5-2009

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CHICANA IDENTITY: RECOGNIZING THE HYBRID SELF IN DEMETRIA MARTÍNEZ'S MOTHER TONGUE

A Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2009

Major Subject: Literature and Cultural Studies

ABSTRACT

Cortina, Cathy Ann., Chicana Identity: Recognizing the Hybrid Self in Demetria Martínez's Mother Tongue. Master of Arts (MA), May 2009, 68 pp., references, 12 titles.

This study argues that although borders divide and fragment identity, there can be an embracement of a hybrid identity. Martínez's novel, *Mother Tongue,* uses the representation of a Mexican-American female who has recognized and endeavored to cross a border to better understand the complexities of her hybrid identity. This journey is represented through Mary, a young woman who resides on a physical border between the United States and Mexico and lives on a cultural border between New Mexico and El Salvador. Martínez presents the cultural, historical, linguistic, and psychological aspects of living on a border between the United States and Latin America throughout the course of the novel. A significant contribution to the existing Chicana Literary canon is the way in which Martínez illustrates how the presence of Jose Luís, a refugee from El Salvador, brings about Mary's recognition of her suppressed Latino/a identity and her endeavor to retain it.

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CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING BORDERS

...The bridge I must be
Is the bridge to my own power
I must translate
My own fears
Mediate
My own weaknesses

I must be the bridge to nowhere
But my true self
And then
I will be useful.

-From Donna Kate Rushin's *"The Bridge Poem"*

In this poem, Rushin emphasizes that individuals must draw strength from themselves when living on a border and attempting to bridge either side of it. This study presents the notion, alongside two prevailing Chicana feminist scholars, Gloria Anzaldúa and Sonia Saldívar-Hull, that although borders divide and fragment identity, there is also an embracement of a hybrid identity. Demetria Martínez's novel, *Mother Tongue,* uses the representation of a Chicana who has recognized and endeavored to cross a border to better understand the complexities of her hybrid identity. This journey is represented through Mary, a young woman who resides on a physical border between the United States and Mexico and lives on a cultural and psychological border between New Mexico and El Salvador. Martinez presents the cultural, historical, linguistic, and psychological aspects of living on a border between the United States and Latin America throughout the

course of the novel. In an interview with Karin Rosa Ikas, Martínez shares "the message of my work is to always question authority" (Chicana Ways, 2002, 124). Ikas explains her book that after Martínez's experience in court for indicted charges related to smuggling Central American refugees into the United States in 1987, "Martínez set the novel in the times of the Sanctuary Movement of the early eighties," which aids in understanding the parallels between the transnational identities of Mary and José Luis.

The text centers the life of what Ikas states is a "dreamy young Chicana, and her decision to provide sanctuary for the pseudonymous José Luis Romero, a refugee from El Salvador" (114). After the death of her mother, Mary lives alone in Albuquerque, New Mexico. With the passing of her mother, and an absent father, Mary finds sanctuary with her politically active godmother Soledad. Though Soledad's voice is primarily heard through letters, she serves as the parental authority in Mary's life. It is upon the recommendation of Soledad that Mary later becomes involved in the Sanctuary Movement that presided in the 1980s and in which Martínez's novel is set against. Soledad asks Mary to meet José Luis, a refugee from El Salvador, at the airport. The novel begins with the meeting of these two characters and the immediate attraction Mary feels for José Luis. Mary's desire throughout the novel is to pursue and develop a romantic relationship with José Luis. José Luis, on the other hand, seeks a haven from the atrocities he has faced in El Salvador.

Martínez illustrates how the presence of José Luis brings about Mary's recognition of her complex heritage as well as the effects on her personality. Throughout the novel, José Luis makes clear that he cannot fulfill Mary's desire of becoming intimately involved. His intentions of coming to the U.S. are solely to seek political

asylum; an endeavor that could prove fatal if he is denied. However, by the end of the novel, a relationship has been built between Mary and José Luis. Each of them pursues it for different reasons, but the result for Mary proves to be educational; as she learns about José Luis's life, she perceives her own life differently. The outcome of their relationship by the end of the novel is José Luis's journey back to El Salvador. He leaves Mary pregnant with their child, a boy who later grows up much in the same way as her mother: distanced from part of their heritage and identity. For Mary, the border remains an obstacle that she can never completely cross; in some respects she succeeds in bridging certain aspects of her U.S. identity and her Latino/a identity and in other respects, she fails. The aspects that she succeeds in bridging refer to the cultural and linguistic borders, while the aspects she fails to bridge refer to the historical and political borders. Though she may not connect with the historical or political borders that exist beyond her own border, she does succeed in recognizing the subtle political history of her border.

In his book, Border People: Life and Society in the U.S-Mexico Borderlands, Oscar J. Martínez states that, quite literally, a "border is a line that separates one nation from another" and that the "essential functions of a border are to keep people in their own space and to prevent, control, or regulate interactions among them" (5). Therefore, it is vital to include a discussion on the various types of borders before beginning an analysis on Demetria Martínez's novel, as it is pertinent to understand the notion that "regardless of location, then, borderlanders are subject to many similar experiences," as is illustrated by the relationship Martinez creates in her narrative (5).

LITERAL BORDERS

Influencing this paper, specifically, is what both Anzaldúa and Saldívar-Hull, in the field of Chicana feminism, say about "borders." Imperative to this paper is the understanding that there are several types of borders. The first is that of a literal border, for example, in the novel *Mother Tongue* there is a physical border between the United States of America and Mexico. Norma Klhan provides a better sense of the nature (socially, politically, and economically) of this particular border in her essay *Writing the Border: The Languages and Limits of Representation:*

> [The U.S.-Mexico border] began with the conflicts between the two colonizing powers, Spain and England. And they continued as the young United States expanded into territories occupied by the Indians and possessed first by Spain and later Mexico. In the process, a cultural and physical space known as "the border" emerged in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, it resulted in both a physical and psychological distancing...this...displacement rendered the region's former owners, the Mexicans, as "other," that is, constructed a different identity... (Common Border, Uncommon Paths, 1997, pg. 123)

At the heart of understanding the U.S.-Mexico border and border theory is Gloria Anzaldúa's work, *Borderlands/ La Frontera,* in which she claims (in the preface to the first edition) that "borderlands are physically present where two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, low,

middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy." One may note the repetition of the word "space" in both quotes, as it is one of the most appropriate terms to describe the distinct region of life on the border. A border is not just geography, but a "space" that houses the blending and merging of different people. Though they may be from very different backgrounds, the lives on the border bring about a strong similarity unprecedented by any other merging of people before.

The first section of Anzaldúa's book entitled "Atravesando Fronteras/ Crossing Borders" is particularly helpful to my reading of *Mother Tongue*, as well as providing a way to think about borders beyond geography; this section brings to question how a physical border connects to the internal border (i.e., psychological, identity conflicts) of those who reside within it. Literal borders can pull away from such aspects of race, ethnicity, and even culture. They also directly affect the identity of a person by creating an internal border that doesn't just arise when there is a physical rubbing of two peoples, but it can span across seas and nationalities; this type of border connects its inhabitants to others across the globe that live in a similar situation.

The struggle of being an inhabitant of a literal border dwells deep in the internal realm of a person's identity and raises conflicts that may never be completely resolved. In an introduction to the second edition of Anzaldúa's work, Saldívar-Hull states that the literal border is an "unnatural boundary" that creates "hybrid people" and a "multiple identity" (2). This term comes from the experiences of the majority of people who live on a border. It is not uncommon for these individuals to straddle two, or more, cultures, and for many this creates a sense of divided self. For these people, growing up with multiple traditions, customs, religions, and languages has fashioned an identity that belongs in

neither of their multiple cultures, but rather, in both at the same time. An identity that is shaped by various cultures is illustrated throughout various works of literature. One example is that of Levair's poem, *AmeRican,* in which the narrator cries out as a Puerto Rican who is no longer just an immigrant to the United States, but has planted roots in American's fertile ground and created a new history, one that is proud to be an American because living here still allows him to retain his native identity. Other literal borders apart from the geographical are the historical, linguistic, and cultural borders. These are considered literal borders because they continue to shape the lives of their inhabitants. While each shares the commonality of being a literal border, each functions in a rather different way. As a totality, the literal borders have an impact on the psychological borders, which involve the construction of one's identity.

The Historical

A historical border is that which pertains to the history of its imposition by one country upon another. By keeping with the same example of the physical border between the United States of America and Mexico, there is a long standing history of the determination to separate and divide Americans from Mexicans. For Gloria Anzaldúa, the historical border is portrayed through her account of the first inhabitants of South Texas and Mexico. In her first chapter Anzaldúa presents the notion that the first inhabitants of North America, called the Cochise, served as direct ancestors to many Mexican people. She continues her account by detailing what she calls the "parent culture" between the Aztecs and the Cochise, and later describes the invasion of Hernan Cortes and the Spaniards. It was these Spanish that later conquered the nation and reduced its Indian population to under seven million people. So it began that the Spanish intermarried with

the Mexican and American Indians to form what Anzaldúa deems is "an even greater *mestizaje*" (27). Martínez reiterates this in her interview with Ikas when she explains the mestiza in New Mexico: "...those of us who have been here in New Mexico...still feel this isolation from Mexico..." (115).

After introducing the reader to this history, Anzaldúa relates the Battle of the Alamo as an "illegal invasion" that " forced Mexico to fight a war to keep its Texas territory" and now serves as the turning point in which Mexicans are viewed as "cowardly and villainous" after their defeat. The history of the U.S.-Mexico border originates from this battle that became a "symbol that legitimized the white imperialist takeover. *Tejanos* [native Texans of Mexican descent] lost their land and, overnight, became the foreigners" (28). These "foreigners" are now the "new U.S. Minority: American citizens of Mexican descent" (2).

Throughout the rest of the first chapter, Anzaldúa writes extensively on the impact that the literal border had on the new minority:

> 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 conquest along with the land. The land established by the treaty as belonging to the Mexicans was soon swindled away from its owners. The treaty was never honored and restitution...has never been made. (29)

An actual physical border has now been placed between both countries, and Anzaldúa's purpose in relating its history is to never let it be forgotten. Through personal

testimonials, Anzaldúa defines the historical border as that which needs to be remembered, and only by remembering, can one endeavor to cross it. For Anzaldúa, writing about the historical border reveals her want to cross back to her indigenous roots: "My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance" (43). By resisting the idea that the border divides, Anzaldúa brings back its history to bridge an identity.

Saldívar-Hull also uses personal testimonials in her book, *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature* to show aspects of the historical border. Her first chapter, "Reading Tejana, Reading Chicana" highlights the poem "Hermano" by de Hoyos as one that depicts the voice of one who "scrutinizes the Anglo-American version of Texas and U.S. history" to one that "undermines…claim of ownership" (17). If one reads further, Saldívar-Hull begins to speak about the language of the border connecting to its history.

