Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
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Nathália Araújo Duarte de Gouvêa

"but ive always been the wrong way": Chicana identity negotiations framed through sexuality and violence in Emma Pérez's *Gulf Dreams* and Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*

Rio de Janeiro
2017

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Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao programa de Pós-graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof.ª Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris

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DEDICATÓRIA

I would like to pay homage to all strong rebellious and resistant women that I have had the pleasure of encountering, especially my mother, stepmother and grandmothers.

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It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions.

Gloria Anzaldúa

RESUMO

GOUVÊA, Nathália Araújo Duarte de. *"but ive always been the wrong way"*: Chicana identity negotiations framed through sexuality and violence in Emma Pérez's Gulf dreams and Carla Trujillo's What night brings. 2017. 96 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2017.

A presente dissertação visa investigar dois romances descoloniais, *Gulf Dreams (*1996) e *What Night Brings* (2003), escritos respectivamente pelas autoras *chicanas* Emma Pérez e Carla Trujillo. As obras oferecem um espaço para questionamentos sobre o sistema patriarcal presente na cultura mexicano-americana, o tabu em relação à sexualidade feminina e a violência contra mulheres e crianças. Embora usem estratégias narrativas diferentes, os dois romances são narrados em primeira pessoa. *Gulf Dreams* enfoca a narrativa de uma mulher em sua vida adulta, recontando em fragmentos de memória a opressão sofrida em sua comunidade enquanto mulher, *chicana* e lésbica desde a sua adolescência. Em forma de um *bildungsroman* moderno, *What Night Brings* aborda as experiências de uma menina pré-adolescente e sua descoberta da existência *queer* O desejo lésbico presente nos dois romances é o elemento que impulsiona as narradoras a confrontarem e subverterem o papel social demandado da mulher. À luz de críticas em sua maioria *Chicanas* e feministas, esta análise investiga a existência de opressões, *machismo* e silenciamento nos romances em questão. A violência contra mulheres e crianças, seja física ou psicológica, perpassa os romances através de casos de assédio, estupro e violência doméstica, comuns à comunidade *chicana*, mas certamente não limitados a ela.

Palavras-chave: Literatura *chicana*. Heterossexualidade compulsória. Sexualidade feminina. Desejo lésbico. Violência contra a mulher.

ABSTRACT

GOUVÊA, Nathália Araújo Duarte de. *"but ive always been the wrong way"*: Chicana identity negotiations framed through sexuality and violence in Emma Pérez's Gulf dreams and Carla Trujillo's What night brings. 2017. 96 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2017.

The present work aims at investigating two decolonial novels, *Gulf Dreams* (1996) and *What Night Brings* (2003) written, respectively, by Chicana authors Emma Pérez and Carla Trujillo. The two literary pieces offer a site for questionings the patriarchal system operating in the Mexican-American culture, the taboo regarding female sexuality and the violence against women and children. Even though the novels employ different narrative strategies, both of them are written in the first-person. *Gulf Dreams* focuses on the narrative of an adult woman, retelling through fragments of memory the oppression she has suffered as a woman, Chicana and lesbian since her adolescence. In the form of a modern *bildungsroman*, *What Night Brings* addresses the experiences of a pre-teen girl and her unveiling of *queer* existence. Lesbian desire, present in both novels, is the element that impels their narrators to question and subvert the expected social role of women. Based primarily on Chicana and feminist criticism, this analysis explores the existing oppressions, *machismo* and silencing of women in the selected novels. Violence against women, whether physical or psychological, surpasses these literary pieces through cases of harassment, rape and domestic violence, common in the *Chicano* community, but certainly not limited to it.

Keywords: Chicana literature. Compulsory heterosexuality. Female sexuality. Lesbian desire. Violence against women.

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INTRODUCTION

> Books saved my sanity, knowledge opened the locked places in me and taught me first how to survive and then how to soar.
> *Gloria Anzaldúa,*

> The sense of submission and docility that we see is not about that, it's about survival… a powerful mechanism. It's like when you are in the ocean and a shark is coming; if you can stay still, it'll go right by you. If you can stay still enough, and you survive it, then you can go on, and do what you have to do. But the nuances and the dynamics are intricate. It's like a dance in a person's life, and it's a continuous conflict about which it is tremendously difficult to make conclusive remarks.
> *Ana Castillo*

I want to investigate oppressions. Throughout this dissertation, this word will appear quite often associated with women. Through my research, I was able to understand that there is not just one capital-lettered History. According to Èdouard Glissant in "History - Histories – stories", a chapter from *Caribbean Discourse,* what he characterizes as History was imposed by enslavement and colonialism and erased collective memory (GLISSANT, 1999, p. 64). My reading also uncovered many unknown figures in Mexican-American histories and in the stories of strong women in my life, stories that convey a deeper meaning to the concept of women, stories that multiply and enrich the field of Women's Studies. Understanding some mechanisms of oppression women have faced and still face in conservative cultures has highlighted the possibilities and the power that literary writing offers to those who listen carefully. When I entered the Master's Program in Literatures of English Language at UERJ, I thought I would be able to contribute to literary theory and, surprisingly, what I understand now travels deeper into my soul. I am changed. Literature has helped my own process of self-acceptance. I have been able to reconnect with desires I could not fully comprehend before. And thanks to this, I was able to break with the numbness I had felt since childhood. For the first time in my life, I opened myself to loving a woman, a new, intense and completely different experience for me. I also found an understanding and compassionate environment among my professors and friends, an environment created by women for women. And here

lies one of the facets of women's unity. I now understand what Malala Yousafzai pointed out in her speech to the UN on the occasion of her sixteenth birthday: "we cannot succeed if half of us are held back" (The Guardian. 2013). I see now that Chicana history is not a simple straight line but a complex geometrical figure yet to be drawn, an achievement possible thanks to many contemporary Chicana authors and the ones who made way for them to have access to education and space to speak up. I feed from the erased lines in history books and the silenced voices. Writing this dissertation involved much more than fulfilling an academic requirement; it renewed my thirst for knowledge. Literature has definitely become personal and political for me.

My objective with this research is to call attention to the representation of histories/stories of/by women in literature, to the internal and external conflicts the hegemonic culture imposes upon Chicanas, specifically upon Chicana lesbians; and to stress various types of violence women inscribed in such culture endure. This task can be accomplished only by questioning issues of patriarchy, *machismo* and their consequences such as gender and sexual oppression and violence against women within the Chicana culture, as represented in the selected novels.

In *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out that the study of literature, especially comparative literature, “may give us entry to the performativity of cultures as instantiated in narrative” which positions us “as reader[s] with imagination ready for the effort of othering” (SPIVAK, 2003, p. 13). For me, these narratives that place the readers facing the effort of othering carry aesthetical dimensions which convey political meaning.

In *Home Girls* (1996), critic Alvina Quintana, hails the achievements of Chicano literatura and claims that it feasts on cultural hybridity (QUINTANA, 1996, p. 16). She mentions Julia Kristeva’s positioning of the female discourse as breaking with patriarchal tradition and functioning “as a feminist act of dissidence” (KRISTEVA apud QUINTANA, 1996, p. 16-17). Quintana sustains that, as resistance literature, Chicana literature acts in response to cultural and ideological containment, transforming itself into a politicized activity (p. 17). The critic also calls attention to the new aesthetic oportunities originated from the opposing ideologies of Anglo-feminist or Chicano influence (p. 21). By regarding a framework that inserts a Chicana social predicament that considers tensions between values and culture and ethnicity and gender, she ponders upon Marta Sánchez’s argument that “Chicana poetics is inspired by conflict and struggle” (SÁNCHEZ apud QUINTANA, 1996, p. 23). For the purpose of this analysis, I hope to critically analyze “the writing[s] of the

powerless", as Quintana says while musing on bell hooks' view that "writings produced by any exploited or colonized group should be recognized for its creative resistance as well as its creative expression" (hooks apud QUINTANA, 1996, p. 28). In agreement with Quintana, I wish to "develop an analysis that will enable us to move beyond the celebratory interpretation that merely identifies the presence of women's voices" (p. 29).

I do not intend to fall prey to the dangers of essentialism; therefore, I do not intend to describe a unique experience for women, much less for Chicanas. Philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler, in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*[1] (1990), discusses the problematic assumption of womanhood as a common identity and common experience in feminist studies. In addition to the different experiences concerning being a woman, there are several facets such as racial, class, ethnic and others that constitute the identity of a person. All these facets should not be disregarded when discussing identity constitution. Butler emphasizes the impossibility to neglect all the overlapping aspects regarding the nature of subject construction.

> If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (BUTLER, 1999, p. 6).

This research is imbued with the perspectives of Chicana Feminist Theory, including the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, Emma Pérez, Carla Trujillo and many others that have intertwined personal and collective experiences with theoretical writings. Emma Pérez's project in *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999) is to write Chicanas into histories. I position this analysis under her theory of decoloniality which fills a gap between the colonial and the postcolonial. Pérez inserts Chicana/o history in this precise gap. Within this new category, she attempts to reconsider Chicana agency and hear voices erased by History, refuting male experience as the norm (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 3-30) with the objective of projecting these voices for others to hear them as well. It is not my intention, by any means, to erase male experience; however, my focal point is to investigate literary representations of women as they struggle to renegotiate their prescribed roles and to transgress patriarchal demands within Chicana society.

[1] In occasions where I do not quote from the first edition, I shall presente the work with its year of publication and reference to the quotation with the year of publication of the edition used in the research.

Pérez's work considers Mexican women on both sides of the border. New types of Chicana identity arise from the "new mergings" (p. xviii) Even though she recognizes the differences between Mexicans living on both sides, she argues that "language, culture, race, class and gender evoked parallels rooted in centuries of common history" (PÉREZ, 1999, p. xviii). I point out that by mentioning Chicano culture, all these intertwining elements are included in addition to their interaction with the so-called *gringos*, the ones outside such culture. In pursuance of clarification, the term Chicano/a here is used to refer to Mexicans living in the United States and to Mexican-Americans that are aware of their conditions in the U.S. society. This concept will be developed further throughout the theoretical discussion.

When writing this dissertation, I chose not to translate Spanish words that are present in the theoretical and literary works because of the meaningful representation of all that lies behind the usage of the English language in the Chicano community and the importance of language for the survival of a people. In *Writing from the Borderlands* (2001), Carmen Cáliz-Montoro emphasizes that "Chicano literature […] disrupts the homogeneity of English with intersecting languages form the various cultural backgrounds that contribute to it" (MONTORO, 2001, p. 5).

Furthermore, Cáliz-Montoro describes the Chicano term "the border" as depicting "a reality of exile within the homeland" (MONTORO, 2001, p. 4). The borderland embodies the multiplicity and dynamism of Chicano experiences and cultures. With the influence of the United States hegemonic culture, the "Chicano experience becomes articulated in opposition and resistant to an invasive mainstream culture" (p. 5). According to Montoro, within this framework, Chicanos have faced a constant battle in their attempt at integration and also negotiation with their various cultural influences and backgrounds (p. 5).

Cáliz-Montoro ends her chapter "Defying Otherness: Chicano Geopolitical, Literary and Historical Imprints" with the notion that the metaphor for the crossroads – Gloria Anzaldúa's concept associated with the person who survives the Borderlands, who lives without borders – reinforces a sense of inconclusiveness. It is in this inconclusiveness that Montoro inscribes Chicano reality:

> An ever-changing process that also reflects the reality of an increasing number of human beings. From living in the crossroads, Chicanos have retraced old realities and experiences and have thus started to envision a different present and future. For some of them, it has involved going back to old myths of origin, such as those involving Aztlán and Coatlicue (MONTORO, 2001, p. 15).

Cherríe Moraga is one of those who have revisited old myths with the objective of reframing them. In her essay "Queer Aztlán: the Re-formation of the Chicano Tribe" (1992), she

intertwines the decolonization of the culture with the decolonization of the body. Moraga claims that the bodies of women in general and the ones of men and women who transgress gender roles have been regarded as site to be conquered. Yet from a feminist standpoint, they are also sites to be liberated. “The nationalism I seek is one that decolonizes the brown and female body as it decolonizes the brown and female earth” (MORAGA, 1992, p. 227). She places *la Chicana Indígena* at the center of this new nationalism; heterosexism and homophobia would no longer be integral components of cultural demands.

In the same essay, Moraga also points out that, for the *Chicano Movimiento*, the preservation of the *Chicano familia* was the most imperative issue. Politics within the movement secured the patriarchal father figure in both private and political lives, reinforcing male dominance. Women were, at most, authorized to feed, fight for *la raza* and perform her sexual duties as a woman (MORAGA, 1992, p. 231). For the protection of this family structure, a variety of topics

> […] were censored both in the cultural and the political spheres as not ‘socially relevant’ to Chicanos and typically not sanctioned in the Mexican household. These issues included female sexuality generally and male homosexuality and lesbianism specifically, as well as incest and violence against women – all of which are still relevant between the sheets and within the walls of many Chicano families (MORAGA, 1992, p. 231)

Moraga mentions that feminist scholars are engaged with the preservation of Chicano culture. However, she advocates they are aware the culture “will not survive marital rape, battering, incest, drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS, and the marginalization of lesbian daughters and gay sons” (p. 232). Moraga stresses the participation of lesbians as critics of the Chicano Movement’s sexism and Chicana liberation.

Much has been discussed about the demands upon women in patriarchal and heteronormative societies. When questioning the behavioral norms for women in a conservative community such as the Chicano, one cannot help but notice how these norms generate or at least influence violence against women. Sexuality issues affecting Chicanas, especially Chicana lesbians, are also predicated to social norms. It is clear that not all members of any community abide by their rules, traditions and social roles; this is an analysis of how such aspects are represented in the novels and produce a dialogue with Chicana and feminist theoretical works.

With the objective of carrying out the discussion proposed, my fictional corpus is composed by two novels: *Gulf Dreams* (1996) by Chicana writer and historian Emma Pérez and *What Night Brings* (2003) by Chicana writer Carla Trujillo. Through the selection of such novels, I intend to foreground the controversy regarding the sexuality of women and the

silences created by issues of sexuality and violence against women and children. The novels have been written by feminist Chicana writers who confront traditional aspects of subject representation. By narrating fictional experiences which correlate to a wider collective representation, these writers are engaged in creating a literature of resistance, challenging both Anglo-influenced and Latino cultures altogether.

This research is also based upon what Paula Moya defines as Satya Mohanty's "realist" account of Chicana identity that surpasses essentialism by "theorizing the connections between social location, experience, cultural identity and knowledge" (MOYA, 1997, p. 128). It is important to acknowledge that I recognize the existence of different approaches to the term experience. Many important critics have devoted attention to the concept, including Avtar Brah (1996), among others, who defines experience not as a given reality but as the effect of processes we call reality (BRAH apud ALMEIDA, 2015, p. 13).

Carmen Cáliz-Montoro also points out that, in their writings, Chicanos tend to inscribe themselves as both individuals and as part of the Chicano community. She brings into the discussion a study by Catherine Lejeune who describes "the border '[a]s a particular hybrid setting [that] shapes [Chicanos'] sense of who they are" (LEJEUNE apud MONTORO, 2001, P. 9).

Emma Pérez's decolonial theory can be related to both novels. It is within the decolonial imaginary that "kaleidoscopic identities are burst open and where the colonial self and the colonized other both become elements of multiple, mobile categoric identities" (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 7). One is not solely oppressed or oppressor, not merely victim or victimizer. Within the imaginary, there is a negotiation towards a decolonizing otherness (p. 7), placing it at a gap between colonial and postcolonial. Some characters in the novels do not activate their agency and show conformity to prescribed roles. On the other hand, both protagonists/ narrators of the novels negotiate a space that is not quietly passive, where there is an attempt at negotiating their agency within the oppressive boundaries that limit them. The way Pérez explains "the (en)gendering of Chicano History, that is, "the writing of women into the field" in the *Decolonial Imaginary* is in consonance with the postures adopted by both narrators.

> Where women are conceptualized as merely a backdrop to men's social and political activities, they are in fact intervening interstitially while sexing the colonial imaginary. […] 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 (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 7).

Gulf Dreams and *What Night Brings*, while fictional works, allow speech to character-narrators whose voices are rarely heard in real life, the Chicana lesbians' voice. Telling their stories promotes visibility and resistance. These novels are able to participate in a process of "decolonizing otherness" (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 6).

The novels differ in many aspects, such as the narrative strategies used, the choice of narrators and the plot itself. Notwithstanding these differences, converging themes are present such as the oppression of female sexuality, lesbian desire and violent events depicted in various ways. Considering this, my organization for the present work intends to categorize both novels in similar patterns. I must mention this dissertation does not address all the themes that are present in each novel. Aside from the introduction and the conclusion, there are three main chapters, each divided into three sections.

In the first chapter, "A transcendent excursion into "otherness": sexuality and violence in the Chicano culture", I intend to present a theoretical background concerning women's studies and Chicana studies. After a brief commentary on the emergence of a space to discuss subaltern, marginalized women brought about by the social movements of the second half of the twentieth century, a discussion on the conscious adoption of the term Chicana follows. I will discuss compulsory heterosexuality and characteristics of male power based upon Adrienne Rich's famous essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980). My focus will be upon women who diverge from the standard heteronormative approach. The second section of this chapter examines on issues and prohibitions on female sexuality according to theory. This section will also encompass the notion of *comadrazgo* (comothering) as a tradition and its consequences in Chicano society. Along with this, it is my intention to discuss briefly the lack of LGBT+ representation in the media and in literature. The third section highlights the elevated statistics regarding violence against women in the United States, concentrating on two forms of violence: domestic violence and rape which are featured in the novels. A concise approach on representation of such forms of violence in literature ends the first chapter. The postulates of Gloria Anzaldúa, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, Adrienne Rich, Emma Pérez, Carla Trujillo, Catrióna Esquíbel, Ana Castillo and Yvette Flores-Ortiz will serve as main theoretical bases for my discussion of the issues addressed.

The second chapter, "Not a dream but a haunting nightmare: oneiric digressions on sexuality and violence in Emma Pérez's *Gulf Dreams*", proposes a deeper analysis of the novel *Gulf Dreams* by Emma Pérez in light of the theory presented in the first chapter. The first section of this chapter provides some biographical information on Pérez life and comments on her published works. In addition to it, based on the narrative in *Gulf Dreams*, I

intend to discuss the choice of leaving the main characters unnamed and the use of epigraphs as foreshadowing elements. In the second section, I dwell upon the main characters' sexual development, the sanctioned system of *comadrazgo* by the Chicano community and women's desire towards other women. Demands involving female rites, repression in the rural area presented and the narrator's choice of leaving are explored as well. The relationship between the protagonists is a key element which influences the entire novel. The third section of this chapter concentrates on processes of epistemic violence against women represented in the novel. By mentioning a documentary entitled *The Mask We Live In* (2015), it is my intention to propose an argument on the socialization of males in general in the United States along with the socialization of Chicanos specifically. Violence can be portrayed at physical or psychological levels. Cases of controlling jealousy, domestic violence, rape/ gang rape and child molestation are all present in the narrative. Such cases involve different violent outbursts caused by male dominance. Due to the great amount of violence portrayed in the novel, I will try to investigate further the intrinsic connections between these acts of violence and the fragmented subjects in the novel.

Similarly to the second chapter, the organization of the third chapter, "Nightvoice: intricate relations between gender, culture and sexuality in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*", begins with Carla Trujillo's life story and her published theoretical works along with a plot summary of the novel. Using Anzaldúa's and other critics' narratives of experience of growing up as a Chicana in a religious and patriarchal society, I will investigate how Carla Trujillo brings to surface the emotions and experiences that form the subjectivity of the protagonist/ narrator of *What Night Brings*. In the second section of this chapter, I plan to analyze the influence of patriarchal control and heteronormative behavior to the extent that they generate sexual and psychological repression. The protagonist is a symbol of non-conformity and resistance. Her process of awakening to the possibility of queerness is arduous and she is not able to identify a space for difference due to lack of representation in her community. A consideration on LGBT+ representation will be necessary. For the third part of the chapter, I will direct my analysis to the aspects of violence represented in this piece of literature through the scenes illustrated in *What Night Brings*. Matters of *machismo*, male dominance and brutal domestic violence against children are depicted throughout the novel.

Literature is a political tool for change. Emma Pérez and Carla Trujillo point to new paradigms on subject representation through the exploration of a Chicano imaginary. I choose to write about these subjects because silence must be broken and, most importantly, because I was given the opportunity to speak up for the fight of women and be heard. I choose to write

this for women and their different experiences and for the Chicano people facing a difficult political moment in the area of the borders at the moment. I choose to write this for my own sake.

Uneasiness and worry caused me to rebel.

