
Revising How the West Was Won In Emma Pérez's *Forgetting the Alamo, or, Blood Memory*

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In a moving elegy to Gloria Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez recalls that on one of their many visits together, Pérez purchased a now well-loved, blue men's workshirt at Anzaldúa's favorite store, the Gap. Pérez muses that Anzaldúa loved the store perhaps because of the transgressive potential in the word "gap" itself, possibly related to her concept of dual gender derived from the *Nahuatl* term *nepantla*, a psychic location of in-betweenness ("Gloria" 1). When Pérez bought the shirt, she noticed a "playful glint in Gloria's eye" as she complimented her, "*te ves bien butchona*" (1). As this tender anecdote suggests, Anzaldúa embraced female masculinity, and while it received little direct attention in her scholarship, she would not have objected to the inclusion of the *butchona* lesbian as *nueva mestiza* within the in-between zone on *nepantla*. In her novel *Forgetting the Alamo, or, Blood Memory* (2008), Pérez calls for critical attention to female masculinity through her baby butch protagonist, Micaela Campos, and further, to how issues of race and nationhood intersect with sex and gender. In *Forgetting*, Anzaldúa's concept of "hieros gamos" as sexual identity can be applied to projects of historical revisioning on the border. As Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, "I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of hieros gamos: the coming together of opposite qualities within" (19). This "coming together" represents the diasporic nature of the U.S./Mexico border both before and after the West was "won." As part of locating the intersections of sex and gender, nationhood and citizenship, Pérez further defines the concept of diaspora, addressed in her theoretical work, *Decolonial Imaginary*, as an in-between location for transformational or oppositional subjectivity (*Decolonial* xix).¹ A queer and Chicana feminist reading of *Forgetting* reveals that contrary to conceptions of both nation and gender as impenetrable and fixed, they have historically been fluid and diasporic.

In *Forgetting*, Pérez also extends the project of "queering" *mestizaje* or "browning" the queer, engaging multiple sites of resistance against both whiteness and heteronormativity (Arrizón 7).² It is crucial to remember how Anzaldúa was originally dismissed by queer theorists as not queer enough, possibly because of her holistic approach to discrimination ("Gloria" 3). Continuing from Anzaldúa's

foundation, *Forgetting* proposes that sexuality and gender are inextricably linked to language, culture, and race, something that has been under-theorized in many articulations of queer and feminist theory. This disregard and accompanying erasure and silencing of Anzaldúa and other queer theorists of color represents the more pervasive effects of racism and sexism within queer theory. By contrast, Chicana scholars embed the term “queer” in race and coloniality from a decolonial, third space feminist perspective (7). As Pérez writes, third space feminism is a type of agency that “uncover[s] the hidden voices of Chicanas that have been relegated to silences, passivity” (*Decolonial* xvi). Because queer theory has roots in Western, white, gay male experience, any study of female masculinity in Chicana/o studies is therefore best accomplished through Chicana scholars like Anzaldúa, a self-described “*jota marimacha de la frontera*” (“Gloria” 3). “Marimacha” is used in Chicana/o culture to describe a woman who is sexually aggressive or who dresses and perhaps passes as a man. The term has been reclaimed by queer Chicana theorists from its epithetic and homophobic origins toward a new understanding of its transformative potential.

In Chicana/o studies, the *marimacha*, *femme-macho*, and the “rejected lesbian” (Arrizón 105) of the borderlands, are related female masculine constructions. As Aida Hurtado argues, like the figure of the *marimacha*, the *femme-macho* in Chicana/o literature is embraced by Chicanas seeking liberation from “the narrow confines of the virgen/whore dichotomy” (388). Though not always tied to lesbian sexuality, Chicana scholars often identify the term *femme macho* as a descriptor for Chicanas who break the bonds of traditional gender and cultural or national belonging: “Many Chicanas, struggling to escape the narrow confines of the virgen/whore dichotomy, embrace the *femme-macho* characteristics as a form of liberation” (388). Interestingly, like Micaela, the *femme-macho* does not embrace conventional beauty, is often not beautiful, but is powerful and sexual (387) to the point where, as Abelardo Delgado suggests, while Chicanos seek Guadalupean wives and mothers, they often desire lovers with *femme-macho* qualities (33). *Femme-macho* women can also be perceived as aggressive due to the fact that in order to escape the virgen/whore dichotomy, they must always engage in battle against patriarchal forces (Hurtado 388). Above all, the *femme-macho* is independent, which contradicts the ideal of the Chicana women who is always seen in relationship to others or in service to others (Flores-Ortiz 106). As *femme-macho* character, Micaela dwells outside of traditional norms of feminine performance, rejecting both compulsory heterosexuality and modification by men.

