

**Chicana Self Expression**  
**Through Language**

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# **Chicana Self Expression through Language**

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Acknowledgments:

Con amor...

**Para mi mamá y mi papá porque sin su apoyo no podría haber hecho esto. Gracias mujer por aguantar mis chiflones y por siempre confiár en que yo podría salir adelante. Papá, gracias por tener la paciencia necesaria para leer mi tesis unas cuantas veces. Gracias por sus consejos. Para Soledad for putting up with me and my craziness, aunque a veces no querías. Espero que algun dia puedas hacer read toda mi tesis. Los quiero mucho a los tres y espero que con esto puedan estar orgullosos de su hija y hermana loca. Los quiero mucho y espero que les guste...**

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### **Introduction: Why are they so angry?**

In the US the concept of the melting pot has been a predominant idea for many years. When immigrants come to the US, they are expected to “fit in” and learn new customs at the expense of their own language and culture. One of the first groups to suffer this censorship was the Spanish-speaking population of what used to be Mexican territory. The Spanish language is a vital part of the Mexican identity. It is true that before the Spanish conquest, people in the territory now known as Mexico spoke various indigenous languages. However, the conquest and its implementation of a new language were able to form a new united identity. By banding under one common language, a mixture of the conqueror as well as the conquered; Mexicans formed a new mestizo identity. Today, this identity is being challenged in the U.S. by the forced assimilation Mexican Americans are experiencing.

Mexican people have always lived in what is now the US and have always been a marginalized part of U.S. society. Ever since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, Mexicans have been foreigners in their own homes and have had to learn to adapt and often times forget their culture to assimilate more easily into English speaking America. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

brought an official end to the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) was signed on February 2, 1848, at Guadalupe Hidalgo. Under the terms of the treaty negotiated by Trist, Mexico ceded to the United States Upper California and New Mexico. This was known as the Mexican Cession and

included present-day Arizona and New Mexico and parts of Utah, Nevada, and Colorado (see Article V of the treaty). Mexico relinquished all claims to Texas and recognized the Rio Grande as the southern boundary with the United States (see Article V). The United States paid Mexico \$15,000,000 to compensate for war-related damage to Mexican property (see Article XII of the treaty) and agreed to pay American citizens debts owed to them by the Mexican government (see Article XV). Other provisions included protection of property and civil rights of Mexican nationals living within the new boundaries of the United States (see Articles VIII and IX), the promise of the United States to police its boundaries (see Article XI), and compulsory arbitration of future disputes between the two countries (see Article XXI). (Gray)

After this land treaty, Mexicans, in order to assimilate into their new country, were forced to ignore large parts of their culture, especially their language. Ilan Stavans in his book Spanglish writes, "[...] after the Mexican-American War politicians north and south of the Rio Grande agreed that Spanish, together with English, would become the language of government in the newly acquired lands- that there would not be one but two tongues. The promise was left unfulfilled [...]" (156).

This language treaty, like the arrangements regarding land ownership, was not honored. Mexicans lost their land, were ostracized for speaking their language and were forced to be ashamed of their skin color. Heritage was lost.

By stealing the language of their newly acquired “citizens”, the Anglos were able to take part of the Mexican identity leaving them in a middle ground without their own identity but at the same time refusing them full access to Anglo society. When the Chicano movement began in the late fifties and early sixties, the search for a Mexican identity was a large driving force. This search has continued since then and no one has been able to portray it more clearly than Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga and Lorna Dee Cervantes. In my paper I will explore how these Chicana authors are able to reinforce the importance of owning one’s language, the power of writing, education and the need to fight against censorship and imposed silence by both Anglo and Latino groups. In her article “Language Choice in U.S. Latina First Person Narrative: The Effects of Language Standardization and Subordination” Cashman writes, “Due to suppression of Spanish in U.S. schools and the oppression of Spanish mainstream Anglo society, many Latinas/os in the U.S. never acquire Spanish or quickly lose it upon entering the English-language-dominated public school system.”

Because of this o(su)ppression, Chicanas had to fight back. For Chicanas, their writing and their language choices are their main tool for self-expression. Chicana authors create new ways to use language in order to express their discontent with the status quo as well as their inconformity with racism and sexism. Chicana authors fight against oppression from Anglo groups, both male and female as well as from Latino groups. They fight against the tradition of

silence and subservience that still lives in the Mexican- American community.

Finally, they write with a different language to be heard and to forge an identity.

Through language subordination Spanish became a “lesser” language, but since it is still spoken in many homes throughout the U.S., it is a vital part of the lives of many Mexican Americans. In her article Holly Cashman writes:

The process of language subordination accompanies standardization.

Language subordination occurs when one language or language variety gains hegemonic power over others. Lippi-Green describes the language subordination process through an eight step model:

Language is mystified

*You can never hope to comprehend the difficulties and complexities of your mother tongue without expert guidance.*

Authority is claimed

*Talk like me/us. We know what we are doing because we have studied language, because we write well.*

Misinformation is generated

*That usage you are so attached to is inaccurate. The variant I prefer is superior on historical, aesthetic, or logical grounds.*

Non-mainstream language is trivialized.

*Look how cute, how homey, how funny.*

Conformers are held up as positive examples

*See what you can accomplish if you only try...*

Explicit promises are made



*Employers will take you more seriously; doors will open.*

Threats are made

*No one important will take you seriously; doors will close.*

Non-conformers are vilified or marginalized

*See how willfully stupid, arrogant, unknowing, uninformed, and/or deviant and unrepresentative these speakers are.*

(Cashman 135)

Chicana writers were excluded from the mainstream literary world and their abilities were put into question. Lippi-Green's model exemplifies how validity of having a unique identity as a Spanish speaker is crushed. Through this process, Spanish speakers are forced to assimilate into a specific model that Americans have created where they become inferior because of their language and are told at the same time they can only succeed by learning the new language and forgetting the old. By forcing people into this assimilation process, language and culture are taken from the individual. Chicanas fight against this mold and re-work the standards of what is acceptable.

### **Code Switching and Other Forms of Expression: How do they write?**

Because of the inequalities they have suffered, Chicanas are forced to create new languages and in order to do this, they use a method called code-switching in their works. Code-switching is very common in bilingual communities. It is especially noticeable in school-age children who are learning English at school but live in bilingual homes:

Code switching refers to the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate between their linguistic codes in the same conversational event. Contrary to common assumptions, code switching is most frequent among proficient bilinguals, and may indeed be the norm in many bilingual communities. (Kells 27)

An example of code switching would be the statement, "Fuí a la store y compre bread y tortillas." The use of English and Spanish is interchangeable depending on the speaker's preference and what words are easier to access. Code switching is a good way to keep Spanish in the lives of younger Chicano generations who might not have close ties to Mexico. It is a phenomenon that has been around for some time but had not been studied until recently. Code switching allows the individual to function in both environments, Mexican and Anglo, without having to ignore either part of their culture. If they can properly code switch then that means that they are proficient in both languages. However,

there is some criticism in regards to the validity and “purity” of this hybrid language. Roger Hernandez states that

Kids grow up learning “street Spanish” or “kitchen Spanish” which does not suffice beyond friends and family... it is not a phenomena particular to South Texas. Want to hear the worst Spanish in the universe? Come to New York... even in Miami the city where code switching has become most dominant culturally, politically and economically, employers are having trouble finding people who can read, write and speak English and Spanish with equal proficiency. It is a looming crisis, given the importance of trade with Latin America to the local economy. (Kells 26)

This statement reflects the thoughts of many people that believe code switching is unclean and destroying both languages, but this is not the only result. Roger Hernandez does not explain how using code-switching decreases the speakers’ ability to read and write in both languages. On the contrary, in order to speak both languages, the speaker needs to know how the languages work, even in written form. Code switching, as stated before, provides individuals with an opportunity to maintain exposure to both languages as well as giving them the opportunity to express themselves freely in the language(s) with which they feel most comfortable.

