The Fiction of Solidarity: Transfronterista Feminisms and Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Central American Transnational Narratives

Ana Patricia Rodríguez

In the 1980s and 1990s, Chicana/Latina feminist cultural activists who were critical of U.S. intervention and imperialism in Central America engaged in the production of what I have called "solidarity fictions," or "fictions of solidarity." During those decades, the United States provided military and economic aid to Central American regimes, particularly in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, to fund wars of genocide and general destruction. As a consequence, many Central Americans sought asylum in the United States as refugees, political exiles, and immigrants. In the heat of that moment, Chicana/Latina writers and critics began to document the deaths, displacements, and border crossings of thousands of Central Americans fleeing civil wars fought between U.S.-supported right-wing governments and leftist guerrilla organizations. Their work produced a narrative of solidarity voicing critical feminist readings of the United States as an imperialist and neocolonial power, thus participating in the construction of a transnational Third World, or "Women of Color" cross-border, anti-colonial feminist discourse and movement. Engaging with *transfronterista* feminist discourses, agendas, and practices, these solidarity narratives, however, might now be examined in the context of the transnationalization of Chicana feminisms in the 1980s and 1990s when Central

Feminist Studies 34, nos. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2008).

American(a)s through their own struggles, histories, and agencies contributed to the radical transformation and politicization of U.S. Latina/o communities.

In this essay, I revisit the production of Chicana/Latina feminist narratives identified with anti-imperialist struggles and hemispheric solidarity movements in Central America in the 1980s and 1990s.[1] Through their texts, *transfronterista* feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Carole Fernández, Graciela Limón, Demetria Martínez, Cherríe Moraga, Lourdes Portillo, Nina Serrano, Alma Villanueva, and Helena María Viramontes, among others, not only challenged U.S. hegemony in the Western hemisphere, but also resisted the enforcement of multiple borders across the Americas.[2] In the process, they transnationalized Chicana/Latina struggles, histories, discourses, and feminisms beyond the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. However, their *transfronterista* feminist logic and anti-colonial imperative, while appealing to transnational Third World feminist struggles and affinities, produced a "fiction of solidarity" predicated on Chicana/Mexicana subjectivities. Examining the production of many of these solidarity fictions, and especially Portillo and Serrano's film, *After the Earthquake*, and Martínez's semi-autobiographical novel, *Mother Tongue*, this essay seeks to shift the primary focus of Chicana/o resistance, resilience, and hybrid borderizations that has shaped many Chicana/Latina narratives about the wars in Central America and to rethink *transfronterista* alliances and narratives in the Americas from a Central American subjective location.

Chicana Solidarity with Central America

The particular historical context explored in this essay is the intersection, as of the 1980s, of Chicana/Latina cultural activists, who took on anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles against forces that would undo the promise of cross-hemispheric feminist solidarity and affinity building. This contact zone of sorts permitted Chicana writers, scholars, and activists to challenge borders imposed by U.S. imperialism and border regimes, starting with 1848, when the northern territories of Mexico were territorialized (taken) by the United States. Henceforth, if not before, the Caribbean and Central America, each in their own turn, have been subjected to U.S. imperialist and empire-building forces.[3] Situated within this conflicted

history, Chicana, Latina, and Central American feminists may be said to share a common imperialist history and anti-imperialist struggle, or what Anzaldúa identifies as "a broader communal ground among Latinas/os."[4] In this hemispheric borderlands of sorts, Chicanas, Latinas, and Central Americanas may participate in the elaboration of cross-border, or *transfronterista,* affinities, alliances, and solidarities. It is at this juncture that Chicana/Latina *transfronterista* feminists produce a unique mixed blend of solidarity fictions to forge alliances and work across geopolitical borders, bridge local and global struggles, and challenge neocolonial and imperialist forces at work across the Americas.

With the expansion and diversification of Latina/o communities in the United States and with the hemispheric coalition building of feminists across the Americas as of the 1980s, Chicana/Latina feminisms begin to be (re)shaped by the larger spectrum of Latinidades and the increasing complexities of heterogeneous Latina struggles. The work of Sonia Saldívar-Hull is exemplary. In her essay, "Feminism on the Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics," and again in her book, *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature*, she describes the agenda of transfronteristas, or cross-border feminists, as challenging power dynamics that directly structure women's lives in the physical and symbolic Chicana/Latina borderlands. Saldívar-Hull argues that Chicana and Latina feminist practices must foreground the possibilities of forging "internationalist connection with women in Latin American and other Third World countries." According to Saldívar-Hull, mestizas throughout the Western hemisphere are linked by their historic positions within multiple forms of exploitation, oppression, and resistance, as well as by their "struggles against the hegemony of the United States," that is, U.S. imperialism. Consequently, Chicanas/ Latinas in the United States are in a position to build "transnational solidarity with other working-class people who like all non-indigenous tribes are immigrants who come to the United States." In an act of solidarity, Saldívar-Hull concludes *Feminism on the Border* with a brief epilogue focusing primarily on the testimonial voices of Maya Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú, Honduran labor activist Elvia Alvarado, and Bolivian mining community leader Domitila Barrios de Chungara.[5]

Following Saldívar-Hull and other cross-border feminists, other Latina feminist scholars set out to produce "flesh and blood theory."[6] For example, fusing personal stories into collective *testimonios* of struggle, members of the Latina Feminist Group in *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* collaborated in the writing of intersectional stories and theories, bridging scholarship in the areas of race, class, gender, sexuality, generation, nation, among other things. In another collaborative work, titled *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*, Chicana scholars also engaged in testimony, dialogue, and feminist theorizing. The use of the autoethnographic method and the "testimonial process" by the Latina Feminist Group, as well as the dialogical exchange produced in *Chicana Feminisms*, made evident the kinds of affinity politics, discourses, and practices taking shape across the Western hemisphere at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Similarly, in *meXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*, cultural critic Rosa Linda Fregoso talks about "the contact zones and exchanges among various communities on the Mexico-U.S. border, living in the shadow of more than 150 years of conflict, interactions, and tensions." Produced in neocolonial and imperialist contact, the borderlands are sites of not only violence, but moreover "transculturation, hybridity, and cultural exchanges." The *X* in the word *meXicanas* in the title of Fregoso's book marks, thus, the ever expanding site of intersecting histories, identities, social practices, engagements, and practices of solidarity between Mexicanas and Chicanas. The slash (/) between Chicana/Latina like the *X* in *meXicana* marks the site of contact, affinity, and solidarity as well as the site of intersections, negotiations, and differences between Chicana and Latina feminists. As Fregoso explains, *meXicanas*, as of the 1980s, navigate spaces of encounter between Chicana, Mexicana, and other Latina women, drawing strength from "a shared history of exclusion and subordination within the cultural and political practices of various patriarchal nationalisms, those emanating from the nation-state (the United States) as well from nationalist, antiracist movements (the Chicano nation)."[7] Along these lines, Chicana/Latina border feminists find engagement or solidarity around issues of immigration (documented and undocumented), disenfranchisement, struggles, and tactical/differential alliances. In this contact,

they actively produce cross-border social identities aligned with trans/national struggles.[8]

