

The Visionary Power of Chicana Girls in Virginia Grise's *blu*

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Introduction

In the Introduction to his first influential book, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz recalls two moments, one from his own childhood and one from Marga Gomez's performance *Marga Gomez is Pretty, Witty, and Gay*. In both moments, the two queer Latinx youth watch and process the representation of queer people on mainstream U.S. television. While cognizant of how they are meant to understand the queer subjects, the youth are also able to repurpose what they are viewing for their own identificatory purposes. Speaking of Gomez's reworking of her childhood memory in her performance, Muñoz writes: "the phobic object, through a campy over-the-top performance, is reconfigured as sexy and glamorous, and not as the pathetic and abject spectacle that it appears to be in the dominant eyes of heteronormative culture" (3). This reconfiguration provides the basis for Muñoz's concept of disidentification, which he defines as "survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to elide a phobic majoritarian public sphere" (*ibid*, 4). In this case, young Gomez and Muñoz work to respond to and exist within a racist, misogynist and homophobic public sphere. Muñoz explains that disidentification may take place both inside and outside the dominant public sphere and that performances of disidentification often circulate within "subcultural circuits" (*ibid*, 5). While Muñoz's theory has proved pivotal to contemporary Latinx, queer, and feminist studies, the specific moments in which he grounds the act of disidentification here are also significant because of their relevance to young people in particular. These moments in his and Gomez's life situate the act of disidentification not only in the practices of queers of color, but more specifically in the practices of queer youth of color. As such, Muñoz's ideas are particularly powerful for youth and suggest the importance of considerations of age in approaches to the work of queer and feminist artists of color.

The following article leverages these considerations while examining how the female youth in Virginia Grise's play *blu* negotiate discursive, physical, and sexual violence. Relying on Muñoz's theory, this analysis emphasizes the ways in which two young women, Soledad and Gemini, disidentify with the racist, sexist, patriarchal and violent social order around them. The two youth enact their survival strategies within both dominant Anglo and subcultural Chicana/o contexts and their responses reflect a negotiation with various forces of violence and domination that is not always consistent or, in Muñoz's terms, adequate (*ibid*, 5). Gemini, the principal young female in the play and the subject of the majority of this analysis, is unable to completely move beyond visions of family that rely on violence. Rather, she engages with various stories and contexts to present a vision that both draws from, and breaks from, the familial and mythological legacies that she has inherited. The multiple ways in which she and her mother, Soledad, respond to, rework, and reject aspects of Anglo and Chicana/o racist and sexist violence can best be understood as practices of disidentification. By applying Muñoz's theory to Grise's play, this article reminds us of the importance of the interventions of youth of color that ground Muñoz's book while offering us a way to understand the actions of some of Grise's characters. More importantly, the article as a whole emphasizes the voice and significance of Chicana girls and

urges us to understand and appreciate more fully the representation, experiences, and ideas of girls of color.

Grise's award winning playⁱ combines Chicana/o inner city experiences and questions of sexuality, class, and race alongside various forms of masculinized and militarized violence. Set in "Barrio USA," the play centers on a queer family composed of mother Soledad and her children Blu, Gemini and Lunatico (aka Luna). The children's father, Eme, is serving time in jail for assaulting their mother and for gang activity. The parents are separated and Soledad now shares her life and home with her female partner, Hailstorm. The narrative covers both the past and present of Soledad and Eme's lives so that those two characters are depicted as between 15 and 37, and between 19 and 41 years old, respectively, throughout the play. The other characters are only depicted at their present ages: Hailstorm (early 30s), Blu (18), Gemini (14), and Luna (13).

