

THE CHICANO GUNFIGHTER AND THE MESTIZA GODDESS:
CONTEMPORARY CHICANA/O IDENTITY

IN AMÉRICO PAREDES

by

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CHAPTER I
BORDER KNOWING AND IDENTITY BUILDING

The U.S.-Mexican border, as a cultural space, a political space, and an economic space, is defined by a historical conflict that stems from the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. This border space is a well protected area, a strictly defined boundary that divides not only two countries, but also two cultures. Because two cultures exist on the borderlands and, in essence, collide, there is a constant struggle for recognition which translates into a struggle for political power between those who are dominated by that power (the Mexican) and those who wield that power (the Anglo). What this conflict also produces is the desire for the less powerful to remember the past or the origin of the conflict itself, which, in the case of the Mexican American, is the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Remembering, however, breeds a deep resentment which is a symptom of the anxiety that is fueled by the Mexican American desire to “be seen,” to matter in America. Although the signing of the treaty “officially” ended the dispute for land between the U.S. and Mexico and “officially” converted Third World Mexican citizens into American ones, Chicanas/os are still “unofficially” immersed socially and culturally in their Mexican heritage. The tension between the Chicana/o’s U. S. citizenship and his/her intrinsic connection to a deep Mexican heritage plays an important role in the construction of an identity or of a consciousness on the border. Walter D. Mignolo astutely points out that “the Third World produces not only

‘cultures’ to be studied by anthropologists and ethnohistorians but also intellectuals who generate theories and reflect on their own culture and history” (5).

The notion of a complex process of identity construction due to the unique political and cultural Chicana/o situation at the U.S.-Mexico border is what interests me. What matters, that is, is how the Chicana/o “thinks” about his/her existence in such a historically conflicted space like the border, how the Chicanas/os define themselves there through literature. In his book *Local Histories/ Global Design*, Walter Mignolo discusses what he calls “border thinking” which he says becomes “border knowledge.” “Border knowledge” is the transformation of “subjugated knowledge” into “subaltern knowledge” which in turn, becomes the “local histories from which global designs emerge in their universal drive” (Mignolo 20-21). That is, what the border Mexican American experiences and thus, sees as his social and political existence within the context of the border region, is the product of the border’s embattled history. Mignolo argues that the “‘native point of view’ also includes intellectuals” (5). Therefore, as part of the cultural group that lost this historical battle between the U.S. and Mexico, the contemporary Mexican American border intellectual has been challenged by his/her unique existence in this “in-between” border space. Mignolo explains the unique situation of the Chicana/o points out the difference in “thinking” or “knowing” between the Amerindian or Native American intellectuals and the Chicana/o intellectual in this region extremely well:

Amerindian intellectuals in Latin America or Native Americans in the United States are in a border position not because they moved but because the world moved to them. On the other hand, the Chicana/o intellectuals are in between both possibilities . . . particularly in the past thirty years, massive migration from Mexico is generating, within the United States, a type of intellectual who thinks in the border, although his or her situation

is different from that of a migrant intellectual . . . This is another type of situation (somewhere in between that of the Amerindians and Native Americans . . .), since the Chicana/o are such in part because of migration but also in part because the world moved around them (the southern frontier in the nineteenth century) or because they descend from immigrants but they are not immigrants themselves (e.g., Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga). (72-73)

For decades, Mexican American artists, authors, musicians, philosophers, and scholars have attempted to express the Chicana/o consciousness on the border. For example, in *With His Pistol In His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* and in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, I am concerned about how Américo Paredes and Gloria Anzaldúa, respectively, reflect this process of identity formation. That is, how do these authors interpret this unique existence “in between both possibilities” within their works differently? In order to examine these works, I will explore the border region as a unique space from which these authors explore identity construction, implying that the U.S.-Mexico border is a cultural, social, and political space which becomes a relevant force in this process. I will also explore how each author influenced the way Chicanos/as think about themselves and their socially subaltern status on the border and how that affects identity construction. José David Saldívar touches on the influence of the border in identity construction in his article “The Location of Américo Paredes’s Border Thinking.” Here, Saldívar points out that “In poems such as ‘The Mexico-Texan,’ Paredes suggested that the history of Chicanos/as (like other U.S. Latinos/as) is inaugurated by the loss of space. Geocultural identities, [Paredes] insisted, must be searched for and recovered performatively” (192).

The U.S.-Mexico border is a very real and conflicted space and because of this, carries more meaning than less culturally diverse areas such as the U.S. Midwest and deeper parts of Mexico, for example. The border is a space that is perceived as different things to different people as well, adding to the complexity of the construction and reflection of identity for those in the region. In her examination of national security and public interest for example, Michelle Saint-Germain describes the border as “a one-dimensional line surrounding and defining the territory of a nation-state” (60). Included in Saint-Germain’s description are the physical dimensions of the length on the border at 1,950 miles that spans four U.S. states as well as six Mexican states inhabited by as many as 20 million people (60). Facts like these are important for the researcher, economist, geographer, and perhaps cartographer, but the border means so much more to the Mexican American. Carmen Caliz-Montoro, a scholar of Chicano literature, tells us that the Chicana/o has come to take the term “the border,” which includes the South Texas region, to describe “the reality of exile within the homeland” (4). This notion of “exile within the homeland” implies a subordinate existence for the Chicana/o characterized by a paradoxical loss or removal of social and political power, as well as land, and a forced exemption of voice, which exists without an actual physical removal of a people. This notion of exile is a painful reminder of the Chicano/a’s subordinate status on the border. Inocencio Manslavo, a character in Carlos Fuentes’s *Old Gringo* reaffirms the negative symbolic perception of the borderlands when he says, ““They’re right when they say this isn’t a border. It’s a scar”” (185).

Some like St. Germain see the border as “a one-dimensional line surrounding and defining the territory of a nation-state” (60). And, yes, the physical dimensions of the border are defined by a length of 1,950 miles that span four U.S. states and six Mexican states inhabited by as many as 20 million people (St. Germain 60). But, to some intellectuals like Américo Paredes, the border is something more complex. He tells us that the border is interpreted “not simply as a line on a map but, more fundamentally, as a sensitized area where two cultures or two political systems come face to face” (*Folklore* 19-20). Calling the border a “sensitized area,” Paredes implies instability within the region as well. Perhaps more importantly, he defines the border as an “area,” not just a line.

Paredes elaborates on his definition of the border in his seminal work, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, by calling it a region that exists “half in Mexico and half in the United States” where the “Lower Rio Grande has made its mark: in legend, in song, and in those documented old men’s tales called histories” (*WHP* Intro). He interprets the border to be a place where the oral tradition of the corrido, the legend, the song, about which he writes, exists along this cultural space, but it is where dominant “history” or “documented old men’s tales” also exist. For Paredes, there is a conflict between the legends of the border corrido, which he considers versions of Mexican American border “history,” and the dominant Anglo version of “old man’s tales” which Anglos consider legitimate “history.” He argues that the conflict between these two sets of tales have always been part of a “way of life” that caused “problems of identity” among other crises for the “border dwellers,” who were the first to confront these problems after the Texas

Revolution (Paredes *Identity*, 19). Therefore, by writing about Gregorio Cortez in heroic terms within the paradigm of the corrido, Paredes creates a different historical understanding of the border, one the Mexican American in the region can call his own. Paredes creates a kind of border “thinking” derived from the local border “knowledge” or histories circulated in the form of the corrido.

Paredes takes the oral tradition of the corrido and legitimizes it by translating it into a written history, a respectable literary form. The corrido becomes another myth, an alternative legend, an history that the Chicana/o can interpret as a representation of his/her culture, which is defined, in part, by an identity of resistance. The new corrido history that Paredes puts forth is derived from the Chicana/o’s desire for independence not only from the paradigm of the Anglo Texan histories dominating the Texas frontier, but also from the identity imposed on the border Chicana/o by the Anglo Texan who also inhabits the border region. He creates a clear dichotomy of Anglo Texan versus the border Mexican American. Paredes appropriates the songs and legends of the corrido and transforms them into “documented” old men’s tales for the Mexican American culture; he turns an oral history into a written one. Furthermore, Paredes elevates Gregorio Cortez from an everyman farmer to a folk hero which Paredes admits, is a “by-product” of the influence of circulated stories that kept “the image of Cortez fresh in the minds of the Border people” (*WHP* 108). Paredes recognizes the influence that corridos have within the border culture. According to Jesse Aleman, “*El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*,” which is the subject of Paredes’s text, “exemplifies the corrido of border conflict insofar as its form is distinguished from other types of balladry, such as romances, decimas, and

coplas, each with their own specific socio-literary contexts” (149). His work, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, promotes an effective strategy of empowerment on the border in similar corrido fashion because as José David Saldívar points out, “It was here in Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas (the territorial overlap of border difference), where Paredes’s collective experiences of the interstices of nationness [sic], community, culture, and social value were negotiated” (192).

Likewise, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa mythologizes the border by describing it even more abstractly than Paredes does. She “knows” the border to be an “unnatural boundary” that is in a “constant state of transition,” a more socially symbolic thing, “*una herida abierta* (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (3). For Anzaldúa, the border is a metaphorical scar that still bleeds and symbolizes real pain that is yet to be healed; the border is a “wound” left open.

Anzaldúa’s interpretation of the border as a scar allows her to express what she sees as a collective ethnic sentiment that she calls a mestiza consciousness. This mestiza consciousness is essentially a process of identity formation, another way of thinking about the “self” on the border. That is, a mestiza consciousness, although seemingly aimed at the woman of color, is really also a collective, “tribal consciousness” that Anzaldúa hopes will permeate boundaries and resist binaries as well as rigid identity categories (Keating 2).

This particular process of “thinking” on the border which leads to identity construction is further complicated by Anzaldúa’s anxiety over her gender and her homosexuality within the very religious and masculine Chicano culture. The fact that she

is a woman and “*made the choice to be queer*” (19 emphasis in original), she says, allows her to rebel even against her own native culture “through sexual behavior” and to “balance” or mitigate the dualities of gender and sexuality. Anzaldúa says, “There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds” (19) reaffirming the ambivalence driving her notion of a mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa’s unique perpetual state of identity ambivalence can also be traced to her radical way of restructuring and studying the cultural history and origins of the Chicana at the south Texas border. The borderlands, Anzaldúa says, is a region where “alienated from her mother culture, ‘alien’ in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self” (20), and where “through our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages. . . .Which was it to be—strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming?” (18). Anzaldúa further explains the Chicana’s ambivalent position on the border by arguing that “*la mojada, la mujer undocumentada*, is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness” (18). Therefore, Anzaldúa understands her identity to be in a constant state of ambivalence, an existence of “half and halves,” always in a state of transition not confusion, and always resisting dualities (19).

After discussing the subjugation of women within the border region, and perhaps more relevant to her identity formation, within the Chicana/o culture, Anzaldúa invokes those whom she calls “the three mothers” (33). For Anzaldúa, the “three mothers,” *La Virgen, La Malinche, and La Llorona*, have influenced the Chicana/o culture and identity formation all the way back to the Aztec culture from which they were derived, where

“women possessed property and were curers as well as priestesses” (33). These icons become the heroines of Anzaldúa’s text. The “three mothers” seem to replace the patriarchal Holy trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are the masculine religious icons and moral bases for all the heroes of the Texas frontier we call the border. For example, Paredes derives characteristics for his hero Gregorio Cortez from the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whereas Anzaldúa derives her powerful iconic personification of the heroine, mostly from *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, a derivation of the Virgin Mary Mother of God. With their legendary origins and Anzaldúa’s psychological interpretations of them as symbols of a complicated feminine ambivalence, the “three mothers” are not only the heroines of the text, but they also become the cultural icons for the Chicana/o on the border. These women help develop the mestiza consciousness or cultural identity whereby the feminine (especially *La Virgen*) replaces the male in “the role of the defender (or patron)” (29). *La Virgen* is also “more venerated than Jesus or God the Father,” according to Anzaldúa (29).

Anzaldúa also argues that “[Chicanas/os] are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of gods. In our very own flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures” (81). Because of this subordinate existence “in the dark,” Chicanas/os desire recognition, equality, and reparation in the form of political, social, and cultural acknowledgement on the border. *Borderlands/La Frontera* attempts to bring the revolution to the forefront of the intellectual dialogue on the border. Anzaldúa’s text seems to indicate the beginning of a contemporary exploration of the Chicana/o identity that attempts to lead the Mexican American out of the dark. *Borderlands* is where the

border intellectual has left off his/her exploration of identity in recent years. That is, the contemporary exploration of identity has been catapulted from her text, an exploration from the south Texas border that saw its beginnings in Paredes's text, in my opinion.

However, the contemporary Chicana/o border intellectual has not substituted Anzaldúa's mestiza goddess/consciousness notion of identity for Paredes's Chicano gunfighter notion of identity but instead, has been in a state of continuous oscillation between the modernist and postmodernist interpretations of identity construction presented in both texts. Identity formation has become a process that not only tries to elevate the Chicana/o politically on the border by pointing out the differences between the Anglo and the Chicana/o, but also mitigates the tension caused by a fragmented subjectivity that Chicanas/os live with at the U.S.-Mexico border. And, although the U.S.-Mexico border is in fact a physical space rigidly defined by physical measurements and geographical characteristics as aforementioned, it is also now interpreted by the Chicana/o on the border as an abstract symbol: a scar, a wound, and "fundamentally, a sensitized region" where two groups of people, Anglos and Chicanas/os, "come face to face" as pointed out by Paredes and Anzaldúa respectively.

Within this zone of conflict in south Texas, the Chicana/o must interpret how he/she thinks and thus, interprets their sense of "self" there. But, again, I argue that it is difficult to adhere to Anzaldúa's theoretical exploration of a postmodernist all-inclusive, boundary-less, mestiza identity described in *Borderlands* without reaching back with nostalgia for Paredes's more rigid masculine version of the Mexican American hero like Gregorio Cortez who exhibited a list of honorable traits such as pride, courage, dignity,

and generosity in *With His Pistol* to define his people and their battles against the Anglo. Therefore, there is an oscillation between the two notions of defining the “self” on the border. On the one hand, the Chicana/o wants to respect the nurturing inclusion of all peoples because of the exclusion he/she has experienced on the border. The Mexican American wants to make the boundaries that have marginalized them disappear. However, the Mexican American Chicana/o also wants to be inspired by the legends of a lone hero like Gregorio Cortez who dies tragically, yet heroically, by bravely “defending his ‘right’ against the *rinches*” (Paredes *WHP*, 147). Chicanas/os are encouraged by Cortez’s resistance. Chicanas/os want to see Cortez’s courage and dignity reflected deep within themselves.

