

MAKING FACE, MAKING SOUL, MAKING SPACE FOR CHICANAS'
TRAUMATIC NARRATIVES: AUTOHISTORIA-TEORÍA AS
METHOD AND GENRE

by

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DEDICATION

To the lloronas, gritonas, and sangronas all around the world.

Keep giving them hell, mamas.

Keep shining bright.

Contigo,

lea

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To the visionary and legendary Gloria Anzaldúa – mil gracias por salvarme, Gloria.

Al Apóstol de Jesucristo, Naasón Joaquín Garcia – contigo hasta el último aliento.

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PREFACE

This research project, my thesis, will feature my autohistoria-teoría as an exemplar of this particular methodology and genre. Before I begin, however, I need to define some important terms related to autohistoria-teoría as a methodology. First, there is shadow work. Shadow work is the process of excavatory deep thinking to unearth painful and traumatic parts of our memories and identities (Keating and Bhattacharya 345). Next, there is magical thinking. Autohistoria-teoría must employ magical thinking, “which is neither understood nor honored in academia” (Keating and Bhattacharya 346). Magical thinking allows the autohistorian to enact in decolonial processes of writing when she “evokes material-and spirit-based approaches to thought and imagination” (Keating and Bhattacharya 346). Decolonial processes of writing include but are not limited to ritual, chant, incantation, talking to plants, the burning of incense, the creation of an alter ego as a reflection of Self, crystals as sources of energy, etc.

Like many writers, I have developed a routine that must be done in order to shift my mind into my work. I call this my ritual and it is a necessary process to undergo when I compose my autohistorias. I invoke Querida. I burn white sage. I close my eyes and listen to rain. I breathe deeply, in and out. I begin carving my words into a stone tablet.

If the reader is willing to follow me down the strange and dark channels that come with shadow work and magical thinking, I will begin my story.

I. LLORONAS, GRITONAS, AND SANGRONAS: AN AUTOHISTORIA-TEORÍA

Prologue

In the upcoming weeks, we will begin fleshing out our autoethnographies. We will start with a central memory and slowly build from there. Please be ready and bring a copy of your first draft next class.

The candles are lit, incense sticks are burning, one warm yellow lamp is bent over my desk, and there is the sound of ambient music and light rain softly playing from my laptop. The ritual is complete, I can now close my eyes and begin to breathe deeply. What is to come will not be welcome, but it will be necessary to embrace. I don a cloak of determination and protectiveness and wrap it around me. I lift my shoulders back. *Breathe in and out.* I open myself up to my center, my Self, and let out She who is my primordial and powerful guide—I call her Querida. She only comes out when I have to journey to the dark recesses of mind, recall, and write the traumatic things that I see. She is my spirit guide, protector, and healer to the wounds that come with shadow work. Querida is an embodiment of my mother, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, and all my female ancestors whose blood, temper and passion run through my veins. *Breathe in and out.* Querida takes me to a beach, the sky is a deep blood-orange hue and is speckled with pinks and purples. I sit on the shore and She squats beside me as we wait; She has a spear resting by her side. Her gaze is fixated on the swelling crest of water coming rapidly towards us. *Breathe in and out.* I let the images come to me in waves, memories splash unto the shores of my mind, slowly they recede, then another takes its place, and another, and another. . .

I hear Querida's spear begin to trace words on the sand and I write.

Lloronas, Gritonas, and Sangronas

I go by many names and titles: Llorona, Cry Baby, angel, liar, Gritona, loud-mouth,
friend, sister, Sangrona, sólo para nombrar unos pocos.

“I do not know what the flowers have, Llorona, the flowers of a cemetery.

When the wind moves them, Llorona, it seems as if they are crying.

Woe to me Llorona, Llorona.

Llorona take me to the river.

Cover me with your rebozo, Llorona,

Because I’m dying of cold.

Ay de mi Llorona.”

-Ángela Aguilar

Burnt Beans

You tell me I’m a sinner.

That I’m an evil woman for feeling this way.

Soberbia, you call me.

Because I’m going against our doctrine.

But they’re no longer our true teachings, are they?

You’ve only looked for and grabbed the cherries you like.

Your fists are dripping in red pulp as you shove them close to my face.

The fruit is no longer whole and edible, and yet when I turn my face away,

¡Soberbia!

I'm called.

You tell me that I'm a sinner.

An evil woman.

I'm an evil woman for wanting to do good for women.

I've forgotten my place.

I crossed that line.

You know? The one that no one talks about until you cross it.

It suddenly announces its presence the way the stink of a pot of burnt frijoles does.

Then everybody must acknowledge it.

The stink doesn't let you forget at first.

It permeates the air, weaves its smoky tendrils into your clothes,

It clings to your hair.

You'll be smelling it for weeks!

Everyone is displeased. . .

And then, all of a sudden, it's gone.

The stink of burnt beans is forgotten.

All is well, until someone burns the beans again.

They don't like it when I cross *that* line.

They say my education has ruined me.

Ay, what now Lea?

You're too much into this woman stuff.

¡Eres demasiado apasionada,

Tienes que tener cuidado!

¡Eres muy soberbia!

I'm tired of eating red pulp,
Of being obedient and silent because they say so.

¡Eso no es mi lugar!

I'd rather be like one of those dirty, riddled little pinto beans.
The one that's always cast away from the pile of clean, light, whole beans.

Soberbia, ay, yo soy bien soberbia.

Because I always cross that line.

Because I want the whole cherry tree.

Because I'm like a pot of burnt beans.

Ramblings of A Llorona: Speaking Out

When I was a little girl, they'd call me Llorona because I'd cry all of the time. My eyes were always red and puffy, my mocos always freshly wiped from my nose by an exasperated mother. "¿Porque lloras tanto? Why do you cry so much? Llorona!" If you'd have asked me back then, I probably would've just shrugged my shoulders and frowned. However, if you ask me now why I cried so much, I would say it's because that was the only way I knew how to tell others around me that I was being violated. Like many mujeres who went through similar experiences such as mine at a young age, we didn't know what was happening during the moments when our trespassers crossed our borders. When they looted, damaged, and stole from us. We didn't know how to form the words yet, we didn't even know that words like 'violate', 'rape', or 'touched' existed. We didn't know that our tios, abuelos, cousins, that our family weren't allowed to do things like

that. We didn't know. We didn't know how to shout, scream, or who to go to. So I did what I knew how to do best. Lloré.

There is a taboo within Chicano culture when one tries to speak up about difficult topics such as this. In my family, women weren't allowed to utter such detestable truths. You get told off, people don't want to hear it, especially if it's a loved one who is guilty of such atrocious crimes. But being in denial is just as bad as being the actual perpetrator; it cloaks its dark tendrils around you, tightens its grasp around your eyes and stuffs its slimy self into your ears. You become just as guilty of the act as the trespasser, an accomplice to their crimes. "¡Mi hijo no es capaz de hacer esas cosas! My son would never do that to his own family! My husband wouldn't touch his niece! ¡Ya cállate! ¡No sabes lo que estas diciendo! No, no, no!" So, we who try to tell you have stepped back in shock, pain, betrayal, our throats convulsing from holding back the words, the transgressions done to us, holding back our wails of anguish for not finding solidarity, comfort, or even a nod of recognition from you. Our hands once outstretched to you have now suddenly fallen back to our sides, limp.

The 10 Commandments of Marianismo¹

1. Don't forget the place of the woman
2. Don't give up your traditions
3. Don't be an old maid, independent, or have your own opinions
4. Don't put your needs first
5. Don't wish anything but to be a housewife

¹ For more on marianismo in Chicano culture, see Gil and Vazquez's *The Maria Paradox: How Latinas Can Merge Old World Traditions with New World Self-Esteem*.

6. Don't forget sex is to make babies, not for pleasure
7. Don't be unhappy with your man, no matter what he does to you
8. Don't ask for help
9. Don't discuss your personal problems outside the house
10. Don't change

Ramblings of A Llorona Continued...

I am a llorona. I am a gritona. I am a sangrona. I cried all the time, then I started shouting, and now I am a nuisance to all whose ears cannot bear my messages of truth. Those who insist on remaining deaf are still stuck inside their own balls of red yarn. Yarn that is made of thick fuzzy strands and is tightly wound around the individual. A dangerous place. A beautiful place. A sphere of comfort that tightly cloaks itself around the individual with sweet and warm caresses. I know many people who are in that place. To be clear, the red balls of yarn aren't just a temporary layer of skin for all the individuals who must embark on this atrocious and liberating journey—it is for some their only layer and their thickest. I know of many who have set up homes in the marsh of red yarn, have befriended others, are comfortable with their neighbors who also prefer their balls of yarn, and recoil from the touch of the passersby and truth-bringers. That is when they begin to tell others that I am a gritona (She needs to stop talking about this crap, already!), and an insufferable sangrona (You better learn your place! You're so annoying! ¡Hocicóna!). But to them I say: Why are you so afraid of me? *Why are you so afraid?*

The Ball of Yarn, The Wind, and The Woman

I want you to imagine a large, red ball of yarn. Imagine that this ball of yarn is teetering dangerously at the top of a steep hill. This hill is rocky. Its jagged branches and sharp edges of stone jut out of its side acting like bony hands trying to grab the red ball of yarn. The sticks and stones are talking, chanting to the timid ball of quivering yarn at the top of the hill, “*Jump, jump, jump!*” In a moment of hesitance, a strong blast of wind thrusts the red ball of yarn off the edge. The ball of yarn knows that the wind meant no harm; the ball hears its laughter as it propels downward, towards the first outstretched hand, and its thread gets caught. The ball of yarn still bounces down this steep hill, quickly unraveling, and its thread snags on another jagged stone, and it keeps unraveling.

There is nothing the red ball of yarn can do now, except try to enjoy the ride, accept its descent into the unknown. The rushing air, the choir of voices cheering it on as it whooshes past, the lightening feeling, almost as if this now little red ball of yarn is flying, is exhilarating. It feels excitement instead of dread when its yarn is caught on another bony hand. Eventually, the little ball of yarn slows to a legato pace, softly bouncing every now and then, humming at a solid mezzo forte by the time it reaches the bottom of the steep hill. Above, it can still faintly hear the enthusiastic choir and see its red thread billowing from their hands as they wave down at the cylinder figure below. The red ball of yarn unfurls itself from its round, tight center form it has been wound up in all its life. It has a name now, this ball of yarn that isn’t quite so red, or fuzzy, or a ball, for that matter. She is a woman. She is me. And she is now free of the threads tightly binding her to silence and feelings of shame. The woman stands up, stretches out her back, lifts her chin, looks at her hands, and immediately she knows they are her most

precious weapons, her most useful tools.

She looks at the sight before her. Mountains, valleys, forests in the distance. As she scans the horizon, her eyes take in strands of red thread billowing in the wind. Her legs feel strong, this ball of yarn takes its first step, and the woman embarks on her journey to the Land of Luz. Along the way she is called many names: Llorona, Cry Baby, angel, liar, Gritona, loud-mouth, friend, sister, Sangrona, sólo para nombrar unos pocos.

The gusts of wind that pushed me over the edge and began my unraveling came in the form of a professor. It came in the form of an English class I took my Junior year in college. It came in the form of an article I read talking about Alma López', *Our Lady*. It came in the form of Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, Cherríe Moraga, and many other women who playfully and forcefully pushed at my back with their messages of truth and reclamations. Perhaps, for the sake of time and density, I will focus on only one of these gusts of wind.

A Central Memory

It was the Spring of 2017 and I was still relishing my newfound independence from my family back in Corpus Christi. I was the first female family member to move out of the house before marriage, I was the first female to refrain from getting married by the time I was twenty, I was the first family member to ever pursue a college degree. Indeed, I was the first of many. Trailblazer, my little sister would certainly call me. Stubborn, others have said. Wild, most certainly whispered in my family's tight-knit cultural circle. Free, if you ask me. I was free to a certain degree. I was free to choose my major, free to move away to study in a different city, free to choose my own classes.

I chose Cisneros. Her name in the course description caught my immediate attention. Sandra Cisneros. It sounded different than many of the other literature courses I had taken in the past. Her name sounded like mine: Lea Colchado. So, without knowing too much about who Sandra Cisneros was, I enlisted in the course, having no idea that there was a playful gust of wind eagerly waiting for me. I eagerly awaited the first day of class. My professor assigned the class Cisneros' *Caramelo*, and I devoured every word. As I was reading, I experienced shock and a weird feeling that Sandra Cisneros was spying on me. I imagined Cisneros sneaking into my room and reading my childhood diaries, snickering when she skimmed over my non-existent love life. Was this payback for reading her diaries in the Wittliff Collection? *Oh God*. I cringed as I envisioned her jumping in a time-machine, a mischievous elf-like Cisneros with a little pen and notepad arriving to my barrio in 2005. She was there hiding in the corner of the kitchen while my abuela threw one of her you're-going-to-miss-me-when-I-die fits. I imagined her chuckling and writing it all down. There were so many parallels to my life in her novel that I almost convinced myself we were somehow connected. The emblematic plots, the dramatic characters (my mother and my abuela fighting in the kitchen), the neighborhoods which mirrored my own, I felt like I knew this story intimately. Like I had lived it. I fell in love with Cisneros. She was talking about issues that I couldn't, unabashedly, fearlessly, passionately. I admired her for her bravery.

My professor noted the positive reception to Cisneros and provided us extra resources to better understand her world, her culture, my world, my culture. The supplementary article titled "Silencing Our Lady," discussed the reception of Alma López', *Our Lady*. At first glance, López' work is striking. There in the middle of the

portrait is a brown woman standing with her hands on her hips, her right leg cocked to the side, and her chin lifted proudly. Her long black hair is draped behind her and her eyes almost gleam with a challenge. Her lips are a deep red as they are set in a firm lock. *I can see her face*; I shockingly think to myself. La Virgen is draped with an emerald cloak of the ancient Aztec moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui. She is clad in a bikini of roses; most notable is the one white rose directly over her groin. She is framed by red, yellow, and white roses being held up by a naked woman, presumably an angel. López' work was fascinating. It immediately moved me and gained my approval. I began reading López' article and quickly found that I was so intrigued in the letters people all over the world were sending to López. Many were of condemnation—*how dare you have the audacity to paint the Virgin of Guadalupe so scantily?! You're going to hell!* Others showered her with praise—*Thank you for finally depicting La Virgen as strong and powerful, as I've known her to be.* I couldn't stop reading the letters López provided.

