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TOMICCAMA TOMICCANACAYO: A FEMINIST/SPATIAL ANALYSIS
OF *flesh to bone* BY ire'ne lara silva

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2023

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in English
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ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a feminist and spatial approach to the analysis of ire'ne lara silva's collection of short stories *flesh to bone*, a continuation of the Anzaldúan body of thought. The thesis introduces two aspects—spiritual and spatial—to the wounds suffered by the Chicana collective Self which can be found within the characters and plotlines of lara silva's stories, and which had previously been outlined by Anzaldúa herself. This thesis also explains in depth the steps necessary to achieving the never-ending Coyolxauhqui Imperative, which is Anzaldúa's idea that to heal the collective Self, individuals must continue to create and tell the stories of our ancestors and ourselves as survivors instead of victims. Throughout this analysis, it is elucidated that lara silva has created herself a new theory to add to the Anzaldúan framework, called Tomiccama Tomiccanacayo, which translates from Nahuatl to mean: "We are protected by the hands and bodies of our ancestors". Thus, this thesis finds that, within *flesh to bone*, this new theory is asserted as a method of continuous healing and as an addendum to Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui Imperative. This study adds lara silva into the Anzaldúan academe and explains her words' significance to Chicana spatiality. My argument for the existence of lara silva's theory is important because of a continued necessity for collective female healing and the creation of art reaffirming the female Self to new generations of daughters becoming women.

Dedication

Dedicated to my purpose, mi luz en lo oscuro, my daughter, Luna

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Introduction

“Flesh to bone to blood to spirit to power...This is where I began. Healing myself. Creating myself.”

—ire’ne lara silva, *flesh to bone*

I was introduced to ire’ne lara silva’s collection of short stories *flesh to bone* in my first semester here at UCF, whilst studying contemporary American women’s fiction with then-adjunct professor, Dr. Rachel Luckenbill. lara silva’s works struck me as beautiful, and I became enamored, through her, with the topic of Aztec mythology and the Nahuatl language, a topic in which I hope to continue my studies. I knew that in some way I wanted to research Aztec mythology in literature, and lara silva’s works were simply too layered with meaning for me to stay away for long; I love a good puzzle. When I first read the collection, I found myself at times with tears in my eyes as I related to lara silva’s loss of her own mother to cancer, and to the mothers depicted in the stories and their apparent love for their daughters, despite holding them back from power. Apparent was lara silva’s call to action for women to raise louder and more self-affirmed daughters, and though I have already taken that role on, I wanted to spread the same message through my life’s works, which includes my thesis.

Not only do lara silva’s stories encapsulate and re-envision traditional Mexican and Aztec folklore, but the stories which follow everyday women re-envision and elucidate the multiplicity

of the traditional Chicana identity, invoking strength in a generation of young mestizas living in a world in which they daily handle the cultural and gendered trauma of subjugation along with subjective trauma, which includes grief over the trauma faced by their foremothers. In this world, which is that of the mestiza's overculture, the inner power, or even the desire for power, which once occupied the matrilineal and matriarchal ancestors of mestizas, has been stripped from them, and can only be replaced through storytelling, putting readers in the shoes of women who gain or regain power and adding a small piece to the puzzle that is the real-and-imagined space of the individual-and-collective mestiza Self.

I chose to analyze lara silva's works because she writes from a place of pure vulnerability, each word and symbol a mirror into her own trauma, her heart on her metaphorical sleeve. She writes to continue the Borderlands discourse, and though she has been granted many awards for her fiction and poetry—like the 2013 Premio Aztlán Literary Prize for *flesh to bone*, the 2014 Alfredo Cisneros del Moral Award, and the 2008 Gloria Anzaldúa Milagro Award (lara silva, “Bio”)—I hold that there is a gap in the literature where analysis of her works should be in the field of Chicana spatial feminist theory; my aim is to fill that space. In *flesh to bone*, each story is transformative, both for her characters and her readers, and it is this transformation that is the symbolic process of healing which my thesis will analyze. Anzaldúa would call lara silva a *nahual*, a shaman, a shape-changer, a writer who can change forms and change the form of the reader through story (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 66). Indeed, lara silva takes on many forms in her life: daughter, sister, writer, reader, poet, healer, teacher. It is the convolutedness of the new mestiza identity which lara silva brings out in her writing, expounding the grey areas of mestizas' morality and representation. It is the continued strife of women to repossess the “concrete physical space of flesh and bone” that is “the most intimate of personal-and-political

spaces” (Soja 114, 112), which lara silva likens to the wound that Anzaldúa describes as the border, and that she writes to continuously heal. And it is the discursive real-and-imagined (Third)space of the Borderlands which silva moves back and forth from to achieve these tasks. My research question is thus: How does ire’ne lara silva not only adhere to Anzaldúan spatial principles and discursive practices, but add to them?

Methodology

I began my research with a ravenous curiosity about two themes in lara silva’s *flesh to bone*: (1) the historical intersection between the mother-daughter relationship/dissonance and Aztec Mythology and (2) trauma and healing. Within the collection, mothers are seen as preventing their daughters from achieving what they want for themselves, whether that be a new name, safety from emotional and physical abuse at the hands of men, wings, or maternal love. In the story “duérmete”, a daughter endures physical abuse and rapes at the hands of her husband, and, because she is “out en la calle all day” instead of “keeping house and raising a family”, her mother shows no sympathy (lara silva 66). This archetype is utilized throughout lara silva’s stories to muddy the gendered morality of marianismo, which once functioned as a sort of feminism-lite, strategizing the marginal space of the Home and injecting the stay-at-home mother with duty-thus-power (Stevens and Pescatello). In the third wave of Chicana feminism, the new space to be striated, instead of the Home, is the Body, which lara silva’s works deterritorialize by revisioning patriarchal mythology and telling stories that reinvoke bodily autonomy and the desire for power in her readers. In the first chapter of my work, I will outline how lara silva exemplifies the Chicana mother-daughter relationship as a wound in and of itself, with dissonance between the generations’ values of tradition versus new perspectives and marianismo versus the desire for intellectual freedom and bodily autonomy. In the second

chapter, I will explore spatiality in Anzaldúan scholarship and literature. And in the third chapter, my objective will be to take everything I have learned about Aztec mythology, marianismo, motherhood, and spatiality in the Borderlands and relate it back to *flesh to bone* to uncover lara silva's new strategy for social change.

Mother-Daughter Dissonance

I went about a feminist approach to my research, taking in the words of as many Chicana and Latina authors and literary critics as I could, such as Norma Cantú, Norma Alarcón, Ana Castillo, Carmen María Machado, Cherrie Moraga, Aurora Levins Morales, and of course, Gloria Anzaldúa, whose theories and discursive practices are omnipresent in lara silva's works. This feminist approach enabled me to contextualize lara silva's works within the realm of Anzaldúan scholarship as writing to inscribe the new mestiza identity within literature and the academe. I began by reading Anzaldúa's ground-breaking *Borderlands/Frontera*, which begot all of the other spatial feminist literature I have since read. In it, she created a new kind of feminism that embraces the duality of the mestiza experience, looking back to las madres for examples, such as the Aztec *Coatlicue* and Mexican *Guadalupe*. Through analysis of the *puta/virgen* dichotomy, she reassesses gender normativity and its barriers. Her call to action is to women to make no excuse for "male hatred and fear and the subsequent wounding of women" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 83). She states: "the struggle of the mestiza is above all a feminist one" (Anzaldúa 106), and lara silva would agree, her stories above all being glimpses through the historical-social-individual glass ceiling. Anzaldúa's emphasis on strategizing the patriarchal mythology of the Aztecs helped me to contextualize *flesh to bone* as an ode to Anzaldúa and her purpose: to flip the script on spatial representations of the nontraditional woman who desires more for herself and her collective Self. Ana Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*

explores the historical roots in machismo and the loss of Self experienced by Latina women by providing the field of Anzaldúan scholarship with yet another identity: Xicanista, which she defines as Chicana activists at “the connection between their feminism and their artistic and literary expressions” (Castillo 100). In regard to my thesis, I was heavily interested in Castillo’s concept of the “Mother-bond principle”, which tells my own— albeit white— mother’s impoverished and tragic story of settling due to either having a child with someone or money issues and not getting the mental healthcare she so desperately needed before taking her own life. Castillo argues that because of our observation of our mothers’ struggles, “the definition of Mother is altered from the one we experienced as daughters” (Castillo 201).