Since there has been a loss of land, political power, culture, and language on the border, many Mexican Americans or Chicanas/os question their identity, what it means to be a Chicana/o on the border. The questioning of the self arises from the anxiety extant in the socially dominated condition of the Mexican American that lives within this relatively new space we call the border. The process of finding the answer to the identity question can be derived from what Mignolo calls “border knowing” or “thinking” as previously discussed. Historically, on the border, the Chicana/o’s cultural “homeland,” Mexico, was violently separated from his/her “official” nation of citizenship, the United States in 1848. In *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, Américo Paredes attempts to address this question of identity and define the experience of the “Border people” (9) (as a group) by describing them, through specifically listed characteristics, as “simple pastoral” people who “fostered a natural equality among men” (10). Paredes also

designates the borderland as a distinct region that lies between the north and the south where the Mexican American experience is unique:

Rio Grande people lived in tight little groups—usually straddling the river—surrounded by an alien world. From the north came the *gringo*, which term meant “foreigner.” From the south came the *fuereño*, or outsider, as the Mexican of the interior was called. (13)

With his list of traits attributed to the Mexican American on the border and the critical analysis of the Texas Anglo on the border who is also described by another list of traits in his text, Paredes’s tendency toward identity construction is more modernist, more static than Anzaldúa’s. That is, Paredes’s modernist definition of the Mexican American identity on the border is a synthesized notion constructed by certain physical and behavioral characteristics that contradict and confront the Anglo Texan perception of the Mexican American in that border area. Furthermore, Mexican-American identity is interpreted within a static corrido paradigm that Paredes creates in order to de-center the hegemonic dominant Anglo paradigm known as Texas history, but which also forms a closed Chicana/o version of culture that reveals a social and racial hierarchy between the Mexican American and the Anglo Texan. The social and racial hierarchy is how Paredes comes to “know” the border; it is how he “thinks” on the border about his own experiences and those experiences of Mexican Americans like him that are markedly different from the experiences of the Anglo. Paredes makes the Mexican American distinctly identifiable, recognizable on the border.

Anzaldúa approaches identity at the border somewhat differently but with the same sense of existing in an “in-between” state perceived in Paredes’s version. Of her text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa says “This book, then, speaks of my existence”

(Preface). *Borderlands/La Frontera* is an exploration of Anzaldúa's personal sense of identity on the border, as one that is always in between cultures in a kind of strange schizophrenic state, or better yet, process:

I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. However, there have been compensations for this *mestiza*, and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being "worked" on. I have the sense that certain "faculties"—not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored—and in dormant areas of consciousness are being activated and awakened. Strange, huh? (Preface)

That is, similar to Paredes who describes the border region as a region "straddling the river—surrounded by an alien world" where the *gringo* comes from the north and the *fuereño* comes from the south (13), Anzaldúa also tells us, "I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life" (Preface). In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, however, Anzaldúa's extended concept of the borderland as not only a "physical borderland," but a "psychological borderland," a "sexual borderland," and a "spiritual borderland" space (Preface), is what distinguishes her interpretation from Paredes's which is a more concrete geographical description of the border as an area where two cultures meet. To Anzaldúa, the border is a "third country, a closed country" (11) that resists binaries and can be interpreted as somewhere and nowhere at the same time.

Furthermore, Anzaldúa promotes this new ethnic consciousness, a *mestiza* consciousness, as a more inclusive construction than Paredes's and thus, is perceived as more adamantly postmodernist in that way. That is, her notion of identity is less rigid, recognizable because of the many possibilities. Anzaldúa resists static characterizations or lists of traits that rigidly define what it is or what it means to be Mexican American. Instead, she emphasizes the constant process of "being worked on," of being in a process of identity construction which is never finished. These varied combinations of self-interpretation, which include allegiances to La Raza, to the Third World, to women, to the Gay movement, to the New Age, and to magic and the occult (Keating 3), lead to her sense of ambivalence within the border space "where two overlap/ a gentle coming together/ at other times and places a violent clash" (Anzaldúa 1). Apropos to her postmodernist sensibilities, Anzaldúa claims that she is "the coming together of opposite qualities within" (19), a "hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species" (81). She resists a trait list and the rigid definitions of what it means to be Chicana/o on the border set up by Paredes. Anzaldúa even explains about the ambivalence she experienced growing up on the border:

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and *agringado* Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at the being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn't stop my feet from thumping to our music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it. (61)

In their respective works, Paredes and Anzaldúa demonstrate the vast complexity in conceiving a unique identity within this equally complex borderland space. The object of my thesis is not to define the border or to declare which of its various definitions is

accurate or not. I also do not intend to give a lengthy history of the border culture from my point of view, but only enough to paint a picture of a perceived reality and thus, a point of reference or context from which Américo Paredes and Gloria Anzaldúa were writing when they produced their two most important works of literature. I do intend, however, to compare how Américo Paredes, in *With His Pistol in His Hand*, and Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, both treat identity construction. I will describe border culture as Paredes and Anzaldúa use it to form what I see as a Border Mythology which promotes Chicana/o identity construction that is used in identity politics. I also intend to point out the development of Paredes's and Anzaldúa's mythic and heroic formulations that constitute the Mythology of the Borderlands along the heterotopia that is the "real" borderlands to offer a critical interpretation of the texts' meanings and to assess their power in shaping the life, thoughts, and especially, the identity of the contemporary Chicana/o. Finally, I will argue that the contemporary Chicana/o intellectual on the border oscillates between the modernist notions of identity and the postmodernist process of identity construction reflected in both works. That is, the Chicana/o has a tendency to define him/herself by adhering to physical and behavioral characteristics that are always in tension with the actual process of constructing an identity which is never finished, due to the fact that the Chicana/o is forced to face two realities on the border at all times. First, however, I will explore the significance of identity construction examined through these two aforementioned works of literature.

CHAPTER II

WHY IDENTITY IN A BORDERLANDS NARRATIVE?

In his lecture “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault puts forth his idea of heterotopias. He argues that there exists these spaces or “places where things have been put because they had been violently displaced, and then on the contrary places where things found their natural ground and stability” (22). The heterogeneous space Foucault describes as an external space sounds a lot like the conflictual space I have been discussing called the borderlands where there exists “a mixed, joint experience” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). Chicano author Alejandro Morales points out the interesting relationship between Foucault’s concept and the actual border between the U.S. and Mexico along the California region. He argues that urban populations along the borders “reach out toward each other filling the spaces between with a multitude of independent ‘topias’ evolving into heterotopia” (Morales 23). Furthermore, Morales says that Foucault’s idea of heterotopias “explains border culture” well because it helps to “bring order and understanding” to an unruly space which accommodates “different entities” and “a wealth of displacements” (23). Similarly, in the heterotopic border space that I have been discussing, specifically between south Texas and Mexico extending from Brownsville/Matamoros to McAllen/Reynosa, the narratives of Paredes and Anzaldúa mean something unique to the Chicanas/os who inhabit that new space. The literature attempts to galvanize the Chicana/o by representing a shared identity which, along the

U.S.-Mexico border, is more difficult to negotiate than identity construction in any other new space, as Alejandro Morales astutely argues:

The inhabitants of heterotopia are rendered strangers to each other and to themselves. Crossing the border, heading north, the Mexican is immediately separated from the point of origin, from the genesis of identity. In a land covered with a webbed veil of freeways the individual Mexican moving north is separated, cut off from the motherland. Here the stranger must struggle to make him/herself at home. Here the stranger is constantly asked to define, explain, and understand him/herself. Life in the chaos of heterotopia is a perpetual act of self-definition gradually deterritorializing the individual. The individual become an ambiguity. (24)

Although Morales's explanation sheds light on the unique condition of the Chicana/o on the border well, he does not address the entire Chicana/o situation as specifically as Walter Mignolo does. Mignolo says that Chicana/o intellectuals "are in a border position not because they moved but because the world moved to them" (Mignolo 72) and that "the Chicana/o are such in part because of migration but also in part because the world moved around them (the southern frontier in the nineteenth century) or because they descend from immigrants but they are not immigrants themselves (e.g. Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga) (Mignolo 73). In other words, the Chicana/o on the border exists there by force.

This particular "border position" that influences identity construction brings me to a discussion of purpose in narrative. That is, it makes me ask the question: Why identity? Why should any narrative be examined in a way that implies a specific purpose which involves the construction of an ethnic consciousness or identity formation just because the author of the text in question is a minority? Do critics ever examine a text by an Anglo author in order to prove or imply that the author of that text is attempting to

galvanize the Anglo population or construct the Anglo consciousness? I do not believe that is usually the case, anymore, at least. But, in Chicana/o literature, this critical approach concerning identity construction reflected in the text is often seriously considered and studied by scholars in the field. For example, in her book *Identity in Narrative: A Study of Immigrant Discourse*, Anna De Fina uses H. Tajfel's definition of identity which describes identity as "that part of an *individual's self-concept* which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (15 emphasis mine). De Fina describes identity in narrative, "especially within social psychology," as referring to "a sense of belonging to social categories" (15). De Fina also includes, in her discussion, P. Kroskrity's definition which states that identity is "the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories," but also stresses the notion that "although identity is not necessarily expressed through linguistic means, language plays a central role in its *construction*" (15 emphasis mine). Therefore, according to De Fina, Tajfel sees identity as "an individual's self-concept," which implies a situated and stable process ascribed to an individual (15). But, Kroskrity sees identity as a "construction" or a process "grounded within social interactions and institutions in which and with which individuals are engaged" (De Fina 15). Therefore, Tajfel's concept of identity is stable and Kroskrity's, dependent on social interactions which are always in process.

In the introduction to her book *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, Paula M. L. Moya asks the same question I ask: Why

identity? That is, why should identity be the central focus of debate or of literary criticism in a postmodern world where academics perceive identity as an essentialist tendency that “as a basis for political action, is theoretically incoherent and politically pernicious” (Moya 2)? Critics like Michel Foucault agree, and argue that identity causes epistemological problems because identity is often expressed through an individual’s experience, and an individual’s experience cannot dictate or determine the social meanings that are “constituted differently in different historical contexts” for an entire group of people (Moya 3). However, the way in which concepts of identity work to interpret experience in Paredes’s and Anzaldúa’s narratives are important to the struggle that belongs to the Chicana/o living on the border. To identify or know oneself is important because it takes the power of defining the dominated, imposing, perhaps, a prejudiced notion of the “Other’s” existence.

Whether or not a minority’s own self-definition is complete or correct is irrelevant because there is a power inherent in defying assumptions that leads to escaping subjugation, which is what is at stake for the Chicana/o on the border. Escaping subjugation through self-definition leads to the promotion of more positive images and a sense of empowerment. Also, to make visible the epistemic significance of identity in these or any texts is to accept that “experience, properly interpreted, can yield reliable and genuine knowledge, just as it can point up instances of real mystification” (Mohanty 32). In other words, Satya P. Mohanty argues that “experiences can be ‘true’ or ‘false,’ can be evaluated as justified or illegitimate in relation to the subject and his world, for ‘experience’ refers very simply to the variety of ways humans process information” (32).

Therefore, whether the experience is true or false does not really matter, but the variety of ways in which Chicanas/os process that experience at the border does.

Paredes's and Anzaldúa's texts demonstrate that several concepts of individual identity formation are possible and perhaps always at play in formulating a group identity on the border. Paredes, by telling "the story of a ballad, *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*, of its development out of actual events, and of the folk traditions from which it sprang" (*WHP* Intro), attributes the Mexican American "self-concept" to an individual, the hero, Gregorio Cortez. Paredes expects Mexican Americans on the border to identify with the hero of the corrido, Gregorio Cortez, who is part of and represents this larger social group, which Paredes calls the "Rio Grande people." For Paredes, identity construction is similar to Tajfel's definition: "that part of an *individual's self-concept* which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (15 emphasis mine). Anzaldúa attributes the Chicana/o identity to an ongoing process she experiences as an individual who is being "worked on" and who lives "on borders and in margins, keeping intact [her] shifting and multiple identity and integrity," but who also includes herself in a larger group she refers to as "*we Chicanos*" (Preface emphasis mine). So, for Anzaldúa, identity formation is really an ongoing process such as the kind defined by Kroskrity: identity is "the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories," a process "grounded within social interactions and institutions in which and with which individuals are engaged" (15).

In addition, both Paredes and Anzaldúa trace the Mexican American Chicana/o identity formation to legitimize it as distinct from the Anglo by reaching back to a different history and genealogy, two concepts challenged by postmodernist tenets. Author Alejandro Morales privileges the point of origin for Chicanas/os which he says is “the genesis of identity” (24). And, I agree with Morales that the genesis of identity is, in part, the privileging of our origins. Paredes and Anzaldúa privilege origins by dealing with history and genealogy respectively in their texts too, to point out their own version of the origin for the Chicana/o as “the genesis of identity.” Paredes uses the corrido tradition, a form of oral folk history, and the story of Cortez as his framework for interpreting the Mexican American experience on the border, and Anzaldúa invokes the ancient history of her people dating back, in one instance, to her “ancient ancestors” who lived in “35000 B.C.” (4) referring to her origins to tell the story of her unique becoming. Thus, each author’s sense of history and its use to form an identity creates a wealth of identity possibilities that avoids any kind of stasis, and thus, marginalization for the Chicana/o. And, although Paredes’s identity formation is strictly patriarchal, and, in that sense, marginalizes women by identifying Gregorio Cortez as the border hero of all Mexican Americans, Paredes initiates the galvanization of a people along the border that Anzaldúa continues to develop thirty years later.

Foucault criticizes the sense of origins that history, genealogy, and identity promote. In his attempt to debunk the notions of origin and identity, Foucault and other postmodernist critics deconstruct dominant narratives that use culture, history, and genealogy as points of origin and legitimization. In his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy,

History,” Foucault argues that “genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people” (*Reader* 83). However, both Paredes and Anzaldúa write about the Chicana/o experience within a framework of history that is strictly guided by genealogy and thus, origins. So, to impose these postmodernist principles on Paredes’s text would mean to question the very “real” effects on the individual and collective identity construction by the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, the man fighting for his right who “rode on and on, pursued by hundreds and fighting hundreds every place he went” (43). Similarly, to impose Foucault’s postmodernist principles on Anzaldúa’s text would also mean to deny the “real” influence behind “*la Virgen de Guadalupe*,” a feminine heroic symbol that “is the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/*mexicano*” who “unites people of different races, religions, languages: Chicano protestants, American Indians and whites” (30).

We can agree that by making these claims, Foucault does indeed undermine the master narrative which has subjugated the voices of minorities in history and literature for centuries. However, if genealogy, history, and origins are false truths propagated by “ephemeral props,” and identity is only a “mask,” an illusion under which “we attempt to support and to unify,” and whereby the “historian” offers only “alternative identities,” according to Foucault, then where does that leave the Mexican American intellectual or any other minority/alternative voice for that matter who tries to act as historian, who tries to reflect a unified experience for his/her people through narrative? This is the question that Chicanas/os or any minority should ask each other under the postmodernist threat of de-centralization and de-legitimization of identity in narrative, only because this is a time

when the minority voice is just emerging, creating a shared cultural context with which to construct an identity that will allow them a place in social discourse. And, isn't the assumption that people need a shared cultural context in order to identify themselves, something worth thinking about? I even argue that the Chicana/o has to create a presence of mythological proportions in order to compete with the overwhelming political influence of the dominant discourse where Chicanas/os are still considered "aliens" in their own land, even after over a century of being American. Literature and novelistic language is a way to regain some of what was lost in terms of culture, dignity, respect, honor, freedom, and most importantly, identity.