There was one, however, that gently and firmly stung my back with its cold air. The only name provided at the bottom of the letter was, Adriana, and I felt like she was a long-lost sister whom I had just met, and who was quickly snatched away from me. She wrote to López as if she were writing to her favorite cousin or to her own sister. As I began reading Adriana's letter, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was prying, as if I had snuck into López' room and opened a chest full of her most precious possessions, taking out the letter and intensely reading it. I started crying. Wait, what? Why are my eyes wet? I kept reading, the letters eventually becoming blurry as Adriana told López of her own sexual abuse experience. She was violated by a family member, too, was pressured into silence by her mother, was suffocated by frilly lace and dolls, was made to feel ashamed

for being the prey of a trespasser. My yellow highlighter trembled in my hand as I marked the sections of Adriana's letter, the page scattered with wet dots. Adriana tells López, "the quiet has killed us for too long... I love my raza but sometimes we're just as tapados as everybody else...it's hard to live ashamed...thank you for speaking out for mujeres como yo...so, no se dejen, keep on talking, keep on painting, keep on yelling, just keep on...". *Just keep on. The quiet has killed us. Keep on yelling. Just keep on. Just keep on.* Those words kept resounding in my head.

I knew then that I was not the only one. The crime done to me was not unique in any way, rather, it was quite common! Once I started crying, I couldn't stop. My breathing came out in ragged puffs of air, and feelings of pain and relief crashed through me. Who was this Adriana? I didn't even know her and yet she provoked a suppressed side of me to surface. Not even those who were closest to me had that power. I quickly began the descent into my own trauma, my memory of when my borders were recklessly infiltrated, the first time I picked up the red thread and started wrapping it around myself. Adriana's words were a shout into the void, she had written the letter to Alma López, not even thinking about it being read by anyone else and her words reached me inside my red womb.² I felt the wind.

"When I extinguish my flame, you prefer me – why?"

- Prisca Dorcas Mojica Rodriguez

The Ball of Yarn and Her Special Guests

Gloria Anzaldúa creates the term "mestiza consciousness" partially to describe the

² I have attached Adriana's letter to Alma López in the Appendix of my autohistoria.

clash of border cultures within an individual. Mestiza consciousness is a consciousness of duality, embracing ambiguity and tradition. Anzaldúa states: “the new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns how to juggle cultures” (*Borderlands* 101).

I felt myself coming into my mestiza consciousness. I was becoming aware of my political, social, and cultural surroundings and experiences that shaped me. I learned about Anzaldúa, and quickly afterwards Cherríe Moraga made her brilliant debut on the dark stage of my mind. She was followed by Ana Castillo, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, Norma Alacrón, among so many other influential Chicana activists, writers, and philosophers. I was reading their books and they were talking back to me through the pages. As I read, my mind transported to a dark theatre, cobwebs and dust caking the walls. I looked towards the empty stage with its heavy, red velvet curtains hanging sadly never having been drawn back. I sit alone in the theatre watching the stage, excitedly anticipating the person who will pop out from behind the curtain. And she does—all of a sudden, a blinding light zeroes in on the stage and gives spotlight to the front and center. Pancha Villa pokes her head out from behind the curtain, cautiously looking around, and tweaking her fake moustache at the corners. She sees me and dramatically pushes back the stage curtain, taking a few confident strides forward, looks at me with a devilish grin and begins her poem for me: “They say I’m a beast. And feast on it. When all along I thought that’s what a woman was.” (Cisneros 112). I’m enraptured.

The next night, Cherríe Moraga takes the spotlight talking to me about white male hegemony, teaches me about Third World Feminism as she sits on a barstool. With an

intense and focused gaze looks at me while explaining how women have failed one another in the battle of the sexes. I sit rigid on the edge of my seat; I don't dare take my eyes off of Moraga. She sighs and says: "This is the oppressor's nightmare, but it's not exclusive to him." She jumps off her stool and begins to pace the stage. "We women have a similar nightmare, for each of us in some way has been both the oppressed and the oppressor. We are afraid to look at how we have failed each other" (*This Bridge Called My Back* 27). I nod my head in agreement, "Yes, sad but true, but do we have the courage to admit this?" We contemplate and discuss.

The following week it's Ana Castillo with her proud lifted chin in the air as she savagely rips apart the dominant culture's power hold on the indigenous and the female in her book *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*. Then it's Sonia Saldívar-Hull with her literary intake on feminism on the border. She talks to me about Sandra Cisneros' story, *Woman Hollering Creek*. She elaborates on the main characters of the story, Cleófilas and Felice: "They embody the Chicana who dares to love herself and uses her voice to contend and fire back at a patriarchal structure that tries to keep her submissive," she smiles at me and her brown eyes twinkle (*Feminism on the Border* 81). Smiling back, "I think I'm starting to understand how self-love can be used as a powerful weapon," I tell her. This sparks another conversation about self-care and the responsibility of an enlightened Chicana.

Next, it's Rosa Fregoso and she delivers an excellent lesson on Marianismo, specifically about commandments seven and nine. Fregoso sits on the edge of the stage, her feet dangling in the air as she looks me in the eye. There is a cloth tied around her mouth, silencing her. She tries to talk, making muffled sounds, but I can't understand or

hear her. She angrily rips off the cloth binding her and says: “There is a conspiracy of silence within the Chicano culture for the sake of family. We’re too busy and worried about what the people will think and say about us it creates a gag order on the Chicana. Chicanas are up against a heavy burden of representation: acknowledging colonialist constructions of Mexican/Chicano masculinity while denouncing sexual and physical assault on women and children by the men in our communities” (96)! I feel my hands clench up into fists by my side, my heart beating faster as every word she says rings true in my experience.

I keep tugging on the red yarn throughout each performance. With each lesson, poem, passionate exclamations and proud, determined gaze I receive from the women on stage, the theatre lightens. The dusty and damp walls now gleam a lovely deep burgundy as the candles cast off their light. The red velvet curtains are now beautifully drawn back as Gloria Anzaldúa takes the stage. She has on a long sleeve button-up shirt that opens up at the neck. Her shirt is tucked into her waist high blue jeans. Her thick black hair is cropped short and she leans on one leg while her hands are tucked into her jean pockets. Her head is cocked to the side as she examines me. The red ball of yarn starts to quiver. I start to break out in a cold sweat, fearing her rejection, wondering if she’ll accept me into her warm arms of Chicana refuge and badassary. Gloria has a feral glint in her eyes and whispers loudly in the hushed theatre, “Aquí en la soledad prospera su rebeldía. En la soledad Ella prospera” (*Borderlands* 45). The lesson begins, and the red ball of yarn feels the wind caress her face in the illuminated theatre.

Los Tíos

They know we won't talk.

Talk. Talk. Talk.

They keep doing it.

They keep doing it.

If the words spew out,

They'll ruin the pretty picture,

They'll scream, they'll shout, they'll—

Talk. Talk. Talk.

We watch with big eyes.

We keep swallowing the truth.

Talk. Talk. Talk.

We hear the lies,

So natural, so smooth.

They know we won't talk.

Talk. Talk. Talk.

But they keep doing it.

But they keep doing it!

They creep and touch,

They smile and rub,
And tell us not to-
Talk. Talk. Talk.

They offer us candies
When the family is around.
Talk. Talk. Talk.

They smile and we frown.
We have to –
Talk. Talk. Talk.

We spit out the sweets
And open our mouths.
Talk. Talk. Talk!
Their eyes widen
And lollipops make us gag again.
Talk. Talk. Talk.

We look at each other,
The cousins, the cuzzos,
My primas and my primo.
We look at the clock.
We stare into the eyes

Of our perpetrators and chant,

“Talk. Talk. Talk.”

Secretos

I realized I wasn't alone in my experience as a sexual assault survivor from a family member, and I slowly started to unravel. When I began to gather the strength to talk about it with trusted family members (it was a safe subject among my siblings and cousins only), others began to come forward about their own sexual abuse within the family. It was a domino effect. It was devastating. It was confusing. It was infuriating. It was consolation. It was puro desmadre, cuz!

Me: “That’s how grandpa got to me. Right next to Jezi, who was asleep. Even with his legs chopped off, he still got me, man.”

Jezi (my older brother by two years): “That man is going to rot in hell. Pretending to be all santo, pssh, ¡hypócrita! It’s a good thing he’s dead!”

Liz (cousin): “And he also got to my mom. Bogus, right cuz? His own daughter. . .and me. I’ll vomit if I see a Snicker bar.” *She shakes her head, her magnified eyes behind her thin wire glasses on the verge of tears.* “Todos lo creen que se salvo, but we know the truth.”

Mimi (cousin): Quietly, “Tío Marcello and Tío Cucú. They were the ones, right Liz?” *Liz nods her head heavily.*

Sam (the eldest of my siblings): “Tío Mingo,” she says quietly.

Karen (the youngest of my siblings): “Me too, it was Tío Mingo too.”

Josh (cousin): “Me too.”

We all look at each other. We're sitting in a circle on the bed and have only the light from the lamp illuminating our young, aged faces. El silencio es impregnado con tantos sentimientos: tension, pain, anger, and a mix of emotions that I can't identify yet. Liz and Mimi are crying, wiping their noses with the collars of their shirts.

Sam: "We can't tell anyone. They'll never believe us. The only ones who'll believe it is Mom and Tía Mary, and they'll kill Mingo and the other ones if they find out."

We all nod our heads in agreement. Oh, we know that our mothers would scream vengeance and spill blood for this. That was the first time I started to unravel. My cousins and siblings performing the part of the bony hands and jagged stones that lovingly encouraged me to unwind. Adriana's letter of gratitude and anger the firm gust of wind that I felt from inside my red ball of yarn.

Pasos

The woman takes her first few steps and immediately hears shouts of anger coming from down the path. She instinctively takes a step back, faltering, unsure, calculating. Wails of anguish are carried on the wind (that sneaky sneak!) and fall upon the ears of the woman. This gives her incentive and the courage to go onwards, trying to find those who still need help unraveling. They are the voices of anguish the wind carried to her, she knows that. The woman walks anew, ignoring the hum of angry voices getting louder with each step. "¡Llorona! ¡Gritona! ¡Sangrona!" the angry voices shout at her. She smiles and shouts defiantly to them, "¿¡Y qué!?", and thinks: *Man, this is crazy.*

II. METHODOLOGY AND GENRE

Autohistoria-teoría as Method and Genre for Chicana Trauma

In this chapter, I discuss the factors that helped me make the decision to pursue writing my own autohistoria-teoría, as well as discuss the criticisms that autohistoria-teoría faces as an autobiographical mode of inquiry. At the end of this chapter, I discuss evaluating autohistoria-teoría and how it may be established as its own genre.

While there is not yet an extensive and sustained analysis or exposition of the concept of autohistoria-teoría, I am able to propose autohistoria-teoría as a methodology and genre that borrows from the surrounding scholarship I've read and processed. My autohistoria-teoría came into its true form after an autoethnography course I took my first semester of graduate school. After the autoethnography course, I began reading around and doing some research over lesser known Anzaldúan theories that involved writing and identity. I stumbled upon autohistoria-teoría and recognized the potential that this autobiographical mode of inquiry could yield for Rhetoric and Writing studies, particularly for Chicanas. My autohistoria-teoría process and the proposal of a methodology and genre for Chicanas' traumatic narratives are informed by the scholarship of Gloria Anzaldúa, AnaLouise Keating, and Caren S. Neile's essay "The 1001-Piece Nights of Gloria Anzaldúa: Autohistoria-teoría at Florida Atlantic University."

There are limited useful inquiry methodologies and genres available to Chicanas in academe, whose truths are rooted in trauma. Readily available methods and genres include autoethnography, a genre that studies self situated in culture, and testimonio, a

methodological approach to narratives of people of color (Chang; Reyes and Rodriguez). Despite these methodological inroads, however, there is still a need for methodological inquiry and genre that will provide women ways to inscribe their narratives through decolonial processes. Decolonial processes of writing allow the narrator to disengage from Western modes of convention such as modernity and coloniality; it is that which is described as uncivilized, untraditional, mystic, and unorthodox by modern rationality. Gloria Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría may provide such a platform for Chicanas within rhetoric and writing studies. From composition, we know that, as writers, "we do, we claim, challenge, perhaps even contest and resist, our alignment with beliefs, interests, and values of the communities with which we engage" (Adler-Kassner 51). Autohistoria-teoría allows the writer to engage in excavatory thinking processes which require interconnections between identity, language, and trauma and to craft compositions that allow writing to serve as epistemological, grounded in theorizing the personal.

Much like autoethnography, and as my own autohistoria-teoría and accompanying discussion illustrate, autohistoria-teoría entails a rigorous process with an outcome, a tangible product. Anzaldúa describes autohistoria-teoría as "a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria-teoría is a personal essay that theorizes" ("now let us shift" 578). It is also worth noting that a prominent Anzaldúan scholar, AnaLouise Keating, gives a list of autohistoria-teoría's characteristics as well, which include it being relational, self-reflective, cultural, political, as well as incorporating storytelling, myth, and transformation (*The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 329). Keating explains, "while autohistoria focuses on and at times fictionalizes the life story

(as seen in Anzaldúa's *Prieta* series), autohistoria-teoría includes openly theoretical dimensions as well" (*EntreMundos/AmongWorlds* 6). Autohistoria-teoría can be analytic and evocative, and almost always is both as it is "informed by a reflective self-awareness employed in the service of social-justice work" (Keating 6). The autohistoria-teoristas determine their paradigm shifts (such as intra- or inter-personal underlying assumptions or major fundamental changes within cultural, societal, and/or political structures, to simply name a few) by asking: what is this piece of desconocimiento trying to reveal, how will it serve as healing and self-growth, how may their autohistoria-teoría become a lens in which to revise, redraw, reread and rewrite cultural stories that they have been born into. As Keating says, "Through this lens, Anzaldúa and other autohistoria-teoristas explore the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation" (6).