U.S. Chicana/Latina Transnational Narrative Interventions

The politically engaged work of Latina *transfronterista* feminists such as Anzaldúa, Castillo, Fregoso, Martínez, Moraga, Saldívar-Hull, Chela Sandoval, to name only a few, set the course for the production of a vanguard of Central America-identified literature by Chicanas in the 1980s and 1990s. At the height of the U.S.-funded civil wars in Central America, a first-wave, vanguard U.S. Latina/o Central American-allied literature comprised the following works: Viramontes's "The Cariboo Café," Villanueva's *The Ultraviolet Sky*, Castillo's *Sapogonia*, Fernández's *Sleep of the Innocents*, Limón's *In Search of Bernabé*, and Martínez's collection of sanctuary poems titled "Border Wars: 1985" and "Turning" in *Three Times a Woman* and her novel *Mother Tongue*. Filmic texts included Gregory Nava and Anna Thomas's *El Norte*, Portillo and Serrano's *Después del Terremoto/ After the Earthquake,* and other various documentaries, mock-documentaries, and narrative films. Like other solidarity workers, Serrano (a writer-activist and independent media producer of Colombian descent) and Portillo (a long-time Chicana filmmaker) could trace back their collaboration to the Central American peace and solidarity movements during the 1980s. The film *After the Earthquake* along with other texts identified here were among the first produced by U.S. Chicanas/Latinas in solidarity to express a growing concern among Latinas/os about the civil wars in Central America. Such texts produced significant points of affinity for a reception audience critical of U.S. intervention in Central America and elsewhere.

Indeed, in a speech delivered in 1990 at California State University, Long Beach, and later published as "Art in América con Acento," Moraga urged Latinas/os to ask themselves, "How can I, as a *Latina*, identify with those who invade Latin American land?" (italics in original). She elaborated that, while Mexico was invaded in 1848, "[t]oday, nearly a century and a half later, the Anglo invasion of Latin America has extended well beyond the Mexican/American border." She also recognized that more

than any other region of the world Central America has endured repeated episodes of U.S. interventionism. Moraga insisted that, "One of the deepest wounds Chicanos suffer is separation from our Southern relatives."[9]

Both Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and Moraga identified the U.S.-Mexico border as a wound that severs Latinas/os in the United States from those in Latin America. Anzaldúa instructed Latinas/os on both sides of the border to learn about each other's struggles in order to bridge that separation and heal that wound, writing:

> To the immigrant *mexicano* and the recent arrivals we must teach our history. The 80 million *mexicanos* and the Latinos from Central and South America must know of our struggles. Each one of us must know basic facts about Nicaragua, Chile and the rest of Latin America. The Latinoist movement (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Spanish-speaking people working together to combat racial discrimination in the marketplace) is good but it is not enough. Other than a common culture we will have nothing to hold us together. We need to meet on a broader communal ground.[10]

In "Art in América con Acento," Moraga also calls for building alliances, especially in regard to the Latina/o diaspora and the Sandinista Revolution. She goes on to decry publicly the demise of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, who were voted out of power in March 1990 after the U.S.-sponsored Contra War. Moraga blamed the Reagan-Bush administrations for financing the overthrow of the Sandinista Revolution through a foreign policy of military intervention and economic blockade. In an illuminating moment, she recognized that U.S. intervention and Latin American immigration are, in fact, linked, for "[e]very place the United States has been involved militarily has brought its offspring, its orphans, its homeless, and its casualties to this country: Vietnam, Guatemala, Cambodia, the Philippines." Moreover, she linked U.S. intervention in Central America to massive Central American immigration waves that continue to this day. For Moraga, "What was once largely a Chicano/Mexicano population in California is now Guatemalteco, Salvadoreño, Nicaragüense."[11] What was once a U.S.-based, Chicano-centered anti-colonial struggle would have to be transformed into hemispheric transna-

tional, *transfronterista* Latina/o alliances, embracing Central Americans in its fold. Like Anzaldúa, who made an appeal for Latinas/os to meet "on a broader communal ground," Moraga argued that U.S. Latinas/os and Chicanas/os had to close the "separation from our Southern relatives" and "emerge as a mass movement of people to redefine what an 'American' is."[12] Through her writing and political activism, Moraga delineated a plan for bridging hemispheric differences, separations, and divides produced by wider imperialist and global forces within U.S. Latino communities.

Transfronterista Solidarity Fictions in *After the Earthquake*

An examination of Portillo and Serrano's short film *Después del Terremoto/After the Earthquake* permits us to see the contradictions of the *transfronterista* feminist narrative of affinity and alliance. The filmmakers use the story of a young Nicaraguan immigrant woman named Irene (played by Vilma Coronado), who immigrates to San Francisco in 1976, as a vehicle for both exposing U.S. interventions in Nicaragua and challenging the masculinist revolutionary master narrative. Produced in 1979 just as the Sandinista government came into power in Nicaragua, *After the Earthquake* represents the coming of age(ncy) of two sociopolitical bodies—the Nicaraguan diaspora and Sandinista Nicaragua. The film is set in the year 1976 as Nicaraguan refugees fled their homeland in large numbers following a devastating earthquake on December 23, 1972, which destroyed the capital city of Managua and killed almost 20,000 people. Precisely at that moment, the U.S.-supported dictator, Anastasio Debayle Somoza, intensified his repression of the Nicaraguan people, and the Nicaraguan Revolution entered its final phase. On November 10, 1976, Carlos Amador Fonseca (1936-1976), cofounder of modern Sandinista thought and militancy, was ambushed and assassinated by the U.S.-trained National Guard, pushing the country into a full-fledged civil war.[13] With Fonseca's death, the Nicaraguan people under Sandinista leadership unified to defeat the forty-year U.S.-supported Somoza dictatorship.

In the context of the film narrative, the year 1976 alludes not only to the rise of the Sandinista Revolution, but also to a turning point in the life of the protagonist, Irene. It is in 1976 that Irene finally decides to make a

life for herself in the United States and to leave behind her past (which reappears in the film in the form of her Sandinista fiancé). Alluding to the trauma of Irene's life in Nicaragua under Somoza rule and during the Sandinista Revolution as well as the trauma of the devastating earthquake, the title of the film situates the viewer in the aftermath of the historical forces that produce Irene's diasporic condition in the United States. As she begins to rebuild her life in San Francisco, Irene tells her story to her friend, Luisa Amanda. Irene explains that in Nicaragua, "There was hunger, misery, thirst, my house was only rubble. . . . That's the reason why I am here." Irene must rise from the ruins of her past and free herself from the (masculinist) narrative of nation, revolution, and war.[14] In San Francisco, precisely in the year of the U.S. bicentennial anniversary, San Francisco's centennial as well, and the year of the great baseball umpire strike no less, Irene sets out to construct a more woman-centered liberation narrative for herself. For Irene, it is the year of looking back while moving forward and pushing boundaries.

In San Francisco, Irene works as a house cleaner, earning money to send to her family in Nicaragua. She lives with her unmarried aunts, who pray to San Antonio (Saint Anthony) to find Irene a good husband, although ironically they appear to have rejected the institution of marriage for themselves. Theirs is a female household, governed by Catholicism and other patriarchal traditions, especially in regard to female sexuality and family values. Catholic symbols like the Virgin of Guadalupe and Saint Anthony seem to represent the gendered tensions conditioning the lives of the women in the household. Although Guadalupe, long recovered by Chicana feminists as an empowering female deity, invokes feminine powers, *facultades* and sensibilities, and transcendental hybrid spiritualities, San Antonio stands guard over the female household, which lacks father, husband, and sons. As Catholic tradition would have it, Saint Anthony is the patron saint of lost hopes; women pray to him for ideal husbands and turn him upside-down while they wait for miracles. In his Latino patriarchal reincarnation in the household, Saint Anthony seems to stand in for the absent males in the family and to lay down the law of the father and God, at least for the aunts who follow the ritual of praying to him for a husband for Irene.

In a key scene in the film, while the aunts make tamales and gossip in their apartment kitchen, Irene receives a visit from her liberated modern-day (pants-wearing) girlfriend, Luisa Amanda, who encourages Irene to become more independent and self-reliant. As they prepare for a party later in the day, they talk about their lives and the arrival of Irene's boyfriend, Julio. As if torn between her friend and her aunts, and what they signify, Irene responds to her aunt's call in the kitchen. On the way back to her bedroom, she passes by her aunts' homemade altar in the darkened apartment hallway, stopping only momentarily at the altar to set aright the statue of San Antonio, which one of the aunts has put on his head as a petition for Irene's finding a "responsible" husband. In the bedroom, Luisa Amanda advises Irene to get an education, and, on their way out, she shouts out within the aunts' hearing range: "¡Qué viva la Independencia! ¡Qué los hombres hagan los tamales!" (subtitled as, "Liberate the women from the kitchen! Let the men make the tamales!"). The aunts respond with visible disapproval; one does the sign of the cross and the other calls attention to Luisa Amanda's "unnatural" wearing of pants, or her way of "vestir ridícula" and of acting "pesada" (unfeminine). As Irene and her friend leave, the hall resonates with the younger women's laughter; the laugh of Medusa punctures the household and awakens Irene to other feminine possibilities, as I will soon discuss.

The image of the spinster aunts, the religious iconography, and the enclosed darkened quarters of the apartment are set in direct contrast to Irene's light-filled bedroom, Luisa Amanda's disruptive shout and laughter, and the complicit conversation that emanates from the two friends in Irene's room. Caught between contradictory forces–her past and present, her homeland and new country, her obligations and desires, her subjection and emancipation–Irene desires to break out of the constrictions that govern her life. She seeks resolution in her life. However, she is torn between her memories of a Nicaragua in chaos and her fascination with the action-filled streets of San Francisco, a contrast that represents her own psychic upheaval, especially when her Nicaraguan fiancé shows up. What will become of Irene's life? The lighting in Irene's room may well foreshadow things to come for the immigrant woman in San Francisco.

Offsetting the static flashbacks of war-torn Nicaragua and the closed spaces of her apartment, in the establishing scene Irene has been first observed traveling by bus on Mission Street to purchase a television set at a local store. On her return trip, Irene visits Luisa Amanda at the dental clinic where her friend works, and both women then take a walk along Mission Street, chatting and talking about the birthday party they will attend the next day. It is at that party that Irene will meet her Sandinista fiancé for the first time in many years and come to the conclusion that they have no future in San Francisco. In these scenes that Fregoso so critically analyzes in *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture,* Irene is observed in motion—walking, speaking, thinking, remembering, and making choices. Fregoso explains, "Irene is a woman who works outside the home, a woman who moves between cultures, languages, the public and the private, possessing the ability to act on multiple levels."[15]

In contrast, her aunts and the other women in the film are rarely seen outside the protective walls of their apartments, as if controlled by their circumstances and traditions. With the exception of Luisa Amanda, all the women wear dresses, seemingly subscribing to traditional gender roles, images, and scripts. Only Irene and Luisa Amanda seem to escape the constraints of their symbolic and real walls and to defy the public image of *mujeres de la calle*—women of/in the streets—by walking, meeting, sitting, and working outside of the home and thus appropriating the open spaces of the Mission District. In the film, the Mission District and its outlying streets represent a hybrid contact zone, a third space of contradictions, or, as Anzaldúa would have it, a "third country," where diverse peoples, cultures, histories, and traditions intersect and where that contact produces differential and deeply situated social identities. For Fregoso, Irene's excursions into the streets represents, in part, "the liberation of a Latina immigrant in the United States, shifting toward the attitude of 'differential consciousness' that Chela Sandoval speaks of."[16] Indeed, Irene in the streets of San Francisco is not the same Irene trapped in the ruins (*escombros*) of Managua, for in San Francisco Irene is reshaped by her diasporic experiences, which permit her "a Latina emancipation" of sorts.[17]

Following the lead of her mentor and sister, Luisa Amanda, Irene thus begins to take control of her life and to enact other scripts in her life.

Even before he appears, Irene has already decided not to marry Julio, her Nicaraguan Sandinista fiancé. Her decision signifies not only an emancipation from the history that pulls her back to Nicaragua, but also a rejection of the feminine patriarchal subjection that awaits her by marrying him. In regard to the life that she has fled, Irene ambivalently states early in the film, "¿y qué hay de nuevo?" (So what's new?). Breaking her ties to her absent parents, surrogate family by way of her aunts, would-be husband, war-torn nation, and patriarchal subjection, Irene realizes that her new city offers her the opportunity to reinvent and transform herself. The film is thus about new beginnings for the Nicaraguan diaspora and for Irene, who in 1979, the year of the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution, takes control of her life and story in the context of San Francisco, California, and subsequently rejects Sandinista revolutionary society. In the film, Irene cannot seem to reconcile (bridge) her Nicaraguan/Central American and "American" woman-centered selves, and thus the film highlights her coming into a mestiza "differential consciousness." At the same time, however, she is shown choosing the United States over Nicaragua, her future over her past, her independence over marriage, and herself over all those still suffering political repression in Nicaragua. The film seems to posit that she become less nationalistic and less Nicaraguan to become more "American" and more feminist. Appropriately, then, the film opens and closes with the same subtitled lines: "and so it began . . . y empezó así."

Indeed, as the film begins, Irene gathers and counts her money to make the first layaway payment on a television set. She keeps her money in a top drawer of her dresser, hidden in the pages of a premarital sex self-help book. The sex book, the money, and the television set signify for Irene a "slippage of desires between sexual freedom and freedom to consume," as Fregoso suggests.[18] Irene's television purchase is key to reading the film as a site of desire for narratives other than those predesignated for most Central American women in their countries of origin. In prerevolutionary and revolutionary Nicaragua, Irene might have been expected to fulfill traditional patriarchal roles such as those of mother, daughter, and wife. As a Sandinista militant, she might have been expected to give her life to the Nicaraguan Revolution as did other

Sandinista women. Her models might have included the revolutionary guerrilla fighter Lavinia of Gioconda Belli's novel, *The Inhabited Woman*, or one of the Sandinista women whose story is told in Margaret Randall's *Todas estamos despiertas* (*Sandino's Daughters*).[19] But Irene is not in Nicaragua. In fact, several times in the film she insists, "But I am here!" And in the United States, she sets out to buy a television of her own, representing the nexus of multiple yet competing gendered national imaginaries, ideologies, and subjective positions all intersecting in her life. Depending on the subjective positioning of characters and spectators, the TV might signify U.S. (cultural) imperialism in Central America, immigrant socialization in the U.S., and Irene's act of feminist emancipation, as Fregoso suggests.[20] At the end of the film, for better or worse, Irene becomes a woman with a television of her own, exhibiting female liberation in the form of personal consumption. Although fraught with contradictions, Irene's declaration of independence through a singular act of consumerism should be read within the ambivalent space of female immigrant agency.

In Nicaragua, Irene might have never spent three hundred dollars on a television, but, in the United States, she has the opportunity to make that decision and take that action. For Irene, the TV does not merely signify an object. Instead, the TV represents an act of volition. Irene will buy the television, despite the fact that it will cost her three hundred dollars, or 5,400 cordobas, money that could easily feed two families for a year in Nicaragua, as her ex-fiancé Julio reminds her during their conflictive first encounter. The TV is invested with the emotional and economic agency that Irene seems to think she has gained in her new country and in her search for new prospects. While the collection of family photographs and newspaper clippings stacked on her dresser anchor Irene to war-torn and earthquake-struck Nicaragua, the TV generates new American images, dreams, and desires, serving as a vehicle of acculturation for Irene in the United States. Rejecting the culture of war that Julio represents, Irene vehemently claims her life in the United States, asserting yet again, "But I am here now!" The willful purchase of the television with *her* own hard-earned money signals for Irene a break with the past and a rejection of masculinist revolutionary Nicaragua, memorialized in the still-life photographs of Nicaragua, wherein everything is forever trapped in the *escombros* (ruins).

Through Irene's TV purchase, the film thus seems to reject the gender ideologies, patriarchal traditions, and women's lives under Sandinista/masculinist rule. Rather than to try her luck with her Sandinista sisters in wartime Nicaragua, Irene, like her mythological namesake (Eirene, the three-fold Greek goddess of peace, wealth, and springtime) makes peace with her (diasporic) condition and seeks her fortune in her new homeland. Like one of her aunts, who objects to the images of hunger, poverty, dictatorship, and war in Nicaragua in a slide show projected by Julio at the party, Irene, too, desires more positive images, "algo más alegre." Irene supplants her history in war-torn Nicaragua with her immigrant experiences, desires, and nostalgic memories. Portillo and Serrano's film seems to write beyond the political revolutionary narrative and to give Irene an upper hand in the gender wars that she now takes up in the United States. In contrast to Nicaragua, women in the United States can wear the pants and achieve their independence, the film would seem to posit.

By the end of the film, Irene is fully read into and through the lens of Chicana and Third World feminisms. Irene seems to reject the formal narrative of revolution, adopt a feminist "differential consciousness," and reach "Latina emancipation." She reaches this higher plateau, however, by breaking with Nicaragua and occluding the particular nuances of her Central American and Nicaraguan identity, heritage, history, gender dynamics, and diasporic conditions. Not surprisingly, the film elicited contentious responses from the exile Nicaraguan Sandinista community.

Not surprisingly, "Sandinistas living in the Bay Area who first viewed the film did not appreciate its emphasis on gender, and refused to be associated with the film."[21] For them, the film lacked authenticity, ideological coherence, and Sandinista commitment, and it did not represent an essentialized Nicaraguan experience in the United States. If not *the* Nicaraguan immigrant experience, then what did Portillo and Serrano's film represent? The fictional docudrama *After the Earthquake* was not produced, so to speak, from *within* the Sandinista Revolution, but rather by non-Nicaraguan Chicana/Latina feminist filmmakers, who from the start "wanted to make a film about what was happening here, not in Nicaragua."[22] Moreover, as Third World feminist filmmakers, Portillo and Serrano wanted to represent the life of one (fictional) Nicaraguan immigrant woman in San

Francisco and not the collective story of the Sandinista community in the city. Critical of the film as a whole and of its immigrant narrative in particular, the Sandinista-identified audience and Sandinista expatriates felt that the film did not express their political and subjective positions. From the hard-line of Sandinismo, they read the film as an ideologically misinformed and politically disengaged text, one that did not align with the Sandinista nationalist revolution, but rather proposed a more ambiguous, and perhaps even more threatening, gendered, sexualized, and subjective liberation without borders. If Irene could liberate herself without the aid or backing of Sandinismo, then there might be no need for a Marxist-Leninist revolution in Nicaragua and the rest of Central America.

While agreeing with Fregoso that *After the Earthquake* makes a strong case that Central American revolutionary organizations like the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) and the Salvadoran FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) reproduced Marxist masculinist gendered ideologies and rarely interrogated internal(ized) gender hierarchies within their revolutions, I am troubled by the film's break with Nicaraguan/Central American history. As a first-generation Salvadoran immigrant who grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s, I am torn by Irene's final solution to adopt a "differential consciousness" from what I consider to be an "undifferentiated" ethno-cultural position. The film seems to propose that Central American women become undifferentiated Latinas and identify as immigrant, refugee women in order to liberate themselves from their retrograde and repressive nationalist histories. In her new start as a Latina immigrant in the United States, Irene appears to break with her Central American/ Nicaraguan identity, heritage, history, traditions, and struggles, much like her aunts apparently have done before her when they refuse to see and hear images of war-torn Nicaragua in a particularly resonant moment in *After the Earthquake*. Seemingly adopting a differential consciousness as proposed by Chicana feminists in lieu of other feminist alternatives, Irene is severed from her Central American legacy of struggles, resistances, and resilience and recast in a Chicana/Latina *transfronterista* solidarity narrative.

