. Thus, I ask three main questions: How, in Xicana literature, does desire rearrange spatial relations to respond and resist repressive practices that limit where and how the enactment of sexuality come to exist? how does desire participate in the constant juggling of a paradoxical space? And to what extent do narratives balance danger, pleasure, and resistance in a fractured locus? In this sense, the mobility of spaces renders them (un)safe, and because they are unfixed, they are also unstable.

“Home” is an example of the instability of (un)safe space. As I have previously discussed, the term is a mobile episteme that can be rearranged to open space for non-normative, marginalized subjects. It stands for Anzaldúa’s turtle (*Borderlands*, 2007, 43), who carries her culture – hence, her home – in her back, in a nomadic fashion, but also dialogues with the geographical location where one grows up or where one feels sheltered and welcome. The childhood house may be considered a home but can also be felt as a nightmare. Going home may signifies a return to the family abode, leaving/escaping the very same place, or even both. The mobility of “home” is highly informed by the epistemological shifts of the episteme “(un)safety” as much as by the materiality of feeling (un)safe. For Xicanas, the complexity of these epistemes enmeshes with the intricate constitution of a border subject.

Questioning assumptions about home, ire'ne lara silva’s short story “Hiding-place” (2013) illustrates the fear, the claustrophobia, and the threatening feeling of those abiding under the reality of domestic violence. Against the idea of the house from childhood as a symbol of protection, as theorized by Bachelard (1994), the narrative focuses on the nightmare of living an abusive oppressor. The protagonist is a child, hiding in a closet from the mythological

creature, the Cucuy, and from the fighting between her mother and stepfather. The text gives few information about the family context, only that, in the house lives the mother, the stepfather, the protagonist, and her little sister. Aesthetically, the text mixes fantasy and reality to express the terror of the violence experienced by the child-narrator. The passage in the epigraph brings the process of silencing of a person under such circumstance, the fear, and the presence of the abuser both in the figure of the mythic creature and of the stepfather, called “the two-snake-man” based on the tattoo he carries on one of his arms. The yelling of the fight only stops after what the reader can understand as a gunshot, but that for the child is a mysterious sound: “I hear a sound like thunder and then the screaming stops” (SILVA, 2013, p. 28). She is worried about herself, her mother, and sister without knowing if they are protected from the two-snake-man and the Cucuy. When I first read this story, it haunted me. The “click, click” of the Cucuy intertwined with the pervasive feeling of fear along with the – lack of – ending disturbed me. We never know if the child could leave the closet safely, if she could survive the Cucuy and the stepfather, if, when she “swing[s] down as hard as [she] can” (SILVA, 2013, p. 30), she hurts or kills the menace. I felt afraid and claustrophobic in the closet, without any chance of running, with the protagonist.

The closet is by itself a paradoxical episteme, as Eve Sedgwick would argue (1990). As a symbol of secrecy for non-normative sexuality, it is both a place of hiding, fear, and shame, while it also brings protection. Being in the closet is by itself a sign that danger is near, and, still, where one finds some level of protection. Sedgwick points out how, for the gay community, keeping the centrality of the closet without a slightly utopian way out could be harmful (1990, p. 68). Both living in the closet and leaving the closet are risk taking actions. In Sedgwick’s discussion, the closet stands, also, for the impossibility of the binary private/public. In “Hiding-place”, this is not as much the issue as is the idea of protection within private spaces, both in the level of the house and of the closet. In the short story, the use of the epistemology of the closet is not related to sexuality, but still brings the meanings of protection/secrecy/hiding along with danger/ enfacement/coming out. The protagonist literally comes out of the closet, shows herself to the perpetrator of violence, and faces him. The relationship between this narrative and Sedgwick’s theorization is a form of bridge among non-normative marginalized subjects who does not face the same kind of violence and discrimination, but can – and should – work, and theorize, together.

“Hiding-place” is a fair example of the fallacy of the private space, that is, the home, the domestic sphere, as a place where women are protected. A recurrent topic in Xicana

literature, domestic violence, and resistance against such oppression, appears in works of authors such as Anzaldúa, Moraga, Ana Castillo, Carla Trujillo, and others. Moraga states that “women and women’s sexuality are [occupied] territory within Chicano nation” (2004, p. 227). Examples of domestic violence in Xicana literature abound. In the previous chapter I analyzed how Anzaldúa works discursively to go back home safely. These narratives put into question the very nature of safety and home. According to a number of authors, safe space is not only related to the protection against physical threatening, but also against emotional and psychological harm (Cisneros & Bracho, 2019; Goode-Cross & Good, 2008; Holley & Steiner, 2005; and others). The Roestone Collective, in the article “Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization” (2014), discusses the concept as relational, porous, and productive (p. 1348). One instance of these complex definition is exactly in relation to domestic violence: “(white) patriarchal [...] social norms deem private space safe and public space threatening for women [...]. However, this association [...] erases the reality of domestic violence that occurs in spaces ‘falsely deemed safe for women, such as the home’” (ROESTONE, 2014, p. 1349-1350). The authors, thus, argue that the binarism safe/unsafe is paradoxical and requires continuous negotiation in the process of creating spaces that comfortably and consciously receives vulnerability and diversity.

Still in “Hiding-place”, the story uses the transformation from safe to unsafe in building the protagonist to counteract domestic violence. From the beginning of the story, home is marked as dangerous. At this point, the text presents a movement from the common sense of house as protection to the reality of domestic violence. Being the house a danger place, the closet brings protection, although claustrophobic, for there is where the protagonist hides from the abuser. Nevertheless, as soon as this hiding spot is found by the Cucuy, it instantly becomes unsafe. With the nails of the creature crossing from underneath the door, marking the porosity of the threshold of the closet, allowing danger to pass through. Thus, the story is conducted through the constant shift enabled by relationality and mobility. The door is not sealed against the danger from outside, which leaks into the closet. This relationality stands both to the porosity of (un)safe spaces and the constitution of the borders. The change in the environment also changes the protagonist, throwing her from a scared and cornered victim of the situation into an active force that breaks the cycle of fear and fights against that which were oppressing her and her family. The story ends in this act of courage and resistance, leaving us with a character that is forced to move, to act. Her last sentence, yelled while attacking her perpetrator, “I’m coming, Isela!” (SILVA, 2013, p. 30), points out to a movement that intends to protect

not only herself, but also other people who have suffered similar violence – here, represented in the image of her sister, Isela. This is not to justify violence as a conduit to growth or development, nor to romanticize oppression. The pervasiveness of violence is unjustifiable; however, its existence is undeniable, and its presence radically characterizes space as unsafe. Acknowledging and facing danger are, somehow, components of feeling protected. In the sense that narratives can depict resistance and a form of deviating from normative assumptions, “Hiding-place” uses this strategy to counteract domestic violence in a literary fashion that underlines the materiality of a threatening home.

Unsafety, to some extent, can work as a catalyst for change, for action, for seeking new alliances. Anzaldúa argues that the potency of taking risks is crucial to construct bridges. Calculated risks make connections, loose borders. In “(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces”, the author affirms that “[t]o step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded” (ANZALDÚA, 2009, p. 246). The concept of bridging presumes connections, close relations between once separated parts. Although a bridge may seem stable, constructed out of steel – or rocks, as the Natural Bridges, in California, described by Anzaldúa – they actually change and move; time and the necessity of different connections act upon these structures of passage; they fall and are rebuilt as needed: “Change is inevitable, no bridge lasts forever” (ANZALDÚA, 2009, p. 243). In this sense, bridges are embedded with (un)safety, for they connect subjects to the unfamiliar, they open new breaches that need new bridges, becoming unstable. Avoiding the unknown, the dangerous path, does not lead subjects into finding new bridges. For Anzaldúa, a person can deal with (un)safety from a perspective of seeking out understanding (*conocimiento*), which can build bridges, or use this feeling to feed our fears, which would build walls.

You read Anzaldúa’s experiences as if she is talking straight to you. You feel the trauma, the pain, the anger in her text. You also feel the impulse to change, her necessity to make herself bridge, to do her work as *nepantlera*¹⁸. Reading Anzaldúa is a constant movement into getting to know her better and delving further into her thinking. She takes the imageries

¹⁸ The Aztec term means in-between and, for Anzaldúa, is a transformative moment that is part of the path of *conocimiento*: “As you make your way through life, *nepantla* itself becomes the place you live in most of the time—home. *Nepantla* is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. *Nepantla* is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it” (2015, p. 127).

for her works from her life and the lives around her. You empathize with her pain, her frustration, her depression, so you can also understand her writing process and her thoughts. You feel as if you know her (I know I do not); she gives you access to her world. When her writings guide you into her life so you can sense the paths to *conocimiento* you realize the importance of her statement: “‘home’ is that bridge, the in-between place of nepantla and constant transition, the most unsafe of all spaces” (ANZALDÚA, 2015, p. 156). Through her imageries, a bridge becomes home for coalition and movement while *conocimiento* is the impulse moving us forward, forcing us out of oppressive conditions into moments of nepantla, where changes are possible. Thus, *conocimiento* and bridges, connections, are hand-in-hand. *Conocimiento* is a journey and “detour is part of the path” (2015, p. 133). She theorizes her experience, and you understand that, for her, the process of theorization is more important than the finalized theory; she values the journey, the pathway. You remember that pain, wound, and even trauma may be used for transformative purposes (you learn – and re-learn – that the frustration with your dissertation, your country, your immobility under the circumstances is part of the process, so, after months delaying seating and writing, you decided it is time to reconnect with your text, so you get in touch again with your ideas, with authors and characters, and with theorizations in search of negotiation with literature for *conocimiento*. You know some paragraphs are going to seem disconnected from the previous or the next one, but later you can deal with it, now you will face this moment of uncertainty by going back to Anzaldúa and once again use her as bridge, so she can help you putting Coyolxauhqui¹⁹ together in your own work).

If bridges as a metaphor for connection and in-between state function as a mobilized “home” so one can negotiate a journey through *conocimiento*, they can also serve as metaphor for paradoxical spaces. The authors of the Roestone Collective advocate for a space that accepts contradictions and multiplicities. The collective believes in the importance of feeling “safe enough”, but not too comfortable. For them, paradoxicality accommodates “multiple overlapping and different identities”, challenges the “traditional mappings of social norms”, where “marginalized identities are both embraced and destabilized” (ROESTONE, 2014, p. 1355). Drawing from the studies of the geographer Gillian Rose, in *Feminism and Geography*

¹⁹ The imagery of the Aztec goddess is used by Anzaldúa to describe her writing and identification processes in terms of fragmentation and re-membering: “while Coyolxauhqui in her dismembered state (depicted as a disk with topsyturvy body parts) embodies fragmentation, she also symbolizes reconstruction in a new order. Her round disk (circle) represents the self’s striving for wholeness and cohesiveness. The Coyolxauhqui process is currently working on each person and her or his culture as both attempt to become more inclusive, more whole” (ANZALDÚA, 2015, p. 89).

(1993), such paradox comes to existence when peripheral subjects need to deal with geopolitical dynamics imposed by a hegemonic ideology while still trying to create another form, less oppressive, of occupying spaces. Rose is specifically discussing the possibility of transforming the discipline of geography – and the knowledge it produces – from a masculinist field to one that encompasses women, at the same time denouncing the fallacy of transparency and rationality in the knowledge produced by men. Although acknowledging the intersections that produce differences in *women*, her debate is centered in the men/women divide, but the relevance of her critical discussion on the production of a masculinist geography and her take on paradoxicality are groundbreaking and still reverberate to a frequency that disrupt the borders of discipline.

In Rose's theorization, the subject of feminism inhabits the paradoxical space. In this sense, "the spaces that would be mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map – centre and margin, inside and outside – are occupied simultaneously" (1993, p. 195). Based on the discussions about the "elsewhere of discourse", ignited by Theresa de Lauretis, Rose calls for a "geographical imagination" capable of producing a "plurilocality" (1993, p. 208) for the marginalized subjects. Developing on Rose's debate, Caroline Desbiens articulates the importance of maintaining the creative locality of the subjects elsewhere, but within the territory of language: "Attuned to the everyday, this much-needed altering of existing frameworks—the creation of an 'elsewhere within' as de Lauretis understands it—seems to me a priority" (1999, p. 183). I agree with Desbiens that the site of creation cannot go *beyond*²⁰ the hegemonic discourse, for it is within this realm that the everyday life of marginalized subjects must be transformed. Elsewhere is the site of the paradox because it is here, within discourse.

Therefore, Rose's plurilocality dialogues with Anzaldúa's theorizations of bridges and *conocimiento*. A bridge becomes a paradoxical space elsewhere, with connections that guide subjects to breaches that need new reconfigurations to allow, once more, new bridges.

²⁰ De Lauretis affirms that "'elsewhere' is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations" (LAURETIS, 1987, p. 25). Reading de Lauretis to theorize paradoxical space, Rose uses the terms "elsewhere" and "beyond" as synonymous. To which, Desbiens questions this relation, calling attention to the fact that, in de Lauretis' "The Technology of Gender", "there is plenty of evidence in her writing that this sphere is nevertheless located inside the patriarchal structures women know and confront everywhere" (DESBIENS, 1999, p. 182). Just to bring one evidence, de Lauretis continues the above passage by saying "I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus" (LAURETIS, 1987, p. 25). Thus, if we agree that its margins are still a constitutive part of discourse, and that "the interstices of institutions" are also part of the institutions, de Lauretis' "elsewhere" is paradoxical exactly because inhabits the resistance that is also constitutive of hegemonic discourse. This reading may seem, somehow, painful; however, if my interest is in the materiality of everyday spaces – with their oppression and resistance – going *beyond* hegemonic discourse reaches a utopian realm that, although fruitful to some extent, is not transformative of the reality that affects marginalized subjects.

Reconfiguring is key to reconceptualization in terms of a paradox, thus granting the mobility, instability, and complexity that *conocimiento* requires to flourish. Reconfiguring brings the creative imagination that Anzaldúa, Rose, Desbiens, Pérez, Braidotti, and others claim in the debate of transformative theorizations. According to the Roestone collective, “because safe spaces are porous spaces, they can neither maintain separation entirely nor indefinitely” (2014, p. 1361). As Rose states, in consonance with Sandoval’s “differential consciousness” (2000), “strategic mobility is actually feminism’s great strength” (1993, p. 27). (Un)Safety, in this sense, is mobilized through constant reconfigurations.

Towards a decolonial perspective, I articulate the paradoxicality and the relationships that form (un)safe space to what Maria Lugones calls fractured locus (2010). Throughout the analysis of the literary texts hereby presented, the hinging between the colonial construed of subjects and their resistance and response to the impositions of coloniality emerge on the bridges that allow movements between worlds. The fractured locus is the plurilocality, the elsewhere of discourse, when perceived from a decolonial perspective. According to Lugones,

As the coloniality infiltrates every aspect of living through the circulation of power at the levels of the body, labor, law, imposition of tribute, and the introduction of property and land dispossession, its logic and efficacy are met by different concrete people whose bodies, selves in relation, and relations to the spirit world do not follow the logic of capital. [...] The movement of these bodies and relations does not repeat itself. It does not become static and ossified. Everything and everyone continues to respond to power and responds much of the time resistantly—which is not to say in open defiance, though some of the time there is open defiance—in ways that may or may not be beneficial to capital, but that are not part of its logic. From the fractured locus, the movement succeeds in retaining creative ways of thinking, behaving, and relating that are antithetical to the logic of capital. (2010, p. 754)

The author tries to find the breaches through which the colonized subject is not only subjected to this position, but, looking at daily lives, they can resist and respond the pervasiveness of coloniality. While coloniality homogenizes through categories, Lugones’ debate on decolonial feminism deviates from this categorical logic, arguing for “seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting her epistemological habit of erasing it” (LUGONES, 2010, p. 753). Thus, if on one hand, homogenization and erasure are colonial technologies acting to maintain hierarchies of power, on the other, the colonized is not only defined by these ideological tools, but come to existence, in the fractured locus, in conflict, contradiction, and multiplicity.

In her works, Lugones recurrently emphasizes the relevance of coalition and knowing others who resist oppressions in the process of disrupting modern colonial gender system and the coloniality of power (2003; 2007; 2010). For her, coalition “impels us to know each other

as selves that are thick, in relation, in alternative socialities, and grounded in tense, creative inhabitations of the colonial difference” (2010, p. 748). She continues, arguing that “the histories of resistance at the colonial difference are where we need to *dwell*, learning about each other” (2010, p. 753). The dwelling, though, is temporary, for *conocimiento* requires movements. If strategic movements are too a form of resisting oppression, once more mobilizing the concept, I choose to read Lugones’ “dwelling” through the lenses of Anzaldúa’s turtle, carrying home in her back, constructing it from a feminist architecture (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 43-44). Anzaldúa’s *conocimiento* and home enmesh to the fractured locus of Lugones to broaden the perspective of dwelling the colonial difference to a mobile form of abiding at the same time specifying the construction of coalitional bridges to a Xicana theorization.

The interactions on the fractured locus of colonial difference participate in the production of the paradoxicality of (un)safe spaces. Against repressive practices that permeate the lives of those hanging out in the fractured locus, I am interested in literary texts that express desire defying coloniality. Patricia Zavella defines repressive practices as “the multiple ways women’s bodies are controlled, covered up, and their desires thwarted by parents, lovers, Church officials, teachers, partners, children, or even themselves” (ZAVELLA, 2003, p. 228). The repression of sexuality related to the spatial dimension can be perceived by the places where sex is accepted: in the colonial/modern gender system (LUGONES, 2007), normativity imposes marriage as the appropriated locus for sex, and its objective would be procreation – falling into the hegemonic “control of sex and its resources and products”, as argued by Anibal Quijano (2000). According to the Brazilian author, Luciana Borges, “the repressive fabric involving sexuality, trying to strictly separate the sexual sphere, intended to be private and personal, from the social sphere, intended to be public and political, is not impermeable”²¹ (BORGES, 2013, p. 101, my translation). The leaking from what should be supposedly personal into the political, and vice-versa, reconfigures these spheres participating in the paradoxical constitution of spaces.

Desire can defy coloniality when pointing to the colonial difference of affectivity. This process adds to the paradox of the fractured locus for exposing that sexual pleasure also participates in the colonial modern gender system. Desire can be a source of both bridges and breaches, and in its nomadic form is constantly reconfigured in space. As I have already discussed, I consider nomadic the desire that moves the subject and space in both figurative

²¹ From the original: “O tecido repressivo que envolve a sexualidade, tentando separar rigidamente a esfera sexual, que se pretende privada e pessoal, da esfera social, que se pretende pública e política, não é impermeável” (BORGES, p. 101)

and literal ways, in a decolonizing effort that is epistemologically and materially transformative.

The authors studied here use desire to disrupt the normative perspectives that implicates in the meanings of certain spaces. For instance, if a stable is a dirty place, in the periphery of the dynamics of the city, it is also where characters in *Forgetting the Alamo* (1999) can use as hangout to talk about their loved ones and their stories of violence and sorrows; if the university is a place for the dissemination of the Eurocentric thinking, in *Electra's complex* (2015) a queer Xicana claims this territory through desire and humor to counteract oppressive ideology; if colonizer/colonized and safe/danger dichotomies are used to describe the borders or the relationship between Spain and America, in *Cabañuelas* (2019) they are complicated through affective relations. The Borderlands respond to the specific characteristics of the plurilocality. When Anzaldúa affirms that borders “define the places that are safe and unsafe” (2007, p. 25) and theorizes the Borderlands to blur such definitions, the paradoxicality is already there. When the worlds grate against one another and bleed, this blood blurs the boundaries and participates in forming bridges. Thus, although the pain and danger surrounding the life in the borders are real, the affinity and affect that are also part of this relationship are embodied as well.

3.1. Borderlands between Laredo and Spain in *Cabañuelas*

Norma Elia Cantú's novel *Cabañuelas* (2019) depicts the story of Nena, a Xicana woman who lives a few months in Spain to research the festivities of the European country. Visiting ceremonies, parties, and parades, the protagonist thinks about her own culture and traditions in Laredo, Texas, a city in the border between the U.S. and Mexico. The signs of the Spanish colonization appear in the connections between the festivities in two geographical locations separated by an ocean of oppressive and violent history, but also a history of affinity and affections. *Cabañuelas* does not romanticize the violence of the Spanish invasion nor the complexities of living in the Borderlands. However, the novel also emphasizes the affective relations created in the ambivalence of living in the bridges between cultures. I focus on two relationships that emerges in the novel: 1) the complex affectivity that Nena demonstrates toward her hometown, Laredo, and 2) the contradictory feelings she develops when involved in a love affair with a Spanish man. Both relationships bring to the fore the tensions of cultures that collide and come together to form a border culture.

