

**Resilience and Resistance in Ritual:
Transformations of and Healing from Inherited Trauma**

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Gender/Cultural Studies

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Advisor: Dr. Becky Thompson

Signature:

Date:

GCS Program Director: Dr. Jo Trigilio

Signature:

Date:

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Abstract

The legacy of colonization continues its assault in the forms of imperialism, sexism, and homophobia. This project analyzes practices forged by women of color to survive, defy, and heal from those colonial traumas. While engaging historical contexts and developing a theoretical genealogy, I explore sites of resistance in the face of trauma, with particular emphasis on the work of Black and Latin@ women. In their intersectional scholarship, women of color teach us that trauma, in all of its forms, is both personal and collective. Women of color create sites of resistance to that trauma through their use of ritual. These resistant practices nourish multiracial coalition by preserving space for the recognition of women of color's experiences. Within this work, I seek to build bridges, developing understanding across ethnoracial lines. As a white, antiracist, bilingual scholar, my methodological approach centering "theory in the flesh" avoids reinscribing Eurocentric paradigms and misappropriating the work of women of color. Through engaging with the scholarship of women of color and the centrality of ritual in their practices of resistance, I fortify the bridge that connects us in a way that supports and contextualizes the work done before mine.

I. Introduction

I purchase most of my books used. I don't mind the faded pages, the pencil marks, or the price stickers. My most recent acquisition was *The Last Generation* by Cherríe Moraga. Moraga describes herself as "a very tired Chicana/half-breed/feminist/lesbian/writer/teacher/talker/waitress" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, which she co-edited with Gloria Anzaldúa.¹ Since I first opened *This Bridge*, Moraga's work as a writer-activist has inspired my own work as a white, anti-racist, bilingual scholar. Even though I should be writing my thesis instead, I read the introduction and final essay. My eyes fill with tears as I read various passages, not out of sadness (though some of the passages are undoubtedly sad) but out of admiration for the beauty of her writing and for the continued relevance of this book, published a year after my birth. Moraga's friend tells her "Everything we write nowadays is outdated before we've finished."² Moraga and I both agree with her friend; I hope to someday write a piece that ages so gracefully.

I flip the book over to the back cover and begin peeling at the stickers while I read the analysis written there. The stickers mostly cover Moraga's face in a photo familiar to me from some of her other books. The indignity startles me, so I begin working at the stickers more diligently than my typical nervous habit would demand. A hole punched in the back cover also strikes me - who punches holes in books, and why!? As I read and peel stickers, I find the endeavor fitting, given the scope of the analysis which I should be writing. Their titles are visible, but I wish to uncover the faces of women of color undertaking scholarship surrounding

¹ Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Lanham: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), 248.

² Cherríe Moraga, *The Last Generation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 3.

“the politics of survival” and “radical transformation of consciousness and society;”³ Moraga’s face embodies her scholarship while I peel back colonial traumas.

The Americas were built on the backs of people of color through a process beginning over 500 years ago.⁴ Imperialism, far from ended, shifted forms and has been rearticulated as globalization, as free trade, as diversity, as democracy. Even at the birth of colonization, resistance rose against it. Organizers of that resistance survive and thrive today. The trauma of colonization also endures, with new traumas emerging from the same historical process. Women of color have borne the brunt of these injuries, occupying a particularly perilous position with respect to race, gender, and sexuality.

In centering theories and practices developed by women of color, this exploration pays particular attention to the contributions of Latin@⁵ and Black women. In order to understand their experiences and their activism, the coalitional aspect must come to the fore while attending to the particularities of their experiences. I discuss Indigenous women from within a *mestiza* context with the understanding that this category does not encompass all Indigenous women in the Americas. Similarly, most of the Latin@ scholars I discuss are Chican@. I avoid a superficial analysis of women of color, instead favoring an extensive inquiry into two precisely situated groups, Black and Latin@ women. As such, this representation does not extensively engage the scholarship of East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, or desi women.

³ Ibid, back cover.

⁴ Ibid, 185.

⁵ I use the commercial at, “@,” symbolizing a fusion of the letters “o” and “a,” as part of a growing movement to generate linguistically appropriate gender neutral terms that are trans and nonbinary inclusive. Within the context of Latin@ women, the commercial at actively includes gender nonconforming women, trans women, and nonbinary folks who identify with womanhood.

Though the establishment of colonial power marginalized Black and Latin@ women on many layers, they have survived and defied that power from its earliest imposition. As the legacies of colonial trauma extend their tendrils through the ever evolving facets of contemporary life, women of color in particular develop innovative sites of resistance and healing. Ritual is one resource cultivated and refined by women of color. Rituals, as intention-based processes with specific steps, generate affective cultural meaning for participants. In both spiritual and secular activist spaces, women of color's ritualized practices create potential for decolonial resistance to and healing from inherited colonial traumas.

II. Origins and Methodology

This line of inquiry arises from a deep reading of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Known for her influential body of work, writing *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and editing *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa made colossal contributions to social justice praxis and cultural theory before her passing. Anzaldúa self-identified as a "Chicana, tejana, working-class, dyke-feminist poet, writer-theorist," naming herself thus as a survival tactic to prevent the erasure or omission of her multiplicity.⁶ As a bilingual anti-racist scholar with research interests in Latin@ and Latin American culture, Anzaldúa's work has been particularly important to me throughout my studies. I submerged myself in *Light in the Dark*, her recently published posthumous work. Experience reading Anzaldúa enabled me to understand other theorists of multiplicity, such as María Lugones. Anzaldúa's analytical approach to Coyolxauhqui's dismemberment corresponds with

⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer - Loca, escritora y chicana" in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, AnaLouise Keating, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 164.

Lugones' conceptions of fragmented self in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. A feminist philosopher born in the Argentine *pampas*, Lugones specializes in Latin American philosophy, subaltern studies, and theories of resistance. She explores a sexual politics "against the tortures of colonization and nation,"⁷ particularly in relation to the plurality of the self.

Anzaldúa and Lugones' discussions of traumatic fragmentation motivated my line of inquiry. My personal experiences with intergenerational trauma also contributed to my focus, while my commitment to intersectional activism encouraged me to center the experiences of women of color. Through grounding my analysis in *autohistoria* and multiracial feminist theory, I attempt to resist the exploitation accompanying the white gaze. While I initially intended to examine trauma in all of its iterations, I found myself gravitating towards postcolonial literature with a distinct focus on cultural and racial trauma.

Alongside many other women of color, Anzaldúa co-created the concept of spiritual activism. Jacqui Alexander's scholarship unites spiritual activism with pedagogy, another set of often ritualized practices. A transnational feminist scholar from Tobago, Alexander addresses the centrality of heterosexuality to nation building, the importance of teaching for justice, and women's experience of the sacred. Additional scholarship of contemporary women of color connecting ritual, trauma, healing, and de/colonization led me to understand ritual as an important site of decolonization and of healing from inherited trauma.

⁷ María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 179.

While Anzaldúa's deployment of spiritual activism as a healing mechanism⁸ refocused me on ritual, Shawn Wilson's work facilitated my understanding of the centrality of ritual in transformative research. Wilson is Opaskwayak Cree from northern Canada; he undertook his doctoral studies at a university in Australia. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* builds upon his experiences and those of Indigenous people in both Canada and Australia. Within this text, Wilson develops a research paradigm that centers the epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies, and axiologies of Indigenous people. While Wilson is not a woman of color, he undertakes this work alongside women of color. The women prominent in Wilson's talking circles include: Jean Graveline; Jane Martin; Karen Martin; Cora Webber-Pillwax; his sister, Alex Wilson; his mother, Peggy Wilson; and a woman known by the pseudonym Wombat.⁹ Not only does his decolonizing research paradigm align with multiracial feminist values of collaboration, collectivity, and relational accountability: Wilson's work also includes women of color and explicitly acknowledges their contributions to his research.