Code switching has been seen as a negative thing in the literary world, where it is considered an atrocity. Cashman explains how it was considered a “deviant linguistic behavior” that people used when they had little capacity to use both languages properly. However, “linguists now recognize code-switching as a

functional linguistic behavior which demonstrates the speaker's ability to manipulate the grammar and lexicon of two languages at the same time" (Cashman 132). As a result, code-switching is a reflection of the speaker's strengths in both languages. The easier it is for them to code-switch, the more likely it is that they are native speakers in both languages.

Chicana writers also use code-switching for a variety of reasons. According to Gary D. Keller, Director of the Hispanic Research Center at Arizona State University, there are three different forms of code switching used by authors. There is

Thematic code-switching in which language mixture "serves the special function of highlighting the theme, message, ideology of the author"; code-switching for characterization, which represents an attempt to recreate authentically how the living character would speak; and code-switching as a function of style, in which language mixing is used "as a literary instrument in the pursuit of such goals as irony, characterization, cross-cultural comparisons, rhetorical devices, double entendres, puns and so on. (Cashman 133)

Anzaldúa uses all these forms of writing. Her language is a mixture of different types of Spanish such as pocho and Pachuco. Pocho is a label given, mostly by Mexican nationals, to refer to Mexican Americans, or Chicanos, that have been Anglicized. Mexicans are people born and raised in Mexico while Chicanos are people of Mexican descent born in the U.S. There are usually differences in language usage between these two groups. Pocho, as a result, is

an offensive term that means Anglicized or “whitened.” However, many Chicanas use *pochismos* [the name of the “language” used by *pochos*] as a way to redefine and explain their identity (Cashman 140). They accept their *pochismos* and incorporate them into their lives. An example of a *pochismo* would be *troca* instead of *camioneta* and *parquear* instead of *estacionar*. *Pachuco*, on the other hand, is the Spanish created by zoot suiters to fight authority - the authority of both Spanish and English speakers. *Pachuco* words include *ruca* (woman) and *periquear* (to talk) among many others. This dialect is not commonly used today. Anzaldúa also uses English and indigenous languages in her writing. She classifies Chicano Spanish as “a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción have created variants of Chicano Spanish, un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language” (Anzaldúa 77). She incorporates code-switching throughout her book Borderlands (1999); and uses it as a tool for self-expression.

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Cherrie Moraga does not define her Spanish use; however, she does define her identity as a Spanish speaker. Moraga explains how she is Chicana by choice and that this label is a political as well as an ethnic one. Moraga writes

I call myself a Chicana writer. Not a Mexican American writer, not a Hispanic writer, not a half-breed writer. To be a Chicana is not merely to name one’s racial/cultural identity, but also to name a politic, a politic that refuses assimilation into the US mainstream. It acknowledges our mestizaje- Indian, Spanish, and Africano. (Hernández 104)

By being Chicana, she accepts her entire heritage not just what is deemed acceptable by white America. By calling herself Chicana, she is making a political statement.

Moraga is seen as an outsider by many Latinos because of her mixed ethnicity, she is half white and half Mexican, but her writings are still full of political as well as social commentary. In her play Heroes and Saints, her protagonist, Cerezita, is a disembodied head. In an interview, Moraga explains that "Cerezita is [a] Mexican American woman who has a great vision and who is imprisoned. She is a symbol for all of us, for any young Chicana who has a great vision and is not allowed to be fully dimensional in a world dominated by sexism, racism and all that" (Ikas 163).

Moraga's work is very interesting because, even though her use of Spanish is very different from other Chicana writers like Anzaldúa, she is still able to keep a strong portrayal of her female characters, like Cerezita. There is a very important scene in the play where Cerezita is talking to Father Juan, a leftist half-breed priest. She is explaining how important her tongue is to her, since she has no body. Her tongue is her only instrument; she uses it to turn pages and to point. She asks him to look up the word "tongue" in the dictionary and they begin to read the definition.

CEREZITA: Spanish: Lengua

JUAN: "1 a: a fleshy movable process of the floor of the mouths of most vertebrates that bears sensory end organs and functions especially in taking and swallowing food."

CEREZITA: (*reciting from memory*): "2: The power of communication through speech." Your turn, Padre. (*He hesitates.*) Go on.

JUAN: "3: The flesh of the tongue used as food."

CEREZITA: (*with Juan*): "4 a: Language, especially a spoken language."

[...]

JUAN: "To chide or-"

CEREZITA: Regañar.

JUAN: "Tongueless"

CEREZITA: "Lacking the power of speech."

JUAN: "Mute. Tongue-tied -- disciplined or..." (He looks up at her.)

CEREZITA: "Unable to speak freely." (108-9)

This section of the play discusses the importance of the tongue as a representative of language, self expression and freedom or the lack thereof.

Moraga explores the marginalization of Chicana women by making Cerezita just a disembodied head whose only tool is her tongue, her voice.

Lorna Dee Cervantes, another Chicana author, also uses this mode of expression in her writing to incorporate the themes of nature and Chicana politics combined. One of her best poems is from her book Emplumada (1991) which is a play on words. Pluma is Spanish for pen so emplumada means with a pen. The pen is her weapon and poetry is her war. Also, emplumada refers to the plumage of a bird; birds usually symbolize freedom as well as nature. From that book, her poem Freeway 280<sup>1</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix for complete poem

Las casitas near the gray cannery,  
 nestled amid wild abrazos of climbing roses  
 and man-high red geraniums  
 are gone now. The freeway conceals it  
 all beneath a raised scar (1-5)  
 Viejitas come here with paper bags to gather greens.  
 Espinaca, verdolagas, yerbabuena (12-13)

She uses Spanish sparingly and like Moraga, her Spanish is used to establish an emotion. She uses Spanish when referring to the “casitas” and the “viejitas” because they are, in a way, an expression of home, family and being grounded. She wants that family but the English “freeway” raises a “scar” destroying her nature, her home. Her limited Spanish use is a result of her upbringing and assimilation in American schools.

These Chicana authors use Spanish in specific, unique ways. In Cashman’s article she explains that there are three main types of writing in regards to Chicana literature. The two most important are interlingual, and it is when the two languages are structurally joined to form a single bilingual text. The second type is one “in which English is the predominant language and the Spanish elements are used for colour, for the creation of a sense of otherness” (Cashman 133). In her book Essays on Xicanisma, Ana Castillo writes about this third type of writing style and criticizes it because it trivializes real Chicana literature.



On the one hand, we may choose to adapt Standard English and white writing standards, using material from our cultural heritage as a “motif.” This, in my opinion, would reduce our poetry to Oaxacan paper cuts strung from beam to beam: white standards the firm structures, with Hispanic “flourishes” lending the local color that sanctions the celebrated fallacy of the melting pot. (Castillo 167)

The Spanish is only used to add color and does not really reflect Chicana life. It perpetuates generalizations and stereotypes. Cashman does not see this second method as a negative thing since it creates a sense of “otherness”. It gives the reader the opportunity to explore another culture and another mindset. Castillo, on the other hand, dislikes when Spanish is used only to celebrate the idea of the melting pot. They are not authentic forms of expression. Moraga, Anzaldúa and Dee Cervantes only use Spanish when necessary and to create that feeling of otherness and to express their emotions. For them, English does not suffice.

