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Coyolxauhqui Mourning:

Chicana Healing Practices Through Re-connecting and Re-membering

Indigenous-based Spirituality

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

Nadia Zepeda

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Coyolxauhqui Mourning:
Chicana Healing Practices Through Re-connecting and Re-membering
Indigenous-based Spirituality

by

Nadia Zepeda

Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Maylei S. Blackwell, Chair

My Master's thesis project explores the ways Chicanas negotiate an indigenous-based spiritual practice centering the experiential knowledges of women who participate in full moon healing circles. Specifically, this research focuses on Omecihuatl, from Orange County, California, and Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle from Los Angeles, California, to demonstrate how Chicanas understand their individual and collective healing. By conducting oral histories of six participants, I trace their healing journey as well as how they came to participate in the full moon circles. In this research, the questions I raise are: how do Chicanas' spiritual and healing practices inform their journeys toward healing? What are the experiences of some Chicanas participating in healing circles? What are the relationships between these women with Indigenous and Native American peoples, practices, and knowledges within healing circles?

While some of the women I interviewed have a connection to indigenous ancestral knowledge, most women experience detribalization. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *Coyolxauqui Imperative*, and Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo and Maria Eugenia Cotera's concept *Mestizo Mourning*, I use *Coyolxauqui mourning* to articulate a detribalized Chicana experience. This works in two ways. The first, in attempting to put an indigenous-based spiritual practice, detribalized Chicanas are missing practices and links to indigenous ancestry. Like the pieces of Coyolxauqui that are lost in her dis-memberment and cannot be recovered, Chicanas face the same dilemma—they can re-member pieces, but something will be lost in their re-connection. In the case of detribalized Chicanas, they must mourn those lost pieces. For some Chicanas, this means grieving the loss of a direct tie to an indigenous ancestry. Second, Coyolxauqui mourning means a re-connection to an indigenous identity and practice through honoring native and indigenous ceremonies, disrupting indigenist iconography, and honoring elders' and ancestors' epistemologies to attain healing and wholeness. I argue that Coyolxauqui mourning works to understand a possible path to re-connect an indigenous-based spirituality and healing of detribalized Chicanas.

The thesis of Nadia Zepeda is approved.

Susan Plann

Robert Chao Romero

Maylei S. Blackwell, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

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Chicana Collective Healing: Introducing *Coyolxauhqui Mourning*

In April of 2013, the smell of *copal*¹ immediately told me I was where I needed to be. The smoke that came from the center, the *ombliigo*², of the circle was so inviting. As I looked around, I saw Gaby, the fire keeper, smudging all who were joining the circle with *copal*. She noted in her introduction to the space that she learned how to keep fire by having participated in *Danza*³. Michelle, the circle keeper of *Omecihuatl*, welcomed everyone to the circle and let folks know that we were gathered here to honor our ancestors. She shared that she was Native and Chicana, and that her grandma taught her how to tend to the *altar* as if it were an elder. She encouraged those who had not put anything on the *altar* to add something in honor of the space, as it will charge their belongings with the energy from the circle. The description written by Iuri on the close Facebook group defines *Omecihuatl* as,

the female duality of *Ometecuhtli*. Together they form 'Ometeotl' which translates to mean, 'Two-Creator.' Although there are controversies of the root of this word in the Nahuatl language, many spiritual leaders say that Ometeotl is the name of the Great Spirit whom created all living things. This [Great Spirit] is not male or female but both. *Omecihuatl* is the female essence of this Great Spirit, in other words "God in female form" or the Goddess of creation⁴.

In the circle, Michelle pointed to Iuri and let us know that she was the person that started the circle in Orange County. Michelle asked Iuri if she could open the circle up by honoring the four

¹ Copal is dried tree resin used as medicine to cleanse an area. Copal is used in indigenous ceremonies in Mexico.

² *Ombliigo* means naval or belly button in Spanish. Circle keepers for these two circles refer to the center of the altar as the *ombliigo*. Placed at the center of the altar is the fire. Both *Omecihuatl* and *Coyolxauhqui* full moon circle have a community altar where anyone participating in the healing circle can place sacred things on there.

³ *Danza*, also known as Aztec Dance, pre-Columbian Aztec history. Because of the Mexican state project after the revolution of 1821, the government made *danza* as part an official historical narrative of Mexico. This ceremony was brought to the United States from Mexico City in the 1970s and has been popular among Chicana/os.

⁴ This description is found in their Facebook closed group page. <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=omecihuatl>

directions. Iuri had begun the opening by honoring the East—where Life and masculine energy begins— and then she prays before moving onto the other directions. We all stood and faced each direction with her and listened to her prayer. The women and I sat in a circle listening with our hearts—as we were encouraged to do— to women who were *desahogandose*⁵ about things they were going through. None of us were listening to prepare a response, but instead, to empathize and to hold space.

I first attended Omecihuatl, a full moon healing circle⁶, three years after graduating from California State University Long Beach (CSULB) when I started reconnecting with people back home in Orange County, California. My friend Cristina saw that I needed a space to talk and heal after my traumatic experience with institutional violence. In the Chicana/o Studies Department as CSULB, some *compañeras*⁷ and I wanted to include queer and feminist Chicana/o experiences into the Chicana/o Studies curriculum and decided to bring issues to light in the department by hosting two conferences. Unexpectedly, the department reacted in a very hostile manner and proceeded with a series of strategic hassling that aimed to delegitimize our work. As we reached out to surrounding campus communities for support, through an announcement of the upcoming conference in the school newspaper, we immediately experienced backlash by anonymous homophobic comments and death threats on the online school newspaper. One of the comments went as far as outlining specific ways to kill gay men and lesbians.

Cristina saw the trauma I carried with me after graduation and she invited me to an all-women's circle. I was nervous to go to my first circle because I was not sure what to expect, but

⁵ The English translation to the verb *desahogar* is to vent. In Spanish, the word means getting well from a worry or concern by telling someone or a group of people about it.

⁶ The full moon circle is a space that some women have created to meet once a month during the full moon to check in with each other in ceremony. By ceremony, I mean they are creating a space where they are tapping into ancestral knowledge and the spirit energy with an altar along with elements that represent the four directions—earth, wind, fire, & water.

⁷ *Compañera* is Spanish for friend or comrade.

something called me to go—I knew I needed this. The day of the full moon, I took some fruit and a blanket and made my way to the healing circle. The circle was inside La Colonia—a community center in a historically Native American and Mexican-American neighborhood in Orange County⁸. As I got more involved with the circle, I realized that full moon circles were not unique to Orange County; circles have been held all over Southern California⁹.

I had started my doctoral program at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) a year after I began going to Omecihuatl's circle, and at that point, going back to Orange County for a full moon healing circles was getting more difficult, especially when the full moon fell during weekdays and I had to be in West Los Angeles for class. Instead of going monthly, I would go once every two or three months. I had *compañeras* tell me about full moon healing circles in the Inland Empire and Los Angeles. I saw on Facebook that Mujeres de Maíz¹⁰ hosted full moon healing circles as well, and they started their circle at 9 pm, which avoided all traffic that divides West Los Angeles from the East side. Participating in the Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle in East Los Angeles laid out a similar, yet different, way of engaging in the act of *el desahogo*. Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle meets every month on the full moon by a Coyolxauhqui stone in the City Terrace at the corner of two big intersections. It is usually very busy with pedestrians passing while sharing a parking lot with a *lavandería*.¹¹ The site is seen as an extraordinary place because the stone is a connection to Mexican pre-colonial history. For

⁸ Michelle, the Circle Keeper for Omecihuatl, grew up in the neighborhood of La Colonia. The community center is called the Anaheim Independence Family Resource Center. All the women that I talked to about the space identified it as La Colonia. Michelle identifies as Chicana or Mexican descent and Native of the Acjachemen Nation.

⁹ While this circle is not specific to Orange County and Los Angeles, there is no documentation about these circles or estimates of how many circles exist.

¹⁰ *Mujeres de Maíz*, which translates to Women of the Corn, was founded in 1997 as a grassroots women of color ARTivist collective that puts forward a variety of events in the community. They center healing and wellness through programming, publications, art, and education. A lot of the programming they do focuses on art, wellness, and healing. (www.mujeresdemaiz.com)

¹¹ *Lavandería* means laundromat in Spanish.

many Chicana feminists, the reclamation of the Coyolxauhqui stone disrupts the heteropatriarchal narrative in Aztec cosmology. Coyolxauhqui was the daughter of Coatlicue. After finding out that Coatlicue became pregnant by a feather and was going to give birth to Huitzilopochtli, the god of war, Coyolxauhqui along with her brothers and sister decided that this baby could not be born. When they were about to attack, Huitzilopochtli cut open his mother's womb and came out in full armor. He dis-membered Coyolxauhqui and threw her into the sky. Many renditions of this story are misogynist situating Coyolxauhqui as a traitor. Chicana feminists scholars have re-appropriated the narrative reclaiming the image of Coyolxauhqui to represent the dis-memberment that many Chicanas feel because of heteropatriarchy (Moraga 1993, Anzaldúa 2015, Gaspar de Alba 2014).

As I walked in, Lorena, one of the circle keepers, smudged me with copal and welcomed me to the space. In the Facebook event, they encouraged people to bring flowers and candles to place them on community altar: the Coyolxauhqui stone. Fe, another circle keeper, welcomed everyone. She explained that the circle had been around since 2010 and it has been apart of Mujeres de Maíz programming. Fe explained that the teachings of the circle were a culmination of northern Native and southern Indigenous teachings. Before the circle began, we also honored the four directions with a Chumash welcoming song. Marlene, the third circle keeper, let everyone know that they were going to pass around tobacco—an offering that initiates a check-in or a letting-go process— to let go of something negative or affirm something positive on top of the Coyolxauhqui stone¹².

Attending healing circles for the last three years has allowed me to set out my path to healing rekindling my relationship with a spiritual practice that fits my queer feminist viewpoint.

¹² While both circles had similar practices of letting go of what we were holding, Omecihautl did not follow the placing of tobacco on the altar space.

These circles shifted spirituality away from heteropatriarchal institutional practices sustained by my Mexican Catholic upbringing. Attending these circles also allowed me to participate in the healing of other women by holding space with and for them. The spaces for healing that Omecihuatl and Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle are providing for the community is what motivated me to be apart of bridging practice and theory. It is through this research project that I have chosen to conduct oral histories of the circle keepers¹³ and participants of the healing collectives. While the circles are not unique, very little has been written about these circles—detailing their origins or effects with and within Orange County and Los Angeles. Information on collective healing circles is scarce perhaps because these circles are kept intimate and often only known by the people who participate in the circle. For example, the Omecihuatl circle is an intimate space and you must know someone who already participates in the circle to be invited to join. They do not post their full moon circles on Facebook. On the other hand, Mujeres de Maíz creates a monthly Facebook event for their full moon circle. Here we see the engagement with social media as a medium that widens outreach. Another reason why little research exists is because much of the literature on Chicana spirituality has dealt with individual journeys and finding their spiritual practice¹⁴. There has not been extensive literature that focuses on Chicana healing circles or collective healing. The goal of this study is to help bridge the practice of holding two monthly full moon healing circles that have recently taken place in Los Angeles and Orange County in the last decade.

Coyolxauhqui Mourning

¹³ I am defining “Circle Keeper” as defined by Native scholar Jean Stevenson. She describes the responsibility of Circle Keeper, as “we are not above anyone else, as everyone is considered equal. We talk about our issues, our past, our present, and what we have learned. We cry and vent as much as anyone else in the Circle [...] it is our responsibility to open and lock the doors, set out and put away the items in the center of the Circle, take care of the Medicines and the items that we place at the center of the circle” (18).

¹⁴ For a more extensive literature refer to *Fleshing the Spirit, Red Medicine, Woman who Glows in the Dark*, and work by Elisa Facio, Patrisia Gonzales, Ines Hernandez-Avila, Irene Lara, Lara Medina, and Gloria Anzaldúa.

My research is inspired by queer Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro* posthumously published in 2015. In this book, she gives a definition of healing that serves as the foundation for my work. She defined healing as "taking back the scattered energy and soul loss wrought by woundings. Healing means using the life force and strength that comes with *el ánimo* to act positively on one's own and others' behalf. Often a wound provokes an urgent yearning for wholeness and provides the ground to achieve it" (Anzaldúa 89). This is especially relevant when talking about the experiences of the women from both circles because they have come to their spiritual journey as a way to heal and also to connect to ancestral and indigenous practices. I see Anzaldúa's "ground[ing]" as the healing circle, and "wholeness," as the goal of Chicana's seeking a sustainable spiritual practice aiming to heal their "wounds."

Northern Native American talking circles and other ceremonial practices influence Chicana full moon healing circles. For a better understanding of ceremonial practices I use the work of psychologists Christopher Rybak and Amanda Decker-Fitts in their article, "Understanding Native American Healing Practices." The authors' goal is to shed light on Native traditional practices and the work of Native American communities so that counselors and therapists can be aware of the effects of Native healing and holistic health. Rybak and Decker-Fitts break down and define different rituals and ceremonies many native communities follow including the use of the drum and song, smudging¹⁵, and sweat lodge. Specifically, they state that "wellness from a Native American perspective considers the communal context for individuals as well as they seek a balance of mental, spiritual, and physical aspects of living" (Rybak &

¹⁵ Rybak and Decker-Fitts define this, as "smudging is a means of purification, often through passing the smoke of burning cedar, sage, or sweet grass over individuals, including healers and those seeking healing, and throughout spaces. Cedar and sage serve to dispel negative energies of various kinds, while sweet grass attracts positive energies" (337). I want to make this reference because I had mentioned earlier in the piece that Circle Keepers in the Full Moon Circles were also smudging and while we come to understand that they are fulfilling a similar purpose of purification, Native folks use different medicine to purify space and people.