From the first pages of *Cabañuelas*, the narrator indicates that the protagonist is aware of the affective complexities of the Borderlands. The point-of-view of the novel is constructed

mainly from Nena's perspective, so it is her feelings towards Laredo that the reader first gets to know as she gives her farewell to her hometown. While she is still preparing to travel to Spain, the character is introduced as one whose existence is enmeshed to her family, friends, and origins:

She is one with that land. No, she had chided herself one day as she worked in her mother's garden and felt the connection to the land, not just visceral but with conciencia, with full consciousness. [...]
 [...] Nena feels a pull, an inexplicable tie to that land, that piece of earth, her beloved South Texas – and northern Mexico, too. Texas with its troubled history of political corruption, of despots ruling with iron hands, and of Texas Rangers lynching Mexicans. Of drugs and violence, but a land full of promise, too. A Mexico that is almost not Mexico. [...] This land where two countries come together, a confluence of cultures, where two languages mingle into a unique Spanglish, Tex-Mex, where two ways of measuring the world coexist – pounds or kilos, miles or kilómetros, litros or gallons. [...] It is the land of Sunday carne asadas in the backyard with friends and family [...]. The culture that protects and shelters. But also the culture that circumscribes and limits. How can she not love this land? (CANTÚ, 2019, p. 4-5)

In order to love her hometown, Nena does not deny the troubles of the region; rather, she loves this land conscious of the troubles embedded in it. The paradox of the Borderlands merges with the complexities of the subjects. Affectivity, violence, family, and culture are presented as part of the land, not in an ontological, essentialist construed, but one that emerges from a “troubled history,” a “confluence of cultures,” “that protects and shelters,” but also “circumscribes and limits.” By the end of the quoted paragraph, the rhetoric question that is, in fact, a statement about the protagonist's love for that land reinforces the paradox of this depiction. While the sentence that precedes this final one is a sign of oppressive characteristics, the last question affirms the love for the place. The passage intertwines positive and negative descriptions of the land, without allowing that one perspective would be more representative than the other. By protecting and limiting at the same time, the depiction of this region complicates the affective relations that exists in this place. Family, friends, and food are symbolic of a comforting connection, while the description of despotism, corruption, and violence does not allow the romanticization of the region, which circles back to the idea of a connection with full consciousness.

This complex perspective of the South Texas is shared with other artists from the region. Santa Barraza, a Xicana visual artist, wrote, in her autobiographical piece in *Santa Barraza: Artist of the Borderlands* (2001), “[b]ecause it is so powerful, so overwhelming, this harsh, sometimes unforgiving land, whose history Gloria Anzaldúa describes as ‘una herida abierta’ (open wound), inspires creation” (BARRAZA, 2001, p. 4). Barraza's works intertwine

ancestry, history, legends, and belongings from a perspective of the Borderlands that, as authors like Anzaldúa and Cantú, tries to disrupt homogenized views of the borders, so often depicted through signs of violence and dehumanization. Anzaldúa states: “How I love this tragic valley of South Texas [...]. This land has survived possession and ill-use [...].” (2007, p. 112). They complicate any simple perspective by acknowledging the troubles and still reinforcing the affective and creational power of this region in their art.



Figure 1: “Nepantla” (1995), by Santa Barraza. Source: *Santa Barraza: Artist of the Borderlands*, 2001.

Another connection the three artists share is the depiction of the movement of going back to South Texas. Anzaldúa ends the essay session of *Borderlands* depicting her familial relationship to the land, her “[t]ierra natal. This is home, the small towns in the Valley [...]” (2007, p. 111). She entwines her current presence in the place with her childhood memories of herself and her family working the land. Barraza also uses her voyage back from Chicago to Kingsville, South Texas, to talk about her art. She describes: “As I continue to drive toward Texas, it gets a little hotter. But when I do arrive in the state of Texas, I see the cactus, the maguey, the mesquite, and the huisache tree. I am almost home” (BARRAZA, 2001, p. 4). A few paragraphs after that, she explains the meanings of using some of these plants in her art, relating them to the lives of Indigenous people who lived in the region in pre-Colombian times. In figure 1, the presence of the vegetation representing a geographical place, as described by Barraza, the position of the person with her back to the spectator, moving forward, in the

direction of somewhere, and the Indigenous woman wearing an image of Guadalupe is representative of the connection between self, mobility, and land. In a session called “The Arrival”, Barraza states: “I contemplate my decision [...] to return to Kingsville to begin another *etapa* (stage) in my lifelong struggle to reclaim my own Chicana identity. I’ve done much of my work elsewhere, outside *Tejas* [...]. But now I am returning home, to the place that is hardest of all to live in” (2001, p. 6). Thus, movement and home create the dynamics that (in)form the art and the identifications of these artists.

Cabañuelas ending, like Anzaldúa’s and Barraza’s texts, also brings Nena back home, missing her experience in Spain, but still reinforcing her ties to Laredo: “I am going back to Laredo to teach. I can’t. That’s it. I have my job. My family. My life. My destiny. I can’t. I must go back home. It’s my home” (CANTÚ, 2019, p. 259). Nena answers to the insistence of Paco, her love affair, that she could stay in Spain with him. Although in here Nena is certain of her returning, during the novel, she shows some opening for the possibility of living in Spain. However, as it is possible to notice in this passage, her ties to what constructs Laredo as her home is stronger than her interest in staying. Despite the love story, Nena goes against the fairytale grain and chooses returning. As I have already discussed in the previous chapter, this movement is relevant to the interwoven intersection between Xicanas, ancestry, and a recollection of their own existence as beings from the Borderlands. The nomadic movement performed by the works of artists such as Cantú, Barraza, and Anzaldúa, highlight their connection to and the relevance of their homeland from a Xicana perspective.

In the first scene of the novel, Nena is in a café, in Madrid. Looking at a *fiesta* in the streets, the narrator develops Nena’s feelings at that moment. She is thinking about Laredo and in the word “saudade”: “Good to have a word for it, a Portuguese word for a yearning for what was left behind...” (CANTÚ, 2019, p. 1). Thus, when Nena’s love story is introduced in the novel, the reader is already familiarized to her affective connection to Laredo. According to Linda McDowell, in “Spatializing Feminism”, it is important to investigate, in space, not only its flows, but also its meanings, the attachment to places (1996, p. 31). I want to focus on the importance of attachment to places for Nena’s relationship with the land will weight in the way she conducts her desire. In this sense, the cultural dynamics and her affection to Laredo helps Nena theorizing the relevance of this place in her life not only in practical, but also in emotional ways.

Cabañuelas constructs yet a new border and, consequently, new Borderlands. Because spaces come to existence in relationality, power dynamics are also constructed in these

interactions. Thus, in the Borderlands between Spain and Laredo, Nena's romantic affair in Madrid complicates binarisms such as colonizer/colonized and imperialism/oppression:

Clearly she can never reconcile these two disparate worlds and her own even more complex position in these worlds. A Chicana with one foot in México, the conquered nations all behind her; Paco, a Spaniard, an Asturiano, no less, a member of that colonial power that conquered her antepasados and who now resents the imperialist power that is her country, the United States. (CANTÚ, 2019, p. 138)

Her relationship to a Spanish man forces her to rethink the links between their countries. The process of colonization is part of Nena's history that she is not interested in erasing or separating from herself, at the same time, for her partner, the U.S imperialism is the new form of colonization that is destroying Spanish cultural traditions. The danger of erasure is a menace that both see in the other. This new affective involvement reconfigures the characters' comprehension and perception of each other's land and subjectivity. Nena is from the U.S, but she is not part of white privileged groups, something that Paco, her partner, it seems, struggles to comprehend. Although she is connected to him, the shadows of history are one part of their relationship that they cannot ignore.

However complex the relationship between two subjects who see in each other somewhat of a menace for their culture may seem, they still find bridges in their contexts that provide the opening for them to share some common grounds. To a certain extent, they use their affair as the unsafe bridge where *conocimiento* can abide. *Cabañuelas* is an example of the affective and knowledge movements both space and subjects need to make to negotiate differences and similarities. In a chapter called "Asturias y Tejas", Nena and Paco tell stories of their lives and share their opinion on a diversity of topics. The title of the chapter unites the new complex Borderlands constructed on the bridge of these two shared worlds. The title uses "Tejas", instead of Texas, reinforcing the historicity involved in bringing these two places together. They are not connecting with "Texas" necessarily, but with the historical background of invasion, colonization, and annexation of this region. The narrative reads: "Their intimacy deepens with each shared story of joy or of sorrow. They are constructing a narrative full of their lives, a retelling of a story that's already happened" (2019, p. 106). The coexistence of these worlds does not contradict her affirmation that these worlds cannot reconcile. The Borderlands of their relationship grow in the paradoxical association between their worlds. In this new plurilocality, divisions such as margin and center are disrupted and supposed opposite terms must negotiate sharing the same epistemological grounds. This affectivity inserts new meanings in Nena's attachments to Spain: Once seen as the colonizer and source of violence

against her ancestors, now, Spain continues being the colonizer and the source of violence, but with new attachments, ones of love, care, and affinity.

Corn and romance intertwine with discrimination and homesickness to complicate the places that form the Borderlands between Laredo and Spain. In the incident when, looking for corn tortillas, Nena heard the prejudice of a butcher, her impetus was to call Paco. “They had corn. But it was only for pigs and Mexicans” (CANTÚ, 2019, p. 107), was the answer to Nena’s inquiry. The craving for corn tortillas, a traditional food in the protagonist’s hometown, associates her time far from home to her with her homesickness. It is Paco who goes to a Mexican restaurant to buy Nena’s tortillas as a surprise in the next day: “He was like that, thoughtful. Loving” (2019, p. 108). This display of affection contrasts to view of him as part of the colonizer. If, in some passages, Paco is “a member of the colonial power”, in others, he is the affectionate partner that “scoured the city looking for [tortillas]”. Thus, discrimination, tradition, and attachment are also part of these new Borderlands.

The complexity of her feelings makes Nena to compare herself to *La Malinche*. This historical figure is often considered the one who sold out her people to the Spanish colonizers. The symbolism of La malinche is pervasive of the Mexican and Xicana culture. Several Xicana authors developed their theorizations departing from the complex position of this character. Emma Pérez discusses how Octavio Paz perception of La malinche creates a Mestizo Oedipal complex, blaming her for the downfall of Mexico, with “the symbolic son, the mestizo, repudiating the symbolic father, Cortés. The Oedipal triangle is completed by *la india* [...]” (PÉREZ, 1991, p. 167). Moraga discusses the imagery of La Malinche to Xicana’s sexuality arguing that “[t]he sexual legacy passed down to the Mexicana/Chicana is the legacy of betrayal, pivoting around the historical/mythical female figure of Malintzín Tenepal. As Native woman and translator, strategic adviser and mistress to the Spanish conqueror of México, Hernán Cortés, Malintzín is considered the mother of the mestizo people” (MORAGA, 2000, p. 91). La Malinche, thus, appears as both traitor and ancestor to the Xicanas. To this connection, Nena reinforces the paradoxicality of her falling in love with a Spanish man while also declaring her love to her hometown and ancestors.

History is present in their relationship in the simultaneity with desire, contemporary context and inner turmoil: “She had not realized it before, but the conflict is real for her. It’s visceral. The hated Spanish who conquered her ancestors, how can she? Is she a Malinche? Her grandmother’s words haunt her: Don’t fall in love, mi niña. Am I falling in love. I can’t. I won’t. But.” (2019, p. 89). When the narrative changes from third person to first person, the

narrator's voice confuses with Nena's. The turmoil created by her feelings surfaces at the page and the protagonist takes control of the narrative. It is not anymore someone else's voice telling her story from a distance, from a bird's eye view perspective. Now, specifically at this point, she brings the force of the "I" to strengthen even more her complicated feelings. The anxiety of her sentiments also fragments the discourse, first in the strength of the denial that she would fall in love ("I can't. I won't.") followed by a "but", isolated between periods. The structure of the text reinforces complications of longing. The sentences constructed through fragments portrays the fragments that form the connection between Nena, La Malinche, Paco, the borders between Mexico and the U.S., and Spain.

Despite consciously trying to avoid the complications of this relationship, the affection between the characters shows resistance and does come to realization. They feel safe enough for both feeling comfortable sharing their perspectives and opinions even when they disagree with each other or see the other as a threat to their culture and history. The danger, then, falls in the fact that the protagonist does not want to fall in love, even less for someone who represents violence and colonialism. Nena, thus, takes risks in order to allow the existence of this bridge between conquerors and imperialists, in the figures of a Spanish and a U.S. citizen. This relationship is not without breaches, which are used to reanalyze the protagonist's affect to Spain, Laredo, Madrid, and the U.S. Affective attachment reconfigures and complexifies the location where desire comes to exist, both in the longing for home and in the love affair. As a nomadic desire, the movements between missing her home, considering a long-term relationship in Spain, comparing herself to Malinche, and bringing closer borders, Nena is constant destabilizing her safe space to allow the bridges that, as Anzaldúa affirms, brings unfamiliar territory.

3.2. Reclaiming spaces in Emma Pérez's novels

On another perspective, Emma Pérez' *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009) remaps Texas from the perspective of a genderqueer Xicana character. In a historical novel that rewrites the impact of the aftermath of the battle of the Álamo, *Forgetting* is a first-person narrative of a young woman trying to survive and revenge the violence her family and herself experienced in the North to South invasion of the white population in the territory that now is Texas. There are, for the purpose of this analyses, three stances where space and desire affect each other in paradoxical terms: 1) the body, 2) the places where interaction between characters resignifies spaces, and 3) the geographical nationalistic division of territory. Although I am working with

three dimensions of spaces that, apparently, are distinguished, these stances are, rather, in continuous process of influencing one another, so they cannot be considered as separable. I will begin my analyses from point number three, for this discussion can also present the historical context of the narrative, which is also crucial for the movements materialized in the novel. I will work the other stances as their relevance emerge.

Eliana Ávila reminds that the term “invasion” or “silent invasion” is usually a reference to migration from South to North (2018, p. 712), as, in colonial discourse, diasporic subjects from Latin America escape their undeveloped context in search for a (post-)modern territory. For the context of the novel *Forgetting the Álamo* another constitution of a diasporic subject is relevant. Emma Pérez discusses in *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999) the movement of both populations and borders that constructed racialized diasporic subjects. As the novel takes place in 1836, in a Texas that has just become independent from Mexico, before its annexation, it is important to foreground that Mexicans, Indians, and Spanish-Mexicans were already constitutive of this territory. However, “even before the region became a territory of the United States, Mexico passed a colonization law in 1824 to encourage foreigners to settle in the sparsely populated area, hoping it would serve as the buffer between Mexico and the U.S.” (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 82-83). This law brought to the area a great number of “Euroamericans, who greatly outnumbered the small population of [...] Mexicans” (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 82). With the ever-growing population of Euroamericans, mainly English speakers, in the region, the dissatisfaction with the centralizing Mexican government also grew. This is the context that ignited the war. In this sense, those who were, first, locals to this territory, soon were constituted as diasporic subjects without necessarily physically moving. The supposed development of the place is constituted by its whitening process, which, in its turn, also constitutes in the process the marked racialized others. Although hegemonic history constructs the discourse of invasion in a migration from South to North, the history of Texas told by its marginalized subjects functions to counteract this understanding of invasion, since the invaders, here, are the white colonizers coming from North to South to occupy a once foreign territory.

In *Forgetting the Álamo*, the supposed heroes who fought in the war against Mexico are questioned. Firstly, the main plot of the novel puts Micaela, a young woman of color of Indians and Mexicans heritage, passing as a man hunting down three marauders to revenge the death of her siblings, the rape of her mother and the assault to her family ranch. In the story,

these white men fought on the same side of the war as her defeated uncle and father. In the voice of Elsie, a family friend who runs a whorehouse,

“Them boys ain't heroes. They ain't no better than a buncha drunks who come here whoring expecting me to open up my doors when they want, waking up my girls when they're all filthy and smelly. Now folks are talking heroes.[...] I swear it didn't use to be like this. Ten, twenty years ago, it was downright peaceful here. Quiet, peaceful, everbody worked hard.” (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p)

Thus, the novel puts into question the heroic acts of the men fighting for Texas independence. The violence produced by the invasion of the white men in this territory is countered by a peaceful²² time before the invasion. In this sense, the hegemonic idea of development that sees the violence brought by the war as “a price to pay” for progress is disrupted, because, for the marginalized groups of people living in these changing borders, the life before it was more peaceful than it is in the diegetic now. The narrative reinforces that the changes coming to this territory were not an advancement for these racialized people against the white hegemony: “Tejas was not changing for the better. Not for our kind anyway” (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). Rather, for them, the changes mark a period of increasing violence, including rape and genocide. Texts continue each other, and so does history, although both in non-linear trajectories. Thus, this is also part of the context that forms the paradoxicality of the relationship between Nena, the protagonist from *Cabañuelas*, and Laredo, her hometown, which, in turn, also affects – and effects – her dynamics with Spain and Paco.

In this background, Micaela travels throughout Texas and New Orleans to find the marauders who raped members of her family and ransacked the ranch where they lived. In the racist and misogynist mess that the territory had got into, Micaela passes as a man to be allowed entrance in places where women were forbidden and to protect herself against sexist violence. She embodies and performs a gender other than the one assigned to her at birth. However, although successful entering into places designated only for men, she cannot embody a skin color different from her own:

The same bartender who was accustomed to ordering me out squinted his eyes at me. I inched my way to the bar and slapped down a coin.
 “We don’t take no meskin pesos no more. Ain’t you hear?”
 “I need some help,” I said.
 “Help? The days for helping the likes of you is done gone. Now get on outa here before I get you throwed out”. (2009, n.p)

²² The idea of peacefulness here can also be questioned through an Indigenous perspective, since this time Elsie's character is mentioning is still after the Spanish colonization of the Americas, in which genocide is already part of the Native peoples' history.

Her racialization as part of the white invasion can be read as a fractured locus, for bringing to the surface the construction of racism as enmeshed to the process of colonization. The growing racism resulted from the war between Texas and Mexico transforms a Native person of that land into an abject, who, in the words of the bartender, does not deserve any help. The use of the slur “meskin” reinforces the discrimination. The colonial gender system that racializes Micaela is the same that, despite passing as a man, creates the pervasive lingering fear of being discovered. She inches her way because she needs to check if her disguise works; she is cautious of her woman’s body underneath the masculine perform. If, as a man, she is threatened for being a person of color, as a woman of color the dangers could easily escalate. The number of rapes in the narrative, including the one suffered by the protagonist, shows that Micaela’s decision of embodying a male persona is in fact a form of transforming her body into a safe space within perilous places, such as the bar, and the region of Texas.

In Xicana literature, spatializing the city between safe and unsafe is one strategy used to question and criticize the barriers that jeopardize and limit the movements of vulnerable people²³. Linda McDowell affirms that “depending on their position in the social structure, people are differentially located in space [...] [And] it is often women who have the most spatially restricted lives [...], trapped in the net rather than free in (cyber) space” (2005, p. 30). For Micaela, not only being a woman is trapping her to limited places she can circulate, but her skin color and ethnicity also functions as entrapment in a city that is becoming overloaded with white people. Her disguise, then, even if partially, gives her freedom to go in male-only establishments. The connections between her body and the territory become evident once her safety as a person depends on passing in an invaded region. She does not subvert the rules of the city; rather, she subverts her own body to fit the rules that otherwise would exclude her. Strategically, her gender disobedience fits her in the rules of the city for her survival. Her body serves as shelter against the violence taking place in the region.

In a novel centered in passing as strategy of survival, recognition functions as bridges between marginalized groups. First when she met Clara, then with Lucius, these characters

²³ Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* (2009), where the protagonist, Esperanza, tells the stories of her neighbors and neighborhood is one example: “Those who don’t know any better come to our neighborhood scared. They think we’re dangerous. [...] All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight” (2009, p. 28). On another take, Ana Castillo also discusses safety and spatiality in her memoir *Black Dove* (2016). When visiting a friend in a white neighborhood, Castillo describes why her experience with the police made her not trusting the institution: “we decided to walk together to the corner drugstore still open in the early evening. [...] Maybe we went for cigarettes or soda and chips, but when we came out we were met by a paddy wagon. [...] We went to jail” (2016, p. 78). These passages illustrate how narratives work with the city in ways that imprisons subjects in specific places, and in the case of Castillo, literal imprisonment.

recognize the protagonist as a woman. With Clara, Micaela's queer sexuality brings safety after witnessing so much violence: "I breathed in the moonlight's air feeling warm and secure from her nearness. I sat up and took a long deep breath and filled my lungs with something unknown to me. Something that was not sorrow. I did not recognize all I felt" (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). For Micaela, feeling secure is unrecognizable until she meets Clara. Micaela and Clara's love story first takes place in a ranch called El Paraíso – and for the short moment they are together in this place, one may argue, Micaela does feel like she is in paradise. Soon after they fall in love, racism and violence throws the protagonist back into her journey. Along the novel, most of the times that Micaela feels secure is when she is near Clara, as they are separated and reunited in their journey. Paradoxically, in a violent and prejudicial territory, it is in the realization of queer desire that Micaela finds security.

The specific places where interactions occur are constituted in and against hegemonic discourse. Bars constantly appear as places where Micaela's safety is threatened, where she is only protected to the point that no one knows she is a woman, even so, her ethnicity cannot be hidden, keeping her constantly under the presence of danger. However, when she finds Clara, in Galveston, the bar is reconfigured to the extent that, although the main floor is still a menace, the room where Clara lives on the second store becomes a place of tranquility: "I let myself be pulled back down and I did not rise from that bed or leave her room for days. To be with her meant my inner turmoil subsided momentarily and I was hopeful again about some kind of future for me but only if she was in the future I envisioned" (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). She is haunted by the violence she is entwined (present in passages marked by her alcoholism and in the ghost, she talks to in the saloon), but still having peaceful moments. The overlap of the room and the saloon are symbolic of paradoxical space. They are both at the same building and they are connected, but interactions allow one part to be considered safer than the other. However, they are not completely isolated from what happens in each room, reinforcing the porosity of spaces. In this building, safety is constructed where the protagonist can live her desire. These cravings are emotional, affective, and material:

Clara slid to the center of the bed and lying back, reached for my fingers and held them. [...] Her breath slowed and deepened and I gleaned her breasts rising and falling through her gown. When I placed my head on her soft bump of a belly, she twirled a strand of my hair and I whiffed the scent of lavender and rose petals from her skin. She gripped my hand and turned to face a wall of books piled high and strewn across the floor, dog-eared and marked from her self-schooling. (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p)

Their affection is evident, in this scene, by the way they touch and feel each other. The description of their relationship intertwines the physical contact, their feelings, and senses. It is through touching, talking, and feeling each other's body that they construct their relationship. The description of Clara's scent and body is enmeshed with the description of objects in the room, reinforcing the connection between affectivity and space. The room has no shelves to put the books, so they are piled on the floor. In one passage, the window in the room is described as "small", in another, the chair as "stiff", and the bed as "squeaky". In general, the room has a dreary description; its redeeming quality is Clara's presence. Although Clara is the source of Micaela's tranquility, she is also the one to bring emotions that Micaela considers a "character flaw" (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). The protagonist's jealousy and violence are the reasons for the couple's continuing separations that forces Micaela into her journey. In Galveston, jealousy makes Micaela to beat up another man, which forces her to run away to New Orleans. The bar as a place for violence counteracts the room as the one for peace. Her actions, then, force her to leave this place where, even if it were only in a room and momentarily, she could find hope and tranquility.

