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Violence against Chicanas from 1950 to 2000

A Thesis Presented

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In the mid-twentieth to late-twentieth century, a number of Mexican laborers came to the United States to search for more working opportunities. After settling in the U.S., they had to adjust to the harsh environment, poor working conditions, and multiple discriminations in Anglo-American society. Also, many Chicanas suffered from religious and patriarchal violence inside their community. This thesis examines different types of violence against Chicana/o migrants in the U.S. from 1950 to 2000, including economic violence, religious violence, racial discrimination, and sexual violence. In both Chicana/o community and white society, Chicanas/os have to deal with different kinds of violence against them.

Here, I focus on three novels—Helena María Viramontes’s *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*, and Emma Pérez’s *Gulf Dreams*—and analyze different kinds of violence against Chicana/o migrants respectively. I argue that how multiple discriminations intersect to result in the inferiority and marginalization of Chicana/o migrants. Furthermore, I investigate the protagonists’ response to the violence in the novels and how they subvert

established racial, sexual, and classist ideologies in the male-dominated community and U.S. white society.

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Introduction

This thesis examines different types of violence against Chicana/o migrants' in the period of 1950 to 2000 in the United States. During this time, many Mexican laborers came to the United States to work, and many of them settled in the U.S. and established their own community. They often experienced multiple forms of violence either at work, at school, or in their daily lives. In addition, in this thesis I analyze three novels, which are all set in the period of 1950 to 2000 to discuss Chicanas/os' lives in the U.S. Thus, I focus on this specific period to discuss the violence Chicana/o migrants encountered in different situations, and how they react to the brutality and injustice of these encounters.

In the first chapter, I outline the diverse backgrounds of Mexican migrants from Mexico to the United States from 1950 to 2000. I divide the chapter into four parts to discuss the historical backgrounds, geographical relationships between the U.S. and Mexico, Chicanas/os' political participation, and Chicana/o sociological specificity as well as Chicana/o migrants' bicultural experience respectively. In the Chicana/o migrants' historical backgrounds, I investigate several important migratory peaks, and explore the reasons that cause Mexicans to leave their hometown for an unfamiliar nation. Next, I discuss the geographical relationships between the United States and Mexico. In this section, I first focus on two main questions, which are: Where did they come from? Where did they go? Many people usually move out of the poorer regions in Mexico to seek working opportunities in the prosperous farms or orchards in the southwestern U.S. On the other hand, there were also Chicanas/os who originally settled in the southwestern U.S. experienced the loss of their territory since the Mexican-American War. Therefore, in this section, I investigate where Chicanas/os originally live and the geographically relationships between Mexico and the U.S. Furthermore, in the following section, I examine

Chicana/o migrants' political participation in the United States. Chicanas/os' were often deprived of their labor rights and wages, and they were also disfranchised and marginalized. Thus, from 1950 to 2000, many Chicana/o organizations led social movements to protest the social injustice and inequality in the U.S. In addition, many Chicana scholars and writers appeared during this period to fight for Chicanas' and Chicana lesbians' rights. In the last section, I center on Chicanas/os' sociological issues and their cultural specificity. I divide it into four parts and respectively discuss Chicana/os' language, religion, food, and clothing, and analyze how they preserve their traditional cultures instead of being made to assimilated into the white U.S. national culture.

In chapter two, I examine the labor and economic violence in Helena María Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995). In this chapter, I first delineate the characters' background in California in the mid-twentieth-century, such as their working conditions and living environment. Next, I analyze the novel by discussing two main issues in the novel, which are Chicana/o citizenship and identity confusion, and economic violence and health crisis. In the former, I examine the reasons why possessing the U.S. citizenship is important to Chicana/o migrants, and how they use this to improve their lives. Also, I discuss how the bilingual and bicultural identities of Chicanas/os complicate their self-identification, and how they adjust themselves to fit into the two societies. In terms of the latter section, I investigate the economic violence against Chicana/o migrant laborers, including low wages, long working hours, lack of welfare and protection, and harsh working conditions. Besides, the bad health constitutions, the lack of medical health care, and the employer's neglect of laborers' health are all causes of the Chicana/o workers' health crisis.

I further analyze the family and religious violence in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993) in the third chapter. This novel is set in a small town in New Mexico in the late twentieth century, so in the first part, I briefly describe the ethnic specificities in New Mexico, a state that has abundant historical stories with different racial and cultural heritage. Therefore, while some old customs are lost or overwhelmed by the dominant culture, many Chicanas/os hope to recover the indigenous religion and beliefs. While going back to Aztlán, they are able to reclaim their old traditions and spirit. Furthermore, this chapter is divided into two sections to talk about family structure and Chicana rebellion, and religious violence and Chicana resistance respectively. The former section discusses how Castillo subverts male-dominated household and patriarchal constraints by portraying the female-dominated household. By depicting the four female characters' experience, the novel shows Chicanas' suffering in the community, and how they rebel against patriarchal control of Chicanas. Moreover, the naming of the four characters all refer to different implications. In the latter section, I focus on the religious violence against Chicanas, and examine how the Catholic Church controls Chicanas' lives and disciplines them with strict moral constraints. This section discusses how the novel's four female characters suffered and being abandoned by the Catholic religion—these are cases which Castillo uses to demonstrate that Chicanas can fight back and resist the Catholic domination.

In the last chapter, I focus on the issues of race and sexual violence in Emma Pérez's *Gulf Dreams* (1996). The novel is set in rural Texas in the late twentieth century, and at the beginning of this chapter, I investigate the historical and cultural context of Texas during this time, such as manual workers in the cotton fields and the legal system against racism and sexism. Next, I critically examine the novel in two directions, which are ethnic and racial discrimination, and patriarchy and sexual violence. In discussing racial discrimination, I center first on the issues in

the novel about Chicanas/o migrants' poor English pronunciation and the segregation they suffer in the United States.¹ Moreover, I discuss how skin color divides people into the dominating and dominated, and also how class, race, and gender intersect to exacerbate women's, especially Chicanas' lives and social inferiority. In terms of patriarchy and sexual violence, I first argue how the patriarchal community controlled Chicanas' ways of thinking and behavior, using the example of the character, Pelón. Furthermore, I continue examining how patriarchal society, the judicial system, and the rejection from the Catholic Church marginalize Chicana lesbians and make them invisible. Finally, I focus on the sexual violence against Chicanas, and how Chicanas fight against patriarchal norms and male violence. To illustrate, I use the female victim, Ermila, in the novel to support my argument.

In the conclusion, I briefly summarize the main issues and cases I examine in the previous chapters, which again concrete my argument on multiple types of violence against Chicanas.

¹ To clarify, Chicanas/os' poor English pronunciation and the segregation are two examples in *Gulf Dreams*. The two cases are used as examples to show the racial and classist discrimination against Chicanas/os or people of color, but not all the Chicanas/os experience the certain racism.

Chapter One

Being the Outsider: Chicana Migrants in the United States from 1950 to 2000

Because of such reasons as historical, geographical, political, and sociological relations, Mexico has had a deep relationship with the United States. Many Mexicans migrated to the United States to search for jobs or to reunite with their families; thus, they became rooted in the United States and formed their communities. Before diving into the research, I need to clarify the terms used to denote groups of people related to Mexico. Some call themselves “Chicana/o,” “Mexicana/o,” “Mexican-American,” “Latina/o,” or “Hispanic.” There are even different terms such as “Californio,” “Nuevomexicano,” or “Tejana/o,” which are named after certain regions, and such terms are not interchangeable. Despite divergent debates, those terms indeed have quite different meanings. Some resources indicate that “Chicana/o” refers to “Mexican-Americans,”² but some also claim “Chicanas/os” refers to people who were born in Mexico and then moved to the U.S., or people who are descendants of Mexicans residing in the United States.³ The terms “Hispanic,” “Latin,” and “Latin American” are sometimes mixed with “Chicana/o” and “Mexican-American.” “Hispanic” usually refers to a group of people related to Spanish-speaking people or culture, and “Latina/o” indicates a person of Latin American descent or origin, especially one who lives in the United States.⁴ Although some terms seem interchangeable, it is

² In the preface of *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Praeger, 1992), Irene I. Blea says: “A Chicana is generally thought of as a Mexican-American female, a minority female whose life is characterized by racism and sexism.” Also, in *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*, the definition of “Chicano” is “used only of Mexican Americans, not of Mexicans living in Mexico.” Plus, in *SpanishDict*, “Chicano/a” also refers to “Mexican-American” (xi).

³ In *Urban Dictionary*, a Chicana/o is “a person who is the descendent of Mexican not born in Mexico but in the USA.” However, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Chicana/o” means “a person of Mexican birth or descent resident who is a resident in the United States (particularly in those areas annexed in 1848).”

⁴ See Blea, xii: “The term *Hispanic* refers to persons of Spanish language culture and may include Central Americans and Latin Americans, persons from Cuba and Puerto Rico, Spanish Europeans, and Chicanos. *Latino* also

necessary to clarify their usages and meanings. In this paper, I will use “Chicana/o” to denote people who migrated from Mexico to the United States, or the group of people who were born in the United States with Mexican origins, and I use this term consistently to examine this certain group of people in all three novels in the following chapters. Before the Chicano Movement, the term “Chicano” was thought to be a negative and discriminatory word.⁵ However, this term gained more popularity and was widely used during the Chicano Movement because people of the community sought to find a word to present identity. Despite some people’s rejection, the term “Chicano” is viewed as a symbol that can interpret and express self-value within the community of Mexican-origin persons in the United States. The term “Chicana” has the same meaning but it is used to denote a female representative or to have a feminist connotation. In *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, Blea defines the term “Chicana” as having “feminist connotations, but it may also denote simply feminine gender.... The word *Chicana* is rooted in the Chicano movement of the 1960s and is a political, ideological term describing a group of people with shared cultural characteristics and shared political interpretations of their experiences” (xi). Blea’s definition indicates that this term is also widely used during and after the Chicano Movement and it was deemed an ideological term that can either show self-identification or represent political and cultural representative. In this paper, the term “Chicana/o” is chosen to denote not only people of Mexican origin or Mexican descendants, but also to express the self-identification of people in the community.⁶ In other

refers to the groups above, but includes Mexico and Central and Latin America.” Also see the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Furthermore, in Segura’s article “Chicana and Mexican Immigration Women at Work,” she points out in her notes: “*Latino/a* and *Hispanic* are broader terms often used by U.S. state agencies to refer to persons of Spanish and Latin American heritage; 60 percent of all Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican origin.”

⁵ See Blea, xi: “Basically, the term *Chicano* implies an understanding of the history of neglect and discrimination endured by Mexican-American people in the United States.”

⁶ See Blea, xi: “The word *Chicana* is rooted in the Chicano movement of the 1960s and is a political, ideological term describing a group of people with shared cultural characteristics and shared political interpretations of their experiences.... In fact, the term *Chicana*, like *Chicano*, self-selectively identifies women with a certain ideology.”

words, “Chicana/o” is used to refer to Mexican-origin women and men who were born in Mexico (first generation migrants) and children with Mexican-origins who were born in the United States (second or third generation with U.S. citizenship).

This chapter is divided into four parts to investigate Chicanas/os’ historical backgrounds, geographical relationships with the United States, political participation and sociological specificity. With analysis from various aspects, we are able to reconstruct the experience and lives of Chicanas/os in the United States.

Historical Background of Chicana/o Migrants from 1950 to 2000

The Chicana/o population takes up a large portion of immigrant numbers in the United States. Looking back at the growth of Chicana/o population, a large number of migrants from Mexico sprung up after World War II and continued to increase rapidly in the following decades. Since the 1980s, the Chicana/o population has grown dramatically. A large number of Mexican migrant workers arrived in the United States during distinct periods. In this section, I will discuss many important periods of Chicana/o migration and demonstrate the different factors in both the U.S. and Mexico that caused migrants to leave their hometown to move to an unfamiliar country.

One of the peaks is the post-war and Bracero Program period. In this period, there were a lot of contemporary workers from Mexico to the United States. They were attracted to the United States with the promise of employment and a better life due to the poverty in Mexico and a dramatic decrease in the labor force in the United States due to World War II. During WWII, approximately 16 million Americans served in the army, and thus most of the regions in the United States encountered a serious labor shortage. Also, “[i]ncreased government spending to fund the war allowed American citizens who were unemployed or working in low-paying occupations to find employment in high-paying manufacturing industries in urban centers. The

need to feed Allied soldiers coincided with a reduction in the agricultural and rural workforce in the United States” (González 21). In the United States, many men and women were devoted to serving in the war, and the result was a serious labor shortage. The emergent demand for farm and railroad workers urged the U.S. government to ask the Mexican government for a supply of labor forces. In 1942 the United States had an agreement with Mexico and officially issued the Bracero Program (“Bracero” is a Spanish word that means “arm,” and migrants in this program were called “braceros,” which means arm-laborers.), which allowed U.S. employers to hire temporary contract workers from Mexico. The Bracero Program ended in 1964, by which over 4 million Mexican farm workers came to the United States. The temporary farm labor forces largely contributed to the U.S. economy. However, there were also many Mexicans chose to work in the U.S. illegally. Although the temporary contract laborers from Mexico solved the pressing need of the labor shortage and stimulated the U.S. economy, a large number of migrants simultaneously caused social problems and a security crisis. For example, U.S. residents and legal citizens might complained without actual facts that many migrants took away their jobs, disturbed the social order, and created crime, among other transgressions. Aware of the increasing problems caused by these undocumented workers, the United States coercively repatriated many of them to Mexico. However, even this action could not stop the increasing numbers in the migrant population.

Bad harvests and poverty were also key factors that pushed Mexican laborers to work in the United States. Migrants from Mexico abandoned their small farm lands and left their village or town to move to urban regions or the United States to escape poverty and find better living conditions.⁷ Therefore, the guest worker program brought many migrants from Mexico and

⁷ See Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Raul A. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, and Migration* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1941), 104: “After widespread advertising and after additional railcars and

stimulated the increase in the Chicana/o population. During the post-war and Bracero Program period, these guest workers played a predominant role in the labor market, but most of the jobs did not provide opportunities for women.⁸

In this period of time, there was only a small portion of Chicana migrants in the whole Chicana/o population, but the numbers steadily increased in the following years.⁹ The statistics show that the Chicana migrant population did not grow rapidly until the 1960s and 1970s, and it reached its peak in the 1980s. Furthermore, the Chicana migrants' population growth was also related to gender-limitations in occupations.¹⁰ Basically, the Bracero Program did not hire female migrants, but other programs would hire whole families or provide jobs for women.¹¹

Migrants from Mexico between the 1960s and 1970s steadily grew, and this time is viewed as another migration wave. Although the Bracero Program ended in 1964, many employers still hired Mexican migrants illegally. Basically, during the 1960s and 1970s, the primary factor of the Mexican migrants' exodus was still the low employment rate and the continued economic problems in Mexico. Migrants were attracted to more promising job

buses were pressed into service on routes to processing centers in Mexico, hundreds of thousands of men, many who went into debt to finance their travel to processing centers, responded to the promise of a good job and good pay... They left their villages principally to escape poverty.”

⁸ See Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 6: “Migration from Mexico has been predominantly male because of three factors: patriarchal social norms, the presence of children, and occupational segregation.” Besides, in Gonzalez, 106: “The term ‘bracero,’ as well as the epithets ‘wetback,’ ‘mojado,’ and ‘wets,’ came to be masculine terms, popularly understood to apply narrowly to men and seldom, if ever, to women.”

⁹ See Segura, 7: “Despite such formidable barriers, migration by women (both documented and undocumented) has grown steadily. Between 1910 and 1939—an era that included both the Mexican Revolution and the Great Depression, which were characterized by significant Mexican repatriations—women constituted 5 percent of migrants from Mexico; that figure increased to 7 percent in the period between 1940 and 1964 (the era of the Bracero Program), and climbed to 20 percent after 1965, following the implementation of the 1965 Immigration Reform Act.”

¹⁰ See Gonzalez, xiii: “Migration flows have been gender-micromanaged at all levels: the Bracero Program (1942-1964) was limited to males only; other programs required family migrations; the border industrial program on the U.S.-Mexico border has recruited millions of young women over the past three decades.”

¹¹ See Segura, 12: “The Border Industrialization Program (BIP), initiated in 1960, attracted more women to the U.S.-Mexican border, one of the largest crossing points in the world, and was based on gendered dynamics. The BIP accelerated the development of *maquiladoras* (factories that produce for export), which targeted women as workers for ‘women’s work’ that required ‘nimble fingers’ and docility as well as participation in gendered social activities such as beauty pageants.”

opportunities and a better life quality in the United States than in other nations. In this period, the gap between urban and rural life in Mexico was even wider, and the unemployment rate was still high. Although industrial development was flourishing and brought about the economic growth in Mexico, it caused the downfall of the agriculture, leading to the poverty in the rural area, and the rise of the unemployment rate. Also, between 1960s and 1970s, Mexico experienced cotton crisis that caused the drop of Mexican population.¹²

Besides, the oil crisis in 1973 and the recession in the United States in 1970 both influenced the development of industry and the economy in Mexico. Moreover, some “braceros” went back to Mexico and shared their experiences with people who wanted to find jobs in the United States also contributed to the increase of the migrant population.¹³ All of these reasons resulted in more people from Mexico migrating to the United States for more job opportunities. In this period of time, the political change in the United States also impacted the Chicana/o migrant population. It is noteworthy that the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 had more or less contributed to the Chicana/o population growth. In 1965, the United States issued the policy that strictly limited the number of legal immigration populations from Latin American nations. Although this policy strictly allocated the numbers of legal immigrants, it allowed family reunification, which meant that migrants who had settled in the United States were permitted to stay with their parents, spouses, and children. This policy reunited family members and strengthened the Chicana/o community. Because of this family reunification policy, Chicano migrants’ wives and children could come to the United States to be together. Therefore, during

¹² See Gonzalez and Fernandez, 51: “It is interesting to note that during the cotton boom years (1940-1960), the boarder municipios where cotton was the main agricultural product—Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Reynosa, and Matamoros—registered the highest rates of population growth. On the other hand, during the years of the cotton crisis (1960-70), the same municipalities suffered a sharp drop in their populations.”

¹³ See Arturo González, *Mexican Americans and the U.S. Economy* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2002), 26: “The initial settlement of political refugees during the Mexican Revolution and social networks strengthened by the Bracero Program also facilitated immigration.”

this time, most of the women from Mexico came to the United States as the spouses of the male migrants,¹⁴ but there were also some who came on their own. Some Chicana migrants were allocated to do agricultural work, some of them worked in the packinghouses, and some of them did domestic jobs, which were usually called “women’s jobs,” such as laundry, childcare, housekeeping, among other work.¹⁵

After the 1980s, another important Chicana/o population growth emerged. In this period of time, there were some crucial factors that contributed to the increase in the migrant populations. One is Mexico’s economic crisis and the other is the better living quality and job offerings in the United States. The implementation of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) was also a major factor that resulted in an accelerating pace of migrant population growth from Mexico to the United States. During the 1980s, the economy in Mexico experienced serious setbacks, including the Latin American debt crisis that resulted in a high unemployment rate in Mexico, and even destroyed the economy of many middle-class people. Thus, the severe economy and high unemployment in Mexico resulted in large numbers of migrants to the United States, and most of them were undocumented laborers. To react to the increasing number of undocumented and the problems as well as the controversies coming with them, in 1986 the United States Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which granted amnesty to those illegal, undocumented laborers who came to the United States before 1982 and punished employers who hired the workers illegally.¹⁶ However, this penalty did not reach its original

¹⁴ See D. Maciel and, Isidro D. Ortiz, *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic, and Political Change* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996), 29-30: “In the past, the migration literature characterized women as appendages to their migrating husbands; women migrated to reunite with their husbands who were already in the United States.”

¹⁵ See Gonzalez and Fernandez, 102: “At the point of production, within the fruits industries, women were employed nearly exclusively in the packinghouses, while men worked the fields. In the organized communities, women, following a gendered division of labor mandated from above, worked in a variety of occupations that included laundry work, garment factories, childcare, cooking meals, and housecleaning.”

¹⁶ González explains, 27: “Certain segments of the U.S. population believed and argued that undocumented

expectation to eliminate the growing number of undocumented migrants. Those migrants could get false documents and employers had official forms to prove the legal status of those migrants. The Immigration Reform and Control Act played an important role in the dramatic growth in the Chicanas/os population in the 1980s and later in the 1990s, most due to the amnesty and the legalization program for undocumented migrants already living in the United States for a period of time.¹⁷

In the 1990s, America and Mexico signed an agreement called NAFTA, which was a free trade agreement that consolidated three nations (America, Mexico, and Canada) as an economic bloc to compete with Europe and Japan. Gonzalez explains:

Under the 'free trade' slogan the proposed treaty would serve two purposes. First, it would guarantee a free hand to U.S. enterprises willing and able to invest in Mexico to take advantage of that country's cheaper wages. Mexico was to become an export platform of manufactured commodities for the United States and other markets around the world.... Second, the treaty would simultaneously deny in various forms and degrees to other economic powers the advantage of operations in and exporting from Mexico.

(54)

In order to implement the treaty, the Mexican government and President Carlos Salinas privatized hundreds of companies and enterprises, resulting in a large number of employees

immigrants took jobs away from U.S. citizens and legal residents, were a drain on social services, were a major source of crime, and threatened the national sovereignty of the country. A series of bills were introduced in the U.S. Congress in an attempt to curb the growing number of undocumented immigrants. The culmination of these actions was the IRCA of 1986." He also says: "Believing that undocumented immigration was driven primarily by the attraction of jobs, the authors of IRCA thought that imposing **employer sanctions** [sic], or legal penalties against employers, would eliminate the pull of U.S. jobs."

¹⁷ See Maciel and Ortiz, 28: "The years of 1989 and 1990 were unusual due to the large numbers of Mexicans admitted as legal immigrants under the legalization program authorized by the 1986 immigration law—the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Fully 405,172 Mexicans were admitted as legal immigrants in 1989, and another 679,068 in 1990."

being laid off.¹⁸ Also, many firms and manufacturing productions went bankrupt. Gonzalez further says:

In the long run, the devastating effects of NAFTA on Mexico's remaining agricultural production and national urban manufacturers will throw into the migration highways an even larger number of people desperately looking to make a living, thereby enlarging at a faster pace the mass of Mexican migrants in the United States. (56)

As result, the economic situations, the job opportunities in the United States, and the NAFTA treaty were the three major points that caused an even larger number of migrants coming from Mexico to the United States to search for jobs.