Along with establishing the importance of studying identity formation within a minority narrative, we must consider the borderland mythology created by the texts of Paredes and Anzaldúa as key to understanding the context in which the recognition of an individual and a collective identity takes place. The disparity of interpretation between the border as a space with a violent history in which the Mexican was displaced and/or assimilated into a society making him inferior, "alien," and/or a foreigner in his own land overnight, and the perception of the border advocated by what Richard Slotkin calls "the Myth of the Frontier" is exactly what creates a heterotopia of mixed experiences. The Chicana/o acknowledges that the border is a place in which "the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans, [which include Mexicans in Texas], who originally inhabited it have been the means to [an] achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and 'progressive' civilization" (Slotkin 10) that we all call

America. However, this “progressive” civilization is not always beneficial for the Mexican American. Therefore, when discussing the works of Paredes and Anzaldúa, I refer to the “border” and mean it as a heterotopia and as a mythical cultural space that is similar to the way Slotkin refers to the mythical perception of the “frontier” created by the Anglo settlers. For Paredes and Anzaldúa, the border is a “complexly resonant symbol, a vivid and memorable set of hero-tales . . . a model of successful and morally justifying action on the stage of historical conflict” (Slotkin 3), as it was for early frontier historians like Frederick Jackson Turner and, later, Texas historian Walter Prescott Webb, for example. I would further add that the border is a space whereby the history and the genealogy of the Mexican American is expressed through these “hero-tales” and that the interpretations of the border space created by these two authors helps formulate a sometimes static and sometimes changing Chicana/o identity.

For the Anglo, this south Texas border region was once considered part of the Western frontier, a “vast area of free land [which] offered the opportunity of independence to whoever could seize and use it” (Murdoch 2). It is cloaked in myth and legend that stems from a historical reality which varies among its inhabitants but still pervades popular culture in America today. Richard Slotkin points out that “for an American, allusions to ‘the Frontier,’ or to events like ‘Pearl Harbor,’ ‘the Alamo,’ or ‘Custer’s Last Stand’ evoke an implicit understanding of the entire historical scenario that belongs to the event and of the complex interpretive tradition that has developed around it” (6). For the Mexican American, different heroes must be formed to evoke a different “historical scenario” that belongs to a very different “complex interpretive tradition”

developed around some of the same events. Therefore, the various interpretations of this region influence the way in which certain groups of people, specifically Mexican Americans, relate to it and thus, define themselves in that place historically. The Chicana/o perception of themselves, which I will refer to as their identity, is also influenced by the way in which they have been viewed historically by the other border inhabitants, the Anglo. Again, recognition within this unique Chicana/o situation at the Anglo-dominated border is part of why interpreting identity construction in a narrative about borders and its people is important.

I will mostly use the term “Chicana/o,” which means an American person of Mexican descent or essentially, a Mexican American. But, I will use the term, as I have, interchangeably with “Mexican American” because they mean the same thing, but perhaps emphasize different political ideas. Paredes uses “Mexican American” before the Raza movement in the sixties and Anzaldúa uses “Chicana/o” in the 1980’s. Alejandra C. Elenes reminds us that “Chicana/o” is a politically charged term which “gained recognition during the Chicano liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s” (359). The fact is that it is difficult to ignore the political implications attached to the term “Chicana/o” so I will not pretend to. In addition, José Limón says that people that live on the border “will invariably speak of themselves as ‘mexicanos’—Mexicans – but in Spanish” as a result of the “more than occasional impoliteness” of the Anglo who would say “Meskin” often (6). Also, “mexicanos” may be part of a lingering sentiment of Mexican nationalism stemming from the short period following 1821 when “the U.S. Southwest . . . became part of the newly founded Republic of Mexico” until 1848, of

course (Limón 6). Limón explains what I argue is at the crux of identity construction on the border after 1848:

This new national identity continued through the rest of the nineteenth century and was intensified by continuous immigration principally from neighboring northeastern Mexico, particularly in the early years of the twentieth century. Probably this is the reason my folks continue to identify themselves as “*mexicanos*” even though this south Texas ground violently became part of the United States in 1848. When an English self-referent is needed—and the population is now predominantly bilingual—they are likely to use “Mexican-American.” (6)

Similar to Dr. Limón’s “folks,” many Mexican Americans on the border “identify themselves” as “*mexicanos*” too. I argue that “*mexicanos*” is a label used only when speaking to another Spanish speaker who understands that “*mexicanos*” means of Mexican descent, not necessarily of Mexican nationalism or citizenship, although it can mean that as well on the border.

The ideological interpretation of social symbols like the border as a scar and its heroes as legends within the narratives of Paredes and Anzaldúa are what allows the Chicana/o to create his/her own Myth of the Border. Richard Slotkin describes myths as “stories drawn from a society’s history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society’s ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness—with all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain” (5). In this way, the border has become a powerful cultural and political symbol by which the Chicana/o is able to express and most definitely dramatize, through literature, an ideology and consciousness in the way that Slotkin explains:

Myth expresses ideology in a narrative, rather than discursive or argumentative, structure. Its language is metaphorical and suggestive rather than logical and analytical. The movement of mythic narrative, like

that of any story, implies a theory of cause-and-effect and therefore a theory of history (or even cosmology) . . . Although myths are the product of human thought and labor, their identification with venerable tradition makes them appear to be products of “nature” rather than history—expressions of trans-historical consciousness or some form of “natural law.” (6)

Slotkin continues to explain that “myths are formulated as ways of explaining problems that arise in the course of historical experience. The most important and longest-lived of these formulations develop around areas of concern that persist over long periods of time” (6). For the Chicana/o, that long period of time originates in 1848 and the area of concern is the border, a heterotopic site consisting of colliding differences. Furthermore, the Border Myths both authors create help explain the problem of identity where assimilation is in constant conflict with the Chicana/o historical experience defined by the difference between the dominant Anglo experience and the Mexican American experience. However, paradoxically, the Anglo experience is now deeply a part of the Chicana/o experience as well because assimilation has become increasingly important for survival but so has the preservation of difference between the two cultures.

Elenes points out that “this understanding of difference is necessary to decenter the Eurocentric [perspective]” (363). But, I argue that some Chicanas/os realize the benefits of becoming somewhat assimilated members of the common American ideal. Assimilation and change within the Chicana/o culture may be inevitable as Anzaldúa points out when she says, “The infusion of the values of the white culture, coupled with the exploitation by that culture, is changing the Mexican way of life” (10). Octavio Paz points out that “it is not important to examine the causes of this conflict . . . the important thing is this stubborn desire to be different, this anguished tension with which the lone

Mexican – an orphan . . . displays his differences” (15). Although recognizing and perhaps highlighting the differences between a Chicana/o and an Anglo on the border helps promote a positive identity construction for the Chicana/o, it, nonetheless, makes the border experience more complicated, yet just as important to maintain as much as possible. The way in which Paredes’s and Anzaldúa’s texts, as reflections of Chicana/o history, genealogy, and myth, are appropriated by the Chicana/o on the border has more to do with this seemingly unavoidable “desire” Chicanas/os experience, or what Fredric Jameson also calls the “political unconscious.”

Jameson points out that in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, this desire “poses no problem of meaning, only problems of use” (Jameson 22). That is, for Paredes’s and Anzaldúa’s text, “the question posed by this desire is not ‘What does it mean [for Chicanas/os to interpret Paredes’s and Anzaldúa’s text as alternative history, genealogy and myth in order to form an identity]? but rather ‘How does [this interpretation] work [for the Chicana/o]’” who is searching for some self-definition (22)? If Paredes’s and Anzaldúa’s texts are a social narrative symbol of a culture, an interpretation of experience born of the entanglement of histories and myths that are unique to the border, then the Chicana/o looking for an expression of this desire can interpret the text as an expression of difference. It is an expression of difference, an expression from which to form a sense of self, an identity that is equally as complex as the Anglo’s. An ability to recognize that difference in “official” literary form is what these texts mean to the Chicana/o. Paula Moya points out that “because differences are relational, our ability to understand an ‘other’ [which, for the border Chicana/o, is the border Anglo] depends largely on our

willingness to examine our ‘self’” (67-68). Therefore, by remembering border history and retelling it, tracing the genealogical origins of the Mexican American, and creating new American heroes through their texts, Paredes and Anzaldúa goad the Mexican American to examine their “self” and in the process, help recover a Chicana/o identity, a consciousness, or self-definition that has presumably been lost.

Mikhail Bakhtin says novelistic language is dialogic and heteroglossic, and as such, it exists as a site of struggle to overcome the univocal, monologic utterances that characterize official centralized language. Bakhtin discusses further the idea of dialogue, or the dialogic, arguing that all words or utterances are directed toward an answer, a response (280). Therefore, I talk about these two works of literature within the context of the complex dilemma of defining the Mexican-American identity as it pertains to people living in the Texas-Mexico border, specifically as the ever-emergent “answer,” in Bakhtinian terms, to the question of identity. However, to say that Paredes and Anzaldúa create a myth for the borderlands in order to forge an identity for the Chicana/o is not to say that the Chicana/o identity is born of myth, or that it is an illusion or a mask, and therefore, does not exist or is not concretely important, nor is it to say that the Chicana/o identity is ever going to be defined as one thing or another, a static idea; however, it is to say that the Chicana/o identity is constantly in motion, oscillating, ever-evolving, emerging, and growing paradoxically less and more defined, changing simultaneously with each new myth, but always becoming something different than any other, always becoming more important within the social and political dialogue.

CHAPTER III

PAREDES'S CHICANO GUNFIGHTER AND THE CORRIDO PARADIGM

Establishing identity is an important part of narrative, especially for the minority on the border. As aforementioned, Paredes and Anzaldúa use history and genealogy as part of their technique for constructing a Chicana/o identity. However, both authors work with narrative and identity construction differently and within different paradigms. Christopher Schedler points out that “the period from 1836 to the late 1930s has been characterized as the century of the epic or heroic *corrido* (ballad), the paradigmatic form of Mexican-American, socio-symbolic expression during a period of open conflict” (107) between the dominant Anglo Americans and the subjugated Mexican Americans. This heroic *corrido* tradition fused with the inevitable embrace of the Anglo American literary tradition and gave way to the development of the Mexican American or Chicano literary renaissance (Schedler 107) of which Paredes was a pioneer. It is during this same century-long period that Paredes points out the advancement of what he calls “the Anglo-Texan legend” (*WHP* 15). The Chicano literary renaissance created a hybrid consisting of the oral traditions stemming from the *corrido* and what Paredes calls “the documented old men’s tales called histories” from which the “Texas legend” is derived. As we will see, according to Jose Limón, Paredes’s work is “a new kind of *corrido* whose complex relationship to the past enables it to speak to the present” (Perez 28).

Paredes tells us that “this book began as the study of a ballad; it developed into the story of a ballad hero,” *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez* (*WHP* Intro). Corridos, for

the Mexican, were “narrative folk songs, especially those of epic themes, taking the name from *correr*, which simply means ‘to run’ or ‘to flow,’ for the corrido tells a story simply and swiftly, without embellishments”, Paredes explains (*WHP* Intro). In this chapter, I argue that by using the corrido as a legitimate subject of scholarly investigation for his book, Paredes validates the corrido as a method of storytelling and an historical account that is simple and without myth or “embellishments,” apropos to his criticism of mainstream historical accounts which he attacks in *With His Pistol In His Hand* (*WHP* Intro). This paradigm, as a different version or form of narrative history can also be seen as a parody of the dominant Anglo history where Texas Rangers, who were Anglo gunfighters, were the heroes of the day. I will also discuss the way in which this “corrido paradigm” is instrumental in the development of the Chicana/o identity as a reflection of the heroism found in Gregorio Cortez, a Chicano gunfighter on the border.

As an expert on the history and the effects of the border corridos, Paredes explains the galvanizing tendencies of the folk song itself along the border. He gives us a history of the corrido. Paredes tells us that the Border *corrido* probably stems from the earlier song form called the *decima* which was preferred and which was probably a product of the “fights with the Indians” at first (Paredes *WHP*, 130). The *corrido* was eventually fully developed during a period of one hundred years from 1836 to the 1930’s (Paredes *WHP*, 132). The traditional folk song was circulated and developed soon after what Paredes calls a “three pronged attack on the Rio Grande settlements: civil war, Indian raids, and the English-speaking invasion” (Paredes *WHP*, 132). During this time, there were “raids and skirmishes between Texans and Mexicans” and as Taylor made his

way across the Nueces, “the Lower Rio Grande became even more of a battleground,” the perfect milieu for the development of the border corrido (Paredes *WHP*, 133). Paredes points out that the ballad subject of the corrido was not always the border conflict, however.

The corridos, like *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*, had their beginnings in the oral traditions of Greater Mexico where folk songs were primarily concerned with the “personal or family relationships, such as the love tragedy or ballad of filial disobedience” (Paredes *WHP*, 142). He tells us that “this must have been useful in regulating conduct in the community” (Paredes *WHP*, 142). Paredes points out that “... the interest of the Border ballad makers seems to have been on matters other than these” border conflicts (142), differentiating between the ballads borrowed from “the Greater Mexican Stock” and the corridos sung on the border about Cortez, for example. Soon, the corrido about border conflict became a dominant form of expression galvanizing the Mexican American who identified with Cortez. The corrido about border conflict also “regulated conduct in the community” as Paredes explains:

The period of border conflict resulted in the gradual emergence of the *corrido* as the dominant form of Lower Border balladry . . . The Border *corrido*, by the time it entered its decadent period in the 1930’s, had not assumed total hegemony over Border balladry, as did the *romance* in Spain. . . . One can see the balladry working toward a single type: toward one form, the *corrido*; toward one theme, border conflict; toward one concept of the hero, the man fighting for his right with his pistol in his hand. (*WHP* 149).

Here, Paredes also makes a direct correlation between the emergence of the border corrido as a dominant form of Lower Border balladry and his modernist notion of a single

definable Mexican American identity formation that it reflects. That is, when Paredes explains the “movement” or development of the corrido, a ballad circulated among the subjugated border Mexican, he is in effect also formulating the idea of a collective identity, an identity of “a single type,” of “one form” with “one theme” and “one concept of the hero, the man fighting for his right with his pistol in his hand” (*WHP* 149) which becomes a dominant concept in the Chicana/o identity of resistance.

In Chapter II: THE LEGEND, Paredes demonstrates how the possibility of resistance and retribution, through the story of Gregorio Cortez, can be a form of justice in the face of the Anglo oppressor. The corrido’s story follows that, after Román, Gregorio Cortez’s brother, tricks an Anglo into trading an injured horse for a worthless mare, the sheriff comes over to their ranch and falsely accuses the brothers of stealing horses. After Román calls the sheriff a “Gringo Sanavabiche,” “the sheriff whipped out his pistol and shot Román . . . in the face” (Paredes *WHP*, 40). In self-defense, Gregorio Cortez “stood at the door, where his brother had stood, with his pistol in his hand” (Paredes *WHP*, 40). After the “Major Sheriff shot first, and missed; [then] Gregorio Cortez shot next, and he didn’t miss” (Paredes *WHP*, 40). In the minds of the Border people in the story and perhaps the Chicana/o reader who has experienced injustice, Cortez’s own pain, anger, and perception of the law becomes theirs. In essence, the new version of history Paredes perpetuates through Cortez’s story also becomes theirs.

