

**“What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This:
Border Dreams of a Chicana in Eastlandia**

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“What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?”

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by

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To contextualize this tapestry I have recreated my personal experience as a Chicana in “Eastlandia” that began on the margins of Hippiedom of Woodstock, NY circa 1969. This diegetic narrative is driven by a passion to place women of color as speaking subjects. Informed by a memory, a dream, a hallucination clearly marked as subjective, I offer my colleagues a discourse about life posited on the alternative framework of “mestiza consciousness”.

Woodstock, Akwesasne, and The Farm

A Chicana in Eastlandia begins with the deconstruction of the hegemonic codification of a Chicana subject from the confines of traditional Mexican-American norms. Walking along Rodeo Avenue in the late 60’s with Mick Jagger in tow was a major lifestyle transaction that changed my life. I was hired as a secretary by the top public relations firm in Beverly Hills Rogers, Cowan and Brenner. It was the glitter of a perceived escape from high school pregnancy and early marriage that put me in a realm of possibilities in Hollywood. I was attracted by the cinematic *écriture* of Hollywood premiers and international press-parties where I knew I could rub up against the latest movie and Broadway stars buzzing around a constellation of rock stars who were usually drunk, stoned, or coked out or a combination of all three.

Accommodation from “la vida loca” and “cholita” social club (Las Orchids de Azusa) to Hollywood altered my consciousness into equal degrees of separation. I could not understand the Hollywood dictum declaring the importance of: whom you knew, what you looked like, and how much money you had. My job was to make sure our high-paying clients made proper and exclusive news headlines on a daily basis. Creating fodder for the gossip rags included creating lies for daily press releases. We would sit around a meeting table fabricating stories that would present a positive spin

on some sordid personal new detail about one of our clients. "Eddie Fisher and Connie Stevens were 'really married before the birth of their illegitimate daughter.'" Fisher had an affair while he was still married to the great and super glamorous Elizabeth Taylor. Another story we simply made up: "Janet Joplin hit Jim Morrison over the head in a drunker stupor last night at the Whiskey-a-Go-Go." Sensationalism had no limits. Pushing me over the edge was the media coup that guaranteed the black vote for Hubert Humphrey (1968). RC&B arranged for a press conference in Watts, CA at that time synonymous with the Black Power Movement. We only had to invite the three wire services: UP, AP and Reuters. Photographers for Time, Life and Look magazines were also invited. The next morning, newspaper headlines showed photographs of Humphrey with his arm around James Brown with the headline: "No. 1 Soul Brother Endorses Humphrey for President." This image would guarantee the Black vote for the Democrats in 1968. James Brown was enraged at the blatant lies without his knowledge. He demanded to be on Johnny Carson's Late Show that evening to repudiate the story. How many working people stayed up late to watch TV when every newsstand announced James Brown apparent endorsement of Humphrey. The damage was done. Such were the easy lies concocted by a few people paid large amounts of money to manipulate mass consciousness.

Slipping from the *barrio* into La-La-Land was not the major leap between values and situated spaces as the one I made from Beverly Hills to Woodstock, New York in 1969. I quickly gave up the allure of a world built on dreams and lies under a clear and conscious understanding that there had to be more to a young Chicana's life than the Hollywood gaze. I followed a musician to Woodstock, NY who rocked my world by asking: "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" I moved to the country in upstate New York where all rock 'n rollers lived. Four idyllic snowed-in weeks in Tim Hardin's log cabin in the woods, a roaring fire and a cookie tin full of pot satisfied everyone. We flew LA where Warren was playing at the Whiskey-a-go-go. By the time I arrived to join him, he had already met the next sweet smiling face.

My return to Woodstock meant I was pretty much on my own. Intervention from homelessness meant I shared a big house with many people. I found a job cleaning houses for the rich New York City emigrés escaping to Nature in a pre-"Woodstock One" Woodstock. Hard work was a lesson I learned early from my Mexican family. But my father could not disguise his disappointment when I told him I would be living in upstate New York. "You gave up Beverly Hills to do WHAT in Woodstock?" I responded that I had never felt so free or been happier.