Decker-Fitts 335). In other words, healing seeks communal balance. Similar to the work of Ryback and Decker-Fitts, Native social worker Jean Stevenson describes her experience as a circle keeper in an Aboriginal community in Montreal, Canada. She writes, “The Circle is a safe place where the participants are able to work on their healing process. By doing so we help ourselves, which in turn has a ripple effect on our family and friends and eventually on our community [...] Confidentiality is a very important part of the Circle” (Stevenson 11). In gathering in a circle, many Chicanas partake of their own spiritual healing, which ripples out onto other parts of their life and ultimately they can find a communal balance. What is important to note about these two research projects is that the authors have explored the importance of knowing the ways Native communities incorporate healing and holistic health in their day-to-day lives. They do so by briefly interpreting different rituals and ceremonies many native communities participate in to have a balance with their spiritual, mental, and physical health. Many of the women I interviewed have an indigenous-based spiritual practice that they have gained by participating in Native ceremonies in California or by going to ceremonies in Mexico. It is important to note that their understanding of healing circles are influenced by talking circles, a Northern Native American practice. Many of the circles fuse traditions together by incorporating *copal* in their ceremony, a southern Native practice, while using sage, sweetgrass, cedar, and tobacco, a common Northern Native practice: this is a kind of detribalized Chicana healing experience.

The purpose of this project is to center the experiential knowledge that Chicanas share in their process of healing through incorporating ancestral knowledge and indigenous spiritual practices both individually and collectively. This work also speaks to these women who, as young adults, saw spirituality practiced by their elders. It focuses on how that act of witnessing inspired their participation in an indigenous-based spiritual practice as well as their participating

in the circle. For this research, I focus on the healing collectives Omecihuatl, from Orange County, California, and Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle, from Los Angeles, California. In conducting six oral histories of women who lead the circles or participate in them allowed for a different understanding of Chicana spirituality and healing practices.

Centering the experiences of marginalized communities is necessary for my Chicana feminist epistemologies because it gives light to an alternative way of healing from heteropatriarchal white supremacist structures that attack women of color. This type of alternative healing practice is coming directly from communities through spiritual and indigenous practices. Heteropatriarchal white supremacist structures function through institutionalized religion and state sanctioned projects that have detribalized and oppressed many Chicanas by attempting to eliminate indigenous communities. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, “research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake” (5). As a researcher, I “‘research back,’ in the same tradition of ‘writing back’ or ‘talking back’” (7) to hegemonic power structures that have historically disempowered women of color. With great responsibility, I use this research to center Chicana experiences with collective healing and spirituality, a history that has been silenced and ignored.

By documenting the narratives of women who participate in the healing collectives Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle and Omecihuatl, this research disrupts the dominant white supremacist heteropatriarchal narrative which values “neutral” and depersonalized knowledge. This research offers a direct contestation to normative research methods by foregrounding experiences of women of color who engage in spiritual and healing practices. The knowledge that one acquires through everyday activities informs the experiential epistemology that one uses to navigate the world, which is the knowledge I will be foregrounding and honoring. In *This*

Bridge Called My Back, Cherríe Moraga says of this vein of thought, “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longing—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). Similarly, in “Toward an Epistemology of the Brown Body,” Cindy Cruz posits that the “[reclamation] for the Chicana social agent, is not only a strategy to make visible Chicana voices and histories, but is also the struggle to develop a critical practice that can propel the brown body from a neocolonial past and into the embodiment of radical subjectivities” (658). It is through the use of our bodies as a site of knowledge that we call into question heteropatriarchal practices. By placing the experiences of Chicanas at the epicenter of this research, it is my intention to contribute to a body of knowledge that interrogates and expands the way we comprehend Chicana spirituality, Chicana indigenous practices and collective healing through re-connections to indigenous forms of spirituality and ancestral knowledge. This research may fill the gaps in the literature about Chicana healing practices through the exploration of their individual and collective journeys into conversations about re-searching lost ancestral knowledge through the experiential knowledge Chicanas contribute while exploring and interrogating decolonial practices. Hence, I am relying on the work foregrounded by feminists of color that values everyday experiences and practices of women and pushes away from hegemonic knowledge production.

As I document the accounts of Chicanas' re-connection to an indigenous-based spirituality, I also want to speak to their detribalization. In the piece, “Indigenous but not Indian? Chicana/os and the Politics of Indigeneity,” authors Maria Coteria and Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo situate the detribalization of most Chicanas/os in a historical context. They note that through colonization and state sanctioned projects by Mexico that aim to incrementally eliminate indigenous communities, cosmologies, languages, and practices through the nationalist project of *mestizaje*. I argue that *mestizaje* was designed as a eugenics project that labeled all Mexicans as a

mixture of indigenous and Spanish blood however, situating their indigenous roots as something of the past. The ultimate goal of *mestizaje* was to eliminate indigenous communities. *Mestizaje* became a Mexican state project that relied heavily on the elimination of living indigenous people, and instead, highlighted the histories, mythology, and fall of the Aztec empire as a national narrative. Cotera and Saldaña Portillo introduce the concept “mestizo mourning” to think about how some Chicanas/os can begin to interrogate the detribalization many have experienced as a result of these state-sanctioned projects. “Mestizo mourning” is interrogating the need to mourn the loss of ancestral knowledge, cosmologies, and practices. As I move forward in this work, I question if a re-connection to ancestral and indigenous practices can occur when hegemonic systems have done everything possible to remove those links. I seek to uncover how Chicanas are negotiating this loss and explore the ways some of the women are re-claiming and re-connecting to indigenous spiritual practices.

The theory behind Gloria Anzaldúa’s work on Coyolxauhqui further looks into Chicanas as re-remembering and re-connecting to indigeneity. In her book, *Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa lays out her framework that centers Coyolxauhqui. She writes,

“Coyolxauhqui imperative”: a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the *susto* resulting from wounding traumas, racism, and other acts of violation *que hechan pedazos nuestras almas*, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us (Anzaldúa 2).

Anzaldúa is using “Coyolxauhqui imperative” to describe her writing process, but as seen above, it can also be used to describe a loss Chicanas experience. Anzaldúa gives a foundation for Chicana feminists to a re-claimed and re-remembered Coyolxauhqui to represent a figure that counters heteropatriarchy and a re-connection to an ancestral past. In centering Coyolxauhqui in

their reclamation, Chicanas are articulating indigenous epistemology that centers wholeness and healing, but also relies on the same indigenist iconographies that the Mexican state project used to detribalize a lot of Chicanas.

Inspired by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa's "Coyolxauhqui imperative," and Maria Cotera and Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo's "mestizo mourning," I bring forward the concept "Coyolxauhqui mourning." I aim to articulate the condition many detribalized Chicanas experience in trying to re-connect with an indigenous-based spiritual practice. Anzaldúa's concept uses "Coyolxauhqui [to] represents the psychic and creative process of tearing apart and pulling together (deconstructing/constructing). She represents fragmentation, imperfection, incompleteness, and unfulfilled promise of integration, completeness, and wholeness" (xxi). Detribalized people cannot fully re-connect to their direct indigenous ancestry because of colonization and active state projects that seek the elimination of indigenous communities by using mestizaje as forced assimilation. Saldaña Portillo and Cotera show the need to mourn because of colonial state projects that have stripped people of their indigenous ways of living and knowing. The dis-connect faced by detribalized people has direct consequences of lost ancestry, history, knowledge, and memory.

In the case of this research, Coyolxauhqui mourning works in two ways. The first, in attempting to put an indigenous based spiritual practice, detribalized Chicanas are missing practices and links to indigenous ancestry. Like the pieces of Coyolxauhqui that are lost in her dis-memberment and cannot be recovered, Chicanas are faced with the same dilemma—they can re-member pieces but something will be lost in their re-connection. In the case of detribalized Chicanas, they must mourn those lost pieces—for some Chicanas this means grieving the loss of a direct tie to an indigenous ancestry. Second, Coyolxauhqui mourning means a re-connection to an indigenous identity and practice through honoring native and indigenous ceremonies,

disrupting indigenist iconography, and honoring elder and ancestor epistemologies in order to attain healing and wholeness. I argue that Coyolxauhqui mourning works together to understand a possible path to re-connect an indigenous-based spirituality and healing of detribalized Chicanas.

Trying to understand how some Chicanas are navigating the detribalization and negotiation of indigenous spiritual practices is what prompted me to do this work. Even though many cannot trace their lineage, because of the detribalization that occurred in Mexico, they found alternative ways of practicing their spirituality and re-connecting to their indigenous roots (Lara Medina 1998, Patrisia Gonzales 2012, Elisa Facio & Irene Lara 2014). These alternative methods serve as a point of departure for this research. As noted later, some of the Chicanas I am writing about grew up with institutionalized religious practices, but through their experiences—either inspired by the Chicana/o organizing happening on their college campus, participating in *Danza*, Peace and Dignity or inspired by the Zapatista movement—many found an indigenous-based spiritual awakening and practice. The healing circles become a space where women shared the knowledges they have acquired and a space for re-connection to indigenous spiritual practices.

The research questions for this study are as follows: (1) How do Chicanas' spiritual and healing practices inform their journeys toward healing? (2) What are the experiences of some Chicanas participating in healing circles? (3) What are the relationships between these women with Indigenous and Native American peoples, practices, and knowledges within healing circles? These questions give insight to what participating in healing circles will mean to some Chicanas involved. The goal is to understand how Chicanas are negotiating their own spiritual practice individually and collectively in these healing circles.

This research study gives a better understanding of Chicana spirituality and monthly full

moon healing collectives. It is important because it gives insight into the ways Chicanas are finding a re-connection with indigenous spiritual practices. In what follows, I offer a review of the literature, which provides a glimpse into the ways spirituality was discussed in early Chicano cultural nationalist writings. I look at the ways *indigenismo* was used in early writings and the dangers of relying on state projects of *mestizaje*. Also, I look at contemporary views of Chicana spirituality, Chicanas' relationship to religion and *curanderismo*. This thesis project is in conversation with healing, spirituality, indigeneity, and *indigenismo* in order to better understand the ways the women in this work navigate their own journey. Ultimately, among the findings that stood out are the ways some of the women found their indigenous-based spiritual awakening, their relationship with remedies, and, for some, how that became a re-connection to ancestral knowledge. Their participation in the circles also revealed the knowledge that they used to guide their circle and the reasons why they participate in the space. Amidst my own journey in Coyolxauhqui mourning with the loss of my ancestral knowledges and as begin re-connecting with indigenous-based spirituality and practice, I see these important conversations as an integral part of my own growth.

Literature Review

In this review of the literature, I explore the different ways scholars have looked at spirituality and indigenous practices in the Chicana/o community, focusing specifically on the experiences of Chicanas. I do this work because this research examines the ways some Chicanas practice an indigenous based spirituality and healing practices that connect back to an indigenous ancestral knowledge that many Chicanas have lost because of colonization and Mexican State projects that pushed for *mestizaje*. By pinpointing the ways some Chicanas are re-connecting to an indigenous ancestral past, I can place this work in this larger literature context. This literature review touches on the Chicana/o Cultural Nationalist Movement and its use of Aztec

iconography to re-connect Chicanas/os participating in the Movement of the late sixties and early seventies to an indigenous ancestral past. I also complicate notions of Chicana/o *indigenismo*. I refer to scholar Sheila E. Contreras' definition of *indigenismo* to understand how a state project by Mexico after the revolution wanted to form a singular national identity—mestizaje. She states that, *indigenismo* “often refers to public policy initiatives spearheaded by mestizo intellectuals, such as anthropologists Manuel Gamio that pursued the explicit objective of ‘social realignment between the races’” (Contreras 23-24) ... “Indigenismo also describes the stylistic appropriation of Indigenous cultural forms and traditions by non-Indigenous artists and intellectuals” (Contreras 24). Ultimately, *Indigenismo* highlighted indigenous people in the past—the Aztec Civilization—but failed to acknowledge and value living indigenous people. I also explore a Chicana feminist spiritual turn that includes a reclamation of an indigenous-based spiritual practice of *curanderismo*—spiritual healing¹⁶. Finally, I briefly discuss the loss of an indigenous ancestry and what it means to try to find a re-connection. I also want to explore how some U.S. Native women show tensions towards Chicanas because of their disconnect and loss to their indigenous ancestral linkages. This is important because many Chicanas are trying to find a connection to an indigenous ancestral linkage, but many are left trying to re-connect with something that at times is out of their reach. Overall, this review of the literature complicates and investigates the ways in which some Chicanas are participating in spirituality, healing, and indigeneity to better understand the healing journeys and the participation of healing circles in Los Angeles County, CA and Orange County, CA.

Indigenous and ancestral knowledge roots the reclamation of spirituality that some Chicanas have found. In “Nepantla spirituality: My Path to the Source(s) of Healing,” Lara

¹⁶ While *curanderismo* can mean different practices of spiritual healing done by a *curandera* (or healer), it often refers to an individual who gives spiritual cleanses or *limpias*. This is something commonly practiced in Mexico and some parts of the United States. For a more detailed account of the *curandera* or *curanderismo*. See *Woman who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* by Elena Avila.