lara silva As Nepantlera

Throughout this feminist approach to my research, I noticed a similar pattern arise: many authors explored a topic called nepantla, which Anzaldúa assigned new meaning in the book which arose from her dissertation, *Luz en Lo Oscuro*. The term translates from Nahuatl to “space between worlds” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 2). Anzaldúa describes it as “the point of contact y *el lugar* between worlds—between imagination and physical existence” (2). I was reminded immediately of Edward Soja’s idea of Thirdspace, or the space between “spatial practices (Firstspace)” and “spatial representations (Secondspace)” (Soja 110). The two ideas are parallel to one another, with both Anzaldúa and Soja exploring their theories in light of feminism, postcolonialism, and nationalism. Soja, in his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*, analyzes Anzaldúa as a harbinger of the postcolonial critique of his theory, emphasizing the multiplicity of the Chicana woman, quoting her: “I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings”

(Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 81). And Anzaldúa even elaborates on the necessity for spatiality in the literature of the Borderlands in the preface to *Making Face/Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, requiring the entanglement of “social issues such as race, class, and sexual difference...with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded” (qtd. in Soja 129). Soja expounds that the body is responsible for the works of art and products of a system and is thus “connected directly to the material dynamics of geohistorically uneven development and the political economy of contemporary capitalism, bringing culture performatively into the realm of class politics” (115). In other words, the works of art produced by lara silva are inherently works written toward self-inscription and social change. Norma Alarcón argues, in her essay “Anzaldúa’s Frontera: Inscribing Gynetics”, that the existence, prevalence and perseverance of androcentric criticism—or that which only comes from the perspective of men and denies all other perspectives—gives way to a need for self-inscription, especially for female authors of color of postcolonial worlds. It should be noted as well that Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Mino Moallem, editors of the anthology *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, would disregard spatial theory as the “spectacle of men out of control” and “loss of legitimation, loss of authority, loss of seduction, loss of genius- loss” (qtd. in Kaplan et. al. 2), but my thesis utilizes this theory due to its strategic utility in forming lara silva’s new theory.

Also in *Luz en Lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa describes an ability called *la facultad*, which she defines as “shape-changing and shapeshifting of identity” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* xv). María Lugones, a fellow philosopher and theorist quoted by Soja, describes this ability of an individual as “world-traveling” (Soja 130). She opines:

“I think that most of us who are outside the mainstream U.S. construction ... are ‘world-travelers’ as a matter of necessity and survival. ... Those of us who are ‘world’-travelers have the distinct experience of being different in different ‘worlds’ and ourselves in them” (Lugones 11).

This traveling and re-imagining reality is an innate ability of Chicana women, and lara silva travels through several as she sees through the eyes of her characters, writing the perceptions of both mother and daughter, both colonizer and colonized, both man and woman.

Supplementarily, I analyzed and will discuss a selection of lara silva’s other publications, both poetry and prose, that evince my thesis, to take in not only her discursive practices, but an outline of her life’s trauma and how her writing discusses current events such as the election of Trump, the mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the overturning of Roe v. Wade. For example, in silva’s poem “i come from women illiterate and rough-skinned”, another window into her grief over her mother is opened: “my mother was a silent mother she died with a thousand songs” (line 22). The desire she portrays in “sometimes i crave the color red” is likely inner strength paired with a desire to take up privileges her mother could not. lara silva’s essay “Everything Must Be A Little Wild”, published in an Anzaldúan anthology she co-edited with colleague Dan Vera titled *Imaniman: Poets Writing in the Anzaldúan Borderlands*, explains that stories of transformation are necessary to teaching generations of women how to heal not only from their own personal traumas, but from the spiritual trauma their ancestors endured for millennia. And two short stories of hers, “of the green grasses” and “serpents-her-skirt” re-imagine patriarchal historical and folkloric stories.

The Coyolxauhqui Imperative: flesh to bone

The most important spatial strategy present in *flesh to bone* is Barbara Hooper's concept of somatography, or "body-writing", in which "[the body] is a concrete physical space of flesh and bone...involving the workings of power and knowledge *and* the workings of a body's lived unpredictabilities" (qtd. in Soja 114). The unpredictabilities of the body can be presumed to be movements away from the center, toward the periphery that geographers have dubbed the margin. This movement is depicted in characters that move away from the standard perceptions of the traditional woman in *flesh to bone*. To strategize the margin in times of social crisis is to maintain social and cultural difference despite representations of social disorder. Thus, Iara Silva's works strategize the margin that is the Borderlands and crosses and contests "the borders around territory, nation, ethnicity, race, gender, sex, class, [and] erotic practice" (qtd. in Soja 115).

Anzaldúa outlines in her book *Luz en Lo Oscuro*, a concept she has dubbed "The Coyolxauhqui Imperative", which she defines as "the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us" (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 1). This concept calls back to Coyolxauhqui, daughter of Coatlicue who became pregnant "upon tucking a ball of feathers into her waistband while sweeping" and usurped her mother, Coatlicue (Klein 226). Upon her decapitation, Coatlicue's unborn son sprang forward from her womb, fully dressed for battle, and tore his sister to pieces, scattering the pieces and throwing her head into the sky to become the moon. The myth is muddled by the fact that "another account of the Aztec migrations has Huitzilopochtli beheading, not his sister, but his mother" (Klein 225). This, Klein opines, is indicative of "the threat to Huitzilopochtli which was posed by his female relative therefore symboliz[ing] all pretensions, both past and future, to

Aztec supremacy” (226). Pointing to a large stone relief of Coyolxauhqui that presents her naked but for her jewelry and a loincloth, which is paralleled by “the Aztec practice of stripping male war prisoners to their loincloth as a sign of their defeat and demeaned social status” (227), Klein suggests that Coyolxauhqui’s “female sexuality served as a metaphor of the inferiority of all those who contested Aztec power, and of their inevitable political defeat” (227). Klein delineates that “themes of female wantonness, occult behavior, and refusal to serve men weave throughout the fabric of Aztec mythohistory, where their potential harmfulness to the social order is always emphasized” (230). This potential harm to the patriarchal order is what lara silva conjures up in *flesh to bone*, shifting the eye of the panopticon across the border and “searching, inquiring, and healing consciousness,” a process Anzaldúa calls “conocimiento” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 20).

What Accretes Around a Wound is a Theory: Tomiccama Tomiccanacayo

One profound quote from Anzaldúa’s *Luz en Lo Oscuro*: “Sometimes what accretes around an irritant or wound may produce a pearl of great insight, a theory” (1). In my thesis, I will argue that a new theory for utilizing Anzaldúan principles to enact social-individual change has arisen through the works of lara silva which brings all of these topics together:

Thirdspace/nepantla, somatography, feminism, postcolonialism, and world-traveling. This is ire’ne lara silva’s theory of Tomiccama Tomiccanacayo, which she outlines in a keynote to her book of poetry *Cuicacalli/House of Song*. From Nahuatl, the theory’s name translates to “[we are] protected by...the bodies of [our] loved ones, of all the power and life they represent” (lara silva, *Cuicacalli* 97-8). Thus, lara silva’s call to action “to women everywhere” (lara silva, *flesh* 136), as she dedicates her collection-titled story “flesh to bone”, is to look back to one’s roots and the suffering of one’s ancestors as fuel to get through one’s individual, political, and collective trauma. ire’ne lara silva continues the work of Anzaldúa to strategize the marginalized

space of the Borderlands in her works, traveling through physical, temporal, and moral nepantlas and portraying the “wound”—that Anzaldúa used to describe the border— as the stripping of subjective and inner strength from the individual Chicana woman, and concomitantly in the collective Chicana Self, that may be regained by completing the Coyolxauhqui Imperative: to look to one’s ancestors to piece oneself together. But Anzaldúa states that there is no end to this action, “just the [continuous] process of healing” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 20). Thus, the work of a nepantlera is never done; this is especially true of modern times.