The Linguistic

The linguistic border is classified as a literal border because it is a realism of the several languages present on a border. If one takes into consideration the border between the U.S. and Mexico that Anzaldúa, Saldívar-Hull, and Demetria Martínez in *Mother Tongue* writes about, there is the Spanish language native to the Mexicans and there is English that is native or customary to the Americans. What happens, though, is these languages begin to merge together as people from both sides also merge. The blending of languages is a characteristic of a person's hybrid identity. Saldívar-Hull calls to question the use of switching between English and Spanish throughout texts serve as a "larger cultural critique of how the dominant group enforces domination through language" (22).

This is the case in Martínez's novel, as Mary finds herself understanding that her ancestral language has been suppressed by her living in the U.S. Her literal border has imposed itself upon the tongues and voices of inhabitants like her, and leaves them criticized for either not speaking English or Spanish correctly and even more so for blending the two together. Saldívar-Hull relates in her book the recognition of switching between English and Spanish freely as a practicing form of language in literature to portray the lives of those on a literal border: "Many of us had never before seen mestiza language with its characteristic code-switching between English and Spanish in print as legitimate literary discourse" (17).

In the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa states her purpose for the switching between English and Spanish throughout her book was to the border serves as a third world country in which its inhabitants do not fully belong to either side; many have become foreigners in their own home while others have migrated to the area. Therefore, the languages that are both native and brought to the border serve as a whole language: "the language of the Borderlands. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born."

The Cultural

In the second chapter of her book, "Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan," Anzaldúa asserts, under the subheading of "Cultural Tyranny" how culture and family have inhibited the development of one's identity. She claims that it is "culture that forms our beliefs" and the reality of our world exists only through that culture (38). It is culture that "keeps women in rigidly defined roles" and are "made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children" (39).Her notion is that culture is taught through

and by the family structure. According to Anzaldúa, the Chicano cultural tyranny is put into practice through patriarchy, and it is the man who sets and imposes cultural norms on the woman of color. It is patriarchy that expresses the woman of color to choose one of three directions: "...the Church as a nun...the streets as a prostitute, or...the home as a mother" (39). Anzaldúa, speaking as a border woman herself, claims that because they are left without any further options, the woman of color today has endeavored to create another direction that enables them to break from a submissive tradition by means of "...entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons" (39). However, in *Mother Tongue,* Martínez contradicts this by presenting a man, José Luis, as the person who exposes the woman of color, Mary, to the complexities of her hybrid identity and therefore enables her to embrace her unique self. Unlike what Anzaldúa argues, José Luis does not restrict Mary to certain roles, in fact, it is Mary who determines their roles at the beginning of their relationship. It is Mary who fantasizes about a domestic life with José Luis where they can "aid la revolucíon" that she has adopted by knowing him (18).

Saldívar-Hull discusses this topic seen in Martínez's work through the narratives of Helena María Viramontes. She seeks to reform tyranny of the family heavily presented in Anzaldúa's work. The second section of Chapter 5 in *Feminism on the Border*, entitled "I Hear the Women's Wails and I Know Them To Be My Own," illustrates the contrast to Anzaldúa's position. Saldívar-Hull questions how the stories in Viramontes's work call for, and not against, a new family structure: "Viramontes's stories are not a quest for origins; what the historias offer are alternatives. In these cuentos, she seeks to transform and rework the concept of the Chicano family, not to destroy it" (131). Whereas

Anzaldúa sought to be relinquished from the patriarchy of the Chicana family, what both Martínez and Saldívar-Hull seek to expose is that one must not run away from the tyranny, instead one must attempt to change the persisting ideals: "Viramontes's stories remind feminist readers of the urgency…to transform unquestioned 'traditions' " (132). Anzaldúa's notion of patriarchy imposing rigid boundaries for the woman of color is not always the case, as both Martínez and Saldívar-Hull have pointed out.

Looking at a close reading of the second chapter of *Borderlands,* the section entitled "Intimate Terrorism: Life in the Borderlands" is of specific interest. Here, Anzaldúa speaks about the safety of the woman of color within her world in the border. Moreover, she implies that the woman of color living on a border does "not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her…" Because the woman of color lives in an in-*between* world, she cannot feel safe "within the inner life of her Self" (42). The self, with a capital "s," refers to her identity. It is the ever-conflicting identity that inhabits the soul of the woman of color. When she is being pushed upon from both sides of her world, she becomes "Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the space between the different worlds she inhabits." Here, Anzaldúa uses the term "space" to communicate the realm in which the woman of color subsides in, a place that she cannot fully build an identity on. In *Mother Tongue* however, Martínez writes away from this type of space where a woman cannot build an identity. In the novel, the character Mary succeeds in recognizing and bridges large aspects of the border she lives on. The theory that Anzaldúa suggests that a woman of color is never fully comfortable do not take precedence in Martínez's novel. On the other hand, the heroine of the story is able to recognize that being different from other characters in the work is not a bad thing at all.

Anzaldúa's view that "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" is rather useful in reading Martínez's novel, *Mother Tongue,* because Martínez illustrates Mary's recognition that the border she lives on includes more than separation of nationalities; it symbolizes the disassociation of those who are "different" and makes it known that there is something wrong or ill about those who live on the other side of the United States. Though Mary is presented as having lived on the American side of the border all her life, it is not until the recognition of the border that enables her see the disassociation that lies within her internal self, and thus she begins to see for the first time the inequality of her culture and its suppression of her Latin identity.

A border inhabitant's identity is one that is not typically experienced by people who do not live near a border. When the U.S. decides to impose a literal border, it also indirectly claimed that there is something wrong with the inhabitants because a part of them had created an identity that merged both worlds of the border. Instead of embracing each side of the border and promoting a merging of the two, the literal border seems to send the message that there can only be one side to the border: the better one. One may ask who it is that defines these terms, and what Anzaldúa called the safe and unsafe. For her, it is the "legitimate" inhabitants, more specifically, those in power. For the people in power, illegitimate inhabitants are "those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (25).

Saldívar-Hull relates her personal experience of straddling a cultural border by stating that "...we existed between Mexican and American, between rich and poor, between the United States and Mexico" (*Feminisms on the Border,* 11). In placing the

cultural aspects before the literal border, she depicts the affects that the border had on her life. Her solution to this matter, she states earlier, was to switch between the two as one flips a light switch. Just as Anzaldúa claims it is cultural tyranny that affects the identity of the inhabitant, Saldívar-Hull prove this in her memory of her mother and teachers: "...Mother believed we could change our identities as easily as the teacher would change our names-expunging the Mexican paternity would ensure her and her children's future as Americans. Nothing would be lost" (3). For Mary in *Mother Tongue,* this is not the case. She cannot change her identity from one to the other. It does not work that way at all. In actuality, she must embrace both sides together as hybrid identity—constantly seeking to educate themselves with their suppressed identity—in Mary's case, her Latino/a identity.

Still, many questions persist throughout a reading of Anzaldúa's work: How is it possible, for a Chicana living in between worlds, to create a strong identity? If all one does is experience the rejections of multiple worlds, where will they have *space* to create an identity? These questions also arise in the reading of Demetria Martínez's novel as well. Does Mary create an identity between two worlds? Anzaldua answers these questions through her theory of the "mestiza consciousness," and the "coatlicue state," as well as relating her personal journey of separating herself from her culture. Anzaldúa states: "The ambivalence from the class of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza's* dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness" (100). Earlier, she argued that culture played a large role in constructing one's beliefs, and later, an identity. For Anzaldúa, she "will not glorify those aspects of" her "... culture that have injured..." her

(44). It is this angry drive that makes her "feel competent enough on the outside and secure enough on the inside to live life…" (43). The questions posed earlier, though they arise in her readings, are not the questions Anzaldúa seeks to answer when she writers her text. For her, it is a primary purpose to find an "accounting with all three cultures-white, Mexican, and Indian" and the "freedom to carve and chisel my own face," to take back the beliefs constructed so readily by her culture and erect her own. As one reads *Mother Tongue*, however, this is not the solution for the character of Mary. Mary does not seek to put away the beliefs she has lived her whole life, whether they be defined by her American identity or not. Instead, she finds that recognizing the true atrocities of history in other parts of the world shapes an appreciation for her lost Latino/a identity. She does not ignore her U.S. identity at all as Anzaldúa suggests, instead she blends the two together.

In her fourth chapter, Gloria Anzaldúa speaks about a state that one reaches in which they realize a truth about themselves and yet, cannot foresee confronting this very truth:

> My resistance, my refusal to know some truth about myself brings on that paralysis, depression…At first I feel exposed and opened to the depth of my dissatisfaction. Then I feel myself closing, hiding, holding myself together rather than allowing myself to fall apart. (70)

Anzaldúa extends this idea of resisting one's truth throughout the final chapters of the first section of *Borderlands: La Frontera* and the chapter "How to Tame a Wild

Tongue." Facing the truth of one's culture and identity struggle is directly presented as the case of a border identity:

> ...alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity-we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the border conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. (85)

Here again, Anzaldúa illustrates her ideas that because she is not wholly one or the other, that makes her less valuable. Though Anzaldúa only mentions two cultural values in the above passage, it is plausible to conclude that this is the case for many peoples that straddle multiple cultural worlds: "Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes...a cultural collision"(100). At the onset of Chicana feminism, this might have been a prevailing thought, but as Martínez relates in her novel, this is no longer the case for new generations of Chicana women. In reality, the hybrid and blending of two worlds is one strong culture in itself.

While Anzaldúa offers no single solution to this dilemma, she does offer suggestions to ease border women of their inner conflict: "At some point, on our way to a new consciousness...the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once, see through the serpent and eagle eyes" (100). She

uses the symbols of serpent and eagle eyes to refer to the white dominant culture being the primary catalyst for the border woman's internal identity conflict.

The literal borders that have been presented thus far bring to light the repercussions on the psychological border. As Anzaldúa and Saldívar-Hull have pointed out, there are several types of borders and my contribution is to show how each aspect of the literal border (the historical, linguistic, and cultural) distinguish the characters Mary and Jose Luis. Along with this chapter, and by analyzing Demetria Martínez's novel *Mother Tongue,* I aim to show the ways in which this duality occurs as well as offering how the woman of color may create an identity that bridges these aspects together.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BORDERS

Sonia Saldívar-Hull compares Chicana identity to W.E.B. Du Bois's prevailing theory of "double consciousness," which he describes as "...a sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others." This is especially true for the Chicana who sees her identity as a reflection of what society and her culture have imposed upon her; (as will be presented in a forth coming chapter, Martínez's heroine Mary, in *Mother Tongue*, sees her identity taking shape through José Luis. He serves as the mirror in which she bases her identity against). Anzaldúa later contributes another suggestion when she states that the Chicana must decide to "...disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory" (101). The suggestions she offers to merge or disengage from border conflicts can be seen in Martínez's novel. Throughout this thesis, I aim to extend Anzaldúa's theories of "mestiza consciousness" to *Mother Tongue,* that one way to solve a dual identity is not to solve it at all. One must cease viewing dual identities as problems. Instead, the woman of

color must take the positives from both worlds, become strong in both cultures and allow the hybrid identity to serve as a bridge to shift in and out of each culture or cultures. Moreover, Martínez's text demonstrates the strength that can be occurred when one educates themselves on the realities of the world that surrounds us. As stated earlier in this chapter, Mary in *Mother Tongue* succeeds in erasing certain aspects of her border that discourage independence while seeking to establish an identity by means of constructing a bridge in which she can take the positives from each side.

