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La Llorona in Nuevomexicana Poetic Narratives: Reflections on Writing and Memory

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by

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on poetic narratives that consider the folklore figure of La Llorona. I argue that contemporary nuevomexicana poets are responding to regional narratives as a way of challenging traditional structures of the lore and female archetypes to reclaim the identity and voice of the figure of La Llorona. Through literature that considers structure and archetype of the lore, Chicana feminist theory, and spectral theory, this essay surveys a selection of poems: "La Llorona Speaks" (2018) by Mercedez Holtry, "Una Carta de Amor de la Llorona" (2011) by Jessica Helen Lopez and "La Llorona" (2018) by Joanna Vidaurre-Trujillo. Through the consideration of the figure of La Llorona in nuevomexicana poetry and my own poetic narrative produced for this project, this investigation explores poetry as a way of navigating themes of identity, grief, and memory, offering a symbolic representation of the lore as an empowering narrative of resistance.

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Introduction

Nearly thirty years after the tragic passing of his wife, Dr. Michelle Rosaldo, anthropologist Dr. Renato Rosaldo wrote and published his book of poems *The Day of Shelly's Death (2014),* bridging the borders between ethnographic methodology and practices of creative writing. In his article "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," published in *Culture and Truth (1989)* shortly after Dr. Michelle Rosaldo's death, Dr. Rosaldo argued for the critical importance of personal experience with grief in anthropological investigations of bereavement in cultures, specifically when understanding the practice of headhunting in the Ilongot community of the Philippines. His later book of poems reflects his careful anthropological methodology of collecting and processing data and his role as an ethnographer, a positioned subject. Yet, what makes his poetry unique is the story it tells, his very personal experiences with bereavement after the death of his wife. He argues that "the way in which my own mourning and consequent reflection on Ilongot bereavement, rage, and headhunting raise methodological issues of general concern in anthropology" (125). The relationship between anthropology and personal experience that emerged in Dr. Rosaldo's parallel writings on death and its understanding in various capacities illuminated the limitations of anthropological understandings of death rituals. At the same time, the inclusion of both creative and anthropological approaches in his creative writing highlights the importance of poetry as a way of both expressing and exploring grief through personal and scholarly perspectives. After reading and writing academically about his book of poems, this project, one that merges theoretical approaches and poetry to invite the possibility of a new perspective about the role of

creative production in academic texts, emerged. I found opportunity to explore creative and academic approaches in the figure of La Llorona.

The folklore narrative of La Llorona is one that has been an essential story in oral traditions of hispanohablante (Spanish-speaking) communities for centuries. It has been passed on in many forms, deriving her contexts from regions, communities, and participants of the lore. In Mexico City, her story takes the shape of a ghostly woman wandering the streets crying out to warn her people of the coming conquistadors (Perez 16). In other regions of the United States, she is a young hispana, mestiza, or indigenous girl, often of lesser means, who is abandoned by a man of lower nobility for a wealthier Spanish woman and drowns her children in grief (Estés 326). In many narratives from New Mexico, she is a young mestiza or Indian mother whose ranchero partner is unfaithful, and she drowns her children in a vengeful despair, left to haunt cantinas and walk along the acequias (Lamadrid 123).

Each narrative reflects the unique identity of La Llorona and positions her in a variety of social, racial, socioeconomic and political contexts within each region, contributing to the collection of a rich oral tradition of her story. In more recent years, as cultural studies professor Dr. Domino R. Perez studies and documents in *There Was A Woman (2008),* the figure of La Llorona has expanded beyond oral tradition, extending into areas of film, music, visual arts, and-as will be evaluated and explored in this essay-reimagined narratives in contemporary Chicana/o/x[1] literature.

[1] I use the term Chicana/o/x here with the intention of inclusivity of all identities and acknowledge that these terms and usages are in flux. I also acknowledge the complexity of the use of "x." For anyone interested in further discussion, see: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/arts/design/pacific-standard-time-getty-latino.html and "What's in an "x"? An Exchange about the Politics of "Latinx"" by Catalina M. de Onis.

This study and accompanying creative work expand on Dr. Perez's work through the consideration of the following questions: How is La Llorona framed in both academic and creative texts? How do nuevomexicana poets personally engage with and respond to the patriarchal structures of the La Llorona narrative? How does La Llorona's symbolic nature reflect both critical thought about women of color in society and personal experiences with silencing, oppression, and grief? How can creative writing inform us about the magnetism of her figure?

The present study is comprised of three components, which include: 1) a critical framing of her narratives in the context of nuevomexicana poetry, 2) a self-produced poetic narrative, and 3) a reflection on creative writing and memory. The aim of this investigation is to reflect on the figure of La Llorona through a scholarly lens, theoretical perspectives, and through creative writing, nuevomexicana poetry and my own creative production, to demonstrate her figure as a symbol of resistance, one that intersects the personal and the academic.

Theoretical and Regional Framework

While acknowledging La Llorona as the woman crying out for her children in the streets of Tenochtitlán, her nearly 500 year-old Aztec history, this investigation begins with a brief reflection on the text "Las Dos Lloronas de Santa Fe" (2009), which explores her positioning within two regionally specific Llorona narratives originating in Santa Fe, New Mexico (121). The author of "Las Dos Lloronas de Santa Fe" (2009), Dr. Enrique Lamadrid, cultural studies ethnographer and professor, recognizes that La Llorona "has been in New Mexico since the beginning" (121). In the two versions presented in the essay, "La Llorona del East Side" and "La Llorona del West Side," La Llorona is a

woman split between communities who wrestle with the meaning and representation of her narrative. In “La Llorona del East Side,” a story echoing themes of a romanticized colonial past, La Llorona embodies the life of a young mestiza or Indian girl, betrayed by her lover and the father of her children, who abandons her for a richer woman, leading her to kill her children in a fury and eventually dying from her own misery and grief (122-123). As acknowledged by Dr. Lamadrid, this version of her story highlights the socio-economic disadvantages of mestiza women in the colonial moment, and the punishment for women who move outside of their social role as a nurturing mother through the theme, or one may argue the symbol, of infanticide. However, it considers La Llorona as a fixed figure, a “captive of pen and ink,” where she is unable to evolve and change in this version (122). Moreover, unique to this version, La Llorona maintains a close relationship with the space and land in Santa Fe; bodies of her or her children “are buried in the Campo Santa de San Miguel” which has since become a highlight of a ghost tour designed for outsiders to come and hear her tale (Lamadrid 123).

Dr. Lamadrid compiles an extensive list of authors, both native New Mexicans and Anglo outsiders, who have written about La Llorona and perhaps even reimagined her story. In this, he writes, “Already deprived of her voice, the East Side Llorona becomes a “brand” emblazoned on tourist brochures, web sites, and souvenirs such as dolls, T-shirts, bumper stickers and mugs” (Lamadrid 124). There are several important themes to note here. First, it is that, although her story is told in many different accounts including local newspapers, books, poems, etc., she still lacks, is *deprived* of, voice, which ironically contrasts with her everlasting wailing that echoes through the rivers and acequias. Second, Dr. Lamadrid takes into account that her romanticized past has now

become an object of both appropriation and consumption. Instead of recognizing the depth of her story and rich cultural tradition, it is stripped of its value and reduced to a "scary story" sold to tourists passing through. Even in all of the noise of her story, why isn't her voice heard? Or, perhaps, who hears her voice?

In contrast, Dr. Lamadrid positions La Llorona del West Side within the context of oral performance, the rich tradition of oral history in New Mexico. Instead of citing a list of authors who have written about her, he includes an excerpt from local oral histories. The selected transcribed oral accounts place La Llorona within an abusive marriage in the present day. Here, she embodies the life of an abused woman, struggling with her own trauma and depression. She loses track of her children one night, only to find they have drowned in the river (124-125). Unlike the romanticized colonial story, here, their death is an accident rather than an act of infanticide. In this version, themes of abuse and trauma are highlighted rather than those of rage and punishment. Instead of taking tours of cemeteries, there is a rich collection of personal encounters, including an account of someone seeing her come out of the river while they were driving along the highway (125). The focus shifts from a perception of entertainment to one that is personal and community based, what Dr. Lamadrid calls "personal and cultural awakening" (125). The La Llorona del West Side takes on the role of "cultural pedagogy, a counter-ideology that advocates for cultural survival in a hostile environment" which is both reflected in the oral performance of her story as well as in the narrative itself (Lamadrid 125). Perhaps while the outsiders on their tours may not hear her voice, there are members of her community that do.

The work includes the voice of Gloria Mendoza who speaks about the cultural importance and the ways La Llorona has *helped* her community. She says, "La Llorona has been used to getting your kids to behave, to getting your kids to not go out at night, to getting your kids to get potty trained or not to cry at night, you know. It has been used for many different things…" (126). La Llorona is not only a mother to her own children, but also a guide for all mothers who fight for their own survival and the survival of their community in an adverse environment (125). Dr. Lamadrid ends the text by writing, "la Llorona is alive and well on Santa Fe's west side, where she is assigned the role of icon of cultural resistance and activism. She cries for her lost and displaced children. She finds, confronts, and challenges them" (Lamadrid 126). In contrast to the image of the cemetery in the east side version, perhaps an image that reflects the static existence of her appropriation, in the west side version, the image of her at work in the community, caring for her children of Santa Fe is not far off from the Aztec account, where she cries out to warn her children of the coming conquistadors. These versions demonstrate her figure as an essential point of contact and tension, one that does not fit into a dual vision, but weaves in and out of time and space, much like the way her wailing weaves in and out of the wind that blows along the acequias. The traces of her story that are found in these versions and narratives capture the diversity in how her story is remembered, how the trauma of a young woman is told and represented, and how this memory, and what is also left unspoken, continues to imprint her communities.

In addition to the regional narratives that Dr. Enrique Lamadrid explores in his essay, the literary canon of works that consider La Llorona from both a creative and a theoretical lens is vast. Not only do scholars like Dr. Domino R. Perez, Dr. Tey Diana

Rebolledo, Dr. José Limón, among others, analyze the figure of La Llorona in a broad collection of productions and folklore and theoretical frameworks, contemporary Chicana/o/x fiction writers like ire'ne lara silva, Sandra Cisneros, Cherríe Moraga, and Rudolfo Anaya creatively respond to this popular narrative by reimagining and rewriting the story La Llorona.

This investigation will identify three theoretical frameworks which inform and influence the creative production component of this investigation, as well as provide a framework within which to analyze the selected poems written by nuevomexicana poets. The frameworks include: 1) structure and archetype in relation to the identities of La Llorona; 2) La Llorona as a symbol of resistance, a concept proposed by Dr. Domino R. Perez in *There Was a Woman;* and 3) spectral theory explored by Dr. Ribas-Casasayas and Dr. Petersen in *Espectros,* which discusses the themes of memory and haunting. Each will provide a diversity of lens through which to understand her narrative and its dynamic nature in creative writing.

I. Structure and Archetype

In her book *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy (2011),* Dr. C. Alejandra Elenes, professor of women's and gender studies whose research focuses on feminist pedagogy, locates the transmission of the La Llorona lore "in the context of family relations or people "doing" family in informal spaces such as the kitchen table, a parent's lap, or in the car as I recall my first lesson" (73). Most scholars begin discussing the legend of La Llorona within its five-hundred-year-old origin story, which is also discussed by 19th century Mexican writer and historian Luis González Obregon, in the book *Las Calles de México (1988),* where he proposes pre-

conquest Aztec roots (75). Yet, Dr. Elenes begins her analysis with the image of the kitchen table. Locating the lore in the dialogue between family members captures the intimacy of the act of narrating the legend as well as the practice of the transmission of values and morals, an oral practice that has shaped the very nature of the lore. Dr. Elenes writes, "There is no one "true" version or meaning of La Llorona, but there are similarities and variations of particular themes among narratives" (Elenes 74). Here, the diversity of versions is honored, as every kitchen table maintains a sense of singularity, and yet Dr. Elenes recognizes the collectivity of the legend through a common structure and series of motifs that are universal.

In the context of Greater Mexican[2] folklore, Obregón suggests that La Llorona was a weeping woman who wore white and was perhaps "the sixth prognostication of the doom of the indigenous inhabitants of Mexico (15)" (Elenes 75). Kathleen Alcalá, novelist, essayist, and short story author, echoes a similar version that her cousin told her, where "a woman had a premonition that the Spaniards were coming to Mexico and would slaughter her children. She began to cry "*¡Ay, mis hijos! ¡Ay, mis hijos!*" (179). Dr. Américo Paredes, cultural studies author and folklorist whose research focuses on Mexican-American border studies, identifies the indigenous origin of legend and writes that the story was "grafted on an Indian legend cycle about a "supernatural woman who seduces men when they are alone on the roads or working in the fields, often killing them" and also connects La Llorona to "Ciuacoatl, the Aztec goddess, who according to Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, appeared in the night crying out for dead children" (qtd. in Limón 408). Each of these ancient interpretations identifies La Llorona as either an

[2] Greater Mexico, in the way that Dr. Domino R. Perez in *There Was a Woman* discusses it, an understanding I adopt here, is a way to speak "of a US/Mexico shared cultural or storytelling history" (11).

indigenous woman or goddess, with motifs of motherhood and death. Dr. José Limón, cultural studies ethnographer and critic, proposes that Europeans "add the motifs of (1) a woman with children (2) betrayed by an adulterous husband, their father, (3) anguished repentance during which she cries for her children" meanwhile he suggests that "the indigenous peoples add an *Indian* woman, sometimes in a flowing white dress, crying *in the night,* near a body of water (an important element in Aztec mythology, and confronting people, mostly men who are terrified when they see her" (408). Dr. Domino R. Perez, in the first chapter "A Five Hundred Year History" in *There Was A Woman (2008),* is careful to distinguish European narratives, like that of Euripides' Medea, from the figure of La Llorona. Instead, Dr. Perez acknowledges La Llorona's appearance "under the names and semblance of her antecedents found in the pantheon of the Mexicas" (18). While Dr. Perez recognizes the influence of colonization and contact on the evolution of the lore, she centers La Llorona around the Americas and "cultural mestizaje" (19). Dr. Perez resists a Eurocentric perspective of a figure that has appeared and evolved throughout the Americas and recognizes the value of the influence of Indigenous history, mythology, and communities. The versions presented in the following analysis of this investigation will focus on this cultural mestizaje in Chicana/o/x literary productions by identifying elements that reflect this blend between European and Indigenous narratives.

