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# (M)othering the Borderlands

## Testimony and the Latina Feminist Group

*With the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa's* Borderlands/La frontera *(1987), women's testimonial literature has been viewed as an important genre that breaks silences, raises consciousness and builds solidarity among women, especially Latinas and Chicanas. Testimonial writing functions as one means through which Latina/Chicana writers, scholars, educators, and students are resisting traditional patriarchal conditions and constructs of motherhood to revise the institution as one based on empowerment through solidarity and sisterhood. In this paper, we explore the testimonial model established by the Latina Feminist Group as a vehicle through which to identify the diverse forms and contexts of mothering practices occurring at the borderlands of bi-geographical and bi-cultural identities. This paper is organized by way of four sections. The first provides an overview of Latin American and Chicana testimonial theory while the second section identifies testimonial writing as a pedagogy and site of diverse and multi-dimensional practices by Latina/Chicana mothers. For the final two divisions of the paper, we elaborate on the themes of solidarity and agency exemplified by the Latina Feminist Group as pedagogies for transformational (m)othering of the borderlands.*

> *Necesitamos teorías* [We need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. We need theories that will point out ways to maneuver between our particular experiences and the necessity of forming our own categories and theoretical models for the patterns we uncover. We need theories that examine the implications of situations and look at what's behind them. And we need to find practical

> application for those theories. We need to de-academize theory and to connect the community to the academy. (Anzaldúa, "Haciendo Caras" xxv-xxvi)

Various studies have been written that denote the transformational potential behind Chicana and Latina[1] writing and scholarship: the defining of "community" not only culturally ("la Raza") but also as a sisterhood and non-familial solidarity.[2] In this dynamic we have the prospective of the individual responsible for giving voice in the socio-political arena to those who cannot speak for themselves from both the family and extended family, sometimes referred to as "la Raza."[3] For the purpose of this essay "la Raza" in addition to referring to race, ethnicity, and to the racial group of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, also infers a sense of community. It is this sense of communal connectedness and sisterhood, within the feminine forum, that is the foundation to our discussion here on the concept of (m)othering the borderlands. Mothering in this context is one that encapsulates a recognition of the self as part of and responsible for the betterment of the larger self: the community, fellow Chicanas, fellow Latinas—La Raza. Mothering in this milieu becomes an act of solidarity, nurturing and mentorship where the sharing of stories of personal life experiences (testimonies) take on the social function as a guide for others going through or that could go through similar events in life. Mothering, in essence, becomes a form of pedagogy, inside and outside the home.

Our point of departure comes from the Latina Feminist Group whose anthology, *Telling to Live,* manifests a distinctive use of the testimonial genre as both a literary and psychological space in which participants engage in a creative form of mothering.[4] Through the act of piecing together the various parts of personal psyche and history these testimonies become sites of personal and communal self-discovery under the safety of solidarity based on gender and culture. It is in that vein that Chicana artists and writers have been critical of the traditional depiction of the cultural figures of womanhood. Much of their work can be characterized by a desire to work towards historically contextualizing these female icons as figures of resistance and representatives of cultural survival. It is this inclusive vision of solidarity that initiates a personal, and ultimately a social consciousness raising, characterized by a new sense of mothering that re-examines and ultimately redefines that which separates Latinas—the borderlands—into something that unites them.

A distinguishing feature that stands out is not only a questioning of a hetero-patriarchal discourse but also a challenging of "borderland" mentality of liminality and belonging. By borderlands, we are referring not only to the obvious geographical frontier positioning of Chicana identity but, for further development here, the idea that there has been a re-appropriation of the

"borderland" to mean something culturally positive. Traditionally, the borderlands for Chicanas and Latinas have been doubly repressive: by the oppressive patriarchal domination of the Chicano culture and by the discriminatory and exploitive world of Anglo society. Drawing from the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera*, "Chicana feminists have reclaimed the liminal space of the borderlands as a site from which to intervene in nationalist and patriarchal discourses" (Camacho 26). Namely, Chicana/Latina writers are embracing the transitional or liminal sense of the border as a site of becoming, of transformation.[5] This in-between space of the borderland becomes for these women a reformulated space of personal and communal empowerment; an aperture where there is a re-visioning of patriarchal systems and institutions to better embody a more authentic personal and national identity construction.[6]

