

“The Fourth Choice:” Forging the Future of Chicax Mother/Daughter Relationships through Storytelling and The Path of Conocimiento in Erika Sánchez’s *I’m Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and Barbara Renaud

González’s *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?*

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The exploration of mother/daughter relationships has been a consistent theme throughout Chicax literature especially in relation to Chicax identity, often dominating the works of writers like Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, and most recently Barbara Renaud González and Erika Sánchez. In such literature, readers often encounter contentious, strenuous relationships between Chicax mothers who refuse to give up traditional cultural norms versus their headstrong, Chicax daughters who seek to establish their own identities beyond their families. The mothers, Amada and Amá respectively, in *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* and *I’m Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* represent many real-life Chicax mothers who seemingly offer endless criticism of their daughters’ “rebellious” lifestyles represented by their abilities to speak their minds, criticize their culture, and overall reject strict adherence to traditional Chicax culture. By the same token, the daughters of each novel are also highly critical of their mothers’ obedience to family, strict religious views, and desire to maintain certain reflections of femininity. It is the daughters’ (Lucero’s and Julia’s) formal education and partial assimilation, which allows them the liberty to speak their minds, while attempting to assert themselves because of such newfound knowledge. Such oppositional viewpoints often suggest an inability to maintain a mother/daughter relationship especially in a culture which remains grounded in patriarchy, religion, and colonization. Despite the struggles that each mother/daughter duo encounters in *Golondrina* and *I’m Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, there lies a desire to ultimately have a healthy, stable relationship with one another which cannot be obtained without a deeper realization of the oppositional viewpoints represented by each generation.

An in-depth exploration of the mother/daughter relationships in both novels offers a blueprint of an innovative way Chicax mothers and daughters in contemporary society may reach a common understanding, a consciousness, that though their paths may differ, their goals are the same. Further exploration of the seemingly opposing generation is also a necessity if contemporary Chicax women desire self-realization, the consciousnessⁱ of their identities. Consciousness of self cannot occur unless the Chicax daughters of these novels confront their personal and communal histories by hearing and learning about their own mothers’ “[her]storiesⁱⁱ.” Lucero and Julia embark on their own consciousness journey as they begin to explore how their stories are embedded within their mothers’ stories as well. Cristina Herrera’s exploration of Chicax mother/daughter relationships in literature and film offers further insight into the importance of such examinations:

Must the mother-daughter relationship be always already a source of rejection and subordination, or can it be a space in which these women achieve agency, subjectivity, and empowerment? If Chicana motherhood has long been shaped through cultural, patriarchal norms that lead to a disconnected or ambivalent mother-daughter relationship, cannot motherhood be rewritten to liberate mothers and their daughters. (Herrera 203).

As Herrera suggests, stories like *Golondrina* and *I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* are ones that must be shared so that we may contest the stereotypes, the misconceptions each generation (both mother and daughter) have about each other. If Chicax continue to uphold those misperceptions by refusing to question and know their Chicax identity within society, Chicax simply add to the destructive elements of patriarchy and colonization which they have struggled against for centuries. Part of resisting the patriarchy and colonization emerges through achievement of *conocimiento* described by Anzaldúa as the attempt to “know the world you live in, to come to grips with the problems of life. Motivated by the need to understand, you crave to be what and who you are...You question the doctrines claiming to be the only right way to life...” (“Shift” 542). By refusing to truly examine where Chicax come from and where we will go in the future, we willingly participate in the dismantling of any power and agency Chicax have acquired over the years. At the same time, the alternative to *conocimiento* places the Chicax woman in danger of remaining in the foreground of history, literature, politics, and society.

Ultimately, the question each daughter confronts as each encounters their mothers' stories and their own is, who am I without my mother? This question comes to a head as Lucero and Julia begin formal schooling, which offers new ways of thinking about the world in contrast to their mothers' knowledge and life experiences. Though it seems that the two ways of knowing, formal education and the maternal knowledge passed on through their mothers (Amada and Amá) are in opposition, it is a balance of the two that can bring about consciousness of Chicax identity for all sides.

Larissa Mercado-López posits the concept of “maternal facultad” as a way of understanding the work and knowledge that mothers obtain through the process of becoming mothers. Mercado-López suggests that “[m]aternal facultad finds value in the subject-in-processⁱⁱⁱ and legitimizes the feelings and sensations of a changing body as signs of a knowledge that can enable subjects to acquire the consciousness to cognitively travel to access other forms of knowing” (185). Thus, the knowledge and consciousness of one's world and identity which emerge through the experience of motherhood opens avenues to contest “normalized” notions of motherhood, the knowledge they do and do not possess, while empowering the mother and subsequent children. In the case of *Golondrina* and *I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, it is significant to note that the stories told are narrated by the daughters, but the stories are those of both mother and daughter: one cannot understand the other or contest and decolonize their positionality in society without the story of the other. Decolonization of notions of Chicana motherhood and expectations for women within the culture begin with explorations of current understandings of womanhood.

Chicax feminist scholar and philosopher, Gloria Anzaldúa asserts that Chicax culture holds three expectations when it comes to women and their identity:

The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a *virgen* until she marries, she is a good woman. For a woman of my [Chicax] culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 39)

Such expectations still ring true for many Chicax women of a certain generation, however, the younger generations who have grown up in more privileged households have begun to question these traditional expectations just as Anzaldúa once did. The dilemma of challenging and resisting women's roles in Chicax culture arises especially when a mother identifies as more traditional and adheres to the ideology of the virgin/whore dichotomy as mentioned by Anzaldúa versus a daughter who chooses to struggle against these expectations. Opposing ideologies such as these emerge in Chicax literature, with a focus on the contentious mother/daughter relationship and identity conflict for both women. Despite the contentious mother/daughter relationships revealed in *Golondrina* and *I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, the mother/daughter duos in each novel achieve consciousness about their identities as Chicax women and their relationships to each other and society through the sharing of one another's stories and their encounters with the path of *conocimiento*.