Emma Pérez

1 A TRANSCENDENT EXCURSION INTO "OTHERNESS" [2]: SEXUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN CHICANO CULTURE

I want to talk about sex, because not only I will get your attention,
but because it is the thing we don't talk about in my culture,
especially not as women.
Sandra Cisneros

A woman in bending over in a field
hot blood running down the side of her leg
I feel it pouring
over the edges of my pad
everywhere/somewhere
we bleed
we were/are told we are witches
our pain is our "duty"
and it pours from between our legs.
Natashia Lopéz

1.1 Women's studies and Chicana studies

The second half of the twentieth century brought about change, a space – though small, a growing one - to include the discussion of racial, ethnic[3] and sexual differences. In the United States, for instance, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, different social movements have emerged and raised visibility of issues regarding race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. The emergence of such space aids the understanding of the specific role of women in the spectrum of subaltern, marginalized people. In the U.S.A., the so-called second wave of feminism focused primarily on white middle-class women, often ignoring the issues of

[2] Sónia Saldívar-Hull in the introduction to the Second Edition of Borderlands/La Frontera, p. 13.
[3] The United States Census Bureau characterizes as ethnic categories the following: "Hispanic or Latino" and "not Hispanic or Latino", since the 2010 Census.

women who belonged to racial or ethnic unprivileged groups. It is paramount to recognize the fact that at times peoples as Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, especially women, are affected simultaneously by a variety of oppressions. Among Mexican-American women, Chicana[4] feminism started challenging stereotypical lines of identity in which the Chicana women are molded and, most importantly, mold themselves to fit socially prescribed roles. In "La Güera", Cherríe Moraga warns against the danger of ranking oppressions: "The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression." (1981, p. 29). In the case of a Chicana lesbian, for instance, she cannot be understood unless one considers that her reality entangles issues and oppressions from different sources. One must understand she faces different situations and dangers for being a woman in a male-supremacist society; a Chicana in a racist, excluding society; and, finally, a lesbian in a homophobic and conservative community. Poverty can also be yet another obstacle in her path, denying access to basic needs. The term Chicana was specifically implemented for the reason that it incorporates profound and political meaning. Scholar and writer Paula Moya distinguishes Chicana from other designations such as Mexican-American, Hispanic or American of Mexican descent. According to her, a Chicana is recognized for "her political awareness", an awakening not easily performed; "her recognition of her disadvantaged position in a hierarchically organized society arranged according to categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality" demonstrates an understanding of fundamental aspects of her society and the consequences of her prescribed social position, and, finally, "her propensity to engage in political struggle aimed at subverting and changing those structures", evincing strength to raise against an excluding system (MOYA, 1997, p. 139).

A theoretical apparatus based on recurrent themes from Women's studies, Chicana studies and Queer studies will be necessary to develop this analysis. Even though queer themes occur throughout the research, Chicana Feminist theory is the main approach of this analysis.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave of feminism exploded, manifesting deep concerns on the role of women and discussing subjects such as sexuality, family and family violence, work and reproductive rights. However, critics point to a homogeneous movement whitewashing issues of women from different races and ethnicities. Women from different cultures all over the world are often subjected to physical, emotional and psychological oppressions; however, their experiences are not the same. Chicanas who participated in the

[4] The word Chicano here is used to refer to Mexicans living in the U.S. and to Mexican-American that are aware of their conditions in the U.S. society.

feminist movement were accused of betraying the *mestizo* community and promoting acculturation. In contrast, the feminist movement at that moment standardized the experience of women, excluding issues of racism and class exploitation.

The Chicano Movement, also known as *El Movimiento*, grew across the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly throughout the Southwest of the U.S. The reduction of Mexican territory was due to the annexation of land in the Mexican-American War of 1848 - now present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah and parts of states such as New Mexico and Arizona to the U.S. Because of such war, Mexico has become increasingly dependent on the U.S. Successive waves of immigration to the United States have happened during the twentieth century. Mexican citizens have suffered political and economic exploitation by the Anglo society since the nineteenth-century and as immigrants, the exploitation process has continued. Scholar Cármen Cáliz-Montoro (2000) describes the borderlands as a representative space of the multiple and dynamic Chicano experiences with very different worlds such as Euroamerican, Mexican, barrio, indigenous, amongst others (MONTORO, 2000, p. 4). Alvina E. Quintana, in the first chapter of her book *Home Girls* (1996), describes Rosa Linda Fregoso's analysis on Chicanas/os inherited history as "a Mexican history of colonialism and imperialism that subjects them to conquest, marginalization and domination within their native territories" (FREGOSO apud QUINTANA, 1996, p. 16). *El Movimiento* was a political movement that emphasized civil rights and cultural nationalism. Nonetheless, this dominated group faced issues of power and control, and, as the movement expanded, it insisted on forgetting to examine the patriarchal nature of the hegemonic system and reinforced the patriarchal rules already operating in Mexican culture. Consequently, as Quintana describes it, within the movement the Chicana women constituted a subordinate group (QUINTANA, 1996, p. 19). In "Women's Studies and Chicana Studies: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future" (2005), Monica Brown and Miroslava Chávez-García describe "the Chicano movement as having originated as a set of diverse local and regional struggles for justice, civil rights and political representation" (p. 114). In this powerful movement, women were important at the beginning but were constantly put aside to deal with issues regarded as small, non-political. If they complained, they were told that the priority of the movement was the struggle for equality for *la raza.* It was through fighting for a space of leadership of their own instead of conforming to a place of servitude in the movement that a field for Chicana studies emerged. Sonia Saldívar-Hull, awarded scholar in Chicana/o Literature, depicted the Chicano movement as homophobic and phallocentric; its "emphasis on family unity and the concept of *carnalismo* (brotherhood) implicitly omitted women from

egalitarian positions of power in the movement" (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 127). Some Chicanas found no space for their own issues either in the Feminist or in the Chicano movement. Seeking a place for active participation, Chicanas found a space of resistance and produced a counterhegemonic process which was stirred by Chicana feminist literature and visual arts. These *transfrontera* texts opened new ground for Chicana identity. The Chicano Nationalist movement achieved a certain degree of success. Improvement in general conditions involving better access via education and politics can be identified. Yet, this slow-growth improvement is opposed to a large growth in Chicano population in the U.S. and, as an ethnic group, the Chicano people in the U.S. are still considered an ethnic unprivileged group, often subordinate and, consequently, subjected to low-paying jobs and police harassment.

As a woman of color, the Chicana is, at least, doubly oppressed. In Anglo society, her ethnicity is a point of oppression, however, not the only one. The very society in which she is born and raised teaches her that a woman should be submissive to the men in her life, as Gloria Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987):

> The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels, she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish (ANZALDÚA,1999, p. 39).

Questions of gender and sexuality have oftentimes been portrayed as taboo in traditionalist conservative societies. When coming across narratives of political theorists on the subject, one realizes that oppressions block the personal and intellectual development of women whose voices and even thoughts are controlled by heteronormativity. In patriarchal societies, women are known as the daughters, wives or mothers, not as individuals. The ubiquitous existence of this behavior influenced, and still influences, women's lives across the world.

In a patriarchal misogynistic society, the traditional gender roles divide and limit the actions of each gender in such a way as to promote male supremacy. From a general perspective, women's expected behavior involves a distressing position in which violent structures enforce women's subservience and affect their emotional/sexual relations with men, who make rules and societal laws in most cultures. Adrienne Rich in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) denounces women's oppression and enumerates ways in which men exercise their power by making use of Kathleen Gough's suggested characteristics of male power in archaic and contemporary societies. The characteristics include denial of women's sexuality; forcing sexual acts upon them, be it by

physical or psychological strength; exploiting their labor to control what they produce; controlling or robbing their children from them; confining them physically; objectifying them in male transactions; blocking their creativity; and restricting from them areas such as society's knowledge and cultural aspects. Some activities that illustrate these characteristics are clitoridectomy, chastity belts, punishment by death for adultery or lesbian behavior, rape, wife beating, father-rights, forced sterilization, arranged marriages and the list goes on (RICH, 1980, p. 638-640). In the process of empowerment, women must be capable of identifying these characteristics in order to conceive strategies to resist.

Generally, most women have observed, lived or, even, imposed on others at least one of the oppressions mentioned above, present in any patriarchal culture. Rich underscores that the characteristics range "from physical brutality to control of consciousness" (1980, p. 640). The word "even", which points to women's dual role, was deployed because this process maintains itself with the help of women who are playing their role according to society's demands. Women, thus, may simultaneously suffer and perpetuate patriarchal oppression. In order to stand strong protecting one another, women should unite and go against this gendered, binary, unequal situation. Instead, the nurturing child bearers safeguard the traditional rules, transmitting and preserving the roles in which all should mold themselves to fit. The colonization and enslavement of the female body in a patriarchal society such as the Chicano community in the United States became common practice and only lately has been questioned more widely.

In the history of the Chicano social movement, when confronted with the new thoughts on feminism and women's liberation, a group of Chicana "loyalists" criticized the *gringa* feminism and stated that they were not interested in "women's liberation," for it did not support *la causa*. Women who diverged from this line of thought suffered discrimination and were labeled *marimachas* (lesbians), *vendidas* (sellouts), amongst others. This historical detail helps explain the rampant homophobia in the Chicano community, discrediting most Chicana feminists and excluding Chicana lesbians (BROWN-CHÁVEZ-GARCÍA, 2005, p. 146). Most of them were able to find their nest in Women's studies and feminist literature and since the 1990s and the third wave of feminism, emphasis on difference has prevailed; difference and resistance present themselves as paramount terms regarding the political agency of gender, sexuality, race and other relevant issues (BRANDÃO et al., 2010, p. 279) that influence the construction of woman's identity in different cultures. At an early age, prepubescent even, the child/adolescent unveils inner questionings crucial to her/his identity development. Gloria Anzaldúa, in an essay entitled "To(o) queer the writer – Loca, escritora y

chicana" (2009) makes use of an extended metaphor and points out that "identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows better over aspects of a person. Identity is a river – a process." Contained within the river is its identity and a river needs to change in order to stay a river because stopping it would mean creating a lake, lagoon or a pond, not a river (ANZALDÚA, 2009, p. 166). "The changes in the river are external (changes in environment – river bed, weather, animal life) and internal (within the waters). A river's contents flow within its boundaries." Identity changes are similarly external and internal, the first being the perception of others upon one and the latter being one's perception of oneself (p. 166). A woman's identity flow in the Chicana community is externally influenced by patriarchal values that frequently restrict that flow. Using Anzaldúa's metaphor, this natural development, this river called identity more often than not is interrupted.

The concept of the cultural space of patriarchy that is central to Chicano tradition and endorsed by cultural and religious institutions has been used to justify male dominance. Thus, girlhood experience suffers from the influence of adults who perpetuate and pass along heteronormative behavior. As a result, girls and teenagers absorb the simplistic binary perspective in which a woman is capable of loving only men. Adrienne Rich in an essay already mentioned describes this process as "male identification" and discusses its effect upon society. It involves the internalization of the values of the colonizer and even participation in the colonization of another person's identity and sexuality. Through this process women end up ranking men at the top in credibility, status and importance, placing beneath men not only other women but themselves as well, thus, ranking any sort of relations to other women as a lower form of connection (RICH, 1980, p. 646).

In this sense, the feminist movement encountered (and still encounters) difficulties and resistance amongst women themselves. In "The Unity of *La Raza*", Mirta Vidal problematizes the connection between *la raza* and *la familia* in the Chicano Community.

> While it is true that the unity of *La Raza* is the basic foundation of the Chicano movement, when Chicano men talk about maintaining *La Familia* and the 'cultural heritage' of *La Raza*, they are in fact talking about maintaining the age-old concept of keeping the woman barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen. On the basis of the subordination of women, there can be no real unity... (VIDAL, 1972, p. 31-32).

El Movimiento advocated emphasis on the cultural heritage to avoid succumbing to a process of acculturation to the *gringo* culture. Yet, this political standpoint also perpetuated gender roles and male sociosexual power.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa advocates a much needed change in the behavior of men if men and women are to live in harmony.

> As long as *los hombres* think they have to *chingar mujeres* and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and, therefore culturally favored over *la mujer*, as long as to be a *vieja* is a thing of derision, there can be no real healing of our psyches. (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p.106).

However, women must change too. Women, in general, and Chicanas, more specifically for this purpose, have begun an empowerment process through social movements in the twentieth century. Identifying and facing one's oppression is part of the process towards consciousness. With the second and third waves of feminism in the second half of the twentieth century, women mobilized an internal process of liberation through the deconstruction of a pervasive ideology of oppression. In the Chicano community, sexism persists deeper within the heritage of colonization partly because of racism directed at women of color by the Anglo society. When men of color experience racism, their frustration is ofttimes mislaid upon women of color as well. In such a way, a Chicana woman is forcibly silenced by mechanisms of domination such as the taboo on sexuality and domestic violence against women and children. In this awareness process, silence must be broken.

1.2 **Notes on Sexuality**

Women's sexuality has been a taboo subject for centuries and women have been led to devote their attention to the male presence in their lives and to the phallus in sexual intercourse. When discussing sexuality in this research, I also address homosexuality issues for the LGBT+ community and, specially, for the Chicana lesbian in such conservative society. Some theorists' works aid this analysis by discussing issues concerning women's identity development including the socializing aspects of women's lives in conservative cultures such as the Chicano culture, women's oppression, the place for the Chicana lesbian in society, and the power of female bonds in *comadrazgo,* amongst other subjects.

Gloria Anzaldúa describes her experiences as a Chicana woman growing up in the Rio Grande Valley (the Valley), South Texas, discussing the cultural expectations regarding women's behavior in her culture, her process of leaving home to understand it, the acknowledgement of a new way for women to follow and of the way in which the community deals with taboo subjects such as sexuality and homosexuality. Culture and the Church are

intertwined in the imposition and perpetuation of these demands and in the exclusion of dissenting opinions. A woman who is a lesbian in such society must face her own sexuality even before facing her homosexuality. Anzaldúa claims that "she [the lesbian of color] goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality." (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 41)

Violence is also a cultural byproduct of this culture because, as Anzaldúa puts it, "culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (1999, p. 38). The dominant paradigms are there not to be doubted or questioned but to be reinforced. Women are expected to abide by the value system and understand their roles as subservient individuals. While writing *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa stated that at the time a Chicana was able to see only three possible places to inhabit: the church, the streets or home (heterosexual marriage and motherhood). Anzaldúa was optimistic when saying there is a fourth option for some: becoming a "self-autonomous" person through education and career but since Chicanos are a working class people in their majority and survival is much more of a priority than educating children, that is an option few can pursue. She also calls attention to the discourse of one of the most important pillars of the community, the Church, for it teaches people that the female is to be feared; a woman is "carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine, she must be protected. Protected from herself." (1999, p. 39). When cultural values enforce the same ideas, even women themselves, assimilating these values uncritically, transmit them. In *Borderlands*, there is a suggestion that all people attempting to dismantle the established regime should question themselves in order to investigate if s/he is not perpetuating some of the practices feminism is combating such as slutshaming or violent outbursts from men.

> How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *hociconas* (big mouths), for being *callejeras* (going to visit and gossip with neighbors), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 38)

These are some of the expectations Chicano society places upon women, expectations on how to behave and how not to.

In "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), Adrienne Rich also discusses these expectations and the power of men, examining how heteronormativity influences socialization of men and women and how a lesbian is perceived in a community where heterosexuality is compulsory. Rich mentions other feminist pieces of writing, including Barbara Ehrenheich and Deirdre English's thesis that "capitalism has needed women to play [a role] in production and/or reproduction". (EHRENHEICH; ENGLISH apud RICH, 1980, p. 633). Also, by focusing on women's romanticizing of the home, Rich

questions if primary sources of emotional caring and physical nurture influence the quest for love throughout a person's life. Normally, it is the mother who nurtures both female and male children so it would seem logical to think "the search for love and tenderness in both sexes originally leads towards women" (RICH, p. 637). Along with that thought comes the interrogation regarding violent control measures used to "enforce women's total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men" (p. 637). Rich's essay, besides being a major contribution to the second wave of feminism in the U.S., throws light upon the structures of Chicano/a society. Identifying the sources of male power might be a way to empower women and to fight these invisible chains they are forcibly tied to. The denial of women's sexuality and/or the act of forcing it upon them, two characteristics associated with male sociosexual power as discussed by Rich, affect their sexuality directly. Taboo issues such as masturbation and bodyshaming are cultural limiting factors. There are also many ways of forcing male sexuality upon women, including raping, marital or not, and wife battering. These two are common practices found in most western societies and will be addressed in our discussion of the novels.

In *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991), Carla Trujillo claims that, in a conservative society, lesbian sexuality "becomes the focal issue of dissent" (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 117), because lesbians go against the standard demands and heteronormativity itself. According to Trujillo, the Chicana lesbian poses a threat to her community by simply disrupting "the established order of male dominance, and raising the consciousness of many Chicana women regarding their own independence and control" (p. 117). Most women, in general, and Chicanas, specifically, live in a society that undervalues women, their labor, their dedication, their identity. Most boys get offended when they are called girl, girly or are accused of doing something as a girl would. Furthermore, Chicanas are taught to suppress sexual desires and focus on satisfying male pleasure. They are taught since childhood that their participation in sex should be either forbidden or anathema unless it takes place in a heterosexual marriage under the church values. Trujillo points out as well that women in the U.S. generally learn to hate their own bodies from an early age and have little or no knowledge of their bodies. She observes that the Chicana lesbian encounters a difficult path to fit into any picture previously offered. The sense of belonging is distant and the process of awakening, troublesome. The Chicana lesbian cannot fit into the picture the traditional heteronormative society paints for women. Besides facing the prejudice of society in general, she also faces the prejudice of her own community.

> As a lesbian she does many things simultaneously: She [the Chicana lesbian] rejects "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980); she refuses to partake in the "game" of the competition for men; she confronts her own sexuality; and challenges the norms placed upon her by culture and society, whose desire is to subvert her into proper role places" (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 120).

Catrióna Esquíbel in *Reading Chicana Lesbians* (2006) argues that relations between girls during girlhood and the process of *comadrazgo* sanctioned by the Chicano society are necessary for the identity formation of the Chicana lesbian. Esquíbel devotes a whole chapter to these relationships and their effects on girls from an early age. "Memories of Girlhood: Chicana Lesbian Fiction" introduces the notion that many Chicana literary pieces describe a link between girlhood affinity and a space for lesbian desire. Soledad Vidal explains in an entry note about the Spanish Borderland how the process of *comadrazgo* happened. Women who settled in the Spanish colonial settlements had two ways of making connections with other women, one would be through blood connections and the other was from the fictive church-accepted kindred of *comadrazgo* (co-mothering) which began as a spiritual link between the mother and the *comadre* (VIDAL, 2006, p. 703). This practice helped bring together two women from different families and by doing so it led to a connection between their whole families. From an early age, *comadres* expect their children to follow the same path and endorse relationships between the girls in the family. These childhood friendships encouraged by the family and tradition may be the beginning of more complex relationships between girls. In societies as such, there is a tendency to focus the attention of any relationship on the man at hand, be he, father, brother, boyfriend, husband or boss. These relations commonly concern actions of servitude and subjugation. Female bonds, on the other hand, tend to emphasize mutual respect and admiration, generating a male-independent connection which reflects upon a woman's own self-respect and admiration, and, depending on the subject at hand, liberating one's self to explore her strengths and desires. The *comadrazgo* is one of the few moments in which the relation is focused on another woman, a very special one.

In that same chapter, Esquíbel quotes Saldívar-Hull, a contemporary feminist Chicana theorist, who also argues that in Chicana/o writing, "stories of girlhood and adolescence provide a glimpse into the construction of sexual identity when 'the girls come… face to face with… their prescribed roles' in Chicana/o (hetero)sexual economies" (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 1990, p. 184 apud ESQUÍBEL, 2006, p. 94). As mentioned earlier, the roles prescribed to women along with the power held by males, tend to affect women psychologically by robbing them of their awareness of their own sexuality. Girls are "frequently perceived as asexual,

since they are not sexually active, or more specifically, not (yet) heterosexually active" (ESQUÍBEL, 2006, p, 94). Girls and teenagers are warned against exploring their sexualities; mind and body are compelled to be left untouched. This discouragement comes from all the institutions that are influential in a child's life: the community, the church, the school and, most importantly, the family. Institutionalized sexuality is present in the presumed non-sexual relations between girls or adolescents especially since, at this age, the child is not to engage in any practice that develops and helps understanding her sexuality.

