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# Wayward Women, Macho Men: Linguistic Construction of Gender Binaries in Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* and Denise Chavez's *Loving Pedro Infante*

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Wayward Women, Macho Men: Linguistic Construction of Gender Binaries in Yxta Maya  
Murray's *Locas* and Denise Chavéz's *Loving Pedro Infante*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

by

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## **Abstract**

Language labels and defines in order to enhance meaning and communication, but through these labels and definitions speakers are also conditioned to associate certain connotations with words and, therefore, their referents. While often harmless, linguistic conditioning can at times create unsavory associations with these referents. One of these instances occurs in gendered labels and conceptions of male and female bodies and purpose. Both Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* and Denise Chavez's *Loving Pedro Infante* can be read through a lens that applies linguistic conditioning with gender theory in order to examine the reinterpretation of female archetypes in the Chicana imagination. It is my assertion here that both authors utilize their characters' associations with these figures through representations of male/female and female/female gender binaries and ultimately call into question the linguistic construction of both the archetypes and Chicana women themselves.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks must be extended to my parents, my children, my thesis advisor, and my committee who all offered me such valuable advice and encouragement during the course of this project.

## **Dedication**

For my father, Michael Tangman, who encouraged me to be a strong woman; my mother, Cheryl Tangman, who showed me how; and my children Erica, Maya, and Jada, who gave me no choice.

## Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Chapter One - Foundations: Sins of the Mother .....	11
III.	Chapter Two - <i>Te Chingaste</i> : An Examination of Language, Society, and the <i>Chingón/Chingada</i> Dichotomy in Yxta Maya Murray's <i>Locas</i> .....	28
IV.	Chapter Three - Rewriting <i>las Mujeres Jodidas</i> : Language, Sexuality, and Reclamation in Denise Chávez's <i>Loving Pedro Infante</i> .....	51
V.	Conclusion .....	71
VI.	Works Cited and Consulted .....	73

## Introduction

In *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* Deborah Cameron notes that “language speaks us” (14) in order to summarize linguists’ consensus concerning the relationship between humans and language inherent in the idea of linguistic determinism. Essentially, the premise of language as a defining and categorizing mechanism allows for speech and writing to aid human communication while also operating as a limiting device. While language affords humans a variety of expressions, it also limits our world view as a result of our need to name, describe, and define. Freedom in the form of communication is exchanged for the limitations of language. While language may “speak us,” we are also spoken into being by language. In many instances, this phenomena is benign and results in no or miniscule negative effects. However, some definitions become connected so intrinsically to the social standards associated with a word that they come to limit those who are defined by that word.

Take, for a brief example, the negative connotations implied when a male child is called out as “a girl.” This occurs often in certain interactions where boys are told not to “hit like a girl,” “run like a girl,” “fight like a girl,” and so on. While statements such as these may appear innocuous, they are not. The exchange posits a clear perceived social as well as biological difference between the sexes that holds the male above the female. This difference is illustrated through the negative, “not”: boys should not hit/run/throw/fight/etc. like girls because girls are considered substandard at those actions. In delineating girls in this way, the use of language functions both to maintain the social view of women as lesser than men as well as elevate men above women because of their perceived prowess based only on sex and gender rather than individual merit. The word “girl” then, becomes a negative term used as a classification in these interactions and the social basis for the ideology persists unchecked and often unnoticed.

Negative connotations associated with gender perpetuate a gendered binary system that operates in most societies. While binaries and continuums are not always of the order of good/bad, with one far end of the spectrum assigned positive connotation while the opposite end is viewed as negative, they do always denote a distinct difference and opposition.

The concepts related in this initial discussion of the operation of linguistic determinants and their connection to the gender binary are the focus of this thesis. Linguistic theories of determinism have been increasingly applied to feminist theories, intersecting especially with research in anthropology, linguistics, and literary studies.<sup>1</sup> In this thesis I will examine the indications of linguistic determinants and sociolinguistics associated with gender binaries as they apply to the work of Chicana authors. In particular, I will examine the binary of the virgin/whore associated with the myth of Malinche, La Llorona, and the Virgen of Guadalupe/Virgin Mary as well as the concept of the *chingón/chingada* binary in Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* (1997) and Denise Chávez's *Loving Pedro Infante* (2001).

## **Chicana Literature**

My analysis of Murray's and Chávez's texts hinges on the intersection of culture, gender, and language inherent in Chicana literature. Although Chicana literature is classified as a United States literature, works by Chicana authors, as those of other women of color, are widely othered. Much like their authors, works of Chicana literature have historically been marginalized

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Cameron discusses the increased interest for theories of linguistic determinism by anthropological, historical, and literary scholars in chapter one of *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*. Examples of scholarship associated with language and gender include Almudena Fernández Fontecha's and Rosa María Jiménez Catalán's "Semantic Derogation in Animal Metaphor: a Contrastive-Cognitive Analysis of two Male/Female Examples in English and Spanish," Christopher Hom's "A Puzzle about Pejoratives," and Laurel A. Sutton's "Bitches and Skankly Hobags: The Place of Women in Contemporary Slang."

by mainstream Anglo culture as well as the broader range of Chicano literature.<sup>2</sup> However, Chicana authors and their texts have been steadily, albeit slowly, making their way into college curricula, anthologies, and other publications. In considering an analysis of Chicana literature, it is important to develop an understanding of the history that surrounds and informs its production.

The Chicano Renaissance<sup>3</sup> of the 1960s resulted in artistic works in many genres from the Chicano/a community in the United States.<sup>4</sup> From the 1960s to the present day, Chicano/a authors have continued to publish literary works that embrace cultural heritage as well as explore and question what it is to be Chicano/a. The literary focus of the Chicano Renaissance also contained a political faction through which the Chicano/a people voiced their discontent with the status quo of the United States and their plight as marginalized citizens.<sup>5</sup> During this time period, Chicanas labored for the common good of both male and female, yet many soon discerned that as women they were not gaining the same ground as men, either within the family, socially, or politically. During the Chicano Movement and the Chicano Renaissance of the 1960s, a push was made to include and support work by Chicanas: however, much of the attention was placed on male authors, playwrights, and critics.

Two men in particular, Luis Valdez and Rodolfo Corky Gonzalez, are credited with being “founding blocks of contemporary Chicano literature” (Bruce-Novoa 76). Valdez’s influence stemmed from his Teatro Campesino and Gonzalez’s from his poetic work *I Am Joaquin*. Both

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<sup>2</sup> Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach explore the marginalization of Chicanas and their texts in the introductory chapter of *Breaking Boundaries*.

<sup>3</sup> The Chicano Renaissance occurred during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and marks a period of productivity and increased interest in Chicano/a artistic and cultural expressions in such areas as art, literature, and language. Chicano/as, who had previously been largely ignored in these endeavors began to push for more representation in artistic circles and funding their own literary presses and scholarly research.

<sup>4</sup> See Rebolledo page 95

<sup>5</sup> See Shirley and Shirley pages 4-9.

men advocated for oppressed Chicano workers through plays and literature that elevated the working class and incorporated Mexican history “to teach Chicanos a centuries-old heritage of struggle for justice,” which “set and/or reaffirmed some precedents for Chicano writing” (Bruce-Novoa 77-78). Chicano writing, therefore, incorporated culture and class during this time.

During the course of the early 1970s, the focus of Chicano literature underwent a shift that moved its content away from the author’s self and a connection to land and property and incorporated more urban elements as Chicanos moved into urban areas.<sup>6</sup> The most modern themes of Chicano literature stem from the discontent of the 1960s, such as “social protest and exploitation, the migratory experience, self-exploration or definition (which includes the exploration of myths and legends), and life in the *barrio*” as well as “*La Raza*, the Race, which has a spiritual connotation that joins all Spanish-speaking peoples of the Americas” (Shirley and Shirley 4-9).

It was not until the latter half of the 1970s that Chicanas were noted in increasing numbers as contributors to the Chicano literary tradition. Although Chicana authors continued to write about the socio-political implications of Chicano/as in the United States, they also began to turn their attention to their own specific needs as women.<sup>7</sup> One of the first such texts was Bernice Zamora’s contribution to *Restless Serpent*, a decidedly feminist text.<sup>8</sup> When Chicanas turned from a focus on the Chicano movement to more female oriented concerns, Chicanos accused them of elevating their own concerns over the concerns of the group as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Bruce-Novoa chapter 8.

<sup>7</sup> See Rebolledo page 95.

<sup>8</sup> *Restless Serpents* is a book of poetry co-written by Zamora with Jose Antonio Burciaga. Like many other Chicanas, Zamora draws from her own life experiences as a Chicana as inspiration for her poetry included in this text.

<sup>9</sup> See Shirley and Shirley and Bruce-Novoa.

While Shirley and Shirley note that the study of Chicano literature is growing, those who are interested in Chicana literature maintain that the expanse of such study leaves much to be desired. Tey Diana Rebolledo finds in the introduction to *Women Singing in the Snow* that “the number of known texts written by Mexican American women in the United States between 1848 and 1960 is very small” (11). She attributes the lack of writings of this time period to the lack of education that non-wealthy Mexican American women received during this time, the lack of time afforded to them to read and write, and the inability of those who did write to publish their works (11). Along with a lack of early literary material there was also a lack of criticism for Chicana texts until the mid-eighties as “the first book-length works of criticism concerning Latinas” did not appear until 1985 (Ortega and Sternbach 3). Despite the slow advent of support for Chicana texts in the early years of the Chicano Movement, Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach draw a clear connection between the Chicanas who benefited from the push for civil rights and education during the Movement and the “collections and alliances” (8) of Chicanas that emerged in the 1980s, positing that these collectives and alliances were “a confluence of the liberation movements of both the United States and Latin America” (8). These elements ultimately culminated in the intense output of Chicanas in the late 1980s.

From this literary history stems the works of contemporary Chicana authors such as Norma Alarcón, Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherrie Moraga as well as lesser known but nevertheless prominent authors Denise Chávez and Yxta Maya Murray. The most prominent themes of Chicana literature continue in the vein of literature of the Chicano Renaissance period of the 1960s and include identity, growth, family, marriage, gender and gender roles, sexuality,

archetypes, class, and language.<sup>10</sup> In particular, Chicana authors have contributed to feminist literatures with their portrayals of gender roles and patriarchy, maternity, and female archetypes in such works as Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* and *The House on Mango Street* as well as Denise Chavez's *The Last of the Menu Girls* and Ana Castillo's verse novel *Watercolor Women/Opaque Men*. They have also been influential in advancing discussions about issues concerning the LGBTQ+ community by subverting heteronormative constructions in Chicano/a culture through both literary endeavors such as Terri de la Pena's *Margins* and works of nonfiction and critical theory including Carla Trujillo's *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Frontera*. All of these themes are used by Chicana authors in order to portray through their fictional and literary works what it means to be Chicana within the Chicano/a cultural community and, more broadly, the United States.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

Both Murray's *Locas* and Chavez's *Loving Pedro Infante* are representative of the ongoing feminist concerns in Chicana literature that have been developing since the 1980s and contain similar themes despite their differences in content. Their focus on the liminal, or border, space of Chicana culture and the feminine make these novels exemplary texts to examine through the lens of gender. A focus on themes of gender and identity as well as the history and archetypes associated with culture make Chicana literature especially receptive to readings that apply gender theory. Critics such as Sonia Saldívar-Hull, Norma Alarcón, Gloria Anzaldúa, and

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<sup>10</sup> A detailed account of the early contributions to Chicano literature can be found in Bruce-Novoa. Additional information about the specific contributions of Chicanas are explored in Shirley and Shirley, Ortega and Sternbach and Sanchez.

others continuously situate feminist readings of Chicana literature as an avenue to explore expressions of self and reimagine or even thwart commonly held thoughts about Chicanas. Early scholars Martha Cotera, Adelaida del Castillo, Liliana Valenzuela, and Norma Alarcón have all sought to expose and re-imagine the myth of Malinche in order to complicate the binary associated with her history.<sup>11</sup>

Coupling an analysis based on gender theory with that of sociolinguistic theory can enhance our understanding of such features within Chicana texts. Chicano/a culture is heavily influenced by the historical and cultural roots of Mexico as will be explored in more depth in Chapter One. The cultural contexts of these works reflect a reverence for, but also a questioning of, traditional roles and archetypal figures as a result of male and female gender binaries, as well as the virgin/whore binary applied to women. Constructions of gender binaries are perpetuated, as in the example previously given in this introduction, through language. My readings of the texts analyzed here are primarily informed by the theory of linguistic determinism, as has recently been adopted for use in the study of feminisms in discourse and literary analysis.<sup>12</sup> Based on the research of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, linguistic determinism revolves around the premise of language as a contributing factor to reality construction.

The most commonly understood ideas associated with linguistic determinism hinged on the studies of Sapir and Whorf; however, the ways in which the theories are utilized in literary and feminist studies today differ from the original ideas outlined in early anthropological studies.<sup>13</sup> It is to this more recent application of theory that I will turn in my analysis of the

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<sup>11</sup> See Saldívar-Hull pages 27-29

<sup>12</sup> For research concerning the application of linguistic determinism to feminisms and gender see Fernández Fontecha and Jiménez Catalán, Hom, and Sutton.

<sup>13</sup> Whorf's writing concerning his study of the Hopi that led to his assertions that eventually became a part of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis can be found in *Language, Thought, and Reality*.

Chicana texts here. Of the wide variety of applications of linguistic relativity, John A. Lucy identifies two relations among the key elements common of each, stating that “Language embodies *an interpretation* of reality and language can *influence* thought about that reality” (294 italics in original). More specifically, Deborah Cameron points to language as a facilitator for politicization given its ability to “regulate human social interactions...and to disguise important truths in a cloud of misleading rhetoric” (*Feminism and Linguistic Theory* 1). Additionally, early proponents of feminist linguistics have pointed to the ability of language to “condition” its users to the hegemonic social order by repeated contact with language use signifying female inferiority as well as perpetuating gendered stereotypes and beliefs.<sup>14</sup> Sapir and Whorf’s hypotheses concerning language, relativism, and determinism will be explored in more detail later in this introduction; however, it bears stating here that while their studies have informed current feminist research in various fields, they have been revised by feminist scholars such as Cameron to examine the construction of ideals based on language rather than the deterministic qualities of language that Whorf outlines in his studies. It is this aspect of language conditioning that I will use in my analysis of the two texts presented in the thesis.