### **LANGUAGE CHOICE: Why do they write this way?**

The two writing techniques explored in the previous section, among many others, are used by Chicana authors for a variety of reasons. Cashman examines the writing styles of both Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga in regards to their use of language and language subordination. She writes,

Moraga and Anzaldúa appear to want to break down these barriers and reflect the situation of linguistic contact between Spanish and English in the United States and in their lives. The difference in quantity and type of integration of Spanish may relate to their individual experiences with native and non-native acquisition of the language. (Cashman 144)

This can be seen in Cherrie Moraga's writing and her incorporation of code switching as well as pocho Spanish in her plays and other works. She, like Anzaldúa, creates her own language to capture her identity. Her writing is "highly politicized, intensely personal and eloquently honest" (Fernandez 299). Moraga has a constant struggle with words and silence. However, her case differs from Anzaldúa's because of her upbringing. Cherrie Moraga was born in California where she grew up hearing Spanish at home from her mother and English at school. Because of her fair complexion she could "pass" off as white, which made things a lot easier for her growing up. She did not have to face much of the discrimination suffered by other Chicanos (Ikas 153).

Moraga's heritage is an important influence in her writing. She is half Anglo and half Mexican and as a result her Spanish is not as developed as that of other writers. For Moraga, it was a choice to be Chicana, to find her mother

tongue, and this is a prevalent theme in her writing. As a child she did not speak very much Spanish and in her later works she writes;

I must return to the fact that not only has the mother been taken from me, but her tongue, her mother tongue. I want the language, to feel my tongue rise to the occasion of feeling at home, in common. I know this language in my bones... and then it escapes me..."¡You don't belong, Quitate!"  
(Cashman 137)

Moraga struggles with her mother tongue and her heritage. She refuses to be anglicized yet the culture that she wants to belong to, Mexican, pushes her away and judges her for being *pocha* and not being Mexican enough. Thus, she lives in a middle ground between two cultures and without an authentic language.

Gloria Anzaldúa, on the other hand mixes various languages, including Spanish, English, and Nahuatl to thoroughly convey her message of rebellion and Chicana empowerment. She exposes the reader to unknown words, forces them out of their sheltered state and makes them go out and research what they are reading. In an interview with Donna Perry, Anzaldúa explained why she uses this particular writing style. She mixes languages because

it's the kind of Borderland dialect that I grew up with, talking both Spanish and English. But I also wanted the readers to start thinking about the myth of a monocultural U.S [...] By speaking and writing both languages, I wanted to force that awareness that this country is not what those in power say it is. It's a *mestiza* nation. (Perry 22)

By code switching, Anzaldúa forces the reader to see the reality of our nation. For her, Chicanos are a disenfranchised class that is still struggling to find a voice and a place in American society. Through her mixture of languages, she puts the reader in an uncomfortable situation where they must face the fact that this is a land of “mestizaje” and everyone does not speak the same language.

Cashman exposes the idea that one of the reasons Chicanas use Spanish in their writings, is simply to make a point. They want to provide a contrasting view from general literature. “Aparicio explains that writers question the hegemony of the standard language ideology ‘by using their ‘incorrect’ or ‘vulgar’ language as poetic discourse and, moreover, within a literary context.” (Cashman 135). For example, Cherrie Moraga focuses a lot more on specific words such as profanity or words that relate to emotion. This can be seen in her plays and her poetry. Moraga’s voice, creatively, is in Spanish, in being Chicana. Using that language gives her a different identity that using regular English cannot give her.

You can see Moraga’s use of Spanish in her collection of essays entitled Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios (2000). Moraga uses her English and Spanish to portray the loss of her grandmother; “I am a child. I watch my mama, mis tías en una procesión cada día llegando a la puerta de mi abuela. Needing her, never doing enough for her... Next door I can hear them all. Están peleando. Mi abuela giving the cold shoulder, not giving in. each daughter vying for a place with her. The cruel gossip. Las mentiras” (Moraga iii).

Moraga’s use of Spanish is very deliberate, as in the example above. She mostly uses Spanish when referring to older generations, especially women. She

also uses it when referring to a strong emotion like “las mentiras” a betrayal that can only be expressed in Spanish, her language, a language that can convey emotion.

Moraga describes feeling the need to write, but not being able to express what is inside of her in English, in the language of the oppressor, in the language of her Anglo father. She states that what she feels must be ‘too much’ to be written down in English, that she needs Spanish to fully express herself. In “La Güera,” Moraga includes a segment of a letter that begins to explain how language choices affect her writing: “[...] in my development as a poet, I have, in many ways, denied the voice of my brown mother- the brown in me. I have acclimated to the sound of a white language which, as my father represents it, does not speak to the emotions in my poems- emotions which stem from the love of my mother” (Cashman 137). Her emotions are in Spanish, yet she has grown accustomed to another language, a cold language that alone cannot be used to reflect her experiences as a Chicana.

Moraga suffers with her uncertainty with language like one other famous Chicana author, Lorna Dee Cervantes. In her poetry, Dee Cervantes juxtaposes English with Spanish. Lorna Dee Cervantes was born in California and is of Mexican and Amerindian ancestry. By using code-switching she and other Chicana writers “violate traditional poetic or literary decorum” (Madsen 24). Cervantes expresses her insecurities growing up; in one of her interviews she states, “To grow up in that sort of environment is to grow up invisible, unheard, unseen, with no power and no possible envisioning of power-personal power or

actual power- in the public world. What you do to survive then is to watch. You check things out and listen” (Ikas 33). This attitude toward her struggles and the inequalities she faced gave her a different insight into life and her writing reflects it. Her writing is very angry but at the same time it possesses a peaceful air, a reflection of her Native American heritage. Even though she does use some Spanish in her work, it is not “adequate” or “proper” and as a result, she is considered *pocha* by Mexican groups. She expresses her sadness with her situation in her work.

In her poem entitled “Refugee Ship”<sup>2</sup> from Emplumada she writes:

Mama raised me without language  
 I’m orphaned from my Spanish name  
 The words are foreign, stumbling  
 On my tongue. I see in the mirror  
 My reflection: bronzed skin, black hair  
 I feel I am a captive aboard the refugee ship  
 The ship that will never dock

El barco que nunca atraca (Rebolledo 293).

In “Refugee Ship”, Dee Cervantes considers herself an “orphan” without Spanish. She sees herself as Mexican because of her skin color and her heritage and customs but her language betrays her. Thus, her use of Spanish is limited, like Moraga’s, where it is used mainly to express those emotions that cannot be expressed in English.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix for complete poem

These combinations of factors, the lack of an accepted identity and marginalization from society, make Chicana writers find new ways to communicate.

**Oppression: Another reason why they write...**

Oppression can also affect the way Chicanas write and can change their language choices. Academia presents rules that try to separate English from Spanish. "Educated" people don't want both languages to coexist as they do in Chicana literature. In her article, Holly Cashman writes,

Despite the fact that linguistic purity is as imagined and nonexistent as racial purity, the former concept is still acceptable, due to the widespread belief in the standard language ideology that dictates firm boundaries around static language systems. This pressure to keep Spanish and English separate and maintain the individual integrity of the two codes undoubtedly influences the social evaluation of Spanish/ English mixing and, therefore, the language choice of U.S. Latina first person narratives. (Cashman 141)

People, especially writers and even students, are forced into rigid structures that disenfranchise them and limit their creativity when it comes to writing as a tool for self expression. This segregation of the languages in academia can also be seen in every day life. Public education forbids the mixing of two languages and tries to favor one over the other by forcing students to assimilate as soon as possible. Further on in her article, Cashman explains why Chicanas use of Spanish can be very limited.

This process of linguistic colonization results in the fact that for many U.S. Latinas, English is the language of education and writing, while Spanish proficiency is limited to the private sphere and to spoken language.



Therefore many U.S. Latina writers who might otherwise want to use Spanish are prevented from doing so by their loss of the language.

