# THE WOUND AND THE STITCH

## A Genealogy of the Female Body from Medieval Iberia to SoCal Chicanx Art

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*Loretta Victoria Ramirez*

# THE WOUND AND THE STITCH

A Genealogy of the Female Body
from Medieval Iberia to SoCal Chicanx Art

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To

those who diagnose the wounds

those who resist being "fixed"

those who bare their wounds, so others might mend.

*We are not the only ones to walk this road.*

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# Preface

*The Wound and the Stitch* is my own generative wound.

This exploration bleeds from decades of life in academia as a student with one BA, three MAs, and one PhD and as an educator at a community college, then a private Catholic university, and finally at a public state university. As a first-generation Chicana and Apache academic I have suffered constant institutional inflictions, usually as subtle microaggressions that graze my ever-thickening skin but also sometimes as heart-piercing stabs that incapacitate me for months (even years) at a time.

From every front of academia, I have been slashed—dismissal of my past achievements, doubt in my current abilities, and rejection of my future potential. Concurrently, I witness these wounds occurring for the first time in my students, largely Chicanx first-generation students as I teach at a Los Angeles university in a Chicano and Latino Studies department. It is in the first-time of suffering each academic wound that we most ache and that we are most fragile in the recovery process. Sometimes recovery never happens, and then we leave, battle-scarred yet with no medals of service, no shiny degree. We are dishonorably discharged.

Fortunately, I survived my deployments, and I have medals to pin over the scars. At least, that is how I used to wear my degrees—to hide hurt. I believed this was the best way to help my students—to present shiny victories that conceal pain. Then, I realized otherwise.

The biggest source of woundedness is in not representing one's truths.

My truth is one of survival, but I am not healed, and I no longer wear victories in such a way as to hide the reality that my wounds are merely delicately stitched—ever aching and threatening to burst. I often receive shocked congratulations for my abundance of degrees, but I must say that while I am proud of those degrees, I am also resentful.

My truth is that my excessive war badges testify to an academic path that was not straight and level. Like most Chicana and Apache bodies, be it in war or academia or frontline service during a pandemic, I was appointed to risky combat zones with minimal rations and equipment to navigate, advance, and

survive. And this is precisely where wounds begin for us, when we are marked expendable—as someone whose well-being does not matter. In academia, my well-being concerned no more than a dozen individuals.

Still, this is my army and my chosen war. I was not drafted. And, while I continue to be marked expendable—from start to present—I do not believe that academia necessarily *wants* to lose me. Indeed, I have found invaluable allies and many more who cannot hear my truths but want to listen. Some even want to learn and act—not just listen. The problem is, even with these prospects to gain alliances and cultivate safe zones for first-generation, multi-marginalized academics, there is often a break in communication.

*It is my first quarter in the PhD program. I am in an enormously intimidating post-human theory seminar with one of our campus's leading thinkers. Before each session, I feel sick. I just cannot understand any of the readings that we are set to discuss. During the session, I am silent, incapable of following the discussion. I do not even understand the vocabulary. Afterward, I cry. What is posthuman? Is it a removal of the body? Can it be studied as a spiritual framework?*

*Maybe that's really it!*

*I feel better. I have a plan. I will write my seminar paper on the posthuman as aligning with notions of spiritualism, perhaps tapping my background in Iberian late medieval / early modern spiritualists. I share my ideas at the next session.*

*I am met with silence for an agonizing minute. Maybe two minutes.*

*I am then asked, why would we return to religious structures that have led us to the problems we face today?*

*I am confused. Afterward, I cry again. I am wounded. I bleed. I am failing in my first few weeks as a PhD student.*

*I seek my advisor. He tells me that if I was met with silence and then confusion, I need to investigate further. He hands me his copy of Cherríe Moraga's* Loving in the War Years.

*I realize that I am not the first to walk this road.*

*Others can understand me. Others speak like me—others who are wounded but locate generative awakenings in those wounds. Those Others are me. We are beyond the limits of our bodies yet concurrently defined by our bodies. I write of our body rhetorics and ways that these rhetorics engage with notions of human and posthuman within decolonial frameworks. I write.*

*I write.*

*Each new seminar session, I haul a printout of my growing draft to show my posthuman professor my ideas during our break time. He listens closely. He wants to learn. I ask if he feels that this would be a good seminar paper. He tells me to write seventy pages—or a book. The stack of writing is higher each visit. I take class notes on my manuscript's margins. My classmates begin to watch my pen oozing with connections as they all speak, and my stack grows—a stack built from non-receptive audiences who now desire to know what I am writing; indeed, they help me to write.*

*I take my first step in developing* The Wound and the Stitch.

*It is my last quarter of my first year as a PhD student. I have adjusted. I have survived. I am looking forward to summer though I am so very engaged with my current seminar. I am taking a course on multilingualism. This is my type of class—multilingualism is all about me, the one who can be heard everywhere and nowhere. I want to study this. I really dig into one of our readings. It speaks of semilingualism.*

*And I confirm that I am not the first to walk this road.*

*Others can understand me. Others speak like me—others who have a tongue that works in so many ways yet never in a complete way. Those Others are me. We can speak everywhere and nowhere.*

*I am semi.*

*At home, I can sound like my family but never quite express my ideas and positions—though my family listens; at school, I can express my ideas and positions—to those who listen—but never sound like an academic. These are a few ways that I am semi. I declare in my multilingual seminar, I am semilingual!*

*"You know, Loretta," a voice responds, "the identifier of semilingual is derogatory. It implies incompleteness: semi-ness."*

*I am surprised. I am embarrassed. I am wounded, even.*

*Yet, I maintain, I am semilingual in my semi-ness. And, what is so derogatory, what is so shameful about semi-ness?*

*I take the question to my advisor. What is so shameful about semi-ness?*

*He tells me that if I was met with resistance, I need to investigate further.*

*So, I investigate: What is the source of this shame? Is the shame that which is possessed by the Chicanx rhetor who elects a vocabulary of partialness? Or is the shame a reminder to audiences that the rhetor has lost pieces of her cultural, historical, and linguistic self? And, why do I feel no shame?*

*I take my second step in developing* The Wound and the Stitch.

*Rhetoric is the lens through which I address woundedness because engagement is in the now. What I mean is that in development of some of my most meaningful thoughts, I have found generation through encountering non-receptive audiences. My rhetorical persona was unable to meet the expectations of specific audiences, and in this disconnect, my truths were lost. While early in my academic journey I felt only the woundedness of these rejections, silences, and confusion, I have found a way to see beyond pain. The wound is surely an upset, often spiteful but sometimes simply mistaken and even well-meaning. Yet it is still an upset, one that snaps me into immediate attention and now leads me towards investigation. The disconnect between rhetor and audience is not my shame. It is not even the audience's shame. There are no villains in my story, not really, even though I feel ill-equipped at the frontlines, expendable. There is merely a rhetorical gap, a gap in our knowledge of cultural rhetorics, a gap in our history of rhetorics—and all gaps can be stitched.*

*It is the penultimate quarter of my PhD program. I sit in my advisor's office on the same day that our campus is being shut down due to rampant spread of Covid-19. Will this be the last time I sit in his office? The world is about to change. Yet in that well-worn chair of mine in my little corner of his corner office, I am at peace. I have finished my dissertation. I have completed a historical genealogy of Chicanx rhetorics that examines feelings of incompleteness as locations where emotions of semi-ness might stimulate transformation of self. I am finished, and I already begin to miss my chair, which fits my body's depth so well. I begin to miss my view of the coffee-brown visual studies building beyond my advisor's desk and these moments when the skinny trees outside our window bend to the crazy and scary world. Yet all is calm inside our discussion space, with punctuated moments of sparkling inventions. Remarkably, there are no inventions that I seek that day. I am finished. And then, he tells me that I am not.*

*I am wounded.*
*Even in my safe space.*
*Even by my greatest ally.*
*I want to cry. I am so tired.*
*He says that being tired is no excuse.*
*I want to cry. I say that I am overworked.*
*He says that I chose this work.*
*I want to cry. I say that there is a pandemic outside.*

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*He will take no excuses. I must investigate why the historical genealogy of rhetorics of woundedness matters. I must write another chapter that extends history into the classroom.*

*So, I step into the pandemic. I do not know where I am going beyond my advisor's office. I just know that it is time to live my scholarship. It is time to ground woundedness in the present, where it has been all along.*

*I take the next step in developing* The Wound and the Stitch*, realizing that with this next step I also begin a new life.*

*My advisor was really telling me that I am finished because I have begun.*

I am not the first to walk this road.

Only by knowing my rhetorical history do I realize this. History explains our ownership of our rhetoric—be it complete or in semi- or fragmented states. We own a rhetorical history. We can claim it back from colonization, obliteration, ignorance, time. Our path has always been there; we travel this path through our own rhetorical strategies, navigation informed by rhetorical ancestors and those we encounter along the way. We narrate our truths during roadside pauses, knowing that these truths will grow deeper and more complex at each new rest stop. And these truths have a greater likelihood of reaching our audiences the more we claim and share our histories.

