

Copyright
by
Brenda Lee Sendejo
2010

**The Dissertation Committee for Brenda Lee Sendejo Certifies that this is the
approved version of the following dissertation:**

**“The Face of God Has Changed”:
Tejana Cultural Production and the Politics of Spirituality
in the Borderlands**

Committee:

Richard R. Flores, Supervisor

Martha Menchaca

Anne M. Martínez

Pauline Turner Strong

Emilio Zamora

**“The Face of God Has Changed”:
Tejana Cultural Production and the Politics of Spirituality
in the Borderlands**

by

Brenda Lee Sendejo, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2010

Dedication

Para las mujeres, the amazing women who shared their lives and stories with me,
and for my family, with love and gratitude.

Acknowledgements

Many people supported me on my graduate school journey and throughout the making of this dissertation. I could not have made it to this final stage without my amazing family and friends and a generous community of scholars.

I am grateful beyond words for the opportunity to do this work. Working with *las mujeres* -- the women who participated in this study -- has been one of the most fulfilling and transformative experiences of my life. It has been an honor and a privilege to help tell their stories and I've grown, both personally and professionally from the experience. With heartfelt gratitude, I thank the following women for their incredible generosity and for entrusting me with their extraordinary life stories. They gave of their time, energy, and were amazing teachers to me. *Mil gracias a* Susana Almanza, Teresa Paloma Acosta, Santa Barraza, Martha P. Cotera, Norma E. Cantú, Rosie Castro, Carmen Lomas Garza, Luz Bazan Gutiérrez, Inés Hernández-Ávila, María Jimenez, Yolanda Chávez Leyva, María Elena Martínez, Irma Mireles, Sylvia Orozco, Hortensia Palomares, Sister Teresita, and Modesta Treviño. These women were wholeheartedly committed to helping me understand Tejana spirituality and are responsible for helping me to complete my Ph.D. Their support has been invaluable. I view this dissertation and my degree as part of their legacy to this Chicana/Tejana scholar and to those who follow me.

I take the responsibility of helping to tell the stories of *las mujeres* seriously and I hope I have served them well. I offer this dissertation as a small piece of a much larger project that I will continue to mold and develop. The stories of *las mujeres* deserve hundreds of more pages and that is my future goal for the book and subsequent works. For now, I ask that they please accept this humble offering as my initial attempt at telling a much larger story of Tejana religious and spiritual history and cultural production. Each of *las mujeres* played an important role in the

making of this dissertation and in my development as a conscientious educator-scholar, and for that I am eternally grateful.

I must acknowledge María Elena Martínez, as she was the initial inspiration behind this dissertation. María Elena gave so much to me and to this project over the years and I learned a great deal from her on so many levels throughout this journey. Without her generosity and spiritual guidance this project would not have been possible. She is a compassionate intellectual, teacher, and friend who exemplifies how to do spiritually grounded, socially-conscious work that makes a difference in the lives of others.

Martha Cotera was gracious and giving in the numerous hours and days she spent with me as well. Her decades of intellectual and activist work, including her seminal scholarship, which brought Chicana history to light, continue to inspire me and inform my work. I am also grateful beyond words for the compassion Martha showed me during a difficult time. Through her healing she has helped me to heal as well. I also wish to acknowledge her son, Juan, who is mentioned in Martha's narrative and whose beautiful spirit lives on through her and through her work.

Mary Margaret Nívar -- my co-Tejana anthropologist colleague and friend -- helped me in so many ways throughout the past two years. She was there to assist in the initial stages of articulating "*mujerista* ethnography," providing vital insight from anthropological, *mujerista*, and spiritual perspectives. She introduced me to Doña Enriqueta Contreras, which was a life-changing experience on so many levels. Mary Margaret has modeled for me what it is to be an anthropologist with integrity y *corazón*.

I benefited greatly from the expertise and support of a wonderful dissertation committee. Richard Flores saw the importance of studying Tejana cultural productions early on and spent numerous hours helping me to craft this *mujerista* ethnography. Through his guidance he pushed me to think outside of the box and to cultivate the courage to take risks, while providing me the

space and support to do so. I will always appreciate Richard's reminders of the importance of telling a rich story and for coining the term "*mujerista* ethnography." He insightfully pointed out that this was also a story of intimacy among women, and encouraged me to write about it. Martha Menchaca has been a source of encouragement and support, beginning in my early years as an undergraduate. I benefited from her intellectual rigor and critical eye towards merging history and anthropology, which have greatly informed this project. Pauline Turner Strong helped me to talk through and clarify my project on numerous occasions. Her insights into feminist anthropology and the anthropology of religion were particularly helpful in thinking about how to situate a Tejana/Chicana ethnography within anthropology. I benefited from the intellectual guidance of Anne Martínez, who inspired and encouraged me in many ways. Her insight into the history of Our Lady of Guadalupe was critical and will continue to shape my scholarship into the future. Anne's mentorship was also vital in many ways, including helping prepare me to enter academia as a junior faculty. I am grateful to Emilio Zamora for lending his expertise to this dissertation and for his work in coordinating the Women of La Raza Unida Oral History Project. Emilio understood the need to record women's experiences early on. I benefited greatly from participating in the project and appreciate the access to its oral histories he provided.

This work was supported by numerous entities to which I am grateful. The Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at UT Austin provided vital financial support over the years, including the Américo Paredes Dissertation Fellowship. Awards from UT's College of Liberal Arts and Center for Women's and Gender Studies also provided funding, as did the American Anthropological Association's Society for the Anthropology of North America and Association for Feminist Anthropology.

My first teachers, Gloria and Jesse Sendejo, provided unconditional love and much support throughout the course of this journey. My mother's prayers and unwavering faith in me,

particularly during the challenging times, helped sustain me. The stories she shared of growing up as a Mexican American woman in South Texas in the 1950s and 1960s fuel me as a *mujerista* ethnographer and Chicana scholar. These stories and my mother are sources of great personal and professional inspiration. My father's high regard for education set the early foundation for me to achieve this goal and he has supported me throughout. Your numerous prayers to *la Virgen* were answered, *papi*.

My sisters, Polly and Priscilla, are two of my greatest supporters. They helped to keep me grounded and provided much needed words of encouragement and laughter, just when I needed it most. I am in awe of these strong, intelligent women and mothers and blessed to call them my sisters. Their husbands, Arthur and Dave, and their children have supported me and enriched my life as well. To Derek, Max, Austin, and Sienna: thank you for giving *tía* Bren such joy and purpose.

I married into a wonderful family in the Ademskis, to whom I am so thankful for their constant support and encouragement. The extended Ledesma, Sendejo, Arriaga, and Fortenberry families have always shown such love. I am blessed to be a part of these amazing families. This dissertation is also the result of the work, sacrifices, and love of generations past. I must acknowledge my grandparents, Victoria and Tomás Ledesma and Enrique and María Sendejo, as well as my great grandparents and ancestors who preceded them. While conducting this research my Aunt Irene Arriaga, Uncle Henry Ledesma, and Uncle Richard Ledesma passed away. Their loving spirits influenced this work as well. The Virgin of Guadalupe is a symbol of faith and source of strength for my family and has been for generations. I am grateful to her and to the universe for giving our lives such meaning.

I thank Roger Barrera, my second cousin and *movimiento* participant, for “getting it,” as we say to one another, and for his strong convictions about social justice. Roger provided valuable insight into the Texas *movimiento* and inspired me with his stories and activism.

My great aunt, Pauline Sul, received her college degree in her 60s and exemplifies a strong Tejana. She possesses a sea of knowledge about our family history and I am so grateful to her enduring my constant requests to tell and retell our family stories. Those moments where she indulged me over our “*calmantes*” are some of my best memories.

I am also indebted to the family I chose. UT Austin has brought me into contact with some of my dearest friends, who helped me to achieve this dream. My beloved Kinsolving friends of over 20 years, Miriam Carrillo, Dawn Callaway-Repass, Leslie Patterson, and Bridget Barrow have been there for me over the years, as have Scott Repass and Scott Walcott. These friends have been persistent in their belief in me and lifted me up on more occasions that I can remember. They are accomplished, intelligent people with strong convictions and heart, and I’ve benefited from their friendship as well as their guidance in talking through numerous issues in this dissertation. Helen Rocket Repass, “little buddy,” is a beautiful soul and reminder of how important it is to do the work that I do.

I am grateful for my Athena friends, especially Jen Mead Shields, Clary Ramos Sukkar, Joedy Yglesias, Allison Kendrick, and their families. Their continued faith in me over all these years has meant the world. They inspired me to want to pursue graduate school with their intellect and drive. It’s been quite a long road and I’m glad I am still traveling it with these dear friends. A special thanks goes to Clary for lending her copy editing talents in the final stages of writing.

This journey has completed me in so many ways. My friendships grew stronger and I cultivated new ones. In addition to the women who participated in my study, my colleague-friends at UT and throughout the U.S. also sustained me.

My dear Corpus *comadre*, Jackie Cuevas, helped me have faith in myself in the most trying of times and shepherded me through with her compassionate and constructive intellectual guidance. I am appreciative for the numerous drafts of statements and talks she reviewed for me.

Together we traveled this crazy road and in the end, did it our way, and it paid off in amazing ways. I am also grateful to my friend, Jen Margulies, for her light, sharp wit, and sense of humor. Jackie and Jen -- and now Avital -- bring out the best in me.

I am so grateful for my dear *comadre* and fellow anthropologist, María Cruz. María taught me to stay true to myself and spiritually grounded within academia and in doing so, helped me to keep my spirit in tact. She is an amazing scholar and teacher who gives me strength and reminds me that the sun shines from within. María and her beautiful family in Pedro and Hector are sources of great happiness in my life.

Elvira Prieto, the other of my “sunshine sisters,” helped me find my sunshine again. I have benefited greatly from her love and light and am a better person for having met her. I am appreciative for her comments on early drafts of papers and assistance with translations in this dissertation.

The CMAS community has meant a great deal to me over the years. I am grateful to CMAS directors, José Limón and Domino Perez, the CMAS staff, CMAS faculty affiliates, and to my CMAS colleagues -- a wonderful community of graduate students -- for their support. Among them are my dear friends, Virginia Raymond, Olga Herrera, Cristina Salinas, Veronica Martínez-Matsuda, and Jennifer Najera, who were vital sources of encouragement and who model the kind of scholar *con corazón* that I strive to be. They helped me to complete this dissertation in numerous ways, as did Hortencia Jimenez, my neighbor and amazing friend, who was there to lift me up and offer support on numerous occasions. She is a scholar with integrity and *corazón* and a wonderful mother who inspires me beyond words. To Hortencia and her beautiful family, *mil gracias*. I am also appreciative for the friendship and support of Aurora Chang and Sergio Delgado.

I appreciate the support of the Department of Anthropology and its faculty and staff. My dear friend and colleague, Mathangi Krishnamurthy, has supported me in numerous ways since

the first day of graduate school orientation and had a good deal to do with my completing this dissertation. She has been a constant source of encouragement, intellectual stimulation, and cunning wit and humor when I needed it most. Her combination of tough love and compassion helped me develop as a scholar and I am grateful that we are completing this stage together. Special thanks as well to my colleagues Heather Teague, Lynn Selby, Raja Swamy, Mubbashir Rizvi, Halide Velioglu, María Luz García, Ruken Sengul, Elvia Mendoza, Alex Chavez, Pablo Gonzalez, Nancy Rios, and Suzy Seriff, for their friendship and support.

I have been fortunate to meet scholars around the country through various conferences and associations such as Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social/Women Active in Letters and Social Change (MALCS) and the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS). I am very grateful to these communities and scholars, who supported me and my work at critical junctures. I acknowledge in particular, Irene Lara, Elisa Facio, and fellow Tejanas Elisa Diana Huerta, Norma E. Cantú, Inés Hernández-Ávila, and Elizabeth De La Portilla.

Lynn Selby and Chase Dawkins deserve recognition for signing on to the idea of producing a documentary on María Elena's life and for their hard work on the film. I will always be grateful for the important role they played in helping me establish what became the foundation for my dissertation research.

Living and conducting this research in Austin afforded me the opportunity to spend extended time with those women in this study who reside here. Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change has become an important space of healing, reflection, learning, and community for me. Former Alma de Mujer director Ana Lara was a wonderful and compassionate teacher during my internship there. Current Alma de Mujer director, Maribel Garza, has put her heart into Alma de Mujer and helped, along with the amazing *mujeres* on the women's council to rejuvenate the land and create a space where we can gather to find spiritual fulfillment and do our social justice

work. Maribel provided me a space to write at Alma during a pivotal time in the development of this dissertation. I reflect fondly upon conversations with my fellow Tejana about *mujerista* ethnography and how to be academics with conviction and *corazón*. Special thanks to women's council members Velia Sanchez and Gloria Quesada for their love and support.

I am also grateful to PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources) for the important work they do for our community and in particular to Susanna Almanza for helping me to learn about the organization and for her involvement in this research project.

I thank Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez for the opportunity to work with the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project and to my co-workers there. I gained valuable experience in conducting oral histories and in incorporating them into scholarship through my work with the Project. I also appreciate the opportunity that Maggie and Emilio Zamora gave me to publish in the anthology on the political and social legacies of WWII generation Latinos. These scholars model bridging academia and community with attention to social justice in important ways.

My work with the WWII Project exposed me to so many wonderful people who I had the honor of interviewing. I wish to thank in particular Mrs. Aurora Orozco and Mrs. Wilhelmina Vasquez, two women of the WWII generation whose strength, intellect, and passion for justice continue to inspire me. I am so blessed to have met and worked with these and all of the other amazing women and men of their generation.

I thank my fellow graduate students with whom I worked on the Women of La Raza Unida Oral History Project, in particular those in my group, Hortensia Palomares and Rachel Correon. My classmate, colleague, and friend, Linda Ho-Peché, deserves recognition for lending her exhibit development expertise in working with me on the Women of La Raza Unida exhibit. Christian Kelleher and Margo Gutiérrez provided valuable assistance during the preparation for this exhibit and the WWII exhibit I co-curated at the Benson, as well as research assistance for my dissertation.

I offer special thanks to all of the attendees of my CMAS graduate portfolio plática for helping me to experience a safe and spiritual space within academia during my plática. My friends Christina Salinas and Andrea Melendez offered beautiful words about their experiences in that space that I will treasure and reflect upon as I work to recreate such spaces in academia. In the plática Virginia Raymond talked about the ways women help and support one another and how this is a form of spirituality. She has modeled doing so, from early conversations with me on religion, through helping me with fellowship applications, and exams preparation. She is a truly giving soul.

Omi Osun Jones deserves thanks for inspiring me with her luminous spirit and convictions about the necessity of bridging our spiritual and academic lives. Her belief in my work meant a great deal and I appreciate her suggestion that I consider looking at spiritual activism within the Yoruba tradition. Our conversations have helped me think through important connections between Black and Chicana feminisms and spiritualities.

I also offer heartfelt gratitude to Sara, a spiritual healer in her own right who helped me in more ways than she will ever know.

I am grateful to all of the people who helped me secure photos for this project, including Rene Renteria of Renteria Photography, Susana Almanza, Carmen Lomas Garza, Norma Cantú, Santa Barraza, and Palo Alto College in San Antonio. Many thanks to Santa Barraza for allowing me to use the image of her beautiful work, *La Lupe Tejana*. Thank you as well to Kelly Besecke for her copy writing assistance.

My future colleagues at Southwestern University have helped me in the transition from graduate student to educator-scholar. They have welcomed me with open arms and offered encouragement as I completed the last stages of the Ph.D. They are a wonderful community of people and I look forward to officially beginning my new position at SU.

With the utmost gratitude and love, I thank Tommy. I am blessed with a partner who supported me in many ways, including with “encouragement flowers” and by cooking many a meal while I hunkered down on fellowship applications, exams preparation, and the writing of this dissertation. Tommy gave me room to grow and a secure and loving environment in which to do so. Knowing I had this support and love made this dissertation possible. I look forward to moving on to the next stage in our lives together.

Finally, there is Milagro, a symbol of love and my ability to overcome adversity. Her spirit sustained me throughout the hardest moments of writing and fueled my strength and desire to tell *this* story.

PREFACE:

**TOWARDS AN ALTAR OF MY OWN:
A JOURNEY WITH MARÍA ELENA MARTÍNEZ**

It is one of those days where I need that extra little push. So I sit here, waiting, hoping for the inspiration to write. I think about the many things that have transpired to get me to this day, to this point, and I realize deep down that I have access to more inspiration than I can even *begin* to put into words. There are the inspirational stories of *las mujeres*¹ -- the women who have participated in this research project -- and the bonds that we've formed, the sacrifices that my Tejano parents and *antepasados*² made to get me to this point in my life, and the growth and healing that I've experienced over the course of this research. There are so many sources of inspiration to draw from; it's just a matter of tapping into them. While my academic journey has brought me to this point in my scholarly career, it is in many ways my spiritual journey that has brought me to this particular project and to this day: to this pivotal stage. I'm lacking something at this moment, however, something I desperately need in order to delve into this final phase of the dissertation. Time is ticking. I need extra inspiration, so I get up from my writing space and

¹ I use the term *las mujeres* (the women) throughout the dissertation to refer to the group of women who I interviewed for this study. I also refer to them as "the women" at times. A general note on terminology: I use the terms Tejana or Texas Mexican to refer to women of Mexican descent born and/or raised in Texas. I use these terms to refer to all of the women in this study as I do Chicana, for all of the women self-identify in these terms. I therefore use the terms interchangeably. I associate the term Chicana with a particular historic moment that intersected with the development of an ethnic and political consciousness that many of the women in this study came into during the Mexican American civil rights movement and/or through their involvement in other Mexican American social causes during or following this period (the 1960s and 1970s). Generally speaking I only use Chicana to refer to those who self-identify as Chicana, as the term can have derogatory connotations outside of this context, particularly for some Mexican American elders.

² Ancestors.

search the house for matches. Locating them, I step into the dark hallway. I turn on the light and look down towards the lone *altar*³ I constructed about two years ago using a tall, thin bookshelf. I stand in front of it overlooking its objects -- framed photos of family members and our dog Maggie, votive candles, my grandmother's rosary, a lacquered wooden picture of *la Virgencita*⁴ dad brought me from the Basilica, dried corn -- a symbol of fertility from my *comadre* María, a rock from the banks of the bay from my trip to visit her in California, dried flowers in a short glass vase, my clay *sahumador*⁵ that holds remnants of copal that I have burned in it, and a rock I took from Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change as a *recuerdo*⁶ of the women's weekend I spent there in 2008. Prayer cards from the rosaries of Aunt Renie, Uncle Richard, Uncle Henry, and a photo of Milagro sit in a box on the second shelf, marking the lives of some of the most amazing people I've ever known and the too many loved ones that I've lost over the past short 18 months. A prayer card from South Texas *curandero*⁷ Don Pedrito Jaramillo's shrine leans up against a *Virgen de San Juan*⁸ candle on the second shelf. This is my sacred space, the one that María Elena once told me every home should have.

³ I use altar and its Spanish equivalent *altar* interchangeably rather than just using either Spanish or English because this is how I refer to the word altar in my everyday speech, by shifting back and forth.

⁴ The Virgin of Guadalupe.

⁵ A *sahumador* is a clay incense burner.

⁶ Keepsake or souvenir.

⁷ A *curandero* is a folk healer who cures ailments on the physical, spiritual, and psychological levels. Folk healers can be a *partera* (midwife); *sobador* (a masseur); a *yerberero* (herbalist) or possess a combination of these skills. *Curanderos* often use herbs and/or spiritual ceremonies in their healing sessions (De La Portilla 2009; Graham, "Curanderismo").

⁸ The *Virgen de San Juan* is short for *Virgen de San Juan del Valle*. The *Virgen de San Juan del Valle* Shrine, also known as Our Lady of San Juan Shrine, is located in San Juan, Hidalgo County, in the Lower Rio Grande valley of Texas. It is staffed by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In 1949 the shrine's first director, Father Joseph Azpiazu brought a replica of Our Lady of San Juan, which was venerated in Jalisco, Mexico at the San Juan de Los Lagos, to his Texas parish. He was inspired with the realization that the shrines of Our Lady of San Juan in Jalisco and of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City were too far for Tejanos to travel. A basilica was built at the site in San Juan,

I remember such a space on my grandmother's bedroom dresser, with the ever-glowing red votive candle that sat in the saucepan surrounded by small statues of the Virgins of Guadalupe and San Juan, and a bronze cross, if my memory serves me right. Hers was the sacred space of which María Elena spoke, there in grandma's little yellow and white *casita*⁹ in Corpus Christi's Westside. It was the kind of sacred space that was lacking across town in our Southside, middle-class suburban house where I grew up. I don't recall an *altar* in any of the homes where I had lived growing up. And it was something that I did not know to miss, until now.

I put my hands together, gazing at the pictures of the people on the altar, the majority of whom I've lost since beginning graduate school. "Aunt Renie, Uncle Richard, Uncle Henry, Grandma Vita, Grandma Mary, Grandpa Qui Qui, Milagro, I need your help. I *really* need your help." I light a plain white candle and then the pearl colored one with Our Lady of Guadalupe on it. Then I light the incense and walk back with it to my writing space. I place the incense near by, hoping the strong scent will trigger something. If not I'll go for the sage. I place another red candle I've lit in front of me, sit down and after giving it some thought, retreat to retrieve the *Virgen* candle. I need her nearby. Here I sit after a long day of doubting myself and my ability to get this done. I wait for inspiration knowing well and good that all the inspiration I need lies within me; these past three years -- their stories, my stories, and the merging of the two -- have been nothing if not inspirational.

Texas and dedicated in 1980. The shrine has become a popular Texas religious pilgrimage site that attracts thousands of devotees who travel each week to pray and attend masses (Azpiazu, "*Virgen De San Juan Del Valle Shrine*").

⁹ A small house.

This *altar*, in many ways, symbolizes my spiritual journey, a journey that coincided with the writing of this dissertation. It is an *altar* I built after coming to know María Elena, an *altar* that filled a space not only in our home but also within me. Its objects represent my life, loves, and losses. Its presence represents a recovery, a re-imagining, and reconciliation and as such, a symbol of who I am in relation to the stories I share here. It is who I am and who I have become: a Tejana, a producer of culture whose spiritual life is inspired by her specific histories and experiences. But where have I come *from*? Where did my journey and the seeds of this project begin?

I remember the details of my first communion picture so vividly. The pressed white dress, white patent leather shoes, pretty socks with lace trim, and the white veil. I recall being so proud of my new white bible with the picture of the little girl on the front cover, smiling and holding her rosary in between her hands pressed together in prayer. I looked a lot like that little girl, minus the blonde hair and blue eyes. My olive skin and dark brown eyes and hair looked even darker against the glaring white of my first communion dress and veil. In the picture I am beaming with pride. I could now take communion and go to confession. I felt grown up and filled with joy. My parents were so proud of me that day, memories I recall with feelings of love. This is what I remember liking about being raised Catholic. I also loved the family gatherings around such rituals; feeling part of a community and a sense of belonging and the security that went along with it. The journey from such experiences to an altar of my own and all that it represents has been a long one. Along the way I came into different and deepened understandings of the spiritual worlds of Tejanas in their various borderlands and in the process, into a deeper understanding of my own. I look over at the orange glow emanating from the

Virgen candle and I feel that inspiration I need emerging as I think of how this dissertation journey began, one spring day in 2004, upon meeting María Elena Martínez.

It was the beginning of the spring semester when my advisor contacted me about a course being offered called, “Memory, History and Oral Narratives: Mexican American Politics in Texas History.” He knew of my interest in Tejana/Chicana history, culture, and feminisms, and told me he thought I might find the course interesting, as it involved students conducting oral histories with women involved in politics during the Mexican American civil rights movement in Texas.

I was excited for the opportunity to learn about women’s contributions to political and social movements in Texas, as well as to engage directly with the women. What a wonderful and rare opportunity to meet some of the pivotal actors in the Chicano and Chicana feminist movements.

The course was developed and taught by Professor Emilio Zamora, who was a contemporary of the women and a participant in the Chicano movement and La Raza Unida Political Party (RUP). La Raza Unida was an independent political party that formed in Texas in 1970 to raise awareness of social and political inequalities affecting among Mexican-origin communities in the United States.

Professor Zamora drew on his experiences in RUP, his knowledge of the Chicano movement, and his insight into the women’s pivotal contributions and organized the Women of La Raza Unida Oral History Project (WRUP). One of Professor Zamora’s objectives in developing the course and project was to recover the women’s history and to continue his

support of radical Mexican feminism. He introduced my classmates and me to a group of nine women who participated in the WRUP Project, providing a space for us to interact with the women and their life and movement histories.¹⁰

Little did I know that my decision to enroll and learn about women's involvement in electoral politics and other movements for social change would lead me to the study of spirituality. As this dissertation will show, this decision shifted the course of my dissertation research and impacted my life in profound and unexpected ways.

When people ask me how I came to this project, I often tell them that it chose me, for I did not originally set out to study the religious and spiritual lives of Texas Mexican women. Years later I am a changed person and anthropologist because of the journey this project and the women in it have taken me on. I cannot imagine my life's work as anything else.

¹⁰ The course was offered in the spring semester of 2004. As part of the course Professor Zamora initiated the WRUP Oral History Project, which involved graduate students assisting with the research and collection of oral history interviews. Professor Zamora arranged for the women to be interviewed by my classmates and me about their political involvement in RUP during the Chicano movement. The purpose of the course was to expose students to the methodology and theory of oral history through hands-on experiences in collecting and analyzing oral narratives from women who achieved prominence in the Mexican American civil rights movement from the 1960's to the present. In addition to having the opportunity to learn about and conduct interviews with participants in the historic third-party politics of the 1970s and 1980s, the course hosted three round table discussions. During the round table discussions the nine former RUP members from various parts of the state offered testimonials on their lives and political histories as community activists. The women included Evey Chapa, María Elena Martínez, Luz Bazán Gutiérrez, María Jiménez, Linda del Toro, Alma Canales, Angelita Mendoza Waterhouse, Elvia Rios, and Martha Cotera. My fellow graduate students in the course included Amelia Abreau, Rachel Carreon, Elizabeth Harrison, Linda Ho, Hortensia Palomares, Sara Schueneman-Ayala, Rebecca Snow, Teresa Taylor, and Cassandra Treviño. Martha Cotera assisted in a number of class activities and is credited for proposing the idea of an oral history project on RUP women. This project, as Professor Zamora suggests, is part of a larger academic project on the UT campus, at other colleges and universities, and among Mexican American communities to recover and understand their histories and experiences (Sources: Dr. Emilio Zamora and the UT Austin Center for Mexican American Studies Newsletter, Noticias de CMAS: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/ctmas/_files/pdf/spring_05.pdf).

The path that led me to write a dissertation on spirituality was comprised of many unexpected events. I was inspired to learn about Mexican American history -- in many ways my history -- in an anthropology course as an undergraduate at UT Austin in the early 1990s. I have been drawn to studying Tejana and Tejano life and culture since. But while I was interested in Tejana cultural productions and history for my dissertation, I had never been particularly drawn to studying Texas Mexican women's spiritual lives. Today spirituality consumes me, enlightens me, and sustains me, both as a topic of research and as an important part of my life. But if you had told me years ago upon my first deciding to apply to graduate school that I would be studying religion and spirituality, I likely would not have believed it. This is because at one time the topic of religion, specifically that of organized, institutional religion, perplexed me. I began questioning it as far back as elementary school. I just did not understand, in particular as I grew older and into a teenager, how, if we as Catholics were "right" in our beliefs, could everyone else be wrong? Would my non-Catholic friends go to hell? According to my Roman Catholic teachings, yes. When I pushed such questions further, as with my parents, I never really got definitive answers, other than having to settle for, "That's just the way it is, *mi'ija*."¹¹ But that just did not make sense to me; I've been on a journey for my spiritual truth ever since. It was in the midst of this journey that this project found me.

At the point in my life when I was taking the oral history course, I was seeking an egalitarian spiritual path that aligned with my views on social justice. I so desperately wanted something that felt right and grounded me spiritually. Catholicism no longer satisfied this in me, and I don't think that it ever really did. It served different purposes then and holds different

¹¹ A term of endearment that is short for *mi hija*, my daughter.

meaning for me today. It is within this context that I viewed María Elena's experiences that spring day. Meeting María Elena marked the beginning of a journey. This journey would lead me to a group of women whose powerful life experiences contribute to our understanding of Chicana/Tejana cultural production, self-making, and borderlands social history, knowledge that was, at times, located through the lens of my own spiritual trajectory.

María Elena Martínez was one of the nine women who the class interviewed about her political involvement in RUP. She entered our classroom on the UT campus that spring afternoon in 2004 wearing a brightly colored Mexican *huipil*¹² with a small beaded pouch around her neck. She had wavy brown hair with tinges of grey, a radiant smile, and a warm way about her. I recall feeling both nervous and excited to meet this pivotal player in the Texas Chicano movement. María Elena took the time to introduce herself with each of the students in the class. She immediately put me at ease. There was something about her that drew me to her from the start. In retrospect, I think it was her combination of gentle compassion and a deeply profound and unwavering commitment to justice that she immediately exuded upon speaking.

María Elena told us of her early life growing up in North Texas and her experience as the first woman to lead a political party in Texas as RUP's last state chair, from 1974-1976. She told us of various RUP initiatives at the local and statewide levels and recollected about her movement experiences, including what it was like for Chicana feminists, women who advocated for gender equality within RUP. My memory of the details of María Elena's talk is limited, but there is something very striking that I have always remembered about meeting her that day.

¹² A *huipil* is a woven blouse created and worn by Latin American groups such as the Maya of Guatemala, Southern Mexico, and Belize. The patterns on these textiles are known to have symbolic meaning and often times tell stories about that particular group's history or worldviews.

María Elena's political history was very interesting, but as I listened to the rest of her life story unfold, I became particularly intrigued by another narrative that emerged: a spiritual narrative. She told us that she was raised Catholic but that she had left Catholicism for another spiritual practice, shamanism. María Elena spoke briefly about her current spiritual path and described a recent trip she took to Hawaii to attend a seminar where she would continue her study of the medicinal and spiritual uses of herbs. She recalled swimming with whales on her trip, and how gentle and peaceful they were. It was clearly an experience that moved her deeply and illustrated her profound connection to and respect for the earth and its creatures, which I came to learn is at the core of her spiritual beliefs.

Hearing about María Elena's spiritual transformation within the context of her involvement in electoral politics and the Chicano movement sparked something within me. I have recently come to realize that this intuitive sense came from my own experience as a Texas Chicana on my own journey of spiritual self-discovery. My transformation from that Catholic little girl to a Chicana feminist and *mujerista* ethnographer drew me to see this connection. However, it was not until later that I would acknowledge this and look within to learn what drew me so to María Elena's story.

A few months after that initial meeting with María Elena I took part in a documentary filmmaking course at UT. In considering the topic for my film project, I came to the realization that it would be wonderful to explore María Elena's life and her journey from Catholicism to shamanism. María Elena graciously agreed to participate in the film, which I co-produced with

classmates.¹³ What I learned about María Elena's life and spiritual journey over the course of the film inspired me to consider the intersection of spirituality and social justice as my new dissertation topic. María Elena displayed her immense generosity yet again by agreeing to participate in the ethnography. I solidified my decision to shift my dissertation topic and officially began my research on the cultural production of spirituality among Tejanas involved in social justice causes.

My participation in the WRUP oral history project and Dr. Zamora's course, an exhibit that I co-curated that drew from the WRUP archives, and the documentary film experience on María Elena's life all provided important foundational knowledge on the lives and histories of Tejanas of this generation and the Texas Chicano movement.¹⁴ The focus of the documentary on both María Elena's spiritual and political lives provided particularly relevant background information. Furthermore, interviews and research conducted for the documentary opened up new directions for the research that were pivotal in helping me to formulate my research questions and the overall shape of the project. In the coming months and years I would learn a great deal more about María Elena, which informed my understanding of her spiritual transformation and Texas Mexican religion and spirituality.

¹³ The name of this film is "The Journey of María Elena Martínez." Co-producer/directors were my colleague in the Department of Anthropology, Lynn Selby, and our fellow classmate, Chase Dawkins. Lynn and Chase were instrumental in producing the film and I am indebted to them for taking on the project and thus helping me begin my dissertation research.

¹⁴ Another outcome of the course was an exhibit that my classmate and colleague, Linda Ho and I proposed and co-curated at UT Austin's Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection in the spring of 2007. The exhibit was entitled, "Women of La Raza Unida/*Mujeres Por La Raza Unida*: A Tribute to Women's Involvement in Texas Politics." Dr. Zamora was the faculty sponsor for the exhibit and provided us access to the WRUP interviews during the course of exhibit production. Linda and I drew background information and quotes from women's interviews for the exhibit. The exhibit also included documents and other archival materials from the Benson's Raza Unida Party Collection. The exhibit was co-sponsored by the Benson and UT Austin's Center for Mexican American Studies.

*The Life of María Elena Martínez*¹⁵

María Elena's current life path is the culmination of life experiences that began almost 70 years ago in a small North Texas town. Hers is the life that inspired me to ask broader questions about the development of Tejana spirituality and activism and in many ways, led me to the answers.

María Elena and her family were among the very few Mexicans who lived in the rural North Texas town of Wiley. She grew up very cognizant of the racial discrimination in her midst. María Elena's parents worked as farm workers in Texas, work María Elena and her siblings would eventually take part in as well. María Elena explains that she knew early on that she was "culturally different." As the only Spanish speaker in her all English-speaking first grade class, she withdrew, rarely interacting with the other students. She said that she was essentially mute the entire year because she did not know a word of English. Furthermore, as they did with her siblings, her teachers Anglicized her name. María Elena became Mary Helen.¹⁶ She and her siblings responded to such rejection of their ethnic heritage by switching from taco lunches to white bread sandwiches in order to fit in. Additionally, they lived with an overprotective, domineering father who was very strict with his daughters and allowed them limited

¹⁵ Information provided in the following narrative was collected as part of my dissertation research, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶ Jim Crow laws refer to *de jure* or legal means of instituting racial segregation that took part around the U.S. from the 1870s to 1965. It refers to "separate but equal" accommodations for people of color in the U.S. "Separate but equal" applied to restaurants, schools, public transportation, and other public facilities. While Jim Crow laws are known to have had a significant impact on African Americans, Mexican-origin people were also impacted by them, as were other peoples of color. Mexican-origin peoples have a long history of struggle against institutionalized racism. In various areas around Texas this resulted in inferior quality schools and educational experiences for Mexican-origin students who were often punished for speaking Spanish in school and forced into Americanization programs. The Anglicization of names that was experienced by María Elena was part of such efforts and a common experience among Mexican Americans in 1940s and 1950s Jim Crow Texas (De León 1983; Montejano 1987).

opportunities to socialize outside of their Catholic youth group and select school functions. While other young people were attending parties at each other's homes, María Elena and her sister were not allowed to do so. Such stories of living in a constant state of displacement between two cultures are common in her reflections on her life.

María Elena's life story paralleled the religious experiences of many Mexican Americans raised in the Catholic Church. She spoke of growing up in a devoutly Catholic household and attending Catholic school. She completed all her sacraments in the church, including baptism, first communion, and confirmation, and was an active member of the Catholic Youth Organization in her parish. She attended mass regularly with her family and taught Catechism classes as a young adult. Her mother was a member of the *Guadalupanas*¹⁷ and her father was a church deacon.

When it came time to think about college a high school teacher of María Elena's encouraged her to apply. As a World War II veteran her father was keenly aware of the benefits of an education and relaxed his traditionally strict rules to allow María Elena to leave home and attend the University of North Texas. College would come to open María Elena's eyes in many ways, including to possibilities for social change. During that period she participated in the Poor People's March, which went through Denton.¹⁸ She cited this period as a pivotal turning point in

¹⁷ *Guadalupanas* are an organized group of women in a Catholic parish who volunteer their time to providing services for the church and church community. Named for Our Lady of Guadalupe, the women typically organize annual Virgin of Guadalupe Day Celebrations on December 12th and care for altars erected for the *Virgen*.

¹⁸ The Poor People's March on Washington, D.C. took place in early 1968. Its leaders were Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Reverend King appointed Chicano movement leader Reies López Tijerina to coordinate a Mexican American delegation in the Southwest. Leaders of the marches and participants advocated for improved job, housing, and educational opportunities (Meier and Gutiérrez 2000).

the development of her social conscious. As she stated, it put the class inequalities she was seeing among children she taught in the local Head Start Program¹⁹ into perspective.

María Elena left the Dallas area to pursue her Master's of Education degree at UT Austin. It was there that she continued her social activism, becoming involved with MAYO, the Mexican American Youth Organization,²⁰ and then RUP. She became an active participant in the Chicana feminist movement and worked with other women and men such as Professor Zamora to get issues that affected women placed on the RUP platform. In addition to working for the rights and professional and personal development of women, María Elena was involved in education reform, where she helped to bring attention to the need for effective bilingual education. Her decision to join in these social causes owes much to her early family experiences.

María Elena's WRUP oral history interview gave some indication of her feminist sensibilities and how she enacted them during her time in RUP. In her WRUP interview she discussed how the male contingent of the party originally approached her to run for vice-chair: " ... I said well, I really don't think we should automatically just say that we can only run for vice-chair, I want to run for state chairperson." María Elena did not think it should be a given

¹⁹ Head Start is a national school readiness program that was created in 1965. It is the longest-running program of its kind in the United States. Head Start programs provide "comprehensive health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families" (www.nhsa.org/about_nhsa).

²⁰ MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization) was the precursor to RUP. It was a national student-led organization comprised of Chicana and Chicano college students from around the country. It was established in 1967 at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. Founders included RUP co-founders José Angel Gutiérrez, Mario Compean, and William Velásquez. This social-change organization was in operation from 1967 to 1972 and a significant site of Chicano movement student activism. MAYO chapters took a Chicano nationalist stance and members took pride in their ethnic heritage in their fight for social and economic mobility and equality for their communities. MAYO leaders were hypercritical of liberal capitalism and adhered to the ideals of Chicano nationalist by claiming the Chicano homeland, or Aztlán, as the Mexican lands occupied by the United States following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. MAYO was often criticized for its radical militant approach by organizations such as LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Latino veterans' organization, the G.I. Forum. MAYO in turn alleged these groups to be ineffective in the non-confrontational tactics they employed to achieve social mobility for Mexican-origin people (García, I. 1989; Navarro 2000).

that women would run for vice-chair, but that they should be considered for the lead position of chair. She followed that by saying she thought that perhaps coming from a home where her father was the “sole voice” made her want to break such patterns that limited women to second choices. She said that until then, neither men nor women considered the possibility that women could take the RUP chair.²¹ The early experience of living under a patriarchal father shaped María Elena’s views on gender equality in other ways as well, including, as I would come to learn, how she viewed women’s positions in the Catholic Church.

In her 20s María Elena began questioning the Church in a way that resonated with me. In her early 30s she left Catholicism, which was followed by a period of what she called “spiritual dormancy.” It was in this period that she would come to lose a dear friend, whose death left her questioning her spiritual direction and purpose. Shortly thereafter, she was introduced to her current spiritual practice, shamanism,²² which provided her the spiritual fulfillment she was seeking. The Catholic Church, as I’ve since heard her say on numerous occasions, no longer meets her spiritual needs.

The interviews I conducted with María Elena earlier on in my fieldwork indicated that there was a connection between the spiritual and the political, but I could not quite articulate it at the time. I just knew it was significant. In the process of coming to know María Elena since

²¹ Martínez, María Elena, interview by Rebecca Snow, April 7, 2004, videotape recording, Women of La Raza Unida Party Oral History Project, the University of Texas at Austin, Austin.

²² Shamanism is an earth-based spiritual tradition that is the oldest spiritual healing tradition still in general use today, dating back approximately 40,000 years to Siberia. It is practiced among Indigenous groups around the world. Shamanism involves the use of herbs in spiritual and psychological healing and journeying, at which time the shaman travels to other dimensions where she/he receives messages from spirit that the shaman can use to create positive change in the material world (Tedlock 2005).

then, over the past four or so years, I came to think more deeply and cultivate more questions about how her political past informed her spiritual present.

As I continued to get to know María Elena in the years following the class and film experiences I often reflected upon her description of her attraction to the Chicano movement. I wanted to know more about what drew her to it and the process by which she came into a Chicana political and feminist consciousness, which began at University of North Texas, followed her into her MAYO years, continued to develop with her involvement in RUP, and which is still very present within her today. It became apparent that those earlier childhood and adolescent experiences later informed her political and feminist development, as well as her desire to become a bilingual educator and to get involved in education reform and electoral politics during the Chicano movement. I also learned that the early life experiences that informed her activist consciousness and desire to create social change in the world informed her choice to leave Catholicism and adopt shamanism. María Elena's spiritual transformation and its relationship to her politics and views on social justice were not mutually exclusive but very much intertwined.

María Elena's life as a civil rights activist turned shamanic practitioner raised many questions for me, including whether other women shared similar experiences of spiritual transformation. Considering María Elena's spiritual transformation within the context of her experience as a central actor in the Texas Chicano movement led me to consider the material experiences that shape women's politics and how such experiences would come to inform their choice of spiritual practice. I came to believe that two were clearly related. I also wondered how women's participation in the movement and growing up Tejana informed the type of change I

was seeing in María Elena's spiritual life. Did other women experience a transformation in their spiritual beliefs that corresponded to some degree with the formation of a political consciousness inspired by memories of earlier social injustices? Was it possible that such a consciousness manifested not only in women's participation in the Chicano movement, but also in the spiritual realm? These were the kinds of questions inspired me to change my research topic from examining Tejanas of the World War II generation and their contributions to the development of a politically aware Chicana generation²³ to the religious and spiritual beliefs of Texas Chicanas.²⁴ The seeds of my dissertation research began with María Elena and led me to the other women in this study, who I will introduce in the next section.

This move to the new dissertation topic came to impact my life in more ways than I could have imagined. In 2008 and in the midst of my fieldwork my husband Tommy and I became pregnant, only to lose the baby, whom we named Milagro. In the wake of our tragedy we searched desperately for a path to heal, and María Elena was there to help us to make sense of a seemingly senseless course of events. Because of this unexpected turn, this ethnography about Tejana spirituality and the reasons women employ certain spiritual practices is informed by my loss and journey towards healing, a journey that several of *las mujeres*, in particular María Elena, have accompanied me on. It is a journey that shifted my positionalities as researcher and woman, and changed the course of this project. Because this experience occurred while I was conducting my fieldwork it led me to think about my loss within the context of this project and as such

²³ See Sendejo (2009).

²⁴ This transition proved to be insightful. I soon came to learn that the experiences of the World War II generation Tejanas who are mothers of the generation of Tejanas I currently study are relevant to my current work. Spiritual and religious practices among World War II generation Tejanas have informed research on changes and continuities among the spiritual practices of their daughters in important ways.

challenged me to think differently about ethnographic research and the possibilities for new ways of knowing. It has also deepened my relationships with many of the women in this study, changed how I view women's experiences, lives and choices, and inevitably, my approach to this research. Had our loss not occurred over the course of conducting this research, this simply would have been a different project.

So while the experiences of women navigating the spiritual, geographic, ideological, and psychological borderlands are their stories, they are also like my own. Shared experiences allow us to travel and traverse times and spaces together, along the way cultivating community, spiritual intimacy, and the interconnections that are so integral to the human experience.

It feels as if I've led several lives between the time that I stood in my grandmother's bedroom watching the glow of her red candle and when I created my *altar*. As I reflect on the process by which I came into an altar of my own, I think about the severing of cultural traditions that happens when people like me become convinced in subtle yet unmistakable ways that we are not good enough because we are Mexican. My parents worked so hard to acculturate us so that we could fit socially in ways that were difficult for them. Their experiences of racial, class, and gender oppression in many ways mirror those of the women in this study, who are of my parents' generation. They were born and raised in the same social climate of the 1940s and 50s in Texas. My parents spared me from this fate by teaching me only English and providing a comfortable middle class upbringing. *La Virgen* was alive and well in my parents' hearts and memories but not visibly in our house on Hogan Street, not like she was represented in the homes of my grandparents and other relatives. In this way our parents safeguarded my sisters and I, but in the

process we also lost many of our cultural traditions and other aspects of our Mexican American heritage, like using Spanish and practicing the tradition of a home altar. And for so long, I did not want traditions like these. I failed to appreciate them enough to want to recover them as I sought to fit into an Anglo middle-class environment.

My altar is a recuperation, something I acquired and required to heal from another trauma -- the shame of being Mexican. How did I get from there to here? Answering this question made it possible for me to better understand my transformation and to use it as a lens to appreciate other women's experiences. I recovered my altar much in the same way María Elena and the other women in this study recover and recuperate ancestral traditions from which they too became severed. And they do so in ways that hold meaning for them. While practices such as *altars* are similar in form to those used by our *antepasados*, their content and functions in many ways differ. Altars and other religious traditions may hold different meanings than they did for our mothers, grandmothers, and great grandmothers, yet they remain potent symbols of our connection to these women and to our other Tejana/Mexicana/indigenous ancestors and ancestry.

How does a young Tejana go from the beaming smile and pride of her first communion to questioning religion? This transition is a lens through which I understand the stories of *las mujeres*, who at once shifted my understanding of larger processes of self-making within religion, politics, and spirituality and of my own.

I have come to understand that what I saw in María Elena's narrative is that political and spiritual transformations are not disparate, but rather one and the same. The same consciousness that inspired María Elena to go for RUP chair over vice-chair told her in her heart that Catholicism was not the right path for her. Her spiritual consciousness was functioning in the

same way her political/activist consciousness did during the movement. In both instances she was working to recreate the social order. Today she works to accomplish this in and through the spiritual realm. There is, in this way, a politics to this spirituality. Religion and spirituality are not just reprieves from adverse forces in the world, they *are* forces in the world.

Tejana religion and spirituality not only exist in the private domain and within domestic spaces, they have made their way into the public realm where spiritual symbols and practices are infused with beliefs concerning issues of social justice like gender, racial, and class equality. This project explores how Tejanas have reexamined, rearticulated, and recovered their religious and spiritual practices, and the experiences that gave rise to this spiritual change. It considers how, like my own life has required my *altar*, women's material and spiritual needs have shifted so as to require new forms of spiritual engagement and meaning. My spiritual compass led me to María Elena. This ethnography is a story about how I interacted with her and subsequently, numerous other Tejana women and their spiritual and political experiences. It shares what I have learned about them, myself, processes of self-making, the cultural politics inherent in them, and the methods necessary to uncover them.

**“The Face of God Has Changed”:
Tejana Cultural Production and the Politics of Spirituality
in the Borderlands**

Publication No. _____

Brenda Lee Sendejo, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Richard R. Flores

This ethnography of spirituality explores the production of cultural practices and beliefs among a group of Texas Mexican women (Tejanas) of the post-World War II generation. These women have been involved with various social justice initiatives since the 1960s and 1970s in Texas, such as the Chicana feminist and Chicano civil rights movements. This study explains how race, ethnicity, and gender intersect and interact in these women’s geographic and spiritual borderlands to produce a pattern of change in the ways they choose to engage with religion, particularly Catholicism.

While the Tejana spiritual productions examined here are in many ways distinct from the religious practices of these women’s Catholic upbringings, they also recall religious rituals and traditions from their imagined, constructed, and engaged pasts. Some women have left

Catholicism for other forms of spiritual fulfillment, including earth-based, indigenous, and/or Eastern religious practices, while others have remained Catholic-identified, yet altered how they practice Catholicism. A common theme in the narratives is that of spiritual agency -- the conscious decision women make to reconfigure their spiritual practices and beliefs. I explore the meaning of such acts and what they indicate about the construction of spiritual and religious identities in the borderlands. I argue that because gender structures Tejana religious experiences to such a wide extent, a critical gender analysis of religious and spiritual practices will provide deeper insight into the making of Texas Mexican culture and social relations.

I examine the women's life experiences through a methodological framework I call *mujerista* ethnography, which draws on oral history and research methods employed by anthropologists and feminist, indigenous, and Chicana and Chicano Studies scholars. In order to further illustrate how the women's material and spiritual needs have changed so as to require new forms of spiritual engagement, I engage in a critical self-reflection of my own spiritual journey as a Tejana raised in the Catholic faith through the use of autoethnographic research methods and *testimonio*.

I argue that these Tejanas have extended the political, feminist, and historical consciousnesses that they cultivated in Mexican American social causes into the religious and spiritual realms. For instance, these women transferred their critique of gender politics and hierarchies of power into the social setting of organized Catholicism with new spiritual practices and understandings, effectively remaking religion and subsequently engaging in processes of self-making by changing the ways they interact with Catholicism and are affected by it. Religion, as a site of social struggle for women, is political. These Tejanas transformed the spiritual into a

site of resistance, resolution, and reconciliation where they disrupt and challenge hierarchies of power and create strategies for healing themselves, their communities, and the earth.

Table of Contents

PREFACE: TOWARDS AN ALTAR OF MY OWN: A JOURNEY WITH MARÍA ELENA MARTÍNEZ	xv
List of Illustrations	xxxix
INTRODUCTION	1
PART I: LAS TEJANAS: HISTORY AND CONTEXT	52
PART II: TOWARDS NEW PERSPECTIVES IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPIRITUALITY: A <i>MUJERISTA</i> ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH	81
PART III: POLITICIZED SPIRITUALITIES IN THE BORDERLANDS: NARRATIVES OF TEJANA SELF-MAKING	109
III. 1: Autoethnographic Reflections from a Tejana Anthropologist.....	110
III. 2: María Elena Martínez	131
III. 3: Martha P. Cotera	148
III. 4: Susana Almanza.....	164
III. 5: Yolanda Chávez Leyva.....	176
III. 6: Carmen Lomas Garza	185
III. 7: Norma Elia Cantú	198
III. 8: Rosie Castro	208
III. 9: Santa Barraza	222
III. 10: Sister Teresita	237
PART IV: TOWARDS A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF TEJANA SELF-MAKING: GENDER IN THE BORDERLANDS, OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, AND SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM	244
IV. 1 Spiritual Agency and Self-Making: An Anthropological Analysis of Gender in the Borderlands.....	250

IV. 2 Our Lady of Guadalupe: A Versatile Catalyst for Change	254
IV. 3 Spiritual Activism: A Manifestation of a <i>Mestiza</i> Consciousness	265
PART V: REFLECTIONS FROM A <i>MUJERISTA</i> ETHNOGRAPHER ON THE MAKING OF A SPIRITUAL ETHNOGRAPHY	276
EPILOGUE: AN ALTAR OF HER OWN	294
REFERENCES	297
Vita	314

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1:	María Elena Martínez's Home Altar	137
Illustration 2:	María Elena Martínez	139
Illustration 3:	Martha P. Cotera, PODER's Cesar Chavez Day March	151
Illustration 4:	Martha P. Cotera at her Home Altar	161
Illustration 5:	Suzanna Almanza	169
Illustration 6:	PODER's Cesar Chavez Day March and Rally	171
Illustration 7:	Yolanda Chávez Leyva, PODER's <i>Festival de las Plantas</i>	178
Illustration 8:	Yolanda Chávez Leyva	182
Illustration 9:	Carmen Lomas Garza	188
Illustration 10:	Carmen Lomas Garza, Primavera Spring Ceremony	192
Illustration 11:	<i>Día de los Muertos</i> Altar, San Francisco, California	195
Illustration 12:	Norma Elia Cantú at her Home Altar	203
Illustration 13:	Rosie Castro	213
Illustration 14:	The Healing Tree, Falfurrias, Texas	226
Illustration 15:	Santa Barraza	231
Illustration 16:	<i>La Lupe Tejana</i>	234

Spirituality is a way of life or a way of being and relating. It is essential that we relate to all other living beings on our planet Earth. It is a path of relationship with all other beings, which includes all of creation. All of creation is spiritual and sacred. Spirit is that dynamic, creative energy that is ever changing, it is a mystery and it reveals itself in many ways if we stop and listen. Spirit is within us; it is our soul and our higher self. Spirit is what created the universe and it has been called by many names: Great Spirit, God/Goddess, Allah, Buddha, Yahweh.

- María Elena Martínez

In short, I'm trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be.

- Gloria Anzaldúa (1981:208)

INTRODUCTION

This project is an ethnography of spirituality. However, over the course of conducting the research for it, a series of events transpired that led to the making of something else as well: a spiritual ethnography. That is, while this project is an ethnographic study of Tejana spirituality and self-making, it also explores the making of a particular *kind* of ethnography, which has been a spiritual process in and of itself for this researcher, a process that has provided deeper insight into the cultural production of Tejana spiritualities.²⁵

Due to the circumstances that surrounded the production of this ethnography, twin, interrelated foci have emerged. The first addresses what it means to develop and execute a *mujerista* ethnography. *Mujerista* ethnography is a methodological process that attends to the spiritual component of producing ethnography. This involves giving consideration to what the researcher brings to the project, as well as viewing the relationships between researcher and study participants as sites of knowledge. *Mujerista* ethnographies examine the lived experiences and histories of Latina/Chicana/indigenous women and their communities. They draw on autoethnography, oral history, *testimonio*, feminist research methods, and indigenous methodologies to understand how individuals have changed their life circumstances through

²⁵ I will expand upon this throughout the course of this dissertation. For now I will say that what I mean by this is that the process of doing research on the spiritual practices of *las mujeres* resulted in moments of spiritual intimacy between the women and me. Additionally, in an unexpected turn of events, this research put me into contact with women like María Elena and Mary Margaret who helped me to heal spiritually. I believe that a research approach that is open to such things occurring has elements of being spiritual, inasmuch as it results in spiritual healing and in connecting people on a spiritual level that becomes part of the story being told. This spiritual ethnography has also served as a rite of passage for me, shepherding me through stages of transition that involved both healing and shifting from student to that of teacher.

transformations of the mind, body, and spirit. *Mujerista* ethnography involves reconstructing experiences from the past and understanding how they bear on cultural practices and social life in the present.

The second focus of this project is the collection of narratives that emerge from *mujerista* ethnographic research and the cultural analysis of this data. Such knowledge comes in the form of women's oral histories, *testimonios*, and informal, qualitative interviews. I weave this information, along with other historical background and data from participant observation into ethnographic narratives that illuminate the intersection of the spiritual and the material circumstances of women's lives. The *mujerista* narratives that emerged from this approach all point to a particular kind of change that occurred and continues to occur in the lives of the women in this study. Study participant, long time civil rights activist and former RUP member, Rosie Castro, illustrates such change with her statement, "The face of God has changed."²⁶ What Rosie is articulating here is that over the course of her life her understanding of and relationship to God has changed. This points to forms of spiritual transformation that Rosie and other women have undergone. As her narrative will explain, the "feminine face of God" replaced Rosie's previous understanding of a hierarchical and judgmental God.

Rosie's statement reveals the processes of self-making and acts of agency that are prevalent among these Tejanas as they engage with religion, politics, and spirituality. Ethnographic narratives will describe how women like Rosie have come to reexamine the

²⁶ For more on Rosie Castro's life and her views on religion, including the changing face of God, see "Rosie Castro: Civil Rights Advocate; Member of La Raza Unida" by Mariana Ornelas (<http://www.accd.edu/pac/lrc/chicanaleaders/castro.htm>). Accessed May 15, 2008.

religious experiences and religious institutions in which they were raised and to subsequently remake their spiritual practices and beliefs.

I approach such transformations -- women's spiritual agency -- as generative and creative acts. In doing so I align myself with scholars who view gender identity as unfixed and fluid, and who approach agency in positive terms; as a means of creating social change (Butler 1990, 1993c; McNay 2000; Ortner 1994). Such perspectives are in contrast to focusing on subject formation as being solely constituted through practices of subjugation.²⁷

I understand "self" in self-making as an unfixed subject that is constantly influenced and shaped by its own histories and experiences as well as those of others. I follow Lois McNay's definition of agency here as "the ability to act in an unexpected fashion or to institute new and unanticipated modes of behavior. Such forms of agency underlie certain transformations within gender relations" (McNay 2000:22). I view "no selfhood apart from the collaborative practice of its figuration" and see the "self" as "entangled with the histories, experiences, gestures, of other subjects" (Battaglia 1995:2).

This project seeks to understand processes of self-making among Tejanas within and in relation to the religious realm and how women navigate, resist, and reframe power dynamics within such spheres throughout their lives. Various structures of domination, such as patriarchal Catholicism and gender oppression, are projected upon and inscribed on the Tejana body and consciousness. The spiritual cultural productions described in this ethnography are therefore at

²⁷ I follow Lois McNay (2000) who suggests that scholars such as Lacan, Foucault, and Ricoeur have focused on the negative aspects of subject formation -- as influenced by social control. I see a parallel between this and my assertion that cultural forms understood as acts of cultural resistance (such as spiritual creativity) be seen, rather, as cultural productions -- generative and creative responses to social control.

once about the realm of spirituality, and the material circumstances that require spiritual practices. I argue that today women act as producers of culture in their remaking of these and other life circumstances.

Towards an Understanding of “Spirituality” and “Religion”

The terms spirituality and religion are fluid, changing, and historically and socially specific and therefore must be understood in their particular context. I will provide some general characteristics and guidelines for how I use them in this project, which is informed by the research I conducted for this dissertation.

I opened this ethnography with María Elena’s definition of spirituality to illustrate how some Tejanas view it and as a starting off point for discussing what spirituality is and means for the women in this study. While *las mujeres* follow various spiritual paths, there are common elements in their practices and María Elena’s articulation of spirituality possesses several of them. For María Elena, spirituality is a way of being in the world. She sees it as a prism through which we relate to one another. She sees all of creation as spiritual and sacred. Spirituality, as she says, is often a mystery. It is ever changing and dynamic. It is inside of us and it is our higher selves. Spirit created the earth and is called, as she says, by many names, including God/Goddess, Great Spirit, Allah, Buddha, and Yahweh.

Examining the spiritual lives of María Elena and the other women in this study has come to inform my definition of spirituality. I view the spiritual as a metaphysical dimension; an inner path that connects to a larger reality. Through spirituality one can connect to the values and meanings that she/he attributes to the world around them and by which they live their life. María

Elena's sense of spirituality as a way of relating to one another grounds the definition of spiritual, especially the manner in which it manifests in the material world and through our relationships to each other and the earth. I explore this relationship between a moral sensibility, ethnical responsibility, and spirituality throughout this dissertation.

I refer to practices associated with spiritual devotion -- both within and outside of organized religion -- in general terms as "spiritual," as in the spiritual practices of Tejanas, for not all women's practices are associated with an organized religion. I use "religious" to describe practices that are used within the context of institutionalized religion or by those who identify as religious.²⁸ Some practices, such as a devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, fall under both categories because some women who do not identify as religious are Guadalupe devotees and identify her in indigenous terms as Tonantzin.

This how I approach these two often hard to define categories. However, as I previously mentioned, and as this ethnography will demonstrate, such categories are by no means static, but based on shifting social and historical circumstances of life. As I will describe in the coming pages, my approach to uncovering the spiritual practices of Tejanas is also inspired by a tradition of the anthropology of religion that focuses on religion and spirituality's *effects* on social actors and understands practices and beliefs as true for those who embrace them. This is key to

²⁸ One of the more often cited definitions of religion is by Clifford Geertz (1973:90). Geertz defines religion as: "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [and women] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." This definition, while useful for understanding the functions of religion, has been critiqued for not providing evidence for how to identify this abstraction called "religion" in the field.

understanding how religion has impacted *las mujeres* and why they have subsequently re-imaged it in different terms.

Class and race analyses of Mexican Americans have underscored discrimination and inequality in their lived history. Women of Mexican descent such as *las mujeres* suffer from double if not multiple oppressions due to the way their gender has structured their lives. Scholars such as Patricia Zavella (1994) bring attention to the heterogeneous nature of their experiences; that they differ in region, class, experiences of racialization, age, religion, and language. Nevertheless, gender, ethnicity, race, and class situate the experiences of Mexican-origin and Latina women in specific ways, including lower educational attainment, lower financial compensation in the workplace, coming from largely working-class origins, and in being disproportionately poor in relation to Chicano men (Anzaldúa 1980; Apodoca 1977; Arredondo et. al 2003; Sandoval 2000). Drawing on personal experience in the Chicano movement and with organized religion, as well as scholarly accounts, Ana Castillo (1994) asserts that women experience the Chicano movement in their struggle for social justice and institutionalized religion differently than men.

I draw on such analyses to understand how gender has influenced the material experiences of Chicana/Tejana women in the religious realm. For instance, I examine the lived experiences; social realities that correspond to religious ideologies. I take from Michel Foucault (1978) who applies his theory of governmentality to the body, asserting that religion acts to govern, or control the sexualization of the body through the power of the discourse it circulates around it, taking away one's agency. The Catholic Church has historically impressed the Virgin image and suppressed the sexuality of its Mexican-origin female congregations acting to govern

women's bodies. As a regime of power the Catholic Church has served to control women's sexuality through discourses that shape society's perspectives, such as sex as amoral. As scholars discuss and many of the narratives in this study confirm, such discourses propagated by the Catholic Church have served to stigmatize Mexican American women, contributing to negative body image and alienation from their bodies and their sexualities (Cisneros 1996; Zavella 2003). This has impacted some women on the physical level. María Elena recalled that Catholic schoolteachers thrust ideas around the body as dirty and sinful upon María Elena to the point of making her physically ill. This is not to say that women's male counterparts were not impacted by such discourses, it is likely they were. However, the extent to which males were impacted has been underrepresented in the literature on Mexican American religious experiences and warrants further attention.

