Universität Stuttgart

Institut für Literaturwissenschaft

Amerikanische Literatur und Kultur

The Virgin, The Wicked, The Weeper – Rewriting Female Mythology in Contemporary Chicana Literature

Masterarbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades Master of Education (M. Ed.)

der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät der Universität Stuttgart

vorgelegt von

Larisa Katzer

Betreuer und Erstgutachter: Prof. Dr. Marc Priewe

Zweitgutachterin: Dr. Saskia Schabio

Einreichungsdatum: 22. April 2024

Selbstständigkeitserklärung

Hiermit versichere ich, Larisa Katzer, Matrikelnummer 3400843, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig verfasst habe, keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen benutzt und alle wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus anderen Werken übernommenen Aussagen als solche gekennzeichnet habe, dass die eingereichte Arbeit weder vollständig noch in wesentlichen Teilen Gegenstand eines anderen Prüfungsverfahrens gewesen ist, dass ich die Arbeit weder vollständig noch in Teilen bereits veröffentlicht habe und dass das elektronische Exemplar mit den anderen Exemplaren übereinstimmt.

Stuttgart, den 22.04.2024

Larisa Katzer

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

> "Mythology often functions as a collective symbolic code that identifies how we should live. Cultures use myths and the stories of heroines and heroes to create role models. These stories enable us to differentiate correct behavior from incorrect, transmit moral values, and identify those traits considered desirable by a group or society. Women's lives are particularly circumscribed by cultural values and norms that try to dictate how women should behave and who their role models should be." (Rebolledo 49)

When thinking of mythology and myths from a contemporary point of view, these terms are predominantly associated with great stories of heroes, monsters, and magical places from ancient times. They are told as entertaining fairy tales or as frightening lessons with rather pedagogical backgrounds, being passed on orally, by letter, or by the media from one generation to the next. However, these myths hold much more significance, and their origins can be considered as important cultural starting points that bring about the establishment of central values and rules within societies. Even long before the beginnings of recorded history, myths have been told to achieve certain goals in culture; to educate and discipline its members and to warn them about behaving against society's policies as well as its norms and values. Yet, the origins of such myths often get blurry as their content and retellings are frequently influenced by gender issues. While men represent the dominant gender shaping the substance and message of the stories, women frequently are subjects to these and suffer from the stories' communicated code of behavior, for example in early Greek mythology which turned Pandora, the first woman, into a symbol of evil to "promote the interests of men who believed that they could dominate women" (Detienne & Lloyd 40). Gloria Anzaldúa states that "culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (38). Within most societies, therefore, men hold the governing position and determine valid sets of rules, making culture a moldable concept that assigns certain positions and roles to its members and pushes women

into stereotypical gender roles which in many cultures make them submissive and inferior to their male counterparts.

Since myths are especially dominant in oral cultures, as Ikas states, they are easily found in Chicano/a communities for they have their roots in the ancient Aztec times of pre-Columbian America (*Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur*, 143). Chicanos and Chicanas are "people residing in the United States who trace their ancestry to Mexico", thus also being termed Mexican-Americans (Shirley & Shirley 4). To understand the great influence mythology had on the rules and (gender) roles in Chicano/a communities which still last to date, it is important to take a look at general Chicano/a history which went through various stages and can be said to be a product of a variety of influences. Hepworth claims that "Chicano/as popularly conceive themselves to have been colonised twice: once through the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century and then again with the appropriation of Mexican land by the United States in 1848" (209). Dating back to 35000 B.C., the oldest evidence of civilization in what is known as the U.S. today confirms the settlement of the Chicano/as' earliest native ancestors in the U.S. Southwest. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, these early ancestors migrated into the areas that are now known as Mexico and Central America which made them direct ancestors of many Mexican people today (26).

However, the definite development of the Mexican and Chicano/a ethnic groups is traced back to the sixteenth century with the Aztec empire's defeat and the land's subjugation to the Spaniards, the renowned conquistador Hernán Cortés leading the way. After overpowering the native people and converting their ancient culture and land into Spanish property, a new people of mixed ethnic origin came into being, also known as *mestizos*. The *mestizos* settled in what is known today as the U.S. Southwest during the sixteenth century, considering the area as the people's original and spiritual homeland (Anzaldúa 27). Nevertheless, this homeland could not withstand the power of the United States which sought to strengthen its

supremacy and influence by extending its borders during the nineteenth century. What Bruce-Novoa terms "the definitive historical event in Chicano history", but, occurred in 1846 with Mexico's defeat in the Mexican-American War (61). The border was shifted after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 with New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California becoming U.S. states, and thus almost fifty percent of Mexican land changed its possessor within a short time. About 80.000 Mexicans were caught in the border area caused by the treaty overnight and were given a year to decide whether to return to Mexico or become the first "official" Mexican Americans, Hepworth explains (196). Most decided to remain in their homes and found themselves "living in the Other's space" which assigned less value to them and treated the new citizens as subjugated people rather than equals (Bruce-Novoa 49).

Still, this new border also constituted the starting point of Chicano/a writing, with shorter forms such as poems or short stories dominating the early times of Chicano/a life in the U.S. which grew steadily during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. With increasing immigration from Mexico to the U.S., the number of Mexican-Americans rose constantly, resulting in generations of Chicano/as being born and raised in the U.S. Chicano/as in the U.S. continuously suffer from unequal treatment and experience discrimination in various social realms, such as labor, economy, habitation, and education (Ikas, *Mexican American Stories* 6). During the 1960s, in the course of the African-American civil rights movement, Chicanos, too, started to raise their voices against racism and discrimination in the United States and by forming several political communities and protests initiated the Chicano civil rights movement, *el movimiento* (Hepworth 197). Inspired by Martin Luther King, Chicanos initiated their movement with the main goal of "defining an identity, which, given their bicultural heritage, has always been a complex challenge for Mexican Americans" (Ikas, *Chicana Ways* 8). Caught between two cultures and nations, Chicano/as sought to be recognized not only as equal citizens but furthermore fought for validation of their misunderstood past. Messmer explains that the

movement's main goal was rather to make Chicano/as more aware of their Mexican history and reinforce the variety of Roman Catholicism that forms the basis of the Chicano/a faith (260). *El Movimiento*, thus, mainly worked against U.S. American schemes of colonialism and capitalism and sought to be separated from the American value system with the desire to return to the Chicano/a homeland, the original U.S. Southwest called Atzlán. The political fight for recognition moreover promoted the development of a Chicano Renaissance in literature. While poems and short fiction had characterized literature until that time, the late 1950s and 1960s can be considered the starting point of the Chicano novel with José Antonio Villareal's 1959 English work *Pocho* being the first actual Chicano novel to be written.

Since "white feminists were often unaware of their own race and class biases", Chicana women were excluded from the political movement as well as from many aspects of social life in the Chicano/a community in general (Roesch 382). This inequality women experience down to the present day stems from what Chicana feminists term "double oppression" or "double stigma" which describes the female experience of being oppressed not only as a member of a cultural minority in the U.S. but as a woman within the personal cultural sphere as well (Madsen 4). Women were often restricted to the house and kitchen, fulfilling their roles as submissive wives and mothers and generally suffering from male dominance. In her memoir *Loving in the War Years*, Chicana writer Cherríe Moraga remembers how "being Chicana meant being less" (51). From childhood on, Chicana women are trained to adhere to the duties they have to fulfill as females, consisting primarily of chores within the household such as cooking and taking care of the children while at the same time being submissive to their husbands, remaining sexually reserved, and never availing themselves of their feminine charms. One of the main forces confining Chicanas to their domestic cages is the notion of *machismo* which dominates Mexican and Chicano/a communities and shapes prevailing gender roles. The Chicano *macho* regards himself as being superior not only to his wife but to the female gender in general; he

assigns to the woman the role of the domestic and submissive wife/mother while he, the family's provider, is free to choose his actions according to his free will whether they are of social, domestic, or sexual nature (Rukwied 17). This *machismo*-driven gender inequality constitutes a major part of many Chicanas' struggle for self-identification and women's comprehension and acceptance of their female selves.

However, if a woman chooses to escape these constraints, Laura Paz explains, she is branded as a "whore – a woman whom men will use for sex but will never marry" (12). Once expelled from the community due to misbehavior, Chicanas struggle to build a life of their own and to find a new place within their community. Mirandé and Enríquez explain this by stating that women are put into two categories in Chicano/a culture: virginal figures are "to be protected, idealized, revered" whereas "bad women" are linked to sexual activity and enjoyment (110). This virgin/whore dichotomy stems from historical or rather mythological female archetypes and is nurtured by everlasting gender inequality in modern society, causing many Chicanas to be "alienated from [their] mother culture" and to "not feel safe within the inner life of [their] Self" (Anzaldúa 34-35). Chicanas have been and recurrently still are heavily affected by myths, religion, and cultural shaping by men which dictate their roles within society and rob many Chicanas of their capabilities of establishing autonomous lives or identities.

Considering the meaning of Chicano/a mythology for the female situation, Gloria Anzaldúa explains the following in her semi-autobiographical feminist work *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

> "*La gente Chicana tiene tres madres* [The Chicana people has three mothers]. All three are mediators: *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada* (*Malinche*), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two." (52; my trans.)

The origins and cultural meanings of these three female archetypes that stigmatize women in Chicano/a culture shall be considered in the second chapter of this thesis. Anzaldúa extends her statement by adding that "the true identity of all three has been subverted – *Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people" (53). The male-dominated retellings of the myths have damaged the concerning female characters to such an extent that their sabotaged and misunderstood origins and backgrounds denounce Chicanas until this day, branding them as either good or evil. On the one hand, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the religious patron of the Mexican and Chicano/a people, embodies the most important female role model in Chicano/a society. Originating from the ancient Aztec goddesses *Coatlicue* and *Tonantzin*, her original role as goddess of fertility has been overthrown several times by the Catholic invaders, desexing her and leaving behind a virgin mother who remains a one-on-one reproduction of the Blessed Virgin Mary until today (Petty 121). Serving as a positive role model for Chicanas, the cult of the Virgin requires women to serve as submissive wives and mothers, performing pure love and care for the family while at the same time repressing sexual wants and needs of any kind to resemble the Holy Mother (Aleksić 217).

On the other hand, the myth of *La Malinche*, also known as *La Chingada* (the fucked one), dominates Chicano/a culture as the undesirable female image. Originally born in Aztec Mexico as Malinali Tenepat, she was sold to Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés as a young girl and served as his private translator and guide. Since she entered a romantic affair with Cortés and bore his first son, she became the personification of the downfall of the Aztec empire and until today remains known as a traitor to her people and country (Petty 122). The involvement of her body and female sexuality in the alleged betrayal of her folk resulted in *Malinche* becoming characterized as the general negative female role model, an impure traitor who avails herself of her physical characteristics, thus portraying the exact opposite of the

Virgin. To date, many Chicanas suffer from the destructive stigmatization the misinterpreted story of *La Malinche* has brought upon them (Grice 233).

On a par with the undesirable *Malinche*, the third female archetype in Chicano/a culture lines up. *La Llorona*, the Weeping Woman, is said to have drowned her children to punish her husband for his adultery. Her devastated ghost is purported to wander the streets at night, crying and weeping in search of her dead children she remains unable to find (Madsen 34). Since the roots of this myth can be traced back to ancient Aztec folklore as well as medieval European stories, the actual origin of *La Llorona* remains unclear to date and a variety of versions circulate in Mexico and other countries of Latin America (Elenes 70). Nevertheless, what the versions share regardless of their origin is the fact that the female is subverted to the role of the "bad mother", neglecting the motifs of her behavior as well as the triggering male misconduct. The myth of *La Llorona* still pressures Chicana women into their submissive roles as mothers and wives, causing them to willingly or unwillingly accept the traditional concepts of maternity and femininity (Elenes 70). Concerning the often misinterpreted myths of *La Malinche* and *La Llorona*, Anzaldúa highlights that "this obscuring has encouraged the virgen/puta (whore) dichotomy" (53). The retellings and everlasting presence of the female myths in Chicano/a society pressure Chicanas to either stick to the ideal of the Virgin and remain submissive to their husband and family or to be cast out of society as traitors, bad mothers, and *putas*.

However, women do not accept these destructive images uncontested anymore. Since around the 1970s, Chicana feminism has sought to strengthen the role of the female as a reaction against patriarchy, Catholicism, and the "mythic memory [...] in which myths, legends, folktales resurface" (Pérez-Torres 15). As a result of their several exclusions from political movements, Women's Liberation groups emerged during the 1970s and Chicanas began to find their own political sphere to give utterance to their battle. During this fight for female respect and the relief of Chicana social struggle, Chicana women had begun to develop and change

into a *new mestiza* with a "plural personality", Anzaldúa claims, able to cope with both their cultural heritages as well as to balance the inequalities based on gender they experience within their communities (101). As Chicana literature became popular during the 1970s and has been stirring up the (Chicano) literary canon ever since, a major method to impart the female fight was and is through literature produced by Chicana writers who use female archetypes and positively rewrite them to empower women instead of denouncing them. Through writing, "Chicanas reject the dominant culture's definition of what a Chicana is" and "refuse the objectification imposed by gender roles" (Yarbro-Bejarano, *Chicana Literature* 215). Such works by contemporary Chicana writers shall be examined in the subsequent chapters of this thesis by taking into account writings by three of the most celebrated female authors of Chicano/a literature, Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, and Denise Chávez. Each of these three women uses the given mythological female figures in her own way and rewrites them in order to portray them as a source of power rather than an image of doom and female inferiority.

The first work to be examined is Sandra Cisneros's celebrated collection of short stories *Woman Hollering Creek and Oher Stories*, published in 1991. The story "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" illustrates how Chicanas deal with their worshipping of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* by writing her letters of request and demonstrates a Chicana's process of detaching herself from the common image of the Virgin without losing her faith. *La Malinche* is discussed in the short story "Never Marry a Mexican" via the protagonist Clemencia whose destructive relationship with a married white man and her problematic understanding of love are due to a complicated attitude towards cultural identity she has to deal with. In the title story "Woman Hollering Creek", the protagonist Cleófilas, a modern *Llorona*, seeks to escape from an abusive husband with the help of fellow Chicanas and the creek running behind her house that links her to the myth of *La Llorona*. Further short stories dealt with in this thesis are part of the collection *The Moths and Other Stories* written by Helena María Viramontes in 1985 who incorporates female

myths in a similar way Cisneros does. “The Cariboo Café”, for instance, tells the story of a nameless immigrant woman from Central America who searches the streets for her abducted son and becomes a modern-day version of *La Llorona* to support women who suffer similarly. The duality between *La Virgen* and *La Malinche* is explored in “The Broken Web” where Catholicism, stereotypical family values, and patriarchy are tackled by a woman shooting her husband. The last work of Chicana literature to be assessed is Denise Chávez’s 1990 novel *Face of an Angel*. Chicana protagonist Soveida Dosamantes reflects on her family history and Catholicism, bringing up the differences of worshipping *La Virgen de Guadalupe* throughout three generations of women and demonstrating the step-by-step detachment from traditional Catholicism into a modern, self-chosen manner of love, faith, and service.

All three contemporary Chicana writers incorporate the female archetypes of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona* into their works by taking the myths that are strongly intertwined with their cultural heritage and patriarchal discourse as a basis for their feminist fiction and revising them. The analysis of the given Chicana works in this thesis shall depict how by rewriting the traditional myths and reevaluating the female archetypes’ qualities, the female myths no longer assist in denouncing women and strengthening Chicano patriarchy but alter mythology’s cultural and social impact by creating modern Chicana role models, thus serving Chicana feminist interests.

2. Contextualizing Female Archetypes in Chicano/a Culture

2.1 *La Virgen de Guadalupe*

To recognize the cultural, social, and individual impact female mythology and the archetypes it brought about have on Chicanas, a basic knowledge of the major myths stemming from Aztec and Mexican culture is indispensable. Among the female myths that occur in Mexican and Chicano/a tradition, it can be said that *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (The Virgin of Guadalupe) constitutes the fundamental, most influential archetype. Today, *La Virgen* is deeply ingrained in Mexican and Chicano/a culture and serves not only as the Catholic patron of Mexicans and Chicano/as but moreover as the ideal role model for females by depicting virtuous traits such as love, duty, submissiveness, and chastity. The patriarchal system dominating Chicano/a society honors *La Virgen* as the ideal female who remains obedient and pure as well as submissive to the Catholic faith. Females who defy the directions given by the Holy Virgin in forms of rebellion or unchastity become socially stigmatized as whores and outcasts and often end up having trouble finding a space within their communities (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 162).

Yet, regarding the historical and religious ancestries of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, her original persona defied the virtuous traits characteristic of her modern interpretation and was strikingly different from the Catholic symbol she depicts today. Bearing no reference to Catholic traditions or dogmas, the original Virgin of Guadalupe descends from early Mesoamerican goddesses of fertility, for the most part from the earth goddess *Coatlicue* which translates to "serpent skirt" (Anzaldúa 49). In pre-Columbian America, *Coatlicue* was known and worshipped for the dual aspects of her character and abilities; Perez explains she had the ability to "transform and shift aspects of her being to simultaneously seduce, cleanse, destroy, and create. Because of her plurality, Coatlicue simultaneously embodies love and sin, and harbors the power to create and destroy life" (53). The goddess's abilities and power assigned the force of

creating life as well as taking it away to the female and thereby elevated the gender to the position of donor and destroyer of all life on earth, equipping the female with powerful and essential characteristics and establishing it as the predominant gender. Nonetheless, the male-dominated culture of the Aztecs later dishonored most female goddesses by dispossessing them of their powers and exchanging them with male gods, "splitting the female Self" (Anzaldúa 49). Female forces became regarded as unnatural and impossible, thus turning female goddesses into monster-like creatures subjected to male dominance. Due to this procedure of revising the divine order, *Coatlicue* was "'darkened' and disempowered", Anzaldúa explains (49). Yet, parts of the disempowered goddess were able to withstand the new order and so *Coatlicue* became *Tonantzin*, the "good mother". The goddess *Tonantzin* was central to Aztec beliefs and culture and was worshipped to bring health and good harvest yield which reinforced the female's central position of creating life and maintaining fertility throughout pre-Columbian society (Anzaldúa 49).