(Cashman 136)

These three writers were able to adapt to the system and use Spanish in their writing. However, as this process of assimilation and deterioration of the Spanish language continues, the Chicana language, which is now a form of expression used in combination with formal Spanish and English, will become disorganized regional dialects without any real connection. Chicanas will lose formal knowledge of both languages not just Spanish if this process continues.

Finally, and most importantly, Chicanas language choices are based on the fact that these choices express their dislike for the status quo. As Cashman puts it, “considering the insidious effects of the standard language ideology and language subordination, the use of Spanish by U.S. Latinas is an oppositional act.” (Cashman 141)

These three Chicana authors fight oppression with their writing and also by the actual act of writing. In one of the essays from the book This Bridge Called My Back, Anzaldúa describes how her “tongue (Spanish) ripped from my mouth, left voiceless. My name stolen from me” (Moraga 208). She was left voiceless having to create a new mode of expression. Cherrie Moraga explores her struggle with oppression in the book This Bridge Called my Back. “How have I internalized my own oppression? How have I oppressed? Instead, we have let rhetoric do the job of poetry. Even the word “oppression” has lost its power. We need a new language, better words that can more closely describe women’s fear

of and resistance to one another; words that will not always come out sounding like dogma” (Moraga 30). “Oppression” has become a meaningless word caught up in useless rhetoric. Moraga fights for a new language, a new mode of expression to explain what Chicanas really live through.

Oppression changes the way Chicanas think and write. They are forced to become revolutionaries and to fight against this inequality. Through oppression, their language choices become limited, they are judged by the way they write and are often times excluded from academia. By code-switching, these three authors took great risks in their writing and fought against publishing houses that refused to publish their work.

### **EDUCATION: What do they really teach?**

Chicanas choose to code-switch and to incorporate Spanish in their text as a political statement as well as a reflection of Chicana life and education. Because of their language choice (i.e. the amount and type of Spanish used as well as the number of *pochismos*) we can see the type of education they were exposed to. In the U.S. the educational system is an important instrument of domination. Education changed the way these three Chicana authors spoke and to what extent they saw themselves as Spanish speakers.

In his book Divided Borders, Juan Flores explore the process of language acquisition and bilingualism in the life of Spanish speakers.

There seems to be a life cycle of language used in the community. The younger children learn Spanish and English simultaneously, hearing both languages from those who use them separately and from those who combine them in various ways. The older children and adolescents speak and are spoken to increasingly in English, which accords with their experience as students and as members of peer groups that include non-Hispanics. In young adulthood, as the school experience ends and employment opportunities begin, the use of Spanish increases, both in mixed usage and in monolingual speech with older persons. At this age, then, the Spanish skills acquired in childhood but largely unused in adolescence become reactivated. Mature adults speak both languages. Older persons are, for the present at least, Spanish monolingual or nearly so. (Stavans 106)

This process is deteriorating today because schools do not properly teach Spanish and older Chicano generations are now speaking mostly broken Spanish without any real idea of what the language is supposed to be.

In her book, Gloria Anzaldúa explains the importance of language as a tool for creating one's identity and the obstacles education presents. In the section entitled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" Anzaldúa tells of the importance of being proud of one's own language and the dangers of tying one's tongue to fit into the Anglo educational system. She starts the section by describing her own experience with racism in school. Her teacher would tell her that "If you want to be American, speak American. If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong" (Anzaldúa 75). Today, Chicanos experience similar problems with the educational system. Holly R. Cashman's essay "Language Choice in U.S. Latina First Person Narrative: The Effects of Language Standardization and Subordination discusses racism in education." She states that:

[...] the role of the education system in promoting the legitimate language (upper middle class English) and suppressing popular modes of expression (such as Spanish in the U.S.) is directly related to the issue of language proficiency, one of the main factors affecting language choice in U.S. Latina writing. (136)

One of the largest issues in education that especially affects Chicanas is the idea of bilingual education. Large sections of the American population are against it without really knowing its history. There are various reasons why people are against bilingual education including the idea that it is un-American,

and it will jeopardize the purity of English. Language has always been a tool used to oppress Chicanas. People discriminate against those that choose not to speak English and see them as second-class citizens. It was assumed that bilingual classes were a result of lower abilities in Spanish speaking populations. However, Ilan Stavans explains how the bilingual education movement began as a result of an influx of Cuban immigrants in the 1960's Dade County, Florida. Many of these Cuban refugees had the idea of going back to Cuba after Castro so they wanted to make sure their children would be able to speak Spanish. "Consequently, they fought for intelligent laws to allow their children to be taught both languages in public schools. Thus, bilingual education was not the result of poor academic performance by Latino children, but an attempt to remain loyal to ethnic roots." (Stavans 154)

Many people are unaware that this is the birth of bilingual education and one of the main reasons why it should remain alive. Bilingual education provides a tie to a group's heritage and allows them to remain close to their ethnic roots. The approach to bilingual education is not the only problem in the educational system with regards to language and language acquisitions. Schools put people that do not speak English at an unequal disadvantage. Sole writes,

Language is a site of struggle for creating new identities. Language learners are placed in unequal relationships of power with the L1 [Native language speaker] speaker, and limited access to linguistic resources will have an effect on their language development and speakers' perceptions of themselves. (Sole 236)

In Sole's research, she explains how non-native speakers have a harder time fitting into the educational system. They, L2 speakers, are put at a subordinate level to L1 speakers. The struggle for an identity begins at a young age when L2 (Spanish speakers) are put in a situation where English is the dominant language. This has an effect on their self esteem.

Another issue with the educational system is the fact that they use subtractive language learning where the old language is taken away and replaced by the new. The two languages are not allowed to co-exist. Chicana writers do not learn proper Spanish in the schools and when they try to express themselves in their mother tongue, a lot of them are full of self-doubt. They question their identity. They are Chicanas but what does that mean? How vital is language in their writing?

In her book The World was Made Flesh: Spanish in the Classroom, Sabine Ulibarri explains that "the Hispano child begins with a handicap the very first day he shows up in the first grade. English is the language of the classroom. He speaks no English, or he speaks inadequate English. The whole program is designed to make him an Anglo" (Ulibarri 295). This is similar to the process Sole describes. Once again, there is a process of assimilation that wants to uproot the Spanish, or "deviant", language and replace it with the English language only. The system is limiting the ability of non-native English speakers by making them monolingual or deficient bilinguals that cannot communicate clearly in Spanish or even English. Thus, it will be harder for this Chicano student to relearn his language and he will be put at a subservient position under the dominant Anglo.

This discrimination goes on to the actual act of code switching and the image people associate with it. For example, the term “differential bilingualism, explains why the native bilingual who code-switches is seen as deficient, while the native monolingual who sprinkles his or her speech with foreign language terms is seen as educated.” (Cashman 140) This discrimination is present in every day society. People that have Mexican accents are usually seen as lower class, probably uneducated while those with Spanish accents are seen as educated and European, refined. This poses the question, why are some languages more important and acceptable than others? Why are French and English more important than Spanish? Ana Castillo expands on this idea by writing,

Along these lines, in daily life and in the mass media, our bilingualism is generally not seen as an asset. People with Spanish accents (and Native people’s accents) are often treated as if they are simply not very smart, while on the other hand, people with European accents, such as French, or Australian (who are not directly European but British descended) but especially the British, are assumed by white people in eth United States to be intellectually superior on the sheer basis of an accent. (Castillo 7)

People are demeaned and categorized according to their accent by the dominant groups. Those with European and “educated” accents are seen as smart while those with a Mexican accent are judged as being ignorant, less than human.