Las Tres Madres^{iv}: Malinche, Guadalupe, and La Llorona, Historical Chicax Expectations

The problem of Chicax mother/daughter relationships must first be understood from a historical and cultural standpoint regarding perceptions of women's roles in society. Historically speaking the idea of the virgin/whore dichotomy plays a pivotal role in understanding how and why Chicax treat and perceive women within their own and other cultures. While this dichotomy has its origins in the colonization of Mexico by the Spanish conquistadors, of importance is the forced "relationship" between Hernan Cortés and Malintzin Tenepal, or La Malinche, as she is known in Chicax culture. As Cristina Herrera asserts, "Mexican and Chicana women learn at a young age the severe consequences of being labeled *chingada*" (Herrera 52). Emma Pérez takes this a step further by arguing that for scholars like Octavio Paz and their interpretation of Malinche as a betrayer to her people, the

...Indian mother of Chicanos/as is denigrated precisely because Paz and others like him cannot come to terms with the Indian woman who, in their eyes, betrayed the race by embracing the white male colonizer. Yet contradictions proliferate. At some level he is compelled to embrace the colonizer father. Malinche becomes the dreaded phallic mother who will devour him, castrate him, usurp him of his own phallus/power. He must therefore ally with the white colonizer father, but to do so is to ally in ambivalence. (Pérez 107)

Such contradictions not only guide the ideology of Chicano men regarding their perceptions of women's identity and their roles in their culture, they also often compel women to adhere to the same concepts. The historical importance of Malinche reveals itself in today's Chicax culture as we continue to note adherence to patriarchal ideology which insists that women remain pure and virginal and deviance from such characteristics signals a *mujer mala* like their archetypal predecessor, Malinche. For the contemporary Chicana, as Chicax, feminist scholar, Norma Alarcón, asserts,

Because the myth of Malintzin pervades not only male thought but ours too as it seeps into our own consciousness in the cradle through their [men's] eyes as well as their mothers', who are entrusted with the transmission of culture, we may come to believe

that indeed our very sexuality condemns us to enslavement. An enslavement which is subsequently manifested itself in self-hatred. All we see is hatred of women. We must hate her too since love seems only possible through extreme virtue whose definition is at best slippery. (Alarcón, “Chicana Feminist Literature” 183)

Alarcón notes that in the teachings shared between mothers and daughters, mothers convey the idea that any sexual transgression or deviance from “virginal” comportment may result in rejection by their families and culture. Women teach their daughters that sexually active women or women who embrace their sexuality are deviants who deserve scorn and exile.

Similarly, Anzaldúa explains that Chicana culture practices not a strict adherence to Roman Catholicism, rather a “...folk Catholicism with many pagan elements,” among them is the reverence paid to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Like La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe has its origins in the indigenous origins of contemporary Chicana culture, “*La Virgen de Guadalupe’s* Indian name is *Coatlalopeuh*. She is the central deity connecting us [Chicana] to our Indian ancestry” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 49). Just as the colonization of the Aztecs by the Spanish conquistadors impacted their descendants’ identities in relation to Malinche, so too did the teachings of Christianity and Catholicism shift and influence societal perceptions of women based on La Virgen.

Today’s contemporary Chicana culture continues to emphasize the virgin/whore dichotomy by asserting the need for women to be virginal, chaste, “desexed,” and any deviance from this type of woman automatically categorizes a woman as the “other” kind of female, to put it simply, women are branded as either “good” or “bad” based on these patriarchal, colonialist ideologies. The binary is especially problematic because it acts as a controlling agent, forcing women to be subservient and obedient to the patriarchy, colonization, and men, while highlighting and praising docility in women. At the same time, the binary serves to shame Chicana especially regarding their sexuality, any attempts to challenge these oppressions, and refusal to conform.

The final mother figure in Chicana history who has shaped perceptions of women, especially mother and daughter relationships, emerges in the various stories of La Llorona. Multiple versions of the story of La Llorona exist, but the main story line remains the same, as relayed by González:

...a rich Spaniard courts an Indian woman, and she bears his children. When he informs his lover that he intends to return to Spain to marry a rich woman and will take his children with him, she goes to the river and drowns his children. La Llorona dies of grief and is told by the ‘master of the gate’ that she may not enter heaven until she retrieves her dead children; this is why it is said that children must not go to bodies of water after dark: La Llorona might mistake them for her own. (qtd. in Herrera 57)

The influence and consequences of colonization and patriarchy emerge as dominant means of controlling indigenous women. The story is a familiar one to many Chicana, as a cautionary tale meant to keep children in line while also enforcing patriarchal dominance over disobedient women and “bad” mothers. Once again, we have an indigenous mother figure who through colonization and patriarchy is punished for deviating from the “norm” of a “good” mother and woman. In terms of understanding Chicana mothers’ behavior and expectations for their daughters, we begin to understand that “[t]he story of La Llorona is critical to discussions of

mother-daughter dynamics, given that many mothers use the legend to control and protect their daughters” (Herrera 58).

Despite the ideology that centers on the virgin/whore dichotomy and “good” versus “bad” mother binary as told through the three maternal figures of Chicana history and culture, La Malinche, La Virgen Guadalupe, and La Llorona, contemporary Chicana theorists and literature seeks to contest and re-appropriate these figures to assert Chicana feminism and consciousness. As Emma Pérez asserts in *The Decolonial Imaginary*, it is necessary to “...tak[e] the ‘his’ out of the ‘story,’ the story that often becomes the universalist narrative in which women’s experiences is negated. Women’s history began the project of refuting male experience as the norm” (xiv). A re-examination of Chicana history from a woman’s perspective is only the beginning of decolonizing stories like Malinche, Guadalupe, and La Llorona.