Along with this, it can be highlighted that female friendships or bonds are not recognized as valuable as heterosexual relations. On that note, Esquíbel underscores that "novels that depict intense emotional attachment and erotic attractions between girls contribute to the representation of Chicana lesbianism by providing images of intimacy… beyond that considered appropriate for proper heterosexual girls" (2006, p. 124). Such novels offer positive imagery for a public often enough excluded from the narrative representation. The problematization of representation in postmodern writing entails cultural and political questionings in social discussions. Representation is a crucial point to embody and humanize ostracized groups such as the LGBT+ in a heteronormative community. Chicana Cherríe Moraga in her political and artistic autobiography *Loving in the War Years* (1983) describes in an intimate paragraph of a very political chapter how she had to leaf through the pages of The Well of Loneliness written by Radclyffe Hall and having as protagonist a "ruling class English woman wannabe" (MORAGA, 2000, p. 172) in an attempt to encounter lesbian desire or through pages of Black women writers to fulfill the need for colored womanhood in literature. She then adds: "in 1975, with so little "me" to read, I wrote. To fill the blanks" (p. 172). Similarly to the process of social exclusion or marginalization Chicanos encounter in the U.S., Chicana/o homosexuals face difficulties in their own community (not only there but in any community with conservative values). The representation of homosexuals in the Chicano community is a thorny issue. Since culturally same-sex relationships are not approved of, there is a tendency of distancing, excluding and/or erasing homosexual figures in the upbringing of children in an effort to pretend that what is not shown does not exist. The space for difference becomes complex and even troublesome to pinpoint, making it difficult for a person to identify herself/himself with different possibilities. Lack of representation is a symptom because these relations are forced to be discreet and secret but few children conceive that idea on their own unless s/he feels the need to explore that line of thought. Conversely, in the media and in literature, imagery and examples of heterosexual relations abound in stark contrast with non-existent or stereotypical representation of homosexuals. In

the introduction of *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (2008), editor Thomas Glave, speaks of the longing for representation and identification existing among homosexual writers of Caribbean descent. The scarce examples of embodiment mostly represent society's prejudice and ignorance on the subject. To complicate matters even further, in the silence of the community, lies, according to Glave, "the erotic-emotional desire for people of our own gender that it seemed no one – no one at all – ever spoke about, much less wished to hear about unless in the realm of "scandal" and "disgrace" (GLAVE, 2008, p3). Having been raised in both the Bronx and Jamaica, Glave is familiar with that Caribbean community in the city and on the island. Notwithstanding this fact, there is great resemblance between the Caribbean and the community discussed in this research, considering there is a widespread belief in the Chicano community (as there is in other racial/ethnic minority groups) that homosexuality is a "foreign evil", a "disease" affecting hegemonic cultures.

1.3 **Notes on Violence**

In spite of the preexisting representation of a traditional family as formed by a heterosexual couple, there is no expectation of equality between male and female. Much to the contrary, women are expected to be obedient and submissive while men are expected to hold power in/over the family. This inequality, based on the supposed inferiority of women and sustained by patriarchal institutions, makes women more vulnerable to violence inside and outside the family. Although non-compliance with or defiance of societal norms is used to justify violence against women, oftentimes they become the target of violent acts simply because of their vulnerability. In March 5th, 1995, Chicana feminist historian Antonia Castañeda gave a speech during the International Women's Day rally and march in San Antonio, Texas. The words of her speech involved local and national statistics concerning violence against women at the time. Among them, rape was considered the fastest growing crime in the nation but only one in ten rapes are reported to law enforcement. Battering was the number one cause of injury to women in the U.S. and in 95% of all domestic violence, the aggression was committed by men against women. In addition, 70% of men who batter their wives also batter their children (CASTAÑEDA, 1998, p. 310). According to current data presented in "Violence Against Women in the United States: Statistics", available at NOW's

website (National Organization for Women website), women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes every year in the U.S. Since many offenses are perpetrated by a person intimate with the victim, they are never reported and the figures are low compared to the actual number of offenses against women, including the ones that have not been disclosed. Most statistics insert only the number of cases reported to law enforcement agencies. The National Crime Victimization Survey gathers data of cases that were not reported at the time they occured. For the year of 2006, for instance, it estimated a rate of more than 600 women having been raped or sexually assaulted but not going to the authorities. Most violent acts discussed are executed by men against women. Women are usually targeted; age, social class, and race/ethnicity seem to be influential factors in the attacks.

> Young women, low-income women and some minorities are disproportionately victims of domestic violence and rape. Women ages 20-24 are at greatest risk of nonfatal domestic violence, and women age 24 and under suffer from the highest rates of rape (N.O.W., 2005).

It is important to point out that there are cases of violence in same sex intimate relationships as well, even though the numbers are substantially lower. A pivotal fact is that in a great number of the attacks the woman either knows the aggressor or is in direct contact with him – family member, boyfriend, friend or husband. As social scientist Yvette Flores-Ortiz describes in her essay "La Mujer y La Violencia: A Culturally Based Model for the Understanding and Treatment of Domestic Violence in Chicana/Latina Communities", issues of power, lack of communication, emotional blockage and other cultural and social factors culminate in violent outbursts. Bodily rape is not influenced just by physical desire; it is a circumstance of an imprinted ideology concerning male power over women's mind and body. There are reported cases of raped men, but the scale is modest compared to female victims.

In an oppressive system, physical and/or verbal micro-aggression or aggression are constantly present in the lives of the dominated. Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the concept she addresses as "cultural tyranny" while addressing gender rules in Chicano community. This concept points to the practices of a large exclusion of women from political and economic decisions in a patriarchal system, also associated with *machismo* (sexism). *Machismo*, an exaggerated sense of masculinity in correlation to a nationalistic pride, consistently dialogues with patriarchy and frequently raises men exhibiting signs of male chauvinism, emotional unavailability, domination upon wife and sexual virility. Since such characteristics are present in the socialization of men in formative years in the form of expectation from the family or in role models, these values tend to be part of one's development. Women are affected by to the

process as well; as Anzaldúa claims, they transmit the rules made by men. After the *Movimiento*, *machismo* has represented the stereotype for the Mexicano/Chicano male figure, but it has been re-appropriated into cultural resistance by some critics. In "Machismo and the border: challenges to ideology and Chicano/a gender roles" (2007), Monique Mowad discusses *machismo* from different perspectives, one of which comprises Alfred Mirande's notion that *machismo* is a crucial cultural trait representing dignity and resistance to colonization (MIRANDE apud MOWAD, 2007, p. 61). Ergo, many Chicanos and Chicanas have interpreted feminism as treason to *la raza*. On the other hand, Saldívar-Hull and other feminist critics agree with Baca Zinn that the activist woman aims at overcoming traditional subordinate roles for women and the violence *machismo* evokes while fighting for Chicano cultural traditions and against acculturation (ZINN apud SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 129). Cherríe Moraga also articulates the possibility of Chicano nationalism being transformed into an inclusive movement by feminists, lesbian and heterosexual women, and gay and heterosexual men together (MORAGA, 2004, p. 224-238).

Moreover, Ana Castillo, activist and literary writer, brings to the fore an underlying discussion regarding the social sciences' stereotypical representation of *machismo* in association with the Mexican culture, often addressed to as the *macho* male and his need to constantly reaffirm his own masculinity, "a demonstration of physical and sexual powers and basic to his self-respect". The political sciences' counterargument is that this exaggerated virility is a "defensive response to the racist and classist hierarchy under which most of modern civilization lives" (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 66) and is not just characteristic of Mexican or Latino men, for all men who feel inferior, non-belonging for racial, ethnical, cultural or class/economic reasons recurrently impose their frustration in a violent form of control and humiliation upon others judged as more vulnerable, commonly women, children and animals (p. 66) Saldívar-Hull confirms that since the 1970's, revisionist studies in the social sciences disprove the stereotypes of "Chicano family pathology, *machismo* and the Chicana passivity of *la mujer sufrida*, the long suffering wife/mother" (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 128) In her chapter "The Ancient Roots of Machismo", Castillo also questions this theory when highlighting the existence of privileged men who have the same behavior towards women. Castillo elaborates on this discussion by pointing out the danger of rationalizing machismo through a personal perspective (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 67).

Gloria Anzaldúa explains the causes of her father and his generation's *machismo* in the Chicano community. According to her, being a *macho* implied "being strong enough to protect my mother and us, yet still being able to show love" (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 105).

She defends his *machismo* as "the result of hierarchical male dominance" (p. 105). Around *gringos*, the Chicano tends to feel a sense of self-effacement, shame and self-deprecation. Losing his sense of dignity and respect generates a *macho* behavior leading to subjugation of women and, in some cases, mistreatment of them. She adverts that in spite of the comprehension of these causes for male hatred and fear, which consequently lead to violence against women, "we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it" (p. 105). As Antonia Castañeda reminds readers "rape and other violence against women are acts of domination – acts of power – the direct expression of sexual politics" against women to protect the supremacy of heterosexual male power and the gender status quo (CASTAÑEDA, 1998, p. 312). Lastly, Ana Castillo underscores that

> There is no justification for machismo. Morally there never was, although given the economic system that civilization developed, society depended on patriarchy to uphold its political and economic principles of exchange. Machismo, has lost its raison d'être, as has the very nature of the way that present society functions. We must not feel inclined to long for a mythical time when man, in the form of father (God), protected women (CASTILLO, 1994, p. 69).

Altogether, whether *machismo* is truly the Chicano males' overcompensation of their feelings of displacement and inadequacy is yet to be uncovered and the need to problematize this notion is indeed understandable.

Domestic (or family) violence is described as abuse of any sort (physical, emotional, psychological or sexual) against any member of the family and performed by another member of the same family. Silence out of shame or fear and lack of social credibility make women and children even more vulnerable to violence. Men's social role in the community is to provide for the family and, consequently, most men feel entitled to the position of boss of his wife and children. In some families, when a male figure is full of unreleased stress, he may explode in a violent outburst that may lead to physical aggression, forceful raping of a member in the family, usually the wife, or even homicide. As Flores-Ortiz describes, there are some characteristics which do not justify the act itself but contribute to the development of family violence in (dysfunctional) Latino families: "frozen cultural patterns; parentification of children; indirect or intrusive patterns of communication and intergenerational problems" (FLORES-ORTIZ, 1993, p. 170-176). She asserts that these are common factors that contribute to *machismo* in a community that reinforces gender prescribed roles and the binary notion of *santa/puta* which inhibits women from dealing with their own sexuality. Flores-Ortiz also discusses other factors. Lack of communicative skills in a relationship leading to anger and resentment and the acculturation of the younger generations pose as threat to the

values of the previous generation, especially if that generation has just immigrated to the U.S. In order to escape, a battered woman, for example, would have to stand against her social, religious and cultural role of submissive wife who should preserve the family under any circumstances. (FLORES-ORTIZ, 1993, p. 176). The community holds her in judgement: lack of help to a battered wife in the community is justified because she is considered disloyal to her husband and to the relationship she had sworn before God; thus, she is made to feel responsible for her own victimization. Children are also the focus of domestic violence, for culturally parents are allowed to punish in order to educate and when a child transgresses the rules or accumulated stress begins to leak, a parent might resort to a violence with the excuse of discipline. There is a propensity for attacks such as the aforementioned to be followed either by offering apologies or by blaming the victim.

Literary works produced by Chicana writers, especially since the 1970's often include the representation of domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape. As already discussed, the Chicano community is structured upon a patriarchal basis and treats women as lesser beings; hence, they are considered easy prey. In Chicana feminist pieces of literature, violence against women and children repeatedly materializes in the form of reference, account or pictorially described scenes.

As an act of violence profusely represented in literature, domestic violence, mostly against women, is present in many short stories and novels produced by Chicana writers. For instance, in "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991), a short story by Sandra Cisneros, the protagonist, Cleófilas, has an epiphany by placing together some of the pieces of news she encounters daily on the newspaper on women suffering violence, mostly regarding women's victimization by men in their lives. She figures that several cases of homicide and woman battering were commited by men closely related to the victims.

> Was Cleófilas just exaggerating as her husband always said? It seemed the newspapers were full of such stories. This woman found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car. This one's cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue. Her ex-husband, her husband, her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her co-worker. Always. The same grisly news in the pages of the dailies. She dunked a glass under the soapy water for a moment – shivered (CISNEROS, 1991, p. 52).

This protagonist, who has been beaten up by her husband frequently, starts to fear for her life and the lives of her two children (one yet to be born). With the help of a doctor, she enters a process of transformation from the culturally expected passive wife to a woman ready to assert her agency. As Sonia Saldívar-Hull mentions in "Mujeres en Lucha/ Mujeres de Fuerza", the fourth chapter of *Feminism on the Border* (2000), Cisneros problematizes the

dichotomy of gender roles in the United States and in Mexico for “it becomes obvious that the material conditions of domination and exploitation imposed on Mexican women in the United States are similar to those they seek to escape in the pueblos of Mexico” (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 104). Saldívar-Hull also calls attention to the story’s implied answers that explain why most women “are omitted by and subsequently remove themselves from feminist influence” (p. 106). One reason is the influence of mass media through *telenovelas* (soap operas) which dictate the proper manner for women to behave, thus, manipulating the notion of “ideal woman” or “ideal wife”. Another reason is male control over constructions of women in the folk imagery such as the tale of *La Llorona* as enacting a passive role (p. 106). While one is able to escape and change a submissive lament to a cry of resistance in this short story, many women are left behind in fear, in silence or in graveyards.

While there is plenty to discuss on domestic violence, unfortunately, the other imminent act of violence is not less abundant in malice. In her essay “The Politics of Rape: Sexual Transgression in Chicana Fiction”, María Herrera-Sobek reinforces views of other feminist critics who describe the act of rape in patriarchal societies “as a metaphorical construct skillfully designed to insure the continuation of phallocratic rule” (HERRERA-SOBEK, 1996, p. 245). Sobek, while researching the concept of rape as a literary motif marginalized authors elaborate on, also mentions that rape-as-metaphor incorporates a reconstruction from the victim’s perspective and, conjointly, form a feminist perspective. This act, as a representation in a metaphor or as the real occurrence, places the woman in a position of vulnerability and subordinate status. In literature, it may denounce the subordinate status of women in many levels such as societal, individual and familial (HERRERA-SOBEK, 1996, p. 246). Women who have suffered from this horrific domination and invasion of their bodies, be it from strangers, acquaintances or family members, are predisposed to become silent entities, devalued objects. In some cases, women who diverge from the social or cultural traditions by wearing a short outfit or dark lipstick color are taken as accomplices in their own rapes because society judges them with the catchphrases “they had it coming” or “they only have themselves to blame” as if men were not able to control their urges and as if it occurred only because of male sexual urges. As Sobek mentions, rape is used as punishment to continue the phallocratic order. At the same time it scars a victim, it also produces an emptiness usually transforming women, most stay in silence. The act of rape represented in literature may offer different meanings correlating to the subordinate position of women in the system and marginalization of women. Fear and marginality are two factors that contribute even more to women’s dependence on the male figure.

It is with the perspective of a patriarchal system, taboo on female sexuality and violence against women in mind that authors Emma Pérez and Carla Trujillo inscribe their narrators of *Gulf Dreams* (1996) and *What Night Brings* (2003). In the beginning of both novels, these transgressive characters are of different ages and thus living different maturity processes but they are described as young Chicana women attempting to explore their sexuality, uncover their own prohibited desires and facing an enormous amount of violence manifesting itself all around and against them. The presence of raping episodes and familial violence overwhelmingly traverses the theoretical and literary works of Emma Pérez and Carla Trujillo representing serious issues to the Chicana community and reiterates the emergency of breaking the silence about the subjects.

2 NOT A DREAM BUT A HAUNTING NIGHTMARE: ONEIRIC DIGRESSIONS ON SEXUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN EMMA PÉREZ'S *GULF DREAMS*

Who would take the nightmare,
have it for her every night so she could rest.
Emma Pérez

Her body offers dualities, closed yet open.
Emma Pérez

2.1 Emma Pérez's theoretical writings and *Gulf Dreams*

The publication of Emma Pérez' *Gulf Dreams* in 1996, considered one of the first Chicana lesbian novels in print, created space for a voice rarely heard in literature: that of the Chicana lesbian. In the novel, a Hispanic woman from the rural Texan town El Pueblo utters her own story since childhood in an intriguing and fairly unique writing strategy. In order to recount her experiences of childhood, her development into adulthood and the way she deals with her sexuality, the unnamed narrator of this novel repeats herself, digresses frequently, veering towards tangential subjects most of which feature violent encounters – threats by men, domestic violence and abuse.

The writer of this novel, Emma Pérez, is a well-known theorist in History and Feminist studies. Pérez was born in El Campo, a small town in the south of Texas with approximately 11.000 inhabitants in the present census and is considered one of the founders, along with others such as Deena González and Antonia Castañeda, of what is now known as the field of Chicana History. As Linda Heidenreich describes in *Three Decades of Engendering History: Selected Works of Antonia I. Castañeda* (2014), Pérez took an active role in writing for the academia and participating in organizations such as MALCS (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social) and NACCS (National Organization for Chicana and Chicano Studies); thus, carving out space in Euro-American dominated publications (p. 31). From 1990 until 2003, she was a faculty member in the History Department of the University of Texas. Since 2003, she has been in the University of Colorado where she is currently chair

and full professor[5]. Among her theoretical works, her essay, "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor" (1991), placed her in direct dialogue with the socialist and the feminist movements addressing sexuality, discourse and power in order to deconstruct male centralist theory and reconstruct a *sitio y lengua* (site and language) for the Chicana.

Her book *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, published in 1999, has impacted the field of Chicana History. In this complex piece of writing, Pérez emphasizes the necessity of creating a historical body of Chicanas and confronting systems of thought and behavior that frame Chicana history. Concerned with eliminating the universalist narrative in history that negates women's experience, she focuses on "taking the 'his' out of the 'story'" (p. XIV), refuting male experience as the prevalent narrative. The silenced voices of the past – Chicanas, Mexicanas and Indias – are still minimized or considered hysterical, irrational or passive. Throughout the chapters, she problematizes historiography as a colonial project, focusing on case studies on silences and gaps that have not been considered as historical facts and promoting a discussion on a genealogy of Chicana identities and sexualities as responses to hegemonic cultures.

In her first chapter "Sexing the Colonial Imaginary: (En)gendering Chicano History, Theory and Consciousness" (1999, p. 3 - 27), Pérez outlines the decolonial imaginary as a new category aiming at rethinking history with the objective of conceiving Chicana/o agency in a transformative way (p. 5). Through Homi Bhabha's concept of a time lag as the interstitial gap between modern and postmodern and the colonial and postcolonial (BHABHA apud PÉREZ, 1999, p. 5), Emma Pérez crafts the concept of the decolonial imaginary as "the time lag between the colonial and postcolonial", "a rupturing space" (PÉREZ, 1999, p. 6). Pérez also advocates a thorough reading of the "interstitial gaps, the unheard, the unthought, the unspoken" (p. 5). Drawing also on Foucault, Pérez reasons that since "all history is constituted by discursive formations" (p. 5), traditional history's impetus is to erase subaltern voices. Ergo, "these silences, when heard, become the negotiating spaces for the decolonizing subjects" (p. 5). Chéla Sandoval's concept of differential consciousness, from which Pérez develops her uncovering of women's history, favors the mobility of identities as interventional practices (SANDOVAL apud PÉREZ, 1999, p. XVI). As Pérez explains:

> Like differential consciousness, the decolonial imaginary in Chicana/o history is a theoretical tool for uncovering the hidden voices of Chicanas that have been relegated to silences, to passivity, to that third space where agency is enacted through third space feminism (PÉREZ, 1999, p. XVI).

[5] For further biographical information visit http://www.colorado.edu/ethnicstudies/people/perez/

Pérez continues to research and create on decolonizing race and sexuality. Even though *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999) was published after *Gulf Dreams* (1996), the theory developed in the book, including the impetus to decolonize race and sexuality is already implied in the novel. The goal of revisiting history, subverting it, and of naturalizing differences is dramatized in the fragmented narrative by the unnamed narrator-protagonist of *Gulf Dreams.*

The novel is divided in a common three-section structure – "Confession", "The Trial", and "Desire", followed by an epilogue. However, this nonlinear narrative is composed of seemingly random fragmented memories that tell the narrator's own story. Narrative fragmentation is a strategy to represent the fragmented stories/histories and subjects that make up the novel. Notwithstanding, the fact that these fragmented pieces do not necessarily follow a chronological order, the sections start with her experiences of youth and end in her adulthood, which can categorize this novel as a coming-of-age novel. "Confession" starts with a summer of restless dreams of the fifteen-year old cotton-picking narrator from El Pueblo. She recalls her first encounter with the sister of her sister's *comadre*, a girl with whom she is expected to share *comadrazgo* as well. This girl is called "the young woman" and, throughout the novel, she, who also remains unnamed, is the center of the narrator's conflicted feelings. The second part, entitled "The trial", focuses on a controversial trial involving the gang rape of a woman called Ermila who refused to hide her anger and had the courage to denounce the crime to the authorities. A newspaper feature on the trial compels the narrator, who is living in the West Coast, to return to El Pueblo, where she will meet the young woman once again. The most obvious connection between the narrator and Ermila's story is the young woman's husband, César Diaz, also known as Pelón, defense attorney for the five men who had raped Ermila. The last section of the novel, "Desire", travels to a moment after the trial in which the narrator finds herself in Los Angeles, after leaving that small town in Texas again, yet still emotionally tied to the young woman. In the epilogue the readers are led to conclude the outcome of Ermila's story which will be discussed afterwards.

