

An Ecology of Hope: Remapping the Borderlands in  
Cisneros's and Fuentes's Short Stories

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## Table of Contents

I. Introduction	3
II. Woman Hollering Creek	
1) <i>La Llorona</i> : The Woman in the Creek	12
2) The Deceptive Border	16
3) Woman Hollering Creek, Towards an Ecology of Hope	19
III. Malintzin de las maquilas	
1) The Haunted: <i>Malintzin</i> , <i>La Malinche</i> , and Marina	22
2) A Hopeless Border?	30
3) <i>Malintzin</i> Approaches an Ecology of Hope	35
IV. Conclusion	45

## *I. Introduction*

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa dedicated her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* “a todos mexicanos on both sides of the border.” Her book offered a groundbreaking message to Mexicans and Americans alike, but especially to those border-dwelling subjects for whom neither term “Mexican” nor “American” adequately captured their identities and experiences. In it, she memorably claimed there exists a hybridity that finds strength in its ancient roots and command in its fusion of language and culture. *Borderlands/La Frontera* contains a historical account of how the U.S.-Mexico border came to be, but also of how the ancient, Aztec spirit still haunts the borderlands today. Anzaldúa narrates:

La gente Chicana tiene tres madres. All three are mediators: *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada* (*Malinche*), the raped mother whom we have abandoned and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two (30).

The Virgin of Guadalupe is the “central diety connecting [Chicanos] to [their] Indian ancestry” (27) and the central female figure for Mexican Roman Catholicism. She is “the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/mexicano” (30). *La Chingada*, in contrast, is the historical female icon that assisted the fall of the Aztec Empire (34). Her roots go back to the treacherous translation and information she provided to Hernan Cortés that facilitated the dominion of the Aztec Empire in the hands of the Spanish. *La Llorona*, entirely mystical, is the “Daughter of the Night, traveling the dark terrains of the unknown searching for the lost parts of herself” (38), a woman who lost her children by her own hand and who cries for them in the night.

Anzaldúa argues that these three archetypes serve different functions in the Mexican psyche: *Guadalupe* “to make us docile and enduring,” *la Chingada* “to make us ashamed of our Indian side,” and *la Llorona* “to make us long-suffering people” (31).

The three figures are used interchangeably, though, creating a kind of epitomized female archetype that elicits a type of powerlessness, a subverted consciousness, in the identities of Chicanos. It is this mythical spirit, embodied by these three dichotomous figures, that haunts the U.S.-Mexico border.

As she writes about the U.S.-Mexico border, Anzaldúa describes not a single border, but multiple ones, all pertaining to her personal (yet in many ways communal) struggles as a “chicana tejana lesbian-feminist” (iii). The borders she explores range from religious to artistic; sexual to linguistic; identity politics to feminism. The way she explores these borders is through a unique first-person, memoirist’s voice undergirded by a heavy theoretical framework – one that concerns Chicana female consciousness, and specifically consciousness of the *india* within her, and the ‘magic’ of *mestizo* identity. For Chicanos share, she says, a dissociated identity in the borderlands, where “hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape” (ii). Anzaldúa describes the U.S.-Mexico border as “*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (3) and writes that “tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger” (4).

But Anzaldúa attempts to break free of the dissociation and tension experienced in the border as well as of the passivity and submissive quality practiced by the three “madres.” She does this by means of accepting and relishing in “the spirit world.” Where a “white rationality” discourages the use of the supernatural as “a mode of consciousness” (38), Anzaldúa urges that Chicanos internalize *Guadalupe*, *La Chingada*, and *la Llorona* as the residual consciousness of their ancestors, as their consciousness,

and hence, as part of their selves. In short, she encourages Chicanos to first understand these three figures, and then to transform them as vehicles for wisdom and empowerment in the threshold of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The working through of communal pain and ordeal by means of using mythical or quasi-mythical archetypes, particularly indigenous and ancestral ones, has since formed a significant presence in critical texts that attempt to address the lessons that can be learned from enduring communities that have faced and overcome the obstacles of domination and obsession. One such text is philosopher Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope*. Lear tells the story of how the Native-American Crow tribe, today known as the Crow Tribe of Montana, were gradually confined to a reservation in the U.S., stripped of their ways of living and knowing, and forced to adapt to an environment that seemed to provide absolutely no sense of the contentment, tradition or peace the tribe was once so familiar with (52). Faced with the difficult task of leading his people, Chief Plenty Coups successfully guided the Crow to their new home by using a mystical method: dreams (80). Prior to their confinement, Chief Plenty Coups had had a dream that his people awaited an apocalyptic future, but that they could survive this "so long as they emulated the Chickadee-person, an iconic figure in Crow mythology whose key attribute is the ability to listen to others and learn from them" (Furrow). Hence, the moment in which all hope appeared to be lost, a *radical hope* emerged, one that was given to Plenty Coups by a Chickadee archetype in a prophetic dream. Plenty Coups then led the Crow with the Chickadee ideal and courage that "would give the Crow the flexibility to create new definitions of a meaningful life despite their inability to conceptualize their future"

(Furrow). The Crow people eventually found a promising future, despite their conditions dictating otherwise.

Similarly, in *Poetics of Relation*, Edouard Glissant argues in a very different Caribbean context that “relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge” (8). Glissant’s notions of shared knowledges share important but little-discussed characteristics with both Lear’s and Anzaldúa’s respective theories of radical hope and generative hybridity. I argue for the “shared knowledge” that all three of these theorists advocate derives from the ancestral roots, myth, and beliefs of cultures that have been subordinated. Hence, the aesthetic and political voice of the Chicano, much like the voice of the Crow, can only be achieved when “communities attempt to legitimate their right to possession of a territory through myth or the revealed word” (Glissant 13). But this legitimization process must often be undertaken both within and against the grain of the language of a dominant culture, which is why Walter D. Mignolo suggests that “border gnoseology” can be understood as “a conception and a reflection on knowledge articulated in concert with the cohesion of national languages and the formation of the nation-state” (11). He contends that in the twentieth century, “massive migration from Mexico is generating, within the United States, a type of intellectual who thinks in the border” (73). Gloria Anzaldúa is this type of border intellectual par excellence.

In this thesis, I will look closely at two texts that manifest what Mignolo calls “border gnoseology,” while also engaging in what Lear defines as “radical hope”: Sandra Cisneros’s *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* and Carlos Fuentes’s *The Crystal Frontier*. Both texts address the U.S.-Mexico border, and in both, we see an approach to the “spirit world” of the kind that Anzaldúa, Lear, Glissant, and Mignolo have

emphasized. In her short story “Woman Hollering Creek,” Cisneros conjures the Mexican legendary figure of *La Llorona* in an attempt to position this figure and the story’s protagonist, Cleófilas, in a narrative of the consequential identity challenges that arise from growing up in a small Mexican town and crossing the border to start a new life in Texas. Likewise, Fuentes’s “Malintzin de las maquilas” is a story about life in the border for women maquiladora workers, their identity almost exclusively shaped by the hostile relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. The protagonists’s first name, Marina, immediately conjures up the continuous haunting of the history of *La Malinche*’s betrayal of the indigenous Mexican people and, hence, of the inevitability for Mexico to prosper because of its turbulent, colonial history.

These female heroines embody their Mexican “madres,” one as *la Llorona*, the other as *La Malinche*, and work to reconstruct both of these archetypes in a way that approaches radical hope, instead of the despair that tends to accompany these figures’ narratives. It is in this way that we see both Cisneros and Fuentes approaching what Anzaldúa has called “the new mestiza,” a unique blend of Mexican-American-Indian races and ethnos that, she thinks, should stop questioning its “alienness” and instead use its spiritual nature to transcend despair (V). It is in this way, by conjuring the archetypal symbols of Aztec consciousness, I argue, that both Cisneros’s and Fuentes’s texts work toward generating hope, despite their seemingly disillusioned narratives. Hence, these two short stories from the 1990’s center around the sociopolitical U.S.-Mexico border, its characters traveling back and forth from ‘the borderlands,’ struggling to find satisfaction in either of its sides, but at the same participating in a radical hope that transcends their border conditions.