## Testimony as Theory: The Latina Feminist Group

*Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* is a documented anthology of women's personal stories, established by the Latina Feminist Group which was composed of eighteen women of diverse Latina backgrounds coming from various regions of the United States. Their collaboration began in 1993 and over the course of seven years, the Group "arrived at the importance of *testimonio* as a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into our history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure" (*Telling to Live* 2). Their collection of stories moves away from the traditionalist standpoint of "woman as silent makers of culture" (Sandoval 6) and towards an active, and sometimes liberating, testimony about personal experiences. These personal accounts may help not only their progeny and community members, but also the larger global community, to understand the challenges faced by many of the testimonialists in each of their differing, yet similar, lived experiences. In sharing their own personal stories, the Latina Feminist Group reconfigure and recreate their own testimonial process as a way in which "to theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity" (*Telling to Live* 19).

The testimonials of the Latina Feminist Group align with what Nancy Saporta Sternbach qualifies as women's testimonial literature, produced both within Latin America and elsewhere, stemming largely from women's condition of marginality (92). As a literature of resistance, women's testimonial writing, including the anthology produced by the Latina Feminist Group, share four basic characteristics: "breaking silences, raising consciousness, envisioning a new future, and seeking collective action" (Sternbach 95). This departs from the original Latin American *testimonios* centered on first-hand accounts by witnesses who often shared their stories of human rights abuses, violence and war, and/or life under conditions of social oppression either

by publishing their own stories or dictating to an intermediary "who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere" (*Telling to Live* 13).[7] Often with *testimonio*, the witness as narrator speaks on the behalf of the collective—as a member of this disenfranchised group—claiming some agency in the act of narrating the group's political struggle while also calling on readers to engage and/or judge the crisis accordingly (Beverly 26). For the Latina Feminist Group, *testimonio* goes further and functions as "an artistic form and methodology to create politicized understandings of identity and community" (*Telling to Live* 3).

While testimonial writing as a literary genre had its genesis in Latin American literature, within the feminist context it drew attention to the racialization of feminist discourse in the hopes of raising communal consciousness of the repression of language, culture, gender, and race. By focusing on the Chicana/Latina question we can discover that, as with the Latina Feminist Group, women's stories of personal experience can contain a larger political meaning. That is, when speaking of the personal experience of self-affirmation, the individual holds the potential to speak for the larger community and promote social change and awareness within their socio-cultural and political environment since "I change myself, I change the world" (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 70). Meanwhile, Anna Marie Sandoval in *Toward a Latina Feminism of the Americas: Repression and Resistance in Chicana and Mexicana Literature* goes so far as to affirm: "I cannot separate myself from my community—my community of women and of la Raza" (xv). Contrary to popular perception, Sandoval re-appropriates the idea of living as a Chicana as living as the Other, yet interprets it as an empowering experience for herself, and through her writing, for others like her.

In writing about themselves, Latina/Chicana women have fought to overcome oppression by focussing instead on "liberating aspects of womanhood" (Sandoval 49) and by writing their *own* version of history that, in some cases, incorporated a revisioning of theory also[8] since "[f]or third world women, resistance is a daily practice, and that practice is living theory" (Sandoval 66). It is important to point out that in the case of the Latina Feminist Group, these women come from different personal, political, ethnic, and academic backgrounds; however, in participating in the collaborative group they "locate themselves at the borderlands of a reconfigured Latin(a) America" (*Telling to Live* x). In so doing, they are confronting established "norms," questioning Eurocentric feminist frameworks, and ultimately creating, as Chicana/Latina feminists, their own solidarities and reconstituted familial spaces. In their acknowledgement pages, many of the contributors from the Group express their deepest gratitude to their families, especially their mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, but also to their colleagues, *compañeras* (female companions), students,

friends, and *comadres* (co-mothers). One member in particular affirms that "*Sí se puede hacer familia* from scratch!" [Yes, family *can* be made from scratch!] (*Telling to Live* xiii).

**The Power of Testimony: "Putting the Pieces Together"**

The model of testimony provided by the Latina Feminist Group demonstrates the diverse practices and processes of mothering occurring in the borderlands. In *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*, in a section entitled "Mature Latina Adults and Mothers: Pedagogies of Wholeness and Resilience," the authors describe some of "the everyday teaching and learning that takes place in diverse communities of women and between mothers and daughters" (Villenas and Moreno 144). This type of teaching and learning includes such practices as holistic "spirituality," "*humor casero mujerista*" (womanist humour of the home), and performative testimonies of "*sobreviviencia*" (survival). These practices are specifically reconceptualised in the borderlands, defined as not only "the physical territory or border areas where two nations come together and overlap, but also the borderlands between cultural sensibilities and ethnicities, between citizen and 'alien,' between generations, between diverse mothering practices, and between meanings of 'womanhood'" (Villenas and Moreno 147).[9]

It is precisely this "bringing together" of the various parts of the self that Caren S. Neile describes in her essay, "The 1,001 Piece-Nights of Gloria Anzaldúa: Autohistoria-teoría at Florida Atlantic University," where she documents her own experience as a student in one of Anzaldúa's creative writing courses. Although not written deliberately as a "testimony" per se Neile describes Anzaldúa's seven step creative writing process as one that "explore[s] how we create identity, consciousness, story and myth" (20) and how this experience raised her own consciousness of self—both as an individual and as a member of a larger community. Neile explains that Anzaldúa set up the class writing groups dubbing the students "*comadres*,[10] whose task is to co-mother our work" (20). This process intrinsically involved a recovery of the mythical figure of Coyolxauhqui[11] who was "disempowered by her disintegration" (20). Writing then becomes the method by which one can achieve a re-integration of the "whole" self as well as a bridge for the bi-culturality and bilingualism of the "split" self. It is this type of mothering, sometimes under the disguise of mentoring in the academia,[12] that one can see then translate from the institutional/academic model to the more personal environment of the home.[13]

As such, in "Cultivating a Guerrera Spirit in Latinas: the Praxis of Mothering," Bianca Guzmán affirms that, as a Latina mother, "[t]he home is the first educational setting for children where loving mothers and family members have

the ability to inoculate and potentially offset some of the negative effects of a racist society and educational system" (45). Like many of the *testimoniadoras* of the Latina Feminist Group, Guzmán identifies herself as belonging "to a historically oppressed group in the U.S." (45) and affirms that "by this very notion we transmit life lessons through our daily actions and rituals which become pedagogical moments or moments of teaching and learning that are political" (45). As part of her mothering practices, Guzmán refers to the pedagogies of the home[14] found in the day-to-day living and communication practices of stories (*cuentos*), advise (*consejos*), and conversations (*pláticas*)[15]—also termed "funds of knowledge" and *educación*, or "resources of education and knowledge found in Latino/Mexicano households" (Villenas and Moreno 673). Such "funds of knowledge" that are interpreted and defined by Guzmán as "relational tools assist Latina mothers to teach their daughters how to survive everyday life by providing them with the understanding of how certain situations occur, why certain conditions exist, and how to handle these situations/conditions in and out of school settings" (47). In other words, such tools "create instances where learning can occur for both mother and daughter that disrupt the racist discourses Latinas face in their everyday lives" (Guzmán 45). In recalling Neile's experience of co-mothering in the classroom through testimonial writing, the mother figure here in the Latina home facilitates a similar process of teaching—"'putting Coyolxauhqui together' porque 'stas en pedazos'" (Lara 47) by sharing the stories of her life experiences, thereby allowing her daughter to construct a different, and more positive, outcome for herself.