Additional elements contained within these Indigenous, European and blended narratives are issues of socio-economic status, gender, and race. Authors Lamadrid, Estés, Alcalá, and Castro all acknowledge La Llorona as a woman who kills her children; yet, each version highlights a particular element. In Dr. Lamadrid's exploration of La

Llorona del East Side, La Llorona, betrayed and abandoned by her partner to marry a wealthier woman, drowns her children in rage, and her ghost haunts the rivers and acequias (Lamadrid 122-123). In *Women Who Run With the Wolves (1995),* author and psychoanalyst Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés identifies a Medea-like La Llorona, who is a young pregnant wife whose children are poisoned by a river contaminated by her husband's factory, and so she kills her children to save them from a life lived with physical impairments from the poison. She dies from grief and is cursed to look for her children along the rivers (327). Alcalá tells a similar story of a woman who "drowned her children in the river rather than watch them starve" (175). In the versions Dr. Rafaela G. Castro identifies, she is a woman who is abandoned by her lover for socio-economic reasons and so she kills her children (141).

Each of these versions establish a general structure of betrayal and abandonment by La Llorona's male partner, her rage that leads to the death of her children as revenge (and in some cases, as an act of mercy), where she eventually dies herself from grief, and she receives a punishment to haunt bodies of water. At the same time, the versions address socio-economic challenges faced by underprivileged women, whether it is poverty, abandonment for wealthier prospects, or the consequences of ecological exploitation and pollution. Moreover, these versions highlight the role of gender and the subordination of women to male dominance and power. The latter versions locate La Llorona within negative female archetypes. Dr. Sandra Messinger-Cypess, author and professor whose research focuses on the representation of women, in ""Mother" Malinche and Allegories of Gender, Ethnicity and National Identity in Mexico" (2005) writes,

> The archetypal reality is culturally based and that we should examine the socially constructed nature of the archetype as it affects behavior...We tend to acknowledge that images, metaphors, myths— the whole of symbolic activity— reflect a particular reality, but also, images and myths structure experience, that is, motivate practices and behavior. Thus, the selection of a certain kind of "archetypal" founding Mother is not based on an unchangeable psyche so much as it is a reflection of a patriarchal ideology in the case of Mexico. Because the presence of a mother figure is significant and unique, the characteristics attributed to this mother and its impact on Mexican culture must be analyzed, discussed, and understood. (16)

Dr. Messinger-Cypess identifies the concept of archetype as culturally and socially constructed. This interpretation of the archetype provides the framework to locate the archetypes of La Llorona as products of patriarchal ideologies. The primary archetypes that will be addressed here include: 1) La Llorona as seductress; and 2) La Llorona as a witch/ominous apparition.

Dr. Rafaela G. Castro, lecturer of Ethnic and Chicana/o Studies and author, writes in *Chicano Folklore (2001)*, "She is always described as having long hair, down below her waist, and is seen wearing a white gown. Sometimes men see her as a temptress and a siren; she entices them to follow her, and then she frightens them with her horrible looks. They are usually found dead the next day" (141). This archetype as seductress frames La Llorona as the perpetrator and ultimately attempts to justify her punishment, shaping her narrative as a moral lesson, one that warns young women to behave and conform to the expected marital and maternal roles (Alcalá 179). Moreover, it marks female sexuality as

immoral, where her identity as seductress can be used to encourage or demand the repression of female sexual expression.

While the archetype of seductress primarily emphasizes the correction of female behavior, the archetype of witch or ominous apparition employs a secondary purpose of haunting men. Dr. Elenes writes, "the legend of La Llorona has become a 'boogie man' story to keep children from straying...She particularly scares men, and in many versions she has a very cold breath and when she uncovers her face, one sees her skeleton...More recently, people don't die but do get very scared ('les da susto'), and some end up bed ridden for months" (74). Chicana[3] activist and author Gloria Anzaldúa points to this archetype in "My Black *Angelos*," where she "connects la Llorona with "la bruja con las uñas largas (the witch with long fingernails), linking her with fearful creatures like Medusa (with her wild masses of hair) and evil witches as a fear of this unknown creature…" (qtd. in Rebolledo 79). Instead of being a seductress, La Llorona is located in the role of an ominous apparition, La Muerte, and of a witch who curses those who encounter her. In this case, it is not her immoral behavior that is framed as a justification of her punishment, but rather her very nature and identity. Both archetypes not only continue to promote a moral objective of encouraging good behavior in children, but both the seductress and the witch/ominous apparition archetypes function to promote conformity in the behavior of women, while also identifying the woman as having an impure nature, consistent with conceptualizations of Eve in the story of Adam and Eve (Elenes 77). At the same time, however, La Llorona as witch can also be interpreted as a representation of power, Dr. Limón writes, "it is in these encounters when La Llorona

[3] This term is used to reflect the way in which Gloria Anzaldúa self-identifies in *Borderlands/La Frontera.*

passes from betrayed grieving mother to frightening phantom that we see what Silvia Bonvenschen calls the return of the witch, as a powerful, repressed female symbol that periodically returns in women's consciousness to "speak" for their interests against male domination" (417). While he addresses the return of the witch in the context of women's consciousness, through La Llorona's haunting of men, we find that her witch identity can be reclaimed as speaking to male domination in both women's and men's consciousness.

In response to these archetypes that have long defined La Llorona's identity and presence, "a number of Chicana feminists' interpretations of La Llorona seek to recuperate her as a feminist icon (Anzaldúa 1987; Chabram-Dernesesian 1992; Saldívar-Hull 2000)" and "to redefine patriarchal images and symbols of women as feminist" (Elenes 79). Moreover, while still aligned with a La Malinche/La Llorona parallel, Dr. Castro writes "Many Chicanos see themselves as orphans of La Llorona, as the lost children of the marriage between the Aztecs and the Spanish Conquerors" (141). La Llorona has emerged as a Chicana/o/x symbol, both as feminist resistance to patriarchal structures and as resistance to Anglo domination and assimilation.[4] In the poems that will be discussed in this investigation and in my own poetry which will be presented later, these structures and archetypes appear in many different forms, both as narrative structure and critical response. While this section focused on the structure and archetypes of the lore in order to establish a foundation for understanding the narrative within the

[4] In "Infamy and Activism" in *There Was a Woman,* Dr. Domino R. Perez discusses La Llorona's resistance to hegemony and political and cultural domination, which I also interpret here as resistance to cultural assimilation and Anglo domination in the United States. Additionally, Alurista in his poem "must be the season of the witch" addresses the theme of assimilation and the loss of culture, tying it into the figure of La Llorona.

context of a diversity of versions, the following section will further develop the concept of La Llorona as a feminist symbol in Chicana/o/x creative productions and theory.

II. La Llorona as a Feminist Symbol

The following section will address the concept of La Llorona as a feminist symbol through discussions about her distinct presence in folklore and representations in terms of sexuality and voice. First, it is important to understand La Llorona within the context of folklore and mythological female figures. Dr. Tey Diana Rebolledo, author and literary critic, in her chapter "From Coatlicue to La Llorona: Literary Myths and Archetypes" (1995) suggests that "women's lives are particularly circumscribed by cultural values and norms that try to dictate how women should behave and who their role models should be" (49). It is through folklore and mythology that the presence of figures like La Llorona emerge to teach these values and norms. Other female figures include La Malinche, a historical and folklore figure used to teach about the dangers of betrayal and sexual behavior, La Virgen de Guadalupe, a religious folklore figure used to highlight the purity and passivity of women as a cultural and social value, and Coatlicue, an Aztec goddess of "love and sin," used to "represent all aspects of a dual nature" (Rebolledo 49; 51; 62). Dr. José Limón in "La Llorona, the Third Legend of Greater Mexico: Cultural Symbols, Women, and the Collective Unconscious" (1990) identifies La Llorona's distinct role. In contrast to the merging of her figure into other mythological and folk figures, Dr. Limón suggests that La Llorona plays a distinct role that moves beyond a function "that sanctions the domination of Mexican women" (409). He suggests that she is "a symbol that speaks to the course of Greater Mexican history and does so for women in particular" (413). In this way, Dr. Limón presents La Llorona as a voice of longing for women.

While the other figures are often traditionally represented as moral lessons for women, La Llorona takes on another role of speaking to history for women, an argument also proposed by Dr. Perez in *There Was a Woman (2008).* Dr. Guisela Latorre, scholar of Chicana feminism and Chicanx art,[5] in *Feminism, Nation, and Myth: La Malinche (2005),* identifies figures like La Malinche, and I add La Llorona, as "an allegory of their own predicament as women of color…" (99). La Llorona is both allegorical in the potential of the lore to represent the world of women of color and symbolic in her figure as a feminist symbol of their resistance.

When considering La Llorona as a feminist symbol, it is important to define her position in terms of resistance. Dr. Domino R. Perez, cultural studies critic and scholar whose research focuses primarily on Latinx literature and popular culture considers a collection of artefacts that include poems, short stories, stage plays, and visual arts in *There Was a Woman (2008),* a study of creative contemporary productions of La Llorona. In her chapter "Infamy and Activism," a chapter focused on analyzing productions of La Llorona that understand her as a figure of resistance which provides the opportunity to move "toward new cultural possibilities," Dr. Perez includes an oil painting on wood by artist Lizz Lopez titled "La Llorona" (2002) which depicts La Llorona as a woman masked as luchador(a), holding her baby close to her chest, and her eyes staring out to the viewers (107). This image captures what Dr. Perez identifies in the other written texts, she writes, "Lopez visually represents La Llorona as a figure of resistance by outfitting her in the mask of the luchador(a). The mask simultaneously codes the woman as a fighter and protects her identity, though it also locates La Llorona, which only may be the

[5] For more consideration of Dr. Latorre's scholarly work, see: https://history-of-art.osu.edu/people/latorre.13

pseudonym under which she fights, in a male-dominated arena" (76). Depicting La Llorona as a luchadora, a fighter, as a figure of resistance positions La Llorona as a woman of power, rejecting an identity defined by the patriarchal structures that construct her worlds. Understanding the figure of La Llorona in this way contrasts the conception of her identity as a hysterical and jealous mother who murders her children. Rather, as Dr. Perez puts it, "La Llorona acts as an agent of transformation or as a means of liberation for women, but the most radical repositionings involve abandoning traditional elements of the lore or changing the outcome to challenge its social conventions and the dominating forces at work in it: forces most often cited as heterosexual Mexicanos and Chicanos, Catholicism, and other patriarchal institutions" (72). This repositioning Dr. Perez identifies also applies to and defines the works of "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991) by Sandra Cisneros, "The Postmodern Llorona" (2009) by Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea (2001)* by Cherríe Moraga and "cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses" (2013) by ire'ne lara silva, a work that was not included in Dr. Perez's chapter, but that I include as an essential contemporary reimagination of the lore.

In addition to the contextualization of La Llorona in Greater Mexican folklore and of her figure as resistance, another element related to La Llorona as a feminist symbol is the role of sexuality and the ways in which Chicana/o/x authors have challenged gender norms through their reimaginations of the lore. Chicana/o/x activists like Monica Palacios, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga reframe La Llorona outside of her traditional gender constructs, highlighting gender and sexuality as critical elements in understanding La Llorona as a symbol of resistance as well as an allegorical context within which to discuss the oppression of women and of their sexuality. Rudolfo Anaya

addresses the intersection between folklore and sexuality in "La Llorona, El Kookooee, and Sexuality" (1992) suggesting "these folk characters [such as La Llorona or El Cucui] were there to teach sexual taboos." At the same time, he says, "because El Kookooee and La Llorona deal directly with the world of sexuality, they are not mere stories to frighten children; they are archetypal characters which speak forcefully about self-awareness and growth" (Anaya 1992). Through reimaginations of the lore, Chicana/o/x authors have identified La Llorona as someone the patriarchal culture ostracized "for her sin" to confront oppression and the complexity of sexuality (Anaya 1992). These explorations of sexuality can be understood in terms of heterosexual female sexuality and a reimagining of female sexuality.

Author Monica Palacios in "La Llorona Loca: The Other Side" (1991) writes La Llorona within a "fatal lesbian romance" where "Llorona does not search for her lost children, but rather for her lost female compañera/self" (Rebolledo 81). Similarly, in her poem "Postmodern Llorona" (2009) Anzaldúa writes La Llorona as a lesbian who wears "white jeans and a white sweatshirt," and "attends UCSC, goes on picnics and to the movies" (281). Anzaldúa removes La Llorona from the maternal narrative and instead uses the motif of children to counter this social expectation and writes, "the dismembered missing children are not/the issue of her womb-she has no children./She seeks the parts of herself/she's lost along the way" (281). Anzaldúa includes sexuality not only as a way of resisting maternal and marital social norms, but to additionally challenge heterosexual norms. Both Palacios and Anzaldúa replace La Llorona's searching for lost children with the search for the self and the identity and voice that was oppressed and silenced as a way of speaking out against the silence. Similarly, Cherríe Moraga in *The Hungry Woman: A*

Mexican Medea (2001) writes La Llorona as Medea, who is exiled from Aztlán with her lover Luna and her son, challenging the dominance of men within society and within Chicana/o/x culture. Here, Anzaldúa and Moraga draw a parallel between Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess, and La Llorona, a parallel that also includes La Virgen de Guadalupe, which Dr. Tey Diana Rebolledo in *Women Singing in the Snow (1995)* highlights as part of a discussion about Chicana/o/x mythology and the ways in which Chicana/o/x writers imagine these myths (Rebolledo 49). In each of these works, by representing La Llorona as a lesbian and through the assigning of new signification to sexuality within the lore, La Llorona embraces her power as a symbol that challenges not only the social behavior and agency of women, but also the very structures and taboo within which these precepts exist.

