

A CULTURE OF DIVISIONS:
CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LA BRUJA AND LA CURANDERA IN
NUEVO MEXICANO FOLKLORE AND LITERATURE

By

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ABSTRACT

La bruja and la curandera are recurring, important figures in New Mexican culture, folkloric history, and literature and they carry with them the fear of the unknown that the Spanish surely encountered upon entering the American southwest in the late 1500s to early 1600s. La bruja is a part of the emergence of the culture of divisions that inhabits New Mexico, thus her image as a resistor to the effects of colonization have been transformed over time to be synonymous with evil and the devil. She has been ostracized from her indigenous culture and forced to fall in line with her European label of a witch. This thesis analyzes the cultural significance of la bruja and la curandera in the post-colonial American southwest. Using Homi Bhabha's theory of the 'unhomed,' this thesis examines stories from *Women's Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie* (published 2000), Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), and Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Hummingbird's Daughter* (2005). By analyzing these three texts, this study sets out to examine la bruja and la curandera in New Mexican history, folklore, and literature from the colonization of the American southwest in the 15th and 16th centuries to the role of la bruja and la curandera in the 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

“That’s how you know you belong, if the stories incorporate you into them. There have to be stories. It’s the stories that make this a community. People tell those stories about you and your family or about others and they begin to create your identity” (Silko 12).

La bruja and la curandera are recurring, important figures in New Mexican culture, folkloric history, and literature and they carry with them the fear of the unknown that the Spanish surely encountered upon entering the American southwest in the late 1500s to early 1600s. La bruja is a part of the emergence of the culture of divisions that inhabits New Mexico, thus her image as a resistor to the effects of colonization have been transformed over time to be synonymous with evil and the devil. She has been ostracized from her indigenous culture and forced to fall in line with her European label of a witch. Once labeled as a witch, she became that identity and stereotype of how we now, in the 21st Century, look at her and her witchcraft or brujería as representing the historical moments of collision between a colonizing power and the indigenous populations of the Southwest.

The bruja is a representation of how the culture of divisions has been found in much of New Mexican folkloric history as depicted in the stories collected in *Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie* (published 2000). In these stories and in Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), there is a clear division between what a bruja and a curandera are in the imagination of the New Mexican culture. In New

Mexican culture, a curandera and a bruja are dissimilar in that the bruja is seen as using spells or magic to harm others, while a curandera uses her powers and knowledge to heal. Luis Alberto Urrea further defines the differences between brujas and curanderas and also the political effects of a curandera in *The Hummingbird's Daughter* (2005). While the bruja evolved from a colonized woman, who would not convert to Catholicism, the curandera was separated from the bruja but not separated from God. Urrea blurs this distinction in his reworking of western spirituality during a period of governmental and religious colonization in Mexico and the U. S. Southwest.

Brujería and bruja are terms in New Mexican and other Latino cultures that describe a woman who is associated with the devil and whose evil deeds are directed at innocent men and women. There is no single portrait of a bruja. She can be someone's next door neighbor or someone who does not conform to the traditional societal expectations of a culture. However, a bruja is always a woman. During the conquest of New Mexico by the Spanish, the Catholic Church spent a majority of the 16th Century converting the indigenous peoples (Navajos, Apaches, Pueblos, etc.) to Catholicism. This process of religious conversion was not easily accepted among the indigenous peoples, creating a culture of divisions, and those who did not convert were ostracized from society and labeled as doing the devil's work. Indigenous women were seen as the bearers of the culture, and because of that, women were targeted by the Franciscans to change their pagan beliefs and to conform to the Catholic doctrine. When those women did not conform, they were labeled as brujas and their ways of worship labeled as brujería.

Bhabha defines this collision as a time of violence and confusion. What emerges from being in between¹ the paradigms of two worlds (essentially, two cultures colliding) is the unhomely state; a culture of divisions. The outcome of the two worlds crashing and merging is a culture that tries to hold onto its indigenous roots while conforming to Christian values. This could look like a culture that speaks Spanish and also native languages such as Diné or Apache, or it may be a displaced culture that loses its land while being able to still live and work on it.

The borderlines that emerged from the clashing of the indigenous and Spanish cultures were ones that became separate from their ‘home’ or ruling nation—Spain. Initial, more abstract borderlines were drawn upon the introduction of two distinct cultures to one another—indigenous and Spanish. Upon the first interactions between the indigenous peoples and the colonizers, more borders are drawn to separate the two cultures—language, spiritual beliefs, men’s and women’s roles—ultimately leading to actual physical displacement and borders drawn on the land. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha defines the outcome of two worlds crashing into each other as the “unhomely state” (9). In the unhomely state, the displaced culture is in a situation in which the colonized community attempts to get a “sense of the relocation of the home and the world” (Bhabha 9). For example, the indigenous cultures of New Mexico were displaced from their home when the Spanish arrived in the 16th century. Bhabha states, “In that displacement, the borders between home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9). Against their will, the native peoples were forced to

¹ Bhabha acknowledges the ‘inbetween’ as a linking of the dwelling as home, while producing an image of the world of history. As in, what is in between the dichotomies of “private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social” (13).

learn to coexist with the Spanish, and one of the ways they did that was to convert to Catholicism.

The bruja in New Mexican folklore has long been a figure of malevolence and immorality with connections to the devil. La Bruja is typically a female figure that is ostracized from society and “is someone to hate to the point of killing if at all possible” (Castillo 157). La bruja is a woman whose continued punishment symbolizes her resistance of the Catholic Church’s doctrines during the time of the colonization of New Mexico by the Spanish. La bruja’s work or brujería is often seen as a resistance to colonization stemming from the world and the home that emerged as the indigenous communities would not conform to the Catholic ways of the conquerors. Her work is often deemed evil and needing to be undone by the colonizer. She is labeled a witch so as to ostracize her from the Spanish colonizing culture.

Ana Castillo proposes that “by refusing to submit to a man/god, the way Lilith/Eve/La Llorona did, woman according to myth, is to be punished forever” (117). La bruja then, as an archetype represents women who are ostracized from society because of their beliefs, and are products of two cultures clashing and combining in order to create a new culture—one that is Catholic and with strong ties to an indigenous spirituality of which the bruja works to remind us of in New Mexican culture. She is found in the folklore and stories from New Mexico in order to remind us of the women who would not willingly convert to the patriarchal ways of Catholicism. She retains her connections with the land that was once hers, but was stolen by the Spanish. In order to villainize those who would not convert to Catholicism, stories were created to connect the

indigenous people with the devil and those stories were and are still used to warn people of the bruja's evil doings.

Chicano theorist Ramón Gutiérrez explicates in *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*, “The conquest of America was not a monologue, but a dialogue between cultures, each of which had many voices that often spoke in unison, but just as often were diverse and divisive” (xvii). The dialogue that occurred between the Spanish and the indigenous communities was one of tension, hate, exploitation, sacrifice, and compromise. The Spanish came to the Americas on a mission and that mission was to find land and spread Catholicism. Both the Spanish and the indigenous peoples were brought together by one common thread—land. The Spanish wanted the land and the indigenous peoples inhabited that land—what followed was a time of vast change that has shaped the culture, history, and people of New Mexico today.

This thesis will take a short look at New Mexican history, focusing primarily on the colonization of New Mexico by the Spanish in order to show the historical influences on the folklore and literature of New Mexico and the Southwest. Specifically, I will follow that history with a description and introduction to New Mexican folklore as collected by many women in *Women's Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie* in the 1940s, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), and Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Hummingbird's Daughter* (2005). This folklore and literature contextualize history by focusing on how la bruja and la curandera are incorporated into the women's perspective of their New Mexican/Southwest culture, their lives situated in place and

land, and their familial and community histories. Although I am looking at three different texts, I will show how the bruja has been and is associated with evil, how the Catholic Church is associated with 'good,' and how the curandera is the bridge that connects these two dichotomies. La bruja is strictly an evil entity, whether she is a character in folklore and literature or whether she is the lady who lives down the street. La bruja and brujería do not blur boundaries and her work cannot be confused with doing 'good.' On the other side of the spectrum (more simply associated as the 'good' side) resides Catholicism. Catholicism, as an entity, is strictly associated with 'good' because of its focus on God, and it does not blur the boundaries between 'good' and evil. La curandera blurs the boundaries between 'good' and evil and becomes the bridge in that interstitial space.

Theorists and authors such as Ramón Gutiérrez, Nasario García, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Luis León, and Rudolfo Anaya have all recognized the uses of the bruja and the curandera in New Mexican and Latino folklore. In line with Ana Castillo's belief that la bruja represents the ostracized, Luis León also understands her to sometimes be confused with a curandera figures. León acknowledges the differences between a bruja and a curandera, but also recognizes the dual worlds a curandera can exist in; she can be both a curandera and a believer in the Catholic faith. As a curandera lives in between two worlds and the bruja is the result of two cultures colliding, Gloria Anzaldúa understands what life is like in between two cultures and how to exist in, what Homi Bhabha calls, the unhomely state.

Ramón Gutiérrez, on the other hand, recognizes the demise of the indigenous cultures' beliefs when the Spanish Catholics arrived in New Mexico. Within the collision of Catholicism and indigenous spirituality, a new culture emerges and Gutiérrez focuses

on the techniques the conquerors used to convert the indigenous cultures. Also, Gutiérrez acknowledges the outcomes of a culture forced to follow a new way of life and what happens when that culture tries to hold onto its beliefs prior to colonization.

La bruja has always been used as a negative figure in folklore, while a curandera heals instead of casting evil spells on innocent people. While the bruja was more of a threat to society at the time of colonization up until the turn of the 20th Century, these authors and theorists acknowledge her shift toward only existing through folklore and legend. Chicana feminists such as Ana Castillo and Gloria Anzaldúa have taken the image and reputation of the bruja and tried to shift it so that she is seen as a victim of man's control over women instead of a follower of the devil. Anzaldúa recognizes the male dominance and the convergence of two spiritualities (Catholicism and indigenous) in her culture in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa states, "Culture forms our beliefs" (38). She recalls lessons her mother taught her about man's and woman's roles in her culture that formed what she was to believe and formed what all women in her culture were to believe, "Through our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages: *No voy a dejar que ningún pelado desgraciado maltrate a mis hijos*. And in the next breath it would say, *La mujer tiene que hacer lo que le diga el hombre*. Which was it to be—strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming?" (39-40). Her mother explained what a woman's role in her culture was and she was supposed to uphold that role with no questions asked. Anzaldúa describes the myth in her culture and how it is centered on *Las Tres Madres*. She describes the convergence of Catholic and pagan beliefs, and questions how she was supposed to grow up in between these opposing spiritualities without

“reconciling the two” (60). What is in the middle—the hostile, the border, the violence—is where Anzaldúa finds herself many times.

Anzaldúa feels left out, pushed out, without a country, without a homeland, but, because she resides in the middle (what Bhabha calls the displacement), she identifies as having all countries:

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture. (102-103)

Much like Anzaldúa, the indigenous cultures of New Mexico were deeply influenced by a patriarchal religion that was impressed upon them during colonization. What the indigenous peoples once thought was their homeland and their culture was suddenly being stolen from them by the Spanish. As in Anzaldúa’s culture, the women were to be submissive to the men, the indigenous cultures were to be submissive to the Spanish conquerors. Through that submission, identity, homeland, culture, and belief are lost. Anzaldúa’s experiences of growing up on a patriarchal culture parallel the experiences of the indigenous culture versus the Spanish Catholic patriarchal culture.

Homi Bhabha defines the physical and then cultural displacement of home as a “deeper historical displacement” and is seen in the colonization of what is now New Mexico, dating back to the late 1500s to early 1600s. The Spanish inhabited this region

and the indigenous people's land by way of the Catholic Church. When the Catholic monarchs lacked money to give to soldiers during the Reconquest of Spain from Moorish occupation, they would reward those conquistadores with land. This custom of rewarding the conquistadores with land continued when the Spanish colonized what is now New Mexico. The lands that the Spanish gave to the soldiers were later known as land grants and they became a sign of social status among the settlers of New Mexico.

Though the Spanish monarchy was rewarding these soldiers with land, they did not take into consideration the fact that this land was already inhabited by the indigenous peoples (frequently recorded as simply the Pueblo Indians and then later specified as Apache, Curac, Cochiti Pueblos, Hopi, Navajo, Kiowa, and Comanche to name a few). The Spanish then set up encomiendas in order to establish some laws and power over the indigenous communities. An encomienda "was a grant to a Spaniard of the fruits of Indian labor, which initially was collectible either in material tribute or in personal service, but soon became tantamount to slavery" (Ebright 14). A Spanish conquistador then had the power to "collect tribute from the town and sometimes require personal service from the Indians," but this did not mean the land belonged to the encomenderos; however, some encomenderos did believe they owned the land (Ebright 14). Under the encomienda laws, the conquistadores who received the land were forbidden to live on this land, but, because the laws were put into effect by the Spanish monarchy, the physical distance between the monarchy and the settlers allowed for many of the laws to be ignored. In effect, "there was a great deal of encroachment on Indian lands," and tensions between the Natives and the Spanish began to rise because of the abuses the Natives were

enduring under Spanish law (Gutiérrez 132). These tensions led to the Pueblo Revolt², thus ending the practice of the *encomienda* and improving relations between the Pueblos and the Spanish. The Pueblo Indians and the Spanish became allies in order to combat raids from nomadic tribes, such as the Comanches, Apaches, and Navajos. The merging of these cultures brought about many culture clashes as well as resistance to religious changes. The Spanish brought with them Catholicism while the indigenous community carried their own spirituality which heavily clashed with the Catholic doctrine.