Within two years I was managing two of the trendiest shops in the middle of the Woodstock town square, simultaneously. Workdays were spent between The Woodstock Health Food Center, where I tended rich hippies, gurus, artists, musicians and a host of infamous health food addicts. On weekends and evenings, I worked at a trendy clothing shop and leather atelier. Week-ends brought hoards of hectic New York City week-enders desiring the latest fashionable "looks." Both jobs placed me in the center of town where I had a prominent view of the simulacrum passing by in frenzied droves. Working long hours provided my son and I with housing and sustenance. Extended families of women and children with the occasional uncle in tow provided an extended community. And I thought I was living the utopian ideal that

had been conceived by Woodstock bohemians of the turn of the 20th century -- the tradition of art, poetry and song and festivals..

Black and white photos from the 1920s document the earliest Woodstock tradition of bacchanalia and revelry with displays of mustachioed men wearing frilly tutus, while seductive black-haired women in Spanish gypsy dresses seductively clench roses between their teeth. Woodstock's Bohemian founding fathers had a vision of their village as a communal art retreat intended for the privileged white *nouveau riche* of New York City. They sought to play in "the fields of the Lord" surrounded by poetry, music, dance, drama and art.

By the late 60's, Woodstock had become a mecca for the up-and-coming "rock 'n roll" world. Bob Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman ("Uncle Albert") created Bearsville Records to attract the likes of Janis Joplin, The Stones, and The Band. Numerous musicians and groupies took advantage of a gentrified rural scene to catch some fresh air while partying with best. I was a late-blooming Chicana "flower-child," raising a young boy under a pre-conceived idea of communal living, had many lovers, and a loyal cadre of surrogate mothers and uncles. I accepted the counter-culture revolution in all its manifestations. I experienced life fully in the decade before AIDS -- when "Free Love" reigned.

My Woodstock family consisted in a succession of men of vague identity -- an interchangeable reflection of my own low self-esteem leftover from growing up a disenfranchised minority woman of color in *Tejas* and California. My ambiguous identity followed me from Southern California to New York. I was still looking for "Mr. Right" to be the "father" to my young and vulnerable son. I slept with many men that I thought would be forever. After repeated disappointments, I surmised that Woodstock men were entirely "spoiled" and self-centered. After all, the ratio of twenty women competing for every man made for slim choices. Carpentry was the favored vocation for the men who were really aspiring "rock musicians" by night. And because

I owned a cabin in the woods badly in need of repair, I found many men who were going to “fix it” while they enjoyed a place to crash. I provided a home and a warm body for their passing passions.

A handsome young artist once told me he preferred single mothers because “they always made a home for their children.” A successful musician said he fell in love with me because he believed in Karma, but then he connected to the next Karmic link with another sweet-smiling face. A golden-haired Adonis admired my exotic looks and athleticism, and after a year as lovers, I finally rejected him because he lacked “spirituality.” I was counseled not to be so harsh on him, because “we are all spiritual beings...and some are at different levels of understanding.”

He was followed in quick succession by a series of lovers and I learned I could love several men at the same time. Eros had kicked in. Two of my lovers adhered to the teachings of a then popular Peruvian guru (Oscar Ochoa). The passion was accentuated through rigorous meditation and exercises. I fell in love with a poet with a shock of Rastafarian hair who liked my “Indianess.” Becoming known lovers, I did everything to encourage his artistic career as a budding artist of Native American portraiture and Gaelic poetry. My own creativity was put aside while I encouraged his alcohol-driven ego. He was the town’s leading poet holding court at the Woodstock Café and Thursday Night Poetry readings. Many women experienced a sense of conquest if they could sleep with him. He finally impregnated a young woman and The Poet brushed it off by saying she/child “meant nothing” to him. Even then, I was not prepared to leave the public light generated by his popularity.

I never quite escaped the “exotic *indigena* Latina” stereotype. I knew I was popular because of my sweet demeanor (translation: low self-esteem) and striking exotic appearance. But not many men bothered to look deeper than my skin. Until I met a full-blooded Oglala man who came to visit the “Indian painter.” Le War Lance parted the block party by holding out his hand to me while announcing to Mr. Poetry,

"I've come to take your woman away, so you'll know what you had." I responded with unbridled passion.