Although my autohistoria-teoría first came into consciousness through an autoethnography class I was enrolled in my first year of graduate school, it occurred to me that there were nuanced differences in my methods than that of my peers. For example, in my peer review group I would constantly code-mesh from English to Spanish and vice versa; I also felt that I was "pushing the envelope" because sections of my autoethnography included creative non-fiction, and I didn't see my peer review group incorporating these methods or stylistic moves into theirs. While seemingly unimportant, I took note of these small differences and felt like my autoethnography didn't seem to quite "fit" within the genre. However, my peer review group and professor made me feel welcome anyways, so I continued to write. As I furthered my studies throughout the year, I began acquiring new knowledge of Anzaldúan and mestiza rhetoric. Through a piece

written by one of Anzaldúa's students back in 2001, I came across a loose outline of how she taught autohistoria-teoría. However, specific class material and writing exercises are lost to me; therefore, I have theorized and compiled a tentative methodology on how to compose an autohistoria-teoría through the available scholarship from Rhetoric and Composition Studies, Women's Studies, Chicana Studies and correspondence with leading authorities on the subject, such as AnaLouise Keating.

It also occurred to me that I could have simply kept my autohistoria-teoría labeled as an autoethnography, as both genres carry similar methodology. Autoethnography also faces criticism that the personal should not mix with research, that evocative autoethnography is somehow too emotionally invested for the social sciences and academia, for that matter. However, even more than autoethnography, autohistoria-teoría may be an even riskier and "unorthodox" methodology and genre to approach within academe. Already aware of the criticism surrounding autoethnography, particularly evocative narratives, I asked myself a series of questions before deciding to undergo the process of crafting my autohistoria-teoría: Do I dare step onto the already thin ice that is autoethnography, to cross the lake of academia, and make it to the other side where autohistoria-teoría waits for me with open arms and a welcoming land? Do I want to push the envelope further? Should I advocate for an unconventional methodology when the autoethnographic genre is in the midst of making its own name for itself within an already tight and unforgiving space? Is it possible for me to turn away from this methodology of inquiry and genre that so clearly allows a woman of color to just Be? What I mean by Being is that I don't have to worry about performing my gender, sexuality, class, or ethnicity to the colonizer's script of who I should be and how I should

act. Am I willing to make yet another compromise and leave key aspects of my identity out of the boat in order to sail quietly by? I don't think so. Autohistoria-teoría, though perhaps seen as unorthodox as a method of inquiry according to hegemonic discourses and positivists within academia – is more ethically sound for my study as it incorporates my roots and identity, because “as a modern-day Coyolxauhqui, [I] search for an account that encapsulates [my] life, and finding no ready-made story. . [I] turn the established narrative on its head, seeing through, resisting, and subverting its assumptions . . . – [I] must provide new narratives embodying alternative potentials” (“now let us shift” 559-560).

Criticisms of Autohistoria-teoría

While autohistoria-teoría has not been an established form of method of inquiry and genre yet, there are still aspects of this qualitative methodology that some researchers may criticize. For example, according to positivist values, magical thinking, shadow work and spiritual activism, all crucial steps in the autohistoria-teoría process, are unorthodox and unnecessary, as it is seen as “unobjective.” As autohistoria-teoría is another form of evocative autoethnography but more radical, autohistoria-teoristas are accused of emotionalism and autohistoria-teoría may run the risk of being perceived as autoethnographers who write evocative autoethnographies are: “insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic” (Ellis 283). According to Keating, however, while magical thinking, shadow work and spiritual activism are not honored in academia, it should be made clear that “this focus on spiritual activism, on metaphysics of interconnectedness, must not be conflated with escapism”

(529). In other words, Ellis also states that critics of evocative autoethnography make a grave mistake separating art and science from one another, and when it comes to autohistoria-teoría, Keating echoes much the same idea: “The spiritual components of life *cannot* be divorced from politics, sexuality, *writing*, or daily living” (529) (author’s emphasis; second emphasis my own). In short, critics of autohistoria-teoría make the same kinds of charges against it that critics of autoethnography, specifically, and qualitative research, generally, make: that it is methodologically unsound because it is not “objective.”

Sarah J. Cervenak et.al., challenge traditional modes of knowing and writing within academia. Traditionally, they state, “academe devalues personal experience as a way of knowing while emphasizing the knowledge of ‘high’ theory as the only ‘real’ route toward making sense of the world” (349). In acknowledging only “high” theory, hegemonic discourses “[are] used against people to silence, censor, humiliate, and devalue” (Cervenak et.al. 349). Anzaldúa discusses ways of knowing, which she calls “conocimiento,” and “those carrying conocimiento refuse to accept the spirituality as a devalued form of knowledge, and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality” (541-542). Conocimiento as a form of spiritual inquiry is reached via creative acts such as writing, says Anzaldúa (“now let us shift” 542). Autohistoria-teoría requires the writer to push back and challenge high theory and hegemonic discourses by using decolonial practices. While the distinction between methodology is a belief on how research should proceed, and methods are the tools one uses to enact a methodology, as a Chicana writing her own truths rooted in trauma and scholarship, I judge autohistoria-teoría to be the most appropriate methodology for my research. Through autohistoria-

teoría, I have the authority and tools to excavate and confront trauma, gather new ways of knowing, challenge official and conventional methods of inquiry and writing, and to carve out a space where, as a woman of color, I can just Be.

While autobiographical modes of inquiry such as autoethnography can be powerful tools for creating and examining self-cultural intersections, autohistoria-teoría yields potential for a rhetorical platform unique to Chicana's voices seeking safe modes of inquiry and writing. For example, accepting modes of inquiry and writing specific to autohistoria-teoría, specific to this thesis, is the focus explicitly on traumatic narratives, and the use of language of the writer's choice. Autohistoria-teoría is unique in that it preserves the language of the oppressed, she who has struggled in reclaiming her Self, her rituals, her religion, and doesn't want to use the language of the colonizer as the only way to express herself. While some may argue that language choice doesn't make a difference, I would say otherwise. Much like Keating, I believe that language has enormous physic and material power and that "language, belief, perception, and action are all intimately interrelated...the words we use shape what we perceive, which in turn shapes how we act" ("now let us shift" 523). Therefore, autohistoria-teoría is unparalleled as an accepting mode of inquiry and genre specific to Chicanas' traumatic narratives. Autohistoria-teoría also may also be used as a bridge to form understanding and change between writer and reader within and outside of academia.

Evaluating Autohistoria-teoría

Before resubmitting my autohistoria-teoría for my thesis, I needed to evaluate it. Combining what I had learned about autohistoria-teoría from readings in *El Mundo*

Zurdo collections, scholarship, and Anzaldúa and Keating's views of what autohistoria-teoría should employ, I evaluated my autohistoria-teoría according to the following criteria:

- Autohistoria-teoría requires rhetorical craftsmanship and a strong sense of personal and cultural understandings as it blends together with “memoir, history, story-telling, myth, and/or other forms of theorizing” (Keating 319).
- In autohistoria-teoría, the self is salient, however subjective because “as the autohistorian tells her own life story, she simultaneously tells the life story of others” (Keating 319).
- Autohistoria-teoría is a decolonial writing process as it employs magical thinking, shadow work, and spiritual activism “which is neither understood nor honored in academia” (Bhattacharya and Keating 346).
- Autohistoria-teoría as a theory for Chicanas writing traumatic narratives will “rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, [a] [theory] that will cross borders, blur boundaries” (Anzaldúa 136).
- Autohistoria-teoría is transformative as a platform for social justice as it exposes the “limitations in the existing paradigms and create[s] new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation” (Keating 319).
- There is evidence of reflexivity as autohistoria-teorístas “create interwoven individual and collective identities [which] revised and in other ways redrawn – become a lens with which to reread and rewrite existing cultural stories” (Keating 319).

After multiple rounds of revision and analysis, I was convinced that my autohistoria-teoría met all the criteria above. However, not quite an autoethnography or a *testimonio*, my autohistoria-teoría did not fit into any specific academic genre. The following will discuss autohistoria-teoría as a genre for Chicanas' traumatic narratives.

Autohistoria-teoría As Genre

As a genre, autohistoria-teoría has the power to carve out a space for Chicanas' traumatic narratives. Through distinctive characteristics such as magical thinking, shadow work, myth, theorizing, and spiritual activism, autohistoria-teoría sets itself apart from other forms of autobiographical modes of inquiry. Through nuanced characteristics as simple as the naming of the genre in a language that is not Standard English, autohistoria-teoría allows Chicanas to incorporate bilingual and bicultural theoretical underpinnings that other autobiographical modes of inquiry and genre may not offer for a Chicana's traumatic narrative.

In this chapter I have expanded my reasonings for a tentative methodology for autohistoria-teoría culled from various primary and secondary sources, as well as emphasizing the importance of establishing it as its own genre. Some might argue that in extending a methodology, I am missing the point of Anzaldúa's belief in de-academizing theory and methodologies. I argue that point by stating that while I understand and believe in the importance of maintaining that sacred space of decolonized learning, a proposed methodology and genre for Chicanas' traumatic narratives within academia would not appease positivist modes of learning, but rather be a transference of that scared and safe learning space. Autohistoria-teoría holds that power to do so. Anzaldúa also

states that there are not enough women of color theorists, such as Chicanas, in academe that provide theories and methodologies for other women of color (*Making Face, Making Soul* xxv), meaning that at some point, Chicanas will have to be brave enough to begin that transference of our sacred and untainted modes of epistemology and start carving out spaces for other mujeres to join her. In the next chapter I will discuss the implications of autohistoria-teoría as a method of inquiry and genre within rhetoric and writing studies. I will further explain to my readers who are still doubtful over autohistoria-teoría's significance in the field about the importance of needing more of autohistoria-teoría because of the few examples available to us, as well as the necessity of hearing a variety of experiences from a variety of voices.

III. MY AUTOHISTORIA-TEORÍA PROCESS

Anzaldúa did not leave a concrete methodology of autohistoria-teoría, nor would she, as she believed that autohistorias constantly changed, shifted, and grew with new knowledge. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my processes are not definite methods, but rather a loose outline of how autohistoria-teoría may be accomplished for Chicanas whose truth is situated in trauma. I often asked myself if this was ‘okay’ and circled back and forth between offering a loose outline to guide other autohistoria-teoristas and abandoning the concept completely. However, I believe that just as autoethnography and testimonio have the power to create change and discover cultural truths, which I discuss in my last chapter, so does autohistoria, and arguably even more so.

Through descriptions found in Caren S. Neile’s essay “The 1001-Piece Nights of Gloria Anzaldúa: Autohistoria-teoría at Florida Atlantic University,” I was able to piece together a tentative outline of how Anzaldúa taught her students to write autohistoria-teoría. The following methodology is based on the information presented in Neile’s essay. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on a methodology of autohistoria-teoría that Chicanas can look to and utilize as they navigate their stories of trauma. Through email correspondence with Keating, I have come to learn that autohistoria-teoría must engage with magical thinking and shadow work, which is present in this chapter and in the following as I describe my space/stages of fleshing out my autohistoria-teoría and the stages/stages of conocimiento. However, Keating also made it clear that Anzaldúa is extremely generous with her theories, and even through the process of painful self-inscription, there is always a meaningful outcome available to all who wish to undergo

the paths of conocimiento. My autohistoria-teoría process was broken into stages to be completed over 16 weeks.

Because there is no readily available method of inquiry for autohistoria-teoría, I compiled the following space/stages and methodology according to the surrounding research I was able to find. To be clear, I label the following “space/stages” because they are not necessarily steps that can be done linearly, but rather one can be in two space/stages at the same time (“now let us shift” 552). These space/stages included two heuristic exercises, an auto-ecological analysis, an analysis of the writing process, an affirmation of spiritual vision, and finally, synthesis into a complete autohistoria-teoría. As I gathered data (by completing these space/stages), I followed Anzaldúa’s seven space/stages of conocimiento for analysis and interpretation of the data, as it was assembled, throughout the process of composing my autohistoria-teoría (“now let us shift” 540).

I am aware that by proposing a methodology and genre, I may be risking reinforcing prevailing modes of knowledge by suggesting a more concrete methodology of autohistoria-teoría. However, I move forward with hope and care that as I come into new ways of knowing, new perspectives, and new orderings of experiences, I may, as Anzaldúa does, honor her methodological processes by utilizing conocimiento and magical thinking as I “use ‘dreaming’ or ensueños (the making of images) to figure out what’s wrong; foretell current and future events; and establish hidden, unknown connections between lived experiences and theory” (*Light In the Dark* 5). One of these images in the making is an autohistoria-teoría when it is being written into speaking a reality. I will now discuss the methodological space/stages I underwent as I processed

and followed this tentative method of inquiry for my own autohistoria-teoría.

The following are the space/stages I followed in crafting my autohistoria-teoría, as I shifted between relational, self-reflective, cultural, political paradigms, as well as storytelling, myth, and transformation while recalling, writing, analyzing, interpreting, and consulting Anzaldúan scholarship.