In his introduction, Paredes begins by telling the reader that “[his book] is the story of a ballad, *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*, of its development of actual events, and of the folk traditions from which it sprang” (*WHP* Intro). Paredes concludes the

introduction by telling us how people composed these ballads about men like Gregorio Cortez who became legends and then folk heroes “to be studied and argued about by generations of scholars” (*WHP* Intro). He promotes the legitimacy of the corrido and turns it into a genre with “historical” ties. Paredes sets up his narrative as a version of the truth based on “actual events” (*WHP* Intro). Paredes tells us “the truth seems to be that the old war propaganda concerning the Alamo, Goliad, and Mier later provided a convenient justification for outrages committed on the Border by Texans of certain types, so convenient an excuse that it was artificially prolonged for almost a century. And had the Alamo, Goliad, and Mier not existed, they would have been invented as indeed they seem to have been in part” (*WHP* 19). Thus, he subsequently paints a picture of the corrido as a legitimate historical context from which to study Cortez’s story, another “truth” and perhaps another form of Chicana/o propaganda as a reaction to the Anglo war propaganda. Paredes also points out that “Cortez has become a legend, as have many other popular heroes before him” (*WHP* 55). However, in describing how Cortez’s story became legend, Paredes defends the myth by stating, “in this case at least it has been possible to go behind the legend to the facts from which it arose” (*WHP* 55). In other words, Paredes is telling his readers that the Mexican legend is not only legitimate, but it is more legitimate than the Anglo legend because the facts behind the legend can be traced to facts.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson explains the validity or “mechanical effectivity” of narrative interpretation that, “whether it’s seen as myth, Greek tragedy, [or] ‘family romance,’” the new narrative denounces “a system of

allegorical interpretation in which the data of one narrative line are radically impoverished by their rewriting according to the paradigm of another narrative, which is taken as the former's master code or Ur-narrative and proposed as the ultimate hidden or unconscious *meaning* of the first one" (22). That is, Jameson is worried over the subjugation of one narrative over some "Ur-narrative" as if one said that *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez* is just another version of the Robin Hood story, which could arguably be the case. However, Paredes explains that "the Border *corridos* make a very clear distinction between the hero of the border conflict and the mere outlaw. Border robbers are not Robin Hoods. Neither do they repent on the scaffold in moralizing verses. They are quite frankly rogues—realistic, selfish, and usually unrepentant" (143-44).

Therefore, even if one could argue that the ballad of Gregorio Cortez is just another version of the Robin Hood story, the roguish concept of the hero Paredes creates in Gregorio Cortez is easily distinguishable from the moral hero in the Robin Hood story. Furthermore, Paredes hopes that the Mexican American will identify with his border hero, Gregorio Cortez, because Cortez represents an uprising against Anglo domination on the border, against the odds "pursued by hundreds and fighting hundreds every place he went" (*WHP* 43). The main concern of the text, then, seems to be the creation of this legendary hero in a mythical borderland as the method with which Paredes is able to address "long-dead issues" such as matters of racism and subjugation as the impetus for political, social, and cultural change along the U.S. border. Paredes uses the study of the corrido, which Guillermo Hernandez argues "convey[s] unofficial versions of history" (69), and makes the corrido's version of history "official." Hernandez also tells us that

the corridos are “composed, transmitted, and consumed by rural and urban working-classes – people distant from circles of power and prestige – the genre expresses viewpoints that often contradict or stand in direct opposition to dominant perspectives” (69). Therefore, it is no surprise that Paredes wrote *With His Pistol in His Hand* during the period that African Americans were also fighting against the fictive superiority of whites legally reaffirmed by the existence of the Jim Crow laws.

In an examination of a set of Marxist principles that he says “offers a philosophically coherent and ideologically compelling resolution to the dilemma of historicism,” Jameson argues that “only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it” (19). In many ways, Paredes acts as a Chicana/o Tiresias who returned from serving his country in WWII, and more than earned the right to speak in 1957 when he was writing *With His Pistol in His Hand*. Paredes speaks up by retelling the story of Gregorio Cortez from the point of view of the people that the corrido legend ultimately affects—the Mexican American. Although I have pointed out the dangers of the “Ur-narrative” as explained by Jameson, what Paredes does by retelling border history is create what Jesse Aleman calls a “corrido critical paradigm” which is “a form of Chicano criticism” that views the corrido as “the Ur-narrative of contemporary Chicano literary production” (49), but not quite in the way that the Anglo Frontier Ur-narratives work in relation to the socio-political context of the minority narrative. Aleman tells us that critics like Jose Limón, Ramon Saldívar, Jose

David Saldívar and others “construct in their own ways a Chicano literary history as well as a mode of critical analysis that evaluates and defines Chicano poetry and narrative through the lens of ‘the corrido of border conflict,’” as Américo Paredes terms it (*WHP* 50). Aleman understands Paredes’s tendency to “support the ideal of unity and stress the value of resistance” at the same time (51) so he explains:

Dialogism and social resistance, however, are not necessarily separate events. In fact, narrativized dialogization, which Bakhtin explains as the ability to ‘regard one language . . . through the eyes of another’ in a process of ‘critical interanimation’ (298), can be viewed as a socio-literary subversive act that finds its most salient expression in novelistic discourse . . . [this] novelistic discourse registers the interaction of multiple voices as they cross each other’s social boundaries in a process of ‘interanimation’ that highlights the ideological assumptions behind each discourse . . . the dialogic process in general creates a hybrid narrative form that . . . does not allow one ideological voice, including the author’s, to control completely the narratives social significance. (51)

With His Pistol in His Hand is Paredes’s “hybrid narrative form” as *Borderlands/La Frontera* is Anzaldúa’s.

Furthermore, under the guise of exploring a literary and scholarly examination of the Border *corrido*, Paredes simultaneously voices a version of Border history unheard of in the American literary canon until this point. Through his protagonist, Gregorio Cortez, Paredes expresses the physical and mental anxiety that saw the existence of the Mexican people under attack on every level by a more powerful and more numerous Anglo force (*Folklore* 14). He finds a way to take the word, and make it his own thereby populating it with his own intentions. Paredes’s version of the “border conflict” helped to reexamine ethnic discrimination that according to José Saldívar, Raymond Williams sees as “no longer a distinction of areas and kind of life; it is what is politely called . . . an expression

of hegemonic cultural dominance” (37). Therefore, Paredes’s cultural work provides “tactical political strategies designed to counter the Eurocentric hegemony in border disputes” (J. Saldivár 17).

The Mexican-American perception (like Judith Butler’s feminist perception of gender) is constructed by “lived subjective experience [Cortez’s and his people’s] that is structured by existing political arrangements [Anglo law and the Texas Rangers], but affects and structures those arrangements in turn” (Butler 903). That is, how Gregorio Cortez is perceived in Paredes’s work is structured by “existing [Eurocentric] political arrangements” (Butler 903), but Paredes’s perception also structures those arrangements by defying them and creating new ones in the form of a fugitive border hero. On a broader scale, Paredes himself defies what Ian Lopez describes as “the common sense” construction of Race by transcending “interpretive codes and racial meanings which operate in the interactions of daily life” (966). Paredes, through Cortez, becomes a seminal voice for the Mexican American after his study of the Border *corrido* is published. Despite the “fabrication” of race and history in writings implied by the deceitful perceptions of Anglo historians and contemporaries like Walter Prescott Webb and J. Frank Dobie, whose work essentially re-created the enemy in the Mexican-American (Garza-Falcon Intro, 1-2), Paredes succeeds in creating a dialogue through his text that changed those perceptions.

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that the identity of Chicanas/os grows out of a border geography (the Lower Rio Grande) and a mixture of “myths and kinships” (Caliz-Montoro 4). More importantly, this particular mixture of cultures

presents a threat to the survival of the oppressed Mexican-American way of life thereby raising the stakes of its implications. That is, as the dominant cultural reality made up of myths and kinships competes with the dominated reality of the minority culture, the minority myths become stronger, more pronounced, strive more to be seen and heard, to survive, because unless the dominated culture responds to the dominant one in kind, its *gente* will disappear. *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez* is an oral version of the Mexican American response to the heroic myths tied to the Texas Rangers told along the border. In addition, *With His Pistol In His Hand*, is Paredes's response to what was considered factual history at the time. Thus, a key point to the Mexican American's identity formation is made when Paredes argues that "the variants of the Cortez legend reflect the Border Mexican's identification of himself with his hero" (*WHP* 112). Mexican-American identity and culture symbolized by Cortez's story is in conflict with the "Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, [and] are transmitted to us through the culture" (in this case the Anglo culture) because "Culture is made by those in power" (Anzaldúa 16). Therefore, Cortez's ballad that was passed on orally along the border resisted the dominant Anglo paradigm which dictated the predefined concepts of the Mexican American.

With attitudes derogatory to Mexican Americans circulated in newspapers, magazines, and books which Paredes says had great influence (*WHP* 16), the inhabitants of the Rio Grande valley had little recourse and little power against Anglo domination. In his description of the country (Part One, Chapter I), Paredes shows us how those in power, the "English-Speaking Texans," orally contributed to the culture of "border

conflict” with a “set of attitudes and beliefs about the Mexican” that formed the culturally dominant paradigm summarized in a list of characteristics that he calls the “Texas

Legend,” a complement to the *corrido* (WHP 15):

1. The Mexican is cruel by nature. The Texan must in self-defense treat the Mexican cruelly, since that is the only treatment the Mexican understands.
2. The Mexican is cowardly and treacherous, and no match for the Texan. He can get the better of the Texan only by stabbing him in the back of by ganging up on him with a crowd of accomplices.
3. Thievery is second nature in the Mexican, especially horse and cattle rustling, and on the whole is about as degenerate a specimen of humanity as may be found anywhere.
4. The degeneracy of the Mexican is due to his mixed blood, though the elements in the mixture were inferior to begin with. He is descended from the Spaniard, a second-rate type of European, and from the equally substandard Indian of Mexico, who must not be confused with the noble savages of the North America.
5. The Mexican has always recognized the Texan as his superior and thinks of him as belonging to a race separate from other Americans.
6. The Texan has no equal anywhere, but within Texas itself there developed a special breed of men, the Texas Rangers, in whom the Texan’s qualities reached their culmination. (WHP 16)

If we examine this list of attributes and acts as “performatives” or “various ways in which [one] shows or produces its cultural signification,” we see there is no true or false preexisting identity by which to measure the Mexican (Butler 908). The Anglo attempt at fabricating an identity for the Mexican has failed or at least has been revealed to be what Butler calls “a regulatory fiction” (908). Nonetheless, in resentful response to these Ranger perceptions of Mexicans, the Border Mexicans in Paredes’s text develop their own non-heroic perception about the *rinche* in a list of typical sayings and anecdotes:

1. The Texas Ranger always carries a rusty old gun in his saddlebags. This is for use when he kills an unarmed Mexican. He drops the gun beside the body and then claims he killed the Mexican in self-defense and after a furious battle.

2. When he has to kill an armed Mexican, the Ranger tries to catch him asleep, or he shoots the Mexican in the back.
3. If it weren't for the American soldiers, the Rangers wouldn't dare come to the Border. The Ranger always runs and hides behind the soldiers when real trouble starts.
4. Once an army detachment was chasing a raider, and they were led by a couple of Rangers. The Mexican went into the brush. The Rangers galloped up to the place, pointed it out, and then stepped back to let the soldiers go in first.
5. Two Rangers are out looking for a Mexican horse thief. They strike his trail, follow it for a while, and then turn at right angles and ride until they meet half-dozen Mexican laborers walking home from the fields. These they shoot with their deadly Colts. Then they go to the nearest town and send back a report to Austin: "In pursuit of horse thieves we encountered a band of Mexicans, and though outnumbered we succeeded in killing a dozen of them after a hard fight, without loss to ourselves. It is believed that the others of the band escaped and are making for the Rio Grande" (Paredes *WHP*, 25).

In his attempt to "redescribe" the Anglo world from the Border Mexican point of view, Paredes's response to the Anglo's fabricated perception of the Mexican-American race can be seen as what Butler calls the "presupposition of difference" necessary for discourse (909). Furthermore, Paredes not only presents the Mexican American with a "presupposition of difference" from the dominant Anglo perspective aforementioned, but also from the Mexican perspective in defense. Thus, Paredes changes the perception of history and challenges the existing Border Myth. This technique initiates a discourse that was perhaps otherwise unavailable in 1958. In addition, Paredes tries to create "a normative vision" for the Mexican reality that "celebrates or emancipates an essence, a nature, or (in this case) a shared cultural reality which (at this time), cannot be found" (Butler 909).

Judith Butler also points out that this shared cultural recognition not only delimits the minority (Chicana/o) but "it in turn enables and empowers the [Chicana/o] in certain unanticipated ways" (903). Therefore, the personal trials that Cortez encounters "are

conditioned by a shared social structure,” but he is “immunized against political challenge” (Butler 903). That is, in the text, Cortez becomes an almost unanticipated and sympathetic hero that nobody wants to turn in to the authorities. Paredes tells us that many suffered to protect Cortez. The man Cortez encounters while he is on the run tells Cortez that “every man that’s given you a glass of water has been beaten and thrown in jail. Every man who has fed you has been hanged from a tree branch, up and down, up and down, to make him tell where you went, and some have died rather than tell. Lots of people have been shot and beaten because they were your people” (*WHP* 48-49). Here, we see what Butler calls “deliberate and instrumental actions of political organizing, resistance collective intervention with the broad aim of instating [sic] a *more just set of social and political relations*” (904 emphasizes mine) carried out by Mexican Americans, “Cortez’s people,” in the novel. Because the ideological community of Mexicans felt like they were “his people” united under a mutual feeling of injustice along the border, Cortez was able to thrive as the personification of justice and resistance against the Texas Anglo. That Mexicans intervened with protest and resistance proves that the effect of the legend behind the man, Cortez, can motivate and galvanize an entire community.

Along with Butler’s notion of “instating [sic] a more just set of social and political relations” as applied to the Anglo Border Myth, Paredes appropriates religious myth in Chapter I: THE COUNTRY and the notion of a community’s voice in Chapter II: THE LEGEND to reproduce a common language parodying the Biblical story of Jesus to tell the account of Cortez’s public persecution. When Paredes describes the deadly fate of Cortez’s followers who suffer for offering him food and water, Paredes likens them to

disciples and Cortez to a Jesus-like figure. Here, he introduces a Eurocentric biblical history and narrative as his reference within the corrido paradigm. Paredes also makes use of certain kinds of language or “words that are already populated with the social intentions of others” (Bakhtin 293), the Christians, who share a belief system understood by the Anglo. Paredes “populates” Cortez’s story with the social intentions of the Border people who desire justice. Furthermore, since many men died rather than tell on Cortez, Paredes imposes a level of value on Cortez’s life comparable to the value put on the life of Jesus by Christians. For example, when a man informs Cortez that in protecting him, “lots of people have been shot and beaten because they were your people” (Paredes *WHP*, 49), Paredes is using common language to depict a Biblical story that implies disciple-like loyalty to Cortez. In Jesus-like fashion, Cortez reacts to this loyalty by “deciding to turn back and to give himself up to the Governor of the state so that his own people would not suffer because of him” (Paredes *WHP*, 49). Cortez is willing to sacrifice himself for his community.