Afterthought

In my search for personal identity, I have always moved in those areas of overlap between Chicana cultural expressions and Native American tribalism, so it was natural to network with Native American groups, particularly in light of the nightmare of a militarized Wounded Knee in Oglala, South Dakota (1973). I traveled to Indian country in the aftermath of federal mediations between gun-toting American Indian activists and BIA authorities. I fell into the company of a full-blood Oglala man and began seeing America's Indian policies through his eyes. It was appalling. I spent weeks in Oglala, SD with War Lance. I clung to his bare chest as we rode bareback across the wide plains. We laid our blanket near nests of curious prairie dogs. We made love to an open sky.

To his people, War Lance was as a "drunken Indian." He was known to chase down bootleg wine all the way to Nebraska. He would drive for an hour to buy a case of pints of Gallo from the nearest white-owned liquor store that still supplies Indians with cheap wine. Pow-wow night meant War Lance would prepare for the evening by consuming enough wine to make him stupid and falling down drunk. I was alone in a crowd of strangers and realized he was the only person I knew in Oglala. I lunged at the 6'4", mixed-blood cop who was hauling away a handcuffed War Lance to his tribal squad car. Stomping my foot down on his military boot with my size-6, Chinese cloth slipper I did manage to distract him long enough. "OK! You're under arrest." He threw me in next to War-Lance and we rode together to the Oglala jailhouse. I was locked in a cell with two women, both asleep and snoring loudly. The cell reeked of

stale alcohol. I was shocked by the Third-World prison conditions. I would not see the tribal judge until Monday, and when released, I was ordered to leave town within 24-hours. I became a fugitive, dodging around corners in the very small town of Oglala. I had to make phone calls back home, buy food and find a way to retrieve War Lance from jail. Ethel Merrivale, the beloved tribal lawyer took me to her home. Granddaughters in the living room with babies, watching the outside world of privilege whites on daily soap operas. An alcoholic uncle or two slept in the back porch. Her house was within walking distance to court and she had War Lance released, but he was not ready to leave his home.

I returned to Woodstock alone with a feeling of disdain for all the pettiness of a self-centered, "Love Generation" most who were entitled to family trust funds and other monetary advantages. Woodstock had thirty-three millionaire families, but their primary concern seemed to be centered on their privileged individualism. When I arrived home from Oglala, my son and poet lover were being evicted from my apartment. Bob Reynolds, the drunken poet artist did not know how to pay bills. I quickly recovered with loans from friends and parted ways with my useless lover. I gained self-esteem in the sacred hills of South Dakota. I also gained an extraordinary respect for Lakota people who have survived years of genocidal practices against them. I was empowered to leave a man that could not or would not provide for his family. Running away with War-Lance was "payback time" for his many infidelities and I saw the disappointment of his loss. I never imagined or planned a revenge tryst with War Lance. The poet's unexpected response to my infidelity was: "how could you do this to me"

My beloved son grew up too quickly and after finishing high school he was ready to return to California for his own self-discovery. I was left to set new priorities for myself. "Now what do I do?" Instantly, I was reminded that I could do anything! "I could go anywhere! I might join the Peace Corps or work for Doctors Without Borders."

Deciding to work closer to home, I helped to organize an East Coast coalition to support Mohawk claims to traditional lands in the Adirondack Mountains. New York State had passed the necessary legislation to turn the 1980 Winter Olympics village into a men's prison after the games. Central New York is the traditional homeland to the Haudenosaunee or People of the Longhouse (also known as: Iroquois by the French, and Five-Nations Confederacy to the British). A growing coalition of social activists drew strength from a united New York Indian constituency, and a protest was organized.

Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, Cayuga and their adopted brothers, the Tuscarora, did not like the idea of using what had been Indian land only to build another prison that would inevitably incarcerate a disproportionate number of men of color. Many members of social justice groups from the East Coast spent the weekend strategizing. We occupied a manorial home that had been built by the turn-of-the-century Woodstock bohemians. Everyone supported the indigenous stand.

I was walking down a wide-curving staircase and bumped into Jose Barriero, the managing editor of *Akwesasne Notes*. He stopped me and asked: "What's a nice Latina girl like you doing in a place like this?" He was repeating my traveling formula." I was off on another adventure, this time to the very heart of Mohawk political and spiritual center along the Canadian border.