Definitions

While some terms may be defined as they arise, many concepts are inextricable from my theoretical framework. In order to establish a common point of reference, I have outlined my understanding and use of the following concepts: trauma; disidentification; *nepantla*; ritual; colonization, coloniality, and decolonization; autoethnography, *autohistoria*, and

⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 44.

⁹ Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 62-68 and 128-129.

autohistoria-teoría; and spiritual activism. These definitions provide a codex for the theoretical foundation from which I build this project.

The form of trauma which I name as inherited trauma draws heavily from Ann Cvetkovich's understanding of insidious trauma. Cvetkovich uses her own experiences as a lesbian, incest survivor, and AIDS activist to examine the historical narrative of queer trauma in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, emphasizing sites of trauma and mourning as spaces in which to live and grow.¹⁰ Insidious trauma emphasizes the quotidian nature of trauma, as it emerges from systemic oppression; while insidious trauma may be more difficult to identify, it also resists a pathological reduction of traumatic experiences. Cvetkovich argues that when "causes of trauma become more diffuse, so too do the cures, opening up the need to change social structures."¹¹ Solutions derived from overly specific conceptualizations isolate trauma to an individual or a specific set of circumstances, instead of addressing the greater societal crisis. Inherited traumas can vary from the psychological effects of centuries of racial oppression, as explored by Joy DeGruy in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, to specific, individual experiences. My purpose here is not to rank traumas, nor to dilute them by making the category too vague. Instead, I want to acknowledge the embodiment of trauma on an individual level, with emphasis on how these individual traumatic experiences form collective assemblages. A broad definition of trauma shifts the focus to healing, creation, and growth, resisting conventions rooted in pathology considering the trauma survivor to be damaged or destroyed.

¹⁰ Tammy Rae Carland and Ann Cvetkovich. "Sharing an Archive of Feelings: A Conversation." *Art Journal* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 73.

¹¹ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 33.

The discussions of decolonization and trauma that follow incorporate the performative concept of disidentification. Michel Pêcheux, extending Althusser's interpellation theory, posits three modes of subject production: identification, or accepting ideological forms; counteridentification, or rebelling against the symbolic system; and disidentification, or transforming the system from within.¹² Elaborating on this third option, José Esteban Muñoz argues that disidentification enables the "politicized agent" to adapt and shift between identificatory and counter-identificatory discourses.¹³ Muñoz was a Cuban-American academic theorist who, before his death, fused queer of color critique and performance studies. Rather than the choice of embracing or opposing the dominant discourse, disidentification offers an option between them, through the process of recognizing discursive fissures. Muñoz provides the example of Franz Fanon's scholarship; a disidentifying scholar can work with his valuable anti-colonial discourse while they challenge Fanon's homophobia and misogyny.¹⁴

The concepts of *nepantla* and *nepantlera* develop a useful analytical approach to the boundaries which disidentification highlights. Anzaldúa defines *nepantla* as a "liminal, in-between space,"¹⁵ similar to disidentification, *nepantla* refers the space in which different worlds, identities, and communities overlap, challenging neat divisions.¹⁶ Whereas disidentification refers to a navigational practice, *nepantla* is the space in which those cultural discourses converge or separate. Emerging from her theorization of the Borderlands, emphasis on spiritual space as opposed to a purely material one distinguishes Anzaldúa's *nepantla*.¹⁷

¹² José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), 11.

¹³ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 168.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 239.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

Nepantla is more of a mental than a physical space, accommodating *nepantleras* who live and work there. Anzaldúa represents *nepantleras* as bridge-builders, with *la facultad* to shift between cultural spaces and create new inclusive spaces.¹⁸

Nepantleras adopt various methods to generate those spaces, especially practices developed through ritual. Not unlike trauma, the conceptualization of ritual takes on a somewhat nebulous meaning here. Ritual refers to a specific procedural structure with intentionality from the participant(s), generating affective cultural meaning for them. Opening up the term “ritual” beyond its usual religious connotation challenges not only the distinction between spirituality and materiality, but also the pressure to evaluate the authenticity of a ritual or ritualized practice. Wilson emphasizes the importance of “setting the stage” for ceremony;¹⁹ this definition extends beyond ceremonial conceptions of ritual, as not all ritual requires preparations. In fact, the ritual itself can be preparation (for a ceremony, for the day, for an examination). These rituals include many spiritual practices, but also activities such as writing or cooking insofar as they inspire affective significance. Affective meaning characterizes both spiritual and secular rituals. As such, this definition of ritual defies traditional boundaries while maintaining a distinction from more trivial tasks. Determining how ritual practices engage resistance calls for a more nuanced discussion of coloniality and de/colonization.

Colonization is the historical process through which European empires claimed distant lands and oppressed people of color. Within this definition, colonization ends with European nations’ official loss of their colonies and recognition of independent states in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. While we may recognize many modern institutions (such as the academy) to be

¹⁸ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 85.

¹⁹ Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 69.

colonized and acknowledge the continuation of settler colonialist practices, colonization refers to the *historical* component, rather than contemporary forms. The coloniality of power, on the other hand, defines manifestations of that heavily racialized process in the social and cultural power structures of the present day. Anibal Quijano discusses how producing racialized labor created the “social geography of capitalism;” as such, racialization has been built into both the modern economic system and modern social values.²⁰ Coloniality demonstrates colonization’s continued role in defining the world order, even as a historical process. Within this framework, decolonization refers to the process of dismantling the coloniality of power in favor of a more egalitarian, less Eurocentric approach. Distinguishing coloniality from colonization and defining decolonization establishes not only the nuance within this framework but also determines the meaning of colonial traumas.

In Western research, coloniality often manifests through Eurocentrism. The emphasis on *autohistoria* in this project resists an ethnocentric gaze.²¹ Whereas an autoethnography takes an anthropological approach to the researcher or their demographic, *autohistoria*, a term coined by Anzaldúa, refers to the process of relating cultural (hi)story²² through personal (hi)story.²³ Through *autohistoria*, Anzaldúa positions herself within her writing, reflecting on her choices and her relations to the theory she presents instead of falsely depicting theoretical work as

²⁰ Anibal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views From South* 1, no. 3 (September 2000), 539.

²¹ My reasoning for maintaining certain Spanish terms, such as *autohistoria*, despite their having literal English translations, is to recognize the genealogy of these theories in Latin@ feminist thought and resist efforts to colonize, appropriate, or decontextualize that work.

²² *Historia* literally translates to either history or story; because in this context it is so often used in reference to collective and intergenerational cultural narratives, I choose to combine these meanings in the English text.

²³ Anzaldúa, “Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera,” *La Frontera/The Border: Art About the United States/Mexico Border Experience*, ed. Natasha Bonillo Martínez (San Diego: Centro Cultural de la Raza, Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993), 113 in Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 13.

objective.²⁴ While related, *autohistoria* and autoethnography are distinct concepts.

Autoethnography generally complies with methodological guidelines as they apply to other forms of ethnographic and anthropological work, while *autohistoria* does not tie into any single discipline. Additionally, autoethnography is a term generally reserved for academic work, while *autohistoria* is a communal epistemological form. For Anzaldúa, *autohistoria* represents an important site for theorizing; her term *autohistoria-teoría* refers to the simultaneous production of *autohistoria* and theory within her own work (and the work of others).