The history of Chicanx rhetorics of woundedness is one lineage, one rhetorical thread that I investigate, practice, and share. *The Wound and the Stitch* is my contribution to validating and owning this cultural rhetoric, rejecting notions that it is expendable. There are many other lineages or threads in Chicanx rhetorics. They are all distinct, but most interweave. Many we have yet to regain, and others continue to be tangled, waiting for decolonization. Still, the Chicanx rhetorical tapestry will continue to be stitched together—threads from the past and threads that are entirely brand-new, that move in dynamic creativity toward our future. These stitches close the gap of our colonial ruptures but must always remain visible so that we can discern each of our specific rhetorical genealogies—born sometimes from pain but always persevering as the way we can tell our varied and unique truths.

# Acknowledgments

*The Wound and the Stitch* would not exist without Daniel M. Gross. He handed me his copy of Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years,* and I realized that I was not alone. I was not alone since Moraga's rhetoric became my constant companion, and I was not alone because by pairing me with this companion, Daniel proved that he could see me—the history I craved, the obstacles I faced, and the future triumphs I could secure. Daniel has been the first and most durable stitch to bind my wounds.

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Enriched by my guides in the in-between spaces, I now teach in the transdisciplinary department of Chicano and Latino Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Here, I am grateful for the inspiration, support, guidance, and friendship that I have received from the entire department—past and present. I want to especially thank Gladys Garcia for finding me and escorting me into CHLS and the wider CSULB community, where I have benefitted from constant support. I send special thanks to Michelle Seales for all the laughter, honest talk, and dreams we shared over the years. We will walk The Way soon.

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To Allison Dziuba, although our years together were few, they were intense! Thank you for your positive energy and coffee chats. I know that many more years are ahead for us as our visions intertwine, even if we are currently positioned in faraway institutes.

My family have never been far away; distance is impossible for us. Because of that, we can survive the wounds, and we can stitch together. Always.

# Introduction | The Wound and the Stitch

## Opening the Wound

In 1803 Marcelo de la Cruz, an Indigenous Mixtec man from Nochistlán, defied the bishop of Oaxaca, Mexico, by disregarding the condemnation of the dilapidated parish church of San Juan Chapultepec. The town had been founded in 1523 to acknowledge Indigenous inhabitants who battled alongside Hernán Cortés's Spanish forces in capturing Tenochtitlán, the Mexica/Aztecan empire's royal capital, but by 1803 the Spanish Catholic Church had abandoned San Juan Chapultepec because of the supposedly idolatrous traditions that the community practiced in its syncretized form of Indigenous Catholicism.[1] With Church doctrine denied, funds were cut and the parish church fell to ruin and shame. Yet according to legend, in an act of rebellious devotion Marcelo eventually prevailed in his mission to secure a revived sanctuary in San Juan Chapultepec.

This accomplishment transpired because Marcelo carried with him a seventeenth-century *virgen abridera* or Shrine Madonna, a small polychromed wooden sculpture of the Virgin Mary in the Immaculate Conception motif that had been entrusted to him by his aunt, Maria Manuel Aguilar (fig. 1). Maria had inherited the virgen abridera from a maid at the Franciscan convent of Santa Catarina de Sena in Oaxaca, Manuela Ramirez, who had received the sculpture from Juana Maria Olivera Chavez, another maid at the convent, who was bequeathed the sculpture by one of the convent's nuns, the first known owner—although her name has been lost.[2] Measuring 6.3 inches tall and 2.4 inches wide, this sculpture was designed with movable joints, allowing for the Virgin's arms to extend from a folded prayer position to reveal her chest cavity. When unadorned and opened, the Virgin's inner cabinet features carved bas-relief narrative scenes of Christ's Passion and Mary's Sorrows (fig. 2). Marcelo de la Cruz

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**Fig. 1 |** Virgen abridera of San Juan Chapultepec, seventeenth century. Wood, pigment, gold, polychromed, 6.3 × 2.4 inches. Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo: Author.

established this virgen abridera as a local devotional object, thus raising the profile of and support for the previously doomed San Juan Chapultepec church.

The San Juan Chapultepec virgen abridera and a second Mexican sculpture in Gama de la Paz were only recently located by Gabriela Sánchez Reyes and Irene González Hernando. In 2009, Sánchez Reyes and González Hernando reported an initial art historical analysis of the pieces for the *Boletín de Monumentos Históricos*, a publication sponsored by the Mexican Council on National Monuments. In 2022, Ana Laura Vázquez Martínez published an essay focusing on archival documents that contextualize church politics around Marcelo de la Cruz's donation of the sculpture. Vázquez Martínez places the sculpture's

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**Fig. 2 |** Virgen abridera of San Juan Chapultepec (detail), seventeenth century. Wood, pigment, gold, polychromed, 6.3 × 2.4 inches. Oaxaca, Mexico. Passion of Christ narrative scenes: (from left) Agony in the Garden, Encounter with Mary on the Way to Calvary, Crucifixion surrounded by Mary and John, and Descent from the Cross as a pietà with Mary holding the body of Christ. Image courtesy of Gabriela Sanchez Reyes. Photo: Mario Carlos Zúñiga Sarmiento.

establishment at San Juan Chapultepec parish church into conversation with histories of colonial conversion propaganda that situate Indigenous devotees as bolstering Marian dedications within communities that had otherwise been abandoned by traditional institutional indoctrination.[3] Although the sculpture has yet to be examined outside these two Mexican publications, it is vital to note that the virgen abridera also extends a medieval European tradition of Marian devotional sculptures that open to expose an inner body cavity.

Traditionally determined by distinctive visual rhetorics of female Iberian Christian patrons and custodians, this type of sculpture proliferated throughout Western Europe and later in the Americas during colonization. While art historians have conducted significant inquiries into these sculptures in Europe, there has yet to be a study of the specific thread of female Iberian rhetorical tradition that crossed the Atlantic or of their uses and meanings within colonial contexts.[4] In "Behind Closed Doors," Melissa Katz lists seventy-two virgenes abrideras from 1250 to 1700, spanning Europe and the Americas, but she does not examine the American pieces.[5] She does not list the San Juan Chapultepec piece, which was identified by Sánchez Reyes and González Hernando the year of Katz's publication. However, she does list an ivory-carved virgen abridera from a workshop in Dieppe, France, whose travels can be traced as far as its sale in Mexico City, where it vanishes from historical records. I suggest that the Gama de la Paz virgen abridera, which fits the features and styling of French sculptures of this genre, might be that lost ivory sculpture. Meanwhile, the San Juan Chapultepec sculpture, a polychromed wood piece, aligns with Iberian models in exterior styling and inner narrative. This virgen abridera serves my study of female Iberian visual and devotional rhetorics and their impacts on—and adjustments for—audiences in the Americas, with special attention to Poor Clare and Franciscan visual programs, particularly those that support Mary as the Immaculate Conception.

While most scholarship on virgenes abrideras investigates the European sculptures in the milieu of material and visual cultures of medieval Christendom, I localize the Iberian and Ibero-American sculptures in conversion-oriented contexts. Vázquez Martínez, similarly, uncovers vital historical documents in her scholarship, yet her focus is not on the sculpture but on Oaxacan religious politics. My interest centers the visual rhetorics that inform the San Juan Chapultepec sculpture as it represents devotional iconographies from Iberia but also shifts to suit new Mexican audiences—not just in the sculpture's placement in its Indigenous parish church but in its visual vocabulary that also suited previous female patrons and guardians in the convent of Santa Catarina de Sena. I study the sculpture's rhetorical genealogy as shaped by European tradition, informed by Mesoamerican audiences through various historical engagements, and inherited by distinct forms of Chicanx rhetoric. By concentrating on the sculptures' site-specific rhetorical encounters and colonial power dynamics, I begin to understand a particular Iberian female devotional rhetoric of the body that enters Mexican regions. While these opening sculptures of the Virgin Mary

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were not cultivated exclusively by female patrons for female devotional practices, there is a tremendous pattern of such provenance for Iberian and Ibero-American pieces, even if male custodians enter the virgenes abrideras chronicles.[6] Just as Marcelo de la Cruz inherited the San Juan Chapultepec virgen abridera after a series of female owners, the majority of Iberian virgenes abrideras are identified with female sponsorship and/or guardians, beginning with the first known piece that Queen Violante of Castile commissioned circa 1270 for a Franciscan Poor Clare convent in Allariz, Spain.

It is this Iberian female contribution, or at the very least extensive female participation, in promoting a particular rhetoric of fragmented bodies that is the chief aim of my exploration in *The Wound and the Stitch: A Genealogy of the Female Body from Medieval Iberia to SoCal Chicanx Art*. This brief consideration of the virgenes abrideras initiates a historical genealogy from late medieval to contemporary Chicanx self-representation strategies that rhetorically engage female woundedness.[7] While devotion to and meditation on Christ's generative wounds were common throughout medieval and early modern Christendom, my scholarship traces impacts of the Virgin Mary's fragmented and abstracted body on potential Ibero-American female perceptions of body and identity, particularly in the context of fissures in selfhood made by the historical shockwaves radiating from colonial violences.

Specifically, *The Wound and the Stitch* examines Chicanx textual and visual rhetorics that focus on the phenomenon of wounds and a stitching together of fragmented selves as stemming from female Catholic devotional rhetorics, yet also interweaving ancient Mesoamerican philosophy. I consider how rhetorics of the Virgin's emotional woundedness engage with Nahua metaphysical understandings of securing stability during lived turmoil through the application of *nepantla*. Accordingly, *The Wound and the Stitch* offers a historical rhetorical genealogy that develops insights from my work in Chicanx literary and visual studies, decolonial feminist theory, medical humanities, and medieval art history; the end goal is to confirm my claim that a ubiquitous form of Chicanx self-representation strategies, notably manifested in late twentieth-century Californian print media and art, positions woundedness to generatively express Chicanx realities and transform the self.