The setting of the novel belongs to what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as "the borderlands" in the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987), as Anzaldúa makes clear she uses the term not just in a geographical sense.

> In fact, the Borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper-classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 19).

In *Gulf Dreams*, traditional culture meets, mixes and clashes with *gringo* culture. Even as a child, the narrator's firsthand knowledge of prejudice against Chicanos, of being an outsider regarding the local language and culture is clearly present. The narrator's family life is similar to that of so many people who live in poverty and pick cotton in the fields as a way to make ends meets. "Poverty, it seemed, led us through those cotton fields" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 31). The narrator's mother, before her, had started working in the fields at eight years old, accompanying her mother every day *en la pisca* and returning to the tent before the others to prepare *masa* for the *tortillas*. When the narrator's mother stayed in the tent she used to take care of the babies whose parents would be working in the fields. If a child cried, she "would scamper to the field to find a hungry child's mother" (p. 32). During the narrator's childhood, one may affirm that she was already able to identify inequality between genders. For example, she comments that even though her brother and she were given sacks one forth the size of her mother's, she was able to fill hers at full capacity while her brother left his half-empty "but at the end of the week, we'd earn the same dollar for a week's wages" (p. 31). This passage illustrates the different treatment given boys and girls from an early age and also the vividness of this particular fragment of a childhood memory.

This narrator combines vignettes and fragments, sketching her vivid but often disquieting memories of childhood, adolescence and, later on, the ensuing consequences and traumas of past experiences. Alongside the clear memories, there are also what she refers to as "frames of unfamiliar scenes" and glimpses of "childhood horrors" that have remained submerged (p. 43). As a first person narrative, the novel describes the relationship between two women whose names are not disclosed to the readers; the references to them are always as "the narrator" and "the young woman". Leaving the characters unnamed is a decision with many different effects. I have pondered over some which fit the narrative at hand including the power not naming characters represents. Such choice by the author produces the impact brought upon the narrative by invisibility, common in homosexual relations. Psychiatrist Gary Sanders describes this tendency for secrecy in "The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name From Secrecy To Openness – Gay And Lesbian Affiliations".

> Being gay or lesbian in an homophobic and heterosexist culture can foster a particularly potent and poisonous secrecy. For it is not simply a secret about a fact, an event, the hiding of a period of time, or a past relationship, but rather it is the hiding of the essence of a person – of that which invites this person to join the human race – the need to affiliate, albeit with persons of the same sex (SANDERS, 1993, p. 21).

The choice of maintaining the characters unnamed may offer a way of establishing a connection between them and women in similar situations for the purpose of identification as well. This possibility brings to mind Lord Alfred Douglas' *Two Loves* (1890).

> What is thy name? He said, 'My name is Love.'
> Then straight the first did turn himself to me
> And cried, 'He lieth, for his name is Shame,
> But I am Love, and I was wont to be
> Alone in this fair garden, till he came
> Unasked by night; I am true Love, I fill
> The hearts of boy and girl with mutual flame.'
> Then sighing, said the other, 'Have thy will,
> I am the love that dare not speak its name.'[6]

This second form of love mentioned is often related to homosexuality since Douglas was Oscar Wilde's lover and Wilde was charged with charges of indecency and sodomy. Even though the "love that dare not speak thy name" is commonly associated with the relationship between an older man and a younger man, this expression matches the choice of unnamming.

This I-narrator depicts in details some fragments of memories from her past in a peculiar, non-sequential manner offering, throughout the novel, clues to the reader – and, perhaps, also to herself - to comprehend the story that has been written years later, *ex post facto*, as an ostensible attempt of releasing herself from that past: "I thought writing this years later would release me from her. But I feel no reprieve" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 27). This fact explains the anachronistic order of facts and the dreamlike characteristic to many vignettes. Even though most of the novel is written in first person, some parts are described in the third person as if the narrator is distancing herself from the situations she is portraying. However, there are moments in which the narrator dialogues with a "you", still inside the narrative, in either a confessional tone or desperate pleading, leading the reader to conclude that this person is the young woman. Ellie Hernández in "Chronotope of Desire" (2003) discusses the appearance of an alternative narrative voice in the narrative of Ermila, suggesting that somehow the narrator is able to identify herself with Ermila. This voiceless character's life story is told by the narrator who appears observant and even omniscient at times. "This sense of omniscience, as a form of mirroring, is exemplified by the protagonist's interest in the rape trial" (HERNÁNDEZ, 2003, p. 167), providing the narrator access to Ermila's lifestory.

The word dream/s appears in the title and the epigraph of the novel. Dreams and nightmares stitch together this fragmented narrative. Some vignettes commence like a true

[6] Except from the poem Two Loves by Lord Alfred Douglas. For the complete poem visit https://poets.org/poetsorg/poem/two-loves.

confession, but all of a sudden a sentence such as “awakened, I quivered” (p. 25) points to the reader that a dream was being narrated. Thus, it is paramount to keep in perspective that this unreliable narrator offers her own viewpoint, conveying her experiences, dreams, traumas and fears regarding love, non-belonging and social oppression. She is aware that her representation of the young woman is at times a projection rather than a description based on reality: “I only wanted to invent you like this, in fragments through text where the memory of you inhabits those who read this” (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 139). Despite claiming that seeks she “release” from the young woman, the narrator also seems intent on engraving the image of the young women on the reader’s mind. Moreover, by not naming the young woman, the narrator states that “to name you would limit you, fetter you from all you embody. I give you your identities. I switch them when it’s convenient” (p. 139). The narrator, thus, confirms that she intends to fully represent the young woman, capturing the complexity and intensity of their identities and of the bond between them. One cannot ignore that this is simultaneously an act of representation and self-representation. Keeping in mind Sandoval’s aforementioned notion of differential consciousness, one may argue that the narrative stance adopted contributes to the representation of identity in process. Their agency is enacted and also limited by structures of power surrounding their existence and the relationship between them.

The notion of dreams and nightmares overarches the epigraphs of the three chapters. “Thus it was that our sexual dream kept changing into a nightmare” from Georges Bataille’ *Story of the Eye* (1928) is the epigraph of the first chapter, “Confession”. It accurately foreshadows the memories present in a chapter encompassing the beginning of a summer of restless dreams and hope of love and also fragmented memories encompassing harsh encounters with social demands, ethnic issues and violent, traumatic encounters. The chapter entiltled “The Trial” is introduced by an excerpt from Clarice Lispector’s *The Hour of The Star* (1977) that reads “[…] tormented shadows haunt my dreams as I sleep tormented at night” as a presage of intensification of matters at hand and implying the existence of shadows from the past. The last epigraph is presented in the third chapter, “Desire”, posing the questioning “¿Y qué buscabas en aquel sueño?” from Gloria Gervitz’s *Migraciones* (2000). The pertinence of the interrogation is clear once the reader realizes the focus on the narrator’s inner examination throughout the chapter.

In her essay “Childhood Scars and Women’s Love in Emma Pérez’s *Gulf Dreams* and Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*” (2010), Pamela June argues that bonds between women may have healing powers (p.79). However, some bonds that are developed naturally may not be accepted by society. Children that are brought up in

heteronormative societies tend to assimilate these principles and be themselves both byproducts and sustainers of the traditions these societies maintain, thus re-creating their own power structures. The traditional family unit can lead to two paths, either a rigid and excluding regime or a nurturing environment in which the issue of otherness is raised. June claims that if power structures are chosen by familial or social pressure, the experience only reinforces the same hegemonies that serve to encourage patriarchal, hetero-demanding, and even racist regimes. Yet, if consciously done, "the family unit can provide a stable and compassionate environment" (JUNE, 2010, p. 79). In *Gulf Dreams*, the narrator suffers this societal pressure brought upon her by her own community. Such oppression interferes with women's sexuality and foments violence against them.

2.2 **The bond that flesh and society frustrated[7]: Lesbian desire and women's sexuality in Emma Pérez'** ***Gulf Dreams***

"I met her in my summer of restless dreams. It was a time when infatuation emerges erotic and pure in a young girl's dreams" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 11). The concept of sexuality here is represented in two approaches: the way in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings (RATHUS ET AL, 1993 apud MOLINA, 1999) and the type of sexual attraction we feel. Sexual development is a natural process that begins at birth, according to the researchers at the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)[8]. The blossoming of sexuality is not necessarily achieved only when a child finds her/himself in puberty. Human sexuality differs from animal sexuality considering that cultural and religious beliefs participate in the process. The development of a child's sexuality is influenced by social aspects and traumatic experiences as well. According to the research at the NCTSN, after the age of 7 years old the child exhibits a need for privacy, especially for self-exploration and pleasure, and demonstrates social awareness of the rules delimitating the boundaries of private and public regarding the exploratory journey into sexual desire. Problems tend to occur if the child's actions are clearly beyond his/her developmental stage which would request

[7] A play on Emma Pérez's words in Gulf Dreams "the bond that flesh frustrated" (p. 27)

[8] Information on Sexual Development and Behavior can be found in material from the NCTSN (http://nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/caring/sexualdevelopmentandbehavior.pdf).

professional help. Another problematic occasion, much more common, emerges whenever their sexual desire is not compatible with the societal and cultural rules.

The sanctioned system of *comadrazgo* emerges in the novel *Gulf Dreams* and contributes to the narrator's awakening to her own capacity of sexual excitement. Since the young woman's sister was the *comadre* of the narrator's sister, the families encouraged the new acquaintances' friendship. There was a brief period of awkwardness as they met, but the infatuation grew rapidly as "she caressed a part of me [the narrator] I never knew existed" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 11) and, from the onset of the relationship, the seed of lesbian desire was already blossoming. The narrator demonstrates an understanding of the expectations on their friendship. She knows her sister and the young woman's sister were set for gossip the moment they arrived at the house again – the conventional reason for girls to meet. Since her family and everyone present expected that an unusual friendship was blossoming, she was also aware that they were not alone but sure nobody suspected the true reason of her coming:

> No one knew why I had come. To see my new friend, they thought. To link families with four sisters who would be friends longer than lifetimes through children who would bond them at baptismal rites. *Comadres*. We would become intimate friends sharing coffee, gossip and heartaches. We would endure the female life-cycle – adolescence, marriage, menopause, death, and even divorce, before or after menopause, before or after death (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 13).

That was the obvious bidding, the obvious bet, but the narrator reveals her true intention: "I had not come for that. I had come for her kiss" (PÉREZ, 1996, p.13). By maintaining her feelings a secret, the narrator makes clear that she knows the mechanisms and pressures of her society. Yet, this knowledge is accompanied by rage against the female rites girls were expected to enact. In a way, the narrator exhibits this anger as the two girls become friends and "the promise of female rites enraged me [the narrator]" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 15). In "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano community", Carla Trujillo points out that a Chicana lesbian - and here it is crucial the understanding that the aforementioned term "Chicana" is not only to define one's ethnicity, but one's political engagement. Since the beginning of *Gulf Dreams*, the narrator takes up this position remarkably so. Ludwig Molina draws attention to the motivating factor of human sexuality (MOLINA, 1999) justifying the questionings on how children from the same family with the same education can develop different perspectives. The Chicana lesbian, as a matter of survival and motivated by sexual impulses, fights to surpass the passive role assigned to her by the community and refuses to accept the heteronormative rule.

During the years of adolescence, acceptance by peers is critical and "predictive of adaptive outcomes in social and academic domains" (PARKER ET AL, 1995 apud SCHWARTZ ET AL, 2006, p. 2). The regular adolescent arrives at that age having been explained or having observing several rules and traditions to which compliance equals acceptance. The narrator of the novel along her young friend embraced a passionate friendship. Both of them confided moments of missing and longing for the other and the young woman expressed reliance on that "passionate friendship" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 17). They had not engaged in any sort of physical performance of the unspoken existing lesbian desire. Lesbian desire here is depicted as the erotic desire between women. The only sexual experience had happened between the young woman and an "intruder boyfriend" of hers with whom she escaped to explore her sexuality in a black Chevy. Haunted by unfulfilled desires, the narrator attempted to forego them by sundering her relationship with the young woman.

She succeeded for one year, during which she would observe her sisters abide by the norms, paint cheeks and seek brown boys and be deceived by them. She then concluded that boys only sought "selfish understanding and constant adoration from women" (1996, p. 20). At that point, after the summer of restless dreams and disappointment with the young woman, the narrator, at the age of fifteen, stated she did not hate boys and chose one. Her choice was not for a "brown" boy as her sisters', but for an outsider who "released a numbness that had protected me [the narrator] from her [the young woman]" (p. 21). However, the relationship ended as quickly as it began and, as the protection lifted, dreams resumed and with them came the understanding that the narrator's infatuation with the young woman exercised protection from the same female rites that enraged her. The narrative reveals what Trujillo had already described as a prerogative for Chicana lesbians, disruption of the established order of male power. While describing her relation with the white boy, the narrator comprehends that "maleness, so convinced of its superiority to the feminine, evolves" (1996, p. 22). In addition, she had awakened a feeling of non-belonging and a feeling to reject the prescribed gender roles.

Even though these women are not the stereotypical lesbian couple, their complicated affair epitomizes some processes most lesbian women undergo. As Emily Brennan Russel claims, between conforming to heterosexuality and "hoping to lessen anxiety and stress from society, or choosing to take on an identity that is socially unacceptable, hoping to find support within important relationships and/or finding strength within the community" (RUSSEL, 2009, p. 24), young lesbians face difficult situations. They experience anxiety about unveiling of sexual desire for other women, about developing self-acceptance and about coping with

non-belonging. In the novel, despite representing different reactions to lesbian desire, each of them, the narrator and the young woman, withstand society's hegemony and familial dominance among other influences. They conform to conventionally accepted standards. In spite of the strong desire they have for each other, they find boyfriends who feel uncomfortable when either woman appears near the couple. As the narrator puts it, "[she and I] trapped in social circumstances. Propriety kept us apart" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 28).

As teenagers, they were intimate friends but while exhibiting dependence on their desperate friendship, the young woman did not reciprocate the narrator's feelings. Thus, they had never touched each other beyond the limit of friendship and still the narrator felt as if carrying the other inside her and conformed to enjoying that "ration of her, when and if she wanted" (p. 27). The narrator describes their relationship as "souls that touched before in a life where my love for her was not forbidden" because they were "joined in a place so uncommon that this world, which bound and confined us, could not understand the bond that flesh frustrated" (p. 27). This fantasy of a life in which cultural and societal boundaries did not hinder the possibility of a relationship between them seems to express a private vision of the narrator, not one shared between her and the young woman.

After being apart for a year, the narrator and the young woman's friendship was restored. The narrator also claims that the young woman then, longed for her when she was with the white boy from Alabama, and also that young woman's desire for her started blossoming at that point. Desire inflamed each other's eroticism. Teasing by kissing on the cheek reached new levels, as the narrator describes her addiction: "the desire to desire her" (p. 27).

Their relationship evolved to a new level when the young woman confided to the narrator that boys had treated her brutally. Understanding her dynamics, the narrator at first refused to continue the pattern by denying her the fight and the victim's role, but the young woman resisted and the narrator "couldn't resist her [the young woman] when she agonized" (p. 27-28). So they engaged in a game of mutual manipulation. Often, people accustomed to abusive relationships continue seeking the same pattern. As Michael Formica argues in "Understanding the Dynamics of Abusive Relationships" (2008), there is a sense of familiarity and comfort in an abusive relationship as if the person who has known only that grows accustomed and dependent on the abuse. In *Gulf Dreams*, a deceitful game of manipulating one another is played by both women; neither knows how to quit it.

The narrator leaves El Pueblo for an unspecified period of time. She fled the Gulf coast to Los Angeles, escaping El Pueblo. Gloria Anzaldúa, in the second chapter of

*Borderlands (*1987), "Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan", posits that leaving home is not losing touch with home "because *lo mexicano* is in my system" (p. 43). On the other hand, she abhors the ways her culture cripples women and caricatures *machos* (1999, p. 43). The narrator fled home seeking sexual freedom, independence and also seeking to escape the young woman and their troubled relationship. However, El Pueblo/ the young woman always summoned her somehow. The narrator comes to the realization that by leaving home to understand one's own self is a decisive process**:** "To recognize truth is not easy when one is so close to home. To speak truth is even harder. Far from home, I am aware of myself" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 50). Concurrently, however, this freedom merged with escapism strategies through alcohol, drugs and casual sexual encounters, a common but dangerous practice.

In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Sigmund Freud states that the unrestricted satisfaction of all needs presents itself as the most tempting way of conducting life, however, it means placing pleasure before caution, bringing with it punishment[9] (FREUD, 2013, p. 22). Freud also claims that the most effective method to affect one's organism is the chemical method, through intoxication. And deliberate isolation, distance from others is the utmost protection from suffering brought about by human relations suffering (FREUD, 2013, p. 22). Through anonymity, the narrator savored the excitement at first, self-repulsion came much later. In a process of empowerment of the body's sexual urges and escapism of the true desire, after leaving El Pueblo, the narrator revelled in nights of lust with many lovers, thrilling and sedating herself. Some of her casual partners were men who asked for nothing but hard sex, but even the women could not satisfy her. Being away from a home located in an oppressive culture may release the desires and sexual adventures that were long repressed, however, she was not able to free herself from the ghosts of the past:

> They [Lovers] served a purpose shortly after I renounced her … not even the women satisfied me. Women after her offered what she never gave, but their stories won't fill these pages. Instead, her story suffocates me, anxious for resolution (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 71).

Such confession underscores the intensity of her feelings for the young woman but it also implies her control over the narrative selecting facts which are meaningful to her[10].

[9] "A satisfação irrestrita de todas as necessidades se apresenta como a maneira mais tentadora de conduzir a vida, mas significa pôr o gozo à frente da cautela, trazendo logo o seu próprio castigo." (In: *O Mal-estar na civilização*. Tradução de Paulo César de Souza. 2013, p. 22. Tradução nossa).

[10] Here I follow Linda Hutcheon's definition of facts as events to which we give meaning (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 57).

The repression in a rural Texas town motivated her plans of leaving. Renouncing the young woman was a measure of damage control, and its consequences were self-inflicted wounds. From an early age, body hate and cutting were part of the narrator's life. She had light skin and light-colored eyes while her family had brown skin and dark eyes. Thus, her feelings of nonbelonging started in the family through the teasing of her siblings. As identification was already an issue that she had to face since childhood, the narrator anesthetized herself with pain by inflicting wounds with a sharp tool, in adulthood, the protagonist anesthetizes herself with pain and, in adulthood, sexual measures of rough, sometimes abusive, sex aid her practices of escapism.

"I had forgotten why I'd left" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 45). Voices had told her to leave, to save herself and so she left El Pueblo and the young woman. Such escapism prevented her, at least in part, from being haunted by the woman in her dreams. The young woman had been married for ten years when the narrator returned to that small Texan town. "She waited after I left to commit herself to a hypocrite's ceremony" (p. 47). Knowledge of the young woman's marriage shatters the narrator's dream. She wonders how the young woman behaved with him, if she was able to be herself, if sexual moments were so intense as theirs had been. Extensively and openly, the narrator is not afraid to remember their intimacy in the first year of junior college, inscribing them into the narrative, describing their affair as "intimacies of the flesh achieved through words" (p. 52). Although the narrator and the young woman remain nameless, their passionate moments are very much present in the novel: a highly-charged eroticism that materializes itself in dialogue rather than actions.

César Díaz, also known as Pelón, is described as a typical patriarchal heterosexual male character, a "*macho*" who sees his wife as his possession. He sought attention from men especially in order to impress them and boasted about his competence and hard work. He liked his wife to be skinny, so she played her part and submitted herself to a routine of housework and of paying attention to her body image. However, there was a stain in her linoleum floor that she was not able to clean. The young woman intended to portray living the perfect life. This superficially happy married life was stained by this muddy smudge working as a symbol of a flawed relationship, it "reminded her that her world was imperfect" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 47). She is a woman trapped in a marriage with no one to hear her cries and anger. The marriage fits the standard marital relationship mentioned before in which the woman's body and mind are exploited as she fulfils her wifely duties. Husband, family and community are superior to the needs of the self. Their marriage was always full of jealousy, control and violence but she loved the power her husband possessed and was dedicated to her husband, no

matter how tempted and involved with the narrator she might have been. This is discussed further forward when focusing on violence regarding the existing presence of domestic violence. “Her reality had dwindled to a house with an empty baby crib” (p. 47). The empty baby crib may be seen as a token of a relationship that had been infertile or chosen for the wrong reasons such as cultural or social pressures. Notwithstanding the predicaments, the heteronormative prerogative comforted the young woman, Pelón had given her what the narrator could not give, the chance of a socially accepted relationship.