The family faces violence within their home and city as well as abroad: Blu and Luna are both lured by gangs, Gemini is gang-raped, and their father, Eme, is serving time in prison for abusing Soledad. This domestic violence appears alongside state-backed control and surveillance – helicopters regularly patrol the sky above the family's home and Blu is killed when his helicopter is shot down in Iraq. The play is concerned with reflecting inter-generational experiences with violence while highlighting questions of gender and sexuality. Commonality in *blu* is expressed when the same weapons (helicopters) are used in urban surveillance and imperialist war and through characters playing other characters. For example, the stage directions are clear that Eme, Blu's father, is to be played by the same actor who plays a police officer who harasses the youth at school. This creates a continuity between masculine authority as it reigns over the young boys. Later, the "Group of Boys" that sexually assaults Gemini is composed of nearly all of the other characters – Eme, Soledad, Hailstorm and Lunatico – emphasizing the relationship between domestic and sexual violence: she is literally raped by the same actors who play her family members. Notably, Blu is absent from this group, which illustrates his special relationship with his sister; he is physically absent and the only person to whom she reports her ordeal. Also significant is that Gemini is the only character to never play another character in the play; this draws attention to the importance of the young girl and suggests that unlike her brothers, whose experiences in many ways mimic that of their father, her experiences and perspectives are singular, unique and unprecedented.

Performing War, Performing Girlhood

The portrayal of various forms of linked violence is common within Chicana/o literature and performance that takes up war. At one point Blu declares that he's joined the Army because he's "been at war [his] whole life. i fight it here or i fight there. All the same" (Grise, 44). Blu compares growing up in a militarized barrio surrounded by police violence and gangs to fighting in Iraq, suggesting that these are interchangeable threats. Calling forth the "sameness" of various forms of state-backed violence, the character and the play draw attention to the surveillance and war that face marginalized communities, and particularly communities of color, within the United States. In suggesting that he faces war-like conditions at "home," Blu echoes the stances of earlier generations of black and brown soldiers, many of whom traced the carry-over of violence between domestic and international spaces. The similarities between conditions of war and deprivation experienced at home and abroad, however, may have disparate impacts. For example, Latino veterans who returned from WWII leveraged their status as patriotic Americans to fight for more resources and expanded civil rights while later generations during and after the Vietnam War often

used the similarities between domestic and international war and discrimination to oppose serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Using his experience neither to explicitly argue for increased civil rights nor an end to U.S. intervention abroad, Blu seems to take a nihilistic approach, recognizing the conditions of warfare he faces in the United States without opposing the U.S.'s larger mission and instead acquiescing to it.

While these tropes of sameness in terms of comparing the conditions faced by communities of color at home and warfare abroad abound in Chicano and Latino literature, they often also rely on an oversimplification of conditions and experiences and the ellision or subsumation of gendered concerns.ⁱⁱ Characters such as Blu somewhat universalize their own experiences as Chicanos without considering how their status as men facilitates a particular experience. However, Latina and Chicana writers who engage with war have often drawn attention not to issues of sameness, but to issues of difference. Authors and artists such as Nina Serrano, Lourdes Portillo, Demetria Martínez and Helena María Viramontes have sought to shed light on how questions of gender and sexuality, alongside issues of race and class, intersect with and impact experiences of war and militarization.ⁱⁱⁱ Their work is consistent with feminist scholars and theorists who posit difference and solidarity, rather than sameness and unity, as the basis for effective coalitional practices.^{iv} Similarly, while Blu asserts that war in his urban environment or abroad is "the same," Gemini's experiences illustrate that experiences of violence are distinct for women and girls. In her reading of the play, Belinda Linn Rincón points out how masculinist protection contributes to militarism's "spatial logic," which in turn relies on the "confinement of women to the home" (248). Connecting this idea to Chicano nationalist ideas about the place and role of Chicanas, the scholar explains that *blu* allows us to see "how masculinist protection operates in multiple registers as different patriarchal groups – gangs, the military, Chicano nationalists – seek territorial control premised on female immobility" (*ibid*). In showcasing Chicana feminist refutations of both U.S. and ethno-nationalism, Grise's work joins a larger corpus of Chicana feminist theory and texts. Like other feminist writers who engage with war and militarism, Grise explores the carry over of violence and injustice experienced by Latina/os as it occurs within and without the U.S. while at the same time remaining attuned to how differences in age and gender impact such experiences.