The narratives I share in this dissertation demonstrate that *las mujeres* have been expanding and challenging the boundaries of "spirituality" and "religion." In doing so they show that such categories are permeable. Moreover, they are constantly remaking religious and spiritual practices in a way that parallels the spiritual agency of their Tejana/o and Mexicana/o ancestors.²⁹ For generations Tejanos have created and recreated their own spiritual and religious experiences, cultural productions situated in historical moments and experiences particular to each generation and their life circumstances. For instance, Tejanos have used the Virgin of Guadalupe as a flexible symbol for various purposes. She provided solace from the hostile climate of a new Anglo and Protestant dominant society in the mid to late seventeenth century, was a symbol of faith in the midst of a tumultuous wartime era during World War II, a symbol of

resistance during the Chicano movement, and a feminist symbol of female liberation and empowerment from the 20th century to the present (Matovina 2005). This dissertation extends such work by examining how gender informs differently such experiences, as in how the Virgin functions as an active symbol in processes of self-making around body image by *las mujeres*.

Research Questions and Arguments

I employ an historical and holistic framework to understand the social reality that corresponds to women's spiritual agency and how spirituality and religion have been used to enforce and then counter social control. As I will explain in more detail, a holistic approach is necessary because religion permeates so many facets of social life. Such an approach examines not only religious life, but those aspects of life that come into contact with it.

This framework informs the following questions, which guide my research: If religion and spirituality are markers of the social world, what does the spiritual agency of these women -- the conscious choices and changes they make around the spiritual traditions and beliefs in which they were raised -- indicate about their social realities? More specifically, what are the everyday lived experiences that are linked to this symbolic action -- the *meanings* behind such change? How have women's lives changed so as to require these new spiritual forms; what do these changes signify about the role of religion in women's pasts that they require new spiritual forms? Finally, how are women creating new life circumstances and remaking their social worlds by remaking religion?

I investigate a widespread pattern of change that has occurred in the ways that these women engage and participate in religion. Considering that religion is both representative and

constitutive of the social world (Durkheim 1965 [1915]; Marx 1975 [1844]; Weber 1958) and that religious and spiritual practices are indicators and creators of social reality, I explore the meaning of spiritual agency among the Tejanas in this study. If religious and spiritual practices and their making are social acts (Durkheim 1965 [1915]) what does the spiritual agency and subsequent production of spiritual forms indicate about Tejana life? In other words, I explore the relationship between the cultural production of spiritual practices and beliefs and acts of self-making to understand the ways that race, ethnicity, and gender intersect and interact in women's lives.

This project explores how women experience and make sense of their social worlds within the context of their religious and spiritual experiences, a commitment to issues of equality and social justice, and in moments of interconnection with one another. I seek to know the historical and social conditions that drive the agency I have observed, and what this change indicates about how Tejano life has changed, in particular the significant change that has occurred inter-generationally. This dissertation explores the meanings behind contemporary acts of spiritual production, the historical and social conditions of their making, and the continuities and changes in the ways spiritual practices and beliefs have functioned over the course of women's lives and into the present.

Spiritual Activism and Mestiza Consciousness

Each of *las mujeres* enacts spiritual activism in their daily life. Although women's religious and spiritual practices and beliefs vary, for all of them, doing social justice work and promoting social transformation is linked to *doing* spirituality. I explain this throughout this

project through the concept of spiritual activism. My use of spiritual activism is inspired by another Tejana who shared similar geographic, spiritual, and political borderlands with many of the women in this study, Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa was a Tejana poet, writer, and cultural theorist from the South Texas Rio Grande Valley born to sharecropper/field-worker parents. For her, spiritual activism involves a metaphysics deeply connected to and anchored in a desire for “personal social and global transformation...” (Keating 2000:11). Much like the women in this study, Anzaldúa uses spiritual practices such as meditation, ritual, and prayer to help her garner the “vision, the desire, and the energy to work actively for social change” (11). Regardless of religious or spiritual practice, each of *las mujeres* creates inner and outer change by putting their faith and spiritual beliefs into action. I examine the ways women draw on their spiritual resources such as ritual, meditation, and community to give them the strength to carry out the work of creating social change.

I argue that such production involves women exerting a *mestiza* consciousness (Anzaldúa 1987) in the spiritual realm. As Anzaldúa explains it, this consciousness entails a “shift out of habitual formations: from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (1987:51). As Sonia Saldivar-Hull writes in the introduction to *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa’s recovery project “leads to the political, feminist, social awareness Anzaldúa calls New Mestiza Consciousness” (1987:x). I argue that *las mujeres* came to such awareness as a result of their experiences as young girls and women growing up in Texas. These formative experiences led to a political and feminist consciousness

that was nurtured and flourished in part as a result of their involvement in the Mexican American civil rights movement and in other periods such as their college experiences. This awareness developed into a political and feminist consciousness that *las mujeres* would more fully exert later in other areas of their lives, including the religious and spiritual realms.

As *mestizas* the women inhabit and navigate multiple planes of difference and identities -- gender, racial, ethnic, class, feminist, activist, political, religious, spiritual, etc. -- and as such are constant border crossers, pulled in many different directions by familial, ideological, religious, and spiritual forces. The cultural production of spirituality by *las mujeres* is a contemporary manifestation of this *mestiza* consciousness, in which women transcend subject-object dualities in their work and life (Anzaldúa 1987:78-80). In doing so, they heal the multiple splits that they have had to endure, including the suppression of their ethnic Mexican identities as young girls punished for speaking their native Spanish in school, being robbed of an awareness of their indigenous and/or Mexican cultural and spiritual heritage, and/or by growing up understanding their sexuality as shameful and feeling alienated from and disconnected to their bodies.

Situating this Mujerista Ethnography: Scholarly Context

The experiences examined in this study are part of the larger body of U.S. and Latina/o religious experiences. I argue that this study examines an aspect of Catholicism that lies outside traditional studies on the U.S. Catholic experience. In *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism* (2002), Timothy Matovina and Gary Riebe-Estrella state that studies have recently begun to address the experiences and contributions of “Hispanic

Catholics.” Most historians, they state, have started the U.S. Catholic story with the Spanish colonial era. They cite notable works by Jay Dolan, James Hennessy, and Charles R. Moore as attending to issues around immigration patterns, political involvement and movement, religious traditions, and demographic shifts. They state that such works, while important for attempting to more fully integrate Latinos into the U.S. Catholic history, often “subsume Hispanics into an Americanization paradigm presumed to hold true for all Catholics in the U.S” (2-3). The Americanization paradigm, as Matovina and Riebe-Estrella suggest, does not accurately capture the Mexican American experience, for in the mid-nineteenth century Mexican Catholics in the Southwest, including many of the Tejano ancestors of the women in this study, were not immigrants, but rather inhabitants of an area and a culture that withstood the U.S. takeover of northern Mexico following the Mexican American War of 1846-1848. This history, one of geographic isolation and social subordination, profoundly affected the religious lives of Mexican Americans in Texas. As Roberto Treviño has suggested, “Over time, Tejanos crafted a religiosity deeply rooted in their history that mirrored their ethnic identity and expressed their quest for self-determination” (Treviño, *Mexican Americans and Religion*). These authors have also observed that although religion has been important in identity and community formation, churches have also fostered socially conservative and often reactionary ideas and challenged causes for social equality.

I argue that we must look to this religious heritage to understand how historical events have once again informed the religious and spiritual lives of Tejanos. This group, the children of the World War II generation, is the first generation of Mexican Americans to make use of the opportunity to attend college and to share in significant spiritual transformations that have

occurred in recent times. While this study does not directly engage this analysis, there is some indication that the two are possibly related.

While issues of acculturation have most definitely played a part in the spiritual development of the generation under study here, there are other socio-historical factors that have had a more substantial effect. This includes *las mujeres'* exposure to the Mexican American civil rights movement and to Mexican and indigenous heritages and histories associated with improved schooling experiences. These are the specific historical and social circumstances that shape the spiritual agency of this particular group of Tejanas.³⁰ So when considering the growing numbers of Latinos in the U.S., we must, as with other groups, consider the specificities of each ethnic group's experience and how people's social locations, including region, class, language, education, ethnicity, gender, and nativity, differently inform their social experiences. Because religion and spirituality are markers of the social world and holistic -- intersecting so many of these other areas of life -- they can offer insight into the making of various other aspects people's social worlds.

Informed by the findings from this study and in viewing religion as representative of the social world, my dissertation looks beyond discourses of Americanization and acculturation to understand spiritual change as social change in the positions of Mexican Americans in the United States. Such change is evident in a study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public life. It

³⁰ I wish to note that while these factors have indeed influenced many in this generation, they did not influence all. For instance, some Mexican Americans, like my parents and their siblings, were not involved in the Chicano movement. While they did earn some college credits they did not attend universities or obtain degrees. They mostly practiced Catholicism their entire lives. There were moments of diversion, as in questioning the Catholic Church's involvement in electoral politics and recent clergy scandals, but overall they remain practicing and devoted Catholics. While out of the scope of this particular project, this study does point to what I believe is an important area of research: the possible connections between involvement in the Chicano and other movements for social change, educational mobility, and spiritual transformation.

indicates that while the number of Latinos, and in particular people of Mexican descent in the United States is growing rapidly³¹ and 67% of Latinos identified as Catholic in the study,³² the numbers of Latino Catholics are declining.³³ It is important to identify the specificities within these larger trends and the distinct ways religion and spirituality are used by various groups and under various circumstances, as the narratives of *las mujeres* illustrate.

Although Mexican-origin affiliation with the Catholic Church has declined, it remains strong. Under these circumstances, why would half of the women in this study leave Catholicism and greatly reconfigure their spiritual paths over the course of their lives? The majority of their parents were first generation Americans, aligning with the Pew Study trend of generational decline in Catholic affiliation. But how and why does it influence groups differently? I argue that focused studies such as this ethnography that aim to uncover the specificities of larger religious trends raise new questions and yield deeper insight into religious participation and experiences with respect to how gender, ethnicity, race, and class shape religious and spiritual practices and beliefs in ways that extend beyond discourses of Americanization or acculturation.

³¹ The U.S. Latino population is projected to rise to 132.8 million by 2050. According to this projection Latinos will constitute 30% of the U.S. population by that date (U.S. Census Bureau).

³² This study was conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2006. It reported that 67% of Latinos identified as Catholic, 19.6% as Protestant, 2.7% as other Christian (Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Orthodox), .9% identified as "other faith", 7.8% were secular and 1.1% declined to answer. The study also indicated that generation also determines religiosity, for while 67% of first generation Latinos identify as Catholic, only 22% of second generation and 15% of the third are Catholic. Two thirds of Latinos in the study are foreign born and 55% were first generation Spanish speakers. In addition to generation, language and nativity, these numbers represent other social locations such as class, nationality, gender and historically and socially specific life experiences.

³³ Source: American Religious Identification Survey 2008. Religious Studies scholar Anthony Stevens-Arroyo suggests that this is indicative of Latinos shifting towards "no religion" categories rather than a more popular narrative of conversion – that Latinos are becoming Pentecostals and/or Evangelicals. The "no religion" category accounted for the percentage of Catholic Latinos and Latinas dropping from 66% in 1990 to 60% in 2008 (Stevens-Arroyo, "Losing Latino Christians," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2010, Catholic America: A closer look at Church, Culture and Change section).

Theoretical Approach

This project brings together theories on selfhood, and gender and agency in order to understand processes of self-making in the religious transformations of the Tejanas in this study. In doing so I aim to illuminate the historical conditions and cultural processes that occur at the intersection of race and ethnicity, gender, religion and spirituality, and social justice and which have shaped the social lives of *las mujeres*.

Gender and Religion

I attend to issues of both self-making and construction in my theoretical framework, for my research shows that in earlier periods of their lives women were participating in performative gender construction and later in self-making, asserting themselves as agents of change and challenging patriarchal and other structures that attempted to confine and oppress them. Their narratives illustrate that this is not a complete departure from interacting with such structures, but rather, that it involves the creative and selective engagement with certain structures, such as the Catholic Church. While religious discourses informed practices of gender oppression among some women, they later drew on alternative means of spiritual fulfillment within Catholicism, as in feminist religious study groups or through personal relationships with Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Judith Butler's conception of gender is a useful point of departure in describing this study's theoretical framework. Butler views gender as "... an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1997:381). *Las mujeres* have navigated gender ideologies over the course of their lives through their repeated participation in gendered spiritual traditions, practices, and discourses. However, this has not

occurred without resistance. This study aims to understand the historical and social forces that shaped women's new understandings of gender and how they have subsequently come to remake themselves within this context. Butler adds that the genesis of gender is not corporeal but performative, so that the body becomes its gender only "through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (1990:274). This attention to change over time is important for this study, which examines how gender ideologies that strived to suppress women confined, controlled, and "made" women over time. However, this study will also show that women would subsequently challenge such ideologies by remaking their lives and repositioning themselves on the social hierarchy through acts like challenging the virgin-whore dichotomy and asserting agency within traditionally "female" spiritual spaces. In these ways gender is being performed and later resisted by Tejanas; the Tejana body "becomes its gender" through these and other acts over time.

Religion has been a formative force in the construction and perpetuation of gender ideologies, having influenced societies' understandings of gender roles in many ways. Women have navigated gender ideologies and gendered hierarchies of power within the context of their religious experiences in societies across the world for centuries (Ahmed 2002; Hoch-Smith and Spring 1978). I offer a cultural analysis of gender that seeks to uncover the construction and perpetuation of and resistance to gender ideologies within the historical and social context of Tejana borderland experiences. These must be understood within the historical context of their own making. For example, as the ethnographic narratives here will illustrate, during the Chicano movement and Chicana feminist movement some Tejanas were challenged to rethink and

reformulate their ideas around gender as part of their processes of identity formation. This aligns with the belief that social movements in the post-war era brought to light the identity politics in which social actors engaged and that identity is an important site of political struggle (Calhoun, C. 1994). I argue that today such political struggle still exists but less within the context of identity politics and more within the context of women's particular religious and spiritual experiences and choices, through which they articulate both personal and public politics.

I argue that because gender structures Tejana religious experiences to such a wide extent, a critical gender analysis of religious/spiritual practices will provide deep insight into the making of Texas Mexican culture. The work of anthropologists who explore gender and religion inform this ethnography. For Hoch-Smith and Spring (1978), "... religious ideas are a paramount force in social life ... relationships between the sexes, the nature of female sexuality, and the social and cultural roles of women are in large part defined by religious ideas" (iv). These women, whose lives are affected in unique ways being both gendered *and* racialized subjects, experience a higher degree of contingency and hence have different religious experiences and spiritual needs. As I noted previously, this is not to suggest their male counterparts did not experience spiritual change, indeed some did, but that gender norms and ideologies situate religious experiences of men and women differently. A direct focus on men is out of the focus of this study, however, it raises important questions for future research, such as to what degree have women's male counterparts exerted spiritual agency? What were the circumstances under which men experienced spiritual change? What effects has religion had on men compared to women?³⁴

³⁴ There is a noticeable absence of *testimonios*, autoethnography, and personal essay on the topic of religion and/or spirituality in the works of Chicano/Latino scholars. This is notable in that these scholars are the counterparts of the

I assert that any analysis of Mexican American religion must take serious consideration of how gender impacts religious experiences because religion has served as a structuring principle for many Mexican American families, and because of the high degree of influence religion has had on the construction of gender relations within Mexican American religious and social life. This includes a gender ideology largely embraced within Mexican Catholicism that is steeped in normative masculinity, essentialized gender differences, and separate roles and expectations for men and women with respect to religious leadership, modesty, and dating/marriage. This ethnography demonstrates how women negotiated these gender ideologies and adapted or challenged them.

This research shows that examining the making of religious and spiritual practices requires a focus on how people's interactions with religion and religious institutions are contingent upon their social locations, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation.³⁵ Gender and race have had a particularly strong influence on the religious experiences of Latina/Chicana Catholics for whom the body -- via discussion surrounding reproduction, submission, birth control -- has been implicated within the politics of Catholic

Chicana scholars represented in this study and those Chicana/Latina and Indigenous scholars who have written about their religious and spiritual experiences. It is such scholars whose works in this area take a reflective turn, unlike male theologians and religious studies scholars, whose works are more objective and largely focus on institutionalized religious experiences among Latinos. This is not to say Chicanos of this generation are not engaging in spiritual agency. There is evidence that they have. However, women's spiritual change and engagement in alternative spiritual traditions are examined to a higher degree in the scholarship and more apparent in informal observations.

³⁵ Roof (1993) documents spiritual change among the baby boomer generation. He found that this generation is more interested in participating in spiritual experiences than in abiding by religious dogma and that they tend to explore various spiritual paths over their lives. However, the study fails to address how race or gender impacts such experiences, including how the memories of gendered religious experiences and racialization inform the spiritual practices of women and people of color.

Church doctrine and the home, for the Church has historically mandated patriarchy and Mexican and Tejano society largely followed what the Church mandates.

Gender and Agency

I invoke gender and agency as central theoretical frames of analysis for this project in order to illustrate how I view women as having asserted agency with respect to structural forces. I draw on Sherry Ortner's discussion of self-making within the context of gender (1984; 1994). Ortner distinguishes between what she calls the "double meaning of "making" that operates in contemporary social and cultural studies" (1996:1), meaning two modes of thought in relation to self-making, which align with what I have observed among the women in this study. The first is the "construction" of self that is situated in and "subjected to, the cultural and historical discourses within which they [subjects] must operate" as put forth by Foucault, Derrida, Althusser and others. In this sense the question becomes one of considering the kinds of difference, identities, and subject positions that are "constructed within the framework of a given cultural, ideological, or discursive formation." The second involves acts of making that occur from the perspective of the "actor's point of view" and considering how "actors "enact," "resist," or "negotiate" the world as given, and in doing so "make" the world" (1996:1-2). Ortner explains such making can illicit just more of the same -- the reproduction of culture, or it may turn out to produce something new, although not necessarily what the actors intended. This study illustrates that in asserting their agency women are not only shifting their engagement with "cultural, ideological, or discursive formations" but how they "make" their worlds and hence, their life circumstances.

Examining Borderlands Lives

Scholarship that explores the material circumstances of borderlands lives is of particular relevance to this project. In his article, “The Mexico-U.S. Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands” (1995) Robert Alvarez examines the contributions of anthropologists and Chicana and Chicano Studies scholars to the development of borderlands scholarship. Alvarez acknowledges, for instance, that women writers including Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros have deepened our understandings of borderlands life by offering new perspectives on Chicana, Chicano, Mexicano, and Mexicana life. Scholars such as Anzaldúa and Cisneros offered deepened insight into living daily life within, as Alvarez suggests, the “context of conflict and oppression where the meaning of life itself is expressed in the paradoxes of daily social behavior.” These authors provide new understandings of the multitude of ways that sexual, ethnic, national, and cultural identities intersect and interact. In doing so they have “disrupted border ideology and exposed various forms of subordination and gender and racial inequality” (461). Cisneros and Anzaldúa offer insight into the making of Chicana and Tejana religious identities particularly relevant to the experiences of *las mujeres*.

Cisneros’s (1997) personal account of her Catholic religious upbringing offers insight into the double standards around virginal purity that are mostly imposed upon girls. Anzaldúa’s theoretical frameworks of identity and *mestiza* consciousness are also relevant. Her attention to gender politics and identity politics are important to this project, for their utility in theorizing difference, but her work is also valuable for the ethnographic data it provides through her *autohistoria*, a reflexive method that draws on her lived experiences. Anzaldúa is one of the few

theorists to articulate the experience of living across multiple planes of difference and cultural hybridity as a Texas Mexican woman.³⁶

The Anthropology of Religion

In addition to theories on gender and agency and self-making, my approach to the study of Mexican American religion and spirituality is informed by and builds upon an established tradition of the study of religion within anthropology that has shown that any spirituality is a reflection of the world around it. I argue that by examining Tejana spiritual production as situated in a particular time and place we can locate material forces and historical conditions that gave rise to it and understand the needs that it meets. It is an approach that “... explores how religious practices are embedded in, or complicit with specific forms of society, regimes of

³⁶ Anzaldúa’s postmodern theory of the new *mestiza* offers a means by which to understand difference on multiple levels and the ways in which nationhood, “citizenship” and belonging are constructed in and beyond political borders and lived out in the margins. As such her theories inform anthropological discussions on the unitary subject, the cumulative impact of multiple forms of oppression and their effects on the consciousness. But most centrally for this discussion, I see Anzaldúa’s work in the present moment capable of doing something else as well. Though Anzaldúa’s work falls under the rubric of postmodern and has received numerous critiques for her work lacking a materialist grounding, she does employ what Cherrie Moraga calls “theory in the flesh” (1981), theory that corresponds to material realities of experiencing multiple oppressions. I argue that Anzaldúa articulates a material experience in her work that is valuable for anthropological analysis. I turn here to Stuart Hall who himself works from a place of “jagged edges” of poverty and racism (1987). Hall states that although it is now well-known that all identity is constructed across difference, narratives of displacement, which I argue Anzaldúa’s is, need to be understood for their “certain conditions of existence, real histories in the contemporary world, which are not only or exclusively psychical, not simply “journeys of the mind” (44). I concur with Hall, for in my analysis, while Anzaldúa’s theories articulate the fractured subject characterized by a certain Tejana historical moment located in particular economic, gender and racial circumstances, these “conditions of existence” have at times been disassociated from her theories by scholars who read her work as “culturalist” (Sanchez 1995). Anzaldúa’s work is important for anthropology in general and feminist anthropology in particular, for Anzaldúa articulates interwoven frames of difference -- exposing gender, racial, ethnic, class, and sexual inequalities along the Texas Mexico border. Her articulation of the specificities of Tejana border experience is unmatched. Anzaldúa offers a map, in a sense, of where ethnographers can locate the real effects of oppressions, strategies of survival, and more specifically for this project, processes of self-making. This is valuable, as the ethnographic data on Tejana experiences, particularly of the generation under study here, of which Anzaldúa is part, is limited. Texts such as Anzaldúa’s which rely on *autohistoria* -- first person accounts -- provide insight into the everyday and show the real effects of past oppressions and strategies people employ for creating social change and recreating their social circumstances in the present.

power, historical struggles, and modes of production” (Lambek 2008:5). It also allows for exploring religion’s real effects on the social world and its actors (Marx 1844 [1978]). This includes examining past and present structures of power such as politics and religion and their relationship to social and cultural agency (Lambek 2008). Dealing with religion and spirituality’s effects involves recognizing that religious symbols and spiritual practices hold meaning to their practitioners and have the ability to inspire and motivate them.

As previously mentioned, my approach to understanding religious and spiritual practices is both historical and holistic. Because religion and spirituality permeate so many other aspects of life, a study of this scope invariably leads to new knowledge about not only religious practices but also other areas of life with which such practices come into contact. These include gender formations and role expectations, the role of spirituality in providing fulfillment and meeting personal and communal needs, religion as related to and at times dependent upon class position, and the social networks and relations that are constructed and maintained within religious and spiritual communities. This study, therefore, takes a holistic approach that “examines the inextricable links among religion and ... the social reproduction of families, gender hierarchy, political organization and modernity” (Lambek 2001:2). I attend to understanding the spiritual development of *las mujeres* through a lens that views their lives as the products of particular historical circumstances and social interactions.

Theoretical Analysis of Symbolic Action

My analysis explores the processes by which the religious symbols that permeate the experiences I document here operate. I relate various systems of meanings to the larger social-

historical processes that accompany them (Geertz 1973). In doing so I examine how they function in processes of self-making, that is, how “symbols mediate our relations to the world” and in doing so shape these women’s orientations to the world (Lambek 2008:129).

This approach involves examining the use of symbols with respect to what their meanings have been; how they have been historically invoked and the conditions under which they developed over time. For instance, I search for meanings projected upon symbols such as Our Lady of Guadalupe -- Tonantzin, the South Texas folk religious site, the Healing Tree, and ask how such meanings and the actions that accompany them have changed over the course of these women’s lives. As such I explore the conditions of their making -- their cultural production. For while symbolic meaning is important we must go further to understand how these experiences are historically and socially situated. I seek out the meanings behind social action in the spiritual realm to determine what meanings such action convey about how religion affects social life. For instance, I explore the processes by which Our Lady of Guadalupe as a symbol *does something* for women who invoke her. To this extent I am concerned with religion’s effects on women today and how women use this and other religious symbols and spiritual practices to gain authority over their lives, to empower themselves and their communities, and to assert their values. Women extend their gender critiques and hence, their politics into the religious realm. In doing so they enact a *mestiza* consciousness by advocating for liberation from gender and racial oppression they and others suffered at the hands of patriarchal authority and various structural forces, much in the same way that many of them did during the Chicano movement, Chicana feminist movement, and in other instances in their lives where they insisted upon fair and equal treatment.

Beneath the symbolic significance -- the meanings that acts such as resignifying Guadalupe and invoking Tonantzin produce and proliferate -- there lies a historic and social context (Asad 1993) out of which such acts occur. I explore the historic and material conditions that gave rise to such acts, examining how these religious practices are embedded in public and private relations of power and economic and political struggles (Lambek 2008 [2001]). Theoretical approaches to religion such that inquire not only about the social meaning of doctrines or religious practices necessarily, but about the historical conditions that foreground them, are necessary for understanding the conditions that allow for certain religious practices and discourses to exist, for others to cease, and for still others to be transformed. In this study I trace the social and historical experiences out of which such change emerged in order to understand how religion has affected and continues to affect social actors.

My approach views spiritual practices and beliefs as mechanisms that people employ both within the context of organized, institutional religion and in less formalized spiritual communities, in order to understand and make sense of their daily lives and circumstances. This involves how they use spiritual practices and understandings to deal with adversity and maintain a connection to others, both in this dimension through community and in the dimension where some believe ancestors and loved ones who have passed on reside. Beyond this I allow the study to reveal the meanings behind women's religious and spiritual behaviors.

Critical attention to gender will illuminate how women negotiate differing notions of selfhood, through religion, spirituality, and politics. As the narratives in this study show, religion and self-making are interdependent cultural constructs, for self-making within the religious realm

attends to navigating, resisting, and reframing relations of power that have historically suppressed Tejanas and their larger Tejano communities.

Politics and Spirituality

The interconnections of faith, religion, social justice, and politics are widespread and span nations, religious denominations, and political ideologies. In the contemporary United States, the words “politics and religion” often evoke ideas of conservative Christian ideologies and the ways in which religious perspectives inform political positions. In this study I argue that today *las mujeres* use spirituality in ways that bring it into the realm of social justice by critiquing gender oppression and power hierarchies within and sanctioned by the Catholic Church, including a critique of the sixteenth century spiritual colonization of indigenous peoples by the Catholic Church. I argue this is a move away from the “public and politicized forms of spirituality [that] have in recent decades come to be associated with conservative, patriarchal religious organizations and movements ... ” (Fernandes 2003:9). The relationship between politics and spirituality examined in this study is significantly different from the forms of spirituality of which Fernandes speaks, which have cooped spirituality as a means of reproducing hierarchies of power and promoting the exclusion of marginalized social groups. The ways spirituality is expressed and lived in the lives of *las mujeres* links issues a demand for material transformation and liberation from oppression with spiritual practices and beliefs. The politics of

spirituality as enacted by the women in this study, as previously suggested, takes on a different meaning.³⁷

Approaching a study of Mexican American religion and spirituality from a *mujerista* ethnographic perspective involves acknowledging that these areas are fraught with unequal power relations and thereby largely political. The phrase “politics of spirituality” requires a good deal of unpacking. While I leave the majority of that task to the ethnography at hand, I would like to state here that by “politics of spirituality” I do not mean the intermingling of electoral politics and religious perspectives, as in the central role that Catholic civic engagement plays in American politics. That is, how the convictions of Catholics translate into their daily public lives. Nor do I mean to address, as the Most Rev. Charles Chaput, Archbishop of Denver has suggested, the persuasion by the Vatican for Catholics to “... take an active, vocal and morally consistent role in public debates, particularly on issues such as abortion, the death penalty and other matters they consider central to social justice.”³⁸ While I do examine how religious practitioners balance their religious beliefs and obligations with their “political priorities,” I argue that these political priorities include gender politics, body politics, identity politics, and racial politics that underlie the making and remaking of religion, in particular Catholicism, in the Texas-Mexican borderlands.

³⁷ There exists a vast body of literature in the area of politics and spirituality. See Berryman (1987) and Gutiérrez (1988) for studies on Latin American Liberation Theology in Latin America and Alvarez (2007) on Liberation Theology and feminist and gay identities within Chicana/o literature. See Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda (2005) and Wilson (2008) for readings on Latino religion and politics; see Mahmood (2005) on Islam, feminism, and politics, and Lambert (2010) for a history of the intertwining of evangelical faith and political engagement in America.

³⁸ “The Political Obligations of Catholics: A Conversation With the Most Rev. Charles Chaput, Archbishop of Denver,” event transcript, March 17, 2009. Pew Forum On Religion & Public Life: <http://pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/The-Political-Obligations-of-Catholics-A-Conversation-With-the-Most-Rev-Charles-Chaput-Archbishop-of-Denver.aspx>. Accessed June 2, 2010.

The spiritual is a site of social conflict for Tejanas, Mexicanos, and Latinas because of their historically gendered relationship to the Catholic Church and because the female body has been implicated in this gendering. For women of Mexican descent (and other Latinas) this has included pressure to live up to Marian standards of virginal purity and the silencing of their sexualities, experiences that differ from those of their male counterparts and relatives.³⁹ Living up to these and other religious standards have material implications for women.

Laura E. Pérez informs my understanding of spirituality as political. In *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (2007) Pérez discusses how Chicana art calls attention to the politics of the spiritual, to the fact that spiritual beliefs and practices generate social and political effects that matter. According to Pérez, "... in the work of Chicana artists making reference to the religious, whether through the use of elements of traditional or more hybrid spiritualities, what mattered most were the tangible effects of such beliefs and practices" (3). Examining religion in this context -- in terms of its effects -- offers nuanced insight into Texas-Mexico borderland experiences because of the high degree of influence religion has had on the construction of gender relations within Mexican American religious life, in particular through Catholicism, which serves as a structuring principle for many Mexican American families. Examples of this among *las mujeres* include a priest telling one woman that she had to stay with her abusive husband in order to preserve the sanctity of their marriage and for the sake of the family unit. For other women it involved feeling alienated from their bodies through discourses that promoted sexuality and sex as amoral. These and other examples of gendering in

³⁹ The term Marian pertains to the Virgin Mary or the veneration of her or any of her apparitions, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Marian standards refer to those where women were held to ideas of sexual purity associated with the Virgin Mary.

the religious realm make religion an important lens through which deeper understandings of gendered relations in the borderlands emerge and hence must be considered in any study of Mexican American religion and spirituality.

Beyond Resistance: Reframing Tejana Spiritual Transformations as Cultural Productions

This study looks beyond discourses of resistance to view the practices I examine here as cultural productions. I consider what these and corresponding acts of self-making indicate about women's social worlds, in particular how women's material and spiritual needs and social environments have changed so as to require forms of spiritual engagement markedly different from those in which they were raised. Women interpret their experiences in various ways. For some their life experiences include growing up amidst a climate of racial segregation in Jim Crow Texas, for others it involved navigating sexism within their La Raza Unida Party experiences and patriarchy within their families, workplaces, or in the form of religious discourses imposed upon them. Such experiences shaped the feminist consciousnesses of many of *las mujeres*.

In the coming chapters I explore how women have transformed the spiritual into a site of resolution and reconciliation. Some reconfigured Catholicism and others embraced alternatives. In all cases they have challenged and disrupted religious and gender hierarchies and create strategies for healing themselves, their communities, and the earth.

An Introduction to Mujerista Ethnography

This project is situated within a larger anthropological tradition of the study of religion within anthropology, which dates back well over a century. Questions of religion, such as community, difference, symbolism, meaning, mediation, power, reproduction, fertility, and hierarchy have been at the core of anthropology since its beginnings (Lambek 2008).⁴⁰

While this rich tradition of studying religion in anthropology exists, studies in this area have generally focused on groups in “other lands,” not as often on the religious experiences of U.S. communities and even less commonly on the experiences of women and communities of color. Applying theories and methods from the anthropology of religion requires a shift in how scholars perceive religious traditions and their making, and the social and historical conditions out of which they emerge. How are the religious and spiritual practices and beliefs of U.S. communities similar to or different in form and function from those outside of the United States? What shape do insider/outsider politics of the researcher take in such instances? *Mujerista* ethnography seeks answers to such questions.

The methodological approaches that anthropologists within the field of religion, including Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Sherry Ortner, and their predecessor, Bronislaw Malinowski have drawn on provided them the data needed to conduct social analysis. Such methods, the cornerstone of which was participant-observation, continue to be the foundations of

⁴⁰ As Lambek and others have noted, contemporary anthropology of religion draws from various traditions. These include attention to the interconnections between religion, language, and poetics, derived from the Americanist (Boasian) tradition. Understanding religious phenomenon as social and the relationship between function and meaning and then between religion and the social order has emerged from the work of Emile Durkheim. Karl Marx drew attention to issues of power and the material experiences that necessitate religion, as well as his work on alienation and mystification. Max Weber analyzed religion within modernity and the connections between religion and economics and politics. The origins of such early questions can be found in ancient thought, as in Plato’s examination of mimesis and philosophy and Aristotle’s discussions of ethics and poetics (Lambek 2008).

anthropological research today. Where does an ethnography on Tejana spirituality fit within this tradition? I have found that my positionality as a Tejana raised in the Catholic tradition required a methodological framework that acknowledged the necessity of and employed both subjective and objective lenses.⁴¹

Advances have been made within the discipline to challenge old methods and to conceive of new ones that more appropriately represent the relationships between researcher and “informant” in anthropological projects today. These include works by feminist anthropologists (Behar 1993; McCarthy Brown 2000; Visweswaran 1994), Chicana and Chicano anthropologists (Paredes 1958, 1978; Rosaldo 1989; Russel y Rodriguez 2002; Zavella 1994, 1997), and indigenous anthropologists (Denzin, Lincoln, and Tuhiwai Smith 2008) whose theories and methods challenge purely objective stances and participant-observer binaries. I argue that extending beyond such binaries has the potential to uncover issues of power in deeper ways and to illuminate new forms of knowledge. My study contributes to these efforts, itself inspired by traditions within feminist anthropology, borderlands anthropology, indigenous anthropology, and Chicana and Chicano Studies, which challenge such dichotomies, binaries, and unequal power relations by proposing alternative methods and theories.

The journey towards knowing that I have taken with *las mujeres* is in many ways a journey without maps, in so much as I had little in the way of preconceived notions of where this project would take me after that initial meeting with María Elena. I was not sure of the particular

⁴¹ This follows the critique of *Writing Culture* (1986) offered by feminist anthropologists in *Women Writing Culture* (1996) who pointed out that the experiences of female anthropologists were largely omitted from this collection on the politics of writing culture. *Women Writing Culture* challenged a purely objective research stance and offered new insights into experimental ethnographies and methods. This dissertation follows this tradition, pushing the boundaries of the anthropological canon and what “counts” as knowledge.

community or religious tradition I was to study, only that I wanted to study Tejanas involved in movements for social justice during and since the Mexican American civil rights movement.

I examine the broader social environments out of which spiritual production emerges in an approach that differs from traditional community ethnography. This ethnography is contextual and multi-sited. It is comprised of narratives and experiences of women from various regions of Texas. This path led me to the lives of numerous Tejanas and hence, into the social worlds of El Paso, San Antonio, Laredo, Houston, Kingsville, Wylie, and Austin. It has also taken me into the lives of women who have moved away from Texas and reside in California and Washington. My foci are women's experiences of spiritual development and how they react to structural forces -- such as religious and other intuitions -- and how processes of self-making and agency occur within the context of such forces. I examine the social environments and histories out of which these experiences occur. But I also often traveled "journeys without distance" to borrow from M. Jacqui Alexander (2006), journeys with women that were journeys of the mind, of the spirit, and of the body; journeys from one way of being into another. It has also been a journey towards uncovering the interconnectedness of these things -- women's bodies, minds, and spirits and, importantly, the life experiences they embody.

While I knew of many of the women through their community activism and involvement, I was largely unaware of their current spiritual beliefs when I set out on this research. I initially thought upon meeting María Elena that perhaps I would investigate the lives of women like her who had left Catholicism for other forms of spiritual fulfillment. It was, after all, something I also knew on a personal level. But upon meeting feminist Catholics such as Martha Cotera and Rosie Castro, I became interested in the broader question of how women -- both outside *and*

within Catholicism -- reconcile their perspectives on social justice with their religious and/or spiritual beliefs. I found that the spiritual agency I was seeing among this generation was not limited to women who had left Catholicism. It was occurring among those who remained Catholic as well. They engaged in spiritual productions both within and outside of the context of their identities and beliefs as Catholics. María Elena raised my awareness about politicized spiritualities and the reasons women would reject Catholicism and seek out other forms of spiritual fulfillment. This was what I initially thought the focus of this study would be. However, when I learned that the face of God had changed for Rosie Castro, I came to know that spiritual transformation was not only occurring among women who had left the Catholic Church, but among those who have remained. Politicized spiritualities existed within the religious realm as well.

Martha and Rosie's experiences of spiritual production challenge stereotypical understandings of Mexican American women's religiosity as monolithic and submissive. They serve as important indicators of how dynamic Tejana Catholic religiosity is today. The spiritual productions of the women in this study, including Catholic women, transcend bounded notions of culture and religion and demonstrate that what may be perceived as organized religion comes with its own contradictions and political implications. This study seeks to understand religious experiences such as Catholicism in a nuanced fashion, uncovering the variations within it and cultural productions that take place within and around it. In doing so this dissertation works at the intersections and borderlands of various spiritual traditions in order to complicate categories such as "religious" and "secular." I challenge resistance/subordination and religious/non-

religious binaries that inhibit our understanding of processes of cultural production, agency, and issues of power.

Stories such as Martha's and Rosie's inspired me to expand the project to include Tejana Catholics, focusing on acts of cultural production and their relationship to women's perspectives on social justice, rather than on women who participated in a particular spiritual tradition. I therefore take a holistic approach to understanding Tejana religion and spirituality by examining various spiritual practices together, demonstrating that the religious and spiritual practices and beliefs examined here are all fluid, complex, contradictory, overlapping, and rooted in particular historic and social conditions. As this study shows, the politics of spirituality transcends divisions among spiritual practices and beliefs.

Method

My early knowledge of María Elena's life inspired me to want to know how the kind of transformation I saw in her spiritual trajectory compared to the spiritual development of other women of her generation. I decided to seek out other women who were Tejana and had participated in social justice work. I chose to focus the study on Tejanas because of the access I had to so many Tejanas and because I believed it was important to have a regional focus and establish Tejana experiences from a socio-historical perspective. I also have access to a large body of scholarship on Texas Mexican experiences, knowledge I accrued from my Master's work on Tejanas of the World War II generation, and my personal experiences as a Tejana from which to draw. I chose to concentrate the study on women because of my access to so many women and because the literature -- particularly in Chicana and Latina Studies -- demonstrated

that spiritual agency was occurring among Chicana and Latina women. I also chose women because focused attention on their particular experiences has been historically underrepresented in anthropological research and in narratives on the Chicano movement.

However, beyond the issue of inclusion there is the larger issue of centering women's experiences, like those of other marginalized groups, about which Andrea Smith states: " ... projects that attempt to organize women of color have begun to reject the politics of "inclusion" (Smith, A. 2005b). Instead they ask, if we recentered the analysis and organizing from the perspective of women of color, how would we see political issues differently?" (Smith, A. 2008:xiii). Smith cites Sandy Grande who argues for substituting a politics of representation for a politics of "radical social transformation" (Grande 2004:1). By recentering the analysis on women this ethnography aims to illuminate unequal power relations and strategies for creating social change that *las mujeres* are employing in their daily lives. My goal is that this study will contribute to the project of "building a more liberating framework, not just for the communities we center in the analysis but for all peoples" (Smith, A. 2008:xiv). Once I establish how and why *las mujeres* have used spirituality to shift their social conditions and those of their communities, I will have established a framework for and raised questions that can then be applied to understanding the religious and spiritual, and hence, social experiences of their male counterparts.

I intend to examine the Tejana experience among this particular generation and group of women in this study and then for future research engage in a comparative study of women from other areas of the United States in order to know how *las mujeres*' experiences relate to those of other generations of women and to women in other regions of the United States. This future

research study will build upon my current study and examine how regional histories and social histories differently or similarly inform women's spiritual development.

For instance, Texas Mexican religiosity has been predominantly Catholic and shaped by particular historical and social forces and events. This includes a religiosity steeped in popular religion borne out of the isolation of Tejanos frontier communities from intuitional Catholicism in Mexico City in the mid nineteenth century. It is also informed by experiences in the early to mid twentieth century when Texas Mexican Catholics struggled against Jim Crowism and faced contempt, often seen as social outcasts and called "Greasers" and other derogatory names regardless of their citizenship or nativity (De León 1983; Treviño 2003). As I explain in this ethnography, these types of events shaped the life experiences of the Tejana and Tejano ancestors of *las mujeres* and subsequently, those traditions passed down to Tejanos such as *las mujeres*. They are traditions whose histories trace back to particular circumstances and situations.

Anthropology and History

The cultural production of spirituality among *las mujeres* cannot be thoroughly understood without attending to the ways in which such practices have developed historically. This study draws on anthropological traditions that attend to historical processes. Recovering histories of a generation of women who have been typically underrepresented in narratives on the Chicano movement and providing historical context are important in this project. However, the central focus of this project is to understand cultural *processes* at work and how they are shaped by historical conditions. I give significant attention to how cultural forms have been historically

produced and the conditions of their making in order to understand how they have come to be today. For instance, I examine the role of certain historical events and experiences in the making of Tejana and Tejano identity, politics, and culture.

The ways in which I collect, interpret, and present historical data and facts in this dissertation are inspired by anthropological approaches such as that of Richard Flores (2002). In regards to the narratives and myths surrounding the Alamo, Flores looks “not under the rubric of historical “truth” and “facts” of the past, but through the *effects* of these stories had as they circulated through multiple locations and sites of public culture” (ix). Flores considers stories about “Texas” and “Mexicans” “whose telling had effectively shaped daily life and public interactions between these two groups for years” (x). I seek to know how the earlier social experiences of interacting with various structures of power and the circulation of discourses -- such as religious discourses around virginal purity and discriminatory racial remarks -- affected *las mujeres* and came to shape them today.

The scholarship of Martha Menchaca also offers an important framework for using historical events and experiences to understand the making of culture. Menchaca demonstrates how some anthropologists draw on historical events and experiences in their analyses, to “historicize for the purpose of contextualizing the present” (13). As Menchaca has shown, this has been important in showing how past issues such as the racialization of Mexican-origin peoples by legal means in the 1940s and 1950s informed the educational, economic, and political experiences and opportunities of subsequent generations of Mexican-origin people, as this study details.

It is important to document the Chicana/o movement experiences of *las mujeres*, however, a focused and detailed historical study of this kind is beyond the scope of this project.

Las Mujeres

As I mentioned in the Preface, María Elena's spiritual and political transformations piqued my interest in Tejana spiritual productions. Informed by her experience I approached other Tejanas from various parts of Texas. Through contacts I made through my participation in the WRUP Oral History Project and the course, previous contacts I had through my work as an exhibit developer and community programs director with the Austin Children's Museum and UT Austin community, knowledge of some women through their scholarly work, and through word of mouth, I located and approached 16 Tejanas in addition to María Elena, all of whom graciously agreed to participate in the study. For the most part I did not know women's current spiritual practices when I initially approached them. I knew they were Tejana, involved in social justice work, and were of the generation that are children of the World War II generation.

The sample of 17 women included 16 who had been raised Catholic and one who was raised Protestant. Nine of 16 women raised Catholic left Catholicism for other forms of spiritual fulfillment. The other seven remain Catholic-identified and the one Protestant, a self-identified Chicana feminist, converted to Catholicism. It is likely not surprising that so many women of the women I initially approached were Catholic, as Catholicism constitutes the largest religious category among Latinos and people of Mexican descent in the United States, as indicated by the aforementioned Pew Study. I chose to focus primarily on women raised Catholic because as it turned out each of the women in this study has at one time identified with Catholicism. I also

focus on Catholicism because Catholicism has been and continues to be the most prevalent religious tradition among Mexican Americans in Texas.

The women who I interviewed for this study include: Susana Almanza, Teresa Paloma Acosta, Santa Barraza, Martha P. Cotera, Norma E. Cantú, Rosie Castro, Carmen Lomas Garza, Luz Bazan Gutiérrez, Inés Hernández-Ávila, María Jimenez, Yolanda Chávez Leyva, María Elena Martínez, Irma Mireles, Sylvia Orozco, Hortensia Palomares, Sister Teresita (a pseudonym used at her request), and Modesta Treviño. Mary Margaret Navár was also a key participant in this project, while I did not interview her directly. Mary Margaret played an important role in helping me to obtain information about Tejana spirituality and in particular Tejana spiritual experiences in the Austin area based on her experiences as long-time Austin resident. Her insight into the topics at hand and helping me in my journey of healing provided me with insight into many of the issues around spirituality, healing, and indigenous ways of knowing and spiritual practices raised in this dissertation.

In addition to María Elena, Martha Cotera, Hortensia Palomares, Rosie Castro, Inés Hernández-Ávila, Carmen Lomas Garza, Sylvia Orozco, Teresa Palomo Acosta, and Luz Bazan Gutiérrez were involved in La Raza Unida Party. All women were involved in some aspect of the Chicano movement or other social causes at some point during the period of the late 1960s to 1970s.

The ways these women enact social justice -- in various forms in their work as spiritual healers, teachers, artists, community activists, and scholars -- are as different as their various spiritual paths. However, in all cases I have found a similar underlying motivation to be strong convictions regarding equality and social justice. I also view them all as participating in the work

of healing -- whether it be working as spiritual healers or healing historical traumas of the past by recovering suppressed histories of marginalized groups including Mexican Americans, indigenous peoples, and women as educators and as artists. In their shared emphasis on justice and healing, *las mujeres* are all connected.

I began research with *las mujeres* in the spring of 2005 with the commencement of the documentary project on María Elena's life, but as I previously mentioned, I had already collected background information on this generation and on some of the women involved in RUP as part of my work in the oral history course and with the WRUP project. Beginning in the fall of 2005, I conducted one to two in-depth interviews on average per month through the spring of 2010.

My search to understand the social worlds of Chicanas in Texas has led me to numerous places over the years -- geographically, physically, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. It has been an outward as well as inward journey. In addition to interviews my engagement with this topic led me to observe and participate in ceremonies such as an all night Day of the Dead vigil in San Francisco's Mission District, a women's spiritual healing retreat at Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change, and numerous full and new moon ceremonies in Austin.⁴² I've attended *temascales*,⁴³ observed *danza azteca*, visited popular religious sites in South Texas, and had numerous conversations over *cafecitos* and tea with *las mujeres*.

⁴² I have attended full moon and new moon ceremonies at María Elena's home where she holds them regularly, as well as at the Natural Gardner, a natural gardening center in southwest Austin that occasionally holds ceremonies in its labyrinth. The Labyrinth "is a journey to the center and back, never crossing the same path twice, never going back. It is similar path to life's journey. Labyrinths are used as a place of meditation to help you decipher the questions that arise as we walk through life" (www.naturalgardeneraustin.com).

⁴³ *Temascales* are ritual sweat baths that are considered part of the Southern Mesoamerican Indigenous tradition, common in parts of Mexico including the Central Valley and Oaxaca. They have recently gained popularity among Chicanas and Chicanos in the United States, particularly among those who practice a Mexica spiritual path who are reverting to the spiritual traditions of their Indigenous ancestors.

The numbers of semi-structured interviews I conducted with each woman varied based on her availability and my proximity to her. I was able to collect approximately one and one-half hours of interview with those who were in other states, including Carmen Lomas Garza of San Francisco, California, Luz Bazan Gutiérrez of Yakima, Washington, and Inés Hernández-Ávila of Davis, California. These interviews were conducted by phone. However, I was able to travel to San Francisco to attend Carmen's *danza* group's annual Day of the Dead event and learn more about her Mexica spiritual practice. I had informal conversations with Inés at *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*/Women Active in Letters and Social Change (MALCS)⁴⁴ and National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) conferences as well as attended her presentations at these conferences.

Because of her participation in the documentary project and because she lives in the Austin area where I reside, I was able to obtain the most number of interviews with María Elena, approximately 20 hours of structured and semi-structured interviews. They took place predominantly at her home. Martha Cotera also made herself available in numerous occasions. I

⁴⁴ MALCS is a national organization of Chicanas/Latinas and Native American women who work in both academic and community settings. They share a common mission: "to work toward the support, education and dissemination of Chicana/Latina and Native American women's issues." MALCS hosts an annual Summer Institute where Chicanas/Latinas and Native American women from a variety of institutions. They come together to network, share information, offer support and re-energize. The MALCS Summer Institute "is one of the few places Chicanas/Latinas and Native American women can come together without the influence of male and/or Euro-American consciousness or opinion." MALCS advocates for a Chicana/Latina and Native American woman space, which they argue is worth protecting MALCS, which was established in 1982 as a response to Chicana/Latina women not being acknowledged for their integral roles and contributions to the nation-wide Chicano movement. A group of Chicana/Latina women in academia gathered at the University of California, Davis to discuss this collective "loss of voice, feeling highly isolated, eager to extend their knowledge to other women, and desiring to change society's perceptions." MALCS was established at this first meeting and one-year later MALCS declaration, which "affirmed the membership's dedication to the unification of their academic life with their community activism" was officially established. The MALCS declaration, written one year later at the Berkeley campus, formally established the organization (www.malcs.net). Study participants Inés Hernández-Ávila and Norma Cantú have been active members of MALCS for several years.

conducted approximately ten hours of interviews with her at her Austin home. I had a single one and one-half hour interview with Irma Mireles in San Antonio at the Mexican American Cultural Center where she works, a three-hour interview each with Hortensia Palomares and Teresa Paloma Acosta, both at UT Austin, a one-hour interview with Sylvia Orozco at the Mexic-Arte Museum where she is the director, and a one and one-half hour interview and follow up interview with Sister Teresita. I met Norma Cantú for two hours at her UTSA office followed by another two hours at her home as well as conducted a follow-up interview via phone. I traveled to San Antonio to interview Rosie Castro for one and one-half hours at the public library where she sits on the board. I met with Yolanda Chávez Leyva for approximately one and one half hours at a coffee shop in El Paso, Texas and had informal conversations with her at the 2008 MALCS national conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. I traveled to Kingsville twice to meet with Santa Barraza. Once we traveled to local folk religious sites and the other time I conducted two and one-half hours of interview with her. I interviewed Modesta Treviño twice for approximately two hours each time at her home in Buda Texas, near Austin.

Due to logistical issues such as scheduling and the amount of information and kinds of information I was able to collect, and in order to keep with the foci of this project I chose to focus the in-depth narratives on ten of the original 17 women. I do make mention of some of the women not included in the ten narratives throughout this dissertation, as their life experiences lent themselves to the topic at hand. I regret that I was not able to use all of the interviews but intend to draw on them for the book manuscript and other publications that will emerge out of this dissertation.

I drew on oral history interviews, conversations, field notes from participant observation I conducted, from a transcript of María Elena's WRUP interview, scholarly sources, writings by some of the women, and transcripts from the interviews I conducted for the documentary on María Elena's life to construct the ethnographic narratives I present here. I also drew from casual interactions I have had with women over the years at conferences and in and around Austin over the course of this research

I chose to focus the study on women because based on my initial observations and interactions with women of this generation, several women in the Austin community, exhibit spiritual production, in ways that initially, at least, seem much more apparent than spiritual reconfiguration by their male counterparts. Women's experiences expose greater degrees of social inequalities, as seen in the area of gender and religion. Furthermore, my own experiences as a woman living within the context of a patriarchal religious environment and my awareness of peers with similar experiences also contributed to my choice to focus the study on women.

As part of examining women's experiences I also discuss two organizations, Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change and People Organized in Defense of the Earth and her Resources, (PODER), both in Austin.⁴⁵ My purpose for including background information on

⁴⁵ Alma de Mujer means "Soul of Woman." Alma de Mujer is the educational center of the Indigenous Women's Network (IWN), a national non-profit organization established in 1985 by a group of prominent and leading Indigenous women activists, including Alma's founder, Choctaw-Chicana artist-educator and environmental and community activist, Marsha Gomez. IWN's board functions out of Canada and is comprised of Native women from various parts of Canada and the Americas. Alma de Mujer has a local women's council comprised of a diverse group of women, many who have been supporters of Alma for several years. This leadership and that of Alma's current director, Maribel Garza, is, as Maribel describes it, matriarchal, or women-led. The women's council is committed to helping fulfill Alma's mission and continuing the spirit of the work of Marsha Gomez by "weaving a broader network of local women who can forward the mission of Alma de Mujer" (council member Mary Margaret Navár). Alma de Mujer was founded in 1988 and is located on 22 acres in the beautiful foothills of Lake Travis on an endangered species habitat and wildlife refuge. Its mission is to provide resources for the revitalization of our connection to Mother Earth, the elimination of all forms of oppressions, self-sustainability and the protection of

them is twofold. First, both organizations weave spirituality and social justice in their missions, thereby providing insight into the topic of spiritual activism addressed here. Additionally, some of the women in this study have previous and/or present day connections to these organizations. They represent the kinds of communities women create and participate in today, thereby providing insight into the lives of several of *las mujeres* and the functions of community. PODER and Alma de Mujer show how, for some women, community is cultivated and sustained at the nexus of spiritual and activist work and communities, as is the case for numerous such organizations across the nation engage in similar work.⁴⁶

Mother Earth for future generations. Alma has provided for over 500 local, national, and international organizations. It serves as a space for the creation of new models of education, healing, leadership, decision-making, and development. Alma's facilities are the site of an on-going process that envisions and supports holistic, healthy, and sustainable communities. Alma de Mujer provides educational programs, training programs and resources, including publications for the local Latina community, indigenous, and non-indigenous peoples. Alma offers youth workshops and summer camps to help youth build self-esteem, community awareness, and leadership skills. Alma staff and volunteers involve youth in activities in the cultural arts, structured reading and writing, community activism, team-building skills, physical sports, and ecological conservation. Alma's programs are reliant on private and public foundation support and individual charitable contributions. Alma also offers individuals and organizations resources to carry out various social justice initiatives and for the community to engage in spiritual development and healing. In addition to youth its network of support reaches traditional healers, artists, activists, authors, and community members, among others. In addition to programming Alma de Mujer has an organic garden, which is part of its goal to promote sustainability and good health. Individuals, groups, and school groups are able to learn how to protect the rich natural resources in the Texas hill country. Workshops and programs taught by local experts address issues around sustainable agriculture, composting, land mapping, pond and waterway care, and herbology (L. Wilson and M.M. Navár, pers. comm; <http://indigenouswomen.org>).

PODER was formed in 1991 to: "increase Austin's residents' participation in corporate and government decisions related to economic development, environmental hazards and the impact on our neighborhoods." This non-profit organization was established by a group of Chicana/o East Austin activists and community leaders to address the social, economic and environmental impacts of such industries and the potential health hazards on East Austin's communities of color. PODER has shown that historically, communities of color, Latinos, African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native Americans, have been disproportionately affected by toxic contamination but that the surrounding communities have not benefited equitably from these industries. Within East Austin and in close proximity to residential neighborhoods and the PODER office, there is a power plant, fuel storage tank farms, lumber companies, and most recently, high tech industries which emit their pollutants into the air that communities and their families breathe, the water they drink, and the earth that sustains them. PODER staff, volunteers, and supporters believe a safe and healthy environment is a fundamental right for all (<http://www.poder-texas.org>).

⁴⁶ Other organizations include: Mexica Cultural Center in San Diego, California, Esperanza Center in San Antonio, Texas, Kalpulli Teokalli Teoyotl in Austin, Texas, and Kapulli Kalolt in Albuquerque, Arizona started by Sylvia Ledesma, an early organizer with PODER, among others. Ledesma is the key organizer of Kalpulli Izkalli, a

The direction of this journey, as I suggested earlier, is also shaped by my own positionalities as a Chicana/Tejana raised in Roman Catholicism and my feminist and anthropologist subject positions. This is an ethnography of Tejana spirituality and I am one of the Tejanas. I saw the need to explore the relationship between women's spiritual beliefs and their political perspectives within María Elena's life experience because there were aspects of her story with which I identified. I saw this from the perspective of a Tejana born and raised in the Catholic Church; a Tejana on a search for a spiritual path that holds meaning for me. This is the historically, socially, and politically situated location from which I write. I did not intend to include myself in this study to the extent that I do when I began this project and my main emphasis remains the study of the lives of the women. The choice to do so still causes some degree of anxiety. However, as indicated in the opening reflection, the story began with my life intersecting with that of María Elena's and the story continued to unfold that way, through a series of intersecting and overlapping experiences that I believe inform the project in important ways.

Rosie's experience and those of other Tejana Catholics helped to clarify why Catholics would re-envision the face of God and how this was similar to or differed from the reasons other women, such as María Elena, chose to leave the Church. Remaining Catholic, as I have found, is a political act in and of itself. It requires women to exert spiritual agency as they searched for ways to reconcile their views on equality and social justice with Catholic doctrine, in particular around issues of homophobia, the position of women in the Church, and abuses of power such as

grassroots intergenerational action and resource center in the South Valley outside of Albuquerque. Its innovative programs include a traditional medicine clinic and an apprenticeship for young women that links environmental and reproductive health. Ledesma returns to Austin on occasion to give *pláticas* on traditional medicine and reproductive health at PODER.

the recently public clergy scandal involving child abuse. The Catholic women in this study act as producers of culture by employing strategies that resist and subvert aspects of Catholic doctrine and practices by the Church and its clergy with which women find troubling or difficult to reconcile.

Today the religious and spiritual practices and beliefs of *las mujeres* vary greatly. They include institutional Catholic practices such as attending mass and taking part in sacraments such as baptism, first communion, confirmation, and for some, marriage; folk Catholic practices including a devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe; the use of home altars; pilgrimages to popular religious sites and celebrations such as *Día de los Muertos*; Buddhism; shamanism and other indigenous and earth-based spiritualities, and “culturally hybrid” forms of spiritualities that intermingle several different spiritual traditions, (Pérez, L. 2008:338). *Las mujeres* engage in prayer, meditation, and participate in various spiritual and religious communities, both within the context of institutional Catholicism and outside of it in women’s prayer groups and ritual and ceremonial gatherings.

This dissertation therefore brings Tejana indigenous (non-institutional) and Catholic (popular and institutional) spiritual experiences into conversation with one another. I examine differences and similarities between how women engage these practices and the roles that their views on social justice, gender positions, and (for some) feminist sensibilities have played in their choice and enactment of spirituality. Doing so has shown that regardless of the spiritual practice, a politic of social justice and insistence on equality characterizes all of *las mujeres’* spiritual experiences. I argue that breaking down binaries between spiritual practices by examining them beyond their differences but rather for their similarities in function in such a

way offers a nuanced understanding of the making and remaking of religious and spiritual and hence, political identities.

A Web of Interconnections

This ethnography outlines a web of geographic, ideological, experiential, political, and spiritual interconnections. Some of the women in this study grew up together, like Carmen and Santa who share memories of visits to Don Pedrito Jaramillo's religious shrine in Los Olmos, a tight knit extended family and the realities of living with "a sense of domination," as Santa Barraza called it, that was the social reality for Mexicans growing up in Kingsville, Texas.⁴⁷ Others like María Elena and Modesta attended college together at UT Austin and later became bilingual educators in the Austin Independent School District. They had crossed paths with Martha Cotera, Rosie Castro, Luz Bazan Gutiérrez, Carmen Lomas Garza, and María Jimenez earlier in life through their involvement in Texas' state chapter of La Raza Unida Political Party. Modesta Treviño and Santa Barraza came to be dear friends through a common love of art and through their participation in the women's art collective *Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste*.⁴⁸ Yolanda Chávez Leyva was also part of the Austin community in the 1980s and knew many of the women during her time attending UT, as did Inés Hernández-Ávila who completed her Master's work at

⁴⁷ Here Santa references a social division between Mexican Americans and Anglos and a hostile racial climate and in Kingsville. It was due in part to the opening of the King Ranch and shift from agriculture to ranching economy in South Texas that shifted the social order and placed Mexicans as laborers rather than landowners on the King Ranch.

⁴⁸ *Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste* (MAS) was a Latina arts network established in Austin by Santa Barraza and Nora González Dodson in 1977. The primary goal of the organization was to promote professional opportunities for Hispanic women artists, as well as to educate local communities through their exhibitions and special functions. While in existence the collective organized several important exhibitions, both in and out of Texas, of photography, sculpture, and visual arts. The art of artists who showed their work under the banner of MAS represented numerous styles and themes, ranging from the political to the supernatural. The majority of MAS members lived in San Antonio, Austin, or Laredo. Its members included Santa Barraza, Carolina Flores, Sylvia Orozco, Carmen Rodríguez, and Modesta Barbina Treviño, among others. In the mid-1980s several MAS members left Texas for career opportunities elsewhere and the organization folded (García, "*Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste*").

UT and is, along with Norma Cantú, an academic in the areas of Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship. Susana and Ines were involved in the same *danza* group in Austin in the 1970s and today several of *las mujeres* continue to be involved in numerous spiritual, activist, and artist circles in the Austin area and other parts of the state and country.

The spiritual trajectories of *las mujeres* have evolved over time and emerged out of specific historical and social conditions. My methodological approach provides a portrait of one aspect of Tejana spirituality today that is not limited to a geographic area but rather is rooted in a particular kind of political consciousness that I argue is informed by the material circumstances of living as Tejanas -- both as racialized and gendered subjects but also as active agents who remake their social circumstances. While women are linked in various ways, as in sharing life experiences, spiritual beliefs, and/or political perspectives, exerting a Tejana/Chicana consciousness clearly connects them. Women are also connected in various ways through shared experiences of gender, racial, and class oppression,⁴⁹ experiences that transcend feminist, religious, and political ideological borders.