Of great contribution to my reading of *Mother Tongue,* are the differences between both Chicana feminists. While Anzaldúa focused primarily on Mexican immigrants, Saldívar-Hull calls into question the lives of other immigrants, such as those from Central America:

> The narratives transform the concept of familia in the same way that the infusion of Central American refugees fleeing civil wars transforms already politically diverse Mexican-origin communities…The new immigrants bring with them histories, political affiliations, and cultural practices that form constellations, narratives closely paralleling those of Americans of Mexican origin. (126)

Saldívar-Hull speaks about the peoples that are left out of Anzaldúa's text. Though the literal border has affected the Tejanos, there are also those who have migrated from other countries. They bring with them their own history from their homeland and become tangled up in the web of historical, linguistic, and cultural borders.

To better present the cultural border in *Mother Tongue,* it is my intention to give a closer analysis of the character José Luis, a political refugee from El Salvador, who has experienced the reality of being forbidden entry to the United States. When one does not belong anywhere, their identity becomes lost as well. For many, like Jose Luis, borders are present when people are "prohibited or forbidden" based on certain attributes. Anzaldúa's view that "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them"* is useful to understand José Luis's predicament. His story in *Mother Tongue* will be presented as the agent that lifts the blindfold of unity the U.S. seeks to keep on the surface. His presence in the novel makes the reader aware that there is a difference between people on both sides of the border. For those, like Mary, who reside near the border, their lives have been shaped by both sides.

The psychological border is also a place between gender, race, sexuality, and class. Anzaldúa continues her definition of a border by saying that border inhabitants constantly exist in a "space," without a homeland to move toward or away from. Anzaldúa's use of the word "space" when she defines a border is chiefly important to this study because it is the "space" between history, language, and culture that draws closer and closer together until there is one identity reigning within the same space. Anzaldúa speaks more about this "space" when she claims that it is up to the individual to create their own world, despite the tyranny of history, language, or culture: "I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face…if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture…with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture" (44).

In Mother Tongue, although she lives on this physical border, Mary learns to hold on to the contributions of her culture from the other side, the side that has been attempted to be forgotten by the United States. When such a person living on a border creates their own "space," as Mary does throughout the course of the novel, only then can they begin the construction of their identity. Mary, however, does not physically leave her home on the border for the purpose of creating her own space; instead, the world comes to her through José Luis as he brings with him the realities of being on the side that is most unwelcome to the U.S.

Although Anzaldúa attributes the psychological border primarily to culture, she does justify the realistic notion that there is also a choice involved in every person:

> And there in front of us is the crossroads and choice: we feel a
> victim where someone else is in control and therefore responsible
> and to blame (being a victim and transferring the blame on culture,
> mother, father, ex-lover, friend, absolves me of my responsibility),
> or to feel strong, and, for the most part, in control. (43)

Whereas it is possible that the internal conflict has been created by external forces, there is also a point where one must release the blame and accept the priority to change. Saldívar-Hull describes this female solidarity as being persistent throughout Helena Maria Viramontes's text, specifically. Saldívar presents commonalities in the demand for female solidarity when she states that "Viramontes is not content to present a reductionist critique of how women are used as agents of the patriarchy and therefore responsible as reproducers of their own oppression. 'The Moths' must also be read as a complex story of female solidarity" (135).

Towards the beginning of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa poses a statement that clearly centers on the logic for conducting this literary analysis of *Mother Tongue*: "...the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place" (85). This integration she speaks of appears in Demetria Martínez's novel; the woman of color is finding a way to integrate her multiple worlds while settling her internal conflicts. Her life in the border is one in which she merges multiple worlds; the woman of color does not choose one side to identify with, instead she takes from each, forming a hybrid identity.

Perhaps the final key contributions towards my literary analysis on Demetria Martínez's novel *Mother Tongue,* is Saldívar-Hull's own analysis of one story in Viramontes's book, "The Cariboo Café," in which she argues that "feminism on the border" extends the principles of Chicana feminism in a transnational context. Drawing from "The Cariboo Café" for support, she states that feminism on the border "makes the leap from filiation to affiliation, from ties to men and women of her own blood to political ties with peoples across national border who enter the United States in search of political liberation" (145). The women in Viramontes's story, "Growing" reveals a new aspect of "border" that Anzaldúa leaves out, and which I find prevalent in Martinez's story, the border of puberty: "Deceptive in its simplicity, "Growing" presents the girl at the border of womanhood...It is indeed a woman's story, commenting on the strictures placed on the Chicana female as she approaches puberty, a time when her sexually maturing body is claimed by the father's word 'MUJER' " (141). The young woman in the story "Growing" not only has to "struggle with a body in transition" but also the "cultural transition that...family must undergo" as they move from Mexico to the United

States (142). Thus, she must attempt to succeed in crossing through these borders. As seen in Mother *Tongue,* Mary grows from a young woman who is rather ignorant of certain aspects of her border to a woman who freely embraces Jose Luis's pride in his identity which thus allows her to create and identity of her own. Saldívar concurs with Gayatri Spivak's assertion that in the "Chicana borderland, there can be no closure" or aid in constructing an identity:

> ...activist authors do not often present subaltern women as emancipator figures with solutions. For sub proletarian women of the Third World-both the resisting women and the incorporated women, in the 'real' world as in the imagined world of fictions-there is often 'no opportunity for collective resistance.' As Chicanas come to a structural understanding of family, we see the urgency of reconstituting the meaning of familia-from filiation to affiliation. (143)

In "The Cariboo Café," Viramontes gives an "explicit connection between Chicanas and refugees from Central America" that Saldívar defines as being the "Chicana feminist's oppositional stance against the political power of the U.S. government and its collaborators south of the border." Like *Mother Tongue*, Saldívar presents Viramontes's text as one that "shows us how a Chicana oppositional art form can also become an arena that reflects politics" (143-145). Furthermore, Martínez wrote a novel that not only depicted her intentions, but also conveyed the parallels of transnational identities. As Saldívar's chapter on Viramontes comes to a close, she reiterates the Spivak notion of the unattainable closure that women on the border face:

> Irresolution, or the refusal of closure in Viramontes's political text, signals a complex project currently being undertaken by Chicana feminist writers, critics, and cultural workers. Together they are working to undercut old stereotypes and open up new possibilities for empowerment by forging a self-representation of Chicanas by Chicanas, women who insist on a self-identifier that marks their political subjectivity as feminist as well as their working-class identification (159).

In her book, *Feminism on the Border, Chicana Gender Politics and Literature,* Saldívar-Hull uses the term "transnational" to describe specific types of texts that parallel each other. This is a key term when discussing borders. Whereas borders divide and separate, transnational texts seek to provide easy movement between both sides of a border, and *Mother Tongue* illustrates characteristics of each aspect of literal borders as well as their effect in creating psychological borders. Saldívar-Hull states that a transnational text is one that"...chronicles previously contained experiences of life on the border" and captures the "struggles endured by newly arrived Latina/o immigrants inhabiting the crowded tenements of urban barrios and border towns" (125). Her reading of Viramontes's "Cariboo Café" in *Moths and Other Stories* parallels my reading of *Mother Tongue.* To take Anzaldúa a step further, Saldívar-Hull states that these transnational texts "transform traditional cautionary tales of women's instability" and the "feminist writers on the border forge complex narratives that bring to bear the nuances of the theories of intersectionality" (126).

Mother Tongue, a Chicana text, rightfully so as the narrative centers the life of a Chicana woman is an important text because it calls into question several ideas. One being the role of men in its text. Many Chicana text authors, like Sandra Cisneros, depict men in a negative light throughout their writings; one might ask why that is so? It seems that in these types of texts there is an anti-patriarchal pattern of writing that stemmed perhaps as a result of the Chicana movement, one in which Mexican-American females sought to establish social, cultural, and political identities emerging in the early 1980s. However, this text steers in the opposite direction, as it is the presence of a man that aids a Chicana woman to recognize the border she lives on as well as her hybrid identity, rather than hinder her independence. Another idea that *Mother Tongue* reiterates what Sharon Navarro discusses in her article "Border Narratives: The Politics of Identity and Mobilization." The idea that "life stories play a significant role in the formation of identity" is observed in Martinez's text as well (129). Because Demetria Martínez writes typically as a journalist, the fact that *Mother Tongue* is a novel contributes to the idea that the story told aids in the fashioning of identity. Navarro also discusses Saldívar-Hull's work as "suggesting...that social scientist reassess women's and men's diverse experiences in terms of gender, class, and race" (136). In Martínez's work, this distinction is made clear by the difference between Mary's identity to Jose Luis's identity and the idea that she can only relate to him on two levels: culturally and linguistically. However, Mary finds that she is unable to fully relate to the extent of Jose Luis's historical and political situation. It is my intent, throughout this thesis, to show the specific ways in which Mary reaches these points, as well as recognizing her difference from José Luis as that with a hybrid identity.

CHAPTER TWO

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BORDERS

In her novel, Martínez practices what Barbara Christian observes in her article "The Race for Theory," when she creates a story of an intimate relationship between a man and a woman in order to depict how living on a border impacts identity. Christian states in her article that "theorizing…is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, and our very humanity?" (*Cultural Critique, 6).* In *Mother Tongue,* the two primary characters share these same types of assaults, but through different experiences. The novel configures these assaults through Mary and José Luis's encounters, as well as their survival. Though Demetria Martínez is a journalist, it is only in the writing of a fictional story that the question is raised about borders impacting identity. In *Mother Tongue*, the emotional borders in a personal relationship evoke a metaphor for the cultural, historical, and political borders in which the characters exist. Mary, the protagonist of Martínez's novel, an impulsive, stubborn young Mexican-American woman living in Albuquerque, New Mexico and looking for something or someone to change her life, finds herself weaving a bridge with José Luis, an El Salvadorian refugee depicted as having experienced the atrocities of history in his home.