Ilan Stavans has also explored the linguistic phenomena unique to the Latino population. He questions the relationship between English and Spanish by saying “Spanish or English: Which is the true Latino mother tongue? They both are, plus a third option: Spanglish- a hybrid. We inhabit a linguistic abyss: between two mentalities and lost in translation” (Stavans 154). He writes of the confusion that exists in the minds of Latinos. In the case of Mexican Americans, this confusion has evolved from a long time ago.

Gloria Anzaldúa criticizes the school system that ostracized her. She talks about the Chicana community “Our speech, too, is inaudible.” She goes on to say,

The schools we attend or didn't attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages. I, for one, became adept at, and majored in English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty. And Spanish was not taught in grade school. And Spanish was not required in high school. And though now I write my poems in Spanish as well as English I feel the rip-off of my native tongue. (Hernández 80)

Her language was altered but instead of giving up and becoming submissive, she still uses both languages. Anzaldúa majored in the oppressor's tongue to prove her intelligence, but at the same time she lost a part of herself. She goes on to say how Spanish was not taught in school. This “inferior



language” was taken away from her and to fight back, she writes in Spanglish, another “deviant” language.

Language can be a tool for oppression when used in the educational system. It has the ability of hurting the psyche of a child and makes them doubt their identity. They begin to question where they belong in American society. In her book, Castillo writes,

Aside from skin color, language can add to the trauma of the Chicana’s schizophrenic-like existence. She was educated in English and learned it is the only acceptable language in society, but Spanish was the language of her childhood, family and community. She may not be able to rid herself of an accent; society denigrated her first language. By the same token, women may also become anxious and self-conscious in later years if they have no or little facility in Spanish. They may feel that they had been forced to forfeit an important part of their personal identity and still never found acceptability by white society. (Castillo 39)

The Chicana language is a combination of things and is a result of colonization and oppression. Mexicans have been colonized and conquered twice, once by the Spanish then again by the Americans. Their land was taken. The first time, a mestizo nation was created in Mexico. Spanish became the uniting factor that helped create this new country. Then, Americans once again colonized Mexican land. Stavans writes, “Latinos, I believe, were, are, and will always be perpetual alien residents never fully here- strangers in a native land. We are of a different variety simply because, unlike previous immigrants, most of

us didn't come to America; instead, America came to us." (Stavans 245) we were colonized and conquered on our land. Slowly, we were judged for a language and for customs that had been on that land for centuries. Overnight, the Mexican became inferior to the American in their own home. This time, English has become a dividing language that has the power of stripping these people from their heritage. Once Spanish, in any form, is lost, so too is the Mexican identity. Chicana writers fight to keep this language alive but because of acculturation, their tools are dull. They must create a new language that captures both parts of their being.

In her book Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society, Aida Hurtado discusses the discrimination minorities' face and how this discrimination affects their self esteem. She describes a three part theory created by French social psychologist Erika Apfelbaum that explains how social identities are created as a result of membership to a group and how a person perceives this membership. The first part is meritocracy where people are supposed to be rewarded for their actions and merits. Race and gender should have no impact. The second part is universal rule "that defines the conditions for achieving success." All meritocracies have a universal rule. This rule is supposed to apply equally to everyone in that society but Hurtado explains how this is not the case, she uses the example of admissions into a four year university. The requirements for admission are to have a certain GPA in high school, be a high school graduate and do well on mandatory standardized tests. Furthermore, everyone is judged by these standards even if not all students have equal access to the same tools.

These requirements are applied in the same way whether an individual's last name is Smith or Gonzalez. However, equal number of Smiths and Gonzalezes do not gain admission to institutions of higher education. Apfelbaum argues that although there is a universal rule for admission into a four year university, in reality individuals of different group memberships have unequal access to the conditions for meeting these requirements. For example, not all high schools have equal numbers of college preparatory classes, the same number of advanced placement classes, equal access to equipment like computers and science laboratories, or adequate textbooks (among many other resources).

What this example shows is that even though there are supposed to be equal opportunities and according to the American ideal, if you work hard enough you will succeed, this is not the case, especially for minorities and groups from low socio-economic status.

The last part of the theory is degrouping. Degrouping is done by the dominant group to erase any ties people have to their own culture, or ethnic identity. "According to Apfelbaum, any time people are categorized into a group, especially through exclusion, there is a risk of creating a social group identity that will help them unite and fight back" (73). To prevent this from happening, minorities are degrouped. They are marked as outsiders from the dominant community, but they are not allowed to form a united community of their own. The dominant group fears that if they join together, they will organize and rebel against the status quo. Degrouping is done by removing an individual's language,

culture, and worldview. This process is very complex with a lot of little, sometimes subtle actions, that are able to deactivate a group's identity and make people believe that meritocracy works in this country even if you are poor, minority, female or all of the above. Things like tokenism, allow the dominant community to use these individuals as examples to prove that the universal rule works. These shining examples, few and far between, gave up their culture and language and as a result succeeded. However, these people are scrutinized and judged with much harsher standards than people from the dominant group (68-77).

This theory, is important when it comes to communication and language choices by Chicanas for a variety of reasons, first off, it shows that meritocracy is a flawed system in this country, it gives people false hopes. At the same time, it makes people that do not fit into the dominant group, develop lower self esteem and begin to question their affiliation with a group. People are forced to leave their culture behind, including their language. This is especially important for Chicanas because they already live in a limbo between two groups. They are not completely Mexican nor are they American. Then, they are also women that belong to a minority group. As a result, they have been affected by this process of assimilation. All the policies that devalue the use of Spanish can be a reflection of this theory. Chicanas have been forced to create a new language, to express themselves in new ways because, in order to be forced into a mold they do not want to fit into, the educational system tainted their mother tongue. Then, they have been oppressed and discriminated against based on their gender.

Males, both Anglos and other Chicanos have excluded them from their groups. These Chicanas explored new modes of communication to create a sense of identity and belonging. They were tying together all the leftover pieces that survived the constant process of assimilation and degradation.

**ANGLO/ FEMALE RACISM: Who they write against?**

Controlling language and language usage is a strong tool to control a population. The majority language, English, and its use as a tool for repression, make Chicanas doubt their identity. Like Anzaldúa, it is hard to know how to express yourself when at school you are told your mother tongue is worthless compared to English, the tongue of the oppressor.

Chicanas are ingrained with the idea that their language is unnecessary and inferior. Many are told that they only need English to succeed in life. This is a form of oppression that hurts the creativity and self-esteem of young Chicanas. Language colonization is also present in feminist groups where minority feminist writers are tokenized. Anzaldúa describes the white feminist as “a missionary role. She attempts to talk for us- what a presumption! This act is a rape of our tongue and our acquiescence is complicity to that rape. We women of color have to stop being modern medusas- throats cut, silenced into a mere hissing.” (Moraga 206). Anzaldúa claims that Chicanas have to fight against this stereotype that demeans them and places them in a situation where they cannot express themselves freely. Chicanas are used as objects by these white feminists who turn them into “hissing” things without real creative voices, without equal rights.

Lorna Dee Cervantes also fights against Anglo oppression in one of her poems from Emplumada “Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, An Intelligent Well-Read Person, Could Believe in the War between Races”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix for complete poem

where she shows her anger and discontent with the racism and poverty Chicanos have to face. She writes

I'm marked by the color of my skin.  
 The bullets are discrete and designed to kill slowly.  
 They are aiming at my children  
 These are facts  
 Let me show you my wounds: my stumbling mind,  
 My "excuse me" tongue and this  
 Nagging preoccupation  
 with the feeling of not being good enough...

This section of the poem, even though it does not include any Spanish, still refers to her struggle with the fact that she is a Spanglish speaker. Her tongue is not adequate for Anglo society. She feels she is not "good enough" as a result of years of racism and humiliation against her, her language and her culture. However, she not only faced criticism from Anglos, but Mexicans also considered her "pocha" so she, like Anzaldúa was stuck in middle ground. She used her poetry as a way to find an identity.