The fact that it took lara silva nine years to get *flesh to bone* published is evident of the continuous struggle for visibility and acceptance of Chicana literature. “How do we go on?”, asks lara silva in her speech “Nomiccama Nomiccanacayo: On the Necessity of Making Art in Difficult Times”. She would argue that art is the only way forward toward healing from trauma, re-imagining the Self, and toward social change. This thesis aims to contribute to the field of Chicana literary studies and, as Soja describes the field, is my “chance to strategically choose marginality as a space of radical openness, a place for critical rethinking, re-envisioning, and more effective resistance to all forms of subordination and oppression both inside and outside the academy” (125).

Chapter 1: The Mother-Daughter Wound

“Breathe and the serpent mouth and the sibilant serpent tongues whisper I am the mother of myself first.”

–ire’ne lara silva, *“serpents-her-skirt”*

The mother-daughter relationship in Mexico and in the Mexican American community as depicted in literary works is one that has been strained by decades of disagreement over the ownership of one’s life story and body. In several stories within the collection, this dissonance is a main factor toward the main character’s characterization and struggle. In her autobiographical poem “i come from women illiterate and rough-skinned”, lara silva’s purpose in writing is found, as well as her identity as her mother’s daughter and writer of silent stories: “my mother was a silent mother she died with a thousand songs/ unsung a thousand canvases still blank a thousand stories/ unwritten my mother died” (silva, “i come from” lines 22-4). Where she expresses sorrow for her mother’s unfulfilled desires, she elucidates herself as the continuer of those desires, all the while explaining a gap between what was normal for her mother, and what she would not let be normal for her, namely a lack of autonomy and actualization at the end of her life. This is parallel to what Anzaldúa herself, in an essay posthumously published by the Gloria Anzaldúa Literary Trust in 2015 within the introduction of the fourth edition of her anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, states as the purpose– and in fact, the responsibility– of Anzaldúan writers: “[para] ayudar a los mujeres que todavía viven en la jaula dar nuevos pasos y a romper

barreras antiguas” or “to help women who still live in cages to take new steps and break old barriers” (Anzaldúa, *This Bridge* xxviii). Toward that purpose, throughout *flesh to bone*, lara silva repeatedly creates and transforms characters whose mothers’ perspectives on life are barriers from their own happiness, actualization, and strength. This writing of stories from silenced voices is the beginning of lara silva’s venture into theorization about finding inner strength through the stories of ones’ ancestors and foremothers.

In “hunger/hambre/mayantli”, lara silva intertwines the main character Luisa’s desire for autonomy with her desire for a return to her indigenous roots. Her mother is appalled by her behavior when she is unable to speak to people normally, opting instead to circulate through strings of Spanish words in an attempt to name herself. Her mother remarks to a friend on the phone: “What kind of future is she going to have if she refuses to speak English?” (silva 5). Notably, the dissonance between Luisa and her mother began at puberty, when Luisa began to “underst[and] that there was something dangerous about her body that her mother needed to ignore” (silva 8). This is also when Luisa began to become lost in her words, and— in fact— silva’s speaker explains that Luisa began her search for a new name as a direct effect of her mother’s disdain of her body:

Her mother demanded little of Luisa— only that she sit, that she eat, that she go to school, that she make no demands. Ask no questions...And so she didn’t. Luisa lived in her words (silva 8).

Luisa attempts to find herself and her strength, which is separate from her mother as a source, within these strings of words. Her mother, Bertha, whose husband had left her with Luisa and Luis, equates being alive and light to the duty of family and the presence and solace given by a man: “She missed the wholeness of a family, the sense of being alive. It was always so dark

now” (silva 11). This is indicative of Bertha’s lifelong conformity to the concept of marianismo, in which mestizas are expected to give themselves fully to their children and men, which becomes a trait witnessed in each of the more modern mothers in lara silva’s stories. Dr. Evelyn P. Stevens, one of the leading researchers of marianismo, defines the concept in her essay “El marianismo: la otra cara del machismo en América Latina” as “engendra[do] abnegación, esto es, una capacidad infinita de humildad y sacrificio”, or engender[ing] self-denial, that is, an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice, and those sacrifices’ concomitant “tristeza” y “luto”, sadness and mourning (20). Anzaldúa’s chapter “Entering into the Serpent” in her groundbreaking *Borderlands* explains the roots of what she has dubbed the puta/virgen dichotomy, which subsequently has become our mother/daughter dissonance and the grounds for an ideology like marianismo. She detailed for us the history behind the split, which occurred in two steps: (1) the splitting of Tonantsi from her foremother Coatlicue, the result of the war-driven and patrilineal Azteca Mexica “giving them monstrous attributes and...substituting male deities in their place”, and (2) the final split of Tonantsi/Guadalupe from her Self, Coatlopeuh, descendant of Coatlicue (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 27). Following this split, what is most important is how the symbols of the three mothers of “la gente Chicana” were utilized by the Church. Anzaldúa contends that, in reference to las indias as ‘us’, the Church used “Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, la Chingada [/la Malinche] to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and la Llorona to make us long-suffering people” (Anzaldúa 30-1). Anzaldúa would agree that it is the avoidance of sexuality, instilled in the daughter by her mother, that places the daughter “back into the kitchen” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25), her Self depleted to the purposes she may serve her husband and children. Thus, to be a true mestiza became to be a good mother, to give one’s Self completely to one’s family, for one’s body to be for the sole purpose of baby-

rearing. This is what was instilled into the mothers in Silva's stories, while the daughters sought Coatlopecuh.

What follows in "hunger/hambre/mayantli" is a testament to sexuality being a freeing factor for young women finding autonomy: Luisa falls in love and has sex with a ghost named Adrian who is in danger of becoming olvidado. To combat the evilness of her daughter's pleasure, Bertha lights candles to "[keep] the darkness at bay" (20). This perceived darkness—and the dissonance between mother and daughter—comes from Luisa's figurative and literal oneness with the dead, sexual autonomy, and obsession with her linguistic roots. As a whole, these three traits are what the mothers in Lara Silva's stories despise about their daughters, and the mothers' lack of them that the daughters grieve and thus find for themselves. Luisa eventually finds her name after the significant action of cutting her own tongue with a piece of glass from the many candles lit by Bertha: Mayantli. It is Nahuatl for hunger, which had been a prominent symbol in the story: Luis had no hunger for food, but had endless hunger for "shadow, shape, motion" and "lines. colors. shadows. curves" while Luisa had an intense hunger for words (Lara Silva 6). Even Adrian displayed hunger for food he could not touch because he had become forgotten, an apparent displacement of feeling. This hunger is understood by the reader to be a desire for a return to the spirituality and oneness of las madres indias undone by male powers.

Another example of these traits being the barrier between mother and daughter is within the story "duérmete" in which the main character, Teré, works as a nurse to distance herself from her past and her family. Her relationships with her mother and her elder patient, Doña Marta, reveal her trauma, subsequent mental suffering, and her perseverance through it. It is revealed that Teré had been serially raped and beaten by her former husband, and that her mother, her sole family member, had encouraged her to stay with him, had "told her she should be keeping house

and raising a family instead of being out *en la calle* all day,” referring to her obtaining her nursing degree (silva 66). Doña Marta, on the other hand, though she has led a long life of child-rearing, is a woman full of knowledge and kindness. Teré looks to her for advice on how to cure her remembering, and comes to understand, through a reassembling of bones that for the purpose of this thesis I will detail in Chapter Three, that it is in fact the remembrance of trauma and suffering that pulls the pieces of one’s Self together and closer to the collective Chicana and female Self, breeding strength.