Lastly, the symbolism of La Llorona's resistance appears through the representation of voice. Dr. Elenes identifies three elements in the La Llorona narrative that reflect "feminist decolonial meanings" which include: "the loss of children; the scream as the basis for its feminist decolonial understandings; and water that for the Aztecs symbolized rebirth" (79). The loss of children, Dr. Elenes links to the "symbolic loss of the past and future" wherein mourning this loss obligates a culture "to transform in imposed and unnatural ways" (81). If La Llorona is a both a feminist and a cultural symbol, the way in which she mourns through spectral hauntings reflects her struggle to transform herself and shape her reality through what is "unnatural" and "in-between." La Llorona's wailing, her voice, is significant as it is a response to the ways in which "women's abilities to voice their decisions and desires" have been subordinated and oppressed beneath "patriarchal structural constraints" (Elenes 83). In "Woman Hollering

Creek" (1991) a short story in a collection of stories, author Sandra Cisneros wrestles with voice through transforming La Llorona's wail into a yell through a moment where the protagonist Cleofilas drives over a bridge called "Woman Hollering" and the woman who helped orchestrate her escape, Felice, yells out the window, surprising Cleofilas. In this moment, the wail became a shout of liberation and "shows that the silence of abuse can be escaped" (Alcalá 174). Nuevomexicana authors Mercedez Holtry and Jessica Helen Lopez include voice as resistance by speaking from the first-person perspective of La Llorona, finally allowing her to speak into and about her own narrative and identity. Kathleen Alcalá cites Rosemarie Coste, author of "La Llorona y El Grito/The Ghost and The Scream: Noisy Women in Borderlands and Beyond" (2000) and writes, "a woman who will not suffer silently, who makes her displeasure heard and expects it to be dealt with, is an exceptional and amazing creature in a culture like the one that created La Llorona's legend, a culture that values patient endurance above many other virtues" (173). La Llorona's haunting and wailing is a way of fighting against the silencing of patriarchal powers and doctrine, and a response to the speechlessness of trauma, a quality that Coste identifies as exceptional and counter-cultural (Alcalá 174).

There are numerous examples of Chicana/o/x authors writing La Llorona as resistance, as documented by Dr. Perez, including Dr. Cordelia Candelaria in "Go 'Way from My Window, La Llorona" (1993) and "La Llorona At Sixteen" (1993), Helen María Viramontes in "The Cariboo Café" (1985), Gloria Anzaldúa in both *Prietita and the Ghost Woman (1995)* and in her poem "The Postmodern Llorona" (2009), among others (Perez 6). These authors recognize that "she is part of us and of our culture. She will continue to stalk us and to haunt us until we come to terms with her" (Rebolledo 80).

Here, part of coming to terms with La Llorona is through rewriting her story to represent the lives and communities of these Chicana/o/x authors and to offer an alternative ending to her story, one that reflects both resilience and resistance to culture hegemony. La Llorona's story continues to haunt her community, but perhaps this lingering haunting, to return to Dr. Elenes, finds itself at kitchen tables, in cars, and on parents' laps, a manifestation of the tension between forgetting and remembering, and finding oneself in her borderlands.

III. Spectral Theory: The haunting of La Llorona

This section will explore the theme of haunting and the ways in which haunting serves as resistance and as a way of understanding collective and personal traumas. I will draw upon the ways in which haunting is presented by Dr. Domino R. Perez in *There Was A Woman (2008),* in *Espectros (2016)* by Dr. Alberto Ribas-Casasayas and Dr. Amanda Petersen, and in other scholarly works that understand trauma through psychology and decolonial theories. Seeing La Llorona as a symbol of resistance, Dr. Domino R. Perez writes, "At times she haunts the cultural landscape of our imaginations, reminding us of the necessity and consequences of acting out against oppression, but she also teaches us how to use our voices, whether wailing in protest or shouting in liberation, so that we may actively shape new cultural and social realities" (73). Dr. Perez conceptualizes haunting as set within a scope of activism, where haunting is a cry to the living to fight against the structures and systems that oppress them in order to offer agency and transformation. In *Espectros (2016),* a book that explores the theme of haunting in transhispanic creative productions, authors Dr. Ribas-Casasayas and Dr. Petersen echo this sentiment and write, "their presence is dialectic, yearning to be part of

the conversations of the living, and imperative, a demand for uncovering what seems absent" (1). In both of these examples, haunting is not perceived as chilling and unnerving, but rather as something essential in order to fight for the liberation of a marginalized people. The ghost is complementary to the theme of resistance, as it is the ghost that identifies injustice and demands change through its act of haunting. This vision is in line with Obregón's interpretation of La Llorona's origin story of a ghostly woman warning her people of the coming conquistadors (Elenes 75). The ghost, La Llorona, lives between time and realities. Dr. Ribas-Casasayas and Dr. Petersen connect the "ghost in theory" to Derrida who "describes the specter as a trace that evidences the ruptures in hegemonic discourse" (2). This is a concept contemporary Chicana/o/x writers reflect in their work; the ghost of La Llorona is a trace of the ways male-dominated and Eurocentric discourses are being challenged, and the authors find themselves writing in this rupture through non-traditional and reimagined identities of La Llorona.

While this perception of haunting is crucial in understanding the significance and symbolism of La Llorona, haunting also touches the realms of memory and grief. Dr. Ribas-Casasayas and Dr. Petersen suggest that ghosts "construct a form of narrative memory, a trope that allows one to speak *of* and *at* a history of violence and programmed exclusions" (5). In this way, the La Llorona lore serves as a way of remembering in order to process and challenge trauma, loss, and oppression. La Llorona haunts as a way of seeking to heal "unhealed cultural wounds" (Ribas-Casasayas and Petersen 7). I would suggest that these wounds are not solely cultural, but reflect the intersectionality of the figure of La Llorona, encompassing gender, socio-economic, racial, and cultural oppressions and traumas.

In *Espectros (2016),* the authors suggest that the specter, and in this case La Llorona, creates "a dialogue with the lost past in the present" wherein the haunting of the specter is a "form of representing the aftermath of individual and collective traumas" (Ribas-Casasayas and Petersen 9). The ghost functions as both a symbol and messenger of the trauma of the past and the way that grief continues into the present. Dr. Megan Corbin, professor and scholar whose research focuses on historical memory in Latin America, in her chapter "The Museum of Memory: Spectral Presences and Metaphoric Re-memberings" (2016) quotes Chilean author Marjorie Agosín, "memory speaks from dead bodies" which later leads to the proposition of "spectral testimony" which is described as a narrative that "interpellates the viewer in the present with a deferred past and requires him or her to do the work of memory…" (17-18). The lore of La Llorona adopts this narrative concept of spectral testimony, which identifies La Llorona as the object of intersection between the past and the present, and requires those participating in the lore, through storytelling or encounter, to engage in the process of remembering and forgetting. This requires each participant to enter into La Llorona's crypt, "an inadmissable loss buried deep within the subject" and her inability to forget and process through liminal memory (Thomas 108). In the case of La Llorona, her dilemma lies in the tension between remembering/rumination and forgetting/acceptance, reflecting that "contention is that the ghost is a symptom of the desmemoria…" (Cuñado 34). This is carries two meanings: on the one hand, La Llorona must learn to release the rumination of the trauma through the acceptance of her loss in order to find healing; yet, she is also a force that requires those living in the present who disremember the past, to remember their individual and collective traumas in order to reshape their realities. In this way, she

is both symbolic of desmemoria, forgetting or un-remembering, and of the urgency of remembering. This desmemoria is what Dr. Isabel Cuñado describes as an inability to "escape the legacy of a past injustice and, as a result, the ghost returns to disturb the apparent order of things" (41). The idea of disturbance of order is what Chicana/o/x feminists echo in their works, where a contemporary and often postmodern La Llorona enters a new space, a space marked by cultural, social and economic shifts, to challenge the structures that confine her and the women of her world. Her haunting prevents the victims "who are expelled from history" from being forgotten (Cuñado 42). Here, activism and memory intersect in the act of haunting.

When considering haunting and the ways it reflects trauma and grief, the ghost is conceptualized as "postmemory" (Ribas-Casasayas and Petersen 64). Ribas-Casasayas and Petersen describe postmemory as something that "hinges between trauma as personal experience and the historical and sometimes mythical character of foundational trauma, while dealing with narrative and graphic exposure to the reality of violence against immediate ascendants in the family tree, and their outcomes, be they retraumatizing or working through processes" (64). The ghost embodies both personal and lived trauma with historical and collective trauma through the generational transmission that opens up or continues the processing of these wounds. This relationship between the personal and historical is represented in my selection of nuevomexicana poems as well in my creative work through the personalization of La Llorona and yet also the recognition of the collective history the lore invokes. La Llorona takes on the form of an individual with her personal life challenges, but always with the acknowledgment of the way this personalization reflects a collective experience of women. In psychology, this

postmemory is often identified as part of the grieving process, which also includes ghosts as an "urge to search" for the dead and in some cases, to mitigate the depth of the grief (Archer 83-84). Yet, this concept of remembering and forgetting is complex. Dr. Joshua Pederson writes,

> The possibility of traumatic amnesia can be frightening for victims; if such forgetting is possible, an ominous memory lurks behind every bad mood, and the return of the repressed is a menacing possibility. An unremembered trauma is an event over which the victim has virtually no control, and admitting the possibility of total traumatic amnesia (or over-emphasizing its power or prevalence) steals agency from the survivor. (338)

The haunting of La Llorona as an essential component in the lore, reflects this fear of amnesia in two ways. First, this fear of forgetting demonstrates La Llorona's crypt, the abstract space where her memories are incorporated into her identity, reflected by her phantasmal state. Second, it brings into question La Llorona's agency. On one hand, remembering never permits her to move beyond haunting, stripping her of her own agency, as she is trapped within the crypt. On the other hand, forgetting would in some ways reflect an erasure of her history and her struggle. Dr. Pederson offers narrative and storytelling as having "the power to enact healing, give order, and allow the reconstruction of the victim's shattered psyche" (7). Perhaps, in this way, La Llorona's haunting is both a way of speaking at history and a way of telling her story in her journey to find healing and recover what has been lost. The ghost, and her act of haunting, reflects a metaphorical and allegorical function; metaphorical of the rupture between the

past and present, and allegorical in its demand to heal the open wounds left by individual and historical trauma and oppression.

La Llorona in Nuevomexicana Poetry

Although originating in oral tradition, the lore treating La Llorona has been an object of study in the field of cultural studies. Many scholars wrestle with this narrative, trying to understand its origins, its transmission, and the ways it appears in and shapes culture.

As previously stated, there is a traditional framework to the Llorona narrative, which has variations; yet even within its various manifestations, these folklore versions often maintain continuity of motifs and outcomes. However, in contemporary literature, Chicana/o/x authors like Cherríe Moraga, Sandra Cisneros and ire'ne lara silva bend this continuity to reimagine the identity of La Llorona, an innovative creativity Alcalá identifies where "women writers of color find ourselves acting as abrecaminos, the ones who lead the way, opening a path into new frontiers for traditional signs and symbols" (Alcalá 119). For example, in the short story "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991) Sandra Cisneros rewrites the ending to the story. Instead of writing the ending as an eternal search for her lost children, Cisneros provides an escape from both the abusive situation of La Llorona and from the death of her child. This reimagination of the ending acts as a counternarrative that represents the agency of a woman who responds to the patriarchal structures of the narrative and escapes the physical death of both her children and herself. Another example of a reimagination is "cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses" (2013) a short story in the book *Flesh to Bone* by ire'ne lara silva, which reimagines the story from the perspective of La Llorona's phantom daughter, Cempasuchil, who follows

her mother, finding those dying at the hands of the conquistadors and offers an escape from this world and a deeper metaphysical healing. Cherríe Moraga in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea (2001)* writes La Llorona through a queer, post-apocalyptic reading of the lore, exploring themes of borderlands, identity, sexuality, as well as positioning the lore in relation to Medea, the Greek princess who shares a story of revenge and the death of her children.

These works represent both a broad literary canon of literature about La Llorona and their regional contexts by drawing upon regional elements of the narrative and responding to or reimagining these versions through creative productions. The previous sections of this investigation, structure and archetype, La Llorona as a feminist symbol, and spectral theory have evaluated how La Llorona is seen and critically discussed in Mexican-American studies. In the following pages, I will apply these principles and theories to an analysis of three contemporary poems written by nuevomexicanas which I have selected due to their meaningful treatment of La Llorona (See Appendix A, B, C, and D). The goal of this investigation is to evaluate how contemporary nuevomexicana poets interact with broader narratives and respond to regional narratives, which includes a brief survey of three poems: "La Llorona Speaks" (2018) by Mercedez Holtry, a poem which wrestles with and responds to traditional elements of the Llorona narrative, "Una Carta de Amor de la Llorona" (2011) by Jessica Helen Lopez, a poem which reclaims the witch archetype, and "La Llorona" (2018) by Joanna Vidaurre-Trujillo, a poem reflecting on the legend and the possibility of eternal peace. Each of these poems address the double standard that exists both in patriarchal society and within the lore itself and

attempt to offer La Llorona healing by giving her a voice to speak out against the oppression of women.