Spanish friars went about trying to convert the Indians through sexual divisions of labor, gifts of “livestock, meat, and education in animal husbandry in return for baptism and obedience of God’s laws,” and through appealing to the Indian women by appearing as “feminine nurturing mothers” (Gutiérrez 77). According to Gutiérrez, “Traditionally, men spun, wove, hunted and protected the community. Women cared for hearth and home and undertook all building construction” (76). To change their lives around and establish particular gender roles in the culture, the Spaniards assigned Indian men to build and women were appointed to weave and not allowed to hunt or do their previous duties. It was easier for the friars to take control over the indigenous populations by changing the roles of the culture which led to the men becoming emasculated and less powerful because they were doing women’s work. The Franciscans also appealed to the Indian women by way of appearing as nurturing mothers. Gutierrez states that, “Fray Juan de

² Occurred between August 10 and August 21, 1680. Sparked by Popé, a San Juan medicine man, and his organization of other Pueblo Indians, such as the Tesuque Pueblo and Taos Pueblo, in response to Spanish colonization. “On August 9, 1680, Popé dispatched two messengers to all the pueblos with knotted cords indicating that only two days remained [until the revolt against the Spanish was to begin]” (Gutiérrez 132). The messengers were intercepted by pueblos that opposed the revolt and they informed the governor of the impending war. Word of the interception spread to the Tesuque Pueblo and they dispatched runners to the other allied pueblos that the revolt was to start the next day. By August 12, “401 settlers and 21 friars were killed and against 170 colonists capable of bearing arms stood 8,000 or more Indian warriors” (Gutiérrez 133).

Prada spoke of nursing the Indians ‘at the bosom of the Church’” (78). The Spaniards used imagery and symbolism of “female breasts, the mouth, and menstrual blood to depict the instruction the Church gave as a maternal outpouring of love” (78).

The matrilineal culture of the Natives and the patrilineal culture of the Spanish clashed as the Spanish continuously demonized the indigenous spirituality of the Natives in order to convert them to Catholicism. Many of the Spanish Franciscans were successful in their attempts of conversion, but some Puebloans, such as the Hopi, the Zuni, and the Keres at Acoma, still resisted Christianization and remained matrilineal. As Gutiérrez notes, there were also those who became accustomed to the Spanish/European ways:

Women’s fertility societies were suppressed, their dances to awaken men’s germinative powers were outlawed as too sinful, and, given the explicit phallic symbolism of the Snake Dance and the ‘demonic’ character of the katsina dances, these elements of Pueblo ceremonialism largely disappeared. The native symbolism that remained was almost totally ascendant and masculine (sun, fire, arrows, and eagles)—symbols that meshed well with those of European patriarchal religion. (79)

The complete abolishment of the matrilineal indigenous spirituality made it difficult for anyone who still worshipped in that faith to function in what was becoming a colonized culture. Spanish views about women’s place in society led them to ostracize any women still holding on to prior religious views, which they did by portraying them as brujas and seen as trying to cast spells on those who were spreading Christianity: “In 1675 alone,

Indian witchcraft was blamed for sending seven friars and three settlers to their graves” (Gutiérrez 130).

Thus, the first chapter, “The Folklore of the New Mexican Bruja,” will connect the indigenous witchcraft at the time of colonization with the bruja that is seen in New Mexican folklore. The large concentration of collected oral stories about brujería and brujas in *Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie* offers insight into the bruja figure in connection to the effects of colonization on the local community. The Federal Writers’ Project was sponsored by the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935. The programs enacted by the WPA (Works Progress Administration), the largest New Deal Agency, employed millions of people to work by building parks, roads through public lands, artists’ work was seen on post offices, community centers, libraries, etc., and writers “were sent out to collect information and folklore in order to produce an organized system of State Guides” (Rebolledo xxi). These writers would go out to collect stories from older residents and “document culture and history” (xxi). The stories I focus on are stories about the bruja and brujería and how they were perceived during and prior to the 1940s.

Brujas have historically been perceived as evil, thus stories about them have been used to warn people and children to stay away from certain aspects of the culture. In my research, I connect major themes that are female centered to the indigenous values that were colonized. Such themes that run through the stories are: women are typically brujas; women are typically the victims of embrujada (bewitching); and the positive and negative connections to the indigenous populations of the southwest United States.

In the WPA stories I am analyzing, brujería is the center of focus. In one story, “The Story of La Curandera,” a Spanish woman is poisoned by a bruja after she divorces a poor man and marries a wealthy man who left his wife. She is then cured by a curandera and, in turn, becomes a curandera herself, pledging to spend the rest of her life healing. In another story, “El Ojo,” a woman who just had a baby does not allow a strange woman to hold her baby and, because of that, a spell is cast upon the baby and the baby dies. A bruja can be someone’s neighbor, a slighted ex-wife, a woman of Spanish heritage, or an indigenous woman, and she can cast spells on those she feels have wronged her or those she is envious of. In the brujería stories, the division between indigenous cultures and Spanish culture is clear, but while historically the indigenous peoples who would not submit to the Spanish ways of life during colonization were ostracized from society, the indigenous peoples in the stories are looked to for healing when someone is a victim of brujería. These folkloric stories are representations of the history of cultures after the colonization of New Mexico, and I will focus on how the bruja and curandera in selected stories represent the culture of divisions that defines New Mexico.

My second chapter, “Curanderismo, Brujería, and Catholicism in Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima*,” will focus directly on Nuevomexicano author, Rudolfo Anaya and his foundational novel *Bless Me, Ultima*. Anaya professes, “As an insider into Nuevo Mexicano (New Mexico) culture, I explore the cultural history of the region. I want my work to reflect the values of those ancestors who have lived in the Rio Grande Valley for so many centuries” (Portales 5). Anaya creates a fictional story in which he remembers and honors his ancestors by telling of their struggles as well as the struggles

of modern day New Mexicans. Anaya has stated that he used the people and surroundings of his childhood as elements in this story. Anaya asserts, “I was shaped by the traditions and culture of the free-wheeling cow punchers and sheep herders of the llano, a lifestyle my father knew well, and was also initiated into the deeply religious, Catholic settled life of the farmers of Puerto de Luna, my mother’s side of the family” (Portales 4).

Anaya is deeply connected to the culture of New Mexico and this particular novel illustrates his understanding and analysis of the importance of the land, the split religious views of Catholicism and indigenous spirituality, and the tales of brujas and curanderas. *Bless Me, Ultima* is a story about a young boy torn between living up to his mother’s and father’s expectations of him and what God’s plan is for him, whoever that God may be. Anaya’s novel is filled with rich connections to land, religious views, and the differences between curanderas and brujas. Because the novel is one of the most widely used texts in public high schools, the portrayal of brujas, curanderas, indigenous spirituality, and Catholicism in contemporary literature has created a distance between the history of a culture and the presence of that culture in more recent years. While brujas and curanderas were seen as an everyday reality after the colonization of New Mexico, the portrayal of curanderas and brujas in contemporary literature has fictionalized the reality of their presence and out of history.

The influence of the colonization of New Mexico is evident in Anaya’s novel. There is a battle between Catholicism and indigenous spirituality as well as the values in each religion and culture. In the foreword to *The Anaya Reader*, Anaya maintains the struggle native New Mexicans deal with when trying to pinpoint a cultural identity:

We are split by ethnic boundaries, we are a border people, half in love with Mexico and half suspicious, half in love with the United States and half wondering if we belong. We have been rejected by our Spanish father, forgotten by our Indian mother, and feel unwanted by a stepmother who passes English-only laws, lights up the border, and proposes laws denying education and health care principally to the children of our Mexican people who come here seeking work. (xxiii)

New Mexicans are a mixture of Spanish and indigenous heritage and indigenous and Christian spiritually, and the bruja represents a part of this mixture that has been ostracized from society. The bruja has been cast out of society because of her evil connections, while dialectically the curandera has been at times welcomed into society because of her associations with healing. Officially, the Catholic Church viewed both brujas and curanderas as evil and separate from the Church, although a curandera was allowed to believe in the same God as the Catholic Church. But in the end, the Church believed that one could not be both a healer who is spiritually connected to the land and a Catholic. The divisions between the Catholic Church, curanderisma, and brujería are yet another example of a culture of divisions. In this chapter, I identify the differences between a curandera and a bruja and how they are viewed by the society in Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*. In doing this, it is apparent that the culture of divisions, or Bhabha's ideas of the unhomely extend Anaya's idea that brujería is separate from curanderisma and the Catholic Church.

The third chapter, "From Bruja to Saint: Teresa Urrea's Political Journey," discusses Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Hummingbird's Daughter* and the idea of brujería as

not just a witch's game to curse people and cast evil upon those who ostracize them, but brujería and curanderismo as political tools to inspire a revolution against a patriarchal government. Urrea's novel, set in Northwestern Mexico and the pre-1910 Southwest describes the spirituality of the indigenous people who inhabited the American southwest, beyond the borders of Mexico and the United States. Urrea concentrates this novel around the historical approach to the cultural and political implications of brujería.

Urrea's book focuses on Teresita Urrea who was born in Mexico to an unwed Yori Indian mother and Spanish landowner father. She grew up learning to heal as a curandera and then became a great healer among her people. Later on in her life, she was thought of as a saint and was sought out to heal the sick. Teresa subsequently moves up to the Southwestern United States/Northwestern Mexico and inhabits the land with her own people (the Yori), her father's people, and the Yaqui Indians. This merging of cultures and religious ideals leads to tension with the Mexican government, when Teresa is believed to incite war on the government for taking their lands. The Mexican government became fearful that her words to the indigenous peoples would cause a revolution. The idea that Teresa Urrea, who was once thought to be a curandera, then labeled a bruja by the Mexican government, then considered a saint by the masses, could inspire the indigenous population of Mexico to take back their land that was stolen by the colonizers brings power to brujería.

In looking at the cultural and political implications of brujería, the story of Teresa Urrea, the Saint of Cabora, in *The Hummingbird's Daughter* leads to some of the beliefs found in the Southwestern United States and reflects on the power of brujería in terms of the power of the church, the government, and their approaches to the colonization of

indigenous populations through religion and medical science. This final chapter will tie together the stigmas associated with brujería as captured by the folklore of New Mexican WPA stories, *Bless Me, Ultima*, and the story of a cultural legend who was and is still believed to be a saint.

The culture of divisions extends Homi Bhabha's theories of the unhomed, unhomey, and the displaced by applying them to folklore and literature inspired by the effects of colonization. This folklore and literature is from the in between place, as Bhabha names it, and reflects a culture that is separated by boundaries, but brought together by similar beliefs. Through Bhabha's theories and my own of the culture of divisions, this thesis will establish the purpose of the bruja and curandera in the folklore and literature of New Mexico and the American Southwest. To conclude, I hope that this work will continue the discussion of the importance of folklore to a culture that has been displaced and divided.

CHAPTER 1: THE FOLKLORE OF THE NEW MEXICAN BRUJA

The fear the Spanish had about the unknown indigenous populations of New Mexico only led to outspread panic. In 1675 in the areas of Nambé, San Felipe, and Jémez, the indigenous populations resisted the Christian ideals and Spanish ways of life. The Spanish had waged war on the natives by trying to force them to forsake idolatry and the natives waged a rebellion against the Spanish by not conforming to their Catholic beliefs. Throughout the state, the Spanish Catholics affirmed that what the indigenous populations were practicing was witchcraft, and to the Catholics, witchcraft was equivalent to worshipping the devil. Because of the resistance of the Apache, Navajo, Tewa, Pueblo, Jumano, and other native tribes, the indigenous beliefs were villainized and the fear of their evil beliefs spawned legends and folklore about brujas and brujería.

In *Land of Enchantment, Land of Conflict: New Mexico in English-Language Fiction*, David L. Caffey states that “New Mexico has long been a reputed hotbed of belief in supernatural phenomena, including witchcraft, ghosts, and the healing arts, which may involve the use of natural remedies as well as practices rooted in faith or superstition” (105). This chapter focuses on the folklore collected from New Mexico regarding brujas and brujería, specifically recorded in *Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie* in the 1940s. This collection of stories were orally recorded, then translated to English, and then printed for the American public to read. In addition, all the stories were told by women about their New Mexican culture, their

ancestry, and their views about their lives. The indigenous cultures of New Mexico and the Spanish colonizers clashed in their beliefs, but they also merged in ways to form a new culture that would be split in two with the native, “pagan” beliefs as well as the Catholic beliefs. These blended cultures were couched in *curanderismo* and in *brujería*. This new culture is what formed the folklore that warns against *brujas*, treasures the *curandera*, and also warns against the indigenous populations of New Mexico. The divisions and blending of Spanish Catholic culture and that of the indigenous peoples produced a culture in which *brujas* and *curanderas* exist. As a result, this culture which tries to hold onto its indigenous roots and conform to Spanish ideologies, is divided. The stories in *La Diabla a Pie* represent the mixing of the cultures—the cultures in between. The stories are examples of the fears of the culture, such as *brujas* and outsiders, and the values of the culture and warnings about what is and is not socially acceptable, like greed and arrogance. These stories depict what Homi Bhabha calls the “unhomely state”; they are the representation of the culture of divisions.