Ultimately, reclaiming female masculine figures that have been subjected to cultural scorn and relegated to the boundaries of historical experience occurs

through the simultaneous revisioning of La Malinche. As many Chicana scholars have acknowledged, embracing La Malinche involves acceptance of *mestizaje* identity, what Anzaldúa and others refer to as life in the interstices. Further, Mexican and Chicana feminists consider La Malinche's legacy of "betrayal to be crucial to understanding the conflictive gender relations ingrained in the social and cultural fabric of [Mexico]" and therefore within Chicana/o culture on either side of the U.S./Mexico border (Arrizón 103). Adelaida Del Castillo explains the scapegoating of Malintzin Tenépal, or La Malinche, as two-fold, a misrepresentation of her role in the conquest, and an unconscious and at times intentionally misogynistic attitude toward assertive Chicanas (139). While the historical figure Malintzin Tenépal has been analyzed in various ways depending on the agenda of the theorist or writer (Alarcón 72), she often becomes a speaking subject who can be used as a positive archetype for the breaking of sexual silences in Chicana/o culture.³ Because as Cortes' translator she was known as *la lengua de los dioses*, many Chicana feminists engage in what Stuart Hall refers to as a process of transcoding, the reappropriation of existing historical meanings and the creation of new ones (179). As Hurtado writes, "Chicana feminists have reinterpreted La Malinche's role in the conquest of Mexico from a traitor to that of a brilliant woman whose ability to learn different languages was unsurpassed by any of her contemporaries" (393). However, in addition to being a speaking subject, La Malinche can be considered a female masculine, mytho-historical figure that destabilizes gender and sexuality through the mutually constitutive categories of race and citizenship. This revision is accomplished by engaging in what Cherríe Moraga refers to in *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios* as a process of reading "against the grain" works like Bernal Díaz del Castillo's firsthand account of the conquest (93). Díaz Del Castillo writes about how Malintzin Tenépal's male attributes distinctly separated her from the other supposedly inferior native women: "Doña Marina [Malintzin Tenépal], although a native woman, possessed such manly valour that though she heard every day that the Indians were going to kill us and eat our flesh with chillis ... she betrayed no weakness but a courage greater than that of a woman" (153). Literary characters in Chicana/o literature like Micaela that impede hegemonic nationalism through female masculinity therefore also incorporate the disruptive and revisionist potential of La Malinche. The adoption of La Malinche's female masculine characteristics further opens space for queer identities in Chicana/o culture, as queer Chicanas represent the ultimate *malinchistas* who betray both restrictive sexual codes of behavior and the sacred construction of the Guadalupean wife and mother.

The abject position of the female masculine subject in Chicana/o culture and her absence from historiography and literature can also be included within the larger,

more pervasive misrepresentation and/or erasure of female masculine women across cultural contexts.⁴ Judith Halberstam's typology in her work *Female Masculinity* adds significantly to the discussion of female masculinity in Chicana/o culture, and it is therefore useful to read scholars like Halberstam through Anzaldúa. This approach allows both for more specificity in the discussion of female masculine identity and renewed consideration of race, culture, and national identity in queer scholarship. As Halberstam writes, "female masculinity is generally received ... as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have power that is always just out of reach" (*Female* 9). In Chicana/o culture, female masculinity disrupts the entire power structure by displacing both *machismo* and *marianismo*, therefore even exceeding female masculinity as what Halberstam calls a "healthful alternative" to the "histrionics of conventional feminities" (*Female* 9) toward an upending of an entire cultural symbolic order. As a displaced figure within the already inferior classification "women of color," Micaela as female masculine heroine represents a kind of outer limit of cultural representation.

