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Anita Tijerina-Revilla

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ANITA TIJERINA-REVILLA

Chicana/Latina feminists have long struggled to sustain social movements dedicated to eliminating multiple interlocking oppressions. Often, they have struggled against narrow definitions of Chicano/a identity and feminism. This article is a case study of Raza Womyn, a Chicana/Latina student organization, whose members organize around a Muxerista *(a Chicana/Latina feminist activist) vision of social justice that rejects patriarchal notions of Chicano nationalism, white and/or middle-class-dominated perspectives of feminism, and static definitions of sexual identity while building on the legacy of Chicana/Latina feminist thought. Specifically, this research documents the experiences of activists who worked to rectify the mistakes of earlier social movements that were undeniably patriarchal and heterosexist. Toward this end, the women in this organization created the space for sexual identity exploration, questioning, and sexual fluidity by rejecting social constructed norms and fixed definitions of hetero and lesbian identity.*

Keywords: *muxerista* / Chicana feminism / activism

In 1999, I attended the fourth annual Chicana/Latina Conference organized by the members of Raza Womyn, a student organization founded in 1979 at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The conference drew over 400 women of all ages and covered a variety of topics in workshops and dialogues throughout the day, including a keynote by Cherríe Moraga and a performance by Monica Palacios. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) sexuality and the struggle against homophobia was a central topic of discussion throughout the conference, including workshops about racism, gender, labor struggle, immigration, and much more. The full integration of Queer[1] issues into their organization's agenda distinguished Raza Womyn from most other student organizations on campus (who were not solely identified as LGBTQ). The conference began at 9 AM and ended at 6 PM, and by the end of the day, I became convinced that this organization had something powerful to teach others and me. Today, I refer to the knowledge that I inherited from Raza Womyn as *muxerista* theory and vision.

This article provides a working definition of *muxerista* and explains how a *muxerista* vision created the space for an exploration of sexual identities that may have otherwise never arisen outside of this environment. Furthermore, this research documents the experiences of an organization

that worked to rectify the mