

Lesbian Identity in Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's Chicano Literature

Jocelyn Dueñas

María Paola Ferreyra

Spring 2018

Advisors: Dr. Donaldo W. Urioste

Dr. Christine Fernández



Source: Goodreads.com



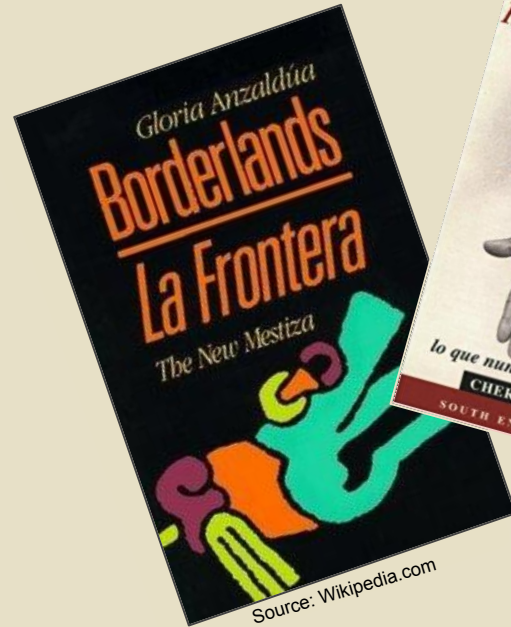
Source: Cengage Learning

Content

- Significance of study
- Research questions
- Literature review
- Gloria Anzaldúa Biography
 - *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*
- Cherríe Moraga Biography
 - *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pas*
- *Loving in the War Years*
- Chicano Culture
- Catholic Religion
- Feminine Body
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

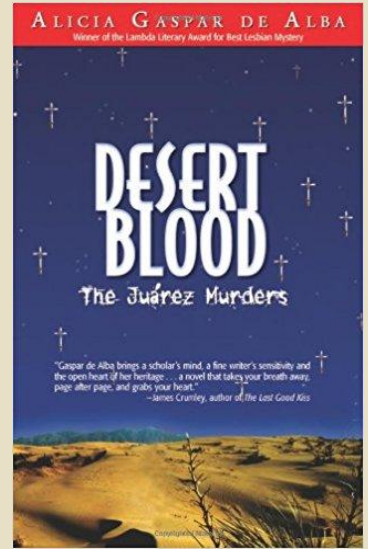
Abstract

- The purpose of this investigation is to analyze how lesbian identity is incorporated in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) by Gloria Anzaldúa and *Loving in the War Years: [What Was Never Said]* (1983) by Cherríe Moraga.



Significance of Study

- This investigation is the result of our interest of the novel *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba.
- The main character, Ivon Villa is a lesbian that due to her sexual preferences receives bad treatment from her mother.
- Due to the fact that Gaspar de Alba included a lesbian character, intrigued us to further explore the topic of lesbian representation in Chicano literature.
- Present both author's lesbian identity through their personal experiences with the purpose of creating a representation of the LGBTQ+ Community.
- Stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community.



Source: Amazon.com

Research Questions

1. How is lesbian identity portrayed in Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's Chicano literature?
2. Why is it important for Anzaldúa and Moraga to include their lesbian identity in their literature?

Literature Review

- The Chicano Movement (1960s-70s)
 - A civil rights movement also known as El Movimiento y La Causa which, worked to empower the Mexican American community and establish their rights as United States citizens (Gonzales 240)
 - The Chicano Movement promoted the artistic representation of the Chicano community including: visual art, music, dance, theater, and literature, but often excluded the chicano LGBTQ+ community. (Gonzales 241)
 - However, there are multiple chicano/as who have worked to establish a voice for the LGBTQ+ community and promote acceptance within society, some of the many writers include the following:
 - John Rechy, Michael Nava, Arturo Islas
 - Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Emma Perez, Estela Portillo Trambley, Carla Trujillo, Terri de la Peña

Literature Review

- Although the LGBTQ+ community earned representation in Chicano literature, Chicana women still felt excluded. Therefore they decided to establish a new movement:
- Chicana Feminist Ideology occurred at the same time as the second-wave of the North American Feminist Movement(1960-1980s) (López Cantó 98).
 - Although both movements fought for the liberation of women's rights, the chicana feminist ideology included aspects that the Feminist Movement of the United States did not include. Some of these aspects include:
 - Race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Saldívar-Hull 203).

Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004)

- Anzaldúa was born September 26, 1942 in El Valle, Texas
- Within the Chicano Literature she is a well known writer, professor, and political activist.
- She received her bachelor's degree in English, Art, and Secondary Education from Pan American University in 1969. She then went on to complete her masters in Education and English from the University of Texas.
- Some of her other works include:
 - *This Bridge Called my back; Writings by Radical Women of Color*(1981)
 - *Prietita y La Llorona* (1996)



Source: Sounding Out

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987)

- This novel includes a combination of autobiography, narrative, and poetry that present a combination of different languages and dialects including Spanish, English, Náhuatl, Tex-mex, Chicano, and Pachuco (Vera Rojas).
- The text is divided into sections that present a chronological order of information that ranges from the history of Aztlán to the contemporary fight for the rights of marginalized women.
- Anzaldúa articulates a new definition of Chicana identity that also allows her to create a new category of a new mestiza (Vera Rojas).
 - This new mestiza refers to marginalized women of color who seek to construct their personal identity despite the racial and cultural oppression they experience.

Cherríe Moraga

- Moraga was born in Whittier, California on September 25, 1952
- Received her bachelor's degree from Immaculate Heart College in 1974 and a masters from San Francisco State University in 1980.
- She is known as a Chicana writer, political activist, and playwright.
- Some of her other works literary and plays include:
 - *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (1993)
 - *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Mother* (1997)
 - *Giving up the Ghost: Teatro in two acts* (1986)
 - *Heroes and Saints and other plays* (1994)
 - *Watsonville Circle in the Dirt* (2002).



Source: Jessica Sabogal

Loving in the War Years: [What Was Never Said] (1983)

- Although the novel includes various sections we can interpret that it is divided within two sections:
 - **First Section:** presents the obstacles that Moraga had to face during the process of discovering her identity. This section includes narrative and poetry in forms of diary entries.
 - **Second Section:** Mentions her critics on The Chicano Movement and The Chicana Feminist Movement. Moraga also establishes the outcomes she wishes to result from these movements in the future. Lastly, she discusses certain myths and traditions that have previously and continue to impact chicana women.
- The novel follows the various obstacles that individuals without representation face. Therefore, she seeks to raise awareness and promote activism.

Chicano Culture: La Malinche

- Malinche was an Indian women who served as an interpret to the Aztec community as well as to the Spanish conquistadors during the Conquest of Mexico (1915). (Loving 91)
- It is speculated that Malinche had a relationship with the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes with whom she procreated the first mestizo (half Indian, half Spanish).
- She is considered a traitor to the Aztec and Mexican communities.



Source: Ancient origins

La Malinche: Gloria Anzaldúa

- Based on the speculated betrayal of La Malinche, Anzaldúa relates her lesbian identity because they were both considered examples of sellouts to the chicano culture.
 - Anzaldúa refutes this idea of betrayal because she believes that the real traitors are the masculine figures of the culture. Since Anzaldúa's sexuality has been marginalized, she openly expressed her sexuality in order to demand the acceptance of her identity, “if you...don't declare certain facets of yourself, they get stepped on” (Interviews 77).

La Malinche: Cherríe Moraga

- As opposed to Anzaldúa, Moraga embraces the title of a sellout that has been attributed to her because of the legacy of La Malinche:
 - “Malinche sold out her indio people by acting as courtesan and translator for Cortez, whose offspring symbolically represent the birth of the bastardized mestizo/Mexicano people. My mother then is the modern-day Chicana, Malinche marrying a white man, my father, to produce the bastards my sister, my brother, and I are. Finally, I - a half-breed Chicana - further betray my race by *choosing* my sexuality which excludes all men, and therefore most dangerously, Chicano men. *I come from a long line of Vendidas.*” (Loving 117)

Chicano Culture: La Llorona (The Weeping Woman)

- This story describes the life of a woman who incited by revenge at her husband's affair, decides to drown her children in the nearby creek. (Loving 142)
- As penitence for the gruesome crime she committed, she has to wander on Earth in search for her lost children. (Loving 142)



Source: FineArtAmerica

La Llorona: Gloria Anzaldúa

- Anzaldúa argued that this story could be used as a way to acquire skills of survival to any individual who is marginalized (Borderlands 30).
- Anzaldúa related this story to her lesbianism because she states that the same way La Llorona has to wail and weep in search for her children, Anzaldúa must also raise her voice and fight for her liberation as a result of all the oppression she receives.