The shift turning the ancient Aztec goddess of fertility into the Madonna known today came about with the arrival of the Spaniards on American ground who brought not only European doctrines but furthermore their religious beliefs based on the Roman Catholic Church. The arrival of the new faith made many native people convert to the Catholic Church under duress or voluntarily. According to Mexican and Chicano/a belief, a dark-skinned lady appeared to a native boy who had converted to Christianity, Juan Diego, in December 1531 on the hill of Tepeyac in the Mexico City of today and claimed her name was María Coatlalopeuh, meaning "she who crushed the serpents" which implied that her faith was to substitute all Aztec beliefs (Anzaldúa 51). She told Juan Diego: "Para hacer mi altar este cerro elijo. Dile a tu gente que yo soy la madre de Dios, a los indios yo les ayudaré [To make my altar I chose this hill. Tell your people that I am the mother of God, I will help the Indians]" (Anzaldúa 50; my trans.). The woman sent Juan Diego to the bishop with the plea to build a church in her name, but the

bishop did not trust him, so the boy collected roses which mysteriously grew in the snow in his robe and when he opened the robe to present them to the bishop, the image of the dark-skinned lady appeared on it (Conover 252). The bishop gave in to the boy's bid and millions of native people converted to Catholicism voluntarily, Ikas states (*Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur*, 161). After Mexico became independent of Spain, all other religious figures were lost in Mexico, Central America, and parts of the U.S. in favor of the Virgin (Anzaldúa 51). She was praised by native people mainly due to her dark skin and her initial appearance on the hill which served as a place of prayer for the ancient goddess *Tonantzin*. Octavio Paz describes the Virgin of Guadalupe's popularity and the importance of her appearance on the hill as a "return to the maternal womb" since the Aztec goddesses had been linked to fertility and life and "the Catholic Virgin is also the Mother [...] but her principal attribute is not to watch over the fertility of the earth but to provide refuge for the unfortunate. The situation has changed: the worships do not try to make sure of their harvests but to find a mother's lap" (85). Seeking to recover from the cruelty they experienced at the hands of the Spanish, native people saw the new icon as a source of protection and love which added stimulus to the rise of the Catholic saint and established a new religious base in today's Mexico and parts of the U.S.

Nevertheless, the creation of the Virgin of Guadalupe led to further deconstruction of the female gender since she split the remains of the ancient fertility goddess *Tonantzin* even more by desexing her and taking away her seductive female features. Lara claims that *Tonantzin* was "demonized by Christianity" and that "the colonizing Spanish transformed Tonantzin into Guadalupe's pagan Other" (100). The former earth goddess became linked to paganism and therefore to evil, the devil, and, above all, to female disobedience. Her female power to create life was despised since she dismantles the virgin/whore dichotomy and does not promote the desired virginal role model for women to look up to (Lara 104). The ability to create and destroy life through the use of female features and seductiveness was undesirable

and any connections to *Tonantzin* were destructed by the Church to keep females from making use of their femininity, thus detaching women from the alleged dangers of sexuality and their bodies. “Our Lady of Guadalupe is divested of her rebellious, proactive potential and seen as all-giving and completely selfless”, Carbonell claims, which depicts the Virgin as the only appropriate role model for women to emulate and subjugates the Virgin itself as well as every woman to patriarchal dominance (56).

In 1737, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* was appointed as Mexico’s patron saint which was acknowledged by the Pope in 1754 and eventually turned her into the main religious figure for all Mexican and Chicano/a people, simultaneously equalizing her with the general Christian persona of Mother Mary (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 161). Her evolution “from a devotional saint to a national icon” led to the establishment of the *Guadalupe* cult in Mexico and Chicano/a-dominated parts of the U.S. that lasts until the present day (Conover 278). Today, *La Virgen* is even more relevant to Mexicans and Chicano/as than Jesus Christ or even God himself and no other religious institution in America counts as many visiting pilgrims as the Guadalupe Basilica in Mexico City (Matovina 243). Blake explains that *Guadalupe* illustrates pride in Mexican history and the cultural roots of the Chicano/a community and that “her name epitomizes dignity and respect” which is why *Guadalupe* not merely constitutes a symbol bound to the institution of Catholicism but is likewise omnipresent in Chicano/a everyday life (103). Her image and name are worshipped and depicted in public spaces or buildings, public transport, and even in private households through the building of altars to honor the Holy Virgin within the family sphere. Additionally, mass media reproduce her image and significance continuously via various forms, most prominently by depicting her as a moral compass in *telenovelas*, far-famed Mexican soap operas (Saldívar-Hull 108). While the extensive reproduction of the *Guadalupe* image in everyday life portrays the Chicano/a identity and seeks to strengthen their people through a communal worshipping of the historical and religious past,

Ikas also claims that today's venerating of the Virgin blurs the boundaries between faith, superstition, and kitsch, making her just as well a highly problematic cultural heritage for Chicano/as (*Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur*, 161).

Particularly females are notably suffering from *Guadalupe's* challenging legacy within the Chicano/a community. The adulation of her maternal and devoted virtues such as love, benevolence, peace, and chastity shaped the Chicano/a cult of *Marianismo* which Rebolledo and Rivero define as Chicanas being obliged to "emulate the Virgin, [...] her characteristics of faith, self-abnegation, motherhood and purity" (189). The *Marianismo* cult serves the Chicano patriarchal system of *machismo* by putting the female under male dominance and shaping women according to their demands, namely to become submissive mothers and wives and to mimic the Virgin's traits within the household. Many Chicanas, shielded from their sexuality and the use of their physical features and captured within the domestic sphere, become prisoners to the male-constructed *Guadalupe* and seek to equal her in daily life which for most women constitutes an impossible as well as undesirable task. Moraga recalls in *Loving in the War Years* how "even if a Chicana knew no Mexican history, the concept of betraying one's race through sex and sexual politics is as common as corn" (103). The cult of *Marianismo* denounces Chicanas for making their own sexual and relationship-related decisions and marginalizes them while at the same time granting men physical autonomy of any kind. While *Guadalupe* constitutes an important cultural and religious image for Chicano/as until today and helps them to define and strengthen their identity, she poses an immense danger and obstacle to Chicana feminists. Consequently, Chicanas seek to free themselves from the constrictive traits imposed by the Virgin of Guadalupe and patriarchism as well as to liberate their bodies and sexuality by finding new ways of reconciling faith and a self-chosen manner of life which can be found in the works by Cisneros, Viramontes, and Chávez discussed in the succeeding chapters of this thesis.

2.2 *La Malinche*

While *Guadalupe* constitutes the positive side of the virgin/whore dichotomy, the undesirable myth of *La Malinche* can be found on its other end. *La Malinche*, also known as *Malintzín*, *Doña Marina*, or *La Chingada*, as opposed to her venerated virgin counterpart, is based not on a cultural icon or belief that developed with time but is rather derived from a genuine Aztec woman appearing in several historical records. Most that is known about her historical origins stems from scripts and memoirs recorded by colonial writers during the rule of the Spaniards over the former Aztec empire, especially conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo who delivered a detailed transcript of Hernán Cortés's victory over the native people and the appropriation of Mesoamerican land (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 147). *La Malinche* was born as Malinali Tenepat, sometimes also delivered Tenpal, in 1502 approximately to a privileged family in the pre-Columbian providence of Coatzacoalcos. After her father's death, she was sold by her mother and stepfather as a slave to claim *Malinche*'s inheritance and taken to Tabasco where she studied Mayan languages and Spanish besides already being fluent in the Aztec language of Nahuatl which made her an outstandingly gifted linguist and translator. *Malinche* became one of twelve women gifted to Hernán Cortés by the Aztecs and due to her excellent language skills soon became the conquistador's private translator and helping hand (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 147). The Spanish gave her the new name Marina which was later added the honorable female title *doña* as a sign of Spanish respect while the Mayans began to call her *Malintzín*, a modification from Marina to Mayan *Malin* with the noble suffix *tzín* which demonstrated both-sided respect for Cortés's assistant from the Spanish as well as from the native people (L. Paz 15). Besides mediating between the Spanish and her people, however, *Malinche* also became Cortés's mistress and eventually had a son of mixed race, Don Martín Cortés, who according to Chicano/a tradition is acknowledged as the first *mestizo* child and therefore as the origin of the entire Chicano/a people (Ikas,

Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur 147). Laura Paz notes that to the Spanish, "La Malinche was a symbol of the primitive new world to be conquered and civilized" (16). The Aztec woman was able to connect the natives and the Spaniards not only in linguistic terms but moreover by mixing their bloods and starting a new race on the newly conquered ground which defined her as the central mediator between native and new people and gave her a prominent position within her increasingly westernized society. Consequently, the majority of early historical records present *Malinche* in a positive light and even name her a hero or *una mujer excelente* (an excellent woman) (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 147). Not much is known about her life after Hernán Cortés departed from the New World. *Malinche* was reportedly given to a fellow Spaniard, Juan Jaramillo, whom she married and had a child with. Some sources also claim she revisited her mother and stepfather to forgive and even thank them since their actions served as the catalyst that made her a Christian woman (L. Paz 15). *La Malinche* died in 1527 or 1528 approximately due to smallpox.

It was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the figure of *La Malinche* became increasingly negatively annotated by Mexican and Chicano/a people and pushed into the role of the collaborator who served the Spanish enemy as Cortés's mistress and thereby betrayed her people; *Malinche* even turned into the main reason for the downfall of the Aztec empire and the rule of the Spanish over American land (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 148). Laura Paz explains that it is mainly due to literary tradition that the originally celebrated woman found in the earliest retellings of the Spanish colonizers turned into the doomed female figure and negative role model that lasts until today; she claims that "from the beginning her image may have been manipulated to serve the needs of the writer" (17). While she was celebrated by the Spanish for bringing the native folks closer to them and connecting land and people, succeeding generations of Chicano/as tend to merely perceive her as the trigger for the destruction of their land, tradition, and heritage. Until today, *La Malinche* is iconized as a *mujer*

mala (bad woman) and even as a Chicana version of the biblical Eve, troubling Chicanas with a "problematic legacy" (Grice 233). Chicanas suffer from the altered story of *La Malinche* that turned into a negative female archetype countering the domestic, caring, and chaste values demonstrated by *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the ideal Chicana stereotype. Women who oppose these values and seek to lead an independent, equal life outside the framework of patriarchy and domesticity run the risk of being labeled as *vendidas* (corruptible women) referring to *La Malinche*, and "betraying their descent in favor of modern American values" (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 148). These females are denounced for living according to their own beliefs that do not suit Chicano/a traditions and become infringed for being whores who abandon the female purity imaged by the Holy Virgin in favor of becoming aware of their bodies and sexuality, referring to *Malinche*'s physical relationship with Cortés which allegedly led to her unfaithfulness towards her race and heritage. *Malinche*'s disrespected utilization of her sexuality gave her the destructive epithet *La Chingada*, the fucked one. In his famous essay *The Sons of La Malinche*, Chicano writer Octavio Paz reflects on the origins of the *Malinche* figure becoming demonized and destructed due to her sexuality. The verb *chingar* has various meanings throughout Latin America, for instance in Chile and Argentina it implies any kind of failure while in Colombia it means one is disappointed; "almost everywhere *chingarse* means to be made a fool of, to be involved in a fiasco" (O. Paz 76). Although the meaning varies in Mexico as well, the word is mainly sexually connotated. However, Paz explains that the initiative for the sexual action rarely stems from the woman herself but that the act is enforced upon her by the male. He explains:

> "The man who commits it never does so with the consent of the *chingada*. *Chingar*, then, is to do violence to another. The verb is masculine, active, cruel: it stings, wounds, gashes, stains [...] The *chingón* is the *macho*, the male; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world." (77)

Even though it is the male who makes use of sexuality and forces the female to participate by violating and disrespecting her according to Paz, Chicanas remain the evil contributors in this action for they are expected to adhere to virtuous values while men are liberated to practice sexuality. Therefore, *Malinche*'s misunderstood actions can be comprehended as a contributing factor that promoted gender inequality and patriarchism in Chicano/a culture, leaving women vulnerable and at the mercy of men while at the same time being associated with evil.

Within the scope of the often misconceived and rewritten story of *La Malinche*, *Malinchismo* was established as a "concept in Mexican and Chicano culture which equates selling out, in whatever form, with Malinche's selling out to Cortés" (Mirandé & Enríquez 256). This concept turns disobedient Chicanas into *Malinchistas*, females who sell out their heritage and people by living the lifestyle of another country, predominantly the U.S., and adapting female values or characteristics that are unacceptable in Chicano/a culture. Cherríe Moraga writes about *La Malinche* that "ever since, brown men have been accusing her of betraying her race, and over the centuries continue to blame her entire sex for this 'transgression'", confining the female gender for a crime that had not been committed (100). It is important to note that in blaming and condemning the figure of *Malinche*, the Chicano/a tradition tends to ignore the historical facts that might have led to her actions, namely that she was sold and most probably raped and threatened. Additionally, Candelaria notes that for their entire lives, Aztec women were harshly disciplined and banned from most of the social and cultural life in the empire (3). While males were free to have sex with women in Aztec society even if they were married, women were sexually restricted and linked to purity and chastity, similar to Chicana women. Even in the earliest times, females were exploited, and "La Malinche was bred to serve and to obey" which might be a possible explanation for her actions and her allegiance to Cortés and the Spanish (Candelaria 5). The character of *La Malinche* might have been misunderstood and

manipulated to the core, blaming her and her female descendants for crimes they have never committed and rendering the female gender inferior.

However, an additional problem in the Chicana community is that the deprived image of *Malinche* as opposed to the Virgin of Guadalupe causes not only a relationship of hatred between men and women but between women themselves, Rukwied claims (24). Mothers who are central to the upbringing of the younger children and especially the transfer of cultural and moral rules, values, and stories to daughters, pass this negatively connotated female myth on to the next generations of Chicanas. Moraga explains how as a consequence, "Chicanas begin to turn [their] backs on each other either to gain male approval or to avoid being sexually stigmatized by them under the name of puta, vendida, jota" (98). To escape social judgment or stigmatization by Chicanos, Chicanas have caused a vicious cycle of self-hatred as well as despite from one female towards the other which generates an increasing need for a female community and self-love within Chicana society to eventually escape pre-fabricated stereotypes and gender inequality. To achieve this, Chicana feminists began to become more and more aware of their Indian and female elements and to develop an understanding of the demonized *Malinche* by regarding her as one of the first women in their history to defy the traditional female role and valuing her for her various skills and the awareness of her femininity and sexuality. Anzaldúa writes about *La Malinche* in *Borderlands/La Frontera* that "for 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wishes to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. The odds were heavily against her [...] She remained faceless and voiceless" (45). This silencing of *Malinche* is countered by contemporary Chicana feminists and writers by reconsidering her social and historical role and rewriting her not as the doomed, misunderstood archetype but as a strong woman and role model, detaching Chicanas from the negative features the myth has brought upon them and honoring *La Virgen*'s supposedly negative counterpart.

2.3 *La Llorona*

The third influential female myth in Chicano/a culture, despised similar to the figure of *La Malinche*, is *La Llorona*, the Weeping Woman. The ancient legend of *La Llorona* recounts a woman who is said to have drowned her children as a punishment for her adulterous husband. Since she remains unable to find the children's corpses again after she hid them, she is believed to haunt lakes, creeks, and rivers at night, desperately weeping and mourning for her dead, untraceable children (Madsen 34). Many varieties of the legend also regard the ghost of *La Llorona* as a seductress of men (Kearney 199). The versions of the legend told over the past five hundred years differ from small details to entirely distinctive fundaments of the story. Debates over the true origin of the myth thus remain, yet it is strongly assumed that the Weeping Woman is the result of an intertwining of indigenous and European folkloric tales and influences. The Aztec origins of *La Llorona* trace back to the sixteenth century, the time of the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica. Legend relates that in 1550, the people of what is now Mexico City heard a painful crying and weeping at night which stemmed from a woman wearing a white dress whose face could not be seen; she wandered the streets until she disappeared into a nearby lake (Kirtley 156). Elenes adds to this version of the legend that the woman was believed to be "the sixth prognostication of the doom of the indigenous inhabitants of México", a woman serving as a forecast for the downfall of the Aztec world who would cry at night over having to take her children far away from the city in order to rescue them (75). This woman was interpreted as the ancient Aztec goddess *Cihuacoatl*, one of the most respected and dreaded feminine deities of Aztec culture. *Cihuacoatl* was praised as the mother of all human beings with the word *Cihuatl* meaning "woman" and *coatl* meaning "snake", making her the "snake woman" (Elenes 75-76). As the ancient goddess was equipped with numerous physical features resembling the modern legend of *La Llorona* as well as the agreement of nocturnal weeping characterizing both female myths, it remains strongly assumed that the snake woman

constitutes *Llorona*'s Aztec origin. Still, *Llorona*'s indigenous origin was dishonored during the times of the Aztec empire already. As the snake woman was also honored as the patron of midwives and both goddess of war and birth, the goddess's image was manipulated to recruit more sacrificial victims for the Aztec war gods by choosing an ordinary Aztec woman who was to reenact the goddess by carrying a cradle containing a sacrificial knife instead of a child and then disappearing into water, leaving the cradle and knife behind as a symbol of desire for further victims (Carbonell 55). The original mother of life and people was disrespected for her ability to bear and nurse children and was misused to serve male Aztec warfare instead, portraying early gender inequality and male domination which began during the Aztec rule. Within the scope of this redefinition of female symbols and deities, the goddess *Tonantzin* became the "good mother" while the snake woman *Cihuacoatl*, *Llorona*'s ancestor, became stigmatized as the "bad mother", assisting the female dichotomy of good mother versus bad mother that lasted throughout succeeding generations of Mexicans and Chicano/as (Anzaldúa 49-50).

However, as the legend of *La Llorona* is evidentially a blend of Aztec and European elements, the myth shows great resemblance to many European stories which are said to have had a major influence on the development of the *La Llorona* legend as it is known today in Mexico, the U.S. and wider parts of Latin America. Primarily, the myth of *La Llorona* resembles the Greek mythological figure of Medea who was betrayed by her lover Jason and in revenge killed the children he had with another woman which had her sentenced to a life of wandering around (Elenes 77). This myth is furthermore closely linked to the character of Lilith, Adam's first wife according to Hebrew tradition who was made from clay just like her male companion. When she realized that Adam as a male was meant to "overpower" her, she flew away and bore several demons which led to mythology and religion ascribing her two main characteristics: "seducing men and killing children", similar to the corruptions that characterize the modern *Llorona* (Elenes 77). Just like her modern successor, Lilith was abandoned

and despised for rebelling against patriarchy and not fulfilling her duties as a woman. What resembles the contemporary myth of *La Llorona* most, still, is the German medieval legend *Die Weiße Frau* which was told in various versions, among them the most famous stories of the Hohenzollern family ghost as well as the White Lady of Cologne. A young woman was once seduced by a noble knight, but when she got pregnant, he abandoned her and refused to marry her. Revengefully, she threw her child under the knight's horse and stabbed it with his sword. Since that day, she is believed to wander around at night, mourning the loss of her child and trying to seduce young men (Elenes 78). The legend of *La Llorona* is therefore believed to be rooted in a fusion of Aztec religious mythology and European, especially German, folk tales brought to Mexico by the Spanish who themselves learned these stories from members of the Catholic Church bringing them along on their travels through Europe during the fifteenth century (Elenes 79). As the stories arrived in Mesoamerica, they were intertwined with the image of the ancient snake goddess *Cihuacoatl*, and the myth of *La Llorona* was born. A lesser-known version of the legend is grounded on an intertwining of *La Llorona* with the story of *La Malinche*. This version claims *Malinche* went mad after Cortés left her and their son to return to Spain and in her sorrow and anger threw the child from the balcony, then killed herself, Laura Paz states (17). Even though this version of the myth is quite unfamiliar and was probably born from a modern-day revision of the legends due to an intense involvement with both rather than stemming from historical or mythological tradition, this version strengthens the image of the bad mother, *mujer mala*, and traitor by linking the two doomed female figures, further encouraging a distinction between good and bad woman (Elenes 76).