Medina explains, “it is a spirituality deeply rooted in returning to the earth/cosmic-centered Indigenous knowledge of our ancestors as a means of healing the wounds inflicted by patriarchal heteronormativity, racism, and capitalism. The return is not to a romanticized past, but to ancient epistemologies that value and understand fluidity and change [...]” (Medina 168). Medina calls on indigenous based spirituality to aid in healing the wounds of historical trauma. While some Chicanas have reclaimed healing through an indigenous practice, it is important to interrogate where they find these connections when detribalized. As noted later in the literature review, the conversations around Chicana spirituality and indigenous practices are complicated. Many have lost their ancestral linkage with indigeneity and are detribalized (Gonzales). Even though many Chicanas cannot trace their lineage, they have navigated to find alternative ways of practicing their spirituality and connect to their indigenous roots (Patricia Gonzales; Lara Medina; Elisa Facio & Irene Lara). In this case, some of the women involved in the healing circles found these alternative ways when they found spirituality through *Danza*, organizing, the full moon circle and the participation in Native ceremonies. While noted that many Chicanas and Latinas had lost their indigenous ancestry through colonization and the journey to find oneself is often very complicated, the conversation that is often missing in this work is the ways in which some Chicanas participate and negotiate their spiritual practices in Chicana indigenism.

In the Chicano cultural nationalist movements of the late sixties and early seventies, cultural and spiritual connection to an indigenous past was used as a call to action for many Chicanos. During this time, there was an emergence of Chicano cultural nationalism that sparked political activism for many Chicana/o youth¹⁷. One of the main catalysts that motivated many of these young people was the Denver Youth Conference organized by the Crusade for Justice

¹⁷ For a more detailed description of the Chicano nationalist youth movement during the late sixties and early seventies, refer to *Youth, Identity, Power* by Carlos Muñoz written in 1989.

March of 1969 in Denver, Colorado¹⁸. In the conference, one of the main organizers, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales read, to a large crowd of Chicanas and Chicanos from all over the nation, the epic poem *I am Joaquin*¹⁹. The poem was a call to mobilize people by empowering them through historical teachings that were often unknown to Chicanas and Chicanos in the later sixties. Gonzales traced Chicano history to Pre-Columbian Mexico, specifically taking an interest in the Aztec civilization. Amongst other important historical contexts, he also referred to the Mexican revolutionary as part of Chicano history. In sharing this poem, Gonzales planted a seed that allowed many to re-claim an ancestral lineage and pride looking back at Aztec history. Corky Gonzales and Luis Valdez eventually made this poem into a short film. For Chicana/os that did not feel connected to U.S. history, situating and re-connecting their own lineage to Mexican history was a point of empowerment.

In the same conference, Alurista read a poem that introduced conference goers to the concept of Aztlán. The poem, which eventually became the preface for the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*²⁰, was a foundational document of the Chicano movement that situated the Aztec mythical place of origin to the Southwest of the United States. This was an important task for its time because it allowed many Chicanos to identify with the places they were living in. In *Bloodlines* scholar Shelia Contreras explains, “Alurista explicitly rewrote [the] Aztec migration story as a Chicano narrative of origin that linked ancient indigenous travelers to present-day mestizo communities in the United States” (72). This was especially important because many Chicano

¹⁸ I learned about the Denver Youth Conference in the documentary *Chicano!* (1996) for the first time in my introduction to Chicano Studies Class at CSULB.

¹⁹ The poem, *I am Joaquin*, is a first-person poem where Corky Gonzalez personifies different people in history from pre-Columbian times to the Mexican Revolution. This poem highlights the indigenous and Spanish ancestry many Chicanos have in their lineage.

²⁰ In the description of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, the authors explain the plan as “Program El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán sets the theme that the Chicanos (La Raza de Bronze) must use their nationalism as the key or common denominator for mass mobilization and organization” (*El Plan de Aztlán*). In this plan, they laid out seven goals as a guide to organize self-determination.

youth felt like foreigners with white supremacists historical accounts, and some related to the poem and saw living in the United States' Southwest as returning to the land of their ancestors. While this mythical origin story was very empowering to a lot of Chicanos, it didn't take into consideration the original inhabitants of the land— the Native American communities that build up the Southwest. This is complicated because in allowing one community to reclaim a historical lineage, another community can also be silenced and rendered invisible at the same time.

While many Chicanas/os saw the re-connection to an Aztec ancestry, with *I am Joaquin* and Aluristas' poem claiming Aztlan, many of the texts were masculinist and did not include the histories and voices of Chicanas. Some Chicana feminists during the seventies were also tapping into Pre-Columbian history to find empowerment, especially in masculinist spaces and narratives that were only glorifying the history to Chicanos. The film *La Chicana* (1979) by Silvia Morales and Anna Nieto-Gomez was a direct contestation to the lack of representation of Chicana history in the poem *I am Joaquin*. In this short film, they highlighted Chicanas' history by using pre-Columbian Aztec history as a starting point; instead of highlighting great emperors, they elevated the Aztec deities like *Coatlicue* and *Tlazolteotl*. They also included Mexicans and Chicanas that were doing social justice work in their community. I highlight these pieces because being in the United States many Chicanos connected to Mexican history as Chicana/o history. The images that they were acquiring from Mexico were State driven projects that highlighted Indigenismo as a national history. This is important to note because many Chicanas are finding a linkage to indigenous ancestral practices, but they are feeding into the project that detribalized them in the first place. For example, the women in the collective who participate in this research are trying to re-connect to an indigenous-based spiritual and healing practice, but they are using names like Omecihuatl, which means woman in Nahuatl, and Coyolxauhqui, an Aztec deity, to name their full moon healing circle.

Seeing Mexican history as part of Chicana/o history implied that many people in the movement were invested in a national narrative imposed by the state. Specifically, in *Blood Lines*, Contreras investigates how some Chicana/o practices are deeply rooted in *indigenismo*. Contreras questions the origins of knowledge of indigenous ways valorized by some Chicanas/os. This includes the glorification of the Aztecs and the placement of indigenous people as something of the past. In the text, Contreras does a close reading of Chicana/o literature that practices indigenism; this includes authors like Gloria Anzaldúa and Alurista. Contreras complicates the conversation around European primitivism, Mexican indigenism, and Chicanas/os indigenism to understand better how they are in conversation with each other.

In a closer reading of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Contreras questions the origins of the knowledge used by Gloria Anzaldúa to situate her teorías that rely on Aztec imaginary like Coatlicue, Tlazolteotl, and Coyolxauhqui. She writes, “less recognized, perhaps, is the degree to which *Borderlands* and other Chicana/o indigenist texts are deeply indebted to language and images first disseminated by European writers as part of colonialist endeavors and, later, as critical reevaluations of the Western social order” (Contreras 114). While the contribution that Anzaldúa has made with *Borderlands* is crucial to highlight, it also demonstrates how Chicanas use indigenism to move towards decolonial practices. The question then becomes, can the theories created under Mexican state projects to erase indigenous people be decolonizing?

While Contreras problematizes the use of *indigenismo*, she also sees the power in working with active indigenous people of Mexico. She calls this oppositional indigeneity and offers the work with Zapatistas as an example of being accountable to indigenous communities. She writes, “The Zapatistas hailing of Chicanas/os also strengthens and, in some cases, activates an oppositional indigeneity that asserts its origins in the pre-contact Mesoamerican civilization from which the rank and file of the Zapatista Army are descended” (Contreras 36). It is

important to move away from romanticized notions of what it means to be indigenous and be accountable to active communities and practices. Similar to this vein of thought, Arturo Aldama writes that he often encourages his students to move away from romanticized ideas of pre-conquest times, and instead, those who are wanting “to understand their indigeneity not to glorify an Aztec past but to examine one's family histories to determine their indigenous lineage [...] and try to connect with those living peoples and community if possible” (Aldama 160). This is important because many Chicanas and Chicanos consistently search for connection to their indigenous ancestral roots because they are often detribalized and do not have a way to link to their roots. In this research, I am trying to understand the linkages some Chicanas are creating to be accountable to U.S. Native and Indigenous peoples of the South. Are there accountability practices for Native communities? What knowledge guides healing circle if these women are detribalized? As noted in the finding later, by searching for a re-connection to an indigenous spiritual and healing practice, many Chicanas have turned to Native and Indigenous communities for this exchange of knowledge. Women talk about their relationship with indigenous elders as well as a connection to their ancestors.

Some recent scholars have complicated the use of indigenism Chicana/o literary productions and have questioned the origin of a lot of these teorías. Lourdes Alberto's article “Topographies of Indigenism” highlights the creation of the modern Mexican nation's vision in centering “Aztec culture as the only kind of indigenous culture that could be safely celebrated, giving rise to Mestizaje as the only racial future that could be embraced” (Alberto 39). Alberto also problematizes the ways some Chicana/o scholars have used indigenism in their work. She writes, “both Chicano and Chicana versions of indigenism resulted in strategies of empowerment for Mexican Americans, but in light of indigenism negative history in the Americas, Native and indigenous studies scholars have looked at their practices of indigenism with suspicion” (Alberto

39). As scholars move towards a more hemispheric approach to indigenous studies, there is a critique of the ways some Chicanas/os are using *indigenismo* as a liberatory practice without exploring the political implications that are embedded within.

Recently, beginning in the eighties, Chicanas writers have been engaging in a spiritual turn by writing about their own spiritual journeys through indigeneity (Gloria Anzaldúa, Ines Hernandez-Avila, Cherríe Moraga, Lara Medina, Patrisia Gonzales, Elena Avila, Estela Roman, Irene Lara & Elisa Facio). While this turn is happening, there is still a question about claiming indigeneity while detribalized. Specifically, in “Speaking Across the Divide,” an interview conducted by Ines Hernandez-Avila and Domino Perez to Gloria Anzaldúa and Simon Ortiz to complement the Special issue of *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, which included Chicanas/os and Native American scholars. In this interview, Anzaldúa responded to her relationship to indigeneity and the relationships and tensions between Chicanas/os and Native Americans. She states, “To have an Indian ancestry means to fear that La India in me that has been killed for centuries being killed. It means to suffer psychic fragmentation. It means to mourn the losses—loss of land, loss of language, loss of heritage, loss of trust that all indigenous people in this country, in Mexico, in the entire planet suffer on a daily basis” (9). Because of this loss, Anzaldúa proposes the term “new tribalism” to allow for a more inclusive identity that goes beyond race and provides a “social identity that could motivate subordinated communities to work together in coalition” (Anzaldúa 9). Anzaldúa sees the importance of being in conversation with her Native American sisters. She also understands the complications in pushing this term. She writes, “tengo miedo que, in pushing for mestizaje and a new tribalism, I will ‘detribalize’ them. I also feel it's imperative we participate in this dialogue no matter how risky” (Anzaldúa 12). Overall, while the conversations Native American women and Chicanas need to engage in

are complicated and messy, they are important because if the complications are not acknowledged/explored, these tensions will continue on both side.

In “Los Espiritus Siguen Hablando: Chicana Spirituality,” scholar Lara Medina writes about the pain Chicanas often feel negotiating the wounds left by religious institutions as well as their need to reconnect with spiritual work. This led many to “*indigena*-inspired spirituality,” which allowed them to “learn to trust their own senses and bodies, recreate traditional cultural practices, and look to non-Western philosophies—all of which offer us a (re)connection to ourselves, our spirit, and to the ongoing process of creating *nuestra familia*” (Medina 189). The reclamation of a spirituality rooted in indigenous practices allowed many Chicanas to find spiritual awakening. This practice moves away from heteropatriarchal doctrines of the Catholic Church, and instead, paves the way to a spirituality that is inclusive and intersectional. In the case of the participants, many women said that they had a spiritual awakening going to college and getting involved on campus. In college, many of the women were empowered to *Danza* and began to move away from Catholicism because they attributed their loss of indigenous ancestral knowledge to the institutionalization of the church. My interviewees also noted that their reconnection to indigeneity was through activism similar to the Chicanas/os in the late sixties and early seventies.

Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives, edited by Elisa Facio and Irene Lara, is one of the first anthologies to focus strictly on Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous spirituality. With its publication in 2014, it is also one of the most recent books on the topic. This anthology brings together scholars, activists, and healers and places them in dialogue with each other about Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women's spirituality. They explain that “build[ing] on the supposition that spirituality often plays a decolonizing role in creating meaning, inspiring action, and supporting healing and justice in

our communities, this anthology contributes to an emerging body of knowledge focused on voicing and understanding spirituality through an intersectional, interdisciplinary, and nonsectarian lens” (Facio & Lara 4). Ultimately, this anthology brings together a conversation that has been happening in academic and community spaces in one book. The anthology is an example of the ways some Chicanas are finding a link to their lineage after their detribalization. It also demonstrates that there are multiple conversations happening around Chicanas spirituality and indigeneity.

As noted above, some Chicanas have reclaimed the ways they practice their spirituality in their terms away from heteropatriarchal institutions that have used oppressive tactics to inscribe colonization. As Medina notes, Chicanas have looked into spirituality influenced by indigenous practices to allow for a more inclusive spiritual practice. Similarly, in the anthology *Fleshing the Spirit*, the authors give space to have a conversation between Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women, and they lay out how they practice spirituality.