That Irene is resignified under the signs of Chicana resistance is not exceptional in Chicana writing in this period. Roberta Fernández, for

example, claims that the Central American protagonist of Viramontes's "The Cariboo Café" is "a symbol of [the Mexican/Chicana legendary] La Llorona weeping for all the disappeared children of the world"; and Ana María Carbonell subsequently reads the same Central American washerwoman in Viramontes's story as exemplary of how "La Llorona can be mobilized to construct powerful and resilient heroines" and perform "acts of maternal resistances."[23] Lost in this Chicana translation are significant figures of Central American resistance such as the Siguanaba/Segua, who have represented the desires, strength, and fighting spirit of Central American women for centuries. Indeed, in Central America, La Siguanaba also known as the Segua is a legendary figure. Before the conquest, she was a beautiful Pipil (Nahaut) woman named Sihuehuet (perhaps deriving from Cihuacoatl, the snake-woman and fertility goddess, who represents both life and death forces and who is the antecedent of La Llorona in Aztec-Nahuatl legend).[24] La Siguanaba conceived an ash-eating, barrel-belly deformed boy, el Cipitio, with the rain god Tlaloc's son, but whom she neglected as she pursued her own desires. For this act of child abandonment (infanticide?), Tlaloc punished La Siguanaba by making her appear upon first sight beautiful, and then hideous, to men's eyes. Legend has it that she appears as a seductress to men near rivers at night and attacks them for straying from home. A water spirit representing fertility and life, she may also be read as a symbol of female desire, sexuality, strength, resilience, and resistance to patriarchy, neocolonialism, and imperialism. Like La Llorona (the woman who mourns the loss of her children by waterways), La Siguanaba is a survivor of imperial(ist) violence, transcultural mediator, and survivalist in different worlds. She is presently being recuperated and resignified on feminist terms by U.S. Central American feminists and others.[25] Under the sign of La Siguanaba, Central American femininities may be read from more culturally specific locations and as embodying Central American women's millennial resistance, resilience, and strength, thus contributing to the construction of other feminist Latinidades and female agencies. U.S. Central American feminist cultural activists and artists such as Mayamérica Cortez, Maya Chinchilla, Martivón Galindo, Leticia Hernández-Linares, Karina Oliva-Alvarado, and others are not only (re)writing feminist narratives infused with Central

American experiences, perspectives, symbology, and idioms, but also elaborating more diverse and critical feminist Latinidades in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[26]

Chicana Anti-Imperialist Solidarity and Agency

In their anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-war literature, Chicana feminist cultural critics mentioned herein, such as Portillo, Martínez, Castillo, Villanueva, and others, indict the United States for its interventionist politics and policies in Central America in the twentieth century. The protagonist of Villanueva's *The Ultraviolet Sky*, for example, associates a brand of U.S. nativist patriotism with the war machine that destroyed entire populations, tortured people, and dismembered pregnant women in Central America in the 1980s. The Chicana protagonist, pregnant herself during most of the novel, identifies with the women of Central America and expresses her frustration and anger with the destructive role the United States has played in the region.[27] In Castillo's novel, *Sapogonia*, the country of Sapogonia represents the contact/border zone where mestizo Latino/a Americans cross paths: "Sapogonia is a distinct place in the Americas where all mestizos reside, regardless of nationality, individual racial composition, or legal residential status–or, perhaps, because of all these." According to Castillo, "The Sapogón is besieged by a history of slavery, genocide, immigration, and civil uprisings, all of which have left their marks on the genetic make-up of the generation following such periods as well as the border outline of its territory." Sapogonia, hence, represents the Americas, which share a common history of neocolonialism, imperialism, and alliances because of that history. It is the location of military action and resistances in Central America and other places undergoing civil crises (including the United States). In particular, the refugees of *Sapogonia*, "risked their lives in hopes of improving their chances of survival, who separated themselves from family and homeland."[28] The Central American washerwoman in Viramontes's "The Cariboo Café," the housekeeper Rosario in Fernández's *Sleep of the Innocents*, and the cleaning woman Luz Delcano in Limón's *In Search of Bernabé* join forces with Sapogón refugees in the United States.[29]

Although Castillo's novel situates Sapogonia somewhere in United States, where much of the plot unravels, the novel makes clear that there is also a Sapogonia in the South. Its referent is a country (in Central America) where there have been "civil wars over the centuries, over the decades." In Sapogonia, "Signs of the military were everywhere." Pastora, the Chicana artist and singer of social protest music at solidarity events, becomes involved in an "underground railroad" sanctuary movement. She transports newly arrived Central American refugees from a clandestine safe house in Michigan to Chicago. Eventually she is apprehended by INS agents, tried for the crime of "harboring illegal aliens," and imprisoned for some time. Pastora pays the price for her solidarity work, much like (the real) Demetria Martínez did in the late 1980s, when she was arrested, tried, and later indicted for her work in the Sanctuary Movement. Castillo's novel explains that,

> [Pastora] had never brought any of the undocumented workers/refugees to her place, but because of her reputation of singing protest music and the public positions she took during her performances, she knew the federal government could very well be suspicious as to what degree she was willing to fight policies she objected to.

Upon being interrogated by INS agents, Pastora insists that "people from Sapogonia, like the refugees from other countries who were given political asylum, were here in search of refuge." But to the INS agents, the would-be-refugees were criminals, "murderers, in fact. They're wanted for killing American citizens in their country." Anyone assisting the refugees was considered a criminal by some and a hero by others, depending on what side of the border debate the reader stands.[30]

Sanctuary and the Romance of Solidarity

On March 24, 1982, on the anniversary of the Salvadoran government-ordered assassination of Archbishop Oscar A. Romero, a number of congregations and churches across the United States "declared themselves sanctuaries for Central American refugees." Susan Bibler Coutin traces the development and analyzes the meaning of the sanctuary movement in

"Smugglers or Samaritans in Tucson, Arizona: Producing and Contesting Legal Truth." Sanctuary workers (of many races and ethnicities) were first moved to action, which they called humanitarian "civil initiative," by the plight of Salvadorans fleeing state-sponsored violence in their country. Sanctuary workers joined forces to transport, host, and protect the refugees, whom the U.S. government refused to recognize as "refugees" despite the stipulations of the United Nations 1980 Refugee Act. In response to U.S. government intransigence, sanctuary workers, including clergy, nuns, and lay volunteers, "began bringing Central Americans into the United States and sheltering them at various locations around the country," thus reactivating through their actions a new underground movement. Under U.S. court orders, sanctuary workers faced surveillance, criminal charges, and, in some cases, convictions for "aiding and abetting" and "smuggling alien" Salvadoran refugees. In her interesting analysis, Coutin shows how discourses–legal, media, biblical, moral, human rights, testimonial, autobiographic, anecdotal–were strategically negotiated between U.S. government officials and sanctuary workers battling, mostly within the legal system, not only over the fate of Salvadoran political asylum-seekers, but also for American citizens' First Amendment rights to free speech, assembly, and civil disobedience or "civil initiative." Moreover, Coutin examines how sanctuary workers also defined and constructed *themselves* discursively in a highly conflictive, repressive context. She points out that "Sanctuary activists manipulated [legal] proceedings to define themselves as law-abiding."[31]