The second half of the 1990's sees the fruition of Anzaldúa's border thinking a decade later as well as the dismal economic and social consequences of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, which passed in January 1994, for many living on the border. NAFTA "created one of the world's largest free trade zones [between] Canada, the United States, and Mexico" as it allowed for economic growth, wealth, and competitiveness to occur between these three countries ("About NAFTA"). Cisneros's short story collection, *Woman Hollering Creek*, was published in 1991, prior to NAFTA, and thus, the narrative is distanced from the towering economic corruption that occurs at the border post-1994, and instead focuses on the social despair of border identity. However, to limit the reading of "Woman Hollering Creek" to a mere grappling of the haunted U.S.-Mexican history and identity politics seems too simplistic. Instead, I argue that Anzaldúa's framework provides us with a new type of border thinking that employs mythical figures to further develop hope.

Contrastingly, Fuentes's short story collection *The Crystal Frontier* was published in 1995, post-NAFTA. The collection centers on Leonardo Barroso, Mexican patriarch and entrepreneur who enables the economic and industrial movement between the U.S.-Mexico border in a corrupt, violent and illegal way. Leonardo Barroso is the oppressive figure of the subjugated, haunted and dejected psyche of the Mexican maquiladora worker, who, at the hand of Barroso, is victim of an exploitation of labor and personal intimacy. The relationships between and within the many other characters in the stories are expressions of the grief, loss, and shame that Mexico experiences in relation to its unstable and hostile relationship to the U.S. Struggles with homosexuality, classism, impossible love, and fragmented identity constitute the narrative of these stories, and the

border becomes a haunted space in which these struggles appear unsettled and the characters trapped, unable to move toward a resolution. “Malintzin de las maquilas” conjures history and mysticism with its title pointing to *La Malinche*, and while it would be tempting to read the story as a text whose only task is to invoke a despairing hemispheric imaginary through the voice of the gothic, it would be detrimental to do so. “Malintzin de las maquilas” does indeed have a haunted historicity at its core; but one, I argue, that is an evolving type of haunting that works toward generating radical hope. It is therefore my argument that “Malintzin de las maquilas” is a text that grapples with border theory through the genre of the gothic in an attempt to move these toward an ecology of hope.

Decisively, Anzaldúa participates in a particular conversation of the U.S.-Mexico border in which she moves from a theoretical and historical narrative of discontent and towards a spiritual and transcendent narrative of hopefulness. In her last chapter, “Towards a New Consciousness,” Anzaldúa epitomizes “the new mestiza” as a new way of thinking “in the border.” Undoubtedly, “the new mestiza” *herself* moves away from mourning, grief, despair, and haunting and instead toward *hope*. It is this exact type of movement of Anzaldúa’s that I argue the texts of Cisneros and Fuentes are undertaking.

I propose, then, that to move border theory towards radical hope will eliminate the boundaries that border thinking can at times be tempted to live in – the threatening and debilitating sense of hopelessness that is often manifested in literary texts that deal with the U.S. Mexico border. And Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, becomes a framework for finding this radical hope. Lear writes, “what makes this hope *radical* is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to

understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it” (103). It is this kind of hope, a radical hope, which for the purposes of this thesis I will call an ecology of hope, that I wish to introduce and explore in Cisneros’s and Fuentes’s texts.

The Oxford English dictionary defines “ecology” as “the study of the relationships between people, social groups, and their environment; the system of such relationships in an area of human settlement.” This last definition is especially used to define cultural ecology, social ecology and/or urban ecology. I will use “ecology” to indicate the ways in which the characters in Cisneros’s and Fuentes’s texts relate to their sociopolitical landscape – the U.S.-Mexico border. As such, I will call the kind of hope that is generated in these texts “an ecology of hope” to illustrate the profound working through of hope that, according to these texts, can only happen in said surroundings, the U.S.-Mexico border, and in the unique context of Chicano/a thinking. As my thesis develops, we will see how this ecology of hope is dependent on border thinking, specifically on Anzaldúa’s notions of mystical and mythological figures as the ultimate driving force of radical hope.

The landscapes that the protagonists in Cisneros’s and Fuentes’s stories move to and from work toward the same ecology of hope that arises *in spite of* the despair and discontent that seems to consume each text. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to move border theory *towards* an ecology of hope. We cannot simply ignore haunted histories – they are there, deeply manifested in both texts and imploring exploration. This thesis, then, does not aim to ignore or disregard the haunting of history that has generated both the hemispheric gothic as a literary genre and border theory as an analytical mode,

but to do quite the contrary, which is to synthesize them as critical frameworks that work toward the generating of radical hope.

## II. 1 *La Llorona: The Woman in the Creek*

*La Gritona. Such a funny name for such a lovely arroyo.*  
- Sandra Cisneros

There is a creek named “Woman Hollering” that is said to house the spirit of *La Llorona*, a Mexican legendary figure, and it runs just behind the home of Cleófilas and Juan Pedro Martínez in the town of Seguin, Texas. Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek” tells the story of how Cleófilas comes to leave her abusive husband and escapes her home. The story begins when she marries Juan Pedro Martínez in an arranged marriage made by her father and moves from her father’s home in Mexico to the U.S. Cisneros then narrates Cleófilas’s many personal and identity battles as she longs for leaving her current life and taking her son with her. The creek and the legend of *La Llorona* play a major role in Cleófilas’s development.

“The natives only knew the *arroyo* crossed on the way to San Antonio, and then once again on the way back, was called Woman Hollering, a name no one from these parts questioned, little less understood...” (Cisneros 46). Historically, the predecessor of *La Llorona* is *Cihuacoatl*, “a woman dressed in white who, like *La Llorona* cries in the streets. She is said to follow “those who had done something bad or who were afraid” (Anzaldúa 35). *Cihuacoatl* is “Serpent Woman, the goddess of the Earth, war, and birth in ancient Aztec” (35). The historical becomes legend, and as such, *La Llorona* is born. There are many versions of the legend, the most common telling the story about a young, married woman who is so enraged and dejected when she discovers her husband has a mistress that she drowns her children in a creek. Upon her realization of what she has done, she tries to save them but dies in the creek, her ghost of a voice forever haunting the creek with cries of “Oh, my children” (Doyle 56). *La Llorona* comes to be the key

icon of Mexican myth as she “howls and weeps in the night, screams as if demented. She brings mental depression and sorrow. Long before it takes place, she is the first to predict something is to happen” (Anzaldúa 36).

In “Woman Hollering Creek,” we get a similar sense of eeriness in the Texas town as in the legend of *La Llorona*. When Cleófilas first arrives to Seguin, the townspeople warn her about the creek: “Don’t go out there after dark, *mi’jita*. Stay near the house. *No es bueno para tu salud. Mala suerte. Bad luck. Mal aire...* You’ll catch a fright wandering about in the dark, and then you’ll see how right we were” (Cisneros 51). At the same time, the townspeople aren’t entirely aware of the legend of *La Llorona*, for when Cleófilas asks them of the origins of the name “Woman Hollering,” the townspeople respond “Pues allá de los indios, quién sabe – who knows... it was of no concern to their lives how this trickle of water received its curious name” (46). There is an air of eccentricity to the creek then, and to the shadow that resides there, pointing to a gothic reading: “as strategic metaphors... shadows pervasively haunt hemispheric American literature, noting thus the already prevailing presence of a disquieting past” (Blanco 30). And although the townspeople cannot name this “shadow,” Cleófilas certainly can, for she eventually comes to recognize it and identify it as *La Llorona*: “Is it La Llorona, the weeping woman? La Llorona, who drowned her own children. Perhaps La Llorona is the one they named the creek after, she thinks, remembering all the stories she learned as a child” (51).

As the story develops, we learn that Cleófilas encounters physical and emotional abuse from her husband and that she grows to fear for her life as well as for her son’s life, Juan Pedrito. She reads stories in the newspaper that point to a pattern of women dying at

the hands of their husbands, lovers, fathers: “this woman found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car. This one’s cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue” (52). As Cleófilas copes with the abuse of her own husband, the creek seems to become alive, “a good-size alive thing, a thing with a voice all its own, all day and all night calling in its high, silver voice” (51). She imagines: “La Llorona calling to her. She is sure of it... Listens... Wonders if something as quiet as this drives a woman to the darkness under the trees” (51). It is this moment when the creek becomes *La Llorona*, the epitome of colonialism, the historical emblem that haunts Mexico and Cleófilas herself. Anzaldúa describes *La Llorona* in her work as “Snake Woman” (38) and “Daughter of the Night, traveling the dark terrains of the unknown searching for the lost parts of herself” (Doyle 58), a similar reaction that Cleófilas has, searching for herself in the creek as an alternative to the misery she encounters in her domestic sphere.

