Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality

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This essay is an attempt to map in broad general terms the origins and development of the Chicano movement in the United States from approximately 1965 to the present. As a prolegomenon to a larger research project on this topic, what is sketched below is but a thematic blueprint, devoid of all the baroque embellishments that greater space and time would permit. As a person who was weaned politically on the rhetorical claims of the movement, and as a university professor who has taught courses on Chicano history for well over ten years, the account presented here mixes insider and outsider knowledge drawn primarily from the fields of anthropology, history, literature, and sociology.

Mexican Americans fought in World War II to make the world safe for democracy. Fighting beside other assimilated immigrants, they believed the national promise that when they returned home, the American Dream of social mobility and middle-class status would be theirs. The troops returned to what became a period of unprecedented economic growth in the United States. It was in this period, between 1945 and 1960, that America's global economic hegemony was truly consolidated. For white American men the dream was indeed realized.


The G.I. Bill of Rights helped educate many of them. The consumer goods, the cars, the stocked refrigerators, money to spare, and government loans to educate their children soon followed. But the benefits, the dreams, and the cash were not equitably distributed. Blacks, Mexicans, and persons of Asian ancestry, all legitimately Americans, had been left out. The 1960 census of the United States graphically showed how far the minority populations lagged behind white America.

These realizations were made potent by the peaceful activism of Cesar Chavez, who was trying to win better wages and work conditions for farmworkers; by Reies López Tijerina’s attempts to regain lands fraudulently stolen from New Mexico’s hispanos; and by the worldwide crumbling of imperialism and the rise of new nationalisms. This complex conjuncture of structural forces was what sparked the Chicano movement. What differentiated the Chicano movement from the civil rights activities of such groups as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the American G.I. Forum, or the numerous mutual aid societies that Mexicanos had created to better their socioeconomic situation, was the Movimiento’s radical political stance. The civil rights movement of the 1940s and 1950s had sought slow, peaceful change through assimilation, through petitions for governmental beneficence, and through appeals to white liberal guilt. The Chicanos, largely a contingent of educated students, in a revolution sparked by rising expectations, demanded equality with white America; demanded an end to racism, and asserted their right to cultural autonomy and national self-determination.

Since so much of the ethnic militancy that Chicanos articulated was profoundly influenced by black nationalism, it is important to recall one of the truly poignant insights in the Autobiography of Malcolm X. Reciting the psychic violence that racism and discrimination had wreaked on African Americans, Malcolm X noted that the most profound had been the emasculation of black men. In the eyes of white America blacks were not deemed men. Thus whatever else the Black Power movement was, it was also about the cultural assertion of masculinity by young radical men.

Chicanos faced what was undoubtedly a rather similar experience—social emasculation and cultural negation—by seeking strength and inspiration in a heroic Aztec past. The Aztec past they chose emphasized the virility of warriors and the exercise of brute force. Young Chicano men, a largely powerless group, invested themselves with images of
power—a symbolic inversion commonly found in the fantasies of powerless men worldwide, a gendered vision that rarely extends to women.

Equally important to the young Chicano radicals was the construction of a moral community that was largely imagined as spatial and territorial. Aztlán, the legendary homeland of the Aztecs, was advanced as the territory Chicanos hoped to repossess someday. Despite the fuzziness of the concept, its imprecise geographic limits, and the previous claims to the territory that American Indians could justly claim, the dream of Aztlán sank deep roots.

The idea and theory of internal colonialism flowed quite logically from this spatial concept of community. Chicanos were an internally colonized population within the United States. They were socially, culturally, and economically subordinated and territorially segregated by white Anglo-Saxon America. These concepts receive definition in the works of Rudy Acuña and myself in history, Tomás Almaguer in sociology, Mario Barrera and Carlos Muñoz in political science, and in numerous cultural productions and artistic works.¹

When this analysis was taken from the global to the local, the barrio became its focus. We see this very clearly in the scholarly works that provide the foundation for Chicano history: Albert Camarillo’s Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848–1930, Richard Griswold del Castillo’s The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850–1890, and Ricardo Romo’s East Los Angeles: A History of a Barrio.²

If anything defined the ethics of this moral community, it was the belief in collectivism and an explicit rejection of individualism.³ Chicanoism meant identifying with la raza (the race or people), and collectively promoting the interests of carnales (or brothers) with whom they shared a common language, culture, religion, and Aztec heritage.

Examining any of the Chicano scholarly or artistic productions between 1965 and 1975 clearly indicates one point. The history of Chicanos was thought to have begun in 1848, at the end of the U.S.-Mexican War. This date heightened the legacy of Anglo racism toward Chicanos. For as Armando Navarre would write, “Chicano politics [and history have] always been imbued with a spirit of resistance toward Anglo-American oppression and domination.” The relationship between Anglos and Chicanos
was conceived out of a master-servant relationship between the Anglo conqueror and the Chicano conquered. The Chicano reacted politically in two ways to the master-servant relationship. Some Chicanos collaborated and accommodated the Anglo invader and engaged in “ballot box politics.” Other Chicanos, however, rejected the conquest and resorted to violence, guerrilla warfare and banditry.⁴

The years 1965 to 1969 were heydays of Chicano activism, largely, though not exclusively, on college and university campuses. Coming from working class backgrounds and feeling privileged by their college draft exemptions, Chicanos identified with workers and peasants, and indeed, wrote a heroic past of worker struggles and strikes, resistance to Anglo oppression, and indigenous cultural pride.

