

## HETEROSEXUALIZATION AND THE STATE: The Poetry of Gloria Anzaldúa

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines how several poems by the late Gloria Anzaldúa offer a compelling portrait of the role of sexuality in relationship to colonialism, neocolonialism, and state formation. Through a reading of “We Call Them Greasers,” “Cervicide,” and “Yo no fui, fue Teté,” the essay argues that Anzaldúa pinpoints how heterosexualization and heterosexism have been violently imposed on the bodies and psyches of Chicanas and Chicanos in the service of Anglo and patriarchal social, political, and economic hegemony. Considering these works in relationship to contemporary Chicana and Latina feminist theory, I demonstrate that Anzaldúa’s poetry, an under-studied aspect of her work and thought, takes up questions of gender, violence, and sexuality from a perspective that connects processes of racialized heterosexualization from the Conquest to our present moment.*

**Key Words:** *Anzaldúa, gender, heterosexualization, poetry, violence*

**This essay** analyzes poetry by Gloria Anzaldúa to argue that her work offers an important perspective on gendered violence. I focus in particular on heterosexualization as a violent process tied to state formation, capital accumulation, and the institutionalization of heteropatriarchal power. These processes are expressed in her poems’ portrayal of the abuse of women as objects of male ownership, the sacrifice of women within Chicana/o families, and homophobia. I explore the ways each of these issues is foregrounded in poetry from Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Focusing on three poems, “We Call Them Greasers,” “Cervicide” and “Yo no fui, fue Teté,” my analysis demonstrates how Anzaldúa’s poetry offers political analysis and social intervention while also combatting the silence and erasure of legacies of conquest (Castañeda 2004). More specifically, these poems exhort us to understand sexual violence

as not only a state crime but as a state creating process. Overall, this essay demonstrates how Anzaldúa's work manifests a Chicana feminist poetics that functions as a necessary social critique and contributes to scholarship on one of the most important literary and critical voices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **Heterosexualization and Violence**

Heterosexualization refers to the imposed process through which identities, desires, and relations are constructed as only heterosexual. This process depends on a view of gender as a bimorphic binary, situating women and men as discrete and opposite identities. While heterosexualization operates from a standpoint that assumes heterosexuality as "natural" and "originary," it paradoxically depends on systemic reinforcement of itself, thereby illustrating the extent to which it is imposed. Moreover, while heterosexualization may be imposed through seemingly benign cultural forms such as children's books about princes and princesses or mainstream film and television, these forms gloss over a much longer and more violent past and present. Heterosexualization is also imposed through violence against LGBT individuals, through bigoted language and action and through state institutions that, despite the recent Supreme Court ruling regarding same-sex marriage in the United States, are deeply invested in a gender binary.

These contemporary cultural, social, legal, and political forms are an outgrowth of a longer history of strategic moves to establish heterosexuality as the dominant sexual economy imbricated in colonialism and state formation. Maria Lugones (2008) uses the phrase "colonial/modern gender system" to link the imposition of a gender binary with that of a colonial system, as both occurred simultaneously in the Western Hemisphere at the time of the European Conquest of the Americas. In this paper I use the phrase

“heterosexualization of the state” to link the imposition of heterosexualization with state formation from the conquest to the present. This phrase evokes the extent to which heterosexualization was an integral part of the colonial mission and remains at the heart of modern nation-states today. The term makes a double reference—to the heterosexualization that helped form the modern nation-states of the Western hemisphere, including the United States, and to the continued enactment of heterosexualization by these states. This process is and has been a violent one, from Spanish colonizers who murdered indigenous people engaged in “cross-dressing” to contemporary legislation that demonizes LGBT individuals (Alexander 2006).<sup>1</sup> Analyzing heterosexualization in Anzaldúa’s poetry allows us to see how her work engages with heterosexualization as a transnational and transhistoric process and offers a new appreciation for her social insight and intervention as a Chicana feminist thinker.