Cisneros and Cleófilas conjure up this image of *La Llorona*, the Snake Woman, whom “many commentators believe that substantially predates *la Malinche* and colonial history” (Anzaldúa 58). With a figure as powerful as *La Llorona* and *La Malinche*, whom we will later see embodying a sense of national repressed history in Fuentes’s “Malinztin de las maquilas,” the female figures that appear in earlier Mexican history, legend and mysticism are immediately invoked, giving Cleófilas, ultimately, the strength she needs to identify within herself a certain power relatable to these strong women so she can flee her husband. Hence, “Woman Hollering Creek” becomes a text highly associated with the gothic and with magical realism, prompting the reader to imagine a “shadow” or a “ghost” as central ingredients to the story.

María del Pilar Blanco, however, worries about calling a text “gothic” or “magical real,” for she writes that while it “may prepare us for the appearance of a ghost within a text, it is nevertheless important to be unprepared – to allow the text a certain newness by reading against the grain, to conceive of reading as an experience of unknowability” (181). With this unknowability in mind, Blanco warns us that we must not give into the “mystification” of a text. For, when we see it as a “mystification” we run the risk of paralyzing the text, or dislocating from it in a way that disengages from the question of “how we relate evolving notions of a landscape’s history and politics to matters concerning the aesthetic forms by which that evolution is evoked” (182). Hence, a gothic reading of *La Llorona* in Cisneros’s work cannot possibly point to an “unknowability,” for it will limit the reader in the “mystification” of *La Llorona* and, by doing so, the text will risk losing its political importance.

Additionally, Doyle writes that the story of Cleófilas “extends and revises such histories” such as *La Malinche*, by “opening a borderland space where old myths take on new resonance and new forms and where new stories are possible. Haunted by the legendary wail of La Llorona, Cleófilas seeks a language to articulate her own story” (54). The invocation of history, along with the political matters involved in “Woman Hollering Creek” bring us directly to the conceptual theory of border thinking that challenges a strictly gothic reading to Cisneros’s work and fosters, instead, an ecology of hope.

## II. 2 The Deceptive Border

*It is imperative that mesitzas support each other in  
changing the sexist elements in the Mexican-Indian culture.  
- Gloria Anzaldúa*

In “Woman Hollering Creek,” Cisneros visits a type of border experienced at a very intrapersonal level by Cleófilas in which she identifies a discrepancy between what she thinks crossing the border means, and what it truly means. This discrepancy, I find, is a deception to Cleófilas, therefore making the border a treacherous, fluctuating, and “a very much alive thing,” much like Cleófilas describes the creek, or *La Llorona*. However, this border is the sole driver for change for Cleófilas, as we will see in the following accounts.

Cisneros narrates: “Seguín, Texas. A nice sterling ring to it. The tinkle of money. She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*...and have a lovely house” (45). Cleófilas, very absorbed by the fairy-tale like *telenovelas* she repeatedly watches in Mexico, is under the impression that moving to the U.S. means she will have wealth, clothes and a nice home. Cisneros compares Texas to Coahuila, a state in northern Mexico, narrating: “*Seguín*. She had liked the sound of it. Far away and lovely. Not like *Monclova*. *Coahuila*. Ugly” (45). Hence, from the beginning of the story, Cisneros marks a separation between these two places – Seguín, Texas and Monclova, Coahuila – in which Cleófilas believes that the former is the place in which scenes from *telenovelas* actually come true and the latter an “ugly” place where things are uninteresting.

Anzaldúa writes of illegal female residents from Mexico in the U.S: “la mojada is doubly threatened in this country” (13). She pinpoints that sexual violence and physical helplessness are the landscapes that la mojada walks on. “As a refugee, she leaves the

familiar and safe homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain” (13). Hence, as Cleófilas experiences the crude reality of her new life in Texas when her husband begins a pattern of abuse and infidelity towards her, we begin to see that the *telenovela* fantasy that Cleófilas held in her mind becomes brutally slaughtered and this border of deception is created. She finds that crossing the border from Mexico to the U.S. does not guarantee joy and stability, but rather pain and disillusionment. As we have seen in the above analysis of *La Llorona*, Cleófilas grows despondent and impatient in her domestic sphere, and *La Llorona*’s haunting eventually becomes somewhat of a getaway musing, prompting Cleófilas to turn away from her current life and leave her husband. And the act that becomes the sole motivator for Cleófilas’s escape is when her husband throws a book in her face (52).

Following this scene, a pregnant Cleófilas needs to go to the doctor’s office and begs her husband to take her. Naturally, he says no because he’s afraid they’ll see Cleófilas’s beatings. To this, Cleófilas replies to her husband: “No, she won’t mention it. She promises. If the doctor asks she can say she fell down the front steps...” (53). While there, Cleófilas seeks help from a nurse, Graciela, for her escape. Anzaldúa writes that la *mojada* “cannot call on county or state health or economic resources because she doesn’t know English and she fears deportation... American employers are quick to take advantage of her helplessness” (12). But something happens with Graciela: instead of taking advantage of Cleófilas’s questionable citizenry status and language barrier (for we learn that Cleófilas cannot speak English), she makes a call to arrange for Cleófilas’s escape.

Over the phone, Graciela tells Felice, the woman who will later help Cleófilas escape:

I don't know. One of those Mexican saints, I guess. A martyr or something... A regular soap opera sometimes. *Qué vida, comadre...* This poor lady's got black-and-blue marks all over her. I'm not kidding. From her husband. Who else? Another one of those brides from across the border (54).

The black-and-blue marks are the epitome of this deceptive border in which Cleófilas finds herself trapped; where crossing the border was once the promise of hope, it has now become a promise of despair. But the way in which Cleófilas defeats the entrapment of this metaphysical border is by participating in radical hope, as we will shortly come to understand. What Cleófilas accomplishes by the end of this story, the escape from her abusive husband, marks in this deceptive border not a trope of hopelessness, but one that pushes Cleófilas and reader alike into a terrain and an ecology of hope.

### II. 3 *Woman Hollering Creek: Towards an Ecology of Hope*

*But when they drove across the arroyo, the driver opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi.*  
- Sandra Cisneros

The specific ecology of hope seen in Cisneros's work pushes forth a new kind of identity that is defined *in* this border, one that seems fragmented in Cleófilas's lack of identity in the U.S where she is fixated on *telenovelas* instead of on reality. This identity, though, works and evolves to push away from fragmentation and towards a type of solid continuity. In this way, this new identity generates hope in "Woman Hollering Creek."

In "Teaching, Hopefully," Chrisopher Castiglia suggests that we understand hope "as a social process akin to what Foucault called *askesis*: a transformational meditation on the conditions of the present undertaken not in relation to the self alone, but to social relations as well" (186). Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents a similar notion to the process of *askesis*: "understanding ourselves as an independent self-consciousness requires the recognition of another. One must recognize oneself as mediated through the other" (229). Simply said, the process of recognition, or recognizing and acknowledging the "sense of self," depends exclusively on one's relationship with others. In *The Politics of Recognition*, Charles Taylor adopts Hegel's definition of recognition to explore this concept at a global level in 20<sup>th</sup> century social politics. According to Taylor, "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence" (25).

"Woman Hollering Creek" is an exemplary and profoundly relevant tale of how hopefulness is embedded in social interaction and the process of recognition. In the last scene of the story, in which Cleófilas escapes with the help of Felice as they cross the creek in the car away from Seguin and toward San Antonio, an exchange happens. As

they drive across the *arroyo*, Felice “opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi” (Cisneros 55). Felice, sensing she had startled Cleófilas and Juan Pedrito, then explains “every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman Hollering. *Pues*, I holler” (55).