In the same poem she goes on to say...

I am a poet  
 Who yearns to dance on rooftops,  
 To whisper delicate lines about joy  
 And the blessings of human understanding...  
 Everyday I am deluged with reminders

That this is not  
My land  
And this is my land.  
I do not believe in the war between races  
But in this country  
there is a war

The first stanza expresses her hopefulness and her desire for a more peaceful existence. She wants to be free from this anger and write about nature and love but she is a soldier in this war and cannot escape it until it is over. She fights because she has to, she is aware of her reality and the reality of many Chicanos in the U.S. Through her writing she fights for them. She, like the ancient Aztecs, is a warrior in a war she does not want to exist and wishes to end but is probably never ending.

Gloria Anzaldúa, like Cervantes, rebelled against the oppression and censorship placed on her by the dominant groups. "Attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arranco la lengua. Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out" (Anzaldúa 76). She explains how she will never give up her language willingly and that any attempt to take it is and has to be a violent, unjust act. Also, by majoring in their language, she challenged the conqueror and showed them that she was not a dumb Mexican that would fall under their rule. However, the fact that she did not leave Spanish behind when learning English, like most Chicanas in an American school system do, forms a contradiction



characteristic of her writing. She will learn the language of the oppressor and master it but she will mix it with her native tongue to create a unique technique thereby challenging conventional writing styles.

The racism these Chicanas and other Latino groups have to face is described by Ilan Stavans. He explains how

rather than banning or stigmatizing the languages of immigrants and Native Americans, we should treat them as resources that could benefit the country both culturally and economically... In fact, one may argue that the English Only movement is a blunt attack against free speech and a showcase of the country's xenophobia. (Stavans 179)

English only movements are attacks on a group's culture. Language is a way to define identity and by removing this tool, the system is hurting the American people as a whole.

Furthermore, Holly Cashman explains how

Because of its stance on languages other than English, mainstream Anglo society differentiates between the Anglo who speaks Spanish as a second language and the Latino who speaks Spanish. As Bruce-Novoa explains: Logically, according to this formula [of European immigrant assimilation over one or two generations] anyone who speaks the language of another country must be either an excellent student or a recent arrival [...] This concept of assimilation remains so ingrained in the U.S. psyche that any deviation suffices to brand a person as exactly that, a deviant, with rather negative connotations (42). Therefore, the Anglo who speaks Spanish is

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worthy of commendation, while the Latino who speaks Spanish receives societal damnation for being slow or stubborn. (Cashman 139)

Therefore, Anglo racism is not an imagined thing by Chicanas. Their language is labeled as inferior. While Anglos that use a little Spanish are praised, people like Anzaldúa are labeled as “stubborn” for not willing to accommodate American culture and give up their own. Mexicans used to be punished in schools for speaking Spanish. As a result of this racism, the stigma that those with a Mexican accent are stubborn is still around today.

Ana Castillo, Chicana theorist, explores the process of Anglo domination through language in her book Essays on Xicanisma.

The vast majority of us were taught to be afraid of a certain type of English: the language of Anglos who initiated and sustained our social and economic disenfranchisement, who consciously or unconsciously instigated our traumatic experiences in monolingual Anglo schools, and who subscribed to and exacerbated that racism under which we have always lived in the United States even though we are U.S. citizens. At the same time, we were equally intimidated by the Spanish spoken by people of middle-class or higher economic strata who come from Latin America. For how could a language of those so different experientially from us, speak for those of us here who have so long been denied a sense of belonging, a sense of historical ties to this nation, and indeed, to any nation? (Castillo 167)

We were taught to fear both “proper” languages and were left in new territory. Revolutionary writers were able to create paths towards a new identity and a new way for self-expression. The feeling of living in a transient place, not being accepted in two society’s causes this schizophrenic writing characteristic of these three Chicanas’ work.

Anzaldúa explains this uncertainty clearly in her book Borderlands

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the only reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves- a language with terms that are neither español ni ingles, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages. (Anzaldúa 77)

The Chicano Spanish as Anzaldúa defines it is a vital part for the creation of her Chicana identity. Chicanas live in an in-between world. They are neither Mexican nor Anglo but at the same time they are both. The language created is a reflection of this confusion, of this “schizophrenia.” Chicanas are faced with the daunting task of creating a new culture out of what has been allotted to them by both Anglos and Mexicans.

**LATINO RACISM/SEXISM/ MACHISMO: More groups that oppress...**

The problem of racism through language is not limited to Anglos; even among Latinos, language is a way to define class. Many Latinos feel that the only way to be truly “Chicano” is to speak a pure form of Spanish. They condemn Tex-Mex and those who speak it. Anzaldúa has been accused of being a “pochó, cultural traitor, you’re speaking the oppressor’s language by speaking English, you’re ruining the Spanish language” (Anzaldúa 77). Then there are others that believe that speaking Spanish is for second-class citizens, wetbacks and *recien llegados*. They turn their backs on their ancestors and completely assimilate into the American society, speaking only English. They have *el nopal en la frente* but could never admit to themselves that they are Mexican. Lorna Dee Cervantes explains her exclusion from Mexican culture in her poem “Oaxaca, 1974<sup>4</sup>.” The poem explains how Mexico rejects her for being *pocha*. She writes “But Mexico gags, ¡Esputa! on this bland *pochaseed*” (Rebolledo 90). Mexico can not stand her *pocha* life, she wants to belong, her skin tells her she is Mexican, one of the bronze people, but her language does not reflect what she feels. Her Spanish does not suffice.

Anzaldúa explains her thoughts on oppression from Chicano/ Latino groups by saying “How often do people of color place our necks on the chopping block? What are the ways we hold out our wrists to be shackled? Do we gag our own mouths with our “*dios lo manda*” resignation?” (Moraga 207) Her anger is directed at Latino groups that help the Anglo oppress and destroy the Chicano that is willing to speak out and say what is happening in US society. Anzaldúa

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix for complete poem

explains how we silence each other and ourselves with prejudices and prejudgments. Chicanos judge other Chicanos because it is easier than fighting against the groups that hold real power. This prejudice can be seen in the Chicano organizations themselves where women were put down and ignored because of their sex. "Even our own people, other Spanish speakers' nos quieren poner candados en la boca. They would hold us back with their bag of reglas de academia" (Anzaldúa 76). Chicanos have their masculinity questioned when they are oppressed by Anglos and a quick and easy solution is oppressing someone else. "As Cordova summarizes it: 'Chicanas write in opposition to the symbolic representations of the Chicano movement that did not include them. Chicanas write in opposition to a hegemonic feminist discourse that places gender as a variable separate from that of race and class' (Hurtado 135).

Lorna Dee Cervantes explores her exclusion from Chicano groups in her poem entitled "Para un Revolucionario". Dee Cervantes writes about the sexism that exists within the Chicano community and how the Chicano man talks about revolution to his fellow "hermanos" and excludes her and her fellow "hermanas" from the dream. She is confined to the kitchen taking care of "los hijos." He talks only to men while she waits for him, to join him in the fight "con manos bronceadas that spring from mi espíritu" (Rebolledo 151-2). Dee Cervantes, like other Chicanas, is excluded from this movement that is supposed to be fighting for justice and equality yet they marginalize a large part of their group because of gender.

So Chicanos and other Latino groups exclude those that choose to communicate and behave in a different way. They judge and label those that violate their cultural norms. Cashman explains how language choice can be influenced by the concept of the pocho, or cultural traitor.