My analysis builds on a significant body of Chicana/o feminist scholarship, while my focus on heterosexualization calls on us to recognize an important aspect of Anzaldúa’s work. Contemporary scholarship contextualizes Anzaldúa’s work within border studies and stresses the bridge-like function such work serves between disciplines, spiritual practices, and activist interventions (Cantú, Gutiérrez, Alarcón, and Urquijo-Ruiz I. 2010; Keating 2005; Keating 2009; Keating and González López 2011, Mercado-López, Saldívar-Hull, and Castañeda 2013; Saldívar-Hull, Alarcón, and Urquijo-Ruiz 2012). Informed by such scholarship, I understand Anzaldúa’s poems as emblematic of a “border feminism” that is “materially linked to a raced, working-class condition and subject” (Saldívar-Hull 2007, 113). My specific focus demonstrates how Anzaldúa’s border feminism elucidates the material conditions and ramifications of sexualized and gendered violence on such subjects. In addition, recent archival scholarship showing that *Borderlands*

began as an all-poetry volume suggests the need for more scholarly consideration of this genre that has received far less attention than her prose (Nuñez-Puente 2013).<sup>2</sup> And while issues broached in these poems—violence against women, homophobia, and heteropatriarchy—are likewise addressed in her prose, the particular portrayals of these issues within the poems merit closer scrutiny.

The ensuing analysis demonstrates that these three poems touch on violence as it occurs against and within Chicana/o families—both nuclear families and cultural ones. Two of the poems—“Cervicide” and “*Yo no fui, fue Tete*”—detail intrafamilial violence, reflecting Chicana feminist engagement with familism. “Political familism” within the Chicana/o movement sought to mobilize the family as an organizing strategy (Blackwell 2011, 82). Reinscribing Chicano men within a heterosexist and patriarchal power structure challenged Anglo racism while bolstering Chicana/o sexism. Critiques of Chicana/o familism became an important part of Chicana feminist consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s, as feminists sought to pinpoint and dismantle interlocking ideas of nationalism, family, and machismo within the movement (Rodríguez 2009). The poems analyzed below are emblematic of such critiques as they bring to light the harm—physical, psychological, and spiritual—that heterosexist Chicano familism enacts on Chicana women and queer men. At the same time, I argue these critiques are related specifically to state processes, framing them as critiques of not only familial patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia but of political, social and economic processes, including heterosexualization.

In addition, two of the poems discussed—“We Call Them Greasers” and “Cervicide”—invoke colonial and neocolonial contexts. Their use of first person and omniscient speakers present a narrative intervention in colonialism

and neocolonialism, and they both reflect particular conditions and urge readers to act to change these conditions. In so doing, these poems enact Tiffany Ana López and Karen Mary Davalos' concept of critical witnessing as they "spotlight the very conditions that brought the story into being" (Davalos and López 2009, 11). Acknowledging that Anzaldúan thought "[invites] us to adopt broader, larger, deeper modes of seeing and responding," I argue that close readings of these three poems alongside one another allow us to historicize nineteenth- and twentieth-century violence within a longer history of border violence and state formation and, most important, to pinpoint the role of sexuality and specifically heterosexuality in this violent past and present (Keating 2006, 13).

The three poems differ in their approach to violence, colonialism, nationalism, and sexuality. However, what remains consistent in all is their emphasis on heteropatriarchal violence in relation to the formation and regulation of state and national communities, what M. Jacqui Alexander refers to as "the heterosexualizing imperatives of nation-building" (2006, 11).<sup>3</sup> "We Call Them Greasers," portrays the use of heterosexual violence in the imposition of racial hierarchies and the colonization of former indigenous and Mexican territories. Analyzing the poem with Chicana feminist historical scholarship, I demonstrate how it calls attention to the specifically heterosexist worldview of colonizers. "Cervicide" brings a critique of capitalism to the forefront by highlighting the violence enacted upon female-gendered bodies as US political and economic power are imposed on mexicana/o communities. This poem broaches the topic of spiritual activism as a means to combat the violence of heterosexualization, suggesting such activism may resist the patriarchal family and the heteropatriarchal, capitalist nation-state. My analysis builds on scholars who have explicated Anzaldúa's spiritual work, while connecting heterosexualization to Anzaldúan spiritual thought. The

final poem I analyze, “*Yo no fui, fue Teté*,” offers a portrait of heterosexist violence within Chicano communities, illustrating the continued effects of heterosexist colonialism and the effort to use heterosexism to create a homogenous ethnonationalist community. Throughout my essay, I privilege the language of the poetry itself, engaging in extended close readings to analyze the gendered and racialized portrayal of heterosexualization. Taken together, this analysis helps us to see how Anzaldúa portrays heterosexual violence as linked to the imposition and perpetuation of patriarchal, Christian, white supremacist, heterosexist, and capitalist system of power and solidifies her own standing as a significant Chicana feminist thinker and theorist whose ideas continue to provoke and engage contemporary scholarship and activism.