Autohistoria-teoría becomes one of the most powerful mechanisms of *autohistoria* by fusing lived experience and theory. Embodying this theoretical element - especially through “theory in the flesh” as developed in *This Bridge Called My Back* - takes a prominent place within practices of *autohistoria*. *This Bridge*, edited by Anzaldúa and Moraga, is now widely regarded as the seminal text of multiracial feminism. Speaking back to “white feminist would-be allies”²⁵ who promoted white womanhood as the universal experience of womanhood,²⁶ *This Bridge* pulled together the voices of women of color “to reflect an uncompromised definition of feminism” in their voices.²⁷ While Anzaldúa and Moraga developed the terminology, theory in the flesh permeates the work of all of the contributors to *This Bridge*. Anzaldúa and Moraga define theory in the flesh as a theory “where the physical realities of our lives - our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings - all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.”²⁸ They do not separate theory from lived experiences or value the two differently;

²⁴ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 4.

²⁵ Toni Cade Bambara, Forward, in Anzaldúa and Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*, vi.

²⁶ Some contributions literally spoke to white feminists, as in the case of Audre Lorde’s “An Open Letter to Mary Daly.”

²⁷ Anzaldúa and Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*, back cover.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 23.

autohistoria-teoría organically links theory and materiality instead of discriminating between the two.

Another integral aspect of transforming and healing traumatic legacies developed by women of color is spiritual activism. According to AnaLouise Keating, the defining characteristic of spiritual activism is “a metaphysics of interconnectivity,” which develops radically inclusionary intersectional practices and identities.²⁹ Keating, a scholar focused on transformation studies, women-of-color theories, and pedagogy, was Anzaldúa’s close personal friend and colleague, co-editing *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* alongside Anzaldúa and preparing Anzaldúa’s unpublished manuscripts for posthumous publication. As *almas afines*, Keating and Anzaldúa heavily influence each other’s work. Connecting inner consciousness to “the outer worlds of action” through spiritual activism drives Anzaldúa’s process of *conocimiento*,³⁰ or consciousness raising.³¹ Like Anzaldúa and Keating, other scholars consider interpersonal connection and translating personal transformation beyond the self to be central tenets of spiritual activism.

Methodological Framework

Due to my focus on groups distinct from my own, I have been deliberate about my methodological approach. In efforts to avoid an objectifying anthropological gaze, this is primarily a theoretical undertaking. Through an analysis grounded in *autohistoria* and theory in

²⁹ AnaLouise Keating, “‘Making Face, Making Soul’: Spiritual Activism as Social Transformation,” in Kim Marie Vaz and Gary L. Lemons, eds., *Feminist Solidarity at the Crossroads: Intersectional Women’s Studies for Transracial Alliance*, New York, Routledge (2012), 211.

³⁰ *Conocimiento* is Anzaldúa’s epistemological term for an awareness that encompasses and connects the external environment, the mind, the body, and the spirit; not unlike consciousness raising of the 1960s or the contemporary cry to “stay woke,” Anzaldúan *conocimiento* is a process, rather than a state, of social awareness.

³¹ Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 178.

the flesh, this project privileges lived experience over abstractions. This does not inherently prevent objectification, and theory does not prevent research from resulting in harm. Through basing this project in multiracial feminist theory, I have attempted to account for my own biases and for the influences of racism in our society. Not unlike Wilson's Indigenous research process, my work begins with the process of "checking your heart,"³² ensuring that positive motives characterize this undertaking. In many ways, this project is a conversation and a form of active listening. The structure incorporates major concepts and theories within trauma studies, women of color feminism, and postcolonial studies throughout the text as they become relevant, instead of developing an isolated literature review.

While I speak in the first person while describing my positionality and methodological choices, the pages that follow are primarily written in the third person. The subsequent pages understand the resilience and resistance of women of color facing trauma through the development of a decolonizing framework. The following section details the forms of inherited trauma stemming from coloniality, particularly imperialism, patriarchy, and heterosexism. Next, I explore the role of ritual in resistant responses, addressing both spiritual and secular sites of empowerment. From here, I examine the significance for multiracial coalition and name sites for future inquiry before concluding.

III. Variations and Manifestations of Inherited Trauma

Rather than weighing the severity of some traumas against others, this section distinguishes forms of colonial trauma by their causes. The analyses that follow address racism,

³² Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 60.

misogyny, and homophobia in particular; while these categories overlap, the context underpinning each one develops specific experiences and thus generates different responses to those traumas. These variations of inherited trauma all represent different manifestations of the coloniality of power; imperialism, patriarchy, and compulsory heterosexuality reflect an enduring progression of violence, both structural and personal.

Imperialism: Racial and Ethnic Violence

Racial and ethnic violence are widely recognized forms of inherited, historical, and collective trauma. The formation of racial categories justified not only the forced labor that built empire and capitalism, but also encouraged dispossession and genocide. Coloniality as imperialism generates racial violence, culminating in genocide and lingering in a double consciousness for people of color. From the trans-Atlantic slave trade to manifest destiny, North America was founded on the labor of people of color. Racial and ethnic violence continue in forms not easily distinguishable from genocide. From statistics regarding unarmed people of color killed by police to a necropolitical disregard for environmental health hazards in Standing Rock and Flint, imperialist forces continue to justify violence against Black and Brown bodies.

Born amidst this cultural history, W.E.B. Du Bois received a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1895,³³ going on to teach while he studied the history of race relations from a philosophical standpoint.³⁴ In his poetic history of the African American experience in the United States, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois identifies double consciousness, the practice of seeing the self through the eyes of dominant society, as the defining characteristic of Black

³³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 7.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 1.

America.³⁵ This double consciousness, for Du Bois, originates in the traumatic experience of the color line. However, even out of this tragedy he characterizes as evil “came something good.”³⁶ namely, greater understanding of social responsibility, progress, and “the ideal of human brotherhood.”³⁷

Many contemporary studies of inherited and historical traumas turn to the Shoah, also known as the Holocaust.³⁸ In part, this relates to timing - the emergence of social science research methods privileged by today’s Eurocentric academy occurred simultaneously with the extensive documentation of biopolitical statistics and the ensuing birth of eugenics. Thorough documentation, currently living survivors of the initial trauma, and the sheer scale of the Shoah create a moral imperative for research while providing abundant resources. The Shoah was a European cataclysm perpetrated primarily against ethnic groups that are currently recognized as white, but the racialization of European Jews and the Nazi doctrine had imperial undertones that drew from the ideology of colonization. During the Second World War, Jawaharlal Nehru (who would become the first Indian Prime Minister) noted that the “ideology of this [British] rule was that of the herrenvolk [sic] and the master race, and the structure of government was based upon it.”³⁹ Far from an isolated European event, the Shoah fits into a larger picture of global imperialism and racialized violence, even spurring a new wave of settler colonialism.

In the second half of the 20th century, while the imperial ambitions of Europe and the United States expanded abroad, a new wave of domestic resistance and political activism

³⁵ Ibid, 38.

³⁶ Ibid, 42.

³⁷ Ibid, 43.

³⁸ Referring to the mass murder of European Jews perpetrated by Nazi Germany as the Shoah rather than the Holocaust decenters the dominant narrative (in this case, a white Christian gentile narrative), in keeping with the intent to maintain traumatized collectives’ agency through respecting their self-naming.