It is through language that the ideology of a “malignant womanhood,” for lack of a better term, has flourished. Yet, it is also through language that women have sought to undermine this existing thought and propose a new visage of the feminine for exploration. Reading Chicana texts through a sociolinguistic feminist perspective allows for a broader understanding of how Chicana authors complicate the subject matter to thwart these ideologies.

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Contemporary variations of linguistic determinism are discussed in more detail in Frederick H. White’s “Introduction: Language and Literature.”

<sup>14</sup> See Dale Spender *Man Made Language* “Introduction” and Cameron *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* “Introduction.”

## Chapter Outlines

This thesis will analyze how representations of various gender binaries are constructed in two Chicana texts, Murray's *Locas* and Chávez's *Loving Pedro Infante*, in order to address how theories of femininity, masculinity, and language intersect to complicate common conceptions of gender. Chapter One "Foundations: Sins of the Mother" addresses historical and theoretical considerations for framing analyses of Chicana texts. I explore the history of the Conquest and the role of the figure of Malinche as it has been conceived previously and in the contemporary Chicana imagination. Also included in this chapter is a brief overview of the lore of La Llorona and the Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgin Mary. My discussion of these figures is intended to situate them within the context of the male/female and virgin/whore binaries that predominate in Chicana literature. A grounding discussion of this viewpoint rounds out the chapter.

Chapter Two "*Te Chingaste: An Examination of Language, Society, and the Chingón/Chingada Dichotomy in Yxta Maya Murray's Locas*" provides a close reading of Murray's text applying principles of gender and sociolinguistic theory. In this close reading I analyze how Murray's construction of both female protagonists and the primary male character in the novel are affected by their internalization and adherence to the gendered binary structure associated with the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy. My assertion in this chapter is that the binary structure is aided by its linguistic construction and ultimately endangers and entraps all of the characters adhering to it, even men.

Chapter Three "Rewriting *las Mujeres Jodidas: Language, Sexuality, and Reclamation in Denise Chávez's Loving Pedro Infante*" offers an analysis of Chávez's novel in a similar vein as that of Murray's. This chapter also views how language serves to perpetuate gendered binaries, but posits that the narrator's discursive questioning of these edicts and overt recognition of their

damaging effects ultimately serves to reimagine the historical female figures of Malinche and Llorona. In this chapter I argue that through the protagonist's reclamation of her feminine heritage she is able to relinquish the hold of the binary structures on her own life and psyche.

The overt gendered depictions of characters in each novel serve to illustrate how male/female and virgin/whore gender binaries operate covertly in the background of our everyday lives. The characters in Murray's and Chavez's novels feel the effects of the binary systems, can even point to their actuality in exchanges with others, yet do not realize the full extent of the detrimental effects those binaries place on their lives. It is my assertion that by closely reading the language used in these fictional accounts not only is the reader's attention drawn to the ways that gendered referents serve to propagate and perpetuate gendered binaries, but they are also inspired to note the societal machinations that correspond to these binaries. It is only through this recognition that Chicanas are able to reclaim the female archetypes associated with their heritage and posit a revised assessment and interpretation of the gendered binaries that exist within their cultural structure.

## Chapter One

### Foundations: Sins of the Mother

#### Introduction

Chicano/a culture is heavily influenced by the historical and cultural roots of Mexico. This chapter, therefore, seeks to frame the works to be examined in subsequent chapters within the foundational history that inspires and perpetuates the gendered binaries of male/female and virgin/whore examined in the novels. The historical association of the gendered binary is most prevalently connected to the Conquest, in particular with the woman who bears the burden of being conceptualized as a traitor to her race and the ill-begotten mother of *mestizos*, Malinche. The first section of this chapter gives a short history of Malinche's involvement in the Conquest as well as outlines how she is read and remembered in the Mexican/Chicano imagination. Also connected to the history of Malinche and the ideology surrounding her is the myth of La Llorona. Viewed as another wicked female figure in lore, the connection of La Llorona to Malinche informs aspects of Chicana narrative in a similar way as many Chicana authors attempt to reimagine her figure in a more positive light. Not all female figures are viewed negatively, however. Juxtaposed against the deleterious visages of Malinche and Llorona is the character of the Virgin Mary/Virgen de Guadalupe. In contrast to the two other women who reside in the Chicano imagination, Mary is seen as a redemptive figure in hegemonic patriarchal traditions, appearing as a virtuous mother in contrast to the non-virtuous figures of Malinche and Llorona. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I will examine how these three female figures, along with their male counterpart ideals, are constructed into a gendered binary that constrains both male and female adherents.

## The Myth of Malinche

In 1519 a young Nahuatl woman changed the course of Mexican history when she was given as a gift to the leader of the Spanish Conquest, Hernán Cortés. It was this fateful event that forever cemented Malinali Tenepatl(1), also known as Malintzín, Doña Marina, and later as Malinche, in the Mexican/Chicano cultural imagination as the traitorous mother of the *mestizo* race. The writings of Hernan Cortés, Francisco López de Gómara, Mariano Somonte, Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo can be used in situating Malinche's early life and contribution to the Conquest. Because Malinche left no record of her own, it is only through these male voices that we are able to learn about her. Cortés, Ixtlilxochitl, and Gómara situate Malinche as a minor character in the event of the Conquest. Alternatively, Malinche is predominantly featured in Díaz's work *Historia verdadera de la conquista de Nueva España* (1632), in which he describes Malinche favorably because of her contributions to the development of New Spain.

Sold into slavery by her mother as a child after her father's death, Malinche was said to have been a descendant of *caciques*, which affords her noble birth if not a noble position. Later, Malinche again changed hands when she was given to the Spaniards by a Tabascan chief, first to a member of Cortés' party, then to Cortés himself. She eventually became Cortés' translator and later bore him a son, Martín. It is the perceived aid that Malinche gave to the Spanish as well as her role as mother to Cortés' child that led to her symbolic representation in Mexican lore as the mother/traitor of the *mestizos*.

## Cultural Perceptions

The lore surrounding Malinche and her association with Hernán Cortés have influenced debates for authors and scholars who view her alternately as a victim or a traitor. Many primary texts from the period of the Spanish Conquest, along with literary works to the present day, have sparked the view of Malinche as a traitor to her people. Using as the basis of their text the *Historia de la conquista de México* (1590), the unknown author of *Xicoténcatl* (1826) portrays Malinche as an overly sexualized, deceitful mistress to Cortés. Similarly, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Guatimozín, Último emperador de México* (2012) and Eligio Ancona's *Los mártires del Anáhuac* (1870) vilify Malinche's affair with Cortés, although Ancona's text views her circumstances as a product of destiny, which influences the perceived flaws in Malinche's own character. Overall, in the early literary accounts of Malinche's character, she "serve[s] as a model of the evil effects of Europeanization" (Cypess 54) and becomes a symbol of treachery. Sandra Messinger Cypess explores many texts that collude with this idea of Malinche and even when not referencing her, portray Mexican or Chicana women as collectively damaged as a result of Malinche's perceived betrayal, such as Margaret Shedd's *Malinche and Cortés* (1971).<sup>15</sup> Scholars have also portrayed Malinche as a deceitful mistress to her own people. Tzvetan Todorov writes of Malinche:

We can imagine that she retains a certain rancor toward her own people or toward some of their representatives, in any case she resolutely chooses to side with the conquistadors. In fact, she is not content to merely translate; it is evident that she also adopts the Spaniards' values and contributes as best she can to the achievement of their goals. (100)

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<sup>15</sup> Shedd's *Malinche and Cortés* is an historical fiction novel that romanticizes the Conquest and Malinche's role as traitor by filling in loosely based historical information about the Conquest with fictionalized accounts of a relationship between Malinche and Cortés.

Todorov's description of Malinche implies that she was complicit in orchestrating the downfall of her own people as retribution for past wrongs and portrays her as a vindictive woman. This vein of reasoning is continued throughout other works, such as Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), in which he explains the negative characterization that Malinche has been afforded in Mexican culture, and Chicano/a culture by proxy. However, what early accounts and analysis of Malinche as figure and as myth have failed to take into account is her lack of agency. Where Todorov finds a woman complicit with Cortés' plans for the Aztecs, willingly colluding in some form of revenge on her own people, he neglects her inability to work as an autonomous being. According to Cordelia Candelaria, it is absurd to expect that Malinche could have thwarted or even prevented the Conquest. Her space as a slave did not afford her the privilege of doing so, and she could not have betrayed her people, because as a slave she was not from that region and therefore would not have been a part of that people. Even if those two actualities were altered, she was also a woman, which did not afford her much freedom at the time (5-6).

Since the 1970s, authors and scholars, especially Chicana feminists, have taken to revising previous ideas about Malinche's role in the Conquest and re-imagining her as a victim of both the Spanish and the indigenous people. Cypess notes that authors such as Rosario Castellanos, Sabina Berman, and Willebaldo López "were cognizant that the transformations that occurred in the image of the historical figure were due to the influence of a patriarchal society's image of women" (138). Rather than accept the deleterious view of Malinche as she has been portrayed, these authors have noted that the cultural standard of women has contributed to the portrayal of Malinche throughout time. Alicia Gaspar de Alba even finds it ironic that the blame has been laid solely at Malinche's feet, noting that others with far more power than she were also instrumental in the Conquest of the Aztecs by the Spanish. Gaspar de Alba argues that

Moctezuma's role of "betraying his people, of reaping the hatred of the subordinate tribes, of receiving the conqueror with open arms (or legs), of ignoring the prophecy that foretold of the collapse of the Aztec Empire, of buying a *malinche's* favors with gifts and tributes worthy of a god" (77) have not been placed under scrutiny in the same way as Malinche's, who by all accounts was merely a slave who changed hands.

While several scholars find that Moctezuma's mysticism, along with the implementation of a class based system, was more directly responsible for the Spanish success than the actions of Malinche,<sup>16</sup> others posit that Malinche's portrayal is more insidiously linked to cultural control. Gaspar de Alba argues that "in the Chicano colonial imaginary...betrayal to the culture is tracked along the axis of gender rather than race," meaning that Chicanos are forced to reconcile their simultaneous love and loathing for their indigenous roots by creating a worldview which denigrates their Indian mother, while also shoring up the idea of the masculine attributes of the Aztec. Gaspar de Alba claims, then, that the Chicano must "transgender the Indian inside them" in order to avoid the feminization of their indigenous heritage through its connection to Malinche (69). Debra A. Castillo explains this argument in more detail, asserting that

If in the complexities of national myth, the nation is both mother and whore, then national pride and perceived deficiencies in the national character derive from a common cause. Moreover, women are to blame – literally or metaphorically – for society's problems. (68)

As a result of the way pride and shame are perceived in the binary of the mother/whore, a schism is created in the Mexican/Chicano cultural psyche.<sup>17</sup> Casting Malinche as a scapegoat for the Conquest simultaneously frees a portion of the culture while denigrating the other. Therefore, the

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<sup>16</sup> See Gaspar de Alba page 27.

<sup>17</sup> Octavio Paz discusses the fragmentation in the cultural conceptions of Mexicans in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.

myth of Malinche continues to be an important aspect of Mexican and Chicano culture as both a historical figure and a pervasive legend.

### **The Myth of La Llorona**

Like Malinche, La Llorona pervades much of Chicano culture. The figure of La Llorona is known as “Llorona, La Gritona, the Wailing Woman, the Wailer, and the Woman in White” (Santos) and her myth has many variations. Most variants of the story fall within two narratives. In the first narrative, La Llorona is portrayed as either a jilted wife or mistress who murders her own children by drowning them in a river as revenge against her wayward husband/lover. Afterwards, she commits suicide and her ghost is said to haunt riverbanks and other bodies of water where she waits to steal away unaccompanied children as her own. The second common variation of the narrative places La Llorona in the position of a siren. Rather than children, in this version of the tale the ghost of La Llorona seduces unsuspecting single men and lures them to the water where she subsequently drowns them.<sup>18</sup> While versions of the tale are different in content, they each point to a similar conclusion: the damage that can be done by a wayward woman.

La Llorona is often connected to Malinche in cultural perception if not in historical fact.<sup>19</sup> Many scholars believe the mythos surrounding La Llorona can be traced directly to Malinche. Those who believe La Llorona is a legend based on Malinche connect the two figures through

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<sup>18</sup> Most versions of the story of La Llorona are centered on one of these two variations according to Santos and Candelaria.

<sup>19</sup> While many of the tales of La Llorona give the woman’s name as Maria, she has been linked in lore to Malinche and to another actual woman, Dona Luisa de Olveros. Dona Luisa de Olveros’ connection to the myth has been traced to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, shortly after the Conquest, and recounts that she was a woman jilted by her husband who drowns her children and herself. In addition, her character is seen as one in a long line of subversive female figures in fictional accounts, including Medea. For additional information see Santos, Candelaria, and Cypess.

speculation that Malinche eventually murdered the child she bore for Cortés as a means to save her son from traveling to Spain and possibly dying away from his homeland. Reasoning for this outcome rests on the Aztec belief that one's soul could not rest if they died away from home.<sup>20</sup> Irene I. Blea equates the two figures in *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, noting that while Malinche is imbued with many names from the period of the Conquest, "from the time of the U.S. war with Mexico to this day, she has existed as La Llorona" (27). For Ibea, these women are one and the same, the legend of Llorona stemming from speculation about the factual accounts of Malinche and used to "[symbolize] the stories of three peoples: the Indios, the Mexicanos, and the Chicanos" (27). Those who believe that Malinche is connected to the Llorona myth add mysticism to their interpretation of Malinche's actual life.

While Ibea equates the two women, many others, such as Luis Leal, Cristina Santos, and Shirley L. Arora believe they cannot be connected. Santos offers no additional possibilities for the appearance of the Llorona myth. However, Leal argues that the mythology of La Llorona pre-dates Malinche and the Conquest, so the lore surrounding the Llorona figure cannot possibly be drawn from Malinche. Instead, Leal links the myth to pre-Conquest lore surrounding goddesses of the Toltecs, Mayas, and Aztecs.<sup>21</sup> Arora claims that the identification of the myth with the Conquest "appears to owe more to a nineteenth-century literary penchant for setting romanticized literary legends in a relatively remote national past than to any real documentation of the legend's early existence." She also negates Leal's ideas about the pre-Conquest connection to the myth, noting that Llorona cannot be definitively traced to the Aztecs just as she cannot be

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<sup>20</sup> See Blea.