Meanwhile, the Chicana migrant population had grown prominently since the 1980s. There were more migrants from Mexico moving to the United States for better job opportunities in the 1980s and 1990s, and females made up nearly half of the migrant population. Maciel and Ortiz say:

Although men may have predominated in these earlier migrations flows, Mexican women also migrated to the United States, where they helped establish Mexican communities throughout the Southwest and Midwest. Currently, many more Mexican women are crossing the border as both legal and undocumented immigrants than had done previously. (28)

With the increased Chicana migrant population and the shift of occupational types, more Chicana workers tended to do domestic work, clerical work, and service work than traditional farm work or work in packinghouses.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Gonzalez, 54-55: "To demonstrate resolute support for market-oriented policies and to attract foreign capital, the Mexican government began to break up numerous government enterprises and to lay off thousands of employees. Hundreds of state companies and institutions were sold or 'privatized.'"

Mexico's Geographical Relations with the U.S.

Chicana/o migration has a lot to do with the economy and politics in both the United States and Mexico, and it is also closely tied to the geography of both countries. The geography and the industrial structure of Mexico influenced its economy. The rise of industrial markets in developing regions of Mexico, the promising job opportunities, the bad harvests in rural areas, and the economic recession are all different reasons that cause farmers or men in rural areas to leave their towns or villages to find better jobs in other places. On the other side of the border, the geographical conditions and agricultural and industrial developments in the United States also had a great significance to the increasing population of migrants. In this section, I first investigate where those migrants came from and what the relationship was between the geographical situation and migration in Mexico. Then I discuss where those migrant laborers went, and why they chose different regions in which to work or reside. In addition, I investigate some Chicanas/os, who originally lived in southwestern U.S. but lost their homeland after Mexican-American War.

The reason why migrants from Mexico entered the United States to work has a lot to do with the economy in Mexico. The Mexican Revolution in 1910 greatly influenced the economy in Mexico for many decades, especially regarding agriculture. González says:

The cumulative effect of land reforms, unequal economic growth, and political oppression was an organized revolt in 1910. When Francisco Madero initiated a widespread revolt against Díaz in 1910, many peasants were caught in the middle.

¹⁹ See Maciel and Ortiz, 13: “Chicanas, like other groups of women workers, are heavily concentrated in clerical and service work, which combined employed two-thirds of Chicana workers in 1991, a departure from the traditional overrepresentation of Chicanas in manufacturing work, as compared to women of other ethnic origins.”

Due to widespread fighting in many rural areas of Mexico, rural lands could not be farmed. (19)

With the loss of their farms and agricultural fields, many farmers and people in the rural regions were forced to head north to find more opportunities. The poverty and bad harvests resulted in a large number of migrants to the United States. Basically, the agricultural regions of Mexico were centered in Guanajuato, Michoacán, Zacatecas, and D.F. (Mexico's District Federal) in the central west and central south, Jalisco located at the Pacific Coast, Durango and Chihuahua in the Northwest, and Coahuila in the Northeast. Those areas were also where most of the migrants came from that were heading north to the United States for work. From 1942 to 1964, the states of Mexico that had the most migrants migrated to the United States to work were from these agricultural regions.²⁰ Guanajuato, Chihuahua, and Michoacán were the top three regions with labors loss and other regions in the central west and central south also lost many farm laborers and people. In general, most regions of poverty were largely located at the central west and the central south areas.

In contrast, the wealthiest regions of Mexico were centered in northern Mexico. Because of the prosperous industrialized regions in the northern states, the economic situation is much better than other regions. In northern Mexico, there were many mountains, deserts, forests, plateau, and some plains. The mining and automotive industries were the two major economic resources of Mexico. However, there were also many people in the northern regions that entered the U.S. to find job opportunities. For example, Chihuahua ranked as having the second largest amount of migrant population, and Coahuila also had many migrants that migrated to the United

²⁰ This statistic is cited from the library of the University of Texas at Austin-Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection: State of Origin of Migratory Agricultural Workers Entering U.S., 1942-1968. Based on the statistic, the top ten regions of Mexico, which had more people that moved to the United States are: Guanajuato, Chihuahua, Michoacán, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Durango, Coahuila, San Luis Potosi, D.F., and Nuevo Leon.

States. The reason was due to the bad harvests in these areas, increasing Mexican population that competed for the jobs, and also the geographical location near the United States. It was more convenient for Mexicans in northern regions to enter the U.S. to search for more job opportunities. In addition, migrants from Mexico would more likely choose to work in the United States than other neighboring nations because of the geographical location, more job opportunities, and the appealing wages. Although migrants in the United States received relatively low pay, they still earned more in the U.S. than in Mexico. Thus, it shows that the geographical location and economy are closely related to the Mexican migration to the United States.

Before WWII, most migrants from Mexico worked in factories and primarily did industrial work, such as working in the mines in Arizona and New Mexico, steel mills in Pennsylvania, railroad lines in the Southwestern regions, and auto parts in Detroit. In the following decades after WWII, however, the need for agricultural laborers increased, and many migrants came to the southwestern regions of the United States to work as farm laborers. During the period of the Bracero Program, a lot of farm workers entered the United States to work as temporary laborers, primarily in the cotton-fields, farms, and ranches, but there were also a portion of migrants who worked to build the national railroads in the Southwest. Because of the labor shortage caused by WWII, farmers and employers in the Southwest had an urgent demand for farm labor forces. A large number of migrants from Mexico came to the United States to work in agricultural regions during the Bracero Program period, such as the orchards and cotton fields in California, Texas, Arizona, and Oregon, ranches and sugar beet farms in Colorado and other Midwestern regions; and other agricultural fields in Washington, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. Along with the crops and fruit harvest in these U.S. agricultural regions, there were

also many food packing and processing jobs in the Southwest, especially California, where many laborers worked with food packing and canning jobs. Also, without choosing the Bracero Program, Texans hired undocumented workers, which were called “wetbacks,”²¹ to work in the cotton and soy bean fields in order to lower the wages, and it allowed the employers to control the undocumented laborers. Those “wetbacks” even suffered from racism and all kinds of racial discrimination and deprivation. In this period, Chicana/o migrants worked in the fields near the cities’ fringes, and they came to the urban areas for more available job opportunities.²²

With more and more Chicana/o migrants coming to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, most of them lived in certain regions of the United States in Chicana/o communities. The appealing job opportunities and much better living conditions attracted a large number of the Chicana/o migrants to reside in southwestern U.S., meaning California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas. Among the five southwestern states, most of the Chicanas/os lived in California and Texas.²³ In these periods, many Chicanas/os continued to move from rural to urban areas because of the better educational institutions, much more convenient transportation,

²¹ See Samora and Simon, 143: “The Mexican illegal alien has been popularly called a ‘wetback.’ The term originated from the fact that the Rio Grande forms much of the long border between the United States and Mexico, from El Paso to Brownsville, Texas, and many Mexican illegal aliens have crossed into the United States by swimming or wading the river. But the term ‘wetback’ is deceiving because most of the Mexicans who came into the United States without legal documents do not swim or wade across the river.”

²² See Samora and Simon, 156: “Since most war-related job opportunities existed in urban centers, there was considerable migration of Mexican Americans to the cities in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s. The impact on rural areas was frequently tremendous. For instance, the smaller towns and cities in the southern part of Colorado lost many residents who moved to Pueblo and Denver for employment. In New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona there was a large exodus of the population to the urban centers.” Also, see Gonzalez, 135: “As it picked up steam again beginning in the 1950s, Mexican immigrant workers continued not only to provide the bulk of agricultural labor in the West and the Southwest, but they also moved into every kind of urban employment available in these regions: in manufacturing, construction, services (especially restaurant and hotel work), maintenance, gardening and landscaping, electronics, as day laborers, as street vendors, and so on.”

²³ See Maciel and Ortiz, 11: “Aside from the historical basis for Mexican residence in what is now the U.S. Southwest, a general contemporary shift in population toward the Sunbelt since the 1970s fueled by economic development and expansion has meant a return migration by Chicanos living in other parts of the United States. The combination of established Latino communities and comparatively attractive economic opportunities has attracted both Mexican immigrants and Chicanos to the same areas of the Southwestern United States, producing both new opportunities for community building and new tensions.”

and more available services, facilities, and utilities.²⁴ In different periods of time, the industrial development and economic situation in various regions of the United States determined where the migrants from Mexico worked and settled down. Furthermore, as more and more migrants came from Mexico to the United States, they tended to live within their own communities, called *barrios* (meaning “neighborhoods”) or enclaves, which indicate a certain community or neighborhood in which people from the same country live.

Seasonal farm workers primarily worked in the southwestern region of the United States during the Bracero Program period, but with changing occupational types and industrial development in the following decades, many migrants moved to other regions of the United States for permanent jobs and a steady living environment.²⁵ After the 1980s, the concentration of the Chicana/o population in the southwestern part of the United States changed, and many Chicanas/os moved to the Midwest to work. Currently, “[t]he Mexican-origin population is even more geographically concentrated. California alone accounts for 45 percent of Chicanos. Six states—California, Arizona, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and Illinois—have 88.2 percent of all persons of Mexican origin” (Maciel and Ortiz 26). The statistic shows that in the 1990s the Chicana/o population was not only concentrated in the southwest, but also in the Midwest.²⁶ In this period, Chicana/o migrants went to different regions of the United States to look for more job opportunities instead of relying only on the enclaves or *barrios* in a certain place. Another

²⁴ See Samora and Simon, 158: “In the census of 1960 it was reported that the majority of Mexican Americans were urban residents. Thus, the transition from the rural to the urban residence occurred over a twenty-year period. The 1970 census shows the continued trend in urban residence, but not at the same accelerated rate.”

²⁵ See Samora and Simon, 149: “In increasing numbers these seasonal farm workers are ‘dropping off’ the migrant stream and beginning to settle down in several areas in the Midwest and the Great Lakes states. As soon as they are able to find work—whether as a dishwasher, a waitress, a janitor, or whatever they tend to stop the migrant in favor of the steady job.”

²⁶ See Maciel and Ortiz, 27.

statistics shows that in 1999, there were also a group of Chicana/o migrants living in New York, Nevada, Florida and Oregon.²⁷

For a long time, many migrants from different regions of Mexico usually went to the United States in certain migration patterns, and later the young people in the regions also followed the patterns those forerunners had established. The previous settlement pattern led new migrants from Mexico to understand the migration network easily and get used to U.S. culture and society. According to González: “Due to unfamiliarity with the new country, recent arrivals often rely on previous immigrants to help them navigate the various institutions. Relatives or friends of immigrants in the United States provide not only information about jobs but also temporary housing and other types of support” (44).

Additionally, there were many Chicanas/os who originally lived in the southwestern U.S. for a long time. However, after Mexico lost in the Mexican-American War, the Mexican government ceded many of its territories, including California, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Wyoming, to the United States according to the Treaty of Guadalupe (1848). The native Chicanas/os experienced the loss of their homeland, and their cultural and social heritage were undermined by the U.S. dominated culture. Those Chicanas/os did not cross the border to another nation; however, they suffered from a deeper crisis of losing their culture, customs, and traditions. Also, many of them chose to become U.S. citizens, but they did not receive the welfare and rights they deserved. I further examine the issues in the following chapters.

Chicana/o Migrants’ Political Participation and Struggles in the United States

²⁷ See González, 45, he illustrates “the distribution of the 7.2 million Mexican immigrants across the United States in March 1999. The states of residence for the overwhelming majority of Mexican immigrants are California and Texas, with more than 75 percent of all immigrants living in these states. Nearly 90 percent of all Mexican immigrants lived in ten states (in order of population): California, Texas, Illinois, Arizona, New York, Oregon, Florida, Nevada, Colorado, and New Mexico.”

Migrants from Mexico have been a controversial issue in the United States that has caused both positive and negative effects. The debate on Chicanas/os issues covers various aspects such as economic, political, legal, social, and cultural concern. Although Chicana/o workers helped solve the labor shortage in the United States, and also made a huge difference to the U.S. economy, Chicana/o migrants sometimes did not receive the remuneration they were supposed to have. Moreover, many Chicanas/os criticized the discrimination, the over-loaded and overtime jobs, the low payment, and the bad living environments they faced. The employment inequity, the racial and sexual discrimination, the deprivation of rights, and education segregation are all significant issues that exacerbate the lives of Chicanas/os in the United States. In this section, I focus on Chicana/o political participation, identity politics, social movements, and literature, and then discuss how Chicanas/os react to the discrimination and social injustice against them.

Chicanas/os have received unequal treatment for a long time, and thus between 1965 and 1975 there were many huge social and political protests that emerged to fight for Chicanas/os' rights, which were collectively known as the "Chicano Movement." It was part of the social activism that boomed in the 1960s and 1970s, and it was fueled by the farm worker strikes in California and Texas in 1965-1966.²⁸ The original purposes of the movement were to fight against unequal treatment, such as employment and educational inequality, political disfranchisement, and deprivation of civil rights among others.²⁹ In addition, one of the

²⁸ See David Montejano, *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1999), xvii: "The specific catalysts were the farm worker strikes in California and Texas in 1965-1966, which set off diverse organizing energies that quickly reverberated throughout the Southwest and later through the Midwest. These strikes ignited a broad civil rights mobilization among all classes of the Mexican American community—businessman, professionals, college and high school students, factory workers, even the street youth."

²⁹ See Maciel and Ortiz, 83: "In a more contemporary sense, the Chicano Movement has left a legacy that has shaped current organizations and politics for the Chicano community. The turn of events in that community and within the larger society during 1965-1975 represents an effort by an economic and political underclass to remove inequities and exclusionary practices."

important issues in the Chicano Movement was the establishment of Chicana/o self-identification, not just as an ethnic group, but also to denote an identity or spirit that showed their pride as people with Mexican origins. The self-identification showed as self-awareness and represented a positive attitude to their community.³⁰ The spirit of Chicana/o group identity, which is called *Chicanismo*, embodied Chicana/o cultural pride and political representation. Maciel and Ortiz describe the movement:

Cries for self-determination and justice by the Chicano community and its leadership drew upon the long-standing sense of being Mexicano/Chicano. Chicanismo embodies the persistence of group identity that contained cultural values, symbols, and practices which result in group pride and political mobilization. (87)

During the Chicano Movement, there were many organizations started, such as MAPA (the Mexican American Political Association), MALDEF (the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund), SVREP (the Southwest Voter Registration and Educational Fund), and NCLR (the National Council of La Raza). These organizations were formed to support political activism. Also, there were some organizations founded earlier such as the LULAC (the League of United Latin American Citizens), which formed in 1929 to fight against racial and social discrimination and strove for Latin Americans' civil rights. These different organizations all centered on a similar objective to put an end to discriminations and unequal working

³⁰ See Maciel and Ortiz, 86: "Part of the redefinition of group identity involves a reconstruction of how Chicanos viewed themselves and the positive aspects of the Chicano experience. This meant a revitalization of the Mexico/Chicano cultures and interpreting them through the eyes of *el pueblo mexicano*. The net results was a growing awareness of Chicanos' historical experiences within American society." Besides, in Montejano, xvii: "The activists took the pejorative lower-class label of Chicano and Chicana and transformed it into a powerful political identity."

opportunities, educational segregation, and social injustice against Chicanas/os, Mexican Americans, and other Latin Americans.

Furthermore, the Chicano Movement also spread to campuses and thus grew much stronger.³¹ Some advocates and supporters formed an organization named MEChA (el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), which is a student organization that fights for the liberation and equity of the Chicanas/os and all Mexican American groups.³² Chicanas/os hoped to gain political power to change their living quality and have equal rights as citizens. The Chicano Movement did have a certain amount of influences on the U.S. government, and later the U.S. government announced several legislations that considered minority people's rights and eliminated discrimination against people of color. Legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Equal Opportunity Act were enacted to protect different groups of people's rights, though in the 1960s and 1970s the outcome of the Chicano Movement did not fundamentally change social inequality.³³

Moreover, in the 1970s, the La Raza Unida party was formed to fight for Chicanas/os' educational rights. Because of dissatisfaction with the injustice and discrimination against Chicana/o students in the schools, they tried to form an organization to fight against the Anglo-dominated system. In 1970, La Raza Unida candidates won school board and city council elections. In the following years, more Chicanas/os in the party fought against the schools, and

³¹ See Maylei Blackwell, *iChicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1969), page 43: "While there was a romantic quality to being involved in a community of resistance, many young people joined the Chicano student movement in order to confront the new forms of race, gender, and class discrimination they experienced in educational institutions as they as they collectively entered universities for the first time."

³² On MEChA's official website, the organization advocates their belief: "Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) is a student organization that promotes higher education, cultural, and historical. MEChA was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of our people. We believe that political involvement and education is the avenue of change in our society."

³³ See Maciel and Ortiz, 89: "Despite passage of significant legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the War on Poverty initiatives, and the Equal Opportunity Act, the status of Chicanos did not alter substantially. For the most part, the legislation mentioned may have had the effect of raising expectations of change even higher among Chicanos than what the political system could realistically accomplish."

“[a] great number of Mexican Americans were hired in administrative, teaching, and staff positions in the school system. Bilingual education was begun in the early grades, and courses in Mexican-American history and culture were started. Also topics of concern to Chicanos were introduced in history, literature, and other subject areas” (Samora and Simon 200). Due to La Raza Unida’s devotion, Chicanas/os were able to preserve their culture and gain the bilingual education. Also, they had more influence in the academic and educational field. La Raza Unida continued to gain victories, and its influence was so great that it impacted other cities.³⁴

However, the Chicano Movement centered on social, racial and civil rights affairs rather than the problems Chicanas encountered. Many Chicanas who helped during the Chicano Movement felt that sexual and gender issues or the women’s plight were often ignored. They believed that “Much of this early work concentrated on race and class as categories of analysis and dealt with the Chicano community as a monolithic entity, with little attention to gender and sexuality or to women’s roles beyond the home and family economy” (Chávez-García 546). Chicanas’ roles had been limited, and their participation within the Chicano Movement was also confined. As a result, many Chicana feminist activists and Chicanas formed independent organizations. For example, the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional, Inc, which was formed in 1970, deals with Chicanas’ plight, problems, and sexual and racial discrimination, and offers assistance. In addition, young Chicanas who gained the chance to attend universities because of the Higher Education Act of 1965 contributed to the broadening of Chicanas’ feminist and political consciousness.³⁵

³⁴ See Samora and Simon, 200: “As a result of these victories, La Raza Unida has organized branches in many other Texas counties with large Chicano populations and in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.”

³⁵ See Blackwell, 46: “While the transition to college was an important historical development, many Chicanas faced extreme difficulties negotiating the new social world of the university, which was layered over and mediated by older expectations of family and community. Chicana activism emerged from these changing circumstances. Although some of these young women’s lives had been circumscribed by traditional notions of family, patriarchy, and Catholicism, at college a wide range of life experiences informed them and contributed to their political vision

With the increased Chicana/o population since the 1980s, the Chicanas/os' political impact on the U.S. government has increased. Chicanas/os' political involvement in U.S. politics and critical issues such as wages, education, electoral rights, and community autonomy have been seriously considered and implemented through a series of legislations.³⁶ In the 1980s and 1990s, there were advancements in Chicana/o political participation and progress made in gaining more Chicana/o voters in elections. Also, more and more Chicana/o candidates joined the U.S. Congress to fight for Chicanas', Chicanos', and Latin Americans' rights. Thus, Chicanas/os have gained political representation, the rise of socioeconomic status, educational rights, and empowerment. These improvements "were evident in the 1982 and 1992 elections with a significant increase in the number of Chicano elected officials" (Maciel and Ortiz 95). With more Chicanas/os participating in the U.S. politics, they could have more power to negotiate their welfare and rights. There was prominent growth in the number of Chicana/o and Latin American federal representatives, state legislators, and local officials in Chicano districts. In this period of time, Chicana feminist's political participation also made progress from previous decades³⁷ as Chicana feminists brought the issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality together to challenge the patriarchal norms, Catholicism, traditional gender roles, and family institutions. They broadened the scope of Chicana issues and focused on power relations and Chicanas' own experiences, when "[t]he boundaries of the Chicano Movement were expanded such that patriarchy, equality, gender roles, and culture served as crucial areas of discourse and struggle" (Maciel and Ortiz 99). In addition, Chicana feminist scholars and Chicana feminist

and activism."

³⁶ See Maciel and Ortiz, 93: "During the interval between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Chicano elected and appointed officials, as well as in the number of activists defining and expanding a Chicano political agenda. The Chicano community and its organizations have been able to use several pieces of legislation to improve opportunities for political representation and voter registration/participation."

³⁷ See Maciel and Ortiz, 100: "[T]he involvement and the participation of Chicanas in leadership roles continue to be an important gauge of Chicano advancement and empowerment."

writers gained more attention in academic fields.³⁸ Particularly in this period, sexuality was a critical issue broadly discussed in many Chicana feminists' or Chicana lesbian scholars' work. They challenged social taboos, patriarchal norms, and heterosexual society.³⁹ There have been many famous Chicana feminist scholars such as Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Carla Trujillo, Emma Pérez, and Yolanda Chávez Leyva who brought the issues of homosexuality, sex, sexuality, and lesbianism into serious discussion. They also critiqued the Chicano cultural and social ethic, as well as conventional patriarchal norms and attitudes toward sex and sexuality. In this time, it showed a lot of progress and advancement in Chicanas/os' empowerment, political involvement and representation, and also Chicanas feminists' transitions and challenges in the academic field.

Sociological Issue and Cultural Specificity of Chicanas/os

Chicanas/os stand at a bilingual and bicultural crossroad. They have to adjust their lives to fit into the U.S. society, but they also want to keep their own culture and custom at the same time. The preservation of traditional Mexican heritage and culture is related to the familial structure and gender relations. In the patriarchal Chicana/o society, men are generally the main economic resources of the household, while most women are in charge of child-bearing, taking care of children, and children's education. Therefore, Chicanas are thought of as being the

³⁸ See Chávez-García's article, "The Interdisciplinary Project of Chicana History: Looking Back, Moving Forward," 553: "The growing presence of Chicanas in academia in the 1990s, coupled with the rediscovery and critical reading of nineteenth century *testimonios* (first-person oral narratives), travel literature, and other archival materials, such as civil and ecclesiastical records, also led to an increased focus on issues of gender and sexuality as well as power and patriarchy in the conquest and colonization of the Spanish Mexican society in the present-day southwestern United States."