Mother Tongue is also written in such a manner that transcends various literary borders. Though much of the novel is written in narrative format, Martínez includes other formats of writing such as poetry, journal entries, letters, horoscopes, and even the occasional grocery list and recipe guide. The narrative is primarily told through first-person point-of-view, that of an older Mary looking back on her relationship with José Luis as well as its impacts on her identity. There are times throughout the text in which this much older and mature Mary interjects the story to explain certain scenes and thoughts to the reader. Each of the literary formats Martínez uses is a distinct observation of the relationship between the two primary characters.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The narrative commences with the first meeting between Mary and Jose Luis. Mary's first impression of him is this: "His nation chewed him up and spat him out like a piñon shell, and when he emerged from an airplane one late afternoon, I knew I would one day make love with him" (3). This opening statement has two significant points of interest, the first being Mary's description of José Luis's history of oppression in his native country, the second being her instant attraction to him. As Martínez continues to elaborate on Mary's first meeting with José Luis and her initial desire to connect to him we learn that Mary wants to save him, she wants to "take a war out of a man" (4). This is also the point in which the reader, retrospectively, sees how Mary wishes to reconstruct herself based on José Luis's identity by placing herself in such a role. Mary is also drawn to his Latin features, the "Tibetan eyelids, Spanish hazel irises, Mayan cheekbones dovetailing delicately as matchsticks." Mary's character reads the victims face in José Luis when she states: "No, he had no warrior's face. Because the war was still inside him.

Time had not yet leached its poisons to his surfaces" (4). Mary thus chooses herself as José Luis's savior because she feels he is unaware of the extent of the damage caused by his history.

Mary eloquently states that José Luis's presence opens up something in her: "before he [José Luis] appeared at the airport gate, I had no clue such a place existed inside of me. But then it opened up like an unexpected courtyard that teases dreamers with sunlight, bougainvillea, terra-cotta pots blooming marigolds" (4). This display of romantic notions that José Luis's presence has awakened in Mary brings about a new implication that there is something lacking in this character that is sought out in José Luis's character, though his temperament is just as, if not more, broken. Clearly admitting to the attempt to save José Luis from his past, Mary tries to create her own space in his life, perhaps as a means to establish meaning and purpose in her own. Presented best through the character's voice, the older Mary also states that:

> His struggles were too large and unwieldy to be folded up and dropped into my palm like alms. In the end, I had no choice but to love him. Desire was not good enough. Love would ripen in the light of time we spent together, like an arranged marriage. Except that I was doing the arranging. And calling it fate. (19)

Martínez illustrates self-indulged thinking that the character Mary yields to, as she pushes aside any bit of scruples that mistake friendship for love. But it is the desire that Mary has for José Luis that does not let her surrender and it is her permanence that forges the ground for the reader's education on global borders and their connection to identity construction; it is through her relationship with José Luis that Mary's eyes are opened to

the realities of her world and the border that she resides on. These passages suggest that Mary is objectifying José Luis; that perhaps unconsciously she will use him for her own self discovery-that Latin features, war, and oppression are all part of her history and heritage as well. As she seeks to save him, she also seeks to save herself.

As Donna Kate Rushin's poem illustrates, the character of Mary is one who has spent much of her time projecting her own identity onto someone else, until she comes to realize much later in life that she had been objectifying José Luis. She speaks specifically about her perception of men in her life as "mirrors" which aid in her ability to perceive herself better:

> From day one I looked for ways to graft a piece of
> myself onto him, to become indispensable. My gestures
> were perfectly timed, touching his hand, twisting my
> hair, excusing myself to touch up my lipstick—ordinary
> actions that would reverse the tides of my life as in the
> theories of physicists who say the dance of a butterfly
> can cause volcanoes to erupt. (15)

This metaphor can be paralleled to Mary and José Luis—that Mary tries to use her femininity as a means to project her identity on José Luis, as well as save him, but she does not realize how closely she is in danger of an erupting revelation that she cannot admit. José Luis's history of oppression is something she can never connect to. Mary states that this perception of using men as mirrors was one of "supreme selfishness" and she admits to a "void" that seemed only to be filled when a man was a part of her life. For Mary, men are the means in which she defines herself. When she meets José Luis, he

becomes a mirror. The more she learns about José Luis, the more she tries to create a new understanding in herself.

Martínez includes a poem, written by the character Mary, which fully describes the motivation and intent for her relationship with José Luis: "Let me be/the bridge, / those troubled/waters, /his eyes, / Let me be" (20). The exact use of the word bridge is of utmost significance to this study, as it is Mary's objective to be the bridge that connects José Luis to her world: "And as we shook hands, I saw everything—all that was meant to be or never meant to be, but that I would make happen by taking reality in my hands and bending it like a willow branch" (5). Taking matter into her own hands, Mary chooses to be the bridge that leads José Luis from his sorrowful past to her "reality" that includes saving her in return for her saving him.

This glimpse of Mary's life prior to meeting José Luis portrays a young woman acting out in self-destructive behavior, wanting nothing more than to find a center to her world to help give reason to her existence. To Mary, meeting José Luis was a way out of this life: "To prove the gods at least were interested in me, I courted disaster, set out to love a man I knew full well would go away. Falling in love was a way of pinching myself...To love a man more than one's self was a socially acceptable way for a woman to be insane" (27).

As Mary and José Luis begin to spend more time together, the essence of Martínez's book reveals the notion that relationships also contribute significantly to the comprehension of one's identity. The story of Mary and José Luis's relationship, specifically as it is depicted in *Mother Tongue*, is a precise example of a connection that aids the protagonist Mary in constructing her identity. Before reaching this point,

however, where both Mary and José Luis pass easily into an understanding of each other, Mary undergoes a transformation that ultimately leads her to the conclusion that she, nor anyone, can be the sole savior of José Luis. Because she decided early on to be the one fated to "save" José Luis from the atrocities he has faced, Mary mistakes the idea that there can be closure to her fragmented identity for falling in love with José Luis (48).

As stated shortly after the first meeting, Mary admits she "...was one of those women whose fate is to take a war out of a man..." but "...had no clue such a place existed"(4). This quote can be clarified in several ways, one being that Mary views Jos José e Luis as a therapeutic project; if Mary can take care of José Luis, then perhaps she has meaning for her life after all. Perhaps her "center" is really being the "center" for someone else. Consequently, this wanting-to-save feeling only causes Mary to realize her naivety to José Luis's situation as well as her own. "Yes, from the very beginning I wanted him. In that time of my life, men were mirrors that allowed me to see myself at different angles." Her relationships with men, Mary continues to explain, served only one function; men were objects to aid in her identity construction. José Luis's relationship began no different, Mary saw something in him that she found lacking in herself, therefore she finds it easier to try and save José Luis rather than herself. Conflict begins to arise when the reader concludes just this: José Luis is far too wounded and Mary has only been projecting her own needs onto him.

As the relationship between the characters progresses, the intentions of Mary begin as an attempt to create a bridge between herself and José Luis, as well as José Luis and what she deems is reality. Mary's idea of reality is explicitly stated when she would daydream of times when she "would not only marry José Luis, but...buy a little house in

the Valley, live on black beans and tortillas, and aid la revolucion with computer bulletins to Central America…" It was during these "runway of dreams" that José Luis would bring her back down to his reality by stopping her wish fulfillments. Ultimately, both characters create bridges that lead to the many aspects of the history, language, and culture that they reside in. Martínez states this conclusion eloquently by separating each character's role in their relationship: "His life as destined to be a statement about the times; I was to suffer the times in my body. His fate was to be a refugee; mine was to love one" (36).

In many ways, we find parallels between José Luis and Mary's experiences. For example, they both undergo a name change. Mary states:

> …we have to pick a name for you, one that you would answer to in your sleep…He said, Roberto, Juan, any name will do…He said, in my country names turn up on lists. Or in the mouths of army officers at U.S. embassy parties. A few drinks later, someone, somewhere disappears. Pick an ordinary name. (13)

In Mary's case, José Luis renames her, "For no reason I could discern, he looked at me and asked if he could call me María. I said of course, it's just Spanish for Mary. He said no, Mary is English for María" (73). These name changes both show that crossing geographic borders affects identity. In José Luis's case coming to American forces him to abandon his Latino/a identity. In Mary's case, the name change suggests a rediscovery of her Latino/a heritage that living in the U.S. has suppressed. The border Mary is living on involves trying to understand and somehow survive these two different cultures.

BORDERS AND BRIDGES

Mary makes clear that her relationship with José Luis was one in which they built bridges each day "by which we transcended borders of culture, language, and history" (48). José Luis not only helped Mary realize that she truly was living on a border (between the United States and Latin America), he also represents the Latino/a culture that she knows is an important part of her identity that has been buried or repressed by the dominant culture. As their conversations lead "back and forth into one another's worlds…" it is José Luis that carries her "over the threshold to a life more spacious than the one… inhabited" (49-50). The more she acquaints herself with José Luis, the closer she gets to understand this border, as well as its many characteristics and most importantly, how she must adapt to living in such a place.

A powerful line presented in the characters first meeting are the fourteen words in which Mary begins to recognize the aspect of borders, she states, "His was a face I'd seen in a dream. A face with no borders…" (3). This is the first, sudden statement in the novel that infers Mary has borders in her life: cultural, historical, and political borders that will be uncovered by her relationship with José Luis. One way to interpret this quote is that Mary is becoming aware that there is the possibility in having a whole identity. An identity that arises when one is deeply connected with their country, its culture, and its history. It is possible to interpret this as Mary noticing the overwhelming existence of borders in her life; she is strongly attracted to a man with none. José Luis has none because he has lived his entire life in El Salvador, he has been constantly surrounded by his Latin heritage.

In the novel, Mary's relationship with José Luis uncovers several literal borders; the first observed in José Luis's character is the cultural border. Mary soon discovers his confidence in his culture, a confidence that she finds lacking in her own life. Originating from El Salvador, José Luis is sure of his heritage, having been so closely immersed in it throughout his life. Mary is one who knows very little of her Mexican culture, having been so distant from her true ancestry. Living under the illusion that she is a "North American to the core…" Mary is a product of living in two worlds, the U.S. and Latin America. In a passage about watching José Luis during his work day, Mary reveals the inability to make sense of her own life: "It's the draining away of color that happens in a woman's life when she can't name her own reality" (55). Until José Luis appeared in her life, Mary's reality was fixed through a narrow scope; a perspective that she felt was suffocating her. But when he arrived, the relationship she built with him widened her perspective on the life she has been living so far: a life in which her Mexican culture is lacking.

Earlier in the narrative, Mary states that she "needed a mystery—someone outside of ordinary time who could rescue me from an ordinary life, from my name, Mary, a blessing name that had become my curse." At age nineteen, I was looking for a man to tear apart the dry rind of that name so I could see what fruit fermented inside" (16). Here, Martínez reveals Mary's favoring of the dominant culture over the Latin American culture. It is important to understand that Mary has lived in the U.S. all her life and has adopted its ideals. More importantly, she has found that she is living in the U.S. has suppressed her Latino/a culture.