Cleófilas is intrigued by Felice – the fact that she drives a pick up that she owned, one that she paid for and that she herself had chosen, both shocked and amazed Cleófilas. Moments after this observation, Felice says, “That’s why I like the name of that *arroyo*. Makes you want to holler, like Tarzan, right?” (55) inciting in Cleófilas not fear, not confusion, but recognition. For Cisneros’s last lines in the story read: “Then Felice began laughing again, but it wasn’t Felice laughing. It was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water” (56). This is a laughter that signifies hope.

It is through Felice that Cleófilas finally finds the beginnings of a sense of identity and through Felice in which she will find a sense of hopefulness that will accompany her after she has crossed the creek. The creek and *La Llorona*, as a result, become spaces in which Cleófilas no longer encounters “pain or rage” (56) but rather hope. Hope – the ultimate recognition; the ultimate space; the ultimate border.

Further, the space that Cleófilas *crosses* when she escapes is also a space of fragmentation. It is a border of

Linguistic crossing, known both as Woman Hollering and as La Gritona. The languages mark shifting national boundaries: before the institution, in the 1840s, of the border that Cleófilas crosses twice, Texas was part of Mexico; before the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Mexico was Indian... (Doyle 63).

The creek, then, becomes a “hidden strata of meaning” that aids “Cleófilas in [recollecting] and [claiming] her own life, history, identity and voice” (63). The holler

and the creek are embedded in history, myth and legend, in the sense of self they provide for Cleófilas – in joy, freedom, and hope. The image of *La Llorona*, coupled with Cleófilas's gradual turning away from *telenovelas* and with her recognition of Felice as a woman who suggests not a fragmented but a wholesome identity, all mark an ecology of hope that happens as Cleófilas crosses the creek.

For it is ultimately radical hope that Cleófilas finds in this space. It is by crossing the creek with Felice and recognizing in Felice that “holler of Tarzan,” and by participating in this laughter herself that Cleófilas can find hope. Cleófilas is as “dynamic and multiple, speaking a forked tongue, reinterpreting history and shaping new myths” as Anzaldúa's “the new mestiza” (78). Cleófilas herself, then, embodies an ecology hope.

Further, this holler scene is contingent to Castiglia's idea that the process of hope has “another narrative tradition, in which the wrongs of the present are not simply escaped or denied, but are wrestled with in order to arrive at transformational aspirations (186). It is through the recognition of the mystical *La Llorona*, the resulting active escape by part of Cleófilas, coupled with the spatial border of hope, then, that we can move border theory towards an ecology of hope. We will now explore how a similar trope of hopefulness is generated within Fuentes's “Malintzin de las maquilas” by the protagonist, Marina.

### III. 1 *The Haunted: Malintzin, La Malinche, and Marina*

*Not me sold out my people but they me. Malinali Tenepat, or Malintzin, has become known as La Chingada – the fucked one. She has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards are epithets Chicanos spit out with contempt.*

*-Gloria Anzaldúa*

Doña Marina is known for many names – *La Malinche*, *La Chingada*, *Malinali*, – but for only one sin: the handing over of Mexico to Hernán Cortés. In his personal and historical account, *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*, Díaz del Castillo narrates that Doña Marina “was a person of the greatest importance and was obeyed without question by the Indians throughout New Spain” (51). Díaz del Castillo carefully recounts the history of how Doña Marina came to be the interpreter and mistress of Hernán Cortés, which ultimately gave Spanish conquistadores the upper-hand they needed to take hold of the Aztec Empire. Díaz del Castillo recounts, “as Doña Marina proved herself such an excellent woman and good interpreter throughout the wars in New Spain, Tlaxcala and Mexico, Cortés always took her with him” (50). Her ability and willingness to translate from Nahuatl to Spanish further spawned her complete and irrevocable loyalty to Cortés, as Díaz del Castillo notes: “she would rather serve... Cortés than anything else in the world, and would not exchange her place to the Cacica of all the provinces in New Spain” (51).

Doña Marina’s great loyalty to Cortés strikingly contrasts her great disloyalty to her people, marking the archetype of her name as cursed and treacherous; Doña Marina the traitor. Indeed, Gloria Anzaldúa claims that “*La Chingada* has made us ashamed of our Indian side” (31) and that the Aztec nation fell at the hands of her when she “interpreted for and slept with Cortés” (34). Anzaldúa reminds us that the names Doña Marina, *La Chingada*, *La Malinche*, and *Malintzin* are interchangeable in themselves, and

that they are also highly associated with *The Virgin of Guadalupe*, as well as with the legendary figure of *La Llorona* (30), as we have examined in Cisneros's work.

In all its forms, the figure of Doña Marina, much like *La Llorona* in "Woman Hollering Creek" haunts the Mexican psyche to this day. Anzaldúa narrates: "En 1521 nació una nueva raza, *el mestizo*, *el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings" (5). 1521 points to the very year when the Spanish finally declared themselves victorious over the reign of the Aztec Empire. Anzaldúa turns to this year that marked the fate of Mexico in the hands of the Spanish to characterize how the *mestizo* that came to be, quite arguably with the birth of Doña Marina's and Cortés's own son, and hence, the very race-conscious birth of newness that haunts the identity and "self" of the Mexican to this very day:

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary alienation makes for... a kind of dual identity – we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness (Anzaldúa 63).

In "Malintzin de las maquilas," Fuentes conjures up the historical markers of Doña Marina and the geopolitical U.S.-Mexico border of 1995 to tell a unique, yet at the same time repetitive story of betrayal and despair. The text follows Marina, a maquiladora factory worker who has a relationship with Rolando, a Mexican entrepreneur whose work is largely based in the U.S. "Malintzin de las maquilas" narrates the corruption and exploitation of the U.S. industrial sector in Mexican land and in Mexican workers, and the story ultimately attributes these corruptions to the overall helplessness of the women maquiladora workers, especially Marina's. By the end, Marina

crosses the border to meet with Rolando at a hotel, only to find him in bed with an American woman. She goes back to Juárez in despair, experiencing both shame and anger.

The very first line of Fuentes's "Malintzin de las maquilas" reads: "A Marina la nombraron así por las ganas de ver el mar" (121). Fuentes goes on to narrate that in her home, a *ranchería* in the north of Mexico, the old and young gather to ask about an ocean that they had never seen and so, when Marina was baptized, her parents said, this one *will* see the ocean (121). In Fuentes's story, Marina navigates the geopolitical space that is the Ciudad Juárez/El Paso, Texas border, a space very much isolated from the ocean. Indeed, this very first line sets a precedent of an inability to defeat historical repetition, for by the end of the story, Marina's dream of seeing the ocean does not come true, and she is left with the emotional residue of the sight with which the story begins, ends, and stands atop of: that impotent, fragile body of water that separates the U.S. and Mexico, the Río Grande.

The Río Grande, indeed, haunts. As does the storming name in the title, *Malintzin* and the first name of our protagonist, Marina. But there is another haunting, one that deals with a resistance with which the characters in "Malintzin" approach *memories*.

"Malintzin de las maquilas" traces a deep sense of pride, hopefulness and prestigious promise when women from agrarian parts of Mexico move to border towns to work at the maquilas. The women in the story are all sent off to Juárez in hope for a prosperous future, some being too smart to remain in agrarian small-towns, such as is Rosa Lupe, one the women who works with Marina. She narrates, "Mi papa me instalo aquí en Juárez en una casita de una pieza en la colonia Bellavista y me dijo: Trabaja

mucho y encuéntrete a un hombre. Eres la más lista de la familia. Y se fue” (131). The women – Rosa Lupe, Dinorah, Marina, Candelaria, all

veían de otro lado... Pero todas estaban divididas por dentro: ¿era mejor dejar atrás todo eso, borrar la memoria, resolverse a empezar una nueva alma con el recuerdo, sentir la tristeza del pasado, convenir en que el desamor es la muerte del alma? (129).

There is a distinction, then, between working in agriculture, deep in Mexico, and working in maquilas, close to the U.S. The maquilas are where they send “the smart ones,” but not without painful memories of home, the women missing home everyday, not wanting to talk about it because it’s too painful, as Dinorah, another woman who works alongside Marina, relates, “los recuerdos nomás duelen” (131). In regards to family and festive traditions, there is a sense that these memories have been left behind in their homes and are now too distant from them, and that what they have acquired as maquiladora workers is instead the crude reservoir of those traditions. Rosa Lupe says about festive dates, “aquí busco esas fechas en el calendario, tengo que recordarlas, allá no, allá las fiestas llegaban sin necesidad de recordarlas” (130).