³⁹ See Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gender and U.S. Immigration* (Oakland: U of California P, 2003), 4: "During the 1980s and 1990s, the social sciences experienced major transformations. Among the most notable were two separate developments: the growth in feminist-oriented scholarship and immigration research. The establishment of women's studies programs and research derived from the second-wave feminist movement, which emerged in the 1970s to advocate equality for women. Feminist research called attention to the unequal power relations between women and men in society and illuminated and analyzed how women's and men's actions, positions, and relative privileges in society are socially constructed in ways that tend to favor men."

preservers of the culture and customs because they have more opportunities than their husbands to be with children and pass the old traditions and cultures to the next generation. Yet to preserve their own cultural specificity they may encounter many difficulties and barriers, and they also seek to think how to reconcile two different cultures and societies rather than being completely assimilated. In this section, I will center on language, religion, food, and clothing to examine how Chicanas/os preserve their cultures and customs in the U.S. society and how both the traditional culture and the new culture influence them and their children.

Chicanas/os straddle two different cultures and societies, and to fit into their lives in the United States, they need to learn English. The bilingual and bicultural specificity is rooted in Chicana/o society. The language complex influence Chicanas/os of different generations differently. In general, Chicanas/os' often communicate with each other in Spanish, but when they move to the United States, they have to learn English at work or school. For the first generation migrants, they have very limited English language ability, and most of them use only Spanish. As for the second or third generation, particularly those who are born in the United States, recognize English as their primary language, and many of them do not speak Spanish. Language has a deep relationship with colonial power and hegemony. English is viewed as a colonizer's language, which is the dominant language of superior groups, while Spanish and Chicana/o cultures are often regarded as the inferior language and subculture. Many Chicana migrants, who either look for jobs in the United States or come joining their husbands, encounter many difficulties because of the language barrier. They can only communicate with their children in Spanish or other indigenous languages. Therefore, Chicanas pass their original language on to their children. Moreover, the language barrier impedes many Chicana/o laborers from arguing

for their rights, fighting against discrimination, and searching for help or social services.⁴⁰

Because of the domination of English education as the mainstream, a number of Chicana/o students and activists protest the unjust educational system that neglects bilingual and bicultural students' rights for receiving an equal education.⁴¹ Many Chicana/o students are prohibited under punishment from speaking Spanish or their indigenous languages at schools. Language rights are always a critical issue at schools and in educational fields. For instance, the La Raza Unida organization has established to fight against discrimination toward Chicana/o students and to protest the deprivation of their education rights. One of their requests is to ask schools to add bilingual education programs. There are also restrictions on the use of Spanish at work, but lately more people see it as a necessary skill in the job market. Maciel and Ortiz say:

Use of Spanish is viewed by some as detrimental in the workplace; but, at the same time, others see it to be a necessary skill for job performance. The former point concerns trends among employers to impose restrictions on the use of Spanish on the job.... The latter point centers around the market value of being bilingual in one's job. (98)

Chicanas/os often struggle with the use of public and private language, which can lead to confusion about their own identity. Bilingual children have to adjust and switch from the

⁴⁰ See Maciel and Ortiz, 97: "Questions of access, substantial job-training program participation, delivery of social services, and Chicano's vulnerability to fluctuations of the economy (in terms of unemployment, layoffs, out-migration of firms from the United States, and the like) are all key areas of concern. Specific issues include limited access to programs due to language difficulties, legal status (permanent resident aliens and undocumented persons), and the lack of bureaucratic representation." Also, in Segura and Zavella, 252: "For Mexican women in the United States there are many barriers to accessing healthcare, including low incomes, low rates of medical insurance, language use (either predominantly Spanish or indigenous language use), and lack of transportation."

⁴¹ See Maciel and Ortiz, 96: "More recently, anti-immigration and xenophobic movements that attempt to establish English as the official language view Chicano culture with suspicion. As indicated earlier, the Chicano Movement emphasized cultural pride and maintenance. Thus, there have been long-standing efforts to institutionalize bilingual/bicultural education by Chicanos. In addition, the recognition and promotion of culture in all facets of American life has been a central mission within the Chicano community." Also, see Kruszewski, Hough, and Ornstein-Galicia, 198: "In the case of Mexican Americans, many of them, particularly activists, often express themselves against "domination" by the Anglo language, culture, and the power structure. Only since World War II, and especially the past fifteen years, have they begun to challenge such 'dominance' activity."

culture's dominant language to their home language. If they use one language less than another, the language is easily lost. For example, Viramontes notes her experience in an interview:

[T]he result of this is first, I get English, nothing but English at school. Then I'd come home and my parents talked to me in Spanish. Since I know they understand English I respond in English. As a result, I can understand Spanish really well, fairly well, I should say, but to speak it is another matter and that's the condition of a lot of Chicanos and Chicanas. (Viramontes and Flys-Junquera 226)

Using Viramontes' experience, it is clear that public language and private language result in Chicana/o children's struggling with their identity. Her parents know English, but they choose to speak Spanish to their children in order to preserve their mother language and their culture. By speaking Spanish, they pass the home language on. On the other hand, Viramontes chooses to respond to her parents in English because she is deeply influenced by the dominant language. She can understand Spanish fairly well, but she cannot speak it well. Although Chicanas/os make efforts to preserve their home language, they have to consider how to balance the two languages. Thus, the preservation of the language and fighting for their language rights are the ways to maintain their culture, and it will continue to be a long-lasting issue in the Chicana/o community.

Next, in Chicana/o society, religion plays a significant role and is also deeply rooted in their culture. Region affects Chicanas/os' ways of thinking and their behaviors. There are numerous religious groups existing in Chicana/o society which were stem from Mexico society, such as: Roman Catholic Church, Protestant Christianity (includes Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witness, and other denomination), and other indigenous religious groups. Among all these in the Chicana/o community, the Roman Catholic Church is the predominant and most influential

domination in Mexico and the Chicana/o community.⁴² The influence of Roman Catholicism is ubiquitous in Chicana/o families, daily lives, and Chicana/o culture. Samora and Simon note that “Mexican and Mexican American religious expression is a type of worship that is closely interwoven with the everyday life experiences and historical struggles of the Mexican American community and that is deeply influenced by cultural, political, and economic realities” (224). Moreover, the influence of the Catholic Church is more obvious among lower-class and middle-class Chicanas/os.⁴³ The Catholic Church in the Chicana/o community has strict norms and hierarchy, and it also contributes to the patriarchal domination over Chicanas.⁴⁴ The Catholic Church has a strong influence on women’s views of virginity and devotion, and women are instructed to be loyal to their husband and marriage. Virginity being intact before marriage is important, and it also determines whether Chicanas can receive social status or respect.⁴⁵ Women who ask for a divorce will be seen as betrayers of the religion, and people in the community will doubt and criticize those women.⁴⁶ Also, young Chicanas’ sexuality and premarital virginity are

⁴² See Kruszewski, et al., *Politics and Society in the Southwest: Ethnicity and Chicano Pluralism* (Boulder: Westview, 1982), 169: “[t]he church has been so predominantly an immigrant church, receiving most of its impetus from waves of immigration during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”

⁴³ See Kruszewski, et al., 181: “Madsen finds religious influence to be pervasive in the lives of lower-class and most middle-class Mexican Americans, although religion is not orthodox and sophisticated but a compounding of Spanish-Indian beliefs and folk Catholicism imported from Mexico.”

⁴⁴ See Carla Trujillo’s article “Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community,” 284: “Religion, based on the tradition of patriarchal control and sexual, emotional, and psychological repression, has historically been a dual means of hope for a better afterlife and social control in the present one. Personified by the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, the concept of motherhood and martyrdom go hand in hand in the Catholic religion.”

⁴⁵ See Ruth Horowitz, *Honor and the American Dream* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1983), 120: “Virginity at marriage generally ensures a church wedding; otherwise, the religious ceremony may be postponed or eliminated. Marriage in the Catholic church gives a woman greater assurance that her husband will continue to support her. If a young woman was a virgin at marriage, her public character is evaluated positively and it is generally believed that she will remain faithful to her husband. The husband then demonstrates his respect for her by spending time at home or taking her out.” Though with time passed, now Chicanas are less controlled by the discipline of virginity.

⁴⁶ See Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 364: “The Roman Catholic Church, with its ideology of the suffering mother, is rigid in its view of the sanity of marriage; women who complain about their husbands’ behavior to the local priest and ask for advice are more than likely to be told, ‘It’s your cross and you have to bear it.’ Single parents are viewed suspiciously by both men and women. To be a single woman may be conceived by others as an indication of weakness.”

related to the Catholic Church's strict rules governing women's morality and faith.⁴⁷ Chicanas are taught to respect and comply with their fathers and husbands, and to follow the Catholic morality and religious discipline established by the Catholic Church.⁴⁸ In addition, Chicanas/os' reverence for the Catholic Church and the Virgin Mary construct a Chicana's womanhood by defining what a good woman is. For example, "[t]he Virgin Mary, especially her Mexican version, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, is the role model for Chicana womanhood: she is the mother, the nurturer, she has endured pain and sorrow, she is willing to serve. Chicanas are supposed to emulate these same values and apply them in serving their husbands and children" (Hurtado 141). In addition, the Catholicism's strong influences on Chicanas are passed down to their children. To illustrate, Chicana mothers teach their daughters to preserve their virginity and respect their fathers and husbands. Most women are trained to be devoted and devout to their religion, and those who deeply believe in their religion teach the same disciplines to their children. They teach their children to be in awe of God and to pray no matter what they encounter. Compared to Chicanos, Chicanas are more devoted to their religion and thus they are responsible for continuing its tradition. For instance, on the average, women attend church more often than men. In a Catholic household, Chicanas are in charge of taking the children to church. Besides, in the Catholic Church, the sisters are trained to be devoted and obedient to God's will. Therefore, it seems that religion is passed on by Chicanas in Chicana/o society.

Protestant Christianity is the second largest religious group in the Chicana/o community.

Although compared to the Roman Catholic Church it is only a small portion of the Chicana/o

⁴⁷ See Hondagneu-Sotelo, 234: "So what was the role of Catholic teachings on sexuality in the lives of these women? The overwhelming majority of the women in this study were educated in the Catholic faith. By no means did they deny the punishing nature of Catholic sexual morality. Premarital loss of virginity was accompanied by Catholic guilt, shame, and remorse."

⁴⁸ See Blea, 111: "Yet Chicana feminists point to the Catholic church as one of the most oppressive institutions in their culture. It is charged with exerting influence in not allowing women to define their own secular and spiritual lives. Feminists also say the church resists change and is oppressive in not recognizing the dissolution of marriages, in taking a firm stance against birth control and abortion, and in not allowing women to be priests."

population, more Chicanas/os gradually joined the Christianity in the U.S. in the 1990s. Because of the many restrictions and religious disciplines in the Roman Catholic Church, as well as its hierarchal system, many Chicanas/os sought other Christian denominations for spiritual solace.⁴⁹ In addition, the Catholic Church refused to support Chicanas/os when they fought for civil rights and other issues regarding welfare for communities.⁵⁰ The loss of clergy and the assimilation of the U.S. Catholicism also resulted in a decline of the Roman Catholic Church.

In addition, Chicanas/os' food traditions and eating habits have a lot to do with Mexico's food history. Mexican farmers have cultivated traditional crops such as corns, beans, squash, tomatoes, tomatillos, and chili peppers, and thus many Mexican traditional dishes are composed of those important crops.⁵¹ Corn is a very important cultural crop that has a close relationship with people of Mexican origin.⁵² It is a food staple that takes up a large portion of the diet among various indigenous groups and different social-classes in Mexico. It is also a significant ingredient in Mexican people's daily dishes such as tortillas. Beans are also mainstay of Mexican

⁴⁹ See Samora and Simon, 239-40: "The Christian Church, except for local community efforts, have seldom been at the forefront of helping to resolve some of the problems of Mexican Americans. In the late 1940s many of the Protestant organizations did attempt to help the migrant workers or seasonal farm workers with a type of welfare aid and limited health programs.... The Catholic Church, which claims most Spanish-speaking Americans as its members, has been quite negligent in its efforts to help Mexican Americans or the Spanish-speaking generally." Also, 232: "Since 1975, 8 percent of the total Latino population has abandoned Roman Catholicism. This figure is 15 percent for Mexican Americans, and as high as 24 percent for Puerto Ricans."

⁵⁰ See Blea, 112: "The Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s had much to do with this change. During this time many priests and community members approached the church to assist in addressing the issues of racism and sexism in the church. The church was at best resistant. At its worst it denied Chicanos support. This experience was widespread. It angered and alienated many members of the Hispanic community. Consequently, many, many Chicanos, including priests, left the Catholic church. Some left for more fundamentalist faiths. Others developed their own spirituality or abandoned religion altogether."

⁵¹ See Janet Long-Solis and Luis Alberto Vargas, *Food Culture in Mexico* (Westport: Greenwood, 2005), 32: "Corn, bean, and squash form what is sometimes called the triad of native Mexican agriculture. The three crops originated and were domesticated in Mexico during pre-Hispanic times. They constituted the basic foods in the ancient Mexican diet and make up the most important ingredients in the modern diet as well. Throughout history, the combination of these three food products has provided Mexicana with a diet sufficient in nutrition to allow them to maintain their health and provide enough energy for everyday living."

⁵² See Long-Solis and Vargas, 32: "It is common for many food systems to be dominated by a particular food item that is closely identified with the culture and can be considered vital to the group's well being. In Mexico, this role is played by corn. It is the most important as well as the most respected food crop in the Mexican diet and is considered sacred by indigenous peoples. There is a common belief among the population that human beings and corn share the same essence and that their destinies are closely connected. The corn plant is believed to be analogous to the life stages of a human being."

food.⁵³ Chicanas/os bring such eating habits into their community and family. Moreover, Chicanas/os' eating habits are related to their religions and different fiestas. For example, the Catholic Church restricts their believers from eating meat on Fridays and sets restrictions for diet during Lent. Besides, Chicanas/os' eating habits are also related to women's cultural inheritances and occupations. Chicana/o society is based on patriarchy and male domination, and it is influenced by Mexican's social and gender dynamics. Similar to women in many different countries, women in Mexico and Chicana/o society have been in charge of the daily cooking and housework.⁵⁴ Moreover, women are often thought to carry the food tradition to the next generation. Most of the women had to learn how to cook and then are expected to pass the traditional menu to their children. Although lately more Chicanas were working outside of the home and were too busy to prepare food for their families, they would buy traditional food outside instead of cooking by themselves.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Mexican women and Chicanas on different rungs of the social ladders have different ways of preparing food. Most of the women prepare food by themselves; middle-class women prefer buying convenient foods at a restaurant or market because they don't have time to cook, and upper-class women tend to hire household assistants to cook for them.⁵⁶ As a result, many Chicanas may not do their own cooking, but they

⁵³ See Long-Solis and Vargas, 66: "People ate two or three times a day. In the morning, before leaving for the fields, men drank a cup of *atole*, or corn gruel. The noon meal consisted of tortillas, salsa, and sometimes *pozol*. If there was food left over, they ate again before retiring to sleep. The first dish eaten was tortillas or tamales, served with a sauce."

⁵⁴ See Long-Solis and Vargas, 63: "In rural Mexico, women have always been in charge of preparing the daily food. They were also responsible for planting kitchen gardens, gathering wild plants, and finding cooking fuel. Food storage also came under the domain of their activities. Women could assume responsibilities that did not interfere with child bearing, the early education of their children, and other chores that could be carried out near the household."

⁵⁵ See Long-Solis and Vargas, 79: "The young women interviewed in the study stated that they were no longer brought up to learn to cook, because more emphasis was now placed upon education.... They also stated that they did not spend more than two hours a day preparing food for the family, because they could find everything nearby and did not waste time shopping. They do not make tortillas; rather, they buy them in the supermarket or from women who sell them on street corners by the dozen. They make use of convenience food products such as cubes of chicken broth and mixes for preparing stews and soups."

⁵⁶ See Long-Solis and Vargas, 79: "Upper-class women generally can afford to pay kitchen help to prepare the food."

create their own convenient way to cook or prepare traditional food. By buying traditional food, preparing food, or serving food, Chicanas pass their eating traditions on to the next generation.

Clothing is also an important cultural production that stands for the Chicana/o spirit and specificity. Chicanas/os preserve the ethnic specificity through continuing the clothing tradition from Mexican culture at rituals. In general, the design of Chicanas/os' clothing is based on comfort and practical purpose. To illustrate, many of Chicana/o garments are made of cotton, and Chicana's blouses or dresses often have short sleeves and a loose design, which are comfortable in the hot weather and convenient for dancing. Many young Chicanas will change the style or the color of the dresses they wear in the rituals, but the design is still similar to the traditional clothes. For working class Chicanas/os, their clothes also tend to be comfortable and convenient for working in the fields such as T-shirts, pants, trousers, and boots. Also, farmworkers usually wear many layers of clothing to protect themselves from the harsh working condition.⁵⁷ Although Chicana/o migrants who are among the labor-class or working-class may wear ordinary working clothes or casual clothes, in some special ceremonies or festivals they will dress in traditional Mexican outfits. For example, one of the important festivals for young Chicana is the *fiesta de quince años*, which is the so-called coming-of-age celebration for those girls who are fifteen years old. The *quinceañera* ceremony is a symbolic moment that represents the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The dresses young Chicanas wear are their first official female adult attires. "Like the wedding gown, it marks a change in the wearer's status in the community. The wedding gown signals that the woman is joining the ranks of married

Nonetheless, household help is becoming scarce and expensive. Many young women, who formerly made up part of the servant class, prefer to look for work as undocumented workers in the United States, where they can command a higher salary."

⁵⁷ See Segura and Denise, 259-60: "At their worksites, farmworker women felt alienated and estranged, wrapped in many layers of clothing that functioned as a protective barrier to the hostile environment—including work and weather conditions, as well as male harassment and women's gossip."

women; she becomes a *señora*. The *quinceañera* dress signals that the young woman is moving from girlhood to her new status as *señorita* and is available for marriage” (Cantú and Nájera-Ramírez 19). The clothes Chicanas/os wear in different ceremonies and rituals represent different social value and cultural symbols. In addition, the style and color of the clothes have different representations in different countries. For example, Mexican people usually wear colorful clothes to attend cultural festivals.⁵⁸ Following the dressing style of Mexicans, Chicanas/os also wear traditional clothes to attend traditional rituals, dancing parties, or religious events. However, men have a quite different dressing style from women. Most Chicanos tend to wear more Western or stylish clothes. For example, the zoot suit is a fashionable style that stands for Chicano masculinity and Chicano ethnic spirit.⁵⁹ Therefore, clothing in the Chicana/o community is one of the ways to show their ethnicity and cultural specificity.

To conclude, from examining the historical backgrounds of Chicana/o migrants, the geographical relationship between the United States and Mexico, Chicanas/os’ political participation, and their sociological and cultural specificity from 1950 to 2000, we are able to construct the outline of migrants’ lives in the U.S. at that certain period of time. The investigation also contributes to this research to analyze Chicana/o laborers and economic violence in *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Chicana/o familial and religious violence in *So Far from God*, and the racial and sexual violence Chicanas/os encounter in *Gulf Dreams*. In the following

⁵⁸ See Norma E. Cantú and Olga Nájera-Ramírez, *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*. (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2002), 19: “In Mexico, Central America, Cuba, and Puerto Rico the honoree invariably wears a pink or pastel shade, such as lavender, lime green, pale blue or yellow, or salmon. In some areas of Mexico and the United States a white dress is a must, and it is the *damas*, the fourteen young women who accompany the honoree, who don the pastel dress.”

⁵⁹ See Samora and Simon, 157: “In the early 1940s many Mexican-American teenagers wore ‘drapes.’ This popular style of clothing resembled the zoot suits worn in Harlem. It was designed to be comfortable to dance in, and was sometimes used as a signal that the wearer belonged to a club or gang. Most Anglos called the outfit a zoot suit and assumed that only hoodlums wore them.” Also, the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, a zoot suit means, “a type of man’s suit of exaggerated style popular in the 1940s (orig. worn by black men in the U.S.), characterized by a long, draped jacket with padded shoulders, and high-waisted tapering trousers.”

three chapters, I will analyze the three novels, respectively, to examine the different kinds of violence Chicanas/os suffered in the United States, and how they react to and fight against such discrimination and violence.

Chapter Two

Labor and Economic Violence: *Under the Feet of Jesus*

Helena María Viramontes' novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), is set in the mid-twentieth century in California. It is a story that delineates the Chicana/o migrants' work in the fields and orchards. Viramontes's parents, who meet in the Buttonwillow's cotton field, and César Chávez give her inspiration to writing the novel.⁶⁰ In the mid-twentieth century, there was a huge labor shortage in the southwestern U.S. including California, Texas, Arizona, and even Washington state due to World War II, and many migrants from Mexico came to the United States for job opportunities. It is also the time that agribusiness in California boomed. Many migrants and labor workers came to the orchards, farms, and cotton fields in California to search for job opportunities and a better quality of life. During this time, the U.S. government and Mexico signed the Bracero Agreement, which allowed many contract laborers to come to the United States to work. Although the agreement guaranteed housing, working, and other welfare for braceros, U.S. law and employers considered their own advantages before laborers' rights. Samora and Simon explain:

Needless to say, this proved quite advantageous to the American grower. Although the Bracero Agreement contained stipulations with regard to health, housing, food, wages, and working hours, most were disregarded by both the U.S. government and the growers. The requirement that Mexican nationals not be discriminated against was also disregarded. (140)

⁶⁰ Viramontes dedicated *Under the Feet of Jesus* to her parents and César Chávez. She wrote, "To my parents, Mary Louise LaBrada Viramontes and Serafin Bermúdez Viramontes who met in Buttonwillow picking cotton" and "In memory of César Chávez."