La Llorona, the bad mother, is mainly used now as a pedagogical strategy in modern Chicano/a society. "If I don't behave, La Llorona will come and take me! Probably to a horrible scary place such as cemetery so I must behave well and obey my parents", Elenes recalls from her childhood memory (70). The mythical woman, often rewritten and misread just like her

fellow negative figure *La Malinche*, became a scary bedtime story for children or rather daughters to turn them into rule-conscious women. The modern legend of *La Llorona* "reproduces traditional values such as obedience and responsibility" to make women "accept traditional notions of womanhood and sexuality" (Elenes 70). Consequences from rebellions against these values come not only in the form of disgrace for the woman herself but moreover as a mortal peril for her daughters, in a social sense rather than literarily spoken, turning them into disrespected outcasts as well. The myth of *La Llorona* turns the mother who gives life into the one who can also take it away through violation of social rules and values (Madsen 35). Mirandé and Enríquez regard *La Llorona* as "an image of a woman who willingly or unwillingly fails to comply with feminine imperatives", expanding this image onto fellow Mexicanas and Chicanas (70). While the male traitor in the myth finds shelter within the scopes of patriarchy and refuses to take responsibility for his actions, the modern Chicano man is just as able to get away with misconduct whereas Chicanas run the risk of falling from grace as soon as they turn their backs on traditional female principles. The everlasting retelling of the *Llorona* legend as a disrespected mother and woman thereby realizes a further distinction between good and bad women as well as the definition of appropriate maternity in Chicano/a society, strengthening gender inequality and pressuring women to cope with how their male-dominated communities expect women to live and behave.

Nevertheless, contemporary Chicana feminists seek to reverse the negatively connotated image of *La Llorona* and her popular legend. Madsen notes how the victimized woman "offers a powerful image that speaks to all the [...] Chicanas who find that the lives they lead cost them their children" (34). Chicanas fight for recognition of the strong, rebellious sides of *La Llorona* and try to defy the negative pedagogical instructions imposed by the retellings of her legend in order to make upcoming generations of Chicanas aware of their female powers instead of falling victim to the often-rewritten, misunderstood bedtime horror story. This

struggle for recognition of the female also includes an awareness of their indigenous roots and *Llorona*'s indigenous origins. Anzaldúa for instance states how "the Aztec female rites of mourning were rites of defiance protesting the cultural changes which disrupted the equality and balance between female and male, and protesting their demotion to a lesser status, their denigration" (43). *Llorona*'s cries shall no longer be regarded as her confession and the regret of her assumed misdeeds but rather serve their original purpose again by helping Chicanas to raise their voices against patriarchy and rewrite the *Llorona* archetype from a traitor and bad mother into a resilient and willing female role model, conscious of her roots and powers which will become visible in the analyses of contemporary Chicana fiction in the subsequent chapters.

3. Rewriting Female Myths in Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*

3.1 Iconizing a Universal *Virgen de Guadalupe* in "Little Miracles, Kept Promises"

Sandra Cisneros's short story "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" from her 1991 work *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* deals with the everyday situation of Chicano/as living in the area of Texas and illustrates how the most influential female archetype in Chicano/a culture, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, shapes their lives, beliefs, and, above all, gender roles. Unlike traditional short stories, "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" is made of twenty-three individual letters, so-called *peticiones* (petitions), put down by Chicano/as in front of statues of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and her aliases. The evaluation of the first petitions depicts how the definition of a Chicana identity is still tied to traditional values and principles that hinder many Chicanas from experiencing epiphanic realizations and keep them within the predominant scope of Chicano patriarchy while the last petition, eventually, demonstrates how to revise one's faith and the archetypical *La Virgen*, yet remaining an intact part of the Chicano/a community.

The female position depicted by petitions written by Chicanas demonstrates how women's agency in the Chicano/a community is restricted by the patriarchal system which has its main roots in the Catholic faith. Aleksić claims that the short story "raises multiple Chicana voices and delivers heterogeneity through the multiplicity of worries and burdens in the lives of Chicanas", portraying the marginalized position of Chicanas within their community which is mainly due to the inferiority of their gender and the iconization of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as the ideal female (216). Thus, the women's concerns generally revolve around their households, families, and male appreciation. For instance, Chicanas Barbara Ybañez and Teresa Galindo find themselves in a rough position concerning the redefinitions of their female

personalities. In her petition, Barbara asks the saint to send her a partner who acts like a real man and accepts responsibility which proves her comprehension of the Chicano/a gender inequality. However, she remains unable to detach herself from one of the main sources of gender inequality and poor female conditions in the Chicano/a community, namely *La Virgen* herself, and thus is still stuck in the gap between tradition and liberation (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 165). By writing to *La Virgen* that she will turn her statue "upside down" until she sends her the right man, Barbara not only portrays her actual inability to live without a man but moreover proves to be unable to redefine her religious beliefs (*Woman Hollering* 118). Her reliance on the help of the Catholicized and male-dominated saint subconsciously links her to tradition and hinders her from finding the modern man she longs for. Similarly, Teresa Galindo had begged the Virgin to send her a man. A year later in her petition, she begs *La Virgen* to take him back away from her. While Teresa needed a man in her life first to learn how to respect her female values as well as a liberated life, she resembles Barbara by begging the saint to take him away instead of using her own will and power to get rid of the lover. Lara explains the women's behavior by claiming that "alternative spiritualities that value 'the feminine principle' have often been a challenge for Chicanas" (106). Caught within the pregiven social rules and beliefs of their communities, including the everlasting faith in the common image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the modern women fail to take the last steps of freeing themselves from common faith and thus still have to rely on the Virgin to come to their aid, keeping them from living fully emancipated lives and finding own ways of defining spirituality.

Via Rosario "Chayo" De Leon, the last petitioner, Cisneros presents an advanced Chicana who unlike her predecessors finds a way of redefining her faith in the archetypical saint and incorporating it into a religiously and publicly emancipated life within the Chicano/a community (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 165). Besides her petition, Chayo leaves her braided hair at the Virgin's altar which she had just cut off. She laments how her mother cried

about her cutting off her hair for the first time in her life and how her family constantly forces her to get married and have kids. Yet, Chayo writes to *La Virgen* not to ask something of her but to thank her for not making her pregnant since she "can't be a mother" just like she "didn't choose being female" (*Woman Hollering* 127). Growing up in the U.S., Chayo has come to terms with balancing two cultures and calls herself "a woman with one foot in this world and one foot in that. A woman straddling both" (*Woman Hollering* 125). Thus, much to the disgust of her family, Chayo has chosen the values, rules, and views she wishes to stick to which, however, lack many traditionally prescribed Chicano/a gender duties, such as becoming a wife and mother. Aleksić explains that Chayo's desire to reject the traditional Chicana path of life leads to great fury within herself since she perpetually senses her environment still pushing her into the traditional female role against her will (219). This anger is what leads Chayo to start protesting against *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and the values she encompasses; she writes:

> "Virgencita de Guadalupe. For a long time I wouldn't let you in my house. I couldn't see you without seeing my ma each time my father came home drunk and yelling, blaming everything that ever went wrong in his life on her [...] Couldn't look at you without blaming you for all the pain my mother and her mother and all our mothers' mothers have put up with in the name of God. Couldn't let you in my house." (*Woman Hollering* 127)

Constituting the Chicano/as' religious patron and defining many values and rules, *La Virgen* becomes Chayo's main target in her protest against her culture's shortcomings which leads to her turning her back on the saint entirely at first, hoping to be able to build the life she longs for and escape the vicious cycle her female line has been trapped in ever since. Cisneros herself explains the anger Chicanas feel towards *Guadalupe* in her famous essay "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess":

> "What a culture of denial [...] I was angry for so many years every time I saw la Virgen de Guadalupe [...] She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to aspire to be Jesus? [...] They were fornicating like rabbits while the Church ignored them and pointed us women toward our destiny – marriage and motherhood." (47)

This anger is comparable to Chayo's position; she rejects the notions of marriage and maternity and despises her culture for limiting female autonomy, faith, and sexuality which are "denigrated and controlled" in the Chicano/a community (Petty 122). Thus, she chooses the only thing she feels able to do in her situation and rejects the image of the Virgin and Chicano/a faith in general in order to counter her dominant culture.

However, she writes to *La Virgen* that it was a hard time rejecting her and her principles: "Don't think I didn't get my share of it from everyone. Heretic. Atheist. *Malinchista*. *Hocicona* [...] Miss High-and-Mighty. Miss Thinks-She's-Too-Good-For-Us. Acting like a *bolilla*, a white girl. *Malinche*. Don't think it didn't hurt being called a traitor" (*Woman Hollering* 127-128). Due to Chayo countering *Guadalupe*'s ideals, her environment immediately links her to the despised image of *La Malinche*, the culture's betrayer, and puts Chayo on a par with this female archetype since "in this case [...] she is stepping outside the bounds of acceptable behavior for women and daring to express feminine power and sexuality" while at the same time betraying the Chicano/a culture in favor of modern U.S. lifestyle (Fitts). While Rodríguez-Aranda states that usually there are "no in-betweens" amid the virtuous Virgin and the wicked Aztec woman, this interconnection of Chayo and *Malinche* constitutes the first step in rewriting the common image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (65). Though she feels hurt and misjudged at first, the associations with the misunderstood figure of *Malinche* inspire Chayo to rethink her heritage and the roots of her faith. Just like she herself seeks to live out her femininity and sexuality freely, she wishes for *Guadalupe*, the center of her Chicana faith, to do so as well:

"I wanted you bare-breasted, snakes in your hands. I wanted you leaping and somersaulting the backs of bulls. I wanted you swallowing rat hearts and rattling volcanic ash. I wasn't going to be my mother or my grandma. All that self-sacrifice, all that silent suffering. Hell no. Not here. Not me", she writes (*Woman Hollering* 127). Via appealing to the symbolism and spirituality of the earth according to ancient Aztec tradition and belief, Chayo contrasts the Virgin's Catholic spirituality and the authoritarian Christian values she represents (Mermann-Jozwiak 112). By rejecting these Catholic traits and breaking out in a new spiritual direction, Chayo understands that there is more to the classic image of the Virgin she has been confronted with since her early years: "How I finally understood who you are. No longer Mary the mild, but our mother Tonantzín. Your church at Tepeyac built on the site of her temple. Sacred ground no matter whose goddess claims it" (*Woman Hollering* 128). Revitalizing *La Virgen*'s true origin, the Aztec earth goddess *Tonantzin*, Chayo finds a way to reconnect with her Mexican ancestors and ancestral traditions without fearing to lose her own identity (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 166). Through accepting not only the modern Virgin's passivity but her ancestor's wild and sexual traits as well, Chayo confesses to a rather "universal Guadalupe"; a saint with various traits and personalities who serves the wants and needs of the diverse Chicana community and whom every individual can turn to without the fear of failing or not being good enough (Ikas, *Zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur* 166). Her epiphany is furthermore illustrated by Chayo declaring that her head, lacking her long braid, now feels "light as is [she'd] raised it from water" (*Woman Hollering* 125). In the Aztec tradition, water symbolizes rebirth (Elenes 79). Chayo, as opposed to the other Chicanas in the short story, achieves to redefine her entire faith and view of herself as a woman by reconnecting with her roots and permitting her own beliefs and desires to intertwine with the common Chicano/a faith and tradition.

In “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess”, Sandra Cisneros claims the following about her own epiphany concerning the Holy Virgin: “My Virgen de Guadalupe is not the mother of God. She is God. She is a face for a god without ethnicity, a female deity for a god who is genderless, but I also understand that for her to approach me, for me to finally open the door and accept her, she had to be a woman like me” (50). Comparable to this, she rewrites *La Virgen de Guadalupe* via Chayo accepting *La Virgen* as an approachable woman on equal terms whom she can transmit onto her own life and experiences to gain knowledge and appreciate her environment. “When I could see you in all your facets [...] I could love you, and, finally, learn to love me”, Chayo writes (*Woman Hollering* 128). Besides loving herself as a woman, Chayo for the first time becomes able to understand her mother and grandmother by viewing their “capacity for endurance through the strengths of Tonantzín” instead of interpreting it as a sign of failure and weakness due to blind acceptance of the unachievable values their Catholic belief represents, assigning strength and potential to the Chicanas surrounding her (Wyatt 265). Nonetheless, by seeing the different facets of *Guadalupe* and linking her to all the varieties she has ever existed as, Chayo furthermore understands that the Virgin is not only the goddess of Chicanas but the goddess of every woman claiming her as her deity as she can also be Buddha, Allah, Yahweh, and many more. By realizing that *La Virgen* serves as a variety of incarnations, she accepts her “as a syncretic construct, one that signals both self-sacrifice and resistance against dominant ideology” (Mermann-Jozwiak 112). This redefinition of *Guadalupe* via linking her to her ancestral roots as well as to many other creeds and traditions provides women with individuality and power to strive after their dreams and to adhere to their subjective standards without having to put their communities and traditions utterly behind.

Lara claims that through the rewriting of the popular Catholic figure of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, “Cisneros takes Mary down to earth” (117). She becomes a saint who instead of unachievable and unrealistic morals portrays the freedom every Chicana and woman in general

has when it comes to constructing her way of living and venerating, no matter the individual preferences and dreams. This modification allows Chayo to stick to her path of life without having to become a mother and wife. Her last words she writes to *Guadalupe*, standing in front of her statue, are: "Mighty Guadalupana Coatlaxopeuh Tonantzín, what 'little miracle' could I pin here? Braid of hair in its place and know that I thank you" (*Woman Hollering* 129). Her hair which has served as a sign of rebellion and protest against the female standards in the Chicano/a community at first eventually turns into the symbol catalyzing Chayo's epiphany and comprehension of her identity, for she finds her way of rebelling against what her environment expects of her without having to leave the community or disconnect the traditions she grew up with (Aleksić 220). The rewriting of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* in "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" "animates la Virgencita into an active, powerful female [...] rather than the stilled image of a Mexican *retablo* or altarpiece" (Carrol & Maher 77). Via this revision, Cisneros enables not only Chayo but all Chicanas struggling with social or religious expectations to look beyond the traditional image of *La Virgen*, to see and understand that she has been a lot more than merely the passive Catholic patron and that she can be whatever one wants her to be at all times while through sticking to this form of worshipping *Guadalupe*, Chicanas themselves can become everything they desire without ever having to lose faith.

3.2 Revitalizing *La Malinche*'s Identity in "Never Marry a Mexican"

In "Never Marry a Mexican", Sandra Cisneros focuses on *Guadalupe*'s destructive counterpart and adds a twist to the negatively connotated myth of *La Malinche* by linking the story's protagonist Clemencia, a Chicana deeply struggling with her (cultural) identity and sexuality, to the mythological female figure. As the title already refers to, the short story opens with Clemencia reminiscing on her mother who continuously drilled her into staying away from Mexican men: "Never marry a Mexican, my ma said once and always. She said this

because of my father. She said this though she was Mexican too. But she was born here in the U.S., and he was born there, and it's *not* the same, you know" (*Woman Hollering* 68). Clemencia here refers to how her father was said to have "married down" by espousing a Chicana from "*el otro lado*, the other side" who could not even speak Spanish while it would have been considered "marrying up" if he had chosen a white woman from the U.S. (*Woman Hollering* 68). Clemencia had given credit to her mother's prejudice against Mexicans from early on; her attitude towards race, however, becomes even more problematic and biased than her mother's. Laura Paz explains that the mother's advice "becomes complicated because it causes Clemencia to loathe Mexicans, white women for not being Mexican, and ultimately herself for the Mexican blood that runs through her", leaving her unsure of her own social position and cultural identity (22). Clemencia's sense of self gets even more damaged when she experiences rejection from her mother directly, that action engaging the women in a modern rewriting of the estrangement between the historical *Malinche* and her mother (Rojas 140). After Clemencia's father died, her mother married a wealthy man and bequeathed the family's home to her husband's son instead of Clemencia. "She would've sold us to the Devil if she could", Clemencia states (*Woman Hollering* 73). This scenario is reminiscent of *Malinche*'s mother selling her into slavery to the Spanish and building a life with her new husband and son. Splitting her sense of identity and heritage even further, Clemencia's mother sends her into a cultural borderland just like *Malinche* experienced at the hands of her own mother. Clemencia thus finds herself in the situation Anzaldúa explains in *Borderlands/La Frontera* as "alienated from her mother culture [and] 'alien' in the dominant culture", struggling to find her way between cultures and forming a female identity (42).

Even after her mother's death, Clemencia's fate is still linked to the myth of *La Malinche*. Like the mythical example, Clemencia works as a teacher and translator, a cultural misfit belonging to neither of the societies she lives in (Fitts). Alone in the world, unwilling to

marry and unable to fully involve with the U.S. lifestyle or to reject her prejudice against Mexicans, Clemencia turns to the last weapon she feels she has to make a stand as a woman, namely her body and thus gets involved with various married white men. She explains she takes "just the sweetest part of the fruit", leaving the tough parts of marriage to the wives (*Woman Hollering* 69). Her main attention, still, has always been directed towards her lover and former teacher Drew with whom she started an affair at nineteen years old. This lover, yet soon begins to call Clemencia "[his] Malinalli, Malinche, [his] courtesan" (*Woman Hollering* 74). Laura Paz explains that Cisneros "compares her to La Malinche because both were seduced by men who were their 'teachers' and once they submitted sexually, they could never gain the respect or hand in marriage of those men they loved" (21). Similar to Cortés, Drew uses Clemencia for short-term pleasure and abandons her as soon as he has to return to the "real world". Unconsciously, Clemencia gets pushed into the same role as *La Malinche*, a woman experiencing loathing for her illicit affairs with men while the male part goes unpunished, for "the pervasiveness of the myth is unfathomable, often permeating and suffusing [Chicanas'] very being without conscious awareness" (Alarcón 204-205). As *Malinche* served as Cortés's helping hand, she symbolizes the female weakness of being receptive to sexual manipulation, Alarcón adds (205). However, unlike *La Malinche*, Clemencia rejects this act of mere sexual exploitation and uses her female sexuality itself as a weapon against patriarchal structures.