As the protagonist points out “daily I’m reminded. I have no right to love as I love”, the place in which she lives “ruptures and negates this practice [lesbianism]” (p. 73). Accommodating one’s sexuality to the community decorum may impair the development of a healthy existence. Adjacent to lack of identification and representation, the Chicano movement’s perspective on the lesbian as a traitor to the race due to *gringo* influence, discussed in the previous chapter, is personified in Pelón. The narrator addresses this issue thoroughly in a passage during their college years when the young man was recruiting students to the *movimiento,* repeating words that were not his and

> Snubbing me [the narrator], he sensed I didn’t worship him. Pelón condemned me, always spurning who I was, what I did, and what I meant to her. He told his friends and strangers I was a sell-out, ‘una vendida’, he’d call me and anyone who didn’t bow to him, rumoring I wasted time with queers” (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 64-65).

Both women knew one could not provide the other the conventional familial lifestyle approved by society. Exploring their sexual desires for and with each other, they began a game in which they violently reached the other through pain. Childhood memories and traumas play a part both in their lack of ability to relate and in their full ability to hurt and be hurt. After understanding there is no way approved by society to feed the narrator’s wishes, that oppressions trap, limit and hurt, especially the ones who do not fit the mold, escapism seems to be the only way out. Nonetheless, the young woman exhibits admiration for the narrator’s courage to go against tradition and transgress societal norms, courage she, herself, lacks. Judith Butler refers to the heterosexualization of desire as requiring and instituting

> […] the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine”, where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female”. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender (BUTLER, 1999, p. 24).

The process of heterosexualization of desire generates the community’s intelligibility concerning homosexuality and is, at least partially, what disables the young woman to act as the narrator does.

Emotional scars both link and distance the women in the story. They could not process the feelings shared beyond body and flesh because heteronormative values are based upon the physical notion of biological sex as gender.

> This was before flesh, before bones crushed each other foolishly trying to join mortal bodies, before the outline of skin shielded us from one another. We both knew this, that we came from the same place, that we were joined in a place so uncommon that this world, which bound and confined us, could not understand the bond that flesh frustrated (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 27).

The narrator could see and love beyond the flesh and beyond society but when realizing that the young woman could not, and thus that their union was impossible, she had to find ways to escape. They could not nurture their bond so they keep fragmenting each other. They hurt the other's bodies, they shatter childhood tokens such as the narrator's childhood photograph whose protective glass penetrates the narrator's skin when the young woman destroys it.

Pamela June argues that the childhood memories represented by objects physically become psychic wounds in this episode. The photograph is transformed into a weapon and wounds the narrator, symbolically with childhood memories. June explains the wounding of these memories may be read in several ways. She offers two pertinent interpretations. One is that the childhood object dates back to a moment in which "they spent time together prior to their compulsion toward heteronormative expectations" (JUNE, 2010, p. 88). Another interpretation is that the memories are the recalling of the pain in their lives considering childhood scars are "a reminder of things forgotten" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 98).

As an attempt to deal with these feelings which go against the heteronormative demands of society, both women seek heterosexual relationships. Their processes, though, are somewhat disparate. In the remembrances of the narrator, she explores her curiosity with the boy from Alabama during her teenage years. At the university, she finds reprieve in Juan, an artist unafraid to admit his nightmares about Vietnam; he was one of many "poor brown-skinned boys" who "could not protest the war in college rooms" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 66). Despite the intensity of their moments together, when she escaped the sweaty rooms they had shared, memories did not follow. Juan represents a reminder of the "different ways [she] loved men from women" (p. 69). The ease with which she forgot him disturbed her and stood in contrast with her inability to forget the young woman. Afterwards, far from El Pueblo, many women lovers sedated her, or even satiated her partially. Most sexual or romantic encounters with others either inflicted pain or sedation, relieving briefly the sexual desire and

obsession for the young woman. On the other hand, from the perspective of the narrator, the young woman went through a common process that people in denial of their own sexuality undergo. Heterosexual relationships served as a subterfuge in order to escape her own desires. After her teenage boyfriend with the black Chevy, the young woman's choice was the epitome of the heterosexual male, Pelón, with whom she endured an abusive relationship but could not terminate it.

The narrator's process of psychological anesthesia aims at numbing her feelings for the young woman. After the trial, she leaves El Pueblo for a second time prepared for separation and determined to put an end to an impossible relationship in which she feels "trapped in common abuse" practices (p. 129). However, after returning to Los Angeles, she remains pray to the memory of the young woman, controlled by her in "unexplainable ways", to a level that appears infused with insanity. Recurring images feed her desire and attachment. At this point the narrator even doubts her interpretation on the young woman's intentions, "I misread your kindness, mistook it for a wish" (p. 131).

In the third chapter of the novel, the narrator's description of the relationship between her and the young woman becomes flimsy, insubstantial. The narrator describes the young woman and her love as her [the narrator's] creation. As a means to deal with issues from the past, writing her story was a way to purge both her attachment to the young woman and the trauma yet to be discussed. In this process of writing, their relationship is represented. Yet, the narrator asserts the way she loves the young woman "is an act of language – words, myth, narrative" (p. 137), "with phrases I create you" (p. 138). In this chapter the narrative strategy of alternating from "her" to "you" enacts a difference between the young woman she left in El Pueblo and the one she creates in her imagination. Teasing and eroticism are mostly depicted in dialogues, not actions. She is attached to the young woman who provides her with the impetus to write away the pain and find the key to accessing a much deeper traumatic process connected to El Pueblo. In the now conscious relation between dreams, nightmares and reality, she feels as if she can no longer blame the young woman for her attachment to the occurrences in Texas and her lack of strength to distance herself from that love. Still, the narrator feels responsible for the way she loves the young woman, and she ponders "I blame myself for beginning to love you [young woman] in a way that can only be expressed on paper" (p. 147) as if this feeling described can only be processed through writing.

Finally, in a silent but hurtful relationship, she addresses the young woman wondering if she "[the narrator] will ever appear in your stories about trees and silences" (p. 136). The girls met under a tree and silences infused the rest of their story. These various silences may

symbolize fear of the normative system, a taciturn political transgression or inners questions yet to be unveiled.

2.3 **"They tried to censor her anger": Silences and violence against women in Emma Pérez's *Gulf Dreams***

As mentioned in chapter 1, in Sandra Cisneros' "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991), the protagonist, by reading the local newspaper, realizes women were often victims of violence and she fears for her life and that of her child in her community. Societies that have been witnessing violent crimes against women for centuries need to take action to stop feminicide. Here the proposition is neither to list all existing forms of violence against women nor to affirm that these violent practices exist only in the Chicano society. The present approach encompasses the analysis of some of the forms of violence against women present and represented in the Chicana novel *Gulf Dreams.*

A 2015 documentary entitled "The Mask You Live In", directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, discusses the rules and pressures on hegemonic masculinity and male rites. Some of the facts and ideas in the documentary clarify the meaning of masculinity and the role men are expected to play in society. It is noteworthy that the documentary proposes to speak about United States' society in general, not just about Chicano society in the U.S. However, the issues raised are pertinent to our discussion. For instance, the documentary briefly addresses the "hipermasculinity" of important male personalities idealized by boys and men all over the world – squandering money and womanizing beautiful thin women; the use of expressions such as "man up" or "be a man" to convey superiority as well as the use of terms like "sissy" or "girl" to offend a male; the connection between masculinity and bullying - to exhibit power -, homophobia – as a way of proving his own masculinity -, the decrying of male tenderness – in order to be a man one must be tough -, pornography – which tends to lead to objectification of women – and even the tendency to crime videogames – to purge all the accumulated pain, sadness and other feelings a male figure is not allowed to express. The socialization of masculinity is a big generator of the accumulation of anger and hate. It is necessary to re-think the system under which boys are raised. Even though processes of epistemic violence in the Chicano community concern not only gender but racial issues as well, it is not the focus of the present research.

In *Gulf Dreams*, the violence from men against women manifests itself in different ways, all of which involve exercising male power. Strong jealousy, harassment (physical and psychological), domestic violence, rape/ gang rape and child molestation are all present in the narrative.

Even amiable and lovable men may use male power to subjugate women. In the novel, the narrator distrusted most men but admired and loved her father. However, she recognizes that he exercised his power over her mother. Other men would admire her mother and her father raged with jealousy, causing his wife to panic and stay home. “She feared my father’s jealousy like abuse, and often stayed home to appease” (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 19). This intense power is used, even if unmaliciously, to control or confine physically, but it also constrains the wife psychologically. Because of the father-daughter bond, it is difficult for the narrator to identify this controlling trait in her father. At first, at fifteen, “I misunderstood her compliance. In time, I recognized her strength, his weakness” (p. 19). Jealousy is a powerful domination weapon, especially if combined with control and fear. The daughter, understanding better male relations with females, changed her perspective, having no one but the father to blame for the mother’s predicament. Blaming women, often the victims, rather than males, is a practice observed many times in the violent scenes of the novel.

Concerning women’s susceptibility to objectification of their bodies since an early age, coping with such harassment is a burden for most women in western societies since an early age. At age of eight, the narrator and her eleven-year-old brother were on the way to their *güelita’s* when a group of four or five boys, about eleven years old as well, approached them. As the oldest blocked their passage, he force kissed her and, then, the other boys took turns kissing as well, suffocating her while her older brother watched helplessly. The oldest boy was *la costurera’s* son. Her g*üelita* lived right next to *la costurera*. At this point, the narrator hints that house was avoided for years to come. A new frightening episode happened as her body developed, when she was nine years old, an older boy who was fifteen observed and chased her at school. On the weekends, the movie theaters were more than a distraction; for her, they were a safe harbor in which she could wait for a heroine to appear and explore her desires through someone else’s passion. One day she heard a voice, his voice, in a sexually insolent tone. He had invaded her safe harbor and her body was trembling with fear. “Leave me alone”, said she, but “refusal was his invitation” (p. 38), so he kept harassing her. Even after complaints to other women, the response was simply that a harmless boy was interested in her, demonstrating how common practices as such exist in the socialization of

most women and they are taught to accommodate to that behavior. When his family left to follow seasonal work, worry ceased.

Another case of violence in the novel describes past actions of domestic violence between Pelón and the young woman. Domestic violence may be brought upon for many reasons. Commonly so, it may be described as a pattern of physical, psychological or sexual abuse caused by threats, intimidation, isolation or economic coercion used by one person to exert power and control over another person in the context of an intimate relationship (FLORES-ORTIZ, 1993, p. 170). In the relationship with the young woman, Pelón resorted to physical and psychological violence so that the young woman would not leave. In college, "he threatened her. He threatened to leave her, he threatened to marry someone else, he threatened her with his fist" (p. 63). Traumatized by events of her childhood and adolescence, the young woman was notable to love without being hurt which generated dependence on her partner. The following dialogue is from one conversation between the women:

> "He doesn't hit me anymore."
> "So you stay?"
> "He's sorry for the bad years, but it was because of us."
> "You blame us? Me? I made him hit you? So did he stop after I left?"
> "He was more relaxed. He thought we'd finally be happy because you were gone."
> "And now that I'm back?"
> "Now that you're back, he's afraid again. He threatened me one night, but then he cried." (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 125)

The construction of identity and sexuality of subjects is often related to childhood experiences. Pérez's novel includes some cases of child abuse, two of which involve the young woman's experience with her step-father and *la costurera's* son, Chencho's experience with his uncle. Even though the narrator affirms having been harassed by uncles and cousins, there are no direct descriptions of such events.

The aggressors in the cases involving the young woman and *la costurera's* son were male figures involved in the lives of the children but the repercussions for the two children were vastly different. Since eight or nine years old, the young woman had her breasts groped and had been fondled for years by her uncle, a fatherly figure, while her mother worked. The physical and emotional abuse the young woman suffered from childhood to teenage years scarred her and taught her only to love when physical or emotional pain is involved. These childhood scars are so deep and excruciating that she needs to anesthetize herself. The action of robbing a child of her/his innocence is a violation that leaves the mind wounded.

Even though Chencho's story does not fit perfectly the scope of this research, it is important to highlight a few points about his childhood, which have had impact on the

narrator's and Ermila's life. Inocencio, also known as Chencho, was a boy influenced by his brother who showed him sexual elements that could be considered inappropriate for a child's eyes. During childhood and adolescence, an uncle would visit Chencho more often and they became inseparable. This father figure took the younger boy to places he should have gone with a father. However, Chencho, *la costurera's son,* suffered from sexual abuse from this uncle until he was able to interrupt it. The consequences of this experience caused or influenced him to look for men's bars as a young man. In front of his peers, he harassed women to reinforce his masculinity. The narrator muses that "The loud rapist is born at childhood. The boy-child frequented men's bars to assuage his pain, but he couldn't quell the memories" (p. 112). He entered the world of sex in a forceful and unwanted manner. As an adult, he looks for men who look like his uncle in gay bars. Progressively, he followed the same modus operandi of his childhood games in which he and a group of friends chased girls around. In drive-in theaters a group of boys either inebriated the girl with whiskey or chased the wanted girl. As they grew older, the game developed from harassment to rape. He was the ringleader of Ermila's gang rape. Chencho's trauma was accentuated by society's demand on masculinity and his need to prove himself a traditional "*macho*" and powerful male, leading him to force himself on victims.

Along the narrative, though, the reader finds clues to the novels leitmotifs: the narrator too has been a victim of child abuse but has never been able to face her trauma. The cyclic narrative with recurring images revisits the past and connects her to the trauma lived in childhood. Cathy Caruth discusses memory and trauma in her introductions to both sections of the book *Trauma: Experiences in Memory* (1995). In the second section, "Recapturing the Past" she defines trauma as

> the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge [...] and thus continually returns, in its exactedness, at a later time. Not having been fully integrated as it occurred, the event cannot become, as [Pierre] Janet says, a "narrative memory" that is integrated into a completed story of the past (CARUTH, 1995, p. 153).

The fragmented pieces of memory appear constantly to conduct her to an understanding of what had occurred to her. The reader is able to catch glimpses and clues the narrator gives while discussing other experiences. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes how she did not laugh when photographs of her were taken. Her "mother framed photographs that captures the sadness" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 16). Gazing at one childhood picture of her when she was not yet one-year-old, she noticed that she was laughing openly and happily. An internal questioning follows this memory-piece: "when did the sadness begin?" (p. 16). After many

other frames of scenes, the narrator leaves yet another clue. While describing how she is drawn to piers, the narrator comments briefly about having lived childhood horrors but feeling unable to access the entire story.

> The mysteries are buried somewhere inside me, but I can never remember everything, only frames of unfamiliar scenes. This thing that hid from me, it would release the young woman from the coastal Texas town who followed me everywhere (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 43).

Through this encoded utterance, it is possible to assume that she cannot access that traumatic recollection within her. On the incomprehensibility of the occurrence, Caruth also argues that "in its repeated imposition as both images and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence" (CARUTH, 1995, p. 153), explaining her hardship to recall the event.

In their community, one community icon stands out: *la costurera.* She sews for families too poor to shop for clothes at stores. *La costurera* has three sons, young boys with no father. A mother arrives with her two-year-old baby and while the mother and the seamstress discuss colors and patterns, two sons take the baby's hand. The traumatic acts happened as follows

> […] they fondle her, they fondle a tiny girl beneath her primrose dress. Curious boys poke fingers beneath her underwear. An older brother stands at the doorway, guarding those who play harmless children's games. A boy pulls down his pants, holds a hard penis in his hand, rubs it against a baby girl's flesh. The baby's eyes track a thin, cinnamon cockroach slithering against a wall, it finds a crack and slips through an opening that was invisible, non-existent. She is numb. This numbness will inhibit her for years (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 60).

It is important to mention that, to describe this particular experience, the narrator shifts from "I" to "she" while depicting this traumatic experience, disassociating herself from the incident, a common reaction given the circumstances. In *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth discusses the notion of dissociation of the psyche around the event as "the splitting off of a "traumatic memory" from the rest of consciousness (and unconsciousness, for that matter)" (CARUTH, 1996, p, 141). Still referring to herself in the third person, the narrator elaborates further on this woman that would crave mixed sensations, never having the opportunity of feeling satisfied for "to not be satisfied was her satisfaction, chasing an unconscious memory" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 60). Thus, speaking of herself in a disassociated form. Even though the narrator did not acknowledge that she was a participant in the incident narrated, in several other moments of the novel, she mentions numbness and not ever being fully satisfied when referring to her own self. Based on psychiatrical and neurobiological studies, Caruth asserts that the history a flashback tells "is,

therefore, a history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood (CARUTH, 1995, p. 153). At this point in the narrative, a key-sentence appears: “Missing links began to mend this life’s chain” (p. 61).

With this investigative analysis, we begin to understand why the second section, which focuses on Ermila’s story, is introduced by two seemingly loose sentences: “What happened here, began long ago. The story began in a hot, steamy room where three boys groped a baby’s body.” (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 77). Through these sentences, the narrator’s story and Ermila’s story are presented as connected, even if subtly and indirectly.

The third section of the novel is replete with the narrator’s own attempt at exploring creatively “the missing links” connecting the young woman, El Pueblo and the boys who had harmed her. The clues become more frequent and intertwined with images of moments between her and the young woman. In her narrative, these images stem mostly from her own imagination. She questions her own sanity, as if warning the reader about the possibility of her not being a reliable narrator. Her notion of incidents is presented in a somewhat confusing way. There are moments in which the narrator affirms “insanity infuses me [her]” (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 131) but, still lacking the complete narrative memory, she suspects “madness could have motive” (p. 132). After leaving El Pueblo again, the narrator falls back into old habits which had silenced her anguish before and continue to do so. With these habits, she “[…] pretended nothing had changed after acts against my body, I pretended I hadn’t changed. I silenced the screams for years, decades, the way I silence desire for her” (p. 130). This narrator unfailingly entangles the young woman with her narrative of the past. She even states that it is through the process of writing that the young woman enters her life again: “and this [the process] is how I will relive the past in the present” (p. 132). She fills in the blanks in her memory in an attempt at finding closure. This process of writing is an important step to organize speech. Through the fragmented narrative with recurring images, Pérez enables the narrator and the readers to uncover together the “submerged riddles” (p. 43) from the narrator’s life. Cathy Caruth suggests that “the danger of speech, of integration in the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much” (CARUTH, 1995, p. 154). Caruth mentions

> Speech seems to offer only, as Kevin Newmark says, the attempt “to move away from the experience of shock by reintegrating it into a stable understanding of it.” The possibility of integration into memory and the consciousness of history thus raises the question […] “whether it is not a sacrilege of traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past?” (CARUTH, 1995, p. 154).

Whether it is a sacrilege or not, there are no guarantees. However, it is the process the narrator follows in writing. She understands "there's no break with the past" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 142). Still, this traumatic process has been unveiled by her narrative act of writing/ speech/ language. Here, the reader observes her understanding of her own need to expel from her being, not only the *costurera's* son or his horrors or the young woman, but "the sleepless nights, the restless dreams, the future that can't be" (p. 139).

"There's nothing left to do except what I'm about to do" (p. 139). Along with this new clue, the narrative leads the reader to a moment in which not even the narrator is sure of her sanity.

> Temporarily insane, or just insane. My act seemed like a source of sanity. I can't tell you when it happened. The murder. You'll have to trace the clues I leave behind in this text. I can't reveal too much. Not because I won't, but because I'm not sure I remember. I can tell you how I did it, how I took pleasure in the act, clubbing him to death, a limp body into death (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 142).

This passage represents the introduction to her act of violence against her aggressor depicted in the following pages. It is crucial to mention that this is the only moment she addresses the reader directly. The reader cannot affirm whether this act really occurred considering the doubts about her sanity and reliability. The lines before the description of the assault suggest the narrator is "engulfed in a nightmare so real I can't wake myself" (p. 142-143). This introduction to the murder scene shakes once again the reader's trust on the narrator. Still, the loud rapist had been found beaten to death outside a "pervert bar", a case the police would not investigate.

In an attempt to release herself from the traumatic experience, the narrator acknowledges her effort to lay blame but she admits to blaming neither the young woman from El Pueblo nor *la costurera's* son anymore. She cannot blame herself either. Yet, dealing with the traumatic event may help her change and stop being that woman who could not ever be satisfied, so she ponders "forgiveness doesn't come to me naturally, but it could save me from more blood-stained hands" (p. 149).

Towards the end, the narrator declares she chooses one past, she chooses to remember a past of pure childhood memories.

> My mother's strong arms as she bent to pick cotton, my father's fried chicken when we came home from *la pisca.* I remember my sisters dressing and painting their faces, my brother strolling beside me. I remember *güelita's* empanadas (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 156).

The selection of events from the past, a prerogative of narrators, turns into a real possibility for her as character-narrator, now that she has started facing and dealing with her

trauma. Her ability to choose the past memories she desires to remember signals the strength and determination to battle the recurring traumatic images. In the preface of *Trauma: Experiences in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth discusses cure from trauma. “To cure oneself—whether by drugs or the telling of one's story or both—seems to many survivors to imply the giving-up of an important reality, or the dilution of a special truth into the reassuring terms of therapy” (CARUTH, 1995, p. vii). Through writing, the narrator reaches a point in which she is able to let go of the memories that hurt her and the necessity of laying blame. Caruth mentions Freud’s early writings on trauma which include the possibility of integrating the lost event into a series of associative memories, as part of the cure” (CARUTH, 1996, p. vii) as a way of allowing the event to be forgotten.