In an attempt to draw out this culture, Mary's access to José Luis is through Soledad, her mentor and godmother. Even before she meets José Luis, Mary is reaching out to understand her identity through Soledad. In a letter to Mary, Soledad answers an unstated, but presumed question: "Mija- Of course I'll teach you about the old remedios" (108). *Remedios* are natural remedies that many Latin Americans, like Mexicans, believe will heal all types of afflictions. In many Latin American cultures, it is standard to find women that have the talent for this type of work. Many across the countries are known as *curanderas*. These healers are typically associated with the native indigenous cultures of Mexico and all throughout Latin America; this native perspective on healing has also typically been treated by the Anglo-American culture as secondary to modern science. According to Soledad, this native practice of healing is now being viewed with respect, "The gringos don't laugh at us anymore when we boil up our little plants." The women are powerful in this role as healers and take strength in being female. Being a healer is a privileged status of women in the Latino/a culture. Mary's interest in the old ways of science proves Soledad proud, "And now I can thank God you're interested, if not in politics, then at least in the old ways." Some important items Soledad lists for Mary to begin her career as a healer include "Garlic and onions (eat them all the time, you should also place sliced onions on windowsills to kill cold germs), Ajenjibre (for hangovers). Albacar (for cramps)...Jojoba oil (for beautiful skin), Manzanilla (for insomnia)" (110). This passage is an affirmation of the specificity of the New Mexican culture and in an attempt to sum up the important ingredients of natural medicines; Soledad mentions one medicine that rises above all others: food. Interestingly enough, though, Mary turns to

José Luis as her healer, much like the people of the Mexican culture turn to food for the foundation of their healing.

The cultures of many Latin American countries center around family and food; to Soledad "food is the best medicine" and "it's because we've gotten too far away from the foods of our ancestors" that have left many Mexicans astray from their healthy life. The ancestors that Soledad speaks of are the first inhabitants of Latin America who understood natural health, and by "mak[ing] every effort to eat what our elders ate, eat with the seasons, and eat what is grown nearby" the Mexican-American, like Mary, draw out New Mexican culture context (110). In this passage Mary is attempting to cross her cultural border by reaching out to Soledad. At the same time, Martínez is using Soledad as a means to affirm the idea that nurturing the Mexican-American identity through food is specific to New Mexico. By reaching out to Soledad, Mary is finding more reasons to connect herself to José Luis; she looks to him as the ultimate healer of the rift between her U.S. identity and her Latino/a identity.

Another literal border in the novel that is brought about by Mary and José Luis's relationship in *Mother Tongue* is Mary's adoption of the Spanish language; specifically brought on by José Luis. This can be seen as one instance in the novel in which Mary succeeds to cross a border. Mary, a self-proclaimed Mexican-American, states that she struggled with her ancestral language of Spanish: "My Spanish was like an old car, parts missing or held together with clothes hanger wire, but it got me where I wanted to go" (11). This struggle in language is inextricably linked to identity, so much so that the title of the novel reveals just that, *Mother Tongue*. The language of origins that identifies who we are in this world, where we came from, and as Mary learns, where we are going.

Though most of the novel centers on Mary and Jose Luis, Soledad proves again to be of crucial importance in Mary's passage through a linguistic wall between English and Spanish.

Soledad, Mary's godmother, was the one who arranged for Mary and José Luis to meet. Working as a political activist, Soledad keeps in contact with Mary through letters: "Dear Mary, Mijita, if you must lose your head over that boy, at least apply yourself and use the experience to shore up your Spanish." Soledad reveals to Mary that language, especially their native Spanish, is something no one can take away: "But the language is mine forever and ever" (41). Since Mary admits to "grafting a piece of herself" on men, adopting the Spanish language, which José Luis only speaks, will only allow her more access to his heart.

In a journal entry dated August 1982, Mary states the connection between learning Spanish and love. After José Luis has spoken the words, "I love you" to her, Mary affirms "Now I have reason to improve my Spanish. I have a word and a way of life to conjugate: Quiero, quieres, quere, queremos…," which translates to I love, you love, to love, we love (63). In this passage, Mary is conjugating the word "love," only keeping everything in present tense, which affirms her desire to stay in this present moment where José Luis is conforming to her reality. This passage also reveals Mary's want for learning her ancestral language directly stems from her love of José Luis. The more she interacts with him, and adopts the Spanish language, the more she finds herself longing to cross her border:

> Dodging from word to word for hours at a sitting, we made our
> way across borders of language without passports or

> permits…His words and those of the poets he admired made
> me want to sell my belongings, smuggle refugees across
> borders, protest government policies by chaining myself to the
> White House gate—romantic dreams, yes, but the kind that
> dwell side by side with resistance. (69)

This particular passage illustrates the move from the linguistic border to the psychological border that arises through José Luis and Mary's relationship. Mary states that "The feelings his poetry engendered in me were like nothing I had experienced before" (69).What she comes to realize is the obliviousness to the politics that have occurred so close to her origin. In seeking to attain her mother tongue, she has also discovered the connection to a political border.

The linguistic border also cannot be fully understood without mentioning the psychological aspect of the U.S. and Latin American border in which Mary lives. Throughout her recognition of living on a border, Mary begins to correlate the success and failures of the aspects of her border as she becomes more actively involved in Jose Luis's fight: "Sometimes, exhausted, I reverted to Spanglish. I sprinkled Spanish words about just so, like dots in a connect-the-dot puzzle, and Jose Luis made the connections, discerning the full shape of the speaker's intent" (71). Here, Mary presents the incorporation of the linguistic and the psychological aspects. By blending the two languages together, Mary also blends the two worlds in an effort to better understand the struggles that continue to haunt José Luis. It is important to remember that Mary is in love with José Luis and therefore persists in relating to him, so as to be closer to him. Her goal was to "take the war" out of José Luis. In order to do so, Mary becomes actively

involved in the political aspects of refugees like José Luis. This active involvement led to a much deeper understanding of José Luis as well as her own heritage:

> What I did not need to translate, however, was the grief in the voice of a U.S. citizen who went to El Salvador to learn about la situación and who came away with a memory of evil. Innocence was lost time and again in this fashion, leaving a void that would be filled with either forgetting or anger, an anger embodied very often in commitment. (71)

At this point in the novel, it is possible to interpret that Mary has decided to make the commitment of understanding José Luis's history. By seeking out her cultural and linguistic heritage, she has been introduced to the real situations of places and people similar to José Luis's history; these stories have angered her to a point where she realizes the suppressed violence in her own history. This realization could have only been achieved with first succeeding in erasing the cultural and linguistic borders that she José Luis presented. Her relationship with him has revealed that they both share culture and language, but by the end of the novel, their relationship takes another turn, to the historical and the political, where they each find that neither can connect to each other's past.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BORDERS

HISTORIES

Mary and José Luis come from very different backgrounds, each with their own history, but it is Mary who looks to José Luis to help her reconnect with her Latin history that living in the U.S. has suppressed. For Mary, José Luis is the motivation for wanted to bring out her suppressed history. Set in the 1980s, the character of José Luis has fled his native country of El Salvador to the haven of the United States of America. Ironically, it is the United States, Martínez implies, which has imposed its doctrines in El Salvador, thus causing civil wars to break out, mass murders to be committed, and corruption to spread. While the U.S. claims to grant asylum to any refugees of El Salvador, José Luis's character presents the living case that many refugees are denied citizenship and deported back to El Salvador. The deportation to El Salvador holds far more danger for these people, and many become what Martínez discusses is the "disappeared." For someone like José Luis who is seeking to flee the wars in El Salvador and testify to the injustices overlooked by the U.S. itself, his life would be at stake if he were to ever return to El Salvador; his situation would become known by people in power that would ensure his disappearance. When a disappearance occurs in El Salvador, it is assumed the person has died a torturous death as punishment for going against the government of El Salvador.

Furthermore, Martínez dedicates *Mother Tongue* to the disappeared as well as delivering a statement in the forward of her novel reminiscent to that of her journalistic writing style: "More than 75,000 citizens of El Salvador died during a twelve-year civil war, which officially ended in 1991. The United States supported this effort with more than $6 billion in military aid. Declassified State Department documents indicate that officials at the highest levels of the U.S. government knew of El Salvador's policy of targeting civilians…Those in power chose to look the other way." It is clear from the beginning that Martínez was passionate about the atrocities that El Salvadorians faced as a result of this twelve-year war, and her personal experiences with it are embedded in the relationship of Mary and José Luis.

For those like José Luis, protection from their government meant entering the U.S. illegally, and their experience once in the U.S. is presented in Martínez's novel:

> …all over the city refugees were rendered invisible with each stroke of the sponge or rake they used to clean motel rooms and yards and porches. Unlike wealthy refugees who fled their pasts…people like José Luis lacked the money to reinvent themselves. So they became empty mirrors. A ghostly rustle of Spanish spoken in restaurants above the spit of grease on a grill. (56)

This passage illustrates the parallel disappearance that these refuges face when they come into the U.S. Their testimonies become lost as they search for a new life that guarantees their safety. However, José Luis does not seem as eager to start life anew in the U.S., which is what changes Mary's plan to rid him of the war that is still within him.

Mary repeatedly refers to everything about or surrounding José Luis as a "mystery" for several reasons. He is indeed an unfamiliar person that she has chosen to aid in his transition from El Salvador to the United States. This arrangement was put together by Mary's grandmother, Soledad, and delivered through a letter that Martínez includes at the inception of the two character's meeting. Soledad's letter of instructions to Mary read like a business transaction without feeling or empathy to the person being transferred. In actuality, Soledad refers to José Luis as a "classic political asylum case…complete with proof of torture" (7). Knowing full well that he has "only a two percent chance of being accepted by the United States," she pleas for Mary's cooperation to aid the unfortunate soul (7-8). Portions of Soledad's letter exhibit the harsh political treatments that El Salvador has suffered while the United States watches idly by. Soledad states: "El Salvador's leaders may be butchers, but they're butchering on behalf of democracy so our government refuses to admit anything might be wrong" (8). It is through Soledad's letters that Demetria Martínez's long career as a journalist flourishes through, sentences that clearly evoke a profound knowledge of the U.S.'s history towards using writing against people: "…you were too young for me to teach you about life outside the law…I'm slipping this under your door so that if they ever catch me, I won't have conspiratorial use of the mails added to all the other charges I've chalked up. Rip this up!" (9-10).