<sup>21</sup> Leal identifies the goddesses Cihuacóatl and Quilaztli for the Toltecs, Xtabay of the Mayas, and Coatlicue for the Aztecs as possible sources for the Llorona myth. For further information see Leal page 135.

connected concretely to Malinche. According to Arora, neither the facts associated with Malinche's history, nor the documentation of what we know of Aztec history have the necessary elements of killing children in the early myths. Llorona's story alone contains this element. Instead, she connects it more to a European tradition because of the similarities in values expressed. However, Arora does note that the second Llorona narrative, that of a siren who lures unsuspecting men, may have a basis in a "pre-Columbian source."<sup>22</sup>

Although the connection between Malinche and Llorona is under debate, both figures are unquestioningly portrayed as "bad women" and their stories appear in cultural lore as tales of caution for women and female children to remain in their socially devised positions or fear similar fates of vilification and eternal damnation. They both represent the consequences of female actions that can be deemed wicked or wayward and stress that social and celestial retribution must be enacted on those women who, willingly or unwillingly, commit transgressions against the established social order.

### **La Virgen de Guadalupe**

In contrast to Malinche and La Llorona, the Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgin Mary is often seen as a positive figure, a woman who other women should emulate for her stoic self-sacrifice as a model mother and dutiful wife. Although the Virgen is the mother of Jesus, her lore as the Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico stems from the story of her appearance to a poor Indian man in Tepeyac, Juan Diego. She is said to have revealed herself four times to Juan Diego and requested that he go on her behalf to request from the bishop that a shrine be built at the location of her

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<sup>22</sup> Arora cites this aspect of La Llorona as connected to those figures of the wailing woman or woman in white that appear in towns along the Texas/Mexico border. These figures are often called by other names: Matlacihua, Xtabay, and Siguanaha.

appearance. In order to prove her appearance, she instructed Juan Diego to fill his *tilma*, a canvas cloak worn by indigenous people at that time, with flowers that were not in season and bring them to the bishop. Upon his arrival, Juan Diego unfurled his cloak, releasing the flowers carried within and revealing an image of the Virgen imprinted on the cloth.<sup>23</sup>

### **Cultural Perceptions**

Similarly to the other two female figures discussed in this chapter, the character of the Virgen de Guadalupe has been known by many names and has had many incarnations. Although her current representation is linked most heavily to the Christian religion, she is also associated with indigenous goddesses through the cultural syncretism of Aztec deities with those of their Christian conquerors. This melding of the Virgen de Guadalupe with indigenous goddesses occurred both by chance and by design.<sup>24</sup>

The erection of the shrine in Tepeyac was orchestrated so as to coincide with the location of worship for Tonantzín, the Aztec mother goddess.<sup>25</sup> Along with Tonantzín, other goddesses connected to the Virgen de Guadalupe include Cihuacoatl who is associated with Tonantzín, Coatlicue, and Tlazolteotl. Colonial priests planned to phase out the worship of the pagan goddesses by the indigenous peoples; however, the priests succeeded in creating an amalgamation between the old goddesses and the new. In some instances, the association of the old goddesses with the Virgen resulted in the conquered Indios attempting to thwart colonial power by masking their worship of the old with the façade of worshipping the new (Lara 100-101). Lara explains that “in the colonial period, Christian beliefs about paganism, the devil, and

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<sup>23</sup> See “Virgen de Guadalupe” and Garcia-Soormally.

<sup>24</sup> See Garcia-Soormally and Lara.

<sup>25</sup> “Virgen de Guadalupe” and Garcia-Soormally and Lara.

female transgression as symbolized by Eve merge in depictions of Tonantzín and related goddesses” (101). Eventually, the Aztec goddesses became synonymous with the transgressions of Eve and symbolic of the base, animalistic, and sexual feminine nature. The Virgen de Guadalupe, then, becomes separated from the old goddesses who serve now as her “pagan other” (Lara 100) and takes on the more traditional form of the Virgin Mary. It is from this figure that the Mexican/Chicano social ideology of the feminine stems.

The admiration of the Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgin Mary as long suffering, dutiful mother has permeated the Mexican and, more broadly, the Latin American social order, namely in the form of what anthropologist Evelyn P. Stevens terms “*marianismo*.” Stevens advances her depiction of the cult of *marianismo* in “*Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo*” (1973) where she defines *marianismo* as “the cult of feminine spiritual superiority, which teaches that women are semidivine, morally superior to, and spiritually stronger than men” (4). Drawing from history, Stevens notes, similarly to Lara and others, that Abrahamic religions sought to remove the old mother goddesses, and all goddesses, from worship, yet during the Council of Ephesus “as Theotokos, Mother of God, Mary was integrated into Christian dogma” (7). From the enactment of Mary as a prominent figure in the church stems a history of cultural adoration and reverence. According to Stevens, both *marianismo* and its male counterpart, *machismo* which will be discussed later in this chapter, seem to be by-products of the Conquest, having significantly less or no hold on societies outside of Latin America and even in the indigenous cultures that remain in Mexico (5). For all intents and purposes, Stevens identifies *marianismo* as a positive trait in Latin American culture that may hinder women in some pursuits but also

presents various benefits, among them “a strong sense of identity and historical continuity” (13).<sup>26</sup>

Conversely, other scholars view the cult of *marianismo* in a more negative light.<sup>27</sup> Marysa Navarro suggests that “marianismo is a concept that is seriously flawed” (257), citing its impossible dictates for women as its major defect. Similarly, Silvia Marina Arrom also finds fault with Stevens’ assessment of *marianismo* because of the strict requirements it places on women for proper behavior. Where Stevens posits that *marianismo* stems from the Conquest, Arrom argues that it is likely a more recent institution derived from the nineteenth century (Garcia-Soormally 258). Arrom equates *marianismo* with the ideas of Victorian womanhood (Garcia-Soormally 257) that saw woman’s place as a moral beacon within the home, caretaker of children, husband, and house with no personal desires or needs other than to ensure the satisfaction of her family. “Women’s lack of economic resources and of opportunities for independent action severely curtails their possibilities of asserting their interests in any way at all” (qtd in Navarro 259) according to Kristina Bohman. The result of adherence to an elevated view of *marianismo*, then, limits the agency and autonomy of women. The sociopolitical aspects of a culture that admires traits in women stemming from the idea of a long-suffering female figure in the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe cannot be ignored.

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<sup>26</sup> Stevens also points to the benefits of *marianismo* that are connected with a society that frowns on divorce, offers women lenience in the workplace in order not to inhibit their abilities as mothers, and understanding and support from the community when men have affairs. For additional information see Stevens pages 12-13.

<sup>27</sup> Marysa Navarro offers a lengthy review of detractors from Stevens’ work in “Against Marianismo.” Here she outlines the views of those who find fault with Stevens’ work based on the conclusions Stevens’ draws from her research as well as the research itself. For more information see Navarro pages 257-260.

The Virgen de Guadalupe has become more than a religious signifier, and contributes to the cultural binaries that are imposed on women, occupying the positive place on a binary continuum yet also adding a limiting factor to women. Both scholars and Chicana authors seek to resituate Guadalupe with female agency rather than the patriarchal, hegemonic ideals with which she has been imbued historically. Contemporary Chicana authors especially attempt to reclaim the goddesses within the visage of Guadalupe in order to question and reinvent the gendered binaries that exist within their culture. Gloria Anzaldúa notes that “today, *la Virgen de Guadalupe*...is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered” (52). As a result of the confluence of the Virgen with both the indigenous Aztec goddesses and the conqueror’s religion in order to enact the assimilation of the Aztecs through her she has been co-opted by the patriarchal culture in order to erase powerful female goddesses and replace them with a more easily controlled feminine.

Anzaldúa also draws a connection between each of the archetypal figures discussed here, noting that the Chicana has three mothers. These are Malinche, La Llorona, and Guadalupe. Each mother figure possesses different characteristics. According to Anzaldúa, “all three are mediators: *Guadalupe* [is] the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada (Malinche)* [is] the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona* [is] the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two” (52). Each of the three mothers serve as cultural symbols, and each have been claimed by the conquerors, and eventually the current patriarchal culture, in order to corrupt the initial association of the three mothers. Anzaldúa

points directly to the revision of the three mothers as a means to enable the dismantling of the female gender binary of the virgin/whore.<sup>28</sup>

### **Cultural Mythos and Binary Constructions**

The mythology surrounding the Conquest and the figures of Malinche and Llorona as the traitorous mothers as well as the Virgen de Guadalupe as the dutiful mother is heavily linked to several binary constructions that exist in the Mexican/Chicano worldview: the dichotomies of male/female, masculine/feminine, *chingón/chingada*, open/closed, strong/weak, and, for women, that of the virgin/whore. The male/female binary obviously appears in most cultures and is not specific to the cultural view of the Mexican/Chicano; however, when coupled with the other binaries, the idea of male/female and the performative traits associated with that binary (masculine/feminine) acquire a hyper-realized level of signification in the cultural conception. In effect, the binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine encompass and become representative of the other binary structures associated with them. The pivotal canonical text that describes these dichotomies in detail is Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. In this text, Paz describes these dichotomies in Mexican/Chicano heritage from the Conquest with his own view of the cultural mythos of the Mexican as a solitary figure.

Paz reflects upon the nature of the Mexican, in particular that of the Mexican male, through the lens of the open/closed binary. He posits that the Conquest and the Mexican's connection to this history have created an ideal of solitude in the Mexican character. The Mexican must remain shut off from the outside world, even including familial relationships, in

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<sup>28</sup> For further information about Anzaldúa's argument concerning the subversion of the three mothers and its resultant phenomenon of the virgin/whore dichotomy see *Borderlands: La Frontera* pages 51-53.

order to be perceived as “closed.” In this context, closed is one half of the binary position and envelops the perceived positive facets of the other binaries noted. Closed comes to be equated with the male within the masculine/feminine dichotomy, that of the *chingón/chingada*, as a result of biological anatomical divisions between the sexes as well as the man’s prerogative to be closed in relationships. Paz outlines the differences between these two figures in the same way that he describes the essence of the closed and the open. The *chingón* is closed and often exclusively associated with the male and masculinity. He “is the *macho*,” the aggressive party who penetrates and strikes out (75). The *chingada*, then, is open and represents “pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world” (77). Although the *chingada* is the negative area of the *chingón/chingada* binary, Paz develops his idea of this figure in more detail than he does the *chingón*. The *chingada* derives from the cultural and patriarchal view of Malinche and is also synonymous with the violated mother.

The final construction associated with the cultural myths surrounding the Conquest and Malinche stems from the idea of the violated mother. Because Malinche’s relationship with Cortés makes her a referent of miscegenation, she is seen as the mother figure of the *mestizos*, she becomes in their imagination the original *chingada*. Some scholars have viewed this as a trichotomy, naming it “Tres Marias Syndrome,” after the Marys associated with Jesus Christ: Mary Magdalene, the whore, and Mary, the mother of Christ, who takes on two roles as both virgin and virtuous mother.<sup>29</sup> Women are viewed as falling into one of these three categories. They are meant to embody the virgin role as young women before marriage and to remain pure until they are wed. Then they will become wives and ultimately mothers, fulfilling the dual roles

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<sup>29</sup> Tres Marias Syndrome and its effects are explored along with Marianisma in Taylor and “Marianismo and Machismo.”

of Mary (mother of Christ). The only other option and cultural view of womankind is that of Mary Magdalene, the fallen woman, the whore. Others refer to this binary structure as the virgin/whore dichotomy, in which the virgin aspect of the polarity encompasses the aspect of motherhood.

Several scholars of Chicana literature, such as Irene Lara and Gloria Anzaldúa, suggest that the Nahuatl peoples at one time in the very distant past did not conceive of the dichotomous relationships in relation to gender as we do today, and as the Spanish did when they invaded Mexico in the sixteenth century. Both Lara and Anzaldúa posit that the Nahuatl subscribed to a more patriarchal society before the Conquest.<sup>30</sup> Under the guise of this new, male dominated system, women became subordinate. Their subordination and subsequent view as submissive was then cemented with the advent of the Spanish and the Christian religion, which demonized the character of Eve.

While women are relegated to positions on the virgin/whore binary, men are also required by a patriarchal society to adhere to certain traits and ideals. Ultimately, the ideal of the Mexican/Chicano man that is portrayed both within and outside his society is that of the macho man who enacts *machismo*. This is tied to Paz and his myth making of the Mexican man as a closed entity. However, others, such as Alfredo Mirandé, disagree with the idea of the *macho* and the definition of *machismo* as it is commonly conceived of in portrayals by Mexican/Chicano men and others. In “A Reinterpretation of Male Dominance in the Chicano Family” Mirandé argues that we have viewed the phenomenon of the *macho* incorrectly. He finds that the Chicano family is far more egalitarian than was previously noted by those in the social science field. However, much of the information that Mirandé uses to support his point

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<sup>30</sup> See Anzaldúa page 27 and Lara page 105.

reads as if it were a piece of Paz's text. I would therefore add that while the Chicano family may in fact be more egalitarian, those who subscribe to the worldview of the powerful patriarch would in fact continue affirming the idea of the *macho* and *machismo* in their homes.

Perhaps the idea of *machismo* is not strictly enacted in each family, but just as those outside the Latino/a culture may have read the concept incorrectly, there are several areas in Latino/a culture that continue to perpetuate this attitude of *machismo*, if not as an ideal, at least as an occurrence. Ultimately, whether patriarchal edicts of *machismo* are overtly subscribed to or not, the fact remains that they operate in the larger culture. It is not my intention here to advocate for either position concerning the masculine role of the Chicano. Instead, what becomes clear through analysis is what feminists have underscored in their quest against patriarchy for over thirty years, that the idea of the patriarchal order, the *macho*, and *machismo*, while they may elevate the male in the social hierarchy, also serve to control him just as much as the prescriptions for woman in that patriarchal society control her.

## **Conclusion**

The mythology surrounding Malinche, Llorona, and the Virgen de Guadalupe can be seen to have ramifications within Mexican/Chicano culture for women as well as men when connected with gendered binaries and their corresponding expectations for each gender. In his exploration of the role of Malinche in the Conquest Tzvetan Todorov notes that there is a certain truth that can be gleaned from conjecture. The notion that although a thing may not be true, if it is believed and forced into being through the transmission of that idea through language and discourse, truth becomes relative. Todorov cites the ambiguity that surrounds documentation of the Conquest written from the point of view of the victors, noting that when it comes to truth,

ultimately, “the reception of the statements is more revealing for the history of ideologies than their production” (54). In effect, what he posits here is that the power of language speaks into being the truth because of its propensity, or lack thereof, to be believed and accepted by the masses who receive it.