Space/stage One: Self/Cultural Intersections: Images From Your Mind Eye

Much like autoethnography, autohistoria-teoría begins with the writer recalling the individual's life. For this exercise, Anzaldúa recommends to “picture a movie screen in your mind's eye. Allow memories to surface. See your life as though a movie you are watching. See yourself as a character in it. Watch the cycle of events of your life unroll before you” (Neile 23). After summarizing their life, the autohistorian then goes through the process of listing different periods and sectioning them into four or five areas. These central memories can be moments of transformation, of pain and loss, of coming into *conocimiento* – whatever the prevailing images that come to the autohistorian's mind. The autohistorian may then decide to choose their central memory, “project it on the screen,” and take “note [of] people, things, sensual perceptions, emotions, [and] intuitive reactions” (Neile 23).

My self/culture intersections or “movie clips” where I paused to rewind, rewatch, analyze and make observations were sectioned into three major central memories: when I was sexually assaulted by a family member, when I left to college, and when I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. After much consideration, I decided to go with the first memory as it was the one that kept making me press the “rewind button.” The central

memory was from the year 1996, when I was about 5 years old. I remember feeling confused and fearful of older men, but I didn't know why. I concluded the memory with a reflection of questions: "What implications arise from trying to trust family enough to tell them about one's abuse, and then experiencing denial, anger, and mistreatment from them as retaliation for speaking out?" "How strong of an influence do the Ten Commandments of Marianismo have over Chicano families?" Explored further, this experience could compel me to see the consequences of being outspoken and unashamed about one's sexual abuse within the Chicano culture. "If one person is strong enough to speak out about one's experience, will it cause others to do the same?" "How will this affect Chicanas who believe strongly in gender norms and keeping silent about, seemingly, shameful events within their own families?"

I followed with recognizing key people in this memory, sensual perceptions, emotions, and intuitive reactions: "Grandpa was my abuser, Mami (my grandmother) knew about her husband but never did anything, Mom and Dad didn't know. At 5 years old no me di cuenta de lo que pasó, I was just suddenly very scared around Grandpa, and around older men, to the degree that it affected my other grandpa on my mom's side. Even to this day I feel uneasy around older men. I was a llorona, a crybaby, every family portrait we took when we were kids showed me with red puffy eyes and a runny nose. I didn't know how to communicate to the adults in my life. I felt lost, confused, and scared." I realized that as I examined this memory, I didn't know what had happened when my grandfather abused me. I didn't have the available means to communicate so I buried it and forgot about it until about five years ago when all my cousins and siblings met up, and we discussed our family's drama and our childhood trauma. It was then, that

as a consciously aware adult woman, who now had that linguistic knowledge and emotional complexity, did I fully comprehend what was done to me. I ended this exercise with the question: “Why does it seem as a rebellion for a woman in my culture to speak out against their aggressors?”

Space/stage Two: Smaller Pieces of Our Desconocimiento

The second space/stage is examining your desconocimiento, the shadow beasts that hold you down, otherwise known as your insecurities and fear. Anzaldúa describes shadow beasts as “expos[ing] our innermost fears, forcing us to interrogate our souls” (“now let us shift” 309). It is a taxing process, given that many of us would rather turn away from the darker sides of us, such as fear, hate, pain, and insecurities; however, it is a necessary step towards enlightenment and writing an autohistoria. You must, as Anzaldúa does, face your fears.

My shadow beast comes to me at night, during classes, and likes to hover over my shoulder when I attempt to flesh out my autohistoria. It clasps its paws over my hands, claws threatening to pierce me – it is impossible to write. I barely get sleep during this period, stressed with my new transition into balancing my workload as a new graduate student, Instructional Assistant, and Research Assistant. My shadow beast knows me all too well, whispering – *you really think you can write? Who are you? A little chicanita from the sticks who barely made it into graduate school, and you think you will be the mother of some revolutionary act? Look at you – your family will disown you; you’ll get in big trouble with your father’s side of the family...you have nothing important to say.* I jump up when I hear its whispers and feel its caresses, pacing helps, and it will slink into

a corner waiting to catch me off-guard again.

Space/stage Three: Relationship to Nature: An Auto-Ecological Analysis

Anzaldúa was adamant about preserving ecological systems and about connecting with nature from one living organism to another. This space/stage requires the autohistorian to submerge themselves in nature, to the best of their ability, and to whatever their current circumstances can allow. According to Niele, Anzaldúa assigned a short writing assignment asking her students to reflect upon their relationship with nature as part of the autohistoria-teoría process.

I carry my autohistoria inside me for days, too timid to write it down because once the words are on paper or on the screen, there's no going back, a threshold will be crossed. During the day I have to resist the temptation to sit down and write outside; I walk quickly past the mountain laurels with their intoxicating scent, past my favorite oak tree on campus that invites me to some shade under its lofty branches. I ignore the birds singing and the flutter of butterfly wings that catch the glint of sunshine. At night I stay indoors and look up at the moon through my window. I see Venus sparkling proudly next to Coyolxauhqui and shiver with excitement and wonder. There's a drumbeat that's slowly surfacing from the depths of my Self, a pull that I can no longer ignore, my autohistoria is demanding to be let out.

The next day I go to Sewell Park and sit by the playful San Marcos river. Before I begin writing, I allow myself to feel that connection to nature which I have been denying myself. I watch the seaweed bend to the river's current, the fishes dance around each

other, and the students laughing and canoeing. With a deep breath, I open my laptop and begin to write, the birds' music serving as my muse. I become like the river and my autohistoria begins to flow out of me dancing, playing, and laughing. In the distance, I can hear the Llorona's wail.

Space/stage Four: The Writing Process

Space/stage four requires the autohistorian to reflect upon their writing process as they fleshed out their autohistorias. This space/stage may certainly be when the autohistorian applies the teoria (the theory) to their autohistoria (story). While Niele doesn't explicitly state what Anzaldúa required them to do for this assignment, based off of a healthy amount of scholarship and theorizing Anzaldúa left behind, I was able to navigate and examine my own writing process.

There are two necessary components when writing an autohistoria: magical thinking and shadow work. As discussed in the preface of this thesis, magical thinking is the act of "evok[ing] material and spirit based approaches to thought and imagination," which may look like but not limited to, ritual, meditative prayer, incantation, and creations of alternative selves such as alter egos (nagualas) (Keating 346). Shadow work is the act of excavatory thinking that requires the autohistorian to unearth painful and dark memories of trauma from their selves. Shadow work may manifest itself in different ways, such as emotions ranging from avoidance, pain, anger, hate, clarity, and exhaustion. To be clear, shadow work is one of the most taxing components of crafting an autohistoria.

According to Anzaldúa, her writing process encapsulates several space/stages and

components which I have addressed. Her writing process is rigorous and complex and serves as a model for my own composition procedure. The following is her description on the act of writing during an interview with Andrea Lunsford which I found useful during this fourth space/stage:

The act of writing for me is this kind of dismembering of everything that I am feeling, taking it apart to examine it and then reconstituting it or recomposing it again but in a new way. So that means I really have to get into the feeling – the anger, the anguish, the sadness, the frustration. I have to get into this heightened state, which I access sometimes by being very, very quiet and doing some deep breathing, or by some little tiny meditation, or by burning some incense, or whatever gets me there. Sometimes I walk along the beach. So I access this state, I get all psyched up, and then I do the writing (“Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric” 9-10).

It is during this step that the autohistorian theorizes her self/cultural intersections, her mind’s image, her autohistoria, the surrounding research and scholarship she has incorporated, and what this means. By making a critical self and cultural analysis, she is able to theorize and write her examinations and new *conocimiento* for others to learn. The following is my meta-analysis that show my examinations of my writing process throughout my autohistoria-teoría. In this sample, one can observe magical thinking, shadow work, and a taxing writing process similar to Anzaldúa’s description.

My Writing Process Analysis: I Am Like Masa

As I sit down to write my central memory, my mind’s image, my heart races and

my hands shake. I begin to feel insecure, embarrassed, and vulnerable. I imagine myself like the squishy masa in the hands of an elderly Mexican woman; she reminds me of the women who I've been surrounded by all my life. They're the type of women who will spend hours preparing the family dinner, making everything from scratch – especially the tortillas. These women who wear thin aprons the colors of bright pinks and blues, with socks and chanclas they bought from the flea market. Their chubby hands riddled with age spots and popping veins but nevertheless, those hands continue to pat-pat-pat the gorditas into shape, roll the tortillas into perfect circles, and handle a butcher knife with ease when they chop off the pig fat. These women who aren't afraid to smack hands away from the sizzling pans of guisados on the stove and whack a child or grown man on the head with a wooden spoon for sneaking a bite of pan dulce before dinner. The same women who taught me how to make pan de polvo, how to cut limes perfectly, and how life “was a bitch!” I imagine a woman, much like these women, now struggling with me – the masa. She's muttering to herself as she kneads the dough, it doesn't want to yield to her hands, it doesn't want to soften and let itself over to her control and take shape. I'm tense. I'm *dura*. I breathe and begin to write. I stop. I close my eyes and remember. Before I can write, I must remember. I'm not sure which is most difficult. Remembering the trauma or reliving it through my writing? I decide writing my memories is the harder part. By writing down my experiences, I am diving into the recesses of my mind where these memories have been carefully locked up. I am carving my memories, my words, unto a stone tablet with bloody fingers. I grimace from the pain as I write down another memory. And another, and another...

Grandpas aren't supposed to do those kinds of things with their granddaughters.

Uncles shouldn't sneak you out of the house in the middle of the night when the rest of the family is asleep. Fathers aren't supposed to touch their children that way. Grandmas are supposed to be loving, not vindictive; not jealous because her husband is giving their grandchildren more affection than he gives her. More affection, more attention, more candies, more everything. Everything. Weren't abuelas supposed to protect their nieta/os?

He had a box of candies that he would bring out. His legs were missing, so he'd roll around the house on his creaky black wheelchair. The sound of plastic wheels running over the uneven and cracked floor tile made me cringe. He liked to offer me lollipops and he saved the Snickers for my cousin Liz; I'd find out years later. This man with no legs ran off with our innocence, took our trust and bolted. Turned the blue house on L Street into a concentration camp for the Colchado grandchildren. We were sent there by our parents to die. But they didn't know they were marching us right up to the gates of hell, how could they? How could they know about Grandpa? He was just a sweet handicapped man with a bad past. It's called forgiveness, don't you know? So he beat his wife and children. So he was an alcoholic cobbling his way to the bar on one leg with a crutch until they chopped off his other leg. So he abused his daughters. So, so, so? Forgive and forget. He can watch the kids, what can he do now anyways, huh?

Our small faces desperately peering out at them from behind the window curtain. *Mama, papa, I don't wanna stay with Grandpa. I don't wanna be here. Take me with you, I'll behave!* We start to cry as we watch him wave goodbye from his deceptive wheelchair, our parents' backs turned to us as they walk down the ramp. The irony of the windows being barred with black iron. If our parents would've turned around maybe they would've seen the prison they threw us in? They would've recognized the corrupt

warden? Either way, they never turned around to follow the piercing gazes fixed on their backs. They never saw.

The table that I'm sitting at is dripping blood. Exhausted, I lay my head down on my rock of pulsating words. My cheeks feel hot and wet, feelings of shame and liberation wash over me. The smell of iron rising from the hot stone. I wonder now, if I'm more kneadable. I imagine the viejita finally smiling as she is able to mold the warm masa, heated by the constant friction of her insistent hands, shape it into a small pudgy ball and roll into a perfect circle.

Space/stage Five: Spiritual Activism

One of the key features that separates autohistoria-teoría from other autobiographical modes of inquiry is the invoking of spiritual activism. According to Keating, Anzaldúa's theory of spiritual activism "posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs nonbinary modes of thinking...at the ethical level, spiritual activism requires concrete actions designed to intervene in and transform existing social conditions...spiritual activism is spirituality for social change" (*The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 323). As an example of spiritual activism, Niele explains the influence that Anzaldúa had on their class by the end of the semester. Her students are the product of spiritual activism, says Niele, and recalls a comment from one of them: "*Gloria taught me that her seemingly smooth blend of autohistoria and theory was, in fact, an intellectual labor of crushing complexity. Her deep regard for the human spirit, in all its manifestations, and recognition of life experience as part of that spirit, brought me closer to acceptance of myself and my work*" (author's italics; 26).

My spiritual activism is seen in the last section of my autohistoria-teoría. It is a call to action to other Chicanas, and my autohistoria-teoría has propelled me to move forward through outward acts such as creating a support group for Chicanas who are survivors of sexual abuse and assault, becoming a member of Alma de Mujer Y Vida – a woman’s empowerment group dedicated to the equality of the sexes based in Mexico, speaking out, and composing this thesis which I hope one day will give another that courage and conocimiento to begin unraveling from their red balls of yarn, cross thresholds, and make their own bridges.

IV. AUTOHISTORIA-TEORÍA ANALYSIS

Once I had completed the previous space/stages, I was ready to transform my autohistoria into my autohistoria-teoría. For the last space/stage, my complete autohistoria-teoría should be, according to Niele and Keating, a minimum of seven pages and should incorporate relational, self-reflective, cultural, political, storytelling, myth, and transformation (21; 329). It should also go under a heavy revision process. During my autoethnography course I was in a peer revision group which proved immensely helpful during my autohistoria's first stages of coming into being. Later, after the semester had passed, I leaned on my own comadres of writing to critique my autohistoria-teoría, as well as turning to the professor of my autoethnography course for edit suggestions. Based on the feedback I received from my peers and from an expert in autobiographical modes of writing, I needed to organize my sections that would allow for a cohesive reading, as well as apply a more descriptive scenes to allow my readers a better understanding of my experience. As I was fleshing out my autohistoria-teoría, I underwent the seven stages of *conocimiento*. The seven stages of *conocimiento* can be seen in my autohistoria-teoría, though not directly stated. The seven stages are as follows:

1. *el arrebatado – the rupture*
2. *nepantla...torn between ways*
3. *the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing*
4. *the call - el compromiso – the crossing and conversion*
5. *putting Coyolxauhqui together – new personal and collective “stories”*
6. *the blow-up – a clash of realities*

7. *shifting realities – acting out the vision or spiritual activism*

The Seven Stages of Conocimiento

I have provided a concise outline of the seven stages of conocimiento and will now describe my experience with each space/stage. In order to give a robust understanding of Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento, I will cite one of her most succinct descriptions of it for my readers:

Conocimiento urges us to respond not just with the traditional practices of spirituality (contemplation, meditation, and private rituals) or with technologies of political activism (protests, demonstrations, and speakouts), but with the amalgam of the two: spiritual activism, which we've also inherited along with *sombra*. Conocimiento pushes us into engaging the spirit in confronting our social sickness with new tools and practices whose goal is to effect a shift (*Light In the Dark* 19).