Mary also refers to José Luis as a "mystery" due to her unfamiliarity with the realities of his life as a Central American refugee. Although Soledad has vaguely described José Luis as someone full of afflictions from a tortured past, Mary does not, and perhaps cannot, fully understand the extent of his wounds. At the onset, Mary is not

even sure of José Luis's real name. According to instructions left by Soledad, Mary is to prompt José Luis to pick a new name upon entrance to the United States in order to ensure his safety if anyone is looking for him. When she prepares to help him choose a new name, she also reveals how unaware she truly is about the reality of his world and what he has traversed. Their conversation follows:

> I said, we have to pick a name for you, one that you would answer to in your sleep…He said, Roberto, Juan, any name will do. I said, why not Neftalí, or Octavio? I wondered, why not pan for gold, for something weightier than the silt of ordinary names like Robert and John. He said, in my country names turn up on lists. Or in the mouths of army officers at U.S. embassy parties. A few drinks later, someone, somewhere disappears. Pick an ordinary name. (13)

This particular passage illustrates Mary's naivety to José Luis's need to remain unobserved. To him, picking a subtle name ensures he does not draw attention to himself, as that could prove dangerous. The connection that José Luis draws between something as mundane as picking a name to be called suggests that the ordinary, simple things in life were not so simple in El Salvador. In actuality, the idea of standing out via names, vocation, or the like seems connected to those who suffered a greater consequence. Likewise, the subject of the "disappeared" is brought to light in this reference as well. Martinez reinforces this topic of the unfortunate peoples who found themselves too close to the frontlines, many because they supported the revolution that had begun to free El Salvador from its civil wars. An example of such a person referred to as becoming the

"disappeared" is José Luis's account of a priest in El Salvador who had taken it upon himself and his church to help the community despite the government's disapproval: "Father Gustavo helped us to see that it was not God's will that we cross ourselves with holy water and die of thirst…We decided that as a church project we would put in a communal well…a medical clinic." However, it was soon after these decisions that Jose Luis witnessed Father Gustavo get shot several times in front of his congregation in which he "died instantly, a merciful death" (30).

Despite all this, Mary feels drawn towards José Luis precisely for the fact that he is a stranger, and she deliberately chooses to leave many aspects about him unknown, even something as simple as his real name. José Luis, as an El Salvadorian refugee has suffered psychologically; having witnessed the atrocities of his country, he flees to a new world where he never truly feels he belongs. We see a parallel between José Luis and Mary at this point, in that both have been pulled apart from their heritage. José Luis remembers El Salvador before the war that caused him to flee, and yet he can never truly return to that El Salvador, even though his "body remembered… [his] very cells concealed the scent of a healed El Salvador" (108). The new El Salvador becomes a place where he does not belong either, therefore José Luis finds himself unable to create a bridge from his memory of pre-war El Salvador to the post-war El Salvador. Likewise, Mary has been literally pulled apart from her Latino/a history, and finds difficulty in retrieving it back. José Luis's story and past fill Mary with desire more immediately than sympathy or sorrow: "Surely I knew the dangers. Yet surely wrongdoing was at the root of the thrill of a Catholic girl…who had learned that breaking the law is a pleasure more poignant…" (19). This particularity suggests a means to keep her desire additionally

interesting. Mary states that the "need for him to remain a stranger" was greater than any fear she had for the true dangers she faced, like aiding an illegal alien and that "...his made-up name dark glasses...must never [be] take[n] off" allowed her to connect with him in a way that she describes as "always good."

In the novel, it is José Luis who aids in Mary's recognition of the border she lives on, specifically of her culture and Spanish language. As stated earlier, José Luis is Mary's motivation for wanted to bring out her suppressed history. And while Mary does succeed to connect with José Luis culturally and linguistically, there are other aspects of living on a border in which she finds she cannot connect to. José Luis is responsible for making stronger, but less likely for Mary to cross, the historical and political aspects of living on a border. By the end of the text Mary is aware that she is limited in relating to José Luis's past. There are times when José Luis makes this brutally clear: "He [José Luis] says, you don't know what it's like to suffer...you have no right...you don't know what it's like to flee" (123). Although Mary mentions that José Luis later apologized for this episode, she deems it is "too late...it has scorched his vision" (123). She states that it was José Luis's perception of her that caused him to speak so: "He saw in me an image of a gringa whose pale skin and tax dollars are putting his compatriots to death. My credentials, the fact that I am Mexican-American, don't count now; in fact, they make things worse" (123-124). One might ask: how could Mary as a Mexican-American woman make the situation worse for her and Jose Luis? To José Luis, Mary, as a Mexican-American, cannot possibly relate to him because she is separated, both literally and figuratively, from the Latin American history and culture that connects him to others. To answer this, it is necessary to take a

closer look at the hyphen between the words "Mexican" and "American." A hyphen, many agree, is used to separate two things that have some type of connection. When one hyphenates their nationalities, though, it is plausible to say that they are deliberately acknowledging their two halves; their two selves. Here, Mary is articulating her border identity. Later, she states: "Earlier in the day he had made love to a *Chicana*. But after telling him the news of the nun's deaths, I am transfigured. For a terrible, disfigured moment, I am a yanqui, a murderess, a whore "(italics mine, 123-124). This passage is extremely important because it brings out both the American part of Mary, as well as her gender by labeling her as the "yanqui…murderess…whore." These names illustrate the idea of the American as an imperializer, savior and policeman of the world that continues to desecrate and interfere with nations and cultures different than their own. The specific label of "whore" illustrates the idea of José Luis believing his native home being figuratively prostituted for political gain.

Throughout the novel, Martínez includes sections of newspaper articles relating to the civil wars in El Salvador, one that specifically brings about an argument between José Luis and Mary. The article summarized the discovery of two mutilated bodies, which were later identified as two nuns reported missing earlier in the week. Upon hearing this report, Mary states that "he [José Luis] hates me for what happened. See, see, what is being done to us? he says. He has heard the story of slain nuns too many times so he wads up and throws his nation's history at me like a rough draft" (123). José Luis's abrupt anger displays the idea that his history cannot be fully understood by Mary because she is heavily immersed in her U.S. culture. Because she has lived her entire life in the U.S., she has been separated by the type of atrocities that José Luis has faced.

Several pages later, in a journal entry dated August 20, José Luis admits his fault for blaming Mary for what is happening in his home country, he laments that it is her culture that can never let her truly understand his, or anybody's, history: "I suspect the real reason for my anger is that I have no idea what to say to make her understand that my world is falling apart around me…But what right do I have to be angry with her? It is not her fault that her culture has made her who she is" (128). Still, Mary continues to seek comprehension of the history of José Luis and other refugee's lives, and while he blames her culture for this argument, he cannot help but admit to the progress she is making: "And there are times when she steps out, when she sees things…She understood what was happening" (129). As her awareness of the border she is living on grows, the text moves to a new view of José Luis and Mary's relationship.

The second section of Martínez's novel commences with a pivotal voice, José Luis's, which laments to readers in a journal entry his view that he cannot be what Mary objectifies him to be: a savior for her suppressed culture. José Luis can only serve as a bridge; he cannot walk over the bridge for her. Furthermore, the reader's insight into his viewpoint reveals the depth of José Luis's struggles:

> I wish there were a way I could tell her. Say to Maria, you're inventing José Luis. And your invention may be very different from who I really am. She sees my scars and thinks I was brave for having survived. She doesn't understand that you don't always need to be brave to survive the most brutal injuries. Unfortunately (or fortunately?), wounds will often start healing even if you don't want them to, even if you would rather die quietly in the corner of

> the cell. The body's will to live sometimes is greater than that of mind or spirit. (81-82)

José Luis's brutal injuries do not just include his physical tortures, but also his remembrance of a healed El Salvador. For Mary, her brutal injuries might be the suppression of her Latin history, and by recognizing it she is brave. During this journal entry, José Luis brings to light his experiences in El Salvador, as well as the origins of his physical, and psychological wounds. Wounds that he tries to show Mary are too large for her to handle, much less heal.

In actuality, José Luis's role in El Salvador was not as glorified as Mary deems it to be. José Luis states: "I wish I could say to her, nothing I have done required courage…Our cry has been, not by the gun but by the Word made flesh in action" (82). He was not the renegade depicted by Mary or Soledad, in fact, José Luis feels some pain for his choice in role during the civil wars:

> If there is courage to be found, maybe it is the hearts of those who have headed for the mountains with guns of their own. The rebels feed the people, teach them to defend what they have gained. That is the courage of choosing not to be a martyr…And by day, when I am speaking to the other dishwashers about their situation, or helping volunteers translate human rights alerts, I know I am doing the right thing. (83)

What José Luis is stating here, is that his role in coming to the U.S. is to testify to the atrocities he has witnessed. When he is giving his testimony, he is creating an outlet for what he has been through. This is his way of healing himself. However, Mary does not understand this, no matter how José Luis explains it to her. Her idea of helping him heal is by creating a new life together, parallel to the American dream of love, marriage, and starting a family. José Luis explores this topic in a letter dated September 16 in which he goes back and forth between giving in to Mary's dream for them, or to continue on his path of testifying to heal. He states:

> Why am I fighting her? …marrying her would solve many problems…My fate would not depend entirely on a political asylum application…Still…the process of applying could buy me some time…But what if in the end I apply and the U.S. turns down my application? The government will deport me… there are rumors that immigration…sends information about political asylum candidates…to El Salvador…if I were deported, it would be the end. (105-106)

José Luis's wavering between his options clearly depicts the reality of his world, a reality in which Mary cannot understand. Though she might think their marrying each other would be the best option, she does not understand that José Luis cannot just wipe the slate clean and begin anew. It is plausible to conclude that Mary's naivety arises because she is blinded by her love for him and by her inability to fully comprehend where José Luis is coming from. Several ideas are presented here: José Luis is stating his need for

Mary to cross a historical border to better understand his situation as well as stating that no one, not Mary, or anyone, can fully help him recover from his past.

Part Two of *Mother Tongue* is a larger step for Mary's recognitions of the historical/political border she lives on. Her relationship with José Luis begins to take a new turn. After learning more about his past and the war that resides within him, it is clear that Mary and José Luis have some connecting histories. Whereas José Luis comes from a country that is suffering global control, Mary is recognizing the lack of representation of her Latin history. Both have had their tongues figuratively ripped out; José Luis by a very explicit violent political situation, Mary by a more subtle historical erasure of her ancestry. Perhaps this parallel is what connects them closer together despite the differences and walls that separate them. Martínez makes very clear in this section of her novel that the personal is not far from the political. The character's relationship progresses to the point that Mary states she "came to understand why José Luis and others like him risked everything—even if they were too young to remember life without war; their bodies remembered; their very cells concealed the scent of a healed El Salvador" (108). Furthermore, upon the death of Soledad, Mary testifies that her relationship with José Luis has "succeeded in teaching me to love a broken world" (188). The novel itself is a testimony that literature and politics give a voice to the voiceless. During the course of the novel, Mary and José Luis personally connect through common experiences.