Also, the appealing working conditions attracted other migrants to work in the U.S. illegally, and without the protection of Bracero Agreement, their lives were even tougher. The migrants and farm laborers worked hard, endured harsh weather and environments, and tolerated inhumane treatment. Most of the migrants came to the southwestern U.S. to look for jobs, especially California. In the orchards and farms in California, laborers picked vegetables and fruits, enduring long working hours for meager wages. Employers did not pay the laborers overtime, and laborers did not have breaks during workdays. These unequal working conditions exhausted Chicana/o migrants and farm laborers.

In *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Estrella's family members and other migrant workers pick fruits and crops such as cotton, tomato, grapes, corn, and peaches from early in the morning to late into the evening. Before the harvest, they have to clean the plots of land, spread the seeds, and lift the frames. After the harvest, they have to dry the fruits and crops; they repeat the seasonal work over and over again. They often have to tolerate harsh weather, limited food and water, long hours working, and terrible working and living conditions.

Additionally, Viramontes dedicates the novel to the memory of César Chávez for his efforts to fight for the farm laborers. Chávez, who was born and grew up in California, formed the Farm Workers Association to help farm laborers and continued fighting for manual laborers' rights.⁶¹ He also helped Chicanas/os get more attention in political participation and increased

⁶¹ See Samora and Simon, 190: "César Chávez then moved to Delano, California, where he formed the Farm Workers Association, later the National Farm Workers Association (NFW)." Chávez launched a series of actions to boycott the grape and lettuce growers' deprivation of laborers' right. Chávez's NFW later cooperated with AWO (the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee) to form the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) and attempted to fight injustice and negotiate with the growers. Samora and Simon also say: "César Chávez, a man of vision, realized the union needed more widespread support than could be offered by its own membership. The cause of the farm worker needed to be brought to national attention and public wrath against the growers aroused. He planned and led a march of farm workers from Delano to the state capitol at Sacramento and in the process stirred millions of Americans. The grape boycott spread across the nation and was soon expanded to include all table grapes.... In 1970, two of the largest grape growers had come to terms with the union" (191). In addition, the film *César Chávez*, directed by Diego Luna and released in 2014, shows how Chávez fought for Chicanas/os' civil rights

the candidates in the Democratic Party in California in 1970s and 1980s. Chávez experienced some success, though he also encountered several setbacks. Nevertheless, his spirit led farm workers to continue standing up for their rights and negotiating with the employers and growers.

In California from the 1940s to the 1960s, many migrants had to move regularly to follow the crops' seasonal growth and harvest. Viramontes delineates labor workers' nomadic working situations in *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Due to the unstable seasonal farm work, many migrants had to move from one labor camp to another. They often lived in bunkhouses or bungalows, which were small and simple. Thirteen-year-old Estrella and her family members represent these nomadic laborers. The government permitted hiring child laborers in the 50s and 60s, so some employers hired children to work in the fields. Anne Shea states: "Farm labor is exempt from laws governing the use of child labor. Fourteen-year-olds can work in the fields with no restrictions and thirteen-year-olds may work with parental permission. If a child works on a small farm, she is not covered by labor regulation" (127). Many employers hired women and children to lower the cost of production.⁶² Echoing this statement, in the novel, Estrella accompanies her mother on the farm when she is four years old. By the time she is thirteen years old, she works in the fields and takes care of her siblings. Many children, like Estrella, had to work in the fields, and were therefore unable to attend school normally or regularly.

Viramontes also delineates Chicana/o migrants' culture, such as their clothing and typical food, and constructs the migrants' lives in California in the mid-twentieth century. For example, women play a traditional female role to do housework such as taking care of children,

and equality and how he founded the organization to help Chicana/o farmers.

⁶² A similar example is presented in Gonzalez and Fernandez, 101: "Throughout the 1920s and into the 1940s the cotton industry in Texas, California, and Arizona actively recruited Mexican families, taking advantage of patriarchal gender relations (and preserving them in the bargain) to lower the cost of production through utilizing the unpaid labor of women and children."

housekeeping, and cooking. In *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Petra cooks the tortilla and burrito for her family's lunch:

Starting in the middle, she rolled from north to south, flipped the dough, sprinkled flour, turned to remove the tortilla already baking on the comal, returned to roll from east to west until the tortilla was perfectly round, then place it on the comal, get more dough, sprinkled flour, turned to remove the baked tortilla from the comal and stack it on top of the others. Spoon the potatoes in the flour tortillas so nothing would spill. Fold the bottom of the tortilla, then the top, then the sides so that the burrito was a perfect envelope, then rewrap the burritos in foil for the lunches. (120)

Like Petra, most Chicanas also did the housework, grocery shopping, and prepared meals for their families. Besides, laundry was included in women's work, and they used to use yucca roots for laundry soap and ground stiff roots to wash clothes.

There are several important issues covered in *Under the Feet of Jesus* that are related to Chicana/o migrants' social lives and working conditions. Crucial issues include the laborers' citizenship and legal rights as well as the unequal treatment of the discrimination against them. For instance, Estrella encounters unequal treatment at school, in the clinic, and in the society despite her legal U.S. citizenship. She experiences race and class discrimination at school because of her identity as a laborer's child and her skin color. Viramontes emphasizes Estrella's bilingual status and disfranchisement of her right to education in the novel. Another significant issue is the poor living environment and employers' neglect of laborers' health. Alejo, Estrella, and their families encounter the spreading of pesticides, the lack of health insurance, and the lack of medical institutions and medical health care. As a result, in the following sections, I will

respectively discuss the important issues in this novel, including Chicanas/os' citizenship and identity confusion, economic violence, and health crisis.

Chicana/o Citizenship and Identity Confusion

Chicana/o laborers always struggle to gain U.S. citizenship and legal status because they believe citizenship grants them the power to negotiate wages, to receive welfare and rights, to have education, and to enjoy the medical resources. In other words, most Chicanas/os consider U.S. citizenship as a necessary key to protect them from employers' exploitation of their rights. In this section, I will mainly focus on the significance of citizenship among Chicana/o groups and issues such as bilingualism, social inequality, and political marginalization.

The first point is the importance of citizenship that makes a difference to Chicanas/os, and I will discuss what citizenship is and why migrant workers are eager to gain citizenship. As Alejandra Castañeda explains: "Citizenship, formed and protected by laws, lived and enacted by individuals, both forbids and necessitates migrants" (1). It is necessary for Chicana/o workers to strive for citizenship, because citizenship grants people the rights to receive education, to share national resources, to find a satisfying job, and to have more benefits. In the novel, Petra is always concerned about her daughter's legal status as a U.S. citizen because she believes that U.S. citizenship can give Estrella power and guarantees Estrella the same rights as the white people. At the end of *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Petra looks at her children's birth documents, which she has kept well preserved:

Black ink feet on the birth certificates, five perfect circular toes on each foot, a topography print of her children recorded, dated, legal, *for future use to establish age to enter school, when applying for working papers, establish legal age for*

rights of franchise, for jury or military service, to prove citizenship, to obtain passports, to prove right to inheritance of property. (Viramontes 166)

Petra believes her children's birth documents and legal status can help them find better jobs and thus get rid of the labor status. Moreover, having citizenship and legal status gives people the rights to vote and participate in political activities. Petra keeps telling Estrella that her authentic legal status as a U.S. citizen will help her discover more possibilities and that it gives her political and social status so she won't have to be a farmworker all her life. Petra is also afraid of the white people's stereotypes and prejudices that cause them to treat migrants of color as thieves and criminals. Her worries and fears result from the insecurity of being excluded from white society and lead Petra to strongly believe in the power of citizenship. Petra tells Estrella,

Don't run scared. You stay there and look at them in the eye. Don't let them make you feel you did a crime for picking the vegetables they'll be eating for dinner. If they stop you, if they try to pull you into the green vans, you tell them the birth certificates are under the feet of Jesus, just tell them. (Viramontes 63)

The phrase "under the feet of Jesus" has two meanings. One is literal, because Petra keeps her children's birth certificates under the statue of Jesus; another implies her children's authentic citizenship and legal status are proved by God.

Nevertheless, legal citizenship does not always stand on the moral and ethical side that grants everybody equal rights. Petra thinks her children's legal citizenship can give them power to elevate their status; however, laborers' legal rights are undermined by the white people's dominant regime, political control, and the injustice of U.S. law. Castañeda says, "[t]he way liberal democracy has defined citizenship has always presupposed the exclusion of certain groups from the category of citizenship, that is, of having rights and equality" (7). In the process

of legislation, the dominant government considers certain groups' privileges and advantages before those people of different races, classes, genders, religions, and sexualities. Therefore, people of different groups usually receive unequal treatment, and the distributions of social resources and welfare are unequal too. Most of the time, it is the dominant group that decides who will share most of the advantages and civil rights. As Castañeda explains:

Citizenship theory, for example, is the central question of this work. It is a question theorized, not only by the anthropologist, but also by migrants who maneuver their lives within and without state frameworks, and by nation-states as they attempt to define who can be a member of their polity. (5)

People who are included in the dominant group can take more advantage of their citizenship. Chicanas/os who have U.S. citizenship are still marginalized by the dominant white society, and they are deprived of their civil rights. Because of Chicanas/os' skin color, they are categorized as the minority group, while the white society occupies the top of social hierarchy. Viramontes contrasts white people and migrant laborers in many ways. When Estrella works in the fields, she thinks of the differences between herself and "the woman wearing a fluffy bonnet, holding out the grapes with her smiling, ruby lips, the sun a flat orange behind her" (Viramontes 49). Later when Estrella sees the nurse in the clinic, she is aware of her own "dirty face, fingernails lined with mud, her tennis shoes soiled, brown smears like coffee stains on her dress where she had cleaned her hands" (Viramontes 137) compared to the nurse's "white uniform and red lipstick and flood of carnations [which] made her even more self-consciousness" (Viramontes 137). Estrella's observations of the differences between herself and the white women mark a distinction of class and social status and convey that the privileges they receive are different. The laborers' rights and voices are usually ignored, Estrella says: "You talk and talk and talk to them

and they ignore you” (Viramontes 151). It is not until she picks up the crowbar and threatens the nurse that the nurse starts to listen to her. The crowbar is a symbol of power. With it, Estrella takes back her right to speak as she fights inequity. Although migrant laborers are often neglected or excluded, Estrella’s action represents her recapture of her rights. It also restates her citizenship. Viramontes uses Estrella as a figure to fight against the unequal society and empower the emigrant laborers. In her interview with Flys-Junquera, Viramontes concludes:

The fact of the matter is that Estrella was just too powerful. By that time, she was just an incredibly powerful figure to me and my endings were inappropriate. That’s why I sort of left it open in a celebration of having a capacity, the empowerment to know. (238)

Through the figure of Estrella, Viramontes reflects the situation of how white people deprive Chicana/o laborers of their citizenship and how they fight to regain the power. Being a part of the citizenry recognizes people’s civil rights and grants them power to negotiate their welfare. In order to gain citizenship and equal rights, migrant laborers have to resist the predominant white superiority and deal with multiple issues that attempt to marginalize Chicana/o laborers.

In addition, citizenship sometimes complicates bilingual and bicultural migrant children’s sense of belonging and self-identification. Compared to monolingual migrant laborers, bilingual migrant children have greater abilities to negotiate their social lives, but they also bear more responsibilities to deal with the duality of belonging to both the outer world and their families. Bilingual children have taken up the obligations that come with citizenship in their daily lives. Language proficiency and literacy are two important requirements for bilingual children to claim the authenticity of citizenship. Kenji Hakuta comments on migrants’ use of English: “Its dominance has been ensured by pressure applied at the institutional level, primarily in the public

schools, and by the psychological needs of immigrants to learn English so that they might fully achieve membership in American society” (165).

To be part of U.S. society, migrant laborers face the language struggle. Without the ability to speak English, migrants are unable to communicate with white people in the United States, and they cannot negotiate or argue their rights with employers. Without English language skills, they could potentially be deprived of their rights. For example, in the novel, Petra, who is a monolingual person and knows little English, is unable to argue for her meager wages and harsh working conditions. Still, even bilingual Chicana/o migrant children struggle with the back-and-forth transition from English to Spanish. Bilingual children of Spanish-speaking parents often play the role of translator between white people and their parents. Switching between the two languages is one of the burdens bilingual children must bear. Jeehyun Lim says, “On the one hand, [Estrella’s] literacy in English confers her a place in the English-dominant social order. On the other hand, Spanish’s role in Estrella’s acquisition of literacy in English points to the mediated relationship Estrella develops with the dominant language” (226). For bilingual children like Estrella, English is not only a requirement in the dominant society, it also functions as a tool to communicate and mediate between the two societies. Estrella has to be the translator between the nurse in the clinic and her mother. Switching from one language to another is common for bilingual labor children, and sometimes it is a struggle for them to choose which language they should use. Viramontes offers an example in the interview with Flys-Junquera:

Here you have a child who has spoken nothing but Spanish going to an educational school system where only English is permitted to be spoken.... There

is a powerful negative attitude that forces you to drop your language. But any time you come home, you come home to parents who speak that language. (225)

When children encountered the struggle of choosing a main language, they often chose the dominant language. It was not only due to the ban on using Spanish at schools,⁶³ but it was also related to the power and usefulness of English. In the novel, Petra usually talks to Estrella in Spanish, but Estrella often responds to her mother in English. In general, except for her mother, Estrella communicates with most people in English. Chicana/o children who encountered the situation often chose to use English because it was the dominant language, and speaking English was a requirement to survive in the white U.S. society. Viramontes says in the interview:

My growing up the first five years of my life speaking nothing but Spanish, and then going into the educational school system and finding out that Spanish was completely unacceptable there. Because it was unacceptable, it was almost as if anything that was attached to the language was a negative thing. So, I can understand to a certain extent why children grow up feeling that they want to hide their parents or the language or whatever, in order to be accepted into the larger dominant culture. (Viramontes and Flys-Junquera 225)

Viramontes's own experience is similar to Estrella's, and they both choose to speak English with people, except for their families. The fact that Estrella chooses to speak English as her main language shows that she understands the power of that language, and she hopes to be part of the dominant society. But during the process of choosing language, many bilingual and bicultural Chicana/o children will experience the confusion of their identity and belonging. It is also a struggle to choose to stand in the dominant side or the side with Mexican blood. For example, in

⁶³ See Samora and Simon, 162: "In an effort to ensure that Mexican Americans learn the English language, some states passed laws prohibiting the use of Spanish in instruction. Furthermore, many children who could not speak English were punished, sometimes physically, for speaking Spanish in the classroom or on the school grounds."

the novel, when the nurse does nothing but still charge Alejo, Estrella feels angry and threatens the nurse to take her money back. After Estrella threatens the nurse, she “felt like two Estrellas. One was a silent phantom who obediently marked a circle with a stick around the bungalow as the mother had requested, while the other held the crowbar and the money” (Viramontes 150). When Estrella takes back her power, she finds herself standing at a crossroad. Does she want to stay in the weak, obedient, and minority Chicana/o group or be part of the powerful and dominant white citizenship? To choose where to belong, Chicana/o migrant children have to experience the struggle of morals, origin, and race versus power, privilege, and class. When Chicana/o migrant children see themselves as U.S. citizens and claim their citizenship, they will probably be at risk of losing their Mexican culture and language.

Many children of Chicana/o laborers faced discrimination and unequal treatment at schools. Labor children were often deprived of their educational rights, and to participate in the citizenship and earn their education, they had to find the information they want by themselves. In the novel, Viramontes delineates how Estrella feels about the power of words and language when her teachers in the public schools exclude her. Estrella complains the teachers “never [give] her the information she wanted. Estrella would ask over and over” (Viramontes 24). Instead of educating her, “some of the teachers were more concerned about the dirt under her fingernails. They inspected her head for lice, parting her long hair with ice cream sticks. They scrubbed her fingers with a toothbrush until they were so sore she couldn’t hold a pencil properly” (Viramontes 24). Estrella cannot learn like normal students. Her status as a laborer’s child excludes her even more. Chicanas/os were often treated as criminal or thieves, and this stereotype also influenced laborers’ children. For example, Estrella’s teachers in the schools “had never let her take picture books outside of the classroom” (Viramontes 30). It seems that the

teachers do not trust Estrella, and they have the prejudice that Chicana/o laborers' children are likely to steal the books. Estrella also wonders "what happened to all the things they boxed away in tool chests and kept to themselves" (Viramontes 25). The tool chest is like the world that Estrella's white teachers block her from, which can give her the information to argue for her rights.

At first the English words are meaningless to Estrella, but after Perfecto teaches her the name of the tools, she starts to understand the significance of the dominant language and literacy. The name and the function of the tools are signifiers of the importance and the power of language skills. "Tools to build, bury, tear down, rearrange and repair, a box of reasons his hands took part in" (Viramontes 26). The tools represent the power of the language, and holding the power can change her inferior lives. "She lifted the pry bar in her hand, felt the coolness of iron and power of function, weighed the significance it awarded her, and soon she came to understand how essential it was to know these things. That was when she began to read" (Viramontes 26). Estrella knows that she can gain the information that is hidden from the schools only when she understands the dominant language. Jeehyun Lim comments, "In her desire for literacy as something that illustrates the power of language, Estrella shows a keen awareness of how language is complicit with the violence of power" (226). Through gaining the power of language, Estrella can negotiate with the white society and fight for her civil rights. Also, once Chicana/o children gain the knowledge and education, they can help improve their lives and future work. As a result, Chicana/o laborers' children must strive to gain the education and knowledge to empower themselves to fight against the unequal treatment they encounter at school and in society.

Economic Violence and Chicana/o Migrants' Health Crisis

Chicana/o migrant laborers often encounter many inequalities such as bad working conditions and poor living quality. Because of their lack of proficiency in the English language and their inferiority, many employers deprive laborers' of their rights and put an over-loaded working burden on them in order to gain profit. In this section, I will discuss several examples of economic violence against Chicana/o laborers and their health crisis in work and the poor medical care.

To begin explaining the economic violence against Chicana/o migrant laborers, I will focus on employers' exploitation of laborers' through their working conditions and living environments. Chicana/o laborers were often categorized as economically vulnerable and as social minorities in the U.S. labor market. There are many reasons Chicana/o migrant laborers face disabilities and disadvantages while working in the United States, these include racial discrimination. U.S. laws and policies tended to protect employers' rights and the government, rather than laborers' welfare. Furthermore, employers often paid laborers a lower wage, and they made workers to work overtime without extra pay in order to cut costs. Additionally, employers did not raise workers' wages even if they worked hard, and Federal law did not regulate the basic working time and salaries for the laborers. As Anne Shea comments, "[w]hen labor laws cover farmworkers, the standards are reduced, or very difficult to enforce, for a variety of reasons. Federal law excludes agricultural workers from wage and hour laws that protect others US workers" (126). Shea also says: "Immigration and labor law work together to create a legal space which excludes the voices of guestworkers.... Through the exclusion of the farmworkers' narratives, the law becomes a univocal script written by lawmakers and employers, and serving their interests" (127). Without the protection of U.S. law and policies, Chicana/o migrant

laborers are vulnerable, and their rights are often deprived. Laborers' wages are disproportionate to the work they do and the time they put in.

The exploitation of laborers' rights forces Chicana/o laborers to live in poverty. They are disadvantaged and impoverished. Employers often ignore workers' welfare. For example, employers did not give laborers days off, and they also did not provide health care coverage or retirement pensions for workers. As Segura and Zavella say, "[s]ome employers of agricultural businesses or labor contractors do not report the workers' salaries. Consequently, many farmworkers who become injured or reach retirement age cannot obtain Social Security benefits (Medicaid) or Medicare, a predicament that can further endanger their health" (250-51). If workers are hurt or suffer from dehydration, there is lack of medical resources to help them immediately. Moreover, many employers will sacrifice laborers' wellbeing. Farmworkers and laborers are seldom allowed to have breaks during the workday, and the resulting fatigue worsens laborers' health. Shea says, "It is not unusual for farmworkers to labor ten to twelve hours a day, seven days a week, without adequate breaks, food, water, or sanitation facilities" (127). Without any health care or breaks provided for the laborers, they are susceptible to illness and injury. Another reason that Chicana/o laborers are disadvantaged is their lack of education and practical skills. González notes: "Because the majority of Mexican immigrants enter the U.S. labor market with limited knowledge and job skills, their initial wages are typically lower than those of comparable U.S.-born workers" (47). Without professional skills or abilities, Chicana/o migrants can only work as manual laborers in the job markets. Lacking English skills also make it more difficult for Chicana/o migrant laborers to find employment, thus making their lives much tougher. In general, racial discrimination, lack of the protection by law, employers'

exploitation of laborers' rights, and limited language skills all result in Chicana/o migrant laborers living below the poverty line.

In addition, Chicanas and child laborers are more vulnerable in the patriarchal working system. Chicanas are even more inferior in both the Chicana/o and U.S. societies, and they have to tolerate economic exclusion with regard to race, class, and gender. I previously noted that some employers hire female and child laborers to lower the cost. Female farmworkers often work as hard as males, but females' wages are lower than their male counterparts. For the female-household family, in which women have to earn the money to raise the children, the overall burden is greater due to economic pressure. In the novel, Petra complains that her limited wage is not enough for her to buy food for children. She cannot even afford a cheap house: "[Petra] remembered every job was not enough wage, every uncertainty rested one certainty: food.... She remembered the moving, all night packing with trash bags left behind, to a cheaper rent they couldn't afford" (Viramontes 14). Their only option is to move back to the labor camps, which have both a bad environment and poor living quality. Furthermore, even though hiring child laborers is legal in some places, many employers exploit child laborers by not paying them. They also do not limit child laborers' work hours. Due to the oversight of the laws and government, many farm employers can hire female and child laborers to lower their labor costs. As a result, Chicana workers and child laborers are more likely to be exploited because of their social, racial, and gender inferiority.