The Biblically inspired story continues as Cortez encounters “a vaquero named El Teco, but Judas should have been his name” since he turns Cortez in to the authorities for a thousand-dollar reward (Paredes *WHP*, 49). Finally, like the Biblical Judas, “El Teco did not enjoy the reward . . . because people cursed him in the streets” so “he buried the money and never spent it, and he never knew peace until he died” (Paredes *WHP*, 49). This story is clearly Paredes’s attempt at elevating the status of Cortez from farmer to epic hero using Biblically inspired common language and story lines. In *With His Pistol*, we can see how Paredes associates the Border Mexican’s experience in the text with the

experience Christian followers went through for the injustices bestowed on Jesus Christ. By parodying the stories behind the life of Jesus as historical accounts while telling the story of Cortez's life within a corrido paradigm, Paredes clandestinely criticizes the reliability of history and storytelling whereby not even the stories of the Bible are safe.

Central to Paredes's development as a writer is the border conflict between the stories or histories of the dominant Anglo-American culture and those of the population of Mexican descent into which he was born. There is no question that Paredes was influenced by the border legends as told by the Anglo, but regains the power of the myth for the Mexican American by creating his own. Acknowledging that every legend has its versions, Paredes admits "The legend as it appears in Chapter II is my own creation. I have put together those parts that seemed to me the furthest removed from fact and the most revealing of folk attitudes" (*WHP* 109). Paredes also points out, in a sarcastic tone, that the history of the region was told by Anglo authors of scholarly works such as Walter Prescott Webb who "lent their prestige to the legend [about Mexicans]" (*WHP* 17). That is, only the history told by Anglo authors was considered scholarly and prestigious while the Mexican had no legitimate voice at the time. The corrido history as told by the Mexican American was only passed around orally, not in newspapers, books, or magazines. Paredes explores these conflicts along the border in *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* to examine a complex set of ethnic relationships to which he credits the narrative folksongs (*corridos*) for their ability to express authentic feelings about the people who circulated them ("Border Identity" 199).

The *corrido* tradition and conventions explained by Paredes in Chapter II fit the circumstances of the cultural conflict and Mexican-American identity crisis perfectly. Caliz-Montoro argues that “since the cultural and literary identity is preserved in the tongue” and as Paredes says, was preserved in the *corrido*, the use of language is crucial for a culture’s survival (8). Therefore, Paredes’s seminal study of the *corrido* through its hero in *With His Pistol in His Hand* demonstrates how language (in the oral tradition) can help the culture survive. In addition, Paredes’s work demonstrates how his borrowed use and masterful command of the English language helped to make his intended point.

Mikhail Bakhtin says:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. . . . [language] exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. (293-94)

By colliding with the Anglo perception of the border Mexican American through his text, *With His Pistol*, Paredes uses the English word and its codes to disrupt the homogeneity of the Anglo discourse. He interjects, into novelistic language, a different cultural perspective, a different “accent,” a different “semantic and expressive intention.” Paredes makes use of ideas and “words that are already populated with the social intentions of others (the Anglo and the Christian) and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master” (Bakhtin 295).

In 1957, Américo Paredes becomes that Bakhtinian “second master” to many Chicanas/os by writing *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. This American literary work in English about the Mexican depicts the “border conflict” through the lens of *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*. Perhaps, to gain a better insight into his political intentions for writing this “hybrid” work, we can look to another scholarly study. In his 1979 study “The Folklore of Groups of Mexican Origin,” Paredes states that “A purely Mexican American folklore *must be sought in the conflict of cultures*” (*Folklore* 13 emphasis mine). He says that “the shock of cultures and peoples in a continuing situation of cultural conflict has given Mexican American folklore the traits which distinguish it from other folklores” (Paredes, *Folklore* 13). Paredes characterizes the border *corrido* as a kind of folklore where very specific events distinct from other folklores define the experience in that region:

The hero is always a Mexican whose rights or self-respect are trampled upon by North American authority. Very often, the conflict begins with one cruel and unjust death of the hero’s brother at the hands of Anglo Americans. The hero takes vengeance and is attacked by large numbers of *rinches*, or Texas Rangers. He kills large numbers of the enemy but it is impossible for him to win a final victory because the odds are so unfair. (Paredes *Folklore*, 14)

This series of specific events described in the corrido also help to establish an expressed binary that functions throughout Paredes’s text. This binary of “us” against “them” that Paredes establishes in the text situates the hero, the outnumbered Chicano gunfighter Cortez against “the Other,” which in this case is the Anglo. Paredes reverses the role of “the Other.” Still, as much as the Chicano gunfighter personifies rebellion and justice for the Mexican American, for the Anglo on the border, the Chicano gunfighter personifies

outlawry and savagery in the text. That is, Paredes understands the Anglo perception of the Mexican on the border and attempts, through the text, to undermine those perceptions.

Joel Poinsett tells us there has been a common presumption about Mexican “nationality” or “race” dating back two centuries which suggests that “something innate and inevitable” shaped by “genetics and environment” explains the social structures of the Mexican, inherited from centuries of colonial rule (9). These notions of perceived “innate and inevitable” Mexican American traits were circulated on the border and were sources for Paredes’s understanding of Anglo-Texan depictions of the Mexican. By revealing the harsh reality of racism expressed by the Anglo-Texan mass media for example, Paredes invites the Chicana/o reader to acknowledge his/her subordinate status through his literature, that perhaps inaugurates a transformation for both cultures. That is, Paredes’s account allows the Anglo reader to face this racist reality head on and perhaps more importantly, allows the Mexican American reader the opportunity to recognize his place in history. Consequently, Paredes becomes the minority voice that is dialectically related to the Anglo reality in which he was immersed.

Moreover, Donald Hoffman points out that Paredes’s narrative is a “contested space” that not only depicts a conflict and power struggle between two cultures but also addresses the imperative issue of “who gets to tell the story” (45). Thus, for Paredes, the story of Gregorio Cortez who, for many, symbolizes the legendary Mexican American hero of that era, was an ordinary man who only became a legend through the circulation of the corrido that described him as righteously defying the Anglo-Texan. Paredes tells us that “if the ballad maker wants to justify the deeds of his hero, he will transform him into

a border raider fighting the outside group, the Americans” (*WHP* 144). By “Americans,” Paredes meant “Anglos” as defined by the Mexican experience on the border. The advantage of perspective is that those who get to tell their story get to define and defend their point of view, to create their own heroes. However, Paredes does write his text in English, reaffirming that one can never entirely escape the Master’s language.

In contrast to Anglo depictions of Mexicans, Paredes uses the legitimate language of genealogy and history to retell the same story differently. Paredes uses genealogy, as the Anglos tend to, in order to tell a historical account that dates back to the eighteenth century when much of the Spanish colonization took place along the border. He tells us that “the Indians from the Spanish presidios . . . preferred outlawry to life under Spanish rule” and that “at its earliest period in history, the Lower Rio Grande was inhabited by outlaws, whose principle offense was an independent spirit” (*WHP* 8). The Mexican (Indian), now Mexican American, early on in history, had an “independent spirit,” an honorable and positive identity trait, even by traditional American terms. Paredes continues to characterize the border dwellers as existing in “tightly knit groups whose basic social structure was the family or the clan” (*WHP* 9). He writes that, “the cohesiveness of the Border communities owed a great deal to geography” (*WHP* 10). Paredes points out that there was a “simple pastoral life led by most Border people [which] fostered a natural equality among men.” (*WHP* 10). These characteristics highlight the Mexican’s lack of aggression and conversely, his desire to treat all men equally, another noble identity trait based on the American ideal of democracy. However, Paredes does criticize this democratic notion by stating that “social conduct was regulated

and formal, and men lived under a patriarchal system that made them conscious to a degree” (*WHP* 11). And, Paredes tells us that for the Mexican American on the border, “obedience depended on custom and training rather than on force” (*WHP* 11), perhaps as a critique of the Anglo-Texan approach to violent law enforcement on the border that was different from the collective Mexican custom of obedience that he describes.

For the individual, though, Paredes depicts Gregorio Cortez as a “Border man” “not a gunman, no, not a bravo” and says that “he never came out of a cantina wanting to drink up the sea at one gulp” (*WHP* 34). This description is an attempt at producing a modernist notion of identity by questioning the stereotypes already extant about Mexican Americans on the border. According to Paredes’s depiction, Cortez was also a hard worker who “never raised his head till he came out the other end” of the field and “he was not of your noisy, hell-raising type” (*WHP* 35). Most interestingly, though, Paredes also says of Cortez that “he was not too dark and not too fair, not too thin and not too fat, not too short and not too tall; and *he looked just a little bit like me*” (*WHP* 34 emphasis mine). In his literary depiction of the historical figure, not only does Paredes question many of the physical and behavioral stereotypes attributed to the Mexican (dark, short, fat, “macho” or “bravo,” drunk, rowdy, and lazy), he, as a person of Mexican descent, cleverly identifies with his own subject (Cortez): “he looked just a little bit like me” (34). Paredes makes Cortez into a sympathetic figure who symbolizes the injustices that many Mexican-Americans saw embodied in someone like Cortez with whom they could identify—someone who not only “looked just a little bit like [them]—[the border Mexican],” but lived like them, talked like them, and perhaps felt like them too. Again,

the folk tradition and its effect on the inhabitants on the border is the reason the “corrido paradigm” was a successful paradigm for Paredes to use as a context for writing.

Paredes emphasizes the patriarchal structure within which social conduct is regulated. The fact that a mother with a strong character was well respected, diminishes the negative associations with a patriarchal power structure dominant in the Mexican culture. The “clanlike characteristics” of the border community which “govern[s] itself, ignoring strangers, except when disturbed by violence or some other transgression of what [the border Mexican] believed ‘was right’” (*WHP* 13) also provides a positive perspective upon which the Chicana/o can base a positive identity formation. If the independent spirit embodied by Gregorio Cortez is brought to life by the circulation of the corrido, then we can see how Paredes’s literary exploration of the phenomenon of Cortez’s life and ballad, as told by the border Mexican, is an effort to thrust this identity into the Anglo-Texan public consciousness. In addition, the hero’s identity can be interpreted as a reflection of a collective identity between the people creating that legend and the legend itself. Ultimately, Paredes legitimizes this effort by writing his book *With His Pistol in His Hand*. Ramon Saldívar notes:

With impeccable scholarship and imaginative subtlety, Paredes’s study of the border ballads, that concern the historical figure of Gregorio Cortez and his solitary armed resistance . . . may be said to have invented the very possibility of a narrative community, a complete and legitimate Mexican-American persona, whose life of struggle and discord was worthy of being told. (Perez 27)

In other words, Paredes galvanizes the border Mexican through his book *With His Pistol in His Hand* creating, through his narrative, an heroic identity as well as a public ethnic consciousness the Mexican-American was needing up to this point. Furthermore, the

legitimization of a “corrido paradigm” provides Paredes and his readers with a version of reality that highlights the differences between the Texas Anglo and the Border Mexican as well as expresses a tradition of resistance that creates a Chicana/o “narrative community.”

CHAPTER IV

ANZALDÚA'S MESTIZA GODDESS AND THE ROLE OF HISTORY

Gloria Anzaldúa, in her preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, claims that her mixture of languages (codes) represents “a new language, the language of the Borderlands.” Within this “new language,” Anzaldúa reclaims history for the Chicana/o. That is, she reinterprets the concept of the border in response to the way it has been interpreted by “Gringos in the U.S. Southwest” (Anzaldúa 3) since 1848. She criticizes what she interprets to be the “illegal” migration of Gringos into Texas and their tendency to be “locked into the fiction of white superiority” (7). In an attempt to identify her own sense of “Self,” her own border identity, she includes, in her political conversation within the text, every Mexican American Chicana/o, and attempts to rewrite what she sees as a new history in response to the history that defined Chicana/o Mexican Americans up until the late twentieth century. Anzaldúa offers no apologies to the Anglos or their univocal history for her “code” switching techniques that tell her story. Anzaldúa explains:

There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born. Presently this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish, is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurting out of our mouths with every step. (Preface)

In her book, Anzaldúa uses Spanish with English to tell stories passed down from grandmothers about female icons such as *La Virgen*, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona*.

Anzaldúa purposely creates the feeling of crossing linguistic borders which she sees as a new language of the Borderland and with that crossing, a new identity formation. For the

Chicana/o, Anzaldúa's text then, is a social symbol of a culture, a narrative system of interpretation and experience borne of the entanglement of histories and myths that are unique to the border. Since a unique system of border language or dialect is used, Anzaldúa stresses community by addressing language as part of her new Border paradigm. She promotes, with her version of history and genealogy, a new Border Myth as well, through a Chicana/o system of ideological formulations. However, her "system of mythic and ideological formulations . . . constitutes the Myth of the frontier" (Slotkin 4) for the Anglo as well. Therefore, like Paredes, Anzaldúa recognizes the importance of retelling to deconstruct the dominant Anglo Myth on the border.

Richard Slotkin argues that Myth "is rooted in history but is capable of transcending the limitations of a specific temporality, to speak with comparable authority and intelligibility to the citizens of eighteenth-century colonies, a nineteenth-century agrarian republic, and a modern industrial world power; that originated in tales told by, for, and about rural White 'Anglo-Saxon' Protestant heroes, which nonetheless became the preferred entertainment of the audience of the ethnically heterodox population of the twentieth-century 'megalopolis'" (4). Before the second half of the twentieth century, White "Anglo-Saxon" Protestant history on the border, whether myth or not, was treated as fact, a socially, politically, and culturally dominant modern master narrative that entertained its own White audience as well as the rest of the Western world. This Myth, thus, "shap[ed] the life, thought, and politics of the nation" (Slotkin 4) before the Chicana/o voice was ever a legitimate one.