La Llorona: Cherríe Moraga

- Moraga related the myth of La Llorona to her own struggle by providing a slightly different interpretation. Moraga argued:
 - If betrayal was in fact the reason that led La Llorona to drown her own children, then perhaps infanticide could be interpreted as retaliation against all men who have dismantled the feminine identity. (Loving 144)
 - By killing her children, La Llorona killed the masculine traditions and therefore all the oppressions that she has endured.
 - La Llorona's weeping can be interpreted as the Chicanas' cry against the belief that women need to become good mothers in order to be seen as "good" women. Therefore, by using the weeping as a form of protest, the Chicana woman is arguing that a woman's possible roles are beyond that of a wife, mother, nun or prostitute. (Loving 147)

Catholic Religion: Cherríe Moraga

- Moraga explains that women's sexuality and their behavior needs to be controlled either by the government or by an established religion (Loving 109).
- She argues that the lesbian woman is exposed to a great deal of attacks because of the perception that exist of Eve and the already mentioned Malinche.
- The representation of these two feminine figures as traitors and untrustworthy, has caused the lesbian Chicana woman to be considered a threat to the Chicano community.



Source: Centro Nacional

Catholic Religion: Gloria Anzaldúa

- Anzaldúa argues that the catholic religion divides the body, the spirit, and the mind. Therefore, she interprets that this division is what has lead marginalized lesbian women of color to experience oppression (Borderlands 38).
- Anzaldúa openly expresses her sexuality in her writing because it is a form of protest against patriarchal institutions.



Source: P-knot.com

The Virgin of Guadalupe

- **Coatlalopeuh:** The Nahuatl origin of the name “Guadalupe”, which connects an individual with their indian ancestors (Borderlands 27).
- **Coatllicue:** Is known as the mother of all Aztec gods and goddesses as well as the representation of fertility. Known as the one with the serpent skirt (Borderlands 29).
- **Tlazolteotl:** Aztec goddess of sin, vice, and sexual misdeeds. The Virgin of Guadalupe also originates from this goddess (Borderlands 27).

Similar to the way that society repressed the aspects that were considered bad and impure of previous goddesses to transform the Virgin of Guadalupe into a pure and chaste being, the Chicano culture has tried to repress the sexuality of the Chicano lesbians to transform them into pure women.



Source: Televisa News

Feminine Body: Gloria Anzaldúa

- Coatlicue is the mother of Coyolxauhqui y Huitzilopochtli
- The female body reveals various aspects of the sexual limitations of the chicana women.
- The feminine body dismemberment represents the oppression Chicana women face because their own identity is divided.



Source: Hiveminer

Coyolxauhqui: Moon goddess who was dismembered by her brother Huitzilopochtli (Borderlands 27).



Source: DeviantArt

Huitzilopochtli was the war god and represents the birth of patriarchy (Borderlands 27).

Feminine Body: Gloria Anzaldúa

- The Mexican Olmec Civilization associated *Coatl*, as a serpiente, which they related to the female body (Borderlands 26).
 - Serpent represents sexuality
 - To dominate the origins of the female body enables chicana women to establish their sexual identity.



Source: Ancient Origins

Feminine Body: Cherríe Moraga

- Similar to Anzaldúa, Moraga presents the dismemberment of the aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui to represent the oppression of the lesbian identity.
- In Moragas play *Heroes and Saints*, she also presents a bodiless character named Cerezita to symbolize her search for her body and identity.
- Considering Cerezita is only a head, the character mentions the importance her tongue. (Heroes 108)
- The tongue and therefore the mouth resemble the representation that Anzaldúa presented of the serpent mouth as the female mouth.



Fuente: Monica Monroe

Feminine Body: Cherríe Moraga

- Moraga also argues how the color of her skin has contributed to the formation of her lesbian identity:
 - Her light skin color has given her privileges, it isn't until she accepts her lesbianism that she connects to her chicana race and understands the oppression her mother and other chicanos face.
 - Being lesbian is Moragas' oppression and it wasn't until she let go of the white privilege of her skin that she could be complete. (Loving 44)

Conclusion

- For both Anzaldúa and Moraga their literary work became a form of political activism. This form of activism was achieved through the use of a multi-genre text.
- Each of the author's work, didn't comply to one specific genre. In fact it included autobiographical pieces, poetry, narrative fiction, journal entries and dreams.
- By doing so, both authors are refusing to stay within the boundaries of one form of expression. This correlates with their continuous protest against the established expectations for Chicana women because these authors have fought to establish a new more inclusive form of expression that also deals with the aspect of sexuality.

Conclusion

- Both of their literary work included a combination of feminist sensibility, lesbian identity, and the description of the constant cultural alienation that they suffered, therefore the multi-genre work seem more appropriate because through the various genres, all the topics that were expressed were done so in a more inclusive manner (Garza 20).

We are civil rights workers and activists, and we have joined coalitions to defend human rights on an international level. As lesbians, however, we have just started to come together. Our energy is divided along many issues that demand we repress part of our identity in order to be accepted. This is where the struggle really begins, and we need each other to withstand the pressure.