The narrator’s expressive words profess: “This part of the story has to be over, even though I don’t believe in endings. I believe in the imagination, its pleasure indelible, transgressive, a dream” (p. 157).

As we have mentioned, the second chapter, which is not so obviously connected to the narrator’s story, focuses on yet another case of violence, “The Trial”. It presents a subplot about a gang rape in El Pueblo. Ermila, the third child of a mother who could not tend to her older children, had to fight to be born since her mother made three attempts at abortion while expecting her. After the passing of the mother at yet another child birth, Ermila fulfilled the role of caretaker of her drunken father, two older brothers and a younger sister. Described as innocent, she had experienced enough to understand how to “throw off a man’s arm” and disappear. However, society claimed “women weren’t supposed to be that sure of themselves, that lustful and proud” (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 97). Her story was similar to many others, “everyone empathized with her life story” (p.98).

The woman, with a difficult past and infamous reputation, was gang raped by five men and refused to muffle the case. She could not escape her nightmares and trauma, so she believed the rapists should not go unpunished. They literally forced their male power upon her, leaving her physically and emotionally scarred and with their faces and identities imprinted in her memory. From all five men, the oldest, the loud one, stood out. It was Chencho. Ermila decided to officially accuse the men for raping her and the indictment was followed by a trial. Because she was a woman, she was judged by the town’s gossip for having dressed in provocative ways, being comfortable with her sexuality and having sexual encounters around town. The process of blaming the victim, especially if a woman, is common in patriarchal, sexist societies because of widespread beliefs such as the woman had “asked for it”, “man cannot control themselves” and other sexist excuses communities

perpetuate. Kell Goff, in an article for the Huffington Post, plays with certainties in life and common sense when stating that "For every rape survivor, there is at least one person who's convinced she (or he) was "asking for it." During the trial of the gang rapists, some women objected to the hideous crime but were afraid to harm their marriages. So,

> The same women who would not condemn the rapists, accused Ermila, that she complained too much, that she dressed too provocatively. These were Ermila's enemies; wives who feared reproach from husbands, wives who would stress, "Yes, men aren't fair, but they can't change, that's how they are". "Ermila shouldn't dress in tight low-cut blouses or in her brother's T-shirts with no bra." She didn't deserve to be raped, they argued. But she shouldn't behave so aggressively, fighting publicly, calling men names, aggravating them. (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 116-117).

Ermila had been walking by the side of the road when Chencho, along with his gang, screamed obscenities at her. Instead of the expected submission, she yelled back, cursed him and resumed to her activity, ignoring him. Her offensive response enraged his male ego and fed his sexual predatory hunger. Neighbors and even women in her family urged her to be silent about the rape. Silence and lack of punishment maintains male hegemony and power. Women had to understand their place because "the town stifled loud irreverent women" (p. 92). Social dimensions of this intrinsic behavior comprehended in gender socialization determine demands and expectations upon women: "To spoil men, to listen to their troubles, and if wives or sisters disputed husbands or brothers, they were called "*putas"* or "*jotas"* (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 92). This sexual violation symbolizes the boundaries for women and violence against all women in the community, violence which is supported by familial, cultural and religious institutions and fear of violence itself. Controlling female desire acts as a form of violation as well.

Ellie Hernández in "Chronotope of Desire" (2003) establishes the concept of "social death" for women who decide not to maintain submissive silence. "The don't-say-anything attitude expressed by the women implies that their reluctance to publicize their outrage originates out of fear of violence" (HERNÁNDEZ, 2003, p. 167). Apart from Ermila's grandmother, all other women urged her to ponder over her choices and be silent.

Due to the trial, newspaper headlines and Pelón's defense case disclosed "her [Ermila's] insatiable appetite for sex" (PEREZ, 1996, p. 93), justifying the actions of the accused as excitement on a Saturday night. Whereas Ermila is judged for constantly frequenting backs seats and alleys, "those men just gave her what she wanted" (p. 93). Furthermore, Ermila's reputation reached the position of *la malinchista, la chingada* by her own people. Aída Hurtado in "The Politics of Sexuality" (1998), describes the Octavio Paz's and El Teatro Campesino's usual perspective of indias as passive whores, Chicanas *putas* as

traitors for allowing penetration in their community and *La Malinche* as the ultimate traitor whose betrayal is cultural and sexual (HURTADO, 1998, p. 392). In the fifth chapter of *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999), "Beyond the Nation's Maternal Bodies: Technologies of Decolonial Desire", Emma Pérez elaborates on the power of sexuality and its discourse in historical studies. She explains that *La Malinche's* own agency, when active, is repudiated as *la chingada,* the betrayer, the whore. This symbol cannot be avoided in Chicano myths and histories for "La Malinche encodes all sociosexual relations and there is no way out" (p. 122). Even though it is not the mainstream take on *La Malinche* and not the reason why Ermila was compared to her, in this reading this symbol cannot be taken for granted, considering that Chicana feminists have reinscribed *La Malinche* with a new perspective, as the powerful, enduring mother, "a cultural survivor who bore the mestizo race" (p. 123). Ermila's independence of thought and actions exposed an institutionalized problem and brought back upon her harsh judgement and mistreatment. She is placed in the role of betrayer for deserting not her people but cultural conformity in a patriarchal system. Her transgressions were incorporated in daily activities such as giving orders to her older brothers, defying teachers or blocking older men's advances, dressing as she wished, dating whoever she desired. Her character is as defiant as the narrator's. Though in different ways and by different means, they are decolonized subjects who do not fit in the conformist community in which they grew up.

The epilogue chronicles the ending of the trial and its consequences. Chencho was sentenced to thirty years in prison, but the community did not accept it. The other men were not convicted. Chencho appealed and was released after only one year. Concerning Ermila's ending, "no one knows" (p. 155) anything until a piece of news with her name catches the narrator's attention. The bones of a woman appeared in a cove on a beach and were identified by the people in town as hers. The reader is not given certainty that they were hers, for the narrator prefers to imagine that Ermila has escaped to her grandmother's village in Mexico. Ermila wished to escape to a world in which misogyny and fear limited her. Silence would not bind her any longer after her decisions. However, "everyone had wanted her silence. They wished her silence in decaying bones" (p. 155). It is implied she was forcefully silenced.

"We live in a violent, psychic horror daily. Some of us are more fortunate. We master ways do disembody from that which is too real to face" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 139). *Gulf Dreams* is a work of fiction and the reliability of the narrator is certainly questionable. As Linda Hutcheon posits in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), postmodern novels do not necessarily transgress in representation and mimesis alone, they "problematize narrative representation, even as they invoke it" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 40). Ellie Hernández elicits the argument

commonly applied to women's literature upon the subjective voice as a "naïve representation of individual grievances in lieu of more literary ones" (HERNÁNDEZ, 2003, p. 173). These women may represent the fear, silences and desires of women under a restrictive system. Transgressors are designated as *putas* or *jotas* in Chicano community and both the narrator and Ermila are labeled with at least one of those words. Transgression keeps them from fitting into their communities. The difference is that Ermila was silenced by others and the narrator was silenced first by her trauma.

Questioning a value system that does not comply with or include what is different is a form of counteracting, identifying the forms and practices of a constraining power and promoting resistance. Issues of sexuality curb the development of women as sexual beings. A community such as the Chicana has social bonds that tie this process as something natural. Violence is a product of many origins. Compulsory heterosexuality may develop in the male and the female upbringings many forms of anger and violence such as rape, domestic beating, marital abuse and others which are destroying and fragmenting subjects, however, often the hegemony does not change because the people who are in control are comfortable but the people who are controlled do not identify it or just conform to it.

When dealing with relationships, taboos of sexuality and the violent consequences of a binary man-woman method such as heteronormativity, subjects who are not able to find a place for themselves either hurt by conforming or suffer the repercussions by defying. The cultural standards of the U.S. society and of the Chicano society treat men as creatures that should not look, sound or feel like a woman. Women are objectified and subdued constantly because of patriarchy and most Chicana women are subjected to three prescribed and accepted roles in life: being a nun, a prostitute or a mother. Another way to counteract is to spread information and consciously subvert this structure in order to generate a place for resistance. "To recognize truth is not easy when one is so close to home. To speak truth is even harder. Far from home, I am aware of myself" (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 50). Repression infects in many levels, physical, emotional and psychological and it restricts subjectivity. If one can consciously subvert the conventions, one may hurt for loving someone else who cannot.

> I thought writing this years later would release me from her. But I feel no reprieve. Not yet. Maybe the only resolution is in the act of loving. Maybe I had to love her enough to let her go. I had to begin to love her more than my selfishness. (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 27-28).

The narrator could not be selfish and want the young woman for herself when she could not provide her with the traditional values of society that appear important to her. In

some passages, the young woman praises the narrator's choice for the unconventional when she realizes a "foundation had crumbled beneath her" (p. 55), and her life of appearances is crumbling down. Oppression speaks to the profound core of the being. When constructing identity in a foundation that limits, conscious or unconsciously, the subject might fall apart. "I am engulfed in a nightmare." (PÉREZ, 1996, p. 142). Either one disentangles her/his subjectivity to the limiting requirements of the community or reality might be the one to engulf.

Silencing is a cruel psychic wounding process from which one may uproot through verbalization of pressure or trauma. Societal judgement and demands commonly present themselves as oppressive tools to control. Once one is "sentenced" to a previously engendered life, only transgressive manners manage to evolve. For this reason, I end this chapter with an excerpt from Oscar Wilde's *Profundis* "All trials are trials for one's life, just as all sentences are sentences of death."

3 "NIGHTVOICE"[11]: INTRICATE RELATIONS BETWEEN GENDER, CULTURE AND SEXUALITY IN CARLA TRUJILLO'S *WHAT NIGHT BRINGS*

Now, I know you can't be with a girl if you are a girl.

Carla Trujillo

There's different ways to be scared.

Carla Trujillo

3.1 **Carla Trujillo's theoretical writings and *What Night Brings***

Carla Trujillo's award-winning novel *What Night Brings* (2003) provides a powerful insight on the experiences of a young Chicana's process of learning the mechanisms of her community to resist them while defying prescribed gender roles.

Carla Trujillo is a well-known Chicana writer in the fields of Literature and Chicana Studies. She was born in New Mexico in 1956 and spent her childhood in northern California. She received a PhD in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with a thesis about the differential treatment of marginalized or underrepresented students in college classrooms. Her vast academic experience includes lecturing on Ethnic Studies in the University of California and teaching courses on Women's Studies in San Francisco State University. Trujillo's writing has filled pages of short stories, personal essays and articles about identity, sexuality and higher education (NELSON, 2009, p. 618). As editor, she is responsible for two collections of writings by women: *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991) and *Living Chicana Theory* (1998), both considering various issues regarding Chicana Studies. *What Night Brings* and anthologies edited by her are widely adopted in college and high school classrooms[12].

Concerning theoretical writings, the anthology *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991) contains an introduction and a critical essay written by Trujillo. In the introduction, aside from glimpses on all of the papers selected as part of the

[11] Title of one of Gloria Anzaldúa's poems (ANZALDÚA, 1991. In: TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 64–66).

[12] For more information on Carla Trujillo's Bio, see http://www.carlatrujillo.net/ and *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of the United States* (NELSON, Emmanuel (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of the United States*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009, p. 617-618.)

anthology, she brings to the fore an examination of the Chicana lesbian existence and claims the Chicana lesbian is similar to any Chicana or any lesbian, "yet her own experience is usually that of attempting to fit into two worlds, neither of which is readily accepting" (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. ix). Her critical essay "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community"[13] (1991) is divided into four sections of socialization: Sexuality, Identification, Motherhood and Religion. It raises awareness on the Chicana Lesbian as a perceived threat in the Chicano community and her participation on the mobilization of consciousness regarding women's independence and male control. As a concluding argument, she acknowledges the different experiences of heterosexual and lesbian women but still summons Chicana women, heterosexuals or lesbians, to look for commonalities within diversity. She sets forth two main reasons for her summoning: the quality *woman* implies subservience in social and cultural contexts; the universal of the body embeds subjugation of any woman, making her vulnerable to the same violations as any woman, daily threats of rape, molestation and harassment (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 191-192).

The other anthology, *Living Chicana Theory* (1998), also includes an introduction and a critical essay, "La Virgen de Guadalupe's reconstruction in Chicana Lesbian Desire", by Trujillo. The introduction, as a personal narrative, falls in line perfectly with our theoretical basis. Her self-description of her personal activist experiences merges with the brief overviews of all the pieces in the anthology. Her words encourage Chicanas to stand up for their rights, embracing the philosophy of "Xicanisma", the term Ana Castillo coined to refer to the concept of Chicana feminism. Trujillo, as many other Latina writers before her, presents her experience during childhood and adolescence that involved being trained to serve men. She describes her household as a place where her father controlled every aspect of their lives, even the food eaten and the subjects talked about: "Happiness, or lack of it, in the home were dictated by his moods" (TRUJILLO, 1998, p. 10). After leaving his control, she found the taste of freedom was exhilarating. Meeting other Chicanas was enlightening, because there were women with the same background, others with gentle fathers and others with mother who had the say-so in the family (p. 11). This calls attention to the fact that not all men and women follow perfectly the common model of the traditionalist family. While participating in the women's movement, lesbian movement or activities in the Chicano *movimiento*, Trujillo acknowledges that the voices of women of color were not heard in any of them. She confesses consternation while seeking to validate her own voice and presence,

[13] This essay has been mentioned in Chapter 1.

for, as Chicana activists, she and others were labelled “troublemakers”; as feminists, “difficult” or “sellout”; as lesbians, “man-hating heterophobe” (p. 12). The stereotyping and the constant demand to explain oneself bothered other Chicanas. Because of stereotyping by others and transgressing for speaking up for one’s self as in Trujillo’s described actions, Sandra Cisneros in “A Woman of No Consequence/*Una Mujer Cualquiera*” states “it’s not to say I understood them [hegemonic others] any better. But they didn’t need to understand me, understand? That was the difference” (CISNEROS, 1998, p.78). Thus, the voices in *Living Chicana Theory* continue the chorus started “by Chicanas demanding not just equality but entitlement” (TRUJILLO, 1998, p.14) and keep up the struggle to make themselves heard.

Critic Emily Anderson draws a comparison between the narrators of Monica Palacios’ and Carla Trujillo’s *What Night Brings.* Here is an excerpt from “Tomboy” (1998), a piece taken from the show *Deep in the Crotch of My Latino Psyche:*

> The land of little boys was ADVENTURE-DANGERBUDDIES!
> And really cool toys.
> Don’t get me wrong, I never wanted to physically be a boy.
> Although I did try peeing standing up a couple of times-and I
> did pretend to shave with dad.
> I liked my girl body. I just wanted what they had-
> POWER! (PALACIOS, 1998, p. 307).

The speaker in the performance feels relegated to a state of disempowerment and longs for maleness, not as an end in itself, but because of the freedom it allows males, especially in engaging in relationships with women (ANDERSON, 2005, p. 2). Likewise, as we will discuss later, Marci’s wish to become a boy has nothing to do with her not wanting to be a girl.

Trujillo’s novel *What Night Brings* features the maturity process of a young Chicana in her initial pubertal years while living in San Lorenzo, California with her parents and her younger sister Corin. This pre-teen girl gradually unveils inner questionings crucial to her identity development. Trujillo dramatizes the conflicts that Marcía Cruz faces as her desire towards other girls clashes with social and cultural norms. Resistance creates a space of confrontation as the curious Cruz girl, Marci, undertakes a hard journey towards self-discovery and slowly manages to deconstruct the hegemonic binarism she encounters on a daily basis. Marci’s household is similar to Carla Trujillo’s description of her own house dynamics. The protagonist/narrator resides with a younger sister, a submissive mother and a controlling and violent father. Her identity development and sense of belonging are affected by the family atmosphere and by the religious and cultural environment.

Marci Cruz faces a difficult undertaking. A lesbian inserted in a compulsory heterosexual culture is often drawn to secrecy and, even, self-hatred for not being like most girls. When analyzing the structure of most patriarchal Western societies, one notices that being heterosexual and marrying a man is massively, even if subminally advertised by the media as the pathway to acceptance and security for women. Conversely, being a lesbian has been silently engraved in our psyches as a threat to the social structure. Adrienne Rich (1980) suggests that compulsory heterosexuality is understood for what it is *de rigueur*. She also accurately perceives that heterosexuality should be recognized and studied as a political institution (RICH, 1980, p. 637). This man-made institution, along with its aforesaid mechanisms to foster male power, enforces heterosexuality on women and has convinced them "that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable" (p. 640). This heterosexual imperialist thought is nurtured as soon as a child starts to be exposed to socialization and vehicles of communication.

In the work environment, women have had to accept male violation as they are at "the mercy of sex-as-power" (RICH, 1980, p. 642) and physical and psychological limits are abused. In this aspect, lesbian women differ from homosexual men considering they are not just compelled to hide their private life because heterosexist prejudice exists; they are expected to act the role of a heterosexual woman "in terms of dressing and playing the [so called] feminine, deferential role required of real women" (RICH, 1980, p. 642). Otherwise, they are considered sexless, frigid or lesbian.

It is not surprising that some women cannot acknowledge their own sexuality. In face of the stereotypes, social and cultural hardships and psychological preassures, African-american poet, essayist and educator Cheryl Clarke once stated that being a lesbian is an act of resistance: "Lesbianism is a recognition, an awakening and a reawakening for our passion for each other [among women] and for the same [own self]" (CLARKE, 1981, p. 128). Clarke creates a parallel between the colonization of women and the colonization of black people to illustrate the white man's greed and power, his inclination to create servants. The white male has learned to relate to "black people – slave or free – as a man relates to a woman, viz. as property, as sexual commodity, as a servant, as a source of free or cheap labor and as an innately inferior being" (p. 131) and all the laws made and taboos created were means to control their property providing as justification arguments such as purity of the Caucasian race and the role of women as caretakers, child bearers in the division of labor. This line of thought is still present and protected by the institution of compulsory heterosexuality which

intends to maintain women separate – frequently because of the competition with males – and it must be confronted. Highlighting Clarke's words,

> All of us would do well to stop fighting each other for our space at the bottom, because there ain't no more room. We have spent so much time hating ourselves. Time to love ourselves. And that, for all lesbians, as lovers, as comrades, as freedom fighters, is the final resistance (CLARKE, 1981, p. 137).

Using the term Chicana lesbian does not imply separating oppressions. On the contrary, it is the total sum of these oppressions that develop queer beings and their unique perspectives. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes in "To(o) queer the writer: *loca, escritora y chicana*" (1998), it is impossible to separate the multiple aspects of identity considering that if one is a Chicana lesbian, all parts of the being are related to being a woman, and are also related to being a Chicana and to being a lesbian (ANZALDÚA, 1998, p. 264). Nothing can go through the sieve and be completely separated. And being an uncloseted lesbian means taking a strong political stand towards visibility. A clash of voices lingers battling inside a Chicana lesbian but the sum of these voices prevails.

Pieces of literature and theoretical works as all quoted above demonstrate the importance of this writing for they foster the writing and reading of non-hegemonic discourse and enable the "other", the "queer" element, to name and represent herself/ himself; alterity can be placed anywhere, it is a social construct and the place of enunciation must be accessible to whomever desires to have his/her voice heard.

Trujillo, as mentioned in the first chapter, claims that heterosexual women of color who question established social patterns are disapproved but Chicana lesbian women are seen as a serious social threat, for disturbing the established order and raising consciousness over their independence and their bodies (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 191). Chicanas are taught that their own body and sexuality are prohibited, whereas Chicana lesbians learn to love their own selves both as women and sexual beings in order to love another since lesbians do not depend on men and do not feel the obligation to procreate, the community identifies them as problematic to the race, church and nature. According to Anzaldúa, the Chicano, *Mexicano* and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for "deviance" (1999, p. 40) which expresses anything condemned by the community and the patriarchal rules.

Interlacing Trujillo's and the narrator's personal experience, *What Night Brings* may be interpreted as a piece of autobiographical fiction. In the first chapter "Life Narrative: Definitions and Distinctions" of *Reading Autobiography (2001)*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson claim their approach to life narrative as "a set of shifting self-referential practices

that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present" (SMITH; WATSON, 2001, p. 1). They emphasize that the term autobiography is exclusionary of other narratives, and shift to the concept that critics, such as Julie Rak and Leigh Gilmore, address as autobiographical discourse. This technique

> […] attends to the aspects of power inherent in acts of autobiographical inscription and recognizes that those whose identities, experiences, and histories remain marginal, invalidate, invisible, and partial negotiate and alter normative or traditional frames of identity in their differences (RAK apud SMITH; WATSON, 2001, p. 3).