#### **“We Call Them Greasers”**

“We Call Them Greasers” is a terrifying account of disenfranchisement and dispossession perpetuated against a mexicana/o community by a group of colonial invaders. The invaders, led by the speaker of the poem, scatter the ranchers’ cattle and then drive them off their land through economic coercion and physical and sexual violence. In the wrenching last stanza of the piece, the speaker tells of raping and murdering a woman while her husband is tied to a tree; he then orders the husband lynched. By making the speaker of the poem a perpetrator of nearly unimaginable sadism, Anzaldúa successfully represents “the ideological narrative” of colonization (Madsen 2008, 194). This ideology is one in which the rape of women by conquering men is an act of national terrorism and a means through which land and power are acquired.

While the violence acted out against the ranchers, specifically the rape and lynching, were by no means limited to the nineteenth century, the speaker’s discussion of protests of mexicanas/os against encroachments on their land

suggest that the poem takes place just after 1848, at the conclusion of the Mexican American War when the United States annexed one-third of Mexico and subsequently violated the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.<sup>4</sup> The speaker and his men “showed ’em a piece of paper with some writing / tole ’em they owed taxes / had to pay right away or be gone by *mañana*.” (Anzaldúa 2007, 156). Like Anglos who moved onto mexicano territory aided by documents of dubious nature, the speaker and his men rely on a language barrier and a corrupt court system to steal land. This historical setting encourages us to see the piece as commenting on the sexual violence embedded in processes of colonialism and imperialism. At the same time, the narration of the rape of the mexicana woman points to the role of sexuality and specifically to heterosexuality within this colonial project. Thus, the rape occurs alongside the imposition of a heterosexist, white supremacist, and patriarchal social and economic system and within a colonial context.

While dissent for his excessive brutality is registered by the speaker’s men who “wouldn’t look [him] in the eyes” after he raped and murdered the woman, his own description of his actions attests to the fact that sexual violence is a central part of colonial processes (Anzaldúa 2007, 157). Sonia Saldívar-Hull concludes that this line does not condone “the boys” lack of protest but rather enacts an implicit recognition of “the power of the class structure in nineteenth-century Texas where the rich land barons controlled all their workers, regardless of race or ethnicity” (2001, 76). Just as he acknowledges the shameful look of the men he controls, the speaker is keenly aware that he is raping not just a woman, but the property of another man. He explains that he violates the woman while “[feeling her man] watching from the mesquite tree” (Anzaldúa 2007, 157). The significance that the rapist places on the other man’s presence belies the extent to which he understands both of them within a patriarchal context. Within such a setting, the rape is an action committed not just against the woman, but also against her husband,

and is a method through which the rapist exerts his social, political, ethno-racial and economic dominance. As Antonia Castañeda has shown, “rape and other acts of sexual brutality . . . were . . . firmly fixed in the history and politics of expansion, war, and conquest” (1993, 25). Sexual violence was a form of terrorism and humiliation aimed at women, men, and entire communities. Colonizers enacted violence within a Western, patriarchal ideology and practice, as they “viewed women from their own social class as needing protection against sexual violence, while at the same time they used sexual violence to subdue indigenous populations” (Heidenreich 2005, 26). In this system, the violation of women amounted to the “symbolic castration of the men of the conquered group” (Castañeda 1993, 25). Moreover, since Western patriarchy views women as the property of men, the domination of women reflected the seizing of power and property by the conquerors. Here, heterosexualization enforces colonial power over mexicana/o peoples while simultaneously maintaining patriarchal power within Anglo society.

In the poem, the rapist situates his actions within patriarchal and capitalist systems of power and emphasizes masculinity and heterosexuality. In fact, the speaker never refers to the man as the woman’s husband but refers to him in exclusively gendered and relational terms. The speaker says of the mexicano: “[I] felt him watching from the mesquite tree” and later refers to him as “her man” (Anzaldúa 2007, 156). While the descriptor “husband” is absent, readers who intuit the relation between the two murdered mexicana/os as a spousal one are brought into the ideology of Western capitalist patriarchy, in which women are “conceptualized in opposition to, and as the possession of, man” (Castañeda 1993, 232). By making the acknowledgement (or assumption) of the spousal relationship between the two victims necessary to conceptualize the speaker’s sadism, the poem emphasizes the powerful relationship among heterosexist, patriarchal and colonial ideologies.