Workers' health is also in great danger because of the lack of medical resources. In terms of access to medical service, non-citizens are less likely to have access to health care than U.S. citizens. There are some realistic reasons. First, most medical institutions consider U.S. citizens, especially white people, as preferential patients, and they have the rights to get better medical

care. According to a comment in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, “Medical care is structured for whites to access it earlier, one of the reasons their life expectancy is highest in the US, whereas people of color often cannot access care until the disease is too advanced for successful treatment” (186). Second, most of the medical institutions exhibit racial, classist, or sexual prejudices. For example, patients of color are often excluded by medical constitutions, and only the white patients can enjoy the best medical resources.⁶⁴ People who are not U.S. citizens or legal residents are likely to be rejected by the medical institutions. In the novel, when the nurse declares that Alejo has dysentery and suggests they take him to a larger hospital, Petra asks, “Does he have papers? What if the hospital reports him?” (Viramontes 142). Petra’s concern and worry represent the medical institution’s hostility against migrant laborers and shows how non-citizens are excluded from medical welfare in the U.S. Moreover, migrants of color are more likely to suffer poor health and ill treatment from the medical institutions. In *Color of Violence*, Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo says, “Given this history, it’s not surprising that people of color—especially poor people of color—often have served as the guinea pigs of the Medical Industrial Complex, suffering poor health and death as consequences” (185). Many Chicana/o migrant laborers have to suffer unequal treatment from medical institutions because of their lower social status and marginalized identities; thus, they are often turned away from hospitals or clinic centers in the U.S. Without citizenship, migrants who want to get medical treatment have to pay a large sum of money, but it is impossible for migrant laborers to afford such expensive medical care. In the novel, the nurse charges Estrella ten dollars for Alejo’s clinic visit even though he does not receive any medicine or a remedy. The difference exists not only between citizen and non-citizen, but also between white people and people of color. For the

⁶⁴ See Incite! Women of Color against Violence eds., *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Cambridge: South End P, 2006), 184: “Even if treatment is provided, violence persists as the delivery of medical ‘care’ is still rife with racism, classism, and sexism, as well as state and colonial interests and structures.”

nurse, ten or fifteen dollars is not a big deal, but it is a large sum for Estrella's family because they need the money to pay for gas. The nurse's indifferent attitude reflects medical industry's coolness toward minority groups, and it illustrates the huge gulf between white superiority and emigrant laborers. When Estrella tries to take back the money, she threatens the nurse with a crow bar: "Estrella slammed the crowbar down on the desk, shattering the school pictures of the nurse's children, sending the pencils flying to the floors and breaking the porcelain cat with a nurse's cap into pieces" (Viramontes 149). For the white nurse, the irony lies in her seeing of Estrella's action of protecting Alejo as violent but not the systemic violence imposed on Alejo due to the use of pesticide on the farm. Shea says: "While the white nurse sees Estrella's act as violent, she does not see the systemic violence that bears down on the migrant family because it is rendered invisible through its normalization. For the nurse, Alejo's pesticide poisoning does not appear to be an act of violence" (139). The white social system and the medical violence against Chicana/o laborers endanger their health and quality of life. It is cruel for Chicana/o migrants that live in poverty to be denied health care because they have no money or resources to get medical treatment. The lack of health insurance, the identity of people of color, and the inability to pay medical fees all exacerbate Chicana/o migrant laborers' health.

The bad living conditions, the harsh working environments, the inaccessible medical institutions, and other medical violence all negatively affect Chicana/o migrant laborers' health. In the novel, Estrella and her family live in a labor camp, a place that accommodates a lot of farm laborers; the living quality is relatively low and life in the camp is dangerous. For example, Estrella finds that there are pesticides in the water: "Estrella had heard through the grapevine about the water, and knew Big Mac the Foreman lied about the pesticide not spilling into the ditch; but the water seemed clear and cool and irresistible on such a hot day" (Viramontes 32).

The poisonous water is harmful to the farm workers. The harsh working circumstances also increase Chicana/o laborers' health crisis.⁶⁵ The overloaded work, the torrid weather, and exposure to toxic chemicals and pesticides worsen laborers' health.

Compared to their male counterparts, Chicana laborers are more vulnerable in the medical system. According to Segura and Zavella, "Women farmworkers also face high rates of reproductive problems and an infant mortality rate that is 25 percent higher than the national average" (251). Chicana workers encounter more health problems and are more exhausted because they have to do both the farm work and housework. The bad living environment also increases the infant morbidity and mortality rates. For instance, in the novel, when Estrella notices the water might be poisonous, she asks Maxine: "You think cause of the water our babies are gonna come out with no mouth or something?" (Viramontes 33). Estrella is aware that the toxic chemicals will do harm to everyone's health and that they endanger their children. Women who drink the poisonous water will probably give birth to dead or deformed infants.

Besides, the lack of health insurance also exacerbates the farm-workers' health crisis. Most of the employers do not provide health insurance for their laborers, and they often ignore laborers' health conditions. For example, many employers spray pesticides to help the crops grow better, but they do not care whether the laborers are exposed. Shea says, "The pesticides are routinely used—because they are cost effective in the preservation of the agricultural commodity despite the fact that they kill and poison the laborer" (139). In the novel, Estrella wonders why the employers spray the orchards earlier than the original schedule, and Perfecto

⁶⁵ See Segura and Zavella, 251: "Farmworkers have some of this nation's most severe social problems and are at greater risk for infectious disease and chronic health conditions than the general population due to poverty, malnutrition, exposure to pesticides, and hazardous working conditions. . . . Some health concerns are clearly attributable to the occupational hazards of farm work and include toxic chemical injures, dermatitis, respiratory problems, dehydration, heat stroke, and urinary-tract infections. Others stem from social isolation, stress, and poor living conditions, and include depression, diabetes, and tuberculosis."

replies, “Since when do they do what they say?” (Viramontes 73). Employers only care about their own profits, not about laborers’ health. Like Alejo, many laborers who inhale poisonous pesticides will eventually die because of their lack of health insurance and sufficient medical health care. Although some job contracts note the welfare, including the health care that employers have to provide to the laborers, but most of the employers still ignore laborers’ health. Many migrant laborers are afraid of losing their jobs and will choose to tolerate the unequal treatment. Moreover, if workers are sick or injured because of accidents at work or spraying pesticides, employers do not compensate or assist them with medical aid. The health of Chicana/o laborers is often in great danger under such terrible working conditions. In *Color of Violence*, Durazo says:

Multiple variables are responsible for the proliferation of these illnesses in our communities, including overexposure to toxic environmental conditions, limited access to healthy foods, and migrant displacement from land and families; each of these factors is a consequence of racism and social inequalities. (186)

The terrible living and working conditions, the lack of health care and health insurance, and the employers’ neglect of laborers’ health worsen Chicana/o laborers’ health crisis. In addition, the poor medical institutions and lack of access to medical health care are negatively affect laborers’ health.

In the novel, Estrella’s family can only take Alejo to a small clinic in the neighborhood near the labor camp. Otherwise, they would have to drive an extra twenty miles to get to the hospital. The small clinic is simple, it smells bad, the wood-panel wall is flaking, and the equipment is old and needs to be repaired. When Perfecto checks the clinic facilities, he notices “the smell of bad plumbing” and “a toilet needing repairing” (Viramontes 136). The clinic is

insufficient and not suitable for taking care of patients, but it is the only medical institution nearby and therefore the only one that Estrella's family can turn to. Moreover, the doctor does not appear in the clinic, and it is the nurse who diagnoses Alejo. The situation represented in the novel points out the limited medical resources for the Chicana/o laborers and shows the lack of acceptable medical institutions in laborers' neighborhoods. The poor medical equipment and lack of medicine illustrates that the issue of migrant laborers' health is often ignored. Most of the laborers who are injured or sick will eventually die in pain and desperation. As a result, with the poor medical resources and scarce medical institutions, Chicana/o migrant laborers are extremely vulnerable and disadvantaged.

To sum up, Chicana/o laborers' citizenship and identity confusion and the economic violence and health crisis that migrant workers encounter are two major issues addressed in *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Gaining U.S. citizenship grants people the rights to enjoy social welfare, but Chicana/o migrant laborers are not entitled to the application of citizenship. The bilingual Chicana/o migrant laborers' children are confused about belonging and self-identification. The economic violence against Chicana/o migrant laborers and the unequal treatment they suffer exploits their rights and exacerbates their lives. The bad working conditions and the poor medical health care also result in Chicana/o migrant laborers' health crisis. By examining these issues in the novel, Viramontes reveals plights and inequality that Chicana/o migrant laborer encounter and the economic violence they face.

Chapter Three

Family and Religious Violence: *So Far from God*

Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993) is set in the small town of Tome, New Mexico, in the late twentieth century. In this novel, Castillo discusses many issues related to family and religion, which have a very close relationship in Chicana/o society and people's daily life. The novel reflects, re-examines, and rethinks the female and male roles in the family and the idea of going back to the indigenous religion instead of being bound by Catholic discipline and moral constraints.

To analyze the heritage of ethnic groups and religion in New Mexico, we must examine its historical trace. New Mexico has abundant cultural stories, such as indigenous culture, Spanish heritage, Mexican tradition, and U.S. influence. Because of New Mexico's long historical transition from the pre-Columbian era to the twentieth century—which includes the habitation of indigenous people, being part of the New Spain colony and then of Mexico, and being eventually a state of the U.S.,⁶⁶ New Mexico has had rich cultural, religious, and historical treasures. For centuries, there have been many Hispanics, Indians, Latin Americans, Chicanas/os, and white U.S. residents in New Mexico, and thus one culture may somewhat influence the others. For example, New Mexico has many different religious groups that have been dominant at various times. Before Catholicism, there were several indigenous religions and myths in the

⁶⁶ See Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco A. Lomelí, *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque: El Norte, 1989), 178-79: "According to them, New Mexico's history had progressed through four stages of evolution, culminating in 'the magnetic wand of steam and iron,' (i.e., the railroad) breaking down 'the barriers of mountains, and join[ing] New Mexico with the world.' The first 'epoch' of this history had been the settlement of the country by the Pueblo Indians' ancestral kin." They keep saying: "The second epoch of New Mexico history had begun in the 1540s with the Spanish explorations of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and with the area's colonization in 1598." Then, the third epoch comes to the "period of Mexican rule," and the fourth the last epoch is the "advent of the ever restless and irresistible American."

society, but they were later overshadowed by the Roman Catholic Church. As Samora and Simon state:

The power of the Roman Catholic Church in New Mexico grew steadily. No one could escape its absolute authority. The Church controlled not only the Indians but the Spanish and mestizo populations as well. It was, in part, a spiritual control—control over the soul and consciences of the people.... In the villages, they relied heavily on the Church for their social contacts and recreation. The Church was the center of community life and the friars were often the only educated persons in the community. (51)

Not only religion but also other cultural specificities will be undermined by the dominant one. Therefore, searching for old traditions and coming back to the indigenous cultures may become objectives for the minority, as it became one of the key points in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s by the Chicana/o community. Its goal was to fight against social inequality and reconstruct self-identification in the Chicana/o community. One of the main ideas in the movement was to find the old spirit that stands for the Chicana/o community. The people were eager to go back to Aztlán,⁶⁷ which was their missing homeland, and re-appropriated it as the symbol of Chicana/o spirit and their roots.

It is worth noting that the term “Aztlán” did not appear until 1968, when it was documented in “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” at the Denver Conference.⁶⁸ It remains a puzzle

⁶⁷ See Anaya and Lomelí, iii: “Aztlán offers a variety of meanings for Chicanos. The term ‘Aztlán’ helped establish the context for the acceptance and promotion of a single umbrella term under which we could fit the various labels we call ourselves. For some, Aztlán may appear to be an anachronism from the pages of Aztec or Náhuatl mythology that was lost in annals of Native Americans history.... For people of Mexico descent, Aztlán exists at the level of symbol and archetype. It is a symbol which speaks of origins and ancestors, and it is a symbol of what we imagine ourselves to be. It embodies a human perspective of time and place.”

⁶⁸ See Anaya and Lomelí, 11: “‘El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán’ is important because in it the Chicano recognizes his Aztec origins (‘We, the Chicano habitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán, from whence came our forefathers...’); because it established that Aztlán is the Mexican territory ceded to the United States in 1848; and

where the exact Aztlán is located, and many documents have tried to find its geographical location.⁶⁹ Despite the different assumption of the location of Aztlán, many simply believe that it is a legendary and ancestral place of Aztec origin. In the Nahuatl language, “Aztec” means “people from Aztlán.” As Anaya and Lomelí say:

According to the Nahuatl myth, the Aztecs were the last remaining tribe of seven, and they were advised by their god Huitzilopochtli to leave Aztlán in search of the promise land, which they would know by an eagle sitting on a nopal devouring a serpent. (8)

The image of the black eagle symbolizes the spirit of Chicana/o, and it becomes one of the important symbols in the Chicano Movement.⁷⁰ For some people, “Aztlán” means the lost territory—the southwestern U.S., which was ceded by Mexico to the United States in 1848—and finding Aztlán is a way to argue for the rights that originally belonged to them.⁷¹ However,

because, following one of the basic ideas of the Mexican Revolution, it recognizes that the land belongs to those who work it (‘Aztlán belongs to those that plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops’); and finally, it identifies the Chicano with Aztlán (‘We are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are AZTLAN’).”

⁶⁹ See Anaya and Lomelí, 10: “Cecilio Robelo, the Mexican historian of Nahuatl mythology, tells us, ‘It is generally believed that Aztlán was located to the north of the Gulf of California.’ But not even that conjecture is accepted, since later he adds, ‘The inexorable question, then, of the place where the Mexica came from, still remains.’ There was even a book published in 1933 entitled *Aztlán*, trying to prove that Aztlán can be found in the lake of Wisconsin. Others have said that it was in Florida; others believe that it was in New Mexico; and still others in California. It was even said that Aztlán was to be found in China.”

⁷⁰ See Anaya and Lomelí, 6-7: “The symbols which have served to give unity to the Chicano movement and which appear in literature are many: Aztlán, the black eagle of the farm workers, the Virgin of Guadalupe, *la huelga*, the expression ¡Viva la Raza!, and the characteristic handshake. . . . The Virgin of Guadalupe was one of the symbols that helped to create Mexican nationality and political independence, her image having been hoisted by Father Miguel Hidalgo in 1810. The eagle of the farmworkers has an older origin, the foundation of Tenochtitlán by the Aztec in 1325, where the people from Aztlán found an island an eagle sitting on a nopal devouring a serpent.” In the Chicano movement, the black eagle was used as a symbol to stand for Chicana/o farmers’ spirit and power. See Anaya and Lomelí, 7: “As a visual symbol, and not literary, the black eagle in the white circle over a red background symbolized for the Chicano the triumph over economic injustice by means of the farm workers’ union, whose aim is to obtain a better standard of living, and also cultural identity.”

⁷¹ After the United States annexed Texas, which was Mexican territory, the Mexican government viewed this action as a hostile behavior, and declared war on the U.S. However, Mexico lost the Mexican-American War, and the countries signed a treaty in 1848 at Guadalupe Hidalgo, a suburb of Mexico City, known as “the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.” According to Samora and Simon, 99-100, the first purpose of the treaty is “to turn a vast area of Mexican domain over to the United States.” Also, “By the terms of the treaty, Mexico approved the prior (1845) U.S. annexation of Texas, thus ending twenty years of squabbling and warfare over the future of that territory. Furthermore, Mexico ceded a vast expanse of territory, long coveted by Americans, to the United States. The

others see Aztlán as an old tradition, and looking for the Aztlán is finding their roots and claiming themselves as “the people of Aztlán.” Through the process of looking back, it helps Chicanas/os to re-define who they are, where they belong, and what they have lost. As Anaya and Lomelí say:

For Chicanos the concept of Aztlán signaled a unifying point of cohesion through which they could define the foundations for an identity. Aztlán brought together a culture that had been somewhat disjointed and dispersed, allowing it, for the first time, a framework within which to understand itself. . . . Aztlán became a collective symbol by which to recover the past that had been wrestled away from the inhabitants of Aztlán through the multiple conquests of the area. (ii)

Going back to the Aztlán presents Chicanas/os’ doubt regarding the dominant social norms and traditions, and it helps Chicanas/os to reestablish the true spirit and to find their value with the old indigenous past. Echoing the concept of going back to indigenous belief, Castillo in *So Far from God* also questions the Roman Catholic Church and its control over Chicanas’ behaviors and thinking, and she delineates the female characters’ abandonment of Catholicism to pursue other spiritual beliefs and indigenous religions. For example, in the novel, when Caridad’s relationship with a woman is not accepted by the Catholic Church, she chooses to turn to the indigenous religion to escape the condemnation and criticism. She jumps off a cliff with her female companion, and then an indigenous deity embraces their love and their way of life.

Furthermore, the mother, Sofi, denies the constraints and taboos of the Catholic Church,

Mexican Cession fulfilled the goals of Manifest Destiny, including modern California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, and a bit of Wyoming.” However, “the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo bound the United States to protect these newly acquired citizens and to guarantee their civil rights. It gave the Mexican Americans the right to right to retain their language. . . . It gave them the right to retain their religion, to worship according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. And it gave them the right to retain their culture, to follow customs their families had practiced for generations and to celebrate the traditional fiestas without interference.” However, the U.S. government did not obey the treaty, and the government did not guarantee the equal rights for Chicanas/os that it promised.

constructs her own organization that takes care of Chicanas who find their own spiritual reliance. Castillo creates the female roles that either go back to the indigenous religion or create a new spiritual world for Chicanas, all representing the rebellion and resistance to the Catholic Church's domination and moral discipline of Chicanas. Also, Castillo also uses the female characters' experience to criticize the patriarchal system within the Catholic Church and Chicana/o society. She uses irony to delineate how patriarchy and Catholic norms confine Chicanas and how Chicanas fight against religious violence and traditional male domination in the novel.

Family Structure and Chicana Rebellion

Familia and the family bond are important in the Chicana/o community, and the dynamics in the Chicana/o household have a lot to do with its familial structure. As with most culture, Chicana/o society is dominated by male superiority; the patriarchal system in the society confines Chicanas' thoughts and behavior and narrows their social roles. For example, because of patriarchy, Chicanas are expected to do the housework and to be good wives and mothers. Trujillo says, "Historically, in dual-headed households, Chicanas (as well as other women) were relegated to the tasks of home care and child rearing, while the men took on the task of earning the family's income" (284). Furthermore, in the traditional male-dominated Chicana/o family, women often suffer domestic violence and constraining social norms. Castillo tries to subvert the male household and patriarchal society to a female household and matriarchal domination. The four main characters—Fe, Esperanza, Caridad, and Sofi—suffer from patriarchal norms and react to the violence against them. Castillo subverts the traditional male personality in reflection to female awareness and rebellion.

In *So Far from God*, Castillo uses the metaphor of naming to subvert the traditional Chicana roles. The meaning of naming functions as a means to represent Chicanas' rebellion to the patriarchal society. As Sirias and McGarry say:

Under patriarchy, naming constitutes a tool of domination through its power to symbolically confine the named within the parameters of an imposed gender identity. Naming, however, can also function as a tool for empowering self-definition, a means by which to redefine women's identity and reject imposed descriptions of the self. (84)

Castillo employs the different meanings of the four characters' names to denote the virtue of traditional Chicanas. The name of one of the female characters—Fe, who is Sofi's third daughter—stands for the virtue of "faith." Her faith is tied to the patriarchal norm, which is to be a wife. She is the only one among all the daughters who always wants to have a wonderful marriage, and she is the one who follows the patriarchal social constraints to get married and serve the husband. However, after her fiancé, Tom, cancels the wedding, her faith experiences severe crisis and doubt. The crushing of her faith causes a traumatic wound. After she reads Tom's letter saying that he wants to break up with her, she starts to scream. She keeps screaming for months, and no one can stop her from bemoaning the loss of her beloved man.

Unfortunately, nothing and no one could quiet Fe down. She wanted her Tom back. And even when Caridad managed to get some tranquilizers from her hospital friends, Fe would only shut up for an hour or two at a time when she slept. She even screamed while she was being fed (because now it was Sofi and her daughters who took turns feeding, cleaning, and dressing poor Fe, who was

truly a mess and who—if she were in any way capable of realizing it—would have been horrified at that thought). (Castillo 31-32)

Fe is the traditional female character who follows Chicana/o social norms, but her faith lets her down, and she is traumatized for a long time. Moreover, after her lengthy screaming, she is unable to complete any discourse. Even when Sofi asks Fe's opinion about her sister's disappearance, she replies: "Did you __ think ____ Cari __ eloped?" (Castillo 86). Fe's suggestion shows her loss and disappointment to fulfill the social responsibility to be a wife: "Poor Fe, she never did get over Tom. All she seemed to think about were bridal gowns, floral arrangements, and the June wedding she never had" (Castillo 86). It is not until she meets her cousin, Casey, a descendant of shepherders who later becomes her husband, that she starts to get better. She finally gets the wedding she has dreamed of, and, to have a better life, she quits her job in the bank to look for higher paying jobs. However, she dies from skin cancer after being exposed to hazardous chemicals in the factory. The death of Fe is an ironic metaphor of the death of her faith, which is the model of the idealized figure in Chicana/o society. Her marriage eventually leads to her death, which shows that she becomes the victims under the oppressive and destructive patriarchal authority. Also, Fe's faith in getting into the superior white society so she can earn more money results in her death. Manríquez comments: "Fe's faith in the capitalist system and her ambition to possess a house, car, and social status are curtailed because her dedication to her job is based on her desire to make more and more money, so much so that she blinds herself to her poisonous surroundings" (42). Fe's death implies the loss of her faith and dream of getting higher status in the white world, and it represents the difficulties and danger for Chicanas/os who want to become part of the white social status. Chicanas/os who are eager to get more privilege and wealth often become victims in capitalist and white society.

In contrast, Castillo's delineation of Fe's two men, Tom and Casey, subverts the predominant patriarchy in the Chicana/o community. Tom's selfishness and weakness break Fe's dream and faith. He does not want to take on the responsibility of a family household, and his weakness results in regret when he knows Fe is marrying her cousin. He thinks, "Not even in the dreams he used to have about Fe after crying himself to sleep on most Saturday nights, after a double shift at the store and a few whiskeys at a poker game with friends, would Fe ever be his again?" (173). Tom's character ironically delineates to those men who enjoy happiness but refuse to undertake responsibility. Compared to Tom, Casey is more obedient to Fe. Casey's role is another subversion of Chicano machismo, and it shows the rise of Chicanas' status in the family. Because of Casey's status as a descendant of downfallen shepherders and his deep love for Fe, he is absolutely devoted and loyal to her. His much lower social status and his habit of bleating make Casey obedient to Fe, but the most important motivation is his love for her. As Castillo states, "Casey usually drove her to work and picked her up and it was Casey who liked to cook dinner most evenings. Casey was in love" (179). In the case of Fe and Casey, the traditional female and male roles are reversed, and it is the women who makes the decisions. Castillo uses Casey to show how traditional female and male figures are challenged and gradually changed.