Elena Avila, a *curandera* and psychiatric nurse, writes *Woman who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* to share her experience using traditional healing practices in her work. She explains,

Curanderos believe that it is not enough to heal the body. One must heal the wounded soul as well [...] Trauma causes a part of the soul to get frightened and run away into hiding. When this happens, a part of our energy is no longer accessible to us. We need 100 percent of our soul’s energy to be in good physical, mental, and spiritual health.

(Avila 19)

Throughout her *testimonio*, she delineates different forms of *curanderismo* as well as outlining the kinds of spiritual traumas one can carry. Avila’s work demonstrates the ways some Chicanas are incorporating Mexican indigenous practices in their day-to-day lives in the United States.

Like Avila, many Chicanas are going back to Mexico and trying to re-connect to an indigenous healing practice by working with *curanderas* and participating in ceremonies in Mexico. For example, Fe mentioned that she created the Coyolxauhqui circle inspired by her participation in a Moon Ceremony in Mexico. One of the things that the ceremony requires is creating a space to meet monthly during the full moon. The work of Avila shows how some Chicanas are distinctly connecting back to a lineage, a way to create connection to what was once forcefully taken from them.

As noted above, the experiences of some Chicanas re-connecting with an indigenous based spiritual and healing practice come from a longing to find what has been lost. In this quest, many Chicanas have navigated different ways to feel a connection to that loss. In what follows, I will breakdown the methods used to conduct oral histories of the participants to better understand their individual and collective experiences participating in full moon circles. After demonstrating the method of this research, I will give profiles of the individual and collective experiences they outline to arrive at an understanding of how these women are finding that connection. This process includes looking at their connection with an early spiritual practice, their spiritual awakening, the knowledge that guides them and the circle—be it experiential or indigenous from ceremonies they participate in—and finally, how they are finding healing while participating in these spaces once a month.

Methods

I interviewed six women to get a better understanding of their spiritual journey and the impact of healing collectives on their lives. Three of the women I interviewed participate in Omecihuatl, a full moon healing collective from Orange County, California. Iuri is the founder of the circle, Michelle is the circle keeper, and Gaby is an active participant. The other three

women participate in Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle in East Los Angeles. Fe is the founder of the healing circle and she along with Lorena and Marlene are Circle keepers.

Specifically, in analyzing the qualitative interviews of the women involved, I reach to a better understanding of the journey some Chicanas take to fulfill their own spiritual and healing practices. The second purpose is to add a new perspective of Chicana spirituality and healing by focusing on collective healing that happens in Los Angeles and Orange County. Finally, the data collected for this study provide evidence as to how Chicanas exchange with indigenous and Native American communities, practices and knowledges. The layout of this section is as follows: the methodology used in this paper which includes oral history and participant observations, the selection of participants, the instrumentation used to conduct this study, the data collection, and how the data will be analyzed.

This research relies on qualitative instrumentation to collect data for analysis. The interviews are open-ended, semi-structured life histories of six women who participate in the full moon healing circles in either Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle or Omecihuatl. Oral historian Valerie Yow writes:

Oral history testimony is inevitably subjective: its subjectivity is at once inescapable and crucial to an understanding of the meanings we give our past and present. To reveal of lived experience is the great task of qualitative research and specifically oral history interviews. The in-depth interview offers the benefit of seeing in its full complexity the world of another. And in collating in-depth interviews and using the insight to be gained from them [...] we can come to some understanding of the process by which we got to be the way we are. (24)

It was important for me to use oral history as a method to see how the women's life history influenced their spiritual practice and their engagement in the full moon circles. Participant

observation also aided in gathering the details needed for this piece. In order to do this type of methodology, I needed to be a participant before asking folks if I could interview them.

Lunenburg and Irby note, "in participant observation method, [you] will intentionally put yourself in the context or location of the phenomena being studied over an extended period. As a participant observer, you will become fully engaged in experiencing what the participants are experiencing" (92). Participating in the ceremonies allowed me to gain new insight on the actual space, and it also facilitated whom I should interview while giving me insight on how the circles functioned.

I began conducting interviews in an oral history course I took with Professor Susan Plann. During the class I had the opportunity to conduct oral histories of two women in Omecihuatl. The summer after this course I followed the Human Subjects protocol. I submitted my IRB and got approved before contacting the rest of participants. Before interviewing the women, I made sure that my questions were in order and that my voice recorder worked. Since I wanted to interview the women where they felt most comfortable, I met them in their homes or in a public space near to their homes. I recorded all of the interviews I conducted. I interviewed each woman once and interviews lasted one hour to two hours. I had a set of questions available but as the interviews progressed I followed the train of thought that the interviewees were sharing.

Before interviewing the women of Omecihuatl in Orange County, I familiarized myself with the circle by participating in it for at least one year. I started attending spring of 2013. Since I was living in Anaheim at the time and had some friends who participated in the Omecihuatl, I was able to get the location of the place and was introduced to some of the women who participated. When I decided that this circle was going to be one that I was interested in documenting, I started observing women who were active participants in the circle. At least ten

women gathered consistently every month. As a participant, I focused on the women who were there and who were actively helping in organizing the circle. Since this is a qualitative study, I used a purposive sampling as a form of data collection where I selected a sample based on my experience with the group (Lunenburg & Irby 175). The first woman I interviewed was Michelle. She is the circle keeper for the Omecihuatl. Michelle identifies as Chicana and Native—part of the Acjachemen tribe. She is responsible for coordinating and leading the circle every month. It was important that I interview Michelle because a lot of the knowledge that guides the circle was coming from her teachings. I interviewed Michelle in her home; it was a great experience because she was able to give me a lot of insight on her life and about Omecihuatl. During the interview, we sat next to her altar and burned medicine while we were talking. In this interview, she suggested that I interview Iuri since Iuri was the one that brought the circle to Orange County. I knew Iuri from the circle and the community, so she agreed to be interviewed in a local coffee shop. There she broke down her journey to spirituality proceeding to expand on how her own journey with the circle looked like. Iuri identifies as Chicana. The last person I interviewed was Gaby, she is an active participant in the collective, and she often keeps the fire for the women in the circle. While I interviewed Gaby, she let me know what it was like growing up in Mexico and how her undocumented status made her hesitant about identifying as Chicana, but going to college helped her understand the similar struggle between being Mexican born and identifying as Chicana. She is a bit more comfortable with identifying as Chicana. I interviewed Gaby in her home.

Participating in Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle in Los Angeles, California was a little different. I started participating in the circle fall of 2014. I made sure to attend the circle for at least three months during the full moon to familiarize myself with the women who participate. The circle is connected to the organization Mujeres de Maíz and it is unlike the one in Orange

County because of its monthly outreach through social media. When I went to the circle, I noticed the ceremony varies because new people are coming in and out every month. The first time I attended there were about twenty-five people and each time I went there were at least twenty people. One of the circle keepers let me know that sometimes they have up to forty-five people participating in the circle. When the women would explain what they were doing, they let folks know that four women help keep the circle going every month even if they all might not show up at once. After the third circle I attended, I approached one of the circle keepers, Fe, and told her about the interviews I was conducting for my research. She agreed to participate, and I asked her if she could put me in contact with the other three women. I sent an email to Fe explaining my project, and she was able to forward it to the other circle keepers. Aside from Fe, only two of them responded. All three participants identify as Chicana. I interviewed Lorena first in her home and was able to get some insight of what it was like to grow up in West Los Angeles, her experiences traveling to Mexico while she was young, and her experience with religion and the full moon circle. Next, I got in contact with Marlene; we met in a park close to her home in East Los Angeles. She was also able to share a bit of her family history and her experience with the Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle. Finally, I met with Fe in her home. As the founder of Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle, she was able to give me an understanding of the reasons for starting the circle as well as some background on her spiritual beliefs.

Since I conducted interviews that focused on the life history of the women involved in the healing collectives, the questions I started the conversation with painted a picture of their parents or their migration patterns. I also asked about their childhood and the effects healing and spirituality had on them. After setting that foundation, I asked them about the healing journey they are currently on and how they first got interested. I followed this with questions about their participation on the healing collective and asked them to describe what is done in the healing

circle. I ended it with asking what collective healing meant to them and also asking them for advice for anyone interested in starting their healing circle. The last question I asked was whether they had anything else to say in regards to their journey or their healing circle. This sparked up other conversations, or they were able to finish a thought.

After individual interviews had been conducted with a voice recorder, I transcribed each interview. With the transcription of each in-depth interview, I was able to code and categorize them to facilitate my analysis. Categories were created and coded using the software program Dedoose, which allowed me to represent different themes that stood out in all the interviews I conducted. Some of the themes that came up with the codes were ancestral roots, growing up with remedies, early spiritual practices, and spiritual awakening, along with collective formation, knowledge that guides the healing circle, reflections and advice for future circle keeper.

Individual Journey Toward Sustaining Spiritual Practice

A spiritual journey is as unique and diverse as the person who is engaging with it. This is no different for many Chicanas who are trying to find healing and spirituality in ancestral ways. There is no set journey that Chicanas take in when they move toward spirituality and healing. As demonstrated in this piece, many Chicanas take different paths to understanding their healing. Following the spiritual practices of some Chicanas gives insight to who these women are and what knowledge guides their collective full moon healing circles. I understand that it is important to first understand the individual journeys some Chicanas face when finding their spiritual practice because it informs how they will heal collectively. This research provides a glimpse of how six Chicanas describe their upbringing, how their spiritual practices are negotiated while growing up and how their experience with their spiritual awakening led them to the spiritual path they are currently embarking on; this includes the full moon circles they participate in once a

month. The following section, *Roots & Remedies*, I will explore the work these women are doing with the full moon circles Omecihuatl and Coyolxauhqui. It is in this intentional space where I attempt to better understand the commonalities and complexities that Chicanas often go through to heal themselves with their communities and participate in healing collectively. Also, by centering the lived experiences of these Chicanas—especially in their spiritual and healing practices—I am re-membering (Anzaldúa) the divides that occur between the body, mind, and spirit in hegemonic narratives that silence women by dis-membering them. My intention is to find subtle moments of ancestral remembrances that occur when seeking those moments of Coyolxauhqui mourning when Chicanas are re-connecting to an indigenous spiritual and healing practice while understanding that they are detribalized. As many scholars have noted, Chicanas/os and Mexicanas/os have been detribalized because of colonization having lost a direct source to their indigenous ancestral practices (Gonzales & Zepeda). What emerges in this work, is that their spiritual awakening, be it college, *Danza*, food ways, and Peace & Dignity, results in the women in this narrative connecting to those moments of re-connection. It is with all this in mind, heart and spirit that I begin this study.

Roots & Remedies

For some understanding ancestral practices begins with understanding where families originate. While some Chicanas might not have direct access to their indigenous ancestral knowledge, there are moments when they do find a connection to their relatives and ancestors through location and memories of their familial lineage and their ancestors. When describing a "politic of decolonization," Arturo Aldama encourages Chicanas/os to try to move away from the glorification of the Aztecs as a lineage, and instead, urges folks to look into familial roots for possible linkage to an indigenous community still practicing their ways and attempt to connect and be accountable to their ancestral lineages (Aldama 160). Attempting to uncover histories

allows for a better understanding of those moments of re-connection that most have in their families—this process uncovers the hidden, self-displaced, and erased.

Michelle, the circle keeper of Omecihuatl, traces her family roots to Guanajuato, Mexico and part of the Acjachemen Nation residing in Southern California. She grew up in Anaheim and was raised by her grandmother after her mother passed away. When asked about her early recollections of her childhood, she remembers,

My teachings came from my grandmother, and they came from my godmother, and they came from my aunties and older cousins. Just little tiny things, maybe they didn't even know what they were teaching me. I think a lot of it was just talking in front of me, not realizing that I was sponging everything up. I remember being like seven or eight years old and my grandma taking me to a *curandera*, those were my memories, you know. Or just little things²¹.

From a young age, she recollects being taught by women who were elders in her family. She identifies being young and observing the things her elders did around her to give her insight on the knowledge her elders and ancestors processed. In the piece “Indianizing Catholicism: Chicana/India/Mexicana Indigenous Spiritual Practices in our Image,” scholar Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez describes women being the “chief transmitters of spiritual practices in the home, and to the seven generations, while also often serving as the chief mediator between the home and external religious institutions and sites” (Broyles-Gonzalez 118). A lot of the teachings that Michelle was able to grasp, she learned by observing the day-to-day practices of her elders, which were subtle and often unintentional. Women in the family can also be mediators to external spiritual and healing practices. She also remembers growing up and being introduced to

²¹ Castillo, Michelle. Personal Interview. May 2015.

a *curandera*²². The subtle memories she brings forward when talking about her childhood demonstrate how she was involved in early religious practices and how significant they were when making connections to her current path of healing.

For some of the women, their re-connection to their ancestral roots come by naming the ancestral lands of their ancestors as well as their relatives' point of migration. Iuri recalls, my family on my mom's side, *somos de un rancho que se llama Rancho de Las Jicamas en Guanajuato es parte del municipio del Valle de Santiago. Valle de Santiago es un valle de siete volcanes y pues dice mi abuelita*²³ that we have always been there. That is our place of origin. My grandmother passed away now, *pero* [but], there's a lot of words that she used in the kitchen that are in *Nahuatl*, and there are these other words that are not *Nahuatl*...I'm guessing...they might *Chichimeca* or *Otomi*²⁴.