In addition to themes of overlapping and intersecting violence, the play engages heavily with Aztec mythology and specifically the story of Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui and Huitzilopochtli. The cover image of the play features a portrait of the title character in ¾ profile, his body slightly turned toward the viewer/reader but highlighting the right side of his naked upper torso, including a prominent tattoo on his right upper arm. That tattoo is easily recognizable, for those familiar with the image, as that of Coyolxauhqui, and introduces the importance of this figure in the play. Coyolxauhqui is the daughter of Coatlicue, an Aztec mother goddess. According to the story, one day Coatlicue was sweeping and a hummingbird feather floated up and touched her belly, thus causing the virgin pregnancy of her son Huitzilopochtli. While Huitzilopochtli was still in utero, Coyolxauhqui colluded with her hundreds of brothers and sisters to murder their mother so that the competing child would not be born. Huitzilopochtli, however, learned of their plan and when he was born, emerged with a sword in his hand and slaughtered his sisters and brothers. He decapitated and dismembered Coyolxauhqui, which is how she is depicted in most pictures and engravings. He then tossed her head up to the heavens where it became the moon; the pieces of his murdered brothers and sisters were also launched into the heavens to form the stars.

These two prominent threads – militarized violence and Aztec mythology – are in fact linked both within the play as well as within other works of Chicana/o literature. The story of Coyolxauhqui is a violent one and is often interpreted as both an explanation of and justification

for continued warfare. According to Aztec scholar Miguel León-Portillo, the legend justified warfare in the eyes of the Aztecs (qtd in Huerta, 41). Chicano theatre historian Jorge Huerta sees the myth, and its recreation in Chicana/o drama, as drawing a link between historical and contemporary struggles. The myth, he explains, “is a metaphor for the daily struggles between night and day, with the all-powerful rising sun ever victorious over the light of the moon and the stars” (41). Chicano literature often invokes Aztec and Mayan figures and motifs to suggest a continuation of war and to depict contemporary Chicano struggles against racism, imperialism, and colonialism as outgrowths of earlier struggles against colonization. In the iconic play *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez, a memorable scene depicts a battered and bruised pachuco who has just been assaulted by U.S. Navy men and stripped of his zoot suit, rising from the stage and transforming into an Aztec warrior. His underwear transforms into a loincloth and his nearly naked figure shifts from a representation of his humiliated and dehumanized status to an indication of his strength and prowess. Mark Pizzato writes that the pachuco may be invoking either the god Quetzalcoatl (for whom reincarnation and return plays an important role) or Tezcatlipoca (in honor of whom sacrifices were made); for either interpretation the scene suggests that the gods function as the character’s “superego, returning after the 500-year repression of the Conquest” (9). This return, which sidesteps historic and contemporary violence perpetuated by mestizos upon indigenous peoples, engages both with “mournful idealization” and the explicit invocation of violence (*ibid*).^v

While engagement with Aztec myth and imagery is significant within Chicana/o literature and in particular Chicana/o drama, the story of Coyolxuhqui and Coatlicue has proven particularly fruitful for Chicana feminist analysis and interpretation. Artists and theorists find in the story a portrait of Aztec militarism and male power as well as ideas about female power (re)emerging. Some Chicana scholars have asserted that the discovery of the stone engraving of Coyolxuhqui in Mexico City in 1974 was no accident, but rather part of “a necessary spiritual force” occurring to guide the descendants of Tenochtitlán (Luna and Galeana, 10). In an early scene, Soledad asks Hailstorm to tell her the story and Hailstorm echoes the idea of Coyolxuhqui as an emerging force that demands her own recognition: “[the conquerer’s] churches [are] sinking but our temples aren’t. our temples are emerging from under the earth” (Grise, 12). When Soledad asks about the stars and the moon, Hailstorm tells her that the former are “warriors” and the latter is “the one, the one that fought against war” (*ibid*, 13). Hailstorm broaches the idea that Coyolxuhqui sought to resist male, patriarchal power in the form of her brother Huitzilopochtli. This interpretation is consistent with that of Cherríe Moraga who in her well-known essay “En Busca de la Fuerza Femenina” suggests that the story is one of male child collusion with patriarchy against feminine and matriarchal power. She writes, “el hijo comes to the defense of patriarchal motherhood, kills la mujer rebelde, and female power is eclipsed by the rising light of the Sun/Son. This machista myth is enacted every day of our lives, every day that the sun (Huitzilopochtli) rises up from the horizons and the moon (Coyolxuhqui) is obliterated by his light” (74). For Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Coyolxuhqui joins Sor Juana and La Malinche as a “bad woman,” illustrating the constructedness of this category and the ways in which some brown female bodies are subject to derogatory framing by forces operating “transnationally, transculturally, and transhistorically” as well as those operating “intracategorically” (19). Gloria Anzaldúa also views Coyolxuhqui as a victim of misogyny and female disempowerment but focuses on how the daughter as a dismembered being broaches issues of reconstruction and healing. Anzaldúa explains: “Coyolxuhqui is my symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation...also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing...the process of healing” (19-20). Hailstorm’s narrative is consistent with Chicana feminist interpretations of the story of