Enacting such a consciousness -- which I assert is a *mestiza* consciousness -- transcends spiritual, religious, and political categories. I suggest it even challenges such binaries. In all cases women are making a critical critique of social injustice, including how gender ideologies and expectations have functioned in their lives, in particular within the context of their past religious experiences.

⁴⁹ There are regional differences among women that emerge in their narratives and which illustrate the regional diversity among Tejanas. However, there are also similarities that cross geographic boundaries.

Regardless of whether women practice within or outside the context of organized Catholicism, each has, in some way, reconfigured the spiritual practices in which she was raised. That is, all women exhibit some degree of spiritual agency.⁵⁰ The act of taking personal initiative in the conscious remaking of one's religious/spiritual practices and beliefs, which as this project and others have argued, is a political act.⁵¹ In enacting such agency women continue a generations-long tradition among Tejanos of actively creating and recreating their spiritual practices and beliefs, acts situated in particular histories of oppression, resistance, and overcoming adversity.

Project Overview

The format I selected for this ethnography reflects the two foci of the study: my conception of *mujerista* ethnography and the women's ethnographic narratives of self-making. I chose to arrange the dissertation into five parts. These sections provide the reader with the necessary historical context, an overview of *mujerista* ethnography, the narratives of Tejana self-making (which includes ten sections, one each on *last mujeres* and one autoethnographic reflection), my analysis, and reflections on the making of this ethnography. I chose this format as not to break up the women's narratives. My intent is for their stories to flow into one another in an ethnographic narrative style.

⁵⁰ My use of the term spiritual agency is inspired by Lara Medina, who initially used this term in reference to the Chicana spiritualities she examined in her piece, "Los espíritus siguen hablando: Chicana spiritualities" in *Living Chicana Theory* (1998).

⁵¹ See in particular Laura Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (2007).

Part I offers a socio-historical overview of Tejana women, which provides background information on the women in this study and insight into the historical and political terrain that they and generations of women before them navigated.

In Part II, “Towards New Perspectives in the Ethnography of Spirituality: A *Mujerista* Ethnographic Approach to Conducting Cultural Analysis,” I elaborate upon *mujerista* ethnography and discuss how this approach is inspired by, situated in, and builds upon various anthropological traditions, including borderlands anthropology, Tejano anthropology, and feminist anthropology, in addition to Chicana/o Studies and Latina and indigenous scholarship. Understanding the spiritual production I am examining within the context of *mestiza* consciousness requires a particular kind of ethnographic methodology and framework that accounts for the historical, social, and political conditions out of which such spiritual production occurs. *Mujerista* ethnography is a model for doing ethnography inspired by indigenous methodologies in which the spiritual practices and worldviews of research participants are considered as a foundational aspects of everyday life (Denzin, Lincoln, and Tuhiwai Smith 2008). It acknowledges women’s corporeal and spiritual experiences as key sites of knowledge production. It is a holistic and historically informed approach that accounts for moments of connection and understanding between the researcher and those with whom she works as vital sites of knowing.

Part III is entitled, “Politicized Spiritualities in the Borderlands: Narratives of Tejana Self-Making.” In this section I offer a selection of narratives from the interviews I conducted that speak to particular issues around self-making within the context of religion, spirituality, politics, and gender. I regret that I was not able to use all of the narratives shared with me. While those

not included offer important insight into Tejana spiritual and political development, I chose to limit the narratives to those represented here based on their ability to speak to the issues I chose to address in this dissertation, namely processes of self-making. I intend to draw on the rest of the narratives for the book manuscript that will emerge out of this dissertation.

Part IV, “A Cultural Analysis of Tejana Self-Making: Gender in the Borderlands, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Spiritual Activism” provides an analysis of three themes that consistently emerged in women’s narratives of self-making, which are linked by processes of self-making and agency. Themes include women’s relationships to Our Lady of Guadalupe, spiritual activism, and how gender interacts with race and ethnicity to inform women’s experiences within the religious realm. This section situates the cultural production of Guadalupe by the women in this study within the larger context of how Tejanas/o have engaged with her since the mid 19th century. I argue that women’s resignification and re-imagining of Guadalupe represents the remaking of their social worlds and that Guadalupe is a versatile symbol that has conveyed a range of meanings that are linked to social action. I will analyze what she conveys to *las mujeres* today and how she has impacted their daily lives.

I explore the conditions that gave rise to spiritual activism and the various forms it takes in the lives of Texas Mexican women. I also address spiritual activism with regard to women’s experiences in the Chicano movement and the extent to which such experiences provided them the apparatus for articulating their perspectives on social justice in other realms, such as the spiritual, later in life. I consider how gender situates spiritual activism in unique ways, as in comparing how Cesar Chavez’s form of spiritual activism was similar to and at the same time, distinct from that of fellow Mexican American civil rights activist and Catholics such as Martha

Cotera. Finally, I consider the theoretical implications of examining the intersections of gender, race, and religion, arguing for a critical gender analysis within borderlands anthropology.

In Part V: “Reflections on the Making of a *Mujerista* Ethnography” I reflect on the challenges and moments of clarity in the process of conducting the research for and writing this *mujerista* ethnography. This section also offers final conclusions and discusses areas for future research.

The dissertation concludes with the Epilogue, “Towards an Altar of Her Own.” In it I relay how an unexpected event that occurred in the last weeks of writing this dissertation at once supported my thesis and challenged me to think more deeply and critically about Tejana spiritual productions.

PART I:
LAS TEJANAS: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Tejanas and Tejanos are *mestizos*, people of mixed European, indigenous, and African descent with specific ancestry linked to Spanish settlers and Tlascalan Christianized Indians that inhabited the Texas region in the mid to late 19th century (Menchaca 2001). The “politics and processes of racial categorization” (2) that Martha Menchaca examines in her study of the racial history of Mexican Americans is important for understanding the spiritual production I investigate among *las mujeres*. The women’s loss of some of their cultural traditions, including religious ones, is shaped in part by such politics and processes, illustrating how life’s material conditions inform the production of culture.

A history of racialization -- including conquest and contact by dominant groups -- such as that experienced by Mexican-origin peoples and other marginalized groups in the United States, has influenced the ways they produce culture and engage in processes of self-making. Such historical events have resulted in groups such as *las mujeres* being severed from aspects of their cultural heritage. This can be attributed to particular processes of racialization and subsequent acculturation, which were in part carried out through legal means.⁵² This study explores such cultural politics and the effects of such historical experiences on women and their contemporary religious and spiritual experiences,

⁵² Menchaca examines how Mexican-origin people have been discriminated against by legal means that afforded privilege to Anglos and “legitimized the inferior treatment of racial minorities” in the United States (1993:1). Also see Menchaca (2001).

Scholarship on Tejanas

The seminal works of scholars who precede me inform this study by demonstrating that, as Cynthia Orozco states, "... we [Tejanas] had a past that is specific to our ethnicity, race, region, and gender" (Orozco in Palomo and Winegarten 2003:x). There is a growing body of literature on Tejana life and culture by Tejanas that includes scholarly works in addition to creative writing. Some of these works include the foundational scholarship of Martha Cotera on Chicana history and heritage and testimonio and historical writings by historian Yolanda Chávez Leyva. They also include works by poet and scholar Inés Hernández-Ávila and author-poet Carmen Tafolla, as well as author-poet Teresa Paloma Acosta who co-authored *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of Legacy* (2003), the only survey history on Tejanas with Ruthe Winegarten. Scholars such as Martha Cotera and María Cotera have also been instrumental in bringing to light the contributions of early Tejana scholar, folklorist Jovita Gonzáles de Mireles, whose examination of Tejana life was likely the first anthropological account of Tejana experiences.⁵³

My contribution to this body of work comes from the perspective of a Tejana anthropologist studying the meanings behind Tejana cultural productions, cultural processes linked to my own Tejana experience. In many ways this ethnography is part of this very legacy

⁵³ Gonzáles de Mireles was the first folklorist to study Tejana life in the borderlands was the first Mexican American woman to earn her Master's degree at UT Austin. Jovita Gonzalez' portrayal of Tejanas is vital for its early attention to women's experiences in the borderlands and how gender situated early Tejana life. In addition to her published works that explore Tejana/Mexicana experiences, including *Caballero* (1996) and her Master's thesis published as *Life Along the Border* (2008), the archives of Jovita Gonzales Mireles housed at Texas A&M Corpus Christi also include unpublished works on Tejana experiences. These include: an original manuscript of *Texas Women Heroines*, an incomplete, original manuscript of *Dona Paula Losoya, Great Pioneer of Del Rio*, and an original manuscript of *Ursula Veramendi: The Wife of James Bowie*. E.E. Mireles and Jovita Gonzalez Mireles Papers, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M Corpus Christi, <http://rattler.tamucc.edu/dept/special/mireles.html>.

of Tejana cultural production, a Tejana cultural production in its own right, situated in specific historical and social conditions.

Mexican American Civil Rights: The Inspiration for a Movement

It is important to situate this study within the context of the emergence of Chicana feminism and the Mexican American civil rights movement because many of the study participants were active in and changed by these movements. I argue that women's experiences within and exposure to these movements inspired already developing political and feminist consciousnesses, which they inserted into the spiritual realm and which inspire their spiritual and political development today. It is the confluence of these experiences and growing up in the often-tumultuous social climate of 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s Texas that prompted feminist, social, historical, and political consciousnesses and, I argue, the spiritual change we see today.

The Mexican American civil rights movement, otherwise known as the Chicano movement, marked the awaking of the political and social consciousness of Mexican Americans in the mid 1960s and 1970s. Its roots, however, begin much earlier. People of Mexican descent have participated in movements for social justice and struggles for civil rights since a decade before the U.S.-Mexican War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. In the approximately one hundred years since then, Mexican-origin peoples have fought at the regional, local, and individual levels to obtain and defend the land, citizenship, and political rights of new Americans guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Meier and Gutiérrez 2000; Meier and Ribera 1993).

Such efforts continued into the era of the Great Depression and into the 1940s and 1950s, a peak period for Mexican American civil rights activity. The Chicano movement is considered a result of the successful organizational goals and efforts of the 1940s and 1950s by regional and national organizations as well as local groups (Meier and Ribera 1993). World War II was a catalyst for the formation of groups such as the American G.I. Forum. This national organization was formed by returning Mexican American veterans who came home from the war less tolerant of the discrimination and second-class citizenship they faced prior to leaving after having fought for their country and demonstrated their loyalty to the United States (Richard Griswold del Castillo 2008; Rivas-Rodriguez and Zamora 2005). As Meier and Ribera (1993) explain, the emergence of the Chicano movement and the opportunities afforded to that generation that set the stage for the movement are a direct consequence of the advances made by the previous generations. The children of the World War II or “Greatest Generation” were the recipients of an educational legacy as well as one of civil rights passed down from their parents that included “incremental improvements in educational, economic, and social mobility” (218).

The Emergence of a Generation

The Tejanas in this study are of this post-World War II generation or “Baby Boomers.” The majority of them experienced the racial discrimination and segregation of Jim Crow Texas, participated in the Chicano movement, and grew up in predominantly working class families and communities.

Taking advantage of educational opportunities afforded to them, many young people of the post-World War II generation, such as many of *las mujeres* mobilized on college campuses

across the United States beginning in the late 1960s, and advocated for improved economic, social, and political conditions for Mexican-origin communities. Some individuals within groups such as MAYO launched assimilationist claims at organizations including LULAC and the G.I. Forum who they believed took on an accommodationist attitude towards seeking social change, instead settling for incremental change. The Chicano student movement had a more militant bent, and sought fundamental and immediate change in the social conditions of Mexican Americans.

Las mujeres were part of this generation in Texas. They represent a group of young people who were generally the first in their families to attend college. Several of their fathers were World War II veterans, meaning, as in the case with María Elena, that strict gender roles were relaxed as parents allowed their daughters and sons to leave home, something that was otherwise not the norm. Education was of paramount importance for the World War II generation, who in many cases had been denied educational opportunities due to racial and class discrimination in their youth.

The Chicano Movement

The Chicano movement era began in 1966 and lasted until 1974 (Navarro 2000). Inspired by the grape boycott of the United Farm Workers and Cesar Chavez in 1965, the post-World War II generation across the American Southwest and beyond, who self-identified as Chicanos, would come to speak out against inferior treatment of Mexican-origin people, in particular racial segregation. The impetus in Texas was the farm workers' march from South Texas to Austin in the summer of 1966. The farm workers' resolve, Anglo-American student revolt of the period,

and the California strikes initiated by Chavez and the UFU inspired Mexican American university students in Texas to mobilize (De León, “*Chicano*”).

There were multiple issues on the Chicano movement agenda and efforts were visible across a good deal of the American Southwest. Chicanas and Chicanos around the nation protested in efforts to seek social change for their communities. Inspired by the African American movement, they mobilized and organized for their political, civil, and economic rights. They fought for education reform through student walk-out protests, for land rights in New Mexico, labor rights as with the United Farm Workers Union, women’s rights within the Chicana feminist movement, and electoral rights through the formation of a third political party. A vibrant cultural arts movement also emerged as part of the cultural recuperation in which Chicanas and Chicanos were engaging. The actors within these various social and political movements that comprised the Chicano movement raised awareness of and contested the racial, economic, and gender inequalities experienced by ethnic and racial communities and women in public and private sectors of American society. The Chicano movement was strong in Texas and *las mujeres* -- the women in this study -- were key players in many of these initiatives.

La Raza Unida Party

The activism occurring in the early period of the Chicano movement set the stage for the emergence of a third political party, La Raza Unida Party. Inspired by the “dynamism and fervor of the Chicano movement” and years of alienation and racial oppression activists in Texas and Colorado reacted against the traditional two-party system (Navarro 2000:21). RUP was the independent national political party that strove to secure political empowerment for Mexican

Americans. RUP emerged out of MAYO, the militant student organization and a desire for political reform among Chicanos across the American Southwest. RUP was formed in Crystal City, Texas on January 17, 1970 and spread throughout the Southwest. Among its co-founders were José Angel Gutiérrez, Luz Bazan Gutiérrez, Mario Compean, and William “Willie” Velasquez. The initiatives on RUP’s platform included ending segregation, examining electoral laws that excluded racial minorities, and increasing representation of racial minorities in local and state politics. Texas RUP was the most successful state office at getting Mexican Americans into the political arena through local and regional elections (García, I. 1989).

The Chicana Feminist Movement and Mujeres Por La Raza

As previously mentioned several women in this study were participants in RUP, which had a high representation of women run for office. Women were active members of RUP from its inception and held leadership positions at the state and national levels of the party. Luz Bazan Gutiérrez became its first county chair in January 1970 and as previously noted María Elena Martínez served as state chair from 1976-1978. *Mujeres por la Raza* was the women’s caucus and advanced women’s political issues which included asserting the equal rights of women and the significance of *La Mujer* and *La Familia*, addressing issues such as the need for quality childcare, job training, and reproductive rights. This active women’s caucus melded the Chicana feminist movement and Chicano nationalism. *Mujeres Por La Raza* formed in 1973 and emerged out of efforts to provide women more leadership positions⁵⁴ and corresponded with the rise of

⁵⁴ In addition to María Elena Martínez other former caucus members who were interviewed for this dissertation include Rosie Castro, Martha Cotera, Sylvia Orozco, Teresa Paloma Acosta, Luz Bazan Gutiérrez, Hortencia Palomares, Yolanda Chávez Leyva, and Ines Hernández-Ávila.

the Chicana feminist movement in Texas, with which several of its members were involved (Orozco, “*Mujeres Por La Raza*”).⁵⁵

Texas served as a key site for Chicana feminist organizing during the Chicano movement (Blea 1992). While women achieved high degrees of representation within RUP, some oral histories collected for the WRUP Project indicate that some women also navigated sexism within the ranks of the male-dominated party. However, this was not the experience of all women; others indicated they were less impacted by sexism.⁵⁶ Those who were generally more vocal about the sexism were involved in the Chicana feminist movement, while those who acknowledged it but did not see it as threatening the movement or women’s places in it did not identify as feminists nor were they involved in the Chicana feminist movement.

Chicanas, armed with a historical consciousness of social oppression and discrimination and a determination to create social change, were key actors in the nation-wide movement to provide greater economic, political, and social self-determination and representation to Mexican

⁵⁵ *Mujeres* supported Chicana political campaigns and identified Raza Unida Party candidates. Statewide candidates included Alma Canales who ran for lieutenant governor in 1972, Marta Cotera in 1972 for State Board of Education, and María Jiménez and Orelia Hisbrook Cole in 1974 for state representative. *Mujeres Por La Raza* also assisted with the campaigns of Chicanas and Chicanos for offices on school boards and at the city and county level. Through their efforts *Mujeres Por La Raza* led more women to become involved at the local level in organizing and participating in conferences and campaigns. Women ran local offices, worked on the petition to allow the Raza Unida Party on the ballot, and generally became more politically active and aware. *Mujeres* declined with the decline of La Raza Unida Party, when it failed to win two percent of the vote for the governor’s race in 1978. The state required this percentage for the Raza Unida Party to retain status as a party and to receive state funds for the primary (Orozco, “*Mujeres Por La Raza*”).

⁵⁶ There were instances where feminists were referred to as *vendidas* or “sell-outs” by males and other women in the movement. Some thought that in asserting their feminist perspectives feminists were identifying with the Anglo women’s movement and dividing the Chicano movement. Alma García (1997) documents this and discusses women in two camps: as loyalists and as feminists. Women in this study who were “loyalists” were often married with families, such as Luz Bazan Gutiérrez and Hortensia Palomares, who felt that the movement should be more focused on Mexican American communities and families rather than the individual woman. The feminist response was that feminism was about the family and larger issues of inequality. Martha Cotera was married with a family and a staunch feminist and critic of sexism within the movement.

Americans. Throughout the Southwest and in areas of the Midwest, Chicanas were pivotal actors in the Chicana feminist movement, labor reform, education reform, and the cultural and literary arts. Chicana feminists made strides in electoral politics working on campaigns at the grassroots level and as elected officials (Acosta 2001; Acuña 1988; García, A. 1997). They contested Catholic patriarchy and the oppression of women in the religious realm and discriminatory treatment towards some Latino congregations, (Basso 1999; Isasi-Diaz 1996; Medina 2000), and created a large body of Chicana feminist literature that articulated the struggles against sexism, racism, and classism that characterized the experiences of some women and their communities (Blackwell 2003; García, A. 1997).

Chicana Feminism

Chicana feminist thought and the emergence of Chicana feminism represent the historic struggle of Chicanas to overcome the paradox of the Chicano cultural nationalist movement. The movement simultaneously worked to end social injustices within race-ethnic and class systems of oppression for Mexican Americans while perpetrating sexism against its female participants, maintaining “patriarchal structures of dominance” (García, A. 1997:1), a hierarchy that was thought by some to afford some Chicano men “superior status within the movement, while at the same time espousing liberation rhetoric” (Lopez 1977:26).

As noted previously, Chicana feminists, women from largely working class backgrounds, demanded attention to issues of gender equality as well as racial equality, a call that intersected with the women’s movement and was in part a reaction against lack of attention by the women’s movement to issues of race and class as structuring principals in the lives of women of color.

Chicana feminists, along with African American feminists and other women of color, contended that the women's movement ignored the fact that women of color occupied different social locations and structural positions.⁵⁷

The Development of Chicana and Chicano Studies

This study is uniquely situated in relationship to the development of Chicana and Chicano Studies because so many of the experiences of *las mujeres* intersected with the movement, which set the stage for the emergence of Chicana/o Studies. Furthermore, this very project is the result of the development of Chicana/o Studies scholars and intellectual projects that focus on the Chicana and Chicano experiences.

Chicana/o Studies was established in 1969 in response to the educational needs of Chicana/o students. On college campuses across the United States students demanded access to courses and materials on Chicana/o experiences. This was a catalyst for the production of Chicana/o scholarship, which included documenting events such as the rise of Chicana feminism and projects such as the WRUP Oral History Project at UT Austin.

A large body of literature came out of the Chicano movement. Women articulated their concerns over racial discrimination and sexism, as well as discussed issues related to politics and

⁵⁷ The crux of their critique was that whereas white feminists aimed to identify with women of color on the basis of what they saw as similar experiences of subordination around sexism, white feminists failed to acknowledge that racial and class oppression also shaped women of color experiences. Since the early 1980s Chicanas have contributed to making feminist theory more inclusive by bringing attention to issues around race, class, and sexual orientation in addition to gender and questioning existing theories. In doing so, Chicanas made significant theoretical contributions to feminist theory, and continue to do so by expanding conceptions of and approaches to understanding difference and power relations. Chicana feminists have demonstrated methods for engaging theories of difference and theories that address intersecting oppressions in productive ways that have significantly broadened the contours of feminist and borderlands studies. Women were finally able to articulate their opposition to discriminatory practices against them and their communities. The space and time of the Chicana feminist movement and Chicano movement served the purpose for such an outlet.

the family through their literary works that serve as the foundation of Chicana feminist literature today (Cotera 1976, 1977, 1980; García, Alma M. 1997; Sandoval 1991, 2000). Securing courses with content on Mexican American and Chicano Studies within institutions of higher education was one of the most significant advances made during the Chicano movement. Several women in this study, as well as men such as Professor Zamora, were involved in this effort to advance a critical understanding of the Chicana/o and Latina/o experience in the United States. Such activist-scholars continue working in Chicana and Chicano Studies programs and across disciplines across the United States as scholars and educator-activists.

The Chicana and Chicano Movements: Planting the Seeds of Tejana Spiritual Agency

Reflecting on my experiences with the WRUP Project and *The Journey of María Elena Martínez* I came to see a connection between Chicana activism and spirituality. I suggest that for many women the seeds of spiritual change were planted during the movement, with the emergence of a women's politicized Chicana consciousness. It was not until years later, however that many of the women would undergo significant spiritual change. It was a gradual process that was often accompanied by a period of separation from Catholicism or aspects of it prior to taking on new spiritual practices and in many cases, identities.⁵⁸

During the movement, many of *las mujeres* began the process of spiritual change by reevaluating their relationships to the Catholic Church. Some did so by exploring Marxism

⁵⁸ I liken this pattern of separation from their social structure (leaving home for college), liminal state (transition between spiritual practices and into a politicized consciousness), and aggregation or reemergence (emerging with new identities and ideals such as Chicana or feminist) to a rite of passage for these women. They transition from one state of being to the next through a process similar to that discussed by Victor Turner and inspired by Arnold Van Gennep (Turner 1969).

(Mosqueda 1986),⁵⁹ while others denounced the Church for its repression of women and its second-class treatment of Latino communities. However, these criticisms did not constitute a complete separation from Catholicism, but rather marked the onset of a consciousness that women would cultivate in years to come. Many women retained those aspects of Catholicism that held significance to them, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe and others continued to attend mass, often at University Catholic Centers while simultaneously coming into a Chicana political consciousness and developing new perspectives and understandings of religion.

Indigenismo and the Chicano Movement

With the Chicano movement people of Mexican descent began to shift how they defined themselves in U.S. society (Vigil 1980). This shift impacted Mexican-origin people and their cultural practices and self-conceptions. The Chicano movement marked Mexican Americans beginning to claim pride in being Mexican and acknowledging their indigenous ancestry. The study of the racial heritage of the Mexican American population began during this period with the study of *indigenismo*, also called indigenism. During this period many Mexican Americans would go through a process of cultural revitalization and reclaim their indigenous identities within a “matrix of recovered Mesoamerican mythology” (Contreras 2008:71).

⁵⁹ Inés Hernández-Ávila was one of these women. This Nez Perce/Chicana scholar and cultural worker would come to reclaim her indigenous roots from her mother’s side of her family during the Chicano movement. She relayed the following to me in regards to delving in Marxism for a short time: “in the early intellectual discussions that we had, in the early days of the *movimiento*, we talked about ... people read Marx ... religion was the opium of the masses ... it made ... sense. To see how the church was promoting joy and happiness in the afterlife and looking around and seeing all the suffering of the devout Catholics and in this life... and it just made perfect sense to say wait a minute, why should they have to wait until after they die, to rejoice in heaven? What’s the problem here? And ... traveling to Mexico and seeing poverty stricken people give their last *centavo* (cent) to the church which was decorated with gold.”

Indigenismo was a critique of racial norms in the United States, but for many Mexican Americans it evolved into an attempt to know and understand their racial heritage, which included reading and discussing works by Miguel León-Portilla and Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia, known as Alurista. In generations prior to the post-World War II generation, Mexican Americans had acknowledged their Spanish heritage and denied their indigenous heritage, forced to shed their indigenous ancestry due to discriminatory legislation and treatment towards indigenous groups in the American Southwest. Positioning themselves as white Mexicans and afforded them more rights than if they were dark complected and deemed Indian (Menchaca 1993; 2001). The Chicano movement was a move towards learning this history and how such laws impacted Mexican-origin people. As this study indicates, knowledge of this history greatly informed the subsequent reclaiming of their indigenous heritage by some Mexican Americans.

The story of Aztlán, considered the Chicano homeland, was appropriated from Mexico's national origin history by Mexican American students and disseminated to the Mexican American community. In the 1970s Alurista offered an analysis of Mexican American indigeneity, placing Mexican Americans as direct descendants of the Aztec Indians. He claimed Chicano forefathers left Aztlán in the Southwest, appropriating it to fit the Mexican American experience, stating that Mexican Americans had indigenous ancestors in both Mexico and the United States, along with other indigenous groups. It is historically documented that a Chichimec group, the Mexica, in fact referred to Aztlán as their homeland and identified the Toltec Chichimeca as their ancestors (Menchaca 2001:34).

As has been the case for peoples on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, the story of the Aztecs, or Mexica as the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan in present day Mexico City referred to themselves, played a critical historical and symbolic role in the formation of Mexican and Mexican American collective identity. As Rodriguez (2007) states, “For Mexicans the tale of the Mexica has served as the “national charter myth,” standing behind every important nation-building legend or initiative” (xiii). For Mexican Americans this includes informing a growing awareness and contemporary recuperation of an indigenous heritage that began during the Chicano movement, in which several women in this study have engaged. I argue that an awareness of this history has had impacts that extend beyond the moment of the Chicano movement and into the present.

I draw here on J. Jorge Klor De Alva who speaks to how historical functions to shape cultural recuperation such as that by Chicanos during the movement:

Bringing marginalized perspectives to light is therefore a revolutionary act of some importance: it can subvert dominant understandings, it might inspire other victims to raise their voice and pen their protests, and it always forces old histories to be rewritten to include or at least respond to the vision of the vanquished (xi).

Klor De Alva refers here to the Spanish accounts of the conquest of Mexico as being taken as the official historical account for almost 450 years. Leon-Portilla and other scholars of *Nahua* Studies have challenged historical narratives of a Spanish conquest of a few overtaking a large number against great odds -- through military, political, spiritual, linguistic and cultural conquests -- a defeated and silenced peoples who quickly disappeared as Indians and became *mestizos*. This has led to a skewed history. The publication of Leon-Portilla’s work has brought to light the past and present experiences of indigenous peoples. Such histories have come to

inform generations of Mexican Americans in the United States who are engaging in historical recovery and cultural recuperation of their ethnic and spiritual pasts, as is the case with several of *las mujeres*, including Inés, Yolanda, María Elena, Santa, and Carmen. This history has acted as a guide and inspired many U.S Latinos, especially Mexican Americans “as they attempt to cope, endure, and triumph in the face of adversity or indifference” (xiv). As this ethnography demonstrates the politics of history and of the power of that history has the potential to impact processes of cultural production and processes of self-making, as the narratives of *las mujeres* will illustrate. It is an issue of inclusion, representation, and construction, that has shaped the social lives of the descendents of this *mestizaje*, the meeting of European and indigenous cultures, hundreds of years later (León-Portilla 1992 [1962]).

These are the types of histories that informed the emergence of *indigenismo*. This claiming of an indigenous heritage by Chicanos included what they viewed as a recuperation of some cultural practices of their indigenous ancestors. I say “some” because in many instances peoples of Mexican descent have practiced cultural traditions with indigenous origins for generations, as in the uses of *curanderismo* or folk healing, in foods, herbs, and Spanish language words derived from *Nahuatl*.⁶⁰ As this study shows, for some, reclaiming their indigenous heritage during the Chicano movement involved reclaiming a spiritual heritage as well. *Danza azteca* and *danza conchero* emerged as popular spiritual ceremonies with

⁶⁰ Some such words include *molcajete* (a Mexican version of the mortar and pestle that is made of stone), and *avocado*.

indigenous roots in Southern Mexico. Today hundreds of *danza* groups take part in ritual ceremony or *ceremonia* throughout the United States.⁶¹

Scholars, including Sheila Contreras (2008) examine such practices are acts of appropriation that have political consequences. I argue that recuperations of their indigenous spiritual heritage by people of Mexican descent such as *las mujeres* must be considered as cultural productions; to extend analyses beyond discourses of appropriation. I concur that the socio-political ramifications of taking on indigenous identities and practices must be explored. I also contend that these practices must be examined for their effects; what they indicate about the lives of social actors who adhere to them and how their lives have changed so as to require them. The historical processes and conditions under which Chicanas/os have been severed from such traditions and subsequently reclaim them must also be considered and examined. Appropriation does not capture the complexity of the circumstances under which Mexican Americans were detached from their indigenous heritage and identities and seek to recover them.

Gender and Religious Activism

The experiences of *las mujeres* in this study show that it is imperative to consider the question of gender in regards to religion for activists. Religious activism was prominent during

⁶¹ The dance form *danza azteca* is inspired by “pre-Columbian choreographies and pedagogies” that can be found in contemporary Mexico. These folk dances or *danzas* meld pre-Columbian and Catholic influences whose format generally relies on a group formation. They are ceremonial, and have spiritual or religious connotations. The emergence of *danza* in the United States, while less present than in Mexico, is said to have originated during the Chicano movement as part of the act of self-determination and recovery of their ethnic heritage by Chicanos (Huerta 2009:8). As Huerta notes, it is important to state that while *danza azteca* is associated with emerging during this time period, *danza azteca* and other indigenous dance and cultural traditions were practiced long before the 1960s in the United States. In addition to the *danza azteca* tradition there is also the *danza conchera* tradition, “marked by significant political and spiritual differences” (9). One key difference is that *concheros* have a more distinct Catholic influence, as marked by the naming of their groups after Catholic saints.

the Chicano movement, particularly within the context of Liberation Theology espoused by religious organizations such as Las Hermanas⁶² and PADRES.⁶³ Such activism has been documented (Medina 2004; Sandoval 1991, 2000; Smith 1991; Tarango and Matovina 1994), however literature falls short of providing analyses of the relationship between spiritual and political ideologies among movement participants who were not involved in these organized religious contexts.

Mosqueda (1986) provides one of few such accounts. He raises important questions about the relationship of political ideologies to religious ideologies and the means by which the Catholic Church asserted social control by limiting the choices of its congregation. He addresses how some movement participants with Marxist tendencies responded to such subordination with an ideological critique of religion as a foundation for racial and class oppression among Mexican communities. This is not to say that such a critique was not raised within radical activist circles among religious activists. Some Catholic nuns and priests in fact raised such points. How gender informed peoples' religious choices during this period is however underrepresented in the literature.

⁶² Founded in 1971, Las Hermanas was the first national religious-political organization of Chicana and Latina Roman Catholics in the United States. The mission of Las Hermanas was to create an alternative space for Latina Catholics to express a feminist spirituality and theology and to work towards applying this to enhancing service to their communities. As agents of change Las Hermanas transformed religious life so that it connected to the struggles of their ethnic and gendered communities. Their motto was "*Unidas en acción y oración*": United in prayer and action (Medina 2004). From the early 1970s to the mid 1990s Hermanas chapters in Texas and other parts of the United States worked to increase awareness of the needs of their communities and for social change. They worked to bring these things to the attention of church hierarchy while also aiming to improve the role of women in the church (Flores C.D.P., María Eva, "*Las Hermanas*").

⁶³ *Padres Asociados para los Derechos Religiosos, Educativos, y Sociales*/ Priests Associated for Religious, Education, and Social Rights (PADRES) was an organization of priests founded in San Antonio in 1969 in order to serve the Mexican American population of San Antonio's Westside. Liberation theology and various theological trends in Latin America informed the work of PADRES, which included involvement in settling local labor disputes, establishing grass-roots organizations and working with women religious groups like Las Hermanas on various initiatives, such as the opening of the Mexican American Cultural Center (Flores C.D.P., María Eva, "*PADRES*").

This ethnography shows the myriad ways Mexican Americans claim and practice and indigenous identity and spiritual activism. This manifests in various ways today, including spiritual traditions such as *danza* and the use of *temascales* or traditional Mexican sweat baths, in environmental justice movements, and in the recuperation of *curanderismo*.⁶⁴ In some instances folk medicine has been passed down through generations within families. Chicanas around the United States such as *las mujeres* are also learning the spiritual and medicinal folkways of their grandmothers through other means, such as through their participation in spiritual, activist, and other communities where such knowledge is transmitted. In the process some women simultaneously shed or remake aspects of their Catholic identities. In the coming chapters I consider these instances of cultural production as symptomatic of larger social processes of Tejana self-making among *las mujeres*.

Tejana Religious History

Tejana and Tejano spiritual traditions, beliefs and ways of life have been characterized by both continuity and change. The spiritual transformations I examine have their roots in mid-19th century Texas Mexican Catholic religious life but can be traced back even further to the original conquest of the Americas by Europeans. Cultural change has been greatly influenced by colonization and religious syncretism, the results of *mestizaje* -- the hybridization of European and indigenous ancestry, and later African ancestry (Menchaca 2001) as well as processes of acculturation. Part of the history that informs Tejana and Tejano religious development is the

⁶⁴ See De la Portilla (2009) for a rich study that explores the origins of *curanderismo* in Texas, contemporary practices of folk healing among *curanderos* in San Antonio, Texas, and various ways that artists and academics act as healers through historical recovery work that heals the wounds of erasure and social oppression by marginalized groups. As I will explain in more detail throughout this ethnography, several of the women in this dissertation take on such roles in their work.

history of racialization of Mexican Americans across the United States that informed processes of acculturation, such as the legal and socially prescribed means by which people of Mexican descent have come to be made to feel culturally and ethnically inferior by more than one dominant group (Menchaca 2001). This history is reflected in numerous aspects of Tejano culture, including religion. Tejanos' religious and spiritual heritage reflects this history and their processes of accommodation and resistance to social forces such as the encroachment of Anglos into Texas after 1835 and in particular the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe de Hidalgo in 1848, which greatly shifted the social positions of Tejanos, who came to be subordinated through class and racial discrimination.

Tejano religious experiences are therefore rooted in a history of oppression that is also characterized by resilience and strategies for survival. These patterns have existed over numerous historical periods and under various social circumstances. Tejano religion is far from homogenous. It is the result of a melding and mixing of histories, traditions, racial and ethnic identities, and politics. It is highly contingent upon, influenced by, and reflective of issues of race and racialization, gender, and class.

While scholars have provided an historical overview of Tejano religiosity (De León 1982; Matovina 1995) none to my knowledge have given critical attention to Tejana religious experiences, which are shaped in very different ways due to women's gendered relationships to the Catholic Church, relationships that have differed a great deal from those of their male counterparts. Some characteristics of Mexican American women's religious roles include women acting as spiritual leaders of the home and as the transmitters of spiritual cultural knowledge to the next generations. We must also account for "layered" oppressions that have

affected all peoples of Mexican descent. For women, the extra layer of gender oppressive situates their experiences in particular ways.⁶⁵ Women are twice oppressed. Their experiences are characterized by a higher degree of contingency because of an added gender component that situates women's experiences with religion differently from men's.

Studies on the spiritual experiences of Latino groups have largely centered on their participation in organized religion, namely Catholicism (Dolan and Figueroa 1994; Elizondo 1997, 2000; Wilson 2008). Others have examined Hispanic Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians (Barton 2006). Additionally, work has begun to address the growing Latino Pentecostal movement (Espinosa 2008; Sanchez-Walsh 2003). Within the context of broader Mexican American religious research in the social sciences, the area of popular religion has garnered attention. Kay Turner's work on the tradition of home altars has shown that an altar "makes visible that which is invisible and brings near that which is far away; it marks the potential for communication and exchange between different but necessarily connected worlds, the human and the divine" (1999:7). Her work is important to this dissertation for illustrating how gender functions in the private sphere, traditions that are passed down by women and which empower them and establish "maternal and relational values" while creating their own private spaces of personal intimacy with the divine outside of the context of patriarchal religious and social structures.

⁶⁵ I do not intend to imply that men of Mexican descent are not gendered with relation to the Catholic Church, but that their experiences take on a different form. As the literature suggests (Cisneros 1996, Rodriguez 1994, Zavella 2003), gender oppression and suppression of their sexualities is more evident and explicit among women, as they are held to different standards regarding virginity than men.

Richard Flores examines how the popular religious play *Los Pastores* among South Texas Mexicanos “ ... “speaks,” like other forms of symbolic alignment to the social desires, sacred longings, and personal motivations of its performance community” (1995:2). The symbolic action exhibited in *Los Pastores* resonates with how *las mujeres* invoke Our Lady of Guadalupe in ways that articulate women’s desires for social and personal transformation. Flores states that *Los Pastores* and other cultural performances are “not mirrors of the real events but constructed from the same historical and social processes of the everyday, aesthetically reconfiguring the worlds of those who produce them” (2). I consider how the popular religious practices *las mujeres* employ are not simply reflections of the social and historical processes of their lives, but rather are in themselves rooted in specific historic and material conditions and social realities that through processes of self-making women work to reconfigure.

Outside of this work, Mexican American women’s spiritual experiences have been largely examined within theological contexts. Jeanette Rodriguez’s (1994) study on Our Lady of Guadalupe’s empowering effect on Latina women and a rich body of scholarship on *Mujerista* Theology and Latina feminist theologies (Isasi-Díaz and Tarango 1988; Isasi-Diaz 1993, 1996; Tamez 1989) are very useful in documenting Latina feminism within the religious sphere and for breaking down the complexities of these experiences and their intersections with issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

Popular Religion

Popular religion has played a significant role in the religious and spiritual lives of Mexican Americans and is therefore central to understanding their social worlds. Popular

religious symbols, traditions, and rituals acts can function as “vehicles for personal, social, and political empowerment and resistance” (Espinoza and García 2008:7). Popular religion, such as practices of home altars and *Los Pastores* as referenced above have also been viewed as methods of resistance by Mexican Americans and other Latino groups against efforts by dominant groups to assimilate them (Matovina 1995). More specifically, for Tejanos, popular religion emerged out of a history of contentious relationships between Tejanos and the Catholic Church that occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While there were instances of clergy who stood as allies with early Tejano communities, more commonly European clergy discriminated against them, viewing their practices as backward and lower class, resulting in institutional neglect by the church (De León 1982; Treviño, “*Mexican Americans and Religion*”).

Tejanos have continued to assert their religious and spiritual autonomy by melding religious and social customs. Tejanos have constructed a deeply rooted religiosity that was a response to social subordination and that mirrored their history, ethnic identity and quest for self-determination (Alonzo 1999). This study examines yet another phase in this history -- how politics and spirituality have come to mutually inform one another.

Tejano religious practices are marked by continuity and change, processes of self-making, ethnic identity formation, and community solidarity. Throughout their history Tejanas and Tejanos have drawn upon certain mechanisms and strategies to overcome adversity and resist oppression. These include forging and exerting a bicultural identity and practicing cultural traditions that reflect that identity and historical circumstances (De León 1982:xii). In a similar fashion the women in this study act as cultural producers, maintaining and cultivating

cultural traditions that reflect overcoming adversity and particular historical conditions. The ways in which Tejanos have engaged in such spiritual production over the generations may differ -- that is, the practices they learn and meanings they attribute to them may be different -- yet their desire to engage in a spiritual path with meaning, substance, and relevance to their lives is similar.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

One of the most potent and historically consistent of Tejana and Tejano spiritual practices is the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is present in the narratives of all of the women in this study.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the most, if not the most revered spiritual figure in all of the Americas. Known as the goddess of the Americas,⁶⁶ Guadalupe is a “divine protectress” who conveys unconditional love to her devotees (Castillo 1996). She represents many things to many people, including hope, liberation, feminism, maternal nurturing, national and ethnic identity. Tejanas, Tejanos, and their Mexican and indigenous ancestors are among those who share a deep and profound devotion to Guadalupe that dates back to the mid sixteenth century. This devotion continues, as evidenced in the lives of the Tejanas in this study. For them, Guadalupe is a healer, redeemer, and a symbol of faith and hope. They imagine new possibilities through her. Throughout women’s lives and periods of questioning aspects of institutional Catholicism and even within the context of a total departure from it, Guadalupe remains a constant. As Norma Cantú stated in her interview, “She’s always been there ...” What I seek to uncover is why each

woman in this study -- within, outside of, or in spite of her association to the Catholic Church -- has remained connected to Guadalupe and hence, to a cultural tradition, religious belief and forms of devotion that exist outside of categories of worship and devotion formally recognized by the Catholic Church.

This study shows that Tejanas' spiritual experiences are as diverse as their varied relationships to Guadalupe. I argue that understanding women's relationships to Guadalupe reveals a great deal about their lived experiences as Texas Mexican women. Tejanas have re-envisioned and rearticulated Guadalupe as a means to recreate their own social conditions. This *mujerista* ethnography analyzes these women's relationships to Guadalupe, thereby analyzing their changing social realities.

What is so powerful about Guadalupe that people, in particular women, have invoked her and established such intimate relationships with her for centuries? What historical conditions inspire the cultural production of Our Lady of Guadalupe? Why are women not re-envisioning Christ in the same way? As this chapter shows, women connect to their pasts with Guadalupe while remaking their presents in a familiar and feminine way that they cannot do with Christ. She is versatile, flexible, and accepting. For some she is Catholic, for others, she is Guadalupe's precursor, the Aztec/Mexica earth goddess, Tonantzin. She can be Guadalupe of their pasts, Guadalupe-Tonantzin of their presents, and a symbol of possibility for their futures. She is brown, Indian, and European. She is *mestiza*, just like them. She is the divine and represents the divine within them. So as women remake Guadalupe, they in turn remake themselves.

In this study I explore Our Lady of Guadalupe as an indicator of women's social worlds. Women's relationships to and remaking of Guadalupe are indicative of their current social

realities and desires for individual and broader social change. As the narratives of *las mujeres* will show, through Guadalupe, we come to know and hence better understand Tejana experiences and the historical and social conditions of living as Texas Mexican women in the spiritual and geographical borderlands.

Beneath the symbolic significance of *la Virgen* -- the meanings that women attribute to her -- there lies a historic and social context out of which such spiritual re-imaginings occur. In the coming pages I examine how, through re-envisioning and rearticulating Our Lady of Guadalupe, Tejanas have recreated their social worlds. Our Lady of Guadalupe is a powerful and potent symbol of women's Mexican Catholic pasts that functions in their presents.

Our Lady of Guadalupe: History

Our Lady of Guadalupe, also known as *Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, la morena* (the dark-skinned one), *la Virgen de Guadalupe, la Virgen* and *la Virgencita*, was recognized by the Catholic Church in the mid-eighteenth century as the Patron Saint of Mexico and later gained prominence as the Patroness of the Americas as well. Millions -- both Catholic and non-Catholic -- revere her across the United States. She is a symbol of the *mestizaje* -- the racial and cultural mixing of indigenous and European peoples that began with the conquest of the Americas by Spain, Latin America, and beyond.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is an apparition of the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, who is said to have miraculously appeared at the hill of Tepeyac, located north of Mexico City, in 1531. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to a recently Christianized Indian, whose baptismal name was Juan Diego. Using the Aztec language of Nahuatl, the Virgin asked that a church be

erected in her honor. Juan Diego tried three times to convince Archbishop of Mexico Juan de Zumárraga of this apparition, and on the third try he succeeded, when roses tumbled out of his opened *tilmatli*, or cloak. A life-sized image of the Virgin was found miraculously imprinted on its cactus-fiber cloth. Juan Diego's cloak is said to be the same painted icon that is displayed on the altar of the twentieth century basilica in Mexico City that bears her name -- the most visited pilgrimage site in the Western Hemisphere (Elizondo 1997). The Virgin of Guadalupe is one of many apparitions of Mary found throughout the world.

As part of the effort to evangelize all native peoples after the conquest, Catholic shrines were layered atop pre-Hispanic temples. Tepeyac had once been an ancient pilgrimage site and place of worship dedicated to several pre-Columbian earth deities known by the generic name of Tonantzin, the Nahuatl word for "our reverend mother." Tonantzin is one of several names associated with an Aztec female earth-and-fertility deity complex, which also includes Coatlicue.

The most popular sense of importance attached to Guadalupe is that she favored Mexicans and that this favor was directed especially at the poor Indian subjects. This has great symbolic significance that explains her popularity in Mexico and in the United States and her role in defining the moralistic import attached to her devotees.

Scholars have debated the authenticity of the painting and the myth surrounding the appearance of the *Virgen* to Juan Diego. Another point of contention involves her appearance as an actual event or as a strategy of the Catholic Church to help in its efforts to Christianize the indigenous population.⁶⁷ Scholars are also divided on whether or not the indigenous population

⁶⁷ Stafford Poole (1995) has found that contrary to popular belief, the account of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe was actually known before 1648, the date commonly associated with the first publication of the account.

prayed to her as the Aztec/Nahua earth deity, Tonantzin. What is not debatable is her presence as a Mexican national symbol, her immense influence on U.S. Latinos, and the profound affection that millions have felt for her. It is my position that the fact alone that people believe in her has meaning that warrants examination.

Tejano Devotion to La Virgen

As Timothy Matovina explains, the Virgin has been an “evolving” and unwavering source of hope and devotion throughout Tejano history (Matovina 2005). That she continues to serve such a role in the lives of Tejanos is illustrated in the narratives of *las mujeres*, where they transform Guadalupe from a popular religious to a politicized symbol of liberation and active self-making.

Guadalupe’s Multiple Meanings

The symbolism that the Tejanas in this study attribute to Guadalupe is part of a large and extensive tradition of meaning production that has surrounded this potent symbol since she is said to have appeared to Juan Diego almost 400 years ago. The various meanings attributed to the most popular religious symbol in the Americas correspond to changing social conditions in the United States and Mexico. I argue they also represent changes on the local level, in the personal, private lives of her devotees.⁶⁸ As previously noted, popular religion has had a

Poole argues that it was not the case that the indigenous peoples immediately became Guadalupe devotees, but rather that she became the central object of devotion for *criollos*. Poole has not found any contemporary connection between Guadalupe and Tonantzin nor does he believe that early missionaries intentionally replaced Guadalupe for any pre-conquest deities.

⁶⁸ The scholarship on Guadalupe is extensive and interdisciplinary. Some works of particular relevance to this study include Erik Wolf’s (1956) anthropological examination of Guadalupe as a Mexican master symbol. Wolf argues that Guadalupe served to unify Mexico at various historical moments. For Wolf, Guadalupe is a cultural form

tremendous influence in shaping Mexican and Mexican Americans' religious, cultural, and social lives. Guadalupe has played a large role in this as one of the most, if not the most renowned and invoked of popular or folk Catholic traditions. The narratives of *las mujeres* illustrate how expansive and diverse Guadalupe devotion is today, offering directions for continued research on the ways she has some to impact women and men of other regions and social locations.

Espinosa and García (2008) offer four interpretations on the significance of Guadalupe to Mexican American communities. The first is theological, as with scholars who affirm the apparition of Guadalupe in 1531 and claim that “the story and subsequent veneration are an authentic and collective expression of faith rooted in the needs of the people,” (8) such as Jeanette Rodriguez (1996), Vigilio Elizondo (1997), and Timothy Matovina (2005). The second category is historical and is offered by scholars such as Louise Burkhart and Stafford Poole who contend that the myth of Guadalupe was a ploy, a “pious invention” by the criollo elite inspired by jealousy towards *peninsulares* at their lower status in the Spanish *casta* system (Espinosa and García 2008:7-8). These scholars do, however, recognize that for those who believe in the “legend” of Guadalupe, “her historicity is largely irrelevant because she has become a symbol of Mexican identity, pride, and nationality” (8). It is this “becoming” of a symbol, its cultural

operating on the symbolic level within a wide range of social relationships. She is a master symbol that, like other master symbols, functions as a “cultural idiom of behavior and ideal representations through which different groups of the same society can pursue and manipulate their different fates within a coordinated framework” (34). She serves to link family, politics, religion, colonial past and present, Indian and Mexican, while acting as a collective representation of Mexican society. Much like Wolf says, she acts to link women and their histories here as well, functioning not as a U.S. master symbol, but perhaps as a Tejana master symbol. Sociologist Jeanette Rodriguez (1994) provides an insightful study of second-generation Mexican American women in California, illustrating how Guadalupe has come to empower and sustain them. Rodriguez argues against claims that Guadalupe encourages passivity in women and therefore acts as an instrument of patriarchal oppression and control; she argues instead that Guadalupe is “active and liberating.” My work brings all of these into play and into conversation with one another, in particular by bringing together Catholic and non-Catholic women.

production and its effects, that are of concern in this ethnography. The third interpretation involves Chicana feminist writers such as Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros who have projected empowering meaning into the Virgin of Guadalupe for decades, often times in oppositional moves against patriarchy. The fourth includes artists who garner sexual and gender empowerment from Guadalupe. From Yolanda Lopez's Guadalupe Series (1975-1978)⁶⁹ to Alma Lopez's more recent rendition of the *Virgen* (2001),⁷⁰ Chicanas have been interpreting their own sexual empowerment through Guadalupe. Writers and artists both take creative license with Guadalupe in cultural productions that blend politics, spirituality, and a remembering of the cultural traditions of their Mexicano and indigenous ancestors. This study examines how such cultural productions play out in women's social worlds.

⁶⁹ Yolanda López's *Our Lady of Guadalupe* series depicts Guadalupe as strong, hardworking and assertive. Included are a self-portrait by López and a depiction of her grandmother, in a statement about the vibrancy of Mexican-origin women. See *Yolanda López* (Davalos 2009).

⁷⁰ The depth of devotion to Guadalupe can be seen through her multiple meanings. Chicana artists re-imagine Guadalupe into empowering images, challenging the image they associate with colonial intuitions and gender discrimination. Many artists began to identify with their indigenous heritage during the Chicano cultural arts movement. Today many refer to Guadalupe's Aztec heritage by referencing her as Tonantzin, the lunar mother goddess, and Coatlicue, the mother goddess who gave birth to the moon and stars. Such depictions are a reaction against what Jeanette Rodriguez (1994) argues and what this study suggests, that Guadalupe's image has been manipulated by patriarchal forces to encourage passivity in women.

PART II:

**TOWARDS NEW PERSPECTIVES
IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPIRITUALITY:
A MUJERISTA ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH**

The choice is not between regretting the past and embracing the future. Nor is it between the anthropologist as hero and as the very model of a postmodern major general. It is between, on the one hand, sustaining a research tradition upon which a discipline, “soft” and half-formed perhaps but morally essential, has been built and, on the other, “displacing,” “reworking,” “renegotiating,” “reimagining,” or “reinventing” that tradition, in favor of a more “multiply centered,” “pluralistic,” “dialogical” approach, one which sees poking into the lives of people who are not in a position to poke into yours as something of a colonial relic.

- Clifford Geertz (1998, 72)⁷¹

As I mentioned previously, this project required a particular kind of methodological approach. I knew this early on, as my relationships with the women formed and we connected on issues of the spiritual, often in ways that transcended a researcher-subject binary. This is not to say power relations were non-existent in this research; to deny they are inherent in any research project is unrealistic. In this section I lay out the methodological approach that I used to conduct this ethnography while “reworking” and “re-inventing” it, in order to minimize any remnants of a colonialist anthropological project, as Clifford Geertz suggests. My intent is that this approach offers a model for conducting ethnography in the borderlands that keeps with the traditions within both the discipline of anthropology and of Chicana and Chicano Studies, while also

⁷¹ As cited in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion* (Spickard, et al. 2002).

questions and extends them in order to elicit deeper knowledge and conscientious ways of interacting with those who share their lives with us.

This is a story about Tejanas. It is about how women's have impacted me as an anthropologist and Chicana scholar but also as a fellow Tejana on a spiritual journey of her own. This, combined with the particular topic of this study, led me to conceptualize and execute *mujerista* ethnography, which accounts for the centrality of spiritual experiences in women's lives and its importance as a source of knowledge in ethnographic studies such as this. *Mujerista* ethnography offers a framework for locating spiritual epistemologies and methodologies. It is the product of working with women on the topic of spirituality and is comprised of research methods this kind of work necessitated. It has elicited certain kinds of knowledges -- *conocimientos*, as I suggested earlier -- that emerge out of employing such methods. So it is also about knowledge production, reconsidering who are considered the producers of knowledge, and under what circumstances.

I also draw on my own experiences as sites of knowledge. This methodology is about collecting knowledges *about* spirituality as much as it is about attending to the spiritual nature of research participants, and the role of spirit in the research process, between participants and researcher. I argue that this acknowledgement works towards breaking down unequal power relations in the research project.

The women I work with here are questioners. By exerting their agency in both the political fronts, in previously male-dominated political and academic spaces, and by re-imagining their spiritual practices and functions of religion in their lives, they have pushed the limits of societal expectations of women in both the spiritual and political realms. There is a

parallel between their questioning -- political and now spiritual -- and my own. While I am on my own personal spiritual journey and one of self-discovery, I am also creating this ethnography -- both endeavors that require drawing on feminist and Chicana/Latina/indigenous knowledges. For in addition to questioning the religious experiences of my youth, I am now brought to a place where as an anthropologist I am questioning old paradigms in order to know how to effectively *do* anthropology in this moment, an anthropology that is at once about spiritual practices and beliefs and the spiritual processes by which such practices are uncovered and understood. Both my personal and professional quests have involved questioning and working towards shifting power relations and creating new, meaningful, and insightful practices. Spirituality and anthropology are therefore connected in numerous ways in this study.

To view María Elena as a “subject” is against who I am as an anthropologist, especially within the context of the friendship and bond that we have formed over the loss Tommy and I experienced and her own journey of healing. She played a critical role in my healing and coming to terms with our loss at a critical time. But how, I wondered, do I write and think about this relationship, about this connection that transcends Western academic notions of self and other? How do I put into words an anthropology that takes into account, which *requires* attention to the mind-body-spirit connections *of* and *between* “researcher” and “informant”? *Mujerista* ethnography attends to the importance of the research participants to the research and recognizes the value of our relationships to them. My approach insists upon honoring those connections between researcher and informant from the moment we enter them. This involves acknowledging that these unions we establish as people -- intellectually, spiritually, and physically -- are key to conducting socially responsible, ethical and compassionate research. I tried so long to keep the

two -- life and work -- separate. I realize now that while there are boundaries, the melding of the two is in so many ways, inevitable and in fact allows me to achieve something much richer and with more depth.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the breaking down of the researcher-informant binary and the idea that ethnographies of spirituality can traverse spiritual processes in themselves, lie at the core of the *mujerista* ethnography. It proposes a shift away from the detached observer stance to the involved observer. I draw on a body of work that addresses feminist claims for objectivity to argue that ethnographies of spirituality require a modified approach that blends objective, situated knowledges, and partial knowledges (Haraway 1988). My approach gives serious attention to the subject position of the ethnographer and what she brings to the research endeavor. This forthright representation of biases, experiences, and insecurities can aid in breaking down some of the power relations in a way that solely objective research cannot. There are inevitable moments of discomfort and challenges that arise within such research, and I aim to address those as well, through reflections in Part V of this dissertation.

Based on my experience with this project, I believe that the affective nature of spirituality cannot be fully grasped objectively. I draw on my own spiritual knowledges and experiences, as in the visceral feeling of moving from one state of spiritual being into the next; from experiencing what it feels like to gradually shift from feeling the heartache and anguish of trauma to feeling whole again, to healing. This also holds for the sense of spiritual community I have experienced and how community and ceremony contribute to spiritual wholeness, completeness, and balance. A *mujerista* ethnographer embraces such personal experiences as starting off points for understanding the experiences of those whose lives she studies. I argue that

this location is an honest and open place from which deeper and different knowledges can emerge with integrity, while honoring the lives and knowledges of those participating in the research. As the editors of *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion* (Spickard, et. al 2002) have demonstrated, a balance must be struck between the knowledge that emerges in “interpersonal encounters between people with specific social locations” and that which goes beyond it (2). That is, while the interpersonal knowledge that emerges is important, so is a degree of objectivity and reflection on knowledges that emerge outside of it.

Scholarship in feminist anthropology, which lies at the intersection of feminist studies and anthropology, has also informed this project. Attention to reflexive research approaches that place the researcher within the ethnography and in conversation with study participants are of particular relevance. Such projects address the politics, pitfalls, and benefits of conducting reflexive research (Behar 1993; Dwyer 1982). Studies by feminist anthropologists explore framing research in ways that minimize unequal power relations among researchers and research participants. In doing so they have pushed the discipline to rethink how we “do” anthropology, a political process in of itself (Walter 1995).

Issues that affect anthropologists who identify as “native” or “halfie” have also inspired this work. Anthropologists who are of the culture she or he explores are referred to as “native” or “halfie” and often have experiences that shift the dialogical relations within the research. Various such scholars raise questions about how knowledge that emerges from studies conducted by an “insider” differs from that of an “outsider” (Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar 1996; Narayan 1993; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984).

For Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) “native” anthropologists are at an advantage in understanding “the emotive dimensions of behaviour” (584). There is a kind of insider knowledge the “native” anthropologist has that is difficult for outsiders to observe. There is also the issue of performance. Ohnuki-Tierney states that research participants are less likely to “perform” for insiders. In Kirin Narayan’s view, even if “native” anthropologists, or “halfies” have this intimate knowledge, they are not always aware of it. Just because she or he is an insider does not mean the daily activities of life are obvious insights for the research. There are also regional and other specific differences to consider.

Narayan offers important insight on the fixity of a distinction between “native” and “non-native” anthropologist. She asserts that outsider/insider or observer/observed binaries are fixed, preferring instead a perspective that views each anthropologist "in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (Narayan 1993:671). The ethnographic narratives presented here illustrate the kinds of knowledges that emerge from my status as a “native” and “halfie” anthropologist, both of which I view in accordance with Narayn, as fluid and shifting categories that change depending on various variables. These include the topic being addressed in the interview and how my own experiential knowledge can contribute to understanding the life experience being shared. I do not claim to assume my positionalities provide me better, only different kinds of knowledges. For while I possess insider knowledge, my social locations, including generation, region, and spiritual beliefs locations also situate me differently from them at times, It is the combination and “shifting categories” of “native”, “halfie”, “feminist”, “Chicana” positionalities and the knowledges that emerged from the ways I engaged with the women in this study that led me

conceive of a *mujerista* form of cultural analysis and methodology, which has informed this project from the beginning stages of research conception and data collection to the concluding self-reflections.⁷²

My call for new research methods and the remaking of cultural analysis (Rosaldo 1989) is another stage in the progression and history of anthropological research. Debates surrounding methodological and theoretical approaches to understanding culture have permeated the discipline since its inception. I draw on scholars who have been rethinking the ethnographic study of religion, and asking questions about insider/outsider statuses (Behar 1993, 1996; McCarthy Brown 2001, 2002; Spickard 2004, et. al). This study contributes to such conversations, both with respect to studies on religion and feminist studies.

Situating an Ethnography of Tejana Spirituality within the Anthropology of the Borderlands

In considering the methodological and theoretical tools I have at my disposal for conducting this spiritual ethnography on the Texas-Mexico borderlands, I draw on the rich field of Chicana and Latina feminist scholarship as well as the anthropology of the borderlands for direction.

The tradition of Tejano anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin would seem a likely place for a Tejana anthropologist to turn for intellectual guidance on crafting a new borderlands methodology. I turn, for example, to the seminal work of Américo Paredes, who illuminated in profound ways the mechanisms and strategies of cultural resistance that Tejano

⁷² I am inspired by the work of Renato Rosaldo, in particular his attention to how cultural analysis must be reformulated to take into consideration the positionality of the researcher as a “positioned subject” who brings with her a particular vision of the field site. Rosaldo’s “angle of vision” is informed by personal grief he experienced over the loss of his wife over the course of fieldwork. My own loss during my fieldwork makes Rosaldo’s claims and arguments to expand cultural analysis particularly relevant.

communities developed in response to racial conflict in the borderlands. His foundational work in Texas Mexican and anthropological scholarship⁷³ argued for a “native” anthropological approach to studying culture by attending to how “insider” knowledge and viewing cultural practices and field work moments in their context can more deeply and effectively inform field research (Bauman and Paredes 1972).⁷⁴

I argue that the historical and social contexts out of which that Tejana and Tejano cultural practices emerge must attend to how gender structures such practices. The spiritual transformations I examine involve gender conflict that necessitates a critical gender analysis that Paredes, in what I view as a product of his time, falls short of providing.⁷⁵ Numerous scholars have critiqued Paredes for his lack of representation of women’s experiences and for depicting patriarchal images and scenes.⁷⁶ For purposes of this dissertation and for establishing the foundations upon which *mujerista* ethnography is built, my point here is not to directly engage with such critiques. I am more concerned with the precedent that Paredes sets for those of us who

⁷³ Paredes’s scholarly and creative-writing have contributed greatly to the knowledge of the culture of the Texas-Mexican border and have influenced the study of the folklore of the American Southwest, Chicano history, and Chicano literature. His many publications led the way toward new theoretical and methodological approaches to folklore and to socio-historical studies of minority groups in the United States.