On a different kind of connection, Micaela spends a night in a stable talking to Lucius, an enslaved man who is cleaning horse dung and brushing the animals while his enslaver is in a bar. Sharing stories is their bridge: "I suppose that in telling his story, he comforted himself as well" (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). Lucius tells the stories of violence, torture, and atrocities he lived, and they make Micaela comfortable about sharing her own stories of death, sadness, revenge, and murder. In opposition to the bars, where she cannot be recognized, in the stable, the marginalized subject recognizes her from the beginning. In the periphery of the city, in the places where the dominant narratives arrive ever so slightly, these characters create their safe space to share experiences and to resist erasure from history. A stable is not automatically safe – so much so that Micaela is raped in one. What constructs the peripheral place as protected from violence is the interaction between the characters. This safety is juxtaposed to Lucius' description of Texas: "You might as well get yourself back to Mexico and leave this place to ole whitey because, darlin, it's slave lynching country and it's Mexican killing country and it's Indian scalping country and it's going to be that for a mighty long time" (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). Thus, in a place where racialized discrimination is ever present, the violence of the geographical region contrasts the protection of the stable. For Micaela, the ghost of danger is personified in Lucius' enslaver, who comes to the scene while she is there. First, he thinks he remembers meeting Micaela before: "'It's the meskin boy. I seen that face before'", so he can

testify her whereabouts to her enemies, which would mean death. Second, he cannot notice that she is not a meskin *boy*, for it would not only show her disguise but it would put her as a woman in jeopardy. Coming from the bar, he is drunk and “toppled over, landed on horse dung and dozed off” (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). Micaela and Lucius share their stories and construct their connections under the sleeping presence of a menace, knowing that their encounter must finish before he wakes up and the stable seizes to offer protection.

The paradox of the stable surfaces both in the presence of the enslaver and in relation to the previous scene taken place in another stable (Micaela’s rape). They avoid considering a space ontologically safe. They also indicate the pervasiveness of the colonial system that threatens the lives of these people. Still, some bridges allow moments of security, where the fractured locus can be enacted. Hence, the paradox. Micaela feels safe enough to confess to Lucius her feelings for another woman. The confession of Micaela’s desire helps to construct a sense of alliance between them. Her story builds a relationship based on complicity and understanding. The stable, like the room Clara shares with the protagonist, is the elsewhere of the bar; although part of the discursive practices that marginalize both Micaela and Lucius, they have somewhat more freedom here than in places normally occupied by hegemonic subjects. By the end of this chapter, the two scenes of the stables are connected when Micaela, as the narrator, says: “what I didn’t tell Lucius was the thing I had yet to admit to myself. The night of Juana’s death, they had done to me what they had done to her and for too long now I had denied it” (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). Linking these two scenes in similar spaces, one of unthinkable violence and other of affinity and comfort, highlights that no place is essentially safe; rather it depends on the connections between the myriad of forces interacting in simultaneity and multiplicity.

Micaela’s is the story of a nomadic subject represented in a constant geographical movement. Her only chance of survival is by moving. When she tries to go back home, she is arrested for a crime she did not commit, despite her killing, robbing, and assaulting other people in her journey. Safety is directly connected to movement, still, keeping home as a place of return. In the end, she lives a nomadic life, but continuously risks herself to visit her mother, Clara, and their twin children, her non-normative family. In order to continue her journey, she builds bridges along the way, connections that are sensitive to the plurilocality they are constructed. Despite the presence of bridges that allow her to fulfill her journey in the company of others, even so they are momentaneous and strategic forms of survival, the breaches that break these connections also mobilizes her journey. Violence is not a price to pay for

development. Nevertheless, violence is constant in Micaela's journey. Thus, the (un)natural bridges and breaches must be reworked and mobilized so she could create safe, although momentaneous and paradoxical, spaces to live – more than just survive – through her desire.

Pérez (re)writing of the conflicts in the Borderlands raises to this challenge, inverting, and disrupting predetermined concepts of affinity, development, and space. The novel not only decenters a dominant historical narrative, focusing on the protagonism of a mestiza, but also emphasizes the importance of (re)visiting the historical past in order to allow new readings. Both the work itself and the protagonist do that to decolonize the borderlands, which otherwise is constructed as belated. *Forgetting the Álamo* acts in what Cherríe Moraga calls "a life of writing against amnesia" (2011, p. 85-86). In this novel the white colonizers bring other levels of violence that displace subjects to a diasporic position in a constant confrontation that engenders and racializes them against white hegemonic social norms. As a response to the normativization of space under Eurocentric oppressive powers, Micaela breaks the norms by finding safety in a non-normative relationship with a mestiza woman.

Less a rewriting of history and more a reclaiming of space, Emma Pérez's *Electra's Complex* (2015) reconfigures belonging on a university campus through desire. An erotic detective literature, the protagonist in the story is Electra Campos, a "middle-aged history professor at a financially fraught New York City college" (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p). Differently from Micaela Campos, Electra is open and conscious about her queer sexuality. Although they carry the same last name, bringing comparisons even closer, they develop in different time and space. The diegesis of the former's story is 19th century Texas, right after its independence from Mexico. The latter lives in New York in the 21st century. The development of the plot in *Electra's complex* occurs in two main places of the city: the university, and the Down Under, "a Chelsea sex club for women" (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p). Despite Electra's efforts of keeping these two environments separated in her life, they constant overlap and interactions in one have effects in the other. As an erotic novel, sexual desire is a form of defining belonging and, as a detective novel, the danger of being murdered or accused of one, serves as a reminder of the presence of a hegemonic culture that is not at ease with the existence of queer women of color in places usually dominated by white Eurocentric knowledge.

Electra's centers the erotic novel in a Xicana protagonist with a Xicana background. The field of erotic literature is often more prominent focusing on men, both as author and reader, though women do write and consume this kind of literary texts. According to Borges,

women writing about sex is, by itself a transgression: “culturally, women are not authorized, by the patriarchal and phallogentric logic, to talk about sex; women *are the sex* and, thus, do not talk, they are talked about. Enunciated by the masculine desire, they appear in erotic literature as a prize to be conquered, or as an object of masculine satisfaction”²⁴ (2013, p. 109, my translation, author’s emphasis). Therefore, by controlling the discourses about their own desire, “erotic literature written by women displace them from mere object of desire to a position of enunciator, discursively building a representation of eroticism from a standpoint of the other, displaced and displacing”²⁵ (BORGES, 2013, p. 111). Thus, by denying the objectifying position regarding their own pleasure, not accepting *being the sex*, as Borges puts it, but taking control of the narrative, erotic novels centered in women’s pleasure and written by women question the heteropatriarchal logic that otherwise, in the normative gender system, would repress their desire. This movement is perceived in Pérez’s novel, with the addition that, not only she complicates the gender system, but she also reworks eroticism from a standpoint that highlights the colonial difference within the university.

The tension between oppression and resistance emerges in the dynamics of the history department, where Electra works. The group Electra calls “dead white men’s club” contrasts with the protagonist’s progressist political views: “Like most history departments, mine also accommodated a group of elderly men from European ethnic backgrounds, meaning very white, very pale, very committed to Jacobean traditions” (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p). The dispute over reclaiming territory in the university occurs mainly with this group: “Sloan pretended I hadn’t met his protégé, when we both had battle scars from the department vote that hired yet another conformist, heterosexually obligated white man to teach more conformist, heterosexually obligated white male ideologies” (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p). Electra describes their rivalry with warlike terms, such as “battle”, and “scar”. Her fighting over the hiring of someone from the “dead white men’s club” resonates with the necessity of alliance in this environment. The “yet another” remarks that the members of this club were already more voluminous than she would consider adequate for the department. When Sloan reinforces the presence of his protégé by

²⁴ From the original: “culturalmente, as mulheres não estão autorizadas, pela lógica patriarcal e falocêntrica, a falar sobre sexo; elas são o sexo e, portanto, não falam, elas são faladas. Enunciadas pelo desejo masculino, aparecem na literatura erótica como prêmio a ser conquistado, ou como objeto da satisfação masculina.” (BORGES, 2013, p.109)

²⁵ From the original: “A literatura erótica escrita por mulheres trata de deslocá-las do lugar de mero objeto do desejo para uma posição de enunciadora, construindo discursivamente uma representação sobre o erotismo a partir de um lugar de fala outro, deslocado e deslocante.” (BORGES, 2013, p.111)

reintroducing him to Electra, he is reassuring his victory over her in their battle for hiring the new professor.

Different from the battles that threw Micaela into her journey, in *Electra's complex*, the protagonist struggles occur in the realm of the university, symbolic of an intellectual battle. To a certain extent, what is at stake between Electra and the dead men's club is the coloniality of knowledge. Electra represents the possibility of knowledge production from the margins, from a Xicana queer woman of color, while her rivals are trying to keep a colonial dominance of intellectuality. While Micaela's traumas are related to a violence that is trying to annihilate her, Electra's is a struggle to maintain her right to occupy the position of a Xicana professor in an environment often filled with Eurocentric thinking and discourse. The proportions of their battles are immensely apart, due to the position they occupy in the society they are inserted. Although Electra needs to deal with discrimination and sexism, she stands in a privileged position if compared to Micaela's situation – a position acquired through accessing and claiming belonging to the realm of the university. The tone of these two works highlights this difference: while *Forgetting* has a gloomier, darker tone, *Electra's* uses sarcasm and mockery to regain balance in the social structure that is the university. Still, keeping these differences in mind, they both fight the social hierarchy that subjects them to a position that, otherwise, would be of inferiority.

Higher education access is a recurrent topic for younger Xicana writers, both by questioning the white hegemonic interpretation of knowledge in the universities or by describing the journey they undergo to apply and occupy this space. *Life is Wonderful, People are Terrific* (2015), by Meliza Bañales, *Mean* (2017), by Myriam Gurba, Erika Sánchez's *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017), and Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us* (2012) and *A Dream Called Home* (2018) are some examples of novels dealing with the school and/or university institutions from a Xicana perspective. In the case of Bañales and Gurba's works, they also deal with queer sexualities. Coincidentally, they were all released in the last decade. Opportunities, difficulties of finding oneself in a predominant white Eurocentric environment, problems with relationships, and the lack of recognition on the potency of non-Eurocentric knowledge are some of the issues that emerge in texts such as these ones. *Electra's complex* differs by depicting a middle-aged professor, in opposition to centering the narratives on students. Nevertheless, her point-of-view continues opposing hegemonic knowledge and power structure.

The university surfaces as an opportunity historically denied to Xicanas on the basis of racism that comes to light as one more contradictory space where while offering opportunities also creates one more battleground where racialized subjects need to struggle with discrimination. In *Post-Borderlandia* (2018), Jackie Cuevas investigates “post-Anzaldúan authors and texts that have emerged to continue shaping queer Chicana literature” (2018, p. 9). In her findings, she argues that “characters may be suggested to be Chicana but do not necessarily struggle with what that may mean to them. They are also queer but do not necessarily struggle much with that either.” (2018, p. 11) As she focuses on texts that highlight gender nonconformity, she goes on, saying that “[t]heir struggles tend to coalesce around issues of nonnormative gender expressions or gender identity” (2018, p. 11). My interest here is to draw attention to the fact that authors and works are dealing with issues of Xicanidad without necessarily having them as the focus of their narratives. Considering Cuevas argument, I contend that, at the same token, the disputable environment of the university becomes a relevant issue in Xicana literature. Sexuality, race, class, and gender intersect with the coloniality of knowledge, this latter represented in the figure of higher education access.

The university is part of the Western institutions that maintain and expand Eurocentrism as the contemporary hegemonic model of global power. According to Quijano, Eurocentrism refers to “a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic, colonizing and overcoming other previous or different conceptual formations and their respective concrete knowledges, as much in Europe as in the rest of the world” (2000, p. 549-550). The ideology that constructs Europe as modern, advanced, and civilized attempts to permeate every part of the world and knowledge is key to this process homogenization so dear to the Eurocentric rationality. Michael Baker affirms that “[m]odern western education emerged and became a central institution within the formation of this emerging civilizational complex now commonly identified with ‘modernity’, the ‘West’, the ‘Occident’, and ‘civilization’” (BAKER, 2012, p. 05). In constructing a linear historicity that locates white hegemonic culture as developed, hence superior, also produces the colonial subject as late, primitive, and uncivilized. Nevertheless, for the colonial modern discourse to be effective, its pervasiveness is adamant. For schooling, and university as part of the system, is one type of institutions from where knowledge spreads in society, its control of what is considered knowledge is relevant for the maintenance of the coloniality of power. For marginalized subjects, access to these institutions is both a life-changing opportunity and a prospect for acculturation and assimilation – a continuous danger of living in a bridge and juggling in the

fractured locus. Decolonizing education, then, is a menace for the project of coloniality for it destabilizes homogenizations and hierarchies yet at a risk for those involved in this task.

In accord to this concern, *Electra's complex* develops a queer Xicana character that is conscious of her position in the university. Electra is a menace to the hegemonic thinking. This menace is symbolized in the murderer, the new professor, member of the “dead white men’s club”, who kills for sexist and misogynistic reasons: “Oops. Too late, I thought. Oh no. The *mierda* is going to hit the fan now. If this guy was capable of killing men just because Trudy gave them blow jobs, he was capable of killing women who had engaged in rather racy sexual activities with her. Auntie or not” (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p). To a certain extent, the killings come from a tentative of maintaining the *status quo*, first by hiring a traditionalist who happens to be the killer, and for the sexism present in the motive for the crimes. In a nutshell, his reason for the murders involves his considering women through stereotypes: the one he loves, Trudy, is “innocent, sweet girl”, and those who are in control of their sexuality are “perverts”. In this sense, perverts deserve to die; it includes Electra and any person with whom Trudy had some kind of affair. Ironically, white men are killed for misogynist reasons. However, the protagonist is the one dominating the university campus from the beginning of the novel, creating alliances, and fighting for the battles she considers important, her life and innocence included.

As is part of an erotic novel, sex and its games are recurrent in constructing action. Electra introduces her office, her relationship to the widow of the first victim, and her colleague with whom she has an alliance using a sex scene to demarcate her relations at the university. As private and public spaces get blurred in the office, for being part of the university and workplace, still being hers own, this is where the first sex scene, after the prologue, takes place. When she returns to her office after the first murder, Virginia, the wife of the deceased, with whom she had had an affair, is waiting for her. This scene involves Virginia alluring Electra into sex and the latter taking control of the act:

She seized my right hand and placed it on her breast. I knew what I should do, but I couldn't fight her seductive trap. I stood immobile and felt the warmth of her tongue titillating my middle finger.

“Virginia,” I whispered.

Her gaze was less than intoxicating with her aberrant black eye. I closed my eyes and massaged her breast, unbuttoned her blouse and excavated for warm flesh beneath her bra. I guess excavation was my expert vocation.

“We shouldn't,” I heard myself say.

“Why not? Everybody knows. I'm no stranger to your office.”

I slid to my knees and lifted her black pencil skirt. She wasn't wearing underwear. I shook my head as she pushed my mouth between her legs. I found her sex wet, metallic and divine. The woman was definitely attempting

to distract me. Her moans became strident and although my office was far from the main hallway, I thought someone might hear. (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p)

Virginia seduces Electra and, although the protagonist considers the former a suspect in the murder, she takes into the provocation. Electra is a murder suspect from the perspective of the police and being caught with Virginia could be used as motive. Sex, danger, and pleasure come intertwined in this scene for, at least, two reasons: 1) they are in an office at a university, so, although private, in the sense that is Electra's office, it is not a place where the sexual act should be performed; 2) being caught having an affair with this woman specifically strengthens the case against Electra. Thus, by accepting Virginia's provocation, Electra also embraces for her own pleasure the risks of this encounter.

This balance of danger and desire can be read as an allegory of the meandering a Xicana goes through in the higher education system. This sex scene is about power and leverage. At first, Virginia conducts the act ("She reached for my hand and kissed my fingers"; "She seized my right hand and placed it on her breast"), but as soon as Electra decides to participate, she becomes an active agent in the play. Virginia is described as a woman who participates in high society circles and has a driven for money and status, while hiding that which gives her pleasure: "Virginia? From an elite family that had lost all its money, she married into power and prestige. [...] For her, money was the means to power, her chief aphrodisiac, and she was drawn predominantly to powerful men even if she didn't like to fuck them. Women, on the other hand, serviced her regularly and clandestinely." In the office sex scene, Electra becomes the one in charge; their pleasure is in her hands and body. She accepts the provocation, the imposition of a hegemonic institution, even though it puts her at risk, so she can take upon the opportunities offered her, and then takes control and does her work. For this college has a high number of students of color, Electra uses her position as professor to teach history from another perspective. She appropriates the system to find other forms of teaching (it can be seen in the chapters she mentions the Occupy Wall Street movement and in the use of Greek tragedy to discuss contemporary Latina women: chapters 03 and 21, respectively). Desire increases danger, but also offers the opportunity for control, for agency. Sex is, thus, political and here is symbolized in the fractured locus between colonized thinking and decolonizing process.

Sex brings to the fore social dynamics. For instance, how does the power relation work in the scene when Electra has sex with one of her students? They are both adults and they both give consent, still the professor/student is an asymmetrical relationship. As affirms Moraga,

When we are moved sexually toward someone, there is a profound opportunity to observe the microcosm of all human relations, to understand

power dynamics both obvious and subtle, and to meditate on the core creative impulse of all desire. Desire is never politically correct. In sex, gender roles, race relations, and our collective histories of oppression and human connection are enacted. (MORAGA, 2004, p. 232)

Thus, a scene might be scrutinized in search for the human interactions being reproduced. In the one previous analyzed, with Virginia, the “creative impulse of desire”, as Moraga puts it, destabilizes the expected Western social relations of the university. On the other hand, the sex scene with the student seems to reproduce some level of asymmetrical power dynamics. I say “some level” because the two characters are Latina women who openly express their sexuality, so, for it alone, they are breaking normative social expectations. Brisa, the student, is a working-class Latina with whom Electra had sexual adventures in the extradiegetic past and, in one instance, diegetically in a classroom. Brisa’s *latinidad* and wit are that which attract the protagonist. However, the professor/student divide continues carrying power relations that cannot be ignored.

In this microcosm of the university, of Latinas occupying this space, their attraction to each other as bonding between Latinas is worth the risk of entering in a sexual act with this specific power dynamic. This movement does not occur in the conscious level, though. The desire is impregnated with social information that creates this specific attraction between them; Brisa’s *latinidad* attracts Electra in the sense that history, memory, and social construction are inscribed in the body that desires and is desired, as Pérez describes the relationship between body, memory, and desire in *Decolonial Imaginary* (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 108). Both Moraga and Pérez concur that the surfacing of desire may showcase the microcosm of human connections for analysis of power dynamics. In this sense, more than simply scenes from an erotic novel, these passages from *Electra’s* (with Virginia and with Brisa) perform through sex the colliding and colluding forces enacted in social relations.

The narrative intends to display the sexual dynamics with the student in a way that diminishes Electra’s role as a player starting a sexual flirting. Again, as it happens with Virginia, Brisa is the one initiating the foreplay, after Electra clearly affirming that now they have a teacher/student affair, so their putting this desire into action is not without problems:

“Brisa, last summer you weren’t my student.”

[...]

She closed the door and locked it. She grabbed my hand and led me to a corner of the classroom away from the windows. I intended a counterattack by escaping through a window but when she placed my hand on her thigh, I was done for. I skimmed the flesh with my fingers and lifted her leg, pulling it wide and around my ass. With access to her thong, I ripped it and stretched my fingers inside. (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p)

As the scene continues, Brisa is described as “assertive”, conscious of her involvement with a professor (“I’m almost forty and I know professors and students shouldn’t fuck”), and in control of her sexuality. In general, the novel follows Electra’s standpoint; however, at this point, the reader has access to Brisa’s perspective of their relationship. This strategy seeks to alleviate the student/professor hierarchy by focusing on the conscious and agency of the one who otherwise would occupy the weakest side of the divide. Beyond the power dynamics between professor and student, what this scene entails is the sexual attraction between Xicana women, their beauty, personality, and intellect.

Using explicit erotic language, the novel uses signs that write women’s body and actions into the realm of the erotic novel. As the previous scene continues, for instance, the narrative describes Brisa’s orgasm:

I sucked harder on her nipple, drew circles on her clitoris with my thumb and thrust fingers potently until she expanded and drenched my hand. Her breast rose and she breathed faintly and as she was about to come, I buried my mouth against hers and felt her moan into mine. She tilted her head back, eyes closed and sighed. (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p)

The novel itself, then, also becomes a fractured locus, along with the classroom and the office, for, here, the language of eroticism gives agency to the pleasure of women of color, putting them in position of control. They know their body and are not ashamed of use them for their own and other women’s pleasure. Both characters are women, and women are also the intended audience. The scene is seductive and powerful and highly imagetic bearing the intention of exciting the reader. Words that, in the world of repression against female pleasure, would be silenced, such as “orgasm” and “clitoris”, appear in the novel unceremoniously.