³⁹ Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 110.

emerged. Civil rights leaders and feminists alike fought for (and secured) landmark victories to end several vestiges of colonization, from racial segregation⁴⁰ to limitations on reproductive health care.⁴¹ However, it is also in this timeframe that the infamous Daniel Moynihan published his report pathologizing single black motherhood.⁴² In the 1970s, multiracial feminism, the vanguard of intersectional feminist praxis, dubbed itself Third World Feminism, declaring transnational solidarity with women of color facing colonial oppression within and beyond the geographical borders of the United States.⁴³

It is from this context that Anzaldúa's *mestiza* emerges, taking Du Bois' concept of double consciousness a step further. *Mestiza* consciousness represents the unique possibility for mixed cultural subjects to transcend the division between the historical colonizer and the historically colonized.⁴⁴ This world-merging is what makes the *mestiza* a *nepantlera*. Rather than undoing her own fragmentation in the process of connecting disparate worlds, she recognizes the persisting cracks in herself even as she assembles the pieces. Embracing rather than erasing boundaries enables her to navigate *nepantla*. While Anzaldúa's articulation of racialized consciousness as psychic restlessness corresponds to the tension of Du Boisian double consciousness,⁴⁵ Du Bois' Black American aims to "merge his double self,"⁴⁶ while Anzaldúa's *mestiza* merges the worlds around her, putting her pieces together in a new form.⁴⁷ "Hatred,

⁴⁰ Becky Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Anti-Racist Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 42

⁴¹ Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life*, 168.

⁴² L. Alex Swan, "A Methodological Critique of the Moynihan Report." *The Black Scholar* 5, no. 9 (1974): 18.

⁴³ Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life*, 129.

⁴⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 102.

⁴⁵ Diane Sue Harriford and Becky W. Thompson, *When the Center Is on Fire: Passionate Social Theory for Our Times* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 67

⁴⁶ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* 39.

⁴⁷ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 139.

anger, and exploitation” characterize the Borderlands that the *mestiza* calls home.⁴⁸ Through the *mestiza* lives in a culture that “cripples women”⁴⁹ and renders the queer “subhuman,”⁵⁰ she transcends the world’s dualities⁵¹ by embodying “(r)evolution.”⁵² In this way, Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* consciousness is not solely an ethno-racial concept; *mestiza* consciousness also engages the traumatic impacts of patriarchy and heterosexism.

Patriarchy: Misogyny, Misogynoir,⁵³ and Machismo

Patriarchy reinforces gender norms across ethnic and racial categories. While the roles themselves vary, they all place special emphasis on controlling femininity and women’s behavior. Through the conceptual basis of the coloniality of gender, binary gender models derive from a history of colonization while cultural figures enable patriarchal forces to idealize and vilify models of femininity. Although these figures represent exaggerated stereotypes, binary logic reinforces cultural expectations to fit the ideal or face the consequences reserved for the vilified deviant.

While Alexander argues that Western conceptions of gender were imposed on Indigenous and enslaved populations,⁵⁴ Lugones goes a step further, arguing that that imperialism and colonization are responsible for the creation of gender in the modern sense. The crux of

⁴⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 43.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 40.

⁵¹ Ibid, 102.

⁵² Ibid, 103.

⁵³ Misogynoir is a term coined by Black queer feminist scholar and activist, Moya Bailey, to describe the hatred and abuse of Black women. See Moya Bailey, “They Aren’t Talking About Me...” *Crunk Feminist Collective*, 14 March 2010, accessed 12 March 2017, <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/>.

⁵⁴M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 198.

Lugones' argument is that colonial forces created the modern concept of gender through colonization. Reproducing class and race hierarchies gendered women of all races in the age of empire.⁵⁵ While white women were gendered to preserve Europe's supposed moral superiority, colonizers imposed patriarchal systems of power on matrilineal and egalitarian Indigenous and African societies, from the Cherokee⁵⁶ to the Yoruba.⁵⁷ By installing patriarchal power structures, the colonality of gender manifests through what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as "controlling images" and what many Latin@ scholars refer to as *marianismo*.

Collins, author of *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, is a sociologist specializing in feminism and gender in the Black community. She situates *Black Feminist Thought* as placing her voice in dialogue with others who had been silenced and those still finding their voices.⁵⁸ The text is simultaneously individual and collective as Collins situates herself within a genealogy of Black women in general and Black feminist writers in particular.⁵⁹ Collins outlines four stereotypes central to the "political economy of domination fostering Black women's oppression."⁶⁰ The four controlling images she describes are the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare recipient, and the Jezebel. Because these controlling images are fictional constructions, the descriptions that follow do not describe real Black women; instead, they reflect the logic that renders the images so powerful within the matrix of colonality. While these stereotypes are not real, they shape the realities of the Black women whom they supposedly represent.

⁵⁵ María Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender," *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise* 2 (2008), 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), xiv.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

As a passive, faithful, and asexual servant, the mammy represents the “ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power.”⁶¹ The mammy figure is juxtaposed against true (white) womanhood through her predominantly physical functions (as opposed to the white woman’s focus on moral development).⁶² Collins refers to the matriarch as “a failed mammy.”⁶³ The matriarch, construed as an aggressive, unfeminine working mother, supposedly emasculates her partners and cannot supervise their children adequately; this flawed logic dictates that her partners either leave or refuse to marry her and that their children do not succeed academically.⁶⁴ The welfare mother, sometimes referred to as the “welfare queen” in popular culture, emerges from centuries of stereotypes. The dehumanizing breeding discourse surrounding Black women’s bodies during slavery valued their fertility, while the welfare recipient stereotype pathologizes that fertility.⁶⁵ Combining high levels of poverty in the Black community with single motherhood, the welfare recipient and her progeny are depicted as excessive and economically unproductive. This inaccurate representation justifies state policies denying Black women bodily autonomy and dismantling social services.⁶⁶ Finally, the Jezebel or Sapphire depicts a sexually aggressive and promiscuous woman; this image not only rationalizes the numerous sexual assaults of Black women, but also accuses them of not nurturing their children, ignoring the role of structural racism.⁶⁷

Within Latin@ and Chican@ culture, controlling images often take the form of *marianismo*. *Marianismo*, as a specifically Latin@ form of the Catholic Marian tradition,

⁶¹ Ibid, 71.

⁶² Ibid, 72.

⁶³ Ibid, 74.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 74.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 77.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 77.

constructs a sacred ideal of virgin motherhood against unacceptable sexual agency embodied by the *puta* (or “whore”).⁶⁸ *Chican@ marianismo* places the religious figure of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a Marian apparition that appeared in Mexico, in opposition to the figure of Malinche, the Indigenous translator for Hernán Cortés and mother of his child. By incorporating the specific figure of Malinche into the *puta* half of the virgin/whore dichotomy, *Chican@ marianismo* codes sexual agency not only a form of deviance but as a cultural betrayal.⁶⁹

Through defining and regulating womanhood, these stereotypes police the borders of acceptable behavior. *Marianismo* and controlling images illustrate some of these models and stereotypes which regulate the sexualities of women of color. Just as modern colonial constructions of race extend into modern colonial depictions of gender, the coloniality of gender also engages with specifically heterosexual models for sexual behavior.

Heterosexism: Queerphobia, Queer Bashing, and Queer Erasure

While compulsory heterosexuality⁷⁰ emerges from patriarchal forms of the coloniality of power, compulsory heterosexuality develops along different lines than more generalized gender oppression. Both within communities of color and outside of them, people violating normative sexual criteria face abuse ranging from erasure to physical violence. The dominant society and communities of color both bolster boundaries between queerness⁷¹ and non-white racial

⁶⁸ Irene Lara, “Sensing the Serpent in the Mother, *Dando a Luz la Madre Serpiente*: Chicana Spirituality, Sexuality, and Mamihood” in Elisa Fascio and Irene Lara, eds, *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 122.

⁶⁹ Cherríe L. Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 92.

⁷⁰ Rich, Adrienne. *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. Denver: Antelope Publications, 1980.

⁷¹ While many transgender and homosexual people do not use the label “queer” self referentially, the label invokes a specific theoretical definition that contrasts with normative (heterosexual, cisgender) sexual practices. Queerness here represents politics and practices, not individual (or even collective) identities.

categories through the equation of queerness with whiteness and of homophobia with non-whiteness. Coding queerness as white enables violent gatekeeping, especially as experienced by queer people of color.