Refusing to accept and reenact *Malinche*'s passive fate as *La Chingada*, the screwed one, Clemencia turns the tables by becoming herself what in Octavio Paz's analysis of the *Malinche* myth would be considered the *chingón*, the active violator instead of the violated woman, the *chingada* (77). "I leapt inside you and split you like an apple. Opened for the other to look and not give back", Clemencia illustrates her sexual act with Drew (*Woman Hollering* 78). Instead of being violated by the unfaithful man, she takes the upper hand by assigning to herself the (sexual) power that is commonly attributed to the male part, "splitting" her lover

from the very core and thereby feeling she is in power and control over her illegitimate relationship. Nevertheless, Fitts states that despite her trying, "she is Mexican in the eyes of the world" and remains "the exotic dark-skinned woman with whom [men] can have sex before going home to their pale, polished wives". While Clemencia desperately tries to establish herself as the leader of her relationships and rejects to be the used one, she remains, just like *Malinche*, the exciting side leap of powerful white men and has to realize that those white men, just like her, would never marry a Mexican and thus merely exploit the Mexican woman sexually as well as emotionally. Trying to take the role of the *chingón* does not bring any liberation to Clemencia and leaves her in the same torn and uncertain position as before; Wyatt explains this by claiming that "that tactic fails to release her from the influence of the Malinche legend. Escaping the crippling polarities of gender is not so simple as appropriating the gestures of masculinity" (245). Thus, Clemencia does not gain great power from trying to reverse gender traits and finds that liberating Chicanas as well as their negative role model of *La Malinche* cannot be achieved by merely copying the misconduct of the male supremacy.

While the mythological or historical *Malinche* is mainly known as a traitor to her culture, Fitts adds how via Clemencia the betrayal of the female "sisterhood" becomes relevant as well. Through her sexual engagement with married men, Clemencia betrays womanhood and disrespects the women around her. Since she has been taught the difference between a white woman and a Chicana from early childhood on, Clemencia remains unable throughout her life to respect white women; "she's not *my* sister", she justifies her lack of compassion for Drew's wife Megan (*Woman Hollering* 76). Just as the often misheard and misinterpreted legend of *La Malinche* implies her betrayal of other women via aiding Cortés with the help of her female charms, Clemencia becomes a traitor not only to her race but also to her fellow Chicanas. "I've been an accomplice, committed premediated crimes. I'm guilty of having caused deliberate pain to other women. I'm vindictive and cruel, and I'm capable of anything", Clemencia even

admits shamelessly (*Woman Hollering* 68). Rojas explains Clemencia's position by claiming that "as long as women are a part of the masculine phallocentric order, they are bound to fight each other for the limited space allotted to them and also to adopt patriarchy's aggressive forms of expression and conquest" and additionally already clarifies that "for Clemencia to move beyond this destructive mindset and toward a self-fulfillment through self-expression [...] she must first take on the role of the master" (144-145).

To become the master and overcome her attitude, Clemencia feels the urge to intrude into Megan's personal space. After dinner with Drew in his house, she starts to hide gummy bears in Megan's personal belongings such as lipsticks, nail polishes, and even her diaphragm. She admits that she had already enjoyed intruding into Megan's space when Megan gave birth to her and Drew's son while Clemencia made love to Drew in their marriage bed; "it's always given me a bit of crazy joy to be able to kill those women like that", she explains and even admits having a relationship with Drew's son eighteen years later (*Woman Hollering* 76-77). Wyatt senses how beneath many of Clemencia's statements "runs a subtext of images drawn from maternal processes – conception, gestation, birth, nursing" which symbolizes a rejection of the maternal ideology of the Chicano/a community (250). After Clemencia places a gummy bear in the very inside of Megan's Babushka doll, she keeps the tiny baby doll from inside the puppet. By throwing the tiny puppet "into that moody creek where winos piss and rats swim" later, Clemencia not only takes away motherhood from the wife of the man who refused to accept Clemencia as more than mere sexual pleasure but furthermore intertwines the myths of *La Malinche* and *La Llorona* (*Woman Hollering* 82). While *Malinche* and *Llorona* are linked in the Chicano/a community to the images of the bad mother and *mujer mala*, Clemencia attempts to free herself from the motherly female image she remained unable to realize throughout her life via her conclusive action and although it causes much pain to another woman, her brutal act symbolizes relief. The rejection of Drew's sexual exploitation of her as well as the

refusal to accept and tolerate a mother and wife through disrespecting Megan's personal space and having an affair with her son, enable Clemencia to finally find a way of epiphany. Eventually, she has to come to terms with the way things are and has to learn that blind rebellion will not set her free from *Malinche*'s legacy and the obstacles she experiences as a Chicana in a white environment. Rojas undermines this and justifies Clemencia's overall behavior by stating that one eventually realizes how her harsh emotions of anger and hatred are never really directed toward other women but in fact at the repressive culture denouncing and subjugating them (146). Accordingly, Clemencia's often ruthless and unsuccessful rebellion is nothing but a desperate cry for help in a community and culture she cannot identify with, but which is too powerful and conventional for her to tackle.

Due to Clemencia's mostly destructive behavior and her often fruitless rebellions, it has become obvious that Sandra Cisneros in "Never Marry a Mexican" does not rewrite the myth of *La Malinche* so as to offer a fully liberated, modern interpretation of the mythological female figure as she does with *La Virgen de Guadalupe* in "Little Miracles, Kept Promises". Instead, she retells the myth through the eyes of a Chicana who is a victim and abuser at the same time, a woman who "like La Malinche, [...] is defined by her race and her sex, and [...] struggles with these meanings that are imposed on her body" in a male-dominated community that is hard to wrestle alone (Fitts). Cisneros's odd rewriting of *La Malinche* portrays cultural and personal chaos which Rojas regards as "a positive energy" that achieves to undermine patriarchy in a way that allows for women to explore alternative and modern modes of identity and self-definition (143). The story illustrates how Chicanas are free to discover unconventional ways of living and expressing themselves and that no Chicana is limited to the given female roles of her community even if culture and tradition are indestructible. Chicanas do not have to marry or become mothers and have no obligation to explain their preferred behavior neither to the men of their community nor to fellow Chicanas. This also becomes obvious in the way the

first-person narrative of the story enables Clemencia to share her own life and thoughts instead of letting men outline her story according to a given archetype defined by patriarchy, making her a real and animated female character (L. Paz 26). While the myth of *La Malinche* is an everlasting victim of patriarchal domination and has been misinterpreted and rewritten at the hands of men who seek to prescribe a Chicana code of behavior, Cisneros presents a version of *Malinche* speaking for herself without having to justify her behavior, putting an end to the objectification of the archetype. Cisneros's open-ended rewriting of *Malinche* sets an end to the spiteful cycle of the legend by commencing Clemencia's narrative at the very point *Malinche*'s story ends, namely the moment the male lover leaves, and thus reworks the *Malinche* character at the core (Rojas 141). Consequently, *Malinche* who had been silenced after Cortés left and had her own story written by men who commonly never met her gets the chance to make herself clear through Cisneros's rewriting without having to apologize for her behavior, detaching Chicanas from her vicious legacy.

By putting Clemencia in *Malinche*'s shoes and reevaluating *Malinche*'s fate as an archetypical woman in this way, Cisneros portrays how the mythological woman is in fact an autonomous individual. Even though Clemencia's actions in the story are controversial and often unrightful and the rewriting of the archetypical *Malinche* does not result in a pure, reprieved female figure, Sandra Cisneros thus portrays an active woman who may not be absolved of her alleged misconducts but has been freed from the role of the passive victim and betrayer, demonstrating Chicanas how to find their voices within patriarchal Chicano/a society and explore alternative identities as well as sexuality without vindicating oneself.

3.3 *La Llorona* Becoming *La Gritona* in "Woman Hollering Creek"

In the title story of *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, Sandra Cisneros tells the story of Cleófilas, a young woman from Mexico who comes to Texas after marrying a Chicano man from "the other side", Juan Pedro, linking her more and more to the female archetype despised similar to *La Malinche* in Chicano/a communities, *La Llorona*. Growing up in Mexico, the lives of Cleófilas and her friends are heavily influenced by their favorite *telenovelas*, Mexican soap operas which are "a potpourri of dramatic events, spiced with exaggeration, complications, convoluted plots, subplots, interwoven stories, coincidence, intrigues, and melodrama" and typically conclude with "a poor bur worthy girl's rise to marriage and wealth" (Mermann-Jozwiak 106-107). Influenced by the depictions of women in her *telenovelas*, Cleófilas strives after dangerously idealistic expectations regarding marriage, children, and a home of her own. Simerka notes how in Mexico and Chicano/a communities, "contemporary mass media portrayals of women and gender relations complement patriarchal discourses transmitted through folk legend", calling on women to remain faithful to prescribed gender roles and ideal images of womanhood and motherhood, such as implemented by *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (53). Thus, Cleófilas concludes that to find a man, she must be submissive and faithful, and as soon as she gets married believes that, just like in the *telenovelas*, she has to suffer for love and stand any kind of pain to keep the bond alive, "because to suffer for love is good. The pain all sweet somehow" (*Woman Hollering* 45).

However, as soon as she arrives in the U.S. and moves into a home that is not at all as glamorous as in her soap operas, Cleófilas must realize that not only her romantic dreams of life on the other side of the border become demolished but her picture-perfect marriage as well. The man she believed would be her companion through life turns out to be an aggressive and brutal adulterer. Alone in the new country, Cleófilas, like her female role models, stands the violence and decides to suffer for Juan Pedro's love. Although living a nightmare, Cleófilas

becomes the submissive wife her culture expects her to be according to tradition and folk tales and accepts her husband's emotional and physical abuse. Gloria Anzaldúa explains how in Mexican and Chicano/a culture, "selfishness is condemned, especially in women; humility and selflessness, the absence of selfishness, is considered a virtue"; thus convincing the young protagonist to remain in her role instead of rebelling against her husband, aligning with the traditional Mexican gender code of behavior and fulfilling Juan Pedro's desires (40).

As a new mother, left alone at home by Juan Pedro all day and deprived of her *telenovelas* in the new country, the creek running right behind their house named *Woman Hollering* or *La Gritona* awakens Cleófilas's interest:

> "*La Gritona*. Such a funny name for such a lovely arroyo. But that's what they call the creek that ran behind the house. Though no one could say whether the woman had hollered from anger or pain. The natives only knew the arroyo you crossed on the way to San Antonio, and then once again on the way back, was called Woman Hollering, a name no one from these parts questioned, much less understood." (*Woman Hollering* 46)

Surprised at the creek's odd name, Cleófilas asks the other women of the town about the term's origin, but they merely reply to her saying "p*ues, allá de los indios, quién sabe* [well, way back to the Indians, who knows]" (*Woman Hollering* 46; my trans.). The women even warn her of *La Gritona*: "Don't go out there after dark, *mi'jita*. Stay near the house [...] Bad luck. *Mal aire*. You'll get sick and the baby too. You'll catch a fright wandering about in the dark, and then you'll see how right we were" (*Woman Hollering* 51). Cleófilas remains unable to understand her fellow Chicanas' warnings at first; Carbonell, however, claims the women's assertions merely "suggest their inability to comprehend the significance of La Gritona's indigenous roots" (66). After not having taken an interest in the creek's origin throughout their lives, the women of the town merely reproduce the horror stories they have been told themselves and

portray only unsatisfactory guides for Cleófilas to understand her new life and environment. The other Chicanas, especially her two neighbors, serve as bad role models in a general sense as they reproduce the very values transmitted to Cleófilas through her *telenovelas*. Soledad, translating to "loneliness", on the one side pities herself after her husband had run away years ago while Dolores, meaning "pain", on the other side "[divides] her time between the memory of [the] men" she had lost (*Woman Hollering* 47). By depicting these two Chicanas, Sandra Cisneros illustrates "female silence, subservience, and suffering underwritten by Mexican culture and the Catholic Church in the names of Cleófilas's neighbors, both aspects of the Virgin celebrated widely in Mexico: *la Virgen de la Soledad* ('Virgin of the Lonely') and *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores* ('Our Lady of Sorrows')" (Doyle 63). While Soledad and Dolores have remained within the constraints of Chicano/a gender policies and the praised persona of the Virgin as the only respectable role model for women to turn to, they are incapable of leaving their cages and request Cleófilas to do the same to validate their own miserable and solitary lives. Thinking of her new home, Cleófilas explains that "because the towns are built so you have to depend on husbands. Or you stay home [...] There is no place to go. Unless one counts the neighbor ladies. Soledad on one side. Dolores on the other. Or the creek" (*Woman Hollering* 51). As a young mother yearning to learn more about her surroundings and the arroyo behind her house, Cleófilas sees insufficient companions in her older neighbors and thus turns to the creek as her only confidant.

Spending her days on the creek's bank with her son and another baby on the way, Cleófilas's miserable situation and the arroyo's mysterious name ultimately remind her of a Mexican figure in a similarly bad position:

> "In the springtime [the creek] is a good-size alive thing, a thing with a voice all its own, all day and all night calling in its high, silver voice. Is it La Llorona, the weeping woman? La Llorona, who drowned her own children. Perhaps La Llorona is the one

> they named the creek after, she thinks, remembering all the stories she learned as a child." (*Woman Hollering* 51)

While Anzaldúa explicates wailing as "the Indian, Mexican and Chicana woman's feeble protest when she has no other resource", Cleófilas refuses to accept *La Llorona* merely as a woman without resources and unlike other Mexicans and Chicano/as does not see in her the evil woman who out of self-interest killed her children (55). Instead, she evaluates *Llorona*'s pitiful condition and tries to understand what would prompt a woman to go into "the darkness under the trees" (*Woman Hollering* 51). While the desperate Cleófilas sitting on the bank of the creek with her child at first evokes the danger of her emulating *La Llorona*'s deed, Cleófilas instead gains strength from reevaluating the miserable woman's circumstances which are similar to her own, and thus "the 'alive thing' does not call Cleófilas to death, however, but to a springlike renewal" (Doyle 59). This constitutes the first step of *La Llorona* turning into *La Gritona* which will be further strengthened throughout the story. The evening after she gains new insights, Cleófilas reflects on her life of domestic abuse while washing dishes: "Was [she] just exaggerating as her husband always said? It seemed the newspapers were full of such stories. This woman found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car [...] She dunked a glass under the soapy water for a moment – shivered" (*Woman Hollering* 52). Whereas water in the traditional myth of *La Llorona* is always negatively connotated since it served as the woman's killing device, "the water becomes cleansing and therapeutic" for Cleófilas after slowly accepting the viciousness of her position and it demonstrates her "slow process of rebirth; it carries her into a new life" (Sandoval 37). While water symbolizes rebirth in the Aztec tradition, the cleansed water now not only carries Cleófilas into a new life of understanding and resisting but furthermore cleanses the despised *Llorona*, adding a sympathetic twist to her evil legend.

The peak of Cleófilas's enlightenment is reached shortly after when Juan Pedro throws a book at her and leaves her bleeding; her favorite book by Corín Tellado, a work of romantic fiction she turned to after her *telenovelas* were taken away from her. Despite the injury, Cleófilas states that "what stung more is the fact that it was *her* book", leaving her shattered but eventually enlightened about her relationship and whole life's infertility (*Woman Hollering* 52). She has to come to terms with the fact that her home as well as her female persona have been overcome by patriarchy in terms of her brutal husband (Carbonell 65). Thus, Cleófilas has gained strength from her involvement with the creek and the myth of *La Llorona*, and by seeing *Llorona* not as the evil protagonist of the horror story she had been told as a child, she rather interprets her as a means of rescue now. By opposing their similar situations, *La Llorona* encourages Cleófilas to grasp her circumstances and finally defend herself, showing how there are other ways of escaping a desperate condition and providing "important strategies of resistance for contemporary Chicana and Mexican women" (Carbonell 67).

These strategies become essential when Cleófilas meets the emancipated Chicanas Graciela, meaning roughly "grace" and Felice, translating to "luck", whose names are highly contrastive to the destructive names given to Cleófilas's afflicted neighbor ladies in terms of empowerment and female pride. During one of Cleófilas's prenatal check-ups, nurse Graciela notices the bruises and scars from Juan Pedro's beating and asks Felice, a social worker, to help Cleófilas escape her abusive home and drive her to a bus station from where she can get back to Mexico. Cleófilas who gained new strength and knowledge from her time at the creek, accepts the offer to run away with her children and is baffled when Felice lets out a holler "as loud as any mariachi" when they cross the creek in her car (*Woman Hollering* 55). "*Pues*, look how cute. I scared you two, right? Sorry. Should've warned you. Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman Hollering. *Pues*, I holler [...] That's why I like the name of that *arroyo*. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, right?", Felice reacts to

Cleófilas's puzzlement (*Woman Hollering* 55). By hollering freely and comparing it to Tarzan, Felice reclaims for Chicanas the freedoms of movement and self-definition that are typically linked to *machismo* and depicted by Tarzan's mobility and detachment from social limits and policies (Wyatt 258). Via her yell, she illustrates how the hollering in the creek's name does not have to stem from anger, pain, or sorrow but that it can just as well symbolize a cry of freedom and possibilities and the opportunity for women of their community to move and live just as their male counterparts do, defying tradition and cultural values. Felice as an emancipated Chicana "introduces Cléofilas to a whole new perspective on femininity and a range of previously unthinkable possibilities for living her life", strengthening Cleófilas's decision to leave her abusive husband with her children and establishing further comprehension of how a Chicana's life does not have to take place within the patriarchal constraints of her community (Madsen 118).

Furthermore, Felice draws Cleófilas's attention to the fact that nothing around them carries a female name: "Did you ever notice [...] how nothing around here is named after a woman? Really. Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin" (*Woman Hollering* 55). As Felice laughs at this observation, she demonstrates how she is able to perceive her environment with ease and free herself from social constraints, illustrating how women are not obliged to fit into any given concepts or descriptions. In place of screaming from anger or ache, Felice is free to laugh at or even mock traditional notions of Chicano patriarchy (Overman 177). Crossing the creek hollering and laughing, Felice presents to Cleófilas a whole new female language that is far from weeping from anger or pain but alters "the very nature of the sounds a woman can produce" (Simerka 54). Felice and Cleófilas are in full control of their lives; they autonomously choose to live without husbands and select their own way of communicating and expressing themselves. As Felice crosses the creeks several times, she becomes one with its misinterpreted story and reverses it by demonstrating female agency

through hollering instead of a helpless and misheard weeping. Sandoval claims that "Felice and the creek save people by finding them a refuge; La Llorona drowned her children in a moment of uncontrolled emotion" (40). Whereas the mythological *Llorona* saw no other way out and killed her children in a desperate search for liberation, Felice defies this helplessness by overcoming the creek and its destructive origin via which she not only liberates *La Llorona* from her everlasting weeping but moreover prevents further damage to the notions of maternity and womanhood by taking Cleófilas and her children over the creek unharmed. Crossing the creek eventually, Cleófilas, overcome with Felice's positive view of life and femininity, laughs as well in the end, "it was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water" (*Woman Hollering* 56). After she had been asking herself whether the woman the creek was named after had hollered from pain or anger, "this binary opposition is undone; la Llorona/la Gritona begins to laugh" on her way towards freedom (Doyle 61). Cleófilas and *La Llorona* finally break the silence they lived in and through female empowerment find ease. The hollering laughter that gurgles out of her mouth like water erases the negative connotations that water has been ascribed due to the myth of *La Llorona* and in the tradition of their Aztec ancestors displays an act of rebirth which leads Cleófilas into her new life and brings along a peaceful alternative ending to the original legend of the doomed *Llorona* and her children.