Iuri's re-connection to ancestral ways comes from the land her family and ancestors called home in Guanajuato, Mexico. Understanding where her family is from, even though she was born and raised in Santa Ana, CA, allows her to make connections to the original inhabitants of those lands in Mexico. She also points to those understated moments when she finds a link with her grandmother and ancestors by language and food ways. She noted that her grandmother would use words that were not in Spanish, but instead, indigenous languages from Guanajuato, Mexico. While Iuri understands these as moments of re-connection, it also exemplifies the loss that

²² Elena Avila describes a *curandera/o* as a spiritual healer; "Curanderos believe that it is not enough to heal the body. One must heal the wounded soul as well [...] Trauma causes a part of the soul to get frightened and run away into hiding. When this happens, a part of our energy is no longer accessible to us. We need 100 percent of our soul's energy to be in good physical, mental, and spiritual health" (19).

²³ This translates from Spanish to: "we are from a small town called Rancho de Las Jicamas in Guanajuato, which is part of the municipal Valle de Santiago. Valle de Santiago is a valley with seven volcanoes, and my grandmother says,..."

²⁴ Lara, Iuri. Personal Interview. May 2015.

occurs to detribalized Chicanas. In noting that food is a way to feel close to ancestors that lack of understanding of certain word or phrases in the kitchen demarcates a loss of knowledge.

Gaby migrated to the United States when she was seven years old, and a lot of her memories about Mexico are of her experience before she migrated. Because of her undocumented status, she has not been able to go back to Mexico. Gaby recollects her time spent during early childhood in the outskirts of Mexico City and is reminded of the healing practices done when she was growing up there. She states,

There was a lot of *curanderismo* around my pueblo... There's this lady, Doña Amelia, she was the one that cured everybody. If the doctor couldn't do his job, or they couldn't afford it, that was the person to go to; she knew *hierbas*²⁵. She was a *curandera*. I remember my mom took us, a couple of times, to get cured of *el empache*²⁶, or *los celos*²⁷, even *caprichos*,²⁸ she had something for everything. She was very good. Again, now that I'm on [an indigenous based spiritual] path that I am at, I wish I could contact her, and I've asked my cousins to get ahold of her to see if I can contact her to see if I can start writing down some of her practices and learning them, but they still have not gotten back to me. I still have to check if she is still around or not²⁹.

Curanderismo, spiritual healing, is a practice that Gaby connects to her childhood and roots to Mexico. Unlike Michelle who grew up visiting *curanderas* in Anaheim, Gaby recalls her visits to

²⁵ Translates to *herbal remedies* from Spanish.

²⁶ *El empache* is having a stomach ache that can come from having digestion problems or emotional blockage that occurs when the person is holding to too much emotional or energy. To read more about this, refer to *Woman Who Glows in the Dark* by Elena Avila.

²⁷ *Celos* translates from Spanish to jealousy, which makes your soul sick.

²⁸ *Caprichos* translates from Spanish to whims one gets, an odd desire or feeling.

²⁹ Cedillo, Gabriel. Personal Interview. August 2015.

a *curandera* in Mexico. Gaby identified Doña Amalia, the small town healer, as a source of healing when western medicine would not be able to or could not understand what was wrong with someone. She noted that Doña Amalia is a *hierbera*. Elena Avila says of *hierberas* [herbalists], as “most *curanderos* feel that it is best to use whatever herbs are available in their local area, as herbs are most effective when picking fresh [...] An herbalist does not pick herbs indiscriminately, but sees all plants as sacred, and will always make some kind of offering to the spirit of the plant he is harvesting—corn meal, tobacco, or a prayer” (Avila 69-70). With those hierbas, Doña Amalia was able to cure Gaby and her family from *empache*, *celos*, and *caprichos*. Doña Amalia had a strong impact on Gaby, and looking back she acknowledges that being on this spiritual path now she would greatly benefit by talking to her, but because of her undocumented status, she has not been able to travel to Mexico to reconnect with her.

Another way some Chicanas have found connection with ancestral ways of healing and knowing is through remedies the women in their family practice. When asked what healing their family practices, some of the women re-membered to think of what women in their family used. Lorena describes her mother's devotion to water as a sacred element that should not be wasted and can be used to heal. She reminisces,

I think my mom is very big on *té*³⁰ and *aguas naturales*³¹. For my mom, everything can be cured with *agua de* something or *té de* something. It wasn't something that was spoken outwardly, it wasn't something that we talked about, and it was something that we watched. I think I learned a lot just by watching my grandma and my mom. Growing up watching the women in my family do things, but it was never shared. I think it's really

³⁰ Translated to *tea* in Spanish.

³¹ Naturally flavored water that could be made by fruit or steeping herbs in hot water then putting them in ice. An example of this is hibiscus ice tea.

hard for the women in my family to share things orally, I have asked my mom a couple of times if she can write down recipes and she would say “*no, nomas mira,*” just watch. It’s more like a watch and learn kind of thing, and unspoken³².

In spiritual practice, water is one of the sacred elements along with wind, fire, and earth. In our interview, Lorena recognizes the deep connection her family has with water. As she explains, water can be a purifying entity and by consuming it, as an herbal tea or naturally flavored water, one can enter on toward healing. Something else to note is the ways in which this ancestral knowledge is being passed down. Lorena points out that she was not directly taught these ways of healing, but instead, she was expected to observe her mother without talking about it or writing it down. These ancestral practices have been passed down by women in her family by observing, and they continue doing so as elder women in her family cure each other and loved ones.

Marlene describes similar practices with her mother. She shares:

My mom would always use different lines of defense specifically with our health. What would always come first were the herbs. This one particular thing was not necessarily using an herb, but when I would get a sore throat she would rub rubbing alcohol *que estuviera caliente*³³ on my throat and my feet. It was always going back to that. It was as simple as oh *mija*³⁴ this is what you got to learn, by doing and paying attention. I remember being little and not wanting to drink that fucken³⁵ *ruda*³⁶ because it didn't taste

³² Santos, Lorena. Personal Interview. September 2015.

³³ Translates to *make sure it is hot*, from Spanish.

³⁴ Translates to my *daughter* from Spanish; it is a combination of “mi” and “hija.”

³⁵ Typically written, “fucking” however, I chose to the phonetic version as it is most commonly used. It is also commonly used in text message conversations.

good. Afterward, I realized that it did help. Things that are ancestral have been part of our culture for a long time and healed someone. That's what I was exposed to [growing up] and also just going to Mexico and being around that stuff. *Que la sobadora*³⁷, *que matriz caida*³⁸, all these different remedies³⁹.

Marlene also notes that her mother is the knowledge keeper of the remedies in her household. Like Lorena, she emphasizes that her mother also emphasized the exercise of “pay attention and practice” as a way of passing down this knowledge. Marlene also acknowledges many of the remedies passed down by her ancestors are really effective because of their generations that it took to perfect the knowledge. She attributes this healing knowledge to her ancestors and the generations it took to be able to heal people. In this quote, Marlene is also emphasizing that there are a variety of healing traditions in Mexico. *Curanderismo* embodies a lineage of varied healers that use different tools to help them cure people. *Sobadoras* heal any ailments that the body might be holding, such as spiritual energy or muscular pain. There are also midwives, *parteras*⁴⁰. Hence, generational knowledge and practices serve as an example of narrative building, the creation of rituals and traditions that build a map to the past, a link to ancestry.

Most of the women described a rootedness that began in Mexico or Southern California. Through this knowledge, they were able to make connections to an ancestry that was taken away from them because of detribalization. Even though they might not specifically have ties to their indigenous lineage, the women have found other ways from the teaching of their elders. Part of

³⁶ Translates to *rue* plant from Spanish.

³⁷ In *Woman Who Glows in the Dark*, Elena Avila explains that, “the sobadora uses massage as her tool [...] curanderos use massage not only to relax the body and the muscles, but to touch the soul, to draw forth and being to heal emotional and physical pain” (71).

³⁸ Translates to *prolapsed uterus* from Spanish.

³⁹ Aguilar, Marlene. Personal Interview. September 2015.

⁴⁰ *Parteras* are midwives who aid in births and help them with prolapsed uteruses.

their knowledge also relies on an elder epistemology, the knowledge that has been passed down by their grandmothers. Even though they might be far from their family's place of origin, they still feel a connection to the land of their ancestors through this epistemological practice. Another way some Chicanas have found rootedness to their ancestors is by remembering remedies that their mothers have been using to heal their family from physical and spiritual illnesses. Marlene and Lorena note that their mothers teach them remedies the women in their family have been taught for generations; they learn through paying attention to their mothers' perform the procedure on themselves or their loved ones. The knowledge of where their ancestors come from and ways they have healed creates for them a connection to a spiritual and healing practice that brings them a little closer to the indigenous practices in their everyday life.

Spiritual Journey & Awakening

For the women I spoke to, early spiritual practice takes many paths. Some grew up in Christian homes that instilled prayer as practice and others did not grow up with a spiritual practice. For the women I interviewed, most had different relationships with some type of spirituality growing up; a mixture of some Catholic and Indigenous teachings.

The entanglement of colonization and patriarchal practices in Christianity often create an uninhabitable place for women. This is why many women move away from institutionalized practices in Christianity and begin a journey of self-discovery. They create their own path to spiritual practices. In the work, "Los Espíritus Siguen Hablando: Chicana Spirituality" Lara Medina notes:

accepting their estrangement from Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic (and their wounded souls), many Christians return to an *indigena*-inspired spirituality, learn to trust their own senses and bodies, recreate traditional cultural practices, and look to non-

Western philosophies—all of which offers us (re)connection to our selves, our spirits, and to the ongoing process of creating *nuestra familia* (189).

In this work, Medina describes a letting go of toxic relationships and practices like Christianity that many Chicanas grew up with. She argues that Chicanas should accept a spirituality that is more indigenous-based that incorporates their whole selves in the prayer and healing. This shedding of heteropatriarchal religion is the experience of some of the women involved in these healing collectives. They have found more clarity in moving away from the Christian practices they grew up with, and instead they are creating their own space. For those who choose this path, it is often results in them finding spirituality on their terms.

I met up with Gaby at her mother's house. When I walked in, I noticed that her mother had crosses and religious memorabilia all over the house; she even joked about stopping her mom because it was too much. Gaby describes her spiritual background growing this way: "my mom is really Catholic, I don't know if you can see all the *cuadritos* around... We were forced to go into church and I personally never liked it...I can say I'm Catholic, but non-practicing. I do not think I am religious, I am more self-proclaimed spiritual." Gaby does acknowledge that she grew up going to church, but for whatever reason she never fit in the experiences of some of other people who participated in the space. While there is still a heavy presence of Christianity in her household, she chose not to partake in a Catholic spiritual practice. Instead, she identifies herself as a more spiritual. While some of the women at times show some positive sentiment towards the institution of religion, there was still a presence of spirituality in their lives. Rather than following an institutionalized religion, Gaby describes being attracted to indigenous spirituality and ways of knowing. This is expressed in her commitment to Azteca, she explains, "eight years ago, a coworker told me that there was a group of *danzantes* that practiced in Fullerton...When I first heard the drums, it opened up something. I was excited to be there...I

knew that this was the path for me. I felt at home there. The church had never done that⁴¹.”

Gaby’s connection to *Danza* has given her the spiritual connection she did not get in the Catholic Church. Hearing the drums of the ceremony she felt an openness that guided her into a spiritual practice that was more “*indigena*-inspired spirituality” (Medina). Gaby did not grow up with an indigenous based spiritual practice but instead found a re-connection through *Danza*. While participating in *Danza* is really empowering to her, at the same time, it is important to acknowledge her loss of an indigenous ancestry and reclamation of an Aztec past still have ties to Mexico’s mestizo state project.

Similarly, Lorena describes her upbringing as being very Catholic. She recalls going to church every Sunday, and feeling conflicted, as she got older. She describes:

I was always known as ‘the rebel.’ My mom is very Catholic, we grew up praying the rosary everyday... We did not question it at the time. Now that I am older, I definitely question our beliefs. I think we have broken a barrier in our late twenties, my sister and I, we finally got to a point where my mom understands our perspective on spirituality is very different. Her perspective is like church and religion, but we are more spiritual⁴².

Some of the rift with Catholicism came from expectations that are often placed on women about their virginity. Losing her virginity at a young age and not being married brought a lot of guilt, which prompted her to go “through a penitence, *yo sola me puse en la penitencia* for four years⁴³.” In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa denotes that often times Chicanas are categorized into two categories, the virginal image of the Virgen de Guadalupe or a betrayer like

⁴¹ Cedillo, Gabriel. Personal Interview. August 2015.

⁴² Santos, Lorena. Personal Interview. September 2015.

⁴³ This translates from Spanish to: “I put penitence on myself for four years.” Note: These interviews were conducted in English but when interviewing the majority of the women, especially when they described their upbringing, would often code switch between Spanish and English.”

La Malinche and La Llorona; she calls this the *virgen/puta dichotomy* (53). Often conflicted by these images, many women move away from what are often heteropatriarchal practices of some institutionalized forms of Christianity. The binary that is often imposed on women by these institutions creates hostile environments. So instead, Chicanas claim a spiritual practice that moves away from Christianity. This is the conflict that Lorena expresses in moving away from the Catholicism she grew up on and instead finding a form of spirituality that moves away from the judgment she often felt by her mom's belief system.