As therefore a particularly powerful form of interstitial opposition, female masculinity can be viewed as a way in which Chicanas have historically resisted what Joane Nagel in her essay "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations" terms the interrelated phenomena of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic nationalism. Contrary to their conception as distinct developments, masculinity and nationalism grew simultaneously in the West due to a "renaissance" of manliness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (244). This "renaissance" gave rise to such institutions as the modern Olympic movement in 1896 and a proliferation of boys' and men's lodges and fraternal organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus (244). This institutionalization of manliness ascribed to the biological male body characteristics now seen as innate, such as willpower, courage, discipline, competitiveness, adventurousness, independence, and dignity (245). These ostensibly "normal" qualities developed contemporaneously with our democratic ideals of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" (245), firmly establishing a link between the constructs of masculinity and nation.

However, while the nineteenth century in America is a historical period that demanded increasing gender and national coherence, Pérez suggests that it was also an era full of tensions and inconsistencies. Pérez creates a butch lesbian, cowgirl figure in 1836 when women were expected to remain in and to maintain the domestic realm. Even now such a figure challenges our notions of how the West was won, deviating from the sexist, nationalist fantasy still perpetuated by Anglo history. Pérez therefore proposes that in order to delineate more nuanced concepts of nation, community, and citizenship, we must look within the absences and

gaps of historical discourse.⁵ By filling in these absences and gaps and imagining a *butchona* lesbian as an important historical figure, Pérez simultaneously challenges whom we hold as historical heroes and heroines. Through Pérez's assertion that there is no pure history, only layered narrative systems (*Decolonial* xv), her novel revises both the historically prevalent notion of the *Mestiza* as straight woman in preference for Anzaldúa's *nueva mestiza*, as well as the sense of literature and history as separate disciplinary entities. In this gap between story and history, Pérez utilizes Foucault's genealogy as a "method of honoring silences, gaps, the unthought" (xviii).

These gaps are often most clearly visible in moments of what Homi Bhabha terms "unhomeliness," which is in many ways analogous to Anzaldúa's notion of *nepantla*. The unhomely expresses the visceral quality of these interstices of nationhood. As Bhabha argues, "It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). By creating ghostly images for these interstitial spaces, Pérez calls upon the unhomely, a political and aesthetic application of the Freudian notion of the "uncanny" or "heimlich / unheimlich," a zone that is simultaneously familiar and strange, particularly in Micaela's "coming-of-age moment." In contrast to the more traditional coming-of-age scenes for literary heroines, this narrative turning point is also a moment of historical and national importance. Pérez simultaneously reconstructs the San Jacinto battlefield as a gendered and sexualized space:

I stood ten feet from his corpse and falling to my knees, I crawled to him. There was the knife mamá had said would be his end. I pulled it from his heart and held it close to my chest and then something came over me, maybe ghosts or spirits because I didn't realize what I was doing nor did I remember having done it. It was as if a strong spirit forced my hand and I cut my cheek from eye to mouth in a crescent moon like my Tío Lorenzo's brand and blood dripped onto my hands and onto my father's chest. Then, and of this I was wholly conscious, I sliced off my long braid and tossed it into a ditch and right away I felt strength come over me. I heaved my father's corpse to pull off the jacket and I put it on. (*Forgetting* 30)

By adopting female masculinity through the symbolic gestures of self-mutilation reminiscent of masculine battle scars—the slicing of her "long braid" and the wearing of her father's jacket—Micaela moves toward an interstitial, female masculine subject position from which she contests both the death of her kin and the racist and sexist violence that is overtaking her homeland through the usurpation of law and authority by the Anglos. Her resistant gestures cause a wave of "strength" to come over her, a strength that allows her to resist from the

in-between spaces of both gender and nation. In addressing these larger issues of nation and homeland through female masculinity, Pérez accomplishes what Bhabha calls a vision of the historical past through the narrative present (22). *Forgetting* becomes a contemporary vessel for a history that breathes as a living thing, open to revision and reconsideration (22).

When Micaela pulls the knife from her father's heart and holds it to her chest, she enters a kind of dream world, a temporal suspension that leads to her moment of gender identification and allegiance to her mestizo community. The "ghosts or spirits" that inhabit her body prevent her from remembering her actions. This suggests that the in-between zone of *nepantla* can be experienced as a type of haunting in which one realizes an aspect of a repressed cultural, national and gendered self. Similarly, as Halberstam writes, because of the deep absences and gaps in historiography, the method of a transgender historian must be to "encounter, [confront], and [transform]," or in other words, you must be willing to be "haunted" in order to engage in a process of historic recovery (*In a Queer Time* 65). This haunting coming-of-age moment ties her to family and culture as well as to female masculinity, evident in the fact that she recalls her "Tío Lorenzo's brand." Her loss of memory and consciousness and their sudden restoration in the moment she becomes a gender outlaw and interstitial rebel speaks of what is often called "double consciousness" of the colonized often realized in an unhomey moment. Micaela becomes the subordinate who "unsettles, shatters, and disrupts" the dominant subject's attempt to create a homogenous cultural zone of authority and oppression (Bhabha 2).