It is within the three stories “death comes on horses/ cortando las nubes”, “tecolotl”, and the collection’s titular story “la huesera/ flesh to bone” that the mother-daughter dissonance is met with a mythical retelling of age-old duendes which had previously been used as horror, but to lara silva they hold in them the potential for restructuring oneself and identity. In “tecolotl”, silva explores an old duende called the tecolotl from the Nahuatl, meaning owl, commonly regarded as *tetzahuitl*, or bad omen, whose calls foretold a certain doom, and who instilled “fear and despair” which “only reinforced the portended doom of their message” (Garagarza). The story follows a young woman whose matrilineage has the spiritual ability to transform into owls. The narrator’s mother, notably, disapproves of her daughter’s abilities while her mother’s “dark-skinned half-sister, never married, without children, poor and illiterate” encourages her to fly (lara silva 79). The narrator catches a glimpse of her Tía’s true wild nature one night as she completed a ritual which seemingly is the end to the *tetzahuitl*: the death of the one who hears the call of the tecolotl. Throughout the years later, the narrator experiences the trauma of being left by all the adults who’d loved her, a miscarriage, and the infidelity of the man she’d loved. It is only when she completes this same process— of killing and eating her ex-lover and former best friend who had been shacking up together— that the narrator finds freedom: “I became complete.

Became fully formed. Became *tecotl*” (97). Where Ana Castillo, author of *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*, explains the notion implicit within marianismo that “[*la hembra*] is yet not *una mujer complete* until the day she becomes Mother” (194), Anzaldúa and ire’ne lara silva instead argue that a woman has it within her Self to become whole, even after trauma and especially without becoming a mother. This theme of becoming whole becomes central to my thesis that ire’ne lara silva has created a new spatial theory for researchers and critics of Chicana literature to discuss and will be discussed more heavily in the chapters to come.

The duende which— in naming the collection after this story— lara silva makes the center of her collection is La Huesera, or the Bone Woman, often also called by the name La Loba, or Wolf Woman. She is called Bone Woman due to the myth that there exists a woman in the desert whose job it is to collect the bones of all dead creatures and sing them a song to reattach their flesh to bone and reanimate them (Pinkola Estés 20). In the original myth, the creature is a wolf, and it so happens that “by splashing its way into a river, or by way of a ray of sunlight or moonlight hitting it right in the side, the wolf is suddenly transformed into a laughing woman who runs free toward the horizon” (20). lara silva tells what the reader finds out to be La Huesera’s origin story, the story of a teenager named Maite Hernandez Ayala who goes through a horrible death and reawakens to recreate herself: “flesh to blood to spirit to power” (lara silva 136). In it, she details her decision to leave her dying mother to make money with her younger sister because “[they] would have starved...and Amá would have died sooner without the money [they] sent her” (133). The mission was futile from the start, the sisters giving every dime they had to survive and the rest toward their mother’s living when Maite is suddenly kidnapped, her jaw broken, her body used by an unknown number of men, her tongue cut out, and her throat cut

as she “died screaming” (135). Maite only mentions her mother as a plot point, but notes, in reference to her prayers during her time of captivity and torture, that she is “[her] mother’s daughter” (134). Her mother had worked as a sobadera and partera, two forms of curandera, or “a specialized healer, learned in the knowledge of specifically healing the body and not necessarily a psychic” to whom “the body is never separate from the spirit or mind” and whose “recommendations always consider the ailing person as a whole” (Castillo 156). Castillo goes on to explain the term “bruja” as a woman who has taken “the step from victim to survivor to guerrillera of her cause” (Castillo 160), which exactly defines Maite’s transformation into La Huesera. The word bruja has negative connotation in popular culture where curanderas were recognized for their skills as healers and given donations to live, like Maite’s Amá is given a place to live by her cousin whose children she had all delivered, and one who she had taught “to walk again when the doctors had given up” (lara silva 129). Much like Maite’s prayers, her transformation into bruja is an example of her being her mother’s daughter. This is one story in which looking to one’s mother for strength works because Maite’s Amá was in tune with the spirituality that had been taken from the other mothers in lara silva’s stories. Where Teré’s mother taught her daughter to accept abuse and be a good housewife, Maite’s mother instilled in her daughters the importance of “working hard, being honest, [and] having faith” (128). This relationship is what gives Maite the strength to become La Huesera, the capacity necessary to hold La Huesera’s spirit and power, and the bridge one must walk over to find their indigenous and—though blocked only by now-centuries of social norms and barriers—inherent spirituality.

Aurora Levins Morales, in her short essay “...And Even Fidel Can’t Change That!” which was published within Anzaldúa’s *Luz en lo Oscuro*, concludes that the current generation of daughters, who she dubs “the third generation” are those capable and responsible of “heal[ing]

the wound” and “chang[ing] the world” (52). She states clearly: “the relationship between mother and daughter stands in the center of what I fear most in our culture” (52). Thus, the gap between mother and daughter must be healed to heal the wounds of transgenerational trauma. Kelli Zaytoun’s concept of transgenerational *sustos*, or postmemories, is important to my thesis that asserts this new theory of *lara silva*’s in that it explains the trauma that must be healed through a return to our roots by way of an understanding of our foremothers’ traumas as part of our Self. Clarissa Pinkola Estés states the existence of one such *susto* that is still ongoing which this third generation now acts upon— the next chapters will explain how— to dissipate: “In essence, the attack on women’s bodies is a far-reaching attack on the ones who have gone before her as well as the ones who will come after her” (Pinkola Estés 174). In response, notably, Castillo suggests- and certainly, *lara silva* would agree- that “surviving such hardships toughens us generation after generation” (201). In *lara silva*’s story “cortando las nubes”, a postmemory is told supernaturally through the ghost of the daughter of La Llorona, an infamous *duende* that need not be explained to the common ear, but that I shall expand upon to enhance the reader’s understanding of her history and meaning. La Llorona, or the Weeping Woman, has unclear origins. Some historians attribute the story to La Malinche, the translator for and consort of Hernán Cortés who has been regarded as a traitor by some *indios* and whose son was taken from her to Spain with his father. Estés categorizes La Llorona in two ways: (1) as a *temblón*, or “shiver story”, a type of story that is “meant to cause listeners to experience a shiver of awareness” (293); and (2) as part of the larger global archetype of the “compassionate Life/Death/Life Mother” which is explained as an innate aspect of all women (47). Further, Estés analogizes the tragedy that is La Llorona’s story to the stifling of Woman’s creative energy, which is threatened by what Estés dubs Her “*animus*”, a Jungian term for the “partly moral,

partly instinctual, partly cultural element of a woman's psyche that shows up in fairy tales and in dream symbols as her son, husband, stranger, and/or lover" or a woman's "opposite-gender nature" (47). Anzaldúa speaks of the end to this process: "By keeping the conscious mind occupied or immobile, the germination work takes place in the deep, dark earth of the unconscious" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 47). In other words, if we allow our subconscious minds to be negatively impacted by threatening social barriers like marianismo, our conscious minds will be occupied by negative thoughts that damage our— and the collective female— unconscious Self.

In lara silva's pre-conquest version of La Llorona, the animus of the only human character, Maravillas, is the thumb of her family and the father of her unborn child. In her mind, fighting her idea of herself as a good mother is the voice of her father: "No choices for women like me— my father had said a thousand times— but to become prostitutes, at the mercy of all men" (lara silva 42). Maravillas encounters the ghost of La Llorona's daughter, Cempasuchil, at a crucial point in her life: she is waiting to cross the border with her boyfriend to start a family but is terrified of rain that could prohibit their departure. She believes that if it rains, there is no tomorrow, for her boyfriend will not take her to America and she will have no place to go with her swollen belly. When Maravillas begs the little girl, who the reader previously attributes the age of a teenager or young adult due to her mature diction, to cut the clouds, Cempasuchil instead explains that her mother "could cut all the clouds in all the skies of the world" (43). Here we see that Cempasuchil is plagued by the same negative animus as Maravillas, but hers is represented by the strangers that conquered her tribe and killed her and her family, who now do so repeatedly so that Cempasuchil must "[hold] herself together only because her brothers would collapse into flesh and pain without her" (47). It is notable that Cempasuchil is the only one the

Mother cannot give a gentle death, her suffering innate, and that the daughter becomes the second mother of the group upon her mother's grief-fueled insanity. The daughter is responsible for reassembling the bodies of her brothers each time they experience their deaths, despite reliving her own at the same time; she is responsible for the caretaking of the infant child Icchautli as her mother and brother take on warrior/curandera roles. In this story of La Llorona, it is the daughter who keeps the search for La Llorona's lost children going. It is she that cuts the clouds despite her lack of belief in herself. It is she who repeatedly goes through the transformation of Life-Death-Life so that she might bring power to current generations of young women and mothers like Maravillas, who after witnessing the daughter's reassembling of her brothers, understands that "[she] would be a fierce mother" (50).