Coyolxuhqui's discovery, significance and strength. She also alludes to an important contradiction in the story, the seeming elevation of war, when she describes Coyolxuhqui as a warrior who fights "against the war." This contradiction is one that Gemini wrestles with later in the play as she places herself in relation to Coyolxuhqui and her brother Blu in relation to Huitzilopochtli, necessitating a complex reckoning with intra-familial violence and the possibilities for new visions.

The story of Coyolxuhqui, Huitzilopochtli and Coatlicue encourages us to look at gendered intra-cultural violence but to also consider familial dynamics in terms of age and power. The story is in many ways that of maternal preference for male children and, in Moraga's words, "una hija rebelde." When Gemini identifies with Coyolxuhqui she not only speaks to the salience of this myth for Chicanas but also forges a link with the figure based on their status as daughters. The play's emphasis on girlhood is further manifested in its portrayal of two characters – young Soledad and Gemini – and in how the two girls respond to the influence of others in their lives. Soledad's responses center around how she interacts with her two lovers, Eme and Hailstorm, and how she refutes a doctor's suggestion that she abort her child. Gemini's responses center on how she reacts to and rewrites the story of Coyolxuhqui. Although the content and context are distinct, in each instance the two young characters resist narratives that are imposed by larger, adult-controlled institutions – namely, the family and the medical establishment. Moreover, their narratives don't simply resist but also rewrite and suggest the possibility for change via new visions of family.

Girls: Foregrounding of Gemini and Soledad's decision

The play foregrounds girls from the start as Gemini is the first character introduced in the play. The stage directions read: "Gemini is sitting on the roof alone, stared out into the distance. The earth and sky meet. The sound of helicopters passing overhead. The blades cut through time" (Grise, 5). By placing Gemini on the rooftop, this setting immediately introduces the significant themes of escape and confinement while also bringing into play the mechanisms of surveillance – the helicopters. Focusing on a young girl alone places the emphasis on her and allows the play to begin to develop her character on her own terms, not in relation to other, specifically male characters. In their analysis of visual representations of girls, Elizabeth Marshall and Leigh Gilmore discuss how girls are more often represented than self-represented and are placed in positions of dependence that emphasize their vulnerability. Techniques such as cropping to focus on fragmented body parts emphasize sexual availability and a lack of control girls have over their own bodies (98-102). This issue of scale, presenting girls and women as physically smaller, is overtly addressed in the play via early and frequent placing of Gemini on the rooftop of her family home. This placement allows Gemini to exist over and above other characters and actions in the play while also gesturing to the necessity of her own space – her need to remove herself physically in order to explore and assert her own perspective and voice. This physical space is both a reaction to the confinement and surveillance she faces as well as an issue that facilitates her visions of transformation and change. As such, the play coincides with Emma Pérez's theory that women and lesbians of color need *un sitio y una lengua*, a space and a language, from which women of color can be centered (Pérez; Danielson, 4). Gemini's affinity for the rooftop indicates her need for physical freedom, beyond the confines of the home and overly-surveilled barrio. Her placement on the rooftop contrasts with the ultimate confinement she suffers later in the play, sexual assault. With the invocation of the necessity and power of an autonomous *sitio* broached by Grise, the