⁷⁴ One often cited example of the negative effects of not viewing cultural practices in context is William Madsen’s (1962 [1973]) misinterpretation of Texas Mexican joking. The social scientist recorded jokes based on literal interpretations. Paredes showed that his citing Mexicans in pejorative terms was based on lack of knowledge of Texas Mexican culture (see Paredes 1978).

⁷⁵ I argue that critical gender analyses of Mexican American cultural practices have been generally lacking in Texas-Mexico borderlands anthropology, save Jennifer Najera’s study on segregation in South Texas (2005), which examines gender in the borderlands from an anthropological perspective. I acknowledge that scholars have previously attended to women in their studies. Richard Flores examines the lives of Clara Driscoll and Adina de Zavala in two chapters of *Remembering the Alamo* (2002). Flores also examines the role of gender in *Los Pastores*, the Mexican shepherd’s play of South Texas (2009). Jose Limón provides a chapter in *Dancing with the Devil* on Jovita Gonzales Mireles and Limón, along with María Cotera, edited Jovita Gonzales’ book, *Dew on the Thorne*. I build upon these contributions with an extended gender critique of religion in the Texas-Mexico borderlands.

⁷⁶ Sonia Saldívar-Hull, for instance, states that Chicanas have often been left out of male-centered stories and texts. She says that while she appreciates the work of scholars like Américo Paredes, Rudy Acuña and others, they have failed to acknowledge women scholars.

are currently pushing the limits of our knowledge of culture and the methods by which we go about uncovering and understanding it.

I argue that much like anthropology required Paredes's new approach to studying folklore, in this historical moment anthropology requires *mujerista* ethnography, a self-reflective methodology that explores new spaces of knowledge production. *Mujerista* ethnography builds upon the anthropological and Chicano Studies tradition of Paredes and his predecessors by incorporating Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship and feminist anthropology and applying it to the study of gender in the Texas-Mexico borderlands.⁷⁷ In doing so I propose a critical methodological and theoretical framework for uncovering gender construction and self-making, gender relations, and gender ideologies.

For Paredes the lower border area brought different cultures, ethnicities, and languages into contact beginning in the early 1800s when the U.S. expansionist challenge resulted in wars, low intensity conflict, and the transfer of land ownership away from Mexican hands. According to Richard Bauman, "The responses of the border Mexicans to the marginal existence thus forced upon them have been the dominant focus of Paredes's career." For Texas Mexicans, "some degree of accommodation" was also necessary for survival during this period, which was also characterized by moments of cultural resistance and "a struggle -- psychological, expressive, social-to negotiate an identity in this environment of conflict" (Bauman 1995:xx).

Paredes studied this "culture of conflict" by way of the *corrido*, which was part of a body of folklore, which acted as an "instrument for the waging of the struggle itself" (Bauman 1992).

⁷⁷ Of particular relevance to this project is Elizabeth De La Portilla's *They All Want Magic: Curanderas and Folk Healing* (2009). Additionally, Diana Huerta's work on *danza azteca* addresses gender within this ancient indigenous-Chicano dance form (also see Huerta 2009 and Huerta's forthcoming dissertation).

In suggesting that folklore employed by Texas Mexicans emerged out of conflict, struggle, and resistance, Paredes changed the face of folklore and greatly influenced socio-cultural anthropology.

I engage in this discussion of Paredes to draw a connection between his method of analyzing the borderlands and my attention to gender. Can we frame Texas Mexican conflict within the context of gender? What does this look like within the framework of a *mujerista* ethnography conducted by a “native” *Tejana* anthropologist? What types of new questions are raised through such lenses?

I argue that there is a parallel between the cultural conflicts that Paredes studied in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the *Tejana* cultural practices of resistance and self-making that continue today. The historical moment and social climates are different, but *Tejano* social and political conflict in the borderlands remains. Spirituality is one method -- an “instrument” with which Texas Mexican women are resisting dominant power structures and engaging in cultural productions that shift the material conditions of their existence. Spiritual agency among *Tejanos* is not new. It represents the multitude of ways that *Tejanos* have asserted their agency and developed survival mechanisms for generations. The acts of spiritual agency we see today just take different form.

This study aims to push our understanding of approaches to anthropology by proposing *mujerista* ethnography as a way to examine contemporary forms of *Tejana* spiritual agency. I am inspired by the kinds of methodological and theoretical challenges that scholars before me have proposed, such as Paredes. Paredes proposed new ways of *doing* folklore which included viewing it as a process rather than a thing, and proposing that it be understood in context and

with attention to the position of the researcher. This ethnography builds upon this type of challenging and expansion of traditional research methods.

I contend that in enacting spiritual agency *las mujeres* are participating in ideological and political modes of resistance. Paredes explores moments of resistance within the context of Anglo dominance -- similar conditions under which Tejano Catholic religiosity emerged. This study considers Tejana resistance and subsequent cultural production within the context of dominant society *and* within their communities and families. For, as Maxine Baca Zinn explains, Mexican American families have long been settings for patriarchal oppression (Baca Zinn 2001). These familial settings and religious communities served as sites of accommodation and conflict for *las mujeres* and other women who were forced to navigate patriarchy within these realms. They were also sites of resistance to which women responded with the production and expression of new cultural forms.

The politicized spiritualities I investigate here are responses to gender politics that permeated women's past religious experiences. Religion greatly informed the cultural construction of gender and hence gender roles to which many women were expected to adhere. This included a suppression of women's sexualities. For instance, women have been expected to remain in abusive marriages for the sake of the family, to be subservient to their fathers and husbands, and expected to follow church doctrine prohibiting premarital sex, contraception, and reproductive rights. Through their spiritual practices and beliefs, women are resisting such discourses that served to oppress them in the past and in the process remaking their presents.

I argue that the practices I examine here are in some ways also a response to borderlands conflict, but a form of conflict that takes the form of patriarchy that women must navigate within

their own families and religious communities as well as dominant society. I examine such acts of cultural resistance as cultural productions that represent particular historical and social circumstances and women's experiences as raced, gendered and classed subjects. The religious realm is a site of cultural resistance for Tejanas because religion is a site of social struggle for women and therefore, political.

Spiritual Epistemologies and the Politics of Knowing

In this ethnography I argue that understanding people's spiritual experiences – and hence their social lives -- requires a *mujerista* ethnography, a way of doing ethnography inspired by Chicana/Latina feminist, feminist anthropology, and indigenous scholarship. At the core of *mujerista* ethnography is the examination of community through a methodological and theoretical framework that examines the mind, body, and spirit of the social actors in interconnected terms. It is inspired by indigenous methods of viewing the “holistic world view of indigenous peoples ... as a means of positioning spiritual knowledge as interrelated with all spheres of life” (Martin-Hill 2004:137). This approach is important for this ethnography, as *las mujeres* have drawn on and applied their spiritual knowledge in various areas of their lives.

In seeking to expand the kinds of experiences that we look to as sites of knowledge, I turn to Jacqui Alexander's use of “spirit knowing” (2005:15) which extends beyond secular and feminist understandings of knowledge. For Alexander, this term is important, because, as she says,

... experience has been understood in purely secular terms, and because the secular has been divested of the Sacred and the spiritual divested of the political, this way of knowing is not generally believed to have the capacity to instruct feminism in the United States in any meaningful way, in spite of the work of

feminist theologians and ethicists. It is a paradox that a feminist that has insisted on a politics of a historicized self has rendered that self so secularized, that is has paid very little attention to the ways in which spiritual labor and spiritual knowing is primarily a project of self-knowing and transformation that constantly invokes community simply because it requires it. In the spirit of the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cornel West, bell hooks, and the more recent work of Lata Mari, Leela Fernandez, and others, there is a tactic understanding that no self-respecting postmodernist would want to align herself (at least in public) with a category such as the spiritual, which appears so fixed, so unchanging, so redolent of tradition. Many, I suspect, have been forced into the spiritual closet (15).

Mujerista ethnography is inspired by such spirit knowing as a valid and valuable form of knowledge and by the indigenous philosophy that views spirituality as a way of life, rather than as a separate, bound, and rigid institution. *Mujerista* ethnography aims to extend possibilities for knowledge production beyond secular modes of thinking and back to the project of self-knowing, as Alexander suggests. It is a holistic approach that aligns with a holistic approach to studying anthropology, and which treats spirituality as interconnected with other facets of life. The idea of the spiritual as expressed in daily action is a fundamental frame through which this study views religious and spiritual expressions. It accounts for the spiritual as it is “manifested in the values, beliefs, and world views that are expressed in everyday actions rather than in periodic ritual” as Martin-Hill states. The indigenous knowledge framework was developed by indigenous scholars to “identify spirituality as a foundational rather than as a separate discipline of inquiry” (138). A *Mujerista* ethnographic approach is inspired by this philosophy of seeing spirituality as central to daily life, as it has been traditionally for *mestizas* for generations.

Mujerista ethnography is highly reflective and relies on autoethnography as one of the methods by which a deeper understanding of the politics of spirituality can emerge. For instance, considering my position as a woman of the generation following the women in this study, I have

insight into viewing how gender politics have functioned for me within the context of religion, which I compare to how they have similarly or differently been experienced by *las mujeres*. The ways in which the Catholic Church has influenced women's gender roles and shaped gender expectations are varied and complex. A *mujerista* ethnographic approach reveals how such issues have been experienced differently and in different contexts for women.

Through autoethnography I also reflect on questions around the politics of knowing for the *mujerista* ethnographer, who is at once an insider and an outsider. By way of my own reflections I explore the *mujerista* ethnographic approach and reflect on my various positionalities within this study. I consider the life circumstances that intersected this study, the research struggles, confront my own biases that inform this research, moments of discomfort, and profound moments of clarity that I experienced on both the spiritual and the material levels over the course of producing this ethnography.

Mujerista ethnography accounts for viewing the spiritual as a foundational aspect of everyday life and views women's corporeal and spiritual experiences as key sites of knowledge production. This includes viewing those moments of connection and understanding between the researcher and those with whom she works as vital sites of knowing.

Another of Gloria Anzaldúa's theoretical insights is important to this study. In it she explains how individuals such as *las mujeres* break down binaries to "transcend subject-object dualities in their work and life" (Anzaldúa 1987:78-80) and heal the various splits that they have endured -- sexually, spiritually, and culturally. Breaking down such binaries not only heals but also leads to new ways of viewing the world, as Anzaldúa states, and paves the way for the emergence of new knowledges. This is a holistic-indigenous philosophy, which I learned of

through personal experience. In my autoethnography I will reflect upon how I endured and then healed a spiritual split of my own. Through this lens I argue that ethnographers must take a holistic approach to understanding the lives and societies we study, and that all facets of life are interconnected by one another, including how our own bodies, minds, and souls have been seen, treated, negotiated, and socially constructed.

A *mujerista* ethnographic approach acknowledges that the anthropologist may simultaneously inhabit a role as a spiritual being, and that the two can co-exist in the study of the spiritual dimensions of life. There need not be a dichotomy. It was through such a realization I came into deeper knowledge about *las mujeres*. Reflecting on my own self-making through employing a *mujerista* ethnography elicited broader and more nuanced forms of knowledge than methods outside of this framework would not have yielded. This is situated knowledge and partial, as all knowledge is. I reflect on this in Part IV.

My deepened understandings of Chicana/Tejana spiritual and political life have emerged in a myriad of places and ways, including in the space where “self” and “other” collide. Gloria Anzaldúa (2002:542) examines these subversive spaces where such knowledges emerge. Anzaldúa calls such knowledges *conocimientos*. It is here that the subversive power of ancient ways of knowing and being that “challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those benefiting from such constructions,” such as spiritual knowledges, manifest. This way of viewing knoweldge, as Anzaldúa states, shifts who are understood as the producers of knowledge. This is the position from which I approach this research and the new

knowledge that has emerged from it, in the form of what I call spiritual *conocimientos*.⁷⁸ *Las mujeres* and I inhabit a space where we produce such new knowledge together, asserting the importance of spiritual histories, practices, and knowledges as important forms of knowing. This study explores how the women and I together mold and occupy these third spaces (Pérez, E. 1999). In the process I reflect on how I work to achieve both personal and professional fulfillment without severing one from the other.

Anzaldúa goes on to say that we are at a critical moment in understanding forms of knowledge that challenge what have previously been seen as conventional forms of knowledge, what she views as a “major cultural shift in ... understanding what knowledge consists of and how we come to know.” For Anzaldúa this involves a move from to valuing knowledges that address the inner exploration of the meaning and purpose of life; of knowing and acting on this *conocimiento*. This involves viewing spiritual knowledges in the same realm as those forms of knowing “occupied by science and rationality.” For Anzaldúa *conocimiento* is: “a form of spiritual inquiry ... reached via creative acts-writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism – both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as a site of creativity). Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself.” Here Anzaldúa articulates the kind of spirituality *las mujeres* exhibit -- that which is intertwined with the struggles of others and the planet. These ways of knowing, as she says, “challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those benefiting from such constructions” (Anzaldúa 2002:541).

⁷⁸ The literal Spanish translation of *conocimiento* is knowledge or knowing.

Anzaldúa addresses several important points about the spaces from which knowledge emerges, and how we tap into it, spaces of knowing that this project explores. Key to her conception of *conocimiento* is the idea of deepening our senses and challenging old ways of thinking and seeking out new sites of knowledge, including the realm of the spiritual. This is the task of this ethnography and it is a political act inasmuch as the spiritual has not typically been afforded a space of valid knowledge production in academia.

While I thought that my insider knowledge of Texas Mexican history, culture, and Catholicism would inform this research, I did not anticipate the project being reflexive beyond that, nor the multitude of ways that I would come to understand “spirituality as a ... legitimate form of struggle in the production of knowledge and practices of qualitative research” (Dillard 2008:277). This has led me to conceptualize and execute *mujerista* ethnography, which accounts for the centrality of spiritual experiences in women’s lives and its importance as a source of knowledge -- in terms of how women view the world through their spiritualities and how we can gain insight into their lives by examining how they understand and engage religious practices and beliefs of the past and present.

*The Study of Tejanas in the Borderlands: From Margin to Center*⁷⁹

As previously mentioned recentering the analysis from the perspective of women of color, as this project does, is important, as Andrea Smith says, in order to see political issues differently and to understand the “social consequences” of women’s experiences. As Neitz (2000) points out, putting women at the center of social analysis illuminates the ways in which

⁷⁹ My contention that the experiences of Mexican-origin women must be shifted from marginal places of existence to the center is inspired by and borrowed from bell hooks’s, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984).

they experience the world differently than men. I argue that it also provides insight into women's social experiences and in turn, those of men and other groups, and in doing so reveals important areas for future research. Antonia Castañeda's (2001) reference to Tejana and other female migrant workers illustrates this within the context of how history is constructed, another important endeavor for marginalized groups such as people of color and women whose histories are often misrepresented or omitted:

The lives of Tejana and other migrant worker women pose significant new questions to [en]gender that history and its meaning, introducing concepts of the body as well as dispossession, displacement, and appropriation that require new ways of conceptualizing family, household economies, and the agency of working-class women. It is a question not just of [historical] inclusion, but of *construction* (134).

Examining religious and spiritual expressions of Tejanas offers new ways of conceptualizing agency and how women's lives, as Castañeda states, are constructed. As this study shows, self-making is an important facet of this "construction," where women actively assert their agency, and hence contribute to constructing Tejana social life.

Mujerista Ethnography: At the Intersection of Anthropology and Chicana and Chicano Studies

It is important to situate the conception of *mujerista* ethnography within the context of how it is positioned within both anthropology and Chicana/o Studies. For like this very study, *mujerista* ethnography is too situated at the intersection of the two disciplines and a product of both.

The foundational work of Karen Mary Davalos on the intersection of Chicana and Chicano Studies and anthropology illustrates how I view this study as existing within these

traditions. In “Anthropology and Chicana/o Studies: The Dialogue that Never Was” (1998) Davalos reflects on Paredes’s call to examine the race, class, and language positionalities of the ethnographer, to which she aptly adds gender and sexuality. Davalos suggests that Chicana feminist scholars have been taking Paredes’s call seriously by doing so. I align myself with these scholars by taking heed of both Paredes’s and Davalos’s calls to position the anthropologist. Davalos states that Chicana feminist scholars have done so by offering “their own voices to the practice and politics surrounding representation.” Américo Paredes urged us to push the limits of anthropological methods. It is in this spirit that I offer this critique of the “politics of anthropology” (Davalos 1998:595). From my own position as a Chicana/Tejana native anthropologist, I argue that the anthropological study of Mexican Americans must critically attend to how gender influences the production of culture. It is from this premise that I engage in an anthropological research project that offers an examination of gender politics and its intersection with issues of class and race.⁸⁰

Mujerista ethnography is inspired by feminist anthropology and its attention to examining women’s roles in society and questioning androcentric biases within anthropology.

⁸⁰ This intersectional approach is inspired by U.S. Third World feminists who have attended to the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in their scholarship. They agree with most gender scholars that it is vital to address how race, class, and other systems of power shape and intersect with gender in order to understand gender relations, in both historical and contemporary terms. A widely accepted view of intersectionality emerged from an interdisciplinary body of theory and practice that attend to the simultaneity of oppressions, the interlocking systems of inequalities, and the multiplicity of gendered social locations (Fabrizio Pelak 2007). Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) is noted as one of the first to use the term intersectionality to bring awareness to the marginalization of black women's life experiences with her examination of singular-axis frameworks of anti-discrimination laws, feminist theories, and anti-racist politics. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins defines intersectionality as “particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation.” Hill Collins goes on to say: “... intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (2000:18). Intersectionality is also inspired by intellectual traditions including socialist feminism, race and ethnic studies, and postcolonial feminisms. Black feminism, womanism, Chicana feminism, and multiracial feminism also include intersectional approaches (Fabrizio Pelak 2007).

Mujerista ethnography is inspired by feminist anthropology's attention to questioning the objectivity of science;⁸¹ to extending our understanding of who are producers of knowledge and interpreters of culture, which such scholars do through their attention to reflexive research and writing and by taking various voices into account. In doing so feminist anthropologists have contributed to the important task of seeking out new sites of knowledge, as I do here in viewing the spiritual as a method of inquiry.

Feminist anthropologists continue to push the limits of anthropology. They have done for decades by asking questions such as, what *is* a feminist ethnography? These are questions that feminist anthropologists grappled with in the 1980s, 1990s, and continue to grapple with today. Such questions address the dilemmas that ethnographers face -- even within the context of a feminist ethnography -- including getting to know study participants and the challenges associated with assuming a universal woman stance. Feminist scholars have also questioned issues of authority and if there can truly be a feminist ethnography within a discipline steeped in relationships of power. Feminist anthropologists respond by cultivating and engaging in research methods that challenge traditional research structures and continue to work towards minimizing

⁸¹ As I have discussed, my position as a Chicana anthropologist on her own spiritual journey impacts the scope of my work and my understanding of women's experiences. It has served as rich terrain for the exploration of research methods that question conventional objectivity claims and proposes methods for remaking social analysis and methodological approaches. I am inspired by Rosaldo's call for such rethinking of our analytic approaches and by theories such as Donna Haraway's situated knowledges (1987, 1991), in which Haraway asserts that we only observe a partial reality when observing social phenomena because our vision is mediated, but that some objective knowledge can be achieved through such a lens. I adhere to this and other feminist claims to objectivity, feminist theories and methodologies (hooks 1984, 1999; Reinharz 1992; Zavella 1987, 1994, 1997) which as Janet Jacobs (2002) states, have " ... challenge[d] the assumptions of neutrality upon which the social scientific canon of objectivity is based" (89), a neutrality that is an illusion according to feminist scholars. My research project also falls under what Zavella and Segura (2008) call "feminist borderlands projects," research that focuses on " ... subjects' constructions of identities and expressions of agency that negotiate structural, discursive, and interactional borders or geopolitical boundaries ... borderland subjects often take extraordinary creative measures and assert their own sense of selves" (539). In this study women's acts of spiritual agency are the "creative measures" Tejanas in this study take in order to develop and maintain a sense of self.

power relations, in part through self-reflections (such as autoethnography and *testimonio*) and transparency about the existence of such relations.⁸² This *mujerista* ethnography follows in this tradition.

Mujerista ethnography is also inspired by feminist anthropologists who have made important contributions to anthropology through critical analyses of how gender functions in societies. While feminist research projects can attend to women's experiences and roles, feminist anthropology does not approach gender as solely a "women's issue" but rather, as a structuring principal in all societies (Moore 1988). They have demonstrated that the human experience cannot be fully examined without attention to gender issues and that gender can change historically and cross-culturally.

I follow anthropologists of color, including Chicana/Latina/indigenous and Black feminist anthropologists and U.S. Third World feminists who have raised important questions about how race intersects with class, gender, and other sites of difference in the anthropological research project, from both the perspective of the researcher and study participants. For instance, works by Chicana/Latina feminist theorists that draw on lived experiences impacted by economic, political, and social forces are also important to the *mujerista* ethnographic framework. Such works theorize "... from a place where physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grow up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga 1981:21). By considering spiritual productions as situated in particular

⁸² Here I reference a number of works that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, such as "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?" by Lila Abu-Lughod (1988), *Fictions of a Feminist Ethnography* by Kamala Visweswaran (1994), "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?" by Judith Stacey (1988) and others.

historical, social, and political circumstances, we can locate material forces and conditions that necessitated such cultural forms.

Mujerista ethnography demands attention to an intersectional approach to uncovering the intricacies of social life through methods and theories that explore the relationships between race and ethnicity, class, and gender within the context of historically situated social practices, such as religion. Because religion has played a central role in Texas Mexican history and culture, and because such a large percentage of Tejanas' Catholic religious experiences are gender specific and their ethnic identities evolved as a response to social subordination, an intersectional approach is necessary to understand the circumstances under which people's lives have come to require spiritual fulfillment and processes of spiritual production.

Mujerista ethnography also attends to the relationship between the researcher and the research participants as a form of knowledge. My own experiences as a researcher and, in some senses, a "native anthropologist" in this project also inspired *mujerista* ethnography, for I learned that a holistic perspective elicits a deeper level of understanding of the social processes at work in the anthropological research project.

Some Chicana/Latina scholars have examined spiritual transformations such as those that I investigate in this study.⁸³ Such studies suggest spiritual change and questioning of old paradigms were occurring, however, the historical and social processes and circumstances that gave rise to those practices have yet to be fully understood ethnographically.⁸⁴

⁸³ See Anzaldúa (1987), Castillo (1994, 1996), Medina (1997), and Pérez, L. (2007), among others.

⁸⁴ Studies on women's experiences are significantly more prevalent than those on men. I believe that this dearth of studies on Tejano/Chicano male spirituality is significant and an indicator of the state of the topic of spirituality in contemporary Chicana and Chicano Studies. It is a rich area of future research.

Chicana/Latina scholars have written of spirituality for quite some time, dating back to proto-feminists, seventeenth century Mexican feminist scholar nun, Sor Juana de la Cruz and the sixteenth century Spanish intellectual Sister and Santa Teresa de Avila. *Mujerista* ethnography follows a tradition set forth by Chicana/Latina/indigenous scholars who explore new epistemologies, pedagogies, and methodologies. *Mujerista* ethnography aligns with work that, “... redefines women’s and girls’ everyday teaching and learning as cultural knowledge, politics, practices of well-being, spirituality, and constructions of identities/subjectivities” (Delgado Bernal, et al. 2006:x). *Mujerista* ethnography is a *mujer*-centered ethnographic approach that re-centers the research on women in order to uncover issues around gender politics and the construction and maintenance of various structures of power among women *and* men that may not be as apparent in research that does not give serious consideration to gender. In that sense it is also a project of recovery, of including the voices and experiences of a group that has been historically marginalized in many narratives on the Chicano movement (Garcia, I. 1989; Navarro 2000) and in ethnographies on the Texas-Mexico borderlands.

Drawing on the personal experience of the researcher and uncovering knowledge for social change (Delgado Bernal, et al. 2006) are also at the core of *mujerista* ethnography. I draw from scholarship that includes that by the editors of *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2003), particularly their view that *testimonios*: “... show how knowledge of and from their [women’s] everyday lives is the basis for theorizing and constructing an evolving political praxis to address the material conditions in which they live. ... These *testimonios* offer the language of Latina intellectuals as an alternative site of knowledge” (ix-x). I offer my *testimonios* of spirituality and healing in this study as such sites of knowledge.

In order to recover the histories and cultural production of spirituality and religion among *las mujeres*, I have relied heavily on oral history to collect and interpret women's experiences. These oral narratives include oral histories, *testimonios*, and life histories. Following feminist oral historians, I find that oral history an important tool for understanding the often underrepresented, misinterpreted, distorted, or omitted histories and experiences of women, as for other marginalized groups whose histories are omitted from master historical narratives. Works by feminist oral historians have produced a wide and rich body of studies that have "introduced women as agents whose very presence transformed our understanding of the social world" (Gluck and Patai 1991:2).⁸⁵

One of the most important functions of oral history is to recover the histories of racial minorities, women, and other marginalized groups whose experiences have been underrepresented, misrepresented, or omitted from historical narratives. The lived experiences of Mexican American women in the Texas-Mexico borderlands is one such group, making oral history an important means by which to collect information on women's lives, including their religious, spiritual, and political experiences.

Oral history is also important because as we look at spiritual transformation, we must go to women's pasts, in order to elicit how their current practices came to be. Participant observation has also been important for understanding what gives meaning to their lives today.

⁸⁵ As Gluck and Patai further discuss, debates around feminist essentializing of the universal experience of woman that characterized the academy, made their way into oral history through "innocent assumptions that gender united women more powerfully than race and class divided them, and that the mere study of women fulfilled a commitment to do research "about" women. Although we had questioned the value of traditional andocentric methodology, not all of us had yet learned to be skeptical of the claims for a single feminist methodology. Our assumptions had the effect of foregrounding gender while obscuring the possible centrality of other factors-race and class, in particular-in the identity of our narrators." The authors go on to discuss how that researcher experiences were situated in a "complex web of relationships, loyalties, and demands" (1991:2).

However, I relied on oral history more so because I was able to chart change over time; to capture the processes through which women came to shift their spiritual practices and to find meaning in their current spiritual lives. Furthermore, examining aspects of life that are not visible, as with those of the spiritual realm in many cases, requires women to describe and interpret their spiritual experiences and their effects are not necessarily observable.

Other important sources of information for this project include *testimonios*, autoethnographies, *autohistorias*, and autobioethnographies published by some of the women in this study and by their contemporaries.⁸⁶ This body of literature was a vital source of information on Mexican American women of this generation and their experiences growing up as raced, gendered, and sexualized beings in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.⁸⁷

Additionally, *mujerista* ethnography attends to issues of spirituality concerning love and compassion, and to the functions of spiritual practices, such as the role of spirituality in struggles for social justice. Some of the narratives of *las mujeres* include *testimonios* I gathered from women's published writings. At times I also gathered *testimonio* during the interview process. During the semi-structured interviews there were times when I halted questions and allowed the women to speak to speak for several minutes, ranging from ten to thirty or more minutes. The interviews focused on spirituality, social justice, and the material circumstances of women's lives. During the longer periods when women spoke I allowed them to take their *testimonio* in

⁸⁶ Here I am referencing scholarship by Anzaldúa, Cantú and Hernández-Ávila who are in this study as well as works by Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Irene Lara, and others.

⁸⁷ While Latino scholars have conducted important work on Latino religion, most frequently in the areas of religious studies and theology, as well as in anthropology and sociology, these works largely focus on organized religion and popular Catholic religious practices and rarely reflect the scholars' personal spiritual experiences.

whatever direction they wished. This sometimes resulted in the interview taking a different direction than originally anticipated and for unanticipated topics to emerge.

“Mujerista” versus “Feminist” Ethnography

Central to my decision to use *mujerista* is that this term embodies a Latina/Chicana/Mexicana/indigenous heritage that is rooted in a long history of struggle, survival, cultural innovation, and self-determination. *Mujerista* ethnography embodies an ethic of social justice articulated in the work of women represented here. By choosing not to explicitly name this a feminist ethnography, I work towards breaking down categories such as feminist and non-feminist. What is left is *mujer* -- a woman-centered approach to ethnography that seeks to uncover the intricacies and nuances of social, historical, and cultural production among men and women.

I have used the term “Chicana feminist anthropology” prior to employing a *mujerista* ethnography. I continue to identify with and am inspired by both Chicana feminist and feminist anthropological traditions. However, I chose the term *mujerista* over feminist ethnography because *mujerista* accounts for women in this study who do not self-identify as feminists *as well as* women who identify as feminists. This study shows that, as with the Chicano movement participants, some women feel that “feminist” holds certain meanings that do not resonate with them and their particular experiences or perspectives.⁸⁸ In my view the use of “*mujerista* ethnography” is more inclusive.

⁸⁸ Some women see feminism as an Anglo woman’s term that does not accurately capture their experiences as racialized *and* gendered individuals. This is a debate that originated among feminists of color in the 1970s and 1980s. “Feminist” also does not resonate with many Mexican-origin elders of the World War II generation.

My own decision to move forward in the uneasy yet necessary task of sharing my own story is inspired by Chicana/Latina/indigenous scholars who have set the stage for drawing on such methods in order to broaden our understanding of social life (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002; Delgado Bernal, et al. 2006).⁸⁹ My life experience, and feminist pedagogies, epistemologies, and praxis are the frameworks through which I see the world and articulate my values and beliefs in both the professional and personal aspects of my life.⁹⁰ There will always be instances where the two roads converge, where the on-the-ground lived experiences of social actors intersect with those of the researcher. This occurred in this project by way of shared Catholic religious upbringings and experiences and through indigenous, holistic, and decolonial ways of understanding and living in the world. I envision such spaces as opportunities to challenge old epistemologies and create new ones, where personal understanding and growth occur alongside the production of academic knowledge, not in isolation from it. I come to this conclusion based on my own “fleshing of the spirit”⁹¹ that informs and is informed by my positionalities as Chicana-Tejana, feminist, student, scholar, and educator.

These spaces of interpersonal connection and experience offer immense insight into religion and spirituality as powerful arenas of social action and social change that extend beyond Western epistemological understandings of ethnographic research. We must challenge and change dominant paradigms in these ways in order to locate new and varied epistemologies (Delgado-Bernal, et. al 2006) that deepen our understanding of cultural practices and the socio-

⁹⁰ I align myself with Chicana/Latina feminist scholars who have demonstrated that one’s spiritual and academic lives do not have to follow divergent roads (Anzaldúa 1987; Medina 1998, Pérez, L. 1998).

⁹¹ I borrow here from Irene Lara (2008).

cultural and political issues that they represent. Exploring spiritual epistemologies and healing methodologies through a *mujerista* ethnography framework attempts to do just that.

Now that I have put forth my approach to gathering information on Tejana self-making and spiritual production, I will share the knowledge that emerged. The narratives in the following section illuminate the texture of *mujerista* ethnography and the multiplicity and layers of experiences that emerged out of this approach.

PART III:
POLITICIZED SPIRITUALITIES IN THE BORDERLANDS:
NARRATIVES OF TEJANA SELF-MAKING

The methodological framework I employed in the making of this *mujerista* ethnography yielded data that I used to construct the following ethnographic narratives. The stories in this section provide insight into processes of self-making which occurred at the nexus of religious, spiritual, and political discourses and practices. Each experience of self-making is unique and unfolded according to the specificities of each woman's life, religious and spiritual beliefs, and social locations.

The narratives I put forth here speak to my central questions around what the spiritual agency of *las mujeres* indicates about their social realities, what such change, as in the symbolic action attached to Guadalupe means, the historical and social circumstances out of which such acts arise, and how the lives of *las Tejanas* have changed so as to require these new spiritual forms. Ultimately, these narratives will shed light on how, by remaking religion, women are creating new life circumstances and remaking their social worlds. The narratives provide deeper insight into how race, ethnicity, and gender intersect and interact with religion and spirituality in the Texas-Mexico borderlands.

Part III. 1: Autoethnographic Reflections from a Tejana Anthropologist

The purpose of including autoethnographic reflections in this ethnography is to show how women's stories have impacted and informed my thinking as an anthropologist and how my own experiences provided insight into the construction of cultural meanings and the transformation of women's identities (Reed-Danahay 1997) through the process of self-making.

I seek out the significance of the women's political and spiritual transformations through a particular lens which, as I described earlier, filters knowledge through my multiple subjectivities as Tejana, Chicana, *mujer*, anthropologist on a spiritual journey that has involved a degree of self-making. These are the locations from which I interpret women's experiences. Such locations and experiential knowledges informed how I viewed women's experiences and shaped the questions I asked them. These autoethnographic reflections represent such experiences and inspired how I view this research and my relationships to the women.

An aspect of my subjectivity that came to bear on this project unexpectedly informs my lens. I came to know trauma and the need for spiritual healing and community in a way I never before knew as a result of the loss of our pregnancy. This has become an additional prism through which I now understand spiritual intimacy, healing, and the choices Tejanas make around spirituality and religion. The first reflection addresses my various interactions with women and some ways that women locate paths to healing and spiritual knowledge. It demonstrates how spiritual traditions are passed down from one generation to the next and not only through families. Cultural knowledges and traditions are being circulated through a fictive

kinship network of which I have become a part with *las mujeres*, which, I argue, is part of a process of spiritual production.

As I described earlier, my own Catholic upbringing, understandings of Catholicism and spirituality, as well as my Chicana feminist consciousness have informed this project. This is not a static position that has gone unchanged, however, over the course of this research. A great deal of learning, questioning, and reexamination has taken place; much of it emerging out of my direct engagement *with las mujeres* and as a result of my own spiritual healing. My ways of being, thinking, and my multiple positionalities have continually shifted in time and space over the past four years since embarking on this project. The following reflection will illuminate how my own experiences have informed how I viewed the women's experiences and, as such, offered deeper insight into the possibilities, poetics, and politics of Tejana spirituality today.

The current spiritual practices of many women in this study and others around the nation of their generation are inspired by indigenous practices and principles. This represents a recent recuperation of women's indigenous heritages that emerged in large part during and following the Mexican American civil rights movement. The following narrative illustrates how I came to access this heritage and history and into knowing about the possibilities of healing from a Zapotec Indigenous perspective. It will show how women are drawn to such practices, what they do for them today, and how through these and other practices women develop spiritual intimacy with one another. This all began with an invitation into the world of Doña Enriqueta Contreras in January 2009.

Moments of Connection: Intimacy Among Women

It was early January 2009 and I got a call from María Elena inviting me to join her and a group of women who were to gather at her friend Velia's home in South Austin to watch the inauguration of Barak Obama. I did not hesitate and accepted the kind invitation. I drove up to Velia's 1950's ranch-style home on January 20th and walked up past wild flowers and an array of succulents and other plants in her front garden. I entered the house to a room full of smiling *mujeres* who welcomed me. I made my way around the group, hugging those who I knew and introducing myself to those I had not yet met.

I loved being there, surrounded by the powerful energies of these activists, educators, anthropologists, and healers -- a sea of wisdom, knowledge, and female companionship and community. Their spiritual beliefs varied, some Catholic, others practiced shamanism and other earth-based traditions, others Buddhism and/or a combination of these. All were in favor of the election of the new incoming President.

Over the course of the two hours leading up to the swearing-in we discussed politics, the election, and the state of the nation. Several among this powerful group of women were involved in the Mexican American civil rights movement in Texas. I listened with great interest as some of them reminisced about their activist days in Austin during the *movimiento*.

We watched intently as Barak Obama was inaugurated as the 44th president of the United States. His swearing in was met with the roar of a dozen cheering, *gritando* women and the beating of María Elena's drum. Then we gathered, holding hands to give thanks. Several of the women shed tears as we went around to say what each of us was thankful for on this historic day. They were so moved. At that moment I got the sense that for many, this occasion marked the fact

that their decades of work and their struggles for equality were not in vain. On that particular day I felt the depth of how profound that particular moment was for those women who had given so much of their lives to fighting for justice.

After the swearing in we gathered in Velia's kitchen. Amidst the hustle and bustle of preparing the food were the sounds of women laughing and speaking a mixture of English and Spanish. The aromas of *borracho* beans, rice, quiche and the fresh scents of crisp *sandía*⁹² and other fruits filled the air. Mary Margaret and I talked over a glass of wine and she told me that she had recently returned from Oaxaca, where she was visiting Doña Enriqueta Contreras. Doña Enriqueta is a Zapotec elder, midwife, herbalist, and master healer under whom Mary Margaret apprenticed and whose biography she is currently writing. Mary Margaret was among the small group of *mujeres* who gathered the previous January for a spiritual healing weekend at Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change. Today she, Velia, and María Elena are members of Alma's local women's council.

That weekend in 2008 we came together, united by the healing work we were each doing. I was there seeking peace of mind amidst the challenges of our journey to become pregnant. Over the course of the weekend we formed a bond that I share with each of them to this day. The elders lovingly coined me, the youngest of the group, "the baby."

The Saturday afternoon of that weekend we all gathered in the middle of the large room in Alma's main lodge where María Elena led us in ceremony. We sat amidst the smells of burning copal, lit candles, personal objects and photos of loved ones we had placed in the center of our circle. At one point María Elena asked the women to gather around me and to place their

⁹² Watermelon.

hands over my womb. They did so without hesitation. I'll never forget how powerful it was to have their hands on me, to feel their love and support. Tears streamed down my face. They sent prayers and positive intentions for Tommy and I to become pregnant. Little did I know, I already was.

I share those memories with Mary Margaret, so at the point where I saw her at Velia's home a year later, she was aware of my journey and had even been part of it. In addition to being one of *las Mujeres de Belen*,⁹³ as we called the group, "Margie" and I have since bonded over being two of the few Tejanas to have participated in the graduate program in anthropology at UT Austin. Needless to say, we've had lots to talk about around the topics of anthropology and spirituality in our various borderlands. We also share being raised Catholic and seeking out alternative spiritual fulfillment. What I did not know that day in Velia's living room is that soon the lives of we two Tejanas would intersect in another way; that Mary Margaret would come to play a critical role in my healing and in expanding my knowledge about anthropology in many areas, including indigenous spiritual practices, the making of community, and the *doing* of ethnography.

As we talked around Velia's dinner table, Mary Margaret mentioned to me that Doña Enriqueta Contreras, Zapotec shaman and *partera*, would be traveling to the states on a U.S. tour that included being the keynote speaker at the International Herb Symposium at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. I came to know of Doña Enriqueta Contreras in 2007, upon interviewing María Elena, who like Mary Margaret, had apprenticed under Doña Enriqueta.

⁹³ "Women from Bethlehem." It is a name given to a close group that uses the sweat bath and exits wrapped in sheets.

María Elena met Doña Enriqueta in the late 1990s at Alma de Mujer. Doña Enriqueta's role in the history of Alma de Mujer is as elder and Grandmother.⁹⁴ Over the years Alma de Mujer has served as a pivotal space for Chicana/Latina/indigenous women's spiritual and activist development in Austin. Numerous women have passed through its doors seeking healing, convening for social justice workshops and organizing, activist gatherings, and spiritual ceremonies such as *temascales*. After learning of Doña Enriqueta's influence on Texas Chicanas I decided to make a trip to Oaxaca to interview her for my dissertation and to learn what drew so many Chicanas to her, such as her mentees María Elena, Mary Margaret, and former Alma de Mujer program director, Chicana-Choctaw artist, Marsha Gomez.⁹⁵

It occurred to me while talking to Mary Margaret how wonderful it would be to bring Doña Enriqueta to UT while she was in the United States. We talked excitedly about the possibility of bringing her to Austin to discuss traditional medicine. Doña Enriqueta is a descendant from a long line of Zapotec shamans that date back to 500 B.C. She owns and operates a health clinic for her community, as well as for international visitors, in the small town of San Francisco Tutla where for 50 years Doña has been a practicing midwife.⁹⁶ There is a large contingent of midwives practicing in the Central Texas area in addition to a strong interest in

⁹⁴ "Grandmother" is a term of respect given to elders of a community. Doña Enriqueta is referred to as "Grandmother" as one of Alma de Mujer's spiritual elders and teachers.

⁹⁵ Marsha Gomez (1951-1998) was an artist, activist, art educator, single mother, community organizer for environmental and community rights. Her ideals were shaped by the ideas of equality, peace, and honoring the earth. She believed artists can use their art to make social change and to promote political activism and they can be visionaries that creatively express those conditions that are of vital importance to the well being of our planet (<http://www.lapena-austin.org/english/events/marshagomez.html>).

⁹⁶ See Doña Enriqueta's biography, *Mujer Zapoteca de las Nubes; Zapotec Woman of the Clouds* (Návar 2010).

traditional and holistic medicine among the Austin community; hence we thought this would be a wonderful fit.

Then, a few minutes into our conversation Mary Margaret took me by surprise. She asked me if I'd like to meet with Doña Enriqueta for a healing session, telling me, "she's the real deal -- generations of traditional Zapotec knowledge and she has never lost a baby or mother ... she has helped so many women who were told they could not conceive." I remember being caught off guard a bit. While I had known Doña Enriqueta to be a *partera*, prior to that moment I had not conceived of the thought of seeing her myself, *for* myself. The irony is that at her house in the mountainous hills of Oaxaca that summer day in 2006, I asked her if she might suggest some herbs for my sister who had just suffered a miscarriage. She gave me the eight bottles of labeled herbs and I went on my way. I was happy that I could help my sister in her healing process and happy that I had learned about Doña and her Zapotec methods of holistic healing and spiritual beliefs. Little did I know at that time that I was suffering from what western medicine terms "infertility," and that Doña's and my paths would cross again some three years later, this time within the context of my own loss.

It must seem like an obvious oversight that I did not think about seeing Doña Enriqueta myself at some point since I learned of our situation, knowing of her work. I came to realize upon reflecting on why I had not thought of seeing her myself, that perhaps it was because I had always tried to keep my work and life separate. I harbored anxiety about blurring the boundaries between the two. Little did I know that an important source of knowledge resided in allowing the worlds to, in a sense, converge. Today I know that it is virtually impossible to keep the two

separate. This does not mean it is not uncomfortable, it is. However, I decided that it is important for me to show my vulnerability as part of this process. After all, *las mujeres* do.⁹⁷

The proposition of seeing Doña at once thrilled and scared me. What would that mean? Would she be able to help us? Could this be the answer we were looking for? In a matter of a couple of breaths something that arose from deep down inside me overrode all of these questions and my reservation. I opened my mouth and out came, “Of course. I would love to.” Here it was -- a chance to see this renowned healer. A chance for a child. How could I *not* accept?

One of the things that I want to relay and reiterate through this particular reflection is the fact that Mary Margaret made this offer to me, this *amazing* offer to a woman stricken with the agony of loss. It was hope. What a gift. Mary Margaret knew my story, saw an opportunity to help me, and reached out. In the coming months we talked for hours about healing and spirituality and on occasion, about how to just get through the day. She taught me some of the Buddhist principals that she lives by, many of which helped me through some of the lowest points in this healing process. We talked about how we Tejanas, who both write about spiritual healers and elders so very dear to us, “do” this thing called anthropology. She helped me to heal from not only the pain of losing Milagro but from the pain of alienation that I often felt from the misguided idea that I wasn’t doing anthropology right. I was just doing it differently.

So this moment when Mary Margaret reached out to me was more than a casual offer of help, it represented a pivotal stage in my own spiritual production. It was about women sharing knowledge and resources -- the production of *conocimientos*; the generating and circulating of

⁹⁷ I thank Mary Karen Davalos for pointing this out to me after hearing my talk on the subject at the 2009 *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambios Sociales* (MALCS) summer institute.

subversive knowledges.⁹⁸ As I came to learn, an important part of this knowledge production occurs in opportunities to help one another. My relationship with Mary Margaret in this sense extended the idea of spiritual agency for me, to include not only individual Tejana agency, but how agency functions on the communal level as well -- how women act as agents of change for one another. This act of compassion and the connection that Mary Margaret and I have established holds significant meaning to me and provides insight into the formation of spiritual communities, the circumstances that necessitate them, and the intimate bonds that keep them in place.

Tommy and I were both tired and the journey had taken a toll on us, a toll that I embodied; carried with me in my mind, body, and spirit. As I would later learn, the root of some of our issues originated in me decades prior. But I did not come to understand this until later, until meeting Doña Enriqueta. Up until that point I did not understand or approach my journey in interconnected terms but rather as separate categories. I turned to Buddhism, various ceremonies, and other means for spiritual healing, to western and Chinese medicines for physical healing, and to a therapist for mental/psychological healing. Doña Enriqueta coming into our home was the first time I truly understood what it meant to understand healing in a holistic, interconnected mind-body-spirit way. It has greatly deepened my understanding of the experiences of *las mujeres* that I explore in the coming chapters.

⁹⁸ I view this along the lines of what Gloria Anzaldúa states about the cultivating of such knowledges, that it involves: "Breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision -- the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and the subtle bodily awareness with social, political action and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges" (Anzaldúa 2002:542).

*Zapotec Epistemologies and Mujerista Healing Methodologies:
Enter Doña Enriqueta Contreras*

I did not expect for that Tuesday evening in June of 2009 to be an opportunity to collect data for my dissertation and I most certainly did not expect to come into knowing through what I call *mujerista* healing methodologies. I did not intend that evening to provide insight into the circumstances under which women incorporate indigenous spirituality into their spiritual lives, nor did I think I would learn about how such practices can impact women's lives. Yes, because of the nature of the work I do, I have been confronted with instances where I was conflicted about my insider-outsider, research-participant positionalities, or both. Deep down inside a part of me cannot deny the fact that *anytime* I enter a spiritual space there are both personal and professional ramifications and choices to make about my intentions for being there. Rearticulating western notions of research involves understanding that the informer–researcher binary is a false binary for those of us who “study our own” and transcend the boundaries between self and other. However, none of this crossed my mind on that day that Doña Enriqueta came to visit. That new epistemological considerations for my work *and* my life would come to bear this particular day was the last thing I considered. I just wanted to heal.

I remember being so nervous awaiting the arrival of Doña Enriqueta and Mary Margaret. I recognized Doña Enriqueta's *chaparra*⁹⁹ demeanor and bright, glowing smile immediately. She wore a long black skirt with black sequins and a white cotton blouse with red embroidered flowers, her hair up in a bun, and sandals. They approached the door and we hugged and welcomed them inside. We offered them a cold *Topo Chico* and had them sit down for a bit and

⁹⁹ A descriptive term meaning short in stature.

talk with us as Tommy and I finished preparing the *calabaza con pollo*.¹⁰⁰ Over dinner we talked about the political, economic, environmental, and social climates of both Mexico and the United States. We discussed how consumerism is eating away at our precious Mother Earth. It reminded me of conversations with María Elena about how the destruction and environmental violence being perpetuated in the United States and other parts of the world against the earth mirrors the epidemics of cancer and fertility issues occurring among women. After an hour or so of conversation Doña got down to asking questions relevant to the healing she was preparing to do. She asked a number of questions about our early lives and we relayed the story of our fertility journey and losing the baby. She asked about both of our sexual histories in order to locate areas of spiritual trauma. At one point during my story she identified when my trauma had occurred, nodding her head assuredly and saying, “*Esa es la clave para curar. Haci es que allí es donde vamos a empezar* (That is the key to healing. So that is where we are going to start).” In order to heal we had to go there again, back to that place in my past. We adjourned to the living room and commenced with the ritual.

Doña had requested basil, a glass of water, sage, and flowers. I chose gladiolas because they reminded me of Oaxaca and because I was drawn to their light purple hue. I remember gladiolas being plentiful at the *mercado* I stopped at before venturing to Doña’s home that summer day when I visited her. Three years later gladiolas and Doña both make their way into my living room, a thousand miles away. “*Ella escojió un buen color* (She chose a good color),” I overheard her tell Mary Margaret, “*Lavanda es el color de la curación* (lavender is the color of healing).” Shortly thereafter we embarked on a two-hour healing ritual, recounting what she

¹⁰⁰ A chicken and squash dish.

called the “spiritual violations” that blocked my/our energies. Afterwards Doña Enriqueta prescribed a regiment of herbs that she had brought with her from Oaxaca for us. I was inspired, refreshed and more than anything, hopeful. “*Como te sientes* (How do you feel)?” she asked. I wasn’t sure how I felt, but I did feel different, albeit not in a terribly strong way. This came later, in the weeks and in particular in the months to follow. “*Tengo más esperanza, más fe.*” I told her I had more hope, more faith. Those were perhaps the most wonderful and powerful gifts I ever could have asked for at that point in my life.

At the end of the ceremony Doña Enriqueta began explaining the program of herbs that she wanted us to take and asked if we were ready for this. After hesitating for fear of appearing disrespectful, I finally mustered up the courage to tell her that I had some reservations. I told her how I was not sure that I was ready to go through it all again -- the trying to have a baby. I believed from the core of my soul in Doña Enriqueta’s ability to help us. *This was my truth* in a way I had not yet felt a path of healing on this journey to be true before. Organized religion was not the answer for me and the other methods I had tried helped some, but did not get to the root of the problem like Doña Enriqueta did. Accessing indigenous knowledge to heal in this way *felt* right. I just was not sure I had the mental and physical energy to engage in yet another exhausting regiment of pills, herbs, the possibility of false hopes, trying to get pregnant. It’s not that I did not believe in her abilities, it’s just that it had taken such a toll on us, so I was torn.

Then Doña Enriqueta told me something that at once shook me and put me at ease, “*O no, esto no se trata de tener un bebé. Esto se trata de curarte a tí.* (Oh no, this is not about having a baby. *This* is about healing *you*).” She was telling me that once our spirits, our bodies, and our minds healed -- what her program of herbs, meditation, and prayer were formulated to do

together -- only *then* will we be able to conceive. “*El bebé es la cereza encima del postre.* (The baby is the cherry on top).” This idea to look to heal past wounds as part of the fertility process was unheard of to me. Why was this holistic approach such an epiphany for me? And why do I choose to address it here? In my research I examine how the material experiences of women’s lives inform their choices of spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. I participated in a recuperation of indigeneity by choosing this method of healing, by being open to it and allowing it into our lives. It is a similar process that I document occurring among the women in this study and in which other Chicanas and Latinas across the United States engage. I understand such recuperation differently after this experience. This experience helped me to see first hand what it feels like for a spiritual path to resonate within you. I better understood why so many women and men recuperate aspects of an indigenous past and what it feels like after a long journey of searching to find answers through a path that feels right.

Understanding the holistic approach to healing within the context of Chicana/Tejana identity in such a way -- through experiential knowledge within the context of my own mind, body and spirit and through Grandmother’s entrance into our home and our hearts -- came as an epiphany to me. I knew of the potential of this kind of indigenous knowledge and healing through my research and as it manifested itself in some of the lives of the women with whom I work. But I had not *experienced* it with my own body, my own spirit, my own mind until that Tuesday evening when Doña Enriqueta Contreras entered our home and helped me to solidify a very significant piece of my journey by helping me to see, to truly grasp how significant, how so effective healing the mind-body-spirit *together* can be. Self and other, north and south collided

that summer evening and in the process new knowledges about women's lives emerged by way of my own.

While the seeds of the recuperation of ancestral and indigenous practices and beliefs were planted during the Chicano movement, for many, like María Elena and as I will describe later Carmen, it came later in life. Indigenous ways of knowing came to some women in this study by way of practices handed down from their parents and grandparents in a continuation of Tejano indigenous cultural practices. As I am learning, for me and others in my generation and subsequent generations, this type of knowledge comes by way of spiritual teachers and elders like María Elena and Mary Margaret who provide women like me access to spiritual knowledge and connect us to people like Doña Enriqueta Contreras. I am the next generation and it was not the Chicano movement or teachings passed down to me by my parents that led me to such ways of knowing. The genealogy of Doña Enriqueta's entrance into my life represents a form of cultural transmission and spiritual knowing. It is occurring for many women who seek out alternative forms of healing and community that resonate with a desire to reconnect to a spiritual and cultural past that helps us to make sense of and find fulfillment in the present. These are the types of paths of knowledge that these women and women of subsequent generations such as myself engage in today.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ While I am not Zapotec, I am *mestiza*, and so I do have indigenous blood. I am still working through how to talk about, understand, and claim -- or not -- this part of my heritage, as I realize claiming indigeneity is very political, and I approach it with a deep respect for the histories and plights of Indigenous peoples across the world. At this point in my life I can say that I find fulfillment in the traditional healing and ritual in which I have participated and feel a connection to them in ways that I do not with other healing methods and spiritual practices. While I feel comfortable engaging in Mexican traditions through the teachings of people such as Doña Enriqueta because of my Mexican descent, I still tread lightly, aware of issues of appropriation. With this in mind, I would not feel comfortable engaging in the practices of other Native Americans in the U.S. or Indigenous peoples of Canada or other regions. I realize my position is not without complication, but I do believe it is representative of issues around

In the weeks following the session with Doña I was terribly clumsy and very flighty. I called Mary Margaret periodically with questions and to check in. She was gracious in guiding me through the healing follow up. She told me that feeling unstable as such was normal following such an intense session and for me to avoid seeing violence in films and on television. She also told me to make time to be alone and quiet, that my spiritual wounds were open and I needed this time and space to heal.

I came out of this experience with a strong sense of closure and contentment. I have found similar moments of solace with Reiki, and at times with other healers, but none lasted. This time it did. This time I understood that I engaged in healing in a way I had never done before. Doña's ritual, identifying my source of trauma and reflecting on it in the coming days, the particular form of meditation she told us to do together, taking the teas and using the ointments and medications she prescribed, together this offered me something that I had not had in the two years of seeking to heal prior. I believe it offered me spiritual healing.

In the months since the ceremony I realized that indeed, what was different is that my spirit has changed. While I think of Milagro often, I no longer obsess over having a child like I once did. My heart still aches, and it always will, but there is a peace within me, a self-love and assurance. I have faith that all will happen as it should and that everything will be all right, an assurance I never before possessed. I truly believe I finally experienced mind-body-spirit healing. I had worked tirelessly on the mind and body but my spirit was broken. My Catholic experience did not provide me any way to deal with such a loss on a spiritual level. I believed

Chicana/o indigeneity that many Chicanas/os who have been stripped of their indigenous heritage and traditions have dealt with historically and continue to engage with today.

there was something wrong with me, something of my own making, rather than considering that something had been done *to* me. I did not possess the spiritual means to deal with this issue. It was not until I engaged in this healing ceremony with Doña that I began to understand this, through feeling whole again. The tireless tugging of my soul, this pain of the unknown, was slowly lifting. It is one thing to read of the mind-body-split, it is another to experience it. Why did I not make the connection before? My professional and personal understandings of processes of spiritual healing and why women chose certain paths over others has been profoundly impacted by this experience. This is one example of how my own healing has informed my understanding of other women's healing. I've come to better understand that there are various ways that women access such knowledges, the mechanisms to heal in such a way, from the mind-body split that happens when they experience trauma. I seek out the mechanisms women rely on to heal in such a way, from sexual, domestic, and psychological abuse, abuse that is too common among women, including some in this study. What resources are in place for them? What processes do women go through in order to come out on the other side transformed, whole again? How does intimacy between women and community aid in the healing process? What does it mean that women are attracted to certain forms of healing -- and that they work -- over others? For instance, what was it about tapping into Mexican indigenous practices that fulfilled me and how might this be related to the recuperation of the ancestral and ethnic traditions of *las mujeres*? That is, how do women's ethnic and feminist identities inform how they chose to heal and what does remaking of religion tell us about women's changing social worlds? These are some of the questions that emerged out of my experience and which shape my approach to understanding the functions of spirituality in women's lives throughout this dissertation. In the

next reflection I will explore questions of spiritual knowing and self-making by way of my renewed understanding of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Reclaiming Guadalupe, Discovering Tonantzin

I came into another form of spiritual *conocimiento* and into a deeper understanding of processes of spiritual decolonization or what I term spiritual liberation, unexpectedly. It happened one day when María Elena and I were having one of the many impromptu talks that we have come to have over the years. Our talks have touched on spirituality, the state of the environment, women's health, history, and politics, among a number of other things. On that particular day the conversation turned to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

I hadn't called for anything in particular that day we were on the phone, just to see how she was doing, but we got on the subject of the Catholic Church. María Elena told me about her experience of coming into doubt about some of the Church's doctrines and beliefs and I recollected how I began to question the Church as a teenager and how this followed me into my college years. I explained how in my early 20s my developing feminist consciousness was conflicting with Catholic doctrine more frequently and with more fervor. I could not reconcile with what I saw as the Church's oppressive attitudes towards women. As I explained to María Elena that day on the phone, I was often seen as the black sheep of the family for being the only one to always question; for my resistance towards the Church. My reputation for questioning has stayed with me even to this day.

I went on to tell María Elena that while I was strong in my convictions, I was saddened by what I later realized were feelings of alienation from my family and culture that accompanied leaving the Church. At the time I associated Our Lady of Guadalupe with the Catholic Church, so once I left the Church, I thought I had to leave Guadalupe as well. But the biggest source of anguish came from the fact that I also associated Guadalupe with my grandmothers and my Texas Mexican identity. This complicated my choice to leave and manifested in feelings that I had betrayed my heritage and most painfully, my grandmothers. I was experiencing something that I saw later among the women in this study: the tension associated with rejecting a part of my cultural heritage for political reasons. It was as Ana Castillo states, “Although the Catholic Church as an institution cannot, for a number of reasons, guide us as Mexican Amerindian women into the twenty-first century, we cannot make a blanket dismissal of Catholicism either. Rejecting the intolerant structure of the Church does not automatically obliterate its entrenchment in our culture” (1994:96). My attempt to obliterate it from my life resulted in a painful estrangement from my family and culture. But I knew no other way.

As I relayed this to María Elena she explained to me in her intelligent, compassionate, and unassuming way that I could open my formerly closed heart to a greater spirit through the feminine face of God.¹⁰² I could do so through understanding Guadalupe on my own terms, separate from the institution of the Catholic Church. She said I could reject attempts by the Church to subjugate women and still hold on to Guadalupe as a symbol of feminine power, strength and liberation. “The Church does not have a monopoly on her” she told me. Referencing

¹⁰² Ana Castillo describes the “feminine face of God” in regards to Guadalupe-Tonantzin in her introduction to *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on La Virgen de Guadalupe* (1996). Also see Jeanette Rodriguez’ piece on the feminine face of God in the same volume.

her belief that Guadalupe was originally the Nahua earth goddess Tonantzin prior to the Spanish conquest, she stated, “She was not originally connected to the Church and she does not have to be now.” Her words were an epiphany to me. I could reestablish my relationship with Guadalupe without compromising my feminist principals.

Up until this time I had read about such acts of spiritual decolonization, as some scholars have referred to the libratory process where by women manipulate religious symbols and practices by projecting egalitarian meaning onto previously oppressive and patriarchal religious symbols.¹⁰³ Women experience a reconnection to spiritual traditions of their pasts and their ancestors by way of spiritual reinterpretations, as with Guadalupe. However, I had not experienced it personally until this moment. María Elena provided her interpretation of Guadalupe as Tonantzin in a way that made sense to me. Understanding Guadalupe as Tonantzin disassociates her from a Spanish colonial past and from the submissive and passive virginal identity that the Catholic Church has propagated; standards to which I was all too familiar with in my own religious experience. What I learned from María Elena is that I could invoke Guadalupe on my own terms, in my own space, for my own needs, as Tejanas have been doing for generations.

¹⁰³ Scholars such as Irene Lara (2008a, 2008b) address the decolonization of the spirit through the process of understanding Guadalupe as Tonantzín. They view the invoking of Guadalupe’s indigenous identity by her devotees as symbolic of the post-colonial process of healing colonial wounds. Lara’s concept of Tonanlupanisma as a decolonial theory and method is useful in understanding how “Tonanlupanista artists invoke and reconfigure feminist and Mesoamerican indigenous thought and iconography to heal the colonial and patriarchal misrepresentation of women’s spirituality and sexuality as popularly configured by the Christian ‘virtuous *virgen/pagan puta* dichotomy’” (2008b:63). Guadalupe-Tonantzin’s multiple meanings are shaped by the numerous, individual desires and needs of women to heal and to partake in an anti-colonial spirituality that connects them to a sacred indigenous/*mestiza* worldview (Lara 2008a, Lara 2008b). It also serves to reconnect women to a spiritual and cultural past (Peréz, L. 1999).

I was finally able to reconcile my feminist perspectives with my ethnic and cultural identity. I no longer had to keep a distance from her. I felt that the Church had been responsible for my growing up in an environment where my spiritual creativity, personal independence, and sexuality were suppressed. I held the Church responsible for my alienation from Guadalupe. With this realization all of this began to lift and I began the process of feeling spiritually whole and healing my formerly fragmented spirit. By reclaiming Guadalupe I discovered Tonantzin.

This experience with María Elena and my introduction to Guadalupe's versatility provides me a distinct understanding of the social, political and historical processes by which women liberate themselves from aspects of patriarchal religion -- and hence aspects of social life -- that no longer meet their needs, while retaining those parts of it that do. In the process I gained a deeper understanding of how Tejanas engage in ethnic/racial/feminist self-making through spirituality, in this case through cultivating relationships with and new understandings of Our Lady of Guadalupe-Tonantzin. My own process of meaning-making around Guadalupe provided me new insight into the meanings her devotees project upon her and how they manifest in social action, as in how Guadalupe can shift from a symbol of Catholic patriarchy to a symbol of liberation and female strength. As such she has at once empowered me and reconnected me to an aspect of my *Tejanidad* that I had been severed from due to particular social circumstances and lack of understanding of her flexibility. María Elena transmitted spiritual knowledge to me much like Mary Margaret did by passing along spiritual *conocimientos* about indigenous healing practices. María Elena taught me how to engage with Guadalupe on my own terms. I experienced spiritual liberation. These are two examples of how spiritual epistemologies are formed and circulated among Tejanas today.