While I claim that Chicanx self-representation of fragmentation through rhetorics of woundedness can be generative and healing, they can also be exploited by an outside gaze due to perceived vulnerability. A response to exploitation is both essential unintelligibility and deliberate illegibility—denying full

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disclosure to exterior spectators. Sourced in private pain, rhetorics of woundedness reserve sections of narrative as exclusive to the rhetor as her own audience, since the exact experience of anguish can never be fully intelligible beyond the sufferer's body and feelings at a specific ephemeral moment. Illegibility is also deliberately retained for self or community when Chicanx rhetors situate performativity of woundedness as distinctive from normative affective performances, recalling José Esteban Muñoz's study of "feeling brown, feeling down."[8] Inaccessibility here highlights nonreceptive audiences as extending institutional silencing of grievances experienced and performed by underrepresented or subaltern voices. I examine the strategies of sharing and not sharing woundedness as they impact the personal and the public, rendered by Chicanx rhetors who conceive a spectrum of wounds—metaphorical, physical, historical, and linguistic—and strategies to repurpose woundedness to advocate redress.

The redress I seek in *The Wound and the Stitch* is twofold: to understand rhetorics of woundedness in connection with current decolonial scholarship and to validate my own experiences of linguistic and identity woundedness within academic spaces. Rhetoric is part of a decolonial process as we locate distinct ways to articulate community and self beyond multitudes of imposed frameworks. When I write that rhetoric is a decolonial process, I envision rhetors who do not prioritize a response to exterior imaginary Europeanness but who prioritize an internal audience of self.[9] Indeed, this rhetorical study is less about examining external audiences than shaping rhetorical personae to prioritize an inner audience. While a goal of rhetorics of woundedness is to seek exterior redress of infliction, the aforementioned unintelligibility and illegibility of wound narratives dissolve the edges of rhetorical frameworks.[10] Such a dissipation reserves legibility to the self as rhetor-audience and maintains aspects of inarticulate pain as a private source of motivation that must, as is the nature of pain, be incomprehensible beyond the body and emotional experience of agony.

Woundedness shuts out the world as one is consumed by the extremity of pain. The immediacy and urgency of articulating identity in moments of pain provide our lenses for studying rhetoric as an action in the *now*. *The Wound and the Stitch* accordingly delves into wounding experiences that make more discernible the audience within—an initial audience that one pleads with and later strategizes with to manage torment. Woundedness is the stinging initiator of this rhetorical reshaping as pain necessarily reorients one's attention inward, where one might seek directions from oneself on how to pivot from infliction.

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In this navigation discoveries, inventions, and strategies must satisfy the self as both the expressor of pain and the sole audience that seeks pathways away from pain. Such reshaping and reorienting facilitate a delinking from privileged forms of semiotic and epistemological systems, thereby raising potential—even if only in the momentary surge of pain—to know self and devise pathways particular only to that moment and need. Yet it is in these moments that one might harness a decolonizing delinking to reimagine rhetorical participations within the exterior world.[11]

## The Wound as Narrative Fount

My motivation to study rhetorics of woundedness surges from linguistic and identity woundedness within academic spaces that I have yet to fully unpack and make legible to myself. My efforts in *The Wound and the Stitch* permit me to personally begin to delink my ideas of self from normative views of what defines a first-generation Chicana-Apache academic. This process is lengthy, yet I attempt to repurpose woundedness so I may learn from trauma. I have benefited from the results already, even if the process is necessarily painful. To be clear, I do not condone my woundedness. Although I articulate generative strategies that emerge from pain, I will always resent and contest the wounds that individuals and institutions have inflicted on me. I also recognize that the damages I have suffered are not physical assaults. I am grateful for that. Yet my standing as an academic was founded on enormous physical, emotional, and social woundedness within my family.

I pay tribute to that now and to an uncle who, like many Chicanos in the 1960s, did not participate in the rhetorics of the Chicano Movement or walk in our local Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium. Indeed, he could not walk or speak in protest, as he was killed in the early stages of the Vietnam-American War. Sgt. Jesus Ernesto Chavez was nineteen when he stepped on a landmine in Hau Nghia Province. While my family sought solace by recalling my uncle's youthful bravery and patriotism, a broader community protested the disproportionate casualties of Chicano enlistees and draftees, arguing military action as unethical and sacrifice as wasteful. Unable to endure the rhetoric of unjust war while mourning a child whose death could not possibly be worthless, my grandparents relocated outside these discourses and the Los Angeles inner city, opting to consolidate family income and my uncle's death gratuity payment to

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situate themselves in our new home base. This base would become my birth environment.

I was privileged by a white-dominant school system in Southern Californian suburban beach cities, and my access to various academic pathways therefore opened because my uncle's single pathway as a young Chicano of the 1960s was toward the army. My pathway also opened because my grandparents sought generation from woundedness. Though they would later identify unjustness in the Vietnam-American War and racist biopolitical frameworks that led to tragedy, their initial need in processing pain was to shut out exterior exchanges and prioritize an inner voice from the wound.

My wounds are mere scratches compared to those suffered by my uncle, grandparents, and mother. Yet the privileged pathway that opened new worlds for me also isolated me as a rare Chicana (and the only Apache) in the spheres of my social and educational upbringing, marking me vulnerable in my dislocation. The wounds I have suffered in this seclusion are not physical but metaphorical, historical, and linguistic. They impact my feelings of self-worth and my consequential uncertainty to give voice to a self that has already been predetermined as worthless simply because of my surname and racialized body. To be clear, I consider myself of extremely high worth, but I do recognize that I am always in a state of semi-ness while I navigate multiple spaces and engage with audiences who predominately share none of my cultural experiences or racial identity. I have always lacked the fluidity to perform these navigations entirely and seamlessly.

While semi-ness can be a derogatory term, I am not ashamed that I feel always partially belonging. Rather, I am ashamed of exterior forces that stretch me beyond reasonable capacities. My sense of semi-ness or partialness is largely based on my experiences as a first-generation Chicana academic. (I neglect my Apache identity here, principally because the invisibility of that inheritance has been so absolute that I cannot honestly claim social experiences as an Apache). As an identifiable Chicana, I do not need to explain my encounters with unreceptive academic audiences. Narratives abound of subtle yet significant microaggressions in classrooms, particularly against female students and faculty of color.[12] In my reaction to microaggressions, I tend to withhold full disclosure of myself and my thoughts, opting for silence and illegibility instead of trusting audiences I encounter in academic spaces. In this way semi-ness becomes a form of control and self-empowerment as I elect and perform rhetoric that maintains my distance, enacts my lack of comfort, and conveys my deficiency in total

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integration. This semi-ness is, accordingly, dually maintained as nonreceptive audiences do not possess frameworks to understand my positionality, and as I resist melding into a system that denies hospitality for my body and voice.

Still, semi-ness is concurrently a source of woundedness for me even if I have defiantly embraced illegibility. This is because there are parts of my semi-ness that I cannot control. I remain isolated from a family that cannot envision my intellectual life, from an academy that will not upset hierarchies to accommodate those like me, and from a Chicanx community that questions my authenticity because my family broke from normative Chicano networks, which shows in my nonnative Spanish, the foods I eat, the beach I love, and the history my family disowned. In essence, my uncle's death and my family's strategies to survive mourning have also closed doors to my culture, marking me a traitor even as I devote my scholarship and teaching to reentering my cultural inheritances. Simply, I belong nowhere.

Yet when I am in pain from this inflicted/maintained wound, I find clarity. I know an urgent truth: I do not deserve this pain. However, my escape from pain cannot be through giving myself to the institute or quitting my attempts to claim my culture. Such a surrendering of self may heal me but replace me in the process. Melding is not the way out of pain. I accept my semi-ness and fragmented self, and I continue to listen to pain. In this rhetorical reorientation toward myself as the sole speaker and listener, I have learned that I cannot leave pain until I satisfy myself as audience. I have also discovered that when we listen to the voice from the wound, initial unintelligible pain purges us of imposed rhetorical performances so that we can eventually locate our own articulation of personal testimony. We locate rhetorics of woundedness amid a rhetorical system that confronts hierarchical frameworks that otherwise control the articulation of self. *The Wound and the Stitch* is, in this way, a personal journey along a historical pathway, one that I hope will strengthen my voice and concurrently illuminate a strategy of self-representation that participates in ongoing traditions and values.

This rhetoric of generative woundedness that I own, centralize, and contextualize is one that I practice, protect, and share with so many Chicanx rhetors. Yet it is only one thread of Chicanx rhetoric and only one specific genealogy within a vast tapestry of Latinx historical rhetorics that continue to represent traditions while transforming to suit current agendas and needs. Each rhetorical thread in this wider tapestry is distinct, deriving from specific moments in and through time and space. Many of our threads have been irrevocably snipped

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from our rhetorical histories, leaving gaps in our understanding and making us vulnerable to linguistic assault. Other rhetorical threads are partial but may be mended, and still others are tangled and difficult to discern. However, through creative and attentive decolonization, a Chicanx rhetorical tapestry may be stitched to close gaps of our colonial ruptures.