The newcomers collecting the stories were “outsiders” in that they did not speak Spanish or understand the New Mexican culture. The women from the WPA faced bitterness from New Mexicans because they were sent from the federal government:

Except for direct emergency relief, little attempt was made to discover the roots of Hispanic misery, or to educate the Hispanic people in matters of food production, job training, or health. So great was the bitterness toward all things federal that in rural Hispanic New Mexico the WPA became known as ‘la diabla a pie’—the devil on foot. (qt. in WPA)

Also, it is noted that “the way the phrase ‘the WPA’ was pronounced in Spanish, sounding like ‘la diabla a pie,’ mockingly incorporated Nuevomexicanos’ attitudes towards it” (Rebolledo and Márquez xxii).

Excerpts from a recorded story in *Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie* illustrate the fear the settlers of New Mexico had in relation to the indigenous populations at the time of colonization. Rumors would spread in rural communities of New Mexico about Indians coming to raid that land:

The people would bury or hide anything of value they had, drive their stock into the bosque (cottonwood thicket) for sometimes the Indians did come, and when they did, would ransack the houses and take whatever they wanted, and drive off the stock, and set fire to haystacks and corrals, while the people fled with their children to some hiding place. (Martínez 76)

Rumors such as these were common among rural communities in New Mexico, according to stories in *La Diabla a Pie*. As the stories were passed down from generation to generation, information was lost as to who spread the rumors that Indians were going to raid the land to instill fear in the villagers. However, within these rumors, there are grains of truth. During the eighteenth century, “when Apaches, Navajos, and Comanches began raiding New Mexico’s villages, they preyed on Puebloans and Spaniards with equal intensity” (Gutiérrez 158). The fear that spread throughout the rural villages of New Mexico when indigenous tribes would raid was surely a precursor to the rumors that are recorded in portions of *La Diabla a Pie*.

The Spanish had invaded a new land that was already inhabited by Navajos, Apaches, and Pueblos and tensions between the cultures were heating up in the mid to late 17th century. Not to mention, there was a time of great drought and famine between 1666 and 1670. During this time, the indigenous population, which in 1638 had totaled roughly 40,000, and by 1670 had fallen to 17,000, began to raid Spanish settlements for food while killing many of the Spanish (Gutiérrez 130). Though there had been bitterness between the indigenous populations and the Spanish during these difficult years, the anger and hatred between these groups only increased and talk of rebellion began to spread. “The medicine men told their tribesmen that the reason they suffered so was because their ancient gods were angry,” and in response to this, the Navajo, Pueblo, Apache, and Tewa began to offer sacred gifts to their gods in order to receive rain and end the drought (Gutiérrez 130). However, the dances and rituals the natives were performing for their gods went against the Catholic customs the Spanish were trying to instill and “in 1673 they [indigenous populations] publicly performed prohibited dances³ making offerings to their gods and begging them to return. In 1675 alone, Indian witchcraft was blamed for sending seven friars and three settlers to their graves” (Gutiérrez 130). New Mexican Governor Juan Francisco Treviño stated that he “had known ‘sorcerers’ hung and forty-seven medicine men who admitted practicing witchcraft were arrested, flogged, and sold into slavery” (Gutierrez 131). The Spanish vilified the indigenous peoples’ beliefs and ways of worship and deemed those acts

³ Prohibited dances included those for fertility, rainfall, and marriage. For example, many of the Pueblo dances were heavily concentrated on sexuality, which the Christians found to be immoral and lewd. “The laws of God commanded chastity before marriage, fidelity within the nuptial state, life-long indissoluble monogamy, and modesty and shame in all bodily matters” (Gutiérrez 73). However, “The Puebloans practiced serial monogamy and polygamy, and seemed undisturbed by sexual variance” (72). Because of this distinction of beliefs, such dances praising what the Christians believed to be blasphemous were prohibited.

witchcraft. The indigenous cultures were deemed witches because of their constant rebellion against conforming to Spanish ways of life. In many ways, brujería symbolized the colonization of indigenous New Mexico and that which was opposite to the Catholic Church and state government.

A Warning Against Brujas

“The Story of La Curandera (A Tale of Witchcraft)” is a story told by Auralia Gurulé, Gracia Trujillo, and Catalina Gurulé in 1940 and is one that defines the differences between a curandera and a bruja. This story also provides insight into the fear New Mexicans had about indigenous groups due to their rumored untrusting nature. Though the indigenous groups were rumored to be untrusting, they had every reason to be skeptical of outsiders invading their land.

In the late seventeenth, early eighteenth centuries tensions between the Spanish and French colonizers increased as the French began to move more toward the west and begin to push indigenous groups more west, “The growing presence of French colonists in Illinois and on the eastern edges of the Great Plains pushed the Comanche, Pawnee, Kansas, Wichita, and Osage Indians in a southwestern direction, into Apache and Navajo hunting grounds” (Gutiérrez 147). The Spanish were aggravated with the French interlopers in the Kingdom of New Spain, therefore troops were sent out to keep the French out. As the Spanish reconquest settles, New Mexico’s population began to separate into different classes:

The dominant class was the nobility. Below them, landed peasants, who were primarily of mestizo origin but who considered themselves *españoles*

to differentiate themselves from the Indians, were by far the most numerous 'middle' group. At the bottom of the social hierarchy were the 'infamous' *genízaro* slaves, detribalized Indians, primarily of Apache and Navajo origin, who had been captured by the Spanish and pressed into domestic service. (Gutiérrez 149)

Differentiations between the indigenous and the colonizers continued to take shape, and the indigenous peoples were forced to the bottom of the social hierarchy while the rich Spanish colonizers sat at the top of the social chain. Even those who were half Spanish and half indigenous—mestizo—denied their indigenous blood so that they sat higher on the hierarchy. As the separation between the social classes ensued, the desire to be of the nobility and relinquish any ties to the indigenous grew for these New Mexicans. To want material items, like money and clothes to gain a higher status was more valued than the indigenous ways of life. Healing through curanderismo fell under the category of indigenous practices and therefore devalued in a materialistic society. As Jesusita, in the story to follow, is of French descent and viewed as a colonizer turns to the indigenous practices of curanderismo, she relinquishes her high status in society. She is materialistic and colonizing in nature until she is cursed by the indigenous bruja. The curanderas, which are a blend of two cultures, cure her by teaching her to abandon her materialistic nature in exchange for an appreciation of an indigenous way of life.

The story is of Jesusita from Las Placitas (a little village near Albuquerque) and the covenant of marriage through two viewpoints—indigenous and Catholic. Jesusita, as noted in the introduction to the story, is a descendent of the Alarys, a French family that settled on a grant given to a Spanish Captain by the Spanish crown for his service to

Spain and the crown (277). By granting Junario with an Indian divorce, Jesusita not only adopted an action of separation the settlers believed the indigenous peoples commonly did, but she was adopting an action that was looked down upon by the settlers/colonizers as well as the Catholic Church that was represented by the friars and missionaries converting indigenous peoples. The imposition of the sacrament of marriage was in the hands of the friars and by accepting this Christian God, the indigenous population was also “promising monogamy and marital fidelity” (77).⁴ As the story opens with this bit of information about Jesusita’s background and marital history, a story line is created in which Jesusita becomes one that is deserving of the bewitching that comes later in the story because of her movement away from the French beliefs and her adoption of Indigenous beliefs dependent on her desires.

Jesusita is married to a poor man and then divorces him. Not long after that divorce, she meets and falls in love with Eugenio, a rich land owner—they move to Azabache, and become neighbors to “the Navajos and lived in peace with them” (278). After living in Azabache for a while, Eugenio spends a year on his ranch in Corrales and Jesusita is left in Azabache alone. One day while she is cleaning, a woman comes to her house and remarks how Jesusita looks very tired and offers to make her some coffee. After drinking the coffee, the stranger vanishes and Jesusita is left “bereft of her senses and [runs] screaming from the patio, tearing her clothing from her body and trying to hide from those who came to quiet her and learn of what happened” (278). There had been a drug in her coffee and Jesusita was bewitched. Afterwards, Eugenio spends all his fortune trying to find a cure for his wife.

⁴ “The friars’ control of marriage and their imposition of monogamy were the tyrannies that most angered Pueblo men and became the most persuasive reasons for revolt” (Gutiérrez 77).

Jesusita was young when she married her first husband. His name was Junario, and he was a poor and indigenous New Mexican, “who settled her in a humble little adobe dwelling and gave her nothing but hard work and privations” (277). This story begins with the short lived marriage of Jesusita and Junario. The marriage was short lived because Jesusita felt trapped in her life with Junario: “The spirited found such an existence intolerable” (277). Her life with Junario was not fulfilling and she ventured away from the marriage and divorced him. Although not of indigenous background, Jesusita grants him what the text terms an Indian divorce, in which she basically throws him and his stuff out of the house. The fact that this action of separation is named an Indian divorce reveals that the settlers/colonizers felt the indigenous peoples were disrespectful with their treatment of marriage. Ramón Gutiérrez notes that among many indigenous tribes, “Marriage was not conceptualized as a monogamous life-long tie. The Indians ‘make agreements among themselves and live together as long as they want to, and when the woman takes a notion, she looks for another husband and the man for another wife” (qtd. in Gutiérrez 11-12).⁵ However, when the Spanish Friars entered New Mexico, among many other changes, they imposed their beliefs of monogamy and of marriage as a life-long sacrament. Jesusita was unhappy in her marriage with a poor man; therefore, she divorces him in a way that only the natives do. She then marries Eugenio, a “wealthy stockman” (278).

In the story, Eugenio takes Jesusita away from their home in order to cure her, and when that does not work, he takes her back to Azabache because he feels that being near the indigenous community would cure her. Eugenio is mistaken when he thinks that taking Jesusita back to Azabache will help her because Azabache is not her home.

⁵ Gutiérrez cites Joseph Brondate’s 1601 declaration of marital norms among the Pueblos.

Jesusita is originally from Las Placitas—a part of the Corrales land grant. Eugenio believes that if she is back with familiar surroundings, then her madness will be cured, but “her mental condition remained unchanged. She raved and tried to run away and tore up all the beautiful clothes he had the serving maids put upon her” (278). Her familiar surroundings only encourages her materialistic nature. Her serving maids try to clothe her in her beautiful clothing and she rips them from her body.

Jesusita is displaced from her home yet again. She is displaced from her home in Las Placitas when she marries Eugenio and they move to Azabache. Eugenio then leaves her to spend a year on his ranch back in Corrales to work. It is in this displacement from her home and from her husband leaving for work that she is bewitched by Eugenio’s scorned ex-wife. As a colonizer, Jesusita is bewitched and displaced as the indigenous are displaced from their homeland. What Jesusita knew as her ‘home’ has now become confronted by the outside—the unknown; the world. In Azabache, “Jesusita acquainted herself with the ways of the Indians and endeavored to learn of their cures. But the Indian, then as now, did not talk of himself and his affairs; so the French lady [Jesusita] learned only what they chose that she should know” (278). Jesusita’s idea of home is displaced and “in that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused” (Bhabha 9). The indigenous peoples do not open up to her and there is a boundary between them. There is a border between Jesusita and the indigenous peoples and, to them, she represents the ‘world’ that is not allowed into their ‘home.’ Jesusita thus becomes unhomed; in a state of unhomeliness; in between home and world. In her unhomey state, Jesusita allows a stranger to enter her home, and by allowing an unknown outsider—an unknown world, in a sense—into her ‘home,’ she unknowingly

invites evil to poison her. As Homi Bhabha reminds the reader, “The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of ‘incredulous terror’” (9). Eugenio’s estranged wife crept upon Jesusita, entered her home, and bewitched her. Displaced and bewitched, Jesusita rips her clothes from her body, tries to run away, and is finally removed from Azabache to find a cure. Thus, Jesusita’s curse is tied to her landscape—her home, her land, her community. Jesusita, although part of the colonizer’s group, is unhomed by the indigenous to teach her a lesson about what she is doing by valuing a materialistic lifestyle and placing her social status above the status of the indigenous. In this way, the roles of the colonized and the colonizer are reversed so that Jesusita’s idea of home is altered as the indigenous’ home was altered at the time of colonization. In order to be unhomed, Jesusita must be removed from her idea of home into an unknown idea of the world.

Jesusita is displaced yet again when Eugenio takes her to Mexico City for a cure, but nothing helps. Eugenio “squandered half of his fortune upon the vain quest of a cure for his wife,” but they were disappointed yet again. By going to Mexico City, Eugenio and Jesusita entered another world in which they were the outsiders. Even with money (one of the reasons Jesusita married him and divorced her former husband), they could not find a cure. The curse Jesusita was under was beyond the means of any money Eugenio could give. They were only moving further and further away from Jesusita’s original home—Las Placitas. Running out of resources and hoping for a cure, Eugenio takes her back to Corrales and there her father and sisters take control of her situation and get her help.

Jesusita's father and sisters take her to El Arbolario "meaning madcap, but applied to Indian witchdoctors" (279). Jesusita is now 'home' so she is no longer physically displaced, but her mental state still lies in that in between point; the result of allowing a stranger into her house. However, now that she is no longer physically displaced, she has a better chance of being cured of her embrujada. The Arbolario, Juan, and his wife, Josefeta, work tirelessly to cure Jesusita. As Rafaela Castro points out, "A curandero or curandera is usually only consulted when after all other remedies, including simple home remedies, fail as well as to treat illnesses from a presumably supernatural curse" (84). In doing so, they are able to pinpoint who poisoned Jesusita, and it turns out to be Eugenio's first wife who was scorned and who had sought to destroy Jesusita. While Jesusita was staying with Juan and Josefeta, for over sixty days, they gave her many drinks to purify and cure her:

Then one Friday Juan conducted her to a secret place encircled by concealing ledges of rock. In the center of the small place was a limpid lagunajo (pool). Juan made her sit down and look into the pool until a face appeared. She would recognize the face and at that instant her mind would be wholly restored. (280)

When Jesusita looked into the water, a face did not appear immediately, but after a few hours, she saw the face of Eugenio's estranged wife passing her the cup of coffee. In that instant, Jesusita was cured. The curanderos/as blend two worlds together and cure those living in the unhomed territory. While Jesusita dwells on one side of the division and the bruja dwells on the opposite side, the curandera bridges the two sides by curing the curse of the bruja and showing Jesusita the faults of her ways.