However, because a history, mythology, or binary is accepted does not mean that it cannot or will not be challenged. Chicana and Mexicana feminist authors have sought to utilize their texts and through discourse speak into being a revised narrative of the female figures of their cultural ancestry. Through their stories they offer redemption to Malinche, Llorona, and the Virgen de Guadalupe and challenge the gendered binaries that society and culture have perpetuated in order to chain women, and men, to their respective social, political, and sexual places. In the following chapters I will examine how two such authors, Yxta Maya Murray and Denise Chávez, reimagine the feminine through characters who thwart the cultural edicts painting women into these binary roles.

**Chapter Two: *Te Chingaste*: Language, Society, and the *Chingón/Chingada* Dichotomy in  
Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas***

Alternately narrated by its two female protagonists, Cecilia and Lucia, Yxta Maya Murray's 1997 novel, *Locas*, centers on the lives of members of the Lobos, a Los Angeles gang in the 1980s and 90s. The Lobos were founded by Manny, Cecilia's brother, who uses his charisma and street smarts to elevate his gang, or *clika*, from hustling old ladies on the street corner to running guns and drugs throughout several neighborhoods. Behind the scenes, Lucia also imparts her own knowledge of the streets and human character in order to mastermind the *clika*'s growth and Manny's eventual ousting as *jefe*. Each character, Cecilia, Lucia, and Manny, represents a different view of what it means to exist in a male-dominated social hierarchy. Cecilia adheres to the strict feminine codes throughout the majority of the novel, wanting nothing more than to please her brother and settle down as a mother to have a child. Conversely, Lucía notes her entrapment in the social order of the gang structure as a sheep (the gang's term for females) and decides to challenge her place by forming her own female gang with two other neighborhood girls, Star Girl and Chique.

As the novel progresses, the Lobos and the female gang clash with one another as well as their enemy gang, the C-4s. Each character in turn must suffer the consequences of their actions and participation in the gang and ultimately their subscriptions to their gendered places in society. Manny is removed from his position as Lobo leader, Lucía rules from behind the scenes but loses her favorite *chica*, Star Girl, when Star Girl is disabled by gunfire and decides to leave the gang, and Cecilia returns to her mother's home, becomes a maid, and resigns herself to attending church and cleaning houses.

Very little scholarly research has been conducted on Murray's *Locas*. Amaia Ibarraran Bigalondo reads *Locas* in the context of gang violence in "Wolves, Sheep and *Vatos Locos*: Reflections of Gang Activity in Chicano Literature" and "Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* (1997): and what about Chicana Barrio Adolescents." In both texts Ibarraran Bigalondo points to Murray's use of setting and the gang environment in order to analyze the novel in terms of the gang's propensity to aid both male and female members in confronting the marginalization of their lives in the space of the *barrio*. Alternately, Lyn Di Iorio Sandín notes in "Melancholic Allegorists of the Street: Piri Thomas, Junot Diaz, and Yxta Maya Murray" the ways in which Murray draws upon the female archetypes within Latino/a mythology to contribute to the understanding of the protagonists' marginalization by society.

This chapter seeks to contribute to the discussion of marginalization in Chicano/a lives through an analysis of Murray's text focused on a reading of *Locas* that draws upon the identity construction associated with the gendered binaries of the *chingón/chingada*, the virgin/whore, and language use. Applying sociolinguistic theory in the analysis of gendered language use adds additional depth to our understanding of the ways Chicana authors attempt to reimagine historical myths and archetypes and reclaim the feminine. An examination of the circumstances and language of the primary characters, Cecilia, Lucía, and Manny, reveal the extent to which the *chingón/chingada* and virgin/whore dichotomies permeate their culture and ultimately exposes the detrimental effects of the binary model on their society.

In order to fully understand how the language associated with the *chingón/chingada* binary helps to discursively construct the binary within the culture, a brief overview of the words associated with "*chingón*" and "*chingada*" are in order. Octavio Paz identifies several meanings for the verb *chingar* in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*. These include descriptions

of drinks associated with drinking and alcoholic beverages (*chingaste*: the remains in a glass; *chingaditos*: coffee lees; *chinguere* or *piquete*: alcohol; *chingana*: a tavern; *chingar*: to become drunk; *chinguirito*: a shot). *Chingar* can also imply the idea of failure (*se chingan, se chinga*), something that is torn or ruined (*chingado*), or “to be made a fool of” (*chingarse*) (76). While these variations in meaning may appear innocent, Paz maintains that regardless of what meaning the word *chingar* takes in any given situation, “the ultimate meaning always contains the idea of aggression” (76).

For Paz, the verb, and its association with the binary positions of *chingón/chingada*, describes two sides of one whole: the closed and the open. *Chingar*, then, “denotes violence, an emergence of oneself to penetrate another by force” (77). Similarly, Alfredo Mirandé defines *chingar* as “an aggressive form of sexual intercourse with numerous connotations of power” (2). Because language both influences and is influenced by social elements and traditions, it is difficult to surmise whether *chingar* shapes the Latino/a culture’s masculine ideal or only reflects the ideology already present within the culture. Nevertheless, the connection between *chingar* and the masculine is present in its relationship to traditionally held constructs of masculinity not only in its association with the act of penetration but also as a result of the emphasis the verb places on power and aggression.

Whereas *chingar* has various meanings associated with the power implicit in manliness in the *chingón*, the opposite is true of the connotations linked to its feminine variation: *chingada*. *Chingada*, lacking action even in its speech form, is used as a noun rather than a verb and signifies a “distant, vague and indeterminate” (79) place. Paz asserts that the word is “hollow” and “says nothing. It is Nothingness itself” (79). In contrast to the male’s power and aggression as the *chingón*, the female or *chingada* is open and receptive. The two poles of this binary are

socially and culturally conceptualized as working in tandem, fulfilling their own distinct roles; however, the notion implicit in the position of the woman as the *chingada* situates her in the realm of “Nothingness” (79) associated with the term and therefore relegates her to a subordinate social position.

The *chingada* is linked to Malinche, who is the original violated mother. Whether one subscribes to the belief that Malinche was a willful traitor or a victim of the machinations of the conquerors during the Conquest is immaterial in reading her as the figure of the *chingada*. According to Paz, the very nature of her openness as a woman, her lack of agency and autonomy, situate her as “the Mother forcibly opened, violated, or deceived” (79). This larger association of *chingar* with the gendered power structure informs the interactions between the characters in Murray’s novel. As the binary of *chingón/chingada* emphasizes a hierarchy of the sexes, so does Murray’s narrative emphasize varying levels of masculine appropriation and performance in each character’s quest to become *chingón*. Cecilia falls quickly to the bottom of the hierarchy as she alternately covets masculine privilege and motherly respect, but is unable to attain either. As a result she remains firmly rooted in the role of the *chingada* both because of her lack of masculine power as well as her ineffectual attempt to align herself with the priority female position of the Virgin.<sup>31</sup> Although she believes herself to have succeeded in acquiring status within the *clika*, Lucía also falls short of the ideal of the *chingón* because she must rely on men for her position within the Lobos and always be wary of other females who may wish to seize her place. The central male character, Manny, though imbued with masculine advantage, is eventually ousted from his position as Lobo leader as a result of stronger male figures usurping

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<sup>31</sup> I reference the virgin here as the Virgen de Guadalupe, Virgin Mary, rather than the literal definition.

his place in the gang's social order. Each character seeks freedom or power in connection with the social constructions outlined by the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy; however, none of them are able to retain these elements because the underlying premise of the construct surrounding this dichotomy requires consistent actualizations of power and aggression inherent in *chingar* and associated with the *chingón*.<sup>32</sup>

Of the three characters examined here, Cecilia ultimately comes to embody none of the characteristics of the *chingón*. Throughout the novel she vacillates between her desires to possess traditionally feminine attributes and those attributes that belong predominantly to men. Even as a young teenage girl, Cecilia has already internalized the priority position of the masculine in her culture, community, and family. Her mother dotes on her brother, Manny, who seemingly can do no wrong even as he steals to help his mother pay the rent and then asserts his position in the household by usurping control from their mother entirely when she attempts to question his actions. Cecilia, however, is never able to realize power either through her desire of masculine freedom or the respect that comes to women through motherhood. Her primary goal throughout most of the novel is to become a mother so she can, as she mentions several times, “be Somebody” (Murray 70). By becoming a mother, Cecilia will elevate herself slightly within the structure of her society as a result of another dichotomy that exists only for women, that which holds up the mythology of Malinche to the symbol of La Virgen de Guadalupe. The

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<sup>32</sup> Although the binaries of *chingon/chingada* and virgin/whore are separate, one dealing with the opposition of men and women and the other with degrees of womanhood, the virgin/whore dichotomy resides within the larger male/female binary and the societal forces that dictate male and female behavior influence and shape that binary as well. Therefore, discussion of the binaries when both are encompassed by one term has been limited to that of the larger binary, *chingon/chingada*, in an attempt at simplification.

contrastive elements of this dichotomy are labeled as virgin and whore, the two most prominent options open to women within Cecilia's cultural frame.

Language plays a significant role in the construction of this ideal of womanhood, especially in the words utilized to label each position within the binary. As in the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy, there is an obvious preference in the virgin/whore opposition for one element of the spectrum over the other as noted through the language. The term "virgin," even when describing a mother who obviously has known a man in a sexual sense in order to birth a child, retains an association with purity because she fulfills her traditional female role and therefore is allowed to maintain the "virgin" label because of her association with the Virgin Mary as a mother figure. Conversely, the only other culturally acceptable option for a female within this construct is to be labeled a "whore," with all of the baggage that term contains.

Cecilia wants a child because it will remove her from the lowest position within the *clika*, a sheep, the position most concretely associated with the *chingada* because the sheep embody all of the characteristics of the denigrated female. Cecilia notes that within the *clika* there is a respectability afforded to the *mamacitas* that does not extend to the sheep. When commenting upon the mothers with their babies, Cecilia states: "They were all Lobo *chicas*, but they weren't sheep no more. Once a girl has a baby she gets real respectable" (70). Here Cecilia indicates that it is only through having children that women can be seen as respectable figures. The respectability afforded to the women who bear children is a direct result of their adherence to traditional womanhood outlined within the binary gender structure. Cecilia's quest to become a mother, however, has a heartbreaking end and only serves to further her progression into the place of the *chingada*.

Although Cecilia does not enjoy sex with or love the man with whom she chooses to have sex, her ultimate goal of conception keeps her from leaving him and, later, compels her to bear the brunt of his temper. When Cecilia manages to become pregnant with her lover, Beto's, child, she envisions her life quietly unfolding on a bench in the park with the other mothers, gossiping, watching their "stroller babies," and receiving the respect they deserve for being dutiful mothers. With the advent of her pregnancy, however, Cecilia becomes the victim of domestic violence rather than a revered mother-to-be. As a result, Cecilia is unable to be a mother at all, losing her baby after Beto becomes enraged and beats her. Cecilia blames herself for the loss of her child. She believes that her actions, her inability to protect her child, to "keep [her] hands down" and "cover up [her] belly" (121) resulted in her child's death rather than Beto's fists.

By pointing to her own actions, or lack thereof, Cecilia reveals how deeply she loathes herself for her inability to protect her child. Cecilia echoes the cultural sentiment of a woman's place as mother, revealing that "a woman's first thing is to make babies and love them better than herself" (225). By putting her hands down to cushion her own fall, resulting in the death of her unborn child, Cecilia believes she has been unsuccessful in her duty as a mother as a result of her own internal failings. The ideology of the self-sacrificing mother is apparent in Cecilia's response to her loss. She comes to believe that she "wasn't like a real woman," stating "I had something wrong in me, something dirty. I didn't deserve her and God showed me that crystal clear" (225-226). Cecilia's statement about her lost child has two meaningful significations derived from her internalization of the cultural gender binaries. The first occurs while Cecilia is still pregnant, but she may also be alluding to her own actions after her unborn child's loss.

During Cecilia's pregnancy she perverts her place as a mother by placing other children in danger. Spurred by Lucía, Manny, Cecilia's brother, requests that Cecilia fulfill her duties to

the *clika* by selling drugs to the local middle school children, and Cecilia eventually complies. She believes that it is her duty, noting that even though she wanted to become a respectable woman by fulfilling her role of having a child, “a girl can’t have nothing for her very own. It’s got to be for la familia” (123). Cecilia’s recognition of the dilemma in which she is placed by her responsibility to her family and her own desires illuminates the lack of choice and agency she experiences as a woman in a community that operates under the strict codes of the male/female gender binary. Although Cecilia does not want to sell cocaine to school children, she ultimately decides that she has no choice because Manny’s wishes as the patriarch of both the gang and her family supersede her own desires. Cecilia links her transgressions against the school children to the loss of her own child. She notes that God did not allow her to have her baby because “[she] didn’t deserve her. So [she] couldn’t keep her” (125). She believes that the loss of her child is a punishment for not acting like a good mother would and protecting children above herself.

Reduced to one ultimate purpose, Cecilia cannot reconcile the loss of her pregnancy as separate from her aptitude as a woman because she operates under the cultural edicts that view the role of motherhood as her ultimate purpose. If Cecilia cannot bring forth a child, she then must surmise that it is her faulty womanhood, her inherent impurity, which creates this resistance. When she expresses that she isn’t “a real woman” (225) she also points to the fact that she has been aligned with the whore, the *chingada*. She is not associated with the *chingada* because of her actions, but because of her inability to bear a child and fulfill her purpose as a woman. Therefore, God will not allow her to pervert the sanctity of motherhood by having a child of her own.

While Cecilia explicitly points to her inability to protect her child and others’ children as the ultimate reason for her miscarriage, she also reveals a reasoning that impacts her

subconsciously and draws from cultural edicts associated with the male/female gender binary. This ideology allows her to see herself as having “something wrong...something dirty” (225) within her person. This statement can also be read as a revelation on the relationship Cecilia begins with another woman after the loss of her baby. At a gang *rumbra* shortly after Cecilia’s miscarriage, she encounters and becomes infatuated with Chucha, a female member of the Lobo’s rival gang, the C-4s. Her relationship with Chucha, though not sexual, is portrayed as more than platonic. Cecilia’s worldview is enlarged when she sees Chucha across the park in the midst of the gang fight. She states that “that night [she] fell in love” (172). Whereas Cecilia’s relationship with Beto had the ultimate purpose of a child and nothing more, her desire for Chucha is purely emotional. When the two women’s eyes meet across the park, Cecilia “[can’t] even breathe for a second with [her] romance feelings that spark and glow like fire-flies when [their] eyes meet like in the movies” (172). When Chucha and Cecilia see each other, Cecilia believes that they are actually *seeing* each other, recognizing each other’s inner being. By remarking that Chucha “sees *me*” (172, italics in original), Cecilia identifies a distinct difference between her relationship with Beto and her forthcoming relationship with Chucha. As women, Cecilia and Chucha have a shared social and cultural position, even though they are members of rival gangs. They identify with one another and can therefore draw comfort from their similar circumstances. However, it is obvious that Cecilia longs for more than friendly comfort from Chucha. As her confidence grows in her new friendship, Cecilia begins to imagine that perhaps she doesn’t need a baby to be somebody because Chucha makes her “feel like a queen” (194).