In this way, *The Wound and the Stitch* focuses on disrupted historical lineages and how such disruption disempowers contemporary Latinx rhetors. While this disruption is undoubtedly part of a broader colonial discussion, and I invite *The Wound and the Stitch* to involve rhetorics beyond Chicanx contexts, I view rhetorics of woundedness as functioning beyond decolonial considerations. Indeed, sexuality and gender identities are parts of our analysis of rhetorical strategies that empower the wounded by repurposing hurtful labels and actions as counter-confrontations.[13] In this intersection of ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, many demographics and many rhetorical lineages may populate our discursive space. I elect to center a specific Chicanx rhetoric that situates woundedness as a conceptual lens through which to analyze self-representational strategies that urgently confront violations against body and challenge normalized categories placed on Chicanx identities. Accordingly, *The Wound and the Stitch* models a methodology to retrieve rhetorical antecedents that may help shed light on pathways for contemporary Chicanx rhetors to advance our voices and ambitions yet also contributes to methodologies in decolonial, feminist, and sexuality studies for the retrieval of histories that today's rhetors may claim and own for self-empowerment.

## A Critical Examination of the Application of Nepantla

While legacies of Indigenous rhetorics have been fundamentally torn from the tapestry of Chicanx rhetorics by colonization and dominant European epistemological frameworks, I must include in my genealogy threads of Indigenous rhetorical traditions of the wound.[14] In this endeavor, I hope to avoid interpretations of Indigenous philosophical and linguistic traditions as colonial constructs. Rather, I acknowledge Indigenous etymologies and usages, leading me to now define my understanding of nepantla since the term informs the development of my historical genealogy of Chicanx rhetorics of generative woundedness.

I begin with a prominent Mexica understanding of nepantla, so I might examine a potential Indigenous rhetoric that negotiates with European *topos* to inform

developments in the rhetorics of woundedness. My intention in this historical genealogy is not to represent passive Indigenous rhetorics that are conquered and therefore positioned as irrelevant to modern Chicanx rhetorical legacies. Instead, I argue that the syncretic nature of a specific Iberian and Mexica metaphysical and spiritual understanding complements an incorporated rhetorics of woundedness, a joint inheritance that the Chicanx writers and artists whom I study utilize in their rhetorical strategies.[15] It is therefore vital that I begin my studies by examining nepantla in its Indigenous usage, since it develops a corresponding foundation with Iberian female devotional rhetorics. My understanding of nepantla often deviates from prevalent applications in Chicanx studies that position the term as colonial negotiation. To illustrate my point, I offer a brief examination of the use of nepantla in the context of its colonial and postcolonial understanding as opposed to Náhuatl application of the word—Náhuatl being the language of the Nahua peoples of Mesoamerica that includes the Aztec/Mexica. I also note here that while *Aztec* is the dominant scholarly name for the peoples inhabiting Mesoamerica during conquest, I employ the name *Mexica*. This is how the peoples of the Tenochtitlán region (modern Mexico City) and their territories named themselves. The term *Aztec* was popularized in the early nineteenth century by Alexander Von Humboldt and derives from European misunderstanding of the Mexica who identified themselves as peoples of Aztlán, the mythical home of the Mexica.

The first known Castilian definition of nepantla is in Franciscan Friar Andrés de Olmos's 1547 dictionary, *Arte de la lengua Mexicana*. De Olmos defines nepantla as "en medio" or "entre." Franciscan Friar Alonso de Molina's 1571 *Vocabulario en lengua Castellana y Mexicana y Mexicana y Castellana* defines the word similarly as "en el medio," "en medio," or "por el medio."[16] These sixteenth-century Castilian definitions of nepantla—"in the middle," "through the middle," "in-between," or "inside"—continue to resonate in modern applications of the word. In her visual rhetoric and Chicanx art history scholarship, Laura E. Pérez defines nepantla as an in-between state, "the postconquest condition of cultural fragmentation and social indeterminacy."[17] This understanding of nepantla traces to what is believed to be its first published appearance, in a sixteenth-century narrative that details a Castilian-Náhuatl exchange and thereby privileges (above the aforementioned Castilian dictionaries) the spoken context of the Indigenous word by an Indigenous speaker. Still, the report of the interchange is made by a Spanish Dominican friar, Diego Durán, in his *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España* (ca. 1581). Durán describes an encounter between himself and an Indigenous

man during which Durán reprimanded the man for practicing Indigenous customs. The man responded, "Father, don't be afraid, for we are still 'nepantla.'"[18] In accord with an earlier interpretation by Miguel León-Portilla in *Endangered Cultures* (1976), Pérez explains nepantla as a neutral in-between state, signaling that the Indigenous man is still in the process of being converted in both faith and customs.

Following a similar interpretation, Anzaldúan theories on nepantla emphasize the neutral in-between state as one weighs among various options. In "Putting Coyolxauhqui Together" (1999), Gloria Anzaldúa envisions nepantla as analogous with writing processes wherein writers are in between inspiration and invention, thereby struggling among possibilities.[19] Anzaldúa fine-tunes her initial borderlands theory in her 2000 *Interviews/Entrevistas* by applying concepts of nepantla as a more advanced descriptor of cultural collisions. Anzaldúa writes, "I found that people were using 'Borderlands' in a more limited sense than I had meant it. So to elaborate on the psychic and emotional borderlands I'm now using 'nepantla.' . . . With the nepantla paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of *mestizas* living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities."[20] In 2002, Anzaldúa continues to define nepantla as "the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems."[21]

Acknowledging that she builds on Anzaldúan nepantla theory, Chicanx scholar-activist Maylei Blackwell writes that nepantla is a word "used by Náhuatl speakers during the colonization of Mexico to name a place or space between two colliding cultures."[22] She argues that female farmworker activists in California might discover in this space strategies of resistance and negotiation. This understanding and utilization of nepantla is of a location that forms a site of marginalization and violation but then transforms into a space in which to discover advantage—an in-between space where Chicanas might understand cross-cultural existence and formulate strategies in pursuit of social justice.[23] This idea of finding a space for interrupting dominant narratives has pervaded Chicanx studies, even when the word nepantla is not applied. Juan Guerra does not reference nepantla in his discussion of critical pedagogies, but he extends the concept of in-betweenness as a state of empowered "nomadic consciousness."[24] He asks that classroom composition pedagogy foster spaces of in-betweenness where students might compose reflections on their travels between languages, modalities, and social identities. In these student reflections, Guerra believes writers

might connect critically with their immediate world. This aligns closely with theories of nepantla, particularly Anzaldúa's narrative theories. Even if Guerra distances his work from a border concept to identify a transient, nomadic experience, his key claim is that reflection of the transition, the in-betweenness, when one navigates spaces will cultivate in student writers critical awareness of the shifting dynamics of their lives.

The dominant and extended understanding of nepantla in Chicanx academic discourse, theory, rhetoric, methodology, and pedagogy is, then, an in-between space where a Chicanx person might coexist with various social, language, cultural, and identity intersections in a transcultural United States geography. This ironically eclipses Nahua usage of the word and its metaphysical concepts to privilege social and political associations within colonial and postcolonial realities. As previously noted, Pérez builds on León-Portilla's study of the first known published usage of nepantla by Friar Durán. In Durán's account, nepantla is specifically applied to a context of conversion and understood as a response to transcultural negotiations.[25] It is later applied in Anzaldúan theories, methodologies, and pedagogies as decolonial resistance during postcolonial negotiations. However, the word preexisted colonization and still exists for Náhuatl speakers. To apply the word in its limited manifestation between the friar and the target of his conversion efforts is to lose its fuller Nahua framework.[26] This is a tangled rhetorical thread, interwoven so tightly with colonial discourses that it is difficult to examine how the etymological transformation and engagement of nepantla can inform rhetorical lineages that do not partake in concepts of colonial in-betweenness.

My project undertakes to detangle nepantla. In this way, I join efforts in decolonial rhetorical scholarship to delink language usage from one privileged form of semiotic and epistemological system to allow examination of the Americas' rhetorical traditions that do not entirely derive from colonial impositions.[27] My understanding and application of nepantla reach for Nahua construction of the term as a metaphysical concept of securing balance within a fluctuating liminal space. The chief emphasis of nepantla is not on sites of in-betweenness but on the action of finding balance when life forces push an individual in various directions. I prioritize nepantla as a verb rather than a noun. The importance of nepantla is in the emergence of the individual from the liminal space—not the inhabitation of that liminal space, not the state within the metaphorical "borderland." Finding stability allows one to emerge from liminal spaces and generatively

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transform. Linked to the metaphysical concept of *ollin*, a Náhuatl term for movement or earthquake, nepantla signifies entrance to a new state of being once balance is secured in the "earthquake" or upsets of lived experience.