However, it seems as if each particular minority sect that makes up what Slotkin calls the “ethnically heterodox audience” on the border has more recently been looking for its own heroes, rejecting “the tales told by, for, and about rural White ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Protestant heroes” (Slotkin 4). Anzaldúa recognizes that the contemporary Chicana/o audience is no different. Like the male Anglo heroes that the minority sects of the “ethnically heterodox audience” once accepted as their own heroes too, for lack of an alternative, the Chicanas/os have, since the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, evoked new ethnic heroes in order to build an identity. The new Chicana/o heroes that Paredes and Anzaldúa develop in their text, come through a different “historical scenario” which belongs to the same events that influenced the Anglo heroes, but creates a different “complex interpretive tradition that has developed around it” (Slotkin 6). As I pointed out earlier in this thesis, Paredes discusses the “corrido paradigm” as a context for which the Border Mexican turned ordinary men into legendary heroes. Anzaldúa, in her text, discusses her theories of identity within a gay, feminist, mystical, religious, Aztec minority paradigm from which she builds the notion of an amorphous identity process and border experience.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s text, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, evokes different kinds of heroes and different events for the Chicana/o to interpret in the way that Paredes developed Gregorio Cortez. Anzaldúa presents Chicanas/os with a different subjectivity, a different genealogy, a different history, and a different myth than the one the Anglo has touted as fact along the border. Anzaldúa’s text is also different from the masculine text which Paredes uses to retell and recreate the Border Myth. In the context

of Slotkin's frontier myth and how it influences identity on the border, I will examine how Anzaldúa develops her own version of a new Border Myth. I will examine the text interpreted "under the hegemonic influence of postmodernism with U.S. literary and cultural studies" (Moya 68) to explore how postmodernism and the Border Myth influence the invention of Anzaldúa's new Mestiza identity that "offer [her the] epistemological tools for [this] individual/collective self-definition, resistance, intervention, and creation" (Keating 5).

According to AnaLouise Keating, Anzaldúa's text "challenge[s] the conventional views that lead to stereotyping, over-generalizations, and arbitrary divisions among different groups; her writings open new spaces where innovative, sometimes shocking connections can occur" (3). When Keating talks about "the conventional views that lead to stereotyping, over-generalizations, and arbitrary divisions among different groups," she is referring to the views generated by history, or what Slotkin calls the "Myth of the Frontier." These historical "conventional views" thrive on binaries such as "safe and unsafe," "us and them," and "American and Mexican," which the U.S.-Mexico border is essentially set up to rigidly define. However, for Anzaldúa, the borderland is "a vague and undetermined place . . . in a constant state of transition" (3), or, as Foucault would say, a heterotopia. With its historical, social, spiritual, genealogical, anthropological, and poetic narratives, Anzaldúa's text is similarly in a constant heterogeneous state of transition. The text seems unfinished, yet to be completed and somewhat in alignment with postmodernist theoretical notions that, ironically, also threaten the minority voice of resistance as interpreted in a narrative. So, within the context of Anzaldúa's stress on

process and transition, Anzaldúa treats the border as an “in-between space” or “nepantla”—a Nahuatl term that “indicates temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of liminality and potential transformation” (Keating 1).

This mythical interpretation of the border is what frees Anzaldúa to shatter stereotypes, collective self-conceptions of inferiority and dangerous binaries to promote a more inclusive “*Coatlicue* State.” The *Coatlicue* state of consciousness is related to the Chicana/o psyche and closely interchangeable with the Mestiza consciousness that Anzaldúa derives from her version of Chicana/o genealogy and history. Anzaldúa explains what the “*Coatlicue* State” means to her:

Coatlicue is one of the powerful images, or ‘archetypes,’ that inhabits, or passes through, my psyche. For me, *la Coatlicue* is the consuming internal whirlwind, the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche. *Coatlicue* is the mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all the celestial being out of her cavernous womb. Goddess of birth and death, *Coatlicue* gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of the cosmic process. (46)

Anzaldúa also tells us that “*Coatlicue* depicts the contradictory” (47). *Coatlicue* represents “a third perspective” in which “all the symbols important to the religion and philosophy of the Aztecs is integrated [and]. . . she is a symbol of the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror” (47). *Coatlicue* represents creation and destruction at the same time (Lara 41). Moreover, Anzaldúa’s alternative views transform the Anglo dominant center into the periphery by resisting formal and disciplinary conventions, language boundaries, and thus cultural ones like the Christian religion within her text. However, as pointed out earlier in my thesis, identity construction is the purpose driven

by the deconstruction of the Anglo dominant narrative as well as the deconstruction of the masculine Chicano narrative.

Anzaldúa's perceived heroes align with the feminine not only by resisting the existing cultural norm that puts women "at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants" (18) within an admittedly masculine Mexican culture, but also by transgressing cultural norms of a masculine American society where border heroes are often gunfighters battling the evil savage element along the border. Instead of evoking Jesse James, a male, Anglo folk hero, or continuing to evoke the Chicano gunfighter such as Gregorio Cortez, Anzaldúa reminisces about *La Llorona's* wailing, for it symbolizes "the Indian woman's only means of protest," an important part of the Chicana/o identity which she claims is "grounded in the . . . history of resistance" (21). Furthermore, Chicana/o feminine icons such as *La Malinche/La Chingada* (the fucked one) and *Coatlalopeuh/La Virgen de Guadalupe* are also heroines evoked in the narrative as a way of tracing an ancient mestiza history and most importantly, a legitimate mestiza genealogy related to the myth of the borderlands from the Chicana/o perspective.

Coatlalopeuh is a descendant of the Mesoamerican fertility and Earth goddesses according to Anzaldúa. *Coatlalopeuh* is more traditionally known as *La Virgen de Guadalupe* among Chicanas/os who closely align her with and often regard her as the same Virgin Mary Mother of Christ, who is a prominent religious and historical figure in the Chicano "folk Catholic" tradition. However, this Virgin icon is different from the symbols in the kind of Roman Catholicism practiced by others (Anzaldúa 27). Anzaldúa points out that "*La Virgen de Guadalupe* is the symbol of ethnic identity and of the

tolerance for ambiguity that Chicanos-*mexicanos*, people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures, by necessity possess” (30). A feminine icon in which “a tolerance for ambiguity” is an overarching trait seems to replace Jesus Christ as an icon of tolerance within Anzaldúa’s mestiza paradigm. Further de-centering the masculine religious paradigm which wields power over culture Anzaldúa argues, “*La gente Chicana tiene tres madres* [The Chicano people have three mothers]” (30). That is, instead of tracing the Chicana/o origins to the conventional heterosexual couple, Adam and Eve, who Milton, one of the quintessential Anglo-Saxon poets and authors, describes as “our first-Parents” in *Paradise Lost* (4.6), Anzaldúa excludes all males from the equation and gives us not just one feminine parent, but three mothers.

This conscious replacement of masculine symbols allows for the feminine Indian deities in Anzaldúa’s text to become legitimate symbols within the context of the Chicana/o culture. She creates this feminine system to decentralize the male and the European, especially venerating *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as the mediator between “the Spanish and the Indian cultures (or three cultures as is the case of *mexicanos* of African or other ancestry) and between Chicanos and the white world” (Anzaldúa 30). With *La Virgen* as the new symbol of mediation, or more specifically, as the new symbolic bridge, Anzaldúa elevates the status of the female against the primarily masculine religious tradition. Furthermore, in the spirit of resisting binaries, Anzaldúa includes “three cultures” as those that make up and perhaps define the Chicana/o and his/her unique genealogy by including genealogical connections to those of “African or other ancestry.”

Acting as a historian, Anzaldúa uses facts and statistics in her text to re-inform her audience and reeducate the reader about Chicana/o history and how the culture came to be, its genealogy. Anzaldúa traces the Chicana/o existence in the U.S. by reaching all the way back to 35,000 B.C. and following the Chicana/o genealogy all the way to the present thus, going further into the dark past than even the Anglo-Americans, who often trace their European culture only as far back as 1492 when Columbus “discovered” America. However, Foucault argues that “genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people” (83). Nonetheless, Anzaldúa surveys Chicano genealogy that is tied directly to Chicano history in a few short but powerful passages:

The oldest evidence of humankind in the U.S.—the Chicanos’ ancient Indian ancestors—was found in Texas and has been dated to 35000 B.C. In 1000 B.C., descendants of the original Cochise people migrated into what is now Mexico and Central America and became the direct ancestors of many of the Mexican people (4).

Anzaldúa continues her genealogy by jumping all the way into the sixteenth century:

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Spaniards and Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico and, with the help of the tribes that the Aztecs had subjugated, conquered it . . . *En 1521 nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings (5).

Anzaldúa’s Chicana/o genealogy eventually bleeds into her “alternative” interpretation of border history beginning with the nineteenth century which led to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848:

In the 1800s, Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, which was then part of Mexico, in greater and greater numbers and gradually drove the *tejanos*

(native Texans of Mexican descent) from their lands, committing all manner of atrocities against them (6).

Anzaldúa follows linear events in Chicana/o history, but tells them from the point of view of the Chicana/o within her text. While the Chicana/o perspective defies postmodernist theoretical convention, it fulfills the postmodernist expectation of deconstructing the Western history of the frontier, or what Chicanas/os call the border.

Foucault argues that “history will not discover a forgotten identity eager to be reborn, but a complex system of distinct elements, unable to be mastered by powers of synthesis” (94). He argues that genealogy is the “sacrifice of the subject of knowledge” (95). He also maintains that “the historical analysis of this rancorous will to knowledge reveals that all knowledge rests upon injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind)” (95).

Anzaldúa’s instinct for knowledge, however, is driven by a very “real” revelation of injustice lived by the Chicana/o that Foucault seems to dismiss as a mere “alternative” to Western history. Anzaldúa is extremely aware of what Foucault calls the “malicious” nature of one’s “instinct for knowledge.” But, she also acknowledges the danger of ignoring that instinct that Foucault interprets as “something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind.” Anzaldúa explains:

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape “knowing,” I won’t be moving. *Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. “Knowing” is painful because after “it” happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable.* I am no longer the same person I was before (48, emphasis mine).

Anzaldúa's processes of "knowing," however painful it may be, is essential in forming a Chicana/o identity or consciousness, especially when the Chicana/o is burdened with the inescapable need to make "sense" of his/her constant feeling of loss, subjugation, collective stereotypes imposed on him/her in that region. Anzaldúa's ambivalent Americanism stems from a conflicted history and interpretation of it on the border. That is, the experiences that keep the Chicana/o moving, changing, crossing borders "again and again" are what make Anzaldúa's theories of an inclusive identity toward a collective consciousness more feasible, or at least, understandable for the Mexican American.

Satya P. Mohanty astutely argues that, if we revise our understanding of "experience," which in Anzaldúa's interpretation means "knowing" or consciousness, then "experiences would not serve as foundations because of their self-evident authenticity but would provide some of the raw material with which we construct identities" (32). Similarly, Anzaldúa reconciles her interpretation of "experience" as part of her mestiza identity, but does so by adhering to the postmodernist theoretical interpretation of identity as something not definite. She chooses not to define her experience as one thing or another, to adhere to one sense of gender or sexuality, to adhere to the rigidity of one religion or to choose one language over another. Instead, her experiences exist in a state of transition, a kind of "bridge" state between one thing and another. Part of her transitional state of being is inherent in her description of the *Coatlicue* state discussed earlier. But, Anzaldúa also emphasizes her "in-between" state and opposition to rigid binaries when she says "there is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds" (19). She complains

that “what we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be one or the other” (19).

Anzaldúa continues her assault on convention by attacking institutionalized religion. She describes religion as the inhibitor of “the other mode of consciousness [that] facilitates images from the soul and the unconscious through dreams and the imagination,” claiming that the Catholic Church “fails to give meaning to [her] daily acts” and “impoverish[es] all life, beauty, pleasure” (Anzaldúa 37). About “ethnic identity,” she says it is “twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (59). However, as I mentioned before, Anzaldúa does not have a particularly socially accepted language to identify with. She explains her frustration with rigid binaries in language and reemphasizes the importance of language in relation to identity formation:

Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (Anzaldúa 59)

Through her text, Anzaldúa gives the Chicana/o the “raw material with which [he/she] can construct [his/her] identities” (Mohanty 32).

Conversely, according to Foucault, in a postmodernist world, the second use of history or the historical sense is “the systematic dissociation of identity,” where he argues that “we attempt to support and to unify under a mask” (an identity) that is a parody, that is plural, where “numerous [spirits and] systems intersect and compete” (94). And, although Anzaldúa says that “[her] whole struggle in writing has been to put us back

together again” (Lara 41), what she accomplishes at the end of *Borderlands* is not the creation of a mask or a parody under which the Chicana/o attempts to unify, but the notion of a plural identity, a heterogeneous and ever changing existence. Whether or not Anzaldúa was familiar with Foucault’s 1977 essay, she agrees with Foucault that “numerous [spirits and] systems intersect and compete.” In her frustration with her constant attempts to promote the plurality of identity as she sees it and resist rigid labels, she states in an interview that ““as long as we rely on language, we’ll have categories,”” and ““as long as you’re entrenched in a counterstance of ‘us against them’ you are locked in!”” (Lara 42). Therefore, Anzaldúa wants to permeate these boundaries created by language, not formulate them, and, in the process, Anzaldúa express the shifting synthesis of a Mestiza identity.

One of the techniques Anzaldúa uses to permeate the boundaries of culture, gender, and perhaps rigid identity constructions that have been established is to expropriate the masculine paradigm extant in the Mexican culture and the Western culture in general, from which she operates. She replaces masculine symbols with feminine ones and gives them positions of power. According to Anzaldúa, *La Virgen* is the hero of the borderland Mexican American because *La Virgen* is a symbol of “our rebellion against the rich . . . against the subjugation of the poor and the indio” (30). *La Virgen* is “a synthesis of the new world and the old,” and of “the two races in our culture” (30). She claims that *La Virgen* mediates between the human and the divine and that Mexicans on both sides of the border turn to her for comfort. *Borderlands/La Frontera* works to reveal a concept of identity, a theory for the Chicana/o to interpret within this

framework of constant transition. Within this border space that Anzaldúa calls a “third country” *Borderlands* resists rigid labels of nationality and the divisive binaries that always seem to subjugate the cultural “Other,” or who Anzaldúa sees as “the prohibited and forbidden . . . the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, [and] the half dead” who live on the border (3).

There is, nonetheless, an inevitable conflict between Anzaldúa’s attempt to fracture the “conventional” and dominant sense of history, genealogy, and perceived Chicana/o identity on the border and what she tries to accomplish with her theory of a mestiza consciousness for the Chicana/o in a theoretically postmodernist cultural milieu. In forging a Chicana/o or Mestiza identity, Anzaldúa must confront what Moya calls the postmodernist “universalizing sameness” which is a concept that theoretical principles in postmodernism use to resist a perceived celebration of “difference” and its interpretation in any literary text. In other words, ignoring that there is a difference between cultures means that there is not definition of cultures. But, Anzaldúa celebrates this difference by doing what many intellectuals do. She “focus[es] on the status of [Chicanas/os]’ personal experiences, examining the claims to representativeness [sic] [Anzaldúa] might make on their behalf” (Mohanty 30).

Anzaldúa’s theory of identity formation is in conflict with the view that an expression of her experiences is a kind of “essentialism” which does not agree with the “position of postmodernism” (Mohanty 30). Mohanty argues that “the essentialist view would be that the identity common to members of a social group is stable and more or less unchanging, since it is based on the experiences they share” and that “opponents . . .

find this view seriously misleading, since it ignores historical changes and glosses over internal differences within a group by privileging only the experiences that are common to everyone” (30). Although Anzaldúa’s tendency toward an identity formation seems to be characterized by the “essentialist” sense of the term “identity,” whereby she tries to privilege the experience of subjugation and historical injustices that are common to all Chicanas/os, she does not ignore “historical changes” or “gloss over internal differences” (Mohanty 31).