Mercedez Holtry, Chicana[6] feminist and slam poet from New Mexico, writes within the context of a regional New Mexican narrative where La Llorona is abandoned by her husband or lover for another woman and drowns her children. The poem "La Llorona Speaks" (2018) begins with the voice of a woman reflecting on advice her mother gave her, when she realizes her husband is having an affair with another woman. The narrator grieves this loss of her relationship, weaving in and out of the act of drowning her children. She is eventually faced with the angel of death who curses her to an afterlife of haunting; after this moment, the narrator begins to identify the ways in which the Llorona narrative has reflected patriarchal conventions. Finally, at the end, the narrator embraces her identity as La Llorona. Although it is unclear if the children are literal or figurative in this poetic narrative, it is evident that the narrator identifies with the grief of the abandonment of La Llorona and the loss of her children, as well as with the anger and resentment that drives her to revenge. Holtry writes, at first, from an unnamed poetic voice of a woman reflecting on the figure of La Llorona and the ways in which her personal experience overlaps with the Llorona narrative, "She was my sadness, my resentment and my disbelief in God all wrapped up in a body that looked just like me" (Holtry 26). This passage demonstrates the way in which the poetic voice sees themself in the face of the ghost and identifies with the feeling of the failure to conform to the traditional feminine role. In this way, Holtry disassociates La Llorona from La Virgen as a form of disbelief in God. Yet, later in the poem, the reader discovers that the

[6] The term Chicana/Xicana is used to reflect the way in which Mercedez Holtry self-identifies in her book *I Bloomed a Resistance from My Mouth.*

narrator's name is "Maria" as she is cursed by the angel of death, a traditional structure proposed by Dr. Estés in *Women Who Run with Wolves (1995)* (27). This shift from an unnamed poetic voice to naming La Llorona as "Maria" draws a parallel between La Llorona and the Virgin Mary, acknowledging the mourning of a death in their stories and identities. The narrator finds herself as one with La Llorona. Holtry writes,

> So I call for them
> until they're close enough
> to realize
> I'm not the mother they know.
> I'm a ditch witch,
> a *Bruja* cursed to this hell. (29)

In this passage, Holtry identifies the bruja[7] archetype of La Llorona, the female personified as evil, the woman condemned to an afterlife of wandering, of living in between life and death. She is stripped of her human identity, Maria, and given the name La Llorona. In this way, her narrative is an example of teaching morals, through its performance of the punishment of women who do not abide by the social structures and expectations. Yet, Holtry challenges this teaching of morals to women and writes,

> Sometimes I wish the angel of death
> would have cursed me to haunt ungrateful men instead
> maybe then I could make the best of this mess
> I made for myself.
> As if he had no part in this tragedy,

[7] English Translation: witch

as if every time you tell my story you blame him for the

death of our children too. (29)

Holtry acknowledges the bias of the structures that influence the way the La Llorona lore is told through the recognition of the role of the male lover and the frequent dismissal of his responsibility in the death of their children in the moralistic message. The haunting of men is a way in which men are held responsible for their role as father and husband. The poetic voice continues and says,

And I sure as hell begged for forgiveness the day I pushed

their skulls beneath the surface,

but where is his sentence?

What price does he have to pay?

Who's going to curse him to cry forever,

to chase the children he never loved in the first place

to drown himself with guilt? (Holtry 29)

The poetic voice is both a participant within the story and observes the way in which her story is told, the double standard of correcting maternal behavior but the failure of the lore to acknowledge the sin of man. As the poetic voice challenges the traditional narrative and its moral lesson directed at women, Holtry shapes La Llorona into a figure of activism, a call to act out against the double standard of men, when she writes,

but just remember

No man will dare come near the river

because I swear

their deaths will be the end of my weeping (29-30)

Holtry questions the traditional outcome of the hope of finding her children in order to break the curse through the death of the patriarchal domination that drives the narrative. She posits through the poem that La Llorona can be an agent to challenge the social norms reinforced by the lore itself. In this way, Holtry writes La Llorona as what Dr. Domino R. Perez terms "as an agent for transformation through challenging the outcome and the dominating forces at work in it" (27).

In addition to a poem driven by feminist objectives, Holtry also incorporates themes of memory and voice, which are interconnected with spectral theory. The poetic voice in the poem recalls the abuse she experienced at the hand of her husband, the consejos[8] given by her mother, and the memory of the moment she drowned her children. This memory of her trauma is portrayed in both first and third person, where the poetic voice describes drowning her children in the first person and then proceeds to identify La Llorona as an alter-ego who committed the crime; the poetic voice is both the participant and the observer. Holtry captures the complexity of trauma through the multiplicity of points of view, in essence also reflecting depersonalization, a disassociation from the self which can occur as a result of trauma (Gentile, et al. 2014). The trauma is remembered through the curse, the conversion into a phantom. The specter becomes the way in which La Llorona remembers her own condemned actions and is remembered by the community. Yet, there is an embrace of Maria's identity as La Llorona when Holtry writes, "Ask the children what my name is/and they will tell you/*Soy la Llorona"* (30). The speaker presses into this identity by saying "*Soy la Llorona*" while also acknowledging the memory of her through storytelling that occurs within the community.

[8] English translation: advice

Although Holtry challenges the traditional structure of the lore, it is still contextualized within the narrative that La Llorona is a figure that teaches good and bad behavior for women. The structure and point of view of the poem both provide a space for Holtry to wrestle with the regional narrative and question the identity of the woman portrayed in the narrative and the social and cultural role of the lore. By the end of the poem, Holtry is faced with the moral and allegorical objective of the narrative, converting from being the subject of a moral lesson to the symbol of resistance against male-dominated conventions. "La Llorona Speaks" (2018) gives La Llorona, the ghost cursed to wander, a voice and uses her memory and experiences of her grief to transform herself into a figure of resistance and activism.

. Like Holtry, Chicana[9] poet Jessica Helen Lopez in her poem "Una Carta de Amor de la Llorona" (2011) writes La Llorona as a wife to a man who abandoned her, with lingering symbols that tell the story of the death of her children. In this poem, La Llorona speaks in first person, moving in and out of deeply metaphorical language that wrestle with the relationship between her and her husband, her and herself. While Mercedez Holtry in her poem holds the man responsible for his role in the narrative, Lopez manifests the resistance of La Llorona through the rejection of the man, and writes, "I spit on your pile of ash, your pious truth, your pitiful love//I have no use for the stone hearts of men/or the ominous apparitions who used to be men" (83). While Lopez acknowledges the responsibility of the man in the abandonment of his family and his infidelity, it is through rejecting him that La Llorona gains her power to embrace her own agency. Instead of concluding the narrative as a victim of the story, she becomes a figure

[9] For more consideration of self-identity, see: https://plumeforwriters.org/women-who-write-jessica-helen-lopez/

of power. Throughout the poem, the speaker mentions figures of other folklore stories, including el Diablo, el Cucui, and El Muerto, unifying La Llorona with the ominous apparition archetype. This parallelism between figures functions to contrast these frequently male ominous apparitions with the power of a female ominous apparition. Lopez writes, "*Ay, diablo!* Pull my fantastic hair of colorless ribbon… pull me into the dirt with you" and then again mentions el Cucui and says, "*Ay, Cucui* torture me soft with your/light-footed rooster, madman dance," and finally El Muerto appears and she writes, "*Ay, El Muerto,* you knock-kneed skeleton/you are the husband I am meant to have" (82-84). Each of these callings to the figures alludes to the unity and synergy between the folklore ominous apparitions. Through the ominous apparition archetype the maternal and feminine social conventions are rejected by the sensuality of La Llorona and the embrace of the "evil." Yet, the poetic voice distinguishes La Llorona from any European comparison by separating La Llorona's identity from Medusa, and writes, "I am no Medusa-/I will ink out these stars/stick a dagger in every last one of them" (Lopez 84). Lopez gives La Llorona space within both regional narratives and broader Mexican folklore. In one sense, Lopez achieves what Dr. José Limón views as the role and importance of La Llorona by separating La Llorona from La Malinche and La Virgen as well as contextualizing her figure within a broader interpretation of folklore, while still maintaining a unique identity. At the end of the poem, Lopez writes,

> I tend my garden of stewed tomato
> and maggoty meat, a bushel of eyelashes
> and children's smiles
> my gardens are overgrown

with thickets, with the laces of

tiny shoes, bits of colored foil,

pin-wheels and yarn,

the tattered love of a mother. (84)

In addition to including the names of other folklore figures, the poetic voice also takes on a bruja-like identity, where Lopez again embraces the witch/ominous apparition archetype as a way of resisting the traditional feminine role. In this poetic narrative, La Llorona celebrates the ominous role she has been forced into. At the same time, Lopez recognizes La Llorona's trauma in the last line, "tattered love," which provides the stanza with the juxtaposition of power and vulnerability. One might interpret this as a decolonial moment, where Lopez acknowledges the paradox and still chooses to embrace La Llorona as a resilient mother and woman through the use of the word "love." Like the way the last line of the poem acknowledges loss and love, throughout the poem, there are other moments of light that contrast the dark metaphorical undertones.

Lopez writes in the beginning of the poem, "I am a wandering offrenda, a/burning white flame, a woman/without footprints" (82). This first-person identification gives voice and agency to La Llorona in contrast to traditional narratives where she is commonly spoken about in third person. Moreover, it addresses themes of sacrifice, remembering, and spectrality. While utilizing the traditional element of "wandering," the poetic voice identifies herself as an offrenda. This metaphor represents La Llorona as an offering, a sacrifice. Alcalá writes of an altar, "the altar has become an artistic expression of this longing for connection to something deeper" (11). "Offrenda" then represents both feminine creativity and a longing for connection. Yet, "wandering offrenda" recognizes

that La Llorona is not tied to place, but rather in her liminal state, she searches desperately for connection. Considering the religious symbolism and function of the offrenda, or altar, as both remembering and longing, perhaps it is a symbol of a way to remember and pray for other women in similar situations to her. This stanza also captures her identity as phantom, always wandering, with a white flame-like presence who leaves no footprints. This exemplifies her existence in the in-between, between life of sacrifice and presence, and a death of leaving no traces. Lopez captures the way memory functions in her work, as a story of both visibility and invisibility, of loss and of remembrance. "Una Carta de Amor de la Llorona" achieves what Dr. Limón identifies as the transition from a weeping mother to a powerful witch (417). The La Llorona of Lopez's poem transitions from being a mother consumed by the loss of her children to a bruja-like figure, an ominous apparition archetype who enters the consciousness, and does, as Dr. Limón suggests, speak against male domination in both a socio-cultural context but also in folklore tradition.

Different from Holtry and Lopez, Joanna Vidaurre-Trujillo writes about La Llorona through the performance of the narrative in her short poem "La Llorona" (2018). It is important to note that this poem is included in her book *Papas y frijoles (2018)* in English and Spanish, "La Llorona" and "The Weeping Woman," both written by Vidaurre-Trujillo. This inclusion of the poems in two languages reflects the tensions in translation, even in self-translations. Each translation maintains the same story; however, there are some minor lexical and semantic differences which will be identified.

The Spanish poem begins with the line "Dicen que se esconde," capturing the oral tradition of the lore and situates the narrative within the context of her community

version of the story. Instead of writing from the first-person perspective of La Llorona as Holtry and Lopez, Vidaurre-Trujillo reflects on the legend as a moralistic tool. She writes,

> entre los montones de jaras
>
> a esperar a los muchitos
>
> que vienen con lacitos
>
> a pescar truchas
>
> en los pocitos
>
> de la Acequia Madre. (90)

Unlike the frequently cited moral lesson of the lore to instruct women into socially-accepted maternal and marital roles, Vidaurre-Trujillo writes about "los muchitos," young children, or young boys as she identifies in her English translation, who disobey their mothers and abandon their chores. This emphasis, while still serving a moral function, shifts the moral focus off of the woman. While the poem is playful at points, the inclusion of a young boy rather than a man who is a husband or a lover, is a compelling narrative decision as it assigns responsibility to a social system that fails to address the double standards that dismiss the immoral behaviors of men and assign blame to women.

Similar to Lopez, Vidaurre-Trujillo also captures the theme of wandering and writes, "Un alma en pena/que llorará eternamente" (90). This line in the Spanish poem translates to "A wandering grieving soul/who shall weep for all eternity" (92). Both translations capture the longevity of grief, and yet the English translation selects the word "wandering," emphasizing her identity of phantom, a woman cursed to live in between realities. This in-between existence of La Llorona is accentuated in the decision to write

the poem in both languages, demonstrating her residency in the borderlands, in a world torn between English and Spanish. Moreover, Vidaurre-Trujillo captures her community's variety of Spanish throughout her book *Papas y frijoles (2018)*. In the Spanish poem, she includes traces of this speech ("muchitos," "jaras") furthering the distinct relationship between La Llorona and New Mexico (Cobos 2003). Vidaurre-Trujillo includes the intersection of elements of gender, language, race, and in some ways, class through the inclusion of the stigmatized New Mexican variety of Spanish, which acknowledges the complexity of La Llorona's identity and the oppressive powers she faces in her worlds (Bills & Vigil 2008).

In the final two stanzas of the poem, the poetic voice shifts audience. While in the first few stanzas, the poem is directed at an audience who may or may not be familiar with the narrative, using phrases like "They say"/"Dice que" and "Legend has it"/"Cuenta la leyenda" to directly speaking to La Llorona herself and says, "¡Llévatelos Llorona!/por desobedientes con sus nanas" and in the final stanza, "Llorona, si te los llevas/te quitas de andar penando por los ríos" (Vidaurre-Trujillo 90-91). This shift from talking about La Llorona and the lore to talking to La Llorona demonstrates the identification with the narrative and her figure. Instead of warning La Llorona not to take children or reprimanding her for her immorality, the poetic voice urges La Llorona to find a resolution to her suffering. In this way, La Llorona is given a sense of agency in the outcome of her spectral reality. Vidaurre-Trujillo writes,

> Y se acabarán
> los lloridos angustiosos
> los gritos espantosos

y descansarás eternamente

en paz. (91)

Although this stanza satirically offers resolution through the kidnapping of living children, instead of ending the narrative with a curse, the poem offers La Llorona peace. What Vidaurre-Trujillo suggests in these final words is to move from La Llorona's melancholia and inability to forget and into the incorporation of the memory of the deceased love and still allow herself to forget and also to punish male behaviors (Abraham & Torok 1994). This leaves La Llorona with a vision for the future, the possibility of transformation and of resolution. Overall, while the poem "La Llorona" (2018) performs a more traditional narrative, Vidaurre-Trujillo finds ways to present La Llorona with a more complex identity and incorporates elements of the narrative that question the lore's moralistic function and highlight the borderlands within which many nuevomexicanas live.