Reading “We Call Them Greasers” from a perspective that looks at heterosexual and colonial violence as constitutive of one another allows us to see the integral role that heterosexualization plays within colonial processes as well as how this systematic violence contributes to the formation of nation-states and citizenry. The speaker institutionalizes aggressive racism and heterosexism through his actions and thoughts, painting the nation as constructed upon murder and rape. In so doing, he creates himself as a normative US citizen—white, male, straight—and excludes all other identities from membership in the nation. The poem’s attention to the experiences of the disenfranchised and violated people disrupts the idea of a homogenous, harmonious nation. Moreover, the poem’s engagement with the history of Anglo encroachment on mexicana/o and indigenous land and Anzaldúa’s attention to gender and ethnicity reflect how mexicana/o peoples “are simultaneously part of the territory but not part of the nation” (Davalos 2001, 24). By using the voice of a perpetrator of horrendous violence, the poem represents the history of US colonialism; however, the sadism of the speaker’s actions encourages an ideological break from those who would identify with Anglo encroachers.

### “Cervicide”

While “We Call Them Greasers” locates heterosexual violence within colonial processes, “Cervicide” links violence against women within a different practice of modernity, that of capital accumulation and the imposition of laws regulating private property. The poem portrays the growing power of Anglo settlers through a clash between ranching families closely connected to their land and animals and invaders who want to harness and exploit human and nonhuman animals. The work narrates the killing of a family’s pet fawn by the family’s young daughter, Prieta. The omniscient speaker explains that the family is threatened by the impending arrival of “the game warden . . . with

his hounds” who will “put *su papi/en la cárcel*” when they cannot pay the \$250 fine (Anzaldúa 2007, 126). After exploring several options, the speaker concludes that “she, Prieta, would have to be the one” to kill la venadita, which she does by clubbing the fawn with a hammer in the shed behind the house (Anzaldúa 2007, 126). Prieta buries the fawn just before the warden arrives; he finds nothing and leaves.

“Cervicide” emphasizes violence enacted within a domestic space and the accumulated effect of heteropatriarchal state and familial power. Prieta succumbs to the needs of her male-headed household, which is itself threatened by the Anglo state. The violence in “Cervicide,” like the violence in “We Call them Greasers,” is state-backed. The impending presence of the game warden in the poem reflects the encroachment of the state on the lives of mexicana/o peoples, while the gendering of both the young girl and the venadita marks this violence as one that has specific ramifications for female-gendered beings. While for contemporary readers, the murder of the fawn may seem inexplicable and unnecessary, placing the violence within processes of state formation allows us to understand the poem’s narration of the relationship between violence and modernity. In making the punishment for the possession of a fawn either incarceration or the payment of a large sum of cash, the Anglo state threatens mexicana/os with the loss of freedom or participation in a cash-based economy.

While capital and economics undergird the poem, its focus on the actions of a young girl and a female-identified deer emphasizes the significance of gender. Through gendered language, the poem comments on the intertwinement of neocolonial power, economic disenfranchisement, state formation, and sexual and gender violence.<sup>5</sup> The first two stanzas of the poem introduce the conflict between the family and the state and present this conflict as one between

men and women, the state and the family, and modernity and nature. The opening line of the poem establishes the existence of the animal: “*La venadita*. The small fawn” (Anzaldúa 2007, 126). With no explanation, the speaker then tells us, “The game warden was on the / way with his hounds” (ibid). Readers are presented with a female-identified animal threatened by a male representative of the state. The reference to the hounds recalls the dogs that accompanied the Spanish conquerors, encouraging readers to see the game warden as a more recent iteration of colonial violence. In addition, by portraying the game warden/colonizer as a threat to female-gendered beings—Prieta and the fawn—we are called on to acknowledge the role of gender in colonialism and how economic threats exacerbate systemic violence (Guidotti-Hernández 2011).<sup>6</sup> Here we see how the game warden imposes a gendered order that is used to bolster the power of the state. The result is a specifically Chicana feminist perspective that understands how the regulation and stratification of gender and sexuality are integral components, as well as results of, state formation.