Through an emerging culture of homonationalism, dominant culture and homosexual culture alike bind homosexuality to whiteness. From the erasure of Tyron Garner in even the name of the *Lawrence v. Texas* Supreme Court case to the use of homosexuality as a humiliation tactic in the Abu Ghraib scandal,⁷² dominant cultural representations of homosexuality either emphasize its whiteness or depict homophobia as endemic to non-white cultures. Queer theory itself largely focuses on the experiences of white lesbians and gays,⁷³ despite its theoretically inclusive definition as “an assemblage of resistant technologies.”⁷⁴ Queerness self-polices to maintain whiteness, while heteronormative, racist social forces define queerness and non-whiteness as diametrically opposed.

Communities of color also perpetuate the characterization of queerness as white. Much of this internal regulation stems from male dominated nationalist discourses, from the “bourgeois black (male) movement”⁷⁵ to Latino nationalisms.⁷⁶ The Chican@ lesbian is often equated with Malinche, considered “a ‘traitor to her race’ by contributing to the ‘genocide’ of her people.”⁷⁷ By engaging in non-reproductive relationships, she is encoded not only as having failed to reproduce scripts surrounding gender and sexuality but also as contributing to the destruction of

⁷² Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 138.

⁷³ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 9.

⁷⁴ J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 29.

⁷⁵ Cheryl Clark, “Lesbianism: an Act of Resistance,” in Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, 132

⁷⁶ María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 179.

⁷⁷ Cherríe L. Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 104.

la Raza. In one interview, Barbara Smith says that “homosexuality is talked about as a white disease within the Black community.”⁷⁸ Smith is a founding member of the Combahee River Collective, the founder of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press and a co-editor of *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, along with Patricia Bell-Scott and Akasha Gloria Hull. As a Black lesbian feminist, Smith herself renounces separatism in favor of coalitions, arguing that “the strongest politics are coalition politics that cover a broad base.”⁷⁹

Cathy Cohen is another noteworthy scholar who challenges these constructions of race and homosexuality as mutually exclusive. Having also spent time on the board of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, Cohen is a founding member of the Audre Lorde project. She wrote *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*, an exploration of the impact of the HIV epidemic in the Black community. In “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” Cohen argues that several stereotypes of Black sexuality, including the nominally heterosexual “welfare queen” are queer insofar as they represent deviation from (and contain the potential for resistance to) heteronormativity.⁸⁰ Other scholars engaged in queer of color critique have begun the process of undermining this false dichotomy between sexuality and race. Though the boundaries created by coloniality between white queerness and non-white heterosexuality continue to be policed from both sides, sites of resistance are growing.

⁷⁸ Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, “Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue,” in Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back*, 125.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 126.

⁸⁰ Cohen, Cathy J. “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal Of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (October 1997), 456.

Personalizing Collective Trauma: Embodying the Intersections

Individualized traumas may appear a red herring in a piece focused on the legacies of colonial traumas. What do isolated incidents have to do with the centuries of racialized, gendered, heteronormative violence from coloniality? The answer lies in the question - these events are not, in fact, isolated. They do not occur in a vacuum somehow disconnected from oppressive power structures. Trans women of color face higher rates of murder than other demographics⁸¹ and Indigenous women are more than twice as likely to be raped;⁸² these are not a series of unlucky accidents. People harm women of color disproportionately because women of color embody centuries of racialized, gendered oppression.

In 1979, twelve Black women were murdered in Boston; while both the police and media ignored the murders because they characterized the victims as sex workers, the Combahee River Collective mobilized, organizing protests and distributing pamphlets on behalf of Black women in the city.⁸³ Combahee River Collective was a Black lesbian feminist consciousness raising and activist group in Boston. Founded in 1974, the group included Cheryl Clarke, Demita Frazier, Akasha Gloria Hull, Margo Okazawa-Rey, Sharon Paige Ritchie, Beverly Smith, and Barbara Smith, among several other activists.⁸⁴ What the Combahee River Collective refers to as interlocking oppressions⁸⁵ becomes a central component of individualized trauma.

⁸¹ Alexandra Bolles, "Violence Against Transgender People and People of Color is Disproportionately High, LGBTQH Murder Rate Peaks," *GLAAD*, 4 June 2012. Accessed 14 April 2017. <http://www.glaad.org/blog/violence-against-transgender-people-and-people-color-disproportionately-high-lgbtqh-murder-rate>.

⁸² The US Department of Justice indicates that Native American and Alaska Native women are more than 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women in the USA in general. See: Amnesty International. *Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA*. New York: Amnesty International Publications, 2007. Accessed 13 March 2017. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/mazeofinjustice.pdf>.

⁸³ Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life*, 147.

⁸⁴ B. Norman, "'We' in redux: The Combahee River collective's Black Feminist Statement" in *Differences*, 18, no. 2 (2007), 104

⁸⁵ Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" in Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back*, 210.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, critical race scholar and civil rights advocate, coined the term “intersectionality” to refer to this phenomenon of interlocking oppressions.⁸⁶ Intersectional identity manifests through embodiment. While dividing forms of coloniality provides valuable insight into the power structures it rests on and into the mechanisms that sustain it, these variations are not mutually exclusive. Many queer women of color, facing all of these violent assertions of power, articulate a fragmented sense of self more extensive than a Du Boisian double consciousness. Anzaldúa likens the experience to that of Coyolxauhqui, dismembered by her brother, scattered throughout the Earth and beyond.⁸⁷ Neither Anzaldúa nor Lugones advocate unification of this multiple-self. Lugones encourages embracing multiplicity rather than searching for a fictional united self or resorting to self imposed separation.⁸⁸ Anzaldúa’s “Coyolxauhqui imperative” emphasizes the “process of making and unmaking” over recovering an original, authentic, whole self.⁸⁹ It is within the multiple self, healing from fragmentation, that both women locate the potential for creating resistant political alliances.

Individualised traumas also reflect an important element that a purely collective conceptualization cannot: the embodiment of trauma. A depersonalized collective disembodies the trauma, emphasizing the socio-historical aspects. Women of color theorizing about trauma instead personalize the collective through embodiment; rather rejecting collectivity, the development of this personalized collective challenges the distinction between personal and collective, opting for a “self-in-community.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), 1243.

⁸⁷ Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 220.

⁸⁸ María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 143.

⁸⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 20.

⁹⁰ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 5.

Depathologizing trauma runs the risk of erasing embodied responses to inherited trauma. Chronic illness and disability are particularly embodied encounters with coloniality; they recenter the embodied experience in social transformation.⁹¹ Chronic illness takes on a larger role in Anzaldúa's later work, following her diagnosis with diabetes and her hysterectomy; Anzaldúa cites her body and chronic illness as sources of knowledge.⁹² A self-identified "queer disabled femme of color writer, performance artist, educator," Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha situates her fibromyalgia within the larger context of trauma and environmental racism in "So much time spent in bed: Gloria Anzaldua, chronic illness, Coatlicue and disability." She writes that "[t]he bed is the nepantla place of opening," discussing her relationship to Anzaldúa through their shared experience of chronic illness.⁹³ Through her time confined to her bed, Piepzna-Samarasinha discovers time and space for her creative process, as she speculates Anzaldúa must have. Despite debilitating physical aspects, her embodiment of colonial trauma develops a place where she can create. Yet, even in this discussion of her own body, Piepzna-Samarasinha connects not only to the larger crip community, but also emphasizes her interdependent relationships with friends who help and care for her when in need.⁹⁴

These writings teach us that traumas are personal and collective. Despite distinct manifestations within each component, coloniality connects imperial, patriarchal, and heterosexist traumas. Because of the foundation of these traumatic variations in historical colonization, decolonization presents an opportunity to resist the underlying coloniality. Ritual

⁹¹ Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 290.