But all was not well in Eden. By 1969, at the very moment Corky Gonzales was trying to weld a fractured Chicano student movement into a national force, the more radical Chicanas were beginning to see themselves as triply oppressed —by their race, their gender, and their class. “Women students were expected by their male peers to involve themselves actively but in subordination,” recalled Adelaida del Castillo. It was not uncommon in those days for the movement’s men “to request sexual cooperation as proof of commitment to the struggle, by gratifying the men who fought it.”⁵ Although the movement persistently had advocated the self-actualization of all Chicanos, Chicanos still actually meant only males.

Within the Chicano student movement, women were denied leadership roles and were asked to perform only the most traditional stereotypic roles—cleaning up, making coffee, executing the orders men gave, and servicing their needs. Women who did manage to assume leadership positions were ridiculed as unfeminine, sexually perverse, promiscuous, and all too often, taunted as lesbians. “When a woman leader had a compañero, he was frequently taunted or chided by the other men for failure to keep her under his control,” recalled one woman.⁶

A 1970 incident at San Diego State University was particularly telling of the tenor of those days. There women had managed to assume leadership over the campus Chicano student group. When it was announced that Corky Gonzalez was going to visit the campus, an intense debate ensued. “It was considered improper and embarrassing for a national leader to come on campus and see that the organization’s leadership was female,” recalled one of the campus leaders.
"Consequently, the organization decided that only males would be the visible representatives for the occasion. The female chairperson willingly conceded."  

The sexism rampant in the Chicano movement was increasingly critiqued in various forms. Marcela Christine Lucero-Trujillo made the point powerfully in her poem, "Machismo Is Part of Our Culture."

Hey Chicano bossman  
don't tell me that machismo is part of our culture  
if you sleep  
and marry W.A.S.P.  
You constantly remind me,  
me, your Chicana employee  
that machi-machi-machismo  
is part of our culture.  
I'm conditioned, you say,  
to bearing machismo  
which you only learned  
day before yesterday.  
At home you're no patrón  
your liberated gabacha  
has gotcha where  
she wants ya,  
y a mi me ves cara  
de steppin' stone.  
Your culture emanates  
from Raza posters on your walls  
from bulletin boards in the halls  
and from the batos who hang out at the barrio bar.  
Chicanismo through osmosis  
acquired in good doses  
remind you  
to remind me  
that machi-machi-machismo  
is part of our culture."

In the poem "You Cramp My Style, Baby," Lorna Dee Cervantes took the rhetorical language of the Chicano movement, mixed it with elements from Mexican culture, and drew the appropriate sexual lesson:

You cramp my style, baby  
when you roll on top of me  
shouting, "Viva La Raza"  
at the top of your prick.
You want me como un taco
dripping grease,
or squeezing masa through my legs,
making tamales for you out of my daughters.9

Articles were also beginning to appear in the movement press highlighting the contradiction between racial and sexual oppression in the Chicano movement. Irene Rodarte posed the question: "Machismo or revolution?"10; a question Guadalupe Valdes Fallis reformulated as tradition or liberation.11 Others such as Anna Nieto-Gómez, Velia García [then Hancock], and Mirta Vidal spoke out about the sexism in the movimiento and militated for the liberation of women.12

Chicano men initially regarded the feminist critique as an assault on their Mexican cultural past, on their power, and by implication, on their virility. If Chicanos were going to triumph in their anticapitalist, anticolonial revolt, divisiveness could not be tolerated. Bernice Zamora in "Notes from a Chicana COED," captured the tenor of the tug of war that would characterize this period.

To cry that the gabacho
is our oppressor is to shout
in abstraction, carnal.
He no more oppresses us
than you do now as you tell me
"It's the gringo who oppresses you, Babo."
You cry "The gringo is our oppressor!"
to the tune of $20,000 to $30,000
a year, brother, and I wake up
alone each morning and ask,
"Can I feed my children today?" . . .

And when I mention
your G.I. Bill, your
Ford Fellowship, your
working wife, your
three gabacha guisas
then you ask me to
write your thesis
you're quick to shout,
"Don't give that
Women's Lib trip, mujer
that only divides us, and we have to work
together for the movimiento
the gabacho is oppressing us!
Oye carnal, you may as well
tell me that moon water
cures constipation, that
penguin soup prevents crudas,
or that the Arctic Ocean is menudo . . .

Men responded to the assault on their privileges by resorting to crass name calling, labeling Chicana feminists as “malinchistas,” traitors who were influenced by ideas foreign to their community—namely bourgeois feminist ideology. One Chicana complained in 1971 that Chicanos viewed the Chicana feminist as “a white, thick calved, lesbian-oriented, eye-glassed gal.” Be “Chicana Primero” the men exhorted, asking the women to take pride in their cultural heritage and to reject women’s liberation. Adelaida del Castillo, among others, retorted that women were not seeking to dominate the movement. They only sought full equality:

true freedom for our people can come about only if prefaced by the equality of individuals within La Raza. Chicanos must be convinced that Chicanas do not wish to dominate, which would be a negation of equality. Their concern is with the liberation of La Raza; the Chicano movement would be enhanced (and perhaps rejuvenated) if men and women were free to be mutually supportive.