In order to feel comfortable enough to take risks in the university campus, the protagonist relies on constructing bridges that help them protect each other. In the battleground that is the university in the fight to decolonize thinking, alliances are crucial. The “dead white men’s club” and Electra know that. Therefore, the importance of the hiring battle. In the case of Electra, she has Adrián as her ally. The novel introduces Adrián for the first time by demonstrating their alliance: “My colleague across the hall and I agreed to warn each other by blinking the hall lights in case the noise in either of our offices grew clamorous or suspicious” (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p). The protagonist uses her desire to mark that she belongs to the place. She feels comfortable enough to break some rules of the institution knowing that she has a friendship with another colleague. Their alliance solidifies in both being queer Latin professors and supporting each other: “I could always rely on him. He was a newly hired assistant

professor, but I had known him since he—formerly she—was Andrea. A transguy, Adrián and I had a solid friendship; in fact, he was probably one of my most trusted friends [...]” (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p). Adrián offers Electra an interlocutor with whom she can freely talk, without the pressure of being under surveillance from hegemonic institutions – the university or the police. They discuss their love affairs, the murder suspects, and daily perceptions of the world. The relationship between Electra and Adrián reinforces their belonging in an institution that is usually deemed elitist and exclusionary.

The aesthetical and political approach affect each other so perspectives in dialogue may display distinct strategies. This movement is visible in *Electra's* and *Forgetting*. They both deal with repressive environments and oppressive relations of power in plotlines involving murders, discrimination, and queer subjects. However, the tone and style of each of these literary texts change their political approach to these issues. As a differential strategy, each novel accomplishes distinct configurations that lead to distinct directions of resistance and transformative possibilities. Micaela's journey does not give room for humor or sarcasm. She suffers all kinds of physical and psychological violence that throws her into alcoholism and self-destructive actions. She cannot see irony or relief in the genocides, rapes, and killings that she witnesses. The aesthetics of the text accompanies the tragedy of the protagonist. On the other hand, Electra's approach to the series of crimes of which she becomes a suspect is more humorous, ironic, and even comedic. Below, I bring two previously cited passages from each of Pérez's novel to compare them side by side:

I breathed in the moonlight's air feeling warm and secure from her nearness. I sat up and took a long deep breath and filled my lungs with something unknown to me. Something that was not sorrow. I did not recognize all I felt.” (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p)

To be with her meant my inner turmoil subsided momentarily and I was hopeful again about some kind of future for me but only if she was in the future I envisioned.” (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p)

Like most history departments, mine also accommodated a group of elderly men from European ethnic backgrounds, meaning very white, very pale, very committed to Jacobean traditions.” (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p)

Oops. Too late, I thought. Oh no. The *mierda* is going to hit the fan now. If this guy was capable of killing men just because Trudy gave them blow jobs, he was capable of killing women who had engaged in rather racy sexual activities with her. (PÉREZ, 2015, n.p)

Despite Micaela trying to describe something positive in her life, often related to her proximity to Clara, the darkness of her living experience surfaces in the text. Hopefulness appears beside the momentarily subsiding of an inner turmoil. Micaela's sense of security is only described when followed by her expressing that she did not know this feeling before. These examples permeate the whole novel. Differently, Electra uses mockery to counter the Western discourse that tries to marginalize her in the department where she works and the misogynist motives of the killer, even when her life is at risk. Electra's tone about her colleagues ("very white, very pale, very committed to Jacobean traditions") evidences her lack of seriousness regarding these men's research topics. Despite being a majority in her department, they are a joke for her: they are members of the "dead white men's club".

These stylistic choices illustrate the strategies used to discuss issues that materialize in the novels. They map out different possibilities for creatively contesting the colonial system of oppression. From a nomadic perspective, analyzing these novels together, they engage in what Chela Sandoval calls "differential consciousness". The reader navigates different aesthetics and political positions, from one work to the other. Sandoval affirms that "[t]he psychic and physical spaces in which subjugated citizen-subjects live is also understood to be an at least metaphoric, if not real, 'war zone.' It is from this place that oppositional consciousness under neocolonial postmodernism has been generated" (2000, p. 28). The tragic tone of Micaela's story forces us to acknowledge the unbearable violence of colonizing forces, while Electra's humor destabilizes the Western thinking from within a Eurocentric institution. Neither performs these movements alone. They build bridges capable of holding them secure, even if for a short period of time or in specific places.

The "click. Click. Click" of *El Cucuy* is an ever presence of danger in the lives of those defying coloniality. With Portuguese and Spanish origins, the folk tale goes that "El Cucuy is a small creature with glowing eyes and razor-sharp teeth in a head like a coconut. He hangs from rooftops and lurks under beds, looking for misbehaving children" (joanne RANDOLPH, 2018, p. 34). According to Rafaela Castro, "[i]n Chicano culture, fear of violence after dark is always prevalent. It may be fear of demons, or fear of the weeping woman *la Llorona*, or *el diablo* who is out enticing young girls, but most often it is fear of the unknown that may cause a loss of innocence and fill a mother's heart with dread" (2001, p. 74). I am using the imagery of ire'ne lara silva's short story "Hiding Place" to think of the effect of decoloniality in spaces taken by colonial forces. Anzaldúa argues for taking risks, facing the unknown, and mobilize bridges to achieve changes. In this sense, *el Cucuy* is symbolic of the colonial power, both as

a creature with European origins that threatens others into obedience and as a pervasiveness presence. Thus, instead of disseminating its legend to scare subjects into obedience, it must be recognized as an imposing presence that can and should be opposed. Decolonizing both the imaginary, as Pérez argues, and the materiality of colonial subjects' existence through the fractured locus, as Lugones advocates, is a process that generates fear, for it faces the forces that impose the homogeneity of the colonial thinking. *El Cucuy* transforms a supposed safe space, a child's home, into a danger one by paralleling the legend with domestic violence. However, as Lugones puts it, coalition in the resistance to the coloniality of gender functions as a starting point for having the fractured locus is common ground (2010, p. 753). Being conscious of colonial forces and constructing bridges with others who are also challenging coloniality may give the courage to face that which is scary.

In these novels, desire exercises movements between danger, safety, and decoloniality. The works hereby analyzed have some common aspects: the authors are both from Texas, as are their protagonists; they point out that these protagonists are Xicanas who deal with discrimination and prejudice, yet in different levels; they articulate the positionalities of the novels from a Xicana perspective, contextualizing and evidencing that these identification affect their desire; their characters also participate in reconstituting the spaces they occupy from these Xicana standpoint; they use their locality to complicate simplistic perceptions of the Borderlands, in the distinct construction of Borderlands that they are involved. On the other hand, they depict different historical times: *Cabañuelas* takes place in the 1980's, *Forgetting the Álamo*, in 1830's, and *Electra's complex*, in 2010's. They also use different strategies to transform and decolonize the spaces the protagonists occupy. The time spent in Spain reconstructs Nena's perception of colonizer/colonized, complicating binarisms without abandoning her ancestry and home. For Nena, the danger of falling in love forces her to rethink new relationships between home, history, affect, and belonging in the Laredo-Spain Borderlands. Pérez (re)writes the conflicts following the battle of the Álamo changing the general jargon "remember the Álamo". The atrocities lived by Micaela should be in the realm of forgetting. Ironically, the novel re-members queer Xicanas into history. The novel decenters a dominant narrative of a historical event and rewrites the traumas of many invaded territory inhabitants. The protagonist can only survive through movement and gender non-conformity. Her brief moments of peace are constructed through her non-normative desire and bridges with other marginalized people.

If coloniality homogenizes spaces and delimits movements, the decolonial processes present in these texts expand the belongings of Xicanas (be it in the Borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico or between two continents apart, the university, or an occupied territory) and complicate spaces where they interact. Women's desire, so often under repression and control, take the protagonism of these different configurations and reconfigures safe and unsafe, functioning as a propulsion to facing danger, and constructing bridges. Nevertheless, they do so through distinct forms and strategies. Now, legend has it that desire may be a weapon against the constant presence of *el Cucuy*. The protagonist of "Hiding Place" is not alone in "swing[ing] down as hard as [she] can" (SILVA, 2013, p. 30) against oppression, and they do hurt and threaten coloniality.

4. CHAPTER 4

“INDIANS ARE EVERYWHERE” OR “EU NÃO TENHO MINHA ALDEIA”: INDIGENEITY AND DESIRE IN THE SEARCH OF ANCESTRAL ROOTS

“We need to think comparatively about the
distinct routes/roots of tribes, barrios,
favellas, immigrant neighborhoods...”

(CLIFFORD, 1997)

This chapter emerges from the constant presence of Indigeneity in the struggle against coloniality. As I propose to use the term “Xicana” regarding the Indigeneity inscribed in Chicanidad, as defended by Ana Castillo (2014) and Moraga (2011), I consider relevant to analyze how this presence surfaces in literary texts. While mapping desire, the relationship with the Native woman appears as the object of desire and as the self-identity that emerges from the desirous encounter. The term “Chicana” is associated with the meeting between the US and Mexico. However, the border subjectivity brings in its multiplicities other fragments that participate in the constitution of such existence. Changing the signifier to “Xicana” forces some level of visibility, if not for fully understanding the meaning and its origin in the use of the “X”, as in the graph of the Nahuatl language, minimally for forcing us to stop at the episteme and acknowledge its alteration. The rupture in the flow of the reading requires a rearrangement of the term in relation to meanings. The “X” brings the visibility to Indigenism along with the Mexican information, characteristics that participate in the Xicana subjectivity but do not follow the same premise in the term “Chicana”. In this sense, this chapter seeks to shed light in this part of Xicana multiplicities, which, otherwise, may run the risk of going unnoticed. More specifically, I analyze desire as a path to an ancestral connection to land through an Indigenous route of affinity.

When certain routes are closed to the path of history recovery, desire is used as an alternative means of connections. This chapter analyzes how Xicanas tie themselves to ancestry through the lives of their objects of desire. The objectification of Indigenous women appears as a recurrent trope in arts. This perception, constructed by an Anglo-European perspective, is complicated in Xicana’s literary works. The ambivalence in their portrayal of Indigeneity, which, while politically (in)formed by their movement to rescue an ancestry that was denied them, still participates in the discourses within the modern colonial system of contemporary

global capitalism. I specifically aim to analyze how desire emerges as a connection within the Borderlands of these subjectivities. So, do the works analyzed in this chapter mythologize the native woman in the process of connecting a Xicana subjectivity to ancestry? Does the materiality of Indigenous issues in the present take part in this connection? If yes, how? What is the participation of land, Indigeneity, and desire in the existence of Xicanidad in these works? To do so, I intend to analyze Ana Castillo's *So far from God* (1992) and return to two works already analyzed in this dissertation, Moraga's *Native country of the heart* (2019) and Pérez's *Forgetting the Álamo* (2009).

The paintings of the French artist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), with his delicate, sensual, passive, and naïve portrayals of Native women, or the novels by the Brazilian author José de Alencar (1829-1877), who wrote *Iracema*, published in 1865, about the forbidden romance between this pure, virgin, and beautiful Indigenous woman and a Portuguese man are some examples of an objectification that, abounding in the artistic milieu, exotifies, silences, and transforms women into a passive other. The description of “Two Tahitian women” (1899) (figure 2), in the Metropolitan Museum of Art website, uses the words of Gauguin himself: “‘very subtle, very knowing in her naïveté’ and enviably ‘capable of walking around naked without shame’”. Jane Duran, in her article “Education and Feminist Aesthetics: Gauguin and the Exotic” (2009), relates primitivism, exoticism, and women as representative of these tropes in the works of the French painter. In Gauguin's art, exoticism and eroticism are linked in the figure of the Native woman.

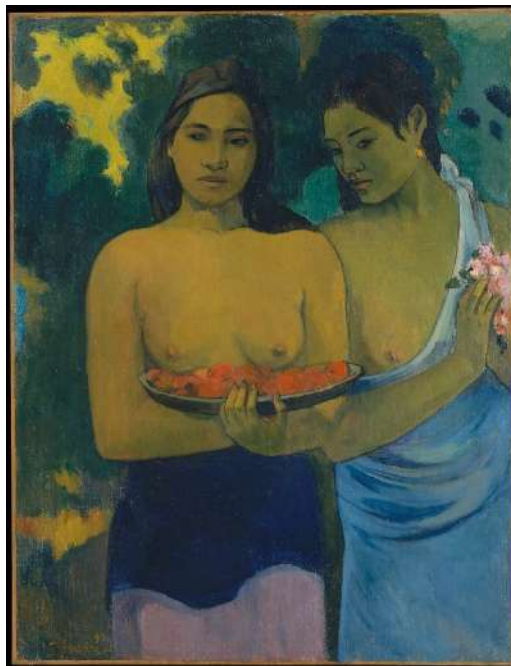


Figure 2: “Two Tahitian Women” (1899), by Paul Gauguin. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art website (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436446>)

In another example, the Brazilian novelist José de Alencar, in the 19th Century, creates a foundational Indigenist origin story for the Brazilian people, mirroring the Chicano Oedipus complex, described by Emma Pérez (1999). Both narratives explore the idea of interracial union between a white male colonizer and a native woman whose offspring represents the idea of a new nation. In *Iracema*, the heroine dies after giving birth to a mestizo son with the Portuguese, Martin. Lucia Sá calls these kind of texts “foundational fictions,” for, “by being read by many and taught in primary schools, they come to represent a certain idea of nationality²⁶” (2012, p. 211, my translation²⁷). My own experience of reading *Iracema* in school as a literary movement can attest to that statement. Alencar’s language gives clues to the problematic discursive constitution of Indigeneity in the Americas. In a letter written by Alencar and analyzed by Sá, terms such as “poetics of the savage” and “true style” appear in his discourse (SÁ, 2012, p. 211). Although trying to praise native language and culture, Alencar still objectifies them as the other. The similarity between distinct origin stories in the Americas is not by chance; instead, these reverberate the pervasiveness of heteronormativity as an instrument of coloniality: the white male colonizer finds in the native female the representation of the land he is out to explore and possess. This problematic relation between male/colonizer/explorer/European to the opposing female/colonized/land/native is discursively reinforced in works such as the ones by Gauguin and Alencar.

When Sá investigates the influence of native peoples’ texts in the literature produced in South America, another work she scrutinizes is *O Falador*, by Mario Vargas Llosa, published in 1987. Sá explains how Llosa slightly changes the Machiguenga cosmology, “drastically affecting our way of looking at these Indigenous people and their view of the world, transforming, for example, the invasion of their territory into a less criminal and less tragic act, suggesting that the Machiguengas are nomads, ‘without a fixed residency’, and are always in movement²⁸” (SÁ, 2012, p. 35). The reactionary approach of the text, Sá continues, also constructs the image of a weak and disperse community. Strategically, Llosa detaches this community from their land, constructing a discourse that justifies the appropriation of the territory, under the excuse of modernization, for imperialist and colonial purposes. This is another example of the importance of theorizing nomadism, as a transformative force,

²⁶ From the original: “ao serem lidos por muitos e ensinados em escolas primárias, vêm a representar certa ideia de nacionalidade.”

²⁷ My translation, as all the translated citations from Lúcia Sá’s *Literaturas da Floresta* in this chapter.

²⁸ From the original: “afetam drasticamente nossa maneira de encarar esses indígenas e sua visão de mundo, transformando, por exemplo, a invasão de seu território num ato menos criminoso e menos trágico, ao sugerir que os machiguengas são nômades, ‘sem residência fixa’, e estão sempre em movimento.”

considering that even nomadic subjects have roots. In this chapter, I investigate how, as characters travel, they also dig further into the roots that avoid their sublimation into colonial discourses.

As I have discussed in this dissertation, mobility is crucial for the connection between desire and geopolitics. Shifting epistemologies, constructing safe spaces, or returning home are movements that come to existence in the paradox of nomadic roots. Nomadic subjects carry their context and historical backgrounds, which, to some groups, need excavations in order not to disappear into erasure and invisibility by hegemonic powers. In *This Bridge Called my Back* (ANZALDÚA; MORAGA, 2002), “roots” appear as that which differentiates the experiences of the authors of the publication while connecting them in their difference:

We named this anthology “radical” [*Writings by Radical Women of Color*] for we were interested in the writings of women of color who want nothing short of a revolution in the hands of women – who agree that that is the goal, no matter how we might disagree about the getting there or the possibility of seeing it in our own lifetimes. We use the term in its original form – stemming from the word “root” – for our feminist politic emerges from the roots of both of our cultural oppression and heritage. (2002, p. liii)

A radical change, in this case “a revolution in the hands of women”, according to the authors, need the perspective of women who had lived distinct forms of oppression and resistance, and this specific perspective comes from their culture and heritage, with all the contradictions, impositions, and habits. The embodiment of their roots participates in what Anzaldúa and Moraga calls “theory in the flesh”: “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (2002, p. 21). These roots can be carried along with the nomadic subjects in their own bodies, in the flesh, while still fed from the geographical, “land or concrete”, locations from where they spread.

Rosi Braidotti opens the introduction of her book *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), with the following epigraph: “It’s great to have roots, as long as you can take them with you” (Gertrude STEIN, in BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 1). The sentence, by Gertrude Stein, stands for the connection between nomadism and the relevance of roots. The paradoxical stance inserts a level of irony that values movement against stillness. This notion undertakes Braidotti’s theorization. Still, she does not ignore the importance of the roots, but she re-thinks them:

How can we re-think the bodily roots of subjectivity [...]? Which body are we putting back into the picture? Intensive body, desiring body, sexually differentiated body, "organs without bodies" body, for whom anatomy is no longer a destiny? And yet this living sexed organism has a unity of its own,

which hangs on a thread: the thread of desire in its inextricable relation to language and therefore to others. (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 56)

In this sense, the first step into re-think a concept is to understand its construction, ideological levels, and (de)naturalization of its meanings, as Sandoval claims in the *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). The body becomes constitutional of the re-thinking process, and the theory in the flesh meets language and desire in the re-configuration of the episteme. “Roots” continue relevant to the constitution of subjectivity, albeit in rearranged epistemological changes. Instead of reinforcing fixity, roots emerge as possibilities for building bridges that (in)form new figurations against coloniality.

Thus, if comprehend one’s roots informs one’s own nomadism, the excavation into a historical context is also part of constructing new figurations in which border, marginalized subjects can abide with all their multiplicities. As this chapter argues, the relation between Xicanas and their Indigenous heritage is constantly on the verge of being erased from their existence. Alicia Gaspar de Alba calls “Chicano/a indigenism [...] an ‘alter-Native’ identity, an identity that is both Other (alter) and indigenous (native) to a specific geography” (2014, p. 102). Alba describes an Indigenous aesthetics as

concerned with portraying a native community’s process of self-determination, cultural survival and continuity, preservation of traditions, negotiation of inside-outside dynamics, political empowerment, and economic sovereignty. In this aesthetic system, community becomes the signifier for place or homeland, for dispossessed people, particularly Native Americans, are also deterritorialized people, relocated by government edict to reservations that lie far beyond their place of origin or that occupy token space on the map of their own homeland. (2014, p. 90)

In a way, these traces are also present in the literary works of Xicanas. Just the same, the idea of “minorities in their own homeland” (ALBA, 2014, p. 90), can also be related to Xicanas. As an alter-Native narrative against erasure, this aesthetics reinforces belonging, community, and cultural traditions. The portrayals described by Alba are acts of resistance against coloniality.

Homogenization, genocide, and shame are some of the technologies (discourse, violence, and affect are intertwine in these machinations) used by coloniality to erase Native people from their history. I do not consider history that which we encounter in museum, frozen in time, dead in the present. Historical context is constructed from information about the past, ancestry, and precedents, but history comes to realization in the present for and from the subjects living today. In this sense, comprehension of the past, the pre- and colonial periods, is relevant in the re-thinking of the bodily roots of subjectivity for those living at this very moment, theorizing from the flesh.

The term “Indian” itself emerges from the process of erasure imposed by the violence of colonization. The colonizers who conquered, sacked, and killed the populations living in the Americas are the ones who named “Indian” the inhabitants of the land they invaded. Anibal Quijano explains:

In the moment that the Iberians conquered, named, and colonized America (whose northern region, North America, would be colonized by the British a century later), they found a great number of different peoples, each with its own history, language, discoveries and cultural products, memory and identity. The most developed and sophisticated of them were the Aztecs, Mayas, Chimus, Aymaras, Incas, Chibchas, and so on. Three hundred years later, all of them had become merged into a single identity: Indians. This new identity was racial, colonial, and negative. (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 551)

The homogenization that accompanied the term “Indian” violently replaced the multiplicity of peoples and cultures in the conquered territory. Thus, the conquest marks the creation of the sign “Indian” and its signifier of racial inferiority. As Quijano puts it: “from then on they were the past. [...] [A]nd because of that inferior, if not always primitive” (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 552). Populations that survived genocide and erasure face the discrimination and the social status that this categorization imposes on them. Paula Gunn Allen says that “[n]obody loves a drunk Indian because a drunk Indian is real, alive, and not at all ideal” (ALLEN, 1998, p. 27). Her ironic claim revolves in the fact that for the existence of the “good Indian”, they should be in the past, dead and in a museum. The reality of Indigeneity is a menace for the colonial discourse, for it denounces the arbitrariness of the dichotomies that construct the Western as civilized, peaceful, intelligent, and savior, and the “Indians” as none of these things.