Candelaria is perhaps the only woman who dares to think of and talk about memories. Fuentes writes: “y su conclusion era que todas venían de otra parte, ninguna de ellas era fronteriza, le gustaba preguntarles de dónde venían, a ellas les costaba hablar de eso, solo con la Candelaria... se atrevían a enlazar amor y memoria” (129). Again, the same sense of despair and a resistance to talk about memories is manifested and creates an evolution particularly in Marina, as we will see, in her refusal to acknowledge or think about them.

There is an event in “Malintzin de las maquilas” that marks the tragic turning point for Marina, as well as for Dinorah. The difficulty of affording a caretaker to look

after his son prompted Dinorah to tie him to a table so he wouldn't get out of the house while she was working at the maquila. But, on the fateful night when the maquiladora women all go out to Chippendale, Dinorah comes home to find his son strangled by the rope she had tied him to (146). This event incites so much emotion in the women that their attempts to block out memories from home become weakened, and each is struck with the reality of their lives. Candelaria expresses her grief in the form of what her grandfather used to say: "que nos quedáramos sosegados en nuestra casa, en un solo lugar... Decía 'Fuera de esta puerta el mundo se acaba'" (146). Similarly, Herrera, Candelaria's lover, attributes the loss of Dinorah to the greater loss of Mexico in the hands of the U.S. as he turns his attention to the shining lights on the U.S. side of the border, and the lack of light on the Mexican side. He says: "bosques, textiles, minería... frutas... todo se acabó a favor de la maquila, todas las riquezas de Chihuahua, olvidadas" (146).

And Marina "dio gracias de que en su casa no había recuerdos, ella era sola y más valía seguir sola en esta vida que pasar las penas de los que tenían hijos y sufrían como la pobrecita de Dinorah" (147). Marina's horror is so far away from her, yet so near, that the only thing she can do instead of thinking about the tragedy that has just struck Dinorah is to run to Rolando and become fixated on her dream to see the ocean. Fuentes narrates:

Entonces Marina... pensó que tenía a Rolando, aunque lo compartiera con otras, Rolando le haría el favor de llevarla al mar, a algún lado, a San Diego en California o a Corpus Christi en Texas... ella no pedía otra cosa más que ir por primera vez a ver el mar con Rolando... (147).

What is Marina's refusal to see the horrors in front of her if not a recounting of history? Do they not point to a similar discourse so potently told over and over again by

Anzaldúa? That *La Malinche* continues to haunt us in many forms? And this time it comes back in the form of an act of betrayal that is not done *by* Marina, but *to* Marina.

As Marina approaches the Texas side of the border, she finds Rolando in bed with none other than an American woman, *La Malinche*'s fate repeating itself in a series of opposed events: Fuentes's Marina, unlike *Malintzin*, is not the betrayer but the betrayed. There is, then, both a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity with these events. While we know the story of *Malintzin*, it is retold here in a turnaround rhetoric, where our protagonist Marina, who conjures up the name and historicity of the treacherous *Malintzin*, is this time the victim, and not the perpetrator, of a love affair that carries with it heavy political repercussions. While in the original story of *Malintzin* we see the betrayal that leads to the relinquishing of Mexico, in this contemporary retelling we see the politically charged consequences of the border, which leaves Marina devastated as she is unable to compete with her rival, an American woman.

Further, this retelling incites in readers a strong sense of familiarity, but at the same time distances readers from the original tale, creating, then, an approximation to the uncanny – a central trope in the gothic mode. According to Justin D. Edwards in *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*, “the uncanny, for Freud, has to do with our sense of strangeness when the unfamiliar appears at the center of the familiar” (27). The invocation of *Malintzin* is therefore consummated in the problematic, repetitive and haunting discourse of the inevitable consequences that the U.S.-Mexico border brings about in its U.S. totalitarianism, and Mexican dependence of the same. Hence, we begin to see that “Malintzin de las maquilas” is nothing short of a gothic tale – for “political discourses have always been embedded in the gothic (19).

María del Pilar Blanco's *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* may further help shed some light on the notion that Marina's story is one of the haunting borderlands and one that approaches the gothic. Blanco asserts that rather than reading ghost stories "as reflections of the dead and extinct," we should focus on "how the appearance of these figures and these events in literary texts announce a questioning about our present and future perceptions of landscape that are common to a transnational American experience" (181). In this way, we can appreciate how ghost stories "reflect *a working through* of the doubts that the present and future inspire" (181). As such, the haunting of *Malintzin* is interlaced with a haunting of the porous, heartbreaking U.S.-Mexico border, thereby retelling this "ghost story" in a way that pushes and challenges the anxieties with which the characters approach said landscape.

Further, Blanco considers the haunting "in relation to geography instead of the unconscious," subjecting the haunting, then, not to what she calls a "generalizable psychic symptom," but instead to the "emergence of a question that is inspired by a landscape in flux" (182). Anxieties, again, are manifested in a geographical landscape, and in "Malintzin de las maquilas," Marina's response to Dinorah's child dying can be understood as a response to move away from the spatial threat of Juárez, border town, the maquiladoras, where she only knows tragedy, and where women are again and again susceptible to run risks that threaten their lives as well as the lives of their children. So Marina instead moves toward Rolando, her love, to Texas, to the U.S., the promising land where dreams come true and where only good things happen... or so she thinks.

What Marina finds on the other side of the border in Texas while she calls Rolando's cellphone is not quite what she expects. Instead of her hopes that with

Rolando, they would “conmigo vas a subir y me vas a llevar a lo alto y lo bonito” (Fuentes 148), she “encendió la luz y se quedo allí mirándolos desnudos en la cama,” (149) Baby, the American woman, and Rolando, together, Rolando’s cellphone forgotten in the bedside table, its battery dead, the crushing words of Baby “Mira. No tiene pilas. No las ha tenido nunca. Es nomás para apantallar” (159) crushing Marina’s hopes in a matter of seconds. Two lines later, without dwelling on the dialogue between Marina and Rolando’s final confrontation, Fuentes narrates:

Marina cruzó el Puente internacional de regreso a Ciudad Juárez. Tenía cansados los pies y se quitó los zapatos de tacones altos y picudos. El pavimento aún guardaba el temblor frío del día. Pero la sensación de los pies no era la misma que cuando bailó libremente sobre el césped prohibido de la fábrica maquiladora de don Leonardo Barroso (Fuentes 150).

*Malintzin’s* final legacy materializes by way of the contemporary crossing of the border, to Mexico, her and Marina’s identities fusing as one, *La Malinche*, *La Chingada*, forever alone, forever miserable, forever haunted... Her conscience subjugated in the tearing apart of an ancient nation, for after all, as Díaz del Castillo recounts, “without the help of Doña Marina we could not have understood the language of New Spain and Mexico” (51).

So far, we have seen how the gothic, which makes its way into “Malintzin de las maquilas” by conjuring the image of *La Malinche*, is a counter-betrayal in a repression of history that allows Marina’s sense of defeat and despair to continue. Now I will propose that this reading, which creates a never-ending, tragic geopolitical discourse, forces us to ask ourselves: *Is there any hope left?*

### III. 2 A Hopeless Border?

*Al que madruga dios le ayuda, más si se es mexicano que hace negocios  
de los dos lados de la frontera.  
- Carlos Fuentes*

Blanco indicates that the haunted imagination “traverses the changing landscapes within and beyond preconceived national boundaries. It wonders about the socializations between the familiar and unfamiliar histories of subjects and insists on... the possible afterlives of these very socializations” (181). And so, Marina’s crossing of the border from the U.S., where her only hope resides, to Mexico, once again, where only despair resides, marks this same insistence of the afterlife of the legendary, historical *La Malinche*. However, the crossing of the border also indicates a much more relevant national conflict, one which is embedded in the geopolitics of the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso border.

Anzaldúa narrates that “the border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by the conquest along with the land” (7). However, the land that originally belonged to Mexicans “was soon swindled away from its owners. The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, has never been made” (7). As a result, Anzaldúa points to the historical “Gringo” who, “locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their lands while their feet were still rooted in it” (7).