However, Cecilia is unable to sustain her newfound purpose and autonomy when she realizes that her imaginary future with Chucha will not be realized. In fact, when another altercation between the two gangs erupts and pushes the two women apart, Cecilia is reduced

even further in her own estimation. The end of her friendship with Chucha prompts Cecilia to recognize that her feelings for her friend transgressed upon her allocated place as a female in her society, and she reverts to an even more passive existence. Cecilia comes to believe that the end of her relationship with Chucha was a sign from God that she must turn from her sin of same-sex desire and embrace her culturally prescribed role as a dutiful female. Although she is disappointed with the outcome, Cecilia believes when looking back during the course of her narrative that she was saved by God: “God chased me down. He saw my bad black heart, my wicked self. He saw me traveling that wrong road and sent me a sign” (195). Cecilia couples this statement with her reminiscences of her relationship with Chucha, drawing a line of reference through their association to the description of her homosexual desires and the “wicked” aspects of her character from which God sought to save her. Cecilia also seems to retroactively associate her sexual orientation with the loss of her child. Through the culturally conceived “defect” of her attraction for and love of Chucha, Cecilia has also aligned herself with the whore, and this contributes to her belief that there is something “wrong in [her], something dirty” (225). As a result, Cecilia turns to the cultural religious figure of the Virgen as inspiration for sacrificing her desires because “that’s what la Virgen did....She lifted up those soft white hands of hers and just prayed and prayed” (195). She cannot enact the expectations of her community and redeem herself by becoming a mother, so Cecilia must therefore atone for her cultural failings by emulating the Virgen in another way.

Although Cecilia primarily voices a desire for traditional motherhood and explores her disappointment at not being able to actualize this aspect of her place as a woman, she also expresses some disappointment in the trappings of womanhood that are forced upon her by society’s binary system and harbors a desire for masculine agency. From the first chapter of the

novel, Cecilia's language also expresses a yearning for masculine attributes in an attempt to garner male privilege and freedom. Watching her brother, Manny, become a self-possessed man, Cecilia reveals that she "wanted to be a man like that" (7). From the description of Manny that follows this revelation, it is clear that Cecilia covets the power and strength that she sees revealed in Manny's emerging masculine form. She notes that "he got stronger, his skinny body moving up and the curves coming out in his arms. His belly hardened into muscle" (7). The points of interest in Manny's manliness for Cecilia revolve around predominantly physical attributes that indicate strength and power. Not only does she focus her description on the fact that Manny is "stronger," she also describes his body at length, detailing the placement of his new-found musculature and the degree to which it appears. Cecilia's descriptions of Manny evoke the qualities of the hegemonic man, or the ideal man who possesses strength, power, freedom, and self-assurance. As a result of the construction of the *chingón/chingada* binary within Latino/a culture, the hegemonic or dominant male figure also becomes associated with the qualities of the *chingón*. Within the *clika* subculture of the novel, then, hegemonic masculinity, as depicted by the *chingón*, is epitomized by powerful men who carry guns and do not shy away from a fight.

Cecilia covets all of these trappings of manliness and relates her desire to the reader in her narrative, though not always overtly. She craves masculine attributes because she has internalized her culture's oppositional separation of the sexes. The oppositional figures of *chingón/chingada*, therefore, can be seen to function as a form of "conditioning," or the internalization of "stereotypes and distortions: with which individuals are frequently confronted," (Cameron 6) through the language structures associated with the binary. The role of conditioning within the novel's social structure becomes clear in the first chapter when Cecilia

and Lucía have Manny’s stash of weapons. Cecilia imagines owning one of the guns and the autonomy that it affords its possessor, but she also realizes that as a woman she is not privy to that sort of agency. She understands that the men in the *clika* “can buy themselves a piece and walk around brave because they know they ain’t bluffing. They’ll take any enemy....But women, they ain’t supposed to carry on. So when I saw them shiny killers I only got a little hungry, dreaming about what it would be like to live that *macho* life” (Murray 17).

Several elements of Cecilia’s wording here can be seen to stem from the cultural acceptance of the gender binary and reveal the strong hold that the binary has upon the individuals within the group, especially women. Cecilia’s wording points out that the men can be “brave” because of their “shiny killers,” but also that the same protective shield is not allowed for women; women are not meant to be brave or to confront enemies. If women are not meant to be brave, then, they are meant to be weak, and they are kept weak by the constructs of acceptability in their society tied to the *chingón/chingada* polarity. Cecilia’s reference to both the acceptable spheres for women and the “*macho* life” (17) in the passage above reveal how deeply ingrained the acceptance of this construct is for her by her failure to question its dictates. She meekly accepts that she will not be party to the bravery or agency afforded to the male.

Although in the beginning of the novel Cecilia does not allow herself to openly covet the position of the male within her gendered society, she later expresses a distinct desire to obtain the male privilege of agency and freedom that is not offered to her as a woman. The catalyst for this is Cecilia’s infatuation with Chucha. During their brief friendship, Chucha succeeds in bringing forth Cecilia’s inner confidence. Whereas Cecilia once bowed and scraped for her brother, Manny, and her lover, Beto, with Chucha Cecilia feels empowered. The way that Cecilia describes Chucha places her in a masculine position. She uses terminology often associated with

the male, calling Chucha “Chiquita” and “sweet thing” (172). Cecilia’s love for Chucha occupies a separate space than that of the Lobo men with their sheep. Only through her relationship with Chucha, forbidden both by who they are as members of rival gangs and women, can Cecilia, even for a brief time, attempt to escape her position as the *chingada* and move under her own force rather than that dictated by society.

In a conversation with Chucha, Chucha asks Cecilia: “What you want if you get one wish, ésa?” (186). At first, Cecilia skirts the issue, but finally she reveals that she would wish to be a man, explaining: “I’d be a big bomba man strutting myself all over the Park. I wouldn’t worry about no babies, or about getting married. See, because men don’t worry about nothing” (186). Within this short exchange, Cecilia exposes the difference between the realities of men and women living within the gendered structure of a society that adheres to an oppositional frame. Again, one can deduce that by outlining the agency men have to wander and not settle in a familial relationship, Cecilia is also calling attention to the lack of these attributes for women within this society. Also pertinent to note is the repetition of her statement about worry, that if she were a man she “wouldn’t worry” and that “men don’t worry about nothing” (186). The double emphasis placed on the lack of concern men are forced to show for their lives, situations, and families reveals that Cecilia, as a woman, views the privilege of maleness as the freedom from worry. Her statement doubly contrasts the unstated reality of her declaration, that while men’s lives are free of worry, women’s lives are full of it.

Ultimately, Cecilia is unable to actualize the agency afforded to men. Rather than becoming a respectable *mamacita* or a “big bomba man,” (Murray 186) the end of her relationship with Chucha prompts Cecilia to revert to the position of the *chingada* by becoming a sheep for God. As noted previously, the language associated with her decision to adopt religion

closely mirrors the accepted female sphere within the larger system of the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy. By attempting to emulate the resolute stoicism of the Virgen, Cecilia reveals herself as a prisoner to God's will rather than acquiring masculine freedom and respectability. Her descriptions of God parallel the construction of male/female relationships. In describing God's will, Cecilia notes that "[God] don't care what you want;" He requests that His followers realize they are His possessions (196) much as the social hierarchy requires women to submit to a patriarchal system of control. Cecilia also asserts that "[God] wants you weak and scared" (236). By describing God as a tyrannical figure who wishes to possess His followers and requires that they submit to Him, Cecilia creates a manifestation of God that replicates the possessive nature of the *chingón* who demands obedience to his will. The God Cecilia describes closely resembles the men of the *clika* and the larger society of which she is a part. He is cruel, authoritative, and possessive, the very epitome of *chingón*. Cecilia ultimately has little choice in submitting to the dictates of her religion. Although she once coveted masculine agency, the social conditioning of the binary structure has become so engrained in her that Cecilia believes that the only way to salvage any respectability is to surrender her life to the church and God's will. Rather than escaping the binary structure, Cecilia remains firmly in the position of the *chingada*.

The pressures associated with being female in a society that allows advantages only to men also spurs Lucía's quest to become more than a sheep by forming her own female *clika*. While Cecilia merely contemplates acquiring masculine attributes, Lucía actively works to attain them, resulting in her ability to partially remove herself from the sheep life of the *chingada* and align herself instead with the *chingón*. The language that Lucía uses in dialogue, as well as to describe her advancement within the *clika*, also reveals her own conceptions of the effect of the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy. One such instance occurs when Lucía initiates two members into

her female gang. In order to become members of the girls' gang, they decide to jump each other in, a process that involves all three girls fighting one another. The act of violence in the initiation is itself tied to the cultural perception of *chingar* as well as the *chingón/chingada* binary because it enacts violence and aggression and compels the aggressor to force herself upon another, as both Paz and Mirandé's definitions of *chingar* suggest. The act of jumping one another in is modeled on the way the Lobo males initiate members into their group, revealing that the women are appropriating male edicts by emulation and indicating that, while the group is comprised of females, it is based on a male model. The basis of the female *clika* upon male constructions of the gang allows an interpretation of the girls' actions, as well as the language used to describe them, as attempts to acquire not only masculine qualities, but the hyper-masculine, aggressive qualities of the *chingón*.

The language that Lucía employs to relate the initiation to the reader coincides with the descriptions of the *chingón* as well. Lucía states: "Me and Chique slapped [Star Girl] around the face, and pulled on her hair, sliced into her with our rings, our nails, ripping her dress, shredding at what was under there" (Murray 49). The account of Star Girl's jumping in is violent, and the words that Lucía uses to describe the event coincide with the connotation of *chingar* associated with the *chingón*. She focuses in her description on the actions that she and Chique perpetrate upon Star Girl that indicate the ways the two girls are violating Star Girl's person. Their acts of "pull[ing]" and "slic[ing]" at Star Girl's body align with the definition of *chingar* as a form of aggression and violence. The "ripping" and "shredding" of Star Girl's dress and the skin beneath it simulates a rape within the violation, allowing the women to "penetrate by force" (Paz 77) and creating a parallel between the women's actions and the actions of the *chingón*.

The appropriation of male initiation techniques is not the only masculine element Lucía adopts. She also reveals a single-minded focus throughout the novel that is aligned with the masculine, and in particular the figure of the *chingón*: the desire for power. Within the gendered social hierarchy delineated by the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy, the female is viewed as a male possession. Lucía attempts to thwart this conception of herself as a woman by infiltrating the Lobo structure and working her way up to respectable status as *jefa* surreptitiously. Throughout the novel, the words she uses to describe her advancement are focused on her perception of her newly achieved power. From her vantage point as the head of the *clika*, Lucía notes the power afforded to her by emphasizing: “I’m the one screaming in all your faces” (Murray 20). The social structure of the gang requires that one take on a harsh attitude, because, as Lucía explains later in the text, “the weak ones get it, that’s how it always is” (91).

The connection between her acquired status and the physical manifestation of *chingar* is clear in her rhetoric because she is forced by the *clika*’s social structure to use her position in order to threaten, to assert her own power and emphasize her own freedom. She does not wish to wield this power and freedom for the good of the community, but rather to assert herself over others by “screaming in [their] faces,” or imposing her will upon them in an effort not to be considered “weak” and therefore aligned with the *chingada*. In this endeavor she is also associated with the *chingón*, who Paz asserts is afforded only two possibilities: “either he inflicts the actions implied by *chingar* on others, or else he suffers them himself” (78). Lucía’s language associated with her position of power within the *clika* cements the connection between herself and the figure of the *chingón*, which she wishes to emulate by firmly placing her in the closed space of perpetrator rather than an open space of receptivity and victimhood.

It is only when she opens herself to another member of her gang, Star Girl, that she chances losing her drive to climb the structural hierarchy of the gang to surreptitiously usurp power from the male leaders. Lucía has a soft place for Star Girl, and when Star Girl is paralyzed as a result of being shot during an altercation with the C-4s, Lucía becomes obsessed with retribution. She equates herself with the Llorona, linking herself linguistically with the construction of this figure as a weak actualization of womanhood. She states: “I’d look in the mirror sometimes and see this white-faced llorona, with skinny bones sticking out her face and big shiny eyes, like I’m sick” (204). Lucía attempts to talk herself out of her destruction by calling up her resilience and telling herself “you’ve gotta be that strong chica” (204). By equating the softness inside herself, her feeling for another, with the figure of Llorona, Lucía calls into question her feminine weakness associated with this figure. She must work diligently to negate the force it exerts on her through her emotions and inability to isolate herself fully in the pure action and response of the *chingón*. Lucía is only able to enact the macho by removing herself from that part of herself that she equates with the llorona, her emotions. Significantly, Lucía’s response of closing herself to others and seeking aloofness and independence corresponds with Paz’s estimation of the bad woman. Paz notes that the *mala*, the bad woman, “is hard and impious and independent like the *macho*” (39). Lucía is not ashamed to be aligned with the bad woman, and in fact wishes to surpass this alignment in order to become the *macho*. Ultimately, Lucía’s goal is to transcend her perceived weakness and close herself off from the world as the *chingón*.

Though Lucía is able to linguistically construct a *macho* façade for herself, in actuality she is as much affected by the ideology of her culture’s gendered binary as Cecilia. Among Lucía’s many references to her tough outlook and her declared ownership of streets and people,

is embedded the reality of her position as a woman in a male dominated society. Not only must Lucía be concerned with enacting the qualities associated with the *chingón* in order to maneuver herself to a respectable position within the larger Lobo structure, she must also guard against the threat of one of her female gang members asserting their own power over her. Lucía watches the members of her group and accepts that she “ain’t safe like [she] think[s]” (Murray 246). She is not safe because by appropriating masculine qualities and attempting to emulate the characteristics of the male associated with the *chingón*, Lucía has also placed herself in the position of having to defend her position against those who wish to thwart her. By complicating the binary structure and assuming a male position, not only does Lucía have to guard against assaults on her privilege from the Lobo men, she also must protect herself from the female members whom she has afforded an advantage to participate in the sphere of the *chingón*. By breaching the binary structure and usurping the male domain in the creation of the female gang, Lucía has created another hierarchy that requires she protect her own position at its apex.