Moving Forward

I now realize that my consciousness was never raised by the degree of drugs or existential practices while living the Hollywood dream or the Woodstock fantasy. I experienced an intuitive leap of understanding (an epiphany) when I came in direct contact with indigenous forms of knowledge production. Indigenous spirituality became the central inscription to my unfolding self-identity. My son returned to California in 1978, and I moved to upstate NY along the U.S. Canadian border. I was

invited to work for *Akwesasne Notes*, an indigenous newspaper published by the Council of Mohawk Chiefs. Mohawk people are a federally recognized Indian tribe who are “The Keepers of the Western Door” of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. I was invited to enter through the women’s door at the Longhouse at Akwesasne.

My work at *Akwesasne* began to celebrate an indigenous epistemology that continues to be informed by a thousand-year old code of law that governs and guides egalitarian and democratic principles. The central governing code of the *Haudenosaunee* is The Great Law of Peace, a set of orally transmitted unwritten rules that governs by consensus. The Law continues to provide autonomy for each woman, child, and man of the Confederacy well into the 21st century. The Great Law of Peace is a political and spiritual ideology that supersedes Western paradigms of democracy. The foundational principles of the confederacy are: *Skennen* (Peace), *Katshatstensera* (Power) and *Kanikonriio* (Righteousness). It is stated that human beings are endowed with the ability to reason through any conflict in order to bring peace through mutual consensus. Power lies in joining the arrows; there is strength in numbers. The foundation of the Great Law is built on the principle idea of destroying and burying all weapons of war under the White Roots of Peace. Atop the giant white pine sits an eagle to warn if danger is coming.

The internationally newspaper, *Akwesasne Notes*, was published out of an old farmhouse in Owl’s Head, New York. I was invited to live in the large house that was home to two families each with two children. I became a welcomed “auntie” who could help with the office, children and chores. The house had no electricity or running water, and in the early-winter freezing mornings, the two older children and I would be the first out of bed. We bundled up in our warmest clothes before stepping out into the bitterly cold sub-Arctic air. Our morning task was to provide fresh water to the waking household. The three of us would pull an old winter sleigh down to the nearby stream where we would break through thick ice to get to the fresh-running water underneath.

On our hurried return, the water in our buckets invariably splashed out in dancing crystals that spiraled down to the hard ice-covered ground below. Our noisy and loud laughter echoed in the cold sub-Artic stillness of the Adirondacks. By the time we arrived at the back door of the house, our anticipated return was greeted with familial smiles and a stove full of steaming food. John Mohawk most always cooked our breakfast food...pancakes with real maple syrup, or corn-meal mush, and thick bacon cooked in maple syrup. John was quite the gourmet cook on that roaring wood-burning stove.

The adults worked out of a trailer across the driveway. On very cold mornings, John and Jose would prime our diesel-fueled generator to run our ancient, electric typesetter. We had the best of both worlds in that trailer: technology surrounded by nature. We were a hodgepodge of indigenous nationalities consisting in one Seneca, a Mohawk, an Oneida, a *Cubano* and a Chicana, all committed to raising consciousness about the continuing struggles of indigenous peoples around the world. We facilitated the publication of *Akwesasne Notes*, an indigenous newspaper that had gathered an international following.

Working in support of traditional forms of spirituality and nascent self-sufficient projects for the Mohawk Nation, we were always included in the maintenance of traditional, cyclical ceremonies in the communal Longhouse at Akwesasne, a two-hour drive away. I was welcomed to participate in Longhouse activities. The Longhouse is the center of shared religious and ritual activities that include songs, tobacco burning, dances, and prayers. Because I was new to the protocol around communal ritual participation, I sat shyly in the background while the dancing began, until Tom Porter (Mohawk Faithkeeper) reminded me that Creator wanted to see us humans “move” to show we were alive.

Secular activities included the production of the newspaper, a mail-order business, and tending to many guests who arrived mainly from Europe. Our objectives

included the implementation and incorporation of new technologies. We researched alternative for food production through hydroponics. The Akwesasne Freedom School began using solar power to bake whole-wheat bread. Sovereignty, self-sufficiency and survival were our primary goals.