These experiences were forms of knowledge that offer me insight into the processes by which women engage in self-making and spiritual agency and how their personal politics are implicated in such acts. The narratives to follow address this through common themes around spiritual activism, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and larger processes of gender formation, negotiation, and construction within spiritual and religious practices and discourses for Tejanas.

III. 2: María Elena Martínez

María Elena Martínez's spiritual trajectory illustrates a process through which some women go where they reconfiguring their spiritual path in order to reconcile their political and ethical beliefs with Catholicism, particularly the Catholic doctrine. This can involve practicing Catholicism differently or, as in María Elena's case, a departure from the institution of the Church. María Elena's narrative in this section further illustrates that personal politics and moral values inform processes of self-making in women's spiritual transformations. María Elena's experience shows how women engage in cultural production by changing their spiritualities and hence their social worlds when they choose to reject aspects of Catholicism or are drawn to other spiritual paths. María Elena's life is characteristic of Castillo's previously mentioned assertion, that Mexican-origin groups find it difficult to completely reject Catholicism, for it is deeply enmeshed in their history and culture. Like other of *las mujeres*, María Elena retained some religious symbols from her Catholic upbringing, as in invoking Guadalupe as Guadalupe-Tonantzin. This resignification facilitates Guadalupe's acceptance into women's lives outside of the structure of the Catholic Church. Women such as María Elena who have left the Church -- and some who have not made a complete break from it -- are drawn to the flexibility of such popular religious practices. They serve certain functions in their lives, including giving them meaning and helping them to make sense of their worlds and life circumstances.

Also central to María Elena's narrative is the idea of the interconnection of all beings that inhabit the earth and the belief that they all have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.

She leads her life in a way that exemplifies this principal, melding it with deeply held convictions about preserving and honoring the earth and its resources, which align closely with her shamanic, earth-based teachings. It becomes clear that María Elena sees a parallel between the healing that the earth requires and the healing that women's bodies and spirits require. For María Elena, both necessitate healing on the spiritual and material levels. I argue this healing is social justice work that she engages in today. As the following narrative will show, the intent of this work is not so different from that of the activism in which she participated in the 1960s and 1970s, it has just taken different form -- that of a spiritualized activism.

María Elena Martínez was born on November 4, 1941 in Wylie, Texas. Her mother was born in Kaufman, Texas and her father in Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico. Her father migrated to the United States with his parents at the age of four. Both of her parents worked as migrant farm workers in Texas growing up and later, like many Texas farm workers, traveled to Michigan to pick beets. María Elena's parents had a limited amount of education and only at the primary school grade levels because of the need for them to work and the migrating back and forth.

María Elena's father purchased a small farm and some acreage in Wylie, planning to make a living as a farmer and rancher; however, economic difficulties led him to have to give up that work and turn to work in the concrete industry. In the summers while he worked in concrete María Elena and her siblings and mother would work hoeing and picking cotton. When she started driving María Elena would drive the family in the family car to various farms to work.

As I mentioned previously, María Elena recalled feeling culturally different growing up in Wylie, a predominantly Anglo-dominated area with few Mexicans. María Elena did not see an

African American the entire time she lived and attended school in Wylie. Based on her interactions with teachers and other students, it appears that the pressures to acculturate were intense and she recalls feeling ashamed for being different. She constantly reflected on what she was being taught in school versus what she was taught at home. The two were often very different. In addition to wanting to change her lunches from Mexican foods like tacos to white bread sandwiches in order to fit in with the other children, María Elena was also made to feel inferior for not speaking English. As the only Spanish speaker in her class she recalled feeling like she was watching herself in a film, as an observer rather than a participant. She did not say an entire word her whole first year of school. María Elena endured “linguistic terrorism” as she said, discouraged from speaking her native Spanish and made to feel inferior for not being able to speak English when she entered school. In retrospect she stated that the school and teacher did not have strategies for addressing the needs of children such as María Elena – they did not know about bilingual education theory or English as a Second Language, for example. María Elena would repeat first grade after her parents transferred her to another school. She entered with her sister and had a good experience with her new first grade teacher, who she remembers fondly and credits for being able to reach María Elena and her sister.

Once she got past the trauma of that early school experience María Elena excelled in school. She graduated as the salutatorian of her high school and was voted Halloween carnival and homecoming queen. She would go on to finish her bachelor’s degree at the University of North Texas where she earned a degree in Spanish in three years, all the while working to help support herself.

As I stated in the Preface María Elena was heavily involved in electoral politics in the years leading up to her tenure as La Raza Unida Party chairperson. She has since “left the political life” as she says. She went on to become a bilingual educator for Austin Independent School District (AISD), a position she held for 30 years.¹⁰⁴ Today she is retired, but trains bilingual teachers for AISD on a part-time basis.

María Elena has studied and practiced shamanism and *curanderismo* since the mid 1980s. She has acquired knowledge on the use of herbs through her own study and by attending herb symposiums and workshops and apprenticing with Doña Enriqueta. María Elena has also studied with other Mexican indigenous *curanderas*: Doña Modesta Lavana, a *curandera* from Hueyapan, Morelos, and Doña Julieta Cabrera from Huautla, Oaxaca. All three teachers have gone to Austin to teach and do healing sessions in the community.

María Elena studies homeopathic remedies and lives an earth-friendly and environmentally conscious lifestyle. This is evidenced by the rainwater collection barrel and hybrid Honda sporting an Obamanos bumper sticker that sits outside her modest 1950s North Austin bungalow where she has lived since 1978. María Elena identifies herself as “a shamanic practitioner who uses shamanic techniques which can be found in many shamanic cultures throughout the world.” She is an active member of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and the Society for Shamanic Practitioners, and a minister with the Circle of the Sacred Earth, a church of animism fostering shamanic principles and practice. She began her studies of shamanism in

¹⁰⁴ María Elena shares this experience with Gloria Anzaldúa who herself suffered this kind of linguistic terrorism at the hands of her South Texas teachers who punished her from speaking Spanish. This was not uncommon among Mexican children in Texas during the Jim Crow era. See Sendejo (2009) for a discussion of how World War II generation Tejanas confronted teachers and administrators who practiced discriminatory tactics against Mexican-origin students, such as attempting to put the children in special needs classes just because they spoke Spanish.

the early 1990s and many of her teachers taught with the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, including Loci, Dana Kilgore, Sandra Ingermann, and Hank Wesselman.

Shamanism plays a large part in María Elena's life. It is a spiritual path that she lives daily. She says the following about her spiritual practice:

Shamanism is a spiritual path that comes from humanity's early experience of living closely with nature; it's a path of self revelation based on the ancestral memory of our collective past that has been preserved today by indigenous peoples all over the planet. Shamanism is now returning back into our collective human memory and our creative imagination to help us dream a better world. Shamanism will help us deal with the insurmountable challenges of modern life and the destruction of the planet by modern living. The long standing prophecies of the Mayas, the Hopi, and the Lakota people and other traditions are becoming a reality and we have to pay attention, change our way of thinking and find solutions so that future generations will have the basic resources to sustain life on the earth. We honor the sacred elements of water, air, earth and fire and understand that we are all connected in a precious web of light. All life is sacred and diversity of all beings is the key to a sustainable world. In shamanism there is the belief that there are multiple realities existing simultaneously including the reality of life on earth. Throughout the expansion of our inner consciousness one can access other spiritual dimensions that provide useful information for healing, inspiration and creativity.

We sit in María Elena's living room on one of the many occasions we've met over the past few years. Her rooms, walls, and bookshelves reflect the intermingling of the many aspects of her identity -- past and present -- shamanism, Chicana, Tejana, activist, healer, mentee, tia, godmother, Catholic, and friend. Two of her four living room walls are painted dark red. On them hang pieces representing these various parts of her life, including the art of Chicana/o and Latina/o artists such as Cesar Martinez and Liliana Wilson, a pencil drawing by Santa Barraza of

her dear friend Modesta and her daughter, a Venceremos Brigade poster,¹⁰⁵ a Texas Farm Workers' March to Washington For Human Rights lithograph, and a sketch of an indigenous woman. Various gourds and rattles are placed in and around her shelves, with a large oversized gourd lying on top of one of her speakers. There are drums around and numerous native and Christian deities as well as candles placed on her shelves and bookcase. On the bookshelves that line the lower half of one of her living room walls are books on herbs, shamanism, photo albums, and a bible. Like in the homes of Mary Margaret Navar, Modesta Treviño, and my own there sits a framed photo of spiritual elder Doña Enriqueta Contreras. A bookshelf in María Elena's bedroom has been converted to her home altar. A tall statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe sits on the top shelf along with more small deities, figurines, flowers, and photos of loved ones who have passed including María Elena's mother, Marsha Gomez, and María Elena's former student, Martha Cotera's son Juan, who María Elena lovingly refers to by his elementary school nickname, "*gordo*."

¹⁰⁵ The Venceremos Brigade is a U.S. political organization that begun in 1969 in the U.S. that showed solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. María Elena and other Raza Unida and local community members went to Cuba with the Brigade in the early 1980s.

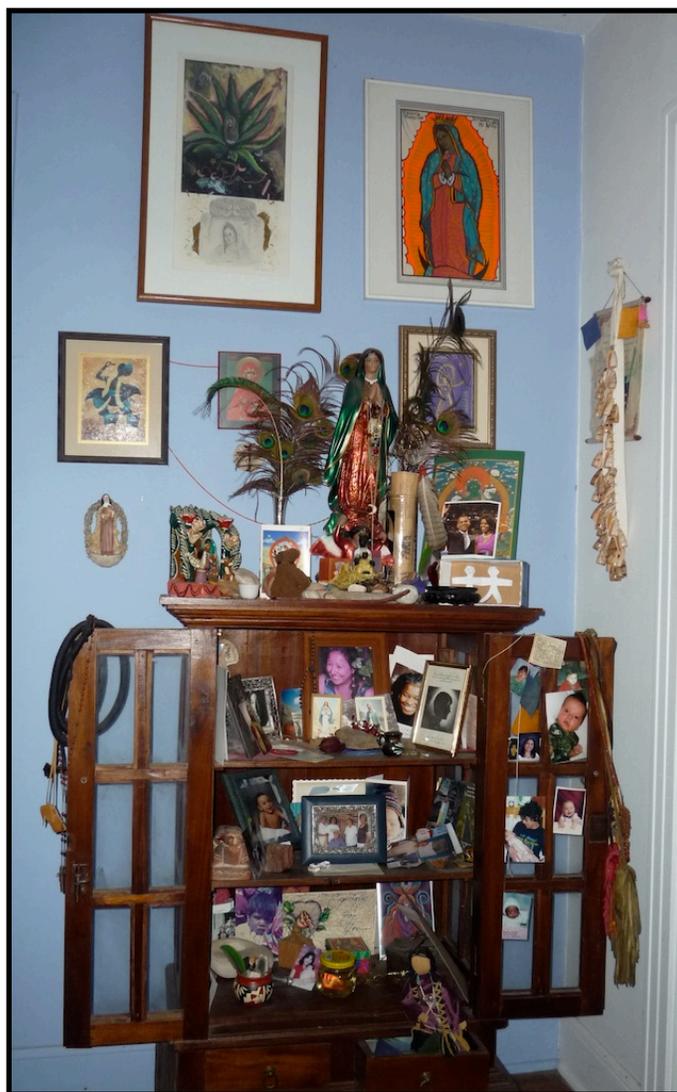


Illustration 1. María Elena's home altar

María Elena was raised in a devoutly Catholic home, was a member of the Catholic Youth Organization and taught Catechism in her early 20s. She went to Catholic school all her life and said that her religious training had a huge impact on how she came to feel about her sexuality. She was taught to feel shame about her body and that it was so engrained in her that it made her ill -- physically ill -- to feel this way, to the point of vomiting. She sees it as a form of

control over her body that interrupted her energy cycle and led to psychological and physical trauma. María Elena felt like this was something she endured on a profound level, about which she stated, “ ... it deeply angered me.”

On numerous occasions María Elena expressed her views on the masculine and hierarchical character of Catholicism and other organized religions. She is very clear about her feelings on this and has strong convictions about it. It is within this context that she told me, “For me personally, the Catholic Church no longer meets my spiritual needs.” María Elena feels very strongly that each human being is on this planet for a purpose, to find their spiritual path and live that path, all expressions of which she believes are valid. Even with her strong views on Catholicism being hierarchical, María Elena still respects her family members who are still active in the Church. But she can no longer embrace it, for as she says, “ ... it is too foreign to me -- it does not speak at all to what my truth, what my journey is.” While the Church does not meet her needs, María Elena still acknowledges it for helping her and her family get through some very difficult times. There are things, however, she no longer believes in, such as the subordinate position of the woman in the Church, about which she stated, “ ... [the] language and voice that comes through in everything and every aspect of the Church being very masculine and hierarchical.” Her feelings about such patriarchal aspects of the Church are likely compounded by the experience of being raised by a domineering father.

For María Elena “old paradigms” of hierarchical and masculine institutions and strict gender roles are no longer serving us well. She believes that they must start shifting and changing, for they are contributing to many of the ills of society -- physical and mental abuse and environmental devastation, for example. It is no surprise why the divine feminine is so very

important to her and why the *Virgen de Guadalupe* spoke as she said, so very, very strongly to her. Guadalupe is a goddess, “an earth goddess honored on this continent” for María Elena.



Illustration 2. María Elena Martínez, Austin, Texas, 2010

María Elena is well read in many subjects, including anthropology and archeology. She is constantly reading a new book on history, anthropology, or shamanism. I gave her a copy of Barbara Tedlock’s *Woman in the Shaman’s Body* for her birthday. I saw her a week later at the Austin Native American Pow Wow where she and Alma de Mujer director Maribel Garza were providing information to attendees on Alma de Mujer and its programs and events. María Elena

approached me and excitedly began to tell me how much the book resonated with her. She later told me that like Marija Gimbutas' *The Language of the Goddess* Tedlock's book was important because, " ... [it] researched, rediscovered and reinterpreted the buried artifacts, pictographs and hidden stories that reveal that the feminine divine has been in the human consciousness for millennium and women actively participated in all realms of spiritual endeavors as shamans and goddess priestesses." She said that she loved both books, that they are "important for all women to know how the feminine divine has been hidden and ignored ..." María Elena knows a great deal about ancient religions, goddess archetypes, and indigenous spiritual traditions around the world. She often refers to them when we are talking about religion and spirituality. Such knowledge is one of the foundations upon which she has built her spiritual practice.

Such histories are important to María Elena. In a previous discussion she told me, "I get a real clear sense that we have not been told the whole truth -- that there is another truth than what is in the bible. And I think that is what we all wake up to find, what voice sounds truth to us and resonates to what we are feeling, so I opened my heart to what I was feeling ... I feel very strongly connected to the earth -- that makes a lot of sense to me so my practice is very earth-based."

Our Lady of Guadalupe

María Elena's practice involves a variety of healings and counseling of people for whom she performs spiritual cleansings or *limpias*.¹⁰⁶ She hosts full moon and new moon ceremonies at her home. She counsels people who are going through difficult personal experiences and to heal

¹⁰⁶ *Limpias*, or spiritual cleansings, are a folk medicinal practice. Those who perform them generally use a variety of herbs and/or incense to rid the person of a variety of spiritual and physical ailments.

from trauma. The Virgin of Guadalupe has had a very strong presence in María Elena's life. She draws on the Virgin in her practice, which takes into account our own individual divinity, the idea that we need to get in touch with our divine selves. We, in particular women, have not been taught to explore this, which María Elena believes is necessary in order to heal. The *Virgen*, however, can aid us in this: "... the *Virgen de Guadalupe* spoke very strong to me ... she has been the healing mother ... she inspires me and teaches me how to use [my own spiritual] power for the good of all beings. Guadalupe-Tonantzin is an earth goddess ... we as women have to heal the collective unconscious of women, find our own feminine divine. We have to heal the memory of physical, sexual, psychological, spiritual abuse that has been suffered by women over the thousands of years and present in the world today."¹⁰⁷ María Elena knows this suffering firsthand, as a survivor of sexual abuse. She is adamant that we must talk about such things, that we must "name it" -- the sexual abuse -- if we are going to put an end to such violence. She believes we should not be afraid to talk about it; this is key to stopping it and to women's healing.

As can be expected, it took years for María Elena to heal from this kind of trauma. She had to come to a place of forgiveness as she said, and healed her mind, body and spirit from the ordeal. It gives María Elena great pain to see women's bodies not being respected and this is one reason she is so adamant about helping women connect with their "divine selves." I believe that her past abuse is a *conocimiento* that allows her to relate to other survivors, that it fuels her desire to help them to heal, and her desire for a non-hierarchical spiritual path, which shamanism

provides her. Helping to heal and to cultivate self-love through counseling, ritual and ceremony are ways that María Elena puts her spiritual beliefs into practice.

For María Elena the *Virgen de Guadalupe* is a goddess representing the feminine divine, an inner divine that women can attain. María Elena has transformed Guadalupe from a symbol of her Mexican Catholic upbringing to Guadalupe-Tonantzin, who María Elena views as the healing mother. This has special significance to her. The *Virgen* provides María Elena a model for being a spiritual healer, particularly of women. María Elena feels strongly that we as women need to get in touch with our own individual divinity; our self-love and inner strength. She believes that we, in particular women, have not been taught to explore this and that it is necessary in order to heal. I recall interviewing María Elena one day and the topic of women and abuse came up. She talked about women not valuing themselves or falling prey to self-destructive behavior and not honoring their bodies. This moved her to tears. María Elena believes women have been suffering such abuse for generations. But she believes that the *Virgen* can help with this: “Women need to heal the collective unconscious of women ... We have to heal the memory of physical, sexual, psychological, spiritual abuse that has been suffered by women over the thousands of years and present in the world today.”

I believe that María Elena’s desire to heal others and to help women relocate their self-love emerges in large part from her own experience of such suffering, having experienced the effects of patriarchy and abuse of power through her overbearing experience with Catholicism and her own experience of abuse. For María Elena re-imagining Guadalupe involves imagining possibilities for helping women to heal and for an egalitarian society in which to do so. This is a paradigm shift, as she has said, one in which women recapture their self-esteem and self-worth.

María Elena states that this involves women trusting their intuition, something she says we have not been taught to draw upon, to value as knowledge. I asked María Elena, “If there was one thing that you would want people to know through this work: a message to send, what would it be?” She answered, “That women are in touch with and know their feminine divine.” For María Elena, this is key to women’s empowerment and spiritual and psychological growth.

Women such as María Elena who reject intuitional Catholicism invoke Our Lady of Guadalupe and other popular religious practices because the meanings of such symbols and practices shift once they are removed from the context of the Catholic Church and the grasp of patriarchal power structures that so many of *las mujeres* critique within organized religion.¹⁰⁸ I suggest that these memories contain more than just remembrances of past abuse and oppression but act as a means of healing this past abuse and creating a path for social justice, which both Guadalupe and Tonantzin in their multiple meanings allow women to imagine and enact. It is a move towards the paradigm shift of which María Elena speaks.

The idea of the feminine divine, as in the power and divinity of Guadalupe– Tonantzin which María Elena believes all women should embody, aligns with the egalitarian character of shamanism while allowing María Elena to maintain a connection to her Tejana/Chicana cultural heritage. The versatility of Guadalupe emerges and is enacted symbolically through María Elena and her healing work, work which assists women in connecting with their feminine divine.

With consideration to the spiritual transformations I was seeing among women, I asked María Elena if she sees a difference between how Chicanas of her generation and their male

¹⁰⁸ Retaining such elements, such as Guadalupe, is, as Paula Gunn Allen suggests, a means by which women remember their origins, their cultures, their histories, their mothers and grandmothers, for it holds a memory, which implies continuance rather than nostalgia (Gunn Allen 1992).

contemporaries enact spirituality today. She says that she believes there is “a connectedness that women have -- with our cycles ... [we] have the capacity to bring life. It is a strong responsibility we have of caring for others which goes to the next level of community, planet, not that men don't have ... for some women it's more natural to go on an earth spiritual path -- not all women.” For María Elena this involves a path that is devoted to caring for and honoring the earth. When I ask her more about this idea of connectedness, and how she uses her spiritual path to make the world a better place, she answers that she believes it is through believing that “everything is one is the guiding spiritual concept -- everything is connected, “It is about an energy, about the idea that whatever happens to anyone on the planet happens to me.” She believes that this is essential for human understanding and to come to a place of peace. She says that it is not that there won't be struggle, but that when we see ourselves connected to one another and each other's experiences, then we are less likely to suffer violence, abuse, and loneliness.

Working for the good of all and the intention of holding the whole of the universe in balance is key for María Elena. She is most fascinated, she says, by the “older spiritual teachings.” For her the premise of shamanism -- that we humans have choice, as she says, is about the fact that *we* determine good and evil. “It's not the devil, its us. Our own human divinity that's been hidden from us through dogma that we have sins on our souls -- come from a place of darkness just from being born!” She says that we have, however, evolved over time and that there is beginning to be an acceptance about that. For María Elena, dogma, control, belief systems were considered the whole truth and that is how we've spiraled down. There are many

truths, she says, and questions how we can see commonalities with so many rigid dogmas and unwavering opinions.

Spiritual Knowledges

María Elena circulates knowledge in her community as a teacher. She passes along spiritual knowledge, knowledge about women's history, ecology, indigenous and Mexican cultural traditions, and in various other capacities. I contend her role in doing so is partly inspired by her belief that for so long many people have lived with certain understandings, without questioning their civic leaders, power structures, the destruction of the earth, or social inequalities. María Elena is working to reverse the effects of this lack of knowledge through education. As I previously mentioned María Elena passed knowledge to me about Our Lady of Guadalupe. She also serves as a spiritual elder and teacher to Alma de Mujer's community. María Elena wrote the following about Alma de Mujer:

Alma de Mujer is a sacred space, a wildlife sanctuary that provides a home to herbal medicine and animals, a place to pray with La Madre, a consecrated ceremonial space, burial place for Marsha Gomez and Bonnie Blackgoat, a spiritual center with a consecrated Medicine Wheel Garden, a beautiful place in Nature that can teach us to be quiet and be in a state of gratitude, love, peace, tranquility. It is a place to connect deeply with Mother Earth. The spiritual community that is gathering around Alma de Mujer is important to the education and spiritual guidance of future generations who will take care of Mother Earth. Alma de Mujer is in our hearts.

Involved in Alma de Mujer in the 1990s, it moves María Elena to see the space rejuvenated with community once again after a period of dormancy where the space was not used on a regular basis. Today she participates as a member of the Alma de Mujer community and works to help make it available as a resource for youth, individuals, and families is by helping to maintain its

garden, by serving as an active member of their women's council, conducting workshops on herbs and healing, and leading ceremonies. The space is being used again in this particular time because people are seeking out spiritual community for their needs in this modern and changing social, political, and environmental time we are in.

Reflecting on el Movimiento

María Elena made a comparison between challenging patriarchy within the religious realm and doing so in her Chicano movement experience. She recalled she and other women “fighting hard for women’s voice” during the movement only to see their relationships with their partners change after women asserted their voices in such a way: “It was against the “American norm” [of] women’s and men’s roles.” She went on to talk about how certain aspects of religion that still have strong and dominant male figures have detrimental effects, such as using sexuality as a control mechanism and viewing sexuality as evil and only as something to be used only for procreation; that birth control is wrong. She questions all of the rules that men amaking and imposing on women, “We have minds and can determine what’s best for us. The sacredness of our own blood [has been erased, tainted] -- we are told that it’s nasty smelling; we are thought to be unclean as women: the odor, cleanliness being so important.”

I see María Elena’s belief in interconnectedness that is so central to her shamanic teachings as another manifestation of her politicized spirituality -- seeing everyone and everything as interconnected is a holistic view of the world and a way of seeing and being in the world that she believes is necessary in order to bring about change. Attention to current

ecological problems and to caring for the earth in a socially responsible manner is an important part of her earth-based spiritual path.

In her role as a spiritual teacher and elder, María Elena has recuperated numerous ceremonies and rituals from which we as Mexican Americans, Tejanos, and Latinos have become detached due to social pressures to assimilate and acculturate. She is currently researching a recent trend in how to conduct home funerals, has conducted rites of passage ceremonies, and Day of the Dead ceremonies. Such practices are not just about reverting to traditions of the past, but about remaking them to fit today's circumstances and people's lives and working and praying for the health and healing of Mother Earth, our bodies, and for peace. In her social justice and spiritual work -- which are closely interrelated, María Elena works to heal splits -- spiritual and psychological -- through reconnecting people to their cultural traditions, bodies, spirits, and self-worth. In these and other ways she is exerting the consciousness she employed during the movement, it is just manifesting in different ways that are deeply interconnected with her spiritual path.

III. 3: Martha P. Cotera

Martha Cotera is a prolific writer and political activist who was born in Mexico and migrated to El Paso, Texas in the late 1940s. Over the course of her life she has been involved in numerous Mexican American, Chicana/o, educational, and feminist initiatives and social causes, including serving as an active member of La Raza Unida Party and co-founder of its women's caucus, Mujeres Por La Raza. She Today Martha resides with her husband Juan in Austin, Texas.

Martha's narrative describes the intersection of the political and spiritual for a long time feminist and activist who, as Martha says, lives by "Christ-like values." One of the things that struck me as particularly interesting about Martha's spiritual development and her arrival at practicing Catholicism was how this politically engaged activist with such strong feminist sensibilities came to convert *to* Catholicism. While Martha shares a Catholic identity with other feminist Catholics such as Norma Cantú and Rosie Castro, her story is different primarily because she converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. I wondered about the process by which this occurred. Knowing of her strong convictions about gender equality and her unwavering feminist sensibilities, I wondered how Martha Cotera was able to reconcile this with her Catholic faith. My desire to want to know more about Martha's decision to convert and be Catholic reveals my own early biases about Catholicism and the need to understand how a staunch feminist can be Catholic, which Martha Cotera greatly helped clarify. As I came to know Martha better, I came to understand the deep extent to which Christian values inform her life

work and moral values. Such values were also informed by her Protestant upbringing that greatly inspires her belief in service and putting spiritual teachings into practice. Through her definition of spirituality Martha has helped me to see how spiritual activism is enacted in Catholic women's lives.

Another thing that makes Martha's narrative unique is that she also shared the story of what it means to grieve as a mother who has lost a child. She explained how she makes sense of such a tragedy and what resources she relies upon to help her to heal on a spiritual level. I would come to learn, from both Martha and by drawing on my own experience, that this is not an easy task; it is a process that has ebbs and flows. Martha has gone from turning the rage and anguish of having a child taken from her into working for social transformation for the greater good, however, as she explained in her oral narrative, there are also moments of difficulty in doing so. There are moments where, as she said, her spirit is broken from the loss and she finds it hard to find joy. Through her narrative Martha shows how she attempts to live out spirituality by helping to improve the lives of others. In doing so she offers insight into moments where she struggled with how to use spirituality to regain her happiness.

I first met Martha Coteria in 2006 through my participation in the Women of La Raza Unida Party Oral History Project, where I learned of her active participation in RUP and that she had co-founded its women's caucus. I also knew of Martha through my studies and through her community activism and political involvement in the Austin area. Martha is a Mexican and Chicana feminist scholar, historian, and a Latina/o Chicana/o Latin American archivist who has worked as a librarian and consultant in Crystal City, Mercedes, and Austin, Texas. She earned a

B.A. from the University of Texas at El Paso and a M.Ed. from Juárez-Lincoln University in Austin, Texas. She has written over 100 articles on Chicana/o, Mexican and Latin American history. One of her most well known and cited works is the seminal Chicana feminist text and first survey on Chiana history, *Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* (1977). *Diosa y Hembra* provides the historical foundations for Chicanas' indigenous heritage and feminist and activist legacies.

I arrived to Martha and Juan Cotera's South Austin home for our first interview, parked, and walked up the steep drive past their small pond, huge oaks, and windchimes. Martha greeted me at the door with her typical Martha energy and enthusiasm. "Hola!" she said, with a huge smile. "Pasale, pasale" she said, inviting me in. We made our way into the living room of their modern-style home, which was beautifully decorated with various types of art -- Mexican and Chicano among them, as well as family photos and various sculptures and figurines. We went upstairs to her office and Martha proceeded to tell me about her early life. She was born Martha Piña in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico, on January 17, 1939. She was raised Protestant in a household with her mother and her politically active and socially conscious grandparents. Martha came from a family of feminists so her political development came early in life. Politics and religion were constant topics of discussion in her household in Martha's early years in Mexico. She said she always prided herself on her intellect. By the time she was twelve Martha had read the bible twice. From an early age she was drawn to the biblical histories and messages of justice that Christ extolled and was raised to believe that one must live their spirituality through doing good for others, through service. At a young age she moved with her mother and sister to El Paso, Texas where her mother raised her as a single parent.

While in her 20s Martha converted to Catholicism, which she says was “an intellectual conversion.” Martha was drawn to the traditions of Catholic female intellectuals such as Saint Teresa de Avila and Sor Juana de la Cruz, and to the centrality of the Virgin Mary and the Virgin of Guadalupe in the Catholic faith. Her attraction to the presence and veneration of these female figures, to the historical foundations of Christianity and to Christ’s messages of social justice inspired her conversion.



Illustration 3: Martha Cotera
PODER’s Cesar E. Chavez "Si Se Puede!" March and Rally
Austin, Texas, March 2010
Photo courtesy of Rene Renteria Photography

While they still identify as Catholic, Martha and her husband Juan are rethinking their relationship to the Catholic Church, but not their relationship to Christ-like values. Martha tells

me that she read about the compendium of attributes that were imbedded in Christ, which were all female. “He’s a beautiful model,” she tells me.

For the Catholic women in this study such as Martha Cotera, enacting and exhibiting “Christ-like values” is at the core of their spiritual practice and fundamental to their choice to be Catholic. It is a form of spiritual activism that connects the metaphysical with life’s material circumstances, which is key for women so invested in community activism and committed to issues of social justice.

While Martha’s spiritual life has been shaped by living Christian values she must reconcile with how connected she remains to the institution of Catholicism. Like other of *las mujeres* Martha’s relationship to the Church has shifted over the course of her life, even within a few short years. Today Martha is adamantly against what she sees as problems with the Catholic Church, including the recent pedophilia scandals and aspects of the doctrine that she feels impinge on women’s rights. Martha makes a distinction between the social justice teachings of Christ and the institution of the Church:

[we] are really rethinking our relationship to the Church but its not our relationship to Christian values or to human values because [its] not only Christianity but our old religions, our own community ancestral practices, our own relationship to the earth, and then our Christian values ... that’s different, that stays intact.

Another aspect to Martha’s spiritual narrative emerged out of an unfortunate tragedy, the death of her son, Juan. Martha shows her amazing strength and ability to overcome the trauma of losing a child, and how she works towards creating a better future for other children and communities as a result of this tragedy:

I have an altar ... I have Juan, of course, in it ... we have images of Brandon who died with Juan, I consider him a son as well. And I have photos of Maruca [her daughter] and ... people I want to protect ... in my office. I also have a photo altar, and lots of it is children, because when Juan died I got very anti-child. I used to see children and I used to see parents in the park and I used to get angry and I used to think to myself why do you spend time with these kids? You are going to lose them. Some jerk is going to come by, some evil person is going to come by and kill them, you know. Then one day I was at an anti-gun rally, a peace rally at the capital and *all I saw* were school children and I realized children are a lot of the reason we need to clean up our act and why we need to have a positive community and community values that are progressive and spiritual are important. So then I thought to myself, ok, I've got to keep this in mind so that I am positive and not negative in my approach to the future. So I build two large bulletin boards of photos of just children. And that I have right next to my bulletin board, right next to my computer and so I will always remember to pray for the children and to pray for the future. So they have two different purposes.

Martha explained how she copes in trying times, like over the loss of Juan:

It's spirituality. I mean what *really* helps in times like that is to have your spiritual values in place and this is why you know the spiritual life is *so* important because it's where you have a constant renewal of your values. This is where you are constantly reminding yourself of what's important in your life, what you see as important for others as well and what you see as important for your community. And I don't know how else you know you could live without this renewal. It's kind of like renewing your vows. You know everyday you renew your vows to be a better person, I think. So when he died it was so important -- let 's not say *died*, let's say *killed* because it's so painful and it reminds you that there is so much to be done in communities when you have that cancer of violence permeating in our communities, and we all are responsible for that. You cannot say well these people or those people, we all are responsible for that, we are all in this same body together.

She added how important spiritual and moral values have been in knowing how to move forward after Juan's death:

So when he was killed it was very important for us to know what our values were and what Juan's values were because that way no one could tell us that we were acting contrary to his memory as some people tried to do by [our] not asking for the death penalty and so we could say you know we have always, always spoken about our values as a family. We have always articulated our values on choice, our values anti-guns, anti-murder ... murder, by this I mean the death penalty and

it was very important, there was never any hesitation. There was never any searching and saying what do I want to do? When your values and your spiritual life are in sync then you know what actions to take and you don't have to have any one else give you the answers or search for the answers you know they are right there for you to access. We are very lucky that as a family we have always been very expressive and have always articulated our values and of course the spiritual life helps.

Fast-forward three years. I stopped by Martha's house a few weeks prior to turning in this dissertation. She had offered to let me take a photo of her *altar* and I decided to take her up on it and to use the opportunity to ask a couple of follow-up questions from a talk we had a few months prior. We sat down for a few minutes before to going to her library to take the photo. I noticed Martha was not her usual bubbly, confident self. She looked somewhat tired. Summer had begun and the Texas heat was taking its toll on everyone, so I chalked it up to that. But then we started talking about recent events, like the war in Afghanistan and the recent Gulf oil spill, and she seemed disheartened. Then she asked me, "So what are your questions? I have to warn you, right now, I don't have a lot of positive feelings in general about what's going to happen with this poor world and whether we are ever going to be a peaceful nation again. I mean I don't understand Afghanistan at all, you know I don't."

We began talking and come to find out Martha's feelings are also about her son, Juan, feelings I suspected might have been brought on by the photo I would take. We start talking about Juan and she told me that she needed to have María Elena come and bless her library. It turned out that since Juan's death Martha had not used the library much, not like this passionate intellectual once did. She told me, "I never thought I'd live to see the time that I could lose interest in general. Now specifically, I'll get a book and yeah ... read it immediately and all that but just an all encompassing passion ... I mean I have lost that passion." "And you had it before

he passed?" I asked. "Yeah. I just lost interest ... I guess ... it's like losing interest in eating and starving." I had shared the loss of Milagro with Martha soon after it happened one day on the phone when she called. She was incredibly compassionate and I remember her telling me, "Don't worry, you'll have your baby." I recall feeling somewhat embarrassed complaining about our loss to a mother who had lost a grown son to murder. That day in Martha's living room she displayed the same compassion. This is the conversation we had after she told me she had lost her spirit.

BS: I know that after losing the baby, I did too. I did this session with Doña Enriqueta ...

MC: Yeah, I did one with María Elena and with Doña Enriqueta

BS: Oh you did one with Doña too?

MC: Did it help you?

BS: It did. I tried a lot of things but Doña helped me in a way no one else really did. But it was very different from your experience.

MC: No, a life is a life ... you were able to [heal/move on]?

BS: It's been two years and I finally feel like I am doing better ... it's a process

MC: (Nodding) It's horrible...

BS: There's something about the spirit being broken.

MC: Yeah, you have that body, spirit disconnect. It's *tremendous spiritual trauma, tremendous spiritual trauma*. I think a lot of connections ... just like a lot of cognitive connections are broken. I lost my hard disc, mentally, you know. It took me about two years to go back and develop the same memory I had before. I had photographic memory -- I could remember every phone number I came across, and none of that. Slowly removed my memory. But it takes a lot of discipline still. It's been since '97 [Juan's death] ... 12 or 13 years. I don't think it's ever going to come back. There are times where I am really happy, but that's really rare. Isn't that strange?

BS: No, I understand. I understand.

MC: You lose your appetite.

BS: I can't image ... much less ... having them for a lifetime.

MC: You really have that feeling of loss. Well yeah, it's your baby. Have they told you what the next step will be for you?

We talked a bit more and as we did I thought back to how I had lost my joy and how hard it was to regain. Then Martha said:

Even after they are born, you worry a lot ... There's other fears too, other concerns, now with this [Gulf oil] spill, I just feel like ... I'm not sure, politics being what they are and everything, I'm just not positive that we are going to make it and you just worry about having your family ... I'm just not sure we have the right people making decisions for the world and not only for the physical world, but for human beings as well ... sometimes it worries me.

I ask Martha what she does spirituality to reconnect, if she attends mass and if that gives her comfort. She says that Juan's no longer interested in going and that she has too much of a mixed background to "really feel entirely comfortable in either place ... [Protestantism or Catholicism] ... That's the bad thing about institutionalized religion -- each has its baggage. They each have their positives but then each has its negatives." She goes on to say that the Catholic Church's attitude towards women is the same as the government's attitude towards life, in terms of war and so many soldiers being sent off. She goes on to talk about local politics and other issues. I then ask Martha, within the context of national and local events, how she makes sense of everything going on in the world through a spiritual lens. I tell her I am writing about the Virgin as representative of women's social worlds, and that I believe the way women see her is how they want the world to be or to look like. "So what does she do for you? How does she affect you?" I ask.

You know, I have a very self-centered attitude about goddess worship and to me the *Virgen* represents the divine in women. And the *long* tradition of goddess

worship and her incorporation to me in religion -- the fact that she was a mother -- I don't have any problems with that ... her being cast in what other people might consider a supportive role, because I think it was the same way as ... the way the Spaniards incorporated the Virgin of Guadalupe in a supportive role and then she became the empress of the Americas -- she became the main force behind Christianity in Mexico and same thing with virgins in other places. You know the way I see it is the way I see Jesus Christ -- who again was the embodiment of the wisdom goddess, Sofia, and all these wonderful attributes were given to him, it's ok, I don't mind, I think it's good for men to have that role model. I think it's good to have a goddess as a role model. I incorporate goddess worship and the way I incorporate those values is by living, you know and not necessarily by worshipping in an institutionalized setting. It's by living day-to-day, minute-by-minute and by doing whatever I can do given my human resources and my human strength of *all kinds*. And to me *that's* always been the best form of worship, and the best form of living ... I think gender is immaterial. I happen to be a woman so I feel that is the best way I can rep a spiritual being. I think it's just *living*, living to the best of your abilities and doing the best that you can with your resources and sharing those as much as possible. Then that way if you have the opportunity to worship, fine if you don't then everyday is a day committed to that.

I tell Martha what she is describing sounds like spiritual activism. She responded, "Yeah, it's *doing* it ..." She then told me about an experience that happened to her the day before that spoke to this issue of living spirituality.

Martha goes on to tell me about seeing a man at the store who seemed ill. As she got in her car after a terribly long and tiring day to drive the five minutes home she would travel, she saw the sick and tired man crossing the street to get on a city bus. Martha ran over to him and offered him a ride. She then drove him 20 miles roundtrip to his home. Afterwards she said she had so much energy, felt wonderful and was no longer tired. She could not believe it:

But the *biggest miracle*, you are not going to believe this. It was 8:11 and I started at 8:06. I lost no time. I lost no time and regained all the energies I had at 8 am. That was *incredible, incredible*. ... That was a gift. That was a total gift. You know.... And to me...when I was coming back I felt just as good -- to answer your question -- as I would have felt if I spent two hours in church. My feeling has always been, you know, do the humane thing, do the right thing ... not that you don't need the spiritual uplift, but I *honest to goodness* I find that outlet,

uplift by being with my mom and being with old ladies, and older men there and having conversations with them and finding out how they are doing and helping out. That is time well spent.

When I ask if this is spiritual for Martha she responds, “Absolutely. Well, I don’t think about it. But once I’m there... and you know, and they just *laugh*. It’s like pure enjoyment, pure energy ...” She says she feels like if there is a choice in your lifetime to do so, that we should take the opportunity. Martha told me that at this point in her life, she sometimes feels like church is really good, but that it is more like social networking, a little self-serving. In regards to sharing your time and life and energies with someone else she says:

... you don’t realize it but you are also serving yourself, feeding your spirit and feeling good about your life. I feel good. And my mother just laughs because I tell her, “*God, mother* I’ve got to get a life. I can’t believe that I come over here to feel good, instead of going out to have beer on Congress or ... something” (laughs). *Me intienes?* But now I’m realizing that the reason I feel good is the same reason I felt so good afterwards, after I dropped this man off and headed home. It’s not that I felt good about *myself*, I felt *good*. Myself felt good, I felt energized, I felt strong, my legs weren’t hurting, I wasn’t hungry anymore, I wasn’t frustrated. I felt like I’d been on a long walk or a work out, I felt good.

I then ask, “Along those lines I have a related question: what does spirituality mean to you?” to which she responded:

Oh my God! Wow. (long pause). I don’t know, I think, I think it means finding that connection between your body and your intellect. When I was tiny -- 6, 7, 8 -- I always felt like spirituality was [my intellect] ... I was very smug about my intellect. I think that the trauma with Juan taught me that the intellect was secondary to other stronger feelings, emotions to connectedness to another human being. And that really surprised me and that’s why it turned me away in a way because all of a sudden my intellect wasn’t enough to save me from this terrible pain and loss. It had *always*, my intellect had always been there front and center for anything.

Here Martha is talking about how our spiritual lives and understandings are shaped by life circumstances. Life’s events force us to periodically reevaluate ourselves and our lives. In the

preceding quote Martha shares how she has come to view her intellect as secondary to a connectedness to others. It is this bridge between body and intellect -- spirituality -- that gives life meaning and it was with Juan's passing that she came into this realization. She goes on to say that in the past her intellect always helped her out of everything:

... I used it as my spiritual base and that's totally self-serving because your intellect is only counting on yourself. ... I think spirituality is this space between your physical body and emotions that are almost physical sometimes or are physical. This space between what is your body and what is your mind. Like I said I always depended on my mind for everything, for emotional support, for reliance, and awareness, and everything and when Juan died I realized it was not sufficient and I kind of turned from it ... I think the reason I turned -- and I think this has to do with my library -- was ... because *it wasn't* sufficient. It didn't do the job ... I could not explain it intellectually, I had no answers intellectually, how I could heal this horrible pain, I just had no answers you know and all of a sudden it kind of failed me. Whereas, spirituality is something that doesn't fail you. It *refurbishes you* if you can find the connections. It *refurbishes you* and it gives you emotional strength, it gives you physical strength even.

Martha uses the same word -- refurbish -- to describe what spirituality can do and to describe how she felt after helping the man with the ride and after visits to see her mother and her mother's friends at the nursing home. In all instances what Martha describes is a personal connection with others. It is the space between intellect and body. Martha continues on to talk about how she views spirituality today:

It also guides your intellectual actions ... *that* is where I need to find the connection. Intellectually you think, "yes I am going to do this." I always bypass this. The spiritual. I thought, "I'm smart, I can do that." Smart is not enough. You have to be spiritually strong as well as smart and thank God I feel that I probably had that strength all along, but I just felt that a little bit perhaps that one could use it like a crutch too much, depend on it a little too much and not use your intellect enough. And now I know you need that space in between ... where your intellect decides this is the action to take and this is the response to make but that it's not all intellect, that there is this *being*, this connection in you that is not just body, not just intellect.

We finish talking and Martha asks if I'd like to go upstairs to the library. She takes me up to the tan room with bright light shining in from the windows. It has wall-to-wall bookcases filled with books. In the middle couple of shelves of one of the bookcases is her altar. "This is where ... I need María Elena to come and help me but I ... I need for her to come and help make it a spiritual home for me again. To connect it back, because, well see I realized that it was just an intellectual ... it wasn't really spiritual and that is why I lost that connection. I'm trying to regain it, but it is hard to reconnect."

I asked Martha, "When did you put it [the altar] here?" "When he first died," she responded. "But then I abandoned the library. I mean ... I just ... lost interest." I asked when she started using it again and she said just a few months ago to prepare for a presentation and now again to prepare for my visit. She said she had to think about it when I was going to visit, "I was going to be very upfront with you and tell you that the day I put the altar here and brought my emotional and spiritual life into this, I abandoned it, because ... I didn't see how that connected, you know... and that might have to do with the fact that Protestantism is very often anti-intellectual in a way. You're all a victim of your upbringing ... But anyway, I am making my peace, slowly, I'm making my peace with it."

Martha shows me the photos and other items on the altar, "And the photos are little Juan and Brandon, the other boy. You know there were two boys.¹⁰⁹ Isn't that cute?" She smiles and points to a black and white photo of Juan and his sister María as children. "That's what a difference there was between them. He was like six and she was like eight years older. He just adored her ... and this of course is Sophie, we have her ashes -- Juan's doggie. This is from

¹⁰⁹ Brandon was the other boy killed along with Juan, who Martha considers a son as well.

María Elena ... a little bird dropped this in her backyard” (she points to feather). Martha tells me she finds photos of Juan around the house when he wants her to remember. “Mary Margaret did this one ...” She points to a decorative metal box decorated with photo of Juan and angels.



Illustration 4.
Martha Cotera pictured with her home altar in her library
Austin, Texas, June 2010

I think back to a talk we had a couple of years back about Guadalupe, with whom Martha came into a relationship with as an adult and with whom she had an “intellectual relationship.” Martha is astutely aware of the history of *la Virgen*, as shown in her book *Diosa y Hembra*, where Martha provides a thorough overview of Chicanas’ spiritual heritage from their indigenous roots to Catholicism. Martha identifies with Guadalupe as Guadalupe-Tonantzin and told me that she likes the various depictions of the *Virgen* that Latina and Chicana artist have

produced, including one of the *Virgen* with an angry and defiant look on her face looking up towards heaven. Martha had told me that when she lost her son she knew the portrayal of the *Virgen* by the Church was not accurate, that a mother who has lost her son would not be submissive. I remember thinking to myself, perhaps rather, the *Virgen* would have a defiant look on her face, turned to the sky, asking why.

I left Martha that day with new insight into how complex and difficult finding spiritual solace can be, especially in light of tragic losses, and how our spiritual practices reflect how we are dealing with these losses. Martha and I connected through experiences of loss and I learned from her that time heals, but that it is a process. I also learned that for her and other women such as myself, it is important “to have spiritual values in place,” as Martha told me a couple of years ago. But as she has shown me, those values and that strength are not constants. They, like she said about her intellectual gifts, are limited. Life is a constant struggle of trying to make sense of and find meaning in life’s events and I think Martha Cotera has done so -- she knows what spirituality is and how to live it, it’s just a matter of reconnecting to it. As Martha described, both intellect and agency have their limits, there is a point where interconnections with others are needed as a vital part of the healing process.

After a few minutes of talking about my finishing the dissertation and her upcoming trip she says, “You know, we really should get some women together, a group -- pláticas. We need to talk about these things, the world; you know ...” It occurs to me that what Martha is talking about is a gathering to connect with others -- a spiritual space for women to nurture that place between intellect and body in community with one another. Martha has shared such connections with others of the women in this study including María Elena and Rosie. There was a spirit of the

Chicano movement that they have described, of coming together for justice, for equality. It is possible that Martha seeks a similar connection to that which she once shared with some of *las mujeres* while working together on issues of social change in the past. Perhaps she seeks to reestablish this kind of union with other women -- the spirit of connection and working together on social causes. I contend that as women like Martha, María Elena, and even myself live our lives and construct spiritual paths that resonate with us, an important part of this process involves connecting with others. This connection was apparent in the miracle that Martha described, the bond she and I shared through our losses, and the women's gathering she suggested, all vital instances of interconnection that tap into that space that lies, as Martha suggests, in between intellect and body.

III. 4: Susana Almanza

Susana Almanza is co-director of the environmental, economic, and social justice grassroots organization PODER, People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources, which she co-founded in 1991. Susana was born on September 20, 1952 in Austin, Texas. She was raised in East Austin with her two sisters and seven brothers in a home not far from PODER's current office where she works with PODER staff and volunteers to address the environmental hazards and social and economic impacts of various industries on East Austin neighborhoods.

While her religious upbringings were Catholic, Susana left the Church as a teen and follows a spiritual path today that involves recuperating aspects of her indigenous Mexican heritage. In 2008 Susana wrote a poem, a self-reflection about making the sign of the cross in honor of her mother entitled, "Why do I make the Sign of the Cross?" So why *does* Susana, a woman who no longer practices organized Catholicism, make the sign of the cross? What might seem like a contradiction illuminates how women negotiate questions around their personal politics and their relationship to a Mexican Catholic religious heritage. Susana's story shows the processes by which formerly Catholic women have recuperated indigenous ways of living and practicing spirituality and how they incorporate the indigenous elements of Mexican Catholic religious practices in their spiritual lives. Susana's narrative demonstrates what inspired her to do so, and the ways her current path fulfills her. For Susana, living spirituality and enacting a spiritual activism is central to her spiritual *and* political development. The two are intertwined.

Susana's narrative also illustrates how Tejana spiritual practices can differ from yet in some ways remain similar to the religious and spiritual practices of their mothers.

I vividly recall the silver pendant Susana Almanza wore around her neck the day of our interview at her PODER office in March of 2008. It was a beautiful pendant with an image of the *Virgen* over a cross. I had not seen many silver pendants like that of the *Virgen* before, mostly smaller gold ones like my grandmother used to wear. I complimented Susana on it and asked if she would tell me about it. Touching it and smiling she said that her friend, PODER co-director Erika Gonzales, had given it to her, “ ... it's really unique because you always see the sign of the cross but you usually see Jesus. But on this cross you see the *Virgen*, who represents the mother, Mother Earth. So to me it was ... such a rare gift to get it ...” I ask Susana why it is so significant that the *Virgen* be there rather than Jesus. “ To me it's really *so* important because ... through my indigenous teachings ... the earth is the mother, she gives life; she's like more the female energy ... when I look at the earth mother it's a woman, so to have a woman that is looking at all the four directions, the four elements ... to me, is very significant ... and so here it is, a woman ... representing the four elements.”

By identifying with Our Lady of Guadalupe as an earth mother Susana is referencing Guadalupe's indigenous counterpart, the Nahua earth goddess, Tonantzin. Through viewing Guadalupe as Guadalupe-Tonantzin Susana can at once remain connected to both a Mexican and indigenous heritage and to her mother, also a Guadalupe devotee. Like María Elena, Susana draws upon something previous generations of Tejanas including their mothers, did not. Seeing Guadalupe as an earth mother, Tonantzin, is of great importance to Susana, as indicated when I

asked her if she identified with Tonantzin: “Definitely. To me Tonantzin and the *Virgen* are the same, going even back as Coatlicue¹¹⁰ ... So that’s what I see as the *Virgen*, she is that transformation from Tonantzin to Coatlicue and so she is the symbol, she is Mother Earth, the symbol of Mother Earth ...”

Like many of the women in this study Susana Almanza’s activism can be located in material circumstances of her early life history. She was raised born and raised in East Austin in what she describes as the Mexican area of the neighborhood that was next to the black area in the Guadalupe neighborhood, only a short few blocks from PODER’s office. Susana came to have both African American and Mexican American friends. She was brought up Catholic and attended Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. However, later in life she came to question the Church’s teachings and history: “I learned how the indigenous people had to transcend a lot of the Catholic symbols ... the prayers and that a lot of the sacred sites were sacred before even the Catholic Churches got there ... they [the indigenous groups] already had a spiritual connection.”

Susana was raised in a home where they valued the importance of the earth and, as she said, giving things to the earth. Her mother always had a garden and told her children, “you’ve got to massage Mother Earth because when you massage and work with her she’ll give you things; she’ll give you life ... she’ll give you this food, these vegetables ...” Susana says that in her own way her mother very much had a spiritual connection to Mother Earth.

¹¹⁰ Coatlicue is also a Mexica-Aztec deity whose name is Nahuatl for "the one with the skirt of serpents." She is known as the mother of the earth and of the Gods and for birthing the moon, stars and the god of war, Huitzilopochtli (Carrasco 1990).

Susana tells me that she does not really have a relationship with Christ, that today she lives a spirituality that is more connected to the creation of the earth and its elements; an earth-based spirituality. This spiritual path aligns with Susana's commitment to ending environmental racism and other injustices, which she carries out through her work at PODER. As Susana indicated, her spiritual path follows indigenous philosophies of a respect for the earth and her resources,¹¹¹ which she lives out in her daily life and work. She also lives her spiritual practice through her understating of and relationship to Our Lady of Guadalupe-Tonantzin.

Susana explained her mother's connection to the *Virgen* on a woman-to-woman level and in familiar and embodied terms. She stated that the *Virgen* knew how to heal her mother of physical and other pains in a way only a woman could. The comfort *la Virgen* brought to Susana's mother was felt by Susana and her siblings, so that is how they saw her as well: "She was a special woman who understood the pain and the sufferings of people that would somehow bring some kind of peace to us or make us feel good or help us in whatever things were going on in our lives ..." racial and class discrimination.

Attending Our Lady of Guadalupe Church further solidified the centrality of the *Virgen*, "And of course when we went to Church it was always about Jesus and God but since it was *Virgen de Guadalupe* Church, the *Virgen* was the main ... and I think that even confirmed to us ... this is the *church* of the *Virgen* so she must be all powerful if she had a church named after her. So I think that really reinforced that not only at home but at church the *Virgen* was the ...

center ...” This idea of *Virgen* the being at the center in ways unique to the position of Christ is prevalent throughout Mexican American of Mexican American religious experiences.¹¹²

I asked Susana how she thinks her relationship is similar or different from her mother’s and she responded:

I don’t know if my mother ever said that the *Virgen* was Mother Earth; that she symbolized Mother Earth. And I think that that might be the difference there ... that she’s more than the *Virgen*, that she’s ... the creator and so she’s the Mother Earth. She is that of giving life and life and death and rebirth and so I think that might be the difference ... yes, she is a woman but she is also the main creator, she symbolizes what the world is all about. It’s all about life and death and birth and death and rebirth and so she symbolizes those things to me. So I think that would be the only thing... my mother never put it in those terms. She put it in the terms of a woman.

Here again the difference between Susana and her mother’s relationships to Guadalupe is apparent -- for Susana she is the earth mother; for her mother she is a mother and woman, but not necessarily a symbol of Mother Earth. That both Susana and her mother -- one Catholic and the other no longer Catholic -- can both relate to the *Virgen* speaks to women’s shifting needs from one generation to the next and to the *Virgen’s* versatility; her ability to give each woman what she needs, whether it be a female figure who understands women’s needs or an earth goddess through whom women can remain simultaneously connected to their Tejana and Mexicana identities while recuperating aspects of their indigenous pasts, including an earth-based spiritual tradition and way of life.

¹¹² See Jeanette Rodriguez (1994;1996).



Illustration 5.
Susana Almanza, Austin, Texas, March 2010
Photo courtesy of Rene Renteria Photography

As suggested earlier, Susana's experience growing up as a Mexican American girl in East Austin was characterized by witnessing and questioning inequalities around her from a young age. She recalled an instance as a young girl, for example when she went into a movie with friends. Her African American friend was asked to sit in balcony while Susana was allowed to sit on the ground floor. This angered her and she knew it was not right. The same feeling emerged when she saw priests exhibit hypocritical behavior and constantly asked the poor of the parish for money. Susanna recalled injustices perpetrated against her and her family from a very young

age:

To me there was a lot of indignities ... as I was growing up I very much understood that because we spoke a different language that people were very disrespectful ... at the time I didn't realize that was racism. It wasn't until I grew up. I felt that like it was very disrespectful because my dad had always said always respect everyone no matter what they look like ... and yet there was disrespect towards us ... because we were poor. So very early on I realized that there were classes ... I didn't call it classism but I *very much* understood that if you didn't have money then people looked down on you. So *very early on* I got to see too... how they treated black people ... I learned that if you were black or brown and then if you were poor, and then if you looked a certain way or you spoke another language that people disrespected you.

Susana makes a direct connection between these early life experiences and her current path of social justice:

To me I always think about all of those life experiences [are] what helped ... to keep me, or put me ... to work on ... social justice issues, because ... I remember all those things ... growing up and some of them are very painful, there are things I haven't forgot, I put them in their place. But I do remember and I don't think any child or any person should have to go through all those indignities or humiliation, just because you are a different color or because you don't have money or ... you speak another language. All of those things I think helped form me and led me to this path [of] activism ... and [to] try to make change about things that are happening ... today... [they] continue to be same issues ... maybe coded in a different way but seems like the same issues.

Susana has dedicated her life to fighting such injustices. In many ways her work with PODER is an outward expression of her inner spirituality, informed by her experiences as a young Tejana growing up in East Austin. History is of great importance to Susana in her social justice work, as she believes that knowledge of history helps to shift who possesses power. History, as she and the staff at PODER have shown, demonstrates how one group has been allowed to dominate over another and for racial and class inequalities to be perpetuated. One example of this is the gentrification that is occurring in East Austin and other parts of the city,

which PODER is bringing attention to and fighting.¹¹³ Part of the education of PODER's Young Scholars for Justice Program (YSJ) includes teaching youth about the history of Austin, including how a city-enforced master plan of cultural segregation in the 1920s led to current economic disparities in Austin.



Illustration 6.
PODER's Cesar E. Chavez "Si Se Puede!" March and Rally, Austin, Texas, March 2010
Photo courtesy of Rene Renteria Photography

Susana's activism is inspired by the material conditions of growing up poor and also by her mother's teachings. Her mother's teachings possess the indigenous influence of many Tejano cultural traditions. I was interested in how Susana developed such a strong connection to her

¹¹³Among its many workshops and programs PODER has hosted public community forums on the gentrification that is occurring in East Austin, including a Property Tax Protest Community Workshop.

indigenous roots. I had learned that the close connection to the earth and some folk religious practices were taught to her by her mother, but wondered what role the Chicano movement played in this. How did the recognition of her indigenous ancestry evolve? I learned that Susana was involved in the Chicano movement prior to becoming involved in the environmental justice movement in 1990, about which she says, “ ... it was recognizing there was more than the Church and that there was no equality in what was happening to our people ... it was saying ... we have spirituality, that we had a history before this conquest.” Like several other women in this study Susana learned about her indigenous heritage through the movement, those things that as she and others have attested to, were not taught in the public schools and which today she and PODER staff assure are included in the YSJ curriculum. As Susana has found, this knowledge is critical for youth and their self-worth. It provided Susana with a recognition of her place in this world and of the importance of the elements and earth and as she said, to work for balance in the path to justice *and* spirituality. Learning of Chicano pre-conquest history and spirituality was very important to Susana as it enabled her to reconnect with “... the things that they didn’t want to teach you in school ... learning more about our indigenous connections and how they really worked in the world before all of this you know, came about.”

Susana was part of the *danza* group *Xinachtli* that was taught by *Maestro* Andres Segura, one of the early *danza capitáns*¹¹⁴ in the late 1960s and 70s who traveled from Mexico City, carrying the tradition to Austin and other areas of the U.S., teaching a group of *danzantes* about connecting to their indigenous and spiritual pasts. She joined him and others -- including fellow *danzante* Inés Ávila-Hernández who was also interviewed for this study -- in Mexico for periodic

¹¹⁴ Leader of a *danza* group.

trips and to participate in various indigenous ceremonies.¹¹⁵ Here Susana learned about looking at the four directions and the four major ceremonies in which they pay tribute to the elements, ceremonies for the water, the earth, and the sun and fire, which makes a whole lot more sense to me ...” Susana goes on to tell me about the connection she made to this way of perceiving the world:

... I know that without those elements I couldn't live so it was basically going back to those indigenous ways and that connection -- like going to Mexico City and taking part in those ceremonies that we had lost, and a lot of the culture shift and territorial shift and our ability to really have a lot of those indigenous spiritual needs that we had. And so in doing danza and *joining Xinachtli* I had the privilege of connecting back to something that *I knew* was always there and that I always knew was missing. When I started getting informed and taking place of all of this it felt like this is it! This is exactly what I've known or *felt* and now I'm taking a part of it ...

This is one of those moments that several of *las mujeres* recall -- that moment where years of searching finally results in coming into contact with a path or alternate way of knowing, as in seeing God as a woman or finding shamanism where one *knows*, feels is the right path for them.

In addition to learning how to care for the earth from her mother, Susana has also taken aspects of her mother's faith and incorporated them into her own spiritual practice, the melding of which she illustrates in her poem, “Why do I Make the Sign of the Cross?”:

“Why do I Make the Sign of the Cross?”

Why do I make the sign of the cross when I pass in front of the church?

My mother always made the sign of the cross when she passed and entered the church.

She gave thanks to God; she acknowledged the house of prayers and she gave thanks to life.

Why do I make the sign of the cross when I pass in front of the church?

Is that I acknowledge the candle, the eternal flame that burns inside the church; the prayers that connect with all the other prayers.

The energies that flow in the walls and go through the earth to Mother Earth and to the heavens.

Susana tells me how she interprets the cross as a symbol of the energies and the four directions:

... when you look at the cross what is the center point? It connects all of that and that's love. You know it's love that connects them and the middle and keeps them together ... it was about the directions and it was spirituality. Then you didn't have to be fighting with people about is this religion or that religion better... because it's just spiritually and ... anybody can be spiritual.