These stanzas also use pronouns and references to different technologies to distinguish between the collective family and the individual, masculine state agents. The family is frequently referred to as “they”: “They had to kill their pet . . . How could they get rid of the/fawn? . . . They had tried that before . . . Should they kill / Venadita?” (126). Although the warden is accompanied by dogs, this group is never referred to with the plural pronoun; the warden is only ever “the” or “he.” This terminology emphasizes that the Anglo state expresses its power and formation through the reification of the singular white male. In addition, the poem portrays the conflict between the family and the warden as encompassing differing technologies alluding to “the profound alienation of the white man from the world of animal/nature/spirit” (Adams 1994, 135). The speaker explores the family’s options

regarding killing la venadita, and explains that they dismiss the idea of using las carabinas because the warden would hear the shot. Instead, they will have to use a more intimate method, a club. Prieta's killing of la venadita illustrates her relationship with the deer. The use of the gendered pronoun "she" to refer to both Prieta and Venadita often fails to distinguish between the two, accentuating their connection. For example, when Prieta brings the hammer down on Venadita's skull, "a wave undulated down her back" (126). "Her back" could refer to either Prieta—as her body responds to swinging the heavy hammer, or Venadita—as the injury ripples through her body. Soon after we are told that "neither made a sound;" referring to Prieta and Venadita collectively emphasizes their unity and suggests they work together to avoid detection by the game warden (126). Rather than function as a moment that separates la venadita from the family, the killing of the deer accentuates Prieta's connection with other living things around her and affirms the place of Venadita within the collective familia.

The family does not experience Venadita's death equally, and Prieta and the deer are sacrificed to the growing power of the Anglo heteropatriarchal, capitalist state and the heteropatriarchal Chicano family. At the conclusion of the third stanza, after the poem has established the conflict as one between the family and the state, the speaker states: "Prieta loved / her *papi*" (126). The line break at first leaves open the antecedent of the sentence and the content of the stanzas leading up to this line in fact anticipates another referent—either la venadita or Prieta's mother. The enjambment echoes the last two lines of the first stanza: "The game warden would put *su papi / en la cárcel*." Read together, the lines juxtapose a threat ("su papi / en la cárcel") with a resigned fact that stands in for the solution: "Prieta loved / her *papi*." The shift from "su papi" to "her papi" also introduces issues of gender and subservience, exchanging the gender neutral "su" for the gendered "her" and

making clear that Prieta's love for her father must take precedence over her love for la venadita. As the last line of the stanza, "her *papi*," evokes a sense of finality and puts an end to the questions about what to do—Prieta will kill the fawn with her own hands.

The female-gendering of Venadita, the intimate relationship between Prieta and the fawn, the location of the murder in a space adjacent to the domicile, and Anzaldúa's notes to the poem all emphasize that Prieta's murder of the fawn is a metaphor for self-harm and inscribe the violence within the institutions of heteropatriarchy and heterosexism. The first note reads, "*Cervicide*—the killing of a deer. In archetypal symbology the Self appears as a deer for women" (ibid). This note encourages us to read Prieta's murder of Venadita as the murder of her own female self and to recognize that the psychic trauma suffered by the girl is as damaging as the physical trauma of the deer (López 2000). The expectation that Prieta will sacrifice herself for the love of her father—exemplified in the lines explored earlier—is consistent with expectations for daughters in the patriarchal Chicano family. As the poem is set during the neocolonial moment of capitalist accumulation and expansion, the work reflects how the Chicano family came to figure as a locus of resistance to Anglo social, cultural, and economic hegemony. This position, which Maxine Baca Zinn (1975) called "familism," became especially important during the Chicano Movement (Fregoso 2003). Cherríe Moraga explains: "The preservation of the Chicano familia became the Movimiento's mandate and within this constricted 'familia' structure, Chicano politicians ensured that the patriarchal figure remained in charge both in their private and political lives" (Moraga 1993, 231). As iterations of the Chicano family took on specific social and political significance, cultural production followed suit, so that we can see in Chicano cultural work from the late 1960s to the early 1990s images of Chicana/o community formations