**Sharing the Self: Sharing the Motherlines Through Testimony**

The woman participants of the Latina Feminist Group similarly elaborate on their own experiences and understanding of mothering in the borderlands through the empowering qualities lent vis-à-vis testimony and storytelling. In the first section of the anthology, entitled "Genealogies of Empowerment," many of the testimonies trace back, through the genealogies (ancestors and parents) as well as the communities (women in their lives), lessons that had been taught in the home—teachings "within/against/alongside patriarchy and an unrelentlessly dehumanizing capitalist economy" (Villenas and Moreno 144). As many of the testimonies demonstrate, Chicanas/Latinas encounter contradictory gender teachings, which as Villenas and Moreno argue, "often involve knowing how to be *una mujer de hogar* (a woman of the home), while at the same time knowing how to *valerse por sí misma* (be self-reliant)" (673). Anzaldúa confirms that "[t]hrough our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages: *No voy a dejar que ningún pelado desgraciado maltrate a mis hijos*. (I'm

not going to let any lowlife mistreat my children). And in the next breath it would say, *La mujer tiene que hacer lo que diga el hombre* (The woman has to do what the man says). Which was it to be—strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming" (18)?

We can see that, for both Anzaldúa and the Latina Feminist Group, "mothering" within the larger global feminist context intrinsically calls for a questioning and re-appropriation of the traditionally passive Mexican mother figures of La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Llorona that have been historically defined, and confined, within the dominant patriarchal discourse.[16] Arturo Morell draws attention to this Mexican patriarchal inheritance in his testimonial *From Cop to Diva and Back,* a one woman play about Alejandra Álvarez, the first female police officer in Mexico City. In this play Alejandra, played by herself, reflects on the "models of motherhood" that fit into six proscribed categories: (1) the apprehensive mother; (2) the suffering mother; (3) the guilty mother; (4) the happy and fulfilled mother; (5) the insecure mother; and (6) the bad and bitter mother (43-47). It is what María Lugones calls "the state of intimate terrorism" when women are "being pressed between two worlds of oppression, the anglo cultural world and the world of their 'mother culture'" (89). Many of the testimonies included in *Telling to Live* depart from this feeling of having to negotiate feelings of not "fitting into" the socio-culturally constructed concept of the "good mother," which is further complicated by the sentiments of Chicana/Latina cultural liminality.

For the Latina Feminist Group, the mother figures that may be found within the personal testimonies of these contributors, become integrated and linked through a shared and collective experience of empowered "sisterhood," or, in other words, of a female solidarity: "How did collectivity and isolation figure in our lives? What was the process of resistance and recovery? .... Breaking the silence, we uncovered the shame that came from abuse. ... Clearly, we needed to share the experiences that we had kept locked away and begin the healing process through spirited reconfiguration" (*Telling to Live* 14).

The anthology as a whole aligns with other Chicana literature that is preoccupied with women's history, and more specifically, with the reclaiming of the "motherlines," not just biological but also communal. In "New Pathways to Understanding Self-in-Relation," Kelli Zaytoun affirms her empowered relationship as daughter to her own familial motherline by stating the following:

> When we know our foremothers' historical and psychological stories, we enter our futures with memories of the pain, frustration, and joy of those who struggled and sometimes died just to make that future possible. In knowing my grandmother's stories of struggles and survival, I gain the strength to persevere. And in my struggles and survival, I

> become a part of the memories of those who have yet to face their own journeys toward individual and social transformation. (149)

Elsewhere, and true to testimonial form, the recovery of Chicana/Latina "motherlines" has the potential for empowerment and healing that can go beyond the immediate familial kinship. For writers like Aurora Levins Morales, a Latina Feminist who centers on genealogies of empowerment in *Telling to Live*, personal histories are a means of mass healing: "whatever activist task we undertake we figure out how the question we're asking or the particular piece of injustice we're confronting can be made big enough, connected enough, to be useful to everyone" (*Medicine* 123). According to Julie Fiandt, Levins Morales' testimonial writing demonstrates the ways in which to "reweave history and create space for mass cultural healing for those who have been wounded by it" (568) and it is this type of cultural healing that we propose is the new (m)othering of the borderlands.