As a revisionist historian, Pérez writes that "impatience" and "frustration" with current historiographies are what often drive her to invent characters that do the work of "decolon[izing] our history and our current historical imaginations" (*Decolonial* 2). By interweaving her theoretical work, a feminist methodology analyzes embodied performance through an integrated, scholarly approach. This brings together Emma Pérez's work as both theorist and novelist. The novel can then best be described as a type of creative queer and feminist praxis in which she locates a history that has not been preserved in established historical texts and archives ("Queering" 1). She describes her project, including both novel and theory, as "[uncovering] the voices from the past that honor multiple experiences, instead of falling prey to that which is easy, allowing the white colonial heteronormative gaze to reconstruct and interpret" (2). In resisting this interpretation, violent marking of the racially other, female body becomes an important trope in Pérez's novel, forcing us to examine the very harsh corporeal realities for mestiza women in mid-nineteenth-century South Texas. She accomplishes this in part through

the image of stamping on the skin. Whether this stamp is from the button on a prostitute's tightly laced corset or from the wounds of rape and violence, both become powerful markers of gender injustice. When Micaela returns from the Battle of San Jacinto in full female masculine dress, she finds the ranch torn apart and her mother sitting up in bed, "with a face bruised and stamped" (30), while her mother continually "falls back unconscious to screams that echo prophecies she had hoped to steer clear of" (32). In contrast to the branding of her mother's body, Micaela's crescent moon scar that weeps and bleeds when she returns home is not reminiscent of a cattle brand. Hers is a self-inflicted war wound reflecting more her a desire for gender justice than her own helplessness and subjugation. Through this wound, she also announces ownership of her body and her refusal to perpetuate the Guadalupean ideal by becoming a man's property. As femme-macho, Micaela also resists what Arrizón calls "the ideological structure of heterosexuality" within Chicana/o cultural contexts, and its "compulsive tendency to locate the feminine in relation to the masculine desire and fetish" (33). However, it must be remembered that both types of disfigurement, the intentional and the inflicted, suggest the literal and figurative historical marking of the female body, straight or queer.

Through Micaela's voice as female masculine subject of a lost history, as Pérez asserts, we can see how words can indeed profoundly alter the individual reader's understanding of the past.⁶ Through cultural production we can approach the past as open to revision through new discourse, and thus disrupt and ultimately alter restrictive norms of the present and future. As Moraga writes, "Every oppressed group needs to imagine through the help of history and mythology a world where our oppression did not seem the preordained order" (120). Pérez accomplishes this upending of a supposed "preordained order" through a gender outlaw who threatens to compromise the very fabric of Tejano identity at a crucial historical moment. Within the context of nation building, *Forgetting* traces female masculine development as against "the full force of gender conformity" that descends upon young girls at adolescence (*Female* 6). Importantly, Micaela observes the oppression of women in her community and avoids this fate by cultivating this alternative. She watches both her unhappily married mother and the prostitutes at Miss Elsie's whorehouse whose only other recourse is to return to abusive husbands and fathers. While officially scorned, prostitution was commonplace during the colonial period (Acosta and Winegarten 29-30), and therefore Miss Elsie's bar would have been a fixture in most South Texas communities, in part as a kind of refuge for women. As Miss Elsie insists, "None of them thought about how they were just girls running from husbands and fathers who beat them. None of them thought about how much safer these women felt among others who were

also running and looking for some kind of refuge, any kind” (*Forgetting* 23). This refuge would have been a necessary one for girls like Micaela’s Aunt Lena, Jed’s dead mother who is gang-raped from a very young age by her cousins, and for all the girls for whom there would have been no safety among *Mestizos* or Anglos. In the context of these vivid images of the hard lives of women in cultures that breed such vehement gender injustice, Micaela’s female masculinity indeed appears healthful: “I guess I felt sorry for mamá, Tía Lena, and Miss Elsie ‘cause there was no way I would ever end up like any of them” (*Forgetting* 27). Her desire to avoid ending up “like any of them” is in part what drives her to continue articulating a female masculine identity that is a part of her as a child.