The basis for a curandera's healing power comes from a deep spirituality and belief in God and God's healing powers, "Curanderos and curanderas have great religious faith and believe that their success or failure in healing a patient depends on God's will for that particular patient" (Pabón 3). Curanderos and curanderas will heal illnesses, help birth babies, and heal those who have fallen victim to a bruja's curse (or have been bewitched; *embrujada*) with the assistance of their belief in God and God's will, herbs, natural remedies, and prayer. The history of curanderismo spans back to the colonization of the Americas by the Spanish and was brought about by the clashing of two worlds and cultures. Melissa Pabón theorizes that, "The practice of curanderismo was historically influenced by the medical theories and practices introduced to the Americas by Spanish explorers, who based their knowledge on Greek, Roman, and Arabic customs and practices. Native American healers, in turn, shaped these practices" (4). However, curanderismo is commonly mistaken for *brujería*, or witchcraft.

Brujería also has a long history spanning centuries of belief in the Catholic Church. It is believed that any opposition to Catholicism must be the work of the devil and evil. Pabón posits that "Belief in witchcraft was widespread during the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries in Europe. This belief was brought to the indigenous communities of the New World by the Spanish Catholic missionaries who worked to convert the native peoples" (5). When Catholic missionaries came in contact with any belief they deemed as a resistance to Catholicism, they categorized them as evil and deemed the resistance witchcraft and the resisters witches. *Brujería* is different from curanderismo in that a bruja may cast spells for evil purposes rather than for healing purposes. Brujas are believed to be capable of "prepar[ing] love potions, lift[ing] spells, cur[ing] and caus[ing]

illnesses, and in general caus[ing] great harm” (Castro 30). As in the story of Jesusita and Eugenio, Eugenio’s first wife casts a spell on Jesusita in a harmful way. She intends to cause harm to Jesusita, therefore she would be considered a bruja.

The bewitching that takes place in this story draws a clear distinction between what a bruja is and what a curandera is. Eugenio’s first wife, who enacts her revenge for his leaving her for Jesusita, shows up to Jesusita’s house and makes “herself very agreeable” (278). Jesusita has no reason, at this point, to believe that this stranger will harm her in any way, so she allows the stranger to enter her house and make her a cup of coffee. As soon as the coffee was served, and the stranger carries it to the patio, “the stranger begged to be excused and hastened away” (278). However, the stranger did have evil intentions toward Jesusita, and this is the basis for brujería. Ana Castillo notes the slight differences that separate brujas from curanderas: “A bruja is not necessarily a curandera in the traditional sense. She falls under the rubric of a spiritual healer or psychic” (156). As simple as that sounds, that a bruja is just a spiritual healer or psychic, the social impressions of brujería impacted the reputation of brujas and brujería.

During the Spanish Conquest of New Mexico in the seventeenth century, Christian friars tried to convert the indigenous tribes. To the friars, as well as the conquistadores and colonizers, the indigenous peoples’ ways of life were sinful and evil. For example, the friars tried to impress upon these tribes the sacrament of marriage and monogamy. In a 1627 reflection of his life’s work, Fray Tomás Carrasco remembers just how difficult it was to “extirpate this evil [polygamy and promiscuity] from among them” (qtd. in Gutiérrez 73). The difficulties of trying to change the beliefs of the indigenous peoples lay with a misunderstanding of Christian beliefs and a misunderstanding of

indigenous spirituality among the Christians. Gutiérrez cites Carrasco's reflection as he explains the misunderstandings of both cultures:

He recounted how one day while imploring the Indians to live monogamously, a woman confused them by preaching against it. 'A bolt of lightning flashed from a clear untroubled sky, killing that infernal agent of the demon right in the midst of those good Christian women who were resisting her evil teachings.' Carrasco was elated that God had struck 'the witch' dead. The Indians interpreted the event differently. For them, persons struck by the germinative force of lightning immediately became cloud spirits, thus confirming that what the woman said was morally true. (73-74)

Villainizing the ways of the indigenous peoples was a tactic the Franciscans employed in order to convince the indigenous peoples that their ways of life were evil. This one example is just of the views of marriage and monogamy, but the Franciscans would point to certain aspects in the lives of the indigenous that the Christians deemed sinful. For the Franciscan, in the above example, a woman who preached against what the Christians preached was evil and, therefore, a bruja. Because it was thought that her teachings were of the devil, she could be nothing but a witch, and the fact that she was struck by lightning only further convinced the Franciscan. However, the idea that being struck by lightning deems someone evil and a bruja was not the belief of the Indigenous peoples. Because the indigenous peoples did not believe the woman was a bruja, the Franciscan's felt justified identifying the beliefs of the natives as evil.

As time passed, the idea of the bruja as a woman who preached evil against the beliefs of Christianity became socially acceptable. Ana Castillo reflects on the bruja's reputations as "someone to hate to the point of killing if at all possible" (157). So even if a bruja was once a thought to be a spiritual healer, women who spoke out against Christianity became the definition of a bruja who spreads the word of the devil. In Jesusita's case, Eugenio's estranged wife added "a potent drug" to Jesusita's coffee in order to ensure the demise of her sanity. The evil act was directed at Jesusita because she was the reason Eugenio left his first wife, "Not long after that [Jesusita's divorce] a wealthy stockman and merchant discovered her [Jesusita], rid himself of his own wife, and married the red-headed girl. . ." (278). Although Jesusita was bewitched, the punishment for leaving his wife fell upon Eugenio. He forthwith lost all his money in order to find a cure for his ailing wife. Jesusita had left her first husband because he was poor and their humble life did not satisfy her. She then married Eugenio who was a rich merchant, but he had wronged his first wife by abandoning her for Jesusita. As revenge, Jesusita was bewitched and Eugenio lost all his money. In a sense, the bewitching not only served as revenge, but it also humbled Jesusita and Eugenio because after Jesusita was cured, they "pursued the lowly ways of their neighbors, and she spent her days doing good" (280). Jesusita was cured at the hands of curanderas and, therefore, she adopted their ways of healing and healed those in need for the rest of her life. It is with Jesusita's healing that we understand the division of brujas and curanderas.

Jesusita went to live with Juan and Josefeta, curanderas (or Arbolarios) who spent their lives healing victims of witchcraft (279). For two months, Juan and Josefeta "mixed the heart of a chili pod with sal de Zuni and burned it and then dissolved the ashes there

in water and gave it to her [Jesusita] to drink” (279). The act of preparing medicinal or healing remedies for certain ailments is key to curanderisma. A curandera “is a specialized healer, learned in the knowledge of specifically healing the body” (Castillo 156). Instead of using her healing knowledge to promote evil or to cast spells on people, a curandera spends her life healing sicknesses and illnesses that plague the people who live in the villages or towns. As in Jesusita’s case, she was drugged by a bruja and had to go to a curandera to be cured. A curandera’s healing also includes undoing the evil done by brujas or fantasmas (ghosts).

From her experience, Jesusita learned from the Arbolario and his wife and she became a curandera. However, “throughout her life La Curandera never overcame her fear of the brujas and she wore all manners of charms to preserve her from their power until her death” (280). Jesusita still feared the brujas even though she had become a curandera who would heal people specifically “in the name of God.” It is important to note that Jesusita’s curanderisma came “second to her faith in God” because in the Christian faith, Christians are to abide by the Ten Commandments which include, “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God. . .” (NASB, Exodus 20). Although Jesusita put God first before her healing and curanderismo/a heals in the name of God, the Catholic Church has neither accepted nor denied this form of healing. However, the Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly defines what kind of “spirituality” is not accepted by the church and the healing powers of curanderismo may fall under this category:

All practices of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others - even if this were for the sake of restoring their health - are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. *Spiritism* often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another's credulity. (513)

Curanderismo is not clearly rejected by this passage, but it is not clearly welcomed by the church. Although, Jesusita and other curanderos/as heal in the name of God, using God's earth that he created, having any powers over a person (especially evil) is condemned.

Curanderismo/a is immediately caught in between two worlds. When the Spanish came to the New World, they brought with them "a medical system based on Greek and Roman customs combined with Arabic practices learned from the Moors in their 800-year occupation of Spain. These theories and doctrines were shaped gradually by Native American influences and medical beliefs" (Castro 84). As the medical system was shaped by the indigenous peoples' beliefs, a new form of healing was born—curanderismo. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, curanderismo falls under the category of witchcraft, which is condemned by the church. Although curanderas heal in the name of God and may even use saints in their prayers for healing, the church does not recognize them.

The Catholic Church does not condone the acts of brujas because of their work that involves casting spells on innocent people in the name of evil. In a culture of divisions, there exists two sides that are divided by what lies in between. One example of a culture of divisions is a culture divided by good and evil. On one side of the divide, exists Catholicism and on the other side exists brujería, and curanderismo lies in between. Curanderas heal in the name of God and brujas cast spells in the name of evil denouncing God. What exists in between these dichotomies are those who believe in the existence of the evil that brujas enact on others and those who believe in the good that curanderas enact on those who need healing. In “Felicia the Bruja,” Julianita is caught in between becoming a bruja and staying a Christian woman devoid of evil deeds. The storytellers of “Felicia the Bruja” aptly named Julianita “the halfway witch” (247).

“Felicia the Bruja”

Felicia and her husband Roque move to Ojo de La Casa from Taos and they immediately earn the reputations of sinful and evil people, “Roque made himself unpopular by his frequent, mysterious, nocturnal forays, and Felicia forgot to hide her witch doll when her first caller entered her house” (243). After a devout Christian woman, María de los Angeles Gallegos, visits her and sees the witch doll, word spreads throughout Ojo de la Casa that Felicia is a bruja. Everybody becomes fearful of Felicia and what she might do to them if she finds out that the town knows she is a bruja. Everybody in town continued to let their children play with her children for fear that, “If they offended her, what might she not do to them? Brujas had power—evil power; they could even make one die” (243). An example of the evil power brujas possess is when a

woman in the town, Sarita, is approached by a little girl who seems to appear out of nowhere. The girl appears on Sarita's doorstep and, "Sarita had said she was hungry for a piece of nice, tender meat. And what did she behold on the dish the child offered her but a piece of tender meat, a slice of young goat" (244). As Sarita is amazed to have a piece of goat at this particular time of the season, the little girl disappears. Still stunned by the gift, Sarita grows uneasy and does not eat the meat. Instead, she places the meat on the table and gets ready for bed. Her only companion, her little dog, joins her to bed. However, "when Sarita arose from her pallet the next morning, she uttered a loud scream. There near her was her little dog. He was not only dead but in a fearful state of decay. The meat was gone from the dish" (244). It was clear that Felicia the bruja had sent the little girl with the bewitched meat.

The people in Ojo de La Casa grew even more distrusting as incidents like Sarita's became more prevalent. It angered Felicia that the people were turning against her and she grew more and more evil with each passing year, "Always there was a cactus thorn thrust somewhere in the body of her witch doll, which always brought pain to someone" (245). Felicia did have one trusting friend, however, and that friend was Julianita. Julianita visits Felicia frequently and "because of her temper and selfishness, Julianita turned many of her neighbors and even members of her family against her. She wanted to learn the ways of the witches" so that she could cast spells on those she felt had wronged her (245). Felicia takes Julianita under her wing and teaches her how to mix herbs together to cast spells and she shows her how to make a witch doll liker her own. One night, for her last lesson, Felicia tells Julianita that she will teach her how to fly "in the night like the wind" (245). As the women stand at Felicia's door, Felicia says, "Now

raise your arms up as I do and rush out calling, I go without God and without the Holy Virgin” (245). As Felicia takes off from the door, Julianita is left behind because she cannot bring herself to say that she goes “without” God and the Holy Virgin. Instead, Julianita says, “I go with God and with the Holy Virgin” (245). With those words, Julianita lands face down in the ground and when she realizes what has happened, she becomes frightened and jumps up and runs back to her house in Las Placitas. She stays away from Felicia for a time, but her curiosity gets the better of her and she returns back.

At this time, the people of Ojo de La Casa were very distrusting of Felicia and avoided her at all costs. When Felicia needs help picking her crop of chile, there is nobody who will help her. She goes into town and bargains for labor, in turn, “three Indians returned to Ojo de La Casa with her” (246). When all her chile is picked and her ristras are made, she decides not to pay the Indians for their labor as she had promised and, “The Indians, furious at her deception, acted rather than quarreled with her. They put a curse on her. For the rest of her days she would suffer” (246). Because she had tried to pay for the labor in peas rather than chile as she had promised, her curse was to feel the sensation of peas being poured into her stomach for the rest of her life.