work attests to the importance of Pérez's concept for girls of color specifically. Borrowing from Marivel Danielson's analysis of the young protagonist of Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*, Grise's work "offers a map of one child's journey to self-discovery, beginning first with the need for a safe space in the face of threatening male sociosexual and colonial powers, then a grappling with the language of ethnic, gender, and sexual alterity" (73). Where Gemini differs from the character Danielson discusses is that it is unclear that she ever "arrives" at a safe space or point of resolution. This however only emphasizes the necessity of her journey and moreover the necessity of those around her supporting her exploration of *un sitio y una lengua* in an attempt to reach safety.

Her initial placement on the roof also establishes Gemini's association with the sky and celestial bodies, paving the way for her later association with Coyolxuhqui while also gesturing to her intervention in common narratives concerning the sky, moon, and sun. As the stage directions indicate, this first scene immediately introduces the opposition to binaries, non-linearity, and reconciliation. By stating that "earth and sky meet" the directions suggest a unity between earth and the heavens, rather than the sharp distinction that often characterizes Western cosmologies. As the earth is the realm of the living and the skies indicative of the afterlife, the breaking of this distinction gestures to the play's more expansive understanding of the relationship between life and death. In addition, with the helicopter blades that "cut through time," the play introduces the important element of non-linearity. Thus, the play's important themes – escape, confinement, surveillance, flight – and its mechanisms of exploring these themes via non-linearity and a resistance to binaries are immediately introduced. Doing so through a focus on Gemini makes her a central focus as well as the principal means through which these themes will be explored. Most significantly, the reconciliation of the sky and the earth that "meet" in the background of this young character begin to associate the girl with reconciliation.

Despite the description of Gemini, she is not the first character that speaks. The opening conversation depicts a three-way meeting between Soledad, Eme and Hailstorm which exists in two time periods – readers witness the first conversation that Soledad has with each of her partners. In her conversation with Eme she is 15, with Hailstorm she is 30. This scene establishes commonality between Soledad's two partners through both content and performance. For example, Soledad asserts her preference for stasis, stating that she's going "nowheres" while Eme and Hailstorm both counter "you gotta be goin somewhere" (Grise, 6). The two partners have similar perspectives on movement, which are in opposition to Soledad who persists, insisting that allowing the world to move around her "don't sound so bad. Like the earth. The moon orbits round the earth" (*ibid*). Soledad disidentifies with a narrative of movement and progress which insists that one must be "goin somewhere," instead asserting the desirability of stasis. In referencing the earth, she finds support for her preference and also insists on her own primacy, she is the earth around which her lovers orbit. While her conversation with Hailstorm takes places when she is in her 30s, the conversation with Eme happens much earlier and reflects the teenager's insistence on her own place and resistance to being swayed by another. When 17 year-old and 30 year-old Soledad repeat the same line, the play emphasizes the ways in which pressure on women to conform to their partner's ideology carries over from youth to adulthood but also how the adult Soledad continues to follow the path of resistance she established as a young girl. This conversation exists in sharp contrast to the earlier portrait of Gemini alone on the rooftop, again showing the importance of young girls and women having space and time alone with their own thoughts and the fact that they must often battle to achieve this space. This scene also continues the play's focus on celestial bodies. Both Eme and Hailstorm tell Soledad to "close [her] eyes" and each ask her to focus on

the stars, with Hailstorm promising to “teach [her] ‘bout the stars” (*ibid*, 8). However, Soledad insists on her ability to see the stars on her own, relating this vision to her ability to make decisions about her life and body.