The last point to make about the mother-daughter dissonance is how to heal it. Ana Castillo contends that "by observing the repressive conditions under which many of our mothers became mothers...as we become mothers...the definition of Mother is altered from the one we experienced as daughters" (201). lara silva offers us a manner of healing in these stories and overtly offers it up with her dedication quote of Paul Monette- prominent gay author, activist, and professor- at the beginning of the collection which ties together some of her meaning: "Tell yourself: None of this ever had to happen. And then go make it stop, with whatever breath you have left. Grief is a sword, or it is nothing" (qtd. in lara silva). We must understand our mothers' shortcomings as being matters of social-historical-individual circumstance to heal ourselves and become better mothers for it, forgiving but not forgetting, and breaking the cycle of trauma. We must take on a new responsibility as mothers of daughters to ascertain that (1) our daughters are strong-willed and demanding of freedom and dignity and (2) that the world we live in is one that will not keep our daughters within the *jaula* that is marianismo.

Chapter 2: lara silva As Nepantlera

“And more and more when I’m alone, through still in communion with each other, the writing possesses me and propels me to leap into a timeless, spaceless no-place where I forget myself and feel I am the universe. This is power.”

-Gloria Anzaldúa, *“Speaking in Tongues”*

In explaining the meaning behind the myth of La Loba/Huesera, Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés explains:

Each woman has potential access to Río Abajo Río, this river beneath the river. She arrives there through deep meditation, dance, writing, painting, prayermaking, singing, drumming, active imagination, or any activity which requires an intense altered consciousness. A woman arrives in this world-between-worlds through yearning and by seeking something she can see just out of the corner of her eye. She arrives there by deeply creative acts, through intentional solitude, and by practice of any of the arts.

(Pinkola Estés 23)

This world between worlds described by Pinkola Estés is ever-present in spatial Chicana discourse, and described first by Anzaldúa as “nepantla”, the Nahuatl term for “an in-between space, el lugar entre medio” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 28). This space, understood by Anzaldúa as “facilitat[ing] the bridging and joining” of worlds (28), is an independently similar concept to the

literary geographer Edward Soja's concept of Thirdspace. Their similarities are best highlighted in Anzaldúa's chapter on *conocimiento*, "now let us shift":

Information your sense organs register and your rational mind organizes coupled with imaginal knowings derived from viewing life through the third eye, the reptilian eye looking inward and outward simultaneously, along with the perceptions of the shape-shifting *naguala*, the perceiver of shifts, results in *conocimiento*. (120)

The initial information gathered is a direct parallel to Soja's idea of "Firstspace", while the imaginal knowings are what he would say are coming from "Secondspace". In the middle, the space Anzaldúa states is the home of the *nepantla* and the space from which *conocimiento* is derived, Edward Soja calls "Thirdspace". Soja gives his definition of Thirdspace as follows:

Along with the cultural politics [the development of an openly postmodern feminism] produces, what is novel is the emphasis given not to space or gender per se, or simply to (Firstspace) spatial practices and (Secondspace) spatial representations, but to 'how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation. (Soja 110)

This movement encapsulates "the represented and what the representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable" and "the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy" (qtd. in Soja 111-2). Soja goes on to highlight Anzaldúa as a leader of the Chicana spatial feminist literature movement which "aimed at an active and intentional 'remapping' of the city as a space of radical openness, a space where...ties are severed and subjection abounds but also, at the same time, a strategic location for recovery and resistance" (110). This space, though she had yet to publish anything specifically outlining her ideas about *conocimiento* or *nepantla* at the time of Soja's writing his groundbreaking geographical book *Thirdspace*:

Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places, was and remains to be Anzaldúa's nepantla. However, instead of having blossomed from Soja's theory, Anzaldúa cites Victor Turner's concept of liminality as being central to her theory, with liminal space being the beginnings of nepantla, and neophytes or "liminal entities...[who] are neither here nor there...betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial", as being the beginnings of the nepantlera (Turner 359). The most important point of Soja's that Anzaldúa inadvertently and latently takes from Soja's trialectics is the necessity of the field being radically open to change, which she allows by spearheading a new era of Chicana literature, with lara silva being of the latest generation to pick up the torch.

Ricardo Padrón, in his article "Mapping Imaginary Worlds", analyzes Middle Earth to find that "the land of the good guys is sandwiched between Evil and the sea" and likens this to the idea that the world, and written worlds, are "conceived as a structured set of social, political, or cultural affairs, or a more or less systematic collection of ideas" (275). Also significant to the argument that ancient Mexican folklore has given way to ideals such as marianismo which must be overcome and deterritorialized by writers and poets like lara silva is Padrón's premise that worlds of "ancient mythology...are known to us primarily, if not exclusively, through stories and verbal descriptions" (256). Through this it can be assumed that the illiterate's perception of historical events, or those who perished or lost in battle, were not carried through history, and thus are not modernly utilized to create a perception of the world or of a people. Anzaldúa covers this appropriation of storytelling in her chapter "Border Arte: nepantla, el lugar de la frontera", whilst recounting a trip to the Azteca exhibit at the Denver Museum of Natural History and the repulsion she felt while participating in what she calls "the essence of colonization: rip[ping] off a culture, then regurgitat[ing] its white version to the 'natives'" (*Luz*, 48). Her description of

herself as a participant in misappropriation of her own history leads her to the concept that she and other Chicanas have their “feet in different worlds” (53). She explains that ‘border arte’ is necessary to the nepantlera who works to recombine folk and fine art. Kelli D. Zaytoun, author of *Shapeshifting Subjects: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Naguala and Border Arte*, similarly asserts that “the text itself is engaged in, not a representation of, naguala/shapeshifting at the time of its writing and in being read or witnessed” (97). In other words, the perception of the story is in itself an act of shapeshifting taken on by both reader and writer. Zaytoun furthers this by explaining Anzaldúa’s concept of naguala, the act of embodiment and the connection to *conocimiento*, or the point of consciousness at which true reality becomes apparent, and *la facultad*, the act of shapeshifting, as being a prerequisite of writing, healing, and justice work (63). *La facultad* is the tenet of *la nepantlera* which mirrors María Lugones’ concept of world-traveling. Lugones gives us the idea that worlds may be incomplete, making it difficult to answer questions like “‘What is a Hispanic?’ [and] ‘Who counts as a Hispanic?’” (10). In her essay, she is expanding on the idea of what she calls being through loving, or “traveling to each other’s worlds” in reference to her relationship with her mother and her relationship with other women. Thus, to put yourself into another’s shoes, one must share a world with them, real or imagined. ire’ne lara silva, interestingly, would agree with Lugones as evidenced in her essay “everything must be a little wild” in stating: “The foundational call is to love, carrying and spilling out love. The foundational call is community and connection” (lara silva, “everything” 21).

At one point in lara silva’s “hunger/hambre/mayantli”, Luisa’s stream of speech ends at the line “te escucharé” and she acknowledges that “something in that last word carried flame in it” (lara silva, *flesh* 11). This line is invariably lara silva’s way of explaining the importance of remembering when others cannot: to listen to the stories of ancestors is to carry on a flame

within oneself. Luisa begins to find that flame with her remembrance of Adrian, and that is the breakthrough in her search for a new name. As a nepantlera, Luisa's, and through writing her experience *lara silva's*, experience here is the traveling between the past and the present through storytelling. In this way the Anzaldúan theories on spatiality are different from Lugones' in that they propose world-traveling through time; where Lugones explains: "a 'world' has to be presently inhabited by flesh and blood people" (9), Anzaldúa's theories necessitate time travel as a form of world-traveling. She expounds that world traveling includes traveling toward the time when female spirituality ruled and that this is a necessary step in nepantlera writing and social justice work and using *la facultad*. One look at *lara silva's* recalcitrant sentence structure is enough to perceive her as continuing Anzaldúa's good fight of taking down "proper" writing discourses altogether, an act of a nepantla.