Xicana Indigeneity seeks to valorize the marginalized side of the binary matrix and to complicate the dichotomic Western perspective through the subject of the mestiza, who, by constitution, cannot be part of one or the other subjectivity; rather, she is one *and* the other *and* the other *and* the other. However, figurations constructed by Xicanas are not free of the complications created by the colonial discourse. Sheila Marie Contreras points out how texts discussing pre-Conquest historical contexts and subjects usually disregard the “Indigenous populations of the present” rendering a mythological aura to a people that survived the genocide of the conquest (2008, p. 11). In this way, the materiality of the present should be taken into consideration to align the aesthetical, political, and material issues involved in the real existence of Indigenous subjectivity. Notwithstanding their interest in creating a sense of belonging and identity, this is a rhetorical pitfall from which Xicanas are not completely exempt.

Contreras discusses, for instance, how Anzaldúa uses myths from Aztec culture, not exactly from the geographical place in which she grew up, to create a range of women's archetypes and a personal connection to herself. For Contreras, the readings of Anzaldúa's theorizations often leave out the influence of Anglo-European ethnographic and anthropological studies. Although Anzaldúa mentions such influences in her text – the fact that part of her theorization comes from seeing a Coatlicue statue in a museum and the references to Jung being two instances of these moments – her appropriation and construction of a Xicana literary tradition can be perceived as an essentialist, unmediated, take on the Aztec pantheon. Contreras analyzes the ambiguity present in *Borderlands*:

In fact, it is with reference to images from Aztec mythology—recast, refashioned, and revalued—that Anzaldúa represents the characteristics of a repressed, but nonetheless resistant, mestiza consciousness in *Borderlands*. Aztec mythology provides a specifically ethnographic basis for asserting the indigenous side of mestiza consciousness, which is depicted as the site of cultural contact and confrontation. Consequently, indigeneity exists most forcefully in Anzaldúa's text as myth and signifies the denied or unconscious side of mestiza consciousness. And although Anzaldúa strives to give expression to the indigenous elements of Chicana identity in the present, her persistent appeal to an Aztec pantheon represented by Coatlicue/Serpent Skirt, Tlazolteotl, the snake, and smoking mirror effectively dehistoricizes the relations between Chicanas/os and Natives. (2008, p. 116-117)

I do not agree with Contreras if she expects to find historical accuracy in Anzaldúa's text. Anzaldúa has not hidden her experience in a museum – an institution of coloniality, used to fix native communities in the past, homogenizing and generalizing their existence. The potency of robing configurations of women from a masculinist pantheon and reconstructing them in new, queer, and feminist figurations is present in Anzaldúa's work exactly in the archetypes she reconstructs from the Aztec mythology. In this sense, reading Anzaldúa as a factual historical reconstruction of the past Aztec society is, of course, going to show flaws in her theorization. The dehistoricization mentioned by Contreras happens when trying to read Anzaldúa's thinking through the light of chronological history. However, her mythologization of Aztec symbols to retrieve women from masculinists perspectives helps to create a literary tradition in which women's roles have more figurations than the repressive ones offered by Eurocentric interpretations of the same symbols that she recuperates from the Aztec pantheon. So, if on one hand dehistoricization occurs in the appropriation of Indigenous symbols, Anzaldúa re-historicizes these very same symbols to expose sexists and racists perspectives, constructing new figurations for the pantheon of women's archetypes. The ambiguity of the process relies on the erasure and re-writing of historicity and on what "history" means. The Xicana author

appropriates the ancient Aztec symbols, enmeshes them with her experience, as a mestiza, and reconstructs new figurations, rehistoricizing past and present at the same time.

To understand the relevance of myth in Contreras debate, we need, first, to understand how she defines myth: “myth is a form of speech, [...] it reactivates the sign as form to initiate a further system of signification, [...] it depends upon history even as it erases it, and that it renders its motivations as part of a natural order” (2008, p. 14). Thus, departing from Levy-Strauss and Barthes, Contreras reads mythologization as the construction of meaning that erases its history and renders itself natural, giving an aura of stability to floating signifiers, anchoring meanings which were supposed to be mobile. Ideology and myth are, then, intertwined in language. Hence, by saying that Anzaldúa mythologizes Aztec women, she is in fact emphasizing the dehistoricizing perspective of Anzaldúa’s theorizations.

If dehistoricization takes place--for Anzaldúa is overlapping two distinct temporalities and geographies, namely, ancient Aztec time and her present existence, and the Borderlands between U.S. and Mexico and the pre-Columbian Aztec city and temples (located where today is Mexico City)--counterdiscourse is the other part of this multichronological-spatial enmeshment. Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui, Shadow-Beast, the Serpent woman are just some of the figurations that she reworks from a masculinist perspective to a queer feminist Indigenist new pantheon. As Norma Alarcón discusses, Anzaldúa does a disidentificatory work in relation to “The Man of Reason” and begins a construction of multiple voices and standpoints; it is resistance against and disruption of the Western way of thinking (ALARCÓN, 1993). I concur with Contreras when she argues that Anzaldúa mythologizes the native women. However, the relevance of *Borderlands* and Anzaldúa in the new pantheon of women figurations is not disrupted by the process of mythologization, for the multiplicity of voices and standpoints, within which Indigenous perspectives are also part, still reverberates in Xicanas’s political and aesthetical writings. Contreras reads in Anzaldúa’s Shadow-Beast, for instance, as a rebellion that emerges from “the legacy of her Indian blood” (CONTRERAS, 2008, p. 121). The ambiguity within the mythologization in Xicana literature relies exactly on the juggling between historicity and myth. Contreras’s criticism is relevant so we do not forget to weigh in the pervasiveness of coloniality even in decolonial rereadings and rewritings of cultural symbols.

The recurrent presence of the Aztec Princess’s trope in Xicana literature illustrates the debate raised by Contreras. In Catriona Rueda Esquibel’s analysis of Terri de la Peña’s short

story “La Maya” (1989), the critic calls attention to the depiction of the Aztec Princess as part of a sexual imaginary that seeks authenticity to Indigeneity and to Mexicaness. Esquibel states:

This sexualization of the native woman is problematic because it participates in international practices of selling third world women to first world consumers. [...] Adriana [the protagonist] does not perceive her desiring gaze as the gaze of the colonizer. The implication is that because she is lesbian and, more important, because she is Chicana, her desire for “la Maya” is represented as free of unequal power relations. (ESQUIBEL, 2006, p. 59)

Agreeing with Esquibel, Contreras asserts that “La Maya” participates in the mythologization of the Indigenous woman.

On another note, Contreras and Esquibel argue that Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s “La Mariscal” (1993) plays with the fetishization of the Aztec Princess at the same time that it subverts certain expectations about this sexual imaginary. Contreras affirms that “Gaspar de Alba’s story [...] offers to us a critique of the fetishization of the pre-Columbian Native woman, a call to be aware of its artifice” (2008, p. 158). In this story, the agency of the native woman character lays in part on her capacity to manipulate the desirable princess: “the object of the scholar’s desiring gaze is a postmodern princess prostitute, aware of the roles intended for her and able to manipulate them to her own advantage” (ESQUIBEL, 2006, p. 61). As Susana/Bertha, in de Alba’s short story, plays with the exoticism of the Native woman to elude the desire of a gringo white man, the narrative sheds light into issues of prostitution, women’s objectification, and precarity in the Borderlands. In this sense, “La Mariscal” is considered what Contreras calls “the contra-mythic in Chicana literature”, “because [it] directs attention to Chicana/o indigenism: its naturalization of a socially constructed racial category, ‘Indian,’ and its links to the anthropological archive” (CONTRERAS, p. 161).

The texts to be analyzed in this chapter explore Indigeneity in the ambivalence of the mythologized imaginary and the historical contexts that constructed the discursive and material circumstances of the present. As the protagonists of each novel see in their lover’s counterpart the Indigeneity that was denied them, they elaborate their desires in terms of belonging and subjectivities. The derided connotation of “Indian” plays a role in their dynamics while they try to embrace their connections to an ancestry related to Pre-Columbian societies. Before moving on to the analysis of Indigeneity and desire in Xicana texts, I shall discuss the works of two Indigenous authors that politically construct their writings from personal and collective experiences: Paula Gunn Allen and Eliana Potiguara.

The themes of movement and mestizaje, central to the Xicana works to be discussed later in this chapter, are predominant in the book *Off the Reservation: Reflections on Boundary-*

Busting Border-Crossing Loose Canons (1998), by Gunn Allen. The title is already playing with mobility, as Allen explains:

I chose the name because if anything defines the American Indian peoples' post-Columbian situation, it is the freedom to leave and return to reservation or local communities. Off reservation we are indeed a motley crew: carrying every variety of blood that has found its way to our ancient continent. Faced with not only duality [...] but with multitude of complexities that are perhaps aptly summed up by our mixed blood, mixed-culture status. [...] "Off the reservation" is an expression current in military and political circles. It designates someone who doesn't conform to the limits and boundaries of officialdom, who is unpredictable and thus uncontrollable. (Allen, 1998, p. 6)

Allen's re/collection of essays dismantles some of the assumptions constructed by hegemonic discourses. She opens her introduction breaking preconceived ideas about authenticity, fixability, and pre-determined definitions – made by others – of what should an "Indian" be. As she puts it, "Indians are everywhere" (1998, p. 7), lifting any chains created by mainstream discourses which limit where marginalized people should be or could go.

Hegemonic discourse transforms the "good Indian" into a dead one and fixes their whole existence to reservations or museums, reinforcing the idea that these peoples belong to the past, as argued by Quijano, for the current existence of Indigenous societies is a continuous menace to the Western modern colonial way of life. Allen ironizes the phrase "[t]he only good Indian is dead", by reminding us that "there are millions of good Indians somewhere" (1998, p. 38). For Allen, the "Indian", in the Anglo-Eurocentric imaginary, has to die because they are a menace to the image of the Western societies that they construct for themselves. The ones who dare survive are living proof that the idea that Western society is civilized does not stand against the violence upon native peoples: these peoples "can be interjected into the American dream", destabilizing it (1998, p. 27). This is an existence that is present against all genocides, still displacing hegemonic discourse erasures. This existence is ever present in the fractured locus of materiality and discourse – to use Lugones's term.

Along Allen's essays, ideas on mobility and multiplicity travel in-between the words. Between fleeing home and returning, she tells stories, and the relevance of telling stories, to construct the geographical places where they come to life. Narratives mark the author's belonging and movements through space and life. This is how she maintains herself and her peoples alive: "A region is bounded, characterized by geographical features, but these features take on a human and spiritual dimension when articulated in language. [...] [I]t is within the stories that all the dimensions of human sensation, perception, conception, and experience come together" (ALLEN, 1998, p. 234). The multiplicities that exist in Indigeneity are also

materialized in the telling of the stories, which in their existence resist homogenization and delimitation. As Allen states, she is not going to be fenced in; she is on and off reservation, for her existence is mobile.

In the movement of keeping herself and her narratives alive, Eliane Potiguara, a Brazilian Indigenous writer, also tells her stories. Potiguara, in *Metade Cara, Metade Máscara* (2018), published for the first time in 2004, highlights another type of migration: a forced one. In her case, her grandmother had to move after her husband's assassination. Through the stories of her family, who had to move from Paraíba, in the Northeast, to Rio de Janeiro, in the Southeast of Brazil, in the beginning of the 20th Century, Potiguara rescues her sense of belonging to the tribe that she was forced to grow apart. Poverty, disconnection to the community, death, sickness, and discrimination are some of the issues she raises while discussing her and her family's journey. The poem "Eu não tenho minha aldeia" (POTIGUARA, 2018, p. 151) describes the violence of being separated from one's community and the resilience of constructing belongings from scratch, which survives colonization:

Mas eu não tenho minha aldeia	But I don't have my <i>aldeia</i> ²⁹
E a sociedade intolerante me cobra	And the intolerant society asks me
Algo físico que não tenho	Something physical I don't have
Não porque queira	Not because I want to
Mas porque de minha família foi tirada	But because my family was taken away
Sem dó, nem piedade.	Remorselessly ³⁰
(POTIGUARA, 2018, p. 151)	

This stanza brings two relevant issues to the debates Potiguara addresses in her book. The first, already mentioned, the forced migration that separates her from her community (*aldeia*). Without her *aldeia*, she lacks the sense of belonging. *Metade Cara*, then, recovers Potiguara's journey back to her Indigenous roots, her activism, and the threats against her life because of her work as an activist. The second issue refers to the imposition of what an "Indian" should be; in other words, the cruel results of this forced displacement. On the one hand, war against Indigenous communities to expel them from their land kills and displaces thousands of people. On the other hand, once they are scattered in cities, living in poor conditions, displaced, society argues they are not "Indians", because they are not living in *aldeias*, in traditional ways. Resonating Allen's discussion, hegemonic discourses try to define what an "Indian" could be.

²⁹ I chose to keep the term "aldeia" in Portuguese because this is a very specific and important term, used to define the groups that Indigenous peoples belong. *Aldeia* is both the community and land where they are located. It could be translated into "village" or, in Spanish, "pueblo", but it would lose the specificities of the context.

³⁰ My translation, as all the translated citations from *Metade Cara, Metade Máscara* in this chapter.

The hegemonic power responsible for forced migrations is the same that prevents those outside the communities to claim their identity.

Potiguara tells how she returns to her ancestors's home and how encountering this reattachment to her history is also responsible for her activism. The concept of "Off reservation" as discussed by Allen bridges into *Metade Cara* so both the forced and volunteered movements present in the book articulate the resilience and resistance of a marginalized population. Their storytelling emerges in the fractured locus, enmeshing resistance, coloniality, violence, attachment to a place and mobility, all at the same time. It is relevant that their connection to their ancestry and to the land do not fix them in one position or subjectivity. Because they found such connections, they trace different routes and keep vias of returning always open. Continuing Potiguara's poem, the speaker says:

<p>Ah! Já tenho minha aldeia Minha aldeia é Meu Coração ardente É a casa de meus antepassados E do topo dela eu vejo o mundo Com o olhar mais solidário que nunca Onde eu possa jorrar Milhares de luzes Que brotarão mentes Despossuídas de racismo e preconceito. (POTIGUARA, 2018, p. 152)</p>	<p>Ah! I already have my <i>aldeia</i> My <i>aldeia</i> is My flaming Heart It's the house of my ancestors And from its top I see the world With a more sympathetic gaze than ever Where I can flow Thousands of lights That will sprout minds Dispossessed of racism and prejudice.</p>
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This stanza, from the same poem, brings terms such as *aldeia*, home, world, ancestors, and minds linked to form the sense of belonging for those ripped out of their land and history. The local and global are present in this belonging, contradicting discourses that try to fence³¹ some groups into specific fixed positions.

Metade Cara is constructed through storytelling, memoir, personal and collective testimonies, manifesto, documents, and poems, to form a multi-genre cross-border text that cannot be easily categorized or contained. The hybrid form of the text itself and the dismantling of borders and genres are already in conversation with many of the other works analyzed in this dissertation. To a certain extent, the text emulates how Potiguara offers multiple readings to oppose homogenization. The history of Brazil is told from the actions and consciousness of Indigenous representatives. The narrator also reinforces the importance of public policies to raise awareness against violence and to preserve reproductive health rights. By doing so, her writings are in accordance with Lugones who contends that genderification and racialization

³¹ "Don't Fence me in" is the title of Allen's Introduction to *Off the Reservation* where she elaborates on the relationship between mobility and Indigenous people (ALLEN, 1998, p. 1).

cannot be considered separate roads to thinking about regimes of oppression. Allen and Potiguara tell stories based on their lives, so they can recover and pass forward the philosophical ways of thinking of distinct groups. They use their families, their villages, discriminations against them, and their movements to keep forms of knowledge that coloniality tries to erase on the surface.

Allen's and Potiguara's discussions relate indirectly to Xicana, land, and Indigeneity. Xicanas, in general, are not raised as or have lived in Indigenous communities; in that their experience differs from Allen's and Potiguara's. However, Xicanas also have challenges claiming parts of their mestiza identity that relate to Indigeneity. Although Potiguara grew up in the city and retrieved her connections to her people after adulthood, Xicanas, more often than not, do not have this familial trace to link them to their *aldeias*. Sandra Cisneros's description of her dealing with the census may illustrate my argument:

The U.S. census form arrives by mail, and I find myself confused by the most basic question.

"What are we?" I call out to Ray, my partner, who is working in his study.

[...]

We don't agree with being classified as "Hispanics," that slave name I connect with presidents who never even bothered to ask us what we call ourselves. What's in a name? Everything. If it doesn't really matter, why won't "wetback" do?

Ray and I decide after some conversation to check "other".

But then the census form insists on details and offers ethnic categories.

We claim "indigenous" because we don't know how to explain it in one word. But after I check off "indigenous," the next question baffles us even more:

What tribe?

[...]

"They want to know what tribe we are. What shall I say?"

After some discussion we agree to write in "*mestizo*". (CISNEROS, 2015, p. 259)

They may carry the phenotype, the political alliance, and consciousness, yet the claim of being "indigenous" is not without complications. Unable to trace themselves back to one specific tribe, calling themselves "indigenous" is not formally accepted. Cisneros appeals to her *mestizaje* so she does not need to fall into being named "Hispanic", for she considers it a colonizing term, and "indigenous" is not allowed for her in official documents, as is the census form.

The native woman, as Norma Alarcón names the representation of Indigenous women in Xicana literature, emerges from the simultaneous disconnection and desire to claim the Indigenous part of their *mestizaje*. According to Alarcón, this movement "to pluralize the racialized body by redefining part of their experience through the reappropriation of 'the' native

woman on Chicana feminist terms, marked one of the first assaults on male-centred cultural nationalism on the one hand [...], and patriarchal political economy on the other” (1990, p. 251). The representation of the native woman, thus, opposes patriarchy, repression, and displacement at the same time. In the sense that it “redefines part of their experience through the reappropriation”, the subjectivities at work become double: (1) the Xicana that reappropriates the native woman and (2) the Indigenous women who are being reappropriated by an other. The difference here is that, as mentioned before, Xicanas are trying to create a sense of belonging, so the divide between the “other” and the “I” becomes blurred. As Allen puts it, multiplicity, migration, and *mestizaje* are deeply connected to Indigenous peoples – as they also inform the constitution of Xicanas. It is in this blurred area that the authors to be analyzed here construct their stories.

4.1. Sibangna and the huipil in Moraga’s memoir

Moraga’s memoir *Native country of the heart* (2019) seeks to retrieve the ancestry of her family by telling the story of the mother Elvira, along with that of her own. This narrative unfolds Moraga’s process of recovering her history as a Mexican descendant with Indigenous background growing up in a family that oftentimes erased this information from their own self-identification. Interestingly, the memoir also unveils the family relationship with Elvira’s process of losing her memory due to Alzheimer’s disease. By doing so, Moraga plays with remembrance and forgetfulness metonymically interlacing mental disability and coloniality.

Metonymy emerges as a figure of speech building the bridge between coloniality and disability. Inquiring about the recurrent theorization of metaphors in the field of autobiography studies as a form of representing the self, Leigh Gilmore argues that metonymy complicates the relationship between the I-narrator and the I-author, forcing more connections than one figure simply representing the other: “When autobiography studies focus on metonymy, they recognize the continual production of identity as a kind of patterning sustained through time by the modes of production that create it” (1994, p. 69). As Renata Lucena Dalmaso puts it, “[m]etaphor, in this sense, is dependent on a clear equivalent, whereas metonymy relies on a continued construction of meaning. As figures of speech go, metaphor is stable in its binary hierarchy of meanings whereas metonymy is more fluid and contextual” (2015, p. 153). Dalmaso continues stating that the autobiographical genre complicates the polysemy of representing disability whilst still being produced through discourse:

[the] portrayal of disability cannot be defined only through the critique of the ‘opportunistic metaphorical device’ [...]. Nevertheless, the discursive effects

of constructing disability as symbolic are still present in autobiographic narratives. Regardless of the assumed anchor to materiality entailed in the narrating *I* of the autobiographical text, the self presented to the reader is still constructed through the course of the narrative, through discourse. (DALMASO, 2015, p. 155)

Materiality, figure of speech, and aesthetics meet in the production of a metonymical interlacing. Thus, the relation between coloniality and the loss of memory caused by the Alzheimer's is not a direct one. It is constructed through the excavations of history that become visible in the sentence "*también soy india*" (MORAGA, 2019, p. 181; original emphasis), said by Elvira in the end of the chapter "Sibangna." It is not by chance that this specific chapter in the book brings a sequence of intertwined family and Indigenous stories before ending in the sentence proffered by Elvira. The line seems like a direct affirmation of identity (*being* as identification, both as Mexican, in the Spanish language, and as Indigenous, in the affirmation). However, the complex connection between historical erasure and Alzheimer's forgetfulness is constructed through the materiality of the living experience and the aesthetics of the literary text. Metonymically, the line is a representation of an identity constantly under erasure as well as a material symptom of the mental illness.

The opening of the chapter "Sibangna" points out that uncovering her family history is an act of excavation against forgetfulness, a dig to find her family's past and her presence in it:

In 1977, as I stuffed my Volkswagen bug to its metal gills and headed north on 101, following in the highway wake of thousands of young people in pursuit of "liberation," I had no way of knowing that twenty-five years later, I would return to San Gabriel to uncover what was left there. Ostensibly in search of my mother's history, it was my own buried remains I sought. *But how do you dig up amnesia?* (MORAGA, 2019, p. 174, author's emphasis)

This passage reinforces the importance of mobility in the constitution of one's own self. The term "liberation" appears between quotes as the narrator resignifies it. First as a symbol of leaving home to move to cities considered more progressive (Moraga describes various moments of her living in New York or San Francisco), the narrator recognizes herself as liberated only when she returns to excavate the Indigenous history of the place where she grew up, in search for a connection to her own family. The last sentence in this passage builds the relationship between her mother's illness and her historical excavations.