Space/stage one: el arrebató – the rupture

In order to come into new knowledge, we see that old ways of knowing and existing paradigms within our cultural and societal circles no longer fit our master narratives. Space/stage one "leads to re-interpreting the story you imagined yourself living, bringing it to a dramatic end and initiating one of turmoil, being swallowed by your fears, and passing through a threshold" (Anzaldúa 587).

I encountered the first space/stage as I began to unearth painful memories of my childhood, of the multiple cultural norms that bound me up and silenced me. I fought with my family's motto of "family over everything," when I realized that family were

the ones who hurt me the most, cut the deepest, gagged the tightest. Upon falling into a rupture, I was suddenly decentered and frightened to have lost that illusion of stability. I became aware of the injustice and oppression surrounding me. I saw through my culture, I was separated from the herd, exiled from the tribe, wounded psychologically and spiritually. I began what Anzaldúa describes as an awakening; I questioned who I was and what the world and my beliefs were about. I struggled to regain my balance and plunged into the ambiguity of the transition phrase.

Space/stage two: nepantla...torn between ways

Nepantla is derived from the Nahuatl word “in-between.” Anzaldúa refers to those who live in the constant state of nepantla as “nepantleras” and “bridge-crossers,” and seeing as they often are mediators of opposing perspectives are even called “bridges” themselves. Nepantleras live between the cracks of worlds, being able to see through restrictive cultural and personal scripts. However, Keating explains that “although it might be tempting to celebrate nepantleras for their ability to move among so many divergent worlds, it’s important to recognize the painful dimensions of this world-travelling. Their inability or refusal to remain within a single group or worldview makes them as vulnerable to rejection, ostracism, and other forms of isolation” (“From Borderlands and New Mestizas” 9). Nepantla is a liminal state where a process of change occurs within a transitional change in life.

I moved into the second space/stage of nepantla as I examined my prevailing cultures’ practices that have harmed me. Yet not wanting to completely detach myself from them (because I still held many other of their values in high regard and they were

my gente), I tried to reconcile the damaging ideologies and cultural practices they preached with my new knowledge. I lived in a constant “in-between” state. I would urge my family to begin looking at gender roles differently – why must the women always cook and clean and serve and quedar bien? I would challenge their ways of life. I would be silenced by shame and embarrassment when somebody would justify these norms with biblical passages and church doctrine. If I had a weak spot, it was my church congregation, which I held close to my heart. But living in the state of nepantla finally gave a logical description to my emotions, and what others have called, rebellion.

I began transitioning every time I would come into new knowledge about my culture, such as the cult of womanhood and Marianismo. Both the cult of womanhood and Marianismo are cultural expectations of women as members of the private-home sphere, the only difference is that Marianismo is explicitly for Latinas, while the cult of womanhood is based on westernized Anglo culture – as a Chicana from Texas, I belong to both. I began to further examine biblical texts, focusing on the passages that others would use against me. When a brother from church would preside over the sermon, I would scrutinize his textual evidence and his logic. I finally came to the decision that it’s not my church that is wrong, it’s not the doctrine – it’s the people, and specifically those few individuals who are given the rhetorical platform to stand up and preach their interpretation of the doctrine, making it seem as though it were law, when in actuality, it was opinion. The same with my Chicano culture. It was steeped in fear. Fear of embarrassment, shame, dishonor on the family, of coming off as weak. Fear was the machine that ran the culture of silence within my family. These two cultural intersections were intertwined. Within nepantla, I began to see the makings of a new bridge as I

gapped the space between my old realities and the ones I that were coming into view.

Space/stage three: the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing

If conocimiento is the act of coming into knowledge, then desconocimiento is the flipside of that binary. Anzaldúa encapsulates her idea of desconocimiento through the image of Coatlicue. Coatlicue was an ancient Aztec goddess known as “Serpent Skirts,” who has a horrific appearance with a skirt made out of snakes and a human skull necklace (Keating 320). Anzaldúa takes the story of Coatlicue and uses it to symbolize one’s state of unknowing what they thought they knew and coming into new knowledge. It’s a painful process of discovery. The Coatlicue state is a time of an awakening consciousness: “only when you emerge from the dead with soul intact can you honor the visions you dreamed up in the depths” of desconocimiento (Anzaldúa 554). Similarly, Adrienne Rich calls it a time when the sleepwalkers are waking up, saying it’s an exciting time for women but “it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful” (When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision 269).

Even though I knew my grandfather was a child molester, I didn’t want to accept it. Family isn’t supposed to do that to each other. I battled with depression and anxiety as I continued my shadow work, often times crying over my laptop and books. During that time, my cousin Elizabeth (Liz) called me to tell me she was flying in from Chicago and wanted to see me. We agreed to meet at the River Walk in San Antonio, where she would be staying at a nearby hotel. This was my chance to ask her about grandpa, to hear the full story about what she had experienced. I thought to myself, if I can hear her story then it will be real and I won’t be able to deny it anymore. I looked forward to our meeting

with fear and anticipation.

We lay on the hotel's plush white bed, drinking rusas and laughing over the time my father poured cumin instead of cinnamon into the Christmas champurrado. After our laughter died down, I decided to muster up the courage and ask Liz about grandfather. She blinked, stayed quiet for a few moments, and then turned to face me, asking "You really want to know, 'cuz? Are you sure?" I gulped and said yes. Liz didn't cry or spew out angry curses, instead she told her story as if looking at her memories from a distance. She crooned to me the story of a little girl who was afraid of her grandfather and Snicker bars. I immediately felt guilt and shame – here I was mad about the time my grandfather assaulted me, when my cousin was forced to endure years of abuse by the same man. I admitted my feelings to her, eyes downcast, I couldn't bear to meet her loving gaze. She squeezed my hand and said "I know about the project you're doing, Sam told me. You're writing over the cochineras our family made us roll in. Wanna know what I think, mija? Send that man and that family to hell."

I nodded and began climbing out of the depths.

Space/stage four: the call - el compromiso – the crossing and conversion

Anzaldúa says that in order to transform, to learn, and to learn what to transform into, one must ask "how can I contribute?" (557). This space/stage of *conocimiento* requires one to look straight into their fears and call them by their names, they become aware of the lies that have been fabricated by society and cultures. It is standing on the threshold of a bridge, but in order "to pass over the bridge to something else, you'll have to give up partial organizations of self, erroneous bits of knowledge, outmoded beliefs of

who you are, your comfortable identities (your story of self, tu autohistoria). You'll have to leave parts of yourself behind" (Anzaldúa 557).

I don't write easily about myself or my trauma. I struggle to come up with the words, I have a hard time seeing my mind's image, I feel uncomfortable giving up a piece of myself. What if I have nothing to offer? I ask myself as I stand at the threshold. I see myself as a tightly wound-up ball of red yarn. It's suffocating. I think about my cousins, my mentors, my mother, myself. I feel that magnetic and exhilarating pull coming from the other side of the bridge and I know that that is my path to follow. I reach inside and offer my heart and tear out fallacious concepts of my Self and my cultures. They taunt me – *You're just a girl – Why do I want women to go to college? So they'll end up angry, like you? – You better find yourself a husband fast, your clock is ticking, mija – The reason you haven't found a good brother yet is because you're too smart, too intimidating, guys don't really like that – somos mujeres, nacimos para sufrir.* They squirm in my hand. My foot hovers over the threshold and as I lean forward, I am pulled over and in by a strong gust of playful wind that press the handprints of my professors, of Gloria Anzaldúa, and of other mujeres fuertes on my back.

Space/stage five: putting Coyolxauhqui together – new personal and collective "stories"

Anzaldúa describes this space/stage as observing the old stories, concepts, and knowledge of ourselves. We have passed a turning point, crossed a threshold, and have chosen not to bring those dead pieces of our past selves into the future. Instead we've "chosen to compose a new history and self- to rewrite [our] autohistoria...[we] shed [our] former bodymind and its outworn story like a snake its skin" (Anzaldúa 558-559). We

come into a newly-formed sense of self, of vision, of autohistorias. We begin weaving new personal and collective stories together to form meaning and understanding.

I fall over the threshold, my red ball of yarn of Self quickly unraveling as I leave behind dead pieces of my Self, of who I use to be, and my perceptions of cultural concepts. As I bounce along the path of *conocimiento*, thinning out to my core, I am no longer bound by *desconocimiento* (my red ball of yarn). I make it to the other side of the bridge, and I can see my hands. I stand on wobbly legs as I begin taking in new aspects of realities, of reassessing dominant narratives, and I know that I must rewrite my group/cultural story. I look at my hands and now they are my greatest tools for the weaving about to begin.

Space/stage six: the blow-up – a clash of realities

As I begin writing, I know that if my autohistoria ever gets into the hands or ears of my family, it could have serious consequences. During the day I wonder, theorize, examine, criticize, daydream, and analyze. At night, I am guided by the lamplight and *Querida* as I hunch over my laptop and type away. My new stories of self demanding to be fed like hungry children. I give them pieces of my heart, lungs, and breasts, to appease them, to help me understand what they're trying to say. When I go back home, I am asked how school is going, and what I'm writing over. My father looks at me over the dinner table, looking half-interested, and my mother is on her phone. I shoot a sideways glance at Karen; she's the only one at the dinner table who knows what I've been writing about. She meets my gaze and raises her eyebrows in a hopeful suggestion. I open my mouth. The words caught in my throat like water backed up in a drain, I squeak out some

unintelligible sounds. My parents don't seem to notice, and this gives me the push to articulate what I've been trying to say for years.

Shit hits the fan. My father stays silent, jaw muscles clenching and unclenching, he won't look at me. My mother's eyebrows are raised into her hairline, her facial expression is a mix of shock, disapproval, and amusement. The next few minutes are tense and uncomfortable for everyone. Father has to leave the table and goes to his room, my mother stays behind and says, "He knew his father and his brother were child molesters. He just doesn't want to accept it. But I don't know about you writing about our business for everyone to see - that isn't right. Our problems shouldn't be made into some kind of entertainment for gringos, it's like airing your dirty laundry for everyone to see. That's not prudent. ¿No te da vergüenza?" My head reels and I want to show my mother the new pieces of knowledge, stories, and bits of myself that I've come into on my journey. I want to tell her about marianismo, about Anzaldúa, about spirituality and trauma, and I want to show her the dead pieces that I've thrown away. I want to point to those dead pieces of desconocimiento and say – *See? Now it's you and dad's turn!* But I don't say anything. Caught between my family and my calling, I remain silent trying to figure out how to reconcile and recover from the clash.

Karen squeezes my hand, "They'll come around." In the meantime, I decide to be that bridge for my parents. I remain open to the possibilities that my work, my autohistoria, will one day be acknowledged, and we can move towards peace, understanding, and love.

Space/stage seven: shifting realities – acting out the vision or spiritual activism

AnaLouise Keating describes spiritual activism as a “spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (“From Borderlands and New Mestizas” 11). Anzaldúa describes spiritual activism as a contract of holistic alliances that through reflective dialogue allows conflict to dissolve. Spiritual activism is a call to action: “Through the act of writing you call, like the ancient chamana, the scattered pieces of your soul back to your body. You commence the arduous task of rebuilding yourself, composing a story that more accurately expresses your new identity. You seek out allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice” (Anzaldúa 573-574). Spiritual activism is the act of piecing your Self and the new paradigm shifts of your realities together in order to tell your story, the one that “fits” and lets you “Be.” You have discovered your purpose and look for others who will help you make a difference in this world. You first must change yourself in order to change the world, as Anzaldúa says.

I pray that as my hands weave personal and collective stories, my autohistoria-teoría may be used as a medium for social change. As I write my autohistoria, I am sewing on other patches of stories/realities of the women who have come forth with their own stories of trauma. I found that as I spoke up about my sexual assault from my grandfather, other women in my culture who were listening leaned in and told me their experiences, too. Many recounted their own autohistorias angrily, shouting the words, tired of the silence; others sang them to me like a sad lullaby, resigned and yet hopeful; and the ones who perhaps made the biggest impact in my weaving-writing, were the ones

who leaned in and whispered their stories in my ear, eyes a bit wide with fear and uncertainty, but there was a glint of something I couldn't quite give a name to, tears plopping on my shoulder, body shaking from the recalling of trauma that their own balls of yarn hadn't freed them from just yet. I listened to these mujeres, many of them my friends and others quickly became a part of the circle. We had forged a community of Chicanas who were trying to make sense of our desconocimiento, living as neplanteras, as survivors of trauma, of coming into conocimiento, and we wanted our voices to be heard. We decided to make those steps, however small they may be, towards change in our culture, towards a recognition of the pain and anger we felt and open ourselves to the exciting and hopeful possibilities that come with making bridges as we walked.