In the final pages of Part Two, Martínez incorporates a scene where Mary learns the truth about José Luis's physical torments. As this section draws to a close, this

intimate scene allows the reader to visualize the comprehension that is finally taking place in Mary's education of the borders in her life:

> One day he told me about the strange markings on his hands and his back…He said, guards snuffed out their cigarettes on my body, one by one…electric wires on my genitals…He felt ashamed. Not because he survived while others died but because the intimacy was too much…To tell another person about what was done to your body in the name of politics is a frightful act of intimacy…I was seeing was a pattern of scars, the legend to the map of his life—1982, someone had branded those numbers into his back…Nineteen eighty-two was the year he was tortured, that thousands were tortured. In the country the size of Massachusetts. In a country named after Christ. (133-134)

This passage illustrates the history that José Luis enters the U.S. with; history that is both literally and figuratively weighing on him. By entrusting his story to Mary, José Luis's testimony serves to aid in her recognition that she cannot connect to him on a historical or political level. José Luis, in his letters, continues this discussion of whether Mary can truly understand the amount he has had to endure. He suggests her misunderstanding as a product of straddling two worlds:

> …perhaps what she really loves is the idea of me. A refugee, a dissident, spokesman for a cause she knows little about, ignorance she seems to have made her peace with. She is trying to separate me in her own mind from my

> history. She thinks by loving the "real" me, the me before the war, she can make my memories of the war end. It is so American. The belief that people can be remade from scratch in the promised land, leaving the old self behind. (84)

We see in this passage once more the distinction between José Luis before the wars in El Salvador, and the José Luis after the wars. Mary seeks time and again to heal Jose Luis from his post-war self. Yet, she cannot, as stated above, because Jose Luis's self has been redefined by the war.

This seems to cause a rift in their relationship. Mary fails in her self-appointed role as his savior because she cannot relate to his violent and political history; an idea that seems to be disallowed by José Luis. Born and raised in the U.S., Mary has literally been pulled apart from the violence of the history and the actions that took place in Mexico and Latin America. While she adamantly seeks to learn more about the unspoken crimes of José Luis and his country, El Salvador, José Luis believes Mary cannot connect to him: "He saw in me an image of a gringa whose pale skin and tax dollars are putting his compatriots to death. My credentials, the fact that I am Mexican American, don't count now; in fact, they make things worse" (123-124). José Luis sees Mary as an American, therefore almost blaming her for her country's role in El Salvador's situation. According to José Luis, it is Mary's inability to understand the reality of living in a world where violence predominates that causes her to fail to erase this historical aspect of living in the U.S. During this point in the novel, José Luis decides to compose a collection of poems for Maria in the event that he leaves. He explains: "It is tempting to save them until that

day comes, if it comes. If I give them to her now, she will take it to mean I am in love with her…But she might miss the larger meaning, that I never know where I will be tomorrow" (131). His poem entitled *#3 For María*, seeks to explain that she has no rooted history in experiences like his: "…my rib throbs beneath / your palm, the rib / they fractured with / a rifle, the rib / that if taken into / the body of america / might make it new, / a country where mercy / and nobility reside, / where the shattered / bones of my people / teach your people / about strength" (132-133). José Luis's poem sheds light on how he views both America and El Salvador. The common belief of America is that it is a place where people can live free, but it is also the place where those who have led violent paths come to rest. For these people like José Luis, there can never be true freedom. Their stories give strength for those like Mary who have never experienced violence on a personal level.

After the death of Soledad, Mary recalls one of the last conversations she had with her in which Soledad gave final advice on her relationship with José Luis. Perhaps understanding his struggles on a more personal level, Soledad tries to make Mary understand that she must understand herself first before she gives her heart away to a man and tries to heal him. Since Mary has been dedicated to stitching the war wounds of José Luis, she has denied herself the opportunities to heal her own wounds; she has made herself more vulnerable. At the end of part three of the novel, José Luis writes an entry that provides the evidence that Mary has been transformed into a different person on account of their relationship. He claims, "…there are times when she steps out, when she sees things" (129). Though José Luis may admit this change, Mary, however, discloses to the reader her inability to fully cross the border she is living in. As she

recalls the origins of her inner hurt, being violated at a young age by a much older man, Mary recounts that at a young age she "learns fear of being alone long before she learns to say abandonment" (166). It is this fear that has been a driving factor in her relationship with José Luis. She cannot resist the want to consume everything that he embodies; only to find that she has no right to do so. It is only years after her relationship with him, and through the mothering of José Luis Jr. that Mary realizes that having her "...heart...broken" was necessary because it had to be "...reset properly so it could carry [her] through life" (155).

In this passage, we find another parallel between Mary and José Luis. Each has been physically violated. In El Salvador, for a reason not explained, José Luis has been physically tortured which has led to psychological problems. Likewise, Mary has experienced sexual molestation when she was a young child, leaving her with psychological scars as well. There is also a metaphorical rape within these parallels as well—the notion that the land of El Salvador has been raped by the civil wars and strife.

The relationship depicted in *Mother Tongue* illustrates the idea that identity construction is fragmented by borders but can be partially healed through connecting, in Mary's case with her Latin history. However, she cannot fully understand where he is coming from. In José Luis's journal entries, there is evidence provided to conclude that Mary's psychology has been greatly affected by their relationship: "I hate it when she talks about me as if I were half god. She won't give me the gift of flaws. And this is what worries me the most, that she wants me to save her...any woman who talks that way...wants to be saved—from what, I don't know" (81-85). José Luis's consistent perception of Mary is that she can never fully relate to him. However, years later, Mary

does come to realize the depth of José Luis's history and the desperation that she felt when she first knew him. His identity is that which she refused to admit, "And all these years I have avoided calling José Luis by his true name, desparacedio, disappeared one" and hers was that "who looked to a refugee to save her from fear—the kind of fear that destroys, cell by cell, because it rampages undetected, unnamed" (88). The final parallel between José Luis and Mary is that there is also a disappeared one in her too, one she cannot reclaim because of living in the U.S.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RECOGNITION OF "DIFFERENCE"

As discussed in Chapter One, a hybrid identity is one that develops when a person has straddled multiple cultures and/or worlds. Anzaldúa's theory of "mestiza consciousness" states that a person with a hybrid identity is one who "continually walk[s] out of one culture and into another" (99). In most cases, there is a stronger presence of one culture over another, and it is the suppression of the latter identity that affects the person's psychology. Like Mary in *Mother Tongue*, recognizing the border one lives on is the first step in endeavoring to create a strong sense of self. Throughout her theory Anzaldúa continues to discuss the following step(s): "At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once..." (100). Another step that Anzaldúa suggests is to "disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory" (101). In *Mother Tongue*, Mary appears to take the first suggestion because she accepts her U.S. identity and her Latino/a identity as one hybrid identity: a Chicana identity.

Having explored Mary and José Luis's relationship as a metaphor for the borders present in the text of *Mother Tongue*, we can begin to examine both Mary's psychology and how she thus embraces her hybrid identity. As stated in previous chapters, Mary relates to José Luis culturally and linguistically, with help of course from Soledad and

José Luis. She does not, however, relate to José Luis historically or politically because she has never lived in an area where violence, such as it is in El Salvador, has dominated her country.

Though she can never fully relate to José Luis, she can learn about his struggles, and it is through her relationship with José Luis that she learns to do so. Throughout the novel, there are instances in which the reader determines that José Luis is troubled in his psychology too, however, his psychology has been affected precisely because of his complete correlation with his identity. Mary's psychology, on the other hand, has been affected precisely because she does not have a full identity.

Mary's relationship with José Luis has helped her to realize that she is different and therefore could only save herself: "And I cannot forgive myself for loving him now, twenty years too late, in ways I could not love him when I looked to him to swim out in the dark waters of my life and save me" (87-88). By the end of the novel, José Luis has helped Mary create a bridge to her Latino/a identity, but more importantly, she learns to understand how different she truly is and has to face this ultimate difference from José Luis's history and experiences rooted on the other side of the border. Mary finds that the bridge between her U.S. and Lation/a identity is a hybrid identity—a Chicana identity – that specifically sets her apart from José Luis.

I stated earlier that *Mother Tongue* crosses a literary border in the medium of ways in which Martínez presents the story of Mary and José Luis. The voice of the narrator also crosses a type of literary border in that there are two very distinct voices embedded within the text. These two distinct voices are representative of each part of Mary's hybrid self. The first voice is that of the nineteen year old Mary who is looking to

José Luis to help bring out her Latino/a identity. This narrator lives in the moment of the relationship and seeks to resurrect her Latino/a culture and language. This is the voice that represents her Latino/a identity. Through this first narrative voice, the reader sees José Luis as a bridge to Mary's Latino/a identity. He serves as the primary motivation for Mary's acquisition of Spanish and interest in this suppressed culture. Earlier in this study I stated that Mary looked to José Luis as her *remedío*, as a healer for her fragmented identity. This first narrative voice supports this in that Mary claims to have positioned herself in the relationship as the one who tried to heal José Luis, help take the memories of the war out of him. In her final visit to Mary and José Luis, Soledad comments on Mary's role by stating: "No, no, the only way to take a war out of a man is to end the war, all wars" (114). Of course, this particular narrator does not fully understand what Soledad could mean when she states that the only way José Luis will be healed is when his country his healed.

In the final page of Part Two of the novel, Mary finds a poem (in one of José Luis's books) dedicated to José Luis by a woman named Ana. In the poem, Mary realizes that she is not the first one to attempt to "take the war" out of José Luis, she also realizes that the last attempt failed, and therefore echoes Soledad's advice that the only way to save Jose Luis from his past is to end all wars. The poem states the following:

LAMENTATION

When at last my man

gets out

to become a new man

in North America,

when he finds a woman
to take the war out of him,
she will make love to a man
and a monster,
she will rise
from her bed,
grenades
ticking in her.
(136)

This poem is fitting at this point in the story because Part Three begins with the introduction of the son that Mary and José Luis had. While this son cannot be described as the "grenade" that José Luis impregnated her with—the child does represent a new generation of the blending of José Luis and Mary's culture, language, and history. Part Three is also the point in the novel in which the second voice dominates more, as the reflective Mary, conscious of her U.S. identity, begins to understand what sets her apart from José Luis. Soledad's final visit to Mary before her death portrays Mary coming to terms with her understanding of El Salvador's violent political history. In her visit, Soledad brings up the topic of *remedíos* once more with Mary, only this time she sheds a new light on the practice of healing. Soledad states: "And every remedío, she said, has elements of both, of the sickness and its cure" (113).