In the solidarity narratives by Latina writers Castillo, Limón, Martínez, Viramontes, and others, Chicanas are often represented as protagonists and agents harboring, transporting, assisting, and saving Central Americans, asserting thus their solidarity agency. Limón herself, as a member of a 1990 delegation to El Salvador, investigated the assassination of six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and her daughter on the grounds of the University of Central America José Simeón Cañas in San Salvador. The Salvador military was responsible for the massacre, which took place on November 18, 1989. Martínez, too, worked in the 1980s as a journalist for the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *Albuquerque Journal* and participated in the Sanctuary Movement, aiding Central American refugees who were

fleeing the violence in their countries. In December 1987, she was indicted on charges of aiding and abetting Salvadoran refugees and was acquitted of those charges in 1988. She writes about her experiences in the Sanctuary Movement in her semi-autobiographical novel, *Mother Tongue*, and in her poems published in *Three Times a Woman,* among which "Grand Jury Indicts 16 in Sanctuary Movement" foretells of the time when "an embrace, a meal, a bed, / harboring, aiding, abetting, / the night we went dancing / will be used against us."[32] Martínez's poems were indeed used in court as evidence against her. In Martínez's novel of solidarity, *Mother Tongue*, the young Chicana Mary takes into her home and care a tortured political asylum-seeker from El Salvador whom she knows by the fictitious name of José Luis. Castillo's novel *Sapogonia* also tells the story of Chicana solidarity activists through the narrative of Pastora, who joins the Central American underground railroad movement and transports Central American refugees to safe houses throughout the U.S. Midwest and Canada. Collectively Castillo, Limón, Martínez, and others provide insights into the *affective* self-construction of Chicana/Latina fictional sanctuary workers, taking readers deep into what I call the "heart of kindness."

An examination of *Mother Tongue* will further illuminate my analysis. The novel's protagonist, Mary (a New Mexico Chicana new to sanctuary work), reveals her good yet naive intentions regarding the object of her affection and narrative—the Salvador refugee José Luis. She explains:

> The feelings his poetry engendered in me were like nothing I had experienced before. His words and those of the poets he admired made me want to sell my belongings, smuggle refugees across borders, protest government policies by chaining myself to the White House gate—romantic dreams, yes, but the kind that dwell side by side with resistance.[33]

José Luis, who benefits from Mary's refugee idealization, recognizes that Mary "really loves the idea of me. A refugee, a dissident, spokesman for a cause she knows little about, ignorance she seems to have made peace with."[34] By loving him and loving the war out of him, she wants above all to *reinvent* him and make him forget the Salvadoran history that has violated and marked him. As evinced by Mary and José Luis's relationship in the novel, Mary's act of solidarity is really an act of making fiction, that

is, of (re)constructing the other and each other according to sanctuary symbolic tropes and narratives.[35] Mary houses the sojourner José Luis and attempts with all good intentions, kindness, and dedication to help him. Perhaps less explicitly and consciously, she also uses José Luis's story vicariously to work out personal trauma. A victim of sexual abuse as a child, Mary has a need to heal her and others' wounds. She recovers memories of her violation by a grown man only when José Luis suffering from an episode of post-traumatic stress disorder jolts her and forces her to remember her past injury. Mary has a "heart of kindness" willing to absorb another's pain, but, as Susan Sontag reminds us in *Regarding the Pain of Others,* pain cannot be fully shared without being appropriated by the other. Warning against the potential of empathy to appropriate the pain of others and to mask complicity in the production of other's pain and suffering, Sontag writes:

> So far as we feel sympathy [and empathy], we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all our good intentions) an impertinent–if not inappropriate–response. To set aside sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may–in ways we might prefer not to imagine–be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark.[36]

In their act of solidarity, Mary and José Luis blur and cross the lines between empathy and appropriation of the self and other only to hurt one another. Ultimately, *Mother Tongue* shows that, although we may attempt to build "communal ground" or solidarity based on identifying with others' pain and injury, in the end we must recognize the limits of those forms of identification. The subject in pain must be allowed to tell her or his story and to exercise her or his agency, and we must be prepared to allow the narrative of trauma to reveal itself. The act of solidarity begins in letting others produce their own narratives out of their particular pain, injury, and situations, an act that Mary is not capable of enabling because of her empathic identification with José Luis.

In Martínez's solidarity romance, *Mother Tongue*, Mary, like Castillo's Pastora, works in the underground solidarity movement and lives in fear of surveillance, detection, and criminalization. Through her godmother, who is highly critical of the role of the United States in Central America, Mary becomes involved not only with the Sanctuary Movement, but also with her first sanctuary charge, the Salvadoran José Luis. Identifying with his personal/national history, she acts according to a politics of affinity and solidarity, whereby she presumably transcends the borders of class, status, and nationality granted to her by her U.S. citizenship. Indeed, as Coutin explains in *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement*, "Volunteers [in the Sanctuary Movement] defined solidarity as a relationship in which North Americans abandoned their privileged positions in order to support the struggles of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees."[37] Joining this struggle, Mary dedicates her days and limited income to giving refuge to José Luis in her apartment and to helping him heal his wounds. Still, Mary as a U.S.-born citizen may cross, straddle, and live on the border, while José Luis as an undocumented refugee must hide in the refuge that Mary offers him and behind a red bandana when he gives testimony of his experiences.

Fraught with cultural differences, linguistic miscommunications, and historical impasses, Mary and José Luis represent the (im)possibilities of solidarity as a leveled and equal social field and empathic space. As an American citizen, Mary finds herself, although not of her own free will, complicit with the foreign politics, policies, and actions of the United States in Central America. Solidarity serves as a means to channel sympathy and empathy into action. Indeed, as Sontag explains, "Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated."[38] For Mary and José Luis, the intimate knowledge of the neocolonial and imperialist order that brings them together in their provisional contact/border zone proves to be their breaking point when José Luis, in a post-traumatic disassociated state, confuses Mary for his torturer and injures her. The romance of solidarity proves thus to be a fiction, and José Luis disappears once again to some clandestine place beyond Mary's reach, memory, and narrative plot.

Through their broken relationship and narrative, solidarity is shown to be a fragile narrative, fraught with unsustainable contradictions.