The liminality of the space in nepantla is nearly ritualistic in concept. This is not liminality as defined by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner.[28] For Turner, liminality is temporary and exceptional. Instead, nepantla is a permanent condition of the cosmos, human existence, and reality—not limited to solely cultural and colonial contacts in which the metaphorical earthquake erases Indigenous paradigms. In actuality, nepantla cannot represent paradigm-erasing contacts, as there can be no erasure in the Nahua metaphysical concept because all change is possible and allowed for. In a permanent condition of renewal after the constancy of upset and at the moment of balance, nepantla is performed. My argument benefits from philosopher James Maffie's visualization of nepantla as a "grand weaving in progress" where each thread of being transforms into a stable stitch for just a moment before moving back into motion for the next stitch to be secured as an ongoing eternal cycle of renewal and rebirth.[29] This process is ordinary, not extraordinary.[30] The upsets or wounds of life are generative and necessary for renewal of each and all. They are, in actuality, the purpose of life.

In my study of rhetorics of woundedness, I apply concepts of nepantla in its generative, balancing action. I emphasize that moment of knotting the stitch, yet this is a delicate ephemeral stitch that makes woundedness visible in order to rhetorically repurpose upsets as concurrently testaments of survival and accusations of assault. This attention to nepantla as a stabilizing activity, rather than a state of being in between, is my contribution to reassert a wider spectrum of etymological interpretation of nepantla and *ollin* that considers beyond colonial frameworks. While my research will focus on an Iberian genealogy, the Mexica concept of securing stability in a quake serves as an interweaving Mesoamerican genealogy in the construction of later Chicanx rhetorics of woundedness. These joint concepts of survival after assault and continued confrontation of turmoil form a rhetorical partnership.

To illustrate this notion, I return to our consideration of the virgenes abrideras. In these sculptures, the Virgin Mary presents steadiness and tranquility for a worshipper audience who approaches. Mary appears in peaceful meditation at this approach. However, by design, the worshipper interrupts this peace as Mary's praying hands must be parted to reveal the inner triptych. Such action reveals the sculpture's carved narrative of pain and sacrifice. This is the upset-state that activates the worshipper's own prayer. Once the upset-state is reconciled through

ritualistic meditation, the worshipper achieves temporary spiritual balance. Thus, the worshipper's prayer ends, the triptych closes, and Mary's prayer begins again with her hands returned to the clasped state. At this stage, the sculpture may physically regain its original positioning as before the upset, yet it may never again appear the same to the viewer who has witnessed the wound within. Mary can never again be viewed as whole and steady. Her being is fragmented between a constant state of prayer and pain, between motherhood and mourning, between warding against sin and welcoming salvation. Mary is altered based on the worshipper's new state of perception. Once her hands return to clasped prayer, Mary is no longer unaffected but rather recovering after the upset of her son's death. Furthermore, her prayer is no longer undefined but instead focused on the reverberations of her son's reality-shaking sacrifice. These reverberations are renewed with each moment of sin or temptation that returns the worshipper for new visits to the virgen abridera, a constant quake around the sculpture that reinforces the link between upsets of life and renewal from woundedness.

In Mexica thought there is generative transformation in life's constant earthquakes. Nepantla signals a disruptive event in life's journey, a continuance of existence as ever-transforming. However, the application of nepantla as a borderland noun-realm that exists between colonizer and colonized—and that a colonized figure might inhabit for negotiations—blurs the genealogical rhetoric that I examine. To be clear, there is a vital element of in-betweenness in nepantla, and my analysis of the rhetorics of woundedness will include speakers who inhabit the wound. The wound is a third space that will absolutely rely on the scholarship and theory of Chicanx writers who discuss nepantla as a generative space between cultures, between languages, and between colonizer and colonized. However, I distance myself from borderland theories and Chicanx studies that link nepantla more directly with this borderland as reflecting predominately colonized and capitalized tensions.

My distance is mindful of four critical cautions. First, to make the borderland metaphor universal to Chicanx experience obscures specific political violence committed at the geographic border. Second, it metaphorically relocates specific issues of Chicanx populations that are far removed geographically and generationally from the border. Third, borderland theories all too often essentialize Chicanx experiences while simultaneously erasing Mexican heritage in the Southwest and Western United States prior to the fabrication of any modern border. Finally, to equate postcolonial borderland theories with nepantla is to make natural the forces of colonial legacies. In other words, nepantla denotes

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finding balance while turbulent life forces naturally rise to destabilize individuals; by equating natural life forces to colonial forces and coloniality, colonization becomes the true way of the world. I am not interested in this framing of nepantla or of colonial borderlands so much as I am in the crossroads that split Chicanx loyalties and identities—the intersections that violently crash and the wounds that occur from such crashes, the quakes that activate generative forces toward new self-awareness.

## The Stitch as Methodology

So, what exactly is this Chicanx rhetoric of generative wound, and why is it stitched, not healed? A short answer is that the *wound* serves as an insistent marker to examine rhetorical inheritance impacted by historical conditions wherein assault is continuous and systematized; the *stitch* signifies delicate, ephemeral acts of healing amid an otherwise still-extant woundedness that insists on further redress. In terms of the colonial wound, the *postcolonial* is not yet achieved if we understand it as a political signal of a post–World War II Western atmosphere that cultivates sovereignty.[31] *Postcolonial* does not mean "after colonialism" or "the time after colonizers leave." It is a historiographical concept referring to the terms and conditions of power that remain even after colonial managers depart. However, the use of *post* might signal otherwise. *Post* implies that violences committed in the *colonial* have concluded. Coloniality, however, persists even if the historical governing systems have been dismantled. In my project, I advocate a *decolonial* process that continues to address still-extant wounds from past colonial violences and present coloniality—*coloniality* being a term that focuses on the continuity of dominating strategies formulated during and extended beyond colonial governing systems.[32] These still-extant wounds are most exactly physical in the displacement of land and bodies but also metaphorical in the displacement of identities, languages, cultures, religions, and epistemologies.[33] The colonial is still an open wound that must be tended and compensated. As Jinah Kim concisely states, "The wound tells how conditions for healing have not been met."[34] *The Wound and the Stitch* accordingly studies Chicanx rhetorics that make apparent one's fragmented state to repurpose woundedness as a testament of assault and to activate activism.

To focus tighter on the woundedness at the core of this rhetoric, I select from among interweaving Chicanx rhetorical inheritances. I define *rhetorical inheritance*

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as a claim to voice that derives from and fortifies one's sense of belonging. This belonging is situated in a rhetor's election of one or multiple intersecting cultural associations within various heritage options, contextualized in local and temporal identification. *Rhetorical inheritance* is not a birthright but a dynamic sense of voice, impacted by one's living relationship with communication experiences and mitigated by historical (dis)connection.[35] As previously noted, I am interested in (dis)connections with Nahua philosophy as it understands the wound metaphorically in conceiving existence as a series of upsets (moments of *ollin*) from which new ways of being may be temporarily secured (reaching nepantla) until the next moment of *ollin* again alters existence. Yet this wound may also manifest as a physical wound, and it concurrently signifies a lived historical wound that extends along the series of upsets. In Catholic philosophy, the wound is similarly metaphorical, conceiving humanity as traversing a series of temptations leading to sin from which atonement and reconfirmed faith may be temporarily secured until the next moment of temptation necessitates penance. Furthermore, this wound may manifest as a physical wound in the actualization of sin, and it concurrently signifies a lived historical wound that extends from Adam and Eve's original sin to Christ's sacrifice and ongoing practices within the Catholic Church. *The Wound and the Stitch*, therefore, addresses metaphorical, physical, and historical wounds in my development of a rhetorical strategy that reharnesses woundedness for generative purposes. I am interested in how the formation of this rhetorical strategy brings into conflict, compromise, and entanglement the two primary influences that concern my historical genealogy: the Mesoamerican and the Catholic Iberian female discourses on generative woundedness.

However, this rhetorical genealogy is also a living one, the practice of which may be a wound itself, derived from moments when Chicanx rhetors elect to make visible their inflictions but confronts a society untrained to esteem the language of fragmentation or woundedness. After all, to apply such rhetorics is to admit one's incompleteness. This is a dangerous strategy, since declarations of incompleteness or semi-ness are often misinterpreted as self-contempt or disclosures of inability or defect. A common response may be to act on a perceived need to heal or fix the Chicanx rhetor, which may result in accusing such rhetors of irresponsibly maintaining the wound. Such actions prevent ownership of this rhetorical inheritance and further alienate rhetors from expressing themselves.[36] Accordingly, the concluding thoughts of *The Wound and the Stitch* also briefly address a linguistic wound that concerns critical race pedagogy. While books on

rhetorical studies typically do not involve writing pedagogy, I insist that explorations of cultural rhetorics enhance ways we teach writing and contest suppositions that particular forms of self-expressions—such as representing self as *semi*—are signs of deficiency rather than elected rhetorical enactments.