Theresa Aragón was but one of the many women who would clearly and unequivocally state that Chicanas, by incorporating feminist demands in their anticolonial revolution, were not dupes of white bourgeois feminists. “The white women’s movement at present is not generally aware of or sensitive to the needs of the Chicana,” Aragón wrote, and as such, “Chicanas would have to define their own goals and objectives in relationship to their culture, and their own feminist ideology in relation to those goals.” Consuelo Nieto argued that while Anglo feminists operated as individuals with individual goals, Chicanas belonged to a community of interest with whom they intended to cast their lot. Class and racial oppression could not be overlooked only to privilege caste oppression. While in some circles “sisterhood was powerful,” for the Chicana, perhaps, it was not.

Just as Chicano scholars who were interested in interpreting the history of the Southwest as a history of racial conflict between Anglos
and Mexicans explicitly chose 1848 as the beginning of Chicano history, Chicana feminists began re-envisioning a history ordered by a different sense of time. For women it was not the U.S.-Mexican War that was most important. Instead, it was the first major act of conquest in the Americas, Spain's defeat of the Aztec empire.

As far as I can ascertain, Judith Sweeney, in her 1977 historiographic review of literature on Chicanas, was the first person to propose a new chronology for Chicano history. That history, she stated, began in 1519 and could "be divided into three major periods: the colonial period (1519–1821); the nineteenth century (1821–1910); and the contemporary period (1910–1976)." Others writing on Chicanas quickly took up Sweeney's lead. Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez wrote in their 1979 book, La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman, that the "roots of the Chicana . . . in the United States, date back to the conquest of Mexico in 1519."

A chronology for Chicana history that began in 1519—not 1848—was not an arbitrary act. Rather, it placed the issues of gender and power at the very center of the political debate about the future and the past. By choosing 1519 women focused attention on one of Mexico's most famous women, Doña Marina. Doña Marina was a Maya woman of noble ancestry who befriended Hernán Cortés in 1517. Cortés availed himself of Doña Marina's considerable knowledge of the local political geography and of her knowledge of various indigenous languages. Acting as his mistress, translator and confidant, Marina helped Cortés to forge local antipathies toward the Aztecs into a fighting force that Cortés successfully unleashed on Tenochtitlán.

In Mexican history Doña Marina, or la Malinche, had always been seen as a villain, as the supreme betrayer of her race. Luis Valdez in his 1971 play, "The Conquest of Mexico," depicted Malinche as a traitor because: "not only did she turn her back on her own people, she joined the white men and became assimilated." In expressing this sentiment, Valdez, the playwright who generated so much of the popular culture that became identified as Chicano in the 1970s, was simply reiterating what was well-established dogma among Mexican intellectuals. Octavio Paz in his book The Labyrinth of Solitude referred to Mexicans as the Sons of Malinche, hijos de la chingada. In a long disquisition on the word chingar, Paz argued that it meant
to do violence to another. The verb is masculine, active, cruel: it stings, wounds, gashes, stains. And it provokes a bitter, resentful satisfaction. The person who suffers this action is passive, inert and open, in contrast to the active, aggressive and closed person who inflicts it. The *chingón* is the *macho*, the male; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world. The relationship between them is violent and it is determined by the cynical power of the first and the impotence of the second. The idea of violence rules darkly over all the meanings of the word.\(^24\)

Paz asserted that just as the power and violence of the *macho* or the *gran chingón* was similar to that of the Spanish conquistador, so too the passivity of the violated mother, or *la chingada*, found an analog in Malinche. “It is true,” Paz writes,

that she gave herself voluntarily to the conquistador, but he forgot her as soon as her usefulness was over. Doña Marina becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spaniards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal.\(^25\)

For activist Chicanas, the historical representations of Malinche as a treacherous whore who betrayed her own people were but profound reflections of the deep-seated misogynist beliefs in Mexican and Mexican-American culture. The only public models open to Mexican women were those of the virgin and the whore.\(^26\) If women were going to go beyond them, then they had to begin by rehabilitating Malinche.

The literary vindication of Malinche began with Sylvia Gonzales’s poem, “I Am Chicana”:

I am Chicana
Waiting for the return
of la Malinche,
to negate her guilt,
and cleanse her flesh
of a confused Mexican wrath
which seeks reason

to the displaced power of Indian deities,
I am Chicana
Waiting for the coming of a Malinche
to sacrifice herself
on an Aztec altar
and Catholic cross
in redemption of all her forsaken daughters.\(^27\)
Adelaida R. del Castillo took up the crusade in historical writing, stating in 1977 that "Doña Marina should not be portrayed as negative, insignificant or foolish, but instead be perceived as a woman who was able to act beyond her prescribed societal function, namely, that of being a mere concubine and servant, and perform as one who was willing to make great sacrifices for what she believed to be a philanthropic conviction." Never mind the fine details; what was important to Chicanas was that Malinche was the primordial source of the two concepts that were at the core of the Chicana movement—mexicanidad and mestizaje. Malinche, noted del Castillo:

is the beginning of the mestizo nation, she is the mother of its birth, she initiates it with the birth of her mestizo children. Even her baptism is significant. She is, in fact, the first Indian to be christianized (catechized and baptized to Catholicism) in her native land, that land which metamorphizes into our mundo mestizo—again she is the starting point! Thus any denigration made against her indirectly defames the character of the . . . chicana female. If there is shame for her, there is shame for us; we suffer the effects of those implications."