Fictional autobiographies tend to mediate between personal and collective experiences, representing issues that do not only concern the individual but some of the group as well. Generalization is not the intention, but the representation of a particular set of histories and experiences is. Carla Trujillo delineates a storyline about the different experiences of a Chicana which can interact with several Chicana personal stories but which is not intended as one single representation of the experience of the Chicana.

Interlocking theory and literature, some aspects represented in *What Night Brings* are relevant to the present analysis, such as the space of patriarchy in the community, represented by the politics of power and violence regarding women, and its consequences upon them. Hence, the relevance of bringing into focus Marci's awakening and awareness of nonbelonging, moments in which Marci cannot recognize a place for her feelings while attempting to sort out her multitude of questionings about sexuality, including her own, and also the ways in which violence can affect Marci's life.

3.2 **"Secrets we promised never to tell"[14]: Sexuality and the unveiling of queer existence**

In her article "A Kitchen of Her Own: Chicana Identity Negotiations Framed Through Foodways in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*" (2013), Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis states that Latino culture is founded upon very strict gender polarities (2013, p. 157). She also claims that the transgressions of the dichotomy femininity/masculinity threatens the social status quo. As discussed before, women's sexuality is a prohibited subject among the Chicano community and the representation of transgressive sexual desires is rarely discussed in most

[14] TRUJILLO, 2003, p. 240.

communities and in literature. In Monica Palacios' "Tomboy", the narrator describes her feelings about the lack of information concerning the possibility of queer existence:

> I wished they would have told me sooner. I wished someone would have taken me aside-preferably an angel and said: The reason you felt like an outsider when you were growing up, the reason you couldn't handle all that Male Sexual Power, the reason you've had all these unexplainable weird feelings for women-is because you were born a lesbian and NOBODY TOLD YOU! (PALACIOS, 1998, p. 309).

Many novels such as Trujillo's add other debating questions to the umbrella term Chicano Feminism. Its relevance is found in the creation of a virtual map of narratives involving sexuality, race and gender, as pointed out by Imelda Junquera:

> The enslavement and abuse of the female body, unable to express itself in a patriarchal and capitalist environment has encouraged the use of the practice of writing as a therapeutical effect. The narrative body becomes a virtual map where all types of experiences are inscribed, finding a place free of censorship. By creating a cartography of autobiographies and testimonial writings, Chicana lesbians entered the literary and editorial world not with much success in the beginning but the resistance that they found in those years has been transformed into a loud clapping which has established them by their own right inside the "womanist" trend as activist women of color (JUNQUERA, 2005, p. 77).

While the mainstream Feminist movement (also known as the second wave) had not been able to provide sufficient space for women of this specific community and the Chicano movement hardly debated and problematized its own traditions towards gendered roles and the needs of women in that society, it was up to Chicana feminists to create their own space, similar to spaces created by women belonging to other minority groups. Resistance has now earned a place in discussions and the process of empowerment of Chicana women demonstrates itself further and further necessary.

The woman characters in Trujillo's *What Night Brings* represent often with wit women that live under the same societal rules and deal with them in their specific ways, accepting or rebelling against them. Marci Cruz lives with her mother, younger sister, and a very violent father in San Lorenzo, California. In a religious and patriarchal society, Marci, a young girl in the fourth grade, believes that the only way to solve her problems is to appeal to God in prayers. She wishes to be transformed into a boy and to have her father disappear from their lives. When Marci understands her feelings towards another girl as feelings of desire, she assumes God made a mistake and her only option is to be transformed into a boy, for she knows "you can't be with a girl if you are a girl" (TRUJILLO, 2009, p. 9). It is crucial to highlight that the child states she does not identify herself as being a male, clarifying that she

does not identify with a different gender, eliminating the potential transgender issue; however, she has been taught to believe that only men are allowed to be romantically involved with women. Furthermore, as the novel develops, the protagonist shows no signs of recognizing in her surroundings and community the possibility of alternatives to the heteronormative path she was taught to follow. Central to Chicano tradition, the concept of the cultural value of patriarchy justifies male dominance and is maintained by the dynamics of the main institutions such as the church and the traditional family. Carla Trujillo refers to religion as having a dual meaning to her society "considering it is based on patriarchal control and sexual, emotional and psychological repression": "hope for a better afterlife and social control in the present one" (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 121). Consequently, the protagonist of the novel suffers from the influence of adults who perpetuate and pass along heteronormative behavior.

Trujillo's fictional community is clearly affected by the parameters of patriarchy as a partially inherited characteristic stemming from the process of colonialism. Patriarchy enforces a system in which men hold the power, women are largely excluded from it and male identification is the process through which women associate men as more powerful elements in society. The female characters which influence Marci Cruz and her sister are extremely diverse; however, most seem to have internalized the male identification process and conformed to it as their society demands. Such is the plight of her mother, Delia, who is married to Eddie Cruz, a violent and misogynistic man who does not allow his wife to work or drive. She acts as if "she's too afraid to see anything for herself" (TRUJILLO, 1995, p. 3), considering that what she sees or thinks seems to be seen by her husband first. Delia perpetuates the role of the traditional Chicana housewife in her compliant relationship with her spouse, her fear of her own and her daughter's sexuality, her feelings of obligation towards the church, and her sense of housework duty dedicated to the husband's likings. Contrasting with her daughter Delia, Grandma Flor performs the role of a woman who, after marital abandonment, regains control of her life, chooses the fittest companion to her desires and runs her own business. What is more, she is the only one who confronts Eddie directly. Flor demonstrates an understanding of the society she inhabits but confronts it when she finds necessary. Delia, Flor and Eddie Cruz are strands in the web from which Marci's main experiences originate.

Nonetheless, Marci seems to be growing up to be her own self, showing early signs of resistance. When disagreeing with the *machista* logic or the undermining patriarchal authority, she resists through inconspicuous strategies of "civil disobedience". She challenges the contents of TV programs because she does not feel represented. She resists fixed cultural-

religious answers to children's doubts by consulting library books that range from Hardy Boys stories to volumes that discuss, for instance, evolution or dinosaurs or that provide clues to the questions the community will not answer openly. Knowledge is a powerful tool for everyone, especially for a child in a conservative society. By the end of the novel, her unveiling of answers culminates in the necessary discoveries to balance her sense of belonging.

As mentioned in the first chapter, in "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community", Carla Trujillo ponders over the difficulties that a Chicana lesbian faces in society. Without abiding by heteronormative rules, the lesbian confronts her own sexuality and desires, defying cultural and social rules (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 120). In the introduction of *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About'*, Trujillo points out that even though, for Chicanos, the fathers are usually the ones who impose sexual conformity upon daughters, it is the mothers who actually "whispered warnings, raised the eyebrows, or covertly transmitted to us the 'taboo nature' of same-sex relationships" (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. X). Regularly, the ones perpetuating the oppressive teachings of the community are the mothers. In *What Night Brings,* Marci prayed at nights and waited every day for a "birdy", as she refers to a penis. One time, during a dream, the protagonist thought her prayers had been answered. While exploring the miracle, Marci's hands reached down and down until she touched her sex. Suddenly, her mother had woken her with a slap on the hand: "Marrana [hog]! Keep your hands out of there" (TRUJILLO, 2003, p. 80). Thus, the mother repressed Marci's natural process of self-exploration of her body.

However, the issue that is most crucial to Marci is not addressed by her parents, school, church or the library books: her desire towards women. With a sense of nonbelonging, Marci instinctively comprehends the impossibility of discussing her secrets with anyone. Consequently, she resorts to faith to solve her problem.

Religion, represented in the novel by the Catholic Church, has implemented and perpetuated patriarchal and religious role models for men and women. In the fourth grade, late in the process of catechism and one of the oldest children in class, Marci cannot accept the ready-made religious answers about the origin of the universe, "God created the universe", and how babies are made, "by praying every night". As she demanded different answers from the nuns about such subjects, "they told me [Marci] to be quiet and rely on faith" (TRUJILLO, 1995, p. 18). Conversely, wisely appropriating religious beliefs of her society, the narrator keeps her interest in girls as a secret solely between her, the baby Jesus, Mother Mary and God in her prayers. This stratagem is a comforting element in light of her

nonbelonging to a complex structure in society, compulsory heterosexuality. It also calls attention to her cultural identification with Chicano religious beliefs. As Emily Anderson claims in "Queer *La Virgen*: Catholicism and Lesbian Sexuality in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*", Marci demands nurturance from the church and, to a degree, she obtains it, even if at the expense of often revising patriarchal religious ideologies to formulate the support she needs (ANDERSON, 2005, p. 2). Moreover, during this process of awakening, Marci does not separate her queerness from her religious beliefs. Intersections between religion and queer identity are exposed in the novel and will be presented in this chapter.

At the beginning of the novel, Marci firmly believes that only a boy would be able to be with a girl. However, Marci's interest in girls is clear since the opening pages. She asks God "to change into a boy". And she clarifies the obvious first thought in one's mind, "it's not because I think I'm a boy, though sometimes it sure seems like I am. It's because I like girls" and she knows one cannot "be with a girl if you are a girl" (TRUJILLO, 1995, p. 9). This excerpt demonstrates the manner faith is combined with her lesbian desires in order to fulfill a specific purpose. Marci's appropriation of a conservative and patriarchal cultural bias contributes to her queer awakening and to her further development of the understanding of her community.

It is imperative to notice the invisibility of lesbian existence in the community. A child of roughly 10 years old has no knowledge of women who feel romantic affection and sexual attraction towards other women and thusly is incapable of comprehending her place in a heterosexual conservative society. During her process of awakening to "queerness", Marci becomes attentive to situations which involve the queer world. Of course the school, church and home are places where her questions about this subject are forbidden. Resourceful, she discovers other methods to unveil the truth. Ironically, it is her father's discourse which is filled with prejudice that introduces her to words such as *joto* and *queer* which propel her to research further.

An incident taking place at the Catholic church of her community also triggers doubts in the curiosity-filled protagonist. At a fundraiser at the church cafeteria which she attends with her family, Marci initiated a game with David Quintana, an acquaintance from catechism. While entering the dark and empty church itself, the girl realized she should not be there, and hid in a pew when hearing voices and laughter from the confessional. Subsequently, the knob turned and her uncle Tommy left the confessional followed by Father Chacón a few of minutes afterwards. Intrigued, she wondered why both men had been in the

same booth of the confessional. She had the understanding she could talk to no one in her community about the incident even though she had no certainty about what she saw.

In another instance, after Eddie Cruz had attacked his daughters with near-homicidal violence, the Cruz girls looked for shelter in Uncle Tommy's house. When their parents appeared to take them home and the children's uncle impeded their leaving, Eddie and his brother Tommy resorted to direct confrontation and Eddie, for the first time in the novel, touched upon a delicate subject, sneering at Tommy and repeatedly calling him "queer" (TRUJILLO, 2009, p. 131). Marci was unable to identify the word "queer" as bad; nevertheless, the thought lingered in her mind because if Eddie was saying those words, they probably were. She perused the meaning of the word in an extended definition from a dictionary at the library. In her child logics, uninformed about sexuality issues, she even associated it with the church in a brainstorming attempt to clear her doubts. "Queer = something bad/ Too much church makes you queer, or/ You're already queer and that's why you go to church./ The church is queer./ If the church is queer than God must be queer" (p.135). The only "bad" thing the child could hypothesize her uncle did was being in the same confessional booth as Father Chacón. After further thought, when reading part of the definition "*slang*: sexually deviate, homosexual" (p. 134), finally, Marci pondered over the fact that her uncle and the priest might like each other. At this moment, her queer awakening consciously commences by virtue of achieving a line of thought in which she includes herself, even though she still associates the queer sexuality with the church.

> So if being in the church makes you a homosexual, or a man long man, or a lady loving lady makes you a homosexual queer, then this must be what I am. I'm a girl. I like Raquel. That makes me a girl liking girl, which is a homosexual queer (p. 137).

There is yet another instance when Eddie's prejudice, now towards Marci, is foregrounded. At a drunken moment, speaking nonstop to Corin and Marci, Eddie demonstrates his frustrations about the girls having started to fight him back in moments of domestic violence. Addressing Marci as Marcito, he describes her as an *hombrecito* and she reacts badly to it, for she knows she is not a boy, yet she says nothing besides "my name is Marcía. Call me that or Marci" (p. 144). He continued speaking about how she would never measure up to him. Marci listened quietly and a few minutes later he was sleeping. As an aggressive binary mechanism, especially against a child, identifying the lesbian as a male figure is detrimental to the understanding of queer existence, as if a woman loving women or dressing in traditionally male clothing were automatically considered a man. It is a common offensive reaction, though, present in the Chicano community.

Marci is not able to identify a space for difference or feel a sense of belonging. This is an indication of the community's reinforcement of heteronormative representation along with the ostracism of queer people. Even though she was comfortable with her body, her desire demanded what her mind could not conceive due to social limitations. Representation is a powerful tool in the journey towards acceptance, or even, self-acceptance. The longing for identification is commonplace in the lives of developing children and adolescents. Silencing and excluding queer voices harm the identification process in the development of an infant or teenager. As Carol Gillian and Michael Sadowski explain in their article "In a queer voice: Journeys of resilience from adolescence to adulthood" (2013),

> Adolescence is a difficult time, but it can be particularly stressful for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identifying youth. In order to avoid harassment and rejection, many LGBTQ teens hide their identities from their families, peers, and even themselves. […] Drawing on two waves of interviews conducted six years apart, Sadowski chronicles how queer youth, who were often "silenced" in school and elsewhere, now can approach adulthood with a strong, queer voice (GILLIAN; SADOWSKI, 2013).

The silence about homosexuality in Marci's community made it more difficult for her to comprehend her sexual desires.

Having a child narrator is a strategy that has been used by writers who want to challenge the status quo, often in a non-threatening and/or humorous way. As Leila Harris points out, there is a dialogue between Trujillo's *What Night Brings* and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984). Trujillo dedicates her novel to "those who couldn't get away", establishing an intertextual connection with the last words in Cisnero's novel. The dialogue between the two novels is confirmed through Trujillo's choice of a child narrator. According to Harris, the distinction between "real author" and narrator adopted by critic Alvina Quintana to discuss *The House on Mango Street* is also instrumental for reading *What Night Brings.* The strategy employed by both authors', that is, using the voice of an innocent child to narrate the events, "seems to challenge patriarchal institutions and cultures gently, from an apparently middle-class, mainstream perspective" (QUINTANA apud HARRIS, 2016, p. 5). It also allows the authors to "construct a safe space from which, paradoxically, she can expose the existential estrangement that derives from cultural and economic subordination" (p, 5). Thus, this type of narrative "functions as the ultimate strategy for escape from confining traditions" (p. 5). Marci's questioning of God's role as the creator of the world is not taken as offensive but as a child's natural curiosity. Nonetheless, it is a questioning that might cause discomfort or hostility if the narrators are older or the tone different. Also, the Catholic Church has long held a strong stance against homosexuality, but

Marci, a child who prays for a "miracle", something so many Catholics do, does not arouse hostility. Perhaps the most ironic and simultaneously most subversive instance that highlights Marci's curiosity, and Trujillo's embedded criticism of the Church's position towards queerness, is Marci's monologue about the meaning of the word "queer" and its humorous associations with Catholicism.

In spite of the difficulty of finding a space to exist, Marci's resistance to patriarchy and her courage to confront her own sexuality lead her to challenge the imposed cultural and societal norms. At the end of the novel, after running away with her sister Corin, Marci is finally able to live with Grandma Flor, an icon of empowerment, in Gallup, New Mexico. Grandma Flor herself is a woman who makes her own rules and challenges the hegemonic thought. When inquired about God, Flor states God is a wish; Marci would "have to be the one to make things happen" for herself (TRUJILLO, 2009, p. 239). This shift in the geographical space provides a space for re-writing the rules and for making space for resistance. The main character is able to find a place for difference in her community, especially after meeting Roberta, a girl with whom she becomes friends and with whom a blood-sealed secret is shared. Marci says "I told her about liking girls" (p. 240), and she answered "I like'em too" (p. 241). The novel ends with Marci stating that after being kissed by Roberta she felt so good she did not worry about not knowing what to do or think. This ending indicates she has found an equal in a space in which she was the different element.

When all these factors are taken into account, we realize that the novel details Marcía Cruz's successful struggle to remove herself, even if temporarily, from a place of nonbelonging. As the novel begins, all Marci knows is that she likes girls which is something that she believes a girl cannot do. At the end, however, Marci starts to imagine the possibility of a site of acceptance for girls like her. Awareness towards acceptance is an arduous path and this *bildungsroman* chronicles a story of strife. Marci's sexual awakening struggles with the tools her own community offers; by doing so, it subverts the norms that a Chicana is expected to follow.

3.3 **"Pínche, cabrona, I'll show you who's the boss"[15]: Scenes of violence in *What Night Brings***

[15] TRUJILLO, 2003, p. 116.

Even though, verbal or physical violent acts of micro-aggression or aggression are present in any society and are daily fare in the media, the representational violence in literature may cause a lasting impact on readers. In Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*, the effect of domestic violence on children narrated with graphic details by Marci, one of the victims, is quite shocking.

In previous chapters, we have discussed how *machismo*, repression and prejudice generate violent outbursts against women. Oppressive systems often impose several aggression generating aspects upon the dominated: patterns of abuse to maintain dominance, social justification, and secrecy are some. In Western societies, women tend to be seen as powerless and as the ones to enforce the rules, not make them. In the Chicano community, a patriarchal system, there is a tendency for women's ostracism from relevant public decisions. As mentioned in chapter 1, the practices of *machismo* (sexism) inebriate and influence the power structure. Men inserted in systems of power which endorse *machismo* tend to be chauvinist, emotional unavailable and controlling of wife and children. These prescribed characteristics may be abided differently according to each individual. Socialization is a unique experience; however, role models and traditional values tend to specify the path to take. Èmile Durkheim discusses the meaning of "social fact" (a term he used to define structures or manners that determine an individual's life such as social norms, values, conventions, among others) and its consequences. Social facts consist of "manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him" (DURKHEIM, 1982, p. 52). Women may partake in the sexist mechanism as disseminating elements. As mentioned in the first chapter, Gloria Anzaldúa explains the *machismo* of the men in the generations of her father and before as resulting from a hierarchy of male dominance (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 105). The loss of a sense of dignity and lack of respect when dealing with *gringos* lead to a *macho* behavior which sometimes involves subjugation and mistreatment. Even though it is comprehensible, women should not have to endure it any longer (p. 105).

The numbers of domestic violence cases in the United States are astonishing. According to a 2014 article on the Latin Times, two-thirds (64 percent) of Hispanic women say they have personally known a victim of some type of abuse and three-in-ten (30 percent) have personally been harmed (Latin Times, 2014). The tendency of domestic violence is to occur between couples. Notwithstanding this proclivity of brutality within the family, it may occur in order to control any family member, not only the wife.

Quintessential representative of imposed male dominance, Eddie Cruz, Marci's father, is the archetypal image of a traditional Chicano. He uses physical violence against his children and sometimes his wife, verbal violence towards his family; he leers at attractive women's bodies; he is also bad-tempered and prejudiced, mainly against *jotitos* (homosexuals). Mr. Cruz behaves as a man too afraid of the empowerment of women; therefore, he does not tolerate confrontation and lack of subordination. He capitalizes on the cultural heritage of *La Raza* and *La Familia* to force his wife, who is dedicated to him, to be subservient too. Eddie expresses his view that his wife and children belong to him, as if *La Familia* were in fact about possession. Eddie Cruz's household works as a repressive environment of which he is the "tyrant". He imposes rules on his wife and children and is infuriated if anything does not function according to his likings. A worker at the Chevy plant for thirteen years, he does not allow his wife to have a job. The girls have to be home before he arrives, usually at 5 p.m. The food has to be something he likes to eat. While fighting with Grandma Flor, he shouts: "These are my wife and kids. They ain't yours. They are mine!" (TRUJILLO, 1995, p. 94), as if talking about his property. The daring grandma responds "Your wife and kids are not your slaves […]. You sure as hell don't own them" (1995, p. 95).

The traditional role of men is to be the provider of the family and the decision-maker. As a result, there is a tendency for males to feel entitled to the position of the head of the family, the leader who creates the rules for the wife and children to obey. Eddie Cruz does not deviate from this propensity. As discussed before, it is commonplace for Chicanos to feel discomfort and subjugation at work. Controlling the household environment with power may be a mechanism to compensate for this feeling of powerlessness. Combined with unreleased stress, this feeling may cause the individual to burst into violent actions against a family member. As Yvette Flores-Ortiz[16] points out, there is a possibility of physical assault, rape or homicide. In these instances, the wife, victim or observer, when abiding by social and cultural conventions, has a tendency to maintain her silence in relation to violent acts whether they are directed at her or the children. Breaking the silence would mean going against the religious and cultural values a woman should uphold. It could be considered by the community as disloyalty to her husband. The case of child battering within the domestic dynamics is also common. If a child transgresses the hierarchy or rules of the household, parents are culturally authorized to physically punish them as a means to educate or discipline. In some cases,

[16] Refer to the theoretical discussion on domestic violence in Chapter 1.

violence erupts. Like their mothers, children, dominated by fear, have the tendency to maintain that abusive relation in silence.