The Akwesasne Freedom School was established in 1979 by local families in order to revive traditional Mohawk culture and language. Fundraising efforts led by Ron LaFrance and construction help from local families and volunteers from around the world provided a unique experience in self-sufficiency. On the first day of school, the Freedom school provided each student a child-size horn rattle in order to learn the ceremonial songs needed to participate in cyclical communal gatherings in the Longhouse. The parents and students built solar ovens for baking loaves of whole-wheat bread. We explored hydroponics in order to provide fresh greens all-year round. But to plant seeds in the dead of winter went against the “laws” of Nature in Haudenosaunee cycles. Even tradition has to change.

The idea of conforming to current health needs meant spending many hours of research and experimentation in order to learn how to eliminate the toxins in our water, air and food. Survival also meant the rescue a dying language for the children of the *Akwesasne* Freedom School. The clan mothers believe that to lose one’s language is to lose one’s identity. Greetings, Thanksgiving Address, origin stories and songs required knowledge of the Mohawk language.

I was welcomed into the *Notes* family because I knew how to contribute my share of work. Everyone was responsible for assigned projects, and we covered each other while publishing a bi-monthly newspaper and an emergency response newsletter with a fully functional phone-tree. We completed and published *Native Peoples in Struggle*. *Basic Call to Consciousness* was revised and reprinted. Ours was a subversive project since we were in direct opposition to dominant systems of worldwide media and economic control.

Vigilante groups began to form in order to eliminate all “outsiders” from Akwesasne territory. Our joint struggle for sovereignty and self-sufficiency became an interrupted narrative, a distorted vision and a nightmare that became a life-and-death struggle in a literal “put your life on the line” opposition to social constraints that threaten indigenous life-ways now more than ever. Death threats and yearlong siege masterminded by New York State Police (Capt. Shneeman), Federal SWAT teams, and local “vigilante” solidified familial kinship bonds between “traditional” *indios* and *indias*. Being blockaded for a year meant that we had to use powerboats to cross the St. Lawrence in the summer in order to send out our beleaguered *Akwesasne Notes*. Food was cooked in a communal kitchen and no one went hungry. Calls for world attention went unheeded by the U.S. media. When I called the New York Times a reporter asked: “has any one been killed?” I no one had been “killed,” she wasn’t interested. The collective of warrior men and women representing tribes from the Yukon to Maine, we held our ground. Noting our implacability, the U.S. government representatives recognized Mohawk Indian sovereignty and finally had the blockade removed. A peace was negotiated. Removal of State Police meant the beginning of Mohawk sovereignty. Salvaging the Freedom school meant their cultural survival.

My identity as *mestiza* as well as the importance of my work at *Akwesasne* was recognized through inclusion to cyclical rituals and private ceremonies that were celebrated in the Longhouse -- the true Indian church for the *Haudenosaunee*. My happiness was fully realized when I was accepted as “auntie” to the many children whom I delighted with offers to jump into my car for a drive to a sauna and swim at the all-white motel across the river in Cornwall, Canada...in the middle of winter. Ultimately, I was publicly acknowledged and honored by traditional elders to be a representative to the U.N. Conference on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva, Switzerland (1981). Traveling to Europe as speaker and translator for the *Haudenosaunee*, I proved my worth as a Spanish-speaking *mestiza*. I aided communication between indigenous

peoples from Central and South America and *Haudenosaunee* elders in clandestine organizational meetings. Indian peoples from countries that deprecate their indigenous populations were amazed at the certitude of strength displayed by their Northern sisters and brothers. We conducted many all-night meetings away from the central forum where we felt free to strategize solutions for a host of mutual degradations that were being imposed on Third World indigenous peoples of the world. *Indigenos* from Central and South America left Geneva with the simple understanding that throughout Mesoamerica, their work was to begin to educate their own people at home that “it was OK to be Indian.”

Emboldened by this venture into international diplomacy and two months traveling throughout Western Europe, I returned to *Akwesasne* only to confront the miasma that confounds tribal peoples straddling multiple identities and borders. Dissolving the unity against a common enemy -- the BIA and its agents -- had now turned into Greed and Envy. It took its toll on the quick disintegration of *Akwesasne Notes* followed by the consequent diaspora of its indigenous intellectuals. Adding to the overwhelming degradation of the Mohawk population were the effluents from two of the largest aluminum factories in the world (Reynolds and Alcoa) dumping 10,000 pounds of fluoride per day into the air and water supplies. Pools of PCBs from a General Motors plant next to the Freedom School had long ago spoiled drinking and bathing water (Milich, 1989, 23--25). Mercury from a Canadian sawmill spilled directly into the St. Lawrence River. Fish had become so toxic that the Mohawk community was warned by New York state health officials not to eat more than two pounds of fish per month. A warning gone unheeded among a people used to traditional staple of freshly caught riverine fish. Swimming in the St. Lawrence was also highly discouraged since the toxins affected your organs, blood and skin. The toxic soup from over industrialization had released air and water borne poisons that a medical team from Cedars-Sinai Hospital in New York City documented to cause brittle bone disease, skin-