**Solidarity and Empowerment Through Testimony**

In order to begin the process The Latina Feminist Group identified that it was crucial that they create a safe place, both physically and psychologically, for these women to share their testimonies that, in some cases, culminate in a cathartic moment of self-healing.[17] This unique space overcame, for its participants, the divisions between themselves and the other members of the group since: "[they] learned to acknowledge and tell how [their] bodies are maps of oppression, of institutional violence and stress, of exclusion, objectification, and abuse. Since our bodies hold the stress and tensions of our daily lives, we also shared stories of body breakdowns, of how we take care of ourselves, or how we do not" (*Telling to Live* 12). As a result, this facilitated the creation of a female centered community that has made possible the telling of personal stories around universal themes such as: adolescence, sexuality, domestic violence, racism and sexism. In so doing, the Latina Feminist Group provided a sense of sisterhood and solidarity amongst its participants that allowed for the collective experience of a new liberation through the sharing of personal stories of struggle and vindication that can also speak to their larger global community—of women coming together in a common physical and emotional space to support, nurture and empower each other through the process of sharing life changing stories of their lives.

It is important to note that revealing one's personal story or sharing one's *papelitos guardados*[18] evokes memories and experiences from the past that are not entirely self-affirming, but that: "[w]e keep them in our memory, write them down, and store them in safe places waiting for the appropriate moment

when we can return to them for review and analysis, or speak out and share them with others. Sharing can begin a process of empowerment" (*Telling to Live* 1). Yet there is a negotiation of a borderland space of self-empowerment through self-enunciation and consciousness raising. This is evident in Patricia Zavella's "Silence Begins at Home" where she writes about her childhood by working through her memories of loss and nostalgia in the attempt to come to understand the racism she faced growing up as a Mexican-Indian in Colorado Springs in the late 1950s. Living with a father that "was very *Mexicano* and military … a volatile combination" and a mother that "made every effort to soothe him, feed him, and take care of him" (49), Zavella focuses on the sentiment of silence she felt as a child. Yet this silence, as suggested by the title, reveals its various implications in her life: silence in the home (not being able to talk about her Indian heritage [45-46]); at school (having her mouth washed out with soap for speaking Spanish at school [48]); and the world of adults (where Spanish was "reserved for secrets, scandals and gossip" [48]). In theorizing such stories of pain and struggle within the traditional, patriarchal family home, Zavella, along with others in the anthology, potentially educate readers about the histories of such oppression and the means of resistance.

In the last section of *Telling to Live*, the Latina Feminist Group offer celebratory pieces of "self-knowledge, "survival" and "personal fulfillment" (303). The first story of this section is told by Levins Morales, entitled "Shameless Desire." The piece recalls the author's sexual transgressions and feelings of delight with her proclamation of self-love before all others: "Here and now, before all these *gente*, I proclaim it. I am the love of my own life, and I will cherish and defend me against slander and disrespect, violence and erasure, in sickness and in health, in favor or out, come hell or high water, until death does me scatter, amen" (306). In reading this testimony and others like it, one is reminded of Audre Lorde's proposal that for women the erotic as power is rooted in the "spiritual plane… in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" and that the historical suppression of the female erotic has led to the limiting of female power (277). The Latina Feminist Group shows the reader that, in some cases, true empowerment and healing begins with the recognition, both as an individual and as a group, that women have conformed to the male standard of power by distrusting this "natural source" of power based on what Lorde terms "nonrational knowledge" (278). That is, there is an intrinsic link of the female erotic as power to the spiritual and it is in nurturing this type of knowledge and separating it from the political that woman will approach her "deepest knowledge" (Lorde 280). For the Latina Feminist Group this journey towards personal and communal affirmation and empowerment happens vis-à-vis public storytelling where "feelings of vulnerability and mistrust" are discussed openly and that encouraged others to "listen, evaluate, and question

in non-judgmental ways" (*Telling to Live* 11). In essence, these women came to acknowledge that "[t]hrough *testimonio* we have learned to translate ourselves for each other" (*Telling to Live* 11).