In addition to dress, one of Micaela’s female masculine strategies of resistance is to identify herself as a hero and an adventurer. Chicanos often embrace the Spanish fantasy that the dignity of the male is linked to the ability to control “their” women (Arrizón 103). This is something Micaela openly defies by identifying with a classic, male literary figure, Don Quixote:

When I was six or seven years old, my papi would read to me from Cervante’s Don Quixote and like papi I saw myself inside those pages. It was as if there was no distance between the adventurer and me as he journeyed through quests I wanted to live one day. As he read I became Quixote whose guts and wit thrust him through danger because he had a steadfast belief that no one could soften no matter how much he was belittled. (*Forgetting* 133)

The “steadfast belief” that is unshakable even in the midst of being “belittled” is a necessary quality for feminist and queer revising of dominant social paradigms. Further, the comparison to Don Quixote also suggests the failure of masculine fantasies and the possibility for women to exceed male authenticity. Through the image of Don Quixote, Pérez clearly locates masculinity in the female body, thus making masculine traits, such as those listed by Nagel, stand alone for scrutiny outside of biological constraints.⁷

In addition, by allowing Micaela to successfully compete for her first love, Clara love, Pérez substantiates Halberstam’s claim that female masculinity often manages not only to imitate but to out-perform hegemonic masculinity in the realm of erotic love. This is perhaps one of the most threatening aspects of Micaela’s character. When Micaela first meets Clara, they are immediately drawn to one another: Clara replies to the old ranch hand’s advances, “‘Romundo, tell your friend that I’ve had enough old chile to last me a lifetime.’ She turned and strolled back to la casa grande and I thought I saw her glance at me and raise an eyebrow” (70). Importantly, their courtship takes place while Micaela is cross-dressed; Clara then maintains her interest and consummates their relationship even though she

knows Micaela's true biological identity. This desire is revealed in Clara's "glance" and raised eyebrow. Micaela actually wins Clara's love in part because of the intense, erotic connection the two women have, and in part because she performs the kind of masculinity women are taught to desire. Micaela is attentive and chivalrous, while Jed, her cousin and competitor, is often violent and callous.

Pérez's therefore views supposedly authentic masculinity and nationalism as destructive and violent in comparison to Micaela's revised, more productive in-between gender identity. This is most evident in the portrait she paints of the Colonel, the fictionalized Anglo Texan who takes charge after the win at San Jacinto. The Colonel's diabolical masculinity with which he literally usurps the law stands in stark relief to Micaela's alternative manliness. The devastating scene at an Apache feast most directly demonstrates the Colonel's malevolence: "Not until a quiet peace came over the camp did the Colonel pick up his Wesson rifle and begin the slaughter, slow and methodical. They were asleep, the women with the men and the children. All asleep ... Blood splattered my face and arms" (96). This "slow and methodical" slaughter is the ultimate demonstration of hegemony on the border, and yet it is Micaela's enactment of manhood that allows these qualities to become more easily scrutinized as a type of lack, not as an expression of authenticity.

Through this unmooring of masculinity from the physical body, Pérez revises historical conceptions of nationhood and citizenship away from the stories of the white, straight, male oppressor and toward the complex, recovered narratives of women's interstitial resistance. However, as a Foucauldian feminist theorist, she suggests with increasing vigor toward the conclusion of the novel that there is no escape of gender constraints, resisting an over-simplification of female masculinity as redemption. Even in a female masculine role, powerful women in the novel do not find total release from the nexuses of power/knowledge in national projects.⁸ Retrospectively, Micaela recognizes the false confidence she felt when she began seeking her revenge: "I was so sure of myself that I must have seemed like a big-headed fool at the time" (27). What Pérez does propose is that female masculine identification locates a set of interstices from which to launch counter-strategies of resistance against racist and sexist hegemonic structures. These structures of hegemony become evident through Walker's fantasy of a homogenous, national utopia, revealed as Micaela is about to be hanged for her cousin's murder: "Things are changing around here, Micaela. With God-fearing folks who speak the right kind of language. Not that meskin-sounding trash I hear you and your mama speaking and not them red-skinned grunts that don't sound like no kind of language no how" (*Forgetting* 203). Walker reminds us that the dream of hegemonic nationalism, tied to hegemonic masculinity, is often achieved only through suppression, an

insistence on the “right kind of language,” and a specific type of “God-fearing” religious expression. As Pérez writes, “By definition, nationalism defies difference, hence feminism. Nationalism must be patriarchal in all its modernist trappings, yet third space feminist practice within a decolonial imaginary will deconstruct a masculinist trap” (*Decolonial* 73-74). Female masculinity becomes a direct threat to the homogenizing efforts that undergird nationalist sentiments on the border.