Unlike the work of Sandra Cisneros, who challenges the very structure of the narrative through a reimagination, these nuevomexicana poets still write within the structure of the traditional narrative, ultimately using poetry to comment on and critique the structure and female archetypes of the lore rather than reimagining the outcome. In all three poems, La Llorona is abandoned, loses her children, and is cursed to wander. While all three poets shift the moral responsibility to the role of the man, Lopez and Holtry give La Llorona a symbolic function as a symbol of resistance. Yet, while there is not an explicit symbolic function of La Llorona as activism in Vidaurre-Trujillo's poem, the inclusion of the poem in a book that addresses the roles of women in a male-dominated

society, can offer an intimation of a desire to include La Llorona as a symbol of resistance.

Each poem negotiates the conflict of memory and La Llorona's crypt, a concept explored and defined by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok as the space where "inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject" (130). Abraham writes, "To be sure, all the departed may return, but some are destined to haunt: the dead who were shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave" (171). Similarly, La Llorona finds her destiny in haunting through both concepts mentioned, being shamed for her abandonment and the death of her children, and for taking her secret of their death to the grave. These phantoms, according to Abraham, "point to a gap, they refer to the unspeakable" (174). The traditional lore reflects the unspeakable actions of La Llorona, represented in her haunting along rivers and acequias, and yet, these contemporary works are speaking the unspeakable, giving the gap a voice and identity, and responding to the shame with empowerment. La Llorona's memories are "entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection" (Abraham 141). This gap, as represented by the poets, reflects the possibility of resurrection. Abraham writes, "The melancholic's complaints translate a fantasy-the imaginary sufferings of the endocryptic object-a fantasy that only serves to mask the real suffering, this one unavowed, caused by a wound the subject does not know how to heal" (142). In each of these poems, the speaker faces La Llorona's crypt, her silence, and attempts to heal her wounds that are left open by giving her an identity and a voice that responds to the oppressive powers of her worlds.

The goal of the inclusion of these poems is to understand how nuevomexicanas are interacting with their regional narratives and the broader literary canon. It is clear that each poet writes the version of their community into the narrative, and yet also participates in responding to and reimagining the narrative. Moreover, the theme of grief, manifested through memory and the defense-mechanisms of the ego are explored within these poems, and will be further explored in my own poetry. Holtry, Lopez, and Vidaurre-Trujillo write to uncover healing for La Llorona, through identifying the double standard and male-dominated structures of the lore, responding to the witch archetype through empowerment, and offering her a voice to speak the unspeakable and to find resolution. These poets demonstrate the relationship between personal experiences and community stories and a critical reframing of the narrative through the challenging of archetypes and embrace of her figure as empowerment. The act of writing her into the pages of Chicana/o/x literature captures what Anzaldúa echoes, "My mother calls her lost and exiled child/a call to the vocation of artist/La Llorona wailing, beckoning, encouraging the artist to rail/against injustices. She calls me to act" (295). The writer responds to La Llorona's call to act.

Creative Production: An Introduction to "Todas nosotras"

The primary element of this investigation is a creative production wherein I have written a series of poems, which are all part of a cohesive narrative, that explores themes of memory, grief and haunting through the figure of La Llorona. One aim of this poetic investigation is to explore the ways in which mujeres[10] identify with and challenge the lore. This is primarily achieved through the role of the protagonist, who is part of a

[10] The Spanish word *mujeres* (English translation: women) is used as a way of recognizing women, and specifically women of color, who participate in both linguistic worlds.

greater community of women who embody the resistance against the female archetypes that constrain women to expectations of gender roles and morality, the resistance against cycles of abuse and trauma, and the reclamation of their agency and voice.

The title of the work, *Todas nosotras,* comes from a line in one of the final poems. However, upon writing it, I reflected on the work of Anzaldúa who writes in her chapter "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (2012),* "The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word *"nosotras,"* I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse" (76). The masculinization of the collective noun reflects the male-dominated structures even within language. Recognizing that a goal of my poetry is to explore the agency of women, it seemed fitting to represent this through the very word that shocked Anzaldúa: *nosotras*.[11]

I would like to emphasize the ways in which many Chicana/o/x authors and poets have powerfully and beautifully written their experiences and voice into the narrative as a way of reclaiming their identity through the lore of La Llorona. This work attempts to contemplate the relationship between theoretical thought and creative writing. Moreover, it includes traces of stories I have been told by community members with the goal of contextualizing and honoring the oral tradition of the lore. The writing process will be further reflected on in the section "Reflections on Writing and Memory."

[11] Anzaldúa continued to develop her concept of "nosotras" in her book *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality (2015).*

Todas nosotras

I. Introduction

When I awoke

I found myself
lying beneath
a mezquite;
I knew its leaves and form
from the ones that grow
into the depths
of our tierra.
And yet
this one,
when I touched its branches
did not have thorns;
the skin on my palm remained
unpierced.

I walked deeper
into the desert's valley,
the smell of river water
rising in the delicacy
of the air.
The light was glowing
from all around me,
not up,
like the sun,
but the sun, moon, and stars
came together
into one being
and shone through
the rustling green.

While I was walking,
I came to the foot of an old tree,
its branches bursting forth fruit
in its new season, again.

There
I found her strong
and glowing
and blue.
She gave me fruit
plucked off
the old tree to eat,
and led me
to the edge
of the water.

There, I entered the water-sky
and I began to drown
in the visions

of a land-
dripping of blood and silver.
I saw myself
protecting my children.
They were taken from me,
broken,
left in the pile
of bodies
in the river,
mine with theirs;
our naked skin
touching,
laying next to one another,
our souls refusing
to abandon
each other;

of him-
dripping in riqueza and lust,
abandonándonos
for the second time;
leaving me
as una mujer joven,
now sin futuro,
or so they tell me;

of poison-
rivers flooding
with his imprints,
weeping over
their webbed hands
and feet;
he couldn't even leave me them
when he left.

She held me as I wept,
a flood flowing
from my body,
crystalizing tears,
sweat forming
into drops of blood,
the stars dimmed their light.

I was sinking
into the water-sky,
but beaming blue,
she reached for me.

She led me past the old tree again,
as I took one final glance

the mezquites bleed
from newly formed thorns;
the creosote weeps;
I walk back
into the darkness,
with new life
inside of me.

I kneel next to the river

my body extending
over the water.
When I feel her
move within me,
her foot marking

the skin of my abdomen,
I find myself
glowing blue.

His hand presses against my skin

As she kicks him
through my womb
with all her might.
I feel her rage
building inside
of me
like pressure
running through my hips
to my back.
She lowers her head
not in respeto pa' ellos
but in furia,
and comes out
into the world
screaming
in blood and water.

I hear him begging

for his children back;
I said it's too late.

He asks me why I did it;
Le respondí,
Did what?

Drown them, he tells me. *I saw you.*

I knew then it had worked.

You give me no other choice;
they are mine,
from my own
body and blood,

I loved them.
I protected them.

It was there he struck me
into the mud
at the water's edge,
where I washed down
to them
before he could find out,
hiding away
in the brush
all living and
breathing and
dreaming
de un futuro
sin él.

Our traces

stretch along the edges of the river,
scraping past the drowning trees
below the melt,
below the poison,
below the pollution

we swim searching.

II. Todas nosotras

The stories my Nana told me cuando era niña

¿son verdaderas?

I always wondered
when I would see her.
I knew it was forbidden, but
I looked for her
in the darkness,
quietly searching the air
for her

cries.

I thought maybe
I could help her
find them.

Todos tienen miedo de ella.
My tía used to tell me
to keep watch,

No salgas de la casa por la noche, hijita.
Pórtate bien, hijita.
Dios ve todo.
También ella:
siempre te ve.

I think
if what they say is true,
maybe she *is* always watching
pero como la virgencita.

<u>Nana said I might be right</u>

as we sat and ate at Rutilio's
y me dijo que sí
la vio una vez.

Había una vez
debajo del puente
en el norte,
lloraba y
lloraba
haciendo eco
en las aguas.
Caminaba a consolarla,
but as she walked
to put her hand
on her shoulder,
the mujer turned
to look her in the eyes, revealing

su cara esquelética
enveloped by white lace,
by white moon
in the plaza
and chased her away,
wailing
in the darkness
of midnight.

Nana says esta mujer
is not after any children.
No es una mala mujer

like everyone thinks.

Nana says she is
a mujer
como ella,

the pobre,
the mentirosa,
the traidora,
the asesina,
the loca,
the bruja,
the fantasma

who struggled
to survive
y todavía lucha
en las vidas
de todas las mujeres
como ella.

Me cuenta que los fantasmas
como esta mujer
wander and wail
because it is
not over
yet.

I call Mami to tell her

about my new trabajo
at the gas station
down the street
from our house,
the one across from
the pizza shop.

Qué bien, mija,
make sure not to be out late,
you know how the men are around here.

and tells me about her new novio
who works como un banquero
next to her hair salon.
Apparently
they went to the same high school.

Él es diferente. No es como los otros.

¿Cómo lo sabes?

I just know. He's different than the other guys I've been with.

I pause.
This is not the first time
she has told me this, and yet
every time these words
slip out
of her hungry lips
I try
and believe her.

Ok, Mami. I'm glad he seems different.

Me pregunta
si puedo cenar con ellos
y la hija del banquero
but I tell her I have to work;

I hang up the phone.

He comes in on Sunday afternoons

Always vestido en jeans y una camisa blanca
he comes in on Sundays
with his abuela
to buy a lottery ticket
for his great tía,
and one candy bar
they always split.

Siempre me pregunta
sobre mis estudios,
mi prima que él conoce,
the latest album release,
a chapter in that book he lent me,
and we exchange smiles.

Tiene novia,
she lives in the city
y siempre me dice
he'll bring her in
to meet me.

You'd like her.
She reminds me of you.

Papi came into town

I ran into the kitchen
and kissed him.

Cariño, mira lo que te traje

He slips a silver chain
around my neck,
with the etched image
of La Virgen
resting on my chest.

Para que siempre te proteja
Cuando yo no esté.
He doesn't say it,
but I know
he wants to.

Me encanta, Papi,
and I hug him.

We sit at the table with Nana;
he tells us about his viajes
en la Ciudad,
and hands me a polaroid
of his favorite café
donde desayuna cada día.
We catch up on mis estudios,
mi nuevo trabajo,
el nuevo novio de Mami.

¿Por qué escribes sobre ella?

Porque Nana estaba contándome sobre
la vez que la vio.
Es para una clase de escritura creativa
en el junior college.

He stares at Nana
and tells me
que solamente son historias.

I know, Papi.
¿La has visto?

Every morning I stop by the café

today,
he slips in the booth,
sitting across from me,
peeking beneath my fingers
to read the title of my book.

El arroyo de la Llorona y otros cuentos,
de Sandra Cisneros.

¿No trabajas hoy?

Más luego, sí.

I saw some art piece of her
in the city with my novia last week.
My tíos are always talking about her;
warning my novia to watch out
when she visits.

I laugh.

Mis tías son así también.
But she's not like what they say she is.

¿No?

No.

<u>When we were younger</u>

My prima and I snuck out
to the acequia
behind our trailer,
hoping to find her.

We told her brother in case
we never came back.

We ran out into the sand
in our matching blue pajamas,
giggling and whispering
to each other
to be quiet.

We sat on the giant piece of driftwood
beneath the cottonwoods.

Behind us, the neighbor's lights
shone dimly through
the corners of the curtains

¿Tienes miedo?
Nooo!
... tal vez un poco.
¿Piensas que las historias son verdaderas, que ella mató a sus hijos?
No sé... I don't know why a mom would do that.
Maybe cuz she was scared.

Tal vez.

We woke up
to the sound of voices
getting closer,
bright lights shining
in the distance.
We stood up to run
until
the voices of our mamis
cried out to us,
calling our names.

qué están haciendo a esta hora fuera de la casa
sin permiso...
and they grabbed us
to bring us inside.

They made sure
we never went out
again to look
for her.

<u>He came in again</u>

to ask if I wanted to see
the art piece of *her*
since he was going to the city
tomorrow

and I didn't work
so le dije que sí.

We drove to the city,
parked in front of a big adobe building,
paid the resident fee,
and walked into
the air-conditioned gallery.

At first glance,
ella parece como La Virgen
gold-illuminating halo behind her,
her head covered.
But as you get closer
you realize there are no angelitos
or praying hands,
but instead a contorted face
and tears.

Glowing,
her head is covered
with blue and white lace
protruding out of the thick paint
on the canvas.
Her veins swell on her neck
in tension;
her thick brows
are tight between her face.

Her eyes closed;
a current
of tears tracing
the lines of
her worn face.

There are no images of her hijitos,
or symbols of their death,
but those who see her,
do not question her tears
because they know.

So?

She's amazing.

I knew you'd like it.

He stood next to me,
putting his arm around
my shoulders and neck.

<u>When I awoke</u>

I found myself laying
in a pool of blood,
my legs spread apart
on white linen sheets.
I cried for help
as she tore through
my skin;
no scream or cry
left her lips.

I was alone
in the middle of the valley
beneath the tree from
my childhood home,
my body stretched out
feet digging into earth
beside the roots
weaving into
the ground.
I stumbled
through the blood
with her lifeless body
against my chest,
walking deeper
into the valley;
the trail of blood followed
behind me.

I came to the edge
of a water-sky
and saw two women
beneath the current,
not drowning,
red and silver lights
flashing
around them.

I turned
to run away
into the darkness
again.

La mañana siguiente

I told Nana what
I had dreamt last night,
as she poured me a cup
of manzanilla tea
from her garden,
and sat next to me,
reaching out
to hold my hand
as I wept.

Solo fue una pesadilla,
niña.

When I dream

I wake up
struggling to know
what is real.
My body aches.
I press my hand
against my cheeks
only to feel the soreness
of my jaw.

I force my way
out of the rustled sheets
and get dressed for work.

I turn on the faucet
at work
no water runs until
I turn around
red blood spills out
over the sink to the floor
beneath me.

I stand breathless,
desperately reaching
for the handle to turn off
the red flow,
but my compañera comes in
shuts it off for me,
sitting me down,
wet in tears.

¿Estás bien?
It's just water, chica.

I tell her
about my dream
and she tells me
I should talk to a therapist.

Mami, what should I do?

Mija, ten cuidado.
But you like him right?

I tell her I do but it's more complicated.

she kisses my hair
and tells me
some things just happen
and it's okay.