What happens when a border space, so charged with a historical hopelessness such as is the U.S.-Mexico one, is never reclaimed? The hauntings, as we have seen, are there. As are ghosts, shadows, and the gothic. Literary undertakings, like Fuentes’s and

Cisneros's, speak of it profusely, as do many other art forms. But what other consequences does such a haunted borderland spawn? The mystical presence of female archetypes points to a consequence of sociopolitics in women, as seen in "Malintzin de las maquilas."

In Fuentes's narrative, Leonardo Barroso, Mexican entrepreneur whose character makes its way into all stories of *The Crystal Frontier*, is founder of the maquiladora where Marina and the other women work. The story turns to a narration that takes place in the corporate offices of the maquiladora. In the exchange, Barroso is sitting with his U.S. investors, relating:

las maquiladoras empleaban ocho mujeres por cada hombre, las liberaban del rancho, de la prostitución, incluso del machismo... pues la trabajadora se convertía rápidamente en la ganapán de la casa, jefa de familia adquiría una dignidad y una fuerza que pues liberaban a la mujer, la independizaban, la modernizaban y eso también era democracia (Fuentes 133).

Further, Barroso says that these women "se integraban a un crecimiento económico dinámico, en vez de vivir deprimidas en el estancamiento agrario de México" (134).

So far, we have seen that Marina, Candelaria, Rosa Lupe and Dinorah all grapple with leaving their agrarian homes, their memories so painful that they seldom allow themselves to think about it. Barroso, though, claims otherwise; that their move from these homes to the maquilas in Juárez is *liberating*. The way Barroso claims that they are better off in Juárez, as, indeed, many of the women claim themselves, can prove to be worrisome and problematic.

Given the tragic turning point of the story in which Dinorah's son dies due to this cause – women's subjugation in the maquilas force them to make decisions that puts them in situations of high risk– readers remain wary of two dichotomous claims:

Barroso's claim that "la maquila no es una suma-cero, sino una suma-suma. Todos salimos ganando" (135) and that it is a space of safety where women are liberated from prostitution, machismo; and the women's own constant sexual and violent encounters in the maquilas.

One such encounter happens when Rosa Lupe fails to wear her blue robe to work and Esmeralda, her supervisor, tells her to change her clothes right then and there, in front of the other maquila workers. Rosa Lupe hesitates, and Esmeralda resorts to taking off Rosa Lupe's clothes herself, leaving Rosa Lupe horrified and ashamed. Following this, Herminio, a male supervisor, shows up joking about how Esmeralda shouldn't play with his girls (132). Later, when Rosa Lupe joins the girls on their break, she was changed into her blue robe, with Herminio walking beside her. Rosa Lupe tells the girls after he leaves: "Le permití que me viera cambiarme de rope. Prefiero que lo sepan. Lo hice por agradecimiento. Prefiero ser yo la que decide. Me prometió no molestrarnos más a ninguna y protegernos de la cabrona de Esmeralda" (133).

With this, we learn that Rosa Lupe subdues herself to a sexually violent situation in the hopes that Esmeralda would stop shaming her and the other women. Rosa Lupe, it seems, does this out of *fear*. Juárez, then, houses the exact things that Barroso claims women are no longer subjugated to given their maquila status, making Fuentes's "Malintzin de las maquilas" a tale of border violence toward women. We learn, too, that Dinorah claims that in order to fend herself off against sexual predators in the maquila, she must "y si me exigen un acostón para ascender, mejor me cambio de fábrica, total aquí nadie asciende para arriba, nomás nos movemos para los lados, como las cangrejitas" (124).

Again, we see a growing consciousness on the part of the women that their conditions are detrimental, their bodies prone to sexual violence on a daily basis, their autonomy culminating even in an inability to want for a partner to share their lives with, for as Dinorah very well says, “¿Para qué? Aquí los hombres no trabajan. ¿Quieres que mantenga a dos en lugar de uno?” (123). Indeed, Rosa Lupe revisits this same notion that women working in maquilas are the sole breadwinners of their households and that having a man around would only hurt their financial situation, narrating: “la mitad de las que chambeamos ahí mantenemos el hogar. Somos lo que se llama jefecitas de familia” (126). This suggests a highly autonomous and independent role of women in Juárez, but one that constantly puts them in danger and in potential risk of sexual and other types of violence.

So, what can we take from this despair? Anzaldúa writes that “borders are set up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (3). “Malinztin de las maquilas” suggests that there are three geopolitical regions, three borders if you will, at play: the first is the U.S., where “lights shine bright” (Fuentes 146), better things happen, and worker are paid well; then there’s agro-Mexico, where hope resides as well, where families are intact, where there is no fear of death or rape, but where there is financial fear, and where the smart ones from these places are sent off to a “better world,” to that land in the middle, the border; and of course, there’s Juárez, the maquilas, border towns, the real dystopia, where children can die, where women are raped, where men don’t work because the women are off in the maquilas, and where the U.S.’s exploitation of Mexican workers starts and ends.

But there is a problem, a limit, to this reading of the gothic and the border, and that is its insistence on dwelling on negativity, discontent, despair, doom, *hopelessness*, and their inability to explore the tiny ray of hope that this reading provides, a reading which, ultimately, gives hope a space, an agency, and a name. I will now propose that though we cannot simply ignore the haunted histories that “Malintzin de las maquilas” dwells on, we also cannot ignore that the story is working through these haunted histories in an attempt to move forward: an evolution toward hope. I suggest, then, that like “Woman Hollering Creek,” it is only by reading “Malintzin” as a tale of the haunted border that we can truly see that these gothic musings demand a hopeful reading. Ultimately, with the help of the mystical figure of *La Malinche*, the text is an evolution from hopelessness to hopefulness.

### III. 3 Malintzin Approaches an Ecology of Hope

*Hope requires more than disciplined determination; it requires imagination.*

*-Christopher Castiglia*

In his book *Radical Hope*, Jonathan Lear explores the psyche of the Crow, a Native American tribe whose lifestyle and ways of knowing were dependent on hunting buffalo. But eventually the buffalo departed and when this happened, Plenty Coups, Chief of the tribe, recounts “the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this, nothing happened” (Lear 2). Shortly thereafter, Plenty Coups experiences an epiphany when he has a dream that promised the Crow a prosperous future only if they mimicked the Chickadee, “an iconic figure in Crow mythology whose key attribute is the ability to listen to others and learn from them” (Furrows).

The Crow, all too familiar with loss, despair – a profound rupture amidst their whole communal being, a culture whose total and complete sense of identity and purpose was lost – finds a glimmer of solace in the future: a type of hope, too abstract to express effectively, too real to ignore, a hope of courage and a hope of humility – *radical hope*. This radical hope, Lear explains, is not inherent; it is not obvious nor is it readily available to members of this culture, but it is rather a look toward the horizon of the past, to that which once was, and then toward the horizon of the future, to that which once will be again, without ever so slim a practical reason to be hopeful. As Dwight Furrow in his review of Lear’s book maintains, “radical hope is irrational because it cannot rest on evidence. But its irrationality is beside the point, because it expresses the human need to confront uncertainty with courage” (Furrow).

Lear shows that by merging education and lifestyle with non-reservation non-Native Americans while maintaining Crow values and virtue and following the wisdom of the Chickadee, “Plenty Coups bequeathed an ideal that would help the tribe tolerate a period of conceptual devastation” (Lear 141). And because this ideal has survived, Lear suggests “lends legitimacy to the claim that the Crow have indeed survived. Or, perhaps, that the Crow have revived” (Lear 141).

I propose a similar radical hope in texts that remain hopeful, even when their narratives seem to dictate otherwise, such as in “Malintzin de las maquilas.” Literary texts are ways of expression: personal, political, communal, ethical. However as Rita Felski points out in terms of the limits of literary critique,

in diagnosing the insufficiencies of a work of art... critique explains these insufficiencies by invoking some larger frame. It looks behind the text for some final explanation or cause: social, cultural, psychoanalytical, historical or linguistic” (190).

Felski urges that Critique prompts us to think that, “that text is *derived*, in a fundamental sense, from something else” (190). As is the case, I argue, with border theory.