The imagery of digging as a work done with one's bare hands represents the troubles of excavating one's marginalized historical past. Moraga brings up the term "Digger Indians", a derogatory name given by anthropologists to the Natives from that area, "the Gabrieleños-Tongva", to the undertaking of recovering pieces of memories. She opens the following

paragraph with “Diggers. Digger Indians is the name the anthropologists first gave to the Indigenous peoples of California” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 174). The word “digger” as a phrase, isolated in the opening of the paragraph, reinforces the comparison of retracing one’s history and the work of archeologists. This metaphor constructs a palpable image to the abstraction of re-membering pieces of memory. Then, she continues to specify which group is native to that region, changing the general “digger Indians” to the particularity of one group, “the Gabrieleños-Tongva”. She acknowledges the diminishing that is to reduce a whole group to one action of survival: they “were similarly denigrated, reduced to the image of broken nails scratching at the equally broken earth in search of supper. And yet this was exactly how I had felt scouring my mother’s past for a sign of palpable memory” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 174). In this comparison, “broken” relates to affective ties to the past, once reconstruction is always already incomplete and partial. This is the first parallel, in the chapter, she traces between the Indigenous groups living in the region and her own history.

The amnesia Moraga discusses in her memoir is twofold: her mother’s Alzheimer’s and the historical erasure that tries to separate her from her ancestry. The interlocking of these two forms of amnesia is reconciled when, through her illness, Elvira admits her Indianness, a quest materialized by the end of the chapter, when Elvira states: “*Bueno, también soy india*” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 181; original emphasis). Her acknowledgement cannot pinpoint any tribal name, for this is a route back that Elvira does not have, but the general “*india*” in this case is more specific than the denial that was recurrent in the family. This is one piece of memory excavated: “*soy india*”. As excavation usually goes, the digger needs to fill in the missing information; the excavated piece cannot construct the discourse around itself alone. Because the narrator cannot identify the reasons for the assertion, she plays once more with memory and forgetfulness. The affection to the mother’s statement is so powerful that the rest of the conversation becomes unimportant, and the only memory that sticks is the statement. The narrator forgets the rest of the conversation, nurturing the first time her mother establishes this relation of belonging. The erasure of memory, a symptom of the mental disability, creates a route back to the ancestors that previously she would have denied. Shame, a feeling constantly accompanying discussions about Indigeneity in the family, is left out of the enunciation: “the words fell so easily from her lips, this time without shame”. The narrator transforms this statement into a piece of memory coming back from ancestry: “Without tribal name or entitlement, and just as Alzheimer’s was beginning to traverse the map of my mother’s brain, the geography of that remembrance returned to her. It was not a grand statement, but it was

grand to me” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 181). As a dig piece of memory coming from the land, the geography of remembrance brings to Elvira the knowledge that previous to the Alzheimer’s she would not have accepted.

In this quest of digging up amnesia, she intertwines the histories of Indigenous groups from California with those from her family. The idea of digging up little pieces of information that time has buried marks the structure of the chapter “Sibangna”, constructed by personal and historical short excerpts. These pieces together may give some clue to understand the past, which is never complete but needs creativity, inference, and sometimes a jump to conclusions. In one of the excerpts, she traces the movements of her family to construct a parallel to that of military Moragas who journeyed along the region where today is California and Arizona. This blood lineage is connected to Indigenous peoples by being “distant relations who killed Apaches or relations who were Apaches themselves” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 178) – probably both. On investigating the tomb of a Lieutenant Moraga, she constructs the parallel described in the excerpt: “I have no paper to prove that my family moved to San Gabriel in 1961 as an act of reconciliation; but in recent years I have wondered over curious geographical coincidences” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 177). From small pieces of information, Moraga seeks to reconstruct her lineage. She is aware that she cannot truly – and fully – recreate the historical past that was erased, but she creates history filling the blanks with the geographical “coincidences” that cross her way. In this way, she reconstructs memory lanes that reconnect her to a past without closing in on any specific truth or even defining one and only truth. The concept of history as mirroring past reality, then, is also questioned.

The narrator also brings to light the use of “Indian” as a derogatory term coming from her own family. The denial of this line of ancestry because of discrimination that leads to shame of one’s own past is part of the cultural amnesia. The colonization that constructs certain lineages as “shameful” forces a situation in which the connection between Indigeneity and the Moragas only becomes possible through parallels constructed based on the places they have lived, using pieces of knowledge and information from the land in the process of re-membering. When the chapter comes to an end and Elvira affirms her ancestry, she breaks with the pattern of denial and shame, re-membering her own history amidst the development of a mental illness.

This chapter from *Native* elaborates, from a personal level, the intimacy between memory, amnesia, and ancestry that first appears in other of Moraga’s works. In “Indígena as Scribe” (2011), Moraga claims the right and the rite to remember. For her, writing is how she resists oblivion: “I am in daily search of these acts of remembering of who we once were

because I believe they will save our pueblos from extinction” (2011, p. 81). In a way, Elvira’s statement is one of these acts of remembering, which justifies the affective relation the narrator of *Native* constructs with the sentence. Moraga considers writing a collective act, capable of keeping the knowledge and culture from peoples dismissed by hegemonic forces alive. She also resists the Eurocentric logic of truth and history and calls for the importance of rewriting and reinventing: “We may have to borrow or invent along the way, but we have the right to remember. And I can no longer let the colonizer nor colonized tell me we don’t” (2011, p. 84). Moraga calls this act “a life of writing against amnesia” (2011, p. 85-86). This is exactly the movement in *Native* where she constructs the routes between pieces of history that seem disassociated from each other in a first moment, but through remembering, through rethinking and writing, she can return to a past that is always in the process of being erased and reconstructed.

On another take of the reconstruction of belonging to a lost ancestry, in *Native* the encounter between the narrator and the object of her desire is surrounded by the political approach to Indigeneity. In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discussed how, in *Native*, the character’s return to her hometown is a movement through the protagonist’s desire for another woman. Now, I intend to expand this analysis to elaborate on how this desire is composed of elements that enmesh belongings, cravings, and adornments. When the narrator recognizes her object of desire as another Xicana, in Mexico, the huipil³² is a point in the constitution of affection: “And then I see her: a short brown-skinned woman standing at a window, looking out at the vast zocalo plaza. Her black hair hangs to her waist, *she wears a huipil*” (MORAGA, 2019, p. 99, my emphasis). Norma Cantú describes the choice of wearing huipil as “not just a result of aesthetics, theirs [Xicanas’s decision] is more a conscious decision to reclaim their Indigenous roots” (CANTÚ, 2020, p. 34). The huipil transforms the body in a place of political stand and a source of specific affective ties. They wear that which positions the subject.

The conscious choice of a garment that demonstrates one’s style, political position, and affiliation reinforces the movement between belonging and disidentification. Moraga recognizes the woman as Xicana, through her accent and clothes, while these same characteristics disidentify the subject from being Mexican and from participating in the normative expectations about clothes. This play between belonging and disidentification is an example of the huipiles’ power as a signifier. The garment marks this woman as someone who

³² Huipil is a traditional garment from Indigenous women of Central America. The tunic-like garment is usually ornamented and woven with different patterns. When worn by Native women, they can indicate their ethnicity.

does not belong to the narrator's imaginary about Mexico: she wears huipil and she is neither Mexican nor a member of a *pueblo*. Moreover, the narrator recognizes the displacement of the woman through her clothes and recognizing the garment leads to the sexual tension between them. The huipil is an artifact for the augmentation of desire.

Because Indigeneity, for Moraga, lives between amnesia and re-membering, the huipil becomes a symbol of the native identity that is so often denied her. This symbol emerges in their bodies as a form of positioning themselves politically before they even speak. The huipil is specifically reclaimed by Xicanas as an association to Indigenous women from Latin America. In Cantú's article, for instance, some of her interviewees discussed their process of buying the garment from Mexican and Guatemalans weavers (CANTÚ, 2020), a remark that positions the huipil as a connection to the materiality of the present (the weavers, their art, and their social status as Indigenous women selling their art in the Westernized racist capitalist world dynamics) while still related to an imaginary. This imaginary can be traced to the Aztec princess and her recurrent depiction wearing the garment. Wearing the garment is a conscious decision that links the Xicanas to myth and materiality at the same time, becoming, then, political. Sandra Cisneros describes her relationship with the garment, the connection she weaves with the fabric, with the artists who produced them, and with the representation they carry in the essay "Huipiles" (2015). She ends the text by saying: "I wear this textile as a way for me to resist the Mexiphobia going on under the guise of Homeland Security. To acknowledge I'm not in agreement with the border vigilantes. [...] This cloth is the flag of who I am" (CISNEROS, 2015, p. 65). In this sense, the presence of the garment is not isolated either in literature nor in the lives of Xicanas; rather it functions as a signifier of political position and identity. Xicanas are re-membering a path back to their Indigeneity and, in the process, putting themselves as allies with this particular group. The huipil visibly materializes in the body the connection Xicanas reclaim.

In Moraga's passage of *Native*, one more meaning joins this constellation: the one of desire. Once the embodiment of the huipil works on identity and political position, it also creates the forces of attraction between the two women. When the narrator states "then I see her" (MORAGA, 2019, p. 82), seeing goes beyond only noticing there is a person in front of her. The visibility of the body produces an affective response in the narrator; first a feeling of disorientation for trying to position the woman within the scenario, and second, a feeling described as "a fire hot enough to melt me" (2019, p. 99). As soon as the object of desire speaks and she can place her in a geographical location, in this case, California, the sexual affection is

symbolized as fire. Once this woman becomes intelligible to the narrator, the symbol she wears, her political position, her identitarian belongings and world disidentifications become visible; hence, she is seen. These recognitions are part of the narrator's desire for this woman. In a memoir called *Native country of the heart*, the relationship between Indigeneity, passion, and geographical belongings surfaces in this passage. The Indigeneity of the scene materializes in the process of re-membering the narrator goes through to recognize her object of desire, in which the huipil is a key element. The object of desire is not a mythologized Native woman, fantasized and locked in the past; rather, she is a Xicana who shares with the narrator the political positions and identity belongings represented in the wearing of the huipil.

Because Indigeneity is constructed in the cracks of erasure, mythology also works a path that must be excavated. Alone, myths can freeze a subject in the past, but when interplayed with the materialization of history and context, they are also part of the re-membering process. The huipil, then, works symbolically in this ambivalence between myth and materiality, participating in the metonymy that connects coloniality, amnesia, erasure, and disability. As memory takes the protagonism of the debate, announcing one's political position on her own body is a form of avoiding erasure. The body, then, carries a signifier of belonging that allows recognition. In *Native*, the garment is part of the construction of desire as affect and functions to connect both Indigeneity and California, the narrator's homeland, which, in its turn, when read along with the chapter "Sibangna" is also a search for a path to a past that is continuously on the verge of being erased. While the huipil is more of a general signifier representing political association to Indigenous rights, in "Sibangna," naming the groups and dealing with specific pieces of history from that region, as much as excavation allows, brings some particularities of the debate, interlocking personal and historical events.

4.2. Ambivalent erasures and sexuality in *So far from God*

The issue of erasure is a constant presence in Xicana literature. Moraga's writings seek to bring Indigeneity from obliviousness into existence. This movement is recurrent in the writings of Xicanas. However, oftentimes, this process takes more complex turns in the play between presence and erasure. In *So far from God* (1994), Ana Castillo writes about the life of Sofia's family and the death of her four daughters. The events of this family life throw the characters into a path of knowledge and awareness. Although Castillo continuously brings to the surface the contribution of Indigenous culture and heritage to the lives of the inhabitants of

Tome, the community depicted in the book, sexuality is erased from the simultaneity of space in the search for a utopian society.

For Roland Walter, in the article “The Cultural Politics of Dislocation and Relocation in the Novels of Ana Castillo” (1998), *So far from God* constructs a utopian community based on the collectivity that is centered in the agency of women. Walter argues that the novel uses a counterhegemonic narrative to find a solution for the feeling of dislocation experienced in the Borderlands. Still, according to him, the novel presents different point of views and a third person narrator that bring to the story individual and collective experiences: "By means of this polyphonic discourse the community of Tome is created in a time-space continuum in which a condensation and a concretization of the temporal and spatial indexes constitute a radical *present-ation* of time in space and space in time” (1998, p. 90, author's emphasis). Thus, the present of the community is constituted by the interrelations of diversities that meet and the encounter of these multiple stories allows the radicalism that Walter asserts, which, by extent, also allows the possibility of the utopian community centered around the protagonist. The activism that leads to the utopian community, then, for the author, is a “solution to the loss of identity, assimilation, and the spread of Anglo culture” (WALTER, 1998, p. 91). Thus, without erasing the conflicts, the raising consciousness of the new mestiza grants the possibility of a relocation of the collective and individual subject of the Borderlands in a utopia that is based on affirmation. As in Moraga’s “Queer Aztlán”, utopia in *So far from God* is the aftermath of a continuous disidentification with hegemonic constitutions of community.

The utopianism that forms Tome revolves around a mestiza woman. Laura Gillman, in her book *Unassimilable Feminisms: Reappraising Feminist, Womanist, and Mestiza Identity Politics* (2010), focuses on the centrality of mestizaje when discussing Chicanas' works in relation to space and place. According to Gillman, Castillo is part of a group of Latina authors who “draw[s] upon popularized conceptions of spatial identity in order to interrogate normative perceptions of Latinas and the social world of which they form a part as well as the effects of such perceptions on their life chances and opportunities” (GILLMAN, 2010, p. 163). Gillman argues that *So far from God* employs a mestiza feminist aesthetic called by Amalia Mesa-Bains *domesticana*:

This feminist aesthetic uses the domestic spaces to which *Chicanas* have been historically relegated to interrogate the tensions such spaces hold as sites of heteropatriarchal violence and domination intrinsic to the community as well as sites of power and contestation against Anglo and *Chicano* heteropatriarchies. (GILLMAN, 2010, p. 174, author's emphasis)

In the construction of the protagonist's identity as an independent Chicana woman who decides to rethink her community from within her domestic sphere, the narrative questions the divisions between public and private space, Western and alternative forms of medicine, and Anglo and Latina/o cultures. Gillman also discusses the representation of labor exploitation and health problems derived from a destructive relationship between Anglo, Indigenous, and Latina communities. For Gillman, Sofia herself is a liminal space of the borderlands, an agent of transformation in the *domesticana* concept (2010, p. 188).

The novel denounces the ambiguity of the hegemonic discourse that, while trying to deny the existence of Indigenous peoples, also exploits them to imperialist enterprise. In the story arch of Fe, one of Sofi's daughter, Acme International, a multinational factory that cleans pieces of weapons for the Pentagon, contaminates its employees for they have to clean the pieces with the chemicals without wearing proper protection, and without properly discarding the residues. The choice of having such a factory in the vicinities of Tome can be related to the fact that the community is considered far from any proper attention and in a region where people may be dehumanized to the point that they become disposable: "Some of the women working there did not have a high school diploma like Fe, several spoke Spanish, Tewa, Tiwa, or some other pueblo dialect as a first language" (CASTILLO, 1994, 179). Although they are left to their own devices regarding proper health care and education, they are part of the globalized world when corporations need workers that they consider disposable and unqualified. The novel, thus, criticizes how dehumanization constructs this place as a source of exploitation. Such criticism departs from the contemporary colonial geographical divisions derived from globalization.

However, instead of simply denouncing such exploitation, *So far from God* seeks to surface the knowledge produced by Native peoples that actively participate in Tome's cultural codes. Instead of only depicting them as victims, the novel portrays the agency of those in marginalized positions. Doña Felicia, the healer, takes another of Sofi's daughter, Caridad, as her apprentice. In the article "Queering Chicano/a Narratives: Lesbian as Healer, Saint, and Warrior in Ana Castillo's *So far from God*" (1997), Colette Morrow argues that Castillo uses a lesbian character, Caridad, to disrupt the belief that sexuality is a white hegemonic issue, which would, otherwise, characterize being a lesbian as "an ethnic deviance"³³ (1997, p. 66). In order to develop her argument, she claims that Caridad occupies three important roles for the

³³ This issue of ethnic and deviant sexual relationships also appears in the works of Moraga (1983) and Anzaldúa (1987). They criticize the perspective that queerness might be associated to treachery by the Chicano community.

Mexican/Chicana/o community: the healer, the saint, and the warrior. Caridad embodies a nomadic subject, traveling in her existence the worlds that inform her own self. In this sense, the events that change the life of Caridad take place in a land considered sacred for Christian and for Indigenous groups. The first time Caridad sees her lover, she is in a sacred place for both groups. Caridad is in a chapel that represents these different coexistences. According to Morrow, "the history of this chapel is linked intertextually, with Native American, Mexican colonial, and New Mexican Catholic religious narratives" (MORROW, 1997, p. 70). As the novel plays with the sanctification of the love between two women, it brings sexuality closer to the Chicana/o community. Both her body and the sacred place are spaces of coexistence and contradictions, constructing Caridad as a character that disrupts ideological discourses from her own community and from the white hegemonic perspective.

The pilgrimage Caridad takes to the land of Chimayo is used to discuss a counterhegemonic discourse in the face of religion. The narrator uses sarcasm to explain that native pueblos of the region had always known about the power of healing of this land and the Christians were late in understanding the powers of this place: "(really, it wasn't their fault that they came so late to this knowledge, being such newcomers to these lands)" (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 75). This parenthetical information comes when the narrator is explaining that Catholics consider the earth of Chimayo holy since the nineteenth century. By initiating the sentence with the interjection, "really", the narrator assumes that knowing about this sacred ground is obvious, as if the reader would not believe that Christians could take such a long time to understand this basic information. When the narrator says that "it wasn't their fault", in a way, the novel is playing with the Western knowledge, since this was already obvious for the natives. The novel plays with the idea of an innocent Western religion unable to understand this important piece of knowledge, inverting the binarism that usually establishes that naiveté is a characteristic of the "Other", constructed in opposition to an intelligent, civilized Western society. Hegemonic discourse describes Christianity as part of this civilized world that has the mission of saving uncivilized, innocent people from their own ignorance. In this narrative, the knowledge about the land disrupts this order: "Native peoples had known [that this land is sacred] all along since the beginning of time" (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 73). In this sense, this debate around the sacred ground brings a hierarchy between the constitution of knowledge in different groups. On the one hand, the land only acquires a holy fame after this is discovered by the Catholics, which denounces that knowledge is only validated when endorsed by certain groups, in this case the Christians. On the other hand, the fact that this information gets to the

reader through sarcasm subverts and questions who really has control over such kinds of knowledge.

The novel also denounces erasure from within the community itself. The narrative depicts how people try to culturally move away from their heritage: “Unlike the rest of the women in her family who, despite her grandmother’s insistence that they were *Spanish*, descendants of pure Spanish blood, all shared the flat butt of the pueblo blood undeniably circulating through their veins, Caridad had somewhat pronounced ass [...]” (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 26, original emphasis). Although they insist on moving far from such ancestry, the bodies of the characters denounce their origins. Thus, though cultural hierarchies produce erasure through assimilation, the presence of different cultural codes occupies the cracks of the space--pun intended. In the case of this passage, the claim that the family has pure Spanish blood does not erase the fact that they bring in their butts the proof that purity is a fallacy.

It is not by chance that Caridad falls in love with a native woman in the holy ground of Chimayo. This is the point where myths meet materiality, and present-day land debates surround the novel, even if they are not directly mentioned. Morrow has already discussed how the novel constructs the vision of the Woman-on-the-wall as that of a saint: the demarcation of the place the image is first seen and the disbelief, in the beginning, that the vision was real are some of the characteristics that make the vision of this woman related to the vision of a saint. For Caridad, “Woman-on-the-wall was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen – but she had scarcely had more than a glimpse of her” (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 79). The Woman-on-the-wall, who embodies the enmeshment of myth and materiality present in Xicana literature, also appears to a person who brings in her body the traces of miscegenation, in a place that represents religious syncretism.

In order to ascertain the relevance of heritage in Caridad 's story with Esmeralda (the Woman-on-the-wall), they jump off a mesa that is part of the Acoma pueblo territory. Or, better, as the narrative puts it, “Esmeralda was flying, flying off the mesa like a broken-winged moth and holding tight to her hand was Caridad [...]” (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 211). This mesa, and the flight of these women, is located near the house of Esmeralda's grandmother, who lives in the territory. Sexuality drives Caridad to a land that materializes the heritage once hidden in her body. Caridad follows her desire, pursuing Esmeralda up to this place. This is where she understands what kind of force makes her move towards this woman whom she barely knows. After jumping, their bodies disappear, as if they have not died, bringing another mythological figure to the story: “There weren't even whole bodies lying peaceful. There was nothing. Just

the spirit deity Tsichtinako calling loudly with a voice like wind, guiding the two women back, [...] deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever” (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 211). Caridad becomes tied to her love for Esmeralda and to the Acoma pueblo. It seems that, in the narrative, the possible way for these two women to be together is living forever after a death that, instead of killing them, takes them to a divine plane. In this sense, Caridad's sexuality is also tied to Esmeralda's and her own heritage, and the miscegenation of their bodies and the places they meet are representative of their own differences. They hold hands and live together in the spiritual plane, but not in their human life.