that were dependent on “paternal governance and heterosexual presumption” (Rodríguez 1999, 29). Moraga likewise points out how heterosexual men benefit from the reification of the patriarchal Chicano family such that “no serious examination of male supremacy within the Chicano community has taken place among heterosexual men” (1992, 231). Although Anzaldúa’s poem takes place a century before the Chicano movement, it was written in the wake of the experiences of which Moraga, Baca Zinn, and others speak. And like Moraga, Anzaldúa’s work uses the female body to critique the use of family and nation as community builders in Chicana/o nationalist cultural production (López 1999). As in “We Call Them Greasers,” conflict between men is played out on the bodies of women and violence against female-gendered beings—even when that violence is committed by women—serves to reinscribe female gendered beings within the realm of power of the heterosexual patriarch. In such instances “heteropatriarchal epistemological and ideological violences produce material violence” against female-gendered and queer peoples (Rojas 2014, 255). Thus we are able to see how Anglo colonial power worked through and with heterosexualization and was reinforced through heteropatriarchal Chicana/o familism.

While the murder of Venadita illustrates Prieta’s subordinate status within the heteropatriarchal family, reading the poem in relation to Anzaldúa’s spirituality theory also allows us to see the possibility for change. Specifically, the close connection between Prieta and venadita reflect the poem’s engagement with spiritual activism and spiritual mestizaje. Theresa Delgadillo explains that spiritual mestizaje, “the transformative renewal of one’s relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-reflective critique of oppression in all its manifestations” is at the heart of *Borderlands* (2011, 1). Prieta’s relationship with the fawn—bolstered through the language of the poem and its note—invokes spirituality in the sense of a

“recognition of worlds or realities beyond those immediately visible” (ibid., 4). Moreover, while *mestizaje* is most often used to denote racial mixture and within the Chicano movement coalesced around a binary, nationalist and patriarchal figure, Anzaldúa’s spiritual *mestizaje* foregrounds *mestizaje* as a process that includes racial, gender, sexual and spiritual knowledges and perspectives (ibid., 11). These knowledges are tied to collective forms of memory and consciousness (ibid., 22). Evidence of the poem’s broaching of this process can be found in its language and specifically the use of plural pronouns. The repeated use of “we” and “they” to describe Prieta’s family indicates a collective consciousness that is representative of spiritual *mestizaje* (ibid., 7). In addition, the use of “she” to refer to Prieta and Venadita singularly and or collectively suggests that Venadita is also a part of the family unit (“they”), thus illustrating the poem’s breaking down of traditional boundaries between human and non-human animals.

These blurred boundaries between self and other are also illustrative of the poem’s engagement with spiritual activism. Prieta’s relationship with the fawn denotes a crucial component of Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism: the interrelatedness of all life forms (Keating 2006). A core component of the tragedy detailed in the poem is the idea that Prieta’s actions are akin to suicide. While difficult to reconcile, this aspect of the poem forces readers to confront “the closely entwined dynamics of self-awareness, oppression, resistance, and transformation” (Keating 2008, 58). In addition, the poem’s emphasis on Prieta’s own actions suggest that she will be the agent of her own liberation. Imbuing Prieta with a strength others in her family lack, Anzaldúa “grafts the power and agency of the Woman Warrior onto” her body (Leimer 2006, 60). In this way the poem details the constraints and limits placed on Prieta without rendering her, and by extension other Chicanas, passive or agentless. The poem’s portrayal of Anzaldúan concepts of spiritual activism

and spiritual *mestizaje* are consistent with the importance of these concepts in Anzaldúa's work and reflect that critiques of heteropatriarchy are important components of her spiritual thought.

While familism in the poem is linked to capitalism, heterosexism and violence, by focusing on Prieta's actions and agency the work affirms the positive potential that may arise from within the Chicana/o family. In this way "Cervicide" is consistent with Chicana feminist texts that criticize but do not forsake the notion of *la familia*. Maylei Blackwell explains that the Chicana/o movement's use of the patriarchal heteronormative family as a model for leadership led many Chicana feminists to argue against nationalism (2011). The tendency of Chicano nationalism to uncritically reproduce patriarchal familial structures meant that women remained overlooked and silenced and that familial arrangements pervaded political organizations and movements (*ibid*). Nevertheless, Chicana feminists remained cognizant of the relationship of the Chicana/o family to class and race-based hierarchies in the US and sought to account for both the potential strengths and pitfalls of engaging with familism. Thus, writers, scholars and activists have recognized the limits of patriarchal familism without discounting the potential for utilizing familism in tandem with Chicana feminism.