The process of my autohistoria was a painstaking one. The journey was not, is not, easy—it never will be. I began to write about my experience with sexual assault before I processed that it happened to me. When I was younger and still believed the lies my family would tell us about my grandfather, I convinced myself what had happened to me was just a dream. How could a man with such a good testimony be a child molester? When he died, he received an honor that my church gives to members who have persevered in the faith. All of the church was present at his wake and burial. I walked up to the open casket with my parents and siblings, watching as some wiped away tears. In the background my grandmother was wildly shrieking, unable to receive consolation from concerned sisters. When I peered over the casket, my father told me to kiss his cheek because this would be the last time I'd see him. His skin was cold and rubbery. I held my little sister's hand as we walked back down the aisle, receiving pitying looks from some of the brothers present. *What a shame to have lost such a faithful brother!* His

hands felt like nopales. *But he's sleeping now, se durmió, he didn't just die.* His gaze on my back made me sick. *The hermano Domingo fought the good fight.* The candy box full of Snicker bars he'd save for Liz is still hidden in his dresser. *He's resting in the bosom of Abraham, now.* The slow creak of his wheelchair running over the broken floor tiles, coming closer, my sisters and I hiding under the bed. *Don't be sad your grandpa is gone we'll see him in Heaven one day.* As I walk down the aisle, I have to fight to keep from laughing. I squeeze my sister's hand and she squeezes my hand back. The Llorona is happy.

It was only when I came into my mestiza consciousness and gathered strength from other strong Chicanas around me that I began to look at my weapons and began honing them. I craved vengeance. I looked in the direction of my tíos and sharpened my knife—my tongue, my hands, the pen. I was tired of just crying, so I began yelling, telling others to wake up, become aware, get informed. I started to call out some of the perpetrators I knew. I was called a sangrona, a cold-blooded woman who didn't care about other people's feelings. I wore the label proudly.

While writing this autohistoria I have had a frightening number of women and girls come up to me and tell me a story similar to mine. I have turned into a shoulder to cry on for many, a guardian of secrets to some, an unmovable rock to rest on, a tree deeply rooted that will bend down to give others a chance to be lifted up. Since having been unbound from my red ball of yarn by friends and mentors who played the part of those jagged and bony hands, I have been able to help others unwind, too. I implore those who are still tangled in their yarn to stay steadfast in hope and when enough courage is gathered to break the gags and slime binding you—*yell*. Yell as loud as you can. Become

a llorona, become a gritona, become a sangrona. I realize I only address women and some men in Chicano culture experiencing sexual abuse, however this message is for all.

Through my autohistoria-teoría I aspire to inform everyone, Chicanx in particular, about the alarming rates of sexual abuse within Chicano families and bring awareness to mental, emotional, and spiritual healing from the infiltration of our borders. Many will not like my message, many will condemn me, call me a vendida to my people, maybe even make me a pariah in my family.

Querida begins to sharpen her spear, my fingers hover over the keyboard. Buzzing.
¿Y qué!? I'm ready.

“Moonlight,
vigilant guardian,
warrior moon,
we ask.
We plead.
Soften the pain with your light,
Coyolxauhqui!
Help us remember
our true selves.
¡Gracias!”
(Cantú 22-23)

I go by many names and titles: Llorona, Cry Baby, angel, liar, Gritona, loud-mouth, friend, sister, Sangrona, sólo para nombrar unos pocos.

V. IMPLICATIONS

As with most research, this project was guided by a specific set of questions. “I wanted to know “what is autohistoria-teoría as a method of inquiry and genre?” “What does autohistoria-teoría do that other methods of inquiry and genres might not be able to do, specifically for Chicanas’ traumatic narratives?” “How does autohistoria-teoría perform as a rhetorical platform for Chicanas’ traumatic narratives in a predominantly positivist culture that devalues, distrusts, shames, or otherwise ignores personal experience as a serious method of inquiry?” “What can she do to bridge empathy, trust, and understanding between those in academic institutions who do not view autohistoria-teoría as a serious method of inquiry and genre and those who do?” “How can autohistoria-teoría, as a method of inquiry and genre which employs decolonial writing processes such as magical thinking, shadow work, and spiritual activism provide a rhetorical space for Chicanas’ traumatic narratives to just Be?” “How does she enact spiritual activism within academic spaces?” “What are the implications of autohistoria-teoría within academia?” “What are the implications of autohistoria-teoría for writing and rhetoric theory, pedagogy, and research?”

While I believe that some of the answers to these questions are implicit in my autohistoria-teoría, I can add to them. In this chapter I discuss the implications of autohistoria-teoría for Chicana populations - the importance of carving out a narrative space for Chicanas’ traumatic autohistoria-teorías, then I will explain how autohistoria-teoría can be a bridge of understanding, trust, and empathy between autohistoria-teoristas and positivists. Afterwards, I will discuss the implications of autohistoria-teoría for

related qualitative studies such as autoethnography and testimonio. Then I will follow up with implications for future research within writing and rhetoric studies and how my thesis is an act of spiritual activism. I will conclude this chapter with the consequences of autohistoria-teoría as a method of inquiry and genre within academia.

Implications of Autohistoria-teoría for Chicana Populations

Writing and Identity

Autohistoria-teoría has the potential to carve out rhetorical spaces within Rhetoric and Writing studies for Chicanas. Now that I have demonstrated how my autohistoria-teoría allows a Chicana from the Texas-Mexico border to have rhetorical independence and enact bicultural nuances, I will explain the importance of writing and identity for Chicanas using autohistoria-teoría as that vessel of representation. As such, Anzaldúa's *Luz En Lo Oscuro* is a culmination of her philosophical and theoretical perspectives on rhetoric and method of inquiry. Anzaldúa uses personal narratives to conceptualize and contextualize her theories of "weaving together mexicana, Chicana, indigenous, feminist, queer, tejana, and esoteric" perspectives (Keating 2015 xxxvii). She discusses identity politics, globalization, decolonization, Marxism, and feminism through a mestiza consciousness, such as her nepantla theory. Nepantla is when one is caught between two worlds, two realities. Anzaldúa calls those who are caught in nepantla, nepantleras ("in-betweeners") who are "supreme border crossers...[and] act as intermediaries between cultures and their various versions of reality" ("Speaking Across the Divide" 20). She plays with different forms of self-identities and dismantled worldviews such as autohistoria-teoría. Nepantla is a key feature within my own autohistoria-teoría, as a

Chicana from Texas who has embodied both indigenous and western practices, *nepantla* is a key aspect of my identity and writing.

To further expand on the concept of *autohistoria-teoría* for my readers, there is a difference between the terms ‘*autohistoria*’ and *autohistoria-teoría*: *autohistoria* acts as a genre and “focuses on the personal life story,” that is, the narrative, while *autohistoria-teoría*, “describe[s] a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection on this storytelling process” (241-242). *Autohistoria-teoría* serves as the analysis and evaluation of the writer’s *autohistoria*, participating in a meaning-making activity, and is the methodological process of *autohistoria*. In her essay “Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s *Autohistoria-Teoría* As An Epistemology of Self-Knowledge/Ignorance,” Andrea J. Pitts proposes “that *autohistoria-teoría* is characterized by several important features: *autohistoria-teoría* is collaborative, sensuously embodied, and productive of critical self-reflection, which can be both harmful and enabling” (347). When the *autohistorian* begins to evaluate and connect meaning from her *autohistoria* to a culture, she risks being consumed by negative recollections from the past, especially if those memories are traumatic. What happens, then, may result in new ways of knowing, an epistemological approach that can serve the writer as well as the reader (Anzaldúa believes they cannot be separated) in understanding and evaluating various self-identities and worldviews. By employing excavatory recollections of traumatic events in the *autohistorian*’s life, they enact what Keating and Bhattacharya calls “shadow work” and “magical thinking,” both methodological steps that differ in some ways from methods common to autoethnography and testimonio (346).

Shadow work is the process of excavatory deep thinking to unearth painful and traumatic parts of our memories and identities (345). In addition to introducing the term “shadow work,” they also claim that autohistoria-teoría must employ magical thinking “which is neither understood nor honored in academia” (346). Magical thinking allows the autohistorian to enact in a decolonial process of writing when she “evokes material- and spirit-based approaches to thought and imagination” that go against traditional western modes of writing that favor *logos* according to positivist perspectives (346). Decolonial processes of writing that magical thinking may call upon can be meditative prayer or ritual, a process that the autohistorian must undergo before beginning excavatory thinking. Another example is the creation of an alter-ego such as I do when writing my autohistoria-teorías (Querida). Anzaldúa calls this a “naguala,” which she calls her *musa bruja* to croon to her words and ideas to write.³ There is no “correct” way to enact magical thinking, and it has no specific methodology, which inherently makes this method unconventional within a positivist perspective. Thus, the creation of autohistoria-teorías involve interconnections between the physical and spiritual realms, shadow work, and ritualistic components which have all originated from women of color, making autohistoria-teoría a prime and opportunistic approach to decolonial processes and methods of writing.

My interest in Anzaldúa’s autohistoria-teoría prompted me to further explore her other theories such as *nepantla* and her spiritual activism, which I believe, is a key component in autohistoria-teoría. By the time I discovered Anzaldúa’s theory on spiritual

³ According to Anzaldúa, *naguala* is the feminine form of ‘*nagual*,’ which derives from the Nahuatl tradition. The *nagual* has, “generally three meanings: *nagual* as shapeshifter (usually human to animal forms), *nagual* as an animal that serves as a spirit guide, and *nagual* as ‘knower’” (DiPietro, et.al. 62).

activism, I was already incorporating bits and pieces of my own spiritual activism and ritual into my writing. Spiritual activism, as defined by Keating, is “a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics – a way of life and a call to action” (“From Borderlands and New Mestizas” 11). It was a validating and emotional moment when I came across scholarship discussing Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism through writing, specifically. In “El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision,” Anzaldúa explains, “We, the women here, take a trip back into the self, travel to the deep core of our roots to discover and reclaim our colored souls, our rituals, our religion. We reach a spirituality that has been hidden in the hearts of oppressed people under layers of traditional god-worship...Our spirituality does not come from outside ourselves. It emerges when we listen to the ‘small still voice’ within us which can empower us and create actual change in the world” (195). Spiritual activism is the outcome of transformational self-growth and self-reflection, combined with the purpose of creating material change through extroversive empathetic and compassionate acts. Keating brings up this same quote when she further explores what Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism is and is not.

In Keating’s essay “Forging El Mundo Zurdo: Changing Ourselves, Changing the World,” she explains that Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism is exactly what Audre Lorde would call a threat to the “mythical norm,” which in the United States is defined as “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (519). Because Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism is seen as an unorthodox method and outcome within academia, her theologies pose a threat. Keating labels this fear as a “difference-as-deviation,” and claims stereotypes, monolithic labels, and false assumptions of sameness will grow stronger if we keep trying to hold up the walls between self and other.

Anzaldúa, Keating explains, advocates that there is strength in difference, in a “visionary place where people from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs and concerns co-exist and work together to bring revolutionary change” (520). To do so, one must call upon one’s spiritual activism which “has its source within an individual, an individual scarred by oppressive contacts,” and channel that energy into resisting various forms of oppression (521). In this thesis, hegemonic discourses act as those various forms of oppression.

Spiritual activism, to be clear, is viewed as an unorthodox method within academia as it is a call to action for social change within existing paradigms that limit new modes of knowledge, such as hegemonic discourses do. This point is made clear when Keating ends her essay in defense of spiritual activism, stating that spiritual activism should not be confused for nor is it synonymous with escapism. Spiritual activism requires vulnerability, an interconnectedness between Self and Other, Nos/Otras, and an understanding that the spiritual components of life cannot be separated from writing.⁴ Ultimately, say Anzaldúa and Keating, spiritual activism means a form of self-sacrifice such as inscribing trauma, unearthing dark memories, and calling upon our vulnerability, which can be the source of one’s power. Spiritual activism is imperative to autohistoria-teoría, as it is the ultimate step within the proposed methodological outline in this thesis. Spiritual activism acts as a call to action through outward-directed compassionate acts, such as writing an autohistoria-teoría as one way of achieving the last step of this holistic approach.

⁴ Anzaldúa explains her theory of Nos/Otras as a clash of identities and social positions, “creating a hybrid consciousness that transcends the us versus them mentality of irreconcilable positions” (*Luz En Lo Oscuro* 79).

Autohistoria-teoría is a unique frame of autoethnography that Chicanas can use to fill their own rhetorical spaces and works significantly well for evocative or traumatic autohistorias. While autohistoria-teoría is similar to autoethnography as an autobiographical form of inquiry and as employing cultural interpretation, there are significant differences nonetheless, however fine they may be. Autohistoria-teoría is a methodological approach specific to Chicanas and their perspectives and trauma. It employs decolonial processes of methods and writing, even solidifying this genre's identity in its very name, a name that is not in English. Anzaldúa's spiritual activism and theoretical generosity have allowed me to further explore autohistoria-teoría and make connections within myself and my research.

Further expanding upon language and identity as a vital component in writing, Melissa Castillo-Garsow delves into her own autohistoria-teoría about running into Anzaldúa's work in academia and the importance of representation within English studies. Castillo-Garsow in her essay "The Legacy of Gloria Anzaldúa: Finding A Place for Women of Color in Academia," explains the advantages and complications of including Gloria Anzaldúa's work within academia. She argues that while Anzaldúa is a wonderful representative of Chicana literature and theory, there are still many issues on exclusion and theorizing within academia. Still, even when Anzaldúa had become a requirement in syllabi and included in the Norton Anthology, academe's doors were still tightly closed to other Chicana writers and theologians who were asking to be let in. Anzaldúa was aware of this, Castillo-Garsow says, and as a matter of fact Anzaldúa grew tired of being the go-to Chicana within her department, rather she enjoyed when others would take her ideas and use them for their own (Reuman 4).

Building upon the conversation of expanding restrictive paradigms within writing and rhetoric studies, specifically when it comes to writing and identity, she quotes Anzaldúa's call-to-action in *This Bridge* when she says we must dismantle these institutions that we perpetuate through our support, that we must not act as accomplices to oppression and are not screaming loud enough in protest. Castillo-Garsow ends her autohistoria-teoría with a chilling and resonating thought and reality for many Chicanas: These words written almost thirty years ago are still true and I urge you to scream with me louder in protest . . .while presenting a version of this paper at the First International Conference on the Life and Works of Gloria Anzaldúa . . . I was both impressed and dismayed at the absence of these voices in English departments. Yet until we value Anzaldúa's struggle to be both of and outside the academy and take it as our own, her vision of a world without bridges will never exist. (305-306)

Castillo-Garsow further explores Anzaldúa's mestiza rhetoric and revisionist history as ways in which she engages with what Chela Sandoval terms as "interventionary tactics that are designed to shift powers that operate inside any sign system" (*Methodology of the Oppressed* 27). A vital way to counter the development of inequitable and hegemonic writing standards and discourses within curricula, is writing from one's roots as way for Chicanas to reclaim their spaces, voices, and identities with have been overlooked, undervalued, and silenced.