Following del Castillo's lead, other women joined the fray. Cordelia Candelaria in 1980 saw in Malinche "the prototypical Chicana feminist." Malinche, claimed Candelaria, embodied "those personal characteristics—such as intelligence, initiative, adaptability, and leadership—which are most often associated with Mexican-American women unfettered by traditional restraints against activist public achievement. By adapting to the historical circumstances thrust upon her, she defied traditional social expectations of a woman's role." Whatever the facts—in the case of Malinche there are dreadfully few—the crafting of a her-story and feminist chronology had shifted the debate away from racism to sexism, away from the male ethos of carnalismo, or brotherhood, and chicanismo, to mexicanidad y mestizaje. Equally important, by examining the life of Malinche the "first" Mexican convert to Christianity, attention was given to the role of religion in maintaining female subordination, with its patriarchal God and its phallocentric clergy.

If the aim of the Chicano movement had been to decolonize the mind, as the novelist Tomás Rivera proposed, the Chicana movement
decolonized the body. Male concerns over job discrimination, access to political power, entry into educational institutions, and community autonomy and self-determination, gave way to female demands for birth control and against forced sterilizations, for welfare rights, for prison rights for pinitas, for protection against male violence, and most importantly, for sexual pleasure both in marriage and outside of it. "La Nueva Chicana," the new woman, shattered the cultural stereotypes and defined herself.

Of course, this is not to imply that what had traditionally been the "meat and potatoes" of the Chicano movement, that is, an interest in working class struggles, ceased with the rise of Chicana feminist writing. It did not. The literature on the condition of Mexican-American working women remained prolific, dating all the way back to the 1930s. What did change in feminist-inspired Chicana cultural production, even when it examined traditional topics, was the centrality that the intersection of race, gender, and class assumed. The example of the case of Mexican immigration to the United States illustrates the point well. A whole generation of Chicano scholars earned tenure at universities by describing the nature and dimensions of the immigration process. More than half of all of the Mexican immigrants entering the United States since 1945 have been women, but this fact eluded most earlier authors—Mario García being the exception. The works of Vicki L. Ruiz and Susan Tiano, Margarita B. Melville, Rosalinda Gonzalez, Gilbert Cardenas and Esteban Flores, and Rita Simon and Caroline Brettell, were important correctives to this oversight.

But even more exciting were the works by women that linked race, class, and gender domination at the work place with gender domination within the home. Patricia Zavella’s splendid work, Women’s Work and Chicano Families, studied women canny workers in the Santa Clara Valley of northern California, and showed how mechanization had contributed to female labor segregation and how the labor market reinforced traditional family roles within the household. Vicki L. Ruiz covered very similar terrain in her masterful Cannery Women, Cannery Lives, a study of Mexican women’s unionization attempts in the California food processing industry.

In addition to these very traditional topics, what was perhaps most revolutionary was that Chicanas began to write and to express a complex inner emotional life. Reflecting in 1970 on the participation of Chicanas in the liberation movement, Enriqueta Longauex y Vasquez stated that
while the role of the Chicana previously “has been a very strong one—it has been] . . . a silent one.” That silence was shattered.

So wrote Alma Villanueva in her poem “Inside,” crafting a female literary voice, and birthing a Chicana poetic consciousness.

Unlike Chicanos who took their sex/gender privileges for granted, Chicanas, as victims of those privileges, realized that an essential part of their literary birthing had to include an exploration of their sexuality. “Our sexuality has been hidden, subverted, distorted within the ‘sacred’ walls of the ‘familia’—be it myth or reality—and within the even more privatized walls of the bedrooms. . . . In the journey to the love of female self and each other we are ultimately forced to confront father, brother, and god (and mother as his agent),” wrote Norma Alarcón, Ana Castillo, and Cherríe Moraga.

Things that formerly were taboo now appeared in print. Arcelia Ponce, in her short story “La preferida,” described how a young girl named Julia had been sexually abused by her father from the age of six to fourteen. Victoria Alegría Rosales vividly recounted the brutal beatings she had received in marriage. Lesbianism, the love that dare not speak its name, was brought out of the closet by Veronica Cunningham in the poem “When all the yous”:

when all the yous
of my poetry
were really
she or her
and I could never
no
I would never write them
because
of some fears
i never even wanted
to see,
how could i have been frightened
of sharing
the being
and me.

In “The Love Making,” Cien writes:

When the swell of your clitoris came bulging into the roll of my sucking tongue, I knew tonight’s sweetness would be long. My excited body moved closer into the swelling folds of your labia, rubbing my teeth, my lips, my whole face into your wetness. Your body jumped and turned spasmodically pressing my head between your legs. As I tried to release my head from your grip, my mouth lost your swollen clitoris.