***"Yo no fui, fue Teté"***

The forced enactment of gendered violence within a family in "Cervicide" provides a bridge between the sexual violence in "We Call Them Greasers" and the homophobic violence in "*Yo no fui, fue Teté*." In this third poem, a gay man tells of getting beat up by his "[*su*] *misma raza*"—other Chicano men. Written in Spanish and with a heavy reliance on *caló*, the poem places "queerness in the street—where violence occurs" and describes both the violence of the encounter as well as the relationships between the victim and



his victimizer (Brady 2002, 84). Whereas “We Call Them Greasers” and “Cervicide” speak specifically to heterosexualization within the nation-state, this poem details how heterosexist and homophobic violence reverberate within ethnonationalist communities and illustrates how the use of heterosexualization to enact and enforce state boundaries is mimicked within ethnonational spaces.

The title of the poem alludes to a children’s rhyme, contributing to the intimacy that characterizes the poem’s language and imagery. The title comes from the third line of the rhyme: “De tin marín de do pingué / Cúcara, mácara, títere fue / yo no fui, fue teté / pégale, pégale al quien fue.” Similar to the English-language rhyme “eenie meeny miny moe” the Spanish language rhyme has several different versions but is often used as a way of determining who is “it” within a group of children. Using part of this rhyme as the title of the poem portrays the intimacy of the violent encounter, setting it up as one between peers or friends and emphasizing that “those of us who are queer and Latina, queer and raced, queer and mixed race—we are not safe . . . in the streets, in our schools, in our own hometowns” (Heidenreich 2006, 52). The rhyme also encourages us to place bigotry within a larger cultural context in which heterosexism and homophobia are imposed from a young age. According to Linda Heidenreich, transphobic and homophobic violence “can only be rationalized in a social system where participating in normalized gender roles is central to what makes a person human” (ibid., 60). The perpetrators of violence in the poem mimic the homophobic and misogynistic hostility of the social system in which they live, just as children mimic and repeat the words of songs and rhymes.

The intimate nature of the crime suggested by the rhyme is supported by the content of the poem as the speaker details how well he knew his perpetrators.

He says that while being beaten up he came to know “*la cara del odio, del miedo*” (Anzaldúa 2007, 164). Placing himself in relationship to his attackers, he ironically uses the word “crazed” to describe the faces of his violators—“*esas miradas enloquecidas*” and then notes, “*y tienen los huevos de llamarnos locas*” (164). He uses the word “loca” (crazy), the root of “enloquecida” and slang for gay men (particularly, effeminate gay men) to point out the hypocrisy of using the word “loca” to dehumanize gay men. Here it is not the gay man who is “loca” but rather his victimizers, who are turned “crazy” through hate and fear. The narrator then drives home the fact that he is violated not just by other men but by members of his own community, a fact that he finds shameful. “*Que vergüenza, mi misma raza,*” he laments (164). The extended attention to the “craziness” and “shame” from which the violence stems encourages us to refrain from positioning “heterosexualization and the attendant discourses and violences of homophobia as imbricated within tradition only” (Alexander 2006, 13-14). Rather, the poem urges us to acknowledge the relationship between heterosexism in colonial and neocolonial contexts and homophobic violence within ethnonational ones.

While the violence of the poem is heterosexist, it is also gendered male as the men beat up “one of their own” for daring to step outside the bounds of prescribed male sexuality. Now enacted on the body of a gay man rather than on the body of a woman (as in “We Call them Greasers”), this violence has the same end, male dominance via enforced heterosexualization. Their actions also align the perpetrators with whiteness because “In America, manhood is white . . . and it is violent” (Heidenreich 2006, 62). Their violence echoes the racist, genocidal, and heterosexist violence that was at the heart of the Conquest of the Western hemispheres and that is the subject of “We Call Them Greasers.” The perpetrators enact heterosexist violence in order to assert their superiority and to police the boundaries of the heterosexist Chicano community.

However, Anzaldúa takes care to point out that the attempt to form a cohesive community through heterosexual violence is not fully successful—her decision to grant the survivor of violence the role of speaker indicates that the attack has failed to silence this queer member of the Chicano community.