After being freed by Felice and Graciela, Cleófilas returns to Mexico, to "the town of gossips" (*Woman Hollering* 50). While returning to her male-dominated Mexican home with a father and six brothers in a town in which she will likely be shunned for leaving her husband seems dangerous and unprogressive, it is proof of Cleófilas newly gained strength and understanding since "she returns as a Gritona" (Carbonell 69). Her involvement with the myth of *La Llorona* demonstrates to her how important the bond between a parent and their children is and how a mother must save her children, because "when a man and a woman love each other, sometimes that love sours. But a parent's love for a child, a child's for its parents, is another

thing entirely" (*Woman Hollering* 43). By returning to her home, Cleófilas makes sure her male family members learn of her enlightenments and becomes able to pass on to her sons the story of *La Gritona*, a female-centered, powerful version of the *Llorona* legend. "Like the mythical Llorona figure who punishes abusive male conduct [...] this Llorona also circumvents errant male behavior" by passing on a story that frees its original protagonist from her alleged sins and gives a new female voice to the woman and the circumstances of her deeds, liberating Chicanas and Mexicanas from the confining conclusions the original folk myth had brought upon them (Carbonell 68).

In her rewriting of the traditional female myth of *La Llorona*, Sandra Cisneros gives a new voice to the archetype which transforms the weeping woman without agency into an active, hollering woman, *La Gritona*. By revising the myth through the eyes of Cleófilas, a woman in a similarly abusive position as her mythological equivalent, "Cisneros revises the myth about a woman who kills her children into one that points the way for resistance for Cleófilas", Overman states (177). The female archetype of *La Llorona* who killed her children out of blank despair, unable to cope with the male misconduct anymore, uses her voice to make Cleófilas aware of alternatives for handling one's desperate situation and represented by the creek and Felice, gives a new voice to Cleófilas as well. The hollering that was once due to pain, sorrow, and anger becomes a new female language of expressing freedom and self-determination to Cleófilas, Felice, and every other Chicana who accomplishes to look beyond the one-sided retellings of *Llorona*'s deeds and finds her way of escaping her misery. Wyatt furthermore highlights how Cisneros in "Woman Hollering Creek" is "rewriting a traditional Mexican story of gender to turn a lament into a shout of triumph or of joy" (260). The transformation from *Llorona* to *Gritona* constitutes not only a personal triumph but moreover a social and cultural achievement by defying ancient gender roles in the Chicano/a and Mexican communities and reclaiming a female story from the hands of men. Thus, Sandra Cisneros's

rewriting of the well-known myth of *La Llorona* into *La Gritona* alters a passive, misunderstood victim into an active woman full of resources and an ancient horror story into a motivational tale for women suffering from abuse and deprivation of liberty due to gender roles and patriarchal domination.

4. Helena María Viramontes Reworking Chicana Mythological Figures in *The Moths and Other Stories*

4.1 *La Llorona*'s Cries as a Female Safe Haven in "The Cariboo Café"

Comparable to Sandra Cisneros, the writings of Helena María Viramontes mainly deal with Chicanas' disadvantaged positions in their communities due to male dominance and explore Chicano/a female archetypes as the source of much of this female suffering. In the short story "The Cariboo Café" which was published as a part of her 1985 collection *The Moths and Other Stories*, Viramontes reworks the ostracized myth of *La Llorona* via the fragmented perspectives of Sonya and Macky, young siblings of Mexican origin who get lost in the streets of Los Angeles, the unnamed owner of the Cariboo Café whose ethnicity is uncertain, and an unnamed woman from Central America. By choosing a Central American woman whose exact origin remains unclear as the center of her story, Viramontes deviates from the standard scheme of using a Chicana as the protagonist of Chicana fiction and tells the story of an unnamed washerwoman whose young son Geraldo disappeared years ago after going out to buy a mango and likely fell victim to the state police who suspects children of aiding the Contras, a political group fighting the socialist regime in Nicaragua and Honduras during the 1980s. Saldívar-Hull labels the child as "one of the countless desaparecidos in those countries whose dictators the U.S. government keeps in power", highlighting the U.S. government's entanglement in the brutal wars (149). Ever since, the washerwoman has been roaming the streets of her country in search of her lost child, impersonating the mythological female figure of *La Llorona*.

In her desperate search, the washerwoman identifies herself and other women suffering a similar fate specifically as *La Llorona*:

> "The darkness becomes a serpent's tongue, swallowing us whole. It is the night of La Llorona. The women come up from the depths of sorrow to search for their children. I join them, frantic, desperate, and our eyes become scrutinizers, our bodies opiated with

> the scent of their smiles. Descending from door to door, the wind whips our faces. I hear the wailing of the women and know it to be my own. Geraldo is nowhere to be found." (*The Moths* 72-73)

Unlike the traditional image of *La Llorona* who is betrayed by her lover representing patriarchy and gender inequality, this modern *Llorona*'s offender "is not her lover but the government of her country and the United States, overtaken by a male-dominated international military state" (Carbonell 58). Thus, the washerwoman does not lose her child due to a desperate personal situation affected by patriarchy but moreover through an unescapable, brutal patriarchal regime that costs women their children. By depicting the washerwoman as one of many Latin women experiencing the same cruelty, Viramontes creates "simultaneity in the Américas" and unites "Central American and North American borderland history", extending the suffering of Chicanas to every Latin woman growing up in a country that had been colonized by the Spaniards first and later suffered from Anglo dominance (Saldívar 105). Accordingly, assigning to the washerwoman neither a name nor a particular heritage symbolizes the extension of Mexican and Chicano/a heritage and history on every other part of the Américas that has undergone brutal subjugation, especially women who suffer from gender inequality the patriarchal systems impose on them. By reawakening the myth of *La Llorona* and connecting her to serpents in her monologue, the washerwoman ultimately becomes a powerful representation of indigenous folks who suffer from constitutional subjugation on either side of the border, uniting Latin women in their indigenous heritage (Saldívar 107).

Further indigenous connections to the *Llorona* myth are made through water which once again influences a *Llorona* retelling. By making the woman a washerwoman, Viramontes unavoidably associates her with water which becomes "an index of her life-draining work" and eventually not only endangers the mother's life but the child's as well, destroying the mother-child bond (Carbonell 61). "When my son wanted to hold my hand, I held soap instead. When

he wanted to play, my feet were in pools of water", the washerwoman reminisces (*The Moths* 74). While water is originally associated with *Llorona*'s source of guilt due to her drowning her children, water evokes the washerwoman's guilt in a broader social and economic sense as her shattering work keeps her from bonding with her son and fulfilling his needs. The damaging force of water emphasizing the original *Llorona*'s inner suffering is thus expanded by Viramontes into a power challenging her external realm in just the same way (Carbonell 61). Unable to escape the male-dominated brutal system she lives in, the washerwoman accuses herself of the loss and possible death of her child, believing she did not care for him sufficiently. Eventually, unable to find Geraldo after years of search within her brutal environment, the woman leaves not only the water but the whole country itself, claiming that "without Geraldo, this is not [her] home; the earth beneath it, not [her] country" (*The Moths* 75). Regarding herself as an insufficient mother, she becomes unable to identify with the native earth anymore and thus has to leave her native country, emphasizing the detachment of their roots which the patriarchal system has brought upon Latin women throughout the last centuries (Németh).

Having a nephew in Los Angeles, the washerwoman crosses the border to live with him. Nevertheless, her search for Geraldo continues as well as her emulating of *La Llorona* since "this Llorona refuses to be silenced and let her son's 'disappearance' vanish from the official record" (Carbonell 59). In Los Angeles, she wanders the streets which become "wider and wider" in her endless search for her son, turning her into a modern, metropolitan version of *La Llorona* unwilling to give up on her child (*The Moths* 76). Unable to forget her self-imposed guilt at first, she thinks her nephew's pregnant wife "will not let [her] hold [the baby], for she thinks [she is] a bad omen", linking herself to the everlasting destructive image of the original *Llorona* myth and enforcing the notion of the "bad mother" (*The Moths* 76). Yet, Carbonell claims that "the text ultimately overturns this momentary self-doubt by focusing on the washer woman's unswerving commitment to motherhood" (61). This happens as the woman

comes across the siblings Sonya and Macky one day who wander the streets alone and sees Geraldo in Mackey, convinced he is her son. She takes the children with her and takes care of them, focusing on Mackey predominantly. Immediately, the news report on the missing kids and stereotype the washerwoman as an abductor even though she found the helpless children on the street, relating to the legend of *La Llorona* whose deeds remained scorned without considering her motivations for action (Alvarado 81).

The actions climax when the washerwoman enters the Cariboo Café with the children and the owner recognizes them from the news. The café serves as the final destination for illegal and desperate people as it mainly hosts illegal immigrants, drug addicts, and homeless people. Sandoval in fact labels it "a wasteland for all who enter" since the place brings even more devastation to everyone entering it as the police are regular visitors as well (75). The hopelessness of the place is symbolized furthermore by the paint that has peeled off its label, leaving merely the word "the oo café" behind which makes the café commonly known as "the zero zero place", a name equaling the forlorn and incomplete identities of those who enter the place (*The Moths* 68). Equally hopeless and lost, the washerwoman and the children enter and by uniting with the café owner bring together all three central characters of Viramontes's story. Carbonell claims that these characters are mainly linked by one underlying feature, namely the myth of *La Llorona*: "Viramontes links these characters by depicting each of them, to a different extent, as Llorona figures [...] All of these characters either lose or are threatened with the loss of a child or dependent, and actively attempt, with varying degrees of success, to recuperate or prevent that loss" (59).

Before actively mentioning the myth of *La Llorona* via the story of the washerwoman, Viramontes introduces the myth by assigning its features to the story's remaining characters at first, thus linking all of them through the female legend. At the beginning of the story, *La Llorona*'s legacy is introduced through the notion of children being removed from their parents.

The illegal Chicano/a children Sonya and Mackey roam the streets of Los Angeles after they lose their apartment keys and their parents do not return home, probably caught by the police. The brutal separation of children and parents occurs just like in the original myth at the hands of a male-dominated political system, leaving the solitary children "exposed to the violence, oppression, and poverty in their neighborhood" and thus illustrating a reverse *Llorona* story in which children endlessly walk the streets in search of their parents (Sandoval 72). In a similar way to the washerwoman, the café owner lost his only son JoJo in a brutal way initiated by the dominating system, namely the Vietnam War. Although he knows his son will never return, he desperately continues to search for him in other young boys he comes across; he accepts drug addict Paulie in his café "'cause he's JoJo's age" and immediately likes Mackey "'cause he's a real sweetheart like JoJo" (*The Moths* 68-70). Desperate and relentless like the washerwoman, the café owner might symbolize "El Llorón", "the symmetrical father figure that has lost his son", Sánchez states (62). Moore adds to this that by assigning the role of *La Llorona* to various people throughout the story, "Viramontes breaks the form of the legend that has La Llorona demonstrated by a single entity" (285). She demonstrates how *Llorona*'s suffering can occur to many different people, no matter their ethnicity or gender, and that the mythological archetype shall not be forejudged as one can easily find oneself in a similar situation. Moreover, the expansion of the myth centers on the notion of blame as it portrays how not the suffering parent should be blamed but rather the dominating force that lies behind the individual and compels their actions.

The notion of blame becomes central during the story's peak, the showdown at the Cariboo Café. While the café owner can be related to the washerwoman and *La Llorona* as he suffers the same fate, they nevertheless remain "natural antagonists" in the Cariboo Café (Fernández 72). As the owner does not only belong to the prevailing Anglo race most likely but moreover to the dominant gender, thus supporting gender inequality and the patriarchal

political system consciously or unconsciously, he betrays the illegal woman and children to the police eventually as he had done with many illegal immigrants before. The racial difference between the owner and the washerwoman is notably represented in the café's label in which the *Carib* is scratched off, for the *Carib* were one of the indigenous people conquered by the Spaniards (Carbonell 62). The missing word thus "represents the suppression of indigenous peoples and suggests the washer woman's struggle is located on a continuum with the conquest" whereas the Anglo male café owner is unable to understand the pain and struggle of an underprivileged race (Carbonell 62). Even though they suffer a similar fate, the café owner gives the washerwoman away in the name of the political system and the modern *Llorona* ends up being betrayed by a man again like her mythological predecessor. Still, this modern *Llorona* eventually rebels against her oppressors and when the police arrive "she begins screaming all over again, screaming so that the walls shake, screaming enough for all the women of murdered children" and declares: "To hell with you all, because you can no longer frighten me. I will fight you for my son until I have no hands left to hold a knife [...] I am laughing, howling at their stupidity because they should know by now that I will never let my son go" (*The Moths* 78-79). While the washerwoman remained silent until that point, she now uses her voice as *La Llorona* again as she did during the search for her son, but this time she hollers and laughs instead of weeping and crying. This *Llorona* "undergoes a change from passive mourner to active accuser" and screams as a means to address all the violence and pain many women like her experience directly at the male oppressors (Fernández 83). In her anger, she does not only find the strength to challenge her tyrants but furthermore fully recovers her maternity spiritually; "she crushes Geraldo against her, so tight, as if she wants to conceal him in her body again, return him to her belly" (*The Moths* 78). She laughs and screams as, despite the threat that surrounds her, she finds a way to resist her fate and reconnect with her child, taking him back inside her and this time keeping him safe from any harm he could experience at the hands

of the oppressors. Even when the male persecutors hold "guns taut and cold like steel erections" against her head, the deathly phalluses symbolizing male dominance cannot do any harm to her anymore since she has recovered her identity and maternity and finds peace eventually (*The Moths* 78; Sandoval 79).

When a policeman shoots her and blood runs down her forehead, she is "blinded by the liquid darkness" but holds onto Geraldo/Mackey's hand, announcing they are "going home" (*The Moths* 79). Even though it means her eventual death, the washerwoman has reunited with whom she believes to be her son, finally able to come to terms with her fate and turn the blame on the actual oppressors instead of herself. Liquid which once negatively dominated her life and kept her from bonding with her son, eventually losing him completely, now transforms her in the indigenous tradition of rebirth, reuniting her with her child and absolving her from the alleged guilt. She is no longer the passive woman defined by social constrictions but an active protester against her suppression by which she not only saves herself but "becomes the voice of all women fighting against injustice everywhere" (Fernández 76). Fernández adds that "the irony of the voice being heard precisely at the moment of the woman's death is transcended by her conversion into La Llorona, for in the collective memory La Llorona's voice will continue forever" (84). Her screams and laughter at the moment of her death and simultaneous relief turn the washerwoman into an immortal modern *Llorona* figure with her voice reaching out to every woman who suffers a similar fate and accrediting the guilt for these fates not to the women themselves but to the male-dominated structures they must live in.

In her rewriting of the traditional *La Llorona* myth, Helena María Viramontes is "forcing the reader to look beyond the level of blame" (Moore 286). While the original legend and its retellings assign guilt to *La Llorona*, depicting her as the original bad mother for killing her children without considering her personal situation, Viramontes illustrates who is really to blame by continuously mentioning the crimes of male-dominated political systems in "The

Cariboo Café". By separating the *Llorona* myth from its predominantly Mexican and Chicano/a heritage and assigning it not only to the Central American washerwoman but moreover to every suffering woman in the Américas, this modern rewriting illustrates how subjugation at the hands of various patriarchal systems throughout the last centuries has influenced all Latinas and connects them at the core, no matter their particular origins. The degradation of the female which is depicted by the mythological bad mother and *mujer mala* is what many Latin women experience and thus the unnamed washerwoman of uncertain ethnicity "comes to embody the myth of La Llorona as a universal character who unifies all women in their struggle against patriarchies and the lingering specter of colonization" (Alvarado 83). The altering of the Chicana struggle to a Latin or, moreover, global female struggle reconnects women not only in their heritage and history but in their futures as well.

By detaching *Llorona* from the concept of a single failed woman and turning many women into modern reincarnations by referring to general public and economic matters, Viramontes breaks with the notion of geographic borders considering female suffering and demonstrates how transnational, universal feminism and sympathy can be achieved (Sandoval 17). The rewriting thus draws attention to the importance of considering another woman's situation sufficiently before judging her which is facilitated by the literary border crossing. Even though the washerwoman finds peace only in death, her screams and laughter reach out to other women in order to support them and serve them as a safe haven, drowning out the desperate cries of the mythical *Llorona* that pressure women even more instead of releasing them from social constraints and becoming an active screamer instead of a passive wailer, similar to Sandra Cisneros's *Llorona* figure. In "The Cariboo Café", Helena María Viramontes hence rewrites the socially misused female myth of *La Llorona* which fell victim to a destructive retelling at the hands of men, predominantly Chicanos, into a modern feminist story that connects all women who suffer from gender inequality and patriarchal dominance throughout the

Américas or even the world, motivating them to face their oppressors and fight the suppression they have been afflicted with for centuries.

4.2 *La Malinche* Overcoming *La Virgen de Guadalupe* in "The Broken Web"

Viramontes's following short story "The Broken Web" illustrates the lives of three Chicana/Mexicana women who are connected through the same man, Tomás, and are captured in his web which the story's title hints at. To be more accurate, the three women, Tomás's daughter Martha, his Mexican lover Olivia, and his unnamed wife, are linked via their emotional sufferings caused "by the forces of patriarchy and oppressive internal and external life conditions that rendered all of them as powerless and victims of their circumstances" (Bani-Khair 174). Hence, Helena María Viramontes criticizes gender inequality and predominant gender roles in the Chicano/a community which she conveys by opposing the two remaining mythological female figures of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche*, the good mother and the bad mother, throughout her short story.

The story mainly revolves around Tomás's wife who remains unnamed in the course of the story. Living illegally in the U.S., the family earns a living by harvesting grapes in Fresno while Tomás smuggles illegal workers from Tijuana into the U.S. Claiming that crossing the border would be too dangerous for his wife, he leaves her behind at a motel near the border, making sure he can visit his lover Olivia in Tijuana. Tomás grasps himself as the family's head and serves as a symbol for Chicano patriarchy throughout the story since men are depicted "as the sole support system and as having the upper hand" in the Chicano/a community even though they are often unable to support their families sufficiently and keep them safe (Davis 13-14). Left alone at the motel, his wife reflects on these gender roles and her own position within the Chicano/a family arrangement which resembles the submissive mother and wife implicated by

the omnipresent Virgin of Guadalupe. Pavletich and Backus argue that these "'frozen' family configurations" are traceable to the "operation of gender norms, and to the Catholic Church's communities" which are visible in the story as the Chicano/a Catholic faith is ever-present and defines the family life (128). As a consequence of the Catholic Church's dominance and the gender roles it prescribes, the unnamed wife finds herself in the same position as many other Chicana and Mexican women, serving the family by cooking and cleaning and staying submissive to her husband. Resembling the image of the Holy Virgin, the wife has to remain loving, caring, and modest to stay true to the notion of pure motherhood that is expected of her. However, via her interior monologue during her stay at the motel, it is displayed how her inner life illustrates in fact the entire opposite of the image of the good mother she presents on the outside; she claims that "only in complete solitude did she feel like a woman" and how "it was like a vacation long deserved, to stay at a place where she didn't have to make beds or clean toilets" (*The Moths* 56). Only when having time to herself, away from her children and husband, she recognizes herself as a woman when looking in the mirror and is given the chance to express her beauty and femininity, for in her everyday life "she is weighed down by her subservience to Tomás and the responsibility of her family", taking away her true womanhood and exchanging it with the submissive roles of mother and wife (Yarbro-Bejarano, *Introduction* 16).