The second character to consider is Esperanza, Sofi's eldest daughter. Esperanza is smart and confident and the only daughter to get an MA degree. She organizes a group named La Raza Politics during her college life to fight against social and ethnic injustice, and she devotes herself to the Chicano Movement. Her name stands for "hope," which fits her promising life: a wonderful educational experience, a good job as broadcaster, and a steady relationship with her boyfriend, Rubén. Her life is full of hope and happiness. Castillo writes, "Upon receiving her

degree, she landed a job at the local T.V. station as a news broadcaster. These were transitional years where she felt like a woman with brains was as good as dead for all the happiness it brought her in the love apartment” (26). Her life seems perfect and successful; however, she encounters the first setback when Rubén dumps her to chase a middle-class white girl. Although Esperanza is an independent woman who always has her own thoughts, the failure of her relationship with Rubén hurts her for a long time. When they go back to each other, they routinely meet at a Native-American Church and make love after the meeting. At this time, she abandons her social life with others, and Rubén occupies her whole world. She even turns down a great promotion in Houston to stay with Rubén, even though she knows Rubén simply wants to have sex with her.

[The relationship] completely closed her off from her other life, the life which Rubén referred to derogatorily as “careerist.” She felt just plain sad and lonely about it. She wanted to share with him that part of her life. She needed to bring it all together, to consolidate the spiritual with the practical side if things. But whenever she suggested to Rubén that they have lunch again like they did that first time or to go out on a regular date in between meetings, he simply declined with no apologies, regrets, or explanations. (Castillo 37)

Esperanza’s relationship with Rubén results in her loss of confidence and self-worth. When she is with Rubén, she completely loses herself and she is always the one who has to sacrifice. For example, when they are dating, they ride in “[Esperanza’s] car with her gas, all up and down the Southwest to attend meetings” (Castillo 39). Also, Rubén “always let [Esperanza] pick up the tab whenever they stopped someplace for a few beers and burritos just before she left him” (Castillo 39). Esperanza pays for all the food, gas, and telephone calls, and she even leaves some money

on his bedroom dresser. In this relationship, her opinions do not matter. It is always Rubén who decides the place and time to meet, and he only thinks of Esperanza as a casual friend who can sometimes have sex with him. She eventually makes up her mind to leave him when she receives a job offer in Washington, DC. However, she goes missing after she is sent to be a front-line reporter in Saudi Arabia. Her missing symbolizes her loss of hope, which ironically delineates her failure both in familial relationships and her relationship with Rubén, no matter how successful or promising her life is. Manríquez comments:

Even though Esperanza seeks to escape Tome by going to college presumably to learn new interactions and practical skills, her family's need and her interpersonal relationships with men continue to draw her back into her family's dysfunctional behaviors. Because she harbors an attraction for machos, she continues to allow her renegade boyfriend to use her for sex and spending money. (42)

Being the eldest daughter, Esperanza is always the one who has to be independent and who is often ignored. Esperanza seeks to find her position and self-value through struggling with her family and Rubén, but in the end her hope is still missing in the dominant society. In contrast, Rubén is a man who cares only about himself, and his patriarchal thinking results in Esperanza's depression and disappointment. Rubén is influenced by the patriarchal society and chauvinism, and he always puts the stress of being a good Chicana on Esperanza:

After all, there was Rubén with his Native and Chicano male friends always joking among themselves, always siding with each other, and always agreeing about the order and reason of the universe, and since Esperanza had no Native women friends to verify any what they were doing she did not venture to contradict him. (36)

Rubén, like other Chicanos, believes in the fixed male and female roles. In the novel, Castillo presents Rubén as a selfish man who utilizes the women who love him to gain everything he wants. He stays with the white woman just because her father can offer him a better job, but he does not forget Esperanza. Although he gains a successful life, Esperanza's missing leaves him with regret and feeling of loss. Castillo uses Rubén's case to mock the men who make use of women's love to gain what they want but eventually feel emptiness.

Sofi's second daughter, Caridad, subverts the traditional patriarchal norms in another way. Caridad, whose name stands for "charity," is the most beautiful among her sisters. Her charity of giving her love unconditionally to men causes her to be the victim of patriarchal violence. When she is cheated on and then abandoned by her husband Memo, her life becomes a mess. She engages promiscuous behavior with those men she meets in bars and "no longer discriminate[s] between giving her love to Memo and only to Memo whenever he wanted it and loving anyone she met at the bars who vaguely resembles Memo" (Castillo 27). Finally, her promiscuity is punished by the patriarchal society after she is raped, terribly mutilated, and dumped by the side of the road. Her "nipples had been bitten off. She had also been scourged with something, branded like cattle. Worst of all, a tracheotomy was performed because she had also been stabbed in the throat" (Castillo 33). Her promiscuous behavior results in her devastation and punishment from the community. Castillo writes:

[T]here are still those for whom there is no kindness in their hearts for a young woman who has enjoyed life, so to speak. Among them were the sheriff's deputies and the local police department; therefore Caridad's attacker or attackers were never found. No one was even ever detained as a suspect. (33)

Her miserable experience is the punishment to her licentious lives, and her behaviors are condemned and scolded by the patriarchal society. After a miraculous recovery, the “Holy Restoration,” she has completely no interest in men and follows her mentor, doña Felicia, as a healer, a *curandera*. During the time being as an apprentice, she falls in love with a woman, Esmeralda, who is once “on-the-wall-now-on-a-hill” (Castillo 79). However, her love for another woman is not accepted by the patriarchal society, which strongly denounces lesbianism. Caridad knows it in her hearts, and she thinks: “How could she tell doña Felicia that for the first time in years, since way before the attack, her heart was renewed, moved by another human being? Admit it, Woman-on-the-wall was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen—but she had scarcely had more than a glimpse of her” (79). But Francisco el Penitente, who is doña Felicia’s godson and Caridad’s obsessed stalker, discovers her relationship with Esmeralda. To escape his obsessive condemnation of the Chicana/o society, Caridad and Esmeralda jump off a cliff. Sirias and McGarry say, “Her lesbianism is unacceptable, and she is sacrificed in order to purify patriarchal society” (86). For the patriarchal society, homosexuality threatens the established heterosexual social structure and harms masculine authority. Therefore, Caridad’s lesbian relationship with Esmeralda is not accepted by Chicana/o society. In general, Caridad is disappointed by her own giving of affection and love, and the disappointment results from patriarchal society. Her love for Memo leads to grief and her lesbian love for Esmeralda is rejected by the male-dominated society, which sees it as destabilizing patriarchal order and harming the heterosexual harmony in the Chicana/o community. As Trujillo says: “I argue that Chicana lesbians are perceived as a greater threat to the Chicano community because their existence disrupts the established order of male dominance, and raises the consciousness on many Chicana women regarding their own independence and control” (281).

As a contrast, Castillo uses two male characters, Memo and Francisco, to represent two kinds of patriarchal symbols. Memo has great male authority, and he only wants to enjoy Caridad's love rather than take the responsibility to care for Caridad in her pregnancy. As a result, Caridad has three abortions, all performed by La Loca, her youngest sister, and she has to bear the guilt of killing her own children. Memo not only cheats on Caridad but also abandons her by joining the navy to escape responsibility. "Memo shamefully running around behind Caridad's back like he did when they had just gotten married and she was expecting. He really should have been more of a man and just settled down to support his new familia instead of running away to the Army" (Castillo 135). Caridad is subordinate to the patriarchal domination, but when she tries to go against men's will to give her love to a woman, the patriarchal society once again destroys her. Francisco is another dominant male symbol that serves as a moral criterion, and his crush on Caridad is a part of the patriarchal dominance and surveillance that haunts her. To own Caridad and show his machismo to control women, he abducts Esmeralda in front of the rape crisis center and then rapes her. Castillo uses the plot to show the ironic contrast to the patriarchal violence against women. The rape crisis center fails to protect women from the dominant male bully, which results in more women facing the security crisis. Johnson says that Castillo is:

[E]voking the power of the patriarchal hegemonic discourse as a mode of control over women's autonomy and sexuality. Castillo portrays the rape as punishment for Esmeralda, who trespasses onto Francisco's property by loving Caridad and, more significantly, who crosses the rigid, virtually impassable border that restricts women to heterosexual desire, when they are allowed to desire at all. (50)

Francisco's behavior shows the brutality of the male hegemonic domination and control over women's sexuality, and it represents the heterosexual norm's rejection to homosexuality. To oppose the male violence and the social rejection of their sexuality, Caridad and Esmeralda choose death to set themselves free from the social constraints. In other words, Caridad's desperate behavior of jumping off the cliff is her protest and her way to escape the persecution of patriarchal society.

Finally, the mother, Sofi, who is the symbol of "wisdom," completely overturns the patriarchal society, which confines women and exacerbates the pain of women's lives. Also, she gains wisdom through her daughters' miserable experiences, and she uses it to fight the male domination. Sofi is taught to be a traditional Chicana woman, who always cares for her daughters and takes good care of her family. Throughout most of her life, she has been worrying about her daughters, and she suffers greatly from her daughters' misery and her husband's cowardice and failings. She devotes herself to the family but could barely have her own life or accomplish other things. "Sofi never did let herself have a good time. Of course, who could blame her, with that strange child of hers with that peculiar affliction of being allergic to people?" (Castillo 134). After her husband leaves her with four children, she has to work very hard to support the family; thus she does not have time to enjoy her life. She does not attend any festival, holiday, important ceremony, or party. Her husband abandons her and their daughters without leaving any message, so Sofia has to sacrifice her own life and freedom to care for the children and make ends meet. In this patriarchal society, Chicanos impose the obligation of child-bearing on women, forcing them to sacrifice themselves for the family. When Sofi is young, her father always evokes the bad female figure of La Llorona,⁷² who "left her husband

⁷² See Kelli Lyon Johnson's article, "Violence in the Borderlands: Crossing to the Home Space in the Novels of Ana Castillo," 43: "The 'Mexican version of the bogeyman,' as Earl Shorris calls La Llorona, is based on an actual

and home, drowned her babies to run off and have a sinful life” (Castillo 161). Patriarchal society presents the bad female model to warn women that, if they are unwilling to take care of their families, they will be seriously punished by God. However, men shirk the responsibility to support the family, and their extraordinary male authority gives them the freedom to follow their will.

Sofi thinks of her own experience, “all her life, there had always been at least one woman around like her, left alone, abandoned, divorced, or widowed, to raise their children” (Castillo 161). In her life, she has never violated the social norms and expectation of being a “good” woman: “Sofi had devoted her life to being a good daughter, a good wife, and good mother, or at least had given it all a hell of a good try” (218). However, after Sofi sees her daughters’ miserable relationships with men and her own suffering in the male-dominated society, she wants to run for la mayor of Tome to make a change and improve women’s lives. She helps women develop their skills and find a sense of accomplishment from the work. “As cooperative owners of their wool-weaving business they had paying jobs they could count on and were proud of and the mothers among them didn’t worry so much about their babies and childcare because they could bring their ’jitos to work” (Castillo 147). Also, those women with particular skills can earn “an associate’s degree in business or in fine arts” (147). Sofi’s wisdom and foresight not only empower women, but also give them the ability to gain higher social status. Besides, she is a woman who dares to challenge and change the order of patriarchal society, and she is the first mayor of Tome. Eventually, she even asks for a divorce from her husband, Don Domingo, who does nothing but burden Sofi. Sofi’s behaviors question the patriarchal violence against women

historical figure, La Malinche or Malintzin, an Indigenous woman who has been stigmatized by her supposed efforts to assist her lover Cortez in the colonization and destruction of her own people. As Castillo explains the tradition, “[F]olklore has it that [La Llorona] drowned her own children to go off with a lover and was then cursed by God to search for them throughout eternity. She is almost always sighted near water; and men, above all, fear the vision.”

and attack male authority. Furthermore, her asking for a divorce shows a resistance to the law that is based on a patriarchal society, which supports men and gives them the advantage. Castillo writes:

[T]he house, that home of mud and straw and stucco and in some places brick—which had been her mother’s and father’s and her grandparents’, for that matter—that house had belonged to *her*. The law, however, based on ‘community property,’ stated that the house belonged to her legal husband who remained, even after twenty years of being *la Abandonada*, Domingo. (215)

The patriarchal society legislates to protect males’ privilege and advantages and to deny females’ rights. Thus, Sofi’s divorce is her resistance of inequality in Chicana/o society, and Castillo uses Sofi as a figure of wisdom and justice to challenge patriarchal authority. In contrast, Domingo, who is represented as a weak man without any sense of responsibility, is used by Castillo to criticize the patriarchal system that lays all the burden on women. Domingo leaves his wife and children for many years to go gambling. When he comes back, he still does nothing but gamble, and he even uses Sofi’s jewelry as pledge and sells the lands Sofi’s grandfather gave her as a wedding present. When Caridad makes a miraculous recovery, Domingo only cares for his daughter’s prophecy, which can bring him great fortune. He seldom cares about his daughters, not to mention helping his wife with the housework. When he learns that Sofi is going to run for la mayor of Tome, he tells her that “it sounds like you’re going to run for mayor of this house, not of Tome” (Castillo 143). He also knows that “under the circumstances, with everybody but La Loca gone, Sofi being the mayor of the house would mean that he would be the only one around to be delegated every task” (Castillo 143). Castillo uses Domingo to represent Chicanos’

laziness and inabilities, and her delineation subverts the established machismo and Chicano figures in Chicana/o society.

Religious Violence and Chicana Resistance

The Catholic religion is a significant part of Chicanas/os' lives, and it especially has great influence on Chicanas' thoughts, behavior, and moral discipline. Chicanas learn to obey males' rules in the patriarchal society, and the Catholic Church is also a patriarchal system that contributes to male domination of women. As Trujillo says:

Religion, based on the tradition of patriarchal control and sexual, emotional, and psychological repression, has historically been a dual means of hope for a better afterlife and social control in the present one. Personified by the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, the concept of motherhood and martyrdom go hand in hand in the Catholic religion. Nevertheless, as we are all aware, religion powerfully affects our belief systems concerning life and living. (284)

Religion gives people the hope and faith that if they follow God's will they can go to paradise, and if they serve God well they can get God's pity and charity. To live a better life and in a hope of a better afterlife, Chicanas/os are devoted to the Catholic religion and even crazed for the miracles. For example, La Loca, Sofi's youngest daughter, dies when she is three years old, but later is resurrected. People see it as a miracle that God has sent her back to rescue and help people. "For a brief period after her resurrection, people came from all over the state in hopes of receiving her blessing or of her performing of some miracle for them" (Castillo 25). People believe that La Loca's return is a sign from God to help people, and they rely on the Catholic religion to be their spiritual symbol. Furthermore, in the novel, Castillo refers to many indigenous gods' and goddesses' embrace of the female characters' pain compared with the

Catholic Church's denial and rejection of wounded women. It represents the similar spirit of searching for the Aztlán and going back to the indigenous religions to escape from the Catholic Church's rigid religious discipline and violence against Chicanas.

La Loca is the first one who represents God's will, and she is viewed as the personification of Jesus Christ because she was dead when she was three years old and then was miraculously resurrected. Her "Holy Resurrection" is viewed as a miracle and a gift from God, so people in Tome called her "La Loca Santa." She claims that God sent her back to help people, and she is indeed the model of a good woman who stands for the Catholic holy spirit and purity. She is the only virgin in her family, and she does all the housework, which is often regarded as a woman's job, such as cooking, taking care of her sisters and the animals, helping her mother, praying for her families, and so on. However, from the day of her miraculous resurrection on, she keeps suffering from the denial of the priest and the Catholic Church.

She did not take her First Holy Communion as each sister in her turn did, nor the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation. Not because Father Jerome would not have accommodated Loca's particular affliction by offering some form of private instruction but because Loca had flatly refused it. Loca would have been walking a very thin line to getting excommunicated herself, insisting that *she* could tell Father Jerome a thing or two about the wishes of God, but Father Jerome took pity on her and finally dismissed Loca as a person who was really not responsible for her mind. (Castillo 221)

La Loca has been to the hell and the heaven, she can tell the evil and the kindness, and she can learn everything naturally, but she is viewed as a girl who has lost her mind. She is the spokeswoman that God sent to pray for people, but people in Tome treat her as an epileptic

patient. When the priest warns her that if “she did not honor the Lord’s day in His Home she would surely burn in hell,” La Loca replies him: “I’ve already been there” (Castillo 221). Her behavior of staying away from others is more or less related to the hostility and constraints from the church and society. Besides, as the youngest daughter, La Loca has been the healthiest and most undefiled child in the family, despite her regular peculiar behaviors. Ironically, however, La Loca dies from AIDS, a contagious disease that often is related to sexual contact. La Loca has never had sex with men, and she always stays at home with her mother and the animals. After she was revived from her first death at the age of three, she is afraid of human odor, which keeps her apart from other people in the community. Thus, she rarely leaves her house, and she has never attended school or any ritual. The only possible reason is that, when she performed an abortion on Caridad, she was infected by her sister, who perhaps carried the AIDS virus. Castillo seems to use La Loca’s infection to represent that even the purest and the most innocent person can be destroyed by the ubiquitous Catholic power and the patriarchal society. Abortion is a mortal sin in the Catholic religion, and when La Loca performs an abortion on her sister, she is going against the Catholic Church. The infection is seen as a punishment for her sin. Her death shows that she is eventually destroyed by the Catholic Church’s moral discipline.

In addition, after her death, La Loca is taken away by an indigenous goddess who wears a blue robe. Carmela Delia Lanza comments, “The lady can be *Guadalupe*, *La Llorona*, ‘My-Mother-Who-Gives’ *Coatlicue*—all aspects of the goddess who was ‘usurped of ancient feminine prerogatives, by the outside culture but has found a voice within the home space’ (78). The appearance of the lady in blue shows a warm atmosphere that cares for people, especially Chicanas who are hurt, and it also shows a strong contrast to the Catholic Church’s rigorous domination. Her death leads her to return to the indigenous religion where she can finally rest in

a peaceful world, a place without rules, terrible people, sorrow, or religious' domination. Moreover, under the protection of the goddess, she can live peacefully and feel safe. This also represents the symbol of the home and the womb, which are just like her mother's protection. Finally, she can relieve herself of all the burdens from her family, from God, from the Catholic religion, and from the whole patriarchal society.

Complementing this, Caridad is the character whose life is always restricted by the Catholic Church. She is used to being obedient to the religion and male authority, but the Church and the Chicana/o society abandon her for her sin. In chapter one, I referred to the fact that the Catholic Church had strict moral constraints on Chicanas' virginity and purity; thus, Caridad's complicated relationship with other men who resemble Memo is a violation of the Church's doctrine. She is seen as a profligate woman who offers her charity to men, and her family hides her abortions to avoid condemnation and punishment from the Catholic Church. "It would have been a terrible thing to let anyone find out that La Loca had 'cured' her sister of her pregnancy, a cause for excommunication for both, not to mention that someone would have surely had La Loca arrested. A crime against man if not a sin against God" (Castillo 27). The Catholic Church condemns women who have abortions, and the moral and ethical control over Chicanas is violence against these women who bear the suffering.

Similar to La Loca, Caridad experiences the "Holy Restoration" after she is attacked by some strangers. Later, during her time as an apprentice, doña Felicia teaches her to follow God's will and to pray whenever she feels confused, but she finds that her lesbianism is totally rejected by the Catholic religion. Although Caridad hides in a cave and creates her own home there for one year, people still find her and persuade her to come out. Her hermitic life allows her to escape the blame and constraints of the Catholic religion and society; however, when Francisco

finds her and tries to take her out, it represents male domination and the Catholic authority once again controls her life. When the men find that they are unable to move Caridad away because of a supernatural strength, they think that it is God's will to keep her as the handmaiden of Christ. In the Chicana/o society, every miraculous or unexplainable thing is related to their firm belief in Catholicism, which somewhat shows people's superstition that regards every mystery as a sign from God.

Therefore, people in Tome call Caridad the "handmaiden of Christ" and they come swarming into the cave where she lives to beg for her blessing and to save people's lives. Later, the newspapers report that many people claim they have received the blessing from the handmaiden of Christ: "Some claimed to have been touched and blessed by her and still some others insisted that she had cured them! One man said that when he laid eyes on her, he saw a beautiful halo radiate around her whole body, like the Virgen de Guadalupe" (Castillo 90). Francisco and others in Tome re-construct Caridad's figure as the pure and virginal woman who is rescued by God to serve as his handmaiden, so Caridad is once again judged and controlled by the Catholic religion. Francisco can be viewed as the moral keeper of the Church that supervises Caridad's purity, so when he finds out about Caridad's relationship with Esmeralda, he thinks that Esmeralda has sullied the holiness and purity of the handmaiden of Christ, and he punishes her with his male authority. Their lesbianism is not accepted by the Church, and people condemn their relationship because it destroys the heterosexual order in society. Trujillo comments, "Since the Pope does not advocate a homosexual lifestyle, lesbians and gay men are not given sanction by the largely Catholic Chicano community—hence, fulfilling our final threat to the established order" (284). The denial by the Catholic religion makes Chicana lesbians either compromise with moral doctrine of the dominant religion or give up their old religion to search for other beliefs

that can accept their love. Trujillo further points out that “[m]any choose to alter, modify, or abandon religion, since it is difficult to advocate something which condemns our existence” (284). Therefore, Caridad ultimately chooses to find her own belief, and it is the indigenous deity that embraces her love with Esmeralda and protects them forever. Castillo writes:

Just the spirit deity Tsichtinako calling loudly with a voice like wind, guiding the two women back, not out toward the sun’s rays or up to the clouds but down, deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever. (211)

Like La Loca, Caridad is taken away by an indigenous deity, and the appearance of the ancient indigenous god represents love from the mother earth. Castillo uses the indigenous god to echo the thinking of going back to the Aztec religion. Returning to the womb and going back to the inception of their religion relieves Chicanas/os’ pain and moral constraints from the Catholic Church.