While it is readily understandable that the two female protagonists would attempt to acquire attributes commonly associated with the male in order to raise themselves from the position of *chingada*, the men within the novel also exhibit a power struggle among themselves in order to retain the same privileges that the women covet. According to Willer *et al*, “true masculinity is narrowly defined, esteemed, and unattainable,” which causes anxiety within the male subject and leads him into a continuous cycle of “striving for ever greater masculinity” (983). The social structure which looks to the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy to define men and women requires that men participate in a continuous assertion of their masculine power so as not to be placed in the female sphere and therefore associated with the *chingada*.

Manny, Cecilia's brother and Lucía's lover, as well as the leader of the Lobos, is faced with a constant need to perform his masculinity in order to hold his position within the *clika*. His performance is accompanied by language closely associated with the *chingón* and the verb *chingar* because he repeatedly uses one possible English translation of the verb: "fuck." One such instance occurs when Manny must challenge Beto to a fight because Beto beat Cecilia. In order to initiate the altercation, Manny calls out: "You fuck with her YOU FUCK WITH ME ÉSE!...YOU FUCK WITH ME!" (Murray 97). Manny's use of the verb "fuck" in this instance is closely linked to the function of *chingar* associated with the *chingón*. The altercation between the two men is tied to the masculine social constructions that exist as a result of the influence of the *chingón/chingada* binary. Consequently, Beto's real assault on Cecilia, because she is Manny's sister and therefore under his care, is read as an actual assault on Manny by proxy, resulting in Manny's need to assert himself as a masculine figure in order to retain his position as the leader of the Lobos and to prove himself *chingón*. What appears in Manny's discourse, then, is the inevitable fear of becoming *chingada*.

Manny's phrasing and his use of the word "fuck" have a clear connection to the gendered cultural Latino/a heritage of the gang members which shapes their perceptions of reality and gender. The segment of Manny's statement concerned with Cecilia differs noticeably from the portion concerned with himself. His statement is comprised of both lower case and capital letters to denote Manny's tone and timbre of voice. The placement of these differing formats within the text emphasize Manny's own perceived slight from Beto because while the phrase "You fuck with her" can be read as aggressive, it does not have the same force as "YOU FUCK WITH ME!" (Murray 97). The capitalization in the reference to Manny himself reveals heightened anger and a louder voice. Manny also chooses to repeat this portion of his statement, again with

emphasis, indicating that Cecilia's abuse is of negligent concern to him in the face of being required to defend himself against a possible threat to his masculinity.

Similar exchanges occur multiple times throughout the novel and seem to be exclusively the domain of the male characters. Perhaps the clearest instance of Manny's use of the verb "fuck" in conjunction with the *chingón* occurs during a *clika* meeting. When another gang member, Chevy, points out that Lucía is in the room, Manny responds by stating: "Fuck you! I ain't no bitch!" (151). Manny's heated response stems from Chevy's questioning of his masculinity by implying that Manny cannot control Lucía. Manny's rhetoric returns the challenge because it possesses a gendered referent, "fuck," which is meant to position his challenger as the receptive *chingada* and himself as the active *chingón*. However, the addition of "I ain't no bitch" (151) also reveals the inherent connotation of the word "fuck" in this context because of its association with the *chingón/chingada* binary. Manny attempts to remove himself from the perception that he is feminized through the dual function of his statement. By saying "fuck you," he places Chevy in the open, female position and inflicts violation through his language. He also asserts his own position as closed male figure with the assurance that he is not a "bitch" because it is only the female who can be described in this way as a result of her association with receptivity, submission, and weakness within the binary structure.

As a man, Manny is forced through social mandates to enact power and aggression to prove his status as *chingón*, not only to maintain his manly status, but also to remain the leader of the Lobos. Manny is unable to retain his masculine status or his position in the Lobo gang, however, because he violates two tenets of masculinity as outlined by the figure of the *chingón*: he opens himself to another man and he shows weakness and submission. Both of these failures on Manny's part allow for Chico, Manny's best friend and right hand to go behind Manny's back

and create the Lobo's rival gang, the C-4s. Later, Beto is able to usurp Manny's position as the *jefe* of the Lobo gang as a result of Manny's weakness.

According to Paz, one of the most basic tenets of the *macho* that separates the male from the female, the *chingón* from the *chingada*, is the male's prerogative to remain closed and private in contrast to that of the female to be open and receptive.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, by not maintaining a solitary, guarded façade and trusting in Chico as a genuine friend, Manny unwittingly places himself in a detrimental position, partially removing himself from the sphere of the *chingón* and allowing himself to be "penetrated" as a result of his feelings for his friend. Chico takes advantage of Manny's friendship by stealing from him and causing him to be arrested. Even after Lucía warns Manny that Chico had framed him, Manny won't believe her. Lucía relates that "it took a long time before we was finished with [Chico] for good. Chico and Manny had been friends since they'd been kids and it was gonna take more...to break that up" (28). It is Manny's history of friendship with Chico that blinds him to his right hand's treacherous plans until it is too late. As Lucía explains, Manny has "to show himself tough and bloody to his enemy else he can't call himself a man" (138). Because he does not immediately assert himself, he loses credibility with his other gang members, resulting in Beto's ability to overthrow him.

Even with the privilege and autonomy afforded to him as a man, Manny finds himself in a continuous struggle to retain his position as a result of the edicts that accompany masculinity in the *clika* culture and its link to the *chingón/chingada* binary structure. Masculine performance in all aspects of life is necessary for men because masculinity is constructed culturally through the

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<sup>33</sup> As examined in chapter one, Paz's explanation of the gender binary associated with the *chingón/chingada* draws from their dual functions where men are seen as closed and reserved and women as open and receptive. For additional information about this dichotomy see Paz's chapter entitled "Sons of Malinche" in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.

perceptions of others.<sup>34</sup> Although the binary seems to afford a better position to men, they are also trapped within a cycle of enacting the requirements of the *chingón* and the masculine performance of the *macho*. If they fail, or are bested by a rival, they can lose their masculine power as well. To be *chingón* one must continually strive to actualize the ideal. Manny hints at this realization in a conversation with Cecilia when she finds him at the end of the novel as a junkie on the street. He states, “I know what you’re saying. Talking how I fucked it up. Didn’t mess Mauricio like I should. Didn’t beat Lucía good while I had my shot” (233). Manny’s declaration exposes the intrinsic flaw of the *chingón*’s cultural construction by noting the difficulty even those members afforded the ability by society to become *chingón* have in retaining the honors associated with this aspect of the binary structure. Ironically, Manny has “fucked it up” by not fucking others over to the degree which social perceptions believe appropriate. Manny’s exclusion from the *clika* proves that even men risk removal from their positions by failing to perform society’s construction of masculinity, the actions implied by *chingar*.

All three of the characters examined here are unable to either attain or maintain the position of the *chingón* throughout the novel. They become, in effect, stops upon a continuum of the binary in which Manny most closely represents the embodiment of the cultural conception of the *chingón*, Lucía balances in the middle of the scale not able to fully actualize either end of the spectrum, and Cecilia is most closely aligned with the *chingada*. The language of each character reveals the depth to which the cultural notion of the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy has penetrated their society and indicates the pervading nature of the binary within their cultural system. An

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<sup>34</sup> Masculine performativity is also discussed in more detail in chapter one. For further information about masculine performativity and masculinity theory see Butler, Connell, and Reeser.

examination of the concept of the dichotomy related through language reveals faults in each character's ability to obtain their desire of becoming *chingón* as a result of the inherent nature of the binary. The reality for all three characters is that none of them, not even Manny, can ever fully achieve the position of *chingón* within the binary as a result of the basic tenet of its construction that one must constantly be on guard for those who would place one in the position of the *chingada*. Members of a society who focus on oppositional structures such as those associated with the *chingón/chingada* dichotomy become trapped within the very social constructions they create. Ironically, one's ability to manifest oneself as the *chingón* ultimately results in the simultaneous placement of oneself as the *chingada* as a result of the submission to the ideal of the binary structure. The binary structure itself is the only aspect of these transactions that successfully satisfies the features of the *chingón* by its ability to control and bend those within the society that subscribe to that binary structure.

**Chapter Three: Rewriting *las Mujeres Jodidas*: Language, Sexuality, and Reclamation in  
Denise Chávez's *Loving Pedro Infante***

Published in 2001, Denise Chávez's *Loving Pedro Infante* examines the precarious position of Teresa (Tere) Avila, a thirty-something Chicana who is enamored with Pedro Infante, a popular Mexican actor and singer during the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema.<sup>35</sup> As a result of her idolization of the traditional masculinity portrayed by the men Pedro Infante played on screen, Tere is caught between her desires for a relationship with a man embodying the masculine ideal of Pedro and the necessity of recognizing the damaging effects of patriarchal edicts on both the men and women who subscribe to these models. Tere relates through her narrative the awkward position in which she finds herself as a person straddling the line between personal desires and cultural expectations. A devout member of the Pedro Infante Club de Admiradores #256, her obsession with Pedro Infante and the type of man he represents comes to symbolize her preoccupation with traditionally prescribed attitudes of men and women associated with the male/female and virgin/whore gender binaries. She longs for a love like those she witnesses in the cinematic representations of Pedro Infante's movies; however, her adherence to the cultural conventions implicit in the interactions between Pedro and his on-screen love interests serves more as a damaging agent to Tere's love life and psyche than a catalyst to prompt her toward traditional love. It is only through the turmoil she experiences with her married lover, Lucio, interactions with her friend, Irma, and her growing awareness of the cultural and romantic conventions portrayed in Pedro's movies that Tere comes to rethink her

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<sup>35</sup> Pedro Infante starred in 45 movies in Mexico between 1942 and 1957. He often portrayed strong, resilient characters. His good looks and talent as both a singer and an actor have endured for decades after his untimely death in a plane crash in 1957. Known as a macho playboy both on screen and off, the line between Pedro Infante in actuality and the men he played was often blurred. For further information concerning Pedro Infante's films and biography see Maciel.

infatuation with the Pedro motif and the sociocultural standards that define and support her place as a Chicana woman. Rather than attempting to usurp masculine agency as the female protagonists of *Locas*, Tere questions her culturally conditioned views of herself as a woman, eventually rejecting them.

Readings of *Loving Pedro Infante* often point to the importance of the impact Pedro's films have on Tere's ability to recognize and separate herself from harmful gender standards. Although Pedro Infante's films play a significant role in Tere's ability to reimagine her place as a Chicana, I would also argue that the use of discourse as a means to engage in self-reflection likewise plays a pivotal role in her ability to identify the detrimental effects of both the male and female gender binaries on her life. For Tere, language and the act of discourse are a method of meaning making that allow her to make sense of the events in her life. The novel is told through Tere's first person narration of the events that precipitate and unfold during her affair with Lucio. Tere breaks her narrative several times throughout the novel to question the reader and herself about her own actions, even noting at one point that her narrative is an attempt to map out her life as one might diagram a sentence. She states that "what [she's] really trying to do here is diagram and outline [her] life for you" (89). By relating her experiences with Lucio and her own beliefs associated with the gendered structure of her community, Tere not only outlines her life for the reader, but also for herself. The recursive action of revisiting her cultural ideologies associated with the male/female gender binary allows her a medium through which to question and ultimately reject its dictates. Language, therefore, is at the forefront of Chávez's novel and becomes a way for Tere to not only diagram her life in order to better understand the events that have unfolded for her, but also allows her an avenue of analysis and reflection which ultimately leads to her ability to better understand and accept who she is as a woman and as a Chicana.

Much of the scholarly research that has been conducted about *Loving Pedro Infante* draws upon the feminist aspects of the novel. The article “From Golden Age Mexican Cinema to Transnational Border Feminism: The Community of Spectators in *Loving Pedro Infante*” by Juanita Heredia explores how Chávez’s depiction of the characters’ reception of Pedro Infante’s films and the portrayal of Mexican cinema and machismo underscores a feminist perspective. Heredia also analyzes the novel’s impact in “Denise Chávez’s *Loving Pedro Infante*: The Making of a Transnational Border Community.” In this second article, Heredia posits that Chavéz not only advances a work that examines a new feminist consciousness, but is also able to bridge a cultural divide through her exploration of Mexican and Chicano/a influences. Christina Herrera examines the portrayal of friendships between Tere and Irma in “Comadres: Female Friendship in Denise Chávez’s *Loving Pedro Infante*.” In this article, Herrera analyzes Tere’s relationship with her best friend, Irma. She argues that Irma aids in Tere’s ability to create and embrace a new self and that the two women ultimately can be viewed as not merely friends, but true sisters.

Alternately, Maria Alicia Garza views several of Chávez’s works to support her supposition that the humorous aspects of the narrative allow for the “subversion of dominant discourses regarding class, gender, ethnicity, body politics, and identity” (70) in “Cooking up the Politics of Identity, Corporeality, and Cultura: Humor and Subversion in Denise Chávez’s *Loving Pedro Infante*.” Situating the novel within a burgeoning criticism of Chicano masculinities, Aishih Wehbe-Herrera examines the male aspects of the novel in “On Men and Machos: Analyzing Chicano Masculinity in Denise Chávez’s *Loving Pedro Infante* and Ana Castillo’s *Sapogonia*.” Wehbe-Herrera reads Chavéz’s novel as a text that attempts to reclaim the notion of the macho from its negative connotation and return it to its origins as the positive edicts

for male behavior. For Wehbe-Herrera, Pedro Infante is able to perform masculinity on the silver screen, but it is Tere who enacts the true spirit of the macho. Robert Davis-Undiano examines the use of characterization in the novel and equates Chávez herself with other authors, such as Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner in "Denise Chávez: Her New Book, *Loving Pedro Infante*, again Shows Her Love of Characters."