Upon José Luis's departure, Mary reflects on her losses and her gains, for she is pregnant with José Luis's child. The separation gives way to the writing of *Mother Tongue* in which Mary attempts to tell José Luis's story to her son and to understand the greater geopolitical forces affecting their lives. Mary makes the following revelation:

> El Salvador is rising from the dead, but my folder of newspaper clippings tells the story of the years when union members disappeared and nuns were ordered off buses at gunpoint, a country with its hands tied behind its back, crying, *stop, stop*. These and a few journal entries are all I have left to fasten my story to reality. Everything else is remembering. Or dismembering. Either way, I am ready to go back. To create a man out of blanks that can never wound me.[39]

In an attempt to understand her relationship to José Luis, Mary confronts the imperialist and neocolonial history of the United States. She appropriates his story and the story of El Salvador as her Chicana story. Symbolic reconciliation is found only at the end of the novel, when Mary in a metareflexive act writes, from her point of view, of the years of her involvement in the Sanctuary Movement. In that narrative, José Luis is a central character that gives personal and national testimony: His story is the story of many Salvadorans in the 1980s. But, when Mary retells his story, it is her Chicana subjectivity that gives shape to every part of the narrative. For Mary, "His was a face I'd seen in a dream. A face with no borders: Tibetan eyelids, Spanish hazel irises, Maya cheekbones dovetailing delicately as matchsticks. I don't know why I had expected Olmec."[40] From the start, Mary reconstructs José Luis from her hybrid borderland/borderless gaze, and he resists that gaze all along, painfully asserting his subjective differences. Whose story, then, is *Mother Tongue*? For whom is it written? As in the case of the Sandinista reception of Portillo and Serrano's *Después del Terremoto/ After the Earthquake*, how does the Salvadoran diaspora identify with this "fiction of solidarity"? Indeed, how could the story be told otherwise, from other subjective positions?

In writing about her relationship to a Salvadoran refugee man, Mary sets out to write a solidarity fiction only to discover the fiction of her own solidarity. José Luis, the subject of his revolutionary narrative, becomes the object of Mary's affection as well as her story of compassion, empathy, and solidarity. The empathizer always requires an "empathee" for transference to take place. In solidarity, Mary appropriates José Luis's pain and attempts to fill the gaps of his incomplete story, but, in doing so, she exposes the limits, transgressions, and mishaps of solidarity and cultural and linguistic translation. In her meta-fictional act, moreover, Mary exposes the limits of solidarity and its idealist narratives that portend to speak truthfully about an other. The crisis of testimonial literature at the turn of the twentieth century reminds us that there can never be one singular collective voice, but rather many voices in cacophony telling the many tortured and often distorted sides of any narrative.[41] Thus, *Mother Tongue* shows that torture survivors, political asylum-seekers, and solidarity workers, in the 1980s, can only tell partial fictions.

Solidarity discourses and practices are problematic at best because they are shaped by structures of power that often elide or blur "specific context and differences," a point also made by Dalia Kandiyoti in her essay, "Host and Guest in the 'Latino Contact Zone': Narrating Solidarity and Hospitality in *Mother Tongue*," Indeed, in her analysis of Martínez's solidarity narrative, *Mother Tongue*, which I, too, have examined here, Kandiyoti proposes the "formulation of 'asymmetrical reciprocity,' in which subjects practice mutuality, recognition and care, fully aware of the asymmetricity of their positions and the partialness of their knowledge of others."[42] In other words, while Chicana/Latina feminists attempt to build affinities, alliances, and "communal ground" across borders,[43] we must also recognize that solidarity is not transparent or innocent, but rather critically shaped by borders, power, and unequal hierarchical relationships, even within Latina/o feminist communities. Analyzing the imbalance of power weighing in on the unequal relationship and failed communication between the Chicana sanctuary worker and the Salvadoran refugee man in Martínez's novel, Debra Castillo reminds us, too, that Mary was, for the most part, "unprepared to see the whole José Luis" and the torturous real-

ity of El Salvador, for she interpreted them through her desires, projections, and histories.[43]

Although Mexicans and Latin Americans across the Americas may share anti-colonial histories subject to U.S. imperialist supremacy, Martínez's novel thoroughly manifests the impasse that Mary and José Luis reach when they must confront their particular histories of domestic violence in their respective homelands. Their anti-colonial struggles are not the same, nor entirely shared, and cannot be reconciled into one undifferentiated *transfronterista* solidarity narrative. In this fiction of solidarity, as I have shown, the (hi)stories of migration, war, violence, and trauma of many Central Americans are all but lost–coopted by the larger narrative of Latina solidarity. Rejecting what Debra Castillo calls Mary's "too facile identification" with Central American anti-imperialist struggles, José Luis is literally disappeared and nearly erased from her narrative, except for the newspaper clippings, photographs, mementos, and memories that she keeps of him for a later imaginary reconstruction.[44] Receding into their own originating story of war and postwar in Central America, the José Luises of these solidarity narratives are now re(ad)dressed in a growing corpus of U.S. Central American literature.[45]

Conclusions: The Fiction of Solidarity

Although Chicana *transfronterista* feminists in the 1980s and 1990s powerfully denounced U.S. intervention in Central America and declared affinity with war-stricken Central Americans, many of their anti-colonial texts privileged Chicana subjects, protagonists, histories, agencies, and sensibilities. In the solidarity fictions examined here, Chicana writers and subjects are the true protagonists, for it is *they* who expose and seek resolution to the plight of Central Americans through discursive acts of solidarity. Central Americans are subject to the telling of a larger *transfronterista* feminist narrative of women's resistance, or what Roberta Fernández calls "an artistically satisfying and politically challenging Third World feminist text."[46] Clearly representing the plight of Central Americans during the civil wars and their diasporic aftermath, Chicana/Latina solidarity literature nonetheless foregrounds Chicana *transfronterista* feminist agendas, imaginaries, and cultural ethos. Central American women, men, and chil-

dren almost always recede into the historical backdrop, the emotional plot, and the personal drama of Chicana subjects are often typecast as the guerrilla fighter, refugee, victim, and, in many cases, the heroic, but dead revolutionary figure.

Chicana critics and writers, moreover, read Central American women through the tropes of the Virgin of Guadalupe (the patroness of the Americas), La Llorona (the weeping indigenous mother who lost her children to the conquest), and La Malinche (the enslaved woman who served as mediator between the Spaniards and Aztecs) of an undifferentiated Mesoamerican shared ethno-cultural imaginary. For example, Viramontes's undifferentiated Central American washerwoman in the story "The Cariboo Café," Limón's Salvadoran domestic worker Luz Delcano in the novel *In Search of Bernabé*, and Mary the sanctuary worker in Martínez's *Mother Tongue* are cast in the light of Mesoamerican Llorona and Malinche women. Losing their sons, fathers, and lovers to the civil wars in Central America, these protagonists mourn the loss of their people, seek refuge in other homelands, and find themselves transformed in the process. Along these lines, U.S. Latina and Chicana writers in the 1980s and 1990s identified themselves with the cause and plight of Central Americans, producing thus the fiction (and illusion) of *transfronterista* solidarity.