ire'ne lara silva's works also certainly qualify as border arte as she tells the transformative stories of grief and trauma and the dissonance between realities unwritten by the indigenous and less-than-true written histories. Of course the story which most obviously and overtly retells conquest from the then-illiterate's point of view is "cortando las nubes", with the point of view of conquest coming from La Llorona herself, but another such story, titled "thorn forest", gives the perspective of a poor Chicana mother, Lourdes, who is rejected by her daughter, Concepción or Connie, at a young age, and who is not accepted back into her life until the daughter is diagnosed with breast cancer. This story reads through the mother's memories and dreams, her reluctant interactions with her own mother, her journey of losing her one and only child, and a subplot of reconnecting with and understanding the plight of her last surviving sibling, her brother Octavio. This story is so important because it outlines each stage of Soja's trialectics and utilizes Lourdes as the central point of world-traveling throughout her grief and

the end of any loving relationship with her mother. It expands upon the mother-daughter relationship by giving us a glimpse of the in-between generation which is still connected to the female spirituality and indigenous roots while also rejecting the rigidness of her mother's marianismo and her daughter's Americanness. Lourdes explains that when Connie was in kindergarten, her teacher had told her "*Bye Connie, there's your nanny*" and that it was at this point that Connie rejected her mother's skin and heritage, developing as a child of America, claiming a whiter name as her own and, according to Lourdes, being "so well-behaved" (lara silva, *flesh* 113). This is a perfect example of Secondspace or spatial representations leaking into the daughter's perception of beauty and oppression, two significant themes of this story especially. When Connie dies, she is buried in a "solid white" coffin, which furthers this metaphor of Connie's desired whiteness and adds to Lourdes' grief as lara silva writes: "*Lourdes would have painted it turquoise blue with purple and red and gold, would have painted the silhouettes of trees, dark-leaved mesquites, silver-thorned huisaches*" (121).

The story continues to include a subplot about Lourdes reconnecting with her brother Octavio who lives solitarily and mutely in the mountains, having once acted as a nepantlera himself, a poet and singer. There are metaphors which follow him of black witch moths with "their gorgeous darkness" (111), the mesquite in which the moths and their caterpillars thrive, and the huisache under which Octavio buried his tragic life story. The mesquite is significant because of a separate essay "L Árbol de la Vida" written by lara silva recently which asks the question: "En una vida llena de retos, ¿qué otro símbolo más grande hay de tenacidad y persistencia que un mezquite?" ("L Árbol"). In the same light, and in a section titled the same as lara silva's essay, Anzaldúa likens the tree to la virgen de Guadalupe but also to herself, sus

raíces being deep but with Anzaldúa feeling the necessity “to forsake ‘home’ (comfort zones, both physical and cultural) to keep burgeoning into the tree of [her]self” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 67).

Within the “too delicate to open” book with a “cover made of dried moth’s wings” (109) which Lourdes had found years before buried in her garden and chosen to keep closed because she had “feared that the moth’s wings that formed the cover would disintegrate” (115), Octavio writes what he cannot speak: the past which made him become mute and withdraw into the thorn forest, a space far away from the world which rejected him. When Lourdes opens the book, she significantly notes that the cover of the book was “strong when she took hold” of it (115), which follows the concept of strength within what is otherwise perceived as other, dark, less-than-beautiful. Octavio’s story follows his and his lover’s relationship which ended in tragedy: classmates of theirs picking up on their relationship which they tried so hard to hide, kidnapping and beating them both, setting his lover ablaze, raping Octavio, cutting out his tongue and leaving him in a ditch. After retreating to the thorn forest, he comes back only to be there for his sister in her grief. They reunite at Connie’s funeral, dig a hole together under the huisache, and his last gift to her is a black witch moth straight from its cocoon. As she holds it and realizes it to be a moth, she realizes that “there’s a thrumming emptiness in her chest that calls out for this piece of itself” (123) and it takes the reader back to Lourdes’ previous realization that “silence is not emptiness” (118). Thus the moth which Octavio loved even as a child now mean so much more to the pair of siblings; the light which reflects from their wings is only possible because of their darkness, and they are literally what heal Lourdes’ emptiness. Within these metaphors and Octavio’s story, the beauty of darkness can be understood, and their mother’s reaction to her son’s absence being telling of the relationship created by social standards. Similar to the mother-daughter relationship in “duermeté”, Lourdes’ mother suggests that she should have stayed in a

loveless marriage after learning of her husband's other family "so that Connie could have grown up with a father", remained silent while her other daughter was being beaten to death over time despite having fought back against her own abuser, the children's father, and exclaims "Mejor muerto que joto" when confronted with her son's homosexuality (120). Amá calls Lourdes an "unnatural mother" (119), but her ideas of what her children should be cloud her ability to love her children as they should have been, an ideal not shared by Lourdes despite having perpetuated the silence between herself and her daughter up until Connie's death. This perception of what her children should be or do is what makes up the Secondspace of Lourdes' and Octavio's identities, where they inhabit Thirdspace, metaphorized here by the thorn forest and equating to the freedom that lara silva states "unleashes in us the mandate to speak healing" (lara silva, "everything" 20). It is Octavio's story, buried in his sister's garden as an inkling of hope that one day someone close to him would know what happened to him, and the brother and sister's conjoined healing, that gives this story light. It is the "light fracturing and splitting amongst [the black witch moths'] dark wings" that drive her to read it (lara silva, *flesh* 114), the light within the darkness that gives reason to storytelling.

In another story which has an entirely different vibe and diction from the other eight, called "hiding-place", nepantla is discovered by a small girl whose mother's boyfriend creates a situation which she cannot control. Even at this young age, she understands the differences between her and her mother: "When I grow up, I won't love anyone who hits me or yells at me. I won't let anyone hurt my babies" (27). The young girl takes us through a terrifying setting in which she is hiding in the closet from her abusive stepfather as he fights her mother, eventually, presumably, killing her. However, her fear is displaced onto the traditional Mexican boogeyman, the Cucuy, a story which has been used for generations to lure young children to sleep and to

convince them to behave. Notably, it is the Cucuy keeping the girl in the closet, keeping her from protecting her younger sister, and it is her doll Betita in which she places all courage. This displaced fear is indicative instead of the girl's choice at the end to undo the social chains holding her back from freedom, the chains which her mother was never able to escape. lara silva, in her essay "everything must be a little wild", explains, that "light will not flow into a trapped space, a shadowed space, a space that is unknown to itself" and that "freedom's dimensions" are socially muddled, when finding them within oneself is what must occur before being able to heal and spread healing (lara silva, "everything" 19). The closet itself is a dark space, but it is not the closet which lara silva's words pertain to, it is the girl's mind and spirit which she empowers for herself, understanding the necessity of autonomy for herself and younger sister. This story which is shorter and with more immature diction than the rest gives the reader a glimpse into the eyes of a young girl troubled by trauma and overcoming it through imagination. In this story the girl travels from a dark, trapped space to an inward *conocimiento* of strength and light.

lara silva, as *nepantlera* in her stories, gives us the new revelation about Thirdspace not only as a focal point of revolution as Soja and Anzaldúa would understand it, but as a place of light and strength. Light and darkness are huge themes of the collection, with its dedication being given to lara silva's multi-talented and now, tragically, lost too-young brother, as she writes "quien conoce, mejor que yo, la oscuridad y la luz" (lara silva). The *nepantlera* is able to travel across these spiritual worlds, from physical space to spiritual space, into *conocimiento* and backward and forward in time to spread healing from *susto*. The world traveler is necessary to the healing of cultural and transgenerational *sustos* sustained from hundreds of years of conquest, oppression, subjugation, and trauma. lara silva thus acts as *nepantlera* within her stories of transformation to heal the wound of the collective female Self, of past, present, and future

generations, and to spread the knowledge that there is light within darkness, beauty within a lack of visibility and representation, working to recombine First- and Secondspace.

Chapter 3: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative

“Healing, unleashed is profuse and uncontrollable, re-ordering and re-shaping it as it sees fit, leaping from heart to spirit to body to mind to heart, weaving together what was torn apart.”