While this project's scope is vast, I concentrate my rhetors in a Californian context, focusing on writers and artists currently in their fifties and sixties and sharing urban, cultural, and social commonalities. I focus on Californian life, text, and art for three reasons. First, the geographical range provides more definition to the lineage I draw than an abstracted essentializing would; generative wounds can be examined as a more targeted site-specific rhetorical performance to confront past and present forces that impart violence against a Chicanx sense of physical and emotional self. Second, the ongoing violence I examine is contextualized within the kinds of Californian classrooms where I have studied and now teach; I respond to linguistic violence committed against Chicanx university voices and identities. Third, as a native Californian, I ground my scholarship in the immediate spaces and generations that inform my positionality. I follow a Chicana feminist tradition of theorizing through the flesh as I write through my living body as it navigates spaces—both physical and imagined—shaped by Californian histories, politics, communities, cultures, and arts.[37]

A project covering these spans of eras, spaces, and topics necessitates the application of various methodologies to stitch together the often disjointed and complex historical genealogy in assorted textual and visual rhetorical manifestations. I accordingly employ transdisciplinary scholarship and a variety of methodologies in the study of relevant historical, cultural, and social contexts.[38] This transdisciplinary framework is one that I practice daily in the ethnic studies department to which I contribute as a professor at California State University, Long Beach, teaching textual, body, material, and visual rhetorics and the application of such rhetorics in composition. I have learned to reject additive models, preferring the transdisciplinarian considerations that inseparably inform my understanding of Chicanx identities.

After all, additive models wherein we collect representative voices from a global population simulate a colonizing logic of laying claim and essentializing voices to advance the power of our presentation of self.[39] I rebuff any extension of the university as a colonial cabinet of curiosity. Rather, I aim to disrupt rhetorical methodologies. Building on my background in Californian graduate programs in creative writing, art history, and rhetoric, my service in Californian museum spaces, and over two decades of teaching composition in a range

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of Californian community college, private university, and public university spaces, *The Wound and the Stitch* bridges cultural rhetorics, decolonial studies, critical race and biopolitical theory, trauma studies, feminist studies, visual rhetorics, and critical pedagogy to explore the legacies of female medieval Iberian rhetorics of the wound in modern Chicanx textual and visual self-representation strategies. I hope to illustrate that interweaving numerous modes is crucial to recovering fragments of cultural inheritances that have been scattered by colonial disruptions and ongoing coloniality hierarchies.

In this way, I align with methodologies used by Walter Mignolo, particularly his concept of *pluriversality* as a renouncement of the "conviction that the world must be conceived as a unified totality . . . in order for it to make sense." Instead, Mignolo calls for a worldview that interconnects diversity, thereby setting "us free to inhabit the pluriverse rather than the universe."[40] As I have already shown in my brief examination of nepantla, this delinking of writing from one form of semiotic and epistemological system allows for greater understanding of the Americas' rhetorical traditions that do not entirely derive from colonial impositions.[41] The delinking concurrently values the fragments that we may then discern without the facade of a stable, core unity. My research utilizes a pluralistic methodology as I envision the *stitch* as maintaining the visibility of colonial woundedness and deterring hierarchical scholarship.

Indeed, a multimodal and multimethodological approach to understanding Chicanx rhetorics is essential. This is particularly the case when we consider that in the Mexican regions that concern my project, cultures were first approached through visual and corporal gestures to overcome verbal and textual obstacles. This first approach launched the colonization of cultures. Thus, for my project to recover Iberian crossover of the rhetorics of the generative wound, I employ overlapping studies of visual, corporal, and cultural rhetorics. In other words, when modes of communication become jumbled into a colonizing system that attempts to obliterate or transform those modes, it is problematic to recover a rhetorical genealogy without considering a methodological framework that allows for multimodal analysis. While I hope to trace a European historical genealogy, I do so with an awareness of various modes of early transmission and the complicated and often incomplete reception of such European traditions by Indigenous interpretations and enactments based on Indigenous understandings of the world.

In this way, I find a helpful model in the transdisciplinary collaborations performed by anthropologist Joanne Rappaport and art historian Tom Cummins, whose *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes* (2012) recovers

historical Andean rhetorics by applying multiple methodologies and multimodal analysis to the culture's literacy traditions. The authors broaden notions of literacy, arguing that "the literate world is constituted by intersecting literacies that individually cannot stand alone. The literate world is thus multifaceted and often recursive."[42] I find Rappaport and Cummins's multimodal methodology and its expansion of literacy instructive, in that my historical genealogy forsakes linear narratives to intermingle with differing ontological and rhetorical systems, much like a tapestry wherein threads of knowing, being, and creating spread from and into multiple directions.

Instead of conceptualizing coloniality as a binary of conqueror and conquered, we might consider ways that various threads or rhetorical genealogies intermingle, transforming the entire Ibero-American plane with diverse colors that serve one function, deliberate or otherwise—the formation of later Chicanx self-representation rhetorical strategies. What I find particularly useful in this tapestry metaphor is its avoidance of hybridity. The tapestry does not recover indigeneity to the exclusion of colonial realities and does not impose European structures on Indigenous subjects. This model complements my attempt to avoid isolating Chicanx inheritors into solely Indigenous or Iberian narratives, instead considering Iberian rhetorical traditions alongside yet distinct from Indigenous traditions—and yet still historically contextualized in settler-colonial realities. Again, the stitching must be made apparent. I intend to study fragments or wounds as part of Chicanx rhetorical inheritances but not to position those fragments as binaries of a hybrid mestiza state.

Indeed, concepts of hybridity conflict with rhetorics of fragmentation, particularly in the idea of mestiza as a blended, cohesive state of mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritage. In chapter 2, I am particularly critical of the uses of mestizaje as participating in or complicit in both Mexican and United States settler-colonial projects of Indigenous dispossession. Accordingly, when I speak of fragmented Chicanx inheritances, I do not assert a framework of cohesiveness, as Anzaldúa famously offered in her "mestiza consciousness" theory.[43] My focus is on rhetorics that make apparent a lack of cohesive wholeness in order to highlight woundedness as part of many Chicanx rhetors' daily experiences, confronting a spectrum of split loyalties and fractured identities at the metaphorical crossroads of mundane life. The query I raise thereby initiates examination of a dominant United States privileging of rhetorics of wholeness that impairs audience reception of cultural rhetorics of fragmentation. *The Wound and the Stitch* cautions that what may be lost in melding our disparate

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parts into oneness are threads of Chicanx rhetorics in their ubiquitous forms—particularly the rhetorics at the core of my historical genealogy.[44]

## Entering the Wound: Narrative Overview

Although I conduct a historical genealogy, I do not map a linear chronology. Instead, I launch this examination by prioritizing and centralizing—first and foremost—modern Chicanx rhetorics of woundedness before I contextualize the rhetorical tradition within historical inheritances from Mesoamerican concepts of sacrifice and Iberian female devotional arts of Marian generative woundedness. This trajectory delinks my historical genealogy from temporal linearity and delinks Chicanx rhetorics from a "starting point" in Iberian and Mesoamerican histories, privileging modern Chicanx rhetors as our new "starting point" from which to radiate outward toward consideration of exterior publics and relevant histories.

In part 1, I define my interpretation of the generative wound in contemporary writings by investigating applications of metaphorical fragmentations and emotions of semi-ness. This study employs a cultural rhetorics methodology to examine strategies for Chicanx self-expression. In chapter 1, "Cherríe Moraga's Rhetoric of Fragmentation and Semi-ness," writings by a Los Angeles native provide the vehicles for my project. Moraga raises issues that often seem disconnected, but not if we consider her discourse through cultural rhetorics of fragmentations, semi-ness, or wounds. In the span of her publications from "La Güera" (1979) to *Native Country of the Heart* (2019), Moraga struggles with disjointed existence and split loyalties. These splits are so extensive that she often writes of startling moments in which she discovers that she is her own oppressor. Such moments occur as she prioritizes certain pieces of her identity at the expense of others. For Moraga, her fragmentation impacts not only inner but physical identity. Her father's whiteness, now the color of her skin, conceals that which Moraga claims as her mother's Indigenous blood that flows beneath. The outer does not match the inner. This is a source of Moraga's wound.

Her solution is to undo her desire for wholeness, to tear apart her white exterior to make public the many aspects of her inner self.[45] Like a virgen abridera, Moraga breaks open to reveal that which cannot be imagined from the white shell. Within, Moraga contains the persecution, pain, and sacrifice of a brown

lesbian identity—but also salvation through sharing her hidden truths. Ultimately Moraga finds her wounds to be constructive. By entering them Moraga learns to embrace her fragmented identity, never finished and never complete but continuously transforming. Such a concept of self recalls Anzaldúa's conceptualization of the borderland experience as a *herida abierta*, an open wound inflicted by a coloniality that maintains fractured identities. While Anzaldúa examines destructive forces that emerge from this *herida abierta*, she privileges the fluidity of linguistically navigating this borderland third space. Anzaldúa conceives a *translingual* forked tongue, a single unit with fragmented endpoints, that Chicanxs may utilize to gainfully negotiate among various cultural heritages and socioeconomic realities.[46] Yet Moraga's tongue is not forked as a tri-tipped oneness. Her tongue is metaphorically severed as she protests a "neogringo theft of the tongue and tierra" and her consequential shame about linguistic inadequacies.[47] This focus on shame evokes Anzaldúa's adaption of Gershen Kaufman's *Shame: The Power of Caring* as she connects concepts of physical borders, sociocultural woundedness, and emotional shame. But while Anzaldúa perceives dissociation among disparate selves as stimulating action, she seeks to heal fragmentation to purge shame. Anzaldúa participates in rhetorics of woundedness but contradicts Moraga's insistence on maintaining fragmentation.