Ana Castillo shattered all Catholic conventions by describing her sexual desire and fulfillment. Here is her poem “Coffee Break”:

15 minutes
They take
their morning papers
monogrammed mugs
to the lounge
moaning and groaning
of monday monotony
& self boredom—
she
does a 2 step down
the narrow hall
to the small room
where toilet paper
plugs the keyhole
whitewashed windows
graffiti wallpaper
designed by unknown
heroes and scholars—
A tiny streak
of sun leaks
through a space
of unpainted glass
makes as a spotlight
for 2 talented fingers
creating fast—
ART IN MOTION!
A STAR IS BORN!
SUCH STYLE!
WHAT GRACE!

Given the importance that sexuality had in the Chicana feminist movement, it is not coincidental that so much of the writing would dwell on the mother-daughter relationship. The confrontation between two cultures and between two ways of life was often played out as a generational struggle between mothers and daughters. Alma Villanueva expresses this sentiment well in her poem “Blood Root”:

I vowed
to never
grow up
to be a woman
and helpless
like my mother."

In “Aztec Princess,” Pat Mora casts mothers as the persons who were holding back the liberation of women:

Her mother would say, “Look in
the home for happiness. Why do you stare out
often with such longing?” One day,
almost in desperation, her mother said,
“Here. See here. We buried your umbilical
cord here, in the house. A sign that you,
our girl-child, would nest inside.”

That night the young woman quietly dug
for some trace of the shriveled woman-to-woman
skin, but all she found was earth, rich earth,
which she carefully scooped into an earthen jar
whispering, “Breathe.”³⁵

For Tina Bénitez, the love/hate relationship that existed between Chicanas and their mothers was the result of the mother’s desire to reproduce in her daughter the values of a patriarchal culture. “The mother blocks her desires by telling her what ‘good girls’ should and should not do,” asserted Bénitez, “thereby, condemning her to emulate a role of powerlessness.”³⁶ Rina Rocha captured the essence of this sentiment when she wrote in her poem “Baby Doll”:
Mothers can be
jealous gods
Just like
husbands
Unforgiving and demanding.

Saying
naughty girl,
aught ought
to have done that.
Naught, ought
to have said that . . .

And I . . . am amazed still—at me!
That I should wait for these
candied coated loving
words of approval
from
jealous gods.”

Mothers came to be despised by their Chicana daughters in large part because of their subordination/accommodation to patriarchal power. As mothers who often favored assimilation, they urged their daughters to learn English, to get educated, to marry well (to wealthy Anglo men all the better), and, if necessary, to abandon their cultural past.

The generational conflict took its most confrontational and accusatory tones when daughters, be they lesbian or heterosexual, started to assert their sexuality. To an older generation, sex was not a topic for public discussion, and even in private it was not a topic broached comfortably. To daughters, many as participants in the sexual revolution of the 1960s, female sexuality was something to celebrate openly, to talk about, to write about, and to represent in a myriad of open ways. For mothers such behavior was tantamount to the abandonment of *mexicano* cultural values and the acceptance of the Anglo ways. Mothers thus accused their daughters of assimilationism; daughters accused their mothers of accommodationism—and here was the problem.

Perhaps the most intense discussion of the mother/daughter relationship yet written was Cherrie Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*—the subtitle translates as “what never crossed her lips.” Here Moraga returns to a re-evaluation of
Malinche as the traitor and chingada, seeing in her historical dilemmas a way to confront her own (that is, Moraga’s) dilemmas in life. Moraga felt betrayed by her mother because she loved her sons much more devotedly than her daughters. This was complicated further by two additional levels of betrayal. As a lesbian, Moraga felt accused of betraying her race by choosing the sex of her mother as the object of sexual desire. As a coyota, the half-breed daughter of an Anglo father and Chicana mother, Moraga saw herself as the daughter of Malinche, suffering her mother’s betrayal of her people.

Moraga is wrenched by the multiple levels of contradiction these betrayals create. On the one hand she loves her mother deeply, treasures the closeness family provides, and realizes that the mother/daughter relationship is “paramount and essential in our lives [in which the daughter always] . . . remains faithful a la madre.” And on the other hand, she realizes that while the daughter is taught to be faithful to her mother, mothers do not always reciprocate.

Most Chicanas who explored issues of gender and sexuality through reflections on Malinche often cast themselves as the victimized daughters of Malinche. Moraga is unique in that she focuses not on Malinche, but on Malinche’s mother, comparing her to her own mother. Thus, in the expository parallels, Moraga and Malinche are identical.

Moraga clearly believes that her mother betrayed her by loving her sons much more than her daughters. We see this resentment when Moraga writes:

If somebody would have asked me when I was a teenager what it means to be Chicana, I would probably have listed the grievances done me. When my sister and I were fifteen and fourteen, respectively, and my brother a few years older, we were all still waiting on him. I write “were” as if now, nearly two decades later, it were over. But that would be a lie. To this day in my mother’s home, my brother and father are waited on, including by me. I do this now out of respect for my mother and her wishes. In those early days, however, it was mainly in relation to my brother that I resented providing such service. For unlike my father, who sometimes worked as much as seventy hours a week to feed my face every day, the only thing that earned my brother my servitude was his maleness."