The lights fade and a subsequent scene depicts a conversation between Soledad, Eme and a doctor. Soledad is 17 and pregnant with her first child, Blu. The doctor encourages her to abort but she refuses, stating “I choose my son;” she then continues, describing how she could see him within her and adds “I could see stars. Day or night” (*ibid*, 10). Whereas earlier Eme and Hailstorm had promised to show Soledad the stars, here she asserts that she can see them herself. In fact, she insists that not only can see them without anyone’s assistance, but she can see them “day or night.” The young girl explains that she is literally visionary, with the power to see her son in utero and to see the stars in the sky. Like Gemini standing on the rooftop where “earth and sky meet,” Soledad speaks to a reconciliation and rejection of binaries: there is no great distinction between day and night since for her the stars are visible during both time periods. Despite attempts by her lovers and a medical professional to guide her, Soledad asserts her independence and her own decision making. Soledad’s visions and decisions constitute disidentification because she takes the ideas and concepts that Eme and Hailstorm proffer – the movement of celestial bodies, the ability to see the stars – and rescrambles them for her own purposes. These two early scenes foreground the importance of young girls in the play, gesturing to processes of disidentification and associating them with visions of reconciliation, unity, and the breaking down of binaries.

Gemini: Re-interpreting Coyolxuahqui

While the play foregrounds young girls from the start, the most significant engagement with girlhood comes via Gemini’s engagement with the story and figure of Coyolxuahqui. This engagement with Coyolxuahqui is complex and nuanced because she is both associated with, and actively dissociates herself from, the figure. That is, she both embodies aspects of Coyolxuahqui and resolutely resolves to reject aspects of the woman. As such, she disidentifies with Coyolxuahqui while also engaging in a rewriting of the myth. Midway through the play, Hailstorm tells Gemini the story of Coyolxuahqui and the young girl responds: “I don’t wanna be no aztec princess...airbrushed on the hood of some lowrider or printed on the calendar they give you for free at the carnereria” (*ibid*, 46). Gemini here references the very common image of the princess Iztaccihuatl held in the arms of the warrior Popócateptl – the image is indeed airbrushed on cars and reproduced in calendars. According to Aztec mythology the princess Iztaccihuatl fell in love with the warrior Popocatépetl. When she was falsely informed of Popocatépetl’s death, she died in grief. After returning from battle, Popocatépetl carried his lover’s body (thus the image commonly depicted is of a warrior carrying the dead body of the princess) to a spot outside of Tenochtitlán; there the gods covered them with snow and turned them into mountains. The story lives on, embodied in the two mountains just east of Mexico City that are named Iztaccihuatl and Popocatépetl. Gemini’s rejection of the role of Iztaccihuatl is a refutation of the common role that women are encouraged to play: passive subjects within patriarchal societies. For her part, Hailstorm suggests that the fate of Iztaccihuatl and Coyolxuahqui are not the same, that the goddess did not die as the princess did: “not dead/she turned into the moon...Lights the sky” (*ibid*, 47). But Gemini continues to see both stories as infused with death, stating emphatically: “not goin down. Not gonna go down like that. Not this time...why do we always end up killing each other and our own dreams?” (*ibid*). While Hailstorm interprets Coyolxuahqui as not dying but being transformed into the moon, Gemini takes the more literal interpretation and sees Coyolxuahqui as

being killed by her brother Huitzilopochtli. Moreover, she relates the goddess Coyolxuhqui to the princess Itzaccihuatl and suggests both lack agency regarding their fates.