– ire’ne lara silva, *“everything must be a little wild”*

The above quote from lara silva’s essay within her Anzaldúan anthology is indicative of her Anzaldúan inspiration, this time by the concept Anzaldúa dubbed “The Coyolxauhqui Imperative”, which she wrote is “the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation” after which comes “reconstruction and reframing” and whose goal “is to heal and achieve integration” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 19-20). This process is omnipresent in *flesh to bone* and is in fact what ties all of the stories together. Though Anzaldúa outlines this process as one which will heal the country after 9/11, it can also be understood from an individual perspective, additionally encapsulating somatography, or body-writing, which lara silva performs each time one of her characters literally/spiritually reassembles themselves, and this is something that occurs in all nine stories of the collection. Barbara Hooper defines the body as “a concrete physical space of flesh and bone...a highly mediated space, a space transformed by cultural interpretations and representations...a lived space...[and] a social space, a complexity involving the workings of power and knowledge and the workings of the body’s lived unpredictabilities” (her emphasis, qtd. in Soja 114). She defines body politic as being “an imaginary obsessed with the fear of unruly and dangerous elements and the equally obsessive desire to bring them under control”, a

process— which has, in fact, been continuous— that is reminiscent of the Aztec mythohistory described by Cecilia Klein (qtd. in Soja 114). Hooper states that because “the boundaries around territory, nation, ethnicity, race, gender, sex, class, erotic practice” are those being disciplined, that these borders are those that become sites of “hegemonic and counter-hegemonic contestations” (qtd. in Soja 115), sites in which self-inscription is an inherent act of defiance, sites that embody Thirdspace and necessitate border arte. Body-writing allows an author to self-inscribe their own vision of themselves and their autonomous bodies, a process which involves literally retaking the space filled by one’s body. Thus, this process can also be understood as the creation of Thirdspace within one’s flesh.

The story in which this allegory is most overt is the collection’s titular story, *flesh to bone*. It is notable that within this story, the place where La Huesera/Maite “began [is] healing [her]self”, “creating [her]self” (136), requiring that women begin with their own selves in the process of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative before acting— through border arte or otherwise— to set others free. Even the duende responsible for the reconstruction of those who have suffered is first responsible for reassembling herself. Thus, lara silva opines that it is through initial reconstruction of one’s body that one is able to heal and achieve spiritual freedom despite trauma: “Heal the spiritflesh, and set the spirit free” (lara silva 130). Significantly, La Huesera is described as whole when “[her] body [is] wavering between woman and wolf” and when she resides “in all the places where the worlds are unseamed” (130). The ‘worlds’ mentioned here are uncertain but can be presumed to be redolent of the US overculture and the US Southwest, making the space inhabited by La Huesera equal to the Thirdspace between the two. Within this space between worlds, the bodies of those who have suffered are remade, but not reanimated. Their spirits are healed, but not settled back within their bodies. La Huesera grieves that she

“can’t reverse time, can’t keep them safe and whole, can’t unscar, unwould, inviolate” (135).

This is obviously a regret shared by lara silva as her works cannot undo the trauma previously endured by her and her readers, the femicide endured by those she has dedicated this story to, or the tragedies that were faced by her ancestors. The only action we as nepantleras are able to take is the continuous process of healing known as the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, the telling of stories for survivors’ and lost ones’ sakes. lara silva writes the necessity of this storytelling as a method of recombining the world’s idea of Chicanas and the individual feeling of power brought by oneness with spirituality in storytelling in her essay “everything must be a little wild”:

It is not enough to just tell our stories. It is not enough to tell our histories. It is not enough to claim the voice of the voiceless. It is not enough to send our words out into the world. The stories we tell and the consequences of those stories are our responsibility. If the stories we tell keep us in the role of victims, if the stories we tell do not speak power, if the stories we tell re-affirm the systems and realities that oppress us, then we are not telling the stories that we most urgently need (lara silva, “everything” 19)

One method of achieving this recombination, of course, is somatography, which lara silva is utilizing in *flesh to bone* as a method of her own healing and conscientización. In multiple characters there are connections to traumas that lara silva herself has endured, and people in her life who have either caused those sustos or been part of them with her. In “thorn forest”, Octavio parallels lara silva’s own brother Moisés who has unfortunately recently passed, and who was the youngest of the family and— to their father’s great disappointment— gay. In “the ocean’s tongue”, the father is guilty of having molested the narrator’s youngest brother. In fact, the story itself is a nod to when the pair was forced to care for their own ailing diabetic father. One can further compare the two fathers’ effects on their daughters with the narrator’s father’s

“threaten[ing] to burn all [her] papers and stories” (170), where in reality lara silva’s own father did not just threaten but had done this because there was not yet a hot meal for him on the messy table (“On Permission”). lara silva takes her own advice when it comes to writing to heal and writing to heal others.

This last short story in the collection, “the ocean’s tongue” best represents Anzaldúa’s idea of the Coyolxauhqui imperative as “a continuous process of making and unmaking” (Anzaldúa, *Luz* 20). The story is narrated through the perspective of a young pregnant woman who receives the call that her father is dying. With the stress of taking care of her father and the identity crisis she goes through after learning about her father’s sins, she loses the baby and a part of herself. She speaks mostly to her unborn son, but after losing him, looks to the ocean for solace: “Will you mother him as I could not. Will you hold him close to your breast and sing him wandering gull songs, the songs of undercurrents and the deep darkness” (171). Here again, we see the beauty in darkness being highlighted as a source of possible healing and the ocean, significantly, depicted as a “mother gone mad” (167), a screaming mother not unlike La Llorona who has helplessly lost her child and been subjugated by the Sun and Earth. Of note as well is her depiction as dangerous to pregnant women, indicative of Klein’s understanding of the depiction of Coyolxauhqui and other female deities as harmful to the social order by Aztec mythohistory. With the trauma of loneliness, loss, and a new understanding of her identity as being part of a man who has destroyed lives solely for his own pleasure, the narrator is left with nothing to do but live on, which she is described as doing in a short blurb at the very end of the collection: “Months have passed. I can sleep now. When I cry, I taste the ocean on my lips” (172). It is this last line of the collection which holds the weight of the constant perpetuity of healing, and the necessity of the telling of others’ traumas to get through one’s own. After being

dismembered by her father, her identity torn apart by the truth of his life, as well as the physical loss of the part of herself which was her son, she is in the state of reconstruction when the story, and the collection, ends. Though this gives the reader a sense of longing for more to the story and to her healing, it can be read as the never-ending story of healing, the telling of your own story and the remembrance of the past as what is necessary for one's own and others' healing.

Reconstruction is also overtly portrayed in "duérmete", a story about the importance of remembering in the process of healing. This step can be understood to be a method of deconstruction and dismembering, as every time Teré is forced to recall her trauma, she is unable to sleep, and it causes her great distress. Throughout the story, it becomes clear that Teré, in the process of attempting to forget her former husband, Ignacio, is tasked with something higher to be able to heal: "Why wouldn't the dreams and the memories leave her alone? What more did she have to do?" (69). After the conscientización achieved through her interactions with the elder Doña Marta, Teré finds the skeleton of one of Doña Marta's lost children in a box in the closet. Teré, in reassembling Doña Marta's lost child's skeleton and placing the two of them together in death, reassembles the pieces of herself necessary to healing. After witnessing Doña Marta's bones which were "scarred into wholeness" (75), she understood that similarly, "her body had survived, healed, grown strong again. She had survived, healed, grown strong again" (75). This distinction between Teré's physical body having been scarred by Ignacio and coming back from it and her spirit having been scarred by perpetual victimhood and her mother's lack of love for her is an important one made. Here again lara silva explains the importance of the spatial body in terms of healing: spatial reconstruction must come before spiritual reconstruction. This story also depicts the reframing of trauma simply as part of one's life, as not trauma, but survival, making Teré now "wanted to sleep and remember" (75).