Gloria Anzaldúa directly contests the image of La Malinche as a sellout of her people, instead flipping the script. Anzaldúa boldly proclaims,

[n]ot me sold out my people but they me. *Malinali Tenepat*, or *Malintzín*, has become known as *la Chingada*—the fucked one...Because of the color of my skin they betrayed me. The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. (*Borderlands* 45)

Anzaldúa does exactly what Pérez asserts is necessary in bringing about the “decolonial imaginary” by telling the story, the true stories, of indigenous woman and mothers like La Malinche. The re-appropriation of Malinche as a maternal, indigenous figure who is merely a victim allows her to become an empowered mother, the mother of the Chicana, mestizo race. Similarly, the Virgin of Guadalupe’s part in the virgin/whore dichotomy is disrupted by Chicana scholars like Anzaldúa through her attempt to re-establish the ties to indigenous women and sexuality (*Borderlands* 55).

The figure of La Llorona is also a maternal figure who is re-inscribed with empowering characteristics of motherhood rather than victimhood. Ana María Carbonell adds to this revisionist notion of La Llorona as an empowering figure by pointing to folkloric literature which emphasizes “...the lover’s betrayal and locating his actions within a social context” allowing room for La Llorona to emerge as a “...resistant maternal figure who confronts the unjust race, class, and gender hierarchy of colonial Mexico” (Carbonell 56). Further examples of the reimagining and contesting of the stories and female figures of Malinche, Guadalupe, and Llorona and through them mother/daughter relationships persist in contemporary Chicana literature including *Golondrina*, *Why Did You Leave Me?* and *I’m Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*.

The subversion of traditional Chicana maternal figures as well as the virgin/whore and good/bad mother binaries are further contested through the act of storytelling and the path of *conocimiento*. Anzaldúa and other Chicana theorists like Cherríe Moraga amongst others argue for the necessity of storytelling as a tool of empowerment and consciousness-raising. Anzaldúa and Moraga write about the importance of Chicana storytelling as an expression of theory in the flesh described as the “...physical realities of our lives...[which] fuse to create a politic born of necessity” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 21). For Chicana like Anzaldúa, Moraga, Pérez, and many others, the act of storytelling especially from their experiences is political because theirs are stories that do not persist in the universalist, colonialist, patriarchal narrative. Further, their

stories are a necessity because Chicana women have been silenced throughout history and continue to be silenced today. Moraga further asserts the importance of storytelling in her own life, explaining that her mother often told numerous stories about her own life to a seemingly indifferent daughter, a daughter who confesses to her privilege because of her “güera” (light) skin and education. Despite the seemingly contradictory life experiences between Moraga, a well-educated mestiza and a mother she describes as largely illiterate, she explains, “[f]rom all of this, I experience, daily, a huge disparity between what I was born into and what I was to grow up to become. Because...these stories my mother told me crept under my ‘güera’ skin. I had no choice but to enter the life of my mother. *I had no choice*” (“La Güera” 28). Storytelling shared between mother and daughter allows a better understanding of one’s self as a Chicana along with an improved comprehension of not only the individual mother’s life but that of those who came before her.

Storytelling and Chicana Empowerment in *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

The use of storytelling emerges as an important guiding theme in the lives of the mother/daughter protagonists of *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Amá and Julia. The relationship between Amá, the mother, and Julia, her daughter, is described as tumultuous as indicated by the tone of the novel’s title and becomes more contentious as both attempt to deal with the unexpected death of Julia’s older sister, Olga. Julia reveals the complex relationship between her mother and herself from the beginning of her story as she describes the vast differences between herself and her sister explaining, “[a]ll I know is that I’m going to pack my bags when I graduate and say, ‘Peace out, mothafuckas.’ But not Olga. Saint Olga, the perfect Mexican daughter” (Sánchez 2-3). Julia’s description of the two daughters’ characteristics and worldviews further asserts the contentious relationship she has with her mother because, unlike her sister, she is not viewed as the “perfect Mexican daughter.” The death of Olga, once a mediator between Julia and Amá, sets off a chain of events that forces mother and the only remaining daughter to confront each other’s stories encouraging Chicana empowerment and consciousness, while also contesting the virgin/whore dichotomies of the Chicana culture, once they finally share the stories of their lives with one another.

Julia immediately establishes her resistance to traditional Chicana notions of femininity by contrasting herself with her dead sister and mother. Julia criticizes her sister, Olga, revealing that “...all she did was go to work, sit home with our parents, and take one class each semester at the local community college” in opposition to Julia’s desire, “[e]ver since I could pick up a pen, I’ve wanted to become a famous writer. I want to be so successful that people stop me on the street and ask, ‘Oh my God, are you Julia Reyes, the best writer who has ever graced this earth?’” (Sánchez 2). By beginning the novel with such strong assertions, Sánchez reveals a Chicana protagonist who can embrace a “fourth choice” previously not afforded to women of her mother’s generation, who as Anzaldúa points out only had three choices: a nun, prostitute, or mother (*Borderlands* 39). Despite the seemingly determined Julia, her dreams are met with constant conflicting ideas of how a daughter should behave, as revealed at various points by her mother including her insistence that learning to cook is a necessity: “[w]hat kind of a woman are you going to be if you can’t even make a tortilla” (Sánchez 33). Unfortunately, for Julia her contemporary views about Chicana feminism are met with scorn by a more traditional mother who wishes her youngest daughter would simply be obedient, chaste, and remain quietly at home.