As Felicia is slowly suffering from her curse, Julianita is dealing with her own problems from the people in Las Placitas. Because of her association with a bruja, Julianita’s gifts of food were being thrown away. Of course this angers Julianita, so she begins to make bewitched wine and “many who drank of it fell ill; for they had not the power of mind to refuse the clear, purple liquid she sent them” (246). As soon as she is feeling powerful, her daughter Petra falls in love with a rich, landowner’s nephew. When

Miguel, the landowner, finds out about Petra's love, he sends his nephew away because he does not want him marrying into a family of brujas. When Julianita finds out about the nephew leaving town, she decides to take matters into her own hands. Julianita cooks some posole to send to Miguel as a gift and, "what she mixed into it will never be known" (246). Instead of her taking it to him, because he might not accept it if he knew it was from her, she asks one of her few acquaintances, Teresa, to take the gift over. As Teresa leaves Julianita's house, she decides that if the posole is good enough for Miguel, then it is good enough for Julianita, "somehow she had an uneasy feeling about the gift" (246). She takes the posole to her house and mixes it with her own posole and returns back to Julianita's house. Teresa tells Julianita that Miguel accepted the gift and wanted to send her some of his own posole. Julianita, happy that she had gotten revenge on Miguel, ate the posole and "nothing could save her. She died by inches for over three years, the final inch succumbing on San Antonio Day, 1939" (247). Her family filled her casket with every rosary, crucifix, and image of Santo Niño they could find so as to keep her body from being eaten away by brujas. "And thus the halfway witch of Las Placitas passed away" (247).

Julianita is caught between becoming a witch like Felicia and staying true to her Christian roots. She is in between what Homi Bhabha describes as the 'world' and the 'home'. Because she is so overtaken with her own selfishness and bad temper, her friends and family begin to distance themselves from her. What she once knew as her home is no longer, so she is left with confiding in a bruja and partaking in a world she does not know. Once she has crossed over to the side of the bruja; the world, she can never return to her home as the same person. She will forever be changed.

Her transition into becoming a bruja is not necessarily a smooth one and, at times, it is comical. What Bhabha calls the ‘unhomely moment,’ the moment in which a person realizes his/her displacement between the world and the home, comes to Julianita the night she partakes in her last lesson from Felicia. As Felicia instructs Julianita to open her arms and denounce God and the Holy Virgin, Felicia takes off flying into the night. Julianita is not so sure of saying “I go without God and without the Holy Virgin” (245). Instead, she says that she goes with God and with the Holy Virgin. In turn, she falls flat on her face. Although a very comical moment for the storyteller and the listener, it is a very awakening moment for Julianita, for she is now caught between becoming a bruja and staying true to her Christian beliefs. Her realization of her displacement is harsh and literally smacks her in the face, but she only stays away from Felicia the bruja for a short time. Julianita was pulled toward the ways of the bruja because of her selfishness, temper, and her desire to cause harm to those who had turned against her. With those feelings still intact, she returns to Felicia to learn more about becoming a bruja. Julianita, at this point cannot turn back to her life before being introduced to Felicia. She can only continue on the path to becoming a bruja, but she cannot fully commit to that either because of her Christian beliefs. In turn, she resides in between these two divisions, never settling on either side. Perhaps if she had used her knowledge of herbs to do good things, she would have taken the path to become a curandera instead.

Jesusita’s and Julianita’s stories are very similar in that they both experience an unhomely moment, in which they cannot turn around and go back to the ‘home’ they once knew. Jesusita, on the one hand is displaced physically from her home and displaced again when she is bewitched. Julianita is displaced when she realizes that she cannot

commit to denouncing God in order to become a bruja. The two ways the women resolve their displacements illustrate how their actions support an ideology. For the dominant ideology, the path of the curandera is the acceptable and rewarded path for negotiating these two cultures, whereas the path of the bruja is unacceptable considered evil in comparison to the curandera. Jesusita takes her bewitching experience and becomes a curandera, healing those who fall under the same spell as she had. She continues to heal in the name of God, as curanderas do, vowing to always put God first before anything else. Julianita, however, is so filled with evil, that she cannot come out of her unhomely moment and do good for others. She is still so angry with those who turned their backs on her, so she continues to cast spells on others. She does not denounce God, nor does she take to flying like other brujas, instead she sticks to bewitching food and wine. Her spells are also not as powerful as Felicia's because she cannot denounce God; therefore, her spells only make people sick instead of killing them.

The differences between curanderas and brujas can be as simple to understand as the differences between good and evil, but they can also be as complex to understand as the products of colonization and the villainizing of an indigenous culture by a more forceful Catholic 'other' culture. Those who would not convert to Catholicism and believe in the Christian God were ostracized and called witches. The witches, then, became the evil that the Christians were calling them by casting spells on them. Curanderas were a product of the two worlds colliding and forming a healing culture that also believed in the Christian God.

CHAPTER 2: CURANDERISMO, BRUJERÍA, AND CATHOLICISM
IN RUDOLFO ANAYA'S *BLESS ME, ULTIMA*

In the previous chapter, we saw the bruja and curandera as exhibiting two paths—two ways of life. In the folklore, the bruja is used to illustrate a path of life which is unacceptable and evil, while curandera is used to illustrate a path which is in line with God by way of healing. This chapter focuses on Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* and a possibility of a middle way; or bridge. Instead of viewing the bruja as evil and the curandera as good, Anaya presents the two dichotomies in terms of the bruja as evil, the Catholic Church as good, and curanderismo as a bridge between the two sides.

Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* is a piece of contemporary Chicano literature that captures the effects of colonization, the clashing of two worlds, and the essence of New Mexican culture. Antonio, the protagonist, searches for his spirituality and, in the process; he has to encounter that which has been "othered" by the two sides of his family—a devout Catholic belief versus a somewhat pagan belief which is associated with an indigenous spirituality. Ultima, the curandera, serves as his spiritual guides and helps bridge the gap between the two opposing sides while also representing one side of the division; an indigenous spirituality. Ultima does not only serve as one side of the division, but also as the bridge that brings both sides together. Ultima also represents one side of a division that separates brujas and curanderas. Anaya gives us multiple binary

oppositions, but he gives us the character of Ultima in order to show a harmonious connection between all the characters.

Describing New Mexican culture, Rudolfo Anaya states, ““We are split by ethnic boundaries, we are a border people, half in love with Mexico and half suspicious, half in love with the United States and half wondering if we belong”” (xvi). The people of New Mexico are a product of colonization and, as a result, a culture divided. Anaya has long been a writer reflecting the New Mexican culture in his novels and short stories. He is an advocate for his heritage because, as he urges, ““We must tell who we are and define ourselves as a people, define our humanity otherwise, someone else will do it and get it all wrong”” (xvii). In his 1972 novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya defines who New Mexicans are through the eyes of six year old Antonio Márez, who is trying to define who he is as he is caught in between many divisions.

Antonio Márez is only six years old when he realizes his life is made up of a series of dichotomies. His mother and father are of two different backgrounds. His father, Gabriel, ““had been a vaquero all his life, a calling as ancient as the coming of the Spaniard to Nuevo Méjico”” (Anaya 2). His mother, María, ““was not a woman of the llano, she was the daughter of a farmer”” (Anaya 2). Within the first two pages, we start to see how Antonio’s life is divided. The first division is between his mother and father. María is from a family of farmers, the Lunas meaning moon in English, who work and own the land and his father is a vaquero, a Márez meaning sons of sea, who roam the land and are inherently restless. Through a series of dream sequences, Anaya shows us Antonio’s internal struggle. His dreams become the window through which the reader sees his thoughts, fears, and internal struggles. In one sequence, Antonio dreams of a

birth (his birth essentially) and the expectations that are put upon him by his parents' dueling sides. As the baby is born, the farmers, the Lunas (María's side), predict the baby's future, "This one will be a Luna, the old man said, he will be a farmer and keep our customs and traditions. Perhaps God will bless our family and make the baby a priest" (5). Just as the Lunas make their prophecy, the vaqueros (Gabriel's side) predict that the baby will grow to be a vaquero because he is of his father's blood: "He is a Márez, the vaqueros shouted. His forefathers were conquistadores, men as restless as the seas they sailed and as free as the land they conquered. He is his father's blood!" (6). Antonio struggles with which side to follow. Although he wants to stay true to both his mother's and father's sides, he struggles with how to do that. His mother would like him to become a priest and his father would like him to roam the land freely and not be confined by any rules or laws.

Antonio is pulled in two different directions and his "fears arise from being torn by the conflicting pull between the inner and outer circles, and by the fact that his family inhabits an in-between space from which it is expected that he will choose one of two directions" (Novoa 181). At this point, it seems as though Antonio only has one of two choices: he either follows in the ways of the Lunas, who are associated with the moon and land and, in turn, associated with femininity, or he follows in the ways of the Márez, who are associated with the sea, freedom, and masculinity. As Juan Bruce-Novoa outlines Alfonso Ortiz's explanation of the three concentric environments of the Tewa people of San Juan Pueblo, he posits that Antonio's predicament parallels the three circles. The Lunas are farmers, religious, and deeply tied to the land and thus fall in line with the women's inner space which "consists of the village, the farmlands, and other

lowlands near the village.’ This inner space, called the navel of the earth mother is subsectioned into the four directions” (181). The Márez are unsettled and driven to roam the land thus they are connected to the outermost circle which is the “clear cut domain of men. . . the destination of purely male religious pilgrimages” (181). His mother’s and father’s two completely different backgrounds can be compared to the inner and outer circles of the Tewa people, and although Antonio is only six at the beginning of the novel, the pressure of a life path is so heavy that it infiltrates every part of his life.

Antonio’s parents’ differences do not end at their last names, they also differ in their religious views. As a Luna, María is a devout Catholic, but Gabriel does not identify himself as a part of any religion:

My father was not a strong believer in religion. When he was drunk he called priests ‘women,’ and made fun of the long skirts they wore. . .my father’s father had taken a priest from the church and beaten him on the street for preaching against something my grandfather Márez had done. . .my mother said the Márez clan was full of freethinkers, which was blasphemy to her, but my father only laughed. (29)

Gabriel and María argue on Sunday mornings because Gabriel works half days on Saturdays and then spends the rest of the day drinking with his friends. On Sunday mornings, Gabriel is too tired from the night before to get up for church, and does not care to go. María, on the other hand, never missed Sunday mass and wants her son to follow in her faithful ways instead of Gabriel’s sinful ways. María’s religious history stretches back to the time of colonization when the Spanish settled in New Mexico: “The colony had first settled there [El Puerto] under a land grant from the Mexican

government, and the man who led the colonization was a priest, and he was a Luna. That is why my [Antonio] mother dreamed of me becoming a priest, because there had not been a Luna priest in the family for many years” (29). As a child of only six years old, Antonio is in between his mother’s and father’s division over what his future will be as well as what his family history represents. Gabriel and María represent an opposition of belief systems that has existed in New Mexico since colonization, “A hybrid religion is a reality for Mexicans and Mexican Americans, who routinely incorporate aspects of belief systems inherited from Native American ancestors with the Catholicism imposed by the Spanish conquerors” (Santangelo 117). Gabriel’s and María’s viewpoints will not converge in order for them to agree with one another, but a hybrid religion forms that combines the two spiritualities. As María represents devout Catholicism that was brought to New Mexico by the Spanish, Gabriel represents a pagan spirituality although he is “descended from conquistadors and would more logically be associated with Spanish Catholicism” (Santangelo 117). Gabriel sees eye to eye with Ultima’s spirituality rather than Catholicism. In one of Antonio’s many dream sequences, Gabriel and María argue their opposing views on religion and conflicting takes on Antonio’s fate. In response to María’s view about holy water running through the veins of the baptized, which is in line with the Catholic Church, Gabriel says: “*Lies, lies, my father laughed, through your body runs the salt water of the oceans. It is that water which makes you a Márez and not Luna. It is the water that binds you to the pagan god of Cico, the golden carp!*” (Anaya 120). Antonio literally represents the divisions of his parent’s beliefs converging to create a hybrid belief in which he discovers a new religion can be made; one that merges the belief of God and the golden carp.

When Ultima, a curandera and beloved friend of both María and Gabriel, comes to live with them, Antonio's life seems to open into a third option one that is not limited to following his mother's or father's sides. With their first meeting, Antonio's world changes: "She took my hand, and I felt the power of a whirlwind sweep around me. Her eyes swept the surrounding hills and through them I saw for the first time the wild beauty of our hills and the magic of the green river. . . The four directions of the llano met in me, and the sun shone on my soul" (Anaya 12). His life is no longer divided into a dichotomy of Luna and Márez, but now there is something in between those two sides, what Homi Bhabha aptly defines as an interstitial space, which is a "passage between fixed identifications" (4). A new world opens up to Antonio when he meets Ultima, and he can never return to his life before he met her. As *Bless Me, Ultima* is a coming-of-age novel, Ultima guides Antonio through his confusion of religion and spirituality. Ultima serves as Antonio's teacher and a friend to his mother and father. María, a devout Catholic, "holds Ultima, a curandera, in the highest regard and actually asks for her help in the matter of the on Antonio's uncle" (Santangelo 117). Ultima is a healer of illnesses as well as a guide for Antonio in navigating his destiny. Without Ultima, there is no bridge to bring together Gabriel's and María's conflicting views. Also, without Ultima, there is no formation of the hybrid religion that mixes Catholicism with indigenous spirituality which represents the religious views of New Mexicans post colonization.