Autohistoria-teoría

Autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría were created by Gloria Anzaldúa to provide a methodology and genre for Chicanas' narratives, thoughts, and perceptions, free from

western conventions of autobiography and theory. As a methodology and genre, autohistoria-teoría takes theorizing the personal to “expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories such as healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual and collective transformation” (Keating 242). While autoethnography, testimonio, and autohistoria-teoría may serve as powerful modes of self-cultural understandings and epistemology, and have similar approaches, there are still nuanced differences between their methodologies. To be clear, these differences are as simple as autoethnography being named in English, rather than in Spanish. While, some may argue that the naming of a genre doesn’t hold much relevance, I would argue otherwise. In giving a genre a name that encompasses one’s origins, language, and identity, it opens up a broader and more comfortable platform for the historically oppressed, whose oppression may stem from the English language.

While some may say that autohistoria-teoría is “trauma porn,” I would argue that it is not. Trauma porn is described as “the perverse fascination with other people’s misfortune” to which the “upsetting portrayals of [trauma] [are] stripped of their emotional impact as [people] sink into the depths of content overload” (Meley “The Pointless Consumption of Pain in the Era of Trauma Porn”). As autohistoria-teoría is neither a perverse fascination with other’s pain nor is it stripped of its emotional impact, it does not qualify as trauma porn. Autohistoria-teoría as a rhetorical platform for Chicanas’ traumatic narratives seeks to acquire a deeper understanding of the Self and surrounding cultures and undergo a rigorous process of self-healing. Trauma porn has neither the substance, complexity, nor the intention of carrying out the objectives a traumatic autohistoria-teoría would.

Making Face, Making Soul, Making Space

Autohistoria-teoría as a method, even a tentative one, made it possible for me to peel back thick layers of my surrounding cultures that involved my identity as a survivor of sexual assault. Before I began this research, I would only allow myself to acknowledge partial truths about what had happened to me and about my family, fearing the consequences of shedding light to the actual reality. I allowed myself to believe the dominant narrative that it was the victim's fault for what had happened to her. I should've known better than to sleep next to my grandfather at five years old. I had been overwhelmed with shame, embarrassment and anger. Autohistoria-teoría allowed me to investigate further rather than keep sweeping my emotions and memories under the rug, as per tradition.

As I began my investigation, I developed a new sense of purpose and I asked myself, what am I ashamed of? Why should I be embarrassed and called a *sin vergüenza* by oppressive forces in my culture? I was in a constant cycle of self-reflexivity and mining the earth of my mind as I conducted shadow work. During shadow work, I would at times sit and reflect over my painful memories, even the happier ones that were tainted by a child's anxiety and fear; it was as if I were holding these memories in my hands while I examined them. Some of the memories were so uncomfortable and raw that I had to step back and examine from afar; however, the process of shadow work proved to be illuminating and edifying to my research, as my autohistoria-teoría has proven.

Some may argue that shadow work is just another term for the process of conducting constant reflexivity found in other autobiographical modes of inquiry such as

autoethnography, specifically. And I would say, yes, that's correct. Even so, what makes shadow work a unique component to autohistoria-teoría is that it reinforces the language and terminology that is not captured in westernized processes of autobiographical forms of inquiry, however nuanced they may be. Simply having the term 'shadow work' within autohistoria-teoría's methodology captures the solemnness and spirituality unique to a decolonized method of inquiry belonging to women of color, in this case, Chicanas. Through my research, I learned more about my Self, my family, and my Chicano culture in sixteen weeks than I had as being a member of these different cultures all my life. I was as Keating says, shifting my perception and in turn "shap[ed] the stories [I] perceived about [my]self" and my cultures (248).

Implications of Autohistoria-teoría for Related Qualitative Methodologies

Autoethnography and Testimonio

Related qualitative methodologies include autoethnography and traditionally, researchers have favored positivist approaches to research and devaluing qualitative methodologies grounded in anti-foundational epistemologies. Specifically, autoethnography is defined as "combin[ing] cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details...it follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling," according to Heewong Chang (46). Likewise, Carolyn Ellis describes autoethnography as "research, writing, story, and method that connect autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political," and thereby establishing autoethnography as a serious subject of study (xix). Autoethnography takes analytical and evocative data, often combing the two, and thus

provides the opportunity for the researcher to explore further self-cultural intersections while still upholding rigorous methodological standards. Heewon Chang discusses the methods of conducting and producing an autoethnographic study. Chang describes autoethnography as “a qualitative research method that utilizes ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and its connection to others” (56).

Critics of autoethnography as a form of scholarship and research argue that this method of inquiry and genre do not hold enough *logos* or *ethos*, and instead lean too heavily on *pathos*. Scholars such as Coia and Taylor fail to view autoethnography as a valid form of serious research, expressing concern that narrative will overshadow other integral elements of autoethnography (Chang 55). Indeed, Chang, author of the first book of autoethnographic methods, likewise warns the readers about the pitfalls of autoethnography if one is not careful. For example, if an autoethnography focuses too much on the isolation from others, overemphasizes on narration over data analysis and only relies on personal memory as a data collection, among other reasons, it will likely have little social impact. Through autoethnographies, one is able to analyze and discern a culture, and use personal experience to reflect on culture via self. Autoethnography can be used as a vehicle to create and engage in conversations in academia, closely resembling narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry, such as *testimonio*, is another research approach used within academia to provide a rhetorical and linguistic platform for people of color and has been studied within the field of writing and rhetoric. Reyes and Rodriguez describe *testimonio* as “integrating qualitative research approaches, oral history, spoken word, and memoir

writings,” by people of color (525). Testimonio is a method of inquiry that helps researchers obtain liberation through the knowledge of speaking and reflection. As Reyes and Rodriguez say about testimonio in the field of education: “Testimonio is a pedagogical aid to help [researchers] develop an analytical frame that demystifies structural marginalization” (527). An important distinction between autoethnography and testimonio is that testimonio serves as a methodology based on perspectives from people of color, specifically.

Reyes and Rodriguez explain that testimonio may be used by Chicano/a scholars as a platform to obtain intention of affirmation and empowerment, such as Anzaldúa and Moraga do when they use testimonio as a way of knowing and redemption in *This Bridge Called My Back*. While testimonio is similar to autoethnography as an autobiographical method of inquiry, it differs from autoethnography in that it reflects the language of those who may use it. As such, what makes testimonio unique is not how it differs methodologically from autoethnography, but rather in how it is named. By having a genre that reflects origins, cultures, and identities, it creates a powerful rhetorical platform for marginalized voices within academia to be represented. As discussed further on, there is power in writing from one’s roots, and writing and identity are unextractable from one another.

Similarly, Cynthia Franklin discusses the challenges and benefits of incorporating autobiographical forms of writing within academia in her essay “Recollecting *This Bridge* in an Anti-Affirmative Action Era: Literary Anthologies, Academic Memoir, and Institutional Autobiography.” Franklin challenges hegemonic discourse and the erasure of identity politics, which anthologies such as *This Bridge* have helped bring awareness to.

She states that anthologies of women of color narratives are vital and “constitute an important part of a literary and social movement aimed at reaching non-academic audiences *and* clearing a space in universities for women of color and genres of writing excluded from the realm of literary” (*this bridge we call home* 423; author’s emphasis). Utilizing methods of narrative such as autoethnography and testimonio may yield exceptional collections of marginalized rhetoric that emphasize the limitations within an already confined field.

While testimonio offers the rhetor of color that rhetorical platform to engage with a genre that reflects their language and identity, one key difference that I make is that testimonio is not exclusive to women of color, such as Chicanas, such as autohistoria-teoría may be. Autohistoria-teoría, narrowed down to being a space for Chicanas’ traumatic narratives, specifically, has the power to create such an influential rhetorical platform that autoethnography and testimonio cannot not be able to achieve alone. By carving out a space for a writer to be of color, specifically Chicanas, and to be a woman, autohistoria-teoría becomes an intersectional method of inquiry and genre unique to the field of rhetoric and writing studies.

Making Bridges Al Andar

I began my thesis with a calculated risk in determining how to approach this project. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, many scholars take issue with autoethnography, *testimonio*, and as such, with autohistoria-teoría, as well. Often devaluing the personal, *pathos*, and memory, most scholars favor a positivist perspective, preferring *logos* and *ethos* – decolonial writing processes don’t seem to have a fighting chance within this

superstructure. Because magical thinking, shadow work, and spiritual activism do not fit into “high” theory, I expect a quick disregard. However, narrative, personal truths, the stories that we share with one another become more than just some rhetorical device – they become realities, worlds, *conocimiento*, and bridges between *Nos* and *Otras*, between *Us* and *Them*, between those of us who know the *lucha*, and those who have no idea what it’s like. As scholar and autoethnographer Tiffany Rainey says, “To build trust and understanding between those of us who struggle and those who don’t, I have to let readers into my head, and I have to keep them there for a while” (64). Gloria Anzaldúa stresses the importance of blurring the thick line between the established binaries; she encourages those of us who straddle multiple worlds, who live in a constant state of *nepantla*, to venture where there are no bridges and build them as we walk. Certainly, a bridge of trust, understanding, and empathy is much needed between Chicanas who are ready to write their traumatic narratives and those who are not yet willing to hear, read, or acknowledge them. The operative word in that last sentence being ‘yet,’ because I know that one day these bridges we are building will be crossed from travelers on both sides.

Implications for Future Research

These disciplinary conversations are central because they provide insights into the connections between available methods of inquiry and genres, Anzaldúan theories of writing, and composition theory that reinforce my argument for *autohistoria-teoría* as a method of inquiry and genre. Analyzing *autohistorias* and my own *autohistoria-teoría* as a Chicana and survivor of trauma has allowed me to establish connections between decolonial processes for Chicanas and writing and identity within writing and rhetoric

studies. In other words, analyzing this scholarship has helped me understand the relationship among available methods of inquiry and genre within academia, methods of inquiry and genre rooted in trauma available to Chicanas in writing and rhetoric studies, and how imperative nuanced understandings of identity and writing are to decolonial writing practices, such as autohistoria-teoría.

The purpose of this thesis is to build upon autoethnography and testimonio through Anzaldúan rhetorical practices and further explore alternative modes of narrative inquiry and genre for Chicanas' truths situated in trauma which may reflect values in rhetoric (marginalized rhetoric) and composition (autohistoria-teoría). Through the process of an established ritual, excavating painful memories, reflecting, listening, writing, and spiritual activism, I hope to obtain a critical understanding of how autohistoria-teoría may be used as a method of inquiry and genre for Chicanas' traumatic narratives, specifically my own; to create my own "theory of the flesh" in order to counter dominant and hegemonic discourses that would otherwise say my methods are unorthodox and weak. The silencing of Chicanas' voices within academia has resulted in marginalizations, a sense of unhomeliness, displacement, and inferiority within our respective fields, and devastating losses in theoretical, literary and rhetorical spaces. To be clear, my aim in this thesis is not say what other autobiographical methods of inquiry lack, but rather what a unique decolonial rhetorical platform such as autohistoria-teoría may contribute to those who are seeking and craving that space in which they can just Be, even if the difference is the labeling of the genre in a language that is not English. Autohistoria-teoría as a method of inquiry and genre carries nuanced bilingual and bicultural theoretical underpinnings that other autobiographical modes of inquiry may not

offer for a Chicanas' traumatic narrative.

Although I do not yet know how my autohistoria-teoría will function, the literature gives me reason to believe that autohistoria-teoría has the power and potential to act as a bridge between the marginalized and hegemonic discourses within academia. It is my hope, like that of Anzaldúa's, that this rhetorical bridge will provide spaces, understanding, and fierce interconnections between rhetors, scholars, and students of all differences, and that one day this bridge will no longer be a necessary path to cross within the walls of academia. My study will affirm the role of autohistoria-teoría as a method of inquiry and genre, as well as serve to gain a deeper understanding of how linguistic and rhetorical differences can be empowering to Chicanas fleshing out their truths. Through Anzaldúan theory and rhetorical practices, I hope to begin chipping away a space for autohistoria-teoría to become a more widely accepted form of autobiographical narrative for Chicanas, queers, the traumatized, the oppressed, for those of us whom in "Gloria Anzaldúa we have a name, a method, a language, a linguistic terrorism aimed to lift us higher" (Sandoval xv-xvi).

In reading surrounding literature, scholarship, and autohistoria-teorías (when I could get my hands on them), I found support and solidarity: Anzaldúa, Keating, Franklin, Moraga, Neile, Sandoval, Alarcón, Lord, Cantú, Lugones, Chung – in all of them, and many more that I did not list. It was upon discovering these allies and talking to my professor who guided my autoethnography and autohistoria-teoría, that I decided to share my own story, one that has allowed me to make a space for myself and others like me. In many ways, these scholars have given me permission to tell my story. Hay un espacio junto a ellas, a space that feels like it's been waiting for me to fill. Any woman of

color who engages in autohistoria-teoría as a space to inscribe her traumatic narrative, will be bienvenida.

Autohistoria-teoría in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

I have begun this thesis with my autohistoria-teoría, what may be labeled an “unconventional approach” because of its ability to break barriers of methodology and genre and expose a Chicana’s experiences shaped by trauma. Thus, autohistoria-teoría showcases the writer’s unique methodological approach and rhetoric situated in truth and trauma. This autohistoria-teoría serves as both an example and springboard for the research questions that drive my thesis and the methodological process I will use to answer the following research questions:

- What is autohistoria-teoría as a method of inquiry and genre?
- What does autohistoria-teoría do that other methods of inquiry and genres might not be able to do or might not be able to do for specific populations?
- In what ways, if at all, does autohistoria-teoría as method of inquiry and genre engage in issues in writing and rhetoric?
- What are the implications of autohistoria-teoría for writing and rhetoric theory, pedagogy, and research?