Julia's initial description of Olga seems to fit the traditional expectations for Chicana women, she explains, "Olga was the perfect daughter—cooked, cleaned, and never stayed out late" (Sánchez 20). This description aligns with the expectations that Chicanos/as hold regarding women, especially in upholding the virginal aspect of the virgin/whore dichotomy. Olga seems to follow the prescriptions of a "perfect Mexican daughter" because she remained in the domestic sphere and obediently adhered to the traditional roles of women as caretakers, homemakers, and chaste figures (since she remained in the home).

In contrast to Olga is Julia who often questions and harshly criticizes her cultural norms when it comes to women's roles and expectations. Julia explains that she often fights with her mother about what a woman should and should not be: "[o]nce, I ruined Thanksgiving by going on a rant about the women having to cook all day while the men just sat around, scratching their butts" (Sánchez 21). Julia takes her criticisms of her culture even further by challenging the role of the Church in their lives: "I told her [Amá] that the Catholic church hates women because it wants us to be weak and ignorant" (21). Such opposition is important to note because it shows Julia's consciousness regarding her positionality as a Chicana woman. Julia is very much aware of the double standards that persist for her sex within her culture, taking note that women are expected to remain within the domestic sphere while also revealing the problems of the patriarchal elements that guide the Catholic church.

These instances of awareness are points which Anzaldúa indicates arise after a traumatic experience, which instigates the path of *conocimiento* for Julia. Anzaldúa explains that one begins their journey through the path of *conocimiento* after a traumatic experience forces one to shift their way of thinking through questioning and awareness. Such questioning and awareness come about by encountering the *camino* or path of *conocimiento*, a changing of perceptions, a confrontation of societal constructions of identity and ideology often grounded in racism, sexism, and colonization. As Anzaldúa explains, a traumatizing or jarring experience jolts one out of their former ways of thinking: "seeing through your culture separates you from the herd, exiles you from the tribe, wounds you psychologically and spiritually. Cada arrebataimiento is an awakening that causes you to question who you are, what the world is about" ("Shift" 547). For Julia, this jolting experience is the death of her sister and more importantly the discovery of items like lingerie and a hotel room key in Olga's room, which lead Julia to question whether she truly knew her sister. At the same time, Amá's lack of consciousness and her desire to adhere to traditional gender norms leads to further conflict between the two women. Through Julia's quest to discover the truth about Olga, she also embarks on a journey of self-understanding, which leads to further struggle between herself and her mother.

The process of attempting to seemingly understand Olga is really one that leads Julia to contemplate her own place in the world, her identity, and her connection to her mother. Throughout most of the novel, Julia remains situated in two spaces of *conocimiento*, the *nepantla* stage, an in between stage, and the *Coatlicue* stage. For Julia, the *nepantla* stage is one that she resides in throughout the novel as she attempts to navigate the traditional expectations her mother holds for her as a woman in contrast to her own ideas which directly contradict the norm when it comes to female roles. Julia describes this idea of being torn between two ideologies of what a "good" woman is: "Amá lets me go to the dance, which I think might qualify as a miracle, though she tells me I better not act *volada*, which means 'flirtatious.' Every time she says stuff like this, I feel shamed, and I don't know why because I haven't done anything" (Sánchez 105). This revelation describes the virgin/whore ideology that persists in Julia's family, her mother attempts to control and harness Julia, specifically her sexuality, using shame. Though

Julia understands what her mother is doing, she still feels guilty as if she has done something wrong when she really has not. This point further suggests Julia reaching the nepantla stage where “[l]iving between cultures results in ‘seeing’ double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another” (“Shift” 549). Though Julia is aware of the concept of controlling women’s sexuality as utilized by her culture, at the same time she has a desire to follow such ideology because it is what she has grown accustomed to.

Though Julia becomes aware of this split in thinking, she does not fully obtain awareness about her identity or why the conflict between herself and her mother persists. Instead, Julia’s inability to cope with her mother’s contradicting ideologies and her failure to deal with her sister’s death leads her deeper into depression and anxiety—what Anzaldúa refers to as the Coatlicue state. Julia’s attempt to seek more answers about herself and her family lead to some knowledge, but with a certain cost: “[p]eriods of being lost in chaos occur when you’re in between ‘stories’ before you shift from one set of perceptions and beliefs to another, from one mood to another” (“Shift” 553). For a time, Julia is lost in the Coatlicue stage, in chaos, unable to find herself or understand other perceptions like those of her sister and mother. Unable to break free from the despairing state, Julia explains, “I’m tired of feeling like the rest of the world always gets to decide what I can do...I can’t keep going like this anymore. What is the point of living if I can’t ever get what I want? This doesn’t feel like a life, it feels like a never-ending punishment” (Sánchez 210). Severe depression and anxiety lead Julia to attempt suicide, but it is this attempt which also forces her to journey further down the path of *conocimiento*. She must reach the depths of despair to move beyond into awareness.

Awareness of identity and connections to her mother do not fully come together until she returns to her country of origin, her mother’s hometown in Mexico. While in Mexico, Julia discovers the hardships that her mother endured in her attempt to cross to the United States, including the rape she experienced at the hands of a coyote. Julia’s *tía* explains the necessity of sharing her mother’s story with her: “[s]ee *mija*, that’s why I want you to know. So when you and your mother fight, you can see where she’s come from and understand what’s happened to her. She doesn’t mean to hurt you” (Sánchez 275). This knowledge and understanding of part of what Julia’s mother has gone through allows her to finally begin to know herself and understand their relationship. It is at this point that Julia encounters a glimpse of the maternal *facultad* of her mother—the lived experiences and knowledge her mother has acquired on her journey to becoming a new individual because of maternity. Upon returning from Mexico, Julia is called to action to try to rekindle a relationship with her mother after all the trauma both women have endured. In this stage, the crossing stage, Julia’s newfound knowledge “...prompts [her] to shift into a new perception of [herself] and the world. (“Shift” 556). Julia finally begins to attempt to understand her mother’s perceptions of the world and treatment of her daughter as they share conversations, *Amá* reveals “I’m ignorant, *mija*. Can’t you see that? There are so many things I don’t know. I wish things were different. I know you hate me, but I love you with all my heart. I always have, ever since I knew I was pregnant with you. I just don’t want anything to ever happen to you” (Sánchez 283).