Many scholars have examined Chávez's novel in terms of the gender constructions associated with her characters, yet a distinct and important facet of these constructions is missing in each: the influence of language. In this chapter, I will view the ways in which Chávez's novel incorporates language use in order to question male-female and female-female gender binaries through the affirmation and interrogation of the role of these binaries in the lives of the characters, especially in the discourse surrounding Pedro Infante, Tere's lover, Lucio, and Tere herself. Although Tere's narrative is predominantly centered on the relationships between men and women and her life as a single woman in a small border town, a large part of her worldview is drawn from her heritage and its social expectations for both women and men. Throughout her narrative Tere conveys to the reader the expectations she has for a "perfect" male partner, which, not surprisingly, are intricately linked to the attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, she also draws heavily upon the female virgin/whore dichotomy in her descriptions of herself and her sex life, and this adherence to cultural lore has a detrimental effect on Tere's psyche and colors the way she views herself. It is not until she realizes that the traditionally masculine man that she seeks, a man like Pedro Infante, will only result in her misery as it did for so many of Pedro's real and on-screen romances, that she is able to reclaim her own agency and withdraw from the traditional guidelines set out by the male/female and virgin/whore gender binaries.

Throughout the majority of the novel, for Tere and the other members of the Pedro Infante fan club, it is clear that Pedro Infante is viewed as a representation of the Mexican “everyman,” the perfect “macho.” For many fans of Infante’s work in the Mexican cinema, Pedro Infante was just that both on and off the screen. Tere describes Pedro more than once as “the man we want our men to be...the man we imagine ourselves to be if we [were] men” (9) and “the man whose child we want to bear” (14). Tere’s observations of Pedro the man and Pedro’s movie characters are colored by her cultural heritage. Pedro represents the perfect man because he embodies the characteristics of the macho who is celebrated in Mexican/Chicano patriarchal culture. However, the concept of the macho can also be disputed. In her narrative, Tere outlines a rough definition of the macho:

I want to go on record saying that to be macho/macha isn’t bad, sometimes. That’s if you’re macho or macha in the right way. That’s if you look at the Mejicano definition of macho. Macho for Mejicanos has to do with strength and pride and ability to carry out responsibility. It doesn’t have to do with what the English language has done to a people. (52)

Here Tere notes that, although the descriptor “macho” has acquired a negative connotation, it is not deserving of this understanding of the term. She points to the translation of the word as the inception of its association with the negative, arguing that “in English, macho means demanding, unbending, chauvinistic, condescending and downright ugly. My culture has suffered from too much translation” (52). Tere’s assessment of the macho seems to point to a misunderstanding of the actualization of the term as a negative; however, Tere’s description of the term also contains qualifying language that she is either unaware of or chooses to ignore. She notes that the act of being macho/a is not bad, but qualifies this statement with the addition of “sometimes” (52). Similarly, she finds that there is a right and wrong way to be macho/a, and only by being macho/a in the “right” way can one affect the true definition of the term. In Tere’s estimation,

the correct way to enact characteristics of the macho/a is to do so by adhering to the “Mejicano definition” (52) rather than the bastardized English translation. So, for Tere, the macho/a is corrupted by the English conception of the term.

The reader is left to question, however, whether Tere’s estimation of the figure of the macho/a are in fact a reflection of an acculturated term or if they are viewed at times in a similar fashion in the Mexican/Chicano culture. The discourse surrounding the idea of the macho is varied as Tere describes. Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos point to the negative association of the term as the true meaning of the macho because the macho is intrinsically linked through culture to the male who must be seen performing action and aggression.<sup>36</sup> However, while some scholars subscribe to a version of the macho that can be read as negative, others, such as Alfredo Mirandé argue that the idea of the macho is removed from its proper context to create a negative image of the macho figure. Mirandé’s assessment of the macho attitude aligns with Tere’s idea of the “correct” definition of macho behavior.<sup>37</sup>

Despite disagreements in identifying the term macho as either a positive or negative character attribute, what can be surmised is that the word does have multiple connotations and thus, through the cultural understanding of the term, can be enacted in a multitude of ways, both positive and negative. Tere’s idealization and admiration of Pedro Infante both in real life and in the fantasy of his films reveals the conflicting nature of the attributes associated with the macho,

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<sup>36</sup> Paz examines the construct of the macho in several pieces included in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and other Writings*. The macho is also explored by Samuel Ramos in *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*.

<sup>37</sup> Mirandé finds through his studies that actual Mexican/Chicano men are not as harsh and strictly patriarchal as the common understanding of the word macho suggests. In both “A Representation...” and *Hombres y Machos* Mirandé’s studies of family and word associations do reveal that the adoption of macho as an English term has tainted its acceptance among the subjects in his research.

machismo, and the Mexican/Chicano ideal of a “real man.” Through her descriptions of Pedro Infante the reader is able to witness how these qualities can be perceived, and sometimes be enacted simultaneously. However, ideals work across divisions and Tere’s definition of a real man, a pure *macho*, is not relegated solely to her admiration of Infante but instead is incorporated into her worldview, whereby she measures every other man she encounters.

Significantly, Tere draws a linguistic line of reference from the construct of the macho/a to Mexican/Chicano culture translated through the lens of the U.S. culture. Not only has the idea of the macho/a taken on an English referent through its negative qualities, but all Spanish terms are also forced through the English language only to emerge broken on the other side. It is the Americanization of Mexican/Chicano culture and language that Tere ties to the disintegration of her heritage. She notes this phenomenon in her discussion of the assimilative practices of her Chicano peers through their altering of their children’s names to be more Anglicized. Tere finds that this occurrence has “created a generation of super-stud Coors drinkers and forget-the-boycott grape eaters and half-baked Hispanic party boys” (52). The “boys” that Tere references here are far removed from the macho men played by Pedro Infante.

Ultimately, Tere’s assessment of the macho is constructed through the linguistic lens of conditioning, where the same tropes have appeared so often that they have become a part of the Chicano/a cultural mindset not only in the perceived connotation of its enactment in Latino culture but also through the ways in which these understandings of terms which name cultural phenomenon affect culture itself. This view culminates in Tere’s observation that Cabritoville becomes a cultural and gendered borderland “with a never-ending horizon of women struggling to find a place to rest in the shade of dreams that are dying” as well as “a world of men struggling to be men, men refusing to let other men be men, and women to be themselves” (54).

Effectively, the people of Cabritoville have come to embody the new Anglicized concept of Latino/a culture either because of the connotations of the terms as read through the English language or as an attempt to more fully identify with US culture through assimilation, which is unclear in Tere's brief discussion. Tere, and the men and women she describes, inhabit a border community in more than a physical sense as they embrace both their Mexican as well as American cultural heritage and seek to meld both into an inhabitable socio-cultural space.

Despite Tere's disinclination to adhere to an Anglicized version of the macho, she nevertheless does find the Anglicized macho figure attractive, most often referencing the characteristics of Pedro Infante that adhere to this definition when she holds him up as a model of masculine perfection in her own mind. Pedro Infante, the man, becomes for Tere inseparable from the characters he plays in his films, and Tere draws comparisons between the real Pedro and his many fictional counterparts. For Tere, the characters Pedro Infante plays in the movies mirror his authentic self because "Pedro's real life was just as passionate as the one he played" (5). It is the joined Pedros that become representative of the ideal man, and this idolization creates the lens through which Tere views Pedro and other men.

Pedro Infante is referenced in Tere's narrative in conjunction with his films. In fact, he is most often explored in-depth through Tere's discourse in the form of "Pedro-as," referencing his various cinematic characterizations. He becomes Pedro-as-Pablo, Pedro-as-Pepe, and, eventually, Pedro-as-Pedro. Each of the characters that Pedro plays embody the masculine values of culture that Tere comes to internalize as correct or proper masculinity. As Pablo, "Pedro plays a melancholic loner...who keeps leaving any number of possible lives behind, and all sorts of

women who might have loved him” (4).<sup>38</sup> Tere’s descriptions of Pedro-as-Pablo can be directly connected to the closed masculine façade of the Mexican macho outlined by Octavio Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*. He is a self-possessed “loner” who is attached neither to his own life nor to the women who have the misfortune of loving him. Paz’s construction of the Mexican macho as one who endures misfortune is constructed in the discussion of Pedro-as-Pepe, who guards his family’s secrets at all costs, costs that exact the majority of their payment from the women in Pedro-as-Pepe’s life.<sup>39</sup> Tere notes that “if Pedro-as-Pepe had only told the truth...a lot of heartache could have been spared” (150). Pedro-as-Pepe exemplifies the figure of the stoic macho who keeps his secrets in order to maintain his closed aspect.<sup>40</sup>

Both Pablo and Pepe, the characters that Pedro played, are composite representations of the macho. The nature of Pedro’s appearance in Tere’s narrative and consciousness as composites of an idealized macho can be read as a symbolic representation of the performative aspects of masculinity often foisted upon men in a patriarchal society that values certain masculine characteristics above others. Masculine performativity as a cultural phenomenon has been explored by scholars such as Judith Butler and R.W. Connell.<sup>41</sup> The general premise notes

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<sup>38</sup> The film Tere references here is *La Vida No Vale Nada*, which appeared in theaters in 1955. The story line follows Pedro Infante’s character, Pablo, on his wanderings. He eventually settles into a new town and begins a romance with a widow, Cruz, to the disappointment of the town priest.

<sup>39</sup> Here Tere refers to Pedro’s film *Nosotros los Pobres* (1948), in which he plays the character Pepe “*el Toro*.” The secret Pepe hides is that his daughter, Chachita, is actually the daughter of his sister who is a whore. By keeping this information from Chachita, Pepe puts into motion events that prove to be detrimental to all involved.

<sup>40</sup> See Paz pages 29-32.

<sup>41</sup> Masculine performativity is discussed in-depth by Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* and “Critically Queer.” R. W. Connell also explores aspects of performativity in his examination of the sociological constructs associated with masculinity in different forms, *Masculinities*. The idea of masculine performativity posits that men are forced to “perform” masculinity by projecting an image of themselves that aligns with the ideals of the dominant masculinity in their society. Therefore, a society that idealizes men with physical strength, sex appeal, multiple

that in order for men to be accepted they must perform or enact the edicts of hegemonic dominant masculinity. Those men who do not or cannot fulfill these roles are viewed as lesser in the eyes of the dominant culture. While the characters that Pedro Infante played on screen were performative in a literal sense as fictionalized men, they also manifest and support the ideal of the macho and dominant masculine standards by contributing to the Mexican/Chicano/a worldview. Through her observations of Pedro's characters on film, Tere also internalizes this view, reiterates it through her narrative, and searches for a man who embodies these characteristics in reality. The man whom she finds is Lucio Valadez, a married man whose daughter attends the elementary school where Tere works. Lucio has many commonalities with Pedro Infante and the men he played in the movies. Tere finds Lucio attractive and describes him as "confident, without fear. Puro chingón" (44).

The moment that Tere pinpoints as the impetus for her love of Lucio occurs when she witnesses a display of affection between Lucio and his daughter, Andrea, during lunch at school. Although in this event Tere portrays Lucio as a caring father and seemingly attaches him to her previously discussed definition of the Mexican macho, Tere again qualifies that definition. Tere notes that Lucio and Andrea "were so happy, so complete unto themselves" and that they have a "love stretched between them, like invisible wires" (46), which shows Lucio's adherence to Tere's definition of the Mexican macho as being responsible for and showing pride in his family. Watching this scene play out, Tere draws her first line of reference between Lucio and Pedro Infante as well, stating that the interactions between father and daughter are reminiscent of Pedro's connection with his on-screen children. Yet she also notes that their bond is malleable

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female sexual partners, etc. will cause men in that society to attempt to live up to those standards or face denigration by falling within a lesser form of masculine actualization.

and dependent on outside forces. Those forces may be as innocuous as the inevitability of little girls growing up, or they can have a more insidious referent, that male agency allows for men to leave their families and adherence to the tenet of the macho that views him as a lady's man. In Tere's description, Lucio holds Andrea "as close as he could, before the world and all the other women in it intervened" (46). By inserting this final statement into her description of Lucio and Andrea's relationship, Tere also points to the inevitability of interference and intrusion from others by the macho's ability to wander. The qualifications that Tere uses in her description of Lucio as a macho, as someone who is culturally read as "*puro chingón*," reveals the commonality between what she sees as a distinguishable definition of the macho regardless of whether it is read through an English or Spanish translation. In both translations, macho associates virility and female conquest with masculine attributes, therefore complicating the possibility for familial affection and responsibility in either.

What first attracts Tere to Lucio are the same characteristics that doom their relationship before it even begins. Similar to Pedro Infante's on-and-off screen love affairs, Lucio leaves Tere heartbroken and forlorn because in his embodiment as the handsome macho, he also possesses the cruel, closed attributes that contribute to that masculine model. Of all the characters that Tere describes in terms of "Pedro-as," Pedro-as-Pedro is most similar to Lucio (167). In this film Pedro-as-Pedro is a cruel, crippled drunk whose wife is put upon by his self-pity and penchant to waste their income on drunken escapades.<sup>42</sup> Tere asserts that Lucio and Pedro-as-Pedro share "the same sort of irritated turn-on-a-peseta flare-ups that become ugly once he doesn't get his way. The same kind of irrefutable heart-wrenching sexiness despite the flawed nature of the

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<sup>42</sup> Tere is referring to Pedro Infante's 1952 film, *Ahora Soy Rico*, in which Infante plays a man who is down on his luck yet is able to turn his life around to become wealthy.

beast” (167). They present the “vain, pompous, and self-assured bravado” of “bad little boys. Unreliable men. Terrible husbands. Distracted sons. Questionable fathers. Insatiable lovers” (168). Tere’s description of Pedro-as-Pedro, and of Lucio through association, portrays not only the hyper masculine attributes of self-assurance and bravado but also implies the closed nature that contributes to their failings as sons, fathers, and husbands. Consequently, by placing Lucio in comparison to Pedro’s character in the film, Tere also reveals her placement of Lucio as a performative simulation of dominant masculinity. She constructs Lucio for the reader much as the producers of Pedro’s films constructed Pedro-as-Pablo, Pepe, and Pedro. Although Tere’s observations of Lucio’s similarities to Pedro-as-Pedro draw a linguistic line of reference to masculine performance through association, Lucio himself contributes to the same designation through his actions in the novel.

While the role of macho that Pedro and Lucio occupy has obvious drawbacks, an equal force is exerted on Tere as a female who must adhere to society’s expectations of her sex. Like her obsession with the macho Pedro, Tere also plays into the construct surrounding the binary of the virgin/whore. Although Tere does not appear to subscribe wholeheartedly to the virgin/whore dichotomy in its traditional form, she has obviously internalized the basic foundational tenets of the binary that offer her a role as wife and mother in order to be firmly placed on the positive side of the continuum.