This project began with memories of my experience with sexual assault and living between the cracks of multiple worlds, of being a nepantlera.⁵ In the process of writing about this trauma and studying scholarship and literature on Anzaldúan rhetorical

⁵ According to Anzaldua, nepantla is “where the outer boundaries of the mind’s inner life meet the outer world of reality, is a zone of possibility” (“now let us shift” 542).

practices, decolonial processes, identity in writing, and autohistoria-teoría I was able to form a holistic view of my own experience and identity as a Chicana who was writing her own traumatic autohistoria. Through this scholarship and literature, I developed a theoretical framework discussed fully in Chapters 2 and 3, that yield new ways of knowing, particularly for rhetoric of resistance and trauma, and what I call a “hermeneutics of conocimiento”, that challenges hegemonic discourses.⁶ The constant tension between hegemonic discourses and rhetoric of the marginalized, such as Chicanas’ autohistorias, produces a continual need for decolonized rhetorical spaces, specifically within rhetoric and writing studies. I believe that decolonial practices of writing emphasize the need to incorporate Anzaldúan schools of thought such as spirituality, epistemology, and facultades. Niele quotes her classmate Ceti Boundy, who says, “much of the time, language is a struggle. Words contain so much magic – are magic – shaping and shifting reality and possibility with every breath, every stroke of the pen or keyboard” (*EntreMundos/AmongWorlds* 19).

Before searching the archives for scholarly journals and articles on autohistoria-teoría, all I knew about autohistoria-teoría was that it was another form of autobiography, memoir, or autoethnography focused on the Self that was unique to women of color’s narratives, however for the purposes of this thesis, I focus specifically on Chicanas’ narratives (Anzaldúa *Luz En Lo Oscuro*). When I began my research, I discovered that autohistoria-teoría, while having a definition, does not have a pin-pointed comprehensive methodology. Rather, autohistoria-teoría was meant to be an act of healing in the process

⁶ Conocimiento is defined by AnaLouise Keating as “a holistic epistemology that incorporates self-reflection, imagination, intuition, sensory experiences, rational thought, outward-directed action, and social-justice concerns” (“From Borderlands and New Mestizas” 10).

of “putting Coyolxauhqui together,” and sheds light on the limitations within existing (positivist) paradigms to create new stories of “healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation” (*EntreMundos/AmongWorlds* 6). It is like autoethnography, then, in that it represents a methodology and genre that challenges dominant discourses by foregrounding personal experience and cultural analysis; yet it is different from autoethnography in its decolonial imperative.

Thesis As Spiritual Activism

This thesis is an outward act of bridging trust, understanding and empathy. Through my narrative, I hope to bring awareness about the challenges that survivors of sexual assault and abuse must face within oppressive cultural norms. This thesis came into being when I “listen[ed] to the ‘small still voice’ within [me] which can empower us to create actual change in the world” (Keating 2002 521). As a member of multiple cultures which often times intersect, usually for the greater good, but sometimes not; those instances of harmful ideologies, though few, cause devastating results within the individual as well as others who get caught up in oppressive cultural norms. It’s all too easy to appease the dominant culture’s values and beliefs, especially within academia, where the personal is believed to stay out of the classroom and research.

However, those pressures to conform to the dominant discourse have failed. By writing my autohistoria-teoría and this thesis, for that matter, my “unorthodox” research and “evocative” narrative have already begun carving a space for itself, as it will soon be embedded in the larger narrative of the academy, quite literally. I also plan to submit my autohistoria-teoría to journals and to whoever else will endorse it. I take it upon myself

to do everything I can to rise up and meet positivist views on what “real” research and scholarship should look like, emphasizing that Chicanas’ traumatic narratives should not be shunned from academia, but embraced as an epistemological method of learning how to trust, understand, and empathize with one another. I will encourage and support other Chicanas to begin laying the foundation for this bridge, to begin to walk into unknown and scary territory, to write, to feel, to share their own traumatic autohistoria-teorías. Yes, there will be pain and perhaps there will be days when the shadow work gets to be too much, but there will also be beauty; you will discover things about yourself you didn’t know were there. There will be joy in the tears, and there will be that sense of relief when you tug on your own red yarn for the first time. It will unravel, and so will you, and so will your autohistoria. As a nepantlera who has the advantage (and responsibility) of having access to separate viewpoints, I use this thesis and my autohistoria-teoría as a bridge and as an outward act of spiritual activism to promote narrative spaces for Chicanas’ traumatic autohistoria-teorías.

It can be said that this thesis in and of itself is a small step towards social justice and transformation. The very fact that it exists and is taking space in academia’s shelves, is, I believe, a demonstration of my *conocimiento* acting on spiritual activism through an outward act.

Autohistoria-teoría Within Academia

Autohistoria-teoría inherently employs decolonial writing processes such as magical thinking, shadow work, and spiritual activism, to name a few main components, which are “neither understood nor honored in academia” (Keating 346). I knew that undertaking this project with a seemingly unorthodox approach in presentation, theory,

and rhetoric would present numerous challenges, especially spearheading my research with my autohistoria-teoría as an exemplar. It was frightening, to say the least. For example, even as I began writing my autohistoria-teoría as an autoethnography, a genre that also exemplifies the evocative narrative, I was still unsure about how well my story “fit” in with the rest of my classmates’ autoethnographies. Even now, though I base my research primarily on Anzaldúan theory and scholarship, I worry that it won’t be enough gain academic merit from scholars in the field. Then, there’s also the matter of my career. I don’t like the idea of having my trauma out in the open, just as much as anyone else would, and the thought of my graduate thesis being a standard piece of writing for my portfolio when applying for faculty positions and doctoral programs makes me uneasy. However, I understand the importance that one person makes when they speak out, write, and break the cultural norms to allow others a place at the table. I’ve seen this example in my mentors, professors, colleagues, and friends, and so I will endure exposure and vulnerability in order to help others with theirs.

The implications of establishing autohistoria-teoría as a method of inquiry and genre, even though the methodology is a fluid outline, may have some serious consequences within academia. Some effects may include but are not limited to advances in rhetoric and writing studies in resistance rhetoric, trauma rhetoric, borderland rhetoric, mestiza rhetoric, marginalized rhetoric. As well as further research and scholarship opportunities in Anzaldúan scholarship, borderland studies, trauma studies, feminist studies, gender studies, and queer studies to name a few. Including autohistoria-teoría in rhetoric and writing studies may also prove to be useful in pedagogy as Anzaldúan writing processes “encourage a desire to challenge hegemonic institutions like schools or

even society, while allowing students to finally identify with a narrative familiar to them,” particularly within multicultural pedagogies (Cantú 327). Perhaps, the most exciting and crucial possibility to building upon the aforementioned is the vast opportunities for theoretical frameworks that autohistoria-teoría as method of inquiry and genre can tap into for she who yearns to know more about her cultures, about her writing, and about herself.

As I’ve mentioned before, academia can be an unforgiving space (if it allows one that much), and “high” theory is reserved for the dominant culture. Allowing autohistoria-teoría into academe’s walls would mean “challenging institutionalized discourses;” for Chicanas it would mean “being suspicious of the dominant culture’s interpretation of ‘our’ experience, of the way they ‘read’ us;” by acknowledging Chicanas’ autohistoria-teorías as theory, it would mean that she could and will “rewrite history, using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories for analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries” (Anzaldúa xxv). Although I believe the field of rhetoric and writing studies could claim autohistoria-teoría as a loose method of inquiry and genre for Chicanas’ traumatic narratives, I would be lying if I said that it would be an easy thing to do.

It is my *esperanza*, like many *mujeres de color* who are also theorists and scholars in the field and in their respective concentrations, that we “de-academize theory [to] connect the community to the academy” (Anzaldúa xxvi). Autohistoria-teoría may very well be that medium if academia chooses to see its potential and value. For the woman of color who has “been gagged and disempowered by theories, can also be loosed and empowered by theories,” and in doing so bring her “own approaches and methodologies

[to] transform that theorizing space” (Anzaldúa xxv-xxvi). Autohistoria-teoría further utilized within rhetoric and writing studies may act as that rhetorical platform for Chicanas’ traumatic narratives to just Be, as well. Through autohistoria-teoría the woman of color doesn’t have to worry about performing her gender, race, or sexuality, nor does she constantly have to appease the dominant discourse of what “good scholarship” and “high” theory looks like. The autohistoria-teorista can freely write and say:

We are ready for change.

Let us link hands and hearts

together find a path through the dark woods

step through the doorways between worlds

leaving huellas for others to follow,

build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our

“home”

si se puede, que sea asi, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos.

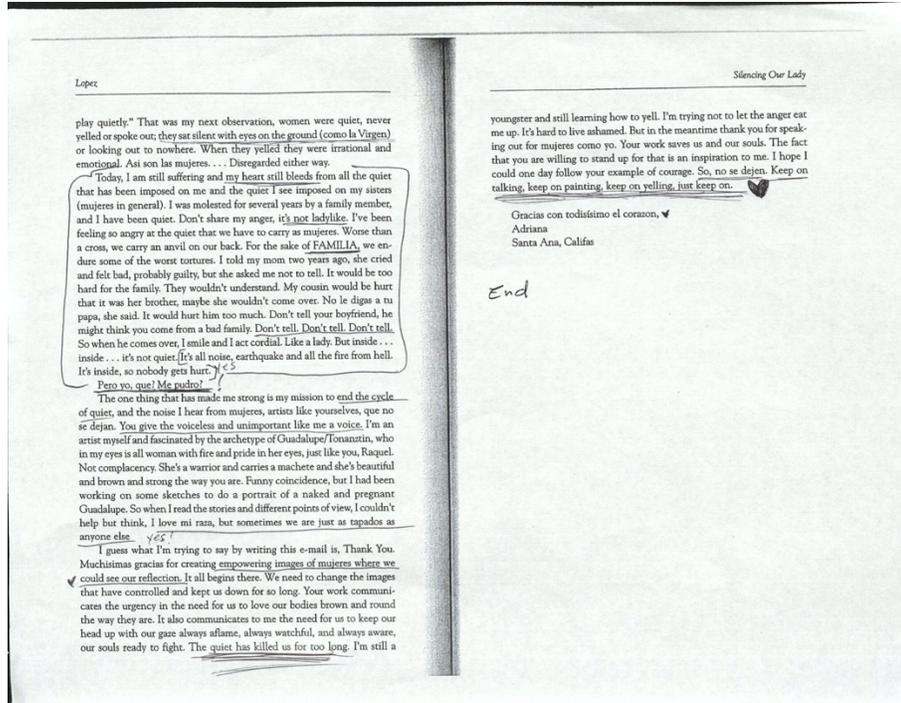
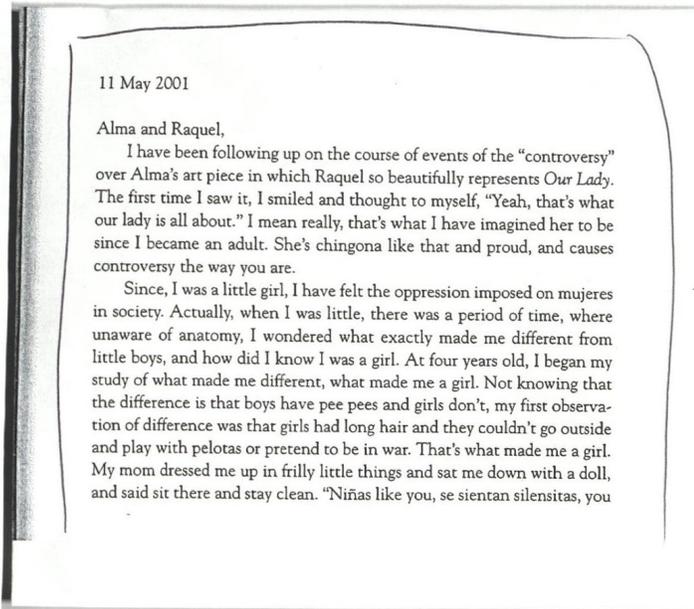
Now let us shift (Anzaldúa 576).

¿Entonces? Adelante mujer, que hay puentes para construir.

APPENDIX SECTION

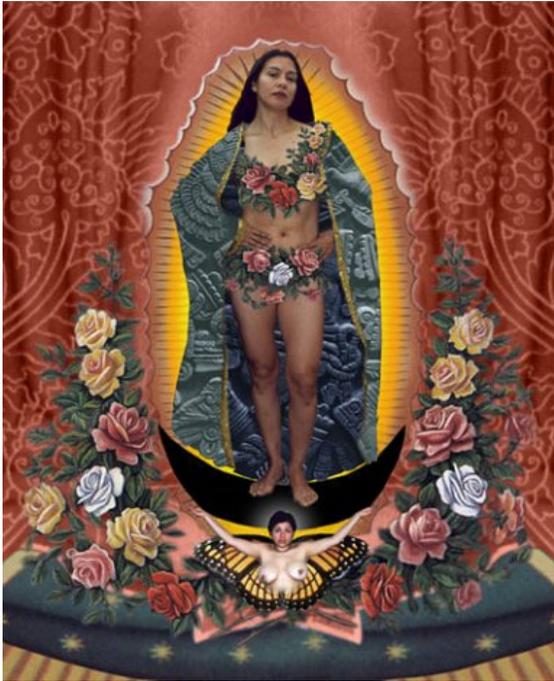
Appendix A

LETTER FROM ADRIANA TO ALMA LÓPEZ



Appendix B

ALMA LÓPEZ' "OUR LADY"



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