Susana reiterates that spirituality for her is about recognizing the sacredness of the elements that give us life -- we cannot live without them, about honoring our water or Mother Earth because “it's our spirit ... it's our spiritual connection” as she says. Susana differentiates this kind of spiritual connection from the Church stating: “[you] don't have to worry, is this person going to punish me for this ... in the Church it was always about punishing and the saving, punishing and the saving ... but in ... spirituality it's just about the recognition ... trying to make sure that you integrate yourself into these four elements so that you can sustain yourself. To me that's spiritually. To me it's about energies ... keeping a balance inside of you and then *outside* of you.” Here Susana is asking how to maintain this internal -- i.e. spiritual -- as well as external, i.e. material condition which she is adamant that every human has equal access to: “ ... we really needed to be sure those elements were protected for the betterment of all the people.” This philosophy aligns with Susana's contention that her social justice work is “absolutely”

intertwined with her spirituality. For Susana her current spiritual path allows her to maintain a connected to and to honor the earth, as her mother instilled in her early on, while allowing her to remain on a path of justice and to reconnect with an ancestral past that resonates with and gives meaning to her life in the present.

III. 5: Yolanda Chávez Leyva

Yolanda Chávez Leyva is a Chicana historian and writer. She is currently a history professor and chair of the History Department at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) where she specializes in Public History, Chicana/o History, and Border History. This native of El Paso, Texas has spent her life, as she says, “listening to and now documenting the lives of people who live on *la frontera*.” Yolanda’s spiritual path draws from the huehuetlahtolli, the ancestral teachings of ancient Mexico, from which she learns and applies to her life. Yolanda says that her life calling is that of *temachtiani*, the teacher.¹¹⁶

Yolanda’s life and work provide insight into the roles that history and historical production play in Tejana self-making. Her narrative illustrates the ways in which Tejanas, other Latinos and indigenous peoples have lost parts of their histories through what she calls linguistic terrorism. As Yolanda states, “to know your history is healing.” Knowing their history has been a driving force behind many of *las mujeres*’ creative acts of spiritual remaking as they reposition themselves, their communities, and their families within the larger context of Tejana and Tejano history, experiences, and social relations. Like Susana and other women’s stories indicate, an awareness of one’s history is key to increasing women’s self-worth and the self-worth and empowerment of their families and communities, as the next narrative indicates.

¹¹⁶ Source: Dr. Yolanda Chávez Leyva (www.academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=54919).

Following a delicious and nutritious lunch of *nopalitos*¹¹⁷ and bean *chalupas*, black beans, fruit and *aqua de Jamaica* following the annual *Festival de las Plantas* event hosted by PODER in East Austin in the fall of 2007, my *comadre* María and I made our way to the area where the *plática*¹¹⁸ would take place. Yolanda Leyva was introduced and began her lecture on history, healing, and the spiritual and medicinal uses of the *nopal*.

María and I sat and listened intently to Yolanda speak. A blanket was spread out in front of her with an array of brightly colored vegetables, lentils, squash, *cilantro*, basil, corn, and *nopales*. Yolanda spoke to the predominantly Latino audience about how as Mexicans; as indigenous peoples, our indigenous blood requires certain kinds of food. Our bodies are not made for cheese and processed foods and this leads to diabetes. She went on to say that history runs through our blood and we must feed our bodies accordingly, otherwise suffer from the consequences of health problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Several things struck me about Yolanda's talk that day at the *festival*, one of which was her statement, "History is healing. To *know* your history is healing." She talked about healing historical trauma from the conquest onward, and various acts of psychological, physical, and spiritual violence that characterize Tejano and Tejana social and religious history. Hearing Yolanda's talk at the *festival* inspired me to want to know more about her spiritual path. What I knew of her up until then made me suspect that she was a healer, for the work that she did as a historian, even there that day at the festival -- sharing the knowledge of our culture, our history

¹¹⁷ *Nopales* are cacti and *nopalito* is the term generally used for the cactus when referring to its use as food source. It is often chopped up and served as a side dish or with eggs.

¹¹⁸ A *plática* is a public presentation or lecture on a specific topic.

and how it can heal us, was the work of one who heals. ¹¹⁹ I would later come across a *testimonio*

Yolanda wrote where she says:

I had been imagining a healing history for several years, inspired in part by historian, poet, and activist Aurora Levins Morales's essay, "The Historian as Curandera." Her advice to "make absences visible," to "identify strategic pieces of misinformation and contradict them," and to "tell untold or undertold stories" spoke to my own sensibilities as a historian who consciously cultivated ties to my communities of origin (Leyva 2003).



Illustration 7. Yolanda Chavez Leyva, PODER's *Festival de las Plantas*,
Austin, Texas, 2007
Photo courtesy of PODER

¹¹⁹ I've seen the profound impact that this type of historical recovery can have as an educator. Numerous students have shared with me how empowering and life-altering learning one's history can be. A young Chicana approached me following the first day of the Gender Ethnicity: La Chicana course with tears in her eyes to tell me how much it meant to her to know that Mexican-origin women had such a long history of activism. Over the years several of my students told me about the very limited information they were taught about their Tejano history in their elementary and secondary educational experiences, an experience I shared in the Texas public school system 20 years earlier.

What does it mean to facilitate bringing histories that heal from out of the shadows, and how is this related to issues of self-making? I understand historical recuperation and recovery, as does Yolanda, as a form of spiritual healing -- healing erasures, histories, lives. I came to learn more about the role of history as a means of healing and self-making in the early summer of 2009 in El Paso, Texas.

Yolanda arrived to the coffee shop where we agreed to meet in a bright pink Mexican dress. Her long salt and pepper hair was pulled back in two long *trensas*,¹²⁰ and she wore long seed bead earrings. She greeted me, we hugged, and sat down. She asked if it would be alright if her *compadre* Antonio joined us so he could say hello. "Of course!" I tell her. Antonio Lopez is a dear friend of Yolanda's of many years. They are both from El Paso. I initially met Antonio that first time I went to Alma de Mujer, where he was working at the time. He had been kind enough to share his knowledge about Alma and his experiences there with me for my background on this project. Our talk turned to the topic of spiritual healing after the loss of loved ones and I shared our story with him. He was incredibly compassionate at a very critical time for me. It is the kind of compassion one never forgets.

Both Antonio and Yolanda have histories at Alma de Mujer, like so many of the women in this study. Also from El Paso, Antonio went to UT in the late 1970s and has identified with his Mexican indigenous ancestry for years. The two friends share practicing indigenous teachings, principals, and ways of life, particularly those of the southern *tradicón*.¹²¹ Yolanda identifies as

¹²⁰ Braids.

¹²¹ The "Southern" tradition refers to Nahuatl-inspired life ways which *danza mexicana* and *danza azteca* and traditions associated with these dance forms to which practitioners adhere. Many Chicanas/os who practice this way

Mexican, American, and Indian. Her father was part Tarahumara -- an Indigenous group of Northern Mexico -- and her mother Caucasian.

While she grew up Catholic and her family attended church, Yolanda's parents did not do all their sacraments but made her do them, "like many Catholics," she said. Yolanda described her spiritual path to me as a "pan-Mexican indigenous path-Mexicayotl," about which she says, "It's the first time I feel at home spirituality." She says perhaps it is because her grandmothers and grandfathers are from this continent. Again there is this intuitive feeling that Yolanda describes that other of *las mujeres* have also told me they got when the right spiritual path came into their lives. They just *knew* it was the right path for them. Like many women Yolanda's search took her on many different paths. For her these included Catholicism, interdenominational practices, Charismatic (mostly Protestant), and Santeria.

In addition to working full time as a history professor at UTEP and taking part in community activism Yolanda is also helping to raise her three grandchildren. Yolanda currently lives in her parents' house, the house in which she grew up. Her grandchildren are the 4th generation in that house, going back 100 years. She writes about her 2001 return to her childhood home:

Returning to the place where I could say, in the most profound way, "I am who I am because I have been there," meant that I would be confronting an often painful history -- my own and, in a myriad of ways, that of my people -- on a daily basis. It meant that, for my own survival, I had to continue my efforts to make sense of the painful stories and to find ways to create a healing history (Leyva 2003).

of life identify with their Mexican indigenous ancestry by practicing Mexicayotl, as does Yolanda. *Danza* and the use of the *temascal* or sweat bath is a southern tradition practice whereas the sweat lodge is of the northern tradition. "Northern tradition" refers to practices of Northern Native American Indian groups.

I see this creation of a “healing history” at work as Yolanda tells me that she is teaching her five year-old granddaughter the *tradición*. Yolanda asked permission of her granddaughter’s father and mother first and they agreed. When I asked Yolanda if she raised her son in any particular spiritual tradition, she tells me he’s as confused as she was. She tried various practices and was practicing Santeria at the time he was growing up and he grew up thinking all the saints were Orishas.¹²²

Yolanda’s decision to leave Catholicism was less about its treatment of women and more about its historical treatment of indigenous peoples, a theme that runs through many of the narratives of *las mujeres*. She told me that she recalled images of the Virgin and indigenous peoples depicted around her church. At that time she attended Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic; these were depictions of the spiritual conquest of the indigenous by the Franciscans. She stated, “there were depictions of Our Lady of Guadalupe hovering over, almost conquering Coatlicue in a sense.” So for Yolanda, what emerged in her narrative is not an account of how the Catholic Church or patriarchy hurt her personally, but that the indigenous peoples were so negatively impacted. It angered her deeply. In her 40s Yolanda stopped attending Catholic Church and rejected Catholicism because of its treatment of indigenous peoples. She recalled the decision and how she told herself, “I’m never going to set foot in the Catholic Church again!”

However, like many non-Catholic activists, when she started doing community work, in particular in her work with Segundo Barrio,¹²³ it involved working with local priests to bring

¹²² Orisha refers to a spirit in the Yorùbá spiritual tradition that originates in Africa.

¹²³ Segundo Barrio is an area in El Paso, Texas located between central downtown and the border that is currently being threatened by gentrification. El Paso’s City Council has been negotiating a plan with developers to destroy the area to make way for “downtown redevelopment.” Yolanda has been fighting this plan for years, along with

awareness to the gentrification of the area where the average household income is \$10,000. Working with the priests has opened her mind, she said. Her ability to go back to Catholic Church and be involved with the Church for purposes of her activist work mirrors other activists' experiences, such as María Jimenez, long time social justice advocate and atheist who has also worked with Catholic priests on issues of social justice. In these instances women are able to put aside their personal experiences in order to work on social causes. The reality is that the Church and priests are often involved in movements for social justice so women like María and Yolanda must decide if and how they are going to negotiate their personal beliefs on religion and put them aside in order to engage in social justice work. It is in moments such as these that for purposes of such work, the indigenous and Catholic intersect.



Illustration: 8. Yolanda Chávez Leyva, El Paso, Texas, 2009

numerous concerned community groups and individuals who hope to save the historic area and its community from displacement.

I asked Yolanda if she is a healer and she said she felt uncomfortable calling herself one. But Antonio said that she has lots of *hierbas*¹²⁴ in her cabinets and he knows because he organized them for her. Yolanda is also part of a *kapulli*. The women in it often call upon her to help with things in their lives like healings or to consult on certain life issues. She has done *limpias* for colleagues at UTEP who have requested them. Yolanda likes UTEP for that and for the fact that her dean and the school support her taking students to Mexico and taking part in *ceremonia*. Yolanda used to have a hard time negotiating the spiritual and the academic but says she is better able to do so now.

Yolanda pointed out something about memory that several other women reference when she stated, “I believe we have ancestral memories in our bodies.” This is something that Doña Enriqueta also talks about. Yolanda said “There was something there that makes sense to me in a way that other paths do not. It does not all resonate, but some of it does and that which does feels right, true.” She says this in regards to doing *temascal*, for instance. In *temascal* she had the feeling that she had been there before. But it was not until her 40s that Yolanda started embracing what she calls “her energies” because prior to that she was scared to do so. Today she studies with an herbalist and iridologist. Drawing on traditional medicine and ancient healing practices such as using *temascal* and *hierbas* is very much connected to her idea of reconstructing and reclaiming history. For Yolanda, history, memory, and healing are interconnected.

Yolanda engages in a spiritual activism that takes several forms, including raising her

¹²⁴ The Spanish word for herbs. It is generally used referred to medicinal herbs but can refer to herbs used for cooking.

grandchildren in the *tradicción* and acting as a healer of community, historical, and spiritual traumas. Once again knowledge has positioned a Tejana where she can work to help reconstruct her history and that of her community and family, facilitating healing for both. Yolanda's current spiritual path is an anchor that helps her to accomplish this in her life and work while allowing her to remain connected to her ancestral heritage, to "feel at home spiritually."

III. 6: Carmen Lomas Garza

Two threads in particular link the narratives of Yolanda and Susana with that of Chicana artist Carmen Lomas Garza. These include the practice of the Mexica *tradición* and the importance of the women's history and their cultural and spiritual ancestry in their lives. They also share a belief that an awareness of these things has the power to help heal past wounds of erasure and oppression, which is reflected in the work that they do.

I came to know Carmen within the context of my job as an exhibit researcher/coordinator for a children's exhibit I was developing that was inspired by and incorporated images from Carmen's artwork. Through my research I had come to learn a good deal about her South Texas cultural traditions that she depicted in her paintings, in the form of "*monitos*" or little figures that she uses. Carmen decided to dedicate her life to producing artwork as a tool for healing the wounds inflicted by the kinds of alienation and racism that she experienced growing up in Kingsville, Texas, about which she said, "... I think the paintings have served a tremendous function of doing the healing ... not just for me but for whoever sees the work." I view Carmen's transition away from Catholicism to Mexica spiritual traditions and living an environmentally conscious life style are acts of self-making. Her narrative that follows explores how this self-making is informed by her knowledge of her South Texas heritage and history, her upbringing in the geographic terrain and social climate of South Texas, and the Chicano movement.

Carmen Lomas Garza was born in Kingsville, Texas in 1948, one of five children in the Garza household. Carmen's father's family moved to Texas as a result of the Mexican Revolution. Her mother's family included *vacqueros*,¹²⁵ railroad workers, and a chuck wagon cook (Lomas Garza 1991). Carmen earned two art education degrees in Texas, and a studio art degree in California and came to be a renowned artist, published author of children's books, and illustrator. Through her work and her family stories she has chronicled the stories of Texas Mexicans and their history and cultural traditions.

Carmen was raised in the Catholic faith, taking part in religious sacraments and Catholic holidays like Easter and Christmas as well as popular religious practices such as the Day of the Dead. Day of the Dead is a popular religious holiday with Mexican indigenous influences.¹²⁶ For Carmen's family it was a family affair, The entire family went to the cemetery to honor their deceased loved ones on that day, November 2nd, with crepe paper flowers dipped in wax and wreaths they had made. They would go to work at the cemetery to clean up the graves and decorate the tomb stones with flowers and as they did her parents and grandparents would tell the children stories about the graves of persons they were decorating, "[about] relatives, ancestors, sometimes stories were sad, funny, or scandalous ... it was a way of learning family history. ... then we would sit down and eat our ... picnic lunch and ... it was an all day affair." The family also made regular visits to local *curandero* Don Pedrito Jaramillo's shrine, and Carmen's mother

¹²⁵ Mexican-American cowboys.

¹²⁶ Day of the Dead or *Día de los Muertos* originated in Mexico, where it is a widespread practice. It is celebrated in various parts of Latin America and the United States. It takes place on November 2. People erect altars in honor of loved ones who have passed. It is typically celebrated in private but public events, such as street parades, also take places in places such as Austin, Texas and Los Angeles and San Francisco, California. Altars range from small altars to elaborate large altars. *Ofrendas* or offerings are placed on the altars in honor of those who have passed. They generally include food, flowers, and favorite items and photos of the departed. It is believed souls who have passed come back on the evening of November 2 to visit (Lomas Garza 1991; Brandes 2006).

and grandmother were deeply devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe who donned both Carmen's mother and grandmother's home altars.

Carmen states that church was her first museum, that she was intrigued by its aesthetics -- from reproductions of biblical scenes to artistic renditions of various saints and Jesus. But in her teens Carmen began questioning the Church, including challenging her parents' rule that she and her sisters had to wear veils to church once the Pope relaxed rules about them during the onset of Vatican II:

Vatican II changed some of the rules -- [they were] relaxed -- mass in Spanish, women didn't have to wear veils anymore ... I read it in the Sunday paper when it came out about veils so I showed my parents the article and they still insisted I wear my veil, and I said I wasn't going to wear it. So as a protest and I didn't wear it and I was the only girl in the church who didn't wear a veil and of course I got a lot of stares but hey... the Pope says I don't have to wear it, I don't have to wear it! (laughs).

Carmen describes herself as a very dutiful daughter who respected her parents. However, she would continue to question the Church:

I was the oldest daughter and so was very dutiful. But I *just* wasn't happy with the Catholic Church ... I remember my father complaining about the Church constantly asking for money, 10% ... he would grumble about it on and on ... and so I just didn't like ... I loved the imagery, I loved the visual and ... it was ... the first museum I ever saw... the paintings, the reproductions, of course the flowers ... but It just didn't feel comfortable ...

BS: Was there anything else that didn't sit right with you?

Well there are some other things ... that I just felt like I didn't feel like I needed to have ... [to] be part of the whole ritual of the Catholic Church. And so when I was 18 years of age I told my father and mother that I was not going to go to church anymore, because by the time you are 18 you can make your own decisions and of course we had a big disagreement about it, but I persisted... and so ... I really have not been an active Catholic ... I had been Catholic and now instead for the past 14 years I've been doing *danza mexicana*.



Illustration 9. Carmen Lomas Garza, Carmen Lomas Garza Exhibit Opening,
Benson Latin American Collection, UT Austin, April 2009¹²⁷

Carmen credits the Chicano movement in large part for giving her the voice to speak out and act against injustices. It was through the movement, her university classes, and her participation in the Chicano cultural arts movement that she also learned about her history, the same history Susana says had been denied her growing up, the history of an indigenous and spiritual past and

¹²⁷ Carmen and her mother's differing spiritual beliefs became apparent to be at the Benson art opening with the juxtaposition of Carmen's mother's Catholic beliefs along side Carmen's indigenous spiritual practice. In this photo Carmen wears a pendant with a Nahuatl symbol symbolizing the four directions (of which Susana referenced in her narrative about resignifying the meaning of the cross to represent the four directions). Just a few feet over Carmen's mother sits in a chair with her walker in front of her. Hanging from the right side of the walker is a Catholic rosary.

about the conquest of the indigenous peoples and ways of life that also in a sense allowed Carmen and Susana to heal the wounds of feeling less than for being Mexican and gain a sense of pride and belonging that the movement instilled in so many. This pride translates to healing for many who see Carmen's works, her brightly colored depictions narrate scenes of family barbeques and birthday parties with *piñatas*, scenes of *conjunto* dancing, a *limpia* being performed by a *curandera*, *tamaladas* and *quinceañeras*. Themes in Carmen's work reflect her personal experiences but address universal commonalities such as family, community, faith, and belonging.

On more than one occasion I have seen hundreds of people lined up to have Carmen sign her books and posters of her artwork, and the often-overwhelming response of some Mexican Americans and Latinos to seeing her work -- and themselves represented -- in museums and galleries for the first time. I have witnessed this myself at the opening of the exhibit I helped develop, a testament to the fact that as Carmen says, her art heals wounds, " ... like the *sávil*a plant¹²⁸ heals burns and scrapes when applied by a loving parent or grandparent" (Lomas Garza 1994:X) For Carmen it was reestablishing a sense of belonging that in many cases was denied them growing up in the harsh racial climate of Kingsville:

... I think that Chicano movement had a lot to do with ... it gave me not only the voice to express myself about my childhood, my life, my community, and it also pointed out a lot of the injustices of the colonialism ... of the oppression and the genocide of the indigenous, all of that history that was not taught to us was suppressed by the Catholic Church and the government of Mexico and South America *and* the United States ... so the Chicano movement helped to ... point out a lot of that. And so ... that was the beginning of my final decision to just leave the Catholic Church eventually... it just happened that way ...

¹²⁸ Aloe vera.

Carmen goes into detail about her personal healing through learning about her own ancestors:

The healing has been happening with the paintings for all of us but I think the more personal appreciation of my ancestors, not just the Garzas who are basically Spanish lineage going back to 1570 ... with Alonzo de la Garza Falcon coming to Mexico City and traveling up to the Monterrey area and helping establish Monterrey and going north to south Texas to the ranchos near Corpus Christi, so there is a long history of Garzas so on my mother's side ... well all my mother's side it's all predominantly *indios* either from Mexico or Texas ...

When I asked Carmen when she remembers first coming into an awareness of her indigenous heritage she tells me that it was in college upon her uncle doing a family tree and beginning to ask questions of Carmen's mother and grandmother, about which she says, "that's when I started hearing the stories ... [to] pay attention, actually, to the stories about the ancestors on my mother's side." She learned that her maternal grandfather came from New Mexico and stories of how some of her ancestors like Francisco Orta, were Native Americans who worked as *vaqueros*, cowboys at the King Ranch. Carmen's great grand parents worked the King Ranch. Carmen makes a direct connection between her current *danza* participation and this South Texas indigenous heritage:

... *danza, danza mexicana, danza azteca*, gives me the opportunity to give thanks to the spirits of ... all my ancestors for the sacrifices that they made to give us life, to give us energy, to give us ways of living to give us the nourishment. One of things I like to do ... when I talk about my artwork ... like for example, *nopalitos*,¹²⁹ is to point out that this was a tradition that has been given to us by our Indian ancestors, and the tamales ... those are kinds of traditions that have been passed down through the generations by our Indian ancestors, and that we should be grateful for that. We aren't taught that in public school, we aren't taught that in our general education about Mexico and the Southwest, it's all about the pilgrims and so I take that opportunity when I am showing my artwork to talk

¹²⁹ Here Carmen references the cactus or *nopal* that is often represented in her artwork as a symbol of South Texas, as in *Nopalitos* (1995) and other works.

about those things.

Once again the function, use of history in the remaking of Carmen's understanding of her social world emerges, as does how she uses the history she has gained through her family, education, and involvement in the movement -- to empower and to heal others. She goes on:

... part of that healing of not just our contemporary lives but also our history. Who are we? Where have we come from? ... to me that was the beginning of my healing ... going on with *danza* has given me another opportunity, another, different way of doing more self healing and centering, centering myself and balancing myself."

I propose that in addition to *danza* the art Carmen produces is a kind of spiritual healing for those who view it, in particular for those who can relate to and find pride in its messages -- a form of the healing power of history of which Yolanda spoke. *Danza* is Carmen's "self-healing" and as other women have articulated a way that gives her balance to do her work of healing history for others.

Like many other women in this study, Carmen is educated about the degradation of indigenous peoples during the conquest of the Americas, which she learned in part through her involvement in the Chicano Movement. She is passionate about the violence that was perpetrated against indigenous peoples and about the role the Catholic Church played in it, which she describes below with regards to the use of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a tool of the colonizers:

... I think the painting that was done of her ... the whole story of how she appeared on the *tilma* ... I mean *please*, I'm an artist. I've seen the painting ... it was all a promotional, propaganda ploy ... the Catholic Church figured out and it worked! It definitely worked and it brought in a lot of ... a lot of *indígenas* who were devastated, they were devastated, physically and emotionally and spirituality devastated when nine people out of ten - when *nine indígenas* out of *ten* died as a result of the diseases and violence ... you can imagine those three people are devastated. It's a loss of their family, their children, their parents, their siblings, their cousins, their friends, of course they are going to be devastated, they are

defeated. And so this image of the Virgin of Guadalupe worked. But at what cost? Look at the tremendous cost ... it cost us dearly ... there's an anger there ... I feel an anger there that I just cannot forget from ... [what] that the Spaniards did, that the Catholic Church did to the indigenous people, to my ancestors, to the other half of my family.

This knowledge of colonialism influences Carmen's spirituality and shapes her spiritual path today, which is rooted in a Mexica tradition. The name of Carmen's group is *Danza Azteca Xitlalli* and she has been with the group for 14 years. In terms of what needs being part of the group fulfills, Carmen says:

... it's mostly to honor our ancestors ... it fits so well with my belief in remembering and appreciating all that our Indian ancestors gave to us ... this is an extension of that ... it structures it in a way that I had not been able to do with my artwork. So the structuring, by participating with a group, it's a physical activity, it's a spiritual activity, a communal activity, it's familial -- the whole family is involved ... teens, babies parents ... are involved ...



Illustration 10. Carmen Lomas Garza, Primavera Spring Ceremony, San Francisco, California, March 2010
Photo by Jerry Carpenter, courtesy of Carmen Lomas Garza

I've often heard people who follow Mexica traditions and participate in *danza* describe it as “a way of life.” Carmen’s description of how she lives in accordance with *danza* and the Mexica traditions definitely resonates with this.

Día de los Muertos in the Mission

When Carmen told me about the Day of the Dead celebration she takes part in each year with her *danza* group, I was intrigued, as it is one of my favorite holidays. Upon telling Carmen this she told responded, “Oh really? You are invited, it’s public.” I decided to take her up on her offer and see how the cultural production of Tejana spirituality plays out in California. How, if at all, was a distinct *Tejanidad* represented thousands of miles from Texas?

It was a cold and rainy night and cars flooded the Mission District on one of its most celebrated nights, November 2nd, Day of the Dead/*Día de los Muertos*. We passed numerous galleries and shops. *Papel picado*,¹³⁰ a large *altar*, and *calaveras*¹³¹ hung in the window of a small gallery on one corner, which appeared to be having a Day of the Dead celebration. My friend María, who I was staying with, had graciously agreed to drop me off, declining to attend this particular year. A practicing *danzante* herself, María been to this same event in years past, telling me something I would soon come to learn all too well that night: that it is quite a commitment, this all night ceremony.

We locate Alabama Street and locate St. Peter’s Catholic Church where the event is to take place. We pull up to the Church and I reflect on the irony of holding a Mexica ceremonial

¹³⁰ Decorative tissue paper cut-outs.

¹³¹ *Calavera* is the Spanish work for skull. Here I refer to paper- papier-mâché skulls that are used to decorate houses and altars during Day of the Dead.

event at a Catholic Church. Nearby a group of young people was getting out of a van with blankets and bags. I grabbed my own duffle bag with a pillow and the non-disposable eating utensils, plate, and cup that all attendees were asked to bring in order to minimize waste, and a brown paper bag with items I had brought for the *altar*, including some copal María had generously given me to present to the group as an offering.

I located the entrance to the church hall and climbed up the two flights of stairs, stopping at the first one to read the large butcher paper sign on the wall with a list of things for the community members who were coming to keep in mind over the course of the evening, such as using your own utensils and plates, that the doors would be locked after dinner; to use the recycle and compost bins provided, and that no one would be allowed to leave after dinner. I continued up the next flight of stairs and approached the doors to the multi-purpose room, which served as a basketball court, a theatre, and a general-purpose community center. Rows of metal folding chairs were lined up in two sections with an aisle down the middle that led to the enormous altar that stretched the length of the stage, about 30 feet or so.

Hundreds of marigolds (the traditional flower of Day of the Dead) arranged in vases, photos, personal objects, and candles lined the altar. Prior to the ceremony beginning dozens of candles would be placed in front of the altar and lit. I approached one of the women sitting on the floor making paper flowers and asked for Carmen. She directed me to the church's kitchen. I immediately recognized Carmen; her hair that had grown longer and become more salt and pepper in the years since I'd seen her last. I tapped her on the shoulder and she turned, "Oh Brenda, you made it!" It was really nice to see her again. At that moment she was attending to one of her jobs for the evening -- helping with the cooking. A frenzy of people were crammed

into the small kitchen amidst wonderful scents of herbs and spices including hot chocolate and *caldo*¹³² steaming in huge metal pots.

Carmen took me back into the main room and graciously introduced me around, telling people that I'd come all the way from Texas to be there. I met the women who were making the flowers and some of the elders as well as the person who was tending to the *altar*, to whom I gave my copal, candle, and the personal objects I had brought to place on the altar as Carmen had requested. They included the photos of loved ones, my grandmother's rosary, and a letter to Milagro.



Illustration 11. *Día de los Muertos* Altar,
Mission District, San Francisco, California, November 2009

¹³² A clear soup generally made with chicken or beef and vegetables. It can also be made vegetarian, as it was at this event.

The following is my recollection of the evening's events to follow, in a style that felt fitting for the way I recall the experience:

Sitting with the women on the hard church floor amidst strands of various colors of crepe paper, wooden dowels and tape. Cold, stale, yet warm and inviting space. Old. Catholic. Indigenous. Chipping paint on some of the windowsills, cold drafts coming through the doors to the outside. I help make the streamers to hang, sitting in front of the long altar and amidst hundreds of orange and yellow marigolds. Ceremony begins, we all take our seats. Drum beats, song, children playing, sitting with their parents, the Dora and Spiderman sleeping bags ... *ometeo* ... men and women wearing *huipiles*, women with *rebosas*.¹³³ Carmen tells me to fold my colorful *reboza* and place it on the chair in front of me. Women wear long braids, all wear the required skirts of various colors. I sit alone among the others, watching. Carmen approaches, asks me if I have a good singing voice, I shy away, thank her, but decline, nervous to be front and center singing. Soon I hear a little girl singing at the top of her lungs every word to a song that I soon realize is in *Nahuatl*. She knows it by heart, more than just the words to a song, she knows the way, *la tradición*, I think to myself. Thick copal in the air, I am fatigued, children start to lay down, one by one, in their sleeping bags. Rattles, mandolin, thick energies, heightened drumming, smoke. Communal sharing of food, giving thanks, take only what you can eat. Reuse all plates and cups. Carmen approaches the altar. It is her responsibility to blow the ceremonial horn, *Atecocolitzin*. She takes it seriously, does it at all of the appropriate times during the ceremony. Protocol is very important. She helps keep everyone in line who approaches the altar for a blessing, helping us all to follow form. Hours and hours pass. More song. More prayer. Sit, rest. Hot chocolate and *pan dulce* break. Give in to the fatigue, take Carmen's advice and go to the back of the hall near a dark staircase and sleep ... 20 minutes of wonderful sleep. Finally the morning beckons. I look out the window to the mission in the early hours of the new day, touch the window, so cold as the sun's rays begin to slowly peak through the clouds. I hear scuffling, the *danzantes* are preparing for the *danza*. *Trajes*, people changing all around me, feathered head dresses, ankle dressings. Carmen brings out her *traje* and then changes into it. Handmade, intricate. She shows me the two feathers on the back of her crown. One from Brownsville, one from the ocean near San Francisco, feathers representing her dual and overlapping identities: her *Tejanidad* and her life in California. Over one hundred *danzantes*, feathers, *trajes* of all colors, copal scents, drum beats. I feel the drum beat in my skin, in my heart, in my soul. Through the chipped windowsills I see the sun rising slowly to the east. Bright hues of orange, red, yellow and clouds of white and grey. Dancing ends. The dancers from all over California and beyond take hands, pray and give thanks for a beautiful celebration. Afterwards we are each handed a small token of the event -- a butterfly with a *calavera* (skull) on a pin with the hosting group's name on it. I retrieve my items and letter from

¹³³ A cotton, woven shawl.

the altar. I help clean up then help Carmen gather her things. We say our goodbyes and I thank her for having me, for letting me share in her *ceremonia*, which was important for me on many levels. We descend the old staircase and pass people I met that night, exchanging goodbyes and thank yous. Carmen gets into her station wagon, I await María, and think of all that has happened.

That experience with Carmen in the Mission helped me to understand why *danza* is so important for her, how it is a physical manifestation of her spiritual and political beliefs, and as a way of acknowledging and working to heal the wounds of violence perpetuated against the indigenous ancestors of the *danzantes* as well as indigenous people all over the Americas, a form of violence that was the result of the colonization that the Catholic Church symbolizes for Carmen. It is an acknowledgement of a history and an honoring of ancestors, the recuperation of indigenous principals and as such, an act of self-making. In experiencing the community she has surrounded herself with and become a part of, in the conscientiousness of how food and the earth are treated, with respect and honor, it became clear how important Carmen's current spiritual path is to her. Her sense of her *Tejanidad* is present in her current spiritual path that honors her ancestors, whether she is in Texas or California. It is her truth and way of seeing the world and herself that extends into her daily life and transcends geographical boundaries. Carmen tells me:

I don't think I'm ever going to go back [to Catholicism], I just don't, not after having done *danza* and seeing how much spiritually enlightening that is and how ... grateful we are to our ancestors, to the creator, and to mother nature and to all of the elements of nature ... we appreciate and respect nature. We definitely have to respect each other. We finish dancing and after each practice, after each practice, after each ceremony when we are still in the circle we are given the opportunity for *palabra*, the opportunity to speak to give thanks to appreciation ... to express our appreciation ... and always respect our elders and the children that are there ...

III. 7: Norma Elia Cantú

English professor and folklorist Norma Elia Cantú shares some common experiences with other self-identified feminist Catholics, including Martha Cotera and Rosie Castro. Norma has also been faced with having to reconcile her feminist sensibilities with her Catholic faith and aspects of institutional Catholicism with which she disagrees. Key to this negotiation is Norma's ability to craft and live an "alternative Catholicism" which is heavily reliant upon her attraction to the rituals and traditions of her upbringing and her ancestors, such as a devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe-Tonantzin, who has been a constant throughout her life. Norma picks and chooses the aspects of the Catholic religion and folk traditions that serve her, demonstrating how Tejana spiritual agency functions and that spiritual practices are fluid and changing, within and outside of the religious realm. This is illustrated through Norma's close relationship and deep devotion to *la Virgen*, who she has interpreted as a feminist symbol of liberation, strength, and empowerment. Norma's narrative challenges static notions of Catholicism and provides insight into factors that influence the making of hybrid spiritual practices and hence, spiritual identities of Tejanas in the borderlands.

I drove the short distance from Austin to San Antonio that spring day to interview folklorist and educator-scholar Norma Cantú at her office on the University of Texas at San Antonio campus. I made my way to her office and she invited me in. As I sat with Norma, I glanced around at the many pieces of Chicana art that covered her walls, which included different depictions of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Santa Teresa de

Avila, a collage piece featuring 1930s labor organizer Emma Tenayuca,¹³⁴ and a painting of Norma done by Santa Barraza for Norma's *cincuentañera*.¹³⁵ Referencing the representations of Our Lady of Guadalupe that adorned Norma's office walls, bookshelves and window sill, I asked if Guadalupe held a special place in her life, to which she responded without hesitation, "Absolutely, yes," then turned and motioned towards the various images of her that ranged from traditional religious iconography to Chicana feminist portrayals. Norma smiled and said, with a hint of double meaning, "she's everywhere."

Norma began telling me of her early life experiences growing up in Laredo, which included coming from a working class upbringing. Norma was born in Nuevo Laredo and at a few months old moved with her family to Laredo. Her mother was born in Corpus Christi and her father in Ayende Coahila, Mexico. Norma's mother still lives in the house on San Carlos Street where Norma was raised from the age of five. In reference to her childhood she tells me, "... the religious part of that ... is really enmeshed in everything ... growing up on San Carlos Street ... was about going to San Luis Rey Church." Her family celebrated the "typical 1950s and 1960s celebrations" such as *misa del gallo*¹³⁶ in the Catholic Church six blocks from her home. Today Norma continues to identify as Catholic but also follows Buddhist teachings and meditates regularly. Folk Catholicism is particularly significant to her, as her story will illustrate.

Her religious background, according to Norma, led her to her current research on non-

¹³⁴ Emma Tenayuca was a leader in the San Antonio Pecan Sheller strike who was chastised by the Catholic Church for being a communist.

¹³⁵ Inspired by the *quinceañera*, a 15 year old girls' coming out celebration, the *cincuentañera* is a 50 year party that women have begun having, often times with many of the same traditions involved in the *quinceañera*, such as *madrinas* (female adult sponsors), a dance, and an elaborate cake. See Cantú (2002) for a discussion by Cantú of her *cincuentañera*.

¹³⁶ Midnight mass.

traditional, folk Catholicism like the *matachines*¹³⁷ and the *quinceañera*. She also studies how traditions such as *misa del gallo* have changed over time. While she is an English professor, the aspect of her work that involves studying folklore is very important to Norma. She tries to combine the two as much as possible.

I had recalled Norma thanking the creator in the introduction to her book *Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood En La Frontera* (1997) and then again publicly when she accepted the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies Scholar Award in 2008 in Austin, Texas. So one of my first questions to her that day was, “Who is the creator to you?” “That’s a really good question,” she said. “I think I am part of it. My higher self is involved in the creation process along with everybody else in my life, past and future. I’ve come to a very different way of looking at God and the world, it’s not Catholic at all, well maybe it is in its essence but it’s not the official Catholic line.” Norma relayed to me the following experience in her college years, referencing priests she came to know while away at college in Nebraska who contributed to her transition to “a very different way of looking at God and the world”:

... those priests were important in my life, not necessarily because of the religious ... part, but because of the intellectual stimulation, I guess you could say. There was no one else I could talk to about some of these things ... and if I started to try and talk about these things at home father would always go back to “*pues asi es*,” you don’t question it, you just accepted.

Norma said that she believed she came into a different way of knowing Guadalupe in graduate school, at a time when she was doing a lot of meditation: “I think when I was doing meditation

¹³⁷ *Matachines* are groups of religious folk dancers of the Mexico and the Greater Mexico regions (Cantu 2009:97). See Cantú’s chapter on the *matachines* in Laredo, Texas in *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos* (2009).

and some of the work, it changed from my young Catholic upbringing and I started seeing her [Guadalupe] as an energy and a force, not just as an image or just the mother or something to pray to, I think there was a change at that point, it was like a paradigm shift.”

This paradigm shift is something of significance for Norma and for many of *las mujeres* in this study. It signals a shift in the way they relate to Guadalupe, a shift from viewing her as they did as young girls to new ways of seeing her and I argue, themselves. Norma goes on to describe going to Alma de Mujer in the 1980s and an experience of feeling the presence of Tonantzin during a *temascal*: “I used to go to Alma de Mujer when the Indigenous Women’s Network used to meet there. [I had] an awakening, if you will, during a *temascal* and I sensed her, I sensed Guadalupe-Tonantzin. It was very special and I’ve had different occurrences [since].” Norma described numerous other instances of feeling Guadalupe’s presence, including smelling roses where none existed, and in knowing in her gut that a certain journal would accept her publication. There are feelings she gets that she connects to the *Virgen*, feelings that illustrate how the ways that Tejanas invoke Guadalupe have changed over the generations. She evolves *with* them and reflects their changing worlds.

Once again the questioning of Catholicism -- the trying to make sense of it -- emerges as it does in the narratives of other women in this study. I went on to ask Norma what kinds of things she questioned during that period of transition, to which she responded:

... women, the role of women ... having to go confession before communion, stuff that did not make sense ... that kind of illogic ... the illogical structures that were there for me. And when I came back in 80’s they were still there but I was more aware of them and I could take or leave [them], so I took what I could and left the rest. I started going to *matachine* dance and doing research, collected lots of data for all these years, never thinking I would write book about it -- I was just going because it’s the Holy Cross, it’s indigenous in many ways. It has a lot of

European stuff but also is very indigenous. It just became part of an alternative Catholicism that I really appreciated.

This statement explains Norma's own spiritual beliefs and practices, which exist at the intersection of her feminist and religious beliefs, apparent in her melding of Catholicism with the indigenous, which is most apparent in her relationship to and understanding of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for whom she possesses a deep and profound devotion. She practices a form of "alternative Catholicism" which gives her the flexibility to, as she says, take what is useful to her and leave the rest. Norma's ability to pick and chose what is useful to her in Catholicism enables her to maintain a Catholic identity and her ties to the Catholic Church. For Catholics like Norma and other women in this dissertation, "alternative Catholicism" is about their ability to creatively select and craft a Catholicism that meets both their spiritual needs and aligns with their feminist sensibilities and views on social justice.

Norma described periods of questioning Catholicism and at times refraining from mass and sacraments during certain periods throughout her spiritual development. But when I asked her what Guadalupe has meant to her, she tells me that today she is "*indígena*, mas que nada," indigenous, more than anything. Norma understands Guadalupe most centrally as *la Virgen's* pre-conquest indigenous manifestation, the Mexica-Aztec earth deity, Tonantzin.

Norma tells me that her mother and grandmothers were Guadalupe devotees. Her mother was a *Guadalupana* and had images of the *Virgen* on her altar at home when Norma was growing up. When I asked Norma if she thinks the ways that women in her family have prayed to Guadalupe over the generations have changed -- as in from her grandmother and mother's generation to her own, she tells me: "Definitely it's changed. One of the ways I think is even the

images I have of Guadalupe by Chicana artists -- it's a very different concept of that energy and going back to Tonantzin. I don't think my mother had that awareness, that it was indigenous; it wasn't a conscious awareness." Here Norma references something that Susana also pointed to -- that their mothers were incredibly devoted to Guadalupe but that they, like many Tejanas of their generation and before them, did not have an awareness of Tonantzin.



Illustration 12.
Norma Elia Cantú. San Antonio, Texas, August 2010
Photo courtesy of Norma Cantu¹³⁸

I go on to ask Norma what she thinks were some things she prayed to Guadalupe for that her mother did not, to which she responded, "I don't think my mother prayed for publications

¹³⁸ The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Norma's altar belonged to her grandmother, Celia Becerra Ramón.

(with a smile). And I don't have any children so I don't pray to protect my children, but I do pray to protect my nephews and nieces, so its kind of like a transference, I guess. Anytime I send a manuscript off I tell the *Virgen* to take care of it and sometimes she tells me it's not going to be published and I know it." Norma tells me that this feeling is not an intuition but rather a *facultad*, as Gloria Anzaldúa would call it, " ... an aspect of knowing, a way of knowing, that perhaps we have not acknowledged yet. We call it intuition but it's really something else, beyond intuition."

Norma goes on to say that Guadalupe has always been a part of her life, stating, "She's always been there ... a constant." She goes on:

[she is] the affirmation of that power of the earth ... as *la tierra madre* ... it's a female energy, definitely. She's always been there ... it's a constant. And part of it, I think has to do with my feminist awareness. I think she was very instrumental in my coming to that consciousness ... By having power, by being a very powerful female. It's almost like ... a role model that's there ... a companion.

In terms of how her feminism informs her spirituality, Norma tells me:

I think it goes hand in hand because it's that respect for your spirit, for being who you are ... and that trust in the universe ... I think in some cases the religion can be a contradiction. I often hear people say, how can you be Catholic and be a feminist? And it's true because it is contradictory. But like I told you earlier, I think I've chosen the parts that I want to work with and there are some very strong feminist Catholics -- I mean, Sor Juana, Teresa de Avila, you know all these precursors and even now... Yolanda [Tarango] all these women that are still doing it ... Sister María Elena Gonzalzes with (the) MACC¹³⁹ ... strong, very efficient, able, and spiritual.

¹³⁹ The Mexican American Cultural Center is a national Catholic institute for multicultural pastoral training and language studies for Hispanic ministry, particularly ministry to Mexican Americans. It is located on the campus of Assumption Seminary on the northwest side of San Antonio. The center prepares pastoral leaders in the United States and Latin America and responds to the religious and social needs of Latino populations by way of the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Native San Antonioan Father Virgilio Elizondo is said to have envisioned the MACC along with a group of priests from the PADRES organization and Catholic sisters from the religious women's organization, Las Hermanas in 1971 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The group agreed upon a format for the MACC that would "prepare priests, sisters, laymen, and laywomen to minister to Hispanics." The MACC opened in 1972 and is in operation today (Ruiz, "*The Mexican American Cultural Center*").

In an interview for her documentary film “The Road to Guadalupe”¹⁴⁰ Ashley Pinedo interviews Norma about her belief in Guadalupe. In it Norma describes the portrayal of Guadalupe that she says the Catholic Church has constructed and propagated, illustrating how this portrayal comes into conflict with Norma’s feminist politics. “She [Guadalupe] represents an aspect of Catholicism that is sometimes very oppressive to women. She is usually looking down, she has her hands folded. She is not an agent ... just passively there. Because she represents a higher being, *she* can get away with it. But a brown woman can’t. If you are submissive, downcast ... *that’s* how people are going to treat you and that’s what you become.” Here Norma draws a distinct connection between Guadalupe’s submissive image and the lived consequences that enacting such submissiveness can have on the “brown woman.”

Norma goes on to say, “She’s indigenous but ... she’s European so she embodies that, but at the same time she represents them, she’s brown like we are. There is ... an identification with her image that transcends the division of the colonizers and the colonized ... She made roses come out of nowhere so she would get what she wanted. The ways she is portrayed around the Church have to do with women ... not being very loud and forceful and not taking agency. But the way the Church looks at it -- I would not want to do that.” Norma makes a conscious choice to invoke Guadalupe on her own terms, which for her are contrary to the meanings the Catholic Church produced and circulates. That Norma chooses to remain a practicing Catholic speaks, once again, to Guadalupe’s immense versatility in Tejana lives and her central role in

¹⁴⁰ “The Road to Guadalupe,” <http://www.roadtoguadalupe.com/2008/04/episode-6-norma-elia-cant-in-san.html>. Accessed May 22, 2009.

their self-making.

Guadalupe devotion is one way Catholics like Norma reconcile with the aspects of Catholicism with which they disagree or chose not to adhere to. She tells me that reconciling is always hard, “With the pro-life movement, with the Pope’s total disregard for women’s communities ... The women in the convents, the nuns that I have known in the past are always at odds with what Rome is dictating, so yeah, that’s a constant. But I don’t think it is new. I think it does date back to the twelfth century when there were women’s groups who were not in favor or did not have the favor of Rome. It’s a *manmade* institution and I specify *manmade* with all its flaws and everything. It is what it is.” Norma goes on to draw a comparison between the Catholic Church and *academia*, stating that both involve women having to endure such contradictions: “You know, it’s the same struggle.”

I ask Norma what then, keeps her remaining Catholic, to which she responds, “Well, I don’t know that I’m a practicing Catholic the way my mother would want me to be (she laughs), but I think it’s what I know -- the rituals and the prayers and the ... it’s more of a folk Catholicism, like I discussed with the *matachines* and the rituals that I practice.” Norma says her Catholic heritage dates back as far as she’s traced her family and that what she is drawn to is more of an “inherited ... folk cultural Catholicism.”

Norma makes an important observation, that such practices of religious transformation among Catholics is not new, “It’s what happens with the Church ... [its] ongoing.” Indeed, the Church has had to adapt to changing demographics of its practitioners and political and social climates. We are at a historical juncture where the questioning of the Catholic Church and its practices and faults are front and center. How will the Church adapt? Will it? This remains to be

seen. In the meantime, while some people choose to make a complete break from the Church, others such as Norma are responding by crafting, as Tejanas and Tejanos have done for generations, a religiosity of their making and in the process shifting the functions and meanings of Catholic religion and the face of God in the borderlands.

III. 8: Rosie Castro

Like Norma Cantú, Rosie Castro identifies as Catholic and possesses a feminist awareness and devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Rosie's narrative explains another means by which Tejanas engage with Guadalupe, in some ways similar to other feminist Catholics represented here, and in other ways different. What is different is that she also employs other mechanisms to reconcile her feminist and political consciousness with the Catholic Church, inspired by a questioning of strict gender roles within the church and those imposed upon her by her family. She engages in spiritual community with women and practices *mujerista* theology. This form of theology allows women to see the "feminine face of God" and to engage in religious scripture and community outside of the context of institutional Catholicism. This space provides Rosie an avenue for practicing her faith in a way that feels comfortable for her while providing her the vital connection of spiritual community.

Rosie Castro greeted me warmly when I arrived at the Memorial Public Library on San Antonio's Westside that July afternoon in 2008. The San Antonio native and former chair of the Bexar County Raza Unida Party and active participant in the Texas Chicano movement was gracious, humble, and unassuming. Today Rosie continues her commitment to social justice and education through community service in her hometown of San Antonio. Rosie has worked tirelessly on numerous issues over the years, including her twin sons' political campaigns. Julián Castro is San Antonio's mayor and Rosie's other son, Joaquín Castro, is a state representative in

the Texas Legislature. Rosie is also an active member of the Amigos de Memorial Library, the library board's advisory committee. Amigos encourages college attendance among community youth by helping students to obtain their GEDs and providing them with resources to help them get into Alamo colleges. Rosie thanked me as I handed her the University of Texas banner she had requested, pointing out the space she planned to have it hung among the other dozen or so banners from other universities that lined one of the library walls. The banners served as a visual reminder, she told me, to the young people in that community of what they could strive for and achieve.

We made our places at one of the library's program tables in the education room. Against a backdrop of student artwork Rosie began telling me of her early life growing up in San Antonio. She was born and raised in the Catholic faith and attended twelve years of Catholic school. Rosie's mother came from Mexico at a young age and raised Rosie "in a household of strong women." It was an intergenerational household as well; Rosie's early childhood memories include debates on current affairs at the dinner table with her mother and Rosie's guardian where Rosie recalls various points of views were expressed. She sees these experiences as pivotal moments in the development of her ideas on social justice and religion and suggests it informed her activism. "I think my ideas about social justice/electing people/religion all helped me later on to not be afraid to speak about different issues" she states.

I was interested in how Rosie enacts her Catholicism today. When I asked her to describe what being Catholic means to her, she told me, " ... it's very personal. It's not an open thing."

She went on to describe how upon walking into her home you'll see a Saint Anthony,¹⁴¹ San Antonio's patron saint. She has several statues of St. Jude, Mary and Elizabeth. Rosie tells me that this is what appeals to her, but that she does not talk about it in public. "[I] have been part of prayer groups with friends of mine who are nuns. Again – that is private. I don't go to church every week. But there are times when I can go and get a good sense of community and there are times when a priest gets up there and talks about abortion and it's a big turn off." Here Rosie reveals the importance of a personal relationship to God in her life, also indicating how being Catholic does not necessarily mean she abides by all of the doctrine, but that there are aspects of it that she does not necessarily agree with. This also provided insight into a question I had once I found out Rosie was a feminist. How, I wondered, does this staunch advocate for racial, gender, and class equality reconcile these beliefs with the patriarchy and subordinate roles of women in the church which other women's narratives and literature in Latina/Chicana feminism and theology has indicated characterizes the religious experiences of some Mexican-origin/Latina women?¹⁴² Does Rosie share such experiences and if so how does she reconcile this?

As the interview proceeded it became clear that Rosie indeed possesses strong feelings towards aspects of the church that she finds patriarchal and hierarchical. I believe the origins of such ideas can be located in Rosie's strong beliefs in women's rights and abilities. Rosie's current relationship to Catholicism is in large part a negotiation shaped by how her perspectives on gender equality conflict with what she sees as the church's negative attitudes towards women.

¹⁴¹ San Antonio de Padua is the saint after whom the Alamo, originally Mission San Antonio de Valero, was named.

¹⁴² The inferior treatment that several of the women in this study relayed to me within the context of their Catholic religious experiences are discussed in numerous accounts in the literature by Chicana/Latina scholars. See among others: Castillo (1997), Cisneros (1997), Isasi-Diaz and Tarango (2006), Medina (2005), and Rodriguez (1994).

It is important to note that this is by no means an easy negotiation, nor is it absolute, but rather one that involves reconciling with the negative aspects of the *institution* with which she disagrees, not with her faith.

Rosie describes her own understanding of women's roles, telling me: "I came from strong women and to see men think for some God given reason they were the head of everything didn't sit well." While Rosie attests to being influenced by the strong women in her family, she was still raised under certain prescribed gender roles, telling me that her mother never really did explain it to her, but that coming from Mexico there was a certain mentality about how women should act. This way of thinking contradicted with Rosie's. In regards to how she was perceived by her guardian for participating in politics she tells me:

... when I was active in politics my guardian said that was not what women did. You were supposed to be demure and do what you were told ... you weren't supposed to be out there knocking door-to-door or campaigning or forget it - run for office ... it's just not what a woman did. We probably had arguments about it. There was not a rational reason in my mind as to why that should be so.

Here Rosie mirrors a questioning of "traditional" women's roles and of religion in which so many of the other women in this study – whether Catholic-identifying or not – have engaged. It brings to mind my own experience of questioning certain tenants of Catholicism early on that just did not make sense, such as if we Catholics are right, then is everyone else wrong? Is everyone else going to hell? It is this kind of intuitive sense about right and wrong that I believe Rosie is describing and which transcends religious and political ideological boundaries. This will to question is present throughout the dissertation as a central theme in women's religious and spiritual, as well as activist development. In regards to the questioning of combating *all* inequality, Rosie states:

I probably didn't get real bad about it ... to where people said oh she's a feminist or hated men. I never hated men. I have two great ones I produced ... but I did hate the idea of inequality of a female just because you were a female just like I hated idea that you were less than because you were Chicano or Black, as apposed to white ... I got quoted in an article on women's changing views on religion ... in the 60s/70s and I said I couldn't put up with the hypocrisy. And again back to why I can't wear it on my sleeve: it's because I felt so much like people who did were often hypocritical – would do one thing like bless themselves but then not be fair to people or discriminated.

Rosie's participation in a community of likeminded Catholic women who engage in readings and discussions of *mujerista* theology, a theology that denounces patriarchy and sexism within the church and strives for a model of doing theology that is inspired by a philosophy of social justice that includes liberation from oppression for all, including women.¹⁴³ This has provided Rosie a mechanism for challenging Catholic hierarchy and patriarchy. She references the work of Sister Yolanda Tarango who co-authored *Hispanic Women Prophetic Voices*.¹⁴⁴ Rosie tells me how Sister Yolanda talks about the feminine face of God, which Rosie told me was eye opening for her in the ways it allowed her to transcend traditional religious teaching in some ways. "The ideas of forgiveness, of justice- [I] did not need to have that going to church ... I just didn't get that doing that any more. I had done that six days a week for twelve years ..."

This marked a pivotal point in Rosie's spiritual trajectory where she began rethinking the idea of "God." Such key transitional moments occur in other women's spiritual development as well, as I will elaborate on throughout the dissertation. Below Rosie describes this process,

¹⁴³ See the study by Mary Jo Neitz, *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment Within the Charismatic Renewal* (1987). Neitz explains that the Catholic Charismatic women in her study stated that "while the social norms of the movement were undeniably restrictive for women, the theology was liberating. There is a parallel here between these women and Catholic women who engage *mujerista* theology. Both are mechanisms women employ to participate in religion in ways that exist outside of the confines of patriarchal religion. Like the women in this study, those in Neitz's felt a sense of freedom from having that direction connection with God.

¹⁴⁴ Here Rosie references Sister Yolanda Tarango, who co-authored *Hispanic Women Prophetic Voices* (1988) with Ada María Isasi-Díaz. See also *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for a 21st Century* (Isasi-Díaz 1996).

reinscribing her understanding of God within the context of a self-awareness, as indicated in her discussion of how *mujerista* theology changed her perception of not only God, but of herself:

What *is* faith when you go through good things and bad things... faith is not just when things are great, there is God to give thanks. So I think much of my experience in the Chicano movement and just life experience made me think about what that faith was. But the changing face of God - or much of it as I grew up - was in seeing and understanding the role of women in the Catholic Church. The role, or how we were seen by the male hierarchy and the understanding that that obviously did not make sense. If we are all God's children then how is one aspect of God's children better than another part? I don't know if it was one thing but if there is something it was probably Yolanda. That had a big impact on me... I would say back in the 80s sometime ... early 80s ... and there was ... a time when a group of us, including María Antoinette¹⁴⁵ ... there were several of us who would get together at a visitation house and sometimes we'd pray and sometimes -- a lot of times -- we'd discuss.



Illustration 13.
Rosie Castro, San Antonio, Texas, April 2010
Photo courtesy of Palo Alto College, San Antonio, Texas

I was interested in how Rosie applied these ideas to her daily life and how they have impacted her. She told me that the idea of looking at God as a woman “ ... says to you that in life what you’ve been taught -- that you are lesser ... men are the powerful ones ... that’s not what God wanted. It was a question of was everything I taught basically a lie?” In answer to her own question she tells me no, she did not see these things as lies but rather a “... a broader view; an expansion of the child notions that you were taught, that it wasn’t a God that ... sin was going to kill you and be angry and take revenge, but the feminine character of a nurturing and loving and of a forgiving, not a warrior God.”

This statement makes sense within the context of Rosie’s quote that follows, where she describes her feelings towards women being taught to be subservient to men. It explains how a *mujerista* theology would be attractive to Rosie, a philosophy and a mechanism she employs for reconciling with church patriarchy:

... how we were taught that women were subservient to men ... that just did not sit well with me, and that never did. Even as I was young but especially as I got older. It just does not make sense that women should be subservient or not equal to men or could not do the same things. ... I think that there was this prescribed role and some of it was cultural and some of it was attributed to the teachings of the church – being demure, respectful but *overly* respectful where you had to bow to authority. I think the overly came directly out of the church. I was always rebelled against it. It is just inconceivable that one male one female, because of different body parts, that one is more able than the other. I really felt that the church, with so many of its prescriptions, made it difficult for women to really enjoy their humanity -- their full humanity. I don’t know why I felt that way but I felt that way from being very young. Maybe I was overly exposed -- I went to church six days a week. ... I’ve always felt that it did not make sense that a

woman would be less than a man. And to me it's a fundamental thing that was taught by the intuition of the Church.¹⁴⁶

For Rosie Castro reconciling with Catholic patriarchy comes through her ability to selectively engage aspects of Catholicism, which for her happens largely in “private”: participating in a progressive Catholic women’s community, through personal engagement with Catholic saints, in her daily prayers and with her home altar, the context within which she experiences an internal shift in her understanding of God, herself and a sense of equality which institutional Catholicism fails to fulfill. Rosie’s statement “The face of God changed” illustrates this reconciliation, central to which is seeing the feminine face of God, which she does in large part through her relationship to the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. Rosie discusses an ethnic identification she has with the virgin as a Latina and names the virgin as a central figure during the Chicano movement with “all of us who were involved with the movement.” Rosie tells me that she’s always worn the *Virgen* around her neck and that she is a prominent figure with whom Rosie has always had a relationship: “ ... I prayed to the *Virgen de Guadalupe* in terms of her being the mother figure; a very strong relationship. To this day I have a picture of the *Virgen* in my home. I have seen her as a dominant female figure.”

Beyond just helping Rosie to remain connected to Catholicism, I view the *Virgen* as serving another very distinct role. In a sense, she acts to offset some of the church patriarchy and inequality towards women and as such been central to Rosie’s remaining Catholic-identified:

¹⁴⁶ Here Rosie points to how gender hierarchies in the church are reproduced in society and in the home. This study supports this contention that this is the case in Mexican American culture, which is so deeply steeped in Catholicism.

Early on [in my childhood] males were the only ones that can be priests, have confessions, perform sacraments. Everything we learned in church has to do with males that communicated God's truth. The power therefore rests with males. Now fortunately with Catholic/Chicano/Latino upbringing there is a very prominent place with Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe ... and some of saints, but that does not totally balance the Catholic -- the Anglo Catholic liturgy -- and all of that that we were taught in school, does not totally balance our Latino-Catholic upbringing. Mary does not totally balance everything we learn in catholic school in terms of male patriarchy.

If not for the *Virgen* Rosie may not be able to overcome this imbalance. I asked Rosie if her understanding of Guadalupe has changed in any way over the course of her life and her answer reiterated the centrality and deep significance of the role of the Virgin in her reconciliation with Catholicism:

I think that it's changed somewhere. But mainly the idea of the protector, of someone who is particularly ... protective of and special to Chicanos, is kind of the way I've always seen her. And I think that that idea has grown over time for me ... in that ... in spite of all of the Anglo Catholic upbringing that I've had she is a figure that probably has done more to keep my faith in the Catholic church alive in that there is that potential of a female, if not a female god but a female role, close to a divine role that you don't see in the Anglo Catholic tradition. At least for me she has grown more as ... the ability to understand ... not just the mother of God but that the idea of God - a feminine God - and I think she portrays that as well.

I was interested in the specific ways in which the *Virgen* has helped Rosie to keep her faith alive. Rosie expanded upon that for me by telling me that it was not until she was older that she started to think about the rules and regulations, the actions of the Church. She sheds light on a particularly relevant topic for Catholics today, referencing the recent church scandals and her feelings toward the current state of the church, stating: "In the last several years the falling short of the clergy, for example, in things like the pedophilia, their inability to police themselves, to

deal with their own shortcomings in an open way, in a way that had any common sense at all to it.” For Rosie, it is also the contradiction that is also difficult to reconcile:

That juxtaposed with how especially the male clergy put so many restrictions on a woman’s body -- morals, you know what you were supposed to do, not do, what you can -- prescribing for women what they can or cannot do and failing in their own right to deal with what priests were doing ... to deal with things like battery by males with their wives ... all those kinds of things made it difficult at times ... to go into a church ... it left a lot in terms of trying to find community in a church in a formal catholic setting. There is a difficulty with reconciling the actions of the Church many times with what the teachings are supposed to be and what your understanding of Christ’s teachings were and looking at what the church fathers are doing ... that became more and more of a struggle. I think that being able to hold onto a strong female figure has been a good thing, had been kind of a salvation or glue that keeps you still attached to the fundamentals of the Catholic faith.

As suggested above, Rosie is very specific and unwavering on the issues that make it very hard for her to reconcile with the institution of the Church, issues that are social justice issues that the Church as an institution has, in her opinion failed to uphold, from the way she was taught to think about her own body to how the Church has become overtly right -- winged conservative; again on issues of women’s bodies such as reproductive rights. Rosie was very passionate in her words as she described the impact of the Church on her self-perception, something numerous Chicanas have relayed to me: “I think ... from early years the whole idea that was engrained with me was how sex was dirty how aspects of our bodies were dirty -- came from church.”