—Juanita Ramos, *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians An Anthology* (1994)

Bibliography

“Anzaldua, Hiskind.” Hiskind, 02 Oct. 2017, <https://hiskind.com/in-celebration-of-gloria-anzaldua/>.

Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

--. *Interviews/Entrevistas*. Edited by AnaLouise Keating, Routledge, 2000.

“Borderlands: La Frontera Cover.” Wikipedia, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borderlands/La_Frontera:_The_New_Mestiza.

“Coatl.” *Ancient Origins*, 22 Oct. 2017, <http://www.ancient-origins.es/noticias-mitos-leyendas-americas/el-mito-quetzalc%C3%B3atl-serpiente-emplumada-dios-creador-004550>.

“Coatlicue.” Wikipedia, 2018, <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coatlicue>.

“El Pecado Original.” *Centro Nacional de Catequesis*, 2018, <http://www.cenacat.org/messages/display/44/la-transmision-del-pecado-original-y-la-situacion-de-maria-inmaculada>.

“Eva y la tentación.” *En El Principio: Creación Del Mundo Y La Caída*, 2016, http://www.buenanueva.net/biblia/5_biblia5to_gdo/5_2_creacycaida.html.

“Coyolxauhqui.” Flickr Hive Mind. 2018, <https://hiveminer.com/Tags/coyolxauhqui/Recent>.

Bibliography

Garza, Elisa A.. "Chicana Lesbianism and the Multigenre Text." Tortilleras: Hispanic and U.S. Latina Expression, edited by Lourdes Torres and Inmaculada Pertusa, Temple University Press, 2003.

"Gay and Lesbian Literature: Cherrie L. Moraga." Amazon.com, 2018, <https://www.amazon.com/Loving-War-Years-Classics-English/dp/0896086267>.

Gloria E. Anzaldua at the beach." Goodreads, 2018, https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/516921.Gloria_E_Anzald_a.

Gonzales, Manuel G. Mexicanos: a History of Mexicans in the United States. Second ed., Indiana University Press, 2009.

"Huitzilopochtli." Deviant Art, 2013-2018, <https://nosuku-k.deviantart.com/art/Huitzilopochtli-407398130>.

López Cantó, Pablo. "Feminismo Xicana." Daimon, Revista Internacional de Filosofía, n. 63, 2014, pp. 97-111, <http://dx.doi.org/10.6018/daimon/19976>. Accessed 11 March 2018.

"Mind, Body, Spirit." P-knot, 19 Oct. 2016, <https://p-knot.com/mind-body-spirit-finding-balance/>.

"Mente, Cuerpo, Espíritu." Cultura Relativa, 06 May, 2017, <http://relativeculturalaqp.blogspot.com/2017/05/mente-cuerpo-y-espiritu.html>.

Moraga, Cherríe L.. Heroes And Saints & Other Plays: Giving Up The Ghost, Shadow Of A Man, Heroes And Saints. West End Press, 1994.

--. Loving in the war years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios. South End Press, 1983.

Bibliography

Ramos, Juanita. *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians : an Anthology*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

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

"Sangre en el Desierto: Spanish edition." Amazon.com, 2018, <https://www.amazon.com/Sangre-desierto-Desert-Blood-muertas/dp/1558855181>.

Sostaita, Barbara. "Gloria Anzaldúa smiling." *Feministing*, November, 2017, <http://feministing.com/2017/09/26/five-gloria-anzaldua-quotes-to-inspire-your-resistance/>.

"The Beauty of Existing on Borders." *Breaking Barriers: Intersectionality of Identity*, 14 Dec. 2011, <https://gws380.wordpress.com/2011/12/14/the-beauty-of-existing-on-borders/>.

"The Controversial Role of La Malinche in the Fall of the Aztec Empire: Traitor or Hero?" *Ancient Origins*, 2 Feb. 2016, <http://www.ancient-origins.net/history-famous-people/controversial-role-la-malinche-fall-aztec-empire-traitor-or-hero-005284>.

Vera Rojas, María Teresa. "Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*", *Lletra de Dona in Centre Dona i Literatura*, 2010, <http://www.ub.edu/cdona/lletradedona/es/borderlandsla-frontera-new-mestiza>.

"Virgen de Guadalupe." *Televisa News*, 12 Dec. 2017, <https://noticieros.televisa.com/especiales/que-relacion-tienen-virgen-quadalupe-y-diosa-coatlicue/>.

Weisinger, Jean. "Chicano Playwright Cherrie Moraga." Cengage Learning, 2018, http://college.cengage.com/english/kalaidjian/understanding_lit/1e/students/drama/moraga.html.