Moraga's writings are my selected lens to understand nuanced strategies within rhetorics of woundedness precisely because she allows a visible wound state and because her career trajectory unlearns colonial fictions of wholeness to embrace fragmentation. This unlearning of colonial fiction is the focus of chapter 2, "Woundedness as Decolonial Rhetoric." Here I explore how Moraga discovers in woundedness keen insights into the tensions and splits that inform decolonial identities and realities. The wound also reminds Chicanxs that we are not obligated to fit a narrative of "correct" seamlessness of language, identity, or culture. Indeed, such narratives of wholeness are suspect, a point of examination that invites discussion of Alexander Weheliye and Sylvia Wynter's application of (non)humanness to refute raceless views of biopolitics, Trinh T. Minh-ha's decolonial theory of the "not-I," and Anibal Quijano and Enrique Dussel's rejection of *myths of modernity*. For Moraga and these theorists, splintered oneness becomes essential to decolonize scholarly epistemologies, systematic biopolitics, and personal identities.

After defining the generative wound through analysis of Moraga, in part 2 I contrast the generative wound with the inflicted wound, precisely a type of physical wound that impairs lives through biopolitical frameworks in the United

States. Part 2 applies decolonial methodologies and critical race theory to make apparent the nongenerative wound. Here the wound is produced and controlled by forces that regard Chicanx bodies as sites of violence and border patrol, thus necessitating my attention to modern biopolitics as a systematic extension of historical colonial governance wherein hierarchical forms of racism determine which living beings might be deemed a "political problem" as depriving resources from privileged vectors of the State.[48] In chapter 3, "Biopolitics and 'Crying Wounds' in *No Más Bebés*," I explore the border patrolling of Chicana wombs in *No Más Bebés*, a documentary directed by Renee Tajima-Peña on the sterilization of Chicanas during the 1960s and 1970s at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center and the subsequent *Madrigal v. Quilligan* case initiated by the Madrigal Ten (the Chicana plaintiffs). *No Más Bebés*, released in 2015, has yet to be extensively examined by the scholarly community, yet the film serves two essential purposes for my studies: first, to demonstrate the inflicted wound as a form of institutionalized border patrol, and second, to critically engage with (il)legibility of Chicanx woundedness. The illegibility of Chicanx rhetorics of woundedness here highlights both the existence of nonreceptive audiences who are unaccustomed to detecting specific Chicanx rhetorical traditions and the domination of narratives that deliberately or unintentionally extend institutional silencing of grievances experienced and performed by female Chicanx rhetors. *No Más Bebés* gives voice to members of the Madrigal Ten to pursue ongoing protections of female reproductive rights, including but not precisely the rights of Chicanas. I study how audiences might not detect rhetorics of woundedness when Chicana articulation of grievances are absorbed by more prominent advocacy discourses. My concern here is that the Chicana wound is not opened solely for the generative benefit of Chicanxs but for intersecting aspects focused on motherhood and womanhood that include yet concurrently decentralize Chicana-specific lived realities.

Indeed, in chapter 4, "Border-Patrolling Chicana Bodies and Wound Theory as Resistance," I illustrate how Chicana woundedness is often repurposed to serve others beyond the Chicanx community and often positioned to obscure biopolitical systems of coloniality. The voice from the wound is recontextualized to heal another rather than address one's woundedness and associated institutionalized state violences. I end chapter 4 by considering Cathy Caruth's trauma theories. Caruth posits generative potentials within "the crying wound" when the aggrieved maintain possession of and attention to one's woundedness as an alternative epistemological method to sustain remembrance of violence until an

otherwise unavailable reality becomes perceptible.[49] Caruth discovers potential in the wound when one examines history's ripple effects. I connect trauma theory to my discernment of rhetorics of woundedness. By observing yesterday's wound in today's reality, we might advocate compensation to distinct communities while celebrating perseverance and resistance even in a state of woundedness.

Parts 1 and 2, by contrasting the generative and the inflicted wound, set foundations for part 3, which at last focuses on the medieval-to-modern rhetorical genealogy and the historical wound that erases threads of this inheritance. In part 3, I return to the generative wound to claim that a dominant form of Chicanx visual and textual rhetoric inherits a distinctive Iberian female strategy that positions wounds and fragments in ways that confront and transform the self. In this analysis, I focus on two prevailing threads in Chicanx art that make productive the wounds of coloniality: the reverse-colonization via reclamation of genres and imagery of Aztecan/Mexica visual arts, and the appropriation of imagery of the Virgin Mary into the lived realities of Chicanx artists. I accordingly bring into my genealogy a consideration of Indigenous heritages that shape Chicanx art together, in parallel, and in discord with medieval Iberian influences. However, it is crucial to consider this history in conversation with contemporary studies and strategies of autopathography, a genre of autobiography that centers on first-person accounts of one's disease or wounded experiences. In this way, I link my historical studies of woundedness to modern visual rhetorics.

Chapter 5, "Reading Wounds (from Right to Left) to Reclaim Mexica Cosmologies," focuses on visual counter-stories that dismantle colonial fictions of wholeness to address historical woundedness. This type of wound develops from geographical relocation and disrupted histories based on coloniality systems. In response to displacement and narrative erasures, the artworks I feature in chapter 5 make central a lack of resolution. While my attention is drawn to the female Californian strand of this rhetoric, the generative wound is deeply rooted in broader Chicanx visual rhetoric. Therefore, works outside female demographics, such as by the collaborative art group Asco (Los Angeles–based) and Enrique Chagoya (born in Mexico but a Californian resident since the 1980s), also help me bridge the medieval and modern.

Much of chapter 5 applies museum or collection theory as we consider how Chicanx artists reclaim visual narratives of self and culture. The Chicanx cabinets of curiosities by Amalia Mesa-Bains and the collaborative *Doc/Undoc* project mirror attempts to seize control of pieces of lost narratives, wherein the collected

becomes the collector of her own story and archetypes. I also query how rhetorics of woundedness contend with permanently erased histories—fissures in history and land-based knowledge that cannot be stitched together. Indeed, this inability to recover cultural inheritances and knowledges that have been entirely erased by coloniality returns our discussion to strategies core to rhetorics of woundedness that advance challenges against dominant narratives of wholeness. Accordingly, chapter 5 concludes by examining the collaborative multimodal *Codex Espangliensis* to consider further challenges to normative storytelling of wholeness and authority. Cast in the medium of a simulated Mesoamerican codex, the accordion-styled folds of the *Codex* can be pulled out into one single, long page. In the Mesoamerican tradition, one reads this page from right to left, but one may elect to unfold this codex from left to right, as in the European reading direction. I offer a reading of the *Codex* from right to left that applies rhetorical strategies of woundedness that are obscured in the European left-to-right mainstream narrative. Here, I consider how rhetorics of woundedness appoint audience responsibility in redressing coloniality wounds while concurrently inviting readers to assert agency in electing alternative reading approaches.

Indeed, the *Codex Espangliensis* returns our discussion to the virgenes abrideras in chapter 6, "The Art of the Generative Wound (from Container to Co-Redemptrix)." These mutable devotional sculptures of the Virgin Mary necessarily challenge worshippers to elect an approach to interpreting the contained narrative to redress woundedness. In chapter 6, I examine traces of the multimodal rhetorical inheritances of these sculptures most prominently in my studies of Chicanx artists who work in various mediums: Christina Fernandez, Amalia Mesa-Bains, and Maya Gonzalez.[50] I have selected these three artists because not only are they Chicanxs who utilize generative rhetorics of woundedness, but they are all female Californians currently in their fifties and sixties, sharing urban, cultural, and social commonalities with both Cherríe Moraga and the Madrigal Ten, thereby providing more definition to the lineage that I draw. In short, part 3 explores visual depictions of Chicanx fractures in modern Californian Chicanx art—a motif repurposed from female Iberian devotional rhetorics, informed by Mesoamerican visual cultures, and now deployed to advance current campaigns.

In my conclusion, "The Linguistic Wound and Stitch Pedagogy," I examine linguistic wounds in classroom spaces. After twenty years of teaching college composition in Southern California, I can fill a void in composition research

and critical pedagogy. The reality of my current Californian classroom space is that I am a professor of Latinx rhetoric and composition in an ethnic studies department. In that context, I define *cultural rhetorics* as expressions of a convergence of both hemispherical studies of Latinx rhetorical histories and practices grounded in specific spaces in time and place, encounters, and individuals. This recalls Malea Powell's descriptions of cultural rhetorics as spaces "practiced into being through the acts of storied making, where the past is brought into conscious conversations with the present and where—through those practices of making—a future can be imagined."[51] For my Latinx students, I propose conscious conversations between present learners and textual spaces informed by specific Iberian and Mesoamerican rhetorics that impact Southwestern United States communicative modes, as expressed today in many of our communities but shaped by individuals who navigate an assortment of life experiences and rhetorical spaces.

I also propose an exploration of how applying rhetorics of woundedness in classrooms may challenge teaching methods that normalize rhetorics of wholeness and their enforcement of language competencies and "correctness" in writing and genre conventions. My goal is to investigate ways that prescribed classroom performances of wholeness may continue to inflict shame on student rhetors, particularly when they practice Chicanx rhetorics that offer generative woundedness and elect forms of semi-ness.

I emphasize, however, that the specificity of my teaching environment and student demographic should not limit this pedagogy to Chicanx students but serve as a consideration for how we might expand historical rhetorics in more diverse writing inheritances. By contextualizing writing strategies within various rhetorical inheritances, *The Wound and the Stitch* guides scholars, educators, students, and communities as we enter historical rhetorics as part of a decolonial process to stitch the wound of marginalized rhetorical identities.