What is particularly alienating for Rosie is to find the Church being more “Republican leaning,” with some of its leadership aligning itself with the Republican Party. Rosie stated that for instance, “... issues of abortion being the litmus test for faith.” She was very disappointed to learn that Edward Kennedy was asked to abstain from taking communion:

... granted he's done a lot of shit that people had issues with -- but our faith taught us to seek forgiveness. Here's a guy who's fought for healthcare and rights of minorities and immigrants -- so many issues that I thought were Christ-like beliefs, this guy being asked not to come to communion? What kind of person ... thinks they have the right to judge based on some false idea of principle and this idea of the abortion issue? I am forever scared of the use of that kind of institutional thinking and not only with abortion issue sometime with other issues there is an attempt to silence anyone who does not toll the line and make that, those kind s of issues the test of whether you are a true Catholic or not I think when you do that you border on some kind of heresy. I really have problem with the Church doing that.

Rosie says that this kind of thing could even happen to her because of her own thinking and asks how far an institution will go before alienating a good number of its constituents, stating that it frightens her, leaving her to wonder how far an institution will go and what it will leave young believers:

How do you carry on or expand the faith by appealing to only part of the faithful and turn to a right wing group (or rather right wing segment of your congregation)? This incredible idea of abortion being murder and yet not the same push against the death penalty. That does not make sense. I think if you care about the Church and about your faith then you have to worry about the direction that the leadership takes.

Here Rosie illustrates how she sees the contradictions in the actions of the Church and she questions them. Rosie's frustration I believe comes from the fact that she was raised in a Catholic faith and attracted to it because of her belief in "Christ-like" values, from which she sees the Church deviating. I believe the frustration is in large part due to the fact that she, like other Catholics today, did nothing, but rather *the church* changed, and has become something she cannot, in many cases reconcile with, save through Guadalupe and Rosie's personal relationship to God. She carries out her own life in a "Christ-like" manner, through her actions to create opportunity and improve the lives of others:

I don't go as often to church ... I try to abide by what I have learned and what I believe it means to be a decent human being, to be Christ-like or to follow Christ's' teachings. In terms of formal church, I'm not a person who goes as often as maybe I should.

As adamant as Rosie is in her beliefs in the faults of the Church, this last statement is very telling in terms of how she views a good Catholic to act- to attend mass regularly. Through its actions the Church has taken away Rosie's ability to be this kind of Catholic; something that was done *to* her and other Catholics whose faith is being tested by the very entity to which they entrusted it. Regardless, women have found solace in other mechanisms by which they maintain their faith in God, as in Guadalupe, women's prayer groups, home altars, and prayer. Hence folk or popular religious practices become even more important for helping women maintain a connection to their spiritual practices and faith. It is in these spaces out side of institutional Catholicism where women's faith is strong, maintained, nurtured and flourishes, a result of another historical period where Tejanos were alienated from the Catholic Church -- the mid 1800s, out of which popular Catholicism was born and continues to flourish (Matovina 1994). In modern times, questioning of the church, women's reconciliation with it or lack there of, and the existence of these alternative spiritual spaces are a result of women's remaking of religion in response to social conditions that require it. The face of God exists in many forms and for many reasons outside of the institution of the Catholic Church.

The expansion of Rosie's childhood notions of Catholicism resonates with the ways in which the meaning of Guadalupe shifted for Norma from her childhood to her adult years. It also resulted in an expansion in my own understanding of processes of spiritual formation among women, women of color, and religious women. By way of Rosie's life story and spiritual

trajectory, I came into a different understanding of how Chicana Catholics and Chicana feminist Catholics reconcile the Catholicism within which they were raised with their spiritual needs and ethical beliefs in the present. This also raised important questions for me about why some non-Catholic Chicanas are *unable* to do so, choosing, instead to leave the church. By way of this insight, this long time civil rights and political activist, mother of twins and recent grandmother illuminated a critical component in the process by which the face of God has changed for her, which in turn led me to consider how this occurs in the lives of other women and under what conditions. What are the processes involved in Catholic Chicana feminists' negotiation of their politics with their religious beliefs? How do their racial, ethnic, and gendered positions and identities play into this? The remaking of religion that I investigate in this project -- involving as Norma Cantú said, an "alternative Catholicism" as well as remaking that occurs in non-institutional religious arenas -- involves a common strand, that of reconciliation.¹⁴⁷ As Rosie's and other women's narratives that follow suggest, remaking religion involves reconciling their religious pasts with their politics -- such as perspectives on gender, race, and class equality -- in the present. The shifting nature of Rosie's understanding of and interaction with "God" signals a form of engagement with Catholicism that is a continuation of a Tejana spiritual tradition, a continuation of a generations-long tradition of religious cultural production among Tejanas, which is multifaceted and socially and historically situated in the particularities of women's lives which are embedded in issues around gender and race that have characterized Tejana religious

experiences for generations.

III. 9: Santa Barraza

Visual artist Santa Barraza was born in Kingsville, Texas on April 7, 1951. She came to prominence as an artist with other Chicana and Chicano artists during the Chicano cultural arts movement that was part of the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The movement raised Santa's awareness of her cultural and ancestral heritage. Santa's life, similarly to that of Carmen and Yolanda, illustrates how attention to tradition and history can inform processes of Tejana self-making and spiritual and political development. This is reflected in Santa's artwork, where she explores what it is to be Chicana and Tejana in the United States. The construction of her indigenous, Chicana, Tejana, and Catholic identities are intertwined with an awareness and consciousness of her spiritual ancestry and cultural heritage. As María Herrera-Sobek writes about Santa in the introduction to *Santa Barraza: Artist of the Borderlands*, "Through pre-conquest symbols, personal memories and tradition, sacred art forms such as *retablos* and codices, she uses Mexican artistic traditions and their power to nurture and sustain cultural identity on this side of the border" (2007:x). Santa does so by claiming the cosmology of her indigenous ancestors while adding contemporary figures such as her mother, sister, and herself, as well as Tejana, Mexicana, and indigenous historical figures such as Emma Tenayuca, Frida Kahlo, and Rigoberta Menchu.

Santa is at once a devout Catholic and also identifies with and honors her indigenous roots. While Santa fully embraces her indigenous ancestry, as evidenced in her artwork, which portrays *Nahuatl* and Mayan codices, and is critical of the history of degradation of indigenous

peoples in the name of Catholicism, she is still deeply connected to her Catholic faith and practices. Unlike her friend and fellow Kingsville native, Carmen Lomas Garza, Santa is able to be both. Her ability to do so reflects the centrality of Catholic religious folk traditions and rituals in Santa's life, about which she told me, "There's something about the ritual." It *does something* for her and has a great deal to do with why she remains Catholic.

Santa's *indigenismo* and Catholicism are both vitally important parts of her life. In this way she exhibits her *mestiza* roots through her spiritual practice. Her two forms of spiritual practice are not syncretic, one is not privileged over the other, but rather they co-exist. They intersect in the ways that Santa makes sense of biblical histories from indigenous perspectives. Her indigenous ancestry and spirituality are connected in profound ways, as evidenced through Santa's art, where she articulates a connection to her pre-Columbian past, a past which informs her worldview as much as her Catholic religious beliefs do, in the present.

That Saturday morning I headed out on highway 665 from Corpus Christi south towards Kingsville. I don't get back to Corpus as often as I would like to, so I used this research trip as an opportunity to visit some of my family while I was in the area. Just a few short miles outside of the city limits I began to lose sight of the suburbs and came across that familiar landscape: the flat, dry land, the mesquite trees, *nopales*, the acres of hoed fields, and the occasional railroad track. As a teenager I gave none of it my precious time or attention. I dreamed of escaping what I thought then to be a treacherous, boring landscape where it was so hot in the summers the back of my legs got burned on the black vinyl of my dad's Chevy Chevette. I remembering thinking I would not give a second thought to trading in the scorching South Texas summers and the

murky, warm brown waters of the gulf for the blue of the Pacific Ocean and crisp 70 degree California weather I'd seen in the movies. Today those same cacti, mesquite, the flat, flat land and especially the gulf affect me in a very different and deeply profound way, in a way that no other landscape in the state, country, or world ever has or ever will; in a way that only someone with roots in South Texas, who has left for a long period of time then come back again, can appreciate. So I drive. Behind me, home, in front of me, my work. As I would come to learn that day, these two spheres are not so easily separated, in large part due to my cultural and collective memories that were activated in unexpected ways by the profound impact of *being* in South Texas; the profound impact of place.

I arrived at Texas A&M Kingsville for my 11:00 A.M. appointment with Santa. I was a bit early so I spent the few extra minutes assessing the palm tree lined main entrance to the campus, formerly Texas A&I, and a hotbed of political activity and an important site for the emergence of the Chicano cultural arts movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many prominent Chicana and Chicano artists including Carmen Lomas Garza, Cesar Martinez, José Rivera and the woman I was there to see that day, Santa Barraza, would come out of this institution. Santa would return decades later to teach in their art department.

Up until this time the closest I had traveled to my Corpus Christi home for research had been San Antonio. The majority of my fieldwork had taken place in Austin, my home of some 20 years. Negotiating my positionalities as researcher and member of the Austin community occurs on a weekly, sometimes daily basis as my work and my life inevitably converge in some (usually unexpected) way, whether it is at a university talk, cultural arts event, or at Alma de Mujer. It was not until I ventured out to conduct research in that South Texas landscape and amidst

popular Catholic traditions that I would experience the kind of knowing and the collapsing of the native-knower binary (Russel y Rodriguez 2001) that I did. I had not considered how my insider/outsider status would impact the research *there*. What I found is that ethnographic research and my various positionalities took on a very different currency in close proximity to my own mesquite tree and *nopal* -- sprinkled backyard. Being there afforded me a different lens through which to understand women's spiritual experiences. Being in the vicinity of my own home and familiar religious practices coupled with experiencing this within alongside Santa's similar experience illuminated how place and memory inform issues of belonging, community, and identity. This deepened my insight into the role of popular Catholic religious practices in Texas Mexican life, which are so significant to Tejana and Tejano self-making.

Santa and I were to have our interview following a presentation she and her students were giving on which she invited me to sit in. The presentation ended and I waited for Santa in the art studio, anticipating our interview. In an interesting turn of events, Santa, aware of my research interests, asked if I would be like to see Don Pedrito Jaramillo's shrine and the Healing Tree while I was in the area. "Or maybe you don't have time and would rather just do the interview," she said. I needed no time to think it over and said, "I would love to." "Great" she said, "let me get Darin (her colleague who would join us) and we'll get going."

So we take off in my car down the highway, Santa, Darin, and I. There are a few cars on the road but not many considering it was a beautiful, cool, Saturday afternoon. It had not rained since September, which was evident by the layer of dust on cars and grey, dry land. Between Darin and Santa they remembered how to get to the Healing Tree, about an hour away in Falfurrias. As we approached it Santa pointed out the new prison that had just been built across

the street, which was visible through high grasses. Ironic, I thought. We approached a small house surrounded by a chain link fence, passing the wooden sign with the words *arbor milagroso*¹⁴⁸ burned in it. Below it was a sign that read, “Open 9:00 - 5:30.” To the right of that was a light blue banner with the crucified Jesus in white flowing in the wind. Dozens of plastic, wooden and beaded rosaries of all colors and sizes lined the side of the metal fence that faced the road and the prison. Behind it stood a very tall Eucalyptus tree, the Healing Tree.



Illustration 14.
The Healing Tree, Falfurrias Texas, March 2008

¹⁴⁸ Miracle tree.

The *señora* who lived in the home and in whose yard the Healing Tree stood greeted Santa warmly, “*Que gusto de verte! Hace mucho tiempo que no te vemos.*”¹⁴⁹ She would later tell Santa that three days prior the woman had a vision that Santa would visit. “*Pasale, pasale ...*” she said, inviting us to enter. After Santa introduced us to the *señora*, I approached the tree. “Put your ear up to the trunk,” Santa told me. “Listen.” I did as she said and heard the sound of running water flowing through the 20-plus foot tree, which, much like the fence, was covered in rosaries. “They [the rosaries] used to be lower,” Santa said, “but the tree has grown.” After a couple of minutes I backed away from the tree, and as I did, Darin asked if I would like to hear his explanation for the running water. I responded with a smile and by shaking my head and he understood that none was needed. My reasons for being there -- as a Tejana anthropologist of religion learning about Tejana and Tejano spiritual traditions and their effects on Tejano communities -- meant that I required no explanation.¹⁵⁰

We toured the grounds, which included a small chapel that had been erected by “two men who were called by Jesus to build it” as the *señora* said. Inside, two walls were covered by hundreds of photos and letters of people in need of healing and whose lives the Healing Tree had touched. Another wall was lined with plastic and live floral arrangements, statues of the Virgins

¹⁴⁹ How wonderful to see you! We haven’t seen you in so long.

¹⁵⁰ Darin would later tell me that he believed the reason for the water flowing to be the wind flowing through the leaves of the tree. Because the Sycamore tree is hollow, it allows for the sound to cascade down the hollow trunk of the tree that sounds like running water. I draw on this narrative to explain two things about my approach to studying spirituality in the borderlands. The first involves the experience of listening to the sound of the water running down the tree and later seeing the dozens of photos and supplications on the walls in the Healing Tree’s small chapel. I have a deep interest in the *effects* of the Healing Tree and other such religious sites and rituals on people -- how such ritual enables them to make sense of the world around them and the communal, spiritual and emotional needs such rituals fulfill. Hence, there was no need to hear Darin’s explanation for the sound of the running water. It is the effects of religious and spiritual practices on practioners that I am concerned with, not issues of “validity.” This approach is central to my methodology.

of Guadalupe and San Juan, Christ, and crucifixes, all donations from visitors. The daughter of the *señora* showed us newspaper clippings about the tree and a black binder full of testimonies by people who had been healed by the tree, Santa's sister among them. The testimonies spoke of Jesus Christ answering their prayers. They included stories by women who had been told they were infertile and bore children after visiting the tree and people claiming to be cured from cancer and other illnesses. In popular religious fashion, Christ and Catholicism were featured in this folk narrative, from the picture of Christ on the flag at the entrance to the presence of the saints and Christ in the chapel, and most noticeably, in the photo of a priest blessing the Healing Tree. While I stayed inside the chapel looking at photos and reading testimonies, Santa sat outside *platicando*¹⁵¹ with the *señora*. I approached them and saw that the woman was selling bottles of oil with leaves from the tree in it. Small bottles were \$5 and large were \$10. I bought a bottle for my Uncle Richard who was battling diabetes. Something in me knew that he would appreciate it and use it. As we prepared to leave, Santa asked me, "Did you say a prayer at the tree?" "Yes, I did" I responded. We thanked the *señora* and got back into the car headed for our next stop.

Santa believes in the Healing Tree. Her sister is one of the people whose *testimonios* is kept in the black binder. *Being* there, situated in South Texas at this shrine, is important for Santa. It holds meaning and does something for her. As she would later say, the ritual is important for her. Being in South Texas and at the Healing Tree provoked feelings in me. I felt very Tejana in that moment. Through some kind of cultural memory rather than experiential memory, I felt a connection to these kinds of rituals. They are part of my ethnic heritage, but I

¹⁵¹ Talking.

had been severed from them in many ways. I came to understand how important place is and why. Drawing on Richard Flores's use of memory-place (2002), I believe that for both Santa and I, being amongst our Catholic heritage, popular folkways, in a landscape thick with cultural memory provoked feelings that were familiar but which were also recuperations in some senses. For me, this reversed a sense of alienation I felt having left Catholicism. There at the Healing Tree and later when we ventured to Don Pedrito Jaramillo's shrine down the road, I felt a sense of belonging. With that came a certain license, the expectation by Santa, for example, that I could and would engage with the Healing Tree and in the practices of the faithful. My Catholic group membership -- whether or not I still practiced intuitional Catholicism -- seemed to provide me a particular cultural currency or spiritual cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; Verter 2003). My Catholic and Tejana -- specifically South Texas identities -- afforded me a sense of belonging and entrance into Santa's world. There were also certain moments of connection with the South Texas land and landscape that to this day I feel connect us in a palpable way. For Santa, being in South Texas again, after years of being away, is also a return. And in many ways, a return to a sense of belonging that only *being* in a place can provide. For her friend and Kingsville native, Carmen who now lives in San Francisco, being Tejana is enacted in other ways, such as through her paintings of her South Texas cultural traditions and wearing a *traje* with feathers from Texas -- in these ways she makes her *Tejanidad*.

That I allowed myself to pray at the Healing Tree gave me a particular kind of insight into why people go to popular religious sites. That I did not hesitate to pray says something significant about the difference between organized and popular religion. I could engage with the Healing Tree and connect with Santa over this Tejana cultural and spiritual experience in a way I

likely could not have done in a Catholic Church. Something else occurred to me, almost 18 months after the experience at the Healing Tree. Another factor influenced why I decided to pray there and importantly, *then*: at six weeks pregnant I had something very important to pray for.

This experience came to inform the questions I asked Santa and other women about their own experiences with popular religion. It informed how I think about the role of popular religion in solidifying ethnic Mexican and Tejana/o identity and a sense of belonging in a way that institutionalized Catholicism may not allow. I came to more fully understand how my engagement with the Healing Tree and my positionalities and familiarity with South Texas and Mexican Catholicism are lenses, spiritual epistemologies and methodologies through which I can more deeply understand how women navigate spiritual and political borderlands.



Illustration 15.
Santa Barraza, Kingsville Texas, 2010
Photo by Juan Lopez Johnston, courtesy of Santa Barraza¹⁵²

“I’m drawn to the ritual”

We leave the Healing Tree and drive to the shrine of popular South Texas folk healer, Don Pedrito Jaramillo. Following a short stint at the shrine we head back towards Kingsville. As I drive Santa and I talk and I ask her about her faith, about being a Catholic. She told me in

¹⁵² In this photo Santa Barraza is working on the commission mural honoring Madre Julia Navarette, who is being canonized as a saint. The mural is one of the exterior walls of her chapel dedicated to the Divine Mercy located on 408 East Richard Street here in Kingsville, Texas. Madre Julia Navarette was the founder of the order of the Missionary Sisters of the Most Pure Virgin Mary. Madre Julia was born in Oaxaca, Mexico and went to Kingsville to establish her order and begin a Catholic school of education. Her recent miracles deal with children (S. Barraza, pers. comm.).

regards to the Catholic Church: “While it has its problems -- homophobia, classism, racism, etc., I’m drawn to the ritual. I just can’t let go of it. It does something for me.” As I came to know more about Santa’s religious beliefs and how while she embraces various forms of indigenous spiritualities from a feminist perspective, as evidenced in her artwork, I learned more about the ways in which she selectively practices Catholicism while maintaining an indigenous identity that is of great importance to her.

Santa Identifies as a “*mestiza*, a Chicana and a *mexica*-Tejana ... of a much disputed area of South Texas” (Barraza 2001). This identity carries through in her work. Shifra M. Goldman writes the following about Santa in the introduction to *Santa Barraza: Artist of the Borderlands*, “... her depictions of the historical, emotional and spiritual land between Mexico and Texas, the pre-conquest symbols, personal memories and sacred art forms have the power to nurture and sustain cultural identity on this side of the border” (x).

In her book Santa says that like *la malinche*, the colonial and indigenous women of the borderlands struggled with two, and later three oppression cultures, confronting sexual and racial oppression and exploitation, leading them to function in *nepantla*, the land in between. It is from this point in history that Santa, as a *mestiza* and a visual artist, “analyzes, evaluates and expresses herself, calling up the *recuerdos* (memories) and *cuentos* (stories), the legends, and the folklore of her *antepadres* and *antemadres*” (x). Within *nepantla* Santa has said that she reclaims her own identity -- in a place where she goes through an altered state of consciousness, where, as she says, she reclaims and constructs her European and indigenous Karankawa and Coahuiltecan identity.

Santa exhibits *mestizaje* in her artwork and in a particularly apparent fashion in her

spiritual choices which I argue are very *mestiza*, melding her Catholic and indigenous beliefs and practices. Santa recalls her early Catholic upbringing:

Mother and father made it very clear to us that we had to go to church would go to first communion ... you know, we did all the things ... I was even a member of what was called the San Juanitas. The little San Juanitas would go to church the first Sunday of each month, had little outfits like the *Virgen de San Juan* ... we had these little blue capes with blue little satin capes We had special training from nuns about what it was like to be a San Juanita, what you should do. I remember all of that but too, once I left and went to college I realized the other side of the coin I realized or I found out that in the missionary work of the conquistadores you know they were Maríans, they did a lot of atrocities and so that sort of turned me away from what I had been trained because I saw that it wasn't really all these positive and good things that we were supposedly trained.

Santa embodies a *mestiza* identity. She does so by simultaneously recuperating her indigenous roots and cosmology through, for instance, the many Aztec codices she paints, all the while maintaining a relationship to Catholicism. South Texas popular religion is represented in her work in her representations of Don Pedrito Jaramillo and one of the most prominent religious icon in her work, the *Virgin de Guadalupe*. The cultural production of spirituality in which Santa engages is similar in some ways to that of other of *las mujeres* in this project, in that it shows that regardless of how women identify spirituality, they can call upon Guadalupe. Her versatility allows women of different religious and spiritual persuasions to make social justice critiques while remaining spirituality connected to her, something Chicana/Tejana scholars and artists have been engaging in for the past 40 years.

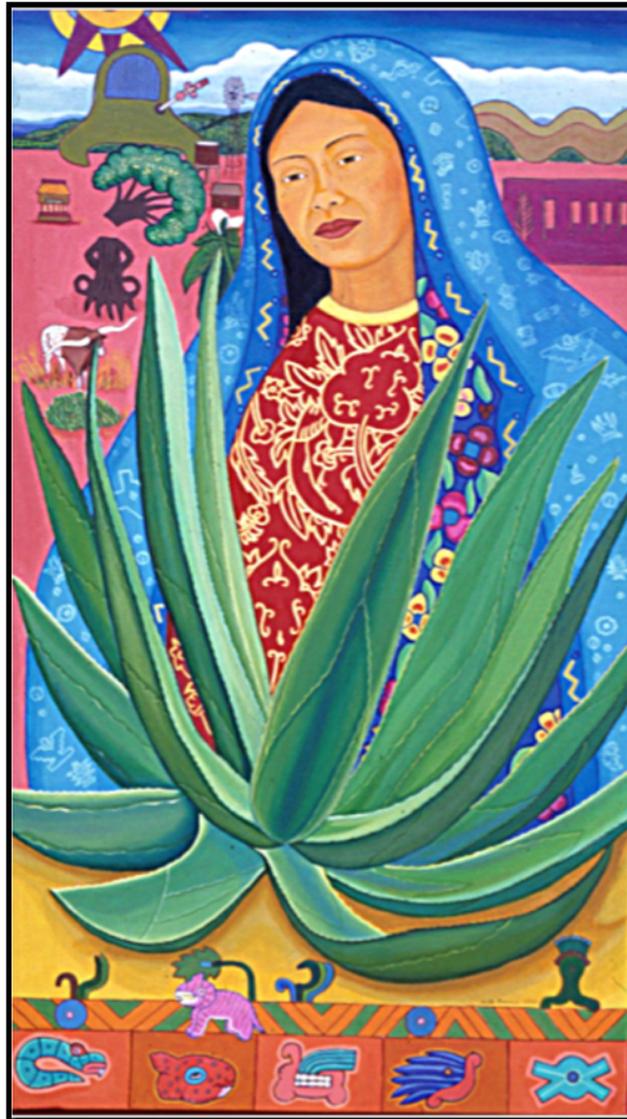


Illustration 16.
La Lupe Tejana, 1995
Oil on canvas, 30 x 51 inches
Santa Barraza

While Santa's expression of her indigenous identity may come through very strong in her work, her actual spiritual practice has a heavy Catholic influence. She possesses a deep devotion for her faith and for the ritual. What I find interesting about Santa's interaction with Catholicism

is that while she has problems with it, as referenced above, hers is not an outright rejection of Catholicism as it is for other women who disagree with some of its tenets. She enacts her disagreement with the Church in ways different from other Catholic women in this study. Insight into this may be gained through the fact that the one thing that does not come across in Santa's narrative is the questioning of the Catholic Church from a young age, something that characterized so many other women's experiences. It is evident that Santa sees the negative aspects of the church -- as do other Chicana/Tejana Catholics in the study -- but that she reconciles with it differently.

The cultural hybridity that Santa embodies through her indigenous and Spanish roots is reflected in her artwork and her religiosity. She exhibits a spiritual *mestizaje* of which Anzaldúa (1987) and Degadillo (2005) discuss. Santa's work involves re-envisioning Guadalupe, as do other Chicana feminist artists as part of a political project, while, at times, maintaining her traditional Catholic symbolism.

As Santa stated, she is aware of the inequities in the Church, such as its stance on homosexuality, but there is something about the ritual that is so strong, which holds such meaning for her, it keeps her connected to the Church. It was so strong it drew her to come home to live her life in South Texas. And this reveals the importance of this connection to ritual and its relationship to place. I gained deeper insight into why this is so for Santa while standing with her at the Healing Tree. My own sense of *Tejanidad* was solidified at the Healing Tree in ways it had not been previously. Drawing on my own experience, I understand this as a draw to place, to memory, to identity, to self. This kind of experience is tangible and potent. It exemplifies the power of memory-place, as Flores explains. It is something that I would not have fully grasped,

that would not have been revealed to me, had I not stood there, in South Texas, with Santa Barraza at the Healing Tree, in my own nopal-sprinkled backyard.

Santa Barraza is at once Catholic, finding deep personal fulfillment in traditional rituals, while maintaining a strong sense of her indigenous identity. This is her path and it gives her life meaning and offers her comfort, solace, and peace. She has deep faith and a devotion that comes through in her art through her use and interpretation of images like Guadalupe, the codices, and the sacred hearts. She hopes to make this her life's work one day:

I'm just hoping and praying that I'll see some signs of direction, some sight where I can dedicated my life to doing more of those types of images. So that there will be a school that is more spiritual, so that there will be a school that people can come and do those types of paintings or that type of manifestation or that type of art production, you know that actually enlightens people and sort of like looks to their soul, sort of creates some type of spirituality with a higher order ... through art, because I think that's what I'm here to do.

III. 10: Sister Teresita

Some of the most enlightening aspects of conducting ethnographic research are those unexpected moments that lead to deeper insight into the topic being studied; those things that contradict our beliefs and challenge our worldviews. Sister Teresita's life challenges mainstream conceptions of Catholic sisters in such ways. From her staunch feminist perspectives to her attraction to Chicana feminist reconfigurations of Our Lady of Guadalupe that help reverse negative perceptions of the Tejana body, her narrative provides deep insight into processes of self-making for Tejanas and women religious. Her narrative expands and nuances our understanding of spiritual production, in ways that challenge religious boundaries, categories, and understandings. Sister Teresita's narrative moves us beyond traditional conceptions of institutional Catholicism to understand how it functions on the personal, individual, and personally political levels among those who have dedicated their lives to it. Through Our Lady of Guadalupe and participation in *mujerista* theology -- feminist theology and spirituality -- Sister Teresita provides insight into another layer of Tejana spiritual production.

In my religious experience growing up we saw nuns infrequently, if at all. Laywomen taught our Catechism classes and sisters made rare appearances at mass. I knew essentially nothing about them growing up and must admit never understanding exactly who they were as individuals, beyond their roles as women religious who had dedicated their lives to God. The role of the priest, on the other hand, was always clear to me, but sisters less so. I have since come to learn of the many U.S. and Latin American social justice initiatives and movements in which

women religious -- Latina among them -- have participated for centuries. Growing up lacking knowledge about the activism of women religious is not surprising, however, as their lives and contributions to social causes have not historically garnered the same attention as Catholic priests. This is what was going through my mind as I sat awaiting my meeting with Sister Teresita in the lobby area outside of her office.

Sister Teresita emerged from her office, introduced herself, and welcomed me. We entered her office and I explained my project to her. She nodded, listening enthusiastically as I discussed the connections I was exploring between spirituality and social justice. We began the interview and Sister Teresita began telling me what attracted her to the sisterhood. She was driven to the service of God because she was drawn to church work and church service, stating, "Service is sort of my bottom line ... " She went on to say that there were not many options for young women in the 1960s who wished to devote their lives to service and to obtain an education. She therefore decided to join the sisterhood, where she could do both. Sister Teresita would return to the fact that she was driven to the sisterhood largely by her desire to serve several times over the course of our interview, indicating its centrality in her life and self-conception of her religious and activist identities.

Sister Teresita described her early childhood, which included growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in West Texas. Like other women in this study, Sister Teresita had a sense of her ethnic and racial difference early on, which included being discriminated against in school. She was also greatly impacted by what she was -- and was not taught -- about her body. This is another prevalent theme in women's narratives -- the silencing of and shame projected upon the body. Sister Teresita says this manifested itself in a self-hatred and low self-esteem that she and

other Tejanas she knows possess. She begins discussing Our Lady of Guadalupe and how she invoked Our Lady of Guadalupe in order too, as she says, redeem that aspect of her self-identity. Interesting, however, is the fact that Sister Teresita was not raised with Guadalupe. In what she says was an attempt to assimilate as a result of the racial oppression in her town, her family did not practice a Mexican Catholicism. She came to know Guadalupe later in life.

Sister Teresita's relationship with Guadalupe is linked to her self-perception and self-worth. Guadalupe plays a pivotal role in the redeeming of the Tejana body and soul. Sister Teresita explains this in relation to how she, as a Tejana, views herself in comparison to her colleague Angela,¹⁵³ a Latina who came to the United States as an exile and entered the convent: "She [Angela] has a confidence that I will *never* have. ... regardless of what accomplishments I may have to say I back it up." Sister Teresita tells me that the real poverty is low self-worth. She ponders how this translates into religious self-understandings, stating:

... [it] has to do with loving myself and faith in God, in experiencing God's love, how do we experience God's love if you don't experience self-love? And so the bottom line is really self-love ... from the very beginning ... we are so impacted with the idea of our non-personhood and our sense of inferiority that we are filled with self-hate.

She goes on to discuss how Latinas are ashamed of themselves and their bodies and how we tend to embody ideas of not being good enough: not tall enough, thin enough, light enough, pure enough. She discusses how Guadalupe acts as the redeemer in this sense, she "redeems our bodies because Guadalupe is dark and people identify [with her]." She mentions Sandra Cisneros's (1997) piece "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess" asking me if I've read it. "Oh yes," I tell

¹⁵³ Angela is a pseudonym.

her, “I teach it in my La Chicana course.” Then she tells me, “Ok, what she talks about is “a woman like me,” you know she’s really explicit about her nipples ... I always use that [in my classes] because it is *such a fabulous* piece, you know the whole sense of Guadalupe -- “I need you to believe that I’m a person. You know like I need you to believe that I’m worthy.””

Sister Teresita goes on to say she appreciates the piece because she feels that what it is saying is that the God that we’ve been presented is not one that we can connect with. Hence, the only way we can redeem ourselves is by having a God that we can identify with that can redeem us from our own shame and self-hatred, that is then like the original sin.

I ask Sister Teresita if she approves of Chicana artists’ various interpretations of Guadalupe, such as Alma Lopez’ controversial digital print of the Virgin in a rose-clad bikini, to which she responds, “Oh absolutely ... I mean Alma Lopez -- the one at the Santa Fe Art Center which I went to see. Really what she is dealing with is can a Latina body be sacred? Or be considered holy or be considered even acceptable?” She tells me she also loves the work of artist Yolanda Lopez, that it is important for her students to be exposed to, telling me, “ ... I think Guadalupe is just, you know, *critical* to the redemption of Latinas. It’s just critical ... we have to deconstruct Guadalupe in order to recognize ourselves ... because you know it’s not the Guadalupe with her eyes cast down ...” Here Sister Teresita reiterates what other women have said, that the image of Guadalupe typically associated with the Church is not the Guadalupe that they think of, that *they* know. She goes on, “[Heranina Vasquez] ... she has a great Guadalupe that I love because it’s a Guadalupe with her eyes wide open, it’s the Guadalupe of Ester Hernandez in the karate, it’s Yolanda Lopez with the strong legs ready to jump off her pedestal. And the Guadalupe of Alma [Lopez], like saying this is my body and see this is so you think

about the Eucharist, this is my body and yet as Latinas to say this is my body is considered vulgar ... I remember when Sandra wrote that piece on Guadalupe the sex goddess and so she sent me a copy before it was published and she said “Oh you’re going to hate me” and I said “no, I’m just so jealous, I wish I could have written this!” The image of Guadalupe with her eyes turned down did not resonate with Sister Teresita much in the same way submissive images of her are not part of Norma’s or Martha’s interpretations of Guadalupe. Guadalupe’s role in redeeming the Tejana body is of central importance in Sister Teresita’s life.

Relativizing: A Means of Reconciling

Sister Teresita is among a group of Catholic nuns who possess a deep devotion to Christ and God but who experience some tension with the institution, namely the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. This is in large part due to sisters’ subversive beliefs and approaches to patriarchy within the Church. As Sister Teresita has explained, while sisters are able to have some freedoms -- in terms of what to teach in their classes, and the ability to write and be vocal about the importance of feminist theology -- there is a limit to the degree to which they are allowed to express their views before the Vatican steps in. So women religious such as Sister Teresita must always be cautious and strategic about expressing their feminist beliefs publicly. Drawing on the idea of relativizing and on *mujerista* theology as means to reconcile with Catholic “failures” and patriarchy are means by which Sister Teresita does so, mechanisms she employs that also allow her to remain connected to her faith. The idea of relativizing allows Sister Teresita to see and navigate around the “real issues”:

Relating to the whole idea of relativizing the Church ... I think what we mean by it is the sense that it's not our first authority. What it is, is that really our first authority is our faith, our community, the faith that is nourished by our community so it's also ... its not an individualistic thing as saying, well I think I'm right and the whole church is wrong, but rather its saying ... I'm a person of faith in the community where I am there are people of faith and together we will move along and won't be held back by institutional boundaries and at the same time were not leaving it because we can't leave it, because it is who we are. We *are* the Church.

Here Sister Teresita is illustrating how relativism allows her to do her social justice work without the constraints of "institutional boundaries." She makes an important distinction between faith and the institution of the Church that resonates throughout the Catholic Tejanas' narratives here. She goes on to describe how sisters took service work into their own hands: "And so with Hermanas¹⁵⁴ seeing it that we stopped looking to the Church and it's institutional representatives to define what ministry could be and we started defining it for ourselves and just doing it." Because Sister Teresita joined the sisterhood in order to serve, her spirituality and the material circumstances of life, from her own early experiences of oppression to fighting the oppression of others, have been intimately intertwined. Religious social activism has been a significant part of the Tejana and Tejano religious experience and has included commitments to local communities by organizations such as Las Hermanas, PADRES, and the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio. However, examining religious activism within the context of a feminist Catholic's life raises unique questions about the complexities of participating in social justice work while interfacing with what Sister Teresita sees as flawed aspects of the institution of the Church. Having to do so necessitated a framework that enabled Sister Teresita to reconcile the patriarchy and submissive roles of women with her desire to engage in social justice work.

¹⁵⁴ Sister Teresita was a member of the national feminist organization of Latina Roman Catholics, Las Hermanas.

Sister Teresita's narrative indicates that remaking of religion is occurring among women religious for some of the same reasons it is occurring for other Catholic lay women and women who have left the Church. Themes of negotiating patriarchy and reconfiguring women's roles and their social positions within and outside of the church are present as well. What we see here is how women religious negotiate such issues in their attempt to remain connected to the Church. They employ similar mechanisms but do so from *within* and from unique positions. Sister Teresita illustrates the self-making that accompanies the ways she navigates patriarchy within the religious realm. For her, strategies like *mujerista* theology and a deep and personal devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe are the mechanisms she employs to do her social justice work, while exhibiting a deep faith and maintaining a relationship to God.

PART IV:

**TOWARDS A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF
TEJANA SELF-MAKING:
GENDER IN THE BORDERLANDS, OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE,
AND SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM**

In this section I offer my analysis of how Tejanas have shaped their lives in relationship to religion and spirituality today. Regardless of spiritual practice or belief, for each woman this involves a confluence of the political with the spiritual. I offer these case studies as a means by which to understand how some women have gone about doing this today. Their experiences also reveal potential topics for future research on men and other groups of women of different generations, geographical regions, class locations, and races and ethnicities.

My goal is for this dissertation to help us to think and, importantly, to rethink how people shape their lives with respect to issues of spirituality, ethics, and personal politics within a framework that examines how race and ethnicity, gender, class, and religion intersect and interact. I argue for a kind of intersectional approach that examines how the presence or absence of one or more than one of these social locations shifts people's engagement with their social worlds and informs their experiences differently. Of key importance are strategies of negotiation within various power structures, such as religious patriarchy, which I argue women employ through the use of a *mestiza* consciousness and questioning social inequities. The role of history and historical production in women's critique of religious patriarchy, in terms of how they understand the indigenous origins of Our Lady of Guadalupe as Tonantzin and draw on Mexica

spiritual traditions is significant. Women use history to make a case for promoting gender and racial equality. A historical consciousness and awareness of the politics of history greatly inform this generation's spiritual development.

The previous narratives, taken together, have significantly deepened my understanding of how religious and spiritual practices function in the lives of their practitioners, which I have found differs in many ways from previous generations. Religion and spirituality continue to function in ways that structuralists and functionalists have viewed such practices as functioning for decades: to promote community cohesion and group identity, for example. What I offer through this study is insight into specific and nuanced ways that this group is doing so differently, thus broadening our understandings of religion and spirituality, their functions, and effects. There are historically and socially specific ways that the women here have engaged religion and spirituality, ways that expand our understandings of how such practices and beliefs function today and how as agents of change, social actors are extending the ways they engage their social worlds and recreate their social circumstances.

As previously noted, religious institutions have contributed to shaping women's individual self-perceptions and societal understandings of gender roles, through propagating religious discourses infused with power (Foucault 1976 [1998]), such as those around sexuality that have material implications on women's lives. This study suggests that today women are acting as agents of change in resisting and reversing the effects of such discourses, in large part through spiritual transformations which I view as new cultural productions. The focus here is not on how women have outright changed religious structures through such cultural productions, but how, by creating and employing strategies to counter the effects of such structures, particularly

those that exert patriarchal control, women are changing the ability of religious doctrine and discourses to effect them and in turn are recreating themselves and their social worlds. They are doing so in ways that are culturally specific and affirming, as in the recuperation of their Texas Mexican and indigenous ancestral spiritual traditions.

Drawing on practice theory and following Ortner's (1996) assertion that studies must examine both "construction" and "making" of subjects, I will analyze how women's identities and subjectivities have been constructed by religious discourses -- or resisted them -- and under what conditions. In examining women's agency I will take into account those structures that worked to socially constrain women and consider how they would come to react to this later in life. I ask, for instance, how women's spiritual transformations have been limited. My analysis will address these concerns by examining them within the context of women's lives over time, for they navigate structures differently at different times in their lives and within the context of shifting power relations. That is, women's positions in relations to such power structures are not fixed but change over time. Such relations of power exist within the context of religious institutions and discourses, family rules, gender expectations and ideologies, schooling expectations, and racial hierarchies that have been imposed upon women and which women have navigated at various moments throughout their lives.

Women employed strategies to navigate such structures and assert their agency through the creation of religious and spiritual communities such as feminist Catholic women's prayer groups, by drawing on feminist theologies, participation in indigenous spiritual traditions, the creation of woman-centered healing rituals and reimagining of Our Lady of Guadalupe. So while structural change has come slow, women have actively changed how they choose to engage these

structures, and have hence changed the face of God, religion, and spirituality among Tejanas in the geographical and spiritual borderlands.

This study has examined gender in the borderlands within the context of social justice. It has illuminated the personal politics that correspond to of the spiritual production of *las mujeres*. Tejanas have understood and interacted with their social worlds through the lenses of religion and spirituality for generations. Since the conquest of the Americas, onset of racial *mestizaje* and the religious syncretism of European and indigenous spiritual practices, Mexican Catholicism has been a central religious practice of Tejanos. It is and continues to be a mix of indigenous and European spiritual traditions. As this study has shown, there are several variations of Mexican Catholicism that Tejanas create and engage, in addition to other spiritual expressions.

Karl Marx (1844 [1978]) stated, “The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against *that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion. *Religious* suffering is at the same time an *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people” (54). In this quote Marx references how oppression requires subjects to seek out reprieve from a harsh classed society and that society finds such reprieve through religion. But what purpose does religion serve once people have obtained class mobility, as with this generation of Tejanas? What function does it serve then? Today religion is not only a reprieve from the social world; it *is* the social world, an at once oppressive and meaningful terrain strategically navigated by Tejanas.

So what does the spiritual transformation examined here indicate about the social lives and experiences of Texas Mexican women and what new insight does this provide into the functions of religion and spirituality today? The following analysis will demonstrate that in the current stage of Tejana spiritual agency religion and spirituality in many ways serve different functions than they did for previous generations.

In many cases women are functioning in a third space, the contact zone or borderlands between Catholicism and indigenous, earth-based spiritual practices. Some lean more towards Catholicism, others to indigenous practices, whether through more contemporary recuperations or by practicing indigenous-inspired folk Catholic traditions. In my view for the most part *las mujeres* invoke hybrid spiritualities. Using “hybridity” offers, as Kapchan and Strong (1999) state, “a unique analytical vantage point on the politics of culture by acknowledging the intricate and complex weave of any heterodox and heteroglossic community” (242). Tejana religiosity is functioning as more than a determinist syncretic religious form that melds Catholic and indigenous traditions. I argue we are witnessing a reverse of the “conditions of displacement” that result from contact when certain forms are lost and others carried over (Kapchan and Strong 1999). I argue that we are witnessing a form of reverse syncretism (Grayson 1992) taking place among this group of Tejanas; that is, the reversing of the religious syncretism that occurred with the conquest of indigenous peoples of Americas by the Spaniards.

Whereas Catholicism was thrust upon indigenous peoples and their own spiritual beliefs suppressed, the contemporary recuperation of their indigenous spiritual traditions marks women’s reconnecting with this indigenous past, privileging the indigenous in Catholic-indigenous practices and suppressing the Catholic practices. For women such as María Elena,

Susana, Yolanda, and others, by leaving Catholicism they are symbolically liberated from the dominant group. The dominant group and cultural practices are now those that were once those indigenous and indigenous-inspired practices of their ancestors that were once suppressed.

As Susana does with the sign of the cross María Elena and others do with Our Lady of Guadalupe. They are symbols of spiritual liberation. Women like Carmen, Susana, and María Elena are reclaiming the indigenous by privileging it in ceremonies like Day of the Dead and acknowledging Tonantzin. Rather than the dominant group asserting their religious beliefs over a subordinate group, the once subordinate group has come into a historical consciousness and is asserting agency. The resisting of domination has resulted in the cultural production of spirituality. Today Tejanas engage in spiritual productions that reflect the agency and social repositioning of socially conscious, historically aware *mestizas* in a contemporary, modern world.

Armed with historical knowledge and *mestiza* consciousnesses, the lenses through which Tejanas now view religion and spirituality and the ways they use them have changed. I examine this through three central areas of inquiry: 1) how gender functions for women in the borderlands within the context of spirituality and other areas of life that intersect women's spiritual lives; 2) women's relationships to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and 3) spiritual activism. In all instances I will attend to the effects and functions of religion and spirituality in women's lives and how they have come to require new spiritual forms. I examine how women have navigated structures of power over the course of their lives and asserted their agency by constructing creative strategies for remaking themselves and their social worlds.

IV. 1 Spiritual Agency and Self-Making: An Anthropological Analysis of Gender in the Borderlands

In this section I engage with theories on gender and agency in order to offer a nuanced understanding of how gender functions with regard to religion in the borderlands. I refer to the processes of resistance and, more accurately in my view, *production* within the context of women's spiritual and religious experiences. I draw primarily on scholarship that will help to illuminate the relationship between gender and agency within Tejana spiritual transformations, which are largely understood here through theories of practice.¹⁵⁵

As the ethnographic narratives provided here suggest, for this group of women gender construction begins in their formative years, primarily within the context of family and religion. However, self-making -- processes by which "actors "enact", "resist", or "negotiate" the world as given, and in doing so, "make" the world" (Ortner 1996:1), and in doing so recreate their life circumstances -- occurs later in life. I argue that processes of self-making in which the women engage involves "undoing" some of the gender conditioning that occurred in their earlier lives. In doing so they recreate their social lives through new understandings of gender. I contend that because religion is such a gendered arena for Tejanas and site of social struggle, it is understandable that it would also be a key site where women enact a *mestiza* consciousness, their agency, and seek out liberation.

¹⁵⁵ Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier (1989) argue that feminist analyses have been one of the primary contexts for the development of what Sherry Ortner (1984) calls practice theory. Feminist anthropology's emphasis on women as social agents led to the proliferation and acceptance of "nascent, ovular, rather than seminal approaches" (28), even as these remained cognizant of the determining effects of larger social systems.

In *Gender and Agency* (2000) Lois McNay argues for a generative framework that recognizes the dominant forms of power that interact with subject formation. McNay employs agency in a way that grounds it in generativity, in the “ability to act in an unexpected fashion or to institute new and unanticipated modes of behavior” (22). For McNay gender is related to embodiment, as in respect to embodied potential, rather than an externally imposed set of constraining norms (25). She argues for thinking through agency in non-oppositional terms, which aligns with my assertion that acts of Tejana spiritual agency must be understood and analyzed as cultural productions rather than within a framework of resistance. We must move beyond discourses of resistance to see women and other marginalized groups as producers of culture, rather than subjects whose identities and experiences are continually associated with discourses around domination or the resisting of domination.¹⁵⁶ This is an important function of in the task of analyzing and then breaking down unequal power relations. To this effect, I understand all women in this study to be enacting agency in one way or another. This study shows that such acts are not absolute. One does not simply act as an agent or not; how they do so differs according to the particular circumstances of the individual. The experiences of *las mujeres* and the ways they recreate their circumstances of existence are situated in particular historical and social conditions.

Some might argue that by remaining connected to the institution of the Catholic Church either through self-identification as Catholic or through ritual devotion, women in this study such

¹⁵⁶ See James Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990) for a discussion of how marginalized groups draw on both overt and covert forms of resistance to domination. Scott uses the example of domestic spaces -- typically gendered as female -- as sites where resistance to domination occurs. While his analysis is useful for understanding multiple and atypical sites of agency, Scott’s reliance on discourses of domination and resistance are the type that I argue must be reframed in terms of their generative nature; as cultural productions.

as Rosie, Martha, Sister Teresita, and Norma continue to function within a structure of domination. I argue that while this can be construed as the case, women do so in ways that limit their direct interaction with patriarchy. *They* control the degree to which they engage patriarchal structures. That is, while the institution itself may be structured as a patriarchal institution, at various times women are shifting in and out of the shadow of such dominance through subverting it. I argue that in the process of challenging the structure, they change it by limiting the reach of its power. This, I argue, is the process by which the face of God changes. Such change is in part a product of women's agency and their employing of a differential consciousness -- functioning within yet outside of structures and ideologies of domination (Sandoval 2000). It is effective in that it changes women's way of viewing themselves and allows them to directly engage with God, yet outside of the context of patriarchal domination.

Saba Mahmood's (2005) study of an Islamic women's mosque movement in Cairo takes a position that is in contrast to a Western feminist model of women's emancipation and which is useful for understanding Catholic women's experiences in this study. Mahmood suggests that following the norms of the traditions within which one is placed is in itself a political and ethical act. She seeks out agency in such norms and argues that they must be understood within their particular historical context. Mahmood argues that freedom is contextual and can only be understood within the existing situation. The women in this study -- in particular the Catholic women -- do experience degrees of freedom within the context of what is often externally viewed as a patriarchal institution. The mechanisms for obtaining such freedoms release them from practices and discourses of patriarchal dominance while allowing them to maintain a connection to their faith -- to something that has deep and profound meaning in their lives.

Women who make a complete departure from the Church exert agency under different circumstances than those who remain Catholic-identified and/or who practice institutional Catholicism. Those who choose to sever themselves from the institution of Catholicism purposefully avoid any interaction with what they view as oppressive religious discourses or structures. María Elena, Carmen, Yolanda, Inés, and Susana's convictions about the degradation of indigenous peoples by the Catholic Church and patriarchal nature of the Church run deep and motivated them to make a complete departure from the Church. For other women dominance took the form of abuse that occurred in part as a result of the complacency of the Church. Memories of such abuse run deep and impact women, as it does men who have experienced abuse -- on the physical, psychological and spiritual levels. This makes it much more difficult for those who have been touched by such violence to reconcile with Catholicism.

Returning to my earlier assertion that women's experiences around the spiritual realm must be understood as historically and socially constructed, I follow Talal Asad who argues that agency emerges out of particular socio-historical contexts (1997). In this particular historical moment, *las mujeres* possess a degree of agency that I argue their mothers' lacked. Relaxed gender norms and educational opportunities expanded possibilities for social, political, and economic mobility for this generation. One manifestation of this, I argue is the spiritual agency examined here, through which we can better understand gender relations and agency. As Yolanda, Carmen, María Elena, and Santa show, women possess access to historical knowledge and various choices of spiritual paths and practices to which their mothers did not and this has resulted in shifts in relations of power on multiple levels, evident through Tejana spiritual production.

IV. 2 Our Lady of Guadalupe: A Versatile Catalyst for Change

Our Lady of Guadalupe represents many things to many people. Each of her multiple meanings is informed by the particular social circumstances and historical conditions of the individual devotee. One of the key insights I gained from reestablishing my relationship to Guadalupe on my own terms was that I had previously viewed religion and religious devotion in somewhat static and binary terms. My understanding of Catholicism prior to partaking in this research was confined in many ways to seeing religion, in particular Catholicism, as functioning one way and one way only. María Elena and the other *mujeres* would, through their experiences and through helping me better understand my own, teach me otherwise.

The *Virgen* was implicated in my static understanding of Catholicism, for I viewed her as part of the Church and knew no other options for knowing her outside of it, on my own terms. That she was fluid, flexible, and able to be reclaimed by me as a symbol of love, strength, and female power, outside of any patriarchal institution was not something I knew through direct experience and this epiphany, this knowledge is not the kind of knowledge I could have gained from reading about processes of spiritual liberation, described in the literature as decolonization. Reading this literature did not affect me in the same way as understanding it through experiential knowledge. This sense of liberation gave me deep insight into processes by which women decolonize their spirits in a way that simply reading about it could not.

As a result of processes of economic and social mobility, and racial and ethnic discrimination, *las mujeres* were forced into new states of intellectual, political, racial, and spiritual being. These various identities and positionalities could serve to pull women in multiple

directions, as exemplified by the tension between most of the women's Catholic religious upbringing and their feminist sensibilities, including my own. María Elena helped me to resolve this tension through Our Lady of Guadalupe, through whom women can be all things at once.

La Virgen's versatility is critical for the *mestiza*, who straddles cultures and multiple identities. The *Virgen* acts as a tool for these women as they exert a *mestiza* consciousness, that is, as they challenge, and break down binaries and transcend dualities, much as I did as I shifted my conception of Catholicism and Catholic symbols to view Guadalupe as flexible and Catholicism as holding multiple meanings. The *Virgen* allows for "healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our language, our thoughts" (Anzaldúa 1987:80). Through Guadalupe these things are reconciled.

Guadalupe-Tonantzin: A Divine Reflection of Women

Our Lady of Guadalupe is a reflection of the Tejana women in this study. She is the divine version of them and divine within them. She is a symbol that on one hand is sanctioned by their culture, but on the other hand has the potential of symbolizing female empowerment. Our Lady of Guadalupe is a bridge symbol that allows women to maintain a critical relationship to either Catholicism or to Tejana culture, versus either disconnecting from the relationship on one hand, or submitting to it uncritically on the other hand. The *Virgen* has signified many things to Tejanos since the mid eighteenth century. She has held feminist, Catholic, nationalist, ethnic, sexual, and gendered meanings. Tejanas have engaged, invoked, envisioned, and re-envisioned her and continue to today in acts that represent a spiritual devotion rooted in a social justice

framework that is informed by the material circumstances of women's lives, yet another stage in the historical interpretation and cultural production of Guadalupe by Tejanos.

As Susana and Norma's experiences explicitly illustrate, Guadalupe serves to link women to their mothers, their ancestors, their cultural heritage, and their pasts. For all of these women being Tejana has meant being female, brown, Catholic, and related to both European and indigenous cultures; being *mestizas*. Guadalupe symbolizes the synthesis of all of these things and the social negotiations that accompany them. One of the most salient negotiations women have had to make throughout the generations is around their sexualities and self-esteem. But today, through Guadalupe-Tonantzin, there are possibilities for transformation and self-empowerment.

Because Guadalupe is a powerful figure of divinity; the feminine define, she is beyond being only a woman. She has the capability to be the divine *in* women, both internally and in their external worlds. Internally, having an image of the divine that's so much like them helps with self-esteem, body image, identity consolidation, and personal empowerment and creativity. Externally, the divine feminine is broader than just a divine woman -- she represents the creative, the nurturing, and the life-giving, often times reconnected to her earth goddess predecessor, as Susana and María Elena explained. So Guadalupe provides an anchoring image of nurture and care and guardianship that several women draw on in their relationships with the external world -- their work, their politics, and their relationships, for example. In doing so women have, in numerous ways, interacted with and transformed submissive, passive images of Guadalupe.

Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Tejana Body

Living up to these religious standards has had other material implications for women as well. There is the serious issue of abuse towards women and the ability of Guadalupe to redeem women from feelings of shame and guilt associated with such horrible experiences, such as sexual and domestic abuse. Then there are moments of low self-esteem and shame around sexuality and the body. It is not surprising, then that Guadalupe is so revered by women, for as María Elena says, Guadalupe can be honored in the image of how an earthly woman should be.

The spiritual is a site of social conflict for Chicana women because of their historically gendered relationships to the Catholic Church and because of the degree to which the body has been implicated in this gendering. For Mexican American and other Latina women this has taken the form of pressures to live up to Marian standards of virginal purity and the silencing of their sexualities, experiences that differ from the religious experiences of many of their male counterparts. Being Tejana for many of the women in this study meant growing up with sexism. Several recall being alienated from their bodies, in particular by their sexuality through pressures to repress it under the guises of original sin. For these Tejanas, like other Latina women, their understandings of their bodies as girls and young women were accompanied by a general sense of “dirtiness.” They functioned within a virgin-whore dichotomy whereby they were only allowed to engage in church-sanctified marriage (Zavella 2003). Anything outside of that was sinful. In their younger years *las mujeres* lived by such standards, within the rules established by their parents. It was not until their teen years and later that they began to outwardly question things such as the model of the ideal woman as passive rather than active with which they were raised. As Sister Teresita explained, Guadalupe acts to redeem the Latina body by liberating it

from these oppressive discourses and accompanying social action, and in the process, enabling women to recover their self-esteem.

The issues around the body that these women and countless other Chicanas and Latinas have relayed resonates with the experience with Gloria Anzaldúa whose dissatisfaction with organized religion and its rejection of the female body originated from her own personal experience of painful early menstruation and the silence and fear that surrounded it. Anzaldúa says this separated her from her own body and led her to see it as “other.” She came to believe religion “eliminates growth, development, change ...” and that it “promotes restrictive categories and rules that separate people from each other and themselves” (Keating, 2003: 8-9). It was when Anzaldúa came to recognize that “[m]atter is divine,” that the spirit so often identified exclusively with the nonmaterial disembodied dimensions of life is itself a vital part of the material world, could she accept this alien as part of herself. She explains that she experienced “a type of conversion” during her hysterectomy, when she realized that the body itself is divine. This insight transformed her: “When I found myself it was the beginning of my spirituality, because it was like getting in contact with who I really was, my true self. My body wasn’t dirty.” As Ana Louise Keating suggested, for Anzaldúa “spirituality begins with and is rooted in the body” (11). Like the other Tejanas in this study, religion, spirituality and the body are intimately intertwined and political.

The combination of Guadalupe’s versatility, ethnic identification with women as indigenous and Mexican, and her persistence as a powerful part of their cultural memory makes Guadalupe more empowering to these women than any other religious figure. While the

particular meanings she evokes for women are somewhat unique, her position as the most important Catholic symbol of womanhood for Tejanas has remained intact for generations.

The remaking of Guadalupe is symbolic of the particular ways women are remaking *themselves*. These processes of self-making involve women enacting a *mestiza* consciousness, where they break down binaries and engage in cultural production that allows them to reverse power relations and recreate their social circumstances. For while women's various positions could pull them in different directions, as seen through my own tensions between my feminist sensibilities and Catholic heritage, through Our Lady of Guadalupe, all these things are reconciled. As *mestizas*, Tejanas inhabit multiple identities and are constantly being pulled in different directions -- by family, partners, dominant society, religious society, feminist and political sensibilities. But through Guadalupe they are redeemed and they are reconciled. They are no longer living fragmented existences, without feeling as if they have disowned a part of themselves, rather they once again feel whole.

Women's own positionalities and ability to do so is reflective of shifting historical circumstances that inspire women to change their social realities and of women's ability and consciousness to do so. There is a politics to this remaking of Guadalupe that is a reversal and a shift from the passive Guadalupe of women's pasts to the active Guadalupe of their presents. Guadalupe at once connects, consolidates, and integrates and as such she is powerful, shifting power from the Church -- from forces that sought to oppress women -- to women. She models personal integrity and she is a symbol of engagement with the world and with other people. Through this one image the women make connections that are important to them, within themselves, between themselves and others, and between elements of the external world.

Through her versatility Guadalupe reconciles women's pasts and presents, Catholicism and their ethical and political perspectives, and their ethnic and feminist identities. Through her women can at once be Mexican, Tejana, indigenous, feminist, and powerful.

As a culturally and historically situated yet flexible symbol, Guadalupe has come to impact women's lives across religious and spiritual practices in a variety of ways. Guadalupe provides the symbolic "sources of illumination" (Geertz 1973:45) that allow women to orient themselves in relation to their particular system of meaning within their culture. However, in my view what is most potent about Guadalupe is how she operates. Going further with respect to the active nature of Guadalupe, we see that she is a symbol that initiates social action. Victor Turner describes such symbols as, "determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action" (Turner 1967:36). This action that Guadalupe inspires in women sustains them and their families and communities in ways that allow women to retain all of their various sensibilities and consciousness and beliefs, without denying one or the other.

Through viewing Guadalupe as the "feminine face of God" and a symbol of women's feminine divine, these Tejanas have reversed the negative effects of oppressive discourses around virginal purity and bodily shame as well as helped other women to do so. I examine how through the cultural production of Guadalupe women are reversing the effects of oppressive religious discourses upon the Tejana body. In doing so, they redeem themselves, as Sister Teresita states. In this way Guadalupe's decolonizing effect works to remake the Tejana body.

Through invoking Guadalupe as Tonantzin, the Aztec/Mexica earth mother, women are also envisioning and carrying out strategies for healing the earth and creating a sustainable environment and healthy communities.

Women's relationships to Guadalupe illustrate how they have found solace and maintained their faith outside of organized religion, which they also do through women's prayer groups, individual prayer, and home altars. It is in these spaces outside of institutional Catholicism where women's faith is strong, maintained, nurtured, and where it flourishes. It is reflective of yet another historical period where Tejanos were alienated from the Catholic Church, reminiscent of a pattern that has existed since the mid 1800s, and a tradition out of which popular Catholicism was born and continues to flourish. In modern times, the questioning of the Church, women's reconciliation with it or lack thereof, and the existence of these alternative spiritual spaces are a result of women's remaking of religion and the social conditions that require it.

The question remains: what is it about being a woman that draws women to need such a figure? What are women's life circumstances that they require her in ways they do not require Christ, for whom they have a different kind of devotion? Many women see a connection between Christ and an ethic of social justice. But what does *la Virgen* do for women? Identifying with *la Virgen* is a common thread among the women in this study and other Latina women that transcends generations and religious and spiritual practices. Because she is a woman the *Virgen* can relate to what women, and mothers in particular ways, are feeling and experiencing. She understands their needs.

Guadalupe functions on the material level in women's lives. The Catholic Church projected certain meanings upon the Virgin and subsequently imposed them upon women in the past. Women are reversing such messages through their cultural production of *la Virgen* in the present.

I have examined the material conditions and the social relations that required the remaking of Guadalupe. These include discourses around the body and silencing around sexuality, women's need to remain connected to a spiritual icon of their Tejana ethnic heritage, and identifying with a symbol of equality, female empowerment, and Mother Earth. Guadalupe is a potent symbol of femininity projected upon Tejanas in ways different from their male counterparts. Her effects are far reaching.

In considering how symbols function on the material level I draw on Richard Flores's analysis of the Alamo's "continued effect on racial identities." The Alamo, as Flores suggests, has functioned on the material level to "hide the material social relations and conditions that require such sites in the first place" (2002:xvi). I suggest that Our Lady of Guadalupe has functioned as a Tejana master symbol, impacting the construction of gender identities and ideologies in ways that parallel how the master symbol of the Alamo affects Texas Mexican racial identities.

While Guadalupe is a symbol of Tejano *and* Tejana history, identity, and culture, the Alamo is not. It is gendered male. This is not to say that Mexican-origin women do not feel its effects. I suggest that gender situates the ways that social actors are affected by such symbols differently. For instance, Guadalupe is linked to both Tejanos *and* Tejanas, but is gendered female. Where as Guadalupe has the potential to impact racialized identities, I argue that today her effects on Tejanas are largely gendered. She was once used as a symbol to oppress women and now being used as a symbol to liberate them. Guadalupe has not been used in the same way among men. Both Tejanos and Tejanas can invoke this female-gendered symbol, but her *effects* on the male versus female body are different. Such effects have been largely hidden through

silencing and by being sanctioned under the guises of “tradition,” for, as Raymond Williams says “... tradition is in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits. It is always more than an inert historicized segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation” (1997:115). Indeed, discourses around “tradition” have been used to oppress women and incorporate them into the practice of particular religious and gender ideologies. However, through the creative cultural production of spiritual practices and beliefs *las mujeres* are challenging hegemonic practices and shifting power relations, and in doing so changing how “tradition” is viewed and understood.