By conveying true feelings and self-perception via interior monologues, Viramontes hints at the silencing of women in Chicano/a communities initialized by patriarchy and the Catholic Church. Just as the unnamed wife, Tomás's Mexican lover Olivia on the other side of the border conveys her emotions solely through interior monologues. Both women search for love and sympathy while being confronted with oppression and patriarchy continuously, leaving behind "a fragmented female identity" that does not know where she belongs and how to properly fit into her society (Bani-Khair 175). Both women disregard the concepts of gender

and relationship predominant in their communities and long for true love and a relationship on eye level in which Tomás fails both of them by pressuring his wife into the submissive role of the Virgin and by continuously leaving his lover Olivia and their two illegitimate sons behind on the other side of the border. Yarbro-Bejarano claims that in order to "break with years of indoctrination by the Church" and its constrictive view of gender, the women must fight for their independence and self-definition (*Introduction*, 12). This is achieved by Olivia through her self-chosen lifestyle which codes her as *La Malinche* in opposition to the unnamed wife depicting *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (Swyt 193). Olivia lives without a man by her side and makes her own living by working as a bartender, a usually male-dominated job. When she leaves for work, she leaves food and money for her sons whom she gave her name instead of their father's, claiming independence from him. Olivia explains in her interior monologue how "it was a silent contract that they had with one another; she never played mother and they, in turn, never asked her to" (*The Moths* 58). By living this way, she deconstructs the image of the good mother and puts herself on a par with the despised image of the bad mother or *mujer mala*, *La Malinche*, deliberately accepting "the scandal that had caused" and life as an outcast of society (*The Moths* 55). Oliver-Rotger accounts for the image of *La Malinche* that she deceives the socially recognized function of maternity, namely to replicate her culture and traditions, for the sake of an autonomous life, thus making Olivia "the reversal of the stereotypes or roles assigned to women in Mexican/Chicano society" (113-120). Therefore, she is freed from consistent dependence on a man which alters not only the traditional female image but moreover the legacy of the doomed mythological *Malinche* whose betrayal is said to be rooted in her dependence and sexual subservience to a male master.

Even though Olivia and the unnamed wife are coded as *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche* in the beginning, Swyt argues that this antagonism is deconstructed throughout the course of actions by Viramontes emphasizing the two figures' alliance which mainly

happens through the wife, the alleged good mother and Virgin, claiming her independence and acquiring features of the bad mother *Malinche*, hence becoming a betrayer of her community and faith, a *Malinchista* (193). Before her marriage, the wife had slept with another man and tried to defy Chicano/a gender roles which "only left her worse off" and strengthened the grip Tomás and patriarchy had on her as she became a doomed woman due to her sexual activity (*The Moths* 60). She claims that "now she could not leave him because she no longer owned herself. He owned her" (*The Moths* 60). Tomás's ownership ends during the face-off in the family's home after the wife finds out about his affair with Olivia. Tomás says to her:

> "What are you raving about? You think you're not guilty? You, a whore, a bitch! [...] I should have spied on you that night you let him rip the virginity out of you, the blood and slime of your innocence trailing down the sides of his mouth. You tramp. You righteous bitch. Don't I have the right to be unfaithful? Weren't you? Vete mucho a chingar a tu madre, más cabrona que la chingada... [Go fuck your mother, you are more of a bitch than the fucked one]." (*The Moths* 59; my trans.)

Oliver-Rotger states how the code-switching from one language to the other in Tomás's accusation emphasizes "the analogy between Malinche, also known as 'la chingada' [...] and a woman who practiced unlawful sex" (191). While Chicano men such as Tomás are sexually free and their actions are neither sanctioned by the church nor the community, Chicanas are shamed and despised for living their sexuality freely. Even though the wife's affair ended before their marriage, Tomás aligns her with the negative Chicano/a female figure of *La Malinche*, the woman who betrayed her people by making use of her body. While Tomás's current affair with Olivia renders him unharmed by his environment, his wife "pay[s] dearly for breaking with traditional values concerning women" and is considered worse than the commonly known image of *La Chingada* herself (Yarbro-Bejarano, *Introduction* 12). However, the wife draws strength from this new definition of herself as a woman which helps her to ultimately

break with the dooming image of *La Virgen*. Other than the original *Malinche* who suffers an eternity of passivity and guilt by being shaped and misread by patriarchy for her alleged sins, this rewritten *Malinche* breaks with the passive image and defines her role and independence by shooting Tomás with his rifle, making "the injustice of men's ownership of women's bodies and women's sexuality erupt[...] in violence" (Saldívar-Hull 138). Ironically, the bullet kills not only Tomás but breaks a statue of Jesus in the living room as well, symbolically breaking the wife's bond with the Catholic faith and its doctrine. "Her children in time would forgive her. But God? He would never understand; He was a man, too", she thinks (*The Moths* 60). Since Chicanas' negative feelings toward men and their problematic relationships are mostly due to the dogmas of the Catholic Church worshipping a male God while reducing women to the roles of the Virgin and mother, the wife cannot find comfort in sticking to a male-dominated faith anymore and thus she ultimately transfers from the submissive Virgin to the despised traitor, avenging herself upon the man who had caged her in for the last decades (Davis 13).

"As for me, I had no choice. I had given up being a woman for you", the wife thinks upon reflecting on her deed (*The Moths* 60). To break free from her dominating husband she saw no other way than to get rid of him lastingly since "her sexuality as well as her individuality have been stifled by their marriage" (Yarbro-Bejarano, *Introduction* 17). She claims she feels "so close to [him]; equally dead, but equally real" (*The Moths* 60). As Tomás had kept his wife from living her femininity and thus caused her death as a woman, she can only feel truly on eye level with him when he is just as dead as she has felt ever since, making her feel authentic for the first time. Nevertheless, she must realize that "Tomás was now an invincible cloud of the past [...] A coiled smoking ghost" (*The Moths* 60). Although she killed her oppressor and finally feels equal to him, she remains dependent on Tomás and the doctrine of the church and has to face a new life as a social outcast just like the mythological *Malinche*. Madsen explains this by stating that she only killed a single man while "the real enemy is the patriarchal law of

the fathers that generates the oppression, suffering, and feminine servitude she has sought to destroy" (38). Having gained her freedom from Tomás, she remains a victim to larger patriarchal forces of the Chicano/a community which follow her like an indestructible cloud for the rest of her life as she remains unable to break a whole system. Yet, she has gained strength from realizing that an existence within this system would never enable her to live according to her expectations as a woman and that staying with Tomás would have caused her complete ruin eventually, by which she nevertheless not only rehabilitates and strengthens the doomed image of the traitor *La Malinche* but other suffering Chicanas as well. This is even intensified by Viramontes's blurring of the *Malinche* myth with its related legend of *La Llorona* after the wife is brought to the mental hospital. As *La Malinche* and *La Llorona* are identified as the same figures in some versions of the myth in which they roam around wailing from pain, the wife states that in the afterlife "she would become a cricket wailing nightly for redemption" (*The Moths* 60). Not crying from sorrow or pain, she will weep for her fellow Chicanas to hear her and to finally understand her. "As la Llorona she opens the system up with a semiotic keening that exceeds the Law of the Father" by which she seeks to reach other women and to make them look behind the surface, to understand the truth and gain strength to tackle the system just as she did (Swyt 195). The resistant weeping of *La Malinche*/*La Llorona* shall reach out to several generations of Chicanas so that in unity they can finish what she started.

The wife's everlasting wails become relevant in the depiction of the third woman entangled in Tomás's web, their daughter Martha who suffers deeply due to her mother's brutal act. Seeking to learn more about her mother's past, she visits her mother's oldest sister which Oliver-Rotger defines as "the writer's commentary on women's complicity with patriarchal repression" since the old aunt's storytelling represents an attempt to bring Martha back on track with Catholic beliefs and gender roles (194). Her storytelling "reproduces conventional cultural concepts of femininity by emphasizing the idea of divine justice" (Oliver-Rotger 194). Thus,

the aunt who grew up in the patriarchal system supported by Catholicism and male-dominated retellings of mythology aligns with the oppressors due to a lack of alternatives in her life and conveys a negative image of her sister to Martha, characterizing her as a traitor and doomed woman and manipulating Martha into sticking to female gender roles. As a result, Martha dives deeper into her Catholic faith as a source of comfort at first and tries to persuade herself that Jesus will "control or contain the violence" (Swyt 193).

Nevertheless, Martha is unable to deny the moving impact her mother's bold and self-defined deed has on her. She confesses her mother's crime to a priest but disguises it as a reoccurring dream she has in which she sees her father in the form of a statue of Jesus shattering, an act illustrating how "the 'solid' symbol of redemption explodes" (Swyt 193). The breaking of the statue unconsciously and against her will shatters Martha's ideal "of the stone shapes of the holy family" and the dogmas she had been taught her whole life (*The Moths* 53). By placing reality into a dream, the dream serves as "a manifestation of a rebellious unconscious and imagination" and "the only place where [...] unspoken truths may be revealed", demonstrating how her mother has altered Martha's view of the patriarchal and religious system even though she attempts to deny it (Oliver-Rotger 195). Martha's mind illustrates a female consciousness where "the univocal voice of tradition, superstition, and taboo" is ultimately crushed and overcome by "a number of marginal resisting voices situated on the threshold of the spoken and the unspoken" (Oliver-Rotger 195). Hence, even when her aunt begs her to "say a rosary with [her] tonight", they cannot overcome her mother's voice in her head and the crickets that wail in the name of the newly strengthened *Malinche*/*Llorona* which may encourage Martha as well as other young Chicanas to break with patriarchal domination and defy the unilateral, confining role of the good mother and wife resembling the image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (*The Moths* 62). Eventually, even though she enters a life as a misunderstood outcast, the unnamed wife not only breaks the web that entangles the women in a state of domination,

misunderstanding, and gender inequality through Tomás but furthermore by reaching out to other women provides the possibility to "break[...] the cycle of use and abuse" introduced by the male-dominated system and church in Chicano/a communities (Yarbro-Bejarano, *Introduction* 17).

In "The Broken Web", Helena María Viramontes opposes the mythological female figures of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche* and by *La Malinche* eventually overcoming the Holy Virgin destructs the traditional image of the good mother and wife as the only possible manner of life for Chicanas. By presenting three different women who eventually manage to overcome not only their immediate oppressor Tomás but also develop an understanding of the inequality and repression they experience within their society, she demonstrates how motherhood and womanhood in general do not have to be built on a one-sided traditional image via presenting the wife and Olivia deliberately choosing to become *Malinchistas*, traitors to their culture as a means to oppose the inequality and limitations Chicanas suffer from. Still, similar to Sandra Cisneros in "Never Marry a Mexican", Viramontes portrays an imperfect modern *Malinche*, one that despite her newly gained agency and voice remains caught within the larger patriarchal system as her deeds are not sufficient to combat her entire male-dominated environment. Yarbro-Bejarano, yet, claims that Viramontes's rewriting of the mythological figure indeed does not portray "idealized versions of feminists successfully battling patriarchy" but that she presents regular women who slowly come to sense that "what is wrong is linked to the rigid gender roles imposed on them by their men and their culture, often with the aid of the Church" (*Introduction*, 10).

Even though this modern *Malinche* is not fully liberated and successful, she thus raises awareness for constructed female roles in Chicano/a communities and how these are mainly linked to patriarchy, the church, and mythology. With the help of *Malinche* and *Llorona*'s weeping, this knowledge can be surpassed to other Chicanas and demonstrate to coming

generations how the image of the good versus the bad mother is merely a construct that can be overthrown and that acting out one's female potential and sexuality is not treachery but a female right. The traitor of the original myth of *La Malinche* can become several women who choose their own ways and reclaim their femininity to detangle the "web of patriarchy, religion, and culture" (Swyt 196). The originally passive and demonized *Malinche* becomes an announcer for fellow Chicanas in the form of the unnamed wife which becomes visible in how she startles her traditional and religious daughter Martha's thinking through her deeds. Thus, the rewritten *Malinche* who accepts for herself a life as an outcast and remains followed by clouds of patriarchy and inequality transforms not only her mythological predecessor into a woman with a voice and agency but becomes the voice of womanhood in order to call her fellow Chicanas of all generations up to break free from the constraints of the good mother and Virgin and to fight the restrictions brought upon them by men, the church, and the retellings of Chicano/a mythology.

5. Revisiting the Catholic *Guadalupe* in Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel*

Lastly, to revert to the Chicano/as' central female myth, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is fundamentally reworked by Denise Chávez in her 1994 novel *Face of an Angel* which tells the story of Soveida Dosamantes, a young Chicana from Agua Oscura, New Mexico seeking to escape her family's history of long-suffering women who have fallen victim to Chicano/a gender inequality and religiously motivated gender roles. Chávez articulates Soveida's struggles by portraying her within the space of her Catholic Chicano/a community, nourished by the notions of *machismo* and *Marianismo*, the Chicana cult of emulating the female mythological and religious figure of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* which has influenced and captivated several female generations of the Dosamantes family ever since. Madsen explains that as per the cult of *Marianismo*, "the Church, the family, the culture require that women be subservient to men, that women renounce themselves in favor of men" (25). This behavior becomes strongly visible within the lives of the women Soveida is raised by, her paternal grandmother Guadalupe, called Mamá Lupita, and her mother Dolores. With the last name Dosamantes literally translating to "two lovers", the men of the family have seldom hesitated to perform their name's implication by committing adultery while the Chicana wife remained confined to the domesticity of the home and family. Nevertheless, several generations of the highly devout Dosamantes women have accepted and continue to accept their husband's misbehavior in the name of the Holy Virgin, willingly confining themselves to the boundaries of the *Marianismo* cult. As her name already suggests, Mamá Lupita depicts the driving force in controlling her female line's behavior and status by reinforcing the faith in *La Virgen* and disapproving of any misbehavior committed by her female descendants, especially concerning female sexuality. Mamá Lupita's influence is sustained by her house which is painted in blue all over "in honor of the Blessed Mother" and serves as a meeting point and safe haven for all family members, gathering

everyone safely under the guidance and authority of the Holy Virgin (*Face* 60). By passing on her Catholic faith and the image of *Guadalupe* as the ideal female, the matriarch conveys not only a religious service but a "teaching of service directed especially toward men in the family", turning the women of her family into docile and persistent mothers and wives (Rosiandani 21). The resulting performances of the archetypical Chicana saintly mother empower the cult of *Marianismo* marked by female passivity and male agency within the Dosamantes family for several generations, "ultimately converting mothers into self-sacrificing incarnations of the Virgin Mary" (Herrera 124-126).

Under her mother-in-law's religious rule, Dolores, who is constantly cheated on by her husband Luardo, knows no other way than to incorporate the only way of living she has ever known into her daughter's upbringing. Soveida recalls how she was termed *escandalosa* (scandalous) as a kid whenever she tried to talk to her mother about femininity and the female body and how each notion of female sexuality was dismissed by unpleasantly subsuming it as "that stuff" (*Face* 21). Consequently, Soveida begins to believe that "sex [is] an ugly thing, a hidden bruise", something not meant for women (*Face* 71). Pushed into worshipping the Virgin of Guadalupe by Mamá Lupita and Dolores and emulating her behavior, Soveida in her early years grasps faith and service as the act of staying true to one's cultural origins and its religious doctrine which is why she claims to "have always identified with saints [...] women who would rather have their breasts ripped off than betray their chastity" and neglects her identity and potential as a woman (*Face* 54). It is not until Soveida and her best friend and cousin Mara get older that she starts to experience the reality of sexuality and femininity. The rebellious Mara who lost both her parents and lives in Mamá Lupita's blessed blue house and under her strict religious regime, serves as a guide for Soveida as she feels no connection to her foster mother's strict and limited lifestyle and seeks to become a self-defined individual after losing all of her closest relatives. She introduces Soveida to mass media and the westernized lifestyle of the

1970s and 80s, including sexuality and female independence which ultimately persuades Soveida to scrutinize her environment and conservative upbringing by which "the complex and complicated reality she experiences and witnesses, distorts her established perspective and stimulates her to be critical" (Rosiandani 27). Initially convinced to be eternally connected to the Virgin saint as imposed on her by her family, Soveida now states: "*Somedays I want to be a saint [...] or even the Blessed Virgin. Other days I just want to be Me. So what am I? Saint or sinner?"* (*Face* 77). The capitalization of the word *me* illustrates how Soveida's identity formed externally by her grandmother and mother begins to crumble and that she begins to sense what lies under the surface, yet she still regards herself within the virgin/whore dichotomy which forms Chicano/a culture's basis in view of women's social status, implying how being purely oneself equates with being a sinner and traitor (Terci 75).

Soveida eventually must learn how her culture and family's fundamentalist Catholic traditions suppressed her individual faith and character when she witnesses Mamá Lupita and Dolores getting Mara tied to her bed and exorcised by priests because she now "looked like a woman and her body had changed to a woman's and she had the desires of a woman and men looked at her like she was a woman, it was certain as well that the devil had entered her" (*Face* 85). To the older Chicana women, Mara has become *La Malinche*, the traitor of their culture and beliefs, "the resistant female who subverts the patriarchal domination of her person" at the wrong end of the virgin/whore range and thus requires divine cleansing (Androne 88). To Soveida, however, her rebellious and brave cousin is "Goddess. Troublemaker. Distractor. Destroyer. The woman all women know and fear. The other half of solid self. Dream sister", all at the same time (*Face* 72). She is the only genuine person Soveida believes and confides in besides the spiritual Mother, but Mara is a twisted role model and goddess to Soveida at first as she incorporates all traits despised in women, besides her endearing, lovely features. Terci explains how the Catholicism Soveida grows up with "is based on the patriarchal moral duality:

good-bad, god-devil, man-woman, and in Soveida's case, saint-sinner" (77). The brutal treatment of her cousin and mentor seems to awaken Soveida; she no longer sees the good, pure woman in contrast to the bad, sinful woman as she was inculcated with but chooses to undo the *Virgen*/*Malinche* or saint/sinner dichotomy and reconnects with *Guadalupe*'s own forgotten duality based on the early Aztec goddess *Coatlicue*/*Coatlalopeuh*/*Tonantzin*. Mara's "darkness" does not stem from her being a *Malinchista*, but rather from her being "as dark as the ancient goddesses suppressed beneath the figure of the Virgin", revealing to Soveida a whole new feature of the saint she has been worshipping from her early days on (Terci 85). "No, I thought. I can't pray to your father, to anyone's father. I don't have a father [...] God's not a man but a woman. A woman! [...] Not Father, not Father. Mother. Mother. *God the Mother*. Praise Her", she thinks during Mara's exorcism, ultimately disputing the Catholicized saint and patriarchal image of God and service Mamá Lupita and Dolores enforce upon her and revitalizing the aspects of her Chicana origins the other women are continuously mute about (*Face* 90-91). Soveida no longer has to choose between being herself and emulating *La Virgen* as she can do both at the same time now since "Guadalupe as Coatlalopeuh embodies maternity and sexuality, a far cry from Roman Catholicism's virgin mother" (Herrera 49). Only by rejecting the pregiven, Catholicized image of the Virgin can Chicanas learn "to see *Coatlalopeuh*-*Coatlicue* in the Mother, *Guadalupe*" as Anzaldúa explains which becomes Soveida's chance of reclaiming her sexuality and femininity without having to give up on her faith and culture; just like her new goddess is a dual character, she can become one herself (106). *Guadalupe* with her reclaimed features of *Coatlicue*/*Coatlalopeuh*/*Tonantzin* is love and sin at the same time, what she can create, she can destroy, demonstrating how a Chicana can perform the same duality without being assigned to either one or the other end of the dominant virgin/whore dichotomy (Perez 53). By reclaiming *La Virgen*'s forgotten Aztec features, Chávez twists the dominating myth of the Holy Virgin into a "counter-myth" which enables Soveida to gain strength

and independence from her patriarchal environment by putting faith in a rewritten version of the pure, obedient saint who turns into a self-determined, pluralistic goddess (Terci 72).