Curanderismo and Colonization

Ultima is a curandera who comes to live with Antonio and his family. Gabriel and María both welcome Ultima into their home because she helped them out at the

beginning of their marriage María explains to Gabriel: “When I married you and went to the llano to live with you and raise your family, I could not have survived without La Grande’s help” (3). Ultima also helped birth María’s children, so she feels a special connection with her. As is the custom of the New Mexican culture, it is not right to allow the old to live in loneliness, “It was the custom to provide for the old and the sick. There was always room in the safety and warmth of la familia for one more person, be that person stranger or friend” (4). However, Ultima is not just an elderly woman, she is also a curandera and the work of the curandera is continuously being compared to and mistaken for brujería. Antonio and María both worry about the effect Ultima on would have on their children because as Antonio points out:

Ultima was a curandera, a woman who knew the herbs and remedies of the ancients, a miracle-worker who could heal the sick. And I had heard that Ultima could lift the curses laid by brujas, that she could exorcise the evil the witches planted in people to make them sick. And because a curandera had this power she was misunderstood and often suspected of practicing witchcraft herself. (4)

Although curanderas are mistakenly identified as brujas, the love and respect María and Gabriel have for Ultima surpasses any doubts. Many times, when the family is walking into town, people would whisper that Ultima is a bruja or they would whisper that she is a woman who has never sinned. In either case, the perception of Ultima was mixed between good and evil, but to Antonio Ultima was always good.

Anaya emphasizes how Ultima blurs the lines between a bruja and a curandera. In New Mexican brujería stories, a bruja will “often take the form of an owl,” typically

called a tecolote (Castro 26). When Ultima moves to Guadalupe, her owl goes with her, “And with Ultima came the owl. I heard it that night for the first time in the juniper tree outside of Ultima’s window. I knew it was her owl because the other owls of the llano did not come that near the house” (13). Antonio does hear the sounds of the owl, but is not frightened because “its soft hooting was like a song, and as it grew rhythmic it calmed the moonlit hills and lulled us to sleep” (13). In common brujería stories, “the hoot of an owl is an evil omen, so one must be careful to stay away from owls,” but Antonio feels that Ultima’s owl is different from the owls that are associated with brujas (Castro 26). Ultima is considered good, not evil because she is a curandera which is on the opposite side of the spectrum as a bruja. Under the classified dichotomies of good and evil lie the bruja and the curandera. The bruja is evil, she casts spells, and is in opposition with God; while the curandera is a healer, she undoes the spells cast by the bruja, and she represents a relationship with God. Ultima has a strong relationship with the land and she often spends time picking herbs that will heal the sick, “Ultima and I [Antonio] walked in the hills of the llano, gathering wild herbs and roots for her medicines” (39). Ultima focuses on choosing plants that cure burns, colds, coughs, etc. She believes that “even the plants have a spirit” and before she picks a plant, she asks for a blessing. She does not use these plants to do evil deeds or to cast spells on others, but to heal the sick. In one instance, Ultima is called to go to El Puerto to heal María’s brother Lucas after he falls ill because he witnesses witches dancing in the forest:

‘Lucas saw that the fireballs began to acquire a form. Three women dressed in black appeared. They made a fire in the center of the clearing. One produced a pot and another an old rooster. They beheaded the rooster

and poured its blood into the pot. Then they began to cook it, throwing in many other things while they danced and chanted their incantations.’ (87)

As Lucas sees these women beginning an evil ritual of *brujería*, he decides to confront them and, as he does, he sees that they are the Trementina sisters, the well known *brujas* from Guadalupe. The sisters attack him and he shields himself with a cross fashioned by two branches tied together. The sisters flee the spot of their evil dancing, but a week later Lucas becomes violently ill. María’s other brother Pedro comes to Guadalupe to ask for Ultima’s help after medical help and religious help both fail. Lucas was taken to a doctor in Las Vegas, but it did not help and Lucas’ health was still deteriorating. The priest of El Puerto was asked to help, but “‘he does not want to pit his power against those *brujas*! He washes his hands of the whole matter’” (84). Lucas’ last hope is Ultima’s help. Ultima agrees to go with Pedro to El Puerto, but asks that Antonio go with her. She whispers to Antonio “‘Be ready Juan—’”, and Antonio is confused by this because Juan is his middle name (85). However, it is believed that “‘only men named Juan or Juan Bautista or women named Juana have the ability to catch or overpower a witch. Conversely the power of a witch cannot be exerted over a person named Juan or Juana’” (Castro 26). According to this belief, Antonio will be able to help Ultima cure Lucas because Antonio cannot be a victim of *brujería*. The healing powers of Ultima combined with Antonio being “‘a Juan’” and his “‘strong Luna blood,’” combine to heal Lucas (89).

When Ultima and Antonio go to heal Lucas, their good powers are pitted against the evil powers of the *brujas*. Antonio has the ability to straddle the two worlds because he is the product of two worlds his parents represent merging. In his journey to discover his spirituality, he is able to go back and forth from each side of the division and also be

immune to curses by the brujas. Ultima also straddles the two worlds because brujería, in its original sense, is a stand in for the indigenous beliefs that were “othered” and made evil by the Spanish colonizers, and Catholicism is the colonizer’s religion that was impressed upon the indigenous peoples. What emerged was curanderismo. Ultima confronts Tenorio Trementina and tells him that his daughters are witches and they must suffer the consequences for tampering with a man’s life and fate. As Ultima works to heal Lucas, which is the work of a curandera, she also does something that is reminiscent of what brujas do, she fashions three dolls out of clay:

For a long time she sat and molded the clay. When she was through I saw that she had molded three dolls. They were lifelike, but I did not recognize the likeness of the clay dolls as anyone I knew. . . . When she was done she stood the three dolls around the light of the flickering candle, and I saw three women. . . . She lifted the three dolls and held them to my sick uncle’s mouth, and when he breathed on them they seemed to squirm in her hands. . . . Then she took three pins, and after dipping them into the new remedy on the stove, she stuck a pin into each doll. (101)

The dolls resemble three women and the text suggests that the three dolls represent the Trementina sisters—the brujas that bewitched Lucas. A curandera’s work is to heal and not to cast spells on others. By making the dolls, Ultima is blurring the lines between a bruja and curandera once again. If Ultima intends to hurt the brujas by making the dolls, then that is not the work of a curandera. A curandera does not do work with the intention to harm. It is not for the curandera to decide one’s fate or take revenge upon someone. Before Ultima holds the dolls to Lucas’ mouth, she sings, “You have done evil,/But

good is stronger than evil,/And what you sought to do will undo you. . .” (101). Shortly after Ultima constructs the dolls and sticks pins in them, Antonio sees them again on a shelf in Ultima’s room, “The dolls were made of clay and shellacked with candle wax. They were clothed, and lifelike in appearance. . . I [Antonio] looked closely at one doll that sagged and bent over. The clay face seemed to be twisted with pain (123). Ultima will not allow Antonio to touch the dolls and soon he again forgets about them. However, one of the brujas that bewitched Lucas suddenly dies. Tenorio Trementina blames Ultima for his daughter’s death. Ultima has ventured into a new world in which her practices of curanderismo are mixed with practices of brujería. Although many of the townspeople of Guadalupe thought of her as a bruja when she first arrived, now that a woman (even though she is thought to be a bruja) has died, Ultima is blamed for acts of brujería.

Anaya again destabilizes and complicates the binaries of bad and good by pairing together María and Gabriel. Good and bad, as binary oppositions, are quite simple in the realm of Anaya’s story; however, dividing the characters between binaries complicates the simplistic ideology because the characters blur the lines of the binary oppositions. While we do know that María and Gabriel are vastly different and it can be perceived that if Antonio follows his mother’s dream for him to become a priest, then that means Antonio’s destiny is to be good and do good for others in a Catholic sense. On the other hand, if he follows his father’s dream for him to roam freely and not settle, then that means that he will be on the other side of the division and his destiny will not be spiritually guided.

We can also look at Ultima through a binary oppositions lens and divide curanderas and brujas. Ultima also blurs the lines between the binaries because she is a

curandera, and, as a curandera, Anaya portrays her as the bridge between the evil side (brujería) and the good side (Catholicism). We are told by Antonio that Ultima is a curandera so she is automatically cast apart from the brujas given what we know about curanderas and brujas. Given what we know about Antonio's family we trust that his family would not house a bruja. Also, we trust that Antonio's family is Catholic (or at least his mother is a stern Catholic); therefore, we see the interstitial space that Ultima inhabits. On the evil side of the division resides, the brujas of Guadalupe who are the Trementina sisters and their father, Tenorio, who owns a bar in town. On the good side resides the Catholic faith, saints, and even María. María is seen as blurring the lines of the division because of her belief in Ultima's healing, but also her strict Catholic beliefs. Ultima is the bridge between good and evil and a middle path which Anaya illustrates for us so as to not simplify the divisions of the binaries.

Antonio especially blurs the lines between good and evil because he is torn between his mother's and father's dreams for him. He begins to question his faith when his friend Samuel introduces him to the story of the golden carp, a pagan god who lives in the river, and he begins to question the good and evil in the world. Ultima takes Antonio under her wing and teaches him the ways of curanderismo. In turn, they build a relationship in which he feels comfortable enough to ask her about all of his doubts and concerns about his destiny.

In the midst of Antonio's first year of school, the death of war veteran, Lupito, and his questioning about the God he was raised to believe in, Antonio is introduced to a new spiritual reality. Samuel, Antonio's friend, takes Antonio fishing at the River of the

Carp and each shares their story about the mythology behind the river, the carp in the river, and the bad luck that surrounds anybody who fishes for the carp:

The river was full of big, brown carp. It was called the River of the Carp. Everybody knew it was bad luck to fish for the big carp that the summer floods washed downstream. After every flood, when the swirling angry waters of the river subsided, the big fish could be seen fighting their way back upstream. . . some of the town kids, not knowing it was bad luck to catch the carp, would scoop them out of the low waters and toss the fish upon the sand bars. (79)

Every year the same ritual would take place. Some people would even take the fish that were left by the receding flood waters and sell them in town. Antonio knows that it is ok to fish in the river but to fish for the carp is bad luck. Samuel tells Antonio about a “strange people” who were sent to the valley “by their gods” (79). These people had wandered the earth and were about to lose “faith in their gods, so they were finally rewarded” (79). The gods gave them their own valley filled with animals, fertile land, and water. “The *people*,” as Samuel says, were instructed that they could have anything on the land, but “there was only one thing that was withheld from them, and that was the fish called the carp. This fish made his home in the waters of the river, and he was sacred to the gods” (80). The people were happy for a long time without needing to eat the carp, but then a drought came upon the land for forty days and forty nights, and the people were beginning to go hungry, so they ate the carp. The gods became angry with the people and were going to kill them, but one god took mercy upon them and persuaded the other gods to be merciful as well: “Instead, they turned the people into carp and made

them live forever in the waters of the river” (80). The one god who took mercy upon the people asked the other gods if he could be turned into a carp as well and, “The gods agreed. But because he was a god they made him very big and colored him the color of gold” (81). At the idea of a new god—multiple gods, Antonio begins to question the God he believes in and whom his mother is devoutly loyal to.

Indigenous beliefs coalesce with Christian mythology to form the story of the golden carp. This story is similar to the bible story of God’s punishment of the Israelites. In Ezekiel 36: 1-38, God is angry with the Israelites because they have turned away from him; therefore, God destroys their land, “Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols” (NASB Ezekiel 36:18). God later rebuilds the city and offers this warning to the Israelites: “Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. ‘I am not doing this for your sake,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!’” (36: 31-32). With this warning, God rebuilds the city and restores all that was ruined, but the Israelites must remember their past sins and never repeat them. Also, the story of the golden carp is similar to the creation story in the Book of Genesis where Noah and his family are spared while the Earth that was corrupt and violent is destroyed by a flood. As the gods in Samuel’s story of the golden carp are merciful enough to spare the lives of the people, even though they went against the rules the gods set forward, Antonio’s Christian God is also merciful when his people sin. What Antonio has believed in his whole life and what his mother has been pushing upon him is now being put up against an

indigenous spirituality, “It made me shiver, not because it was cold but because the roots of everything I had ever believed in seemed shaken. If the golden carp was a god, who was the man on the cross? The Virgin? Was my mother praying to the wrong god?” (81). Antonio is, at this point, what Homi Bhabha calls unhomed. What Antonio once thought was his home has now converged with the world. Antonio’s eyes have opened to a new world, one that is inhabited by the indigenous people. As Antonio’s culture may be seen as the oppressor, Antonio is the one who is oppressed by the Catholic beliefs enforced upon him.

What Antonio knows as his home, a strict belief in the Catholic faith, is confronted with this new spirituality that does not worship the same God as he does. In his displacement, Antonio questions his God which is wrong according to the Catholic Church. Because “Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one,” then Antonio should not question God (Catholic Church 1:1: 2: 1). Since he does question whether his God is the right one to worship, he is guilty of sin, “Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty” (St. John of the Cross). Antonio is caught in between two beliefs. His belief in the Christian God is being questioned because a different world has opened for him. On one side of the division is Antonio’s belief in Christianity and on the other side is an indigenous faith he has just realized exists. The bridge that connects this division is Ultima.

Antonio is in an unhomely state because he is displaced from his home and forced into the realization of a world beyond his home: “‘Beyond’ signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary—the very act of going *beyond*—are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the ‘present’ which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced” (Bhabha 4). There is a fear that exists when venturing beyond the division or boundary. Antonio has ventured past the comfort of his knowledge of home and into the unhomely state, but he has yet to move beyond that middle state of displacement. Once Antonio is introduced to the world outside of his home, he can never return to his home the way it was previous to his knowledge of the world. For example, when Ultima is called to cure Lucas of *embruja*, she asks if they went to see a priest first. The priest blesses the house but does not acknowledge that any evil has taken place. By dismissing the idea of evil, the priest (along with the Catholic Church) takes away the power that evil has over a person. When one believes in something, whether it be God, healing, evil, or the devil, he/she gives it power, gives it meaning in the world and in their lives.