Instead, Anzaldúa as author, critic, and historian, points out internal differences within the Chicana/o culture, but she does this while trying to avoid binaries. In addition, Anzaldúa does not fail to criticize what she calls “cultural tyranny,” which is the power that the dominant culture wields over the weak. In *Borderlands*, not only is the Chicana/o the weaker culture and subject to oppression, but the weak have also been the women within that culture. Anzaldúa aggressively questions the expectation of women’s subservience in the masculine Chicano culture:

How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *hociconas* (big mouths), for being *callejeras* (going to visit and gossip with neighbors), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? (16).

Anzaldúa also points out that “even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca* [they want to put locks on our mouths]” and “hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia* [rules of academia]” (Anzaldúa 54). Promoting what she calls a *Coatlicue* State, or part of her theory of Chicana/o identity that rejects a modernist definition of the Chicana/o “essentialist” identity, Anzaldúa reveals the

internal differences within the Chicana/o experience and pacifies possible criticisms made by postmodernists about her approach to an identity construction that is defined by “experiences.” That is, for postmodernists, “experience” cannot be a source of objective knowledge” and is therefore a fabrication, a false sense of “knowing” or of forming an identity that derives from it. Nonetheless, Anzaldúa, as an author, and a critic, attempts to deal with this epistemic predicament by discussing identity as many things to many people, and as something that is always in process, never static. However, she does not entirely escape the postmodernist problem when acting as the historian.

Foucault claims that the “historian” offers an “anonymous European [person] . . . the possibility of alternative identities” and that “historians supplied the Revolution with Roman prototypes, romanticism with knight’s armor, and the Wagnerian era was given the sword of a German hero—ephemeral props that point to our own unreality” (*N,H,G* 93). It is true that Foucault undermines the symbols that the “European [person]” relies on to define him/herself within a social and historical context, the genealogy and history of the European, the myth which in the discourse of postmodernism, does not work to interpret a text. And, as pointed out by Jameson, “modernist history is the first casualty” (Intro xi). Foucault would consider any interpretation of these “ephemeral props” (an element of myth and modernist history), a discursive illusion tied to the notion of an equally illusory “identity.” Anzaldúa’s “props” and heroes are different, however, not only because they are female and non-European, but also because they wield tolerance, hope, and nurturing instead of a sword. They are still tied to the construction of an individual and collective identity though.

Anzaldúa's heroines, who include the "three mothers," *Coatlicue*, and *Coatlalopeuh*, among others, are central to her text. They establish a different religious as well as historical paradigm from which Anzaldúa explains her theory of the Mestiza identity. When establishing these feminine icons as the heroines of her text, Anzaldúa identifies symbolic "props" to explain their power within the culture not to escape the "unreality" described by Foucault, but to appropriate the function of these "props" to work to her advantage within her retelling. She uses history to establish their relevance and legitimize them in contrast to the male Christian God of Western culture and even in contrast to Paredes's Chicano gunfighter. Ultimately, the woman, as icon, is what Anzaldúa is promoting in *Borderlands*. She elevates the female to influence and/or to reject a Chicana/o identity formation that, up to this point, has been influenced by masculine or "macho" ideals. I would like to point out, however, that Paredes does, in fact, indicate at one point in *With His Pistol In His Hand* that "If the mother was a strong enough character, she would receive the same sort of respect as the father" when he describes the customs of the "old Border families" (*WHP* 12 emphasis mine). It is always clear in Paredes's text, too, that within the border community "Decisions were made, arguments were settled, and sanctions were decided upon by the old men of the group, with the leader usually being the patriarch, the eldest son, of the eldest son, so that primogeniture played its part in social organization . . ." (*WHP* 12) and that "The patriarchal system not only made the Border community more cohesive, by emphasizing its clanlike [sic] characteristics, but it also minimized outside interference, because it allowed the community to govern itself to a great extent" (*WHP* 12-13). Not only was the

“border community” a patriarchal system with the oldest male at its head, but it was also an isolated community without any “outside interference.” The community preserved itself.

Anzaldúa characterizes the contemporary customs and identity of the border Chicanas/os quite differently as interpreted through a more feminine sense of history and genealogy. Anzaldúa has discovered a way to emphasize the feminine role in the contemporary construction of a Chicana/o identity on the borderlands, especially within a postmodernist milieu. That is, she deconstructs the patriarchal “macho” system with which most Mexican Americans, male and female, tend to identify. Anzaldúa criticizes the historical “vanquishing” of the feminine power within the Mexican culture which she explains dates back to 1168 A.D.:

Huitzilopochtli, the God of War, guided [the Aztecs] to the place (that later became Mexico City) where an eagle with a writhing serpent in its beak perched on a cactus. The eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother). Together, they symbolize the struggle between the spiritual/celestial/male and the underworld/earth/feminine. They symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the “higher” masculine powers indicated that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian America. (5)

Therefore, Anzaldúa further rejects the White people versus people of color or Mexican American versus Anglo paradigm that Paredes promotes and from which many Chicana/o self definitions come. Yes, the “Gringo” is still “the Other” to Anzaldúa and the Chicana/o. The “Gringo” is still part of the historic Texas Rangers who lynched Chicanos and “would take them into the brush and shoot them” on the border (Anzaldúa 8). In addition, for Anzaldúa, the “Gringo” is still “locked into the fiction of white superiority”

(7), but she criticizes the limitations that her own culture puts on the Chicana's identity construction as well. That is, she deconstructs the "macho" Chicana/o border culture from within itself by bringing her heroic feminine icons to the forefront. However, that is not to say that her feminine tendencies are irrelevant to the Chicano male. Anzaldúa insists that, the main mother, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, is a galvanizing icon:

. . . [she is] the symbol of the *mestizo* true to his or her Indian values. *La cultura chicana* [the entire Chicana/o culture] identifies with the mother (Indian) rather than with the father (Spanish). . . . Because *Guadalupe* took it upon herself the psychological and physical devastation of the conquered and oppressed *indio*, she is our spiritual, political and psychological symbol. As a symbol of hope and faith, she sustains and insures our survival. . . . "Nuestra abogada siempre serás/ Our mediatrix you will always be." (30)

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is one of the heroines of the text. She serves as the galvanizing symbol for the border Chicana/o as Cortez does for the Mexican American borderer in *With His Pistol In His Hand*. Furthermore, *La Virgen* yields the power of comfort, tolerance, nurturing, and perhaps most importantly, she is "the virgin mother who has not abandoned us" according to Anzaldúa (30).

With the amount of scholarship given to the *Borderlands/La Frontera* text, Anzaldúa's supposed "props" are arguably not ephemeral ones and neither are her heroines illusory in the Foucaultian sense. That is, Anzaldúa's socially symbolic metaphors are a bridge that connects a collective consciousness and a subjectivity which as José David Saldívar points out, "Jameson calls 'the political unconscious,' defining relationships between the temporal and the eternal" (63). Anzaldúa's bridging metaphors resist dangerous binaries that form immovable and unchangeable, stereotypical identity constructions as we have discussed. The breakdown of binaries and de-centering of

master narratives such as those promoted by institutionalized religion, Western masculine realities, as well as histories, makes Anzaldúa's text and her theoretical process of identity formation somewhat more postmodernist in that sense.

Anzaldúa emphasizes an history and genealogy different from Paredes, but similarly modernist. And although history is always subjective, Anzaldúa has nonetheless built a historical paradigm, different from the typical retelling of the border history by "old men," but is considered equally legitimate. In addition, her criticism within the Chicana/o border culture lends her the credibility that perhaps was not as apparent in Paredes's text which only emphasizes the binary between Anglos and Mexicans as I argued before. Moreover, Anzaldúa's tendency toward an ambiguous identity formation makes it difficult for postmodernists to criticize her theory of identity construction because her definition of Chicana/o identity is always changing. Anzaldúa's definition of herself is difficult to pinpoint much less that of her entire culture. However, in her text, she does hark back to when "Matrilineal descent characterized the Toltecs and perhaps early Aztec society. Women possessed property, and were curers as well as priestesses" (33) to reestablish the status of Chicana women on the border. So, by pointing out the power structure whereby women ruled, Anzaldúa cannot escape her tendency to desire the usurpation of the male and the Anglo and all of their perceived political status in the culture and on the border. She cannot also escape her tendency to redefine women by becoming nostalgic about their role in society when they wielded power.

Therefore, Anzaldúa's version of history demonstrates that not even a self proclaimed ambivalent, gay, feminist, woman of color on the border can escape the

modernist tendency to reach back, with nostalgia, to a place in time when the Chicana/o could identify him/herself through his/her place in history and connection to genealogy. Anzaldúa's notion of a mestiza consciousness is the result of a constant political and ideological struggle. Identity, for Anzaldúa is not static. Monica Torres argues that "Central to [Anzaldúa's] alternative epistemology is motion" (198). In addition, Beth Berila argues "Anzaldúa never allows readers more than a momentary comfort in this homeplace [sic] because she immediately marks it as unsettled" (123). The place where identity construction is always occurring and that is never settled is the border. And, the process of identity construction itself is a way of making meaning, a way of "creating spaces [through the text] for voices that have been marginalized and erased" (Berila 124) by the dominant narratives and history on the border.

CHAPTER V
THE PREDICAMENT OF THE AMBIVALENT
IDENTITY IN A POSTMODERNIST WORLD

Marcial González tells us that “it is important to distinguish postmodernism as a cultural condition from postmodernist theory. Far from being a mere illusion, postmodernism marks the emergence of an actual condition, characterized by extreme social fragmentation and differentiation, skepticism toward universal systems, a preference for localized politics as opposed to mass movements, and the depthlessness [sic] of aesthetic production” (163). The notion of social fragmentation seems to be in conflict with Paredes’s notion of identity but in accord with Anzaldúa’s notion of mestiza consciousness. The problem with any kind of identity formation for a minority in postmodern America is this: identity is a product or symptom of what Jameson calls “modernist history.” That is, identity consists of a created and much needed sense of self-perception/definition that is influenced by several factors, including culture which is tied to language which is tied to history and to genealogy, an imagined origin (because no one can trace back to one “true” origin, or back to the stone age).

A superficial and dangerous confusion exists between what American nationalism means to the Chicana/o’s cultural identity which is tied to a different non-European heritage, history, and genealogy. The Anglo-American’s ancestral journey to America was one of escape from an overbearing monarchy. Their journey was an heroic and dangerous emigration that resulted from a desire for social, cultural, and primarily

religious recognition as well as a desire for individual freedom from unjust persecution by the English Church. Derived from those “historical” events are the myths of the Pilgrims, the English Separatists who founded Plymouth Colony in New England, the first colony in America. There exists an historical myth where small numbers of English farmers, poorly educated and without social or political standing, broke away from the Church of England because they felt that they could not “in good conscience . . . obey the 1604 *Ecclesiastical Constitutions and Canons* or . . . conduct their worship in complete conformity to *The Book of Common Prayer*” (Beale 22-23), the guiding rules allowing the religious pluralism Puritans rejected. These early historical events formed a collective national identity, as “Americans,” and most importantly, a cultural identity which defined them as the sons and daughters of “the free” and “the brave” who came here in the seventeenth century.

For many minorities, though, especially those on the U.S.-Mexican Border, the notion of identity was once as clear as their notion of nationality when they were Mexican citizens (like that of the American citizen today). That notion of nationality tied to identity was suddenly challenged with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Paredes points out that “It was the Treaty of Guadalupe that added the final element to the Rio Grande society, a border. The river, which had been a focal point, became a dividing line” (*WHP* 15). In addition, Anzaldúa points out that the signing of the treaty “left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land” (7). Literally overnight, a new nationality was imposed on the once Mexican citizen who had to deal with an American sense of heritage and culture which could not

be immediately appropriated. After all, American heritage was and has always been derived from an Eurocentric culture with which the Chicana/o is not entirely familiar.

This conflict between a newly imposed American nationalism and an old Mexican culture has been the source of anxiety for the Chicana/o. This conflict exists between the knowledge that “this land . . . was Mexican once, was Indian always” (Anzaldúa 3) and what Anzaldúa calls “the fiction of white superiority” which led the Gringo to “seize complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it” (7). At the time, the spirit of American imperialism or what the history books call “manifest destiny” was the driving force behind Anglo westward expansion. Anzaldúa points to this “fiction” by citing a historical expression from one William H. Wharton dated around the time the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed:

The justice and benevolence of God will forbid that . . . Texas should again become a howling wilderness trod only by savages, or . . . benighted by the ignorance and superstition, the anarchy and repine of Mexican misrule. The Anglo-American race are destined to be forever the proprietors of this land of promise and fulfillment . . . The wilderness of Texas has been redeemed by Anglo-American blood & enterprise (7).

The two elements of nationalism and culture will never completely merge for the Mexican American as they did for the Anglo American who migrated from Europe to fulfill his/her perceived destiny.

Although neither Anzaldúa nor Paredes overtly point out this particular conflict between the notion of American nationalism and Mexican culture, they are nonetheless aware of it throughout their text. Anzaldúa’s reconciliation of this conflict is found in the text expressed through her resistance to “an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other” (Anzaldúa 19). Her mythological interpretation of the border

as a “third country” also reaffirms her resistance to dualities that politically marginalize Chicanas/os. Her concept of the “three mothers” reveals the same adamant resistance to the “macho” Chicano culture and to the transgression of masculine paradigms associated with the Chicano and Anglo-American culture. Anzaldúa deconstructs these dominant centers which makes her mestiza consciousness a postmodernist notion. However, the fact that she uses history and genealogy to decipher this identity construction or process complicates the status of this epistemology in a postmodern America. Paredes identifies this conflict by studying the border corrido as a legitimate expression of the difference between an American nationalism that subjugates the Mexican on the border and the Mexican culture to which many Mexican Americans are loyal.

In addition, Paredes’s and Anzaldúa’s new historical, and genealogical interpretations, as told from a “marginalized” perspective, reveal the power of their texts as a politically charged tool of interpretation whereby a collective consciousness can be reached despite the postmodernist theoretical restraints. By deconstructing the “Frontier Myth” as explained by Slotkin, Anzaldúa mythologizes the border space in order to construct a plural and heterogeneous sense of identity or what she calls “*conocimiento*” (knowing/recognizing). This identity construction is similar to the Foucaultian plurality, and she admits her attempt at “substitut[ing] for the divisions between people of color in this country” (Lara 42). Anzaldúa’s description of the new mestiza identity sounds postmodern but still relies on the general identity constructions of what it means to be “Indian” and “Mexican” in order to describe what it is to be a “new *mestiza*”:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to

be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (79)

Paredes and Anzaldúa both rewrite history to reposition the subordinate status of the Mexican American within the hierarchy of cultures on the borderlands. By reinterpreting or retelling the “historical” accounts involving “Gringos” and Mexicans, the Mexican American can begin to understand that there is another side to the story; the Chicana/o can begin to identify and know him/herself. The retelling affects that identity construction on the border. The danger of misunderstanding, though, occurs when authoritative texts of the past paint a picture of the Mexican American, and that picture is passed down without any diverse filters. Paredes and Anzaldúa are two of those diverse filters that are essential to this dialogue of self-discovery. They reinterpret a border existence from the inside. Through their texts, Paredes and Anzaldúa are reacting, retelling, and re-writing what, to them, is wrong with history. They are part of “the [Chicana/o] community’s self-questioning [that leads] to a greater sense of political and cultural freedom, with its cultural poetics as a primary form of interrogation” (Limón x).