Soveida's enlightenment about her true cultural origins and her female ancestors continues when she feels the urge to learn more about "[her] Chicana self" and enrolls at a community college to attend courses on Chicano/a history and culture which brings her even closer to understanding Chicana mythology and its misunderstood female archetypes (*Face* 283). Socolovsky claims that Chicana experiences and traumata are "communal, collective, and historically determined, they need to be remembered" which is why Soveida seeks to engage in her ancestors' history to transfer their experiences onto the present and find a way of demonstrating to her fellow Chicanas the pain and confinement they have been enduring ever since as a result of male domination and the contemptuous patriarchal revision of Chicana female mythology (189). She asks in one of her term papers: "Isn't it time for women to break those chains of oppression? Isn't it time for that endless cycle of self-hatred to cease?" (*Face* 317). Soveida's newly found voice becomes the voice of the Chicana story that has been silenced but now is told by her who has looked beyond the surface and reclaimed the female powers of the Aztec ancestors. She comes to understand how "it is women who have sadly helped to propel the myth forward, into each age, victims of their own supposed mercy"; her upbringing at the hands of strict and Catholic women has shown her how Chicanas push themselves into the virtuous role of the obedient mother and wife and pass this lack of self-definition on to subsequent generations of women, forming further "conquered women" who "know no other way" (*Face* 319). Soveida, however, breaks with the conquered Chicanas' lack of agency by making individual decisions and leading a self-defined life; she gets married but when she finds out her family name curses her with an adulterous husband, she leaves him "without saying goodbye" (*Face* 192). Unlike Mamá Lupita and Dolores, Soveida refuses to endure all the male-conducted pain and suffering and exits the toxic relationship in time. Countering the principles and

rules of *Marianismo* and living up to her newly gained dualistic character which she has found in worshipping a diverse version of the Holy Mother, she realizes how she can destroy what she has created if it does not suit her wants and needs. She sees her female body's worth and her freedom as a deliberated Chicana and begins to live out her sexuality to the fullest and without regrets; she who has "always prayed to the Holy Mother, the Virgin Mary" now identifies "with Saint Mary Magdalene, the supreme woman saint, ultra whore, no cloying virgin" because her goddess has many faces and just like her, she can be whatever she desires to be (*Face* 57). Her actions thus "defer stable and univocal meanings", she "breaks taboos and defies silences surrounding suffering, pain, and abuse", as Socolovsky underlines (188).

Soveida's desire to revise the conservative cult of female service to men, God, and the Catholicized Virgin as well as her wish to pass this knowledge on to other Chicanas finds its peak in her professional career. Working as a waitress at El Farol Mexican Restaurant, Soveida breaks with the Marianistic tradition of women being confined to their households and exercising service to men by choosing her way of serving herself in a spiritual, social, and professional manner. Ever since, she has been "imbued with the idea that the purpose of life was service. Service to God. Country. Men", while her waitressing is "connected with, some might say based, even bound, in a divine, preordained belief in individual service" (*Face* 171). Hurst claims Soveida "tries to conduct herself and her daily work in a manner that honors her spiritual awareness"; her service as a working woman waiting tables widens her horizon on the true meaning of the term "service" which does not have to be directed solely at men and the patriarchal institution of the church anymore but at herself, her very own spiritual, emotional, and economic wellbeing (35). Madsen adds how Soveida's perception of "service as the servitude of women" transfers into the awareness that "to serve is to love and that to serve well is to serve oneself"; only in this way can Chicanas break the chains of patriarchal domination and the damage done to the pluralistic Chicana female origin (148). All of her knowledge and her

manner of serving herself, the women around her, and her Chicana goddess are recorded by Soveida in her *Book of Service*, a handbook for future waitresses which is "about more than serving food. It's about service" (*Face* 451). Besides professional tips and tricks, the handbook teaches Chicanas how to redefine the dominant definition of spiritual service to men and a male God; she gathers experiences and mistakes made by herself and other Chicanas in a single source and thereby assists women in countering the domination exercised by men and the church. Service becomes the ultimate female source of discovering oneself and redefining Chicanas' social and spiritual conditions, allowing for the reworked version of the Virgin to enter the lives of women and create female characters who are "listen[ed] to and remember[ed]" (Terci 84).

In her *Book of Service*, Soveida concludes her situation the following: "I was in love with myself and with all the world. I knew I could do anything, be anything I wanted" (*Face* 343). Androne notes Soveida learns from redefining her female identity that "service is inevitable, but one's agency and attitude toward service are crucial" (96). Consequently, her last step in the redefinition of service and Chicana faith is to change her mother and grandmother's attitudes, the very women who have shaped her life as well as their own lives within the limits of service towards men and the Virgin of Guadalupe. When Soveida gets pregnant by one of her affairs, she chooses to keep the baby and become a single mother which is strongly despised in the Chicano/a community and collides with the principles of the *Marianismo* cult. Since Mamá Lupita has grown old and weak she moves in with Dolores, leaving her big blue house which now "smells of dust" empty of inhabitants, including the formerly ever-present *Virgen de Guadalupe* herself (*Face* 462). Soveida decides to move into the house and raise her child there, but she states the house requires a deep cleansing: "A good day to clean a house, especially one that needed real work, deep work, work done with care. It was a happy day, too, for the house was being cleaned the way it should have been thirty years ago" (*Face* 462). While

the house stays blue on the outside as it has been in honor of the Virgin, its insides finally begin to change. Soveida's depiction of the dusty and smelly house suggests how it is about time for the Chicana position to develop and for a new version of the Holy Mother to move into its rooms, nourishing the inhabitants with love, freedom, and the ability to become whatever they desire. Terci explains the ultimate altering of *Guadalupe* and her features the following:

> "Attached to Catholicism and tired of the Marianismo ideal, the Virgin of Guadalupe and her female devotees need to slough off the heavy burden of the patriarchal/machismo guise, which does not function any more in a world where a new generation of women has replaced the older, where young women like Soveida Dosamantes seek for an identity apart from the imposed norms defining women" (82)

Soveida as a new role model bringing a new manner of faith and service into her family, ultimately redefines the conservative, obedient image of the Holy Virgin into a pluralistic female goddess with various facets, needs, and desires as she ought to have been ever since but suffered from a revision brought upon her at the hands of men and mythology.

"I will name her Milagro. She won't be like the women I always knew: lonely, clinging, afraid. She'll be someone new. Someone to behold. Milagro. In a room crowded with other women, she will always be herself. Miracle. Loving the others. Blessing them. Wishing them peace", Soveida then remarks on her future daughter (*Face* 399). Soveida's enlightenment which will be passed on to her daughter will rebind the women of the family, they will relearn how to love and support each other outside the confining limits of their male-dominated environment and with the help of their reclaimed goddess. Instead of serving men and the Catholic Church, "Soveida chooses to be of service to her grandmother and mother through female touch, healing, and maternal bonding" and instead of rejecting them for their past mistakes takes charge of them, helping them to value their worth as women and let go of the restricting past (Herrera 140). Eventually, Mamá Lupita finds peace with her reworked house and admits

to its shining in new splendor and Dolores confesses: “All my love mistakenly went to someone else when it should have come to *me*. Nobody can love us the way we need to love ourselves. Especially for women like us” (*Face* 373). Madsen defines the Dosamantes women as “those who have loved destructively, allowing men to dominate and violate them, accepting brutality in place of love and domination in place of caring” (149). However, those are the very women who eventually manage to overcome the cages patriarchy and the Catholic Church have kept them in for centuries and reclaim their female rights of self-definition and self-love. With the help of Soveida’s enlightenment and her reclamation of the Virgin’s ancient and original features, those women as well as succeeding generations of Chicanas will be able to direct their service towards a dualistic goddess who allows them to become the women they desire to be as well as themselves as individuals instead of the men who have brought pain and suffering upon them and betrayed the ancient roots of the powerful female.

Through her depiction of Soveida Dosamantes’s enlightenment towards female independence and self-definition, Denise Chávez represents “the new mestiza/Chicana consciousness of daughters who resist and refuse to accept the constraints against which their mothers and grandmothers have chafed, and which limited their lives” in her novel *Face of an Angel* (Madsen 40). By making her initially conservative Chicana main character witness the physical and emotional cruelty Chicanas have to suffer within their community, Chávez rewrites the archetype of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as a pure, obedient saint and server of men into “a multiple, heterogenous, syncretic goddess figure” via unraveling her forgotten ancient features and reclaiming the Blessed Mother’s dual character (Terci 85). This reevaluation eventually motivates Soveida to redefine her understanding of faith and service as she realizes her own dual character as a woman, how she is able to create and destroy as well as to be sincere and sinful at the same time, expressing sexuality and femininity without shame and the scorn of the patriarchal community. Self-love and the undoing of damaged and misunderstood female

mythology in Chicano/a culture become Soveida's goal in her undertaking of sharing this re-defined female faith with the Chicanas around her and through her reevaluation of past experiences and mistakes made by her female line, the novel "captures the stories of these women as a foundation for Soveida's rite of passage that redefines service into a centering force, a definition she processes because of and through the testimonies of the women in her family" (Androne 84). Using her ancestors' failure as a source of power and revitalization, Soveida eventually succeeds in reclaiming her mother, grandmother, and in the long term other Chicanas through the destruction of the toxic cult of *Marianismo* and the establishment of a reworked, female-centered faith and service that is directed at women themselves and worships a goddess who allows for pluralistic approaches to life, femininity, and sexuality. Similar to Chayo in Sandra Cisneros's "Little Miracles, Kept Promises", she enables herself as well as her Chicana community to practice their faith and stay true to their culture and traditions while at the same time detaching themselves from the male influence of the church and community, liberating their denied female roots and rewriting their impaired myths. Terci explains that the rewriting of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* by Chávez via the character of Soveida "is completed at the stage of Guadalupe-hood" (91). This very stage frees Chicanas from patriarchal constraints and the conservative myth surpassed by the male oppressors, allowing throughout the worshipping of a pluralistic goddess the emergence of pluralistic, self-defined female characters and a female-centered manner of practicing love, faith, and service.

6. Conclusion

It has become obvious in the course of this thesis that mythology and archetypes have influenced Chicanas and their situation within Chicano/a communities and culture in a negative, destructive way ever since. Since the emergence of the Mexican state and throughout the development of Chicano/a communities in the U.S., Chicanas have been denied the rights of self-definition and personal freedom and have been largely excluded from participating in their communities in the same way as men. The first chapter of the thesis explained how the roots of female inferiority lie within the roots of Chicano/a culture itself which originated in today's U.S. Southwest. Chicano/a history began with the Aztec empire being subjugated and ruled by Spanish conquistadors such as the distinguished Hernán Cortés who progressively destroyed ancient Aztec traditions and substituted ancient culture and faith with Christianity and the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The definite event of Chicano/a history came about with the Mexican-American War which led to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, turning countless Mexicans into U.S. citizens reluctantly and establishing growing Chicano/a communities in the U.S. throughout the following decades. Chicano/as, however, were rarely identified as genuine U.S. Americans neither by other Americans nor by themselves and so the desire to return to their ancient roots grew stronger regarding the discouraging economic and social situation. Consequently, *El Movimiento* was established as the Chicano answer to the 1960s civil rights movement.

Yet, it has become visible that Chicanas were not recognized as a part of this movement by other women or by their own communities, highlighting the "double oppression" Chicanas suffer from due to living in the U.S. with foreign roots while at the same time being suppressed within their own culture for being women; patriarchy and *machismo* confine women to the house and expect them to serve their husband and children. Great parts of this miserable female position stem from female mythologies and the female archetypes these myths occupy which

constitute a major part of Chicano/a culture, being reproduced for many generations and seeking to define as well as confine Chicana women.

Out of the three major female archetypes stemming from Chicano/a mythology which have been examined and characterized in the second chapter of this thesis, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* constitutes the dominant and most significant mythological character in Chicano/a culture. Now an ideal role model for women portraying motherly and virginal traits such as love, purity, and submissiveness, her origin is thus a far cry from the Virgin Mother known today. Based on the Aztec fertility goddesses *Coatlicue* and *Tonantzin* who were worshipped as the givers of life and defined by sexuality and femininity, the ancient Virgin had dual aspects to her character which made her giver and destroyer at the same time. With Spanish rule and the rise of Catholicism, *Coatlicue*/*Tonantzin* was desexed and robbed of her female features, clearing the way for the Holy Mother who appeared to a converted indigenous boy in 1531 and was eventually declared as the patron of Mexicans and Chicano/as. *La Virgen* turned into the motherly role model for all Chicanas who educates them to stick to traits of obedience towards their husband and family, chastity, and modesty.

On the contrary, the female myth of *La Malinche* was introduced as the undesirable counterpart to *Guadalupe*. Born Malinali Tenepat, the Aztec girl was sold into the hands of conquistador Hernán Cortés whom she not only aided as a translator and cultural guide due to her exceptional language skills but also became his lover. Formerly celebrated by her people and the Spaniards for linking the two races and serving as a cultural bridge, today's Mexican and Chicano/a cultures despise her for the same reasons, as modern retellings of her story define her as the traitor who through her sexual affair with Cortés betrayed her culture and people and thus led to the downfall of the Aztec empire. Disregarding the motifs for her deeds and the probable repression by the Spaniards, Chicano/a culture constructed upon her the concept of *Malinchismo*, the act of selling out one's country and traditions in favor of another. Mainly

women suffer from this concept as they are easily labeled *Malinchistas* by their patriarchal environment for living out their sexuality freely as opposed to the desired role women shall maintain, namely that of the Virgin Mother, making not only the mythological and historical *Malinche* passively suffer at the hands of men but moreover modern Chicanas. The antagonism of the pure Virgin and the alleged traitor *Malinche* who made use of her female traits constitutes the origin of the virgin/whore dichotomy dominant in patriarchal Chicano/a society which labels a woman as either one or the other due to her behavior, preferring the image of the Virgin and despising all actions resembling the misinterpreted myth of *La Malinche*.

Lastly, the female myth of *La Llorona* was introduced, set on a par with the image of the bad woman *La Malinche* depicts. A common bedtime story in Mexico, the U.S. and parts of Latin America, *La Llorona* is the woman who drowned her children as a means to punish her adulterous husband. While there are many versions of the story as well as many origins linking her to Aztec as well as European medieval stories, all these versions share the fact that the woman who suffered from male misconduct is portrayed as the offender while the male part is protected from guilt, neglecting motivations for her deeds and thus strengthening the image of the bad mother as the undesirable role model for Chicanas. As the story of the unacknowledged *Llorona* is subject to everlasting retellings from one generation to the next, her damaged image supports the inaccessible definition of maternity in Chicano/a culture by supporting male-made images of the good versus the bad mother and teaching women from their earliest days on how to behave properly in order to be appreciated by their environment, supporting patriarchal agency and female passivity.

What all these female myths and archetypes have in common is the fact that their retellings and traditions were mainly influenced and shaped by men who disregard the true roots and origins of the stories and thus neglect the notions of femininity, sexuality, and strength that lie beneath the surface of the myths to keep the virgin/whore dichotomy alive and dictate

women's lives. However, it has become visible how Chicanas stopped accepting these destructive female images and the ways patriarchy uses them to influence women's lives and decisions and subvert the female gender. Thus, in the course of the emergence of Chicana feminism and literature starting in the 1970s, Chicana feminists and writers began to focus exactly on those female myths that shape their lives so heavily and use them as a means of portraying and at the same time contesting the miserable social position of Chicanas in their fiction; rewritings of traditional female myths became an important part of Chicana literature to resist their inferior situations and reclaim female power, self-identification, and sexuality. This has become especially visible in the works of Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, and Denise Chávez dealt with throughout this thesis who use the misread archetypes of *La Virgen*, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona* as sources of female empowerment as they rewrite the female mythologies and add twists to the dominant versions of the archetypes in order to serve Chicana feminist interests and establish powerful role models for women instead of passively accepting the denouncing legacy these mythologies bring upon the female gender.

A major work analyzed regarding the rewriting of Chicano/a female mythology was Sandra Cisneros's 1991 collection of short stories *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. In "Little Miracles, Kept Promises", the focus lies on rewriting the Catholic image of *La Virgen* dominant in Chicano/a culture by revitalizing and remembering her forgotten and forbidden Aztec origins of female power and sexuality. Young Chicana Chayo suffers from her mother and grandmother's despise of her liberated lifestyle in the U.S. and it is not until her reconnection with her Aztec roots that she is able to reconnect with her female line, too; she looks beyond the Catholic image of *La Virgen* she grew up with and fathoms her true origin as *Coatlicue*/*Tonantzin*, a dual personality just like herself who can choose to do whatever she desires and make use of all her female traits. At the same time, the redefinition of her faith and her saint allows her to remain faithful to her community and family as well and to realize the

potential and strength of the women around her. Cisneros's rewriting of *La Virgen* via unraveling her ancient feminine features and placing them within the notion of the venerated Holy Mother turns Chayo into an ideal role model and allows Chicanas to stick to their faith and traditions while at the same time being free to make their own decisions without fearing social marginalization. *Guadalupe*'s confining traits are unfastened in the short story, and she is turned into a universal saint who allows and approves of various self-chosen Chicana lifestyles.