This openness to understanding and hearing her mother’s side of things is also accompanied by a shift in ideology. In the crossing stage, Julia engages in what Chela Sandoval refers to as a differential consciousness, awareness of one’s position within multiple worlds. She describes the activity of weaving between various positionalities as “differential,’ insofar as it enables movement ‘between and among’ ideological positionings” (58, 9). Differential consciousness is a survival tactic developed by women of color to cope with their existence in

the third space. Women of color use differential consciousness to move between oppositional ideologies and identities depending upon the situation they find themselves in.

Julia learns how to cope with her identity as a Chicax and maintain a relationship with her mother by shifting between oppositional ideologies represented by herself and her mother. It is primarily through the sharing of their life stories and experiences with each other that Julia and her mother can begin to heal and achieve awareness of each other's positionalities, signaling the final stages of *conocimiento*: questioning, telling one's story, and transforming one's way of thinking. Julia reveals her newfound awareness as she embarks on her new journey to college:

In some ways, I think that part of what I'm trying to accomplish—whether for her [Amá], Apá, and Olga. It's not that I'm living life for them, exactly, but I have so many choices they've never had, and I feel like I can do so much with what I've been given. What a waste their journey would be if I just settled for a dull, mediocre life. Maybe one day they'll realize that. (Sánchez 339)

In embracing this mentality, Julia contests the ideology of women as mothers, housewives, or whores and chooses a "fourth choice," education. But the decision to choose education does not indicate a rejection of culture and family, rather Julia comes to understand that in choosing college she is also choosing an avenue and opportunity to continue to share her mother's story, remaining connected to her family, while also forging a new path of awareness for herself.

What remains significant about Julia and her mother's stories are their abilities to recognize the problematic ideology of women's roles and expectations in their (Chicax) culture. Though Julia was somewhat aware of the concepts of the virgin/whore dichotomy and the good girl/bad girl binaries as passed down through stories and histories of notable women like Malinche, Llorona, and Guadalupe, she subverts these ideas of women as whores, bad mothers and perfect ideals by refusing to back down from attaining her dreams of acquiring and education, yet doing so in such a way which allows her to retain ties to her family and mother.

Especially important are the beginnings of awareness encountered by Julia's mother as well—though she finds it difficult to completely reject the binaries of women as good/bad or virgins/whores, her final discussions with her daughter reveal a greater understanding of her daughter's desire for more than simply what her culture has taught her to accept and be. In coming to consciousness together, Julia and Amá can address and shift the ideologies of women into notions of empowering Chicax who have choices beyond those of their ancestors and this awareness emerges because the two women are finally able to share parts of their stories with one another. The storytelling is ultimately the key that binds the women to each other, history, and their future selves as awakened Chicax.

Mothers, Daughters, the Stories They Tell and Creating Spaces of Chicax Empowerment in Barbara Renaud González's *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?*

Like *I am Not Your Mexican Daughter*, González's *Golondrina* also explores a mother/daughter relationship and their growing sense of empowerment as they come into consciousness about their identities and connection to one another via storytelling. Unlike Sánchez's novel, however, the relationship between Amada (the mother) and Lucero (the daughter) is not as contentious as that of Amá and Julia. Barbara Renaud González's *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* explores the relationship between a mother and daughter

using storytelling. González's novel begins fittingly, in the kitchen, with Lucero, the daughter, asking her mother, Amada, to relay the story of how she crossed over from Mexico to the United States. Though Amada is initially hesitant to convey her story she eventually begins to unfold the events of her life. Lucero contributes her own perspective of her mother's story while also revealing how the two women's lives intersect. Though the primary struggle within this text is slightly different than *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, both novels do focus on the struggle of obtaining an education and retaining ties to culture, though in very different ways. The struggle to achieve an education is one that brings awareness of some of the cultural issues of the Chicana culture, namely that of virgin/whore dichotomy and patriarchal expectations for women. Through the sharing of each other's stories, the women of *Golondrina* reveal how they contest traditional, patriarchal expectations for women as simply virgins/whores or good/bad women, while also establishing Chicana empowerment by obtaining consciousness of their positionality as Chicana women.

Especially significant is the theme of identity as it is linked to personal, communal, and cultural history, knowledge, and storytelling. The story is framed by Lucero's uncertainty about her identity, which is the result of the Anglocentric epistemologies of her institutions of learning coming into opposition with her home/cultural ideologies. Lucero initially away, finds herself "called" home. Once back in the home space, Lucero is forced to evaluate her subjectivity and especially how the academic experience has impacted her. Though the narrative does not focus solely on Lucero's schooling experiences, there is no doubt that the formal institutions she attends signal a shift in consciousness. This shift in consciousness is the second step that occurs once Lucero encounters Gloria Anzaldúa's path of *conocimiento*, in which she begins to contemplate her place in the world. Because of persecution at school, Lucero experiences a transition and awareness of her positionality, which Anzaldúa refers to as "un arrebato," a jolt from the familiar, a shifting between worlds ("Shift" 546). Such awareness includes the shattering of the belief that assimilation is the only solution to the persecution they endure. Once this awareness is achieved, Lucero begins to contemplate her understanding of the world and where such societal constructions emerge.