The problem raised by Caridad's death is related to the erasure of a lesbian sexuality from the community through mythologization. Myth and materiality play their roles in *So far from God*, where contemporary issues surface in different moments of the novel – the dehumanization for exploitation in the capitalist system and the erasure of heritage in one's life are some of them. On the other hand, Caridad, represented as warrior or healer, is mythologized, in Contreras's terms. The scene of the women jumping off a mesa may be representative of the character's ambivalence: they are alive and dead at the same time; the place they live now is not on the top of the mesa nor down, on the ground; rather they are in-between, living as lesbian brown Xicana women connected through the spirituality of their heritage. However, this scene also reinforces a trope in the representation of lesbians in media and popular culture, that which is called Dead Lesbian Syndrome. Moreover, at the same time that the acknowledgement of a queer sexuality drives her to the cliff, it is this sexuality that is mythologized when they remain in-between, with an Indigenous deity after death. Caridad's desire traces her path after seeing the woman-on-the-wall, in Chimayo, and this is also the force that links her to the Acoma pueblo through the woman she desires and through the land where she ends her life. Thus, because mobility is actualized through desire, it is possible to say that Caridad's is a nomadic desire. However, the nomadism, in this case, sees its limitation when confronted with the erasure of sexuality, produced as the result of the character's last movement: jumping off a cliff.

According to Anzaldúa, the Borderlands are spaces for those who do not adjust to the norm, “*los atravesados* live here” (2007, p. 25). However, in *So far from God*, women's sexuality is erased during the process of bringing forth a community that has to deal with so many problems and, to a certain extent, finds a way of living throughout their conflicts, contradictions and interests. Caridad is the only of the main characters who has a queer sexuality. Her becoming aware of her queer desire is the main reason of her death: the

understanding of her feelings prompts her towards the act of jumping off the mesa. The narrative ends up bringing a metaphor of dematerialization that dissolves differences and depoliticizes sexuality. Morrow's analysis of Caridad's character as a form of inscribing sexuality in the realm of Xicana issues works only up to a certain extent. She only analyses the scene in which Caridad meets the Woman-on-the-wall for the first time. When going further in this investigation, the death of this couple because of their desire erases the possibility of sexuality as another sphere of multiplicities in the interrelations of the Borderlands and reinforces it as problematic.

Other two storylines erase sexuality in favor of the coherent operation of the community: Sofia's celibacy and Loca's AIDS. As the novel is clear about it, Sofia's lack of love interest is not a choice: "Had she been able to have a lover, she would not have hesitated a year after that son of a gun had taken off [...]" (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 112). Sofia cannot date or have any kind of sexual affair because she must take care of her daughters alone, working all day long in the butcher shop to support her family. It is important to remark that her celibacy does not occur because of moral values; although she was officially married to Domingo, after he abandoned the family, she does not consider him in the equation of her life choices. In this sense, the novel disturbs the supposed morality of a marriage. However, after mentioning that Sofia would like to have a love life, her sexuality disappears from the novel. Even after the death of her daughters, as the last chapter presents Sofia's actions, there is no mention of a sexual life. This raises the questions: if her daughters's need for attention stopped her from having any lover, why does the novel avoid discussing Sofia's sexuality by the end of the narrative? Or, why does the novel avoid finding a way for Sofia to have a lover besides all her chores? She accomplishes being an unofficial mayor, then, later, she becomes the president of M.O.M.A (Mothers of Martyrs and Saints association). Sofia's realizations change her life and the life of the community; however, her sexuality is erased from the simultaneities of pluralities that form the openness of a political space.

In this same direction, Loca's death caused by complications of AIDS also removes the debate surrounding the HIV/AIDS crisis that initiated in the 1980s. Since Loca's death and resurrection at the age of three, she has a kind of allergy to people and the only person she allows to touch her is her mother, Sofia. This is the reason why Sofia, according to the narrative, "only knew two things about [AIDS]: that there was no known cure for this frightening epidemic and... there was no way that Loca could have gotten it" (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 226). Even though the character tries to avoid contact with the outside world, her illness may be

representative of how those participating in the constitution of space can be affected by this very space, nonetheless. Thus, while her illness connects Loca to the world around her, questioning the possibility of living in isolation, it erases the relevance of sexuality in this debate.

The novel participates in a double movement. First, it connects Indigeneity to the lives of Tome's community, actively participating in its cultural codes and as the recipient of the dehumanization promoted by hegemonic forces to control and exploit other peoples. Part of this movement comes to realization through the acts of Caridad's character who moves her storyline using the propulsion of a desire she takes her time to understand. Desire leads her to the land of the Acoma people, where she can live with the woman she loves forever in a mythological and spiritual plane. The connection between desire, land, and Indigeneity lives in the ambivalence between myth and materiality constructed for Caridad in the body of her loved one and in the land itself. The other movement happens when, to create the utopian community led by a Xicana woman of color, the novel erases the participation of desire and sexuality in the constitution of spatiality. The presence, however, is there, like the story of Caridad, living forever in-between, appearing in the cracks of discourse.

In yet another ambivalence of the novel, desire and sexuality are embodied in the characters while, paradoxically, they are excluded from the utopia of Tome. Sexuality is, after a certain point, left outside the range of multiplicities that are imperative in the constitution of a political use of space. This is not to argue the novel is not political; rather, this means that the narrative itself is constituted in the coexistence of contradictions. By writing the enmeshment of desire and Indigeneity, *So far from God* mythologizes the existence of such a connection and erases it from the community depicted in the novel.

4.3. Whispers and claims in *Forgetting the Álamo*

In the case of *Forgetting the Álamo*, the desire between two mestizas provides the opportunities for these characters to discuss and reconnect with a heritage that is continuously being erased. As previously discussed, queerness offers a safety for the protagonist that other instances of her life fail to offer. In the epicenter of a "slave lynching country and [...], Mexican killing country and [...], Indian scalping country" (PÉREZ, 2009), as Lucius describes the territory of Texas after the independence from Mexico, land, violence, and the production of colonizing discourse are on the making while Micaela strives for survival. The enmeshment of desire and the Indigenous heritage of these characters, in this context, functions as a

counternarrative against a coloniality that questions the hegemonic discourses about spatial temporalities.

Pérez (re)writes the historical events occurring after the battle of the Álamo, in 1836, from the perspective of a genderqueer non-normative protagonist, Micaela Campos. This period marks the war between Texas and Mexico, when the former separates from the latter, becoming independent until 1845, when it is annexed to the U.S. Pérez's work contests the official narratives that construct the violence of this context as "a price to pay" for the development of the – soon to be annexed – territory of Texas. In a normative linear temporality, Mexico is considered belated, thus, its separation as an independent country and its later annexation to the United States are treated as forms of development. This development is racialized in a colonial standpoint that disregards Mexican and Indigenous cultural codes as related to an undeveloped past.

The non-normative sexuality of Micaela questions the unilinear hegemonic temporality and binarism that constructs Anglo-Eurocentric societies as civilized and native ones as barbaric and belated. Her lover is a mestiza woman, like her, with whom Micaela can recognize herself. This love story considers the importance of their heritage in a construction against a background of erasure of the Indigenous participation in the Borderlands:

It was said mama was india and her grandmother on her mother's side was Tonkawa, a people descended from the wolf, but those who said this spoke in whispers. Others whispered she was mulatta, having inherited her great-grandfather's tanned skin of a Spanish Moor, but her father's family claimed she was Española, as pure and Spanish as they were meant to be, descendants of the Canary Islanders that arrived a century earlier. (PÉREZ, 2009, np)

The use of terms such as "it was said" and "whispers" highlights the difficulty of recovering parts of one's heritage that are considered racially inferior. Whispering appears as a sign of shame, a part of the self that is better to keep silenced. However, the silencing process is never complete, so the whispers emerge. The rewriting of historical events to include these same characteristics that hegemonic perspective tries to silence needs to use the whispers, little hints that are obscured by erasure.

The counterpoint of whispers is the claiming of European heritage. While others whisper, the family "claims" an impossible purity, impossibility materialized in the "tanned skin" of the mother. The tanned skin does not carry any truth about origins. It can be an Indigenous or Moor heritage, depending on who is telling the story. Anyhow, the body becomes the place where the visibility of impurity contradicts the fallacy present in the discourse of pure Spanish. The difference between claiming and whispering marks the discourse of coloniality

within the colonized subjects. Similarly, “it was said” evidences the lack of historical sources even for those living the experiences they are trying to tell. The passive voice obliterates the subject who recounts the family history and gives an aura of uncertainty to the statement. Nevertheless, Micaela’s narrative finds in the whispers a name to her ancestry people. She calls them Tonkawa, rescuing this heritage, even without concrete proof, since she only has whispers and stories told by a passive voice.

Contrary to the whispering of *mestizaje*, as is narrated, Micaela and Clara bring forth in their relationship the Indigenous part of their selves. In this context, Clara states: “‘Most folks don’t know what to make of me,’ she said. ‘Some think I’m white like my grandfather, and others, they see my papa’s blackness shining through me. It’s mostly Mexicans who call me India. They wanna see my mother’s blood’” (PÉREZ, 2009, np). Comparing to the description of Micaela’s family heritage – “It was said mama was india and her grandmother on her mother’s side was Tonkawa, a people descended from the wolf, but those who said this spoke in whispers” (2009, n.p) – Clara’s description foregrounds her *mestizaje*, not in whispers, but as a loud constitutive of her self. The trouble others face in categorizing her is not described as inferior characteristics intrinsic to the self, as might be perceived in the whispers. Instead, Clara embraces that different people read her in different ways. In Clara’s description of herself, neither being white as her grandfather, black as her father, or Indigenous as her mother is a reason for shame. More than that, neither of her heritages is relegated only to her past, her ancestry. Her historical construction is brought by her as constitutive of who she *is*, in the present. This present, then, is not anachronized as a traditional past. In other words, none of these characters are mythologized or frozen in a past that idealizes purity. Being *mestizas* brings them closer and flourishes Micaela’s desire for Clara. Micaela desires Clara’s *mestizaje* and the relationship to her origins. Hence, that which is considered by dominant discourses as relegated to the past, as primitive, erased by genocide, is used to connect these two characters. This desire also moves Micaela to seek more about her own heritage by recognizing her own *mestizaje* in Clara. It is a desire that moves her in the direction of the desirable object, and also moves her into rethink her own self.

Thus, the fact that Clara is *mestiza* affects her connection to Micaela. The latter affirms that “I realized my love for Clara was as bound up in her past as what we had right then in her tiny room” (PÉREZ, 2009, n.p). In this sense, their relationship moves from past to present, reconstructing a connection that recognizes the relevance and the participation of Indigeneity in the process of *mestizaje*. The protagonist supposes that their proximity to Clara’s “real home

brought up things she had a need to remember” (PÉREZ, 2009, np). As these are characters who are constantly on the move, and as such, the story is also a fictional travel writing, they are still informed by concepts of “home” and “real”. Home, however, is again related to ancestry more than the materiality of a place. As the conversation goes, we learn Clara is a descendant of a coastal tribe, Karankawa, so being in Galveston, a bay city closer to the land of her ancestors, is considered near her “real home”. The history these characters try to recover for themselves, then, ties their nomadism to each other and to their roots. As nomadic as these characters are, they still link themselves to the land of their ancestors in a strategy of survival against erasure.

The relationship between these two characters constructs safety and recognition – as I have discussed in the previous chapter – that leads the narrative to associate the traditional heritages of the mestiza to a protection against the daily violence of their context, counterarguing the dominant ideology that considers the anachronized past as repression. Considering Allen’s affirmation that, according to Anglo-Eurocentric perspective “a good Indian is a dead Indian”, for they belong to the past and the museums, and Quijano’s theorizations about the racialization of Native peoples, the presence of ancestry and their connection to the land in *Forgetting the Álamo* work as a counternarrative to the hegemonic discursive construction of Indigeneity. These characters name their origins and live them in the present. They are not only “Indians”; they are Karankawa and Tonkawa, and these ancestries (in)form their routes and affective to places and to each other. By the same token, Allen and Potiguara argue for the importance of both mobility and territorial belongings. Mobilization is not a movement distancing oneself from one’s *aldeia*. Similarly, reclaiming and recognizing belonging to a land is not a movement towards fixity. Rather, as it is also perceived in *Forgetting the Álamo* and stories such as Potiguara’s, displacement is related to a concept of home that unfolds forced diasporas, within one’s own country, and genocides. Thus, as a counterpoint, mobility – and in the case of *Forgetting*, mobility triggered by desire – becomes an act of using displacement to recover historical events and parts of the self that colonial violence tries to erase.

The works hereby analyzed differ from the idea of mythologization argued by Contreras since they seek to relate Indigenous past to the life of these groups in the present, using tradition myths, and material experience to recover belongings. Contreras criticizes the use of the Aztec princess as a symbol in Xicana literature for this myth would ignore the materiality of present issues regarding Native peoples. However, *Native country of the heart*, *So far from God*, and

Forgetting the Álamo deal with ancestry and belonging through desire in a way that political and aesthetical enmeshment construct literary works that position themselves in the excavation of Indigenous memory and history, and their existence in the present. The characters, in the fictional and non-fictional narratives, are displaced from their ties to Indigenous land. They become nomadic in the search for a connection that was previously denied them. Instead of focusing solely on mythological entities and tropes, they contextualize their work around Native groups from the geographical locations around where they take place. They create alterNative narratives that include, at the same time, their displacements and belongings to Indigeneity. When reading them close to each other, the map of Native peoples multiply. Rather than simply “Indian”, these texts work the historical contexts of different peoples without ignoring the process of amnesia that is constantly trying to erase the history of marginalized groups. The constellation of paths to do so changes from text to text, though, reinforcing the multiplicities of journeys and possibilities that emerge when homogenization is disrupted.

If garment is a way of associating oneself to Indigeneity and belonging to the point of recognition and desire, as Moraga articulates in her memoir, the use of a literal illness also allegorizes the process of forgetfulness and memory recovery in a metonymical fashion. On the other hand, the demarcation of land appears as the background that glues two characters together for eternity, keeping them poised in the ambivalence between myth and materiality, as is the case of Castillo’s novel. The same way that recognizing her queer feelings for another woman throws Caridad, in *So far from God*, from a mesa, queerness also puts the protagonist of *Forgetting the Álamo* in motion, though into another direction. In Pérez’s novel, the ancestry of the characters creates a connection between them, to which their mestizaje functions as a bridge so they can find in each other support to survive the violence of a region undergoing major changes. These works play with the ambivalence of nomadism, a search for ancestral origins, and a connection to the land. Desire, then, is the route of choice to this past that reverberates in the present, allowing this paradoxical relationship.

The complexity between belonging and mobility that emerges from the presence of native accents in Xicana literature dialogues with Allen’s theorizations on *Off Reservation* and Potiguara’s personal and collective stories about displacement and ancestry. Allen reinforces that it is not because Indigenous peoples have a connection with the land that they should be spatially constrained. On the other hand, Potiguara brings to the fore the issue of forced displacements, which, without an *aldeia* to fix some grounds become a movement that does the colonial work. From the garment to the body to the memory, these works raise issues of

visibility/erasure and shame/pride in a dance between desire and land that explores ways of reinscribing Indigeneity against the power of coloniality. In some way or another, these texts denounce imperialist perspectives on Native peoples and use mestizaje as a form of historical and geographical belongings. Purity, in the representation of the Aztec princess or the European heritage, is dismissed as unrealistic and a bravado easily dismantled by the materiality of the mestiza existence. Paradoxically as it might sound, nomadic desires, in these cases, are rooted in Indigenous lands.

5. CONCLUSION: BUILDING EROTIC BRIDGES

“The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.”

(LORDE, 1984)

As I come to the end of this journey, I feel compelled to mention James Clifford’s intertwining of routes and roots. As he acknowledges the inseparability of movement and connection to places, in similar forms, nomadism in Xicana literature is always already enmeshed to their roots. In the pages of this work, I tried to find out how they use desire to relate their nomadism to their eagerness in connecting to a past that in the hegemonic historical perspective tends to be erased. In the literary texts, traveling worlds is rooted in the multiplicity of the *mestiza*. In this sense, their longing for roots and stories about their origins is not based on the myth of purity. On the contrary, as *mestizas* they look for a geopolitical contextualization that allow their multiple existence. Because stillness, as that what is given as the norm, may kill them, sometimes literally, sometimes as complex beings who cannot live having parts of their own existence subjected to oppressive impositions, mobility saves their lives. It is because they can move that they can also go back to communities, working in the juggling logic of oppression and affect.

My mapping, I hope, was guided by those who travel the journeys among worlds and trace the paths they need to continue moving. Different from the travels with colonial and exploratory purposes, that map terrains according to their values to a capitalist and imperialist perspective of the world, I seek to mark down the routes created from desire and transformative potential by those who need to live in their journey and trace these very same paths they inhabit. These narratives build, against coloniality, decolonial bridges. They resist, and, sometimes, reject, the imposed paths of colonizers, for, these normative options, do not function for specific subjects; rather, they oppress and immobilize. Marginalized groups use many tools to open their routes. I choose to scrutinize the presence of desire in this process.

I see desire as a driving force, an energy that throws the subjects into activities and into each other; thus, I focused on movements propelled by this drive. What I encountered was an unstable but always under construction relationship between beings who find this force in the geopolitical nuances between themselves and the other. The literary works hereby analyzed open spaces to fracture the fabric of coloniality even though deeper structures of power tried to maintain the integrity of their oppressions. In the rupture against coloniality, the mestizas build bridges to reach out. As they move over these bridges, they also transform the community of departure, the one of destiny, and the trajectory they undertake. For they cause these changes, they can return through different routes to their families, their lands, or their neighborhoods. Otherwise, such a return would be oppressive and exclusionary of their multiplicities. It is because they are continuously creating new routes that they can also navigate back and forth to these places. This navigation is not without perils, for the hand of coloniality is constantly showing its pervasiveness. However, what makes these literary works relevant to think Xicana movements through desire is exactly because they do not ignore the ever presence of coloniality while also not subjecting themselves to its rules.

I mapped out desire as a transformative force, capable of moving geographical, social, and emotional Borderlands. My cartography amounts to those who started this work before me. Catriona Rueda Esquibel, for instance, in *With her machete in her hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*, states that she “begin[s] to map out the terrain of Chicana lesbian fictions” (2006, p. 01). The author continues delineating that her research involves “drama, novels, and short stories by Chicana/o authors that depict lesbian characters or lesbian desire” (2006, p. 01). I did not necessarily focus on lesbian desire or characters; however, as my research developed, they become prominent in my corpus. I did not depart from the idea of analyzing lesbian literature, mainly because the nomadic desire I am interested dialogues with the issues raised by Anzaldúa about what is, exactly, a lesbian author or a lesbian narrative (ANZALDÚA, 2009). At the same time that this category is not abandoned, it becomes interlocked with others that disrupt its limitation and circumscribe new possibilities of readings both of the narratives and subjects, such as the use of queer, and queer woman of color, as self-identification or the construction of a unique term, like Moraga’s Xicanadyke concept (2000). Many works were left out for a matter of time, space, and even access in some specific situations. The amount of queer texts analyzed speaks more to the transformative potential of non-normative approaches to new figurations of existence than to any categorial delineation of the research. Works such as *Under the feet of Jesus*, by Helena Maria Viramontes, “Never Marry a Mexican”, by Sandra

Cisneros, and *The King and Queen of Comezón*, by Denise Chávez³⁴, are just a few that would add even more depth to this debate have I had time and space to continue my work.

My work acknowledged, in the selection of texts to participate in this conversation, the standpoint of their authors. I call in the relation between the work and the authors not in the sense of confusing characters with their creators, nor of considering the actions of the former a representation of the latter's intentions. Electra is not a representation of Emma Pérez, for instance. Both presence and lacking surfaces in a cartography of the Borderlands. Thus, it is possible to use this cartography to investigate where lacking is a presence and bringing to this position the existence that has always been there. Queer women existed in the region that became Texas, in 19th century, but Emma Pérez, by perceiving the lack of stories about these subjects, creates Micaela and Clara. Pérez rewrites the story of the invasion of Texas and inserts characters erased by official historical documents. *Forgetting the Alamo*, on its turn, brings safe and unsafe spaces that allow Micaela and Clara's existence and resistance. This story finds a way for them to survive and thrive. The paradox of the Borderlands is enmeshed in places where they come to exist. I reinforce the presence of the authors because of my own methodology in producing this text. After deciding I was going to work with Xicana Literature, I started reading even more their books. My first cut to fit what I was looking for in the texts was the author. I was going to exclusively analyze literature from authors who self-identify as Xicana, or, more common, as Chicana. Ironically, I myself am not Xicana, and, because of that, I have to be extremely cautious of my words. I hope I have fulfilled this task. I do not desire to write about the other. I want to have a conversation, be part of the debate, and, in order to do so, from an honest standpoint, I must declare my position. Most of the theories I use come from feminist, decolonial and/or Xicana studies. It was a conscious move to bring more women of color to the conversation and working with white men only when necessary. Bridges must be constructed, so I did not ignore important texts just because of the author's identification, I simply gave preference to the relevant works of subjects who participate in marginalized conversations from a street level perspective, in other words, who theorize and live their own theorizations. For my work, the authors are Xicanas, sometimes black women, other, Latinas, always feminists and in search of new ways to decolonize our lives. The path I choose for this decolonization is through desire.

³⁴ *Given up the ghost*, by Cherríe Moraga, *I am not your perfect Mexican daughter*, by Erika Sánchez, *Mean*, by Myriam Gurba, *Empanadas*, by Anel Flores, *The distance between us*, by Reyna Grande, and *Flesh to Bone*, by ire'ne lara silva, are just a few more that I would add to this list, but I am afraid it would become too long.

The enmeshment of the erotic, language, and movement creates what I am calling a cartography of Xicana desire. The paradox of spaces is continuously dislocating marginalized subjects and, through this dynamic of movement, they create new figurations of existence. This cartography perceives space as the multiplicity and simultaneity of all that meets within. The encounters of history, background, subjectivity, and realities form the space. These meetings bring new agents to the play that create new reconfigurations of the space that is once again reconfigured in a continuous movement.