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# Notes

Introduction

1. Vázquez Martínez, "Historia y devoción de un santuario," 258–59, 266. In discussing historical views of San Juan Chapultepec as a space of syncretized Indigenous Catholicism that included perceived practices of idolatry, Vazquez Martinez describes negotiations between Marcelo de la Cruz and local church leaders as follows: "Es posible que al conocer los casos de idolatría en San Juan Chapultepec y los alrededores de la Villa del Marquesado, asi corno la necedad de los indios de adoctrinarse, los franciscanos dispusieran tener una junta con Marcelo de la Cruz el l6 de junio de ese mismo año en el convento" (266).

2. Sánchez Reyes and González Hernando, "De la virgen abridera," 22–23; Vázquez Martínez, "Historia y devoción de un santuario," 266.

3. Vázquez Martínez, "Historia y devoción de un santuario," 266, 273.

4. See Katz, "Marian Motion." Gertsman studies virgenes abrideras as part of the interactivity of Christendom's medieval visual cultural; see *Worlds Within*. González Hernando has published location-specific scholarship on Iberian sculptures; see *El arte bajomedieval y su proyección*.

5. Katz, "Behind Closed Doors."

6. See Katz, "Non-Gendered Appeal," for a counterargument asserting that Shrine Madonnas are not cultivated exclusively by female patrons for female devotions.

7. For various discussions of the terms *Latinx* and *Chicanx*, see Milian, "Extremely Latin, XOXO." Although interpretation, reception, and utilization of the "x" in *Chicanx* and *Latinx* varies in scholarly and popular thought, I view the "x" as minimizing binary thinking about gender identities, making more prominent a move toward expansive inclusivity, and marking both the unresolved inheritance of colonized identities and the potentials that arise from such lack of resolve. In short, the "x" aligns with my concept of woundedness, a mark that obliterates specificity yet concurrently places no limits on generative potential.

8. See Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down."

9. My concept of rhetoric as part of decolonization processes aligns with arguments advanced by García and Cortez, "Trace of a Mark That Scatters."

10. For trauma theory, see Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

11. Shaping my ideas on decolonization and delinking are works by Mignolo, including *Darker Side of the Renaissance*; "Delinking"; "Epistemic Disobedience." See also Baca and Villanueva, *Rhetorics of the Americas*; Ruiz and Sánchez, *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies*; García and Baca, *Rhetorics Elsewhere and Otherwise*; García and Cortez, "Trace of a Mark That Scatters."

12. See Pérez Huber and Solórzano, "Racial Microaggressions"; Pérez Huber and Solórzano, "Visualizing Everyday Racism." See also Pérez Huber, "Racial Microaffirmations."

13. See Muñoz, *Disidentifications*.

14. I use the term *colonization* as do Ruiz and Sánchez in *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies*. Ruiz and Sánchez define it "to include not only the taking of land but also the taking of culture and the defining of knowledge (of which language is a crucial part)" (xiii).

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15. Petra Pakkanen criticizes syncretism as a categorizing system but suggests ideas of syncretism as heuristic tools for locating otherwise "hidden antecedents of historical facts and to interpret them" ("Is It Possible," 125–26; Pakkanen cites Leopold and Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion*). For political impacts linked to syncretism in Latin America see also Benavides, "Syncretism and Legitimacy."

16. Troncoso Pérez, "Crónica del *Nepantla*," 143–44.

17. Pérez, "Spirit Glyphs," 200.

18. Ibid., 220n7.

19. Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 253, 258.

20. Anzaldúa, *Interviews / Entrevistas*, 176.

21. Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift," 541.

22. Blackwell, "Lídres Campesina," 13.

23. See D. Baca, "*Rhetoric Interrupted*." Baca views nepantlisma as a space in which one might adapt the colonizer's rhetoric to interrupt colonizing macro-narratives.

24. Guerra, "Putting Literacy in Its Place."

25. Troncoso Pérez details the original text of the exchange in "Crónica del *Nepantla*," especially 144–46. For an English translation, see Durán, *History of the Indies*.

26. For a similar observation on prevalent applications of *nepantla* by contemporary Chicanx scholars, see de Antuna, "What We Talk About," 159–62.

27. For canonical writings in decolonial theory, history, and methodology, see Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui, *Coloniality at Large*. For application of decolonial pedagogy in rhetoric and composition, see Ruiz and Sánchez, *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies*.

28. Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality."

29. Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*. Maffie places *nepantla* into conversation with a cluster of Náhuatl words that share possible etymological roots:

**Weaving cluster**: *tlaxinepanoa*, "to weave something"; *tlaxinepanoliztli*, "the act of weaving"; *xinepanoa*, "to weave something, like mats, fences, or something similar"; *qualli tlaxinepanoani*, "the accomplished weaver"; *tlaxinepanolli*, "something woven" (359–60).

**Joining cluster**: *nenepanoa*, "to join or mix one thing with another"; *cennepanoa*, "to mix some things with others"; *nepan uiuixoa*, "to shake or swing two things together"; *tlanelpanuiuixoliztli*, "the act of shaking and mixing something together"; *ixnepoa*, "to line or cover something, to fold a blanket, to join one with another" (356–57).

**Social interconnectivity cluster**: *nenepantlazotlalo*, "to love each other"; *nenepantlazoltlaliztli*, "the love they have for each other"; *nenepantlazotlaltia*, "to create bonds of friendship between people"; *manepanoa*, "to get married, or to join hands"; *nepanoa*, "to have intercourse with a woman or to push into a group of people"; *nenepanoliztli*, "copulation or carnal intercourse"; *motlatolnepanoa*, "to agree on what is said"; *tlatolnepaniuiliztli*, "agreement or conformity of reasons and opinions"; *nepanotl titotla* p*aloa*, "to greet with one another"; *nenepantlapaloliztli*, "reciprocal greeting"; *nepan tzatzilia*, "to shout to one another or for those who are working to hurry one another"; *tictonepantlatlaxilia*, "to blame each other for something"; *tenepantla moctecani*, "to stir up trouble among others"; *tenepantla moquetzani*, "the one who puts himself between those who are quarreling in order to calm them"; *nepantla quiza titlantli*, "the messenger between two people" (356–57).

30. See Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, notably 355, 360, 363, and the chapter "Teotle as Nepantla."

31. See the foreword of Ruiz and Sánchez, *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies*, where Victor Villanueva differentiates *decolonial* from *postcolonial*.

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32. Further discussions of coloniality can be located in Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Decolonial Turn," 219–20.

33. For arguments that decolonization impacts violations that manifest in metaphorical and physical forms, see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*, which explores how Africa and the Global South "became victims of genocides, epistemicides, linguicide and cultural imperialism, but also the trajectories of struggles for epistemic freedom that were provoked and ensued" (2). For counter-arguments that insist that decolonization focus on solely the physical, see Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor."

34. Kim, *Postcolonial Grief*, 68.

35. For further discussion of rhetorical inheritances, see my examination of archival methodologies in Ramirez, "Archival Quest."

36. See my examination of the myth of wholeness as impacting writing pedagogies in Ramirez, "Unmaking Colonial Fictions."

37. Moraga, "Entering the Lives of Others," 19. See also Calafell, *Latina/o Communication Studies*, 8, 93.

38. On critical race theories and methodologies, see writings by Pérez Huber and Solórzano. Also valuable for the development of my scholarly frameworks is T. Torres, "Latina *Testimonio*."

39. See Lechuga, "Anticolonial Future."

40. Mignolo, "Foreword," x.

41. See also Sánchez, "Writing," 88, 85, 80.

42. Rappaport and Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City*, 255.

43. See Anzaldúa, "Acts of Healing."

44. See Ramirez, "Unmaking Colonial Fictions."

45. See Yarbro-Bejarano, *Wounded Heart*, 4. Yarbro-Bejarano perceives that nearly every poem in the first edition of Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* centers on the female body, which Moraga systematically tears into semihuman pieces. See also S. Smith's reference to Moraga's "self-censoring body" as a form of detachment between the socially-constructed body and the identity formed in relation to body (*Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, 139–40).

46. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera*, 6.

47. Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 2nd ed., iii.

48. See Foucault, "'Society Must Be Defended,'" 66.

49. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

50. For the artists' biographies and works, see their websites: Amalia Mesa-Bains at the MacArthur Fellows Program (https://www.macfound.org/fellows/474); Maya Gonzalez at her artist website (http://www.mayagonzalez.com); Christina Fernandez at her gallery (https://galleryluisotti.com/artists/christina-fernandez).

51. Powell, "2012 CCCC Chair's Address," 388.

Part 1

1. Miller, *Art of Mesoamerica*, 225.

2. Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, iii.

3. See Klein's studies on depictions of females in Mexica visual culture, especially Klein's scholarship on the Coyolxauhqui Stone in context with the Coatlicue sculpture, "Devil and the Skirt" ("New Interpretation of the Aztec Statue"). For a general study of female representation in Mexica art, see Klein and Quilter, *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America*.

4. For interpretations of Mexica male-female iconography and gender ideologies, see Sigal, "Imagining Cihuacoatl"; see also Brumfiel, "Figurines and Aztec State." For ancient

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