While mainstream U.S. society exerts overt pressure on writers to assimilate into monolingual English, many Latino cultures exert covert pressure on writers to maintain Spanish. Due to the historic colonization of the Spanish language both in the South West United States and in Puerto Rico, a strong politics of Spanish language maintenance is articulated from within both groups and those who accept and use English are considered traitors or sell-outs [...] Penalosa notes that due to linguistic ideologies which promote linguistic purity, the term pocho came to designate a Mexican who goes to the United States and becomes Americanized, especially with reference to his Spanish speech.

(Cashman 140)

Chicana writers have a hard time expressing themselves freely when faced with so many barriers. First off, their ability to use their native language is jeopardized in the school system. Then, Anglo society tells them Spanish is unacceptable especially in their literature. Finally, Latino groups also criticize the Chicana/Latina writers that use English with Spanish. Anzaldúa, Moraga and Dee Cervantes are considered pochos for their language use.

To break down these barriers, Anzaldúa describes the importance of ownership of one's voice, and the creation of one's language to express what

has been forbidden for so long. In Chicana literature, you find words not even Chicanos would use because not only do they have to rebel against the Anglos, but against their fellow Chicanos who usually believe the macho ideals traditional to Mexican society. Rosario Castellaños in her essay "Language as an Instrument of Domination" expresses this need to develop a new voice. "We have to create another language, we have to find another starting point, search for the pearl within each shell, the pit beneath the peel, because the shell holds still another treasure, the peel another substance. Word is the incarnation of the truth, because language has meaning" (Hernández 76).

### **SILENCING: Why they speak up?**

The case today with Chicanas in the U.S. is not the first instance Mexican groups have suffered the censorship and a violation of their language. Language was used as tool during the Conquest. Dating back to the conquering of the Aztecs; the most successful tool used to destroy a group of people has been the destruction of their language. Language was a weapon, especially when you think of La Malinche. La Malinche is an important figure in Chicana literature because of the influence she has had on the way women are portrayed in Mexican and Mexican American traditions. She was labeled a traitor and blamed for the fall of the Aztec empire. Aida Hurtado writes,

Skepticism about women has its origins in the cultural and sexual violation of La Malinche. Historically, La Malinche, a woman, is the ultimate traitor of Mexico. La Malinche supposedly facilitated Hernan Cortes conquest of the Aztec empire by acting as translator between the Spanish and the different Mixteca tribes. Norma Alarcon notes, 'Malintzin [La Malinche] comes to be known as la lengua, literally meaning the tongue. La lengua was the metaphor used, by Cortes and the chroniclers of the conquest, to refer to Malintzin the translator'. (Hurtado 140)

Ana Castillo also notes how women have been ostracized and silenced in Mexican households. She writes, "[...] the mexic Amerindian woman had been gagged for hundreds of years. I not only refer to the literal silencing of the Mexican indigenous population, economically impoverished and therefore



powerless and voiceless, but also the censorship that results from double sexism, being female and indigenous” (Castillo 7).

Indigenous people suffer in silence, as do many Chicanos who are afraid to speak up with accents. Chicana writers incorporate the idea of being indigenous, they reconnect with this part of their heritage, in order to speak out for this group that was silenced and tortured for so long. Today, Chicanas have become the voices of this disenfranchised group. They have redeemed indigenous women that dared to speak, like La Malinche, and have created a new voice.

Silencing and the idea of being silenced is a theme present in much of Anzaldúa’s work. In her life, Anzaldúa felt silenced by her family and a more collective society where she was expected to silently obey. In an interview she explains how, for her, “the silencing from the outside came from my family and my culture, where you were supposed to be seen but not heard” (Perry 27). Similarly, Stavans writes about the Chicano struggle with language and how hard it is to have a voice. “From early on, the Chicano psyche has been belligerent. Silent resistance, a refusal to accept their new status, always colored the lives of Mexicans north of the Rio Grande” (69).

Chicanas constantly struggle with oppression and with the tradition of silence. Anzaldúa constantly pushes the boundaries on what is acceptable. She is oppressed by Anglo society, and by the Mexican idea of machismo. Both groups, Anglos and Latinos, misunderstand her use of language. However, Anzaldúa writes

Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing [...] I will overcome the tradition of silence. (59)

Anzaldúa also discusses the idea of being silenced by talking about La Llorona. She writes

La Llorona's wailing in the night for her lost children has an echoing note in the wailing or mourning rites performed by women as they bade their sons, brothers and husbands good-bye before they left to go to the "flowery wars." Wailing is the Indian, Mexican and Chicana woman's feeble protest when she has no other recourse. These collective wailing rites may have been a sign of resistance in a society which glorified the warrior and war and for whom the women of the conquered tribes were booty. (55)

This is still going on today. This idea of being silenced seems to be ingrained in the Mexican psyche and as the generations in the U.S. evolved, this idea was reinforced by the oppression Chicanos face.

In another of her essays, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers" Gloria Anzaldúa further describes her struggle with language: "We speak in tongues like the outcast and the insane. Because white eyes do not

want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit" (80)

Finding a language is a constant struggle for people like Anzaldúa, caught between two worlds and living in the borderlands. Using words becomes dangerous, a struggle where you are unsure of what to say and of what will be accepted. The ability to create and to write comes into question. Since we don't have a language of our own, how are we to write? Do we even have the right to express our thoughts? These are all questions Anzaldúa brings up in her writing and that in many ways she is able to resolve some of these conflicts in Borderlands. Anzaldúa encourages others to, like her, "throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules the map and the compass" (Hernández 88).

For Anzaldúa, the act of writing is a form of protest as well as a form of meditation and self-discovery. As a child, her family discouraged her from writing. She was seen as abnormal for her interest in books. Coming from a strict Mexican family, she was expected to act like a girl. Women were not supposed to be educated, she was supposed to grow up and marry, have children. Her writings fight against this imposed life. She broke the rules in her culture when she chose to pick up a pen and write her discontent. In her essay "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers" Anzaldúa explains why she writes.

I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you...To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve autonomy. To dispel the

myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. To show that I can and I will write, never mind their admonitions to the contrary.... Finally, I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing. (Hernández 84)

Her writing is a form of expression and self-preservation. Anzaldúa's writing is free, open and representative of whom she is. It is interesting to note how different her works would be if she did not incorporate the languages she does. Her writing would no longer be part of her and would not have the healing power it has now. Other Chicana writers also use their writing to feel free and to, in many ways, confess and expose their anger, and self- doubt.

Cherrie Moraga also explores the idea of living in silence and how the lack of language and voice has led her to self doubt. Her self-hatred and struggle to find who she really is can be found in her essay entitled "Art in América con Acento" where she writes;

We are a living breathing contradiction, we who live en las entrañas del monstruo, but I refuse to be forced to identify. I am the product of invasion. My father is Anglo; my mother, Mexican. I am a result of the dissolution of bloodlines and the theft of language; and yet, I am a testimony to the failure of the United States to wholly anglicize its mestizo citizens.  
(Hernández 102)

Moraga describes the U.S. as "las entrañas del monstruo." She is an outsider in American society because she feels she does not belong. This

section describes how she feels. Her language and identity have been altered by America's need to "Anglicize" her yet she is still not completely Anglo. She refuses to ignore her roots and to leave behind her language.

Moraga was able to create a connection between her and her mother thereby speaking for her as well. Moraga writes,

It wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression-due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana- was realized [...]

I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings.

(28-9)

Chicana writers are constantly forced to push the boundaries of language because for so long they have had to remain silent. They are twice a minority, being women as well as Mexican. Chicanas are bound by the male rhetoric from which they must break free. That is why it is so necessary for them to create a language and a writing style unique to them. They must fight the tradition of silence and oppression by expressing themselves in their own way, without compromise or rules. Anzaldúa writes, "ahogadas, escupimos el oscuro. Peleando con nuestra propia sombra el silencio nos sepulta" (Anzaldúa 76).