Lucero begins to explore her story by questioning how her mother crossed over from Mexico to the United States. The act of questioning signals the beginning of Lucero's awareness, which is needed to balance multiple epistemologies. This awareness occurs not only for Lucero's identity, but as a way of understanding her mother's identity and life as well. As Lucero watches her mother, she realizes "[m]y mother's looking at me from the stove, but she is really staring at the past, and for the first time I realize how there must have been a before-me, as there will be an after me" (González 3). This is an especially striking revelation for a daughter, one that does not come to her until she is older and has chosen to reflect on her cultural background through the life and stories of her mother. As Amada begins her story, Lucero notes that her mother is reluctant to tell it because "I can tell she's sorry that I'm just like her. I'm an exile just like she's been all her life, only from a different side of the river. So I keep going" (González 3). The notion of being an exile emerges from the traditional ideology Lucero's mother has grown up with regarding "good" and "bad" women. Since Amada chooses to defy her mother and marry at a young age and embarks on a journey to the US, leaving her husband and child behind, she is deemed a "bad" woman and mother, forcing her into exile. Lucero immediately notes that her mother and she cannot fully belong to Mexico or the United States because of society's construction of their identities as Chicana women. Amada's inability to acculturate marks her as

different, as not belonging to the United States because of her lack of English skills, brown skin and culture.

In contrast, Lucero's ability to acculturate, but not fully, also marks her as different. She cannot fully claim a Mexican identity because she was born and grew up in Texas, knows English and a bit of Spanish, and has been educated in the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of this dilemma as she explains

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. (*Borderlands* 85)

Because Lucero is forced to acculturate she becomes alienated from her family and culture and especially from the epistemologies of her community. This sense of alienation occurs primarily due to Lucero's exposure to the epistemologies of her formal education, which leads to the development of the education conflict. The result of such a conflict is Lucero's inability to fully identify with the epistemologies of her home or school. The education/educación conflict forces Lucero to privilege the epistemologies of her school over her cultural knowledge.

Once Lucero begins to encounter trauma after trauma both at home and school because of her gender and race, it forces her to become conscious of her identity, the problem of binary thinking, and her position between multiple epistemologies. Such realizations especially become evident once Lucero encounters *arreatos* which force her to question and reflect on the familiarity of her surroundings, including the belief that such oppressions are the "natural" way of society. As Lucero reflects on the trauma experienced in school, she notes that the other Mexican children refuse to assimilate because

they don't want to belong like I do, they have no chance, but at least they belong to each other. They tell me I'm the stupid one, for pretending to be a gringa, and now the *mexicanos* are beginning to hate me, too. The crazy thing is I'm beginning to hate them back, they just don't know it's the gringos I hate even more for making me hate them. (González 95)

Though Lucero wishes to assimilate and tries her best to, she realizes that she still does not truly belong to the Anglo world. Lucero experiences hatred from the Anglos who reject her because she is Mexican American and considered "inferior" and the Mexicanos feel she is a sell-out. In addition, Lucero begins to hate both the Anglos and Mexicanos because both groups continue to contribute to the problematic dichotomies she has begun to question, causing her further confusion regarding her identity. Thus, Lucero is in *nepantla*.

Lucero becomes further aware of her position between multiple epistemologies once she is forced to abandon her Spanish words in lieu of English ones. This also leads to awareness that her subjectivity is constructed by an Anglocentric society. She, too, has begun to accept the premise that English is better than Spanish, and therefore more privileged. The school system, including her teacher, is Anglo. The pedagogy and curriculum is Anglocentric. Because Lucero is Mexican American, she does not have a chance to learn about her culture's history, nor is she able to express herself accurately due to the language barrier. Lucero describes the alienation she feels as she attempts to ask for help,

Frijole eater, greaser, dirty, stupid, *gobacktoMexico spic*. How do I say they call me these names because of you, Mami! Or the way my classmates laugh at my clothes and skin and even my hair, as if I was some monster, uglier than Frankenstein...Every day they look at me as if I don't belong here, as if I don't deserve to be in school with them, as if they want to break me into little pieces like my Spanish words already are. (González 95)

Lucero understands that she cannot go to her mother for help both because she no longer possesses the language to do so and she believes her mother could never understand what she is enduring. She is aware that she could never turn to her teachers or classmates at school because they simply mock her. Lucero reveals the persecutions she endures at school explaining "[t]hey've already broken the other Mexican kids, some of them pretend they don't speak Spanish anymore, and the others who won't learn English are failing, just like they want us to. And though I'm polite, they still hate me, still call me those names. I'm not dumb like they say, either" (González 94-95). Each of these incidents leads to a confusion of identity for Lucero because adherence to her culture ensures further alienation and oppression, while the assimilationist pedagogy of her school pushes her further from her family.

One of the ways in which Lucero attempts to contest the Anglocentric epistemologies thrust upon her by her school is by re-inscribing her mother's story as well as her own back into history. In choosing to tell her story, Lucero rejects the versions of history that ignore women. As Pérez suggests, the notion of [her]story must be revealed, Lucero becomes involved in telling history from the often ignored female and Chicanx perspective, namely that of her mother and herself. Lucero alludes to the stories that are often hidden and forgotten as she explains the importance of storytelling in her family:

Mami taught me the best story sometimes takes a lifetime to tell, that's why you have to tell it over and over until you get it right. The best story, like a quilt she said, is made from scrap pieces of cloth, old buttons, leftover thread, and don't forget the wornouts and *manteles*, '*¿verdad, mijita?*' That's where the real story is, she said, just look for it in the cabinet where everything's stored away and forgotten. And that's how I'm telling you this story, finding the hand-carved jewelry box I brought her once from Hawaii... (González 7).