El amor prohibido

"The new woman
takes his breath away
with a beauty
he cannot resist

so he leaves
his young love
for her
riqueza
flowing
from her body
and her pockets.

she becomes the intruder;
she becomes a past restraining him from his future;
while
he becomes an image
of passion and love."

Nana sets down the opening lines
of my story
onto the kitchen table.

Es un poco… dramático.

Nana tells me
that not all stories go like this.
She reminds me
of todas las complejidades
de la vida en esta tierra
y en otras tierras.

Mira, hijita,
una vez, me enamoré de un hombre así
y mi historia no terminó como esta.

She touches my chin,
raises her dark brown eyebrows,

her eyes smiling into mine
and nods.

He asks to read my story

I tell him not yet,
Oye, necesita más trabajo.

He pauses,
rubbing his arm against
my shoulder,
his tender dark eyes
looking into mine
and he tells me he knows

how it ends.

I blush
and tell him
he doesn't.

He says he's heard
her story a thousand times,
a thousand ways.

I tell him this one is different.

When I first felt her move

I was in the supermercado
Aisle 9.
She hiccuped.
Or was she turning?
I couldn't tell.

We started picking out names.

Hijita, ¿qué te parece Manuela? ¿O Isabel?

Mija, necesita un nombre más... moderno, como Azucena.

Como se puede ver, we're still working on it.

<u>We haven't seen each other in a while</u>

Since he moved to the city;
I still see his abuela most weeks,
always with updates.

I sent him with a copy of my story
a few months ago,
the one for my class.

Walking home
one afternoon,
a hand grabbed my shoulder.
He began to tell me
how much he loved

my story.

I turned,
six and a half months pregnant.
Shocked and nervous,
me preguntó

¿Quién es el padre?
I tell him it's someone he doesn't know.

He breathes a sigh of relief
and laughs;
says *that* was a close call,
and tells me I look happy,
that the father should feel so lucky.

I tell him I am...

<u>Mami holds me as I weep</u>

I am afraid;
I tell her about my dream,

Nana comes in to the room
to hold my hand,

S*olamente fue una pesadilla, hijita. Remember?*
Eres fuerte. Y ella será fuerte, también.

I walked by my childhood home

The dark clouds gathered
in the sky, the sun still
peeking through.
Its beams
lighting up the windows
to the trailer.

After that night
our mamis caught us
outside looking
for her,
I never did search
for her again.

That was the night I found out
she wasn't

the scary bruja,
mistaking living children
for her own.

She had left us alone
by the acequia.

Then I thought
she must have found her hijos.

I wonder if I will tell my daughter
her story, or one
like all my tíos have
of an almost-encounter.

Even Tata told me he gave her a ride
in his truck one night
when he looked over
while he was driving over the bridge
she was no longer there.

Everyone has their encounter story.
Es casi un prerequisite for being a viejito.

What story will I tell her?

Papi came to see me after he heard the news

He brought a rebozo as a gift,
and couldn't believe how big I was getting.
No, not in height nor age.

I knew the question lingered in his mind,
until he surprised me by asking,

So, whose is it?

Mía, Papi. Es mi hija.

Una niña?

His eyes filled up like clouds,

Será tan fuerte como tú, Cariño.

Era el jueves cuando me contaron

That it wasn't just one,
but two.

"Though rare,
sometimes mistakes like these happen"
they say.

I found myself shaking in the chair,

black and white shirt scrunched up
framing my giant belly, wet with gel.

I can't hear what they say,
but
their faces blur
their voices fade
into the noise
of sound
screaming within me.

"Do you understand what this could mean?"

Se ríen

We all did;
How can one miscount babies?

I kept the other news from them;
instead, we celebrated with
virgin margaritas and our favorite show.

Supongo que necesitamos comprar otra cuna,
dijo Nana.
Y escoger otro nombre, ¿no?
dijo Mami.

I smiled.

The three of us took a walk along the river

watching the
remaining cranes stand tall
in the shallow water,
still rushing.

The islands were getting smaller,
flooding into spring
from winter snow.

The Duran Duran song
Mami used to play
echoed in my head.

I sat on the bench,
seven months big,
looking like nine.
I wondered if he thought about me;
If he wondered if I lied.

That night after the museum,
we sat at the table
in his apartment.

So te gustó el arte?

Sí, me gustó muchísimo.
Ella es tan misteriosa, sabes.

He whispered something
I couldn't completely make out,
but I knew from his movements.

He stretched out his arm,
my body tingling,
shaking.

I pushed away.

¿Y tu novia?

Nos separamos.

¿Y es todo?

Sí

he reached for me again,
this time with no hesitations,
only my questions

that were silenced
by his touch.
A week after that night,
he came into my work
and I noticed through the window
his novia
sitting in the passenger seat
of his car.

Looking down, he whispered,

Estamos juntos otra vez.

I tried to smile,
and left to the back.

Sitting here now,
watching the water swirl
as it washes downstream,
my mind flashes with dizziness,
hot fever
not from sun,
but from realizing
lo que pasó.

How could I not have known?
How could I be so stupid?

The Duran Duran song faded
into the distance.

Nana sat next to me on the bed

the one I was now sharing with Mami
after the banquero incident.
Turns out, he was married.

Vas a contarle sobre sus hijas?

I sat there, looking down,

my eyes swelling with tears.

Entiendo, preciosa. Es una decisión difícil.

I shook my head.
I told her what he had done,
what I had done.
Now I was the mentirosa,
the invader,
the mala mujer.

Nana stood up,
holding my shoulders firmly
with both hands,
looking into my wet eyes,

Tú no eres una mujer mala.
Tú no eres culpable.
Eres una mujer con un corazón precioso
que contiene todo el amor posible.
Un amor fuerte
que vas a compartir con ellas.

I knew she was right.
But I couldn't help but
feel like
the intruder,
this time,
without riqueza flowing from
my body and pockets,
only a body
about ready to burst.

When I told Papi

Over the phone
all he could muster up is

¿¿¿Hay dos???
Supongo que ahora necesito comprarte DOS rebozos,

uno pa' el frente, el otro pa'trás.

I laughed.

Do you think you'll be able to come for the birth?

Por supuesto, Cariño. I wouldn't miss it.

<u>The day I found out</u>

Nana found me crying,
barely able to step out of the shower
with the purple towel wrapped around me.

I cried,
overwhelmed
with the pain in my back and hips,
overwhelmed
with feelings that I was
bringing them into the world
like mentiras.

Nana stood beside me on the wet floor,
slowly guiding me to the bedroom
to sit down on the bed.

She sat next to me,
taking a deep breath,
her delicate, yet strong
aging hands squeezed mine.

Hijita, estaba casada antes de casarme con Tata.

What Nana? You were married before?

Sí, un mes después de jaiscul. Estuve casada por dos años.

Her eyes began to fill with tears.

And what changed? Did he die? I had no idea, Nana.

No, él era muy abusivo.
Por dos años pensaba que
podía ser una buena esposa
y que un día él cambiaría.
Y me amenazaba su mamá.

So one day you just decided to leave?

De una manera.
Quedé embarazada de él.
Pensaba que el bebé no sobreviviría
con todo el abuso.
Me encontré en el piso varias veces,
sangrando.
Me sentía atrapada.
No podía irme,
especialmente con su mamá.
Siempre me estaba mirando y juzgando
para entonces ya yo tenía el bebé.
No tenía el apoyo que necesitaba.

So what happened?

Pues, en la oficina del doctor,
la enfermera sabía lo que yo aguantaba,
y todos los riesgos para el bebé.
Entonces, tomé la decisión más difícil de mi vida,
yendo en contra de mi familia, mi religión,
para proteger al bebé y a mí misma.

I sat there in silence,
light catching the tears
slowly falling down our faces,
her hands trembling
in mine.
Nana, I'm so sorry.
No puedo imaginar la fuerza y fortaleza
que te debe haber requerido.

Pues, nunca le conté nada a nadie,
mis padres murieron sin saber.

So what happened to the man?

Unos meses después,
me dejó por otra mujer.
Nos divorciamos.
Estaba devastada.
Finalmente escapé del abuso,
pero no sin el dolor profundo
de estos dos años.
Y realmente,
yo no sabía qué iba a hacer.

So how did you meet Tata?

Cuando fui a México;
me fui para escapar
pero conocí al amor de mi vida.
Lo extraño tanto.
Todo es decir, tu vida no es una de mentiras.
Tú tienes tus secretos para protegerte
y para proteger a tus hijas.

We sat there,
holding hands.
It was the first time
I think I really noticed my Nana cry.
In all her tenderness and fortaleza,
I had never felt so close to her before.

<u>I woke up in sweat</u>

Mami woke up next to me,
as I struggled to breath
through the pains.
I looked up at her and she knew
it was time.

She and Nana grabbed my things,
as I slowly walked to the door,
wailing through the contractions,
that were now getting closer together.

I had never seen Nana drive this way,
but she was la reina del highway.

Mami started telling me
about the day I was born.
She was 17 and terrified.

I didn't have your dad there,
just your Nana,
and we fought a lot,
but I didn't argue with her once
the day you were born.

She reminded me that Nana
doesn't mess around.

At the hospital,
they ushered me into the room,
and I yelled at Mami to call Papi.

Remembering they hadn't spoken in years,
she dialed his number and told him
I was in labor.

She returned with the news.

He wasn't coming.

He wouldn't be able to come for several weeks.

<u>When I awoke</u>

I found myself surrounded by flowers
from Nana's church friends.
I reached over to smell them,

finding a note that said

Condolencias
I laughed, realizing the mistake.

The doctor came into the room
with my fresh, newly born baby girl,
resting her against my naked chest
to try and latch,
the nurse sitting next to me.

Mami and Nana followed,
carefully, smiling with red eyes,
I laughed
and told them
I must have passed out.

They looked at each other
and sat on the bed next to me.

Everything was spinning

I began crying,
yelling to the nurse,

She won't latch! She won't latch!

The rest of the hospital force
rushed in and gave me something;
pain medication, maybe?

My ears rang intensely,
the baby screaming
through my own screams,
until the nurses picked her up
and left the room.

Uncontrollably, I began to scream louder,

NO! Where are you taking her? Bring her back!

Nana and Mami held my arms,
wiping the sweat off of my face.
I found myself weeping
in the dark
I don't remember
when it stopped.

Three days have passed

Since I was going to be in the hospital
longer than expected,
monitoring the baby,
monitoring me.

In those three days,
I had been seen by
doctors,
nurses,
surgeons,
priests,
psychiatrists.

The baby was mostly ready to go home;
I was not.

The next day

They brought me the birth certificates
to sign and to write their names,
followed by
the death certificate to sign,
to write her name.

Now that I think about it,
you never did tell us what names you chose,
Mami said as she stroked my face.

My hand shaking,
I penned in their names.

Río and Lluvia.

Mami and Nana looked at each other
and back at me.

I told them a Duran Duran song,
and after a short story I read
in junior college.

They grabbed my hand
and whispered,

Son perfectos.

La pérdida was sinking in

The nurse and psychiatrist
gave me the prescription to take
when I go home.
They told me if I have any feelings
or inclinations to harm myself
or the baby,
to call for help immediately.

Don't forget to take your medication.

The weeks have passed

My body slowly healing;
the baby growing,
now taking formula
since I stopped producing milk.

I still find myself crying
every night
as I place her into the crib
next to the empty one.

She loves her Nana and Abuela.

I still cannot shed
the remorse,
the guilt,
the blame,
the feeling that it was my fault.

If only I had known about her sooner.
If only I had exercised more.
If only I had eaten healthier.
If only I had gone in to get that test.
If only I had not missed my appointment.
If only I had not kept working in the final months.
If only I had made different decisions.
If only I had
If only I
If only
If

<u>We started taking walks along the river</u>

and today, it was the first time
it was only me and her.

I took her out
cradled her in my arms;
she looked back at me,
her dark brown eyes
reflecting mine.

I had hoped he would come
to see me
after they were born;
he hadn't.
His abuela brought us macaroni and chile
last week, but said he was very busy.

It was that day I realized
she knew.
She scooped her up
in arms full of

a grandmother's love.

I was learning
to accept his absence,
and the absence of a father
who had still not yet come;
what had changed?

Papi never missed a birthday,
a graduation,
and only a few holidays.

Did I abandon her the way they abandoned me?

How do I face it?

Their absences,
and my own.

My feet pressed into the mud

One step after another.
Her head rested
in the crevice of my arm,
water rising
as we walked
deeper in.

River water rising,
my hair rising,
my voice rising,
our bodies

sinking
into the water,
pulled down
into the current

Sinking.

The surface water still,
The groundwater still,
Our bodies, still.

Me desperté.

Her lifeless body

Rested on mine.
They told me I had to hold her;
All mothers must
so they can learn to accept
una pérdida tan profunda.

Have you ever held the lifeless body of your child in your arms?

They told me she came out
screaming
drowning
in and out
of silence.

Mami rushes her out of the room

I am awakened
by my own screaming
Nana trying to quiet me.

The nightmares are getting worse.

Dreams of river water,
Dreams of rushing water,
Dreams of walking into water,
pulled down by the current,
drowned in the poison,

Trying to get her back.

There she was

Dressed in a long white
baptismal gown,
She reaches out to me,
extending her small rolling arms
to grab the sleeve of my dress.

As she turns,
her golden face
turns white,
her skin crumbles
into the sand
at my feet,
leaving only the bones
of death
screaming
crying out to me.

I am on my knees
digging my hands
into wet earth.
My hair falls,
catching my lips
and sticking to the wet of my face.
Gasping for breath,
I am screaming
into the wind.

Faint sounds of her cries

echo through my dreams;
I look to the empty crib
hoping to see her there,
sleeping.

In a daze,
I awake
to her cries,

Had I found her?

No,

it was her sister.

I stumbled out of bed
to pick her up,
placing her on my chest.
I held her more closely
than I had before.
We fell asleep
to the sound of the cars
driving by,
their lights flashing through
our window.

La verdad

Hay días en que no pienso en ella.

Until I awake from a nightmare,
and I find myself weeping with grief,
not of pérdida, but of olvido.