Gemini's questioning of the role of death and murder points to a contradiction in the story of Coyolxuhqui and its potential as a narrative of feminine liberation. If Coyolxuhqui's dismemberment by her brother indicates male power and violence, does a refutation of this imbalance necessitate female violence? Would a story that centers on Coyolxuhqui successfully killing or overthrowing her brother reflect a more egalitarian vision or simply reproduce gendered hierarchies? Gemini's unanswered question, "why do we always end up killing each other and our own dreams?" would suggest not, gesturing toward the necessity of new visions and dreams. However, the young girl exhibits inconsistency in regards to this point. She makes explicit her relationship to Coyolxuhqui, saying, "i dreamt i was the moon... coyolxuhqui...my brother he is the hummingbird warrior huitzilopochtli" (*ibid*, 48). She then asserts a different vision of the myth, one in which she lives and her brother dies: "i'm rewriting the myth. clipped his wings. because this time i do not die. this time he was the ultimate sacrifice. i cut out and eat his heart. even if for a moment, the war will end" (*ibid*, 56). While Gemini's version does re-write the dismemberment/death of Coyolxuhqui, she doesn't seem to move beyond her own earlier implied desire to stop the cycle of "killing each other and our own dreams." Moreover, it's unclear how her killing of her brother will bring an end to war. Gemini's disidentification with Coyolxuhqui is not simple or uncontradictory. She appears to reject aspects of the myth – the death of Coyolxuhqui - while remaining invested in the structures of power in which it is rooted. On the one hand, in her version of the myth, it is her brother, not she, who dies. On the other hand, she invokes a collective "we" that resists death/self-destruction. These inconsistencies are relevant given her age and harken back to Pérez's ideas as they invoke the ways in which she struggles for *una lengua*, a language, through which to articulate her reality and her visions for a future. That she is not able to sustain a coherent verbal articulation is not a failure but rather a comment on the various struggles she faces and her attempt to negotiate powerful discourses of family, sexuality, gender, and violence. Gemini's engagement with the myth and various attempts to rework it reflect her "trying on" different disidentificatory and emancipatory processes, not all of which may be "successful" or "sufficient." The rewriting of Coyolxuhqui from a murdered subject to a murderer may be a "failure" that indicates that "disidentification is not an appropriate strategy for all minoritarian subjects all of the time" (Muñoz 1999, 162). However, we might also follow Gemini and the play's lead in terms of staying attuned to non-Western cosmologies and the breaking down of binaries to approach the discussion of murder and death differently.

As the quote from Anzaldúa mentioned above indicates, Coyolxuhqui's story may be as much about transformation and healing as it is about death and destruction. That is, the process of dismemberment may spur processes of "reconstruction" and "healing" (2015, 19-20). Anzaldúa's ideas concerning the regenerative power of destruction echo those of Octavio Paz who also views creation and destruction as linked. While these two actions – creation and destruction – are antithetical for humans, for gods, Paz explains, they are part of a game: "*Para ellos no hay diferencia entre jugar y crear: cada una de sus piruetas es un mundo que nace o que se aniquilla*" (1999, 294).^{vi} From this perspective, creation and destruction are linked in a symbiotic, ongoing process. As such, Gemini's determination to "cut out and eat" her brother's heart may not be the same kind of death and destruction that either Coyolxuhqui experienced or Blu fell victim to in Iraq. This may not be death, but rather transformation. Such a reading is in line with Gemini's earlier association with the breaking down of binaries – "where earth and sky meet" – as well as her discussion elsewhere of sirens. In regards to the latter, she imagines the dismemberment of the

moon as entailing an immortal transformation. Speaking to her mother she says “the moon she gonna break into a million pieces. Fall into the ocean turn sirena...sirenas never die” (Grise 2011, 41). Here the dismemberment and falling of the moon/Coyolxuhqui does not hasten death but rather leads to eternal life. This sentiment is expressed again toward the end of the play when the family members collectively narrate Blu’s death, which occurs when his helicopter is shot from the sky. Several characters, including soldiers, Lunatico, Blu, and Eme narrate: “we regret to inform you/his helicopter fell out the sky./the stars became guerrilleras./the moon fell into the ocean,/turned sirena” (*ibid*, 53). This section conveys Blu’s corporeal death while also suggesting immortality and transformation. Notably, not only does Blu become associated with resurrection – the moon becoming a siren – but he is also associated with the female figure of Coyolxuhqui as his helicopter, like the moon, falls from the sky. This follows Gemini’s breaking down of binaries between heaven and earth and life and death, while introducing a third binary to be resisted, that of male and female.