However, the evil that has taken over Lucas does not go away and his brother, Pedro, is forced to look for an alternative cure. Because the priest does not take any action, Antonio again questions his faith and his God, “Why doesn’t the priest fight against the evil of the *brujas*. He has the power of God, the Virgin, and all the saints of the Holy Mother Church behind him” (85). At one point, Antonio asks his dad if there is evil in the world and Gabriel answers in terms of how he sees evil in the world: “I think most of the things we call evil are not evil at all; it is just that we don’t understand those things and so we call them evil. And we fear evil only because we do not understand it”

(248). Gabriel points out to Antonio the fear of the unknown that humans innately have. To “other” something or someone is to not see the similarities that he/she/it has with each one of us. When the Spanish colonizers came to New Mexico, there were already inhabitants of that region. By “othering” them they put a barrier between themselves and the indigenous peoples so that they would not feel like they had to understand or relate to the “other.” The colonizers separated their culture from the indigenous culture by labeling the indigenous beliefs as evil or those who believed in it as evil because they did not want to convert to Catholicism. In Antonio’s eyes, the Catholic Church has been the know all and end all of all beliefs and he is slowly understanding that by believing in this one way of life, he is “othering” those who do not believe. With Gabriel’s theory that evil is only a label that is placed on the unknown and Ultima’s belief that the land that God has given has a spirit, Antonio’s beliefs take on a new shape. Ultima acts as a bridge between the divisions so that Antonio can make sense of the world and his place in it.

While Ultima blurs the lines between *brujería* and *curanderismo*, she serves as a spiritual guide for Antonio. Ultima prays with Antonio’s family and goes to church with them regularly and on one of their walks to church, Antonio asks Ultima how a man can take communion if he is a sinner and Ultima explains to him “you must never judge who God forgives and who He doesn’t” (33). As the story progresses, Antonio’s bond with Ultima deepens and “in her company [he] found a great deal of solace and peace. This was more that [he] had been able to find at church or with the kids at school” (223). With Ultima, Antonio’s eyes are opened to a spirituality that combines Catholic belief with a respect and honor for the land. Although Ultima does believe in God and heals in the name of God, she also uses the Earth that God has made to heal those who are sick. Her

healing and belief in the land is not accepted by the Catholic Church because it is seen as a worshipping of other gods or an adoration of something other than God, but she still believes in God.

CHAPTER 3: FROM BRUJA TO SAINT: TERESA URREA'S POLITICAL JOURNEY

Before the Mexican Revolution of 1910, tensions continued to build between the church and state. The bruja and curandera figures were seen as a hindrance to modernization as Mexico tried to modernize itself in technology, science, and religion. The curandera represents an indigenous spirituality that was not evolving with the rest of the country. The Catholic Church was also viewed as archaic, and the Mexican government began to impose laws on the church in order to control its practices. As the modernization of Mexico progressed from the end of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th century, the indigenous peoples were forced from their lands and their beliefs villainized because they did not fall in line with the political views of the Mexican dictatorship.

This chapter focuses on the political back lash against Teresa Urrea, a curandera in Mexico around the time of the restructuring of the government after its annexation by the United States. Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Hummingbird's Daughter* tells the story of Teresa Urrea's life through the lens of historical fiction. By focusing on her initiation and "calling" of a sort into the practice of curanderismo, Urrea describes how Teresa became known as La Niña de Cabora and La Santa de Cabora and how a curandera could gain so much recognition that she is seen as a threat to the Mexican government. As the boundary lines between the United States and Mexico were defined, the divisions between the

indigenous peoples and Mexicans were defined as well. The divisions between the indigenous and the Mexicans include a curandera, Teresa Urrea, who stood up for the indigenous who were moved from their land by the government. To the Mexican government, she “represents a major impediment toward modernization, the stubborn refusal of indigenous communities to concede their territories” (Nava 500). Thus, the government ostracized her from society and from her homeland by exiling her and her father to Nogales, Arizona. Much like the indigenous peoples who would not convert to Catholicism at the time of colonization by the Spanish, Teresa did not conform to the views of Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship. She is seen as a resistor, a revolutionary, a bruja, and a threat to a country.

Teresa is the product of two worlds and cultures colliding; her father a rich Mexican land owner and her mother an indigenous, “either Tehueco (Holden), or more probable, Yaqui (Larralde)” servant (Nava 501). As a curandera, she is not recognized by the Catholic Church, although she is a believer and follower of God, because she is a resistor to the church’s traditions. Because of her resistance to two patriarchal societal structures, today she “remains a symbol of resistance to oppression for contemporary Chicanos. She is thereby a Chicana counterpart to La Virgen de Guadalupe, a symbol of warmth, succor, and hope for the poor, destitute, and exploited” (Mirandé/Enríquez 86). The legend of a curandera who is ostracized from her native country, deemed evil, and called a revolutionary, serves as a feminist hero in Chicana history. The curandera serves as a representation of the result of an indigenous culture that was colonized by Spanish Catholics. The Spanish colonizers brought Catholicism with them as they conquered the new world, and they villainized and “othered” the indigenous peoples that already

inhabited the region. If the indigenous did not convert, they were deemed brujas and ostracized by society. Brujas inherit the label of evil and inhabit one side of a culture of divisions. On the other side is the Catholic Church. The curandera lies in between the divisions and acts as a bridge that connects the two sides. From the convergence of the Catholic Church with the indigenous spirituality emerges curanderismo. Teresa is the bridge that connects each side of the culture of divisions. She becomes powerful because she inspires the indigenous peoples to take back their land from the government; therefore, she is feared by the Mexican government because of her resistance to their politics.

The Mexican government, along with the church, deemed her a bruja and her healing powers brujería. By reducing her to the status of a bruja, the government tried to take her powers of healing and her power over the indigenous peoples away. In a sense, Teresa was oppressed and re-colonized by the Mexican government and the Catholic Church. She was oppressed physically when displaced by the government, but was also displaced spiritually because “she represents the traditions that modernization is trying to evolve beyond, the ostensible superstitious and primitive world-views of Mexico’s religious past” (Nava 500). She represents a world that Mexico tried to move beyond and leave behind. Toward the end of the 19th century, Mexico modernized itself in terms of technology and medicine in order to compete with its northern neighbor, the United States. In doing so, Mexico gathered all the indigenous peoples, moved them off their land, and buried their culture and spirituality. Bhabha identifies these displacements in relation to literature about slavery and apartheid:

The profound divisions of an enslaved or apartheid society—negrification, denigration, classification, violence, incarceration—are relocated in the midst of the ambivalence of psychic identification—that space where love and hate can be projected or inverted; where the relation of the ‘object’ to identity is always split and doubled. (Bhabha 373)

Bhabha refers to a “deeper historical displacement” (373) when one’s physical home and then cultural home is displaced. One cannot forget about the past, where his/her heritage has come from. To acknowledge or define who a person is today is to acknowledge his/her cultural history. Teresa, who is displaced physically from her home, can continue to carry her spiritual identity. Teresa is unhomed from her country by the Mexican government because she is seen as a resistor to the progression of modernization, and she is also unhomed by the Catholic Church because of her practices of curanderismo. Much like Anzaldúa, Teresa is “between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits” because she has no country due to her expulsion, yet Mexico is her country because she is indigenous to that area (102-103). Although she is unhomed physically from her native country, it is still her homeland and it will always be a part of her. Anzaldúa identifies herself as “cultureless” because as a feminist she challenges male-derived beliefs. Teresa is likewise in opposition with two patriarchal structures. The Catholic Church views her healing as *brujería* and the government views her as a revolutionary. In both instances, she is displaced by both structures.

Mexico: 1880-1910

As noted in *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, the fear of the unknown did not end after the Spanish colonized New Mexico and much of the Southwest. In fact, this fear was used for political means by the Porfirio Diaz regime. Although the Spanish and indigenous cultures were mixing to create a new culture, the Southwest was still separated from the American government which began to set up borders between what is now Mexico and the United States. Around the mid-nineteenth century, American troops occupied Mexico City and “the Mexican government seated in Querétaro was convinced that further struggle against the invader was impossible and peace talks were initiated between the United States and its southern neighbor” (González de la Vara 43). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo initiated the set up of boundaries and stipulated a loss of land for Mexico. With the signing of the treaty, Mexico “accepted the loss of slightly more than half of its territory, in which approximately 115,000 people lived” (González de la Vara 43). The people who ended up on the United States side of the new border divisions were asked to leave their homes and land to move to the Mexican side of the border. There, and stated in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, they were promised a new place to live, their own land, and Mexican citizenship. However, land was not quickly granted to them and thus created a border culture—people displaced from their homes with no place to live.

Paul Vanderwood explains that “all during the second half of the nineteenth century Mexicans weighed doctors, technology, spirituality, priests, money, education, republicanism, individualism, progress. . . [and questioned] the entire trajectory of their country and the balance of their lives between God and government” (59). The

modernization of Mexico took shape in the 1860s under president and “full-blooded Zapotec Indian” Benito Juárez (Vanderwood 59). In the midst of the reform, the views of religion changed also: “Power struggles between priests and civil authorities only amplified the stress in individual minds and caused some to become harshly anticlerical, though still firm Christians” (60). However, the modernization process and reform from the “old” ways of life to the “new” ways of life did not occur everywhere in Mexico due to the vast landscape and rural populations; for the rural populations, the reform took more time. The Catholic priests were losing power over the Mexican people as religion took a back seat to modernization and technological advancement. Also, the Catholic Church lost power because the “civil government’s all-out assault at mid-nineteenth century on the wealth, power, and influence of the official Church” (60). The government then imposed laws on the Catholic Church that inhibited them from practicing their traditions in a standard fashion: “no more processions during Holy Week, nothing resembling a political pronouncement from the pulpit. . . [and] priests even had to ask permission of the authorities to administer last rites to a parishioner dying at home” (61). The Catholic Church and the Mexican government were at war with each other until Porfirio Díaz came into power in 1876.

Díaz felt the need to solve the problems, or at least calm the tensions between the Catholic Church and the government, “hence the government’s effort to negotiate a reconciliation with the highest authorities of the official church” (Vanderwood 146). Rules and limitations of the church’s practices were still enforced, but a pledged agreement to Pope Leo XIII that the Catholics in Mexico who were still loyal to the church allowed Díaz to command power over the church. Díaz continued with the push to

modernize Mexico which started during Benito Juárez's presidency. Once Díaz took control of the church and of the Mexican people, Mexico's image became attractive to foreign investors transforming Mexico into a capitalistic nation.

As the Mexican government pushed for a more modernized country, the indigenous peoples became more and more ostracized because of their beliefs. *The Hummingbird's Daughter* reflects on the political struggles between the indigenous peoples holding onto their land, spirituality, and essentially a way of life that is no longer viewed as appropriate by the Mexican government, and Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship.

Curanderismo and Mothers of God

In the process to modernize Mexico, the government takes control of the indigenous people's lands and especially the lands in the north close to the border. Much like the colonizers did when they came to the new world, the Mexican government displaced the indigenous peoples and moved them to desolate areas. *The Hummingbird's Daughter* captures the life of Teresa Urrea and the lives of the Yaqui and Mayo Indians as they tried to hold on to their homeland and resist being displaced by the Mexican government. The novel begins with the birth of Teresa at the hands of Huila, a curandera. Teresa enters the world already divided between two cultures. Her mother, Cayetana, is of indigenous blood, or what Urrea describes as "the People"⁶; while her father, Tomás, is a rich Mexican landowner who owns the ranch in the Mexican state of Sinaloa on which Cayetana works. She is born with a red triangle on her forehead which Huila knows is a good sign because "red triangles were reserved for the powerful ones" (27). Huila knows that Teresa will grow up to be a curandera, a healer, just like herself because

⁶ In *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, 'People' is capitalized to represent the indigenous peoples of the land.

she was also marked by the red triangle. Teresa enters the world as the product of two cultures and bearing a gift that separates her from others in the community. Her father does not know she exists because his relationship with Cayetana was brief, as are most of his relationships with other women besides his wife. Cayetana abandons Teresa and she never sees her again. Teresa is then raised by her aunt and shown the ways of curanderismo by Huila.

Huila is a curandera and servant to Tomás and his wife Loreto. The People “could not imagine those hands, which could bring babies forth from the womb, which could drive wicked spirits from the insane with an egg and some smoke. . . picked up Urrea plates, washed Urrea shirts, or carried out Urrea wads of soiled paper from the indoors excuse-me closet” (47). Huila is cherished and respected by the People, not recognized or accepted by the Catholic Church, and a servant to the land owners. Tomás does not succumb to the views of the Catholic Church and he does not necessarily share the same beliefs as Huila, but he sees Huila as a confidant of sorts; someone he can talk to about any questions or confusions he has about life. Huila is very honest to Tomás whereas other people around him are intimidated because he owns the ranch and he is the boss.