Both Lorena and Gaby show how some Chicanas have a complicated relationship with institutionalized religion and often decide to move away from a practice they grew up with. Instead, they claim a connection to Catholicism through cultural means and create a spiritual path on their own terms. While it is common for some Chicanas to move away from a Christian practice, others vacillate between various indigenous-based spiritual practices formed during their spiritual awakening.

An example of this is Iuri's experience. Her mother passed away when she was a baby and her aunt, uncle and great-grandmother helped raise her and her sister. Losing her mother so young opened her to have a connection with prayer from a young age. She recollects,

I remember being eight years old and asking my [adoptive] mom⁴⁴ to teach me how to pray the *Rosario* because I knew I needed to pray for everything...Death was always a big presence since I was a child because I was always aware that my mom had passed away. I yearned to have a connection with her...I remember praying to God as a child that I could see her in my dreams. It wasn't until I was sixteen or seventeen becoming

⁴⁴ Because of the sudden death of the mother, her aunt and uncle adopted her and her sister, so she sees her aunt as her mother.

political and emphasizing my ideologies that I learned about how our people became Christian. When I got to college, my very first year, I had a fall out with my spirituality⁴⁵. Prayer has always been really important to Iuri because this was a way she was able to connect with her mother who passed, it also served as a way for her to pray for other things. As Iuri got older she started student organizing and participating in *Danza*, and in these spaces, she was taught about the church's role in colonization. She calls these points of tension having a fall out with spirituality because she correlated the church with the violence inflicted onto indigenous communities. Instead of praying the way she grew up, she started participated in different Native ceremonies she got exposed to in college.

When Iuri experienced fallout with spirituality, she was able to find other spaces to pray. In college, she found *Danza* and with this ceremony, she was able to help and participate in Peace and Dignity, Participating in Peace and Dignity allowed her to meet different Native American and indigenous folks. This intertribal run has been happening every four years since 1992. The run is inspired by the Eagle and Condor Prophecy, which predicts the gathering of Northern Native and Southern Indigenous communities. Iuri, describes the run as following the eagle and condor prophecy. She explains,

An intercontinental meeting of indigenous pueblos where it was the first time [the run] happened between representatives of northern native tribes and southern native tribes and central native tribes that all came together where that meeting was recognized, politically recognized by nations that they were coming together as indigenous nations since colonization. Some say that's when it started, that's when this prophecy started manifesting itself. But it was in the seventies that they started talking about the eagle and the condor prophecy, and every tribe has a different version of the prophecy, but in a

⁴⁵ Lara, Iuri. Personal Interview. May 2015.

generalized version, its the concept of the spirit of the eagle of the north and the spirit of the condor of the south, will come together and meet once again and recognize each other and come into union. One land, one people that the concept of borders is false the whole concept of the division between North American, South America and Central America is false that we are one big land mass⁴⁶.

Many of the women shared their participation in Peace & Dignity when they were in college and that really impacted their views of indigeneity. For Iuri, her spiritual awakening came participating in a ceremony in Arizona. She recalls;

I remember being in a community in Arizona, they were Yaqui. I participated in a sweat lodge with a spiritual leader and a Sun Dancer. He was hosting sweat lodge, and he allowed people to pray the Catholic way in his lodge, and he had a cross outside of his lodge. Our ancestors were strategically keeping the prayer alive even if they had to be behind a cross...so they wouldn't stop their connection to mother earth. I felt like the contradiction was over, I didn't have to feel like there was a contradiction. I could pray with my grandmother and with my mom, and I could pray the rosary, I felt like I needed to pray with my grandmother because I don't know how much time she is going to be around for and I would be contradicting myself. I needed to pray with my elders regardless of how they pray⁴⁷.

The conflict that Iuri felt in praying in the ways she had growing up were resolved when she came out of the sweat lodge. During the sweat lodge, a purification ceremony, Iuri was able to clearly see how she can negotiate the indigenous practices in her spiritual awakening with her upbringing as a Catholic. Iuri had a deep connection to prayer and incorporation of praying with

⁴⁶ Lara, Iuri. Personal Interview. May 2015.

⁴⁷ Lara, Iuri. Personal Interview. May 2015.

her family could coexist without being a contradictions. Upon reflection, Iuri realized that many of her ancestors were able to keep prayer alive by praying to mother earth using the cross—representing Christ and the four directions. In other words, indigenous forms of prayer and practice were kept alive under the auspice of Christianity. Broyles-Gonzalez adds, “many Euro-Catholic concepts were easily assimilable into preexisting indigenous terms and ideas...indigenous peoples thus appropriated the cross of Christ and reinterpreted it by merging it with what has for thousands of years been called the World Tree...the pivot of the universe and the power of the four directions” (Broyles-Gonzalez 124). Hence, in those moments of prayer, Iuri was able to make connections to her ancestors and their indigenous practices.

Michelle also expresses her view on Catholic practices and the negotiation she has with using many of their prayers. She notes;

as a Catholic, and my grandmother being a Catholic, you learn to pray all of your saint candles, I have a lot of faith, even though I don't consider myself Catholic, I do have a lot of saints in this space and the Virgin of Guadalupe. I also have a lot of faith in the eagle feather and the hawk wing...I don't lie to label myself, I have this thing about labels, I feel like once you label yourself, then people expect you to do certain things a certain way according to that label. I practice a lot of different traditional ways. I have an elder, who taught me spiritual baths, she's from Cuba, and she works [with] a lot of other things. I just feel like, it is my toolbox, my medicine bag. It's my medicine bag and whatever I put in my medicine bag, and use, that's what I use. You do have people tell you, you're Native American, you shouldn't be doing this. I have had to fight, for my right, to pray without a label⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Castillo, Michelle. Personal Interview. May 2015.

Michelle mentions having a medicine bag to hold all of the teachings that she has accumulated over the years. This includes her grandmother's teachings about Catholic saints and different knowledges that many other elders and people in her community have shared. She sees value in using different ways of praying. She mentions that there are some apprehensions by some folks in her community about mixing so many ways of praying and healing but she feels like having access to this diversified medicine is important to her life.

What is important to note in these narratives is that most of the women experienced some apprehension or conflict when describing their early relationship with their spiritual practices. Some have found that engaging in a spiritual practice is what is important to them. They still have a connection to their spirituality, but it exists distinct from institutional protocols. Iuri and Michelle describe the negotiation necessary to navigating their spirituality, like praying the *rosario* with their grandmothers or praying to saints even though they rarely follow Catholic teachings. They are also navigating how they can balance ancestral practices and Catholicism to pray in a way that connects with their elders. All in all, these women have created a unique, personalized spiritual practice that allows them to have a relationship with Catholic spirituality and also find ways to incorporate ancestral and indigenous practices in their prayer. These are also reflections of the knowledge that is coming into the circles the women participate in once a month. Their individual journey and practices inform the healing that is happening when they are coming together.

Like many of the women mentioned above, Marlene did not have a strong connection with Catholicism because of its views of purity and its involvement in colonization. But she was still connected to prayer. In college, she found a connection to spirituality through her participation in *Danza*. She explains;

I was part of *Danza*. For me, that was my most important space because that was where I was able to explore my spirituality and it was something that I always wanted to do, even here *pero me daba miedo aquí* [but I was afraid]. [In Berkeley,] it was a cool space; we were all on the same page because we were all students. We definitely sought refuge in that space. It exposed me to a different cosmology. In terms of like how we came up this road and how to connect to the world and the spirit world through dance. I'm a dancer, and it allowed me to understand my body and experience for the first time coming together of...it's hard to explain. So it's a combination of that, different things coming together and warming the spirit. It exposed me to that. It exposed me to other spiritual processes because of *Danza*, I went to my first sweat lodge and sunrise ceremony and things like that. I learned about the copal and smudging and all these different rituals and protocols and stories, and that felt good. It reminded me of Michoacán and although that wasn't explained to me that way, that we're going back to the motherland and ancestors and all of that, but I connected to that⁴⁹.

Marlene shares commonalities with the other women interviewed. College was a time when she, like others, found a connection to an indigenous-based spiritual practice. Growing up in East Los Angeles, *Danza* was a big part of the community, but she did not feel encouraged to participate. It was in college, a time when many first-generation students feel far from home and isolated, when she decided to participate with many students who were also trying to find something familiar at UC Berkeley, which has historically been isolating to people of color. Like Gaby, Marlene also was exposed and impacted by the Aztec cosmologies that were incorporated in *Danza*. She describes a connection to the body, mind, and spirit that often gets separated because bodily and spiritual knowledge are not valued as much as the knowledge of the mind, which is

⁴⁹ Aguilar, Marlene. Personal Interview. September 2015.

equated to hegemonic knowledge production (Cruz 2001 and Facio & Lara 2014). *Danza* was also a catalyst for her participation in other ceremonies, which include sweat lodges and sunrise ceremonies by Lakota leaders. Even though she is far from her ancestral homeland, these ceremonies became a re-connection to her indigenous ways of knowing.

Some of the women who participate in the healing collectives did not grow up with religion in their homes, but they found spiritual awakening at a particular point in their lives, which led them on their journey toward spirituality. Fe's parents, for example, were part of the Chicano Cultural Nationalist Movement of the late sixties and early seventies. A lot of people at that time were really critical of institutionalized religion and its involvement with colonization. Many folks, including Fe's parents, were critical of the institution of Catholicism and did not introduce religion to their family as a practice. She recalls, "I was born into the movement, [my parents] were Chicanos who did away with Catholicism, and the Catholic religion, so I wasn't baptized and we didn't practice religion on Sunday or any day, so I didn't grow up with that and didn't know traditional prayers, things that maybe family members did." Fe was introduced to an indigenous-based spirituality being around people who lived ceremonial lives. Going to Chiapas to gather with the Zapatistas, being one of the founders of Mujeres de Maíz, student organizing at UCLA, and Peace and Dignity newly introduced her to different ceremonies and led her to a path of spirituality. She remembers one of those experiences this way:

I went to the Peace and Dignity run in 2000, one of the main prayers for me was mainly for the community to have a place for women, Chicana women, in LA or the Southwest. For these kind of traditions or these ways are more accessible and being able to come to these ways. So for me I was still learning. I had learned a little bit but there was still a lot to learn that was definitely a ceremonial training of sorts being on the run, community run, being with those prayer staffs, and all those communities. That I think [it] really

shaped me discipline-wise a little bit and knowing that we all have to step up to learn certain things⁵⁰.

Aware of the lack of access for ceremonies for Chicanas, Fe's prayer during the Peace & Dignity run was to open up spaces for Chicanas to find ceremony in Los Angeles. By setting the prayer she was being intentional about the need for ceremonial spaces for Chicanas, but she also knew that learning indigenous ceremonial ways was a tremendous responsibility. For Fe, it was a time when she saw the importance of stepping up and creating ceremonial spaces for Chicanas. For Marlene and Iuri this was also an opportunity to meet different folks from all over the continent and share space and knowledge with them. Many prayers have manifested since Peace & Dignity and many of the women are still seeing the fruits of their intentions in the community.

All in all, I focused on the women's individual journeys through spirituality to have a better understanding of what knowledges they bring to the collective. In this section, women demonstrated the roots and remedies that set the context for how they understand their own upbringing and their connection to their elders. Understanding how they grew up spiritually also gave insight into how the women were able to negotiate their own spiritual practices either by understanding the complexities of merging both Catholicism and an indigenous based spirituality or by completely eliminating Catholicism and instead creating their own practice. As I see them articulate their experience toward an indigenous-based healing practice, I note how they became empowered by connecting to *Danza*. As mentioned earlier in this work, there is a genealogy of Chicanas/os connecting to indigeneity through consciousness raising practices in college. Some of the women described their spiritual awakening as happening in college when they learned the histories of violence linked to institutionalized religion. While danza became a catalyst of this consciousness rising, it is also important acknowledge the complication in finding spirituality

⁵⁰ Montes, Felicia. Personal Interview. October 2015.

through *indigenismo*. Can the state project that detribalized many be a mode for to re-connect through indigenismo? As I move forward, I will demonstrate the collective healing the women engage in and how their spiritual foundation speaks to understanding their healing practice.

Full Moon Healing Practices & Collective Journeys

Coyolxauhqui Circle has met every full moon monthly since 2010 in City Terrace around the local Coyolxauhqui stone that shares a parking lot with a lavandería. The stone is a replica of the one located in *El Templo Mayor* in Mexico City. About twenty-five miles away, Omecihuatl is also gathers at *La Colonia* Community Center in Anaheim, California, where the women who participate in this circle have been gathering together since 2012. Once a month, the women involved come together to participate in a talking circle and accompany each other in individual and collective healing. In this section of my research, I explore women's participation in the full moon circles as well as situate the knowledge that guides the circles and ceremonies that occur to uncover the direct moments of ancestral knowledge that many bring forward and share in the full moon circles. In other words, my intention is to highlight Chicana healing circles as a form of re-searching hidden ancestral knowledge through the experiences of Chicanas while exploring and interrogating decolonial practices.