In the heart of border theory, we encounter texts where pain, loss, grief and despair are at the foundation, like in “Malintzin de las maquilas”, and where the past is doomed to repeat itself in the present. But here I am proposing that amidst these tragedies there is a fundamentally true being in itself, a voice that resounds and trespasses obstacles and thought-processes. A voice that begs for individuality, freedom, and great solidarity, both with the characters and the reader. And this is the voice of hope: an ecology of hope.

Cultural theorist Christopher Castiglia contends that grappling with hope in Academia is not an easy task to undertake. On that contrary, it is quite a difficult one, and

it can only be achieved when we look at a “hopeful pedagogy” as something much more complex than a mere reading of hopeful naïveté or redemption. He says:

Developing a hopeful pedagogy won’t be easy. It risks being called naive, parochial, unrigorous. Academic prestige—including such basic markers as juried publication and hence tenure and promotion—privileges performances of cynicism divorced from, even contemptuous of, explicit hopefulness. (191).

To assert Castiglia’s insistence on the progression of hopefulness in pedagogy, I contend in regards to my analysis that no, “Malintzin de las maquilas” is not a text about redemption. No, it is not a text of a hopeful naïveté. It is not even a text about happiness. Instead, it is highly concerned with the abrupt yet prolonged consequences of the U.S.-Mexico border in a deeply problematic pattern; pain and disillusionment are the heart and core of these texts, creating a human border in which, when crossed, a paradigm of the deepest despair is created. And this paradigm haunts. But border theory, as it works through the discontents of a multicultural and multiethnic people, at the same time recognizes its dwelling spirit, a hopeful one.

The ecology of hope that I explore goes beyond a celebration of hybridity and border life, beyond happiness, even, for it deals with a contentment, a peace treaty of sorts, both inside and outside of the characters. It is a hope that spawns further hope – one where the working out of the past provides solutions for the future. Because an ecology of hope has no temporality; it has no limits; it has no explanation; it has only conviction.

What is required for this hope is imagination. Castiglia asserts that:

One’s capacity to achieve critical hope depends... on an awareness that the world is multiple and fractious, and that participation in that world therefore requires that we imagine negotiations and collaborations that work with and don’t simply deny differences of cultural practice and privilege. Hope, in other words, may

operate most powerfully beyond our comfort zones (188).

Castiglia's idea that hope operates "beyond our comfort zones" is very much relevant in the practice of reading texts that deal so intimately with border theory, as does "Malintzin de las maquilas." In his lecture, Castiglia then goes on to merge criticism and imagination, saying that at the heart of this merger is our ability to cross political, identity and belief borders, and hence, our ability "to imagine oneself *differently* so as to conceive more justly one's relation to power, knowledge, and opportunity—requires skills both of criticism and imagination. It requires, in short, hope" (189). We are faced with a similar task in "Malintzin de las maquilas," for in many ways, the text challenges us to look beyond our comfort zone, our current ways of knowing, and to instead imagine this new landscape of a border town, where events and characters live in a constant state of despair. However, Castiglia says that "one must be capable of imagining that what *is* is not necessarily what *must* be, and to suspend attachments to the probable, which suffuses life with a sense of doomed inevitability (187). Hence, as Castiglia urges, we might soon find that with the indispensable skill of imagination, the story lends itself to a hopeful wandering, for as we force ourselves to see that what is (Marina's unrequited love that puts her back in the despair of Juárez) is not necessarily what must be in the future. This then creates a narrative where this sense of despair is not inevitable, but rather a state of being which Marina will ultimately be able to move away from.

How? In his book, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDs, and the Promise of the Queer Past*, which he co-writes with Christopher Reed, Castiglia visits a similar notion to that of Lear's radical hope in which he expresses that dealing with the present (and the future) requires a working through with the past. Indeed, Castiglia writes about the

horrific pain of AIDS and that when AIDS communities come together, the dwelling on past experiences is “an imaginative process of projective psychic realization” rather than “a sadomasochistic process of self-abuse melancholy” (181). Similarly, in Tom Roach’s review of Castiglia’s book, he narrates:

To their credit, Castiglia and Reed also do not wish to return “home” to the pre-AIDS carnival or to resurrect *in toto* earlier cultural forms. Instead, they cherish the “memory communities” invested in historical practices that express opposition to restrictive norms of the present, communities whose membership rests not on personal identity but on a collective yearning for a better now. Looking backward together lends itself to a “reparative imagining” that holds the capacity to transform not only what we are and might be, but also what we were (4).

Roach contends that Castiglia and Reed discover “the seeds of an ‘ideality politics’ in which remembered loss ‘insists on the realizability of the ideal’ (Castiglia and Reed 179), where memory becomes “a determination to use the past to propose alternatives to current social and sexual systems” (Roach 35). In short, Roach narrates that “memories of loss, according to the authors, give rise to ideal images that work to forestall future, even phantasmal, privation” (8).

This idea of using the past to prevent its repetition in the future is precisely the type of trope we find in “Malintzin de las maquilas” when Marina crosses the border. The analysis that best explains how memories of loss forestall a repetitive future lies in Marina’s final encounter with Rolando that, though painful in her present reality, will prove to be not a type of despair, but rather a type of hope – for being rid of Rolando and the U.S. will provide Marina the promise of living a fulfilled life *in the border*, allowing her to discover her sense of identity and self, and hence, working with past memories to achieve future hopefulness.

There is a moment of disinhibiting freedom and hope that Marina experiences prior to her final detrimental visit to Rolando. Earlier that day, back in the maquila, after Rosa Lupe joins Marina and the other women outside following her robe incident, Fuentes narrates about the women “Marina las vio tan tristes, tan ensimismadas, que decidió hacer algo insólito, algo prohibido, algo que las hiciera a todas sentirse contentas, distintas, libres...” (140). What she does is she takes off her shoes, throws them up and, barefooted, runs through the grass, laughing, mocking the signs of the maquiladora that read “keep off the grass” (140). Fuentes narrates that Marina:

sintiendo una emoción física maravillosa, era tan fresca la pelusa, tan mojada y bien cortada... que correr sobre ella con los pies desnudos era como darte un baño en uno de esos bosques encantados que salían en las películas, donde la doncella pura es sorprendida por el príncipe armado, brillante todo, brillante el agua, el bosque, la espada: los pies desnudos, la libertad del cuerpo, la libertad de lo otro, como se llamara, el alma, lo que decían las canciones, el cuerpo libre, el alma libre (140).

Following Marina’s running around the prohibited grass, the other women “rieron, chancearon, celebraron, advirtieron, no seas loca, Marina, quítate, te van a multar, te van a correr...” (140). Marina is not caught and the scene changes abruptly to their quotidian lives inside the maquila. But in this poignant moment, where Marina experiences joy and a deep sense of contentment, we see a falsity of sorts beginning to form – for Marina associates her feelings with that of a princess in a fairytale.

Instead of turning to the past – to memories – to act on or change her present or future, Marina dwells on fairytale-like qualities. Hence, a reality that is not in any sense real is what Marina, and the women around her, are using as a gateway to a promising future. But, the same fairytale-like narratives that they attempt to use to create a future are limiting. And this passage shows us just how limiting they are. This act of running

through the grass that the women find so dangerous is only the manifestation of the memories that they cannot and do not want to think about. As long as Marina and the women keep their memories repressed, as long as they keep longing for the fairytale, they will never encounter a true type of freedom and hope, one that doesn't have to be justified with fairytale-like qualities. Hence, as my reading of Castilgia takes me, by dwelling on the fairytale, Marina will never forestall the past from happening in the future. While their resistance to memories continues, there will be no way for Marina to truly *act*, instead of *being a victim of* the border.

When she prances around the prohibited grass, she feels not in her reality, but in an alter-reality, one in which everything is “shiny” and body and soul alike are *free*. Marina's feelings that take part not in the maquila, but rather in another world, then, point to a set of desires and hopes that she will be unable to achieve given her circumstances. While it would be tempting to read this passage as one that elevates Marina in a sense of hopefulness (the fairytale), I argue that it does quite the contrary – it subjugates her in hopelessness (reality) and allows her to long for something that will never happen (the fairytale) instead of acting for change in a current situation (reality). Hence, my analysis takes me to the idea that without ridding herself of the fairytale, and without confronting her memories (as the women fail to do constantly), Marina will never find a hopeful future.