In "Esta Risa No Es de Loca" (This laughter is not of a madwoman) Caridad Souza engages with the idea of erasure through the stereotyping of women that goes against the norm as mad or "crazy." These classifications essentially deny the full and authentic expression of the self—in this particular case of a Puerto Rican woman of mixed African heritage. For Souza, her mixed racial heritage marked her both in her social and familial sphere as "not quite white, not entirely black… always be suspect, always be less than" (116). Because her mother married a black man this racial miscegenation, Souza reveals, also made her sexually suspect. This suspicion of her mother's sexual proclivity was further emphasized by the fact that her mother lived on her own, without a husband. For this her mother was "branded a whore … and, by association, her four daughters were considered junior whores-in-training" (117). Thus, even before she forms her own sexual identity Souza admits to having been predefined by her mother's behaviour—a common occurrence in the predominant machista culture.

On the other hand, Souza also describes that not having had a father figure in the home growing up also prevented her from having "the kind of patriarchal protection most Latinas do" and was thus forced to bear "the brunt of the psychological and sociopolitical impact of the *puta* [whore] label" (119). This sexual categorization of her mother and sisters because of her mother's questionable marital status and its reflection on her daughters influenced Souza to not only question "official history," but also, its domination and oppression through racial, sexual, class and gender stereotypes (121). For Souza "esta risa no es de loca" redefines laughter as the ultimate defiance of patriarchal norms—it goes beyond talking back to mark a deterioration of the power of labels that mark women as an inferior Other.

In many cases though, the reader comes across personal stories of abuse and trauma that still hold much weight on the testimonialist's psyche. In some cases, contributors seek the protective label of "Anonymous" to share their story so that it may shed light on the injustices suffered by the individual (by not focussing on their personal identity) in the hopes of raising communal knowledge and possibly the universality of the experience. Especially since, as Anzaldúa states, when speaking about the Chicana experience: "Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her; when the males of all races hunt her as prey" (*Borderlands* 42). Similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's groundbreaking *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* we believe that the Latina Feminist Group in *Telling to Live* continues in the tradition of a transnational feminist testimony that not only addresses the

attempt at erasure but, more importantly, provides a new non-hegemonic counter-narrative that best captures the solidarity of (m)othering the bi-cultural, bilingual and bi-national existence of the Chicana/Latina woman. We also believe that the Latina Feminist Group succeeds in challenging the "borderlands" as a lack of belonging or as a liminal existence to redefine it as a shared (m)othering on a "parallel emotional psychic terrain" (*Telling to Live* 5). A new "borderland" home where bi-culturality and miscegenation represent a double richness and not a deficiency of race and where there is a freedom of exploration of the diversity of lived experiences of the Chicana/Latina contributors.

## Concluding Thoughts

If the testimonies in *Telling to Live* represent a selection from different personal, political, ethnic and academic backgrounds, what unites them? Two main points stand out in this respect: (1) the idea of empowerment achieved by giving voice to silenced histories and (2) how women's stories of personal experience can contain larger political meaning:

> All of us emerge from various mixed inheritances, whether through ethnicity, race, sexuality, regional culture, religious-spiritual formation, class, generation, political orientation, or linguistic heritage and practice. Included in our social identities are the various places we have inhabited and traversed, and the spaces in which we have worked. Our inherited historical and political formations—maps of our crisscrossing trajectories across borders—affected our professional, intellectual, and personal development. (*Telling to Live* 5)

As the title of our article would suggest, we propose that a new sense of communal "mothering" is not simply limited to the biological but one that encompasses a trans-border nurturing of a new generation of, in our specific case, Chicanas and Latinas. This (m)othering, as embodied by the Latina Feminist Group and Gloria Anzaldúa, takes on the form of sharing one's life stories through testimony so that present and future generations will not have to suffer erasure through similar life challenges inherent to the racism, sexism and prejudices endured by their fore-mothers. Essentially, what we are witnessing is evidence of not only the utility and value of testimonial literature in everyday lives of Chicana/Latina women, but as well incidences of transformational and empowering (m)othering strategies and theories which are not limited by cultural, geographical, or institutional borders. One of the final affirmations in the testimonial collection of *Telling to Live* asks of their

readers the following: "this is where our love meets itself, and where we dance in all varieties of movement. We hope the reader might feel inspired to dance with us" (304).

[1]While "Chicana is often used to refer to U.S.-born women of Mexican or Latin American descent who identify with a collective history of oppression and pride" (Bernal et al. 7), Latina is often employed "as an umbrella term to encompass the diversity of … immigrant and U.S.-born women from different Latin American countries" (Bernal et al. 7).