How could I have forgotten her?

Rage builds up inside of me,
releasing itself
in the corners and crevices
in my body,
heavy chest and heavy mind,
shaking hands,
bloodshot eyes.

Lo veía en mis sueños

También, hijita.
Su fantasma, o espíritu, no sé.
Los doctores me dijeron

que es normal.

Siempre quería preguntarles,
¿Su espíritu o su muerte?

"Normal"

Nana breathed a long breath
and whispered

No existe.

Going to work

Mami and Nana take turns
watching her
as I return back to work
and school.

Some vecinos talk,
whispering,
¿Quién es el padre?
¿Una madre soltera?
¿Regresó a la escuela?
Necesita un hombre
para que pueda quedarse en casa.

loud enough for me to hear,
quiet enough to avoid the answers.

Some days

I find myself
imagining our world
on pages.
The three of us,
two hermanitas preciosas
uncovering the world together.

I imagine
what it would be like
to raise two girls,
the way they would giggle
in the back seat of the car
as I watch them
through my rearview mirror.

The fights over shared clothes,
All of their differences,
All of their creativities,
All of their fuerzas,
and my own.

I imagine
what it would be like
to be fuerte
como quisiera ser.

And so I write.

Lluvia smiled for the first time

I shouted for Nana and Mami
to hurry.

Nana stroked her cheek,
while Mami grabbed her tiny toes,
as I smiled back at her,
seeing each other
in the reflection of our eyes.

Tía came over to meet her

Papi's sister,
and she cried and cried,
piercing llantos.

Tranquila, preciosa.
No llores tanto

o ella te oirá
pensando que eres suya.

Tía, ¡por favor!

She can't understand me, jita.

I know, but still! Not funny!

Pero jita, sabes que ella siempre escucha…

Tía throws her head back, laughing.

Ya basta, Mami says.

Has my brother seen her yet?

The room remained silent.

I saved up

to buy a polaroid
to take a picture of her
to send to Papi

and to begin to document all of her changes.

It has only been a few months

and counting every day
since I lost her.

Today marked six months.
I hadn't been to the grave
since the funeral.

I went alone,
bringing wildflowers
I picked along the way.

I sat on the dirt road,
my hands rubbing across
the smooth marble
to clear away the earth,
tracing my fingers along
the indentations of her name
and a bible verse
Nana chose from Matthew
etched into the stone.

My whole body shook.
My mind flashed
to those moments I found out;
I wept for days after.

A shadow covered the grave
the tree hovering over
the hot ground
as I knelt there
silently,
listening to the wind,
the llantos within.

<u>Todas las mujeres de la iglesia</u>

Me dicen
Será más fácil con el tiempo.

I know some of them
have lost the way I have lost.
I know they mean well.

Pero, no.
Nunca será más fácil.

Solamente será diferente.
Yo seré diferente.

Yo *soy* diferente.

It was then I found myself
grieving.
Not the loss of my child,
but the loss
of me.

She cries through the night

y le digo, *a mí también*.

Nothing I do calms her,
though I am her mother.

I tell her I need quiet time;
through her cries
she tells me

that is enough

and I cry harder,
and she cries harder.

Her whines and llantos
are the sounds of
rippling water
rushing over my feet,
ice cold,
sounds of
water
rushing over rocks
and buried trees,
rushing over bones
of fish,
and other creatures
like me.

In the movement of her voice
weaving in and out
of soft cries
longing for warmth

and desperate shrieks,
I find myself.

Me enseñó algo este día

as I listened to her cry,
through my own tired whimpers.

We cry for many reasons.

Sometimes
a need
to feel close,
safe.

Sometimes
hunger,
a nagging longing
waiting to be
fulfilled.

Sometimes
exhaustion,
nothing can soothe except
crying.

Sometimes
pain,
as the body speaks, dice
something is not right.

Sometimes
frustration,
our whimpers
are our prayers
for calm.

Sometimes
temperature,
rising and

falling.
I know how she feels.

I feel it too.

Ex voto

No soy muy religiosa,
pero anoche
fui a la ofrenda
en la iglesia de adobe
para dejar una oración,
para hacer una promesa.

Dejé un milagrito
con un poema,

y me fui segura
con lo que necesitaba hacer.

Estaba lloviendo

Her cries mimicked the sounds
of the rain rushing
through the acequia
in the song of
summer monsoon.

It was there

en el campo
al lado del río
the mountains rose
covered in cloud
speaking its prayers over us
in thunder
rain rushing
down the crook
of my spine
down the lines of my face

She was wrapped around me
in the rebozo Papi gave me,
as I tried to keep the rain
out of her eyes.

It was there.

I walked into the water
and drifted away.

The cries finally stopped.

In the middle of the night

I heard them screaming my name.

Was I finally to be punished?

Ay, hijita, ¿dónde estás?

¡Ay, mija, mija!

I felt wet,
warm arms
wrap around me,
images of white and flashing yellow;
they carried me home.

Cuando me desperté

I found myself
laying on the couch
in the living room
of Nana's house,
dry, wrapped
in a white blanket,
with sopita on the table
next to manzanilla tea.

The rain splashed on the window

to my side,
but instead of cries
echoing in each drop,
I saw la cara tranquila
of mi Lluvia
in the arms of Mami,
laying her on my chest.

¿Ella está bien?

Sí, hijita. ¿Por qué?

Porque la llevaba conmigo anoche en el río
cuando me encontraron.

¿Qué?

Estaba conmigo.

Hijita, no, estaba durmiendo aquí.

I sat silently
confused
still holding her
in my arms,
she smiled back at me.

She was with me last night

o es lo que pensaba.

<u>Después de esa noche</u>

No la oigo llorar más.
Ni en mis sueños.

El único sonido
que oigo
es Lluvia,
riendo

con toda la magia
de los movimientos del río.

La encontré

That night,
the moon shone
over my head,
as I cradled her,
held her,
wept over her,
laid her to rest.

Will I one day be buried there too?

I found my hija,
the lifeless one,
the dead one,
the one I searched for
in my dreams.
I know that grief
goes on and on

So I grieve.

I cry.

I scream.

My voice will be heard
in the wind
on quiet nights,
lifted with all of their voices
in the wind
on stormy nights.

I carried her
in the fracture
of my womb
into este mundo,

and then
into the next.
I will always carry her.

y su hermana, Lluvia,
I carry her
in this world,

The way Mami and Nana
carry me.

Todas nosotras

Papi said he's coming
for Christmas,
pero vamos a ver.

The three of us
still take turns
caring for Lluvia.
Sometimes I take her to class
rocking her on my lap
taking notes between
her small fingers
grabbing mine.

Todavía vivimos juntas
y es todo lo que pudiera desear.

Y lo que ha cambiado:
his abuela takes care of Lluvia
once a week, too.
Though I never officially told her,
sabemos
que ella sabe.

A veces sueño con ella:
mi Río.
Pero estos sueños
son preciosos,

y la veo en el jardín,
dormida bajo el mezquite,
al lado del agua.

And in our garden
in the back of Nana's house,
surrounded by cottonwoods
Lluvia se ríe,
the warmth from her tiny, growing body
radiates through mine.
We sit on the sand,
dipping my feet
into the cold acequia
la puerta entre los mundos.

Nana and Mami
join us.
The four of us
sit, laughing beneath
the summer sun.

Reflections on Writing and Memory

Two Octobers ago, I found myself driving between Albuquerque and the small town of Belén which rests nearly forty miles south of the city. To get there, I drove out past Albuquerque and over the river that runs along Isleta Pueblo, eventually riding between the mesa on the right of the highway and the valley on the left of the highway until Exit 195 appears, where I turn off to make my way to meet family at a tiny restaurant in a red brick building that stands on Main St. I eventually sit down, order something with red chile, and begin with the catching up and listening to the family chisme. Somewhere in the conversation, and I'm not sure how we got there, it could have been a mention of their family house in Ratón, New Mexico, they start telling stories about La Llorona. One member mentions giving La Llorona a ride past Isleta, only to have her disappear out of the car as they drove across the river; another family member

says her sister was chased by La Llorona through a plaza near a creek. I was surprised at how effortlessly they told these stories, and their honest-to-God truth about seeing her that was reflected in statements like “I’m serious” and “What, you don’t believe me?” I had to keep reminding them I believed them, and they continued their stories between a conversation with an old friend, who later walked into the restaurant and upon seeing each other excitedly yelled “Carnal!” On the way back home, as I drove past the Isleta Casino, I imagined her disappearing out of the car to wander the river’s forest.

Some weeks later, I was sitting in the living room of a mobile home tucked away in Belén, where the houses on the street are lived in by all of the family’s siblings. Again, La Llorona made her way into our conversations and I sat there listening while a family member said she didn’t think La Llorona was a scary, evil woman. Instead, she shared that she thought she was a woman who was just trying to do her best, like all the women of the community do. This understanding of the ghost-woman struck me, and I pondered it as the months went by.

When I began to conceptualize my poetic narrative, with the works of Sandra Cisneros and ire’ne lara silva circling around my mind, so did the stories from the small community of Belén, which were shared with me over the kitchen table. I kept imagining the faces of the women I know from this community who have faced incredible difficulties in their lives and yet are still the matriarchs and pillars of their families and communities. They embody an incredible power and strength and are unafraid to use their voices. My mind then wandered to the photographs of the women in my family, children and grandchildren of Azorean immigrants, living in Central California, who woke up every morning to take care of the farms, forced to exchange college, which was “for the

boys of the family," for jobs in the home, while I thought of the other women in my family who concealed their origins until their death. I could see all of their austere, powerful faces in our family photographs, and I could almost hear them crying and screaming out through the images, rupturing their silence. It was then my characters and story began to take shape.

I wrote my narrative in three states: New Mexico, California, and Colorado. In each space, new voices whispered to me as I sat at kitchen tables and on couches, writing, deleting, rewriting. In New Mexico, I found myself walking along the acequia near the river, where I saw the ghost of my protagonist kneel beside the water in grief. In California, I knelt along the edge of the grass at a cemetery on a hot day in May, leaving yellow sunflowers at the grave of an infant. In Colorado, I wrote as the rain beat against the skylight while a baby cried relentlessly upstairs, as if in sync with the heavy drops of water. Each of these places left traces in my poems, as it is a narrative that is haunted by many places and histories.

Haunting, or the act of being haunted, asks us to notice the unseen, to pause and detect the collapse of time and memory into a moment distinguished by a sound, a figure, or a shadow. Poetry can act as haunting or haunted in the way it allows for the exploration of this collapse. Dr. Renato Rosaldo, in his essay "Notes on Poetry and Ethnography," writes

> The work of poetry, as I practice it in this collection, is to bring its subject- whether pain, sorrow, shock, or joy- home to the reader. It is not an ornament; it does not make things pretty. Nor does it shy away from agony and distress. Instead it brings things closer, or into focus, or makes them palpable. It slows the action, the course of events, to reveal depth of feeling and to explore its character. It is a place to dwell and savor more than a space for quick assessment. (105)

Dr. Rosaldo, in his book *The Day of Shelly's Death (2014),* uses poetry to slow down during moments of devastating grief and loss, even to the moment of "the fly entering her mouth" (102). This act of slowing the action and pausing captures the ways in which grief and the depth of human experiences and feeling lingers. This is something I reflected on during my writing process. What compels us to slow down? What might we see, hear, touch, and feel when we do? How does the practice of slowing down invite us to experience our own vulnerabilities? I often find that La Llorona narratives move between the weakness of women in traditional narratives and an unwavering strength in many reimaginations. Instead, I wanted to explore the ways in which strength and weakness, or rather vulnerability, meet.

As I wrote poems that carried the heaviness of the protagonist's grief, I was forced to face my own. In many ways, it was the writing of grief that allowed me to enter into images and spaces I had avoided and to recover that which had been lost, a theme that is unmistakable in the narrative of La Llorona; she wanders to remember and recover. Alcalá in *The Desert Remembers My Name (2007)* writes, "On one level, one can coolly research history, listen to family stories, and pick out elements that spark the imagination and work in a novel. On another level, I often have to stop and cry. Why am I crying? For things that are lost: family, dignity, connections" (88). While this investigation has been one of researching theoretical frameworks and critiques, hearing community and family versions of the lore, reading and teaching literature about La Llorona, I found myself closest to her in the difficult moments of writing, in the deep searching for connection and in the haunting of what has been lost.

There are many ways to contemplate memory and haunting. In *Canícula (2015)*, Chicana[12] author Dr. Norma Cantú remembers through photographs, where she recalls her life between México and the United States and tells a story of a community. In the very final story she includes in the collection, "Martin High," she reflects on those students she went to school with and writes, "Some of us die in Nam, others in childbirth; some die in car accidents, others OD; some go to prison, others go to Europe; some retire at forty-five and go back to school...And some of us never leave, and some of us never come back. Some of us keep coming back" (192). She captures this idea of haunting through nearness of and truth about the cycles of living and the faces she will and will not see again. In *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life (2015),* Sandra Cisneros includes photographs and reflections on her life and writing. Kathleen Alcalá does something similar in *The Desert Remembers My Name (2007),* where she writes about her process of digging up her family's past and the haunting of a homeland full of family secrets. Luís Alberto Urrea in *Wandering Time (1999)* writes about his own haunting and journey to find healing, something he finds in both people and nature. Each of these writers make an attempt at remembering, forgetting, and haunting. While some do so through photographs, sifting through family records and stories, travelling without knowing where they're going, each writer engages in the process of writing as remembering and as rewriting. They use their voices as a way to explain the world, where there are "too many fragmented or unfinished stories around me" (Alcalá 74).