inflammation, birth deformities, and even death. Soon after my return from Europe I became pregnant and I had no choice but to leave my communal family under the cloud of toxic wastes that had been produced by the dominant corporate culture of 1982. I had fallen in love with a Longhouse chief who declared he could only marry someone who belonged to a clan in order to maintain traditional family lines. As a disenfranchised *indigena*, I could not expect his support. I made no claims.

Sweet asylum, again! This time The Farm in Summerland, Tennessee, a communal village conditioned by enlightened "Flower Power" families. Originally from San Francisco, Steven and Ina Mae Gaskin and three hundred kindred spirits had traveled to Tennessee in order to escape the 60's Haight Ashbury free-for-all. The Farm is inscribed in self-negation, consensus governance, and an ultraistic ideology that they freely share with the disenfranchised of the world. Midwifery is central to their way of life and they provide free midwifery training to American Indians and Third World women from Mesoamerica. At The Farm, midwifery provided the structure for their spirituality, a foreground manifesto in the sacredness of birth -- their only true ritual. Their gods incarnate are the children who reflect *samsara* in their gaze. I was attracted to their lifestyle for this reason. I arrived at The Farm two months before the birth of my pureblood, mestizo son (a Chickahawck -- half Chicano, half Mohawk), only to be rushed to a Nashville hospital because of complications in my pregnancy. As a "premie," my son required intensive care that lasted more than two months. I was tended each day by a rotating group of mothers and midwives who drove ninety miles from The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee. They brought me daily consolation and companionship, and I never felt alone because I had daily hospital visits from newly found and concerned friends. Several women brought me their babies so that I could wet-nurse in order to keep my breast milk from drying out while I waited for the time my son could nurse by his own. Very few women in America can claim that kind of sisterly support. Michael Bear recovered nicely with special prayers and tobacco

burning ceremonies I had requested from my friends back home at *Akwesasne*. [Michael Bear is now twenty-eight]. But becoming part of mendicant “communal family” meant not having the choice or means to leave. I valued my autonomy and did not like to ask the Farm’s central council for permission or money to buy my son’s first pair of shoes. For a third time in less than 15 years, I left my communal home.

Returning to familial roots and my *mexicanidad* meant returning to Southern California where I hoped to recover the intertextuality of my indigenous peoples scattered throughout Aztlan. I wanted my son to know his blood family. Marginalization, Despair and Welfare was all that greeted me. It did not take me long to realize that the only solution to poverty was to go back to school. I adjusted to my new identity as a “re-entry student” in college since this appellation acknowledged that I had experienced a full life. Now, as a doctoral candidate, I am fully involved in Comparative Religion and Critical and Cultural Studies. My approach to academia has been to learn how to re-position a “new” epistemological subject for women of color. I am confident that through personal agency and their subjectivity, I may begin to posit a new model of empowered feminism, one that recognizes that biological changes in the body, psychic changes in the mind, and a growing spiritual awareness that are all productive starting points for analyzing culture and the formation of self-identity. (Csordas, 1990, 9)