When several characters collectively echo Gemini’s story of the moon “turn[ing] sirena” the play asserts the visionary power of young girls. In doing so, they reinforce Gemini’s ideas regarding transformation in light of the play’s engagement with questions of escape, confinement, and death. While Blu seeks to escape the violence of his town and family but encounters more violence in war, Gemini seeks to transform familial relationships. She doesn’t leave the space of her family or barrio as her brother does, but remains there as she rewrites the myth and her relationship with her brother. While Gemini expressing the desire to clip Blu’s/Huitzilopochtli’s wings and eat his heart can clearly be interpreted as a violent one, we would do well to also approach this vision as one of transformation as opposed to (only) death and destruction. This again echoes Anzaldúa as the author explains that in Coyolxuhqui she “[seeks] a healing image, one that reconnects me to others. I seek the positive shadow that I’ve also inherited” (2015, 10). Gemini’s re-writing of her relationship to Blu and to death is an alteration in their relationship that inaugurates a new era.

Conclusion

The final pages of the play emphasize reconciliation for the family and a uniting of binaries in terms of traditionally female and male-gendered entities. This uniting is expressed through the oral participation of all characters/family members and the use of imagery associated with blue, stars, and water. The family members take turns listing entities associated with the color blue and the character Blu; Gemini says “sky, moon, blue” and Hailstorm adds “ocean blue” (*ibid*, 57). Eme adds “sounds turn to waves/breaking” and then Gemini brings her brother in relationship to the stars saying “close my eyes. See a million/stars on the back of my/eyelids, blu” (*ibid*, 58). Here Blu is associated with blue entities – water, waves, ocean - but also with elements of the myth of Coyolxuhqui – the stars and the moon. In her final action in the play Gemini lights a circle of blue candles and stands in the middle, suggesting that the candles represent the stars that surround her. This also suggests that, like her brother, Gemini is no longer corporeally on earth, she is joined by her brother in the heavens, but surrounded by him as well. After Gemini enters the circle of candlelight the remaining characters, Eme, Hailstorm, Luna and Soledad, collectively utter the last line of the play with the first three characters repeating “ocean waters carry you” until Soledad concludes “carry us home” (*ibid*). This reflects a final transformation and reconciliation between “you” and “us” as the characters begin by narrating Blu’s fate only to arrive at narrating their own.

The tension between movement and stasis that has been foregrounded throughout the play has been resolved as the characters, led by Soledad, speak of a collective homecoming.

Blu's engagement with issues of inter and intra-generational violence, the co-imbrication of familial, racial, and state violence and attention to how gender and sexuality impact experiences of war and occupation is consistent with Chicana and Latina feminist literature and scholarship committed to understanding how militarism intersects with questions of race, class, gender, citizenship and sexuality. Where the play pushes this conversation further is with its focus on the experiences and voices of Chicana youth. Cristina Herrera reminds us "that the lives and experiences of young Latinas must be given critical attention" particularly "at a time when the humanity of people of color is under attack" (2016, 99). Set within a context of pervasive violence encompassing state-backed and gender-based abuse, *blu* coincides with Herrera's call and encourages us to look more closely at the significance of age in narratives of militarism and violence and to place the fields of Chicana/o military studies, Chicana/Latina feminisms, and girl studies in conversation with one another. Gemini's prescient, transformative visions both carry on and further a legacy of Chicana feminism as she learns from her elders's (Hailstorm's) discussion of Coyolxuahqui but alters the story and its significance to meet her own needs and those of future generations.

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ⁱ The play was the recipient of the 2010 Yale Drama Series Award

ⁱⁱ See Vigil, "Latina/o Literature and War: Gendered Contact Zones," in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (forthcoming).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Vigil, "Latina/o Literature and War: Gendered Contact Zones," in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (forthcoming).

^{iv} See, for example, Mohanty (2003) and Sandoval (2000).

^v See Vigil 2014, particularly pages 37-40, for a larger discussion of the problems inherent in Chicano claims to be the inheritors/legacy of indigenous resistance to colonialism.

^{vi} For them, there is no difference between play and creation: each of their turns is a world that is born or is annihilated (author's translation).