The full moon ceremony is a sacred ceremony many follow as a way to spiritually shed anything they have been carrying the previous month to let new energy take its place. Some examples might be problems with partners, community conflicts, trauma they grew up with, etc. Many people with moon cycles gravitate to full moon ceremonies because they also experience this shedding when they bleed⁵¹. When I asked Iuri about starting up Omecihuatl, she wanted to

⁵¹ Here, I have used the people instead of women because not all that participate in monthly moon cycles are ciswomen and not all women have menstrual cycles, but may have a ritual to commemorate the full moon. As a cis-woman, I want to make sure that I honor gender non-conforming and trans folks in my work. A cisgender person is someone who identifies with the sex and gender presentation they were assigned at birth. Being cissexist is engaging in transphobic behavior when assuming that cisgender is "natural."

denote one she participated in when she was in graduate school that inspired the circle. The friend that introduced the circle to her had been involved in organizing the grandmother circle, a space that brought different indigenous elders together to share knowledge. In the grandmother circle, Iuri shared, “she learned indigenous women's medicine and learned about healing circles, and she wanted to start one in her hometown.” After that, Iuri helped co-facilitate, and they would “gather in the circle, every month, just the women she knew. We would start off with songs, then go around the circle in a very organic way there was not a topic chosen beforehand or anything like that I was just sharing, if there were women that we knew about that did specific types of healing work, then she would invite them over, and they would share.” When her program ended at UC Riverside, she decided to bring the knowledge she acquired as a healing circle participant and facilitator to Orange County. Iuri points out that *Alianza Indigena*⁵² was bringing circles in Orange County before Omecihuatl, reminding us that there has been a foundation for this work established by many indigenous and native community members in Orange County allowing for spaces like Omecihuatl to exist. Since 2013, Iuri has asked Michelle to take the role as circle keeper, and while the circle keeps the original intention, Michelle has also added her insight to the circle space, including the knowledge her elders have taught her and her experiential knowledge.

In Los Angeles, Fe shares that the start of the Coyolxauhqui Circle came as a vision for a future Mujeres de Maíz space before it happened. What pushed her to begin having monthly circles was by her involvement in a moon circle in Mexico. She shares, “there was a vision, but the Coyolxauhqui Circle didn’t manifest until 2010 because I was involved in a moon circle in Mexico, part of what I understood of the cargo coming back was to come and share or to make

⁵² Alianza Indigena was founded in Orange County, California in 2001. In their mission statement they state, “El Centro Alianza Indigena bridges our Indigenous Communities and Peoples locally, nationally, and internationally. Advocating Indian rights & leadership within our Indigenous Youth, Women, and Community Families. Building a network and providing a place for the communities to organize and support all Indigenous Peoples” (<http://bit.ly/2ggsJjR>).

accessible some of the knowledge.” Both Iuri and Fe were inspired by the lineage of ceremony and prayer laid as a foundation by their elders. They also show a need and responsibility to make knowledge accessible to their community. Collective meaning making is an important intervention the circles are doing because they are directly countering heteropatriarchal knowledge productions that want to keep these ways of knowing out of the community. To manifest their collective making, both Iuri and Fe did the work of bringing women they knew together once a month during the full moon.

Two factors that go into consideration when hosting a full moon monthly ritual are: the location in which the circle takes place in and who is in attendance. In other words, the people and the location make them space for healing to happen. Even though the location and people might be different, all participants have the same intention of letting go or giving thanks and holding space for the women involved in the ceremony. In *Landscape of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, author Belden C. Lane intersects History, American Studies, and Cultural Geography to situate sacred place and the history of spirituality within the United States. In one of his statements that guide his integrations of a religious landscape he writes, “Sacred place is ordinary place, *ritual made extraordinary* [...] it becomes recognized as sacred because of certain ritual acts that are performed there” (15). Churches are not the only sacred places, if rituals occur then that place becomes extraordinary—whether the place is found in nature or an urban setting. A sacred place is made extraordinary through ritual, sustaining a live link to healing practices within communities. These sacred spaces link diasporic communities together on a global scale. For participants in the full moon healing circles, ordinary places—like a stone in an intersection or space in a community center—become “extraordinary” sacred spaces when an altar is placed in the center of a circle. Specifically, the

space is made sacred with the placing of elements, like fire, water, earth, wind⁵³. Both circles open the *altar* to the women present, so they can add anything that is sacred to them on the altar. The culmination of the elements and personal items make the circle at that moment in time sacred. Hence, the gathering of the women, their energies and intentions make for a sacred space.

In Omecihuatl, space becomes sacred when the *altar* is set up. The incorporation of the elements and the four directions, and the honoring of each elements by praying and giving thanks for each direction it corresponds to, allow for a place like a community center to become extraordinary while the women are in circle. When discussing the energies present, Patrisia Gonzales notes, “the land and the natural world are alive and imbued with life force and spirit, so as much as we may make and create meaning, land creates our meaning as living entities” (xxi). Michelle, the circle keeper for Omecihuatl, describes the altar as a grandmother that comes in and shares knowledge with people in the circle. She explains,

this circle is our grandmother because when we're in a circle, and you have all these different women in this circle, all these women have an elder and if it's not an elder, it's a life lesson. The women who do go to elders for advice, those elders' teachings go into the circle, and that's why I call it our grandmother. There are a lot of grandma teachings, and I know whatever I'm taught, goes into the fire, whatever Iuri is taught goes into the fire. [The teachings] could come from her mother that comes from her grandmother, life lessons go into that circle, that is why I consider it a very sacred space⁵⁴.

By situating the *altar* as an elder, Michelle is highlighting its energy. The intention put forward by the women is what creates a sacred space. They call upon the Spirit and “life force”

⁵³ To get a better understanding of what those sacred elements in the altar are, refer to *Woman Who Glows in the Dark* by Elena Avila and *Red Medicine* by Patrisia Gonzales.

⁵⁴ Castillo, Michelle. Personal Interview. May 2015.

(Gonzales) to create a sacred site to honor ancestral and indigenous knowledges. Coming together in a circle also allows women to center experiential knowledge that comes from their lives and ways of knowing passed down by their elders. The circle also creates a strong bond and energy among the women. The sacred site that the women create in the full moon circle is informed by the guidance. The teachings that the women contribute to the circle come from their lived experience or the guidance of an elder. The knowledge is central to understand the ways certain ceremonies are being practiced.

Iuri describes where the knowledge that guides the circle comes from and what she understands that informs this site. She says:

Traditional knowledge, particularly Native and Indigenous knowledge; I know that is a very broad term, but it's specific because every single woman that comes to that circle and shares something, there is a root with what they are sharing that teaching or that practice, it has a root to an elder and that elder comes from a place where there is a northern tribe or central or south. Whether that practice can be claimed by a particular tribe or not because of colonization. [Sometimes] their only claim is the women tribe, the woman nation. The indigenous women nation is that location that kept it alive. *Por ejemplo el té de siete azahares en mi familia*, we know that you drink *té de siete azahares cuando te pones nerviosa*. Who kept that alive? It was the women, the women who passed it down. We might not remember the name of our tribe, but we remember to do that. That's the women nation that kept that—the traditional native woman knowledge, the knowledge of the elements, and the connection to the elements⁵⁵.

Iuri gives insight in the ways the women of Omecihuatl contribute knowledge every month. She notes that these knowledges come from both northern and southern indigenous practice. At the

⁵⁵ Lara, Iuri. Personal Interview. May 2015.

same time, like Michelle has noted, they are also informed by the everyday experiences women hold as keepers of medicinal ways. Iuri and Michelle underline the most obvious Native and Indigenous practices, immediately making the connection between ancestral healing and practices in medicinal plants and tea. These women acknowledge that they have been detribalized and their healing and medicinal practices are ways of re-connecting to ancestral healing practices.

When interrogating ways to think about the participation of detribalized people in ceremonial ways, Anzaldúa gives insight to this re-connection. In *Light in the Dark*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes,

El arbol de la vida (the tree of life) symbolizes my 'story' of new tribalism. Roots represent ancestral/racial origins and biological attributes; branches and leaves represent the characteristics, communities that surround us, that we've adopted, and that we're in intimate conversation with. Onto the trunk de mi arbol de la vida, I graft a new tribalism. The new tribalism, like other new Chicano/Latino narratives, recognizes that we are responsible participants in the ecosystem [...] in whose web we're individually strands.
(67)

The connection that Iuri is making with her use of “women nation” is similar to the views that Anzaldúa shares with “new tribalism” in the re-connection and re-membering of parts that have been suppressed and erased because of colonization. The connection to the Earth through the tree of life or plants allows for the re-connection of a relationship with the Earth. Noting that both “women nation” and “new tribalism” have connections to the individual, the community, the Earth, and the Cosmos demonstrates something larger than the self. The spaces that these full moon circles allows is the ability to make the connections to a re-connection to an indigenous based spirituality that has been buried deep in medicinal ways that we no longer recognize as

Native/Indigenous practices, which continue to be ignored and overlooked. Spaces like Omecihuatl and Coyolxauhqui Circle become these spaces of reviving ancestral knowledge.

For the women in Coyolxauhqui, they create an environment of sacredness through the ritual they participate in every month. When asked about the name Coyolxauhqui, Fe explained that they were influenced greatly by Chicana feminists that were reclaiming Aztec deities to theorize about their lived experience as Chicanas. One of those theorists is Gloria Anzaldúa—she uses Coyolxauhqui as a way to describe “both the process of emotional and psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon a labor of re-visioning and re-remembering” (xxi). For the women who participate in Coyolxauhqui Circle, they are engaging in this act of reaching/re-remembering a kind of wholeness in trying to find a connection between their body, mind, spirit, and soul. Also, finding a re-connection in a ceremonial practice. With the intention of creating a space for healing and letting go set forward by the circle keepers, it transforms into a ceremonial space. Fe gives insight on how the circle is run every month. She explains,

It's usually getting there and set up. Starting the fire and smudging the stuff of the *altar*. When people come, smudging them and asking them to join the circle, and then we usually do an opening prayer, to the four directions, and a song, speak about what is the Coyolxauhqui circle—we say it started because of the women that went to a moon circle, and wanted to come back and share, and make this accessible. We also emphasize that it's a learning space and when I say it, I usually mention that it might not be their tradition, some people might be long time sun dancers or *Danzantes*, and they might say they are not doing it the way I know it, or they are doing it differently, so we usually mention, it may not be your way, it's part of north and south, you have northern from

Lakota and other California ways and Southern Mexica *Danza* ways, you see out here elements that are mixed, most of the people are beginner to newer people so that's mainly letting them know and for those people, asking why you are doing this, hopefully, we are not doing anything different than what they do, we just ask people to be patient and open because this is the way we do things⁵⁶.

She describes the uses of knowledges of both northern native and southern indigenous practice in conversation with their talking circle. Purification of the space by burning copal is medicine commonly used in the South; and tobacco placed on the alter used to let go of anything negative the person is holding is a Northern native practice. Both practices are joined in the ceremony. She also notes that they are influenced by ceremonies and practices they participate in living along with California Native communities. Also, they participated in *Danza*. This fusion allows for the women to incorporate many of the knowledges they have acquired as they have participated in ceremonies both in the United States and in Mexico. The emphasis of a learning space also allows women who have not participated in any ceremony before to share different kinds of medicine in one ceremony. Because it's a learning space, Fe or any other facilitator will open up describing their intention and also the reasons why they use certain medicine and where it comes from. These practices bring the women closer to a spiritual understanding of their ancestral past and to a collective spiritual understanding.

The experiences of the women who participate in their circles also give insight into the ways the circles are run and how they have been impacted by their participation in the circle. Marlene, for example, explains why she enjoys participating in Coyolxauhqui Circle as the circle keeper;

⁵⁶ Montes, Felicia. Personal Interview. October 2015.

I enjoy it because it's a learning space. We are taking all the different *enseñanzas*⁵⁷ we've learned along the way and trying to bring them together and create a space in very important times. I'm going to keep it real, I like it because it's a learning space, a sharing space, we definitely want to use what we have learned from *Danza* because that is our experience collectively. I like that its not hardcore Mexica or hardcore Lakota because part of the other reason why I stay away from *Danza* or committing to the sun dance because I've been invited, it's because I'm not any of those. Those aren't my traditions; I have the Mexica based on what my Nana says, but I feel my connections and my roots to Michoacán, *Purepecha*, and completely different things. For me, I can't, it's not betraying, but I feel like lets keep it more universal⁵⁸.

For Marlene, participating in the Coyolxauhqui circle allows her to use the knowledge she has gathered in her life and come together with the other women. She also notes the importance of creating learning space for folks that are participating. While she acknowledges that both Lakota and Mexica practices are embedded in the circle, she appreciates that space creates a new environment that represents the women who participate in the space. Even though she has participated in *Danza* and has learned some traditional Native teachings, she also wants to honor the teachings that come from her *Purepecha* lineage. In Marlene's case, she is trying to navigate these moments of contention where she honors the practices that speak to the circle, but at the same time, longs for a need to re-connect to an ancestral lineage that was taken from her. The commonality she sees in all of these teachings is the "universal" aspects of their ways that revere the Cosmos, the Universe, and the Earth. Her solution, like Anzaldúa's use of new tribalism, is to incorporate and to honor the universal.

⁵⁷ Translates to *teachings*, in Spanish.

⁵⁸ Aguilar, Marlene. Personal Interview. September 2015.

As one of the first people to go to the circle, Lorena eventually became one of the circle keepers. She also shares insight about her participation in the full moon circle in Los Angeles.