⁹² Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 115.

⁹³ Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "So much time spent in bed: Gloria Anzaldua, chronic illness, Coatlicue and disability," *Brown Star Girl*, 15 December 2010. Web. 24 April 2017. <http://www.brownstargirl.org/blog/-so-much-time-spent-in-bed-gloria-anzaldua-chronic-illness-coatlicue-and-disability>.

⁹⁴ Piepzna-Samarasinha, "So much time spent in bed."

becomes a central element in decolonized responses to trauma geared towards resisting hegemonic power structures and empowering survivors.

IV. Resistant Responses and the Role of Ritual

The scholarship of women of color surrounding trauma and empowerment delineates ritual as a defining tenant. Resistance and empowerment do not reduce the harm of the preceding traumas. However, as this contribution decenters the pathological understanding of trauma (and survivors), psychological research emphasizing post-traumatic growth plays an important role.⁹⁵ Through applying post-traumatic growth to inherited traumas, this project looks beyond personal healing to explore resistance and empowerment.

Ritual flows through varying responses to trauma which incorporate resistance, healing, and empowerment. Ritual is not inherently spiritual or ceremonial⁹⁶ - the defining characteristic of ritual is conscious intent. Resistant, empowering, decolonizing ritual may be as simple as an intimate conversation about how personal pasts inform the present, as in Bernice Dimas' *queeranderismo*⁹⁷ or Shawn Wilson's talking circles.⁹⁸ On the other hand, it may as elaborate as performing a *danza azteca* ceremony⁹⁹ or developing an Indigenous research paradigm.¹⁰⁰ Ritual can be an element of ceremony or a self-contained action; it can have a purpose, or the goal may

⁹⁵ Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun. "The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring The Positive Legacy Of Trauma." *Journal Of Traumatic Stress* 9, no. 3 (1996): 455-471.

⁹⁶ Jeffrey Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy." *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (December 2004), 552.

⁹⁷ *Queeranderismo* is a portmanteau that combines "queer" with *curanderismo*, a term referring to myriad Chican@, Latin@, and Indigenous healing practices. See: Bernice Dimas, "Queeranderismo," in Fascio and Lara, eds, *Fleshing the Spirit*, 79.

⁹⁸ Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 129.

⁹⁹ Maria Figueroa, "Towards a Spiritual Pedagogy along the Borderlands," in Fascio and Lara, eds, *Fleshing the Spirit*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.

lie in the process. As such, ritual encompasses various spiritual and intellectual practices, which, through decolonization, facilitate healing from colonial traumas and cultivate empowerment in the face of those traumas.

Ritual in Spiritual Practices

Ritual informs many spiritually-based responses to trauma, though not all spiritual practices incorporate ritual. While these forms of spiritual practice and ritual interconnect, designating the following categories helps to map their decolonial potential. Decolonized spiritual resistance includes: disidentifying with dominant religious rituals; uncovering Indigenous spiritual rituals; and developing new spiritual rituals. Regardless of form, empowerment requires tailoring ritualized practices to survivors' needs.

Due to Catholicism's deep entrenchment within Latin@ culture, counteridentification, a wholesale rejection of the church's culture, would entail loss of community for many. Disidentification, however, provides a valuable avenue for pragmatic resistance through decolonizing the church. The reclamation of the Virgen de Guadalupe gives Chican@ feminists a disidentificatory relationship with Catholicism, a relationship which values spiritual and religious practices while challenging its Eurocentric and patriarchal history. Even Chican@s who may not consider themselves feminists interpret Guadalupe as an empowered feminine figure, in spite of the coloniality and *marianismo* surrounding her. For many Chican@ feminists, reclaiming Guadalupe relates directly to her ties to Indigenous deities. Spiritual *mestizaje*¹⁰¹ and Tonanlupanisma emphasize Guadalupe's ties to the Nahua mother earth goddess, Tonantzin,

¹⁰¹ C. Alejandra Elenes, "Spiritual Roots of Chicana Feminist Borderland Pedagogies: A Spiritual Journey with Tonantzin/Guadalupe" in Fascio and Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit*, 45.

reconfiguring her as a method of “healing the colonial and patriarchal misrepresentation of women’s spirituality and sexuality.”¹⁰²

Many Chican@s and Latin@s turn directly to Indigenous rituals and spiritual practices. While *danza azteca*, *flor y canto*, and other structured ritual ceremonies provide guided direction towards healing, there are also less formal Indigenous spiritual rituals that create place for decolonial healing. *Curanderismo* and shamanism heal trauma through ritual assemblages. *Ofrendas* and *limpias* are relatively self contained healing rituals, with precise goals (such as expressing gratitude to an audience¹⁰³ or preparing for childbirth¹⁰⁴). Together, various types of Indigenous spiritual healing rituals foster “both psychological healing and ideological and political empowerment, for the practice of healing a psyche that has been splintered [by the coloniality of power]... returns power to us as individuals.”¹⁰⁵

Du Bois identifies the Black church as the “social centre” and “most characteristic expression of African character”¹⁰⁶ which reproduces the world “cut off by color-prejudice and social condition.”¹⁰⁷ For Du Bois, religious ritual does not simply heal the damage from the color line; it creates a world with the potential to move beyond it. The Black church has decolonizing potential, but Du Bois’ unidimensional analysis does not account for gender or

¹⁰² Brenda Sendejo, “Methodologies of the Spirit: Reclaiming Our Lady of Guadalupe and Discovering Tonantzin Within and Beyond the *Nepantla* of Academia,” in Fascio and Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit*, 93.

¹⁰³ Lara, “Sensing the Serpent in the Mother, *Dando a Luz la Madre Serpiente*,” in Fascio and Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit*, 118.

¹⁰⁴ Patrisia Gonzales, “Anatomy of Learning: *Yauhtli*, *Peyotzin*, *Tobacco*, and *Maguay*,” in Fascio and Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit*, 220.

¹⁰⁵ Laura E. Pérez, “Writing with Crooked Lines,” in Fascio and Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 150.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 151.

sexuality. More recent studies have found the Black church to be characterized by hypermasculinity and homophobia, marginalizing women and gay men in particular.¹⁰⁸

While Vodou and Santería are both religious practices of the African diaspora, considering them together generates significant tension. As Alexander notes, within the United States, Santería is often legitimized through dislodging it from its African roots. Meanwhile, depicting Vodou as a darker set of practices¹⁰⁹ ties into a broader Eurocentric method of cultural reproduction. As in the cases of these creolized and mixed spiritualities, spirituality is not inherently decolonial or resistant; the key component of resistant forms (of both Santería and Vodou) is that of a fully fleshed out genealogy.

Black women also develop spaces to heal from the traumas of coloniality through developing new rituals based upon historically grounded cultural practices. Akasha Gloria Hull calls the expansion of these new and reclaimed spiritual practices the “Third Revolution,” negating the common association of the 1980s with political regression.¹¹⁰ Along with Barbara Smith, Hull was a member of the Combahee River Collective and co-editor of *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Interactions with ancestors, whether through channelling, communing with the dead, or carrying their stories into the present, reflect the ways in which spiritual practices maintain connections to cultural heritage. Some spiritual practices involve carrying material objects symbolizing that ancestry.¹¹¹ Hull also points to the “service aspect” of spirituality, linking the Third Revolution to spiritual activism.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Elijah G. Ward, "Homophobia, hypermasculinity and the US black church," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7, no. 5 (September 2005): 501; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander, M. J., *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 298.

¹¹⁰ Akasha Gloria Hull, *Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2001), 7.

¹¹¹ See: Namonyah Soipan in Hull, *Soul Talk*, 86 and Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 104.