The second narrative voice in the text is that of the 39 year old Mary reflecting on her nineteen year old self. This narrator lives with the product of her relationship with José Luis, not just physically, but metaphorically as well. Though she has a son now with

José Luis, José Luis himself is absent in her life, and has been for a while. It is this reflective narrator that understands she cannot fully connect historically or politically to José Luis's Latino/a identity. This is the voice that represents her U.S. identity—that her recognition of living in the U.S. has suppressed her Latino/a identity. This recognition of both parts of her hybrid identity illustrates the difference that sets her apart from José Luis. However, throughout the novel, José Luis views Mary as sharing in the oppression of El Salvador because she was born and raised in the U.S. and seems unaware of what is happening outside this comfort zone. Mary states:

> A priest who had traveled with an Albuquerque delegation
> came back with bullet casings imprinted with the name of a
> U.S. city…stories of Salvadorans, stories about torture,
> dismemberment, hunger, sickness. I heard those stories and felt
> lucky. I had lost a mother to cancer and a father to infidelity.
> My losses were natural. (72)

Mary hears about the involvement of the U.S. in the wars of El Salvador and seeks to separate herself from it all by claiming comprehension. In connecting the stories of tortured people in El Salvador to her parent's death and absence in her life, Mary underrates the extent of the U.S.'s involvement. One such passage illustrates this clearly: Mary states that "no human being on earth is illegal," to which José Luis accuses her of being a romantic (76-77). However, despite this failure to fully relate to Jose Luis's violent history, Mary discovers that this failure comes from having a very different identity that José Luis does: a hybrid identity. By the end of the novel the two narrative

voices in the text function to bring together a hybrid self that sets Mary apart from José Luis.

Mary begins to see herself as she truly is by the end of the novel: one who has accepted her Chicana identity. Mary shares this by stating:

> I think a part of me envied him [José Luis]. It's a terrible thing to admit. When he gets up to talk in packed churches, his wounds are deep as the Grand Canyon, open to everyone. Mine have always been invisible...It's not on the same scale as death squads and disappearances or rich people owning all the land...the issue isn't who got hurt more. (172)

What Mary learns is not the importance of sharing a very explicit violent history with José Luis, but rather that she has a history too. Only, hers is much more subtle, but the fact still remains that she recognizes that no matter how subtle her history is, it is still a part of her and shapes her identity as a Chicana. This understanding and maturation that stemmed from her relationship with José Luis is brought to life with the last line of this passage: "...the issue isn't who got hurt more." Mary is no longer competing with José Luis to see who is hurt worse so that way they can be saved; instead, it is about recognizing each other's difference and celebrating those differences. For Mary, it is recognizing that she has a hybrid identity and instead of looking at it as a problem, she is learning to see it as a means to embrace other cultures. Anzaldúa discusses this in her theory of "mestiza consciousness" when she states that a person who lives on a border is in "all cultures at the same time" (99). Twenty years later, Mary states that the process of making sense of her hybrid identity is still taking place. Mary finally discovers she has

"melted down sadness and joy into a single blade with which to carve out a life…just beginning to discern the shape that was there all along, just beginning to become me" (190).

Mary takes the reader along a journey, years after her encounter with José Luis; to a time where her nineteen-year old son visits her in the same house she first made love to José Luis. Not only is her son named after his father, José Luis, he is also the same age that Mary was when she first met his father. One can imagine that Martinez decided to introduce Mary's son at this precise age to illustrate the cycle of life for many that find they straddle two worlds. One of the most interesting aspects of Martinez's account of Mary and her son is his very name. To be named after his father alludes to the great influence he had in Mary's life. The reader soon finds out that José Luis Jr. is not known to his father, as he left shortly after Mary's pregnancy. Mary admits to such an influence when she states, "…once upon a time I gave you the name José Luis in order to make it real, to make a made-up name real"(150). Earlier in this paper I stated that Mary was attracted to José Luis for several reasons—his Latin features, and the mystery surrounding his life in El Salvador. She consistently objectified José Luis to fit her own needs and here again she objectifies her son to fulfill what his father could not. Mary relates an incident where she recognizes her tendency to objectify the men in her life. She states:

> My son, as all children do, indicted me on charges of
> conspiring to control him. He presented the evidence. And he
> grew up. Right there, one terrible afternoon, my baby grew up

> and became himself: Olmec with a warrior's helmet, raging
>
> against me and the powers that had laid waste his Earth. (143)

In Part Five of Demetria Martinez's novel, there is shift to an alternate perspective—that of José Luis Jr. As Mary and her son are on their way to El Salvador, José Luis Jr. relates his internal thoughts on the situations. The subject of the "disappeared" is brought up again in this final section as their search for his father becomes more profound. Throughout this section the reader also discovers Mary's attempts to raise José Luis without any borders or walls. She wants him to be fully immersed in his culture, to connect to his Hispanic identity from the very beginning. José Luis Jr. states that he was uninterested about this connection his mother would force upon him, but it is the trip to El Salvador that aids in exposing him to life outside of their border. Interestingly enough, it is José Luis's own experience with traveling outside of his border that allows him to absorb his Latin heritage—not his mother's pestering. When Mary tells her son the truth about his father—their meeting, and her falling in love, as well as the one episode where he beat her—José Luis Jr. begins to understand the immense role that his father had in her life. He states:

> I think deep down I've always been angry at not having had a
>
> father. But after Mom told me I got my angry streak from the
>
> night he hit her, a part of me quite being angry. It never dawned
>
> on me that even though he went away, he left me parts of
>
> himself. Mom didn't make me from scratch. (180)

Unlike Mary, José Luis Jr. is the one whose identity has been grafted upon. The memory of his father, the fact that his father personally experienced the atrocities of a

violent history enables a construction of identity different than Mary's. As a child, he feels a much greater obligation to connect to his absent Latin American identity. Unlike Mary, it is not just that he has been pulled away from his history, it is that his father, who obtains history within his own body, has been pulled away from him too. José Luis Jr. attempts to reconnect to his lost heritage by traveling to El Salvador to find out what happened to his absent father.

Upon arrival to El Salvador, Mary and her son find a photograph of José Luis with a question mark written below the photo—which indicates that his whereabouts are unknown. Both mother and son take this as a good sign because at least this means he is not dead, that he might not have returned to El Salvador at all, or he could be alive somewhere. José Luis Jr. reads the name of his father to his mom: "But look Ma, look at his name. It's José Luis Alegria. José Luis. It's not a made up name after all…See, Mom he told you his real name because he loved you and he wanted to give you something real" (183). The idea that Mary never knew who José Luis is demolished here, as they find that he had given her his true identity and shared a part of his life with her. José Luis did not just leave Mary his real name, but he left her a son, an actual half of his heritage.

Much in the way Mary succeeded in overcoming the linguistic and cultural aspect of her border through José Luis, so does her son upon staying in El Salvador. José Luis Jr. recognizes the following: "Dad was always disappeared to me. But now he's come back and given me another name" (184). Apart from this new adoption of José Luis's last name as his son's middle name, José Luis Jr. adopts the language of his father: "A new language is a tincture, a drop of which forever changes the chemistry of the person who is learning it" (187). As her son becomes immersed in his native

language, he thus begins to erase the border that he is living in; a task that both he and his mother were able to do with the help of José Luis.

The addition of José Luis Jr.'s recognition of his heritage, in the context of Mary and José Luis's relationship throughout the text, aid the reader in thinking about the cycle of how borders often divide or fragment identity. The idea that the second generation in *Mother Tongue* is also displaced from their ancestry perpetuates the idea that this is a growing trend for many who straddle two or more worlds. Even though Mary might have intended for José Luis Jr. to be aware of where he comes from, the absence of his El Salvadorian heritage is absent, therefore leaving him displaced from a major part of his identity. In the novel, Mary grows up in a diasporic culture that has contributed in diluting her Latino/a identity. For her son, the absence of his father has diluted his specific El Salvadorian heritage. As the text demonstrates for both characters, it is the presence of José Luis, whether physically or spiritually, that aid them both in recognizing their hybrid identity. Though Mary might have failed in some aspects of connecting to José Luis's historical and political border, she did succeed in recognizing it. And while José Luis Jr. grew up displaced from his father's culture, his trip to El Salvador brought about his recognition of his suppressed El Salvadorian identity. Both Mary and her son have succeeded in the fact that they have decided to embrace a world that has long been suppressed by their U.S. identity.

Demetria Martinez's novel, and the story of Mary and José Luis's relationship, teaches us several things about hybrid identities. In the text, there are two narrator's voices that sometimes conflict with one another. The primary voice is that of the older Mary who is reflecting on impacts and perhaps her true agendas of her relationship with

José Luis. This perspective aids in revealing what could not be seen while it was happening. The second voice is that of Mary living in the present moment with José Luis, we see this through the journal entries, letters, poems, grocery lists, and recipes. This voice is much more naïve, motivated primarily by love. It is also this voice and part of Mary that José Luis attacks when she cannot understand his historical and political experiences; he sees her as being so corrupted by her straddling of two worlds that it has brought out a part of her that seeks to save everyone but herself. Though Mary was in love with José Luis during their relationship, upon reflection, she knows it was more of a selfish act—she loves him but objectifies him too. And while it was good that Mary reached out to José Luis to explore her Latino/a heritage, she realizes he couldn't save her and she couldn't save him. Most importantly, Mary recognizes difference as well as similarities. She recognizes that she is different from José Luis, and this is good, because otherwise, she would be perpetuating and imitating the Anglo American's inability to recognize difference and continue its constant plea of assimilation. Mary recognizes this when she states: "It is a habit of Americans to think heaven gave us a unique destiny, that we are to spread truth among nations" (162).

By the end of the novel, Mary becomes aware of the border in her life through her relationship with José Luis, and by various aspects involved in this border, Mary does succeed and fail. More importantly than succeeding or failing in crossing various aspects of her border, is Mary's recognition that her hybrid identity sets her apart from José Luis, and it is not a bad thing. Moreover, Mary continues this teaching to her son José Luis Jr. when she seeks to raise him in such a way that he is fully aware of his Latin American heritage, despite the absence of his father. Though Mary and José Luis's relationship

draws to a close when he decides to go back to his home country of El Salvador, their experiences of what was learned does not fade away. Mary carries her new passion for her Latino/a identity through her son. As Mary recognizes her U.S. identity and Latino/a identity, she embraces her Chicana identity.

The argument presented throughout this paper reveals several things. The first to reiterate the important work that Anzaldúa does in seeking to recover Latino/a heritage for Chicanas. Second, that Martínez seems to suggest that this recovery can only go so far, as a Chicana must also look towards her U.S. identity and the fact that they inevitably share in the oppression of the Latin world. Martínez concludes her interview with Karin Rosa Ikas by stating that "In general, I believe that our energy must be drawn from many world communities because our identities are made up of many elements" (Chicana Ways, 2002, 121). In her novel, Martínez has moved to a new avenue of Chicana writing; a space in which future Chicana authors will seek guidance. She does this by incorporating a primary male character as the means in which the female character comes to terms with herself. The only way Mary is able to love a world far from her own is through her relationship with José Luis. By loving a world that is not her home, shows the reader the necessity for embracing other cultures, both for good and bad. This idea of incorporating a protagonist male character in a Chicana text is important precisely because in the reader does not see José Luis dominating or influence her in a violent or patriarchal position; instead it is through the theme of love and the recognition of difference and similarities that aid Mary to embrace her hybrid identity; a fact that might explain why this text hasn't been fully embraced in the canon of Chicana literature.

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