[2]Chicano scholars often remark on the notion that:

> Chicana mothering is not exclusive to the birth mother; extended family members, such as grandmothers and close female friends or relatives called *comadres* (co-mothers), may frequently assist with the childcare responsibilities while the mother works. Chicana feminist scholarship reveals that this unique familial arrangement of surrogate motherhood and extended kinship poses challenges to canonical, psychoanalytic analyses of Western motherhood that assume exclusive mothering practices. (Mercado-López 178-79)

[3]The term was based on José Vasconcelos concept of "la raza cósmica" [the cosmic race] to highlight the fact that the people of Latin America are a mixture of many races, cultures, and religions.

[4]This form of mothering bears resemblance to such concepts as "othermothering" or "community mothers," both examples of the broadening of the maternal ethics of care, from one's biological children extended to the children of the community. For further discussion of "othermothering" and "community mothers," see Andrea O'Reilly's *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's* Of Woman Born.

[5]For a discussion of border liminality, see Santiago Vaquera's essay in *Border Transits. Literature and Culture Across the Line.*

[6]Nevertheless, it is important to note that Chicanas must also, at times, write against the nationalistic discourse that privileges the phallocentric code intrinsic to the cultural construct of machismo in order to remain true to the feminine experience they are narrating.

[7]John Beverly defines Latin American *testimonio* as "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet…form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (24). The problematics of this method of authorial production/manipulation arose especially with respect to Rigoberta Menchú's Nobel Prize winning testimony *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia / I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (see Doris Sommer and Elzbieta Sklodowska in *The Real Thing).*

[8]See Sandoval, p. 43.
[9]In the collection of *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*, Sofía Villenas calls her essay "a personal narrative about the spaces of possibilities in the teaching and learning experiences between mothers and daughters" (144).
[10]Although *comadre* translates as "neighbour, godmother, midwife" and even as "procuress" there is an obvious play here with the idea of the literal translation of *co-madre* as "co-mothering" since *madre* is mother.
[11]Coyolxauhqui was the daughter of Coatlicue in Aztec mythology. She was perceived by her brother Huitzilopochtli as such a threat that he cut off her head and cut her body into many pieces and buried them all in different places (Neile 20).
[12]See, for example, contributions from Iris Ofelia López, Norma Cantú, Gloria Holguín Cuádraz and the anonymous testimony "Welcome to the Ivory Tower" in *Telling to Live.*
[13]A possible topic for further development along this vein would be to examine how mothering/mentoring is at work in the current academic environment. That is, how is academia changing for students and all those involved in higher learning?
[14]Guzmán refers to Delgado Bernal's theories, defined most recently in "Learning and Living Pedagogies of the Home" in *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*:

> The communication, practices, and learning that occur in the home and community—what I call pedagogies of the home—often serve as a cultural knowledge base that helps Chicana college students negotiate the daily experiences of sexist, racist, and classist microaggression. Pedagogies of the home provide strategies of resistance that challenge the educational norms of higher education and the dominant perceptions held about Chicana students. (113)

[15]"*Consejos* are usually a unidirectional form of nurturing advice and moral lessons designed to influence behaviors. *Cuentos* are stories that are usually told to teach a moral lesson, and *pláticas* are bidirectional conversations that involve the sharing of personal thoughts and experiences as a means of healing the mind, body, and soul" (Guzmán 47).
[16]Chicana writers are "redefin[ing] their relationships with 'las tres madres' of Mexican culture by depicting them as feminist sources of strength and compassion" (Herrera 32). For many writers, there exists "a desire to work towards historically contextualizing these female icons as figures of resistance and representatives of cultural survival" (Santos).
[17]See *Telling to Live,* p. 11.
[18]The concept of *papelitos guardados* as developed by the Latina Feminist group is multi-dimensional just as much in English as in Spanish, possibly connoting

meanings such as: "protected documents, guarded roles, stored papers, conserved roles, safe papers, secret roles, hidden papers, safe roles, preserved documents and/or protected roles" (*Telling to Live* 1).

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