Moraga continues to describe how her mother treated her own father, conforming to Mexican cultural norms that expected feminine subservience to men. When her mother became a wife, the act of treachery was again repeated; favoring her sons, revering her husband, and taking
her daughters for granted. "Traitor begets traitor," Moraga writes, like mother, like daughter. Malinche's mother was the first traitor (mother) who begot the second one (daughter).\(^{52}\)

To assert her Chicana identity and to reclaim "the race of my mother," Moraga breaks free from Malinche and Malinche's mother by choosing to "embrace no white man."\(^{53}\) She is finally united with the race of her mother through Chicana lesbianism, by loving other women. By refusing to give her sexual loyalty to Chicano men, by refusing to live as a heterosexual, Moraga realizes that, in the eyes of the \textit{movimiento} men, she has become a "malinchista," a traitor. This she proudly accepts, stating at the end of her book that she comes from a long line of \textit{vendidass} (traitors).

If the generational tension in Chicana expression is between mothers and daughters, the generational refuge is between grandmothers and granddaughters. In various essays Tina Bénitez, Norma Alarcón, and Diana Fey Rebullero have explored the ways in which "the grandmother/granddaughter relationship gives the Chicana an escape from her gender role expectations enforced by the mother."\(^{54}\)

To achieve what Tina Bénitez believed was a necessary reconciliation with the mother, she proposed that the mother/daughter relationship had to be conceived as evolutionary.

As a young girl the mother is portrayed as nurturing and loving. However, as the Chicana matures she becomes more critical of her mother and the role she succumbs to. When the mother tries to impose this self-sacrificing role upon her daughter, what emerges from the literature is the daughter/ writer's repulsion and rejection of the mother and veneration of the grandmother. As the Chicana strives for a new vision of transformation she turns to the mother for reconciliation and thereby draws strength for the rebirth and empowerment of herself and all Chicana women.\(^{55}\)

Early explorations of the relationships between mothers and daughters were hostile, but gradually some women came to realize that they could not blame their mothers for what their mothers themselves had not been able to control. Guadalupe Valdes-Fallis reconciled herself with her mother when she acknowledged that her mother had not had any other options open to her. In an autobiographical essay titled "Re-uerdo," Valdes stated:

\textit{My story . . . might well be entitled "Mother's Advice." It is a bitter story, written at a time in which I was angry about my own life and about having}
followed my own mother’s counsel. I was trying to make sense of the world, trying to understand why one could follow all of the (cultural) rules and yet end up unhappy. I felt betrayed, trapped and all alone. Until recently, it had not occurred to me that my mother has also been betrayed and trapped . . . like so many women, she had also tried to follow rules; to make sense of so many things that seemed unfair; and to hope that somehow, for her daughters, things would be different. Clearly, my anger was misdirected. My mother gave me what she could. She said, ‘Marry a man who doesn’t drink.’ Amazingly that, like the mother in ‘Recuerdo,’ her formula for happiness was so simple. She focused on the one thing that had made her life unhappy, and she wanted more for me. It seems sad now, that I blamed her for so many years, blamed her because I believed her, blamed her because the formula was not complete and did not bring happiness.56

The ultimate solution to this relationship was, according to one Chicana feminist, for mothers to give their love and approval to their daughters freely, and for daughters to relieve their mothers of all the psychic burdens they too had endured. “The choice is to either passively sit and watch our sisters and mother be beaten into the ground, or to help them rise above by giving them the love and support they so often seek from men.”57

The theme of the individual in our capitalist, postmodern society forms the last section of this historiographic survey. Postmodernism is one of those much bantered but illusive terms. It usually refers “to a certain constellation of styles and tones in cultural works: pastiche; blankness; a sense of exhaustion; a mixture of levels, forms, styles; a relish for copies and repetition; a knowingness that dissolves commitment into irony; acute self-consciousness about the formal, constructed nature of work; pleasure in the place of surfaces; a rejection of history.” A postmodern culture is one in which a formerly unified subject is split into his or her constituent parts; in which a single homogeneous style is superseded by a number of heterogeneous fashions. We see this tendency toward fragmentation, eclecticism and reflexivity in television advertising and on MTV. But in addition to being a general cultural style, postmodernism is, says Raymond Williams, a general orientation. It is a “structure of feeling” for apprehending and experiencing the world and our place, or placelessness, in it.58

In the past five years some Mexican-American intellectuals have
embraced the subversive experimentation of postmodernism to describe the fragmentation of Chicano culture, showing how there never was, nor currently is, one "Chicano movement," with a capital "C." Instead, they view the Chicano movement as an eclectic composition of peoples and traditions. In recent years the names of those whose works could be considered postmodern are Gloria Anzaldúa, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Richard Rodriguez, Renato Rosaldo, and Tomás Almaguer. I will return to them shortly, but before I do, I want to focus first on John Rechy. In 1963, when the thought of a Chicano movement hardly existed, John Rechy exploded onto the American scene with the publication of City of Night, an autobiographical novel that described vividly, through the eyes of a male prostitute, the sexual underworld that pulsed in the very heart of Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, El Paso, and San Francisco. In The Sexual Outlaw and Rushes, Rechy further elaborated on "the narcissistic pattern of my life," a life that was governed by the narcotic of "sexmoney." From room to room, from bed to bed, from face to face, at a dizzying pace, Rechy showed us his tricks. In bar rooms and back rooms, in restrooms and parks, and behind bushes that barely concealed, men of every sort played out their own fantasies with him. Men fellated him, they furtively groped and caressed his body, they licked his legs and boots and drank his urine; a scenario that always ended with him mounting his partners and "play[ing] the male role with [these] men." 59