Tere’s adherence to the views expressed by the conceptualization of the female gender binary associated with the virgin/whore dichotomy is evident in the words that she uses to describe herself and her actions throughout the novel. She knows that “every family has its puta. In our family, it’s me” (132). By labeling herself as the family’s *puta* or “whore” she notes that her acts of transgressive sex have damaged her. Tere knows that in her community her sex life is

associated with female sexual transgression because as an unmarried woman she has willingly eschewed cultural guidelines in favor of her own physical pleasures. Although Tere labels herself a *puta* and therefore firmly places herself in the female gender binary spectrum as whore rather than virgin, much of her association of this term, as with her ideology surrounding the macho, is constructed from the way she is perceived by those in her community. The female gender binary is constructed through the act of discourse, community and cultural standards, and policed through linguistic mechanisms, namely the proliferation of town gossip.

Tere knows that the other women in her community do not approve of her actions or her single status based on the way in which women in her position are viewed and discussed by other members of the community. She is not even spared speculation by those she associates with as one of her Pedro Infante fan club members, Ofelia Contreras, and Ofelia's friend Elisa Urista both view her as a wayward woman: "According to them [Tere] was the type who was always 'de parranda' looking for a good time, anytime, anywhere and with anyone" (26). Because she is a single woman who dates and goes to bars to have fun, the other members of her community view her in a negative light. Tere notes that "when you play the field in Cabritoville, the field is pretty rough terrain. After a while you're branded with a Big A, or in my culture, a Big P, for Puta" (46). Tere's depiction of how she is viewed in her community is reminiscent of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. While the reference appears humorous, it also enables the reader an intertextual insight into the detrimental worldview still perpetuated through the virgin/whore binary. Because Tere's actions as a single woman do not adhere to the cultural rules surrounding her position as a female on the gender binary she is placed in the view of her acquaintances as a negative on the spectrum of the virgin/whore dichotomy.

Aside from Tere's association with community policing of proper female behavior, she also linguistically aligns herself with the whore through her descriptions of herself throughout the novel as "*jodida*." In many instances throughout the novel Tere uses this word to describe herself and her situation. In English, the word *jodida* can be translated as "fucked," "damned," "broken," or "tough." If Pedro Infante is presented as the quintessential macho, *un chingón*, then Tere appears as the *chingada*, at least in the beginning of the novel. From her descriptions of her character and actions, Tere becomes equated with these tropes. For all intents and purposes Tere is both literally and figuratively fucked by Lucio, by her community, and by her own acceptance of the edicts placed on her as a woman in her culture. She is fucked figuratively as a female who enjoys physical and sexual pleasures to be ostracized and aligned with the conception of the bad woman through her association with the whore in the binary structure. She is also damned and broken. Damned by the community and cultural perception of her and broken by her relationship with Lucio that leaves her unable to function when she learns that he will not leave his wife and in fact has another mistress. In her cultural estimation Tere is also broken because of her alignment with the whore, unfit to ever take a position aligned with the virgin as a wife and mother because of her past transgressions.

At the beginning of the novel Tere views herself through the male centered cultural lens associated with the figures of the dominant male and submissive female as well as the female gendered binary associated with Malinche and the *chingada* as the bad women on one side and the Virgen de Guadalupe and her cult of *marianismo* as positive on the other. As a result, Tere is discouraged from realizing her authentic self as a woman because she faces a struggle between these two constricting views of what it means to be female in her culture. Perhaps there is no more telling discourse within the novel than that concerning Tere's shame in body and mind

when she describes her sexual activity with Lucio. Tere describes her lust in the basest of terms, equating herself with an animal by stating: “I was an unclean dog in heat” (64). She also says that she was “a wild woman, but not in a good way” (64). There is no cinematic glow for Tere in her relations with Lucio. Tere continues to describe her situation:

Aquella Noche my mind was weak and Lucio’s was strong. We weren’t equals. I was the woman fucked and he was the man standing over me as I was draped over the bed like a costal of green chile, a wet gunnysack without support....It was a cartoon fuck....I felt foolish and stupid and undignified. (65)

Each of the comparisons that Tere makes for herself contain negative connotations and place her in a position of weakness. As an “unclean dog in heat” (64) she linguistically constructs herself as less than by noting her lack of cleanliness both in the state of her body and mind. Concerned that she has not had time to prepare for her lovemaking with Lucio, Tere is ashamed of her cracked heels and leg stubble. More significant, however, is that she equates herself with an animal both in stating her similarity to a dog and a wild woman. She is overcome with desire for Lucio, releasing her from her civilized feminine self that checks those unsavory urges as unladylike and has given in to instinct and desire. By losing control of herself, Tere has allowed her feminine weakness to bend to her desire, her wild nature because good women are not supposed to give in to their desires.

Similarly, she is weak because of her position as an object for Lucio’s sexual fulfillment. In describing her account of their sexual relations, she places herself conspicuously beneath him on the bed. Not only is she beneath, overpowered by his physicality and her own abandonment of perceived morality, her descriptions of her person as a “wet gunny sack” and “costal of green chile” also position her as flimsy and uncertain as both items offer little support or resistance to outside forces. By describing herself in this way, Tere places herself also in the position of the *chingada* as open and receptive to the force of the closed *chingón*, Lucio.

For Tere, her affair with Lucio is degrading and humiliating not so much because of the sexual acts themselves, but because it goes against cultural edicts that police female sexuality outside of marriage and for the purpose of bearing children. Tere notes in her narrative that she desires the traditional family elements: a husband, a home, children. Yet, she cannot realize her desires in her relationship with a married man who already has a child. Although Tere states that she does not subscribe completely to the idea that women must remain pure or not enjoy sex at all, it is evident in her discussion of her sex life and use of birth control that she also finds the act of preventing a possible pregnancy with a man whom she believes she loves unsavory and undignified.

In fact, an entire chapter of the novel is concerned with Tere's attempt to rescue a forgotten diaphragm from Lucio's hotel room. While Tere's account of the ordeal is self-deprecating and laced with humor, the language she uses to describe the diaphragm, herself, and her situation infuse an element of negativity into the otherwise humorous account. The reader is immediately struck by the chapter title, "Pink Eye." A play on the shape and color of the diaphragm, which Tere also notes resembles "a peeping flesh-colored eye reverently closed" (97). However, after reading the descriptions of the other names she uses for her diaphragm, "pink eye" begins to conjure thoughts of swollen eyes oozing with the effects of conjunctivitis.

Aside from the diaphragm's association with a painful and temporarily disfiguring condition, Tere has other pet names for her method of birth control. Among them are "Swamp Thing" (94), "Monster from Hell" (95), "Alien" (95), "Creature from Planet X" (95), "Rosemary's Baby" (96), "Godzilla" (96), and "El Demonio" (97). Tere describes her diaphragm in the worst terms, equating it with classic horror figures, aliens, and even a demon. Each of the descriptors is associated with an aberration, something that does not belong, that infiltrates

normalcy and wreaks havoc. In a way, the descriptors Tere uses for her diaphragm mirror her own conceptions of herself and her sexuality. In her culture's conception of her and through her own internalization of those concepts, she also is an infiltrator in her role as mistress to a married man, inserting herself into another's marriage in a similar fashion as the diaphragm is inserted into her sex in order to prevent any evidence of her transgressions. More importantly, if the diaphragm becomes a symbol for Tere herself, it works also to symbolize her impression of herself as the whore on the dichotomous line formed by her cultural associations with her place as a woman as it relates to love and sex.

Tere's concern upon finding her diaphragm missing and her need to return to the hotel and retrieve it is not due to its function, but to its very existence and that it might be seen by a maid. It is a "dripping reminder of [her] darkest transgression" (97), proof not only that she is having an affair but that she is a woman who enjoys sex, who eschews the virgin role in favor of the whore. She is terrified that it will be found by one of the hotel maids, whom she knows, not because it can be traced back to her but because of the shame she feels that it even exists. Tere is disgusted that the maid will have the responsibility of discarding it and imagines the maid's reaction to the discovery:

Marta, Uvalia's sister, would have to pick up my diaphragm with a brown paper towel and throw it away, squinching her nose and trying to avert her eyes, thinking all the while: Cochinos, marranos, sin verguenzas. Here I am. Me. Left to clean this filth. (102)

By leaving her diaphragm in the hotel room and forcing the maid to discard it, Tere believes that she has also made Marta complicit in Tere's own shame. The fictional scenario of Marta discovering and disposing of the item also points to the negative connotations of female sexuality.

The terms Tere imagines Marta will use when she discovers the diaphragm result from the cultural constructions of open expressions of female sexuality as an unsavory action. Marta labels the perpetrators “*cochinos*” and “*sin verguenzas*” branding them as filthy, disgusting, and shameless. Although Tere knows that her name is not on the diaphragm and Marta would not know whether the couple who had shared the room were married, dating, or having an illicit affair, she nevertheless imagines that Marta will be disgusted with the finding and lament that she has to be the one to dispose of the apparatus. That Marta would find even the evidence of marital coitus shameful reveals that it is the act of female sex that is viewed as filthy and appalling.

Throughout Tere’s narrative relating the actions and consequences of her love affair with Pedro Infante and her not-so-loving affair with Lucio, she also references the image of her favorite tree, which she has named Gabina. The image of Gabina recurs at important moments for Tere in the narrative. When Tere is at her lowest points she either finds herself in the vicinity of the tree or actively seeks it out. Significantly, Gabina arrives in Tere’s narrative initially on the night her affair with Lucio begins when they encounter each other at a fourth of July celebration. Tere absently hopes that the fireworks do not set anything on fire, especially Gabina (62). Gabina appears again when Tere is frantically searching for her diaphragm and she remembers herself as “a young girl unappreciated by all men” (93) finding comfort in the tree’s shade. Though Tere is not appreciated by the men in her life even as she remembers her connection to the tree in her youth, the tree has endured as a symbol of herself. She believes that she “was that lonely tree, Gabina, a woman so full of mystery, a spirit so deep no one dared to see me as I truly was” (93). Where Tere finds no comfort or salvation in men, she does connect to the feminine represented by the enduring nature of the tree.

Consequently, it is Tere's feminist friend, Irma, who brings her to the tree when Tere needs to clear her mind and rethink her relationship with Lucio. After Tere has not heard from Lucio for several days and believes that he has found another mistress, Irma takes her on a drive and they end up at the alamo where Gabina grows. Tere knows that "Irma had brought [her] here to gather what strength [she] could, in Gabina's tender, embracing shade" (159). Similarly, Tere brings Lucio to Gabina when she knows that he is seeing someone else, and Tere only seeks out Gabina purposefully when her affair with Lucio is over and she has realized the faults in the macho figures of both Pedro and Lucio: "I drove in the direction of Gabina. That great giant tree. The mother tree. I would sit there in the darkness of those deep roots for a while and breathe in the immensity of that old, steady cottonwood" (320). For Tere, Gabina comes to symbolize more than cool shade and embracing roots. She becomes the ancient mother who guards and protects her daughter from harm. As representation of ancient mother, Gabina is endowed with pre-Conquest understandings of womanhood, not associated with either the non-virtuous Malinche and Llorona or the virtuous Virgen. Instead, she embodies the aspects of the female Aztec goddesses Coatlicue and Tonantzin. Tere draws strength from the enduring aspects of Gabina who can also be read as a recognition of the enduring aspects of the ancient feminine. It is only when Tere is able to relinquish her socially informed constructions of what the ideal man, and the ideal woman, are that she is able to reclaim her feminine heritage and resurrect through her love of the tree her own feminine cultural roots.

In Tere's fictional narrative the reader is able to accompany her on her journey of self-discovery, a journey that cannot be fully actualized until she speaks her renewed self into being through her written discourse. The reflective purposes of writing as a means to self-understanding allow Tere to make sense of her life and the hardships she has faced because of

her adherence to a cultural norm that places men and women on opposite ends of a spectrum. By forfeiting her desire for a man like Pedro Infante, a man who embodies all the characteristics of the quintessential macho, Tere is also able to reconnect with and reclaim her own cultural heritage as a woman and to relinquish the shame constructed about her sexuality and herself as a result. She comes to discover that rather than a bad woman she is instead only “a good person—who is sometimes bad” (284). By realizing that the social and cultural construction of female binaries create an impossible dichotomy, Tere is able to loosen the power that both the male/female and virgin/whore gender binaries exert on her life. Discursive reflection allows her to recognize the damaging effects that these binaries place on her, and Tere is able to free herself by questioning her adherence to their dictates. Unlike the female protagonists in *Locas*, she neither wishes to possess and embody the characteristics of the macho *chingón* nor those of the long-suffering virgin in order to prove her worth to her community and herself. Instead, she is able to transcend both binaries through the realization that each is limiting.

## Conclusion

Although language can perpetuate damaging ideologies, and often does when used by dominant groups that seek to preserve and disseminate their own beliefs to maintain power, it is not static; it grows and evolves. Language, then, allows marginalized groups to seek, reclaim, and redefine their linguistically constructed social places. Through their literary efforts, Yxta Maya Murray and Denise Chávez call into question the social hierarchy inherent in the conception of the male/female and virgin/whore gender binaries. Murray's *Locas* undermines the male/female binary by exposing the detrimental aspects inherent in its construction, revealing that a social system built upon the need to control and subjugate half of its citizenry ultimately entraps all members. In a more positive examination of the workings of gendered binaries, Chávez's *Loving Pedro Infante* identifies, questions, and finally rejects the binary structure's dictates. Instead, Chávez's protagonist seeks to reclaim both her cultural and feminine heritage.

It is through such efforts that the three mothers of the Chicana, Malinche, Llorona, and the Virgen can be reclaimed by the very women they are meant to represent. Rather than caricatures used as cautionary tales to warn girls and young women about the detrimental aspects of their womanhood, Malinche and Llorona are resurrected through Chicana literature as powerful, positive figures of feminine history. The Virgen is also revised from her position in the cultural imaginary as benevolent, long-suffering mother as an agent of her own destiny, endowed with choice regarding if, when, and how to become a wife and mother.

Continued examination of the ways in which Chicana authors revise, reimagine, and subvert constructions of these gendered binaries are important. Just as these authors have resurrected and reclaimed positive aspects of these historical figures and the lore surrounding them, continued scrutiny and discussion of various views associated with the binary structures

enable feminist authors and scholars to develop further discourse and enact change in the conceptions of real women within a culture that holds fast to the models upon which these constructs are built. If language, as Deborah Cameron notes, does in fact “speak us,” we must endeavor to expand our understanding of the ways in which Chicana authors expose, question, and transgress upon these ideologies through their representations of historical figures and fictional circumstances. Examination of works by Chicana authors with a distinct focus on gender and sociolinguistic theories must continue in order to expose the conditioning of gendered directives.

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