Also relevant to a discussion of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative is Anzaldúa's idea that "Coyolxauhqui exemplifies women as conquered bodies" (Anzaldúa, Luz 49), thus necessitating not only body-writing, but sex-writing, or the writing of sex from a female standpoint, empowering without victimizing, shaming, or subjugating the female. Ana Castillo writes in *Xicanisma* that "at no time in a woman's life is she given reprieve from being aware of her motherbody" (207). Speaking from my own experience, we are especially hyper-aware of how giving birth and the act of mothering has affected our bodies and taken away our physical autonomy, and this is due solely to the Secondspace— or spatial representations of women— that survives within the global media. Castillo quotes Clarissa Pinkola Estés on the importance of "refut[ing] ideas and language that would revile the mysterious body, that would ignore the female body as an instrument of knowing" (qtd. in Castillo 207). Biologically female bodies are the only ones capable of knowing what it is like to carry life within one's self, to bring life to the world, and yet they are the most scrutinized for perfection. Castillo asserts, quite bluntly and correctly, that "our bodies do not belong to us" (136). They belong instead to the eyes of men, the babies we suckle, the families we raise, and the media which attacks our reified selves. In a world which steals from us our idea of ourselves, it is crucial that we write our bodies the way we see them, the way we feel them to be.

Somatographically writing across the border which maintains erotic practice—which I will herein refer to, for continuity purposes, as sex-writing—is also geographically important, by Barbara Hooper's understanding, because of the historical lack of space, especially within the academe, allotted to queer identities. Anzaldúan scholarship has for decades been a part of the discussion surrounding queer literature, and lara silva has included herself through her story "desembocada/the mouth of the river". The story is of a young woman going through the loss of

her father and twin brothers, who had died when she was nine after suffocating in a traincar on the way from Mexico to the US. Going through this grief, she one day is visited by a goddess in a dream who she falls in love with, worships, and awaits with every waking moment her return. Slowly this nameless “golden-skinned and black eyed” goddess becomes “[the narrator’s] refuge...haven...balm and...healing” (143, 148). With vivid descriptions of the mouth of the river goddess’ lips, hips, hands, and breasts on her body, the narrator seemingly enters a sexual relationship with her, but their relationship can also be understood as heretic reverence. Before leaving the narrator for ten days the mouth of the river breathes into her whilst kissing her “the translucence of giving words birth” (150), explaining the requirement for speaking truth to trauma during the process of healing. The mouth of the river then gives the narrator a vision of her father and brothers in which she is able to “let [her] hands fall” and “[release] the words”, understanding then “the teaching of [her] god: to embrace without limbs, to release without relinquishing memory” (156). Though different than lara silva’s own upbringing– with her in an interview having stated that she “read maps before [she] read books” (Guzmán)– the narrator states:

I’ve never been able to read maps...But it fascinated me to think there might be ways to map the soul, the spirit, the shifting borderlines between emotions, unknown lands between being and non-being. The non-physical dimensions of memories, of yearning (145)

Thus, this narrator, through the experience of a lesbian relationship with a river goddess, is able to overcome her grief and reframe parts of her life, including her concept of herself, her trauma, and the possibility of becoming *nepantlera*.

In the footsteps of Anzaldúa, Castillo defines una activista as “*una guerilla* who has taken her personal tragedy to empower herself and help her environment” (158). This definition is reminiscent of lara silva’s quote of Paul Monette, “Grief is a sword or it is nothing”, and here, instead of pertaining to the transgenerational sustos experienced by Chicana women, she links it to individual traumas which must be overcome not only to, as Doña Marta said to Teré, “survive and...keep on going” (68), but to be able to also heal others. lara silva’s *flesh to bone* is a masterpiece, the stories of which depict the Coyolxauhqui Imperative in action. She explains—through the reconstruction of her characters and the inclusion of tidbits of her own experience—that the Coyolxauhqui Imperative is ongoing, necessary to the healing of the mestiza, and most importantly, that the process must be unapologetic.

Conclusion |

What Accretes Around a Wound is a Theory: Tomiccama Tomiccanacayo

we have walked through fire through burning infernos

we have wept we have suffered

we call ourselves back we have survived we have

become stronger we call ourselves back we have not lost

any part of ourselves we are not diminished we call

ourselves back

we are whole

– ire'ne lara silva, “*i call myself back*”

In *Making Face, Making Soul*, Anzaldúa explained that: “In our literature, social issues such as race, class and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded” (Anzaldúa 25-26). The theory which has come from the collective trauma of Chicanas and lara silva’s individual trauma, whose name Tomiccama Tomiccanacayo literally translates from Nahuatl as “[we are] protected by the hands and bodies of [our] departed loved ones” (lara silva, *Cuicacalli* 97-8), continues Anzaldúa’s spatial theory and expands upon her Coyolxauhqui Imperative. This theory states that it is necessary, in order to maintain a continued search to the end of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative and to protect ourselves from harm in the first place, and that one look to one’s foremothers—mythological, folkloric, or ancestral—for “the wisdom to know what [we] should allow in...and

what [we] should perceive as poison and turn away—everything that would cast [us] into the role of monster or victim, what would make [us] calloused or apathetic, despairing or weak” (lara silva 98). Especially while writing, lara silva states that it is imperative that the nepantlera be in tune with her wild self, the part of herself which comes from her wild female ancestors, and that she reminds herself of their strength. And yet even those who had been victims have strength because of their will to survive and heal. There are multiple wounds examined throughout my analysis of lara silva’s works which this theory can be—and is in fact encouraged by lara silva to be—utilized to close.

The mother-daughter dissonance is one wound within the collective female Self which lara silva calls upon readers to close through increased spirituality, a return to one’s indigenous roots, and assuming curandera roles, healing over time—and future generations—our daughters’ selves. Individual grief and traumas, experienced by each of her multifaceted characters, is able to be overcome through these same methods. Another, of course would be the wound between Firstspace and Secondspace, the nepantla of Thirdspace inhabited by the collective female Self and their bodies. And finally, a third is the wound which reopens and becomes infected when we forget our trauma, with remembrance of your past and your ancestors’ pasts being an integral step to deconstruction and dismembering and eventually becoming spiritually whole.

The most important distinction that lara silva makes in her keynote away from Anzaldúa’s spatial theory is that truly believing and “walk[ing] this earth” with Tomiccama Tomiccanacayo is the key to “becoming so strong that we would not let ourselves be injured” (lara silva 97). Initially, this keynote was written as a method of relighting the fire for “artists and activists” after the election of Trump (93), but my thesis argues that she is also speaking to implore nepantleras such as herself to continue the good fight of preserving sexuality/spirituality,

becoming unapologetically visible through body-writing and sex-writing, recombining the Firstspace and Secondspace occupied by Chicanas, and reconstruction of the collective female Self.

To continue this work in the future, I think it is vital to explore the literature regarding Thirdspace and nepantla more thoroughly and more broadly across Pan-Atlantic and Pan-Indigenous literature, and especially to include more works by Pat Mora and Aurora Levins Morales. A more exhaustive historical-social explanation of the myths and duendes in the literature would serve in the future to lead to a better understanding overall of mythology's importance in regaining spirituality and becoming nepantlera/curandera. I would also include a more holistic analysis of lara silva's works, because I believe her poetry to be an invaluable resource when explaining this theory and the author/poet's Anzaldúan nature. Transnationalism—and especially its tendency to erase differences between women—was a topic that, though I continually researched it, I was unable to include in this thesis due to time constraints, but it is one that both Soja and Anzaldúa expound upon and that lara silva embeds into her work, as well, as an aspect which is continually scarring the wound between the spiritual/sexual self and the modern self which necessitates its own subordination to live in a society run by marianismo and machismo as ideologies. To that end, the words of Minoo Moallem, Caren Kaplan, and Norma Alarcón¹ become an asset.

The border spatiality which lara silva has and continues to expand upon in her works is in great need of being further evaluated by the academe. Her words are indispensable when it

¹ Alarcón, Norma, Caren Kaplan, and Minoo Moallem. *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*. Duke University Press, 1999.

comes to the discussion of Chicana literature, evidenced by the fact that theory can be extracted from only one collection of stories. These stories are little individual masterpieces outlining the necessity of feeling the strength of one's ancestors coursing through their veins in the day-to-day, walking with their head high and writing with more purpose than can be attained by the misery recently brought on by Trump anxiety disorder, and the onslaught of sexist/racist/homophobic forces seeking to control/limit/destroy women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Border arte can be revitalized by Tomiccama Tomiccanacayo, and the theory stands to gain more traction and detail after any further research of mine is completed.

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