The third character affected by religious violence is Esperanza, who is always the rebel against the old traditions and the “good” female figure constructed by the Catholic Church. Even though she lives in a Catholic family, her thinking is always different and unconventional. When she attends college, she comes in contact with different spiritual books and discovers various religions. She thus questions the old traditions and disciplines constrained by the Catholic religion, and she keeps looking for the religion and belief that can satisfy her curiosity:

In high school, although a rebel, she was Catholic heart and soul. In college, she had a romance with Marxism, but was still Catholic. In graduate school, she was atheist and, in general, a cynic. Lately, she prayed to Grandmother Earth and

Grandfather Sky. For good measure, however, she had been reading a flurry of self-help books. (Castillo 39)

She keeps searching for the truth that can satisfy her curiosity and can make her fit into the society. Esperanza is a woman who will question the predominant patriarchal system; she even encourages her mother to fight for women's rights and challenge the discipline the Catholic Church imposes to control women. When Sofi decides to run for la mayor of Tome, she tells her husband:

Our 'jita, Esperanza, always tried to tell me about how we needed to go out and fight for our rights. She always talked about things like working to change the "system." (Castillo 142)

Esperanza's behavior to challenge male and Catholic authority is regarded as unorthodox thinking that will threaten the society's established patriarchal system. She wants to break up the patriarchal system in Chicana/o society and Catholic Church that confines women: "Esperanza was the kind of woman that no town was big enough for no matter what category one might put her in" (Castillo 46). Although she once was devoted to her love for Rubén and the Catholic religion, they both disappoint her. Furthermore, her pursuit of a better job also fails her. After she was sent to Saudi Arabia, she is missing and soon declared dead. Esperanza's death symbolizes the complete collapse of her hope to find her own position in the patriarchal society, and she fails to find her own belief under the control of Catholic religion in the community.

According to La Loca's narration, after Esperanza's death she befriends La Llorona, whom she asks to send a message to La Loca to announce her death to her family. Castillo uses La Llorona to reflect Esperanza's plight in Chicana/o society. She has no place to accommodate herself in the real world, so only in the spiritual world can she be set free from the social

constraints and Catholic discipline and truly be herself. Also, Castillo refers to La Llorona here to subvert the bad woman figure built by the patriarchal society and the Church. Castillo describes La Llorona:

If not a woman who had been given a bad rap by every generation of her people since the beginning of time and yet, to Esperanza's spirit-mind, La Llorona in the beginning (before men got in the way of it all) may have been nothing short of a loving mother goddess (162-63).

La Llorona is abandoned by the Church and her community, and her bad image is passed down from generation to generation to condemn bad women and advocate good women. In the novel, Castillo reverses La Llorona's legend and re-interprets it:

The land was old and the stories were older. Just like a country changed its name, so did the names of their legends change. Once, La Llorona may have been Matlaciuatl, the goddess of the Mexica who was said to prey upon men like a vampire! Or she might have been Ciuapipiltin, the goddess in flowing robes who stole babies from their cradles and left in their place an obsidian blade, or Cihuacoatl, the patron of women who died in childbirth, who all wailed and wept and moaned in the night air. (161)

La Llorona can possibly be a gracious mother or baby-guard goddess, but the Catholic Church and the patriarchal society impose the bad image on her and mark her as the model of bad woman.⁷³ Johnson comments, "Aztec goddess or mother of mestizas, La Llorona bears a legacy of violence for Indigenous women in the United States; in her legendary punishment lies the

⁷³ See Blea, 28-29: "However, because society does not attribute heroic deeds to women, it rarely conceptualizes the hero as female. In fact, it does the opposite, producing negative images of women. Since heroines are rare in American culture, and Chicanos in that culture have been Europeanized and Americanized, Chicanos have failed to recognize their cultural heroine and have instead been taught to believe the Euro-American conquerors' version of La Llorona. They are blinded to the heroic deeds of Malintzin."

cultural censure and condemnation of subversive women” (44). When she is alive, Esperanza, like La Llorona, is given a “bad rap” because she refuses to be an obedient woman. After her death, she can finally find her own belief in her spiritual mind. Furthermore, her friendship with La Llorona shows the idea of going back to the indigenous religion, which provides a spiritual support for all Chicanas.

Last, but not least, Sofi is a character that successfully overturns the male authority in the Catholic Church, and she also denies the moral disciplines that teach women to obey their husbands and fathers. Sofi used to be devoted to the Catholic religion and her family, and she was taught to be a traditional “good” woman. However, she keeps suffering from the religious violence in her community, as well as the priest’s indifferent attitude to La Loca’s death. After La Loca’s “Holy Resurrection,” Father Jerome questions her: “Is this an act of God or of Satan that brings you back to us, that has flown you up to the roof like a bird? Are you the devil’s messenger or a winged angel?” (Castillo 23). The priest’s doubt and accusation of La Loca offend Sofi, and she is so furious that she scolds the priest. People in Tome see Sofi’s behavior as an offense to the Church and authority. Castillo writes:

“Oh, my God!” others uttered, crossing themselves at hearing Sofi call the priest a pendejo, which was a blasphemy, crossing themselves all the more because although the verdict was still open as to whether they were witnessing a true miracle or a mirage of the devil, Sofi’s behavior was giving way to the latter—after all, calling the holy priest a pendejo and hitting him! (24)

People blame Sofi for her rudeness and irreverence to the priest, who is the authority of the Catholic Church. She first bears the unfriendly hostility from the Church. She also is criticized for her challenge to the Church by asking for a divorce from Don Domingo. She has to tolerate

her husband's abandonment and gambling, and she also has to take care of her four children alone. When Domingo comes back, she tries to forgive him because the Catholic religion prohibits divorce. Sofi's fear comes not only from the Church's punishment, but also from her mother's disapproval. The devotion to the Catholic Church is deeply rooted in the Chicana/o family, and it forms a strong bond that constrains women who fear condemnation from the Church and their family. It is powerful also because the Church is part of the culture and community—that is, there is no space outside of it to form other communities. If you are excommunicated, you have no community, even one that you fight with. Castillo says:

But back then, to be excommunicated was more fearful to Sofia than the thought of destitution; not to mention that her mother was still alive then, and her mother had been like the Church's conscience incarnated to her daughter. If anything ever brought the fear of God to Sofi even more than the thought of being excommunicated it was her mother's disapproval, so divorce had been out of the question. (218)

Chicanas are devoted to their religion, and they pass on the rigid religious discipline and moral doctrine to their daughters. In order not to offend her mother and the Catholic Church, Sofi has to suffer domestic and religious violence. As Segura and Zavella say: "The Roman Catholic Church, with its ideology of the suffering mother, is rigid in its view of the sanctity of marriage; women who complain about their husbands' behavior to the local priest and ask for advice are more than likely to be told, 'It's your cross and you have to bear it'" (364). Because of the purity and sacredness of marriage, divorce is not allowed in the Catholic Church, and women have to tolerate their husband rather than dissolving their marriage. However, Sofi eventually files for divorce from Don Domingo; it is her challenge and resistance to Catholic authority. Castillo

overturns the tame and obedient image of traditional Chicanas and Sofi's decision to file for divorce represents women's rage against Catholic domination and the patriarchal society.

Furthermore, Sofi completely breaks the patriarchal rules to run for la mayor of Tome, empower women, franchise Chicanas' political rights, and help women find jobs. In addition, Sofi becomes the president of an organization named, M.O.M.A.S (Mothers of Martyrs and Saints), a group that considers the rights of women, especially the mothers in Tome, and makes women much stronger to protect their own rights. Also, Sofi rebels against the Catholic religion by electing a female pope in the M.O.M.A.S instead of a male pope. Evelyn P. Stevens says, "In the patriarchal Catholic culture—where God was the father and only men can become priests—the Virgin Mary stood as the most prominent image of what an ideal woman should be" (3). Traditionally, only men can become pope because they are the authorities in Catholic society, but women are viewed as inferior and often are designated to be the handmaidens of God. In the end of *So Far from God*, Castillo attacks the injustice Chicanas suffer in the Catholic Church by telling a story about how a woman "who passed herself off as a man had been elected pope" (Castillo 252). She is later severely punished by the Church for not only disguising her female identity, but also defying male authority. "[S]he was not only thrown off the throne for not being a man, but dragged through the streets and stoned to death" (Castillo 252). The Church uses violence to punish unconventional women, and thus Sofi challenges Catholic authority by electing female popes. "Nothing like that never happened among the M.O.M.A.S! ¡Hijo! Imagine las M.O.M.A.S. taking things that far to make sure that they all had wombs!" (Castillo 252). Through the character of wisdom, Castillo once again subverts the old tradition and social norms in the Catholic Church and the patriarchal society.

The naming of Don Domingo in the novel also has an ironic meaning. Domingo is a Spanish word that means “Sunday,” and Sunday is the holy day, which is the day people attend church. However, Castillo uses the holy day to name Sofi’s husband, who is lazy and always gambling, which is an ironic twist to the Catholic Church’s sacred spirit. The church is supposed to be very sacred and solemn, but when it is dominated by the patriarchal society, it becomes a weapon to constrain and control women.

To sum up, in *So Far from God*, the female characters represent different personalities, and Castillo uses them all to resist the patriarchy and Catholic authority that construct Chicanas. In the novel, Castillo assails the predominant authority in the male household and the Catholic Church, and she also attacks the Chicana figures that the patriarchal society imposes on them. By representing the death of hope, charity, faith, and the personification of Jesus Christ, the novel not only symbolizes the devastation that white and male-dominated society brings to Chicanas, and it shows the oppression of the Catholic Church through the death of four theological ideals of Catholicism. In addition, Sofi, the only female who remains in the household, shows the wisdom gained from her painful life and her daughters’ deaths as she tries to empower Chicanas and challenge the male hegemony and Catholic authority. Therefore, Castillo’s overturning of the male and female figure and the challenge of the Catholic Church represent Chicanas’ resistance and rebellion against the dominant male authority and religious violence.

Chapter Four

Race and Sexual Violence: *Gulf Dreams*

Gulf Dreams (1996), by Emma Pérez, is set in rural Texas in the mid-twentieth century (around 1950-70). During this time, Chicanas/os in Texas often worked as manual laborers on the farm or cotton fields. Most of the employers hired legal guest workers due to the Bracero Program, but many Anglo farmers in Texas chose to hire laborers illegally to lower costs and to better control the worker. In the first chapter, I noted that employers in Texas tended to hire Mexican laborers illegally instead of hiring Braceros because undocumented workers were more manageable and had no legal right to protest the deprivation of their rights and wages. As a result, workers in Texas were more likely discriminated against and exploited by their employers, and their living qualities, working environments, health, and food were poor. According to the Bracero Program, the employers was to pay the farm laborers reasonable wages, provide them food and housing, and care for workers' health, but many employers did not follow the agreement. Needless to say, the rights of many Chicana/o farm workers who were not Braceros were denied. Many laborers worked in Texas with very low wages and under very harsh working conditions. For example, in *Gulf Dreams*, the unnamed female protagonist works in the cotton field with her families and relatives when she is fifteen. Through her, Pérez explains:

We picked cotton. My mother, sisters, brother, aunts, cousins, my grandmother. We would pick rows and rows of white-being fiber with brown seeds embedded in its fluff. Picking fast, grabbing handfuls with fingers, often pricking them with spiny, sharp leaves that hugged the plant's flower. Fingers bled from cuts, shedding red stains on white balls. (30)

They work very hard in the cotton field to earn meager wages, and they sometimes get hurt while working. Also, they work hard because they want to earn enough money to get an education.

Pérez writes, “Together, my mother, sisters, brother and I made the money we needed for school. I remember we were poor; poverty, it seemed, led us through those cotton fields” (31). Because of their lack of skill, education, and language ability, they are often despised or discriminated.

Many undocumented laborers in Texas were vulnerable in the labor market because they were not provided basic rights and wages that was guaranteed in Bracero Program. As a result, Mexican government banned their people to work in Texas. Samora and Simon say: “In the state of Texas alone, Mexicans were discriminated against to such an extent that the Mexican government forbade the use of its nationals in the fields in Texas” (140). Despite the Mexican government’s ban and the 1965 U.S. Immigration Act that tried to control the numbers of Chicana/o workers, many documented and undocumented still came to the United States to find jobs. Another reason that results in Chicanas/os being vulnerable in the white society is due to poverty and social inferiority. For instance, Pérez delineates that the female narrator and her family are mocked by an Anglo farmer and the white people:

I sensed in his gaze pity for Mexicans who worked his fields. I sensed ne believed this was all we could do, labor in the fields like burros; mules, senseless and dumb. He was not unlike Anglo teachers. They’d glare at my brother and me, anomalies in the white school, mutes and mutants, for our silences, for our brown skin. (33)

Like the female narrator’s family, Chicanas/os often suffered from racism, classism, and sexism in society. As Blea says, “In the 1960s poverty and racism became hotly debated issues in the United States” (118). Because of economic inferiority, people of color were often discriminated,

and their rights were also seriously exploited. Based on the Treaty of Guadalupe (1848), the U.S. government guaranteed Mexicans equal rights as the U.S. citizens, which promised to let them preserve their religion, cultures, and language. However, the U.S. government did not comply with the treaty. As Samora and Simon say:

Even these basic civil guarantees were soon violated. As we have seen, the Anglos on the frontiers had long before developed a superiority complex. They generally considered the Mexican a lazy, uncivilized person, reduced to a state of inferiority by his language, his religion, and his culture. (100)

Due to the white people's feeling of superiority, they often looked down on Chicanas/os' culture. Samora and Simon comment that white people "felt justified in denying an inferior people equal rights" (100). They generally thought it is fair to treat inferior people differently. The social and racial discrimination is so serious that it exacerbated Chicanas/os' quality of lives and working. As a result, in the 1960s and 1970s, Chicanas/os launched the Chicano Movement to fight against the discrimination and injustice in different fields and to protest U.S. employers' exploitation of laborers' rights and wages. Inspired by the black civil rights protests, Chicanas/os initiated the movement to strive for equal rights and citizenship and to eliminate racial and sexual discrimination. Montejano comments:

The question of inclusion also suggests a different kind of politics, a "normal" or routinized institutional politics that stands in contrast to the "politics of protest" that took place roughly between 1965 and 1975. In the sixties, frustrated with the remaining segregationist limits and inspired by the Black civil rights movement, a general mobilization of the Mexican Americans community took place. (xvii)

Farm worker strikes began in California and Texas in 1965-66, and then rapidly spread to other regions in the United States. There were also many organizations formed to support Chicanas/os, such as MALDEF, MAPA, and NCLR. Reacting to this great debate on discrimination and injustice against people of color, in the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. government declared a series of policies and laws to protect them. For example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination based on race, religion, color, gender, and ethnicity. It also banned various segregations in public spheres such as schools, workplaces, and restaurants. Furthermore, the Civil Rights of 1968, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Equal Opportunity Act, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act since 1974, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 along with non-profit organizations has helped low-income people of color.

U.S. federal law did not take action to prevent sexual violence until 1994, in which the Violence against Women Act (VAWA) and the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (VTVPA) were constituted to address violence against women and women of color. However, the U.S. legislation and judicial system are often criticized for existing class, racial, sexual, and gender violence. White society tended to consider people of color as poor, uncivilized, dangerous, and more likely to commit crimes. Furthermore, women of color were even vulnerable in judicial system. For example, in *Gulf Dreams*, Ermila is raped by a gang of rapists, and the head of the gang receives less than a year in jail. The others are all freed without any penalty. This injustice exacerbates women of color's lives in the society and the violence against women of color makes them more vulnerable.

Ethnicity and Racial Discrimination

In white society, people of color often were treated as inferior ethnic groups, and they were subordinate to the dominant white supremacy; thus, they were more likely being victims of

social injustice and discrimination due to their ethnicity, racial differences, and low social class. Chicanas/os suffered racism and classism either at work, at schools, or in their daily lives, and the discrimination against them exacerbated their quality of lives and harmed their ethnic dignity.

I first focus on the racial discrimination toward Chicanas/os' poor English pronunciation, which causes their inferiority in society. The language barrier was one of the problems Chicanas/os encountered in the United States. As Samora and Simon say:

The Mexican American who did not understand English was completely out of touch with the powers that controlled his existence. Since he could not understand, the Anglos were reinforced in their belief that all Mexicans were inferior. (100)

When English was seen as the dominant language in U.S. society, Mexicans' native language was rejected and viewed as inferior. According to *Color of Violence*:

[W]e live in a country where race prejudice, in the words of Fanon, obeys a flawless logic. For, after all, if inferior peoples must be exterminated, their cultures and habits of life, their language and customs, their economies, indeed, every difference about them must be assaulted, confined, and obliterated. There must be a dominant culture and therefore a dominant people, a dominant religion, a dominant language, a dominant legal system, a dominant educational system, and so on, and so on. In other words, there must be dominance and subordination. (Trask 83)

Because of perceived racial superiority, white people treated people of color as inferior to emphasize their colonial power. Any culture or language related to people of color was viewed as inferior and unenlightened. Thus, using Spanish was prohibited at work or at school, and

Chicanas/os were forced to learn English to keep up with the dominant society. English efficiency therefore became a measure to differentiate the superior and the inferior groups. Since English was seemed as a dominant language, people must learn it to climb the social ladder. As Pérez's "Speaking from the Margin" says, "Third World people know that to learn the colonizer's language gives one access to power and privilege—albeit controlled, qualified power" (60). Pérez's comment echoes my point in the second chapter that learning the dominant language is necessary for Chicanas/os to own the ability to negotiate their rights and to gain privileges. I noted in the previous chapter that Estrella understands the power of English allowing her to discover the information and rights white people hide from her. In *Gulf Dreams*, the female narrator further experiences shame and inferiority when her teachers keep correcting her pronunciation:

Pronunciation divided worlds. In a school where students' names ranged from Hodges and Hutchins to a sprinkling of Garza and González, teachers rejected Spanish sounds. They taught me to enunciate strange foreign words, immigrant sounds. (Pérez 16)

When the teachers drawl and speak slowly to correct the female narrators' poor English pronunciation, which has strong Spanish inflection, she feels that the standard pronunciation separates two worlds: the white superior world and the people of color's inferior world. Chicana/o students not only have to learn the dominant language but also need to correct their odd pronunciation to avoid white people's mockery. Like Estrella in *Under the Feet of Jesus*, the female protagonist in *Gulf Dreams* realizes the importance of learning the dominant language to survive in the white world. "Unskilled at the language of survival, but I would learn" (Pérez 16). Learning the dominant language is necessary so she can communicate with white people.

Additionally, her strange English pronunciation is often mocked by white people by mimicking her Spanish accent. Some whites working in the cotton fields sometimes play a joke on her pronunciation: ““Hey, Meskin, where’s your seester?” they mocked” (Pérez 34). Therefore, white people think that Chicanas/os’ inability to speak standard English is due to ignorance and inferiority, and the poor pronunciation results in the racism against Chicanas/os either at schools or at work.

The practice of segregation is another inhuman treatment Chicanas/os suffer. Before 1964, there was no legislation to punish racism against people of color; thus many white people were repelled by people of color and refused to contact them. People of color were considered inferior, uncivilized and even suspected of carrying some unknown bacteria or illness. Therefore, many white people refused to share the public facilities with people of color. People of color were not allowed to sit in a coffee shop or use white people’s bathrooms. There were different bathrooms marking “whites only” and “colored only.” For instance, the female narrator in the novel describes that:

The town disapproved of brown and white holding hands. Since my childhood, racial insults were common in supermarkets, restaurants, laundromats, barber shops, and gas station bathrooms. The Texaco near my grandmother’s house announced on its bathroom door, “For Colored Only.” (Pérez 22)

White people tended to separate the white and the colored to represent their racial superiority and social hierarchy. This racial discrimination often appeared in public spaces, and this racial segregation stemmed from white people’s racial prejudice that treated non-white people as inferior. According to *Color of Violence*:

How much more honest and historically accurate to acknowledge that racism prevents us as people of color from living together with white people as equals. Under the current violent hierarchy, there is only daily pain and fear. Fear because violence breeds hatred which, in turn, breeds more violence. Not the revolutionary violence that cleanses victims, as Fanon so honestly argued, but the violence of racism. (Trask 86)

Instead of receiving the same rights as white people, people of color have to suffer segregation, inequality, and white hostility. This racial discrimination against people of color continued to be legal until 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was legislated. The Act “prohibits discrimination in places of public accommodation because of race, color, religion, or national origin. Places of public accommodation are hotels, motels, restaurants, movie theaters, stadiums, and concert halls” (“Civil Rights” 1). The Act further prohibited discrimination regarding schools, employment, housing, and other public spaces or spheres. Although racial segregation was prohibited by the U.S. law, it is still ubiquitous in the white society. Even today, the people of color are still fighting against different kinds of racism in schools, on the job, and in their daily lives.

Social hierarchy is categorized in part by skin color, the top of which white people occupy while people of color are at the bottom. In *Color of Violence*, Trask says: “The color of violence, then, is the color of white over Black, white over brown, white over red, white over yellow” (82). White skin color give people a sense of superiority, and skin color often decides different social statuses. Trask further says: “It is normal that hierarchy by color exists, that mistreatment by color exists, that income by color exists, that life expectancy by color exists, that opportunities by color exists, and all the other observable hierarchies documented by scholars

over the years exists” (83). People with white skin can own more rights while the people of color have only a little. Besides, people with light skin color can access higher social status and gain more privileges but also receive racial discrimination inside Chicanas/os’ own community. For example, in *Gulf Dreams*, skin color is a problem for the female narrator. The female protagonist’s light skin gives her more privilege and advantage than her family members in the white world while it separates her and her family. Her skin color marks her as an outsider in her family, and her sister even claims that she is adopted.