Each of the lived experiences, the backgrounds of the Tejanas in this study, provides insight into how and why they are drawn to Our Lady of Guadalupe. I believe such experiences are linked to women’s cultural memory. Such historical experiences are connected to memories of the past that define each woman’s understanding of her present. For example, to Sister Teresita who suffered low self-esteem, Guadalupe is a redeemer; for María Elena, who suffered abuse, she is a healer and representation of the feminine divine, and for Martha, who experienced the tragic loss of a child, Guadalupe is a defiant and powerful mother figure too knows the loss of a son.

Guadalupe’s versatility in form and function is diverse. Her meanings are fluid and flexible and this is why she has remained a constant and held a prominent place in the lives of Tejanas and Tejanos for generations. As they change, so does she. Attaining social mobility and entering into careers previously reserved for Anglos and males for instance, has changed how she is invoked. For example, when I asked Norma Cantú how she prays to Guadalupe differently than her mother, she responded, “Well, I don’t think my mother prayed to Guadalupe for

publications,” with a laugh. Guadalupe will remain a constant in the lives of Tejanas because of her flexibility and tenacity, moving and molding with changes in the social lives of Mexican-origin people in Texas and other all over the world.

This insertion of beliefs on social equality into the spiritual realm that we see through women’s cultural production of Guadalupe permeates other areas of their lives as well, including their work and activism. The next section will explore this in depth through the concept of spiritual activism.

IV. 3 Spiritual Activism: A Manifestation of a *Mestiza* Consciousness

As the last section on Our Lady of Guadalupe showed, through *la Virgen* women make vital connections between their pasts and presents and their inner and outer worlds. Through her they reconcile the negative impacts of religion and religious discourses on women with their desire to remain connected to a Tejana/Mexicana/indigenous ethnic identity rooted in an ethic of social justice. Through her they change their lives and those of others.

In her work Gloria Anzaldúa speaks from the position of a Tejana born and raised in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. This fellow Tejana navigated the geographical and spiritual borderlands of her contemporaries and friends in this study much in the same manner as they have. Anzaldúa articulates a spirituality of her making; a spirituality that bridges the material conditions of her upbringing, her current surroundings and a world that which she envisions for her future: “In short, I'm trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be” (Anzaldúa 1981:208). In this section I explore the strategies and mechanisms that Anzaldúa's peers, *las mujeres*, employ as they too craft a spirituality that blends their pasts, presents, and desires for the future.

I expand here upon the broader theme of how women's material conditions shape their spiritual reimagingings by examining how women enact spiritual activism, a form of activism that “works to transform all structures of hierarchy and exclusion and is based on a spiritualized understanding of ourselves both as individuals and as part of a larger interconnected world”

(Fernandes 2003:17). This theme of interconnection parallels María Elena's contention that all living things are interconnected. Fernandes argues for pushing the limits of feminist analyses by asking how such analyses of social justice would shift "if the existing dichotomy between the material/political/social and the spiritual realms were to be set aside. How would central feminist discussions of questions of identity, practice and knowledge be transformed?" (10). Fernandes argues that social transformation requires an explicit engagement with questions of spirituality. *Las mujeres* exhibit this connection in their lives; for them, questions of spirituality and social justice are inextricably linked.

The women in this study women have exerted an "outer expression and call to action of inner feelings and beliefs" which has come to impact their communities and larger society, what Fernandes refers to as a "spiritual responsibility" in creating social change. Unlike conservative discourses of "personal responsibility," as Fernandes states, spiritual responsibility entails "confronting the fundamental linkages between self-examination, self-transformation and individual ethical action on the one hand, and the transformation of larger structures of oppression on the other hand" (16).

Las mujeres participate in a "lived spirituality" where they employ a spirituality that is inclusive and not mediated by the rules of a particular religion. Fernandes articulates the reclaiming of a "non-hierarchical, accessible understanding of spirituality" (10). This occurs in the lives of women who are inspired by the social justice teachings of Christ such as Sister Teresita, Rosie Castro, and Martha Cotera, who live by "Christ-like values that are not only connected to the Church as an institution, but which women enact outside of this context, in their daily lives, as Martha described in her narrative as the *doing* of spirituality. That is, while some

women identify as Catholic, they do not hold solely to Catholic religious practices and dogma. They extend their spirituality beyond that context, “picking and choosing” how they use and live spirituality in ways that meet their particular needs.

For women like Susana and María Elena, spiritual activism occurs within the context of their earth-based and/or indigenous spiritual traditions, outside of the context of organized Catholicism. Regardless of their spiritual practices or beliefs, I argue that all women are engaging in spiritual activism. All use spiritual practices, beliefs, and worldviews to create positive social change in the material world. In addition to personal relationships to Guadalupe, this is another way that the women in this study are connected. The ways in which *las mujeres* enact spiritual activism vary; much in the same way they differently invoke and reimage Guadalupe. The form their practices take is different, however the content -- the *intent* -- is similar. For this generation of Tejanas, living a spiritual life involves living a spiritualized activism.

Gender and Spiritual Activism

An important insight that emerged from this project is how gender differently situates activism. In his piece, “Cesar Chavez in American Religious Politics: Mapping the New Global Spiritual Line” Luis D. León (2001) discusses the political life of Cesar Chavez. Chavez, founder of the United Farm Worker’s Union, was known as a charismatic leader who “wielded spiritual authority” (858). León explores the nature of this spiritual authority and argues that it must be understood within any discussion in the importance of Chavez as a leader for the labor

movement and Chicanos. How does the relationship between spirituality and social justice that Chavez employed differ from or parallel that of *las mujeres*?

León shows that while Chavez identified as Catholic, his religious identity was “complex and fluctuating, erudite and theological, was central to establishing ... his “prophetic vocation”” (859). Chavez never claimed to be exclusively Catholic though he practiced and was baptized Catholic. His mother had a huge influence on Chavez, whom he credits for his adoption of a philosophy of peace. His mother was a *curandera*, “ ... skilled in the elaborate world of indigenous postcolonial curing” (859). Her faith in her skill was as strong as her belief in the saints and *la Virgen*. Her indigenous faith was as equal in importance to her Christian faith.

León draws a parallel between the various religious persuasions of Chavez and prominent social justice leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. While they possessed differing religious practices, they all blended their spirituality and activism, “They all intersected ... in their commitment to nonviolent social change, coalescing with the organization of workers” (866). A closer look at the activism of these noted figures, particularly Chavez, reveals that gender plays a role in the *reasons* men and women enact spiritual activism.

Chavez’s position on his faith resonates with Martha Cotera’s enactment of “Christ like-values.” Chavez states about his religious identification later in life: “For me, Christianity happens to be a natural source of faith. I have read what Christ said when he was here. He was very clear in what he meant and knew exactly what he was after. He was extremely radical, and he was for social change” (865). Like Martha and Norma, Chavez’s spiritual practices were diverse not only within Christianity, but beyond. He was fascinated by the study of and engagement in other religions. However, Chavez is often cited as being directly connected to the

Catholic Church during the movement, efforts which were executed in order to afford power to the labor movement rather than for any personal connection to Catholicism Chavez as an individual chose to make publicly. As León states, “He saw himself more ecumenical than is often assumed ... connecting him solely to institutional church enables his co-optation in support of sundry church positions and projects that he reviled, especially those involving the church’s’ misogyny, homophobia and pedophilia” (867). I argue that there is an apparent parallel between the Christ-like social justice influence on the social consciousness and activism of women such as Norma and Martha and that of Chavez. Chavez distanced himself from the ills of the institution of the Church. However what is different, based on my analysis, is that the women’s form of spiritual activism directly challenges gender oppression in a way that Chavez’s did not and which was not apparent in other social justice leaders of his era.

Some scholars who have examined the “New Age” and feminist spiritually movements have characterized these movements as individualistic, focusing almost solely on personal goals and desires (Keating 2000; Fernandes 2003). The type of spirituality the women in this dissertation enact more closely relates to a form of spiritual activism that Anzaldúa exhibits, where she “ ... anchors her metaphysics in her deeply held desire for personal, social and global transformation” (Keating 2000:x). For Anzaldúa, spirituality is “a highly political, always embodied endeavor that has nothing in common with conventional forms of religion” (x). I suggest that the women in this study enact spiritual activism in ways similar to those of Anzaldúa. I argue that while some of the women in this study identify with organized Catholicism, they do so in ways that are far from conventional.

When Sister Teresita described the “just doing it” of ministry work, she was talking about the *doing* of spirituality -- the coming together of the religious/spiritual and the material occurs within the context of defining ministry in terms that were less hierarchical. This is a mechanism that allows Catholic feminists like Sister Yolanda, Rosie, Norma, and Martha to enact, as I previously suggested, a differential consciousness. They employ strategies for navigating power dynamics by functioning, “ ... within yet beyond the demands of dominant ideology” (Sandoval 2000:43.4). This is one example of many of how women invoke their activist consciousness and personal agency in the religious realm in order to create positive change in their social worlds. It is a form of negotiation in which women who have left Catholicism do not engage. In making the conscious choice to leave Catholicism, this group no longer operates within Catholic religious “dominant ideologies” and therefore they do not exhibit a differential consciousness in this particular way.

Negotiations of the Spiritual Activist

The work of social and political activists is never without negotiation. Whether within or outside of organized religion women enacting spiritual activism comes with its challenges and limitations. It involves a great deal of reconciling. This reconciling is a key aspect of Tejana spiritual production -- of the making of culture and of themselves. In order to understand it we must understand how Catholic women, for instance, are able to navigate patriarchy and what they view as negative aspects of the church and then to understand why one woman would remain Catholic why others choose to leave.

There are key elements that run throughout women’s narratives that provide insight into

how they use spirituality to inform their work today and which I see as distinguishing the way this generation practices spirituality than previous generations. One is in regards to history. Central to the identity formation of each of these women is knowledge of history; history of the origins of their spiritual practices and of their own ethnic and racial heritage. This includes an historical awareness of the development of Catholicism and how indigenous peoples were implicated in the religious syncretism that occurred as a result of the conquest of the Americas. For several women this history informs whether or not they chose to remain Catholic-identified. Some are able to reconcile with this history, while for others, it is too great a source of tension to reconcile. There is also the use of history as a means of personal empowerment. As Yolanda Leyva stated, "To know one's history is healing." Through historical recovery, reconstruction, and retelling of Tejana/o/Mexicana/o and Chicana/o history through art and education, women use an awareness of their history to help others heal the spiritual and psychological trauma of loss of their history and ethnic discrimination they have suffered.

Reflections on the Movimiento

In our last interview for this dissertation I asked María Elena a question regarding her participation in the Chicano movement. "What did you get out of that experience?" I asked, to which she responded: "It showed me that we could change the world ... the belief that you could change the world through organizing." She also believes that the struggles of the Chicano movement were important, but that they are not important now. María Elena feels that we must move beyond the movement. That is, the movement was important for her, but today María Elena has moved forward in terms of placing her energies into working for social and individual

change today. The way she lives her life is one way of doing that. She applies what she learned in the movement -- the belief in creating social change to her life's work today. So in this sense her political activism has not ceased, the consciousness is still there; it has just taken a different form. The next phase of creating social change for women of this generation, I believe, is through a spiritual activism. For María Elena this has taken the form of a life-long commitment to bilingual education and now to spiritual healing, the healing of the earth and its communities, and work that helps to promote self-worth and dignity in women and girls.

The movement was life changing in other ways for participants such as Santa and Carmen. It was vitally important for these South Texas Tejanas, who grew up in a harsh racial climate and experienced social oppression in Kingsville. They both attribute feelings of belonging and self-worth they came to possess to their experiences with the Chicano movement. Today their artwork functions to reverse feelings of oppression and instill pride in Tejanas and Tejanos, Mexican Americans, and others, healing work that I view as its own form of spiritual activism.

Much in the same way many women were drawn to the Mexican American civil rights movement through a shared historical consciousness of racial discrimination and segregation, they are also drawn to spiritual activism as a way of living their activism in a way that is grounded in spiritual and moral values. I therefore argue that spiritual activism is a contemporary manifestation of the kinds of political work that so many women participated in during the 1960s and 1970s. During the movement and in their college experiences women cultivated the consciousness, knowledges and other tools -- the apparatus -- to fight social inequality. Today they draw on such tools in other aspects of their lives. I argue that they do so today within the

spiritual realm, through spiritual activism. I contend that women came to the *movimiento* with certain knowledges and strategies they cultivated living as Mexican–origin women in 1940s, 50s, and 60s Texas and interfacing with gender, racial and class oppression. I argue that much like women’s gender subjectivities and their gendered experiences informed the construction of their Chicana and Chicana feminist identities and experiences within the social movement of that period, their gendered experiences with religion informs the spiritualized activism they enact today.

Martha has publicly discussed the sexism and gender politics that she and other women stated permeated their experiences in the male-dominated ranks of La Raza Unida. Martha draws an insightful parallel between women navigating patriarchy within the Catholic Church and during the Chicano movement, comparing the Catholic Church to male dominance she recalls within her experience as an active participant of La Raza Unida Political Party: “La Raza Unida is like the Catholic Church: You don’t have to like it all. You have to be able to see the real cause and issues -- it’s not about “the boys.”” This led me to consider that women such as Martha employ the strategies they used to navigate gender hierarchies within the political realm in the 1960s and 1970s to navigate religious hierarchies today. I argue that women use similar tools of political negotiation from the past in their presents. For these women spiritual activism entails calling upon and even honing tools they used during the movement in order to once again challenge, navigate, and dismantle patriarchy. They are tools Tejanas have employed for generations as they navigate the gendered and racialized terrain of their geographical, spiritual, and political borderlands. I suggest that the ability to do so is part of the cultural production that enables women like Martha to continue to lead a life by Christ-like values.

The ways in which Anzaldúa and some of *las mujeres* have experienced shame around their bodies and sexualities positions their engagement with spiritual activism in particular ways. Anzaldúa's conception of the *Coyolxauhqui* story for instance is a statement about the violence and hatred towards women and the mind, body, spirit split. For Anzaldúa, when you "... take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She's no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in this anticolonial struggle, has been to ... put us back together again. To connect up the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit. That's why for me there's such a link between the text and the body, between textuality and sexuality, between the body and spirit." For Anzaldúa writing is activism and a "means for bringing about spiritual-material change" that helps "put us back together again" (Keating 2002:11). The narratives I shared in this dissertation, including my own interactions with María Elena, Mary Margaret, and Doña Enriqueta provide insight into the kinds of tools women employ for putting themselves, their communities, and each other back together again while trying to remain on the path of spirituality and social justice, which are inseparable for these women.

Tejanas have a history of activism and I propose that using their spirituality to promote social change is an extension of the work women were doing during the movement and another stage in their long history of spiritual agency. Today women use ritual, prayer, ceremony, and community as the foundations for activism.

Mexican American healing and spiritual traditions are fluid and vibrant and provide insight into issues of power, community, and agency. The transformations I examined in this study are markers of changes in women's material conditions and consciousness, which are

reflected in the spiritual realm and the ways they chose to engage in the world and in community. Such change has manifested in the local level and spiritual level and is characterized by traditions of the past as well as the remaking of religion in the present. The spiritual productions I examine here, while characterized by both a recuperation of past traditions and an ethnic of social justice in the present, signify rapid cultural change in the religious traditions of Texas Mexicans. They represent a paradigm shift in ethical standards with regard to Catholic religion, most prominently through women's contesting gender inequalities and reconstructing gender roles and expectations. Because religion has historically been a gendered space and site of social conflict for Mexican-origin people and their indigenous ancestors, it is understandable that such remaking occurs here.

PART V:

**REFLECTIONS FROM A *MUJERISTA* ETHNOGRAPHER
ON THE MAKING OF A SPIRITUAL ETHNOGRAPHY**

I often take walks on the trail near our house. It is my calming space, my opportunity to be in nature and to take a breath and clear my head. I often have moments of clarity on that trail. Such a thing happened one day in the final weeks of finishing this dissertation.

Up until that time I had felt a particular kind of frustration with this project that was not about the content, but the experience of *doing* ethnography. I have indeed grappled with such issues around methodology, as have many anthropologists. The particular tension I was feeling had to do with the process of trying to present this information in a holistic way that captured that essence of knowledge that emerged within the context of spiritual practices and self-making. I could not put my finger on it, but I could not envision this project in the style of a traditional ethnography. As I was walking that day, it hit me: what I had constructed was at once an ethnography of spirituality *and* a spiritual ethnography.

Trying to present this research as a typical ethnography was challenging because I was trying to produce an ethnography of spirituality within the context of what had been, for me, a spiritual experience. I felt I had to keep the making of the ethnography and the spiritual experiences I had during its making separate. I did not have the tools or model for articulating the melding of the two. I was trying to present what I thought was the whole picture but there was something missing.

While engaging in the research for this project I had numerous spiritual experiences, including healing on a spiritual level from our loss. This experience is now part of who I am as both a researcher and producer of culture. It acts as a lens through which I have viewed this research. Like many anthropologists before me, I have been drastically changed by this research, in large part because of the research but also because of life events that intersected it.

A *mujerista* ethnography allowed me to reconcile the anxiety I was feeling; the split around thinking that I had to suppress this part of the story -- my own. Through *mujerista* ethnography I no longer had to separate my own spiritual experience from the production of this dissertation. This project, as I have suggested earlier, is in itself a Tejana cultural production and symbol of the Tejana spiritual agency and transformation that occurred during its making.

The anxiety I was feeling subsided with the realization that this was a spiritual ethnography as much as an ethnography of spirituality. Understanding this dissertation in this way has resulted in my coming into new knowledges about the remaking of religion and subsequent spiritual production, knowledge that I believe has benefited the project and deepened my analysis. New knowledge also resulted from seeing that I was the beneficiary of knowledge passed down to me by *las mujeres* that was connected to my own experiences. This included my epiphany about Our Lady of Guadalupe that María Elena helped to facilitate and the exposure to Doña Enriqueta's indigenous healing techniques through Mary Margaret. The transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next in such ways reflects the making of spiritual epistemologies. This learning represents the broadening of possibilities for spiritual fulfillment and healing in which Tejanas such as myself and other Latinas are coming into. Such transmission is an important component of Tejana spiritual production, a marker of the

possibilities for what our spiritual worlds can be today. In the coming pages I reflect on these various issues; on the making of a *mujerista* ethnography. I close with final conclusions and thoughts on areas for future research.

The Making of a Mujerista Ethnography

Positioning myself as a researcher-subject allowed for the emergence of the *mujerista* ethnographic method. Utilizing this approach within the context of an ethnography of spirituality has led me to consider these methods within the framework of a spiritual methodology through which I have come into knowing about the women's spiritual lives. I hope that this approach has offered new perspectives on doing ethnography and raised new considerations for the spiritual realm as a site of knowledge production.

One of the challenges I faced with this project was a tension I felt about writing introspectively about my spiritual experiences and constructing an ethnography of spirituality. My anxiety came over trying to separate the two. So realizing this was not necessary, that the project is a spiritual ethnography as much as it is an ethnography of spirituality, was an epiphany. My anxiety subsided and I have come to terms with the fact that doing ethnography with integrity can occur in the space where spiritual experiences of the researcher and knowledge obtained about spiritual practices of research participants can intersect and overlap.

Part of this process involved fleshing out traditional approaches to methodological observations in order to arrive at one that accounted for and could fully capture what was going on, both in terms of what I *thought* was going on, and what actually was happening. It was not until our tragedy that my view of the world shifted that I came to realize that this project would

require a unique framework. My approach *necessitated* a *mujerista* ethnography, for in addition to my experiences serving as lenses through which I understand the women's, they are also the lenses through which I have found the need to question traditional anthropological methods and to construct new methodologies that consider how we as researchers study religious and spiritual practices but also in terms of how, for those of us who study our own communities, such practices can serve as a vital points of connection with the people with whom we work and offer possibilities for new spaces of knowing to emerge.

In considering such new spaces of knowing, I am inspired by a borderlands *mestizaje* framework that involves “centering and listening to *el cuerpos y* experiences *en nuestro* analysis” (2008) and which acknowledges that theories must come from the everyday lives of people. This framework attends to the fact that our bodies and experiences can be “powerful sources and sites of knowledge and identity negotiation and production” (2008:256-257). The bodies of Tejanas, including mine, are sites of knowledge. They hold memories of lifetimes of social struggle, identity formation, and redemption. Omitting my own experience of personal loss and how my own body and soul managed trauma and grief would have differently situated the degree of knowledge that I had to draw upon here. It is also possible that my experience and the newness of it -- that it occurred while I was conducting this research, also shifted how I viewed women's experiences. It may have led to my overemphasizing certain themes and missing others. Patricia Zavella states, “ ... self-reflective analysis of our own experience will push us to provide “provisional” analyses that are always incomplete, but which make clear whose viewpoint is being represented” (1997:45). It is my hope that some of this becomes

clearer as time goes on and that I can critically reflect on such issues in the coming years as I continue to build upon this research and expand my “provisional analysis.”

In sharing how my own spiritual epistemologies have been shaped, through my personal interaction with Catholicism and experiences of loss and healing, I have aimed to provide insight into processes by which women come into spiritual understandings and use spirituality.

Mujerista Paths to Knowing

I view particular paths to knowing such as information transmitted to me from María Elena, Mary Margaret, and Doña Enriqueta Contreras, as *mujerista* paths to knowing; matriarchal paths of knowledge. Such knowledges counter patriarchal forms of knowledge production that omit in many instances, the experiences of women and other marginalized groups. This is a form of recovery -- historical and social -- and a component of Tejana self-making that involves the passing down of spiritual and other knowledges between and among women. For instance, I once felt disconnected from a larger tradition of Tejano borderlands anthropology at UT Austin. My Tejano advisor wholeheartedly supported my project, however, in a more general sense and beyond him, I felt that this Tejana, feminist, Chicana, *mujerista* project did not quite fit the mold. Perhaps it was that this is one of very few dissertation projects that focused on Tejana cultural production. So when I met Mary Margaret she expanded my realm of understanding. She opened up a path of knowledge that she had accessed generations prior as a student of Américo Paredes. He had inspired *mujeres* before me. In my experience such a path had traditionally been the purview of a Tejano male academic tradition. A *mujerista* academic mentorship opened up this path of knowledge in a way that it

had not been previously. Mary Margaret drew on knowledges handed down to her by Paredes and infused them with an understanding of how the spiritual is a site of knowledge production and self-making for Tejanas and passed them down to me.

Holistic Approaches

The holistic and historical approach I have taken with this research accounts for the spiritual as a foundational aspect of daily existence rather than understood as practices taking place only during ritual or ceremonial occasions. Doña Enriqueta's impact on my way of understanding the indigenous and holistic ways of seeing and acting with and in the world mirrors the integral role that indigenous scholars have played in the critique of Western epistemologies and methodologies. My experience with Doña Enriqueta was one I reflect on from my various positions as a Chicana, Tejana, woman, anthropologist, and *mujerista* ethnographer. Meeting with Doña signaled a shift in my understanding of spirit and of physical, mental, and spiritual healing. That is, in the course of researching other women's epistemological understandings of their spiritual worlds, I came into a revelation about my own, through a very palpable mind-body-spirit experience that is helping to heal my formerly fragmented self. This experience illustrates the "put(ting) back together" of the body, soul, mind, and spirit of which Anzaldúa speaks (Keating 2000:11). Such healing methods gave me insight into the processes and paths by which several Tejanas have come into indigenous and other forms of spiritual knowing.

Place

My positionality as a South Texas Tejana and relationship to South Texas religious traditions provided me insight into the potency of place within regards to religious and spiritual experiences. The move from practicing Catholicism within a church to engaging in popular religion at the Healing Tree speaks to how, as Richard Flores states in regards to moving the site of the Mexican shepherd's play, "shifting sites -- church versus the barrio of the performance -- shifts the semantic field" (1995:133). Much like the meaning of the play shifted from the familial of the barrio performance to the institutional feel of the church performance, there was a meaning that these religious rituals held for me *in* South Texas. They revolved around belonging, nostalgia, and a certain familiarity with Santa Barraza during our time there that I do not feel engaging in Catholic ritual in a church. In rituals outside of the church, there is a decolonizing effect that takes over. I can at once partake in my ethnic heritage without having to navigate Catholic patriarchy. Such popular religious sites are also sites where various, often competing meanings and practices are accommodated. This occurs among pilgrims and custodians of the shrine, as well as its devotees (Sallnow and Eade 2000). I had a relationship to the site outside of any context of organized religion while Santa simultaneously maintained her own close connection to her Catholic faith.

Doing ethnography in my own backyard -- to *be* in South Texas -- influenced how I interacted with the Healing Tree and provided me insight into Santa's motivations for doing so. I am not a practicing Catholic and do not regularly pray to a "God." I acknowledge "the universe" and the "creator" at times, but not God in any monotheistic sense. But when I approached the Healing Tree that day in Falfurrias with Santa, something in me drew me to pray

and to purchase the bottle of tree oil from the *señora*. So when Santa asked me if I had said a prayer while we were at the tree, she said it in a manner that assumed that I had said one, and to my surprise, I had.

My own relationship to a Texas Mexican Catholicism, my various positionalities, and the experiences I have described in these pages led me towards a new understanding of issues around gender, race, and religion in the borderlands, and they inspired new directions for borderlands methodologies and epistemologies that I have proposed in this project. Because relationships between researchers and informants and their social worlds are constantly shifting, we as ethnographers must follow suit and engage in the remaking of research methods, exploring possibilities for new sites of knowing. I saw the seeds of this dissertation project in María Elena's spiritual and political journeys. This project came into full view through my examination of her life experiences. I was only able to see this, I believe, through the lenses of a Tejana on a spiritual journey of her own.

Risking the Personal

As I stated earlier, the choice to write about the loss of our pregnancy and challenges with fertility was not an easy one. I struggled with whether or not to do so for months and still do. Such a topic is largely taboo in American society, even though a startling number of women and their partners experience such issues and losses each year. There are also the risks associated with writing from such a position as a female scholar and scholar of color. What will the ramifications be of writing such personal things within the context of a scholarly work? Such questions have consumed me at times and at others, inspired me to keep moving forward. This

journey has been a roller coaster of emotions. In the end, I choose to go forward including my experience. I choose to risk the personal, as Gloria Anzaldúa says, because to do otherwise would be, in my opinion, dishonest. My positionality and view of my world, the worlds of the women in this study, and the worlds we share are different than they were before our loss. I am different and our relationships are different. This aspect of my subjectivity positioned the research and my relationships to the women differently. I hope my self-reflections will provide insight into the cultural production of spirituality among Tejanas and the key role spiritual intimacy and personal exchange in community plays in this production. I know more than I would have prior to my experiences and I believe being upfront about them makes for better anthropology.

This has become, in many ways, a story about the interconnections and intimacy between women. Spiritual intimacy, sisterhood, love, *comadrazgo* -- the convening and connections, the support networks that women have cultivated and nurtured for centuries have taken many forms. This is yet another unanticipated aspect of this project -- something I did not originally envision would come out of it, but which has, in large part through our loss and the subsequent bonds that I made with several of *las mujeres*. I find it interesting that this kind of knowledge emerged from a place of insecurity and vulnerability. I went into this project knowing early on that it would place me in situations where I would struggle with my insider-outsider status. I was often torn about whether I was at a ceremony for me or for the research. The lines blurred at times, in particular early on in the research, and this was a very unsettling feeling. So part of this project is about what happened when I let go and let it flow as it would.

As I have mentioned, deeper understanding of the women's lives has often occurred in those spaces where our experiences and interests intersect. This provides me a particular kind of insight into their experiences. The new way of being, seeing, and interacting in the world that I came into as a result of our loss involved a new way of seeing and approaching my work as an anthropologist. For instance, my experience provided me with new information about the potential for what might inform women's actions, life choices, and spiritual engagement.

My autoethnographic reflection depicted my coming into community with women and into knowing about indigenous spiritual practices and the processes by which they are learned by Chicanas in Austin, Texas. Oaxacan master healer-shaman and *partera* Doña Enriqueta Contreras came into my and Tommy's lives much like María Elena, when we needed her most. It was a pivotal moment that at once shifted our pain and facilitated our healing, our understanding of our loss, my own understanding of women's trauma and spiritual healing experiences, and the interconnection between mind, body, and soul in this process. Through our experience with Doña Enriqueta I came to better understand how the body and soul are portals of experiential knowledge, for both the researcher *and* study participant, identities I at times simultaneously occupied.

Prior to this particular healing experience my methods mainly consisted of participant observations and interviews with women. While I had drawn on my experiences as a Tejana raised Catholic and my coming into a Chicana feminist consciousness, I had not yet had the experience of that degree of loss and grief to draw on. I had not yet understood how our bodies carry grief, nor understand, *truly* understand, healing within a holistic context before, not to this extent and not from the core of my own body and soul. The mind-body-spirit connection

therefore acts as a form of knowing from my own subject position, through those experiences of the women in this study and as a means to understand the intimate moments and interconnections between a researcher and the women with whom she works -- ultimately, moments between women.

During the period surrounding our loss I searched desperately for a path to heal. María Elena had become so much more than an “informant” over the course of the two years prior to our loss. Our friendship had strengthened, as had my admiration for her and her commitment to healing and helping others. I had come to know her as a teacher -- intellectually and spiritually. So it is not surprising that when our lives were turned upside down in such a way, María Elena was there to assist us in picking up the pieces and help mend our severely broken hearts and spirits. Through ceremony and counseling she helped us make sense of our loss from a spiritual perspective, and in doing so she offered us solace and peace, as she did for Martha and her family, and numerous others. This was a gift to us. It was a reprieve and relief that touches the soul. It still amazes me that María Elena was there during *that* particular point in my life -- that our paths crossed when I needed it most.

My understandings of the roles of “researcher” and “informant” have changed within the context of this experience. I have a renewed understanding of how spirituality can assist women in bonding and act as a common lens through which they identify and make sense of their worlds, even if the ways they practice spirituality may differ. The dire need for spiritual healing and María Elena’s role in helping us to attain it confirmed for me something that I always knew, but not quite in this way -- that the “researcher-informant” binary is false. The relationships

between researchers and research participants take various forms today, necessitated by new approaches to ethnography and life experiences and circumstances often out of our control.

Confronting Biases: La Virgen as a Symbol of Tejana Self-Making

Being open to the experiences of Catholic women provided me insight into Tejana spirituality in ways that limiting the study to women who left Catholicism for other spiritual fulfillment would have lacked. It was important for me to challenge homogenous and static understandings of Catholicism. Having said this, I also recognize that my personal beliefs about the shortcomings of the institution of Catholicism are a bias I possess. Throughout this research I have tried to be upfront about this bias and to recognize that my own beliefs that the institution of Catholicism has patriarchal elements have inevitably impacted the research. I have tried to be, to the best of my ability, flexible. I respect women's choices to remain Catholic and the creative means they have employed to stay connected to their faith. In my view remaining connected in such a way and exhibiting a differential consciousness is, in some ways, even more subversive than severing themselves from Catholicism. My hope is that I was able to maintain a level of objectivity and critical eye to the cultural processes I examined here in ways that have benefited the research and illuminated processes of cultural production and self-making.

Both the women who left Catholicism and those who remained have shifted how I view the Catholic faith. Whereas I once equated Our Lady of Guadalupe with Catholicism, today I no longer believe she is the sole purview of the Church, and I have reestablished my relationship to her. Through my own experience and those of *las mujeres* I have learned that this is a process. One does not immediately invoke a religious symbol after years of not doing so. I am in the

process of reclaiming Guadalupe on my own terms -- as part of my ethnic heritage, in memory of my grandmothers and other *antepasados*, and as a symbol of my *mujerista* beliefs and strength.

Towards the end of completing this dissertation I went into a jewelry store. It was the two-year anniversary of losing Milagro. I wanted something to symbolize the day and how much healing I had done. I had come a long way and I wanted something to mark that amazing journey and her. It was a jewelry store near our home in South Austin, in an area with a large Latino population. Jewelry with symbols of *la Virgen* is not generally easy to find, and I was pleased that that particular store had more *Virgen* pendants than I have ever seen in one store at one time.

I located a beautiful, small silver one. "I'll take that one please," I told the woman behind the counter. I left with my *Virgen* and a small angel pendant. As I reflect on that pendant, I realize that it was the first time I bought anything with the *Virgen de Guadalupe* on it following coming to know her the way I do now.

Before the experience of conducting this research and coming to know *las mujeres*, Our Lady of Guadalupe symbolized my heritage, but I do not recall having a personal relationship with her. Having her around my neck today represents my transition to knowing her on my own terms; to invoking her as what I need her to be -- a non-hierarchical and liberating symbol of my strength, of motherhood, and of my indigenous, Mexican, and Tejana heritages. She functions for this Tejana in ways similar to the women in my life -- kin and fictive kin -- who have taught me about *la Virgen* and the vast possibilities that she represents.

Through Guadalupe women are able to remain ethnically and culturally connected while retaining and evoking their feminist sensibilities. Guadalupe signifies my past; my heritage, my ancestors, my grandmothers, my sense of being Tejana. For those of us who have been separated

from their cultural heritage through acculturation, racism, geographic distance, or distanced from our families due to evolving feminist and political consciousnesses, Guadalupe is there. She is a constant and a symbol of tradition and *Tejanidad* in an ever-changing world.

Considerations for Future Research and Conclusions

As I mentioned previously, I was unable to include all of the interviews and oral histories I conducted with women for this study in this dissertation. However, those that I did not include as narratives do provide important insight into Tejana social life and spirituality and as such these interviews point to some important areas for future research, which I aim to explore. One such area includes a closer examination of religious conversion and of rejection of organized religion, as in the experience of Houston activist and La Raza Unida participant, María Jimenez. María says that the Catholic Church turned her into an atheist by providing her advanced courses in theology and Catholic history as a Catechism teacher. Art museum director and former La Raza Unida member Sylvia Orozco's interview provided insight into how this generation differently identifies. While involved in the Chicano movement, Sylvia does not identify as Chicana, but rather Mexicana. An important area of future research involves examining this identity formation and how it reflects in women's and men's spiritual practices. Scholar, poet, and cultural worker Inés Hernández-Ávila's life story is important for understanding how bicultural Tejanas negotiate cultural traditions of two heritages, in her case Nez Perce and Tejana. Inés's participation in the Chicano movement and Native American heritage are important for understanding how individuals who navigate multiple identities craft spiritual practices and beliefs that meld these various identities; and how Native-Chicanas such as Inés

reconcile a Chicana spiritual identity -- of the southern tradición or Catholic, for instance -- with their Native American spiritual traditions. Inés's experiences would also provide insight into how Native groups understand Chicano indigeneity and claims of appropriation that have been projected upon Chicanos and Chicanas engaging in Mexica spiritual traditions. La Raza Unida co-founder Luz Bazan Gutiérrez and longtime Austin activist Hortensia Palomares provide insight into the development of feminist versus non-feminist consciousnesses during the movement. Future research will examine how this translates into the spiritual realm, as well as how women's decisions to identify as feminist or not were influenced by the degree to which they were raised in patriarchal households. Both Luz and Hortensia described growing up in households void of the harsh patriarchal hand that María Elena and others have described.

I contend that studies such as this ethnography, which examine the experiences of women and how they navigate hierarchies of power, can offer directions for potential future areas of study, including those that address gender and religion in the lives of men and other groups of women. For instance, my study raised questions for me, including: how are masculinities nurtured within the context of discourses around sexuality that focus on the female body rather than the male within the Catholic Church? What are the impacts of such discourses on the psyches of males and how does this impact their social relationships with other males and women? How do women's Chicano-Tejano male peers experiences compare to theirs? Why is spiritual agency so much more prevalent among women? While I believe this study points to some of the answers to these questions, it also brings attention to how a critical gender analysis can bring to light important questions for future research.

I suggest that the questioning that women are doing today, both within and outside of Catholicism, and its corresponding spiritual agency is indicative of a paradigm shift that is in the making. Old paradigms, such as those that limit women's power and potential, do not serve them. Much like the methodological tools available to me required me to seek out an alternative methodology that better reflected what I was witnessing occurring among *las mujeres*, the women are too reformulating how they interpret and engage in the world.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is a symbol of this paradigm shift because she is an example of how religious and spiritual practices are indicators and creators of social reality. She is a lens through which we can understand women's lived experiences because for those who have had any relationship to Catholicism, she is present. As a flexible and forgiving symbol, she is a gauge through which we can understand Mexican American women's and other people's religious and spiritual beliefs, moral values, and ethics. Through her we can understand how women perceive the world around them, and themselves. I have aimed to show that Guadalupe, as a powerful, potent, and effective symbol functions to change how women see themselves. And, she is a gauge for how they view their social worlds. Turning this lens on other groups of Latinas and women of other socio-economic and educational positions is a research endeavor that was out of the scope of this project, but which I believe is important and a rich area of future research. I also believe that studying Guadalupe's relationships to her gay, lesbian, queer, and male devotees are also rich areas of research that will greatly enhance our understandings of borderlands cultural productions and social life.

Spiritual activism is an important frame through which to understand how religion and spirituality function differently for women today than it did in generations past. I argue that

access to information about their histories, the Chicano movement and embracing ethnic pride, and their feminist development informed women's spiritual activism. They show how important it is to look to history to understand cultural productions and process of their making in the present. But we must also look beyond such historical events and identity construction to the material conditions of growing up as Tejanas in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. The experiences of this generation -- children of the World War II generation -- have influenced an entire generation of politically and socially conscious Mexican Americans who entered colleges and universities as students in large numbers. Today this generation is involved in working to recover and reconstruct the history of Mexican-origin people. Among them are *las mujeres*. Not only are they working as scholars, activists, artists, healers, and educators, they are doing their work through the context of spirituality. They are recovering their spiritual heritage as much as other scholars are recovering their racial heritage, labor, social movement, political and literary histories and in the process recuperating and remaking it.

They are a varied group, *las mujeres*, but they share deep convictions about social justice and human and civil rights. I argue that today the spiritual realm is a context within which their work is played out. They continue their work of creating social change, armed with a spiritual activism that is present -- albeit in different forms -- throughout their lives, including in the form of helping me, one of a small minority of Tejana Ph.D. students in the nation, to obtain her degree. Through such acts they continue to promote social justice by bringing awareness to Tejana/Chicana history and activism, but also through their support of younger generations who they mentor, such as myself. They are all committed to education and to helping support the next generation of leaders, educators, and activists.

If my spiritual exploration, those of the university -- age students who I teach, and many of my peers across the United States are any indication, the spiritual agency explored in this ethnography will continue to flourish for generations to come. "The face of God" will likely continue to change and evolve in various ways and under various circumstances in the spiritual, psychological, and physical borderlands of Texas and Mexico, and beyond.

EPILOGUE: AN ALTAR OF HER OWN

I end this dissertation much in the same way that it began: on an unexpected note. I began it with a story of an altar -- my story -- and I conclude it with a story of another altar and the end, or rather beginning of another journey.

I am in the home stretch of finishing the dissertation. It is a Saturday evening and Tommy and I are on our way to catch dinner after a long day of my writing and his usual gardening and home improvement projects. I look at my phone and see I have an email message from my mother. I read the email and gasp. "Oh my god!" This is crazy, I tell Tommy. The email reads:

Hi Bren,

Andrea came over this afternoon and helped me put some stuff on the walls and organize (decorate) with whatever I had in the house. She is amazing and has fun doing it but now I finally have an "Altar"! She saw a baker's rack that she said I might like ... and even helped me decorate it. It is so pretty with the big *Virgen de Guadalupe* frame over the altar. That used to be my mom's picture, which I had framed. I put some pictures of my deceased family there. I am so pleased with it.

Why did these few lines of an email from my mother strike me so? Perhaps it is because for the past several years I have been conducting research on Tejana religion and spirituality based on certain premises. One was that I was drawing on my personal experiences of being raised in a middle class Mexican American Catholic home. My parents are native Spanish-speakers, bilingual, and were born into an ethnic Mexican religious and cultural upbringing. But they shed many of such traditions when they achieved social mobility and moved into the

Mexican American middle class in Corpus Christi. Today my parents are both devout, self-identified Hispanic Catholics.¹⁵⁷

I have understood my mother's adult religious experience as very different from those of *las mujeres*. Part of mom's acculturation experience and moving into the middle class involved shedding a certain degree of *Mexicanidad*, something not uncommon among socially mobile Mexican Americans in Corpus Christi. I believe this was symbolized in our suburban home by the lack of an altar or Mexican Catholic religious iconography. The picture of my grandmother's that my mother mentioned was a symbol of our Mexican American heritage. Something about that decorative metal frame that once held the picture of *la Virgen* -- and the memory of how it looked in Grandma Vita's home -- was reminiscent of a Mexican American culture I was too naive to appreciate growing up and when she was alive. I wanted it back, that which I felt I had, in many ways, lost. I must admit mom's replacing the metal frame with the contemporary wooden one left me with a sense of loss. That metal frame held different meanings for mom and me.

So I was secure and fairly confident in my knowledge of these things, including that mom had not asserted spiritual agency to any noticeable degree. Then, in the final weeks of my dissertation writing, my mother throws me a wrench. An altar? After all of these years? What does this mean? What inspired her to shift *her* religious practices? And why now? My mother has never identified as an activist nor been outwardly political in any way. She was not involved in the Mexican American civil rights movement. She is a devout Catholic and has never claimed

¹⁵⁷ My parents identify as both Mexican American and Hispanic but much more often, Hispanic. We were raised with an awareness of being Hispanic rather than Mexican or Mexican American in Corpus Christi, which speaks to the pressure to acculturate that influenced many middle class Mexican-origin people in the city.

to be a feminist. She prays for me and my sisters and our family members on a daily basis. She once told me she goes to church because it is peaceful; because it makes her feel good and that she often gets something out of the sermons. We respect each other's different views. And while we came to her on different terms, we both find meaning in Guadalupe. I learned about home altars from María Elena, not from my mother. And now we both have altars, altars that stand for different things. Or do they? The anthropologist in me is intrigued. What do I do with this information?

After giving it some thought I decided to go against my initial instinct to call up mom and ask her these questions or to try and analyze any of this right now. Perhaps she herself needs time to "sit with it," this recuperation, this cultural production in which she is engaging. So I end this dissertation with more questions about Tejana spirituality, thanks to my mother, another Tejana. For now I leave my questions about my mom's altar for later, for the book project, an article, or perhaps, just leave them as questions from a daughter to her mother about the process by which she came into an altar of her own.

REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, Lila.

1986. *Veiled Sentiments*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

1990. "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women and Performance* 5(1): 7-27.

1991. "Writing against Culture." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard Fox. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 137-62.

1993. *Writing Women's Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Acosta, Teresa Paloma and Ruth Winegarten.

2003. *Las Tejanas*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Acuña, Rodolfo.

1988. *Occupied America*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Alexander, Jacqui M.

2005. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Allen, Paula Gunn.

1986. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon.

Alvarez, Alma Rosa.

2007. *Liberation Theology in Chicana/o Literature: Manifestations of Feminist and Gay Identities*. New York: Routledge.

Alvarez, Robert R.

1995. "The Mexican-U.S. Border: The Making of an Anthropology of the Borderlands." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 24:447-70.

Anzaldúa, Gloria.

1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

2000. *Interviews/Entrevistas*, ed. AnaLouise Keating. New York: Routledge.

2002. *now let us shift ... the path of conocimiento ... inner works, public acts*. In *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, 540-587. Routledge: New York.

- Anzaldúa, Gloria and Cherrie Moraga, eds.
1981. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press.
- Apodaca, María Linda.
1977. "The Chicana Woman: An Historical Materialist Perspective." *Latin American Perspectives*. (4)1/2: 70-89. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Aquino, María Pilar.
1993. *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Aquino, María Pilar; Machado, Daisy L., and Rodriguez, Jeanette, eds.
2002. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Asad, Talal.
1982. "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz." *Man* 18: 237-259.
1993. "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category." In *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, 27-54. Baltimore: John Hopkins University.
- Azpiazu, Joseph O.M.I. "Virgen De San Juan Del Valle Shrine," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/VV/ivv1.html> (accessed April 22, 2010).
- Baca Zinn, Maxine.
2001. "Political Familism: Toward Sex-Role Equality in Chicano Families." In *The Chicano Studies Reader: An Anthology of Aztlán, 1970-2000*. 455 – 472. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications.
- Barraza, Santa.
2000. *Santa Barraza: Artist of the Borderlands*, ed. Herrera-Sobek, María. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Barton, Paul.
2006. *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists in Texas*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Basso, Sister Teresita.
1997. "The Emerging Chicana." In *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma M. García, 58-65. New York: Routledge.

- Battaglia, Debora, ed.
1995. *Rhetorics of Self-Making*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bauman, Richard and Paredes, Américo.
1972. *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*. Austin: University of Texas.
1995. *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, Richard, Patricia Swain, and Inta Gale Carpenter, eds.
1992. *Reflections on the Folklife Festival: An Ethnography of Participant Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Behar, Ruth.
1993. *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*. Boston: Beacon.
1996. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon.
- Behar, Ruth and Deborah A Gordon, eds.
1995. *Women Writing Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Berryman, Phillip J.
1987. *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement and Beyond*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Blake, Debra J.
2008. *Chicana Sexuality and Gender: Cultural Refiguring in Literature, Oral History, and Art*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Brandes, Stanley.
2006. *Skulls to the Living, Bread to the Dead: The Day of the Dead in Mexico and Beyond*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Butler, Judith.
1990. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." In *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, 270-282. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
1993c. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.
1997. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge.
- Cadena, Gilbert R.
1987. *Chicano Clergy and Liberation Theology: A Descriptive Analysis*. (SCCR Working Paper No 23). Stanford: Stanford Center for Chicano Research.

- Calhoun, Craig.
1994. "Social Theory and the Politics of Identity." In *Social Theory and Identity Politics*, ed. Craig Calhoun, 9-36. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cantú, Norma E.
1997. *Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
2002. "Chicana Life-Cycle Rituals." In *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*, eds. Norma Cantú and Olga Nájera-Ramírez, 15-34. Champaign: University of Illinois.
2009. "The Semiotics of Land and Place: *Matachines* Dancing in Laredo, Texas." In *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, eds. Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma Cantú, and Brenda M. Romero, 97-115. Champaign: University of Illinois.
- Carrasco, David.
1990. *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Castañeda, Antonia I.
2001. "Que Se Pudieran Defender (So You Could Defend Yourselves)": Chicanas, Regional History, and National Discourses. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Women's West, 116-142.
- Castillo, Ana.
1994. *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*. Penguin Books: New York.
1996. "Introduction." In *Goddess of the Americas/La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, ed. Ana Castillo, XV-XXIII. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Ceseña, María Teresa.
2009. "Creating Agency and Identity in *Danza Azteca*." In *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, eds. Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma Cantú, and Brenda M. Romero, 80-96. Champaign: University of Illinois.
- Cisneros, Sandra.
1996. "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess." In *Goddess of the Americas/La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, ed. Ana Castillo, 46-51. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Collins, Patricia Hill.
1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Cotera, Martha P.

1976. *Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* Austin: Information Systems Development.

1977. "The Chicana Feminist." Austin: Information Systems Development.

1980. "Feminism: The Chicana and Anglo Versions, A Historical Analysis." In *Twice a Minority: Mexican-American Women*, ed. Margarita Melville, 217-234. St. Louis: C.V. Mosby.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé.

1988. "Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti Discrimination Law." *Harvard Law Review*. 101: 1331-1387.

1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989:139-167.

Davalos, Karen Mary.

2001. "Chicana/o Studies and Anthropology: The Dialogue that Never Was." *The Chicano Studies Reader: An Anthology of Aztlán, 1970-2000*. 585- 617. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications.

2009. *Yolanda M. López*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Delgadillo, Theresa.

1998. "Forms of Chicana Feminist Resistance: Hybrid Spirituality in Ana Castillo's *So Far From God*." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 44(4): 888-916.

Delgado Bernal, Dolores, Alejandra C. Elenes, Francisca E. Godinez, and Sofia Villenas, eds.

2006. *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*. New York: SUNY Press.

De La Portilla, Elizabeth.

2009. *They All Want Magic: Curanderas and Folk Healing*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

De León Arnoldo.

1982. *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

1983. *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans In Texas, 1821-1900*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Denzin, Norman K., Yyonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith.

2008. *Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Dillard, Cynthia.
2006. *On Spiritual Strivings: Transforming an African American Woman's Academic Life*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Dolan, Jay P.
1987. *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*. Garden City: Galilee Trade.
- Dolan, Jay P. and Deck, Figueroa Allan, eds.
1994. *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S. :Issues and Concerns*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Durkheim, Emile.
1965 [1915]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Joseph Ward Swain (trans.) New York: Free Press.
- Dyer, K.
Catching Up the Men: Women in Sport. London: Junction Books.
- Eade, John and Sallnow, Michael.
2000. *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Elizondo, Virgilio.
1997. *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
2000. *Beyond Borders: Writings of Virgilio Elizondo and Friends*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Espín, Orlando.
1997. *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections of Popular Catholicism*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Espinosa, Gastón and Mario T. García, eds.
2008. *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Espinosa, Gastón, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, eds.
2005. *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Fabrizio Pelak, Cynthia.

2007. "Intersectionality" in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Malden: Blackwell Pub.

Fernandes, Leela.

2003. *Feminist Practice: Nonviolence, Social Justice and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Flores, María Eva. "Las Hermanas," *Handbook of Texas Online*,

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/ix13.html> (accessed: February 21, 2009).

Flores, Richard.

1995. *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherd's Play of South Texas*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian.

2002. *Remembering the Alamo: Myth, Modernity, and the Master Symbol*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

2009. "Los Pastores and the Gendered Politics of Location." In *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*. Eds. Gastón Espinosa and Mario T. García.

Foucault, Michel.

1977. *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Interviews and Essays*, D. F. Bouchard, ed. New York: Cornell University Press.

1978. *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1. New York: Vintage.

García, Alma M., ed.

1997. *Chicana Feminist Thought: the Basic Historical Writings*. New York: Routledge.

García, Ignacio.

1990. *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party*. Tucson: University of Arizona Mexican American Studies Research Center.

Geertz, Clifford.

1966. "Religion as a Cultural System." In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton, 8-12. London: Tavistock.

1973. Religion: Anthropological Study. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, 13: 398-406. New York: Macmillan.

1977. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

1998. "Deep Hanging Out." *New York Review of Books*, October 22, 69-72.

Gluck, Sherna Berger and Daphne Patai, eds.

1991. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. Routledge: New York and London.

- Goizueta, Roberto.
1997. "Foreword." In *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*, ed. Orlando Espín, ix-xxii. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- González, Jovita.
2006. *Life Along the Border: A Landmark Tejana Thesis*. Ed. María Cotera. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- González, Jovita and Eve Raleigh.
1996. *Caballero: A Historical Novel*. Eds. María Cotera and José E. Limón. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Graham, Joe S. "Curanderos," *Handbook of Texas Online*,
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/sdc1.html> (accessed: January 13, 2010).
- Grande, Sandy.
2004. *Red Pedagogy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Grayson, J H.
1992. The Accommodation of Korean Folk Religion to the Religious Forms of Buddhism: An Example of Reverse Syncretism, *Asian Folklore Studies* (51) 2: 199-217.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo.
1988. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Hall, Stewart.
1987. "Minimal Selves." In *Identity: The Real Me*. London: ICA Document 6:44-46.
- Haraway, Donna.
1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives." *Feminist Studies*. (14) 3: 575-599.
- Hoch-Smith, Judith and Anita Spring.
1978. *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*. New York: Plenum Press.
- hooks, bell.
2003. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge: South End Press.

Huerta, Elisa Diana.

2009. "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity and *Danza Azteca*." In *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, eds. Nájera-Ramírez, Olga, Norma Cantú, and Brenda M. Romero, 80-96. Champaign: University of Illinois.

Isasi-Diaz, Ada María.

1993. *En La Lucha (In the Struggle): A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

1996. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Isasi-Diaz, Ada María and Yolanda Tarango.

1988. *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Kapchan, Deborah A. and Pauline Turner Strong, eds.

1999. Theorizing the Hybrid. Special issue, *Journal of American Folklore*, 112(445): 239-253.

Lambek, Michael, ed.

2008 [2001]. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Lambert, Frank.

2010. *Religion in American Politics: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lara, Irene.

2008a. "'Goddess' of the *Américas*: Beyond the Virtuous *Virgen/Pagan Puta* Dichotomy." *Feminist Studies*, (34)1/2 (spring/summer 2008): 99-127.

2008b. "Tonanlupanisma: Re-membering Tonantzin-Guadalupe in Chicana Visual Art." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, (33)2 (fall 2008): 61-90.

Latina Feminist Group, ed.

2001. *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*. Durham: Duke University Press.

León Portilla, Miguel.

1990. *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990[1963].

León, Luis D.

2007. Cesar Chavez in American Religious Politics: Mapping the New Global Spiritual Line. *American Quarterly* 59(3): 857-881.

Leyva, Yolanda Chávez.

2003. "“There is great good in returning”: A Testimonio from the Borderlands. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24(2&3): 1-9.

Limón, José E.

1994. *Dancing With the Devil*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Lomas Garza, Carmen.

1991. *A Piece of My Heart/Pedacito de mi Corazon: The Art of Carmen Lomas Garza*. New York: Free Press.

López, Sonia.

1977. "The Role of the Chicana within the Student Movement." In *Essays on la Mujer*, eds. Sánchez, Rosaura and Rose Martínez Cruz, 16-29. Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications.

Marx, Karl. "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker, Robert C, 53-65. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

McCarthy Brown, Karen.

2001. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

2002. "Writing about "The Other," Revisited." In *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, eds. Spickard, James V., J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire, 127-133. New York: New York University Press.

McNay, Lois.

2000. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000.

Madsen, William.

1973 [1962]. *The Mexican Americans of South Texas*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 2nd edition.

Martin-Hill,

2004. "Women in Indigenous Traditions." In *Women and Religious Traditions*, eds. Anderson, Leona M. and Dickey Young, Pamela, 137-159. Oxford University Press.

Matovina, Timothy

1995. *Tejano Religion and Ethnicity: San Antonio, 1821-1860*. Austin: UT Press. 2005. *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Matovina, Timothy and Riebe-Estrella, Gary.
2002. *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism*. Ithica: Cornell University Press.
- Medina, Lara.
1998. "Los Espíritus Siguen Hablando: Chicana Spiritualities." In *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo, 189-213. Berkeley: Third Woman Press.
2004. *Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious-Political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church*. Philadelphia: Temple.
- Medina, Néstor.
2009. *Mestizaje: (Re)mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Menchaca, Martha.
1993. "Chicano Indianism: A History of Racial Repression." *American Ethnologist*. 20(3):583-603.
1995. *Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California*. Austin: UT Press.
2001. *Constructing Race, Recovering History*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Meier, Matt S. and Margo Gutiérrez.
2000. *Encyclopedia of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Meier, Matt S. and Feliciano Ribera
1993. *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Mintz, Sidney Wilfred. 1979. "The Anthropological Interview and the Life History / In: *Oral History Review*. 18-26. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Montejano, David.
1987. *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Moore, Henrietta.
1989. *Feminism and Anthropology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mosqueda, Lawrence J.
1986. *Chicanos, Catholicism, and Political Ideology*. Lanham: University of America Press.

- Narayan, Kirin. 1993. How Native is a 'Native Anthropologist'? *American Anthropologist*, 95 (3): 671-682.
- Návar, María Margarita.
2010. *Mujer Zapoteca de la Nubes; Zapotec Woman of the Clouds*. Austin: Zapotec Press.
- Navarro, Armando.
2000. *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Neitz, Mary Jo.
1987. *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment Within the Charismatic Renewal*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
2002. "Walking between the Worlds: Permeable Boundaries, Ambiguous Identities." In *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, eds. Spickard, James V., J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith McGuire, 33-46. New York: New York University Press.
- Ohnuki-Tierney
1984. *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ortner, Sherry B.
1989. *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
1994. "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties." In *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, 37-40. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
1996. *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Orozco, Cynthia.
"Mujeres Por La Raza," *Handbook of Texas Online*,
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/MM/vimgh.html> (accessed March 3, 2009).
- Paredes, Américo.
1958. *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
1978. "On Ethnographic Work Among Minority Groups." In *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship*, Romo, Ricardo and Raymund Paredes eds., 1-32. La Jolla: University of California Press.

- Pérez, Emma.
1999. *The Decolonial Imaginary*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Pérez, Laura E.
1998. Spirit Glyphs: Reimagining Art and Artist in the Work of Chicana Tlaminime. *Modern Fiction Studies* (44)1: 36-76.
2007. *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Poole, Stafford.
1995. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol 1531-1797*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Ramirez, Roberto R.
2004. *We the People: Hispanics in the United States*. Census 2000 Special Reports.
- Reed-Danahay.
1997. *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. New York: Berg.
- Rodriguez, Sylvia.
1991. The Taos Pueblo Matachines: Ritual Symbolism and Interethnic Relations. *American Ethnologist* (18)2: 234-256.
- Rodriguez, Jeanette.
1994. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican American Women*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
1996. "Guadalupe: The Feminine Face of God." In *Goddess of the Americas/La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, ed. Ana Castillo, 25-31. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Rodriguez, Jeanette and Ted Fortier.
2007. *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Rosaldo, Renato.
1993. *Culture and Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Rubel, Arthur.
1966. *Across the Tracks: Mexican Americans in a Texas City*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Ruiz, Vicki.
1998. *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Russel y Rodriguez, Monica.
2002. "Confronting Anthropology's Silencing Praxis: Speaking Of/From a Chicana Consciousness." In *The Qualitative Inquiry Reader*, 347-376. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.
- Saldívar-Hull, Sonia.
2000. *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics to and Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sallnow, Michael J. and Eade, John, eds.
2000. *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. New York: Routledge.
- Sánchez, Rosaura.
1997. "Reconstructing Chicana Gender Identity." *American Literary History* (9)2: 350-363.
- Sánchez-Walsh, Arlene M.
2003. *Latino Pentecostal Identity: Evangelical Faith, Self, and Society*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sandoval, Chela.
1991. U.S. "Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World." *Genders* 10: 1-23.
1998. "Mestizaje as Method: Feminists-of-Color Challenge the Canon." In *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo, 352-370. Berkeley, Calif.: Third Woman Press.
2000. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sangster, Joan.
1994. "Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History." *Women's History Review* (3)1: 5-28.
- Scott, James C.
1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sendejo, Brenda.

2005. "Cultivating a Chicana Consciousness on the Border: The Influence of World War II Generation Latinas on the Chicana Generation." Master's Report, University of Texas at Austin.

2009. "Mother's Legacy: Cultivating Chicana Consciousness During the War Years." In *Beyond the Latino WWII War Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of a Generation*. Eds. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and Emilio Zamora. 156-177. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Smith, Andrea.

2005b. *Conquest, Sexual Violence, and American Indian Genocide*. Cambridge: South End.

2008. *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Spickard, James V., J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith McGuire, eds.

2002. *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*. New York: New York University Press.

Stacey, Judith.

1988. "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 11(1): 21-27.

Tamez, Elsa, ed.

1989. *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

1993. *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Tedlock, Barbara. 2005.

The Woman in the Shaman's Body: Reclaiming the Feminine in Religion and Medicine. New York: Bantam Books.

Treviño, Roberto R. "Mexican Americans and Religion," *Handbook of Texas Online*,

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/pqmcf.html> (accessed October 14, 2008).

2003. Facing Jim Crow: Catholic Sisters and the "Mexican Problem" in Texas. *The Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (2): 139-164.

Tylor, Edward Burnett.

1958. *Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Turner, Victor.
1967. Symbols in Ndembu Ritual. In *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 19-47.
1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Verter, Bradford.
2003. Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory* 21(2): 50-174.
- Vigil, Diego James.
1980. *From Indians to Chicanos: A Sociocultural History*. St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company.
- Visweswaran, Kamala.
1994. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wald, Kenneth D.
2003. *Religion and Politics in the United States*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Walter, Lynn
1995. Feminist Anthropology? *Gender and Society* 9(3):272-288
- Weber, Max.
1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Williams, Raymond.
1978. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford Press.
- Wilson, Catherine E.
2008. *The Politics of Latino Faith: Religion, Identity, and Urban Community*. New York: New York University.
- Wolf, Eric R.
1958. "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol." *The Journal of American Folklore*, (71)279:34-39.

Zavella, Patricia.

1987. *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

1994. "Reflections on Diversity among Chicanas." In *Race*, eds. Steven Gregory and Sanjek, Roger, 199-212. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

1997. "Feminist Insider Dilemmas: Constructing Ethnic Identity with Chicana Informants." In *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life*, eds. Lamphere, Louise, Helena Ragoné, and Patricia Zavella, 42-61. New York: Routledge.

2003. "Talkin' Sex: Chicanas and Mexicanas Theorize about Silences and Sexual Pleasures." In *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*, eds. Arredondo, Gabriela F., Aida Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramirez, and Patricia Zavella, 228-253. Durham: Duke University Press.

Zavella and Denise A. Segura.

2008. "Introduction: Gendered Borderlands." *Gender and Society*, (22)5: 537-544.

Vita

Brenda Lee Sendejo was born in Corpus Christi, Texas on February 19, 1971. Her parents are Gloria Ledesma Sendejo and Jesse Sendejo. Following high school Brenda attended the University of Texas at Austin, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Cultural Anthropology. Her professional employment includes five years as a museum educator and exhibit researcher and developer. In 2003 Brenda entered the Mexican American Borderlands Program in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin to pursue her graduate studies.

Permanent address: 2618 Davis Lane, Austin, Texas 78745

This dissertation was typed by the author.