Huila is very much respected by the People and everyone else on the ranch. She is healer whom people go to for physical as well as spiritual guidance. Every day she witnesses the plight of the People on the ranch and how hard they work on the land that used to be theirs but was taken away. She has a definite compassion for women. She aids them when they are giving birth, she heals them and their sick children, and she shares in their oppressed status in society:

All these women, Huila thought: Mothers of God. These skinny, these dirty and toothless, these pregnant and shoeless. . . These twisted ones tied to their pallets, these barren ones, these married ones, these abandoned ones, these whores, these hungry ones, these thieves, these drunks, these mestizas, these lovers of other women, these Indians, and these littlest ones who faced unknowable tomorrows. Mothers of God. If it was a sin to think so, she would face God and ask Him why. (92)

Huila sees these women as beaten down by the oppression of men and victims of their culture. Although they are oppressed, Huila elevates them all to the status of “Mothers of God.” They are nothing, cast out by their culture and dismissed for being thieves, drunks, unwed mothers, etc. but they are everything because they are Mothers of God. They are strong women for enduring all the hardships in their lives and for accepting their status in a patriarchal society. As they are the Mothers of God, they will be protected and, one day, liberated from their oppressed status in society.

Huila recognizes and acknowledges the oppressed women of her culture and sees the struggles and barriers women in her culture have gone through and endured. Gloria Anzaldúa discusses what it means to be a witness to and sufferer of the oppression of women by men of her culture and men outside of her culture:

The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. For 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people (and Mesoamerica her lot under the Indian patriarchs was not free of

wounding). For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. . .She remained faceless and voiceless, but a light shone through her veil of silence.

(Anzaldúa 45)

Huila is witnessing the societal status of women in her community and Anzaldúa is reflecting upon the 300 years of persecution the “dark-skinned” woman has been a victim. The past and the present collide in *los intersticios*, or the interstitial space as Homi Bhabha refers to, but the past should not be forgotten. Anzaldúa repeats just how long women have been silenced, enslaved, colonized, and there can be no more. Huila as a curandera, and Teresa as her pupil serves as an interstitial passage, or bridge, that links the past to the present by way of curanderismo. To move on from the past suffering, one must cross through the interstitial passage, but also not forget all that happened in the past. Teresa gives hope to the indigenous peoples of the Southwest as they are forced from their land by the Mexican government—and forced to consider what western medicine and curanderismo means in their daily lives in direct connection to the Catholic Church and their indigenous beliefs.

Santa Teresa de Cabora

Teresa is in opposition with the Catholic Church because the church does not recognize curanderismo as a legitimate practice of healing in the name of God. When Teresa is a young girl, she is approached outside of church by the priest and warned about consorting with evil, particularly Huila, the curandera she is training under: “Beware, child, the heathen ways are fraught with danger. Many have thought they

walked with angels and have awakened with devils” (114). However, the practice of curanderismo is rooted in a deep faith in God, “Curanderas have great religious faith and view their ability to heal as a gift given to them by God” (Castro 83). Curanderas commonly heal with prayer in conjunction with plants and herbs. When Huila takes Teresa to learn about the ways of curanderismo, she teaches her the importance of God to their healing, “Everything talks. . . All is light, child. Rocks are made of light. Angels pass through rocks the way your hand passes through water. . . Every rock comes from God, and God is in every rock if you look from Him” (94-95). The basis of curanderismo is the belief that God is everything and that God created everything. Teresa is curious to learn more from Huila and she questions this logic that if God is everything, then everything is God (95). Huila is quick to correct her by saying, “Don’t be a heathen, God is everything. Learn the difference” (95). The work of a curandera is not rooted in polytheistic belief, in which multiple gods exist and everything in nature is represented by a deity, but rather it is rooted in the belief in one God that encompasses everything. From these teachings early in life, Teresa forms her beliefs about God, healing, and prayer. According to Paul Vanderwood, “priests were not needed at all and neither was the Mass they celebrated. The faithful needed no intermediaries but should communicate directly with God through prayer” (187). In one scene in the novel, Teresa goes to the chapel with a visitor to the ranch, Cruz Chávez, who is curious about her healing powers. He questions her motivation for not covering her head when entering “God’s house,” and she responds, “The entire earth is God’s house. This is my house. God comes here to visit me” (384). Teresa believes in God, but not necessarily with the Catholic Church’s

idea of God. She does not submit to the rules of the church because she feels that her connection with God should go directly to Him and not by way of an institution.

*

The Catholic Church becomes a branch, essentially, of the Mexican Republic which leads to much corruption. In the novel, Tomás Urrea represents recognition of the corruption of the church and of the government. He does not attend church, but rather questions religion and those who partake in it calling them “Liars trying to look pious for each other. . . All a big show to somehow fool an absent God into overlooking their sins” (114). He sees religion as a big show which people attend because they feel it will relieve them of their sins. Tomás doesn’t necessarily question the idea of an existence of God, just the idea of religion so he asks a priest ““Don’t you ever just get tired of religion? Isn’t it all just exhausting?”” (115). The priest responds ““no one is more tired of religion than a priest”” (116). Tomás is content with the idea that a priest is even more exhausted with religion than he is. Tomás is a wealthy land owner and is not seen as a threat or a resistor to the Mexican government or to the church for his beliefs and ideas about these social structures because he is not of indigenous decent, nor does he involve himself in political arguments that could be seen as revolutionary ideas.

He is not spreading his ideas about the government in a rebellious manner, but he does share his thoughts with his friend and scholar Lauro Aguirre. Tomás feels like the institution of religion is built on politics instead of a true belief in God: ““Nothing deadlier than a missionary. . . If there is a God, do you really believe he speaks Latin? It was the genius of the Jesuits to handle these people [Yaquis] in such a fashion. And when

the Jesuits were expelled from Mexico, they left behind their religion” (162). Tomás believes that when the Spanish came to the New World, they brought with them their religion, but their main motivation for colonization was to find gold. In Tomás’s discussion with Aguirre about the Spanish colonization of the Río Yaqui, he says, “In the name of the king of Spain, and the power of God Almighty, we have come to bring you the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. Oh, and where’s the gold?” (161). Tomás believes that the Spanish came to the New World in search of riches and impressed their God upon the indigenous peoples under the guise of spreading the word of God. Therefore, Tomás is skeptical of anything having to do with the Catholic Church. Also, Tomás and Aguirre bear witness to claims made by the priest that the church is very much run by the Mexican government. In one instance, Father Gastélum and Aguirre have a conversation about the fact that Aguirre isn’t Catholic and the Father has to make a note of that in his reports that go to the pope as well as to “a second father. . . in Mexico City” (235). Aguirre questions the idea that the Father serves both the pope and the dictator Porfirio Díaz and calls Díaz the “murdering thief in Mexico City” (236). Father Gastélum notes that Aguirre has expressed hatred toward the dictator and says that he (the priest) serves “only God. . . and the republic” (236).

Teresa, the Revolutionary

Through a series of letters, Aguirre and Tomás exchange thoughts on the political happenings of the time. Tomás expresses his thoughts about his daughter’s power over the indigenous peoples of the region: “*But what words are there to describe religious fanaticism?. . . I cannot claim my daughter is ‘holy.’ But these mensos, etc., can only think*

of one word for this insane behavior of Teresa's, and that is in the epithet 'Saint!' (377).

It is not that Tomás is not convinced that Teresa has the powers to heal, but the idea of her being called a saint that is idolized like the saints of the Catholic Church. To be influenced by something, like the indigenous are influenced by Teresa, is a weakness in Tomás's eyes.

As the Catholic Church influenced a nation of people, Tomás doesn't want his daughter to become another institution that is overpowered by the Mexican government. Aguirre explains to Tomás that Teresa is more than just a healer; she has inspired the indigenous people to take back their lands, "*Teresita, the phenomenon of Teresita, is something we attend to from afar. In her lies hope, my brother. In her lies the flaming ember of liberation for all Mexicans. Revolt!*" (379). Teresa is a curandera who inspires the indigenous peoples to revolt against the politics of the Mexican government. She does not outwardly tell the people they must revolt, but she gives them hope that they do not have to continue living the way they have and continue to be mistreated by a government that does not even acknowledge their existence. A revolution was on the horizon: "The Indians in the United States were rising again, the Apache would not be tamed, and full-out war with the Yaquis here in Mexico was ticking every closer" (286). Teresa is at the front of this revolution and through her healing she has inspired an oppressed people to take back what is theirs. However, she has now become a threat to the Mexican government because they see her as trying to incite a revolution and oppose their political empire.

Teresa evolves from a young servant girl and into a powerful curandera. She is not a fictional character but an actual woman immortalized in the minds of Chicanos/as

as a revolutionary figure. She is the product of a culture of divisions; one in which she is half indigenous and half Spanish and yet she stays true to both divisions by acknowledging them and residing in between them.

She is labeled a bruja because she does not allow herself to be colonized, essentially, by the Mexican government. She does not agree with their politics and will not submit to obeying their rules. She becomes the bridge between the two worlds of indigenous and colonizer, the bruja and the Catholic Church. She resides in that in between space, the unknown space that connects the past to the future. Although Mexico was moving forward with its industrialization, she holds onto the past and her beliefs.

From the folklore transcribed in *Women's Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie*, to Antonio's journey to find spiritual balance, and finally to the political influences of a curandera, la bruja and la curandera are more than just signifiers of good and evil in a culture. In the culture of divisions—that which is divided between indigenous, colonizer, Catholic beliefs, and pagan beliefs—the divisions are brought together by the acceptance of the bruja as an evil figure, the Catholic church as a 'good' structure of beliefs, and the curandera as a not quite evil yet not quite good figure in both literature and reflections of real life situations (as seen in the folklore of New Mexico).

CONCLUSION

“We have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, both at the same time. It’s exhausting” (Olmos).

I haven’t lived in New Mexico since 2006, but I can still feel my hometown, the food, the traditions, and my culture running through my veins. I grew up sheltered from other cultures and towns because we lived in a small town named Chama which is located in northern New Mexico. This region of New Mexico is not just a location on a map, but it is our pride and where our roots are. Northern New Mexicans, much like the rest of natives in New Mexico, are proud of their heritage, the Spanish dialect they speak, and the food that they eat. When I left home as I graduated high school, I left myself behind. I forgot about my family’s roots. I forgot that my ancestors were among the first settlers/colonizers of New Mexico. I forgot that my family has been in New Mexico for centuries and that we are proud of these roots. I remember my dad telling me, “Remember where you came from, jita,” because the worst thing you can be in my culture is a sellout. The worst thing you can do is forget that you come from a long line of hard workers, of men and women struggling to put food on the table, of those who refused to speak English in school and were expelled, and of strong women. I forgot who I was because leaving my culture bubble left me open to criticisms by people who did not know me or where I come from.

Gloria Anzaldúa says, “Culture forms our beliefs,” and my culture has definitely shaped my beliefs (38). In my thesis, I wanted to write about something I knew and something that is very important to me. Upon starting my prospectus two years ago, I remember envisioning my thesis being about the land grants in New Mexico and how New Mexican literature and Chicano literature is focused on land—ties to the land, land ownership, a place in the world. There is a billboard-like sign on the highway driving north toward my hometown. The billboard reads, “Tierra o Muerte,” and this is essentially the attitude of the people who inhabit this valley. “Land or Death” is what the words mean in English, and it is a strong message to all visitors to the valley. To us, land is everything, and even if someone is money poor, he is rich if he has land. This sign and message inspired me to research the history of the land grants and the colonization of New Mexico. I came to the conclusion that the perspective of “land or death” comes from a colonizer’s way of thinking. When the Spanish ventured into what is now the Southwestern United States, they were hungry for land and it did not matter that there were inhabitants already on the land because the Spanish believed that it was theirs for the taking. I realized I was dealing with purely patriarchal ideologies, such as colonizing of land, government, and the Catholic Church, but I was also leaving out very important matrilineal ideologies.

I am a firm believer in the idea that women are the bearers of culture. If we take that concept and Anzaldúa’s notion of culture forming our beliefs, then we have the idea that women are responsible for keeping their culture alive and teaching their culture’s beliefs to their children, grandchildren, etc. This is a pretty big responsibility for women, but after reflecting on my life growing up, it became clear that women control a culture.

Through stories, food, and language, I learned about my culture. My grandmother, aunts, and my mom held all the stories that were told to me about people getting punished for not going to church, for staying out late during lent, and for sinning. After thinking about how much women influence and control a culture, it only made sense to me that when the Spanish colonized the New World, they began by villainizing the women for witchcraft. Placing indigenous beliefs up against a patriarchal Spanish Catholic belief system created divisions within the cultures that were forced together. La bruja becomes an evil entity casting spells on innocent people, while Catholicism is a good entity because of its belief in God, and then la curandera is the bridge between good and evil.

In my thesis, I wanted to show, through history and literature, the effects of colonization. While I could have taken a feminist approach to the villainizing of la bruja, I wanted to show the literature and folklore that evolved from the in between space; in between two worlds and two cultures. La bruja and la curandera are women, yes, but they are also a part of the emergence of an unknown world as a result of colonization. Although the women in these stories and books were stuck between two worlds, they never forgot who they were and stayed true to their beliefs. Homi Bhabha's theory of the unhomed fits perfectly in my thesis because of the idea of two worlds colliding to form an unknown world. My culture is the result of a culture of divisions. We are Spanish because of the colonizers, we are indigenous because we are the product of colonization, and stuck in between these worlds we created a new culture.

This thesis is more than a requirement to graduate. I run the risk of being seen as a sell out because I opened my culture up to criticism by putting it under a microscope to dissect. However, I know of nothing else. As Rudolfo Anaya says, "We must tell who we

are and define ourselves as a people, define our humanity otherwise, someone else will do it and get it all wrong” (xvii). This is who I am and I am proud that I wrote about my culture and heritage because it is mine and it cannot be taken away from me.

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