Notes

I wish to dedicate this article to Elvira Arrellano and those who labor in the New Sanctuary (Immigrant) Movement.

Elvira Arrellano was a Mexican undocumented immigrant woman who lived in Chicago, Illinois, for over a decade until 2007. Under deportation order by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of Homeland Security, Arrellano sought sanctuary at a United Methodist Church in Chicago in August 2006 and lived on the premises of the church until August 2007. After traveling to Los Angeles to participate in a pro-immigrant event, she was apprehended by ICE and deported to Mexico, leaving behind a young son in the United States. With her deportation, activists declared the reactivation of the (New) Sanctuary Movement that supported undocumented Central American refugees fleeing the violence of the civil wars in Central America in the 1980s. In Mexico, Arrellano continues to be active in an organization called, La Familia Unida (The United Latino Family) representing families separated by deportation. As of 2008, her case has been presented to a House Committee for reconsideration. See the official website of the New Sanctuary Movement, www.newsanctuarymovement.org/index.html.

1. See Ana Patricia Rodríguez, "Refugees of the South: Central Americans in the U.S. Latino Imaginary," *American Literature* 73, no. 2 (2001): 387-412.
2. See especially, Lourdes Portillo and Nina Serrano, *Después del terremoto/After the Earthquake* (San Francisco, 1979); Helena María Viramontes, "The Cariboo Café," in *The Moths and Other Stories* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1985); Alma Luz Villanueva, *The Ultraviolet Sky* (Tempe, Ariz.: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1988); Demetria Martínez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and María Herrera-Sobek, *Three Times a Woman* (Tempe, Ariz.: Bilingual Review Press, 1989), 105-56; Ana Castillo, *Sapogonia (An Anti-romance in 3/8 Meter)* (Tempe, Ariz.: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1990); Carole Fernández, *Sleep of Innocents* (Houston: Art Público Press, 1991); Graciela Limón, *In Search of Bernabé* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993); and Demetria Martínez, *Mother Tongue* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994).
3. See Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).
4. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987; repr., San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Press, 1999), 109.
5. Sonia Saldívar-Hull, "Feminism on the Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics," in *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*, ed. Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 217, 208, 217; and Saldívar-Hull, *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
6. Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), x.
7. Rosa Linda Fregoso, *meXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xiv, xv.
8. See especially, Chela Sandoval, "U.S. Third Word Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders* 10 (Spring 1991): 1-24; Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Elizabeth Martínez, *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-colored Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 1998). Also, Fregoso, *meXicana Encounters*, 30-47.
9. Cherríe Moraga,"Art in América con Acento," in *Latina: Women's Voices from the Borderlands*, ed. Lilliana Castillo-Speed (New York: Touchstone Books, 1995), 212, 213, 210.
10. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 109.
11. Moraga "Art in América," 213.
12. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 109; Moraga, "Art in América," 219.
13. Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000).
14. Examples of masculinist revolutionary narratives include Omar Cabeza's classic revolutionary *testimonio*, *Fire from the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista*, trans. Kathleen Weaver (New York: Crown, 1985); and Alejandro Murguía's expatriate novel, *Southern Front* (Tempe, Ariz.: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1990).

15. Rosa Linda Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 98.
16. Ibid., 96.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 96, 103.
19. Gioconda Belli, *The Inhabited Woman,* trans. Kathleen March (New York: Warner Brothers, 1995); Margaret Randall, *Todas estamos despiertas: Testimonios de la mujer nicaragüense hoy* (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1980), and in English, *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (Vancouver, B.C.: New Star Books, 1981).
20. Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen,* 102-3.
21. Ibid., 153.
22. Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Screening Resistance: A Conversation between Lourdes Portillo and Rosa Linda Fregoso," www.lourdesportillo.com/screening.html.
23. Roberta Fernández, "'The Cariboo Café': Helena María Viramontes Discourses with Her Social and Cultural Contexts," *Women Studies* 17, nos. 1-2 (1989): 76; Ana María Carbonell, "From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros," *MELUS* 24, no. 2 (1999): 71.
24. Carbonell, "From Llorona to Gritona," 53-55.
25. See Leticia Hernández-Linares, "Conversaciones," *Raza Spoken Here 2* (San Diego, Calif.: Calaca Press, 2000), and *Razor Edges of My Tongue* (San Diego, Ca;if.: Calaca Press, 2002); Dago Flores, "Sihuehuet y Cipit: La otra leyenda," http://chichicaste.blogcindario.com/2008/01/00825-sihuehuet-y-cipit-la-otra-leyenda.html.
26. Mayamérica Cortez, *Nostalgias y soledades* (San Salvador: Editorial Clásicos Roxsil, 1995); Martivón Galindo, *Retazos* (San Francisco: Editorial Solaris, 1996); Hernández-Linares, *Razor Edges of My Tongue*; and Maya Chinchilla and Karina Oliva-Alvarado, eds., *Desde el EpiCentro: An Anthology of U.S. Central American Poetry* (Oakland, Calif.: Np, 2007).
27. Villanueva, *The Ultraviolet Sky,* 161.
28. Castillo, Sapogonia, 5, 185.
29. I have discussed this further in my, "Refugees of the South."
30. Castillo, Sapogonia, 218, 178, 179.
31. Susan Bibler Coutin, "Smugglers or Samaritans in Tucson, Arizona: Producing and Contesting Legal Truth," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 3 (August 1995): 552, 553, 550.
32. Martínez, "Turning," in *Three Times a Woman,* 124.
33. Martínez, *Mother Tongue,* 69.
34. Ibid., 84.
35. Coutin, in "Smugglers or Samaritans" (566), provides an example of one of the symbolic narratives taken from Leviticus 19:33: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong."
36. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 102-3.
37. Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 184.
38. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain,* 101.

39. Martínez, *Mother Tongue*, 12; emphasis in original.
40. Ibid., 2-3.
41. The best known example of this "crisis" is the controversy over the "facts" of Rigoberta Menchú's testimony. See David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999); and Arturo Arias, ed., *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
42. Dalia Kandiyoti, "Host and Guest in the 'Latino Contact Zone': Narrating Solidarity and Hospitality in *Mother Tongue*," *Comparative American Studies* 2, no. 4 (2004): 424, 425.
43. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 109.
44. Debra A. Castillo, "Barbed Wire Words: Demetria Martínez's *Mother Tongue*," Intertexts 1, no. 1 (1997): 14.
45. For examples, see Francisco Goldman, *The Ordinary Seaman* (New York: Grove Press, 1997); Héctor Tobar, *The Tattooed Soldier* (New York: Penguin, 2000); Mario Bencastro, *Odyssey to the North* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1999); Quique Avilés, *The Immigrant Museum* (Mexico, D.F.: PinStudio y Raíces de Papel, 2003), among others. Note that men write these texts.
46. Fernández, "'The Cariboo Café,'" 77.