Even though Micaela tries to conform to feminine norms by wearing a dress at her trial, Micaela’s deviant sexuality and gender have already done the work of rupturing the notion of ideal female citizen:

I did as Miss Elsie asked and showed off my slim hips in the calico dress with silly yellow flower print, maybe hoping I could be saved from impending death, as if a dress could conjure such power or luck. The townspeople sat in the pews of the church that served as courtroom, turned and stared at me seemingly prepared to make me the obligatory scapegoat for all their misfortunes and conquests. (*Forgetting* 196)

As gender outlaw, Micaela becomes the ultimate scapegoat who must accept blame not only for the “misfortunes,” “conquests,” but also the supposed victories of the entire community (196): “‘Is it a she or he?’ someone yelled. ‘I think it’s a he/she,’ someone else yelled. Miss Elsie spoke out, ‘Leave her be. She lost her papa at San Jacinto.’ ‘A thing like that ain’t got no pappy,’ someone yelled. ‘Hell, let’s save everybody the trouble and hang the he/she. That oughta take care of a couple of sins and law that been broken here’” (198). Her masculine performance is clearly her most offensive transgression, and in the eyes of the audience at her trial, this what transforms her into an “it” existing outside of the protection of the law. Because she successfully mimics the authentic male performance upheld as the foundation for the future state of Texas, her existence becomes far too threatening to the new Anglo hegemony.

Following the legacy of Anzaldúa who never prescribed to fixed notions of gender or citizenship, Pérez’s objective in *Forgetting* is not to provide answers that can illuminate present or past gender violence, but rather to pursue more complex lines of questioning. As she warns, “if you seek categorical, definitive answers [in my words], you will not find them. I will submit more questions, more interventions, as I continue to speak from the margins, as I continue to experiment with my own ‘*sitio y lengua*’” (*Decolonial* xix). While I do not suggest that Pérez creates Micaela out of any autobiographical impulse, Pérez’s theoretical voice echoes through Micaela’s as she realizes how black and white her community has become and how coherent gender and sex must be to conform to the new norms. When viewed as a female masculine revision of La Malinche, Micaela further challenges

ideas of racial purity based on Western notions of fixed Western identity. She proposes instead hybridization and in-between subjectivity (Arrizón 64). The power in the *marimacha*, for example, lies in its challenge to so-called coherence. As Arrizón writes, “the double body inflection in mari-macha [the combining of marianismo and machismo] symbolically alters the “Mary complex”—imagine the configuration of Mary as the macho woman” (161-162). Arrizón believes that *marimacha* is a type of queer interpolation that suggests a place where gender is “fluid and destabilized” (162). This transformation of epithets is directly linked to the reclaiming of La Malinche, as both a process of disidentification with hegemonic forces within both Anglo and Chicana/o culture and a development of a more positive Chicana sexuality. By novel’s end, Micaela perceives this need for complex reasoning and eschewing of binaries:

... only two sides of things mattered in my homeland anymore and after all I had seen, I knew life was more complicated even if I couldn’t abide by the complexities myself. Thing is, the time for discussion about more than one way of seeing things was over and I wondered if there would ever be a time for free thinking in this so-called republic. (*Forgetting* 189)⁹

This tolerance for ambiguity is a cultivation of what Anzaldúa calls the ability of the *Mestiza* to “stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically ... to shift out of habitual formations” and to “cop[e] by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (79). In this realization, achieved through embrace of female masculinity, Micaela typifies Anzaldúa’s *nueva mestiza*.