¹¹² Hull, *Soul Talk*, 8

Rather than emphasizing the political component necessary for spiritual activism, Hull asserts that political activism demands spiritual engagement.¹¹³ She places this spiritual revolution within an extensive lineage including Harriet Tubman, Zora Neale Hurston, and Fannie Lou Hamer, while also distinguishing the contemporary movement from those before.¹¹⁴

So-called New Age spiritual ritual practices, while incorporating nonwhite and non-Western cultural elements, are different from spiritual activism and Hull's Third Revolution in one key way; New Age practices often decontextualize and misappropriate non-Western practices. New Age practices are missing the theory behind theory in the flesh, generally taking on a neoliberal, individualistic attitude. The "multicultural coformation," encouraged by bridge-building spiritual practitioners, requires coalition against the dehumanizing dominant culture.¹¹⁵ Contextualizing these practices never ends; multicultural coformations shift, making regrounding them in both theoretical and embodied contexts a continuous process.

Because so many spiritual practices grow out of ceremonial rituals, spirituality neatly connects with ritual. Many women of color resist Eurocentric pressures and respond to their trauma through empowerment by reclaiming heritage within Catholicized rituals, reconnecting with ancestral ceremonies, and creating new spiritual rituals. However, unlike appropriate and exploitative New Age spiritual practices, spiritual activism emphasizes the importance of historical, cultural, and personal context.

¹¹³ Ibid, 236.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 18.

¹¹⁵ Pérez, L., "Writing with Crooked Lines," in Fascio and Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit*, 27.

Ritualized (Hi)Stories¹¹⁶ and Intellectual Practices

Another form of ritual that provides unique opportunities for resisting coloniality is built around the development and imparting of knowledge. Outside of the academy, intellectual practices develop space for public intellectuals, promote alternative ways of knowing, and do not privilege titles, such as “professor,” over roles, like “teacher.” The public intellectual is “the intellectual who spends some significant portion of his or her time engaged with the nonacademic public.”¹¹⁷ Because of the unique potential for decolonizing theory and praxis within the realm of the public intellectual, this analysis demands content more inclusive than the academic world. While there may be potential for a decolonized academy, that remains a distant future; rather than placing value judgments onto differing epistemological methods, this analysis explores varying intellectual practices together. These rituals can further entrench the coloniality pervasive in dominant culture, but, through developing alternative methodologies, they can also decolonize intellectual practices and promote cultural healing.

Archeologies and Archives

Through the preservation and cultivation of knowledge, women of color incorporate rituals in decolonial archives and archeologies in order to heal from colonial traumas by challenging the coloniality of power. While many of these archives and archeologies, such as the inquiries into the Coyolxauhqui monolith, take place within academic spaces, they also permeate non-academic publics, as in the case of *Marginal Eyes*. Defining archives and

¹¹⁶ By using “(hi)stories,” I emphasize the plurality of perspectives regarding the past and the value of alternative historical methods, such as oral traditions and narratives, which have largely been devalued by Eurocentric historical studies. Stories, in their context here, serve the same larger cultural purpose as history in general.

¹¹⁷ Linda Martín Alcoff, “Does the Public Intellectual Have Intellectual Integrity?” *Metaphilosophy* 33, no. 5 (October 2002), 524.

archeologies and describing their interplay with decolonial healing demonstrates how intellectual rituals developed by women of color can challenge the coloniality of power.

Archives and archeologies both engage epistemological practices related to (hi)stories. While archives and archeologies are sometimes concrete, they also incorporate forms such as Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*. This archeology refers to the process by which practices give rise to new ideas and statements, which in turn have the potential to change practice.¹¹⁸ Through using the plural forms, archeologies and archives, this section distinguishes the decolonial, resistant forms of these epistemologies from the dominant academic disciplines. Unlike Archeology and the Archive writ large, the plural forms acknowledge varying epistemological and methodological forms, including those deviating from academic disciplines. Archeology and the Archive often remove Indigenous relics from their cultural and geographic contexts, exposing them to the Western European gaze through museums. The foundational distinction between archeologies and archives is that archeologies uncover and reveal (though may not necessarily discover) knowledge, whereas archives preserve that knowledge. While these methods are not inherently decolonial, removing the monolithic connotation of the singular opens up alternative methodologies that can undermine the coloniality of power.

Unlike the scientific discipline of Archeology, these archeologies can uncover pasts that were lost to time as well as pasts that never existed. Emma Pérez' historical archeologies come from a place of disillusion, allowing her to discern *nepantla* in her analysis of feminism during the nationalist revolution in Mexico.¹¹⁹ A Chicana@ lesbian feminist historian, Pérez is best

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge & The Discourse of Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 208-209.

¹¹⁹ Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicana Lesbians into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 32.

known for publishing one of the first Chican@ lesbian novels, *Gulf Dreams*, and developing the theoretical concept of “sitios y lenguas.”¹²⁰ Pérez sees postcolonial theory as a “hopeful utopian project;”¹²¹ Osa Hidalgo’s work, on the other hand, constructs a fictional utopian past. Mirroring a film documenting the archeological “discovery” of Olmec culture, Hidalgo’s fictional film *Marginal Eyes* depicts the discovery of the West’s matrilineal origins with the unearthing of clay artifacts. In the same alternative world as that discovery, Chican@s and other women of color represent the dominant socio-economic class, occupying leadership positions in government and the sciences.¹²² Through fiction, Hidalgo disidentifies with the reality privileged by History and Archeology, as well as with contemporary society’s domination by straight white cisgendered men. In the words of Muñoz, *Marginal Eyes* “looks into the past to critique the present and helps imagine the future.”¹²³ These archeologies reveal faults in the past, while unearthing the potential for a better future.

The Coyolxauhqui monolith from the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan unifies these theoretical archeologies with material culture. The unearthing of the Coyolxauhqui stone in 1978¹²⁴ recentered her *historia* within Chican@ culture in the same time period as the ascent of multicultural feminism. Coyolxauhqui plays a pivotal role in the works of Chican@ theorists including Anzaldúa, Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Virginia Grise. Anzaldúa asserts that “Coyolxauhqui exemplifies women as conquered bodies”¹²⁵ and the cycle of de/re/constructing,

¹²⁰ Emma Pérez, “Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor,” in Carla Mari Trujillo, ed., *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991.

¹²¹ Pérez, E., *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 33

¹²² Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 23.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 25.

¹²⁴ Lourdes Cué, “Coyolxauhqui: La Muerte De La Diosa,” in *Artes De México*, no. 96 (2009), 40.

¹²⁵ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 49.

central to *conocimiento*.¹²⁶ Through unearthing decolonizing figures like Coyolxauhqui, their cultural meanings decolonize historical narratives and nurture resistance in those cultural spaces.

Archives are generally understood to be collections of records with enduring value. Keith Breckenridge, a well-published scholar of biometrics and state documentation, hails the digitalization of archives as a development that has “broken” national and colonial archives’ “monopoly over the narrative of the past.”¹²⁷ Breckenridge is a professor and Deputy Director at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Witwatersrand, an organization dedicated to interdisciplinary research in post-apartheid South Africa. Aside from dramatically increasing accessibility, digitalization removes the material context of archival media. While this can lead to misappropriation, it also allows the “source community” to bypass an “archival aura” during reproduction,¹²⁸ an aura that imposes the curatorial gaze and a false objectivity.¹²⁹ The archival aura functions much like the veil of Du Boisian double consciousness; curatorial choices obligate the community from which the object comes (or “source community”) to view the object with the perspective of the curatorial gaze, usually a manifestation of the colonality of power. Rather than seeing an object, viewing a picture, or reading a document from the perspective of the curatorial gaze, the digital archive and digital reproduction allow the viewer, particularly those viewing their own culture, to independently situate the object within their worldview.

¹²⁶ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, 50.