Bronze in the summer with hair and eyes so light that I could pass through doors that shut out my sisters and brother. Their color and brown eyes, I envied. I grew to resent the colors that set me apart from my family.... At five, I took a butcher knife, sat calmly, sadly, on the pink chenille bedspread, threatening to slice away at tanned skin. (Pérez 15)

Moreover, her light skin color places her in an embarrassed position in society because, for both her community and white society, she is viewed as an alien and an outsider. She herself represents the “border”—her skin is a border metaphor, which separates the two worlds but she is not a part of either group. Her skin color results in disapproval from both groups. The female protagonist lives in the pain of the curse from her skin color. She says, “I’m trapped between visions and that which I intuit, never sure what’s real, but always conscious of how I’m scorned, hated, rejected for who and what I am” (Pérez 115). Since her childhood she has known that she is not accepted by her family and community, and she further experiences white hostility against Chicanas/os as she gradually grows up.

Mexican, dumb, stupid, hateful, ugly, someone who must learn a world that craves tanned brown, not real brown, not birth brown, just gringo-tanned-at-the-

beach, golden brown, not Mexican brown. Dark-honey-brown, a grad school teacher called me once. “You are a dark-honey-brown, I envy your color,” she said for all the *gringuitos*, but I discerned the mockery. (Pérez 115-16)

The female protagonist feels uncomfortable and upset in both the white and Chicana/o society because her somewhat light skin color makes her a stranger in both groups.

On the other hand, social classes are also important in deciding one’s superiority. A white woman with fairly low social class was also despised and treated as inferior. For example, in the novel, the female protagonist dates a white man who enjoys his racial superiority while still being stuck in his working-class social status. Her white boyfriend’s mother is a working-class white woman, and her white skin does not guarantee her the privilege and prerogative other white people enjoy. Because of her inferior identity, she has limited occupational choices:

Domestic service in Alabama was a black women’s work. In Texas, Mexican women cleaned white women’s homes. Her white skin had not guaranteed that privilege. (Pérez 21)

Skin color is not an absolute promise of privilege and authority, as they also depend on one’s social status. As Torres comments, “Once again, under an interlocking system of domination, the benefits of skin privilege are not absolute. Because of her status near the bottom of class and gender hierarchies, the boy’s white mother must labor as a cleaning woman” (231). Due to her inferior social class, the white woman has to do the cleaning jobs that women of color often do. Furthermore, to shed the stigma of the working class, the white man despises her mother to gain higher social status and white privilege:

The son took her bitterness and made it its own. How could she have measured her son's deception? He would bond with male prerogative to abandon the female, the womb. (Pérez 21-22)

The white son looks down on his mother's powerless social class, and he does not pity her. His male superiority makes him feel that men should belittle women and despise them. "Maleness, so convinced of its superiority to the feminine, evolves" (Pérez 22). The white male superiority exacerbates women's inferior situation in society. The white women suffer the discrimination of social hierarchy, and women of color even suffer triple intersectional violence of their race, class, and gender. Take the female protagonist as an example. As a woman of color, her Chicana identity and labor class cause her to be seen as inferior and discriminated against in the white society. In general, Chicanas/os' had to suffer racism and discrimination because of their poor English pronunciation and skin color, and they even received inhumane racial segregation.

Patriarchy and Sexual Violence

In Chicana/o society, patriarchal domination constrains Chicanas' lives and their way of thinking, and it strengthens male control of women. Furthermore, Chicanos' male superiority gives them supremacy, causing many Chicanos to treat Chicanas with violence to show their male power. For instance, in the novel, the lawyer Pelón often uses his male authority to control and discipline his wife, and he often abuses the female protagonist for her homosexuality.

Besides, based on the female protagonist's experience, it is very common to hear in the news that women suffer sexual violence done by their uncles, relatives, or even strangers.

I first analyze how the patriarchy contributes to the male domination over Chicanas and how patriarchal society controls and confines Chicanas' thinking and behaviors. In Chicana/o society, the patriarchal system gives Chicanos extraordinary power and authority to control

women in nearly every aspect, including their behaviors, sexuality, motherhood, and religion. Patriarchal society teaches women to repress their needs and desires, and women are also taught that they are born to be inferior to men physically and mentally. As Trujillo says, “We exist in a patriarchal society that undervalues women. We are socialized to undervalue ourselves, as well as anything associated with the concept of self. Our voice is considered less significant, our needs and desires secondary” (283). The patriarchal system in Chicana/o society not only undervalues women but also confines their thoughts and feelings. For example, in *Gulf Dreams*, the female protagonist lives in a society that condemns women who complain or disrespect their fathers, their husbands, or other men.

The town stifled loud, irreverent women, women expected to stay in their place, to spoil men, to listen to their troubles, and if wives or sisters disputed husbands or brothers, they were called *putas* or *jotas*. A woman’s strength was judged by how she accepted her husband, no matter what kind of life he dealt her, drunkenness, womanizing, a slap or a firm word. This was the bargain of marriage. (Pérez 92)

Patriarchal societies use male authority to discipline women in order to make women men’s subordinate. Chicana/o society condemns women who dare to resist or disrespect their husbands or other male authorities. Categories such as the “good woman” and “bad woman” are constructed to control Chicanas’ thoughts and behaviors. Mónica Russel y Rodríguez describes “good” Chicana womanhood:

The stereotype in question regards Chicanas as passive and silent, and it appears in culturally explicit ways to endorse “Chicana” in the exclusive role of mother and wife.... Indeed, Chicanas who defy the Chicano patriarchal claim of the

authentic and “good” Chicana—passive and dedicated to house and home—risk being denounced as acting white or being a *vendida*, a sell-out. (105)

The point about “acting white” is an important point because it is saying that Chicanas have to also keep their culture alive as a resistant culture through their oppression. Moreover, patriarchal society teaches women that being a good woman is to be a good daughter, a good wife, and a good mother. The good woman fulfills her natural duty to be a mother. As Trujillo comments, “The point of view that we are not complete human beings unless we are attached to a male is further promoted by the attitude that we are incomplete as women unless we become mothers” (284). Patriarchal society binds women to the home, and places the burden of raising children on women. If women do not accomplish the mission of being mothers, they are not complete human beings, and thus they are not “good women.” Conversely, the definition of “bad women” is these women who resist or deviate from social norms, refusing to be traditional women. As Stevens says:

The same culture provides an alternate model in the image of the “bad woman” who flaunts custom and persists in enjoying herself. Interesting enough, this kind of individual is thought not to be a “real woman.” By publicly deviating from the prescribed norm, she has divested herself of precisely those attributes considered most characteristically feminine and in the process has become somewhat masculine. (11)

In patriarchal societies, men condemn women who threaten the established patriarchal norms. These “bad women” are perceived as rebellious and disobedient, and the patriarchal society denounces those women who act against men’s will. Moreover, Chicanos use their male power and authority to control their wives and daughters, and they condemn those subversive women

who are unwilling to obey men's rule. For example, in *Gulf Dreams*, Pelón is the typical Chicano who often uses his male authority to govern his wife and discipline other women. "At home, Pelón checked his wife's face, her attitude, her movements" (Pérez 117). He controls her wife's thoughts and behavior, uses violence against her, and threatens her with insult or fist. He is the man who wants women to worship him and to praise his male authority. In contrast, his wife, a woman who is weak and afraid of losing her husband, often suffers brutal treatment from him. "In his world, her reality had dwindled to a house with an empty baby crib" (Pérez 47). Her life is withering with a brutal husband and the duty of reproduction to meet society's expectations. "No one listen to the young woman's cries or anger" (Pérez 48). Patriarchy oppresses women and ignores their thoughts, and men use male authority to control women and demonstrate their sexual superiority. Thus, Chicanas often have to suffer mental or physical violence and social pressure within and without the household.

Secondly, I explore how heterosexual Chicana/o society condemns homosexuality, and examine what Chicana lesbians suffer in the community. In *Gulf Dreams*, the female narrator tries to date boys a few times, but she is sick of the male superiority and arrogance. Moreover, there is a special attraction that drags her to the young woman from El Pueblo. However, her love for a woman is unacceptable in the Chicana/o community, so she must keep her affection secret. She cannot tell others about her sexuality because it is a taboo in heterosexual world:

Daily, I reminded, I have no right to love as I love. I live in a place that ruptures and negates this practice. Don't misunderstand me, even when I'm told to hide from public, to meet only in unlit rooms where you can't see us, I'm defiant.
(Pérez 73)

The whole Chicana/o patriarchal and heterosexual society act hostilely to lesbianism for many reasons. First, Chicana lesbians pose a threat to the patriarchal hierarchy that men established, breaking the males' rules. As Trujillo says:

As a lesbian she does many things simultaneously: she rejects “compulsory heterosexuality”; she refuses to partake in the “game” of competition for men; she confronts her own sexuality; and she challenges the norms placed upon her by culture and society, whose desire is to subvert her into proper roles and places.
(283)

The Chicana/o society is quite hostile to Chicana lesbians, and the rejection from people in the community and white society results in lesbian invisibility. Second, Chicana lesbians not only disobey men's disciplines, but they also disrespect men. They do not play the “game” of chasing after men's attention like other women do. For example, in the novel, the female protagonist confesses that she has never respected Pelón:

Snubbing me, he sensed I didn't worship him. Pelón condemned me, always spurning who I was, what I did, and what I meant to her. He told friends and strangers I was a sell-out, “una vendida,” he'd call me and anyone who didn't bow to him, rumoring I wasted time with queers. (Pérez 65)

Pelón condemns and attacks the female narrator for not respecting male authority and blames her for the insults.

The third reason for society's condemnation is that Chicana lesbians touch other women who are probably some people's wives or girlfriends. Chicanos regard this behavior as an invasion of their possession. For example, in *Gulf Dreams*, Pelón is furious about her wife being

touched by the female narrator, and this is also why he despise the female protagonist's lesbian identity. *Color of Violence*:

According to one researcher, women perceived as lesbian are also the subject of increased attention by law enforcement because they are perceived to be taking something that is not theirs to take, intruding on male territory and undermining male privilege by having sexual relationships with other women. As a result, officers “get a kick out of breaking down their self-esteem, they feel that they need to be broken.” (Ritchie 144)

In patriarchal society, women are seen as men's possession, and lesbians' appearance threatens male authority because they take away that “possession.” In the novel, Pelón is afraid that his wife will be “stolen” by a lesbian. His wife once tells the female protagonist, “He was more relaxed. He thought we'd finally be happy because you were gone.... Now that you're back, he's afraid again. He threatened me one night, but then he cried” (Pérez 125). When some Chicanos feel that their male authority is challenged, they usually feel furious and act more aggressively toward lesbians. Pelón, for instance, is afraid his territory will be intruded upon by the female narrator; thus, he acts more aggressively against her.

The fourth reason the Chicana/o community opposes lesbianism is that Chicana lesbians betray the traditional Chicana/o constraints and expectation that they be “real women” who are obedient to men, fulfilling their natural duty to be a mother, and following the patriarchal norms. As Tatonetti says:

According to conventional Chicano cosmology, a Chicana lesbian is considered a “traitor to her race” [...] contributing to the ‘genocide’ of her people” by choosing to love women. (232)

Chicana lesbians are seen as betrayers—the sell-outs to the community—and they bring shame on their family and to the whole Chicana/o society. Thus, they can only hide and tolerate the condemnation and blame from the community. As Trujillo says, “Chicana lesbians have very little choice, because their request for self-identification comes with the territory. This is why ‘coming out’ can be a major source of pain for Chicana lesbians, since the basic fear of rejection by family and community is paramount” (284).

In addition to the rejection from the heterosexual society and Chicana/o community, the disapproval from the Catholic Church is a major reason for Chicana lesbian invisibility. Hurtado comments:

The punishment and banishment from Chicano communities has been especially harsh for women who claim their lesbianism openly. To prefer women is the ultimate rejection of patriarchy; the strong Catholic underpinnings of Chicano culture make lesbianism a mortal sin. (142)

The Catholic religion disciplines Chicanas, instructing them to keep their virginity before marriage and to be in awe of men. However, Chicana lesbians subvert the traditional constraints over women, and they claim women’s own rights for their sexuality and body. Chicana lesbians’ bold behavior and their relationship with women go against the Catholic beliefs. The denial and rejection from the religion persuades Chicana lesbians to either abandon their religion or hide their sexual orientation toward other women. This statement echoes Caridad’s case in chapter three, which is also a vivid example of how Chicana lesbians suffer from religious violence and how she chooses to give up Catholicism to experience her love with another woman.

In general, Chicana lesbians have to suffer condemnation from patriarchal society, rejection from their families, and disapproval from the Catholic Church because their love for

other women is basically unacceptable in the conventional Chicana/o society. The rejection and disapproval from different fields in society all contribute to Chicana lesbians' marginalization and inferiority. However, an increasing number of Chicana lesbian writers have spoken of their sexual desire and their self-identification, just like the female protagonist in *Gulf Dreams* who writes of her affection and love for her lover and spills out her sexual desire. Their contribution and coming out make Chicana lesbians visible in the society and lead to more people accepting their existence and respecting their sexuality.

In the last section, I investigate how patriarchal society contributes to Chicanas' physical and mental suffering and how the ubiquitous sexual violence in society exacerbates their lives. In patriarchal society, it is common to hear that women suffer from sexual violence in their family, in the community, and in the society. The patriarchal system rationalizes sexual assaults on women because Chicanos think of Chicanas as their possession. As Trujillo says, "Historically, women have been viewed as property. Though some laws may have changed, ideologically little else has" (283). Chicanos' patriarchal thinking provides them with a reasonable reason to harass or insult women. In the novel, the female protagonist says that "Boys, cousins, uncles had pawed me" (Pérez 61). She also says, "I had read about men who raped Vietnamese girl as routinely as they shaved their beards. Rape was commonplace for them, almost a daily chore" (67). She uses her own experience to show how men brutally treat women, believing it is reasonable and normal to rape women. The violent behavior and thinking are sick and distorted. Additionally, the ubiquitous sexual violence against women is influenced by many Chicanas' tolerance and indifference. In the novel, the girl, Ermila, who is gang raped, is the biggest victim in the patriarchal society. As a young girl, she already suffers sexual violence. Ermila is sexually harassed by her father's white boss when she was only sixteen years old: "[T]hey'd gape at her

breasts through her sleeveless, white T-shirt, asking her out for a drink even though she was only sixteen” (Pérez 100).

Not only does the Chicanos’ sexual violence against Chicanas exacerbate their lives, but white men also threaten Chicanas’ safety. Different kinds of sexual violence such as sexual harassment, sexual insult, rape, and battery all endanger Chicanas’ living quality and make them more vulnerable in their society. After Ermila is gang raped, led by the head of the rapists, Chenchó, she accuses those men. However, her people blame her for challenging patriarchal norms and disrespecting men. Ermila is seen as the kind of “bad woman” I noted in the previous section, and her bold behavior of resisting and challenging male authority are condemned and criticized by people in the community. Patriarchal society uses its male dominant power to overwhelm women, teaching them to be passive and silent. The community also accuses and punishes Ermila for seducing men. People in the community support the rapists, and Pelón, as the lawyer of Chenchó, claims that the rapists are innocent. “Pelón calls the rapist a victim. The woman is absent, a consequence. Her injury is nothing to these men who decide she is their whore” (Pérez 93). Ermila is isolated and abandoned by all of her people in the community. They attack her for her complicated relationship with other men. Pelón defends for Chenchó and other rapist that:

The guys had little fun. Nobody got hurt. Not really, and anyway, she asked for it. She was always with somebody, in the back seat of a car, in alleys, she fucked anybody. Those men just gave her what she wanted. (Pérez 93)

Indeed, sexual violence against Chicanas is common because many women enable such violence with their tolerance and indifference. For example, many women in the community blame Ermila that “she shouldn’t behave so aggressively, fighting publicly, calling men names,

aggravating them” (Pérez 117). Those women do not stand behind Ermila but choose to support the rapists. Most of the women are afraid to offend their husbands and male authority, and they find it more beneficial to support men than to fight for the suffering woman. As Trujillo says:

Yet, an alliance with a man grants a woman heterosexual privileges, many of which are reified by the law, the church, our families and, of course, “La Causa.” Women who partake in the privileges of male sexual alliance may often do so at the cost of their own sense of self, since they must often subvert their needs, voice, intellect, and personal development in these alliances. These are the conditional contributions commonly prescribed for women by the patriarchy in our culture and in the larger society. (283)

When Chicanas’ economic resources stem only from their husbands, they are unable to resist male domination for fear of losing their financial support. Some think it is advantageous to ally with men; being in alliance with men can probably provide them higher social status or more rights. Because of many women’s indifference and neglect, the sexual violence against Chicanas becomes more serious. Also, these women think it is Ermila’s fault because the clothes she wears are too erotic and provocative. “Women may have objected, but most were cowards, afraid to lose husbands or lovers. The same women who would not condemn the rapists, accused Ermila that she dressed too provocatively” (Pérez 116). In the conventional Chicana/o community, Ermila’s behavior and how she dresses go against society’s expectation of a “good woman.” Moreover, most women remain quiet and indifferent to men’s violence against women, choosing to tolerate men’s brutality. In the novel, other women in the community say: “Yes, men aren’t fair, but they can’t change, that’s how they are” (Pérez 117). They passively tolerate such violence instead of trying to fight against it. Women’s indifference is also a part of the

patriarchal system, and it thus contributes to the violence against suffering women and make Chicanas more vulnerable in the society.

In addition to the patriarchal oppression of women, the Anglo legal system contributes to Chicanas' safety crisis. In the novel, Ermila fights against the patriarchal constraints by turning to the judicial system, but the Anglo legal system reacts indifferently to her pain and suffering. Despite her accusation of the rape gang, she does not receive justice or compensation. The rapists have more advantages in this lawsuit. Most of them are set free, and Chencho receives only a year in jail. Ermila is abandoned by the whole Chicana/o community, and the Anglo society fails her, too. Therefore, Chicanas' rights are seriously violated, and they face more danger in society. As Torres says, "The task of speaking out against sexual violence is fraught with danger and risk for all women, but speaking out places women of color in an even more vulnerable and conflicted position" (234).

Furthermore, in the novel, naming has special and interesting meanings. Of the women, only the victim, Ermila, has a name, while other women, including the female narrator, do not have names. Pérez uses the naming to point out two things. First, Ermila is the only woman who stands up to fight against the patriarchal domination and resist sexual violence against women, so she deserves a name. Second, all the women except for Ermila are the same, remaining silent and indifferent and afraid to challenge male authority. However, Ermila's bravery does not bring her the justice she deserves. In the end, she is found dead and drifting on the beach. Her death implies that women who oppose men will be punished and seems to be a metaphor of the patriarchal brutality imposed on Chicanas. But Ermila's story also has a positive meaning, showing that to gain justice and equality, there must be sacrifices. Although Ermila dies eventually, her spirit of fighting against male brutality remains.

There can be no happy ending, only in fantasy, what the mind chooses to make up, to hold onto as real. The imagination will dodge cruelty, escaping the crime—how the body has been pillaged, scarred—pretending this never happened, fooling memory with another meaning. She would live her life pretending, lying. If Ermila didn't bargain with it now, the act itself, the rape, the violation, would haunt her waiting to happen again in memory that is so real that when the man behind a checkout stand glares at your breast, you bear the shame all over again. (Pérez 92)

If Ermila does not defend her own rights, she will live in shame painfully for the rest of her life. If women do not fight for themselves, they will always live silently and in the crisis of sexual violence. As a result, although the patriarchal society, other women's indifference, and the judicial system all contribute to the danger of sexual violence against Chicanas, Ermila's bravery represents a positive change, showing women's resistance against sexual violence and social inequality.

To conclude, violence based on race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender is the vital issue in *Gulf Dreams*, and the cases of such violence in the novel represent the violence Chicanas/os suffer and point out how Chicanas experience brutal treatment in their patriarchal society. Chicanas/os' poor English pronunciation and the practice of segregation are common racial discriminations that Chicanas/os suffer in the white world, demonstrating white superiority in the separation of the supposedly noble, white people and the inferior people of color. Also, Chicanas/os' skin color is discriminated against in white society, and Chicanas/os often experience violence based on their ethnicity, low class, and gender. In addition, the patriarchal system contributes to the male power to dominate Chicanas and to the sexual violence against

Chicanas and Chicana lesbians. By analyzing the cases in the novel, we are able to understand what Chicanas/os suffer and how they resist the violence against them.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on the different types of violence that Chicanas/os suffer either in the Chicana/o community or in the U.S. society. In the period of time from 1950 to 2000, a number of Mexican migrants came into the United States, and this period was important because many changes and policies that dealt with the violence against Chicanas/os emerged. The investigation of Mexican migrants' historical backgrounds, their migration route based on the geographical relationship between the United States and Mexico, their political participation and social movements, and the sociological issues and cultural specificity help us to re-construct the Chicana/o migrants' experiences and their lives in the U.S. Furthermore, through the analysis in the thesis, we were able to understand the difficulties and sufferings Chicana/os underwent.

In addition, in the preceding exploration of the three novels, the characters' sufferings and their rebellion against the violence stand at the center of the analysis. In *Under the Feet of Jesus*, labor and economic violence are critical issues in discussing Chicana/o migrant laborers' working experiences in the U.S. Chicana/o migrants hope to gain U.S. citizenship in order to negotiate their rights; however, language barriers and their sense of social inferiority worsened their lives in the U.S. Also, migrants' rights and wages are often exploited, and the poor medical institutions and the lack of medical health care all exacerbated Chicana/o laborers' difficulties.

Next, in *So Far from God*, Castillo uses the different female characters to represent the family and religious violence against Chicanas, and how they resist the violence. The four daughters, who have special names that stand for four different characteristics, react differently to the brutal violence against them, but their deaths in the end finally set them free from the Catholic Church's constraints and from male domination. Also, their mother, Sofi, once devoted

to the Catholic religion, challenging the male authority and fighting against the Catholic Church after her daughters' miserable experiences.

The race and sexual violence represented in *Gulf Dreams* in the last chapter brings the issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality into conversation with one another. From the examples in the novel, we were able to realize the racial and classist discrimination against Chicanas/os. They have to suffer from humiliation in addition to discrimination, such as white people's mockery of their awkward English pronunciation, segregation, and the social hierarchies based on race, class, and gender. Male supremacy constrains Chicana's thoughts, acts aggressively towards Chicana lesbians, and contributes to the ubiquitous sexual violence against women in society. But Ermila's resistance against male brutality expresses the point that Chicanas have to keep standing up for their own rights. There will always be sacrifices, but hope will eventually appear only when they keep fighting.

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