### **CONCLUSION...**

As Chicanas, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga and Lorna Dee Cervantes have been forced to re-evaluate their identities and find new avenues of self expression. They describe themselves as Chicanas, not only ethnically, but politically. Through their writings, they are able to fight against oppression, silencing, racism and sexism. Their need to speak up and fight against the status quo has served as an inspiration for younger Chicanas who have no other role models. Chicanas do not fit into the dominant group mentality and by finding these new role models, they are learning that it is possible, even if not completely accepted by everyone, to express themselves in the modes they find most fitting whether it be English, Spanish, Spanglish and everywhere in between. Borders have been crossed and soon will be erased. Hopefully, future generations will follow the lead of these three authors and fight back against the discrimination Chicanos still face today.

In her poem entitled for the color of my mother, Cherrie Moraga writes about her struggle with her heritage and her speech. She writes "I am a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother speaking for her<sup>5</sup>." (Back 12) She speaks for her mother who couldn't speak for herself because she was poor, knew little English and was female. Moraga is willing to speak up and break the tradition of silence. She describes herself as a "white girl gone brown." She was brought up to fit into Anglo society, she could've forgotten her Mexican heritage but she didn't. She chose to be brown, to be Chicana.

One of the most representative poems by Moraga states:

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix for entire poem

I lack imagination you say.  
No, I lack language.  
The language to clarify  
My resistance to the literate.  
Words are a war to me.  
They threaten my family.  
To gain the word  
To describe the loss  
I risk losing everything.  
I may create a monster  
The word's length and body  
Swelling up colorful and thrilling  
Looming over my mother, characterized.  
Her voice in the distance  
Unintelligible illiterate.  
These are the monster's words.  
(Hernández 80)

Chicanas are not done creating this new language. It is a constant struggle because the boundaries are constantly shifting. With the current political situation, Spanish has once again become a target. People that speak Spanish have been denied service and are treated as inferior. However, Spanish is still spoken in many homes throughout the U.S. so it will not soon die. The constant evolution and mixing of English and Spanish will continue as the number of

Hispanics in the U.S. increases. The interweaving of these two languages will be used as a tool by future Chicana writers to once again establish their identity of borderland people. Not wholly Mexican but not completely Anglicized. These in-between people will keep striving for an identity in this ever changing society.

This land was Mexican once  
Was Indian always  
and is.  
And will be again. (Anzaldúa 113)



## Appendix

### 1. Freeway 280

Lorna Dee Cervantes

Las casitas near the gray cannery,  
 nestled amid wild abrazos of climbing roses  
 and man-high red geraniums  
 are gone now. The freeway conceals it  
 all beneath a raised scar.

But under the fake wind sounds of the open lanes,  
 in the abandoned lots below, new grasses sprout,  
 wild mustard remembers, old gardens  
 come back stronger than they were,  
 trees have been left standing in their yards.  
 Albaricoqueros, cerezos, nogales . . .  
 Viejitas come here with paper bags to gather greens.  
 Espinaca, verdolagas, yerbabuena . . .

I scramble over the wire fence  
 that would have kept me out.  
 Once, I wanted out, wanted the rigid lanes  
 to take me to a place without sun,  
 without the smell of tomatoes burning  
 on swing shift in the greasy summer air.

Maybe it's here  
 en los campos extraños de esta ciudad  
 where I'll find it, that part of me  
 mown under  
 like a corpse  
 or a loose seed.

## **2. Refugee Ship**

**Lorna Dee Cervantes**

Like wet cornstarch, I slide  
past my grandmother's eyes. Bible  
at her side, she removes her glasses.  
The pudding thickens.

Mama raised me without language.  
I'm orphaned from my Spanish name.  
The words are foreign, stumbling  
on my tongue. I see in the mirror  
my reflection; bronzed skin, black hair.

I feel I am a captive  
aboard the refugee ship.  
The ship that will never dock.  
El barco que nunca atraca.

**3. Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe In the War between Races**

**Lorna Dee Cervantes**

In my land there are no distinctions.  
The Barbed wire politics of oppression  
have been torn down long ago. The only reminder  
of past battles, lost or won, is a slight  
rutting in the fertile fields

In my land  
people write poems about love,  
full of nothing but contented childlike syllables.  
Everyone reads Russian short stories and weeps.  
There are no boundaries.  
There is no hunger, no  
complicated famine or greed.

I am not a revolutionary.  
I don't even like political poems.  
Do you think I can believe in a war between races?  
I can deny it. I can forget about it  
when I'm safe,  
living on my own continent of harmony  
and home, but I am not  
there.

I believe in revolution  
because everywhere the crosses are burning,  
sharp-shooting goose-steppers round every corner,  
there are snipers in the schools...  
(I know you don't believe this.  
You think this is nothing  
but faddish exaggeration, But they  
are not shooting at you).

I'm marked by the color of my skin.  
The bullets are discrete and designed to kill slowly.

They are aiming at my children.  
These are facts.  
Let me show you my wounds: my stumbling mind, my  
“excuse me” tongue, and this  
nagging preoccupation  
with the feeling of not being good enough.

These bullets bury deeper than logic.  
Racism is not intellectual.  
I can not reason these scars away.

Outside my door  
there is a real enemy  
who hates me.

I am a poet  
who yearns to dance on rooftops,  
to whisper delicate lines about joy  
and the blessings of human understanding.  
I try. I go to my land, my tower of words and  
bolt the door, but the typewriter doesn't fade out  
the sounds of blasting and muffled outrage.  
My own days bring me slaps on the face.  
Every day I am deluged with reminders  
that this is not  
    my land  
    and this is my land.

I do not believe in the war between races  
    but in this country  
    there is a war.

**4. Oaxaca, 1974**  
**Lorna Dee Cervantes**

Mexico,  
I look for  
you all day in the streets of Oaxaca.  
The children run to me laughing,  
spinning me blind and silly.  
They call me in words of another language.  
My brown body searches the streets  
for the dye that will color my thought.

But Mexico gags,  
!Esputa!  
on this bland pochaseed.

I didn't ask to be brought up tonta!  
My name hangs about me like a loose tooth.  
Old women they know my secret,  
"Es la culpa de los antepasados."  
Blame it on the old ones.  
They gave me a name  
that fights me.

**5. For the Color of My Mother**  
**Cherrie Moraga**

I am a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother  
speaking for her through the unnamed part of the mouth  
the wide-arched muzzle of brown women.

at two  
my upper lip split open  
clear to the tip of my nose  
it spilled forth a cry that would not yield  
that traveled down six floors of hospital  
where doctors wound me into white bandages  
only the screaming mouth exposed

the gash sewn back into a snarl  
would last for years

I am a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother  
speaking for her

at five, her mouth pressed into a seam  
a fine blue child's line dawn across her face  
her mouth, pressed into mouthing English  
mouthing yes yes yes  
mouthing stoop lift carry  
(sweating wet sighs into the field  
her red bandana comes loose from under the huge brimmed hat

moving across her upper lip)  
 at fourteen, her mouth  
 painted, the ends drawn up  
 the mole in the corner colored in darker larger mouthing yes  
 she praying no no no  
 lips pursed and moving

at forty five, her mouth bleeding into her stomach  
 the hole gaping growing redder  
 deepening with my father's pallor  
 finally stitched shut from hip to breastbone  
     an inverted V  
     Vera  
     Elvira

I am a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother  
 speaking for her  
 as it should be  
 dark women come to me  
     sitting in circles  
 I pass through their hands  
 the head of my mother  
 painted in clay colors

touching each carved feature  
     swollen eyes and mouth  
 that understand the explosion the splitting  
 open contained within the fixed expression  
 they cradle her silence  
     nodding to me

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