At the 1989 meeting of the National Association for Chicano Studies, Rechy was finally honored with a panel on his work. But in the 1960s, Chicanos refused to acknowledge Rechy as a Chicano or even to accept his novels as Chicano literature. Though his mother was a mexicana and had raised him the barrios of El Paso, it was his Scottish father who had given him a name and abandoned him and his mother. It was his name, his homosexuality, and the themes he explored in print that excluded him from the community young men defined as Chicano. Ironically, at the very time that he was being rejected by Chicanos, the Texas Hall of Fame inducted him into its ranks as a Chicano author, an identity Rechy has always proudly claimed.

Rechy's novels were intellectual forerunners to postmodernism among Mexican Americans. The themes of marginality, of fractured identities, of suspension betwixt and between worlds, were themes he first articulated, but which would not emerge again until 1987. In that year Gloria Anzaldúa's book, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mes-
tiza appeared. The book defies easy classification. It is a combination of history (much of it wrong), poetry, essays, and philosophical gems, in which Anzaldúa describes her fractured identity—an identity fractured by not only the reality of the border between the United States and Mexico, but also the numerous borders in personal life. Anzaldúa claims to be a mestiza or mixed-blood lesbian, and we can see the meaning of that in her poem “Del otro lado”:

She looks at the Border Park fence
posts are stuck into her throat, her navel,
barbwire is shoved up her cunt.
Her body torn in two, half a woman on the other side
half a woman on this side, the right side
And she went to the North American university,
excelled in the Gringo’s tongue
learned to file in folders.
But she remembered the other half
strangled in Aztec villages, in Mayan villages, in Incan village . . .

She remembers
The horror in her sister’s voice,
“Eres una de las otras.”
The look in her mother’s face as she says,
“I am so ashamed, I will never
be able to raise my head in this pueblo.”
The mother’s words are barbs digging into her flesh.
De las otras. Cast out. Untouchable.
“But I’m me,” she cries, “I’ve always been me.”
“Don’t bring your queer friends into my house,
my land, the planet. Get away.
Don’t contaminate us, get away.”

Away, she went away.
But every place she went
they pushed her to the other side
and that other side pushed her to the other side
of the other side of the other side
Kept in the shadows of other.
No right to sing, to rage, to explode . . .
Always pushed toward the other side.
In all lands alien, nowhere citizen.
Away, she went away
but each place she went
pushed her to the other side, al otro lado.”
In “To live in the Borderlands,” she writes,

means you are neither *hispánia indica negra española
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mutita, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
now knowing which side to turn to, to run from;

*Cuando vives en la frontera*
people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,
you’re a *burra, buey*, scapegoat,
*forerunner of a new race,*
half and half—both woman and man, neither—
a new gender;

To live on the Borderlands means to
put *chile* in the borscht
eat whole wheat *tortillas,*
speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;
be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints; . . .

To survive the Borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*
be a crossroads.*

In her essay “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa vividly shows,
through the example of language, the complexity of Mexican-American
cultures. She begins by identifying eight forms of Spanish:

My “home” tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers,
with my friends. They are [*Pachuco* (called *caldo*), Tex-Mex, Chicano Span-
ish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, and Standard Mexican Spanish, with
Chicano Spanish] being the closest to my heart. From school, the media and
job situations, I’ve picked up standard and working class *English.* From
Mamagrande Loche and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I’ve
picked up Standard Spanish and Standard Mexican Spanish. From *los recién
llegados*, Mexican immigrants and *braceros*, I learned Northern Mexican
dialect . . .

She then goes on to describe how and when she uses each type, proving
the point that the relationship between language and identity is not a
neat and easy one, and that Mexican Americans are a complexly strat-
ified group.

Another person who had been extremely influential in the Chicano
postmodernist movement is Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a performance
artist in San Diego. He identifies himself as “a child of crisis and
cultural syncretism, half hippie and half punk. . . . In my fractured
reality, but a reality nonetheless, there cohabit two histories, two languages, cosmologies, artistic traditions, and political systems which are drastically counterposed." His eclecticism poignantly emerges in a poem "Good Morning, This Radio Latino Spoiling Your Breakfast as Always":

Alien ation
alien action
alien-ated
alguien ate it
alien hatred
aliens out there
hay alguien out there
"aliens" the album
"aliens" the movie
cowboys vs. aliens
bikers vs. aliens
the wet-back from Mars
the Mexican transformer & his radioactive torta
the conquest of Tenochtitlan by Spielberg
the reconquest of Aztlan by Monty Python
the brown wave vs. the microwave
invaders from the South
vs. the San Diego Police reinforced by
the Border Crime Prevention Unit reinforced by
your ignorance, dear San Diego . . ."