¹²⁷ Keith Breckenridge, “The Politics of the Parallel Archive: Digital Imperialism and the Future of Record-Keeping in the Age of Digital Reproduction” in *Journal Of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 3 (May 2014), 519.

¹²⁸ Katja Müller, “Reframing the Aura: Digital Photography in Ancestral Worship” in *Museum Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2017), 69.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 75.

Additionally, by sidestepping the question of originality, digital archives undermine another gatekeeping tactic. Instead, the source community creates a performative authenticity through their re-contextualization of the object.¹³⁰ While personal papers, manuscripts, and other paper documents are the most conventional archival subjects, various media, from audio recordings to sculptures, may be preserved in an archive. We see this in representations of the Coyolxauhqui stone, particularly in painted reproductions, using molecular residues on the original to determine color.¹³¹ In many ways, these colored representations and models become more authentic; unlike the stone buried under Mexico City for centuries, these representations are created to represent their historical and cultural contexts, rendering them inseparable from those contexts.

Through decolonial epistemological methods, archeologies and archives contain the potential to heal historical trauma from colonial violence. Resistance in intellectual spaces extends the decolonial potential of pre-existing knowledge; however, intellectual spaces for resistance also incorporate the discovery, creation, and circulation of knowledge. Rituals surrounding research practices and pedagogy increase access to forms of resistance while creating new spaces for healing.

Research and Pedagogy

Like archeologies and archives, research and pedagogy impart and cultivate knowledge. However, rituals surrounding research and pedagogy extend beyond archeologies and archives through their generative potential. The processes of imparting and producing knowledge define pedagogy- and research-based rituals. Research and pedagogy evade monolithic connotations

¹³⁰ Ibid, 70.

¹³¹ Cúe, “Coyolxauhqui,” 40.

because of their breadth; even in their singular forms, research and pedagogy accommodate an abundance of methodological practices. The understanding of ritual here encompasses various methodologies commonly involved in pedagogy and research. For the purposes of this analysis, research is the search for knowledge while pedagogy is the circulation of that knowledge. These definitions include and reserve space outside of academia; storytelling can be a form of pedagogy, and listening to the radio can be research. Popularizing these concepts renders them more accessible.

Wilson defines a new research paradigm based on indigeneity, incorporating ritual and alternative ways of knowing by departing from Eurocentric paradigms. His process rests heavily on relationality, as opposed to a Western, Eurocentric emphasis on individuality.¹³² He draws attention to the importance of “building relationships and bridging this sacred space”¹³³ (that is to say, the space between people). This Indigenous research paradigm also emphasizes “epistemological egalitarianism,” avoiding criticism of others’ ideas because all inquiries undertaken with ethical motivations are equally valid, once properly contextualized.¹³⁴ Through emphasis on relational accountability, Wilson minimizes the possibility of harmful effects and articulates the active role of subjects in the research process.¹³⁵ Most importantly, Wilson underlines the requirement that research perform a beneficial function.¹³⁶ As such, research incorporating relational accountability and respect can heal the active parties involved.

¹³² Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 38.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 87.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 94.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 101.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 102.

Alexander emphasizes the central role of intelligibility - making ourselves understandable to one another. As such, her understanding of pedagogy incorporates the self-taught.¹³⁷ Through decentering the hierarchy of professor/student and teaching/learning, reconfiguring pedagogy as teaching/learning can, in and of itself, engage ritual in the process of sharing growth.¹³⁸

V. The Path Before Us

This analysis is incomplete, as are its implications for forms of decolonizing resistance and healing; Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui imperative suggests that it may never be complete. In her formulation of spiritual activism, Anzaldúa emphasizes that ritual alone is inadequate, one of many steps towards transformation. Including activism is central to transformative practices.¹³⁹ Activism is a term we use regularly without deconstructing, a habit which has led to failures ranging from performative allyship to single-issue politics. At this juncture, I wish to emphasize the *activ(e)* in activism. It is neither passive nor self-perpetuating. Activism requires not only intent and planning, but also follow through. The process of activism does not end. Much like Anzaldúa's stages of consciousness, activism demands continuous, active engagement.

Any time ethno-race and indigeneity (and, to some extent, queerness) arise, the concept of authenticity is quick to follow. While on the surface, authenticity represents a defensive response to inherited and shared traumas, ultimately the concept (in identity, in praxis, in experience) serves as another gatekeeper that stunts growth. Anzaldúa cautions against idealizing the practices of marginalized groups, from *la Raza* to queers. Emphasis on

¹³⁷ Alexander, M. J. *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 6.

¹³⁸ Figueroa, "Towards a Spiritual Pedagogy along the Borderlands," in Fascio and Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit*, 37.

¹³⁹ Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 11.

authenticity and tradition limits the ability to incorporate truly intersectional positionalities. Because of the relational element of (individual and collective) identity, social transformation requires “extending *beyond* ourselves.”¹⁴⁰

Despite emphasis on accessible, open, egalitarian processes and practices, issues surrounding gatekeeping and accessibility remain. The unfortunate reality is that histories remain masculine, the ivory tower remains white, and the church remains straight. While marginalized people can reach these places, structural (e.g. “need blind” acceptance in higher learning institutions) and informal (e.g. microaggressions) limitations combine to reduce access, all accompanied by the erasure of the coloniality underlying the very foundations of these institutions.

Another question of accessibility relates more to individual access. Specifically, who has access to these rituals, healings, and resistances? Theoretically, because of the approach and definitions, everyone. Unfortunately, that is not realistic. From the material cultural components involved in many rituals or the (often buried) histories they evoke, secular and spiritual resistant practices are not equally available to everyone, even when constructed with egalitarian intentions. As such, economic and class-based barriers continue to haunt these resistant practices. Drawing upon scholarship that emphasizes acts of survival in and of themselves as resistance, such as that of Barbara Omolade and Audre Lorde (among others), would be an effective point of departure for overcoming these hurdles.

¹⁴⁰ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 75.

VI. Conclusion

This project analyzes practices, methodologies, and paradigms that women of color are already using (and have used for centuries) to heal and grow from and despite trauma, rather than suggesting the use of ritual for that purpose. Instead of a genealogical analysis (which in and of itself may be a ritual of resistance), this project explores potentials and concepts which may or may not be fulfilled. This is an investigation into *nepantla* spaces, found in between, behind, and beside objectively defined experiences.

Through exploring the role of ritual in resistance, this undertaking highlights the empowering, decolonizing methods women of color use to respond to and heal from inherited traumas. This exploration engages with current resiliences and resistances. Rather than prescribing correct or best practices for resisting and healing from inherited traumas, or suggesting that the work of women of color be co-opted by white women for their own personal growth, I (returning to the first person) seek to build bridges, developing understanding across ethnoracial lines.

While I hope that people of color may find my analyses useful, undertaking this work as a white woman gives me the unique opportunity to strengthen the connections on this side of the metaphorical bridge, to encourage white women, straight women, and men of color to continue working on the bridge our sisters began. In a recent talk at Tufts University, Judith Butler emphasized the relationality inherent in vulnerability,¹⁴¹ a relationality that, I would argue, extends to trauma. Understanding the trauma of others depends on our empathy; our empathy, in turn, demands that we address the origins of that trauma as if it were our own. Through finding

¹⁴¹ Judith Butler, “The Politics of Human Rights,” Mellon Sawyer Seminar in Comparative Global Humanities from Tufts University, Boston, MA, April 3, 2017.

common threads among some scholars seldom put in conversation with one another (and others frequently read together) in a unified framework, I build upon the decolonizing, depathologizing understanding of the resilience and resistance of women of color facing inherited traumas. Their work encourages multiracial coalition, while this framework accounts for and values the experiences of women of color, without decontextualizing or coopting their enduring practices of resistance.

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