In the process of writing, I have been on a journey of exploring the figure of La Llorona, while also mining myself as a writer. How am I learning to use voice? Where do

[12] For more consideration of self-identity, see: https://inside.trinity.edu/directory/ncantu

I position myself in Chicana/o/x writing? Why La Llorona? Why poetry? There is no simple answer to any of these questions, and yet I am drawn to Alcalá's realization. Alcalá writes,

> What is it we really seek? We seek the truth, about the world, and about ourselves. Not facts, but a true thing, an artifact that we all know but that has been obscured, and of which the story reminds us. They resonate with us, they ring like a bell when we see or hear them. These artifacts are called universal symbols, and art that endures draws on these universal symbols. These are symbols that cross cultural, sexual, racial, and age lines, symbols that, as nature writer Barry Lopez put it, remind us of things that we have forgotten. (125)

La Llorona, similarly, is a Greater Mexican symbol, where her wails are the chiming of bells that echo in the consciousness of the members of her community. It is evident in the diversity of creative productions about her figure that she is a border crosser, crossing the border between México and the United States, between sexual and racial lines, and lingering through the generations. La Llorona reminds her community in the present day of their history, agency, and of what has been forgotten and remembered.

Anzaldúa writes, "It is the reader (and the author reading the reader) who ultimately makes the connections, finds the patterns that are meaningful for her or him...The reader's co-creation of the book makes me, the author, realize that I am not the sole creator" (190). While the writer or poet can write in images, codifying artifacts, utilizing voice, tone, and style, it is the reader that creates the narrative. This co-creation in many ways, is what makes La Llorona's narrative dynamic, as it is not simply the poet, fiction author or the storyteller who creates and gives meaning to her; rather, it is the

participation of each member that creates meaning and speaks out against injustice and speaks to the power and fortitude of La Llorona's community.

Conclusion

La Llorona is a complex figure of the borderlands; as such, this investigation is limited in its scope as she can be considered through many different lenses and perspectives, both theoretical and creative. The goal of this investigation is to understand how contemporary nuevomexicana poets respond to her narratives and to explore how creative writing, specifically poetry, responds to her call to action. The poetry included in this reflection, both that of the nuevomexicana poets and my own production, explores themes of memory, feminism, grief, and resistance. Levi Romero in his poem "A Poetry of Remembrance" (2008) writes,

> through the poetry
> and the song and the rhythm
> of their stories
>
> and we take their stories
> and we form ours to theirs
> and we lament the tongue
> recalling the sound
> of its native language
>
> how we carry it with us
> into this, our other world
> lamenting the spirit of the heart

which will cry out to no one's hearing

and we take the forewarning of the elders

and we'll remember, we'll remember, we'll remember" (127)

This poem captures the movement between two worlds, two languages, and the way in which poetry functions as remembering a collective identity and history. In this way, it seems only fitting for La Llorona to find herself in poetic narratives, as she too cries out to her children, her community, to remember where they came from. Romero continues and writes,

and we'll laugh and join

in the circle of our brethren

in that vast periphery

hollow and echoing

remembering us home

because we are still alive (127)

La Llorona reminds us that she is not a static figure of the past, but one that haunts, is still aliv, the present. Lara silva writes in "cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses" (2013)

> Tonight she's breaking lights along the river, deepening the shadows, distracting the men in white vans...Afterwards, she'll take her sharp machete and gut train cars, leading the suffocated to a safe clearing. She'll run to lock doors and gates against the rioting Navy men with Mexican blood and skin and zootsuit under their nails. She'll lend her voice to the protests and the marches and whisper in the

> ears of poets. She'll swing along the rivers, and pull the ones returning to the land of their ancestors away from the strong currents and the lights and the traps. She'll lead the Rangers' horses into falling over the cliff's edge rather than letting them carry death to the Indio villages. She'll fight with the campesinos to hold their land, their homes, their ties to the earth. She'll spend the night with the Yaquis fighting the pale ones. Running alone, she'll cover miles and miles, decades and centuries before dawn. (39)

La Llorona, while symbolic of a lingering past, also finds herself deeply rooted in the present, not as passive, but as an active part of her community, as the voice that cries out to her people in power, and as a heroine who resists against oppression and injustice and haunts the present to reclaim the future of her children.

At the present moment, this project functions to create an opening. It is still a reflection in process, with the possibility of future research. Moreover, creative writing is an on-going practice, and I anticipate continuing to develop and rework "Todas nosotras." In the end, it serves as a point of departure into continued research about the ways in which grief is discussed in relationship to the figure and narrative of La Llorona. When we look at the figure of La Llorona, her grief is often interpreted as weakness, something that drives her to madness. Yet, through these other creative productions that reimagine her, we find that her grief can tell us a story about the experiences and the challenges that are faced both in everyday moments and in the ways women of color are represented in society. In this way, La Llorona is magnetic. She calls her community in to listen and will continue to speak into the future. When we think about the essence of her

nature and the nature of the lore, a project like this one will always be in dialogue with her figure and will always be pausing to listen and transform.

Appendix

A: “La Llorona Speaks”
in *I Bloomed a Resistance From My Mouth*
by Mercedez Holtry

La Llorona Speaks

He told me he would be home shortly.
He had been gone all day
and it was past sundown
when I knew he wouldn’t be coming back.
He often did this.
My mother warned me not to marry a *borracho*
like she did.
She told me there would be heartache,
there would be sleepless nights
of wandering and waiting
of wanting to know the truth
but always settling for living a lie
because it doesn’t hurt as bad
when you’re in denial.
Except when coming home past sundown
becomes a habit
and he knows just as well as you do
that you will forgive him just as sure as the night will fall.
His mistress had a certain scent,
the kind that made you gag in your own mouth.
She lingered on his breath.
I imagine she had blue agave eyes,
maraschino cherry lips,
a body like a coke bottle.
She had hold on him.
Something toxic,
abusive.
He always came home wanting to fight
and I always got the shit end of the stick.
The last crack at breaking the bottle.

And I could never figure out why he preferred
a cold hard lover
when I kept this home warm
and let myself go soft
so he may always have a place to lay his head.
The neighbors say they recognize my cry.
They know when he’s left to see that bitch

because I howl louder than the coyotes.
I release the pain like I'm praying to the moon.
I have cried so many tears
for so many nights
in a cold empty bed.

But on this night,
the night of hallows eve,
there was something about the darkness
that distracted me from the light.
The cold wind was pointing towards a river current.
I never noticed how deep the Rio Grande was
until I was standing in it with my children.

Their bodies shivering
begging to go back inside ,
a voice whispering
teach him a lesson Maria
show him he's not the only one allowed to leave.
I opened my eyes
and saw her
pushing the skulls of my children's head under the water.

She was my sadness,
my resentment and my disbelief in God
all wrapped up in a body that looked just like me.

I will never forget the sounds they made as they resisted,
the tiny lungs begging for air.
How they gently floated away,
and she stood there
laughing
until she wept,
until she faded away into the current,
the wind carrying her aching pain.
I wouldn't doubt the children heard her from a mile away.
I tried to save them.
I tried to bring them up for air,
but there they lay,
lifeless,
their bodies a cold shiver,
their tiny hands pruned,
their lips purple.
What has she done?
What have I done?
What will I do without *mis hijos.*

They didn't deserve this.
This ratchet evil I have latched to them.
Punish me creator,
punish me.
And in the distance
I could see a bright light coming towards me.

The angel of death was upon me,

"Maria, look what you have done"
You have let the pain of being broken break your family,
and for this
you will wander every ditch
every river

looking for the souls of your children,
but you will never find them
and every child who will know your name,
will run as far away as possible.
You will never be called mother again
only murderer
A victim of your own crazy love.
A prisoner of the riptides.
You used water the source of life
as a weapon
for your personal spite
so now you and the water can never be separated.
It will pour from you like waterfall.
Your eyes a well waiting to dry out
but you won't be able to stop.
You live in this state of sorrow neither in hell
nor in heaven but here on earth.
Your name isn't Maria anymore.
They will know your story
and they call you Llorona
and you will weep
and weep
and weep
until every child who walks the earth
knows your name."

And then he left
and I stood knee high
in the dirtiest water I had ever seen.
My clothes, soaking wet
and the sobs began

and tears haven't stopped
and the voices,

the voices sound like my children.
Mis hijos?
So I call for them
until they're close enough
to realize
I'm not the mother they know.
I'm a ditch witch,
a *Bruja* cursed to this hell.
Sometimes I wish the angel of death
would have cursed me to haunt ungrateful men instead
maybe then I could make the best of this mess
I made for myself. As if he had no part in this tragedy,
as if every time you tell my story you blame him for the
death of our children too.
Why don't you save me a little grace
and shame that cold hard lover of his
I might be a murderer,
but I ain't no home wrecker.
I ain't no cheater.
And I sure as hell begged for forgiveness the day I pushed
their skulls beneath the surface,
but where is his sentence?
What price does he have to pay?
Who's going to curse him to cry forever,
to chase the children he never loved in the first place
to drown himself with guilt?
I'll walk this crusty piece of shit ditch
chasing the children back home where they belong
for eternity
but just remember
No man will dare come near the river
because I swear

their deaths will be the end of my weeping.
Ask the children what my name is
and they will tell you
Soy la Llorona.

B: “Una Carta de Amor de la Llorona”
in *Always Messing with Them Boys*
by Jessica Helen Lopez

Una Carta de Amor de la Llorona
with special thanks to Danny Solis

open a jar for the dead, the winds of an open-
mouthed river like a fishy kiss, oily, will ride up your neck
it bas been minutes, decades only a day since
the departure of my cherub stones, my children
made of pitfalls and marble, two pairs
of trusting eyes

the moon a witness to their slipping away
beneath a blackness like the spit of a serpent,
the river who froths at her lipless mouth

I am a wandering offrenda, a
burning white blame, a woman
without footprints

Ay, diablo! pull my fantastic hair of colorless ribbon,
shred me with your long talons like *papel picado*
like eyelets of a delicate dirty lace
you are my inverted love, my mariachi monstrosity
pull me into the dirt with you,
I will rub this sand between my legs, haunches ragged
with the smell of your open palm
you are the closest thing to a man

let your onion eyes linger
over my crow eaten bones
you are the living thing inside
of my dead moon,
the noose of my womb,
the worm rotten entrails

pine away, you silver-footed devil, tongue of a bastard,
I have seen a meandering love like yours before,
now my lidless eyes are peeled back over my skull as I watch
you with all of the blood and wrath I have ever known
I spit on your pile of ash, your pious truth, your pitiful love

I have no use for the stone hearts of men
or the monsters who used to be men

What shame my husband brought to us,
you should have seen his lackluster eyes,
his ghostly slit that spoke to the back of my head
his pockets empty with gold, head full of stale air
his arrogant thighs
his high-cropped riding pants
his slick stallion
like bitter potatoes he cast us back to the earth

When he paraded that woman,
made of silk and parasol,
hot coals scorched my eyes
my peasant knuckles yearned for
something to smash against

I am a love-shorn bride,
a barefoot gaggle of ball and socket
take this piece of hip-bone
carve it into an obsidian blade and
cut this womb from me. *Ay,*
Cucui torture me soft with your
light-footed rooster, madman dance
acid rain letters of the dead

we will fashion a house of sticks and burnt stone,
cobbled brick of blackened bread
the windows shades made of our eyelids
sightless so that I might not remember
the spectacle of the river

you will let me forget I ever gave birth
and instead I will forge you from the jelly of my gut

Ay, El Muerto, you knock-kneed skeleton
you are the husband I am meant to have
our beloved bridal bed wilts like
white magnolia and softens like curdled milk

Tell me, dark lord, in whose
child shall I find reprieve?
What thin-ankled dark-haired
beauty will become my savior,
my temporary resurrection?
I am no Medusa –

I will ink out these stars,
stick a dagger in every last one of them.
I will blind the night.
I am all that whispers, the knotted hair of Hemlock,
a banshee, misfit cry,
a bag full of misbegotten keys,
the sour breath of grief

I tend my garden of stewed tomato
and maggoty meat, a bushel of eyelashes
and children's smiles
my gardens are overgrown
with thickets, with the laces of
tiny shoes, bits of colored foil,
pin-wheels and yarn,
the tattered love of a mother

C: “La Llorona”
in *Papas y Frijoles: Cuentitos y Poemas para honrar a mi cultura*
by Joanna Vidaurre-Trujillo

La Llorona

Dicen que se esconde
entre los montones de jaras
a esperar a los muchitos
que vienen con lacitos
a pescar truchas
en los pocitos
de la Acequia Madre.

Aunque se arrastren de panza
bien calladitos
por el bordo de l’acequia
están en riesgo
de que los pesque La Llorona
cuando se empinan a picar los pocitos.
Y si se los lleva jamás los volverán a ver.

Cuenta la leyenda
que un alma dolorida
será para siempre.
Un alma en pena
que llorará eternamente.

A no ser que pudiera llevarse
a esos muchitos
con mezquinos en las manos
hechos agua
con un montón de truchas
ensartadas en jaras horqueteadas.

¡Llévatelos Llorona!
por desobedientes con sus nanas.
En vez de partir leña
a juntale hierbas a los cochinos
se van pa l’acequia a pescar truchas
con la panza colorada.

Llorona, si te los llevas
te quitas de andar penando por los ríos.
Y se acabarán
los lloridos angustiosos

los gritos espantosos
y desecansarás eternamente
en paz.

D: “The Weeping Woman”
in *Papas y Frijoles: Cuentitos y Poemas para honrar a mi cultura*
by Joanna Vidaurre-Trujillo

The Weeping Woman

They say that she hides
behind the clumps of willows
to wait for the little boys
who come with snares
to catch fish
in the spring-holes
of the Acequia Madre.

Even if they move stealthily
on their bellies
along the bank of the river
they are in danger
of the Weeping Woman snatching them away
when they are down on their knees
poking for fish.
And if she steals them they’ll never be seen again.

Legend has it
that her soul will be forever afflicted
with overwhelming sorrow.
A wandering grieving soul
who shall weep for all eternity.

Unless she could snatch
those little boys
with warts in their hands
sopping wet
with a bunch of fish strung on forked willow sticks.

Steal them away Weeping Woman!
for disobeying their mothers
by leaving their chores undone.
Instead of chopping wood
and gathering weeds to the feed the pigs
they take off to the slower-moving flow of the acequia
to catch fish
with red and orange markings on their bellies.

Weeping Woman, if you snatch them
there will be no need to roam tormented along the riverbanks.

And the haunting cries of despair
the horrifying screams
will be hard no more
and your soul will rest eternally in peace.

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