The Pompidou Center in Paris is often given as a splendid example of postmodern architecture, because instead of concealing its wiring, its vents, its plumbing, and its foundations, everything is exposed. In social science writings on Chicanos, Tomás Almaguer’s recent essay "Ideological Distortions in Recent Chicano Historiography" lays open the historiography on Chicanos, exposing the false epistemological closures and the simplistic ideas that he, as well as other Chicano radicals and intellectuals, claimed as their credo in the 1960s. Almaguer argues that, motivated primarily by the desire to challenge the dominant assimilationist model of the 1950s, Chicano radicals embraced a colonial analysis that depicted the history of Chicanos as that of a colonized minority. In this internal colony, racism and economic exploitation were the dominant themes—themes that had been born as a result of the U.S.-Mexican War. Almaguer shows how in the scholarly works
of political scientists Mario Barrera and Carlos Muñoz; historians Ricardo Griswold del Castillo, Albert Camarillo, Ricardo Romo, Juan Gómez-Quinones, Guillermo Flores, and Rudy Acuña; and sociologists such as Joan Moore, Charles Ormeles, and Almaguer, colonialism and racism became the dominant themes of their analytic frameworks. These themes cast the present and the past as a conflict between Anglos and Chicanos that politically called for a cultural nationalist movement to crush imperialism.65

However strongly these sentiments were felt in the 1960s, Almaguer argues that the analysis was wrong. A cursory examination showed that Native Americans had been ignored. Mexican Americans historically straddled several classes, and in the racial hierarchy Mexicans occupied an intermediate position between Anglos and Indians. In short, much of what had been written was an ideological distortion of the past, fashioned to fit the political tenor of the day.

Alex Saragoza recently made a similar point.66 The Chicano radicals of the 1960s chose 1848 as the beginning of Chicano history because that date more conveniently highlighted Anglo-Mexican conflicts. "Why did Chicano history not begin in 1836?" Saragoza asks. The answer is simple. During the Texas War for Independence, Tejanos and Anglos fought alongside each other as allies. This date complicated the dichotomous "Them/Us" racial vision too much and just did not meet their political needs.

Let me conclude by bringing together the various strands that I have tried to weave together here. I began by outlining the shape and dimensions of that political community Chicano radicals forged in the 1960s, turning next to the feminist assault on that vision and the construction of her/story; a story that was rooted in the politicization of the body. Postmodernism fractured all of this into bits, exploded the categories, and left a disordered and disordering vision of the past and the future. Chicano cultural nationalism had a clear vision. However misdirected and obtuse, by defining Anglos and colonialism as the enemies, a plausible strategy for revolutionary change was close at hand. With Chicana feminism, too, the political vision and strategy were clear. Women unite against your fathers, brothers and sons, to overthrow patriarchy. But what is the political vision of postmodernism with its emphasis on alienation, despair, confusion, and the layer upon layer of splinterings and fractures?
Twenty years ago Enriqueta Longauex y Vasquez, an early Chicana feminist, uttered the following words:

The Raza movement is based on brother- and sisterhood. We must look at each other as one large family. We must look at all of the children as belonging to all of us. We must strive for the fulfillment of all as equals, with the full capability and right to develop as humans.  

At this time, the majority of the persons living in poverty in this country are Chicana single-mothers and their children. Chicanas over the age of twenty-five, on the average, complete only 8.4 years of schooling, in comparison to the 13.5 of their white counterparts. And when the average income of a Chicana-headed household is still only $4,930, the burning issues that sparked the Chicano movement have only intensified and taken a clearer class form. Indeed, if one takes a long view when analyzing what the ultimate impact of the Chicano movement was on the daily lives of ethnic Mexicans in the United States, it was to obscure the class character of the racial order. No matter whether one subscribed to the masculine Chicano vision of the nation with its emphasis on la raza (the race) and carnalismo (brotherhood) or the Chicana nationalism of feminists who turned to mestizaje (race mixture) and mexicanidad for inspiration, the imagined community was stratified by region, by class, by generation, by color, and by political persuasions. The various strands of Mexican-American activism that did manage to extract social and political concessions from the state and regional capitalists were those segments of the movement that never lost sight of their class character and class aims. Cesar Chavez organized agricultural workers throughout the Southwest through his United Farmworkers of America, militating for better wages and work conditions—concessions his union was able to extract, if only for a short period of time. Reies López Tijerina created the Alianza Federal de Mercedes in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, and through this organization was able to get Hispano land claims favorably settled. The impact of the struggles that both of these men led are still felt in labor relations and land rights litigation. As for the student component of the movement, perhaps the most significant and enduring legacy were the curricular changes and the creation of Chicano Studies programs and departments.


6. Ibid., 7–16, quotation from 9.

7. Ibid., 7–16, quotation from 8.


17. Ibid., 10.


24. Ibid., 77.

25. Ibid., 86.


29. Ibid., 141. Adelaida del Castillo’s essay was also a profound critique of Octavio Paz’s work on Malinche. See for example 413–32.


49. Cherrie Moraga, Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios (Boston, 1983).
50. Ibid., 139.
51. Ibid., 90.
52. Ibid., 103.
53. Ibid., 94.

62. Ibid., 55–56.


64. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Good Morning, This is Radio Latino Spoiling your Breakfast as Always,” *La Linea Quebrada/The Broken Line* (San Diego, 1989), 12.