The working through of memories, then, is the imperative work that Marina will have to take on. But it is a working through that does not happen in the narrative, for the narrative falls short of explaining this to the reader, which is why reader imagination is necessary. Without the working through of memories, Marina is caged. Without it, she is

hopeless. The narrative, in its tragic ending, points us directly in the direction of Marina's working through the past.

When Marina crosses the border back to Juárez after finding Rolando in bed with the American woman, Fuentes narrates when she takes off her shoes: “el pavimento aún guardaba el temblor frío del día. Pero la sensación de los pies no era la misma que cuando bailó libremente sobre el césped prohibido de la fábrica maquiladora de don Leonardo Barroso” (150). We learn that the feelings that accompanied Marina in the “keep off the grass” maquila experience differ greatly from the feelings she encounters as she crosses the border. As she takes off her shoes and walks across the border toward home, devastated, Marina is working through something that she had never quite encountered: reality. She is confronting and accepting that Rolando has been unfaithful to her and that she must leave him and go back home. And though her sense of hopelessness as she crosses the border is there, beside her, I argue, walks the very thing I have been discussing: radical hope.

Everything is lost, yes – but hope remains in that very space that allows Marina to finally accept her reality as is and *move on*. Hope remains in her heart breaking – it remains there because she is now able to move away from the false fairytale that she created in her head when she dances in the maquiladora's grass. Hope remains in being rid of the falsity of Rolando and of the idea that the U.S. provides a fairytale. When all is lost, as the narrative presents, all is gained. Marina's hope, ultimately, resides in her being able to work through the past to achieve a hopeful future. No more fairytales, no more falsity. Just a deep sense of despair that is necessary for future positive endeavors.

It is because this radical hope happens at the heart of the U.S.-Mexico border, when Marina is crossing it, barefooted, her body and soul exposed fully, that I can call my it an ecology of hope. The border provides a space for Marina in which she navigates in a devastated present, but in a futuristic hopefulness that readers will understand fully only after realizing that Marina's heartbreak, like that of the Crow in Lear's *Radical Hope*, is one that will only provide strength and clarity for the future. The border gives her agency, for as Anzaldúa narrates, "there in front of us is the crossroads and choice: to feel a victim where someone else is in control and therefore responsible and to blame, or to feel strong, and, for the most part, in control" (21).

This reading, ultimately, allows for Anzaldúa's "a new mestiza" to take on the form of Marina. Anzaldúa talks about "the new mestiza" in a highly cultural, linguistic and racial consciousness. Here, I transfer these same ideas of Anzaldúa's "the new mestiza" into a consciousness of hope from past to present in Marina. Anzaldúa narrates that "by creating a new mythos – that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave – *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (80). Hence, it is not that Marina specifically creates a new consciousness of race, but rather of hope. The border, ultimately, provides Marina with the healing of the spirit, one which will allow her to confront her painful memories so that, by doing so, she will be able to construct a hopeful future. This ecology of hope lives on. After all, as Fuentes relates in a CBC Massey Lecture, "Latin America... can live with the future and with the past in its conflictive present. The future and the past are but the actual value we all give to our present, where the times of mankind, being many, are one" (74).

The hope that I am suggesting, therefore, is what will ultimately give Marina the

personal and cultural identity to live a fulfilled life in the border – to come to view the border as a unique space in which she can feel free, like she did in the maquila. When read this way, the ending of the story leaves the reader with a hopeful narrative, instead of a hopeless one. But to do so, to arrive at hope:

a reader must engage imaginatively, placing herself in the situation of others (empathy), to imagine how readers might speak to the situation, needs, and aspirations of characters and contexts different from her own (negotiation), and to imagine how the text might work differently, what endings it might envision, what pleasures it might inscribe, what alliances it might enable (world-making) (Castiglia 190).

This imagination is aided by the legendary figure of *La Malinche*, one of the three Mexican “madres” that haunts Marina’s consciousness. *La Malinche*, as does the border, gives agency, optimism and strength to Fuentes’s female protagonist, immediately moving border theory towards an ecology of hope.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

Cisneros's and Fuentes's literary works manage to move border theory towards an ecology of hope by way of the profound identity, political and personal motivations of protagonists Cleófilas and Marina. The mystical and quasi-mystical figures used in both texts, *La Llorona* and *La Malinche*, remind us that texts written in the U.S.-Mexico border carry with them tropes of despair and disillusionment, but also generate, with these same archetypes, radical hope.

The urge to move border theory toward a discourse of radical hope is an especially relevant task to undertake considering the United States' 2016 presidential election. Shattered, disembodied, fragmented and stripped of hope, more than half of the United States of America grieves the defeat of a leader who advanced social progress, gender equality, and minority inclusion. They must instead welcome, however reluctantly, the president-elect that promotes the exact opposite of these qualities that so promised the nation a prominent future.

And yet, amidst the heartbreak and despair experienced by the nation, it is the work of Lear that resonates loudly in light of these recent events. Just as Plenty Coups let his dream of the Chickadee-person guide him toward a hopeful endeavor that would revive his tribe, so must the nation participate in creating a new narrative of hope that will enable it to move forward in unity. As *Radical Hope* illustrates the maximum potential of an exemplary leader, Plenty Coups, it is evident that the creation of a hopeful narrative in contemporary U.S. politics must come not from its leaders, but perhaps from the most marginalized of its people – indeed perhaps those most historically suppressed

by the U.S. nationhood itself. When radical hope arises from such groups, then alternatives to hostile political climates are generated in overwhelming ways.

The texts of Cisneros and Fuentes illustrate a simple reality: that there is *always* hope left. No matter the circumstances, no matter the conditions, no matter the horrors. Like the Crow, Cleófilas and Marina have to face despair in order to arrive at hope. But Cleófilas, Marina and the Crow all face despair with agency – they adapt, they progress, they believe. This is how, by the end, they achieve and revel in radical hope. In short, hope can only exist where despair has once taken place. This, I believe, is what the texts of Cisneros and Fuentes tell us. This, I believe, is what makes hope transcend. And this, I believe, is what today’s political climate will bring.

We have seen the way Castiglia urges that hope is dependent on imagination. Hope depends on “an awareness that the world is multiple and fractious” and, hence, it can only operate “beyond comfort zones” (188). In this way, the discourse of radical hope can only happen within a multi-faceted, multicultural perspective, one that excludes the practice of misogyny, xenophobia, racism, and bigotry, and that instead is forward-looking, tolerant, global, and humane.

Fields in the humanities, I argue, are the highest social and academic vehicles for the dissemination of radical hope, as they practice such a multi-faceted perspective. *Hope starts in the humanities*. Castiglia recognizes this when he writes: “We in the humanities—called on repeatedly to justify our relevance to the “real” world—can answer that call through our practices of hopeful imagination and the democratic skills they undergird” (Castiglia 190). As educators, academics, and thinkers, it is our responsibility to engage the nation in a conversation that invites imagination and

hopefulness. In this light, the stories under examination here become extremely relevant, for they foster the exact conversations that the nation should be enveloped in today.

Lastly, given the above analysis, it seems almost inevitable to understand borders as dynamic agents of change *themselves*. Stained in histories of colonialism, nation-building and oppression, borders take on the same qualities of their living counterparts, subjugated time and time again to forces that are too powerful and too malignant. Thus, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Frontera* becomes a manifesto in which she challenges and rejects the constant apologies of Chicanos, Mexicans and indeed all Latinos to Anglos for their linguistic and cultural hybridity and asks of the reader: "Today we ask to be met halfway. This book is our invitation to you – from the new mestizas" (v). Her prose is poetic and powerful, often explaining the haunting of the borderlands as a residual overload of the long, difficult history of Mexico, in which betrayal and loss was and still is commonplace. But, much as Cleófilas and Marina are aided by the mythical remnants of their histories, so must the U.S.-Mexico border use its profound historicity and uniqueness to give a voice to its people and, hence, to actively transform its living past into an ecology of hope. Finally, I consider it imperative that our task be to push for a reading of hope: one that is difficult and radical in its energies, never lapsing into facile optimism. We must nurture what has moved the humanities since the beginning of their existence: the radical, irrational, instinctual, beautiful and eternal echo of hope.

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