While the novel refuses any easy solutions, *Forgetting* does propose that it is the strength of interstitial communities of women that will allow for an inscription of the female masculine subject. Here, we can recall the moment of shared *butchona* recognition between Pérez and Anzaldúa on a simple shopping trip as more than personal; it was also an exchange full of the potential for historical and cultural revision. In *Forgetting*, it is Micaela’s female allies who intervene and prevent her scapegoating and murder. By successfully stopping the literal and symbolic “hanging” of the female masculine woman, the “it,” the “he/she” that many feel deserves to hang for transgressions, the women suggest a type of resistance that, as Kanika Batra writes, is in many ways yet to be realized in many global locations (93).¹⁰ The question becomes not one of Micaela’s sexed and gendered identity “a priori,” or the articulation of identity as salvation, but rather how a group of women come together to save a controversial life in this incipient moment of nation building (Bhabha xvi-xviii). In the conclusion of *Forgetting*, the diasporic intermixing found on the border before the establishment of Texas is literally “forgotten” in favor of the racist, nationalist fantasy of Walker and the

Colonel. Consequently, many attempts to silence and subordinate all varieties of difference do in fact succeed. However, through the writing of a female masculine heroine who survives to tell the story, Pérez suggests that the recovered narratives of women's resistance are integral, not peripheral, to the unhomely reality of all national projects, past and present.

Notes

¹ Diaspora replaces the limiting categories of “colonized” or “immigrant” with a spatial metaphor that can accommodate gender/sex differences of the most marginalized groups, such as female masculine women, as well as hold the potential for the intervening and constructing of new queer and lesbian subjectivities.

² Arrizón follows the work of Anzaldúa by insisting that *mestizaje* is a “complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize hybrid sites of experience and empowerment” (7).

³ Malintzin Tenépal was originally honored by los indios as a polyglot; they called her *La Lengua de Las Dioses*, or Tongue of the Gods (Blake 37). For the indigenous people, she became positively associated with the act of speaking.

⁴ For example, on September 29, 2011, *Late Night* talk show host Jimmy Fallon made the following quip: “A recent study found that women inherit their sense of style from their mothers, which explains why I saw Chelsea Clinton shopping at ‘Men’s Warehouse’” (“Late Night”). While these types of jokes often appear as isolated phenomena, I argue that collectively they represent a current and long-standing popular, intolerant attitude toward masculine women that forecloses more productive representations. This joke also reveals how little has actually been accomplished toward the inscription of female masculinity in our collective, cultural symbolic.

⁵ Pérez believes it is essential to foreground issues of sexuality and gender in a postmodern mode of questioning, particularly when one recalls that the dominant mode of Chicano/a historical scholarship in the United States has been through a materialist lens focused upon the Chicano worker since the 1960's and '70s. She writes, “I believe that postmodern questions [of subject formation] provide a fresh look at Chicana/o history and the manner in which gender/sex is contemplated and negated. Paradigms that take into account the cultural condition of the worker have been useful, but constricting” (*Decolonial* 11). “Woman” then becomes a backdrop for Chicana/o historical writings (12). In an effort to place women as historical actors rather than props, she proposes altering our linguistic terminology and replacing “colonized worker” and immigrant laborer with “diaspora.” Although complementary opposites, the immigrant as the male worker who relocates by choice, and the colonized as male worker without choice, both imply work as a “genderless, sexless social condition” (18).

⁶ Further, as Arrizón's asserts “the borderline of postcolonial critique demands an encounter with the past as contingent space that invents and interrupts the performance of the present” (14).

⁷ Within Pérez's criticism of male authenticity, it is important to consider Halberstam's analysis of the murdered transgendered teenager from Nebraska, Brandon Teena, who performed a similarly successful “enactment of manhood” (*Queer Time* 70). Micaela's manliness likewise destroys the authenticity of the male adventurer and calls critical attention to masculine identification itself.

⁸ As Michel Foucault argues in *History of Sexuality, Volume One*, we are all constituted by and implicated within these power/knowledge systems.

⁹ Despite common misconceptions of the nation of Mexico as less egalitarian than the U.S. in the nineteenth century, mestiza women actually lost legal rights after they became U.S. citizens. Interstitial resistance became the only recourse for women who sought to regain these lost rights, such as rights to property after marriage (Acosta and Winegarten 28).

¹⁰ Further, Batra recognizes that there is no “easy” relationship between Western-based feminist and queer theory and postcoloniality and that we must anticipate a feminist discourse that is burgeoning yet in many ways still incoherent (93).

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