In developing a coherent theoretical framework, I rely on a narrative of oppositional praxis in order to begin to counter the male-centered ideological constructs inherent in the modern scholarly canon. The wide range of post-modern, sub-altern, and de-colonial theories provide meaningful structures by which to place women of color at center. Critical and Cultural race theory inscribe a powerful new meaning for the disenfranchised, the marginalized, “the Other.” Dr. Chela Sandoval points out that understanding dominant theory becomes the way we can begin to interrogate the formation of consciousness. What a better way to understand how power relations are

established, maintained and controlled.¹ Given such a fresh new view, historical, cultural, and social constructs of gender become new territories Chicanas are free to explore. I now begin to feel less threatened by the omnipotence of “master narratives” and their inscription of gender identity. Although I may position indigenous knowledge production within Euro-centric paradigms, the post-modern critique of ideological formations provide me with a language by which I can begin to feel safe to explore and redefine my own cultural heritage as *Indigena* (the past), identify as *mestiza* in a modern world (the present), while living in a land occupied by facades (the future). My voice can further elaborate on the importance of indigenous cosmologies, symbols, rituals and myth. My words can counter and resist patriarchal oppression. I recognize the colonial-mind set of my assimilated sisters so I can call them on it when I have to. I identify with the past through active participation in ritual ceremony. I can elaborate on the schema of Nature vs. *Kulture*. I live in a world filled with simulacrum becoming real by what inscribes it. And as I begin to discard 20th-century canons still locked in Modernism and Kantian dualities, I embrace the chorus of de-colonialist discourse to further expand my knowledge of consciousness and subjectivity. As I position myself further outside dominant Western paradigms, my tentative steps are guided by U.S. Third World scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa and “mestiza consciousness”; Che Sandoval’s “methodology of the oppressed”, Yolanda Broyles-González elaboration of the “Indianization of the Catholic church”, Norma Alarcón’s theory on “‘the’ native other”, and numerous other U.S. Third World female and male scholars explicating post-colonial discourse.

As a Chicana scholar I have moved in those areas of overlap between cultural expressions and transpersonal spaces. Academic survival has meant I have had to develop an ability to read the “signs” that inscribe and position me as subject in someone else’s project. As a first-generation American of bi-cultural and bi-lingual origins, I am strongly committed to fostering an awareness in my students not only of

the many cultures and voices represented in the literature they read, but of the historical contexts that present us with our specific communities and their fracture zones. I believe that a newfound *conciencia de la mujer* provides me with a constructive way of interpreting and negotiating these zones.

On a personal level, I continue to engage with life in a survivalist mode. Assuming a low profile, I live expecting the unexpected. Finding a voice has become an urgent proposition when the semblance of the larger hegemonic balance is threatened. As I scramble for identity as a modern, *mestiza* self, tied as it were to tradition and innovation; and as the tentacles of multi-national, corporate culture continues to destroy indigenous autonomy and sovereignty, I identify with women of color who play on “difference” in order to reveal contradictory elements in all our lives. I now enter the Third World Women’s Movement properly informed within the interices between zones intersecting gender, race and class issues. I join the ranks of Third World Women, “women of color” who are engaged in what Rosa Linda Fregosa identifies as the re-configuring of “oppositional identities of origin, authenticity, and collectivity.” (Fregosa, 1993, 114). A renewed emphasis on the significance of memory, place, and displacement serve women of color by allowing engagement with and interrogation of dominant ideologies which -- as Sandoval points out -- “have long held that the behaviors of marginalized peoples depend on no methodology at all or rather that they consist of whatever acts one must commit in order to survive, both physically and psychically” (Sandoval, 1995, 411). Only now can I begin to understand that women of color can successfully define new theoretical models that position a discourse on an entirely different subjectivity, one of our own making. Re-definition erupts from the long-silenced!

END NOTES

1. "Eastlandia" is how I designate the spatial-temporal environ of the East Coast United States, following performance artist, Maria Elena Gaitan who signifies the West Coast as "Pocholandia" and Gomez Peña's designation of the U.S. as "Gringolandia"
- 2 "Diegetic narrative" as defined by Plato means "simple narrative," in which "the poet himself is the speaker."(104). From *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond*, (1991), Robert Stam, Robert Gurgoyne, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, editors.
3. "Women of color" is a highly contested term that emerged from a "consciousness of exclusion." See *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. (Watertown, MA: Persephone Books 1981).
4. See Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera, The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute books 1987.
5. According to Thomas J. Csordas, "the existential ground of culture and the sacred begins with the body." Csordas collapses the distinction between subject and object, cognition and emotion, mind and body that allows us to "investigate how the locus of the sacred is the body, for the body is the existential ground of culture. It is from "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology" in *Ethos*, vol. 18, no. 1 (March 1990) 23.
6. See Chela Sandoval's "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," in *Genders*, No. 10. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991.

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