Lucero's realization that she must not only share her mother's story, but hers as well reveals the beginning of her desire to contest the lack of women's stories, especially Chicanx ones, throughout history. Lucero's storytelling directly contests the privileging of Anglocentric, patriarchal histories, thereby making room for those stories that were once deemed insignificant. Amada's story is an especially important one to tell, because as Pérez explains, her story like many others has been relegated to the margins, and theirs are often the stories "previously unheard, rebuffed, or underestimated" (xv). It is the

[v]oices of women from the past, voices of Chicanas, Mexicans, and Indias [that] are utterances which are still minimized, spurned, even scorned. And time, in all its dialectical invention and promise, its so-called inherent progress, has not granted Chicanas, Mexicanas, Indias much of a voice at all. We are spoken about, spoken for, and ultimately encoded as whining, hysterical, irrational or passive women who cannot

know what is good for us, who cannot know how to express or authorize our own narratives. (Pérez xv)

By asking her mother to relay her story, Lucero finally gives her mother the voice and freedom she so desperately wished for. It is particularly important that Lucero help her mother achieve her voice because she represents the Mexican, immigrant, Chicana, and Indian women. Amada's voice and her story are suppressed in multiple ways throughout her life, first by her mother, especially when she wishes to go to school "but there is no money" and then by her former husband, Sapo, who prevents her from telling her story because her duty is to "say nothing" (González 11, 18). Lastly, Amada's story is often silenced by her husband Lazaro's stories and his insistence that she should forget Mexico and the Spanish language. Despite the silencing that Amada must endure, it is her daughter Lucero, a name which means "light, but more than that, more like a necessary light in darkness" who will break it by telling her stories (González 105).

Amada's story is an exceptional one that cannot occupy "traditional" spaces; rather she must relay her experiences from a space that is representative of the many cultures, worlds, languages, and experiences that she encounters. Because Amada cannot fully belong to Mexico or the United States, representative of the first and second spaces, her story goes untold in these places. However, critical reflection of this fact shifts Amada and Lucero into a space between the first and second spaces, the third space. This third space of storytelling and writing also requires both Amada and Lucero to form a differential consciousness as they reflect on their life experiences. Sandoval argues that when people are marginalized in dominant societies, just as Amada and Lucero have been, the development of a process of deconstruction of dominant ideologies takes place. Amada and Lucero's exposure to the oppositional epistemologies of the US school system and their cultural environment has caused them to question their positionality in both spaces. Amada and Lucero begin to question why they are rejected by their home and school cultures, why the Anglocentric, patriarchal epistemology is privileged over their cultural ways of knowing, and why their identities as Chicana are rejected in both spaces. Such awareness and questioning emerge especially through the act of storytelling.

Rather than submit to one epistemology or identity over another, both women choose to weave between them. This is especially evident through Lucero's decision to relay her family's story because she chooses to tell her own story; she is contesting Anglocentric master narratives. She chooses to employ the English language to share this story, suggesting an acceptance of certain aspects of the Anglocentric epistemology. These acts can be defined as engaging in differential consciousness because both women choose to relay their experiences using the English language and writing, both tools of assimilation, to tell their story. Amada deconstructs her position within the dominant Anglo society by offering her story to her daughter and in turn Lucero does the same when she offers the interweaving of her family's stories to the reader. The decision to relay her family's story, from a uniquely Chicana perspective contests the privileging of Anglocentric, patriarchal, individualistic ways of thinking. In this way, both Amada and Lucero can find a voice in a society that has often silenced them.

Lucero's decision to document her mother's story gives a voice to both her mother and her self. Especially significant is Lucero's ability to give voice to and provide a place for her mother's story. Though Amada's husbands have prevented her from achieving an education and relaying her stories, Lucero can break free of the cultural restraints that often require Chicana to engage solely in the roles of mother and wife. In choosing to tell her family's stories, Lucero

counters the epistemologies of her school. Lucero's storytelling is also indicative of the use of Laura Rendón's *sentipensante* pedagogy in which a balance exists between "inner work, focusing on emotional and spiritual nurturance, and outer work, involving service and action in the world" (135). Storytelling allows Lucero to reflect on her own identity and positionality in the world, while also inviting readers to engage in similar strategies, thereby balancing the focus on "inner" and "outer" work.

It is from this space that Lucero can also provide her own perspective regarding her mother's and father's lives. The combination of Lucero's story intertwined within that of her mother's and father's family histories allows Lucero's story to emerge from a third space. Lucero's ability to interrelate these various perspectives reveals that each of them is a part of her story. Lucero purposely places her story and herself within this in-between space to present her multiplicity. Citing Irigaray, Pérez refers to an individual who positions herself in such a space as a "strategic essentialist," who is described as:

one who exercises political representation, or identity politics, within hegemonic structures. The strategy asserts countersites within dominant society. As a dynamic process, this tactic gives voices to each new marginalized social or political group, bonded temporarily at specific historical moments. (Pérez, "Irigaray" 87-88)

Chicanx and Latinx residing in the United States employ strategic essentialism when they embrace their Chicana/Latina identity and re-envision it. Rather than contextualizing such an identity solely within the racist and discriminatory experiences encountered, Chicanx can re-appropriate it. Especially important is the site from which Chicanx and Latinx re-appropriate and re-contextualize their identity.