She shares,

I didn't know what to expect; it has been a learning circle. Through *circulo* we have learned how to drum, now the four of us get together to drum, that is so healing. Not having grown up with indigenous traditions, *asi como* drumming, or pow wow. To hear the drum it just calls you back. You know that it belongs to your people; the sound is your people calling you back. It's so powerful. That's how I want to feel like I belong. It's ancestral; I can feel it in my skin⁵⁹.

At first, she did not know what to expect from the circle, but shortly after joining, she was introduced to indigenous ceremonial ways. She felt a visceral connection with the drum that took her back to an ancestral knowledge that was not known to her. In being called back, she felt like these were tools that belonged to her all along. The tools reappeared after being hidden/buried in a memory space. This subtle moment of Indian-ness flooded through her connection with the drum.

Gaby, one of the women who participate in circle and keep the fire going, describes her experience with *Omecihuatl*:

As I started committing a lot more, it has definitely helped my healing process just being involved. We have different things to bring into each other's lives. We're in the process of wanting to heal; we got to work as a collective to do that. Looking for that spiritual backup or guidance within each other is such a blessing. How someone's experience, since we're a talking circle we do a lot of that, we bring different types of medicine to each other so sometimes what someone has experienced, has helped someone else deal

⁵⁹ Santos, Lorena. Personal Interview. September 2015.

and cope with their own experiences. When I tell people these girls are my medicine, their experiences are my medicines people don't understand. It's so funny the reactions people give me, so I explained to them to me medicine is anything that heals you.

Gaby has found comfort in the space they hold for each other during the circle. She acknowledges that many of these women are there because they want to heal and they are on a journey together to find wholeness. She relies on the support of the women to help her get through hard times the same way she is there to hold space for them. Gaby describes these women as her medicine because together, they hold the key to the groups' healing as well as their own. Meeting once a month allows them to gain a sisterhood that many outside the circle might not understand but the healing these women have forged made significant contributions to people around them. These women strive for wholeness through the ancestral knowledge or through the lived experiences they share.

The women who participate in these full moon circles are finding wholeness in re-searching and re-connecting to ancestral ways of healing and praying. In *Light in the Dark* Anzaldúa defines healing as “asking back the scattered energy and soul loss wrought by wounding. Healing means using the life force and strength that comes with el ánimo to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf. Often a wound provokes an urgent yearning for wholeness and provides grounding to achieve it” (90). These circles are providing the women who participate with the grounding they need to heal. Meeting once a month to *desahogarse* allows these women to teach each other ways to cope with what they are dealing with in their lives. Using medicines that have been used by their ancestors to heal allows them to open themselves up to an experience some might not have access to without the healing circles. Honoring the medicinal ways of the North and South but also incorporating teachings and practices from their mothers and grandmothers gives this circle an extensive amount of

knowledge. As the women find healing for themselves and their communities, the hope is that they will continue sharing and healing in the ways of their ancestors.

Concluding Analysis

The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which some Chicanas are participating in spirituality and healing practices on their own and collectively. Specifically, I have focused on the experiences of six women who are involved in full moon circles; three of these women are active in Omecihuatl in Orange County and three of the women are involved in Coyolxauhqui Circle in Los Angeles, California. The women shared their individual paths toward spirituality as well as their participation in full moon circles. The questions that guided the work are as follows: How do Chicanas' spiritual and healing practices inform their journey towards healing? What can be learned from spaces that practice collective healing? What are the relationships between these women with indigenous and Native American peoples, practices, and knowledges within healing circles? The theoretical framework that guides this examination of circles relies heavily on the work that women of color feminists have laid out to center the lived experiences of marginalized peoples⁶⁰. Inspired by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Maria Cotera and Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo, I bring forward the concept of *Coyolxauhqui mourning* to articulate two parts of understanding Chicana spiritual practice. The first speaks to the detribalization experienced by Chicanas and the need to acknowledge, articulate, and grieve the loss of an ancestral indigenous lineage. The second, is a reclamation of an indigenous-based spirituality that is rooted in a re-connecting to an indigenous identity and practice through honoring native and indigenous ceremonies, disrupting indigenist iconography, and honoring elder and ancestor epistemology in order to attain healing and wholeness. While some aspects of

⁶⁰ The work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Cindy Cruz, and Cherríe Moraga are essential when thinking about the lived experience that women of color bring forward as a site of knowledge.

Coyolxauhqui mourning can be complicated, like many Chicanas have relied on *indigenismo* to re-claim an indigenous practice. The sites of possibility when honoring what has been lost and centering living indigenous people, cosmologies, and ways of knowing can transform the ways Chicanas negotiate spirituality.

The literature on spirituality and indigeneity in the Chicana/o community dates back to the cultural nationalist of the late sixties and early seventies. When considering the mythical place of Aztlan and centering *indigenismo* as an indigenous lineage (that many in the movement held on to), we could understand why it is imperative to interrogate where many of these ideas and concepts are rooted.⁶¹ Similarly, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Cherríe Moraga in “Queer Aztlan” also relied on Aztec imagery and history to inform their theory and liberation rhetoric. Many Chicana/o scholars have built on *indigenismo* to empower the community, but as they feel an empowerment towards Aztec history and culture, many Chicanas/os are participating in the erasure of the lived experience of indigenous communities in Mexico that are marginalized by the state. How can we take claim to something that detribalized us? How do we begin to mourn for this loss while honoring and being accountable to indigenous people? It is important to have conversations about our loss and mourning in order to move forward and not perpetuate the same erasure that *mestizaje* brought forward. As I look at the work the women are participating in, I see that there are ties to *indigenismo*, but they are also making the effort to talk to different indigenous and Native elders to remain accountable to communities whose land we are living on.

⁶¹ In the literature review, I mention the work of Alurista and Corky Gonzalez during the Denver Youth Conference and how the concept of Aztlan was newly introduced to many young Chicanas/os, which propelled them to be empowered. They no longer feels like foreigners in a land they were living because the Aztec prophecy Alurista wrote about in his poem situated Aztlan in the Southwest. The Early imagery was masculinist and work by Chicanas early in the movement also wanted to paint a different picture about this history, and they centered Aztec deities (Anna Nieto Gomez) and the reclamation of the story about La Malinche (Adelaida Del Castillo).

Focusing on Chicana spirituality and healing, I include in my analysis their efforts to try to capture an indigenous-based practice. They re-claim an “*indigena*-inspired spirituality” (Medina) that tries to move away from Western practices that marginalize indigenous ways of knowing and, instead, center an intersectional Chicana identity. In their quest to link different indigenous practices, many Chicanas have relied on methods like *curanderismo*; a practice connected to their ancestral healing.

There is limited literature on work that speaks to the collective healing Chicanas participate in, specifically when they come together during the full moon, as my research shows, full moon gatherings are a common practice in indigenous healing practice. Hence, I have centered the experience of six women to better understand their spiritual practice, collective healing, and history.

I started the research of the healing collectives by following their individual journeys toward spirituality and healing to comprehend what knowledge they carry and contribute to the circle. A goal of this section is also to understand the re-connections the women make to an indigenous way of knowing and negotiations of detribalization. Some of the women are moving away from a glorification of Aztec culture and practice in order to center the ancestral knowledge that comes from their family. While some of the women claim direct ties to their ancestral connection through awareness of their indigenous relations, those who have been detribalized only have relationships through everyday practices created by the women in their family. Oftentimes, these fractured practices are the only link to their mothers’ and grandmothers’ ancestral knowledges— this is their detribalized experience. This can be through the knowledge their elders shared with them and through subtle teachings by their elders that women associated ancestral knowledge to. Gaby and Michelle, for example, reflect on being young and going to a *curandera* to help eliminate spiritual ailments; no one explained it to them

however, at a young age they observed these ways. Iuri made connections in the kitchen when listening to her mother and grandmother share ancestral knowledge, noting an indigenous dialect used while cooking; a direct tie to an indigenous practice. While she is not quite sure what language they were speaking, she felt a connection to her ancestors. Herbal remedies were also prevalent in the knowledge shared by these women's elders. Marlene and Lorena see remedies like teas and *aguas frescas* as a connection. They both talk about writing them down, but their mothers were adamant about learning them orally *como los antepasados*, passed down by the women in their family.

In discussing their spiritual upbringing and awareness of an indigenous-based spirituality, the women had insight into how they grew up and how their indigenous-based spirituality developed when they started going to college, participating in *Danza*, or through a death in the family. Some of the women interviewed felt a rejection of Catholicism because of the institution's relationship to colonization and misogyny, while others saw the importance of praying with their elders, they connected praying to Catholicism and indigenous spirituality.

Most of the women who participated in this work noted that they participated in *Danza* at one point in their life or they still do. *Danza* also becomes a bridge to Indigenous spirituality. For many of these women, they find a connection to ancestral spiritual practices through *indigenismo*. In *Bloodlines*, Sheila Contreras problematizes this Mexican state project because it located indigenous people of Mexico as part of the past and called for new people who were once all indigenous, but now because of the mixture, are *mestizo*. This is what informs a kind of *indigenismo* that is often celebrated by Chicanas/os. By situating them as something of the past and equating *mestizaje* with progress, this form of indigenism was set to negate the existence of living indigenous people in Mexico.

The full moon circles, Omecihuatl and Coyolxauhqui Circle, give insight to the ways some full moon circles are run in Los Angeles and Orange County, California. The women who participate in the circles are re-connecting to ancestral healing and spiritual practice. As a learning space, the women are welcome to bring insight from elders and ceremonies they participate to create a space of their own. The women attribute the lessons offered by the connection they have either to their elders or teachers they have because of the ceremonies they participate in. Both groups see the importance of fusing knowledge of the Northern native practices as they engage in living with communities in the United States. And also indigenous communities of Mexico by the connections they have from their elders or ceremonies that take place in Mexico. For some, these circles are the first time they are connected to an indigenous-based healing and it becomes a catalyst for them to participate in other ceremonies.

Some of the women did have connections to their ancestral ways, but others represent detribalized communities because of colonization, having had displaced people away from their land and indigenous ways of knowing. As detribalized people, it is important to make sure we honor and respect the practices of living indigenous people. State projects like Mexico's post-revolution and other settler colonial practices in North America that aim for the extermination of indigenous people, have a goal of situating indigenous individuals as people of the past. Therefore, they can make the claim that there are no longer indigenous people living. The responsibility that we have as detribalized people is to try to uncover that subtle moment of "Indian-ness" by our elders and ancestors. We must never forget to do work that honors indigenous people living in the United States and our ancestral homelands. It is understandable that detribalized people gravitate towards this Aztec history, but there is also a responsibility that must ensure that we honor the current struggles for land and knowledge preservation.

Throughout this work, I attempted to show the ways these women's spiritual and healing practices influence what they bring forward in these circles. The women also attribute much of the knowledge being shared in these circles as being both indigenous from Mexico and Northern Native from the United States. The ceremonies the women participate in through Peace and Dignity, *Danza*, Sun Dance, Sweat Lodge, and Moon Ceremonies, as well as the knowledge their elders share, inform knowledge brought forward by the women participating in the circle. If some of the women are not familiar with these ways, the circle becomes a learning space that introduces them to other ceremonies.

The questions I want to continue to explore in my dissertation are: What does it mean to research in relation to healing? Can we re-connect to an indigenous-based spirituality when we have been detribalized and our personal connections to our indigenous lineage are unknowable? What kind of responsibilities do researchers have to healing communities that practice native, indigenous, and ancestral healings? As researchers, can we include our own experience with healing circles? In doing so, are we servicing a greater community to thinking about their own healing and possibly creating spaces and moments of healing? What does it mean for graduate students to do research and work on healing at the same time as they are dealing with institutional violence being queer, women, people of color in a space where we haven't been historically included? Can I heal from my research? Can my research heal?

Appendix

Interview Questions:

On Growing up

- 1) Place of birth?
 - [If the place is the same where they live now] Have you lived there all your life?
 - [If they don't live in the same place] When did you move to your current space?
- 2) Tell me about your family background?
 - Where were your parents/grandparents born? Where did they work or what did they do?
- 3) Can you describe to me your childhood?
- 4) While growing up, what did you learn about culture, healing traditions?
Did you see any for of healing practices in your home?
- 5) What spiritual/religious traditions did you grow up with?

On Healing Work

- 6) What guided you towards your current path of spirituality & healing?
 - What are some of the activities you partake in?
(i.e. danza, sweatlodges, healing circles, ect)

On Healing Circles

- 7) How did the group come together? When? Why? How long?
- 8) What got you interested in the Coyolxauhqui Full moon Circulo?
- 9) What is your role in the circle?
- 10) What does the concept community– healing mean to you?
 - What do you think of this practice?
 - How do you engage in this practice?
- 11) What sorts of issues are addressed in community healing?
- 12) Describe activities in a typical circle?
 - Describe activities in last circle you attended?
- 13) What kind of knowledge guides the circle?
 - Are there specific teachings that inform your circle?
 - What principals guide the circle?
 - Why is healing important to you? Do you feel like it is important for Chicanas, if so, why?

- What is the role of healing in social justice or social movements?
- 14) Why do you think this type of collective work is important? Benefits? Advantages?
 - 15) What is some advice for people who are considering starting up their own healing circle?
 - What would you tell them to expect?
 - 16) Is there anything else you would like to say about healing circles?

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