Aside from dramatizing Eddie Cruz's *machismo*, Trujillo depicts scenes in which he is extremely violent against Marci and Corin. Out of fear and anger, the girls increasingly rebel against their father's rules as the novel develops. In order to preserve what he sees as his natural place of power in the house, he claims he must punish the girls to avoid being embarrassed or losing control of the house. However, his violent "lessons" have no didactical purposes but to maintain his sovereignty.

One of his "lessons" is presented in a moment when the Cruz family was visiting at a cousin's house. They arrived when it seemed the family had just had dinner. The children were playing together when Marci went inside to check if her parents were ready to leave. There was food still on the table and the adults were discussing the lack of representation in the union. Marci, realizing the family had already finished eating and feeling hungry because she did not eat much at her house since there was only food prepared the way her father liked, decided to eat some cucumbers. Her father scolded her and continued to do so even after the owner of the house assured her she could eat whatever she pleased. This situation was interpreted as an embarrassment by Eddie. He, as the provider of food and discipline, had a daughter who ate food at another house without permission. After the scolding, he decided she still needed punishment as if it were his obligation to his family. "You know this means I have to punish you" (p. 58) and her punishment was performed after she, obeying his order, selected the belt for the hitting. This situation illustrates his necessity for control.

Amanda Grovert, in "Domestic Violence Against Women: A Literature Review" (2008), explains the cycle of violence in cases of abuse or assault. At the starting phase of an abusive relationship, some type of violent act occurs. After the first incident of physical abuse, the abuser may not have to continue his practice so as to gain or maintain control. It is possible that the threat of violence alone be enough. The second phase is a moment in which the abused attempts to maintain the abuser calm, feeling insecure and, in some instances, feeling at fault for the abuse (GROVERT, 2008, p. 6). In the case of Marci and her sister, the novel starts at a point when the characters have already been victims of the father's violence. When the reader first meets Marci, she confides she wishes her father will disappear; she explains she does not wish his death because it would be a sin. Marci describes her dread since the first pages of the novel when she describes "there's different ways to be scared […]":

> […] like when you bike down a hill, or ride The Hammer at the fair, or when the teacher catches you stealing art paper to take home. These I could handle. But nothing is as scary as my dad getting mad. I can't remember the first time he hit me, only the sound of mad feet. I'd be so scared I didn't know who I was. It was like I was across the room watching him come after me, chase me, then catch me (TRUJILLO, 2003, p. 11).

In one description, not the first, she describes Eddie's unpredictability when it comes to outbursts of anger through child battering. At first, he might be laughing, "but the problem was you never knew what would make him mad" (p. 11). At this instance, Marci was not able to understand his reasons. She remembers, though, that each hit was felt in her entire body. Her smaller and skinnier sister intervened in her behalf and was equally hurt. Delia, the girls' mother, is referred to as the "watchdog of the whippings" (p. 12) and interceded for the first time by pleading to Eddie. Marci figures out that her mother must have thought this time he was so violent he might have killed one of them because she had not intervened up to that moment. Afterwards, Corin and Marci, gravely injured, were summoned by Eddie. Since their fear is stronger than hate, as Marci described, the girls obeyed him. The father's words expressed remorse, but he soon passed on the blame to them. His apology overflowed with blaming statements such as "Do you think I like to hit you guys?" or "I just wish you wouldn't get me so mad" (p. 12).

Other instances of domestic violence against the children abound in different moments of the novel. Two episodes manifest the degree of violence portrayed in *What Night Brings*. During a period of time, Eddie Cruz decided to abandon his family. After Delia's acceptance of his return, the girls decided to disown him as a father and call him by his name. As a consequence, he battered his daughters, this time with a different *modus operandi*.

> 'Pínche, cabrona, I'll show you who's the boss.' He whipped off his belt, lifted it up to hit me, then stopped. He slowly put down the belt and faced me. In a heartbeat he slapped me across the face. I fell over. Then he used his elbow to smash the top of my back so that I fell hard on the floor. He kicked me in the back, right above my butt. It hurt so bad I couldn't move. After that he went after Corin, who ran to the kitchen. I heard her trying to get out the back door. He must've caught her because she screamed (TRUJILLO, 2003, p. 116).

The girls escaped to the house of their uncle Tommy who understood Eddie's intentions were to hit them without leaving marks. Eddie blamed his daughters yet another time and life in the house returned to its regular routine.

Further on with the reading, Eddie turns extremely violent, but this time his victim was his wife. Marci and Corin had been attempting to capture a photograph of Eddie with another woman considering this would be the only circumstance his wife would confront him. When

the photos get to Delia, her first reaction was to hit Marci with a belt. Rechanneling her anger to Eddie, Delia shouted at him, telling him to leave the house. At this point, he felt disrespected and slapped her in the face.

> Wham! He slapped her right across the face. She grabbed her face in surprise and started crying.
> 'Now, goddamit shut up, Delia. I ain't never hit you before, but I'll hit you again if you ever disrespect me like that! Especially in front of the kids.' […]
> 'Since when do *you* care about the kids?' Mom must have read my mind. 'You're always kicking them around like perros. They already know what kind of asshole their daddy is, and now they know how much he cats around, too. You ain't nothing but a lying sonavabitching cheat' (TRUJILLO, 2003, p. 227).

After a nonstop series of strokes, neither Delia nor Eddie could notice Corin and the rifle. But Corin's shot at his back did not kill him.

At some level, Eddie Cruz is a Chicano male subdued by the Anglos in the Chevy plant he worked. His sexist behavior is due to his socialization as a male in a patriarchal community. His frustrations and level of stress can be associated with class and ethnic submission. The notion of a static role as the provider, as Anzaldúa points out, accompanies the traditional values often imposed by the family structure. Eddie displays moments of insecurity and despair at moments. At times, Eddie pulls his rifle out of its case and threatens to commit suicide. He complains about his situation and pressure at work by declaring "they got a goddamn boot on my neck every fucking day […] And I'm just tired of it" (p. 7). Curious details are highlighted by Marci. The first is that her father would not be able to reach the trigger of the rifle and at the same time aim at a vital part of his body because of his short arms. Combined with this fact, Eddie loads the firearm with four bullets leading Marci and the reader to the conclusion his intention is the one of harming all four members of the family, placing his family in constant danger. No matter his level of insecurity and frustration, there is no justification for his violence against those who are more vulnerable than he, that is, his children and wife.

It is relevant to mention that Eddie also resorts to violence with other individuals; however, he has a different response if physically confronted. Once, after the girls contacted Uncle Tommy, they were rescued by him. Tommy refused to allow Delia and Eddie to take them home. When uncle Tommy denied Eddie's request to take away the girls, he attacked his brother Tommy verbally, calling him queer. Tommy, who was the stronger of the two, reacted by punching him out. Physically subdued, he let the girls stay at Tommy's house for the night.

Throughout the narrative, Marci and her sister Corin gradually develop a space of resistance and confrontation not only against their father's dominance but also against the implicit rules of patriarchal structure and church. One form of resistance relies on physical ways of defense such as learning Karate moves and planning to tie up the father to force his promise not to ever again hit them, but it is not feasible for the two children to control their father. Contact with their strong woman role model, Grandma Flor, also offers an insight on how prepared they need to be to face male domination. The girls also resort to passive confrontation when choosing to disown Eddie as father, calling him by his first name rather than "father". These attempts exhibit their urgency to deal with the situation at hand, the violent behavior of their father, but they also underscore how difficult it is for the girls to find help in a society that allows men to treat women and children as Eddie does. The girls' only way out is to take advantage of their confusion generated by the shooting incident and run away to Gallup, New Mexico. They live with Grandma Flor who refuses to send them back to the parents.

In conclusion, Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings* is ultimately a positive coming-of-age novel. After all Marci and her sister's fighting and resistance, Marci embodies transgression in her refusal to conform. Her journey from living in fear to facing her fears allows her self-awareness, acceptance and a hopeful ending. This novel merges gender issues, feminist criticism and the embodiment of one of the largest issues of the community, violence against women and children. It also illustrates the lack of representation of queer existence and its consequences upon a society that oftentimes deals with gays and lesbians as either "diseased" or traitors. Violent practices represented in *What Night Brings* are justified by *machismo*, repression and prejudiced practices. The cycle of violence must end. Ongoing discussion and interventions must take place regarding gender roles and the physical and psychological consequences of male hatred, breaking silences concerning women's sexuality, violence against women and prejudice against homosexuality in the Chicano community. There needs to be a change in the education of males and females for, as Gloria Anzaldúa mentions, "as long as men are taught they are superior and therefore culturally favored over *la mujer*" there can be no real healing (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 106) and no harmony.

CONCLUSION

Consciousness is born out of one's intimate awareness of one's oppression.
Emma Pérez

i did take your question
the wrong way
but ive always been
the wrong way
i was the wrong way with men
and now im
the wrong way
because I love women
Natashia López

In the introduction of this dissertation, I proposed to investigate literary representations of histories/stories of/by Chicana women, especially Chicana lesbians, regarding physical and psychological conflicts generated by the oppressive influence of patriarchy and the hegemonic culture. Strongly connected with these oppressions, violence inscribes itself in different ways in their daily lives. The various types of violence analyzed may be represented by physical aggression: wife battering and rape, for instance, or in psychological forms of repression, be they through the subjugation of women, the prohibition of sexuality or the internalization and perpetuation of oppressive demands. Challenging deep-rooted social structures within the Chicano culture such as patriarchy, *machismo* and heteronormative systems is the pathway followed to complete my mission.

Literature carries the utmost assignment of representing these interrelations of realities in fiction. Personal experience from the writings of Chicanas, along with literary, psychological, historical and sociological theories, aid the development of this analysis. In "Postmodernism, 'Realism' and the Politics of Identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana Feminism" (1997), Paula Moya acknowledges that the key to declaring epistemic privilege for oppressed people comes from the fact they have and share their experiences. These experiences "can provide them [the people who have been oppressed in a particular way] with

information we all need to understand how hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality operate to uphold existing regimes of power in our society" (MOYA, 1997, p.136). Social location, identity and knowledge, thus, claim a connection that is historically variable and mediated through experience (p. 136). Moya fosters the notion that the interpretation of these experiences will be the fundamental element through which these women construct their identities (p. 137).

Even though the scope of this research does not privilege discussions on race, ethnicity and class, these issues have been tangential all along, for they are imprinted in identity. It is this simultaneity of oppressions that Cherríe Moraga addresses in *Loving in the War Years* (1983) when stating that

> In failing to approach feminism from any kind of materialistic base, failing to take race, ethnicity, class into account in determining where women are at sexually, many feminists have created an analysis of sexual oppression (often confused with sexuality itself) which is a political dead-end (MORAGA, 2000, p. 118).

These modalities are permanent part of the experiences of Chicanas.

With the help of the rise of social movements in the second half of the twentieth century and in light of the phenomena of globalization and postmodern theory, the second wave of feminism presented new questionings upon the spaces women were allowed to inhabit and the division of labor. In the well-known essay entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1998), Gayatri Spivak problematizes the hardship faced by third world women when struggling to have their voices heard at a moment when postcoloniality and feminism, as separate forces of resistance, did not meet all their needs. She, then, asserts that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow" (SPIVAK, 1988, p. 82). In another occasion, Spivak, while acknowledging that representation if problematic, suggests that it needs to take place. "And there has to be a persistent critique of what one is up to so that it doesn't get all bogged down in this homogenization; constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others […]" (SPIVAK, 1990, p. 63). In *Massacre of the Dreamers* (1995), Ana Castillo insists on resistance against the roles women are encouraged to play and defends the need for Chicana empowerment.

> What we have been permitted to be without argument in society is the compassionate cooperative, yielding, procreator of the species, *india fea, burra* beast of burden of society. Viewed as ugly and common as straw. We know that we are not. Let us be alchemists for our culture and our lives and use this conditioning as our raw material to convert into a driving force pure as gold (CASTILO, 1995, p. 226).

The transformation proposed by Castillo involves awareness and resistance. It requires that women change from passive silent beings to speaking acting ones and become in charge of their own agency.

In this transgressive process of acknowledging the agency of the Chicana lesbian, I focused on two main elements: sexuality (including lesbianism) and violence. Concerning these aspects, the foremost goal here was to break with the silence, promote visibility and verbalize how these elements take up a crucial space among the unspoken subjects in Chicano society.

Repression against a woman's understanding and acknowledging her own sexual desires through discourse or action is an integral element of the traditions of Chicano society. As Carla Trujillo explains in "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community" (1991), "the majority of Chicanas, both lesbian and heterosexual, are taught that our sexuality must conform to certain modes of behavior." (TRUJILLO, 1991, p. 186). Trujillo underscores the fact that as a cultural practice, shame is thrown upon the ones who dare to cross the limits of passivity and repression. She states that "we [Chicanas], as women, are taught to suppress our sexual desires and needs by conceding all pleasure to the male" and even satisfaction in sex is portrayed as taboo (p. 186). The expected attitude of a woman in a male dominated system presupposes dedication, loyalty and subservience. A way to control those who infringe these boundaries may be the imposition of shame, ridicule, or even violence.

The Chicana lesbian lives with the commonly expressed ideas that "what we're told is bad, wrong, dirty and taboo – namely our bodies, and our freedom to express ourselves in them" (p. 187). To recognize herself as a lesbian, she must acknowledge her own sexuality and attraction for another woman. Sonia Saldívar-Hull, in "Chicana Feminisms" (2000), mentions Cherríe Moraga's argument that assumptions of heterosexuality erase Chicana lesbian subjectivity (MORAGA apud SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 32). Adrienne Rich, in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) understands the lesbian existence as "the breaking of a taboo and rejection of a compulsory way of life" (RICH, 1980, p. 649). Rich adds the notion that lesbian existence may be interpreted as "a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women", even though she understands further meaning to this existence: "a form of nay-saying to patriarchy, an act of resistance" (p. 649). In agreement to Rich, Carla Trujillo declares, as previously mentioned in this discussion, that the Chicana lesbian is seen as a threat to her community for disrupting "the established norm of patriarchal oppression" (1991, p. 186).

There have been many justifications for the alarming statistics concerning male violence against women in the Chicano community. Some of them point to the frustrating ideological reality of Chicanos, a demonstration of male power, a perpetuation of a *machista* line of thought or the transgressive patterns of some Chicanas, lesbian or heterosexual. Theorist bell hooks contends that "Patriarchy, the institutionalized structure of male dominance, encourages males of all races and classes to define their masculinity by acts of physical aggression and coercion towards others, women and children (1994, p. 148). This pervading violence becomes apparent in daily cultural oppressions and in the numbers of reports of assault and rape. Yet, it may also exist in places and forms that are not so visible.

In *Gulf Dreams*, sexuality, sexual desire and violence become interconnected in a web of fragmented memories the narrator retrieves. The reader, by having access to these fragmented pieces of memory, is able to identify some of the processes she has been through and that contribute to make up her fragmented Chicana identity. By describing and acknowledging the blossoming of her desire towards the young woman, the narrator finds a pathway to resisting the demands of female rituals, consequently resisting patriarchal structure as well. Having her body violated at a very young age, the narrator is obliterated, saddened and in constant search for a satisfaction that could only be resolved in not being satisfied. In "The Politics of Rape: Sexual Transgressions in Chicana Fiction", Maria Herrera-Sobek describes the violent act of rape as producing "a *hole*, a nothingness, an empty space" (HERRERA-SOBEK, 1996, p. 249). In *Gulf Dreams*, it is this empty space the narrator can never fill; hence, never experiencing a feeling of self-fulfillment. The narrator's creative process attempts at dealing with her lesbian desire, her never-ending pursuit for satisfaction and her traumas as a culturally oppressed, physically molested and psychologically hurt subject.

In *What Night Brings*, the plight of Marci Cruz is depicted through her own voice. In the beginning of her narrative, the protagonist is not able to pinpoint a solution for her desire towards women. As her life experiences advance, she becomes increasingly more aware of her own sexuality, even though she continues to be repressed by socio-cultural norms. During a crucial moment of discovery, she unveils the existence of queerness and is capable to inscribe herself in that still confusing category. Her father's controlling attitude, which often leads to violent acts against her and her sister, represents the behavior of a man who is accustomed to the privileges of male dominance within his culture but who is also discriminated by the dominant culture. In this novel, Marci Cruz embodies the experience of a

female child in search for identification and acceptance while confronting her own being as point of dissent.

Sonia Saldívar-Hull and Arjun Appadurai are among the critics who emphasize the aesthetic aspects as offering an even greater purpose for literature. Saldívar-Hull mentions Helena María Viramonte's take on aesthetics as "a *practice* of political *intervention* carried out in literary form" (p. 125). Arjun Appadurai remarks upon how "electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination", which, as he stresses, is "neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but [as] a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices" (APPADURAI, 1996, p.4). The novels at hand are literary interventions with fictional yet common experiences for Chicana lesbians; both work "in the service of subaltern political aesthetics" (SALDÍVAR-HULL, p. 125) allowing a space of contestation to arise from their readings.

Overall, the novels *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* present narratives portraying the development of the lesbian desire and some of its repercussions in the Chicano community. In addition, the scenes of violence represent with intensity many ways a Chicana may be harmed. It is through these readings of existence/resistance and through representation in writing that the importance of literature and the relevance of this research come into being for the purpose of this research. Whether hollering or silenced, these women exist. So does oppression. Through patriarchy, homophobia and Western domination women have been subjugated and wounded for far too long. These issues must be heard and discussed so as to arrive at a movement that decolonizes the brown and female body, as Cherríe Moraga claims in "Queer Aztlán" (2004, p. 227).

Here lies hope that, at some point, dreams of desire and freedom may never have to be engulfed in nightmares again. And hope that with this change come the realization that there is no wrong way to love.

What can you do? You can resist.
Whoever you are, you can say No –it stops here – it stops with me.
And we can find ways to take individual and collective political action.
Antonia Castañeda

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APPENDIX A - Sources for reporting violence against women and children

In the United States

Visit purplepurse.com to learn more about domestic violence and financial abuse as well as how to start conversations about this important topic. For immediate assistance with a dangerous situation, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799 SAFE (7233) or TTY 1-800-787-3224.

Fonte: Purple Purse

There are two agencies within the Department of Justice that may help: Office on Violence Against Women and Project Safe Childhood. Learn more in https://www.justice.gov/ovw and https://www.justice.gov/psc/about-project-safe-childhood.

No Brasil

Por meio do Disque 180, a mulher receberá apoio e orientações sobre os próximos passos para resolver o problema. A denúncia é distribuida para uma entidade local, como a Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher (DDM) ou Delegacia Especial de Atendimento a Mulher (DEAM), conforme o estado.

Fonte: UNICEF.

En Mexico

Líneas telefónicas em Mexico. Directorio nacional de líneas telefónicas y centros de atención a mujeres en situación de violência. ¿Te encuentras en una situación de violencia? ¿No sabes qué hacer? Localiza tu Estado y encontrarás un número telefónico. ¡Tú llamada es importante! Accede el website: http://vidasinviolencia.inmujeres.gob.mx/vidasinviolencia/?q=lineasTelefonicas.

Fonte: Vida Sin Violencia.

APPENDIX B - Poem mentioned in the title

The Flesh

Nathashia López

im so tired of my flesh
i feel so dirty sometimes
i want to shed myself
I try each day I struggle
with a new birth

today
i stood above my lover
legs sread open
she lay between my legs
her hands stretched up to mine
and I leaned into her
staring into each others eyes
it felt so beautiful
but as we continued to stare
her lips moved

“I want to ask you something but I don’t want you
To take it the wrong way – have you really slept
With 68 men?” I had given her one of my poems
Where I talk about all the men ive fucked.
Writing about it I thought would help me start to
Deal with it but now I’m faced with this question
And I feel the need to explain.

she thinks im dirty
used tainted flesh
just think of all the dicks
that have been in my cunt
all the perverted tongues
who could blame her
who would want to love me there
how could anyone see my flesh
that which has such an ugly dirty history
as beautiful

and so now
even with women
men interfere with my life
men
their penises hover over me
their semen a black scarf
surrounding my face
covering my hair my eyes

hide me
i feel too exposed
give me long skirts
take me to where I am whipped
for showing my ankles
take me to where my clit
is sli/ced
i don’t want to feel this dirty passion

yes Stephanie
i did take your question
the wrong way
but ive always been
the wrong way
i was the wrong way with men
and now im
the wrong way
because I love women

Reference: LÓPEZ, Natashia. “The Flesh”. In: TRUJILLO, Carla (Ed.). *Chicana Lesbians. The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About.* Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991.