Lucero can be described as a strategic essentialist because of the position from which she reveals her story. Her interweaving of her mother's stories with her father's and her own demonstrates her acceptance of these multiple identities. Within this context, Lucero employs strategic essentialism and becomes a strategic essentialist because she chooses to include the stories of her mother, father and herself. She purposely presents these perspectives to assert a specific identity politics of *mestizaje*. This assertion is especially important because she is also presenting it from a Chicanx perspective, countering the perspective of the dominant Anglo, patriarchal society. This emergence of a countersite allows Lucero to give voice to her mother, father, Mexican immigrants, Tejanx, and Chicanx. She does not choose one dominant voice to represent the marginalized; instead, Lucero focuses on the often-unheard story of the Mexican woman's border crossing and the challenges she must endure to earn a better education and future for her children. She also emphasizes the voice of the Tejano who occupied the land before the Anglos came and stole it. From this countersite, this third space, that Amada and Lucero place their story to contextualize their exploration of their *mestizaje*.

As Lucero becomes more familiar with her family's stories, she begins to question her subjectivity and the dominant ideologies of US school systems. Lucero's desire to contest the epistemologies of her school signals a major shift in her consciousness. At this point Lucero finally discovers the need to balance multiple epistemologies which will allow her to embrace her identity. This understanding occurs once Lucero enters the Coatlicue state which Anzaldúa describes as a point where you

begin to know and accept the self uncovered by the trauma, you pull the blinders off, take in the new landscape in brief glances. Gradually you arouse the agent in this drama, begin to act, to dis-identify with the fear and the isolation. You sit quietly and meditate, trance into an altered state of consciousness, temporarily suspending your usual frames of reference and beliefs while your creative self seeks a solution to your problem by being receptive to new patterns of association. (“Now” 553)

Once Lucero has reached this state she finally understands the importance of her family’s stories. Lucero’s fear is accompanied by the desire to hear such stories, as she explains that “a part of me doesn’t really want to hear it, it’s just that her stories don’t leave me alone, even when I wish they’d go back into the cupboard where Mami picks them out along with her spices” (González 133). Lucero’s fear is also the realization that though she may not want to hear such stories about her family because they may cause grief, they must still be told.

Lucero learns from her father that as “the eldest son, [he] was entrusted with top-secret for-your-eyes-only family stories, [and] says he has to give them to me, the firstborn daughter” (109). Though Lucero’s father passes on the family stories, he also makes her promise that she will not share what he’s told her with others because it would embarrass the family. However, to truly cope with who she is, it is necessary for Lucero to share her family’s stories because they are also her story. Through the act of storytelling, intertwining her story with that of her parents’ Lucero can reflect on her identity and the multiple epistemologies she must juggle and sustain.

Conclusion: The Bond of Chicana Mother/Daughter Relationships

Lucero and Amada’s relationship ultimately becomes a stronger one because they can share their life experiences and stories with each other and beyond. In sharing their stories, they also empower themselves as awakened Chicana who have often been silenced in Chicana history and culture. So too, are Julia and Amá able to forge a stronger relationship because of their ability to listen and share the stories of their lives. The sharing of these experiences directly contests the traditional ideologies of women as passive, obedient, “good” women who should not speak out against their culture.

The mother/daughter duos of both *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* represent significant shifts in expectations for Chicana mothers, daughters, and their relationships with each other and their Chicana culture, as well as their expressions of self-identification. Each relationship further demonstrates that a “fourth choice,” education, has emerged for contemporary Chicana. In choosing education, the daughters of each novel directly contest female expectations of the past; however, their desire to share their experiences with their mothers and moreover, to share their mother’s stories as well, also signals a move toward a new consciousness, *conocimiento* for both mother and daughter. Awareness of the deep connection to the mothers who have birthed them and those women who have birthed Chicana culture in the past also represents a significant shift in re-inscribing women back into history, and a traditionally male culture, while telling stories that have long been ignored or forgotten.

Both the works of González and Sánchez are representative of contemporary Chicana literature, signaling a positive shift in literature and storytelling, a shift toward acknowledging and legitimizing the stories of Chicana women who have long been muted. Through the telling of mother’s stories along with those of their daughters, there is acknowledgement of the validity

of maternal knowledge of the world, which is just as important as their daughter's experiences. The explorations of the mother/daughter relationships also represent the very real problems that persist within Mexican American culture. In a changing world, where Latinx (including Mexican Americans) are fast becoming the majority-minority it is imperative that Chicana mother/daughter relationships remain grounded in history, persist, and change via the decolonization of expectations for motherhood and womanhood. The relationships between Amada and Lucero and Amá and Julia demonstrate how younger generations of Chicana women can remain tied to their cultures, traditions, and family while also critiquing and altering those elements of their culture which seek to continue to colonize or delegitimize women's power. Each of these women solidify their identities by embracing their cultural, communal, personal "her" stories through the telling of their mother's stories interwoven with their own, while also forging their own paths and identities as they achieve further education. Lucero and Julia serve as symbols of the future for Chicana culture—a future which suggests that a balance of culture and education is not only a possibility but a necessity. Especially through literature and cultural studies, we can change the narrative of what it means to be a Chicana to one who can retain ties to culture and become educated successes in our world.

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ⁱ In using the word consciousness, I equate it with the term *conocimiento* as discussed by Chicana theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa, to mean coming to a deeper understanding of identity and the influence that societal concepts of race, gender, class, colonization, patriarchy have on identity.

ⁱⁱ Chicana theorist Emma Pérez uses the term "[her]story" in her discussion of the decolonial imaginary, asserting that women, especially Chicana and indigenous women must reclaim history by sharing their stories.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mercado-López describes mothers as a subject-in-process meaning that the physical, emotional, and mental changes affecting a mother's body impacts their identity and interactions with others as well—thus they are subjects whose identity is consistently shifting due to the experiences of motherhood. This is important to note in terms of maternal *facultad* because it shifts this idea of maternity and knowledge acquired through motherhood into a relevant, important, and necessary part of identity shaping.

^{iv} Anzaldúa refers to this term and the discussion of "Las Tres Madres" in *Borderlands*.