In "Never Marry a Mexican", a rewriting of *La Malinche* was presented even if it is achieved in an entirely different manner than *Guadalupe*'s rewriting in the previous story. Clemencia, a young Chicana, is put into *Malinche*'s shoes and suffers from the lack of respect she experiences in an environment she does not fully identify with. Neglected by her family similar to the real *Malinche*, she defines her life according to the sexual encounters she has with married white men. Unlike the mythological *Malinche* who became a passive victim of patriarchy's definition of her story, Clemencia refuses to be used by men and attempts to keep the upper hand at all times, in a sexual as well as emotional manner. She eventually must come to terms with the fact that despite her trying, she remains, like *Malinche*, the exotic mistress of powerful men and that her attempt to grasp power over a few men cannot demolish larger patriarchal forces. Even though Cisneros's rewriting seems odd as it does not present an ultimately liberated version of *Malinche*, it was shown how it is a powerful rewriting of the dominant myth as it puts the power of storytelling into *Malinche*'s and thus women's hands. She presents a version of *Malinche* who speaks for herself and does not have to apologize for her behavior, and although Clemencia's actions are mostly unrightful, Cisneros's rewritten *Malinche* is not the passive victim but the active protagonist of her own life, depicting how Chicanas are free to explore their identity and sexuality and speak for themselves without fearing to be classed with the destructive end of the virgin/whore continuum.

In the work's title story, the doomed image of the bad mother *La Llorona* is rewritten. Unable to combat her cruel husband, Cleófilas finds comfort in the creek running behind their house named *La Gritona* and it is not until she connects the creek's odd name to the story of *La Llorona* that Cleófilas learns to revitalize her female strength and rethink her miserable situation. Cisneros adds a twist by making her protagonist refuse to emulate *Llorona*'s deeds; she rather lets her reconnect with *Llorona*'s origin and properly understand the doomed woman's actions. Cleófilas's enlightenment is completed when she learns that there are alternative procedures for suffering women like her and *Llorona* and that the hollering the creek was named after does not have to stem from a sorrowful weeping or crying as in the original legend, but that it can as well symbolize a joyful cry of freedom and happiness which women can produce on their way of liberating themselves from patriarchal limitations. Eventually, Cleófilas can leave her abusive home as a *Gritona* able to pass on a revised, powerful version of the *Llorona* legend to her sons. It was concluded that Cisneros rewrites *Llorona*'s original cries of pain and sorrow into a new female language represented by shouts of victory and power and by rewriting the legend of *La Llorona* into that of *La Gritona* releases the traditional female myth from male domination, turning the traditionally passive and misunderstood mythological woman into a resourceful woman capable of making decisions.

Alike Cisneros's short stories, the stories in Helena María Viramontes's 1985 collection *The Moths and Other Stories* portray rewritings of the most influential female myths in Chicano/a culture which were analyzed within this thesis as well. In "The Cariboo Café", it has become obvious how the originally solitarily suffering *Llorona* is rewritten by Viramontes into a global symbol of feminism by connecting all women who suffer the loss of a child. By choosing a protagonist from Central America, Viramontes gives a voice to all Latin American women suffering from patriarchal domination similar to Chicanas as well as to all women suffering the loss of a child at the hands of a political system that suppresses them. The

washerwoman's search for her child crossing borders into new countries and connecting her to people in similarly miserable positions shifts the notion of blame away from the *Llorona* archetype and onto the actual oppressor, namely patriarchal political and social authorities. As in Cisneros's rewritten version of *La Llorona*, it has become obvious how the washerwoman alters the mythological archetype from the passive, misheard woman into an active, resourceful woman during the showdown at the Cariboo Café in which she reclaims her supposed son from the hands of patriarchy and twists *Llorona*'s original sorrowful weeping into cries of power, joy, and independence. Viramontes thus constructs out of this powerful reclaiming of *Llorona*'s dignity a safe haven for women all over the Américas or even the world to join the fight against male authority and support feminism, rewriting the impairing myth into a feminist code.

In "The Broken Web", the entanglement of Chicanas in the web of patriarchy has become evident. The antagonism between *La Virgen* and *La Malinche* is portrayed in the story specifically when the nameless Chicana wife, tired of emulating the Holy Mother and being confined to the house and family, seeks to regain her freedom from her cruel husband which immediately links her to the doomed image of the traitor *Malinche* in a social, cultural, and domestic sense as she allegedly betrays her culture and reclaims her sexuality. Yet, the woman takes the risk of falling from grace for good and gets rid of her husband via which Viramontes illustrates how resembling *Malinche* in the eyes of Chicano/a patriarchal culture has nothing to do with being a traitor or whore eventually but rather portrays it as an act of self-love and reclaiming female freedom. Sexuality, femininity, and self-definition, thus, are not sinful traits but a Chicana's rights as a woman. Parallels can be drawn to Cisneros's rewriting of *Malinche* as the unnamed woman, similar to Clemencia, cannot find peace eventually and is sent to a mental institution by patriarchal authorities, thus likewise not serving as a flawless, liberated rewriting of the *Malinche* archetype. Nevertheless, just like Cisneros, Viramontes rewrites the myth insofar as to prove that what Chicano/a society interprets as traitorous and sinful is

nothing but the reclamation of the feminine and basic female rights, hence deconstructing the stereotypical archetype of *Guadalupe* and comprehending her as a weapon of patriarchy. By blurring *Malinche* and *Llorona* at the end of the story and illustrating how the unnamed woman's powerful hollering gets through to her daughter and following generations of women, it has been shown that Viramontes turns her into the voice of feminism, reaching out to fellow Chicanas to join the fight against patriarchy and destructive female archetypes in their culture.

Lastly, Denise Chávez's 1994 novel *Face of an Angel* was examined regarding generational gaps in the worshipping of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and the eventual redefinition of the Virgin Saint through the youngest generation represented by Soveida Dosamantes. Growing up within the limits of the cult of *Marianismo* depicting *Guadalupe* as the only desirable female role model, the reality of modern life makes Soveida come to realize that the true dichotomy of the female does not lie within the antagonism of the virgin versus the whore or the good versus the bad mother but moreover within *Guadalupe* and all women themselves. She thus reconnects with *Guadalupe*'s forgotten side and reclaims the duality of her Aztec origins which allow Chicanas to be more than just the obedient mother and wife. Soveida reclaims her femininity and sexuality and by passing it on to her female line as well as fellow Chicanas, she defines a new manner of service and faith which does not address men and a patriarchal God anymore but women and a pluralistic female goddess themselves. Similar to Cisneros in "Little Miracles, Kept Promises", Chávez hence rewrites the Catholic, conservative myth of *La Virgen* based on her forgotten ancient origins rooted in female power and creates a saintly role model for Chicanas allowing them to still act out a model of faith that is deeply ingrained in their culture and traditions but yet tolerates various female identities and notions of femininity, enabling Chicanas a pious but sovereign life within the sphere of Chicano/a communities. The evaluation of Denise Chávez's work has shown that like Sandra Cisneros, she rewrites the traditional archetype of *Guadalupe* into a universal and pluralistic female goddess accessing

all Chicanas and approving of individual ways of life beyond the confining roles of mother and wife.

In summary, it can be stated that in their contemporary works, Chicana authors Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, and Denise Chávez aim at harsh critiques of the female mythologies and their archetypes predominant in Chicano/a culture by depicting the realities of Chicana lives and weaving redefined versions of the myths into their fiction. By rewriting the original traditions which have been subject to patriarchal interpretation and domination ever since, they release the archetypes of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona* from their destructive legacy and instill them with a new sense that seeks to create advanced role models for Chicanas. Either by remembering the archetypes' feminine origins or by reinterpreting their myths from a feminist point of view, the three writers attach to the mythological female characters new attributes and features which distinguish them from the patriarchal versions of the stories and hence break with the dominant virgin/whore or good woman/bad woman dichotomies by supplying alternative choices and actions for women in the Chicano/a communities. Either way, Cisneros, Viramontes, and Chávez achieve to rewrite these traditional Chicano/a female mythologies instilled with patriarchal beliefs of proper womanhood into motivational feminist stories of emancipation and femininity and provide Chicanas with role models who instead of denouncing women are able to empower and support them beyond patriarchal authority and cultural confinement.

7. Works Cited

Alarcón, Norma. “Chicana’s Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision through Malintzin/or Malintzin Putting Flesh Back on the Object.” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Third Woman Press, 2002, pp. 202-211.

Aleksić, Ivana. “(Re)Constructing Identity in Sandra Cisneros’ ‘Little Miracles, Kept Promises.’” *Folia Linguistica et Litteraria – Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, vol. 21, 2018, pp. 213-222. *UCG*, folia.ac.me/image/folia_21.pdf. Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

Alvarado, Karina Oliva. “The Boo of Viramontes’s Café: Retelling Ghost Stories, Central American Representing Social Death.” *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2013, pp. 77-93. *STTCL*, doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1806. Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

Androne, Helane. *Ritual Structures in Chicana Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Bani-Khair, Baker, et. al. “Female Identity Diffusion in Helena Viramontes’ Selected Short Stories: Postmodern Perspective.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 9, no. 6, 2019, pp. 173-177, dx.doi.org/10.30845/ijhss.v9n6p21. Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

Blake, Debra J. *Chicana Sexuality and Gender: Cultural Refiguring in Literature, Oral History, and Art*. Duke University Press, 2008.

Bruce-Novoa, Juan. *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos*. University of Texas Press, 1982.

Candelaria, Cordelia. “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1980, pp. 1–6. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/3346027. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Carbonell, Ana María. “From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros.” *MELUS*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1999, pp. 53–74. *Oxford Academic*, doi.org/10.2307/467699. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Carrol, Michael, and Susan Maher. “‘A Las Mujeres’: Cultural Context and the Process of Maturity in Sandra Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek*.” *North Dakota Quarterly*, vol. 64, no.1, 1997, pp. 70-80. *HathiTrust*, hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015078923367. Accessed 13 Dec. 2023.

Chávez, Denise. *Face of an Angel*. Warner Books, 1994.

Cisneros, Sandra. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Vintage Contemporaries, 1991.

--. “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess.” *Goddess of the Americas/La Diosa de los Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, edited by Ana Castillo, Riverhead Books, 1996, pp. 46-51.

Conover, Cornelius. “Reassessing the Rise of Mexico’s Virgin of Guadalupe, 1650s–1780s.” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2011, pp. 251–279. *University of California Press*, doi.org/10.1525/msem.2011.27.2.251. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Davis, Erin. “Growing Up in the Mexican-American Culture: A Literary Perspective.” *Quirk: A Journal of Collegiate Inquiry & Debate*, vol. 1, 1995, pp. 8-14, my.uiw.edu/quirk/_docs/quirkfinal1995.pdf. Accessed 15 Dec. 2023.

Detienne, Marcel, and Janet Lloyd. “So What Is the Sex of Mythology?” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2008, pp. 39–46. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/29737359. Accessed 15 Feb. 2024.

Doyle, Jacqueline. “Haunting the Borderlands: La Llorona in Sandra Cisneros’s ‘Woman Hollering Creek.’” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1996, pp. 53–70. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/3346922. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Elenes, C. Alejandra. *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. Lexington Books, 2011.

Fernández de Pinedo Echevarría, Eva. "Telenovelas in Chicano Writing: A Multidimensional Perspective." *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación/Culture, Language and Representation*, vol. 4, 2007, pp. 125-139. *RACO*, raco.cat/index.php/CLR/article/view/106204. Accessed 07 Nov. 2023.

Fitts, Alexandra. "Sandra Cisneros's Modern Malinche: A Reconsideration of Feminine Archetypes in Woman Hollering Creek." *International Fiction Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2002, journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7712. Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

Grice, Helena. "Case Studies: Three Important Works of Chicano/a Fiction." *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*, edited by Helena Grice et. al., Manchester University Press, 2001, pp. 230-239.

Hepworth, Candida. "Chicano/a Fiction." *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*, edited by Helena Grice et. al., Manchester University Press, 2001, pp. 189-230.

Herrera, Cristina. *Contemporary Chicana Literature: (Re)Writing the Maternal Script*. Cambria Press, 2014.

Hurst, Mary Jane. "Transcendence and Mythic Vision in Leo Tolstoy's 'Resurrection' and Denise Chavez's 'Face of an Angel'." *CCTE Studies*, vol. 77, 2012, pp. 29-37. *Texas Tech University Libraries*, hdl.handle.net/2346/68167. Accessed 13 Dec. 2023.

Ikas, Karin. *Die zeitgenössische Chicana-Literatur*. Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000.

--. *Mexican American Stories*. Langenscheidt-Longman GmbH, 2001.

--. *Chicana Ways*. University of Nevada Press, 2002.

Kearney, Michael. "La Llorona as a Social Symbol." *Western Folklore*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1969, pp. 199–206. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/1499265. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Kirtley, Bacil F. "'La Llorona' and Related Themes." *Western Folklore*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1960, pp. 155–168. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/1496370. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Lara, Irene. "Goddess of the Américas in the Decolonial Imaginary: Beyond the Virtuous Virgen/Pagan Puta Dichotomy." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1/2, 2008, pp. 99–127. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20459183. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Madsen, Deborah L. *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature*. University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

Matovina, Timothy. "The Origins of the Guadalupe Tradition in Mexico." *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 2, 2014, pp. 243–270. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43898605. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Mermann-Jozwiak, Elisabeth. "Gritos Desde La Frontera: Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, and Postmodernism." *MELUS*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2000, pp. 101–118. *Oxford Academic*, doi.org/10.2307/468221. Accessed 10 Dec. 2023.

Messmer, Marietta. "Transformations of the Sacred in Contemporary Chicana Literature." *Theology & Sexuality*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2008, pp. 259-278. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi.org/10.1177/1355835808091417. Accessed 15 Dec. 2023.

Mirandé, Alfredo, and Evangelina Enríquez. *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman*. University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Moore, Deborah Owen. "La Llorona Dines at the Cariboo Cafe: Structure and Legend in the Work of Helena María Viramontes." *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1998, pp. 277-286. *ProQuest*, www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/la-llorona-dines-at-cariboo-cafe-structure-legend/docview/195686279/se-2. Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

Moraga, Cherríe. *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. South End Press, 1983.

Németh, Lenke. "Haunted Borders, Nostalgia, and Narration: Cherríe Moraga's 'Giving Up the Ghost: A Stage Play In Three Portraits' and Helena María Viramontes's 'The Cariboo Café'." *Americana: E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2016, www.americanaejournal.hu/index.php/americanaejournal/article/view/45097. Accessed 13 Dec. 2023.

Oliver-Rotger, Maria Antonia. *Battlegrounds and Crossroads: Social and Imaginary Space in Writings by Chicanas*. Rodopi, 2003.

Overman, Linda Rader. "Mestiza Consciousness of La Frontera/Borderlands in Sandra Cisneros and Helena María Viramontes." *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American West*, edited by Steven Frye, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 170-183.

Pavletich, JoAnn, and Margot Gayle Backus. "With His Pistol in Her Hand: Rearticulating the Corrido Narrative in Helena María Viramontes' 'Neighbors'." *Cultural Critique*, no. 27, 1994, pp. 127–152. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/1354480. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.

Paz, Laura. "'Nobody's Mother and Nobody's Wife': Reconstructing Archetypes and Sexuality in Sandra Cisneros' 'Never Marry a Mexican'." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2008, pp. 11-28. *ProQuest*, www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/nobodys-mother-wife-reconstructing-archetypes/docview/210147648/se-2. Accessed 13 Dec. 2023.

Paz, Octavio. *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*. Grove Press, 1961.

Perez, Domino Renee. "Words, Worlds in Our Heads: Reclaiming La Llorona's Aztecan Antecedents in Gloria Anzaldúa's 'My Black Angelos'." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 15, no. 3/4, 2003, pp. 51–63. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20737214. Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Petty, Leslie. “The ‘Dual’-Ing Images of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s The House on Mango Street.” *MELUS*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2000, pp. 119–132. *Oxford Academic*, doi.org/10.2307/468222. Accessed 10 Dec. 2023.

Rebolledo, Tey Diana. *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature*. University of Arizona Press, 1995.

Rebolledo, Tey Diana, and Eliana S. Rivero. “Myths and Archetypes.” *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature*, edited by Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero, University of Arizona Press, 1993, pp. 189-195.

Rodriguez-Aranda, Pilar E. “On the Solitary Fate of Being Mexican, Female, Wicked and Thirty-Three: an Interview with the Writer Sandra Cisneros.” *The Americas Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1990, pp. 64-80.

Roesch, Claudia. *Macho Men and Modern Women: Mexican Immigration, Social Experts and Changing Family Values in the 20th Century United States*. De Gruyter, 2015.

Rojas, Maythee G. “Cisneros’s ‘Terrible’ Women: Recuperating the Erotic as a Feminist Source in ‘Never Marry a Mexican’ and ‘Eyes of Zapata.’” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1999, pp. 135–157. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/3347227. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Rosiandani, Ni Luh Putu. “Chicana Experience in Denise Chávez’s ‘Face of an Angel’: A Feminist Perspective.” *Celt: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching & Literature*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2006, pp. 17-29, journal.unika.ac.id/index.php/celt/article/view/186/187. Accessed 14 Feb. 2024.

Rukwied, Annette Luise. *The Search For Identity In Two Chicana Novels: Sandra Cisneros’ ‘The House on Mango Street’ & Ana Castillo’s ‘The Mixquiahuala Letters’*. 1998. University of Stuttgart, Master’s Thesis.

Saldívar, José David. *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. University of California Press, 1997.

Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature*. University of California Press, 2000.

Sánchez, Jesús B. "Hosts, Guests and Parasites in Helena María Viramontes's 'The Cariboo Café'." *Miscelánea*, vol. 58, 2018, pp. 49-65. *ProQuest*, www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/hosts-guests-parasites-helena-maria-viramontes/docview/2188845544/se-2. Accessed 13 Dec. 2023.

Sandoval, Anna Marie. *Toward a Latina Feminism of the Americas: Repression & Resistance in Chicana & Mexicana Literature*. University of Texas Press, 2008.

Shirley, Carl R., and Paula W. Shirley. *Understanding Chicano Literature*. University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Simerka, Barbara. "Women Hollering: Contemporary Chicana Reinscriptions of La Llorona Mythography." *Confluencia*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2000, pp. 49–58. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27922768. Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

Socolovsky, Maya. "Narrative and Traumatic Memory in Denise Chávez's 'Face of an Angel.'" *MELUS*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2003, pp. 187–205. *Oxford Academic*, doi.org/10.2307/3595306. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Swyt, Wendy. "Hungry Women: Borderlands Mythos in Two Stories by Helena Maria Viramontes." *MELUS*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1998, pp. 189–201. *Oxford Academic*, doi.org/10.2307/468019. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Terci, Fatma Tüba. *Postmodern Goddesses in Contemporary Chicana Feminist Novel: 'Peel My Love Like an Onion', 'Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento: A Novel' and 'Face of an Angel'*. 2008. Ankara University, PhD dissertation.

Viramontes, Helena María. *The Moths and Other Stories*. Arte Público Press, 1985.

Wyatt, Jean. “On Not Being La Malinche: Border Negotiations of Gender in Sandra Cisneros’s ‘Never Marry a Mexican’ and ‘Woman Hollering Creek.’” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1995, pp. 243–271. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/463899. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Yarbro-Bejarano, Yvonne. Introduction. *The Moths and Other Stories*, by Helena María Viramontes, 1985, pp. 9-21.

--. “Chicana Literature from a Chicana Feminist Perspective.” *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: New Frontiers in American Literature*, edited by María Herrera-Sobek and Helena María Viramontes, University of New Mexico Press, 1996, pp. 213-219.