This poem also engages with familism; while the men discussed are not linked as a biological family, the language suggests that the violence they enact is internal and that they see the speaker's sexuality as a threat. The poem also evokes familism as the survivor of the violence relates to his attackers as members of his "race"—which hinges on the idea of a Chicana/o people or family. Here then we can see how familism is enacted at a cultural and social level, drawing on the heteropatriarchal nuclear family as a model but moving outside it into an understanding of Chicana/o familia as also defined and enacted socially and politically. In the poem, the perpetrators of violence enact a brotherhood defined as "an allegiance between heterosexual men" that requires the exclusion of women and gay men who threaten their homosocial bond (Rodríguez 2009, 141). They rely on a heteropatriarchal and heterosexist idea of familism to maintain their own bonds with one another and reinforce ethnic unity in the face of a racist world. Keeping in mind the double-referent that heterosexualization entails—both as a contribution to and as an effect of colonial encroachment—the poem illustrates how colonized communities upon whom heterosexuality has been imposed nevertheless reinforce and reproduce heterosexuality.

### **Conclusion**

Examining the role of heterosexist, heterosexual, and patriarchal violence within these three poems has allowed us to place such violence within a historical framework that extends from the past to the present. This understanding offers a context through which to evaluate violence

perpetuated against and within Chicana/o communities and families in relation to state forces, without collapsing or equating their differing impacts or trajectories. Importantly, the violence that continues to accompany these state processes indicates their very constructed-ness and points to the internal contradictions in heterosexualization. Alexander reminds us that heterosexualization “within the state apparatus . . . is constitutively paradoxical . . . at once necessary to the state’s ability to constitute and imagine itself and . . . at the same time, a site of its own instability” (2006, 23). By engaging with the language and ideology of violence, Anzaldúa’s poems lays bare these internal contradictions. Moreover, they offer theoretical insight as well as a creative intervention into ongoing social injustice, thereby encouraging us to acknowledge that “the processes for seeking knowledge [and] the spaces for intellectual reflection . . . need to evolve” (Partnoy 2006, 1667). The continued relevance of his work demonstrate how Anzaldúa’s poetry is and continues to be work that is “about us that is useful to us” (Heidenreich 2006, 58) and an integral part of understanding inter-connected forms of subordination and oppression in the service of enacting change.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> While these are disparate examples, both illustrate how states violently enforce the idea of a binary sex/gender system upon which heterosexualization rests. See Alexander 2006 for a

discussion of the violent heterosexualization of Spanish colonizers. The North Carolina state legislature's passage of HB2—which, among other things, requires transgender individuals to use the bathroom that coincides with the gender on their birth certificate—is a contemporary example of how states engage in heterosexualization.

<sup>2</sup> Scholarship on Anzaldúa's poetry consists mainly of close readings of individual works, see Brady (2002), Hartley (2010), Pérez (2004) and Pérez Torres (1995). Anthologies from meetings of the The Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa (Cantú et al 2010, Saldívar-Hull et al 2012, Mercado-López et al 2013) include original poetry by contributors, suggesting the importance of this genre. Within these works, only Nuñez-Puente (2013) focuses on Anzaldúa's own poetry. The author lists "Cervicide" as a poem included in the original manuscript and published version of *Borderlands* with minor or no changes, but does not analyze "Cervicide" or mention the other poems analyzed here.

<sup>3</sup> The term "heteropatriarchal" captures "the interdependence of patriarchal and heteronormative social imaginations and structures" (Rojas 2014, 249). Colonization and land ownership were and are tied to heteropatriarchy as the imposition of hierarchical structures rely on a gender binary and gendered division of labor (Smith 2006, 72).

<sup>4</sup> See Menchaca 2001 for a thorough discussion of the violation of the treaty and subsequent racialization of Mexicans by the US government.

<sup>5</sup> While the precise historic moment of the poem is unknown, the term neocolonial aptly describes the imposition of Anglo cultural and economic control on the family that invokes the trauma of conquest and colonialism (Carillo Rowe 2011, 132).

<sup>6</sup> References to the conqueror's dogs resonate in contemporary Chicana feminist literature. Helena María Viramontes's novel *Their Dogs Came with Them* alludes to this history and uses the description of the massacre at Cholula from *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* as an epigraph.

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