Paredes uses Anglo-centric terminology and history and applies it to his version of Mexican American history on the border, switching the Gringo’s and the Mexican’s positions in the story, respectively. He demythologizes the Rangers, for example, while mythologizing Cortez’s plight. *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez* and Paredes’s corrido paradigm from which he writes creates a border mythology that helps unify and thus, identify the Mexican American as one kind of person. Paredes mythologizes the border

through the corrido as a narrative form and the legend of Gregorio Cortez as a symbol of righteousness and understandable rebelliousness against an abusive oppressor, namely the Texas Rangers. Anzaldúa uses Aztec history, anecdotes, poetry, corridos, theory, mysticism, and religion, etc., to create her own mythological borderland history.

But, Anzaldúa builds upon the modernist notion of what it means to exist as a Mexican American on the border even though her notion of the mestiza identity is one of movement. She mostly takes the behavioral characteristics of border Mexican Americans that Paredes has already established in his study of the corrido and theorizes that Chicanas/os are all of those things and more. Chicanas/os are a mixture of cultures such as Black and Indian too. That is, Chicanas/os have ancestry that not only stems from the Aztecs, as Anzaldúa points out, but also from the border Indians who Paredes tells us “were absorbed into the blood and culture of the Spanish settlers” (9) and the African. Although both authors attempt to define what it means to be Chicana/o or Mexican American on the border, both suggest distinct ways in which to do it. Whereas Paredes creates a binary between the Anglo and the Mexican, Anzaldúa “resist[s] the either/or structure [and] suggests a new way of thinking *and* a new way of acting, one that relies on a relationship between those who previously have been firmly situated on opposite sides of the border. In this case, her critique of the binary almost literally forces her to change her behavior. In short, she demonstrates that how we know deeply influences how we act” (Torres 199).

Alan Dundes tells us that “one of the essential tasks of anthropologists and folklorists is to make people aware, consciously aware, of their cultures” (101). Paredes’s

hero is Gregorio Cortez, a Chicano gunfighter. Through him, Paredes makes the Chicana/o aware of his/her culture. Cortez symbolizes the masculine side of the infamous patriarchal Mexican American identity—the “macho.” In *With His Pistol in His Hand*, Gregorio Cortez becomes a role model for the border people in the wake of conflict with the “evil” Gringos and temporarily beats overwhelming odds as a lone Chicano gunfighter. Cortez, in the text, is perceived as right in his rebellion, as a “macho” hero on the border. The concept of “macho” was not always positive, at least not if we look at the concept with our contemporary view of feminism in mind. Still, the legend of Cortez became the male role model that every Mexican American wanted to be like in the 1950’s.

Alfredo Mirandé discusses the concept of the “macho” which has “traditionally been associated with Mexican or Latino culture” and tells us that the concept has found its way into popular culture today (66). In contrast to Anzaldúa’s feminine notion of the border identity, Paredes’s story of Gregorio Cortez, studied and told within the tradition of the corrido, emphasizes the traditional concept of the “macho” before its more modern interpretation in pop culture. In order to create the modernist notion of Mexican American identity with which the border Mexican American can identify, Paredes utilizes the traditional concept of the macho that Mirandé explains:

Un hombre que es macho is not hypermasculine or aggressive, and he does not disrespect or denigrate women. Machos, according to the positive view, adhere to a code of ethics that stresses humility, honor, respect of oneself and others, and courage. What may be most significant in this second view is that being “macho” is not manifested by such outward qualities as strength and virility but by such inner qualities as personal integrity, commitment, loyalty, and most importantly, strength of character . . . It is not clear how this code of ethics developed, but it may

be linked to nationalist sentiments and Mexican resistance to colonization and foreign invasion. Historical figures such as Cuauhtémoc, *El Pipila*, *Los Niños Héroes*, Villa, and Zapata would be macho according to this view. (67)

Thus, Gregorio Cortez is considered “macho,” according to this positive traditional view. A model of the typical Chicano gunfighter, Paredes uses the legend of Cortez and the corrido paradigm to galvanize the Mexican American on the border. He does not use a variety of language or overt religious iconography like Anzaldúa does in her text. To Paredes, the variation of language and/or dialects is not as important to the formation of the Mexican American identity as it is for Anzaldúa. What is important to Paredes is the legitimizing of the corrido to tell the Mexican American version of history at the border, to change the perception of the Mexican American in the U.S. Perhaps, as a Mexican American author and the first ever to earn his Ph.D. at the University of Texas in Austin, Paredes wants to show the world that he too can have command of the English language as well as any Anglo in academia. He wants to demonstrate that he too can utilize the Anglo tools of telling stories and elevate the “Borderer.” Therefore, there are little to no incidents of the Spanish language within his text.

Anzaldúa, however, chooses to rewrite history by retelling it in six different dialects of two different languages. Since she claims that “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (59), switching language coincides with her notion that a mestiza identity on the border is an ambivalent and ever-changing thing, moving from one side of the border to the other. Although Paredes’s text is in English, the Master language, it nonetheless defies typical novelistic convention. The text is not only the story of Gregorio Cortez, but also a study of the border region, its people, and

the corrido form itself. Anzaldúa also reconstructs the novel form, as we know it, by using different literary forms and genres throughout her text. There is no linear plot or story in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, but a text written in radical form. Berila points out that “This radical form begins immediately as *Borderlands* opens with a corrido written in Spanish, moves to a passage which revises history to reclaim Aztec roots, then moves to Anzaldúa’s own poetry about the violence and contradictions of living on the borderlands (23-25)” (123). There is no uniform method of writing, but there is a unified theme—the retelling of the history of the borderlands in a way that is mythologized and in a way that influences border identity construction. In addition, Anzaldúa’s heroes are female, heroines.

She explains the roles of “our three mothers,” *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Malinche* (la Chingada), and *La Llorona* who personifies “the Indian woman’s only means of protest [that is] wailing” (21). Anzaldúa argues that “the true identity of all three [mothers] has been subverted—*Guadalupe* to makes us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people...encourag[ing] the *virgin/puta* (whore) dichotomy” (31). She says though, that “we have not all embraced that dichotomy” (31). The rejection of dichotomies is what mostly defines all of Anzaldúa’s historical, social, psychological, political, cultural, and literary attempts within this text. Also, the rejection of dichotomies is what makes it more postmodernist than Paredes’s.

Anzaldúa’s feminist tendencies define what Mexican Americans have looked to when in search of an identity in recent decades. That is, contemporary Mexican

Americans have turned to their mother(s) in order to unite across the borders according to Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa's heroines, especially *La Virgen*, are symbols of ethnic identity with which people of mixed race, and those who cross cultures, can identify. In her discussion of language within the culture, Anzaldúa attempts to explain some of these less theoretical problems with the formation of a Chicana/o identity, keeping with the notion that the Chicana/o identity is heterogeneous and plural in nature. As aforementioned, Anzaldúa tells us "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (59). However, Anzaldúa does not adhere to one language. She aligns herself with many languages which she refers to as "Chicano Spanish." This observation does not make the formation of a Chicana/o identity any easier to accomplish since "Chicano Spanish" is a "bastard language . . . not approved by any society" (Anzaldúa *Preface*). If identity equals language for Anzaldúa, then the Chicana/o identity is in a constant state of change, resisting stasis like language, at least, presumably, until "Chicano Spanish" is approved by any society. Anzaldúa elaborates on this complex connection between language and identity and its plurality:

Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)

7. Tex-Mex
8. *Pachuco* (called *caló*) (55).

Anzaldúa is right when she points to all of the languages or dialects which people on the border speak. She is also correct when she says that this variety of “Chicano Spanish” is a bastard language, not accepted by the mainstream. Therefore, if she is right about the rejection of this “Chicano Spanish” and language constitutes identity, or at least part of identity, then the Chicana/o at the border will always be an “alien.” And, he/she will constantly be in a process of defining him/herself until full American assimilation takes place, which does not seem to happen all too often on the border.

Postmodernist complications with Paredes’s identity construction are more obvious because of his highly modernist tendency to define the Mexican American experience on the border through a list of traits derived from patriarchal ideals which limit the Chicana/o on the border and the female gender, mostly. That is not to say that Paredes’s modernist list of physical as well as behavioral traits to define the border Mexican American is not legitimate in a postmodern world. David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen argue that “The importance of resistance in the formation of Chicano identity no doubt explains the place of Américo Paredes” (18). Paredes’s modernist cultural work, *With His Pistol In His Hand*, contributes to the preservation of the Mexican border culture in America by “underscor[ing] the ways in which the dominant Anglocentric discourse suppresses regional differences” on the border (Saldívar 37). Furthermore, *With His Pistol In His Hand* “constitutes needed insights into the boundary disputes between and among academic disciplines as well as geographic territories” (Saldívar 37). Johnson and Michaelsen also point out that “Chicano studies essentializes [sic] Chicano

identity around the figure of resistance: in short, there will be no Chicano assimilationists” (18) on the border. Without Paredes’s essentialist/modernist Mexican American identity construction reflected in *With His Pistol In His Hand*, through the tradition of resistance on the border so prevalent in the Chicana/o culture, we would not have postmodern notions of identity construction today and the contemporary Chicana/o would not have been inspired by his retelling to resist and reject the dominant narrative.

Although Anzaldúa’s heterogeneous and plural identity seems to confront the postmodernist predicament of identity construction more adequately because it resists stasis, Paredes’s modernist identity constructions are still relevant to the individual and collective contemporary Chicana/o intellectuals. That is, Gregorio Cortez still reflects an ideal rooted in the tradition of resistance that cannot be denied in the culture. Paredes’s exposure of the Anglo hegemonic cultural dominance at the border through *With His Pistol In His Hand* inspires others, like Anzaldúa, to critique “the cultures of U.S. imperialism” and emphasize “border culture” which Saldívar argues “is a term that transgresses various disciplines and theoretical boundaries: folklore, ethnography, musicology, history, and literary ‘theory’” (39). Nonetheless, Paredes as ethnographer and historian limits the identity construction of the border Mexican American by defining the “Borderer” as everything opposite of what the Anglo defines him. That is, the border Mexican American is not “cruel,” “cowardly,” “inferior,” “passive,” “mongrel,” and “treacherous” (16) as the Anglo perceived him to be, but these characteristics do describe the Anglo Texas Ranger in the text. Furthermore, Paredes limits dialogue, which also influences identity construction, by adhering to the Anglo versus people of color

dichotomy in contrast to Anzaldúa, who not only recognizes this dichotomy, but also focuses her discussion on the limitations of identity within the Chicana/o culture.

In an era of postmodern social relations, identity has become an increasingly important topic of discussion no matter how incompatible identity construction is with postmodernist theory. Arturo J. Aldama argues that “the issues of identity are urgent for peoples positioned as ‘Others’ or subalterns by the violent histories of colonialism. . . . [In America] we have the diverse nations of indigenous peoples renamed ‘Indians’ through a geographical error and imagined and treated as savages (noble and fierce) by the colonizing cultures” (30). There is no doubt that these acts of colonization contribute to the problems of identity formation, especially at the border where there exists two realities. Anzaldúa agrees “people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes” (37). And, even though the Chicana/o at the border has become “adept at switching modes,” he/she cannot and perhaps never will be able to define him/herself completely. Instead, the Chicana/o will be in a continual state of transition from which he/she will always be learning to adapt to their surroundings. Perhaps the Chicana/o will develop the most advanced version of human identity that will be able to change, adapt to any situation where the concept of identity is compromised. Adaptation or partial assimilation into another culture while struggling with the overwhelming desire to preserve a former culture can and will ultimately always change what it means to exist at the border as a Chicana/o. After all, that desire to preserve the Mexican culture is where the anxiety and

resistance comes from, which means that this desire will never go away if it has not already at this point.

The contemporary Chicana/o should not and perhaps, will not ever forget the conflicted realities revealed by Paredes's binary. Remembering the past helps us talk about the present. Recognizing the differences between two cultures helps to define the other. Aldama stresses the importance of remembering the violent border history and recognizing the differences between the dominant Anglos and the dominated Chicano:

On a material level, looking back over five hundred years of history, we see full-scale invasions, genocide, rapes, usurpation of lands, broken treaties, and our stratification as social and cultural inferiors to the civilizing culture. On a level of discourse, we challenge the violent practices of representation that reify our positions as barbarians, exotics, illegal aliens, addicts, primitives, criminals, and sexual deviants; the essentialists ways we were invented, simulated, consumed vanished and rendered invisible by the dominant culture; as well as the insidious processes of internalized colonialism in our understanding of ourselves and of others. (3)

In addition to remembering the violent past, the contemporary Chicana/o intellectual should also embrace the method or process of identity construction that emphasizes inclusion and tolerance, even for the Anglo and even when the Chicana/o is remembering. Ultimately, the contemporary Chicana/o intellectual will be in a constant state of movement between identities. Part of that movement will reflect Paredes's rigid and static notions of the Mexican American identity forged by pointing out the differences between the Anglo and the Mexican. The other part of that movement will adhere to Anzaldúa's theory of a mestiza consciousness. This movement between notions of identity construction is the kind of oscillation which will perhaps never cease to exist on the border. The border Chicana/o will always be nostalgic for the masculine heroics

personified by the legend of Gregorio Cortez in *With His Pistol In His Hand*. He/She will identify with Cortez's courage and resistance and with the physical and behavioral traits his/her people on the border possessed. On the other hand, the border Chicana/o will find comfort in adhering to the notion of being in a constant process of identity formation guided by the principles of a nurturing tolerance for ambiguity like Anzaldúa describes.

Since identity formation is important to all people of all races, the Chicanas/os will never give up the search for an identity that will grant them their own subjectivity. In 1957, Paredes began a search for something similar when he wrote *With His Pistol In His Hand*. Anzaldúa picked up the search from where Paredes left off thirty years later, in 1987, with *Borderlands/La Frontera*, but she changed the concept of identity to fit the new and more complicated world that she inhabited. These texts then, work like bookends for now. Paredes's text shows how the search for an identity at the border begun and how it was realized by the organic emergence and influence of the border corrido. Anzaldúa's text shows how identity is a process that is constantly changing the meaning of existence on the border for the contemporary Chicana/o intellectual. The search for identity on the border may never end, but it will teach the Chicana/o Mexican American that identity is not only a list of traits that distinguishes them from the Anglo nor is that identity defined exclusively by the historical conflict on the border, but also, that to be a Chicana/o Mexican American means to be in a uniquely distinct state of existing, a state of oscillation between ideals, and a constant state of crossing and then erasing borders.

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