A myriad of genres emerges from reading the cartography of desire I am depicting here. Composing this cartography, one shall find essays, novels, memoirs, poems, historic fiction, detective and erotic narratives, and some texts that are even hard to tell exactly what they are because they disrupt categories to the point that they are many and new possibilities of storytelling. They play with language, and with tongue. The differential movement, as conceptualized by Chela Sandoval (2000), gives the theoretical perspective to approach the liberty of the discursive transit in the ruptures of the colonial discourse – which can also be read as categorial impositions – in search for opening even more in each passing the space for *los atravesados*, who live in the Borderlands (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 35), to express themselves and live their multiplicities. In other words, whatever becomes an instrument in the hands of marginalized subjects to carve the colonial difference must be considered as such. By crossing genre borders, these authors work in a constant reinstatement of the Borderlands. By analyzing them together, we, as readers, participate in this process as well, for, the relationship among space, authors, readers, and works interact in the simultaneity of existence. The focus on who tells the story and what / how stories are being told construct an excavation of mobile desire that has the specific objective of historicize and spatialize these movements.

It is with this goal in mind that I assert that Xicanas build routes of return which do not entail in a quest for purism or authenticity. By returning, they retrieve knowledge that was, somehow, denied them, that, at some point, might have been considered minor or not even perceived as a knowledge at all. For their existence emerge from the Borderlands – geopolitical, emotional, material and discursive – ambiguity and contradictions build routes that lead to distinct pasts, histories, and contexts. The many returns taken by Moraga are just one example; going back to social movements, historical circumstances, indigenous ancestry, familial land, and community permeates almost the totality of these works. Xicanas, both authors and characters, carried with them their multiplicities, surfacing and disrupting the myth of purity even when in search of their origins. The number of pasts in their history are as multiple as the

journey they can take to reconstitute their own stories. By living their pleasures, despite and against repressive colonial ties, as part of their multiplicities, these subjects construct a cartography of desire that is geopolitical, space related, and historically engaged.

Place means more than geographical location. It can be the body, memory, community, family, bridges, as in Anzaldúa's concept, encounters of worlds, as theorized by Lugones. These are forms of representing attachment to places that do not depend on specific geographical locations to be constructed. Although regional landscapes inform these constructions, they are not primordial or the only source of information to construct affective places. In impure communities, attachments are constructed from every piece (in)formation available or created by their members. Because signifiers of place, such as home, land, and safe space, are lifted from the concept of geographical location, still not excluding it, nomadism can be rooted in places of attachment.

Although when analyzing the various forms of returning I focused on Moraga's texts, most of the literature in my corpus deal with some dilemma about the issue. Anzaldúa goes back to Texas to visit her family; Nena, in *Cabañuelas*, deals with the conflicting decision between returning to her hometown or staying in Spain with her lover, where she constructs a distinct Borderlands between Madrid and Laredo; in *Forgetting the Álamo*, the protagonist is arrested – immobilized (put in jail) – when she decides to go back to the family ranch and her only way of survival is by moving, but, still visiting her family from time to time; and, in *So far from God*, the character returns to an indigenous cultural ancestry that is tied to land and desire by the end of her material life. This is just to reinforce the relevance of returning to the Borderlands subjects who become distanced from some parts of their cultural selves, through the interlocking of oppressions enforced upon them in the colonial/modern gender system.

In *Blood lines* (2008), Contreras criticizes the return through ancestry and indigenism to an idealized pre-conquest representation of a past for Xicanas. A simplistic view on looking back at ancestry, in the sense of a primitivism, “less complicated modes of living premised on a ‘return’ to more ‘natural’ philosophies of existence” (CONTRERAS, 2008, p. 18), is undoubtedly problematic. In her analysis, Contreras, properly, praises Lorna Dee Cervantes for “a distinctly critical poetic voice that consciously resists the ease of a return to origins of any kind” (2008, p. 134). However, when considering returning as a form of mobility to retrieve parts of one's own stories that is being erased through cultural amnesia, this movement becomes a form of recollecting elements which were missing from the hybridity that is the mestiza. Mythology, history, and present materiality meet in the act of return.

My movement from the epistemological shifts created by the nomadic desire, passing through the fractured locus that produces, although unstable, safe spaces to construct bridges against the colonial presence, to the connection between land and indigeneity provides mobility without abandoning the impulse of seeking one's roots. Maybe "seek" is not the appropriate word, for, these roots are not laid there for anyone to find, it is not a given. Rather, they are built in the movements against amnesia (MORAGA, 2011). This is an action of excavation, of appropriation, of claiming the right to belong and to become, and of reordering that what it is already known, what is expected to forget, and what is felt in the encounters with others. The instability of bridges balances the scale of the permanence of the land. None are static or always the same. However, changes should take into consideration the stories these spaces have already shared and constructed. This balance is what I found in the cartography created by the pages I investigated.

The epistemological play Anzaldúa does with "(un)natural bridges" and "(un)safe spaces" (2009) advances the impermanence of any concept that might be considered pure, definitive, or stable. Natural and unnatural, safe and unsafe, become complex concepts that do not exist by themselves; or that define spaces prior to the existence in their simultaneity. Rethinking concepts change actions as well. We need safe and unsafe, natural and unnatural elements to build bridges and paths. If safety guarantees the possibility of our existence, it is the unsafety that puts us and the situations we find ourselves into question. In Anzaldúa's theorizations, this is an important moment, when we position ourselves in a *Nepantla* state (2002), when movement is necessary and consciously agency has the potential for changes. In this process, the geographical land and territory are reconceptualized from a historical perspective of the margins, or Eurocentric institutions are destabilized by the presence of marginalized subjects. On the other hand, metaphorical readings of home, return, bridges, and architecture open the meanings to accommodate non-normative existences. Again, I am not happy with my own use of words. I do not agree with the term "accommodate", because it implies easiness, comfort, tranquility. This is not what it is found in the epistemological turns the authors provide. On the contrary, they disturb any easy application of categorial systems.

The comfort they might find is that they do not do these movements alone. Their bridges among worlds enable partnerships that help, to some extent, to alleviate the weight of the constant battles they overtake. Now, I take issue with the pronoun "they". Who are they? Authors, characters, readers, all of the above? Maybe I should return to Lugones concept of "I-we" and the life in the hyphen (2003). In this way, I am also implicated in these movements,

along with those I brought to the discussion. I do find comfort in the literature of Xicanas, in a literature that dialogues and counteracts the supposedly canonical texts; a literature that addresses the pervasiveness of land, borders, immigration, travel issues imposed by the colonial/modern gender system. I feel like I am taking a rather personal rhetorical detour, here. Full disclosure, I do feel passionate about this literature and, as Anzaldúa puts it, “detour is part of the path” (2015, p. 133). I am driven to construct a bridge where I can reside in the company of others that I admire. Somehow, this work is this impermanent abode where I can dwell for a limited amount of time.

These literary texts create the possibility of residing in the bridge, in transit, in the encounters among worlds. Bridges, coalitions, and communities participate in the construction of the colonial difference. By doing so, these literary corpus resist immobility and stiffness. This is the feminist architecture Anzaldúa claims, that provides a roof for those paving a non-normative way. These bridges are places of residence and resistance, for their strategic movements are always already creating a safe space that allows security, leading to the unveiling of new breeches in the encounters of distinct worlds. The instability between bridges and breeches opens the cracks for transformative new figurations. With coloniality hovering these spaces – in the figure of a drunkard, a murderer, or a familial criticism – mestizas fracture the fabric of oppression to free their movements. Their multiple existence depends on creating the fractured locus, as Lugones conceptualizes the term (2010). The freedom is never complete, for the pervasiveness of coloniality is a constant reminder that hegemonic powers will try to siege them back into the racist, sexist, and geopolitical repression the colonial/modern gender system imposes to them.

By living traumas and pleasures in and against the colonial/modern gender system, the friction of residing and resisting against oppression forces the reconfigurations of coloniality and subjects implicated in the process. Lugones (2010) discusses how, intentionally or not, marginalized beings are constantly forcing the readjustment of coloniality. Desire is one of the tools used in the building of the bridges that participate in reconfiguring and counteracting the colonial perspective. Sex, sexuality, and the use of the erotics to claim indigeneity, mestizaje, belonging, and roots, among other participations in the history of spatiality establish that the Xicanas represented in these narratives will exist in the wholeness of their multiplicity. The inseparability of race, gender, and sexuality permeate the narratives. They deal with this interlocking of oppressions that tries to disconnect and homogenize certain parts of their beings by complicating the terms of the colonial/modern gender system. This is a movement that,

while allowing their existence, also puts them on the spotlight, for the colonial system shall not easily accept their defiance. And once more, this is a movement that opens bridges and breeches, creates possibilities for pleasure but also for traumas. This is the operation that appears in the cartography of Xicana desire.

The traumatic aftermath of coloniality is relevant to highlight, so we do not fall into the fallacy of an idealized, simply celebratory, perspective of the Borderlands. None of the authors analyzed in here ignore in their texts the oppression and wounds of coloniality. Even in more humorous narratives, the existence in the Borderlands is not an easy and free one. Geopolitics, familial or community constraints, sexism, and racism participate in the interlocking of oppressions. In a way, the topographical image that emerges by mapping ideological spaces, as Sandoval proposes (2000, p. 55), orients the movements in and among Xicana literary texts. By consciously delineating the tethers of oppression, they play in transfiguring the oppressed scenario into a space that allows mobility. Traumas, oppressions, wounds, and menaces are depicted but do not solely define Xicana subjectivity. They act upon the situations they are involved; they have pleasure, they suffer, and they transform their environment without falling into simplistic roles of victims or heroines. By doing so, they consciously add a variety of figurations to the complex space of the Borderlands.

The authors hereby investigated occupy a political position that, on some occasions, they literally wear in their bodies for anyone to see (the wearing of the huipiles is one example), while in others the body itself materializes certain positions. This conscious standpoint is one layer of this cartography that cannot be ignored. Aesthetical and political issues become inseparable, so the texts cannot be read without considering any of these parts; otherwise, the reading would be incomplete. Poetics meet living experience in the production of Xicana literature. It is imprudent reading *So far from God* or *Forgetting the Álamo* without considering the political issues related to indigenous land, for instance, or not acknowledging that *Electra's complex* is an erotic detective narrative, but is, likewise, about the coloniality of knowledge and the dangers of Eurocentric institutions for those living in the margins. These are literature produced by and for the Borderlands. The narratives bring criticisms along with affective ties to the dynamics of the places they depict.

Sometimes, when one character travels to the world of another text, new possibilities of readings emerge. This is the case of reading epistemologies of home in the essays of *Borderlands* along with Leyla, the character of the poem "Interface". These are bridges among Anzaldúa's texts that recognize the never-ending potentialities of these works. The power of

the erotics that Leyla embeds in the poem is also powerful in reading the essays. The same way that the speaker of the poem return home in her own terms, Anzaldúa, too, manages her terms of return. Homophobia plays with the fear of going home and the prejudice against queer and other forms of non-normative sexualities and informs the conclusion of the poem. The architecture of home Anzaldúa is building encompasses both the poems and essays. World-traveling, thus, in Xicana literature broadens the possibilities for new transformative readings. Through the erotic power of Leyla, who is materialized during sex, one more level of meaning is added to homophobia. This is not to try to embellish this kind of discrimination. Rather, this is to bring more trouble to the idea of home and its affective relations.

I have discussed how meetings among certain characters create spaces that may be read as the fractured locus, where safety and danger permeate the scene. To a certain extent, the Borderlands is a fractured locus, and its literature empowers a subjectivity that the colonial discourses try to create as the abject. If, as Mary Pat Brady puts it, the border is an alchemical territory capable of transforming beings into aliens (2002), the literary production of this space functions as a countereffect. Objects in the hegemonic perspective, then, become complex subjects, with agency and desires that compel them in search of others to share and build their stories. These activities and protagonism on their own lives rupture the colonial network. The open wound of the Borderlands (ANZALDÚA, 2007, p. 25) enmeshes with the fissure produced by decolonial acts. Traumas and new figurations of existence, in their materiality and discursivity, grate against each other and participate in the fractures of border encounters. The Borderlands is essentially a potency for becoming a fractured locus of the decolonial rupture.

In seeking representations of desire, I often focused on scenes depicting sexual encounters. These passages frequently surfaced the political perspectives of the sexual drive and how this potency could transform those involved in the action. In *Loving in the war years*, for instance, Moraga describes how language is connected to her being. The sexual description intertwines the narrator's coming into realization about the depth of her heritage in her sexuality (2000, p. 132). Carmela gives the narrator pleasure and a way of reconnecting with her *Xicanidad*. In *Forgetting the Álamo*, a sexual scene is also used as a moment of self-discovery for the protagonist (2009, np). In this case, the feeling of safety and complicity emerges as something the protagonist could not recognize by herself. On another take, Anzaldúa's speaker materializes an alien during sex (2007, p. 172). The materialization of another being inscribes in the epistemological mobilizations of the author an erotic level that allows new poetic readings in terms such as homophobia, the house as a turtle, and a feminist architecture. In the

case of *Electra's complex*, social hierarchy and the dangers of Eurocentric institutions for those living in the margins emerge in an erotic novel. These narratives use different strategies to depict sex, and sex, on its turn, depicts different results of the desire as a political and/or a bridging tool.

Although analyzing the sex scenes is a form of gazing into the relationship between desire and political aesthetics in literature, narratives can depict affective desires using other avenues. These are the case of *So far from God* and *Cabañuelas*. In the former, the driving force that unites Caridad and the Woman-on-the-wall is portrayed in the in-between they find themselves, enmeshing mythological indigeneity and current issues regarding Native Americans debate on land and territory. In the latter, the affective connection Nena develops with her love affair surfaces the Borderlands between distinct forms of imperialism. These narratives are part of what Lugones describes as “intimate, everyday resistant interactions.” To which she continues asserting that “[w]hen I think of intimacy here, I am not thinking exclusively or mainly about sexual relations. I am thinking of the interwoven social life among people who are not acting as representatives or officials” (2010, p. 743). These stories reposition the characters, in their daily lives, in new forms of thinking the borders and reinforce the complexity of connecting land and desire. Still, aesthetically distinct – while *So far from God* displays features typical of fantastic realism, *Cabañuelas* keeps its account tied to the realistic side – they share the fact that both reconstruct Borderlands in new situations of in-betweenness derived from the daily life of the characters.

The intimate interactions in the terms defined by Lugones are in action in many of the texts analyzed here. Another example of such intimacy is the construction of the stable as safe space so Micaela and Lucius, in *Forgetting the Álamo*, can spend the night talking about their loved ones. Or, the alliance between Electra and Adrián, in *Electra's complex*, which allow them go against the impositions and the terrors of Eurocentric institutions knowing that they are not alone. Desire emerges as bridges, as self-recognition, as partnership, as a way of traveling in time, space, and worlds, as a political assertion, and as that which makes someone what she is. Although essentialisms are questioned by the non-repressed desires, being someone from within is also constructed in the movements driven by desire.

Nomadism ties roots and mobility in the construction of a strategic mapping of Xicana desire. These movements may be forced or by choice, and this difference informs the actions performed along the way. The nostalgic for fixity encounters the reality of movement. This supposedly paradoxical endeavor allows return to past historical contexts avoiding the myth of

purity. The mestiza as a subject that, by definition and existence, does not fit the myth of purity navigates contradictions and creates a system of roots as multiple as the ways she finds to go back to her pasts. The nomadic desire constructs paths that move both epistemologically and materially the context where this kind of drive is in activity. By doing so, neither subject, space, nor episteme remain the same.

In the case of Xicana desire, specifically, the drive is informed by the indigenous, Mexican, Anglo-American, and Chicano cultural codes that form the Borderlands. The internal desires are constructed too by external information. Therefore, knowledge is relevant in the constitution of desire; writing against amnesia feeds the energy that propels approximations. When the narrator, in *Native country of the heart*, feels the fire in her body, this sentiment comes from her associating garment, political position and an internal force that moves her. The decolonial potency that is represented in the “X” of Xicana regards the remarkable presence of territory and indigeneity in their affective bonds. In their literary works, they excavate, through fiction and non-fiction, the connections that link them to a place even though they need to move among worlds. This affiliation to space travels along the axis of time as well and informs current issues with both mythological and historical contexts. Although specific to their context, Xicanas’s stories are not isolated and bridges with whom they share some levels of interlocked oppressions become visible. The huipil as linking them to Indigenous women of Latin America is one example. The conversation about reservations, home, and belongings among literary works by Native Americans, Indigenous Brazilian women, and Xicanas, as it occurred in the previous chapter is another. To conclude, mapping desire in Xicana literature also makes visible the strategies used against immobility in the process of finding safe spaces in a world where coloniality is still acting upon marginalized lives and recovering traces of one’s own multiplicities to use them as material in creating new social configurations against colonial impositions. Desire becomes a motor for transformation that happens through rewriting, reclaiming, and reorganizing the existence in the margins. This process participates in a literary tradition that is both new and ancient at the same time, that dates pre-conquered periods and is right now in the making.

5.1. Further avenues of research

From the first pages I wrote to this final text, many themes and texts have changed, as I have too. I take issue with the word “final” because I know knowledge is a continuous and never-ending process. However, at some point I needed to finish this stage of my life. Some

ideas dear to my heart I had to let go in the way. I intended to analyze a corpus composed by more books than I ended up doing. I had to cut whole chapters that I have first proposed to write. These changes are not the result of considering these ideas or texts less important; rather, they are the aftermath of narrowing down to the specifics of my hypothesis and theorizations that are also guided by time and space constraints. Some proposals become works that I am conducting in parallel, and others were left for future projects. The reality of life influences the paths we must take and forces us in constructing ways that were unexpected. For instance, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I returned from my time researching in San Antonio-Tx two months earlier than it was expected, and two weeks before going to Austin to spend seven days researching Anzaldúa's archive. So, this was one part of the project that I had to leave behind – at least for now.

One issue that I am pursuing right now is building a bridge between Xicana and Brazilian literature. I started this movement in the previous chapter, bringing closer theorizations by Xicanas, Native Americans, and Brazilian indigenous women. However, the bridge, specifically, was not the main focus of that debate. Thus, to continue this path, I recently published an article articulating a dialogue between Brazilian and Xicana authors about literature from the margins (MADELLA, 2021). I realize this is just the beginning of queering, or as I prefer to call, *esquisitar* this bridge. I, however, wish to reinforce that this conversation must take into consideration the colonial/modern gender system and the inseparability of multiplicities as much as the historical background of each of the groups meeting over the bridge. Also, this is a conversation that must occur in the margins, with those who live and produce knowledge in the margins. To be respectful of the agents constructing knowledge, it is also imperative to consider the distinct Borderlands that geopolitics create in each of these places. The virtual event *I Simpósio Internacional sobre a Escrit(ur)a de Gloria Anzaldúa*, organized by Instituto Federal do Mato Grosso do Sul, held in 2021, showed that I am not alone in this task.

Although my corpus encompasses books up to 2019, the authors I analyze are active in writing and working since the 1980s, or even earlier. One perspective that I had to cut out of my research is the analysis of materials produced by younger authors, the ones who started publishing after the 2000s. Would their works reverberate similar issues from the authors who started writing around three decades ago or more? How do they continue in this literary tradition? How do they address issues of identity, political consciousness, belongings, and living in the Borderlands? Reyna Grande writes about her life as an undocumented immigrant,

in *The Distance Between Us*. Myriam Gurba addresses her period in the Eurocentric institution that is college as a Chicana, in *Mean*. Erika Sánchez discusses depression in her coming-of-age novel *I am not your perfect Mexican daughter*. How do being Chicana relate to sexuality, queerness, and desire for these and other younger authors? How are they dealing with (de)colonial issues? This is one of the pathways that I consider is still full of possibilities to explore.

Finally, I feel it is important to mention that the political environment we are living is increasingly surrounding and suffocating those who work against normativity and the status quo. The university is continuously suffering all kinds of harassment, especially when involving marginalized subjects. In Brazil, the secretary of culture recently signed a document forbidding the use of neutral language in cultural projects applying for Federal grant³⁵. This same secretary also forbids the requirement of the vaccination passport in events applying for grant, reverberating the negationist view of these days³⁶. This very same negationist view that spiked the death toll due to the Covid-19 in the first couple of months of 2021. These actions unveil the necessity, ever so present, of continuing with research that value cultural productions, including literature, from the margins of hegemonic discourse. The inclusion of one or another book in the curricula of schools or university is not enough to consider that an author, a literary genre, or a topic from the margins are now occupying a canonical space in society or even in the university. To face all this recurrent pressure, we need the help of what Adrienne Maree Brown calls Pleasure activism. Our desires are political, our pleasures, relevant, our stories deserve to be told and listened. The power of the erotic needs to leak to every single corner of our lives. That is the only way we can find the strength to hold on against these and so many other forms of oppressions and attempts of silencing those who go against repression, those who do not accept immobilization. We just need to know that we are not alone in this fight. Bridges are always being built and so very often they use the bricks of desire in their structure.

³⁵ See the news: “Secult publica portaria que veda o uso da linguagem neutra em projetos da Lei Rouanet.” In: <https://www.gov.br/turismo/pt-br/secretaria-especial-da-cultura/assuntos/noticias/secult-publica-portaria-que-veda-o-uso-da-linguagem-neutra-em-projetos-da-lei-rouanet>. Accessed in: Feb 16th, 2022.

³⁶ See the news: “Mario Frias veta passaporte da vacina em projetos da Lei Rouanet.” In: <https://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/mario-frias-veta-passaporte-da-vacina-em-projetos-da-lei-rouanet-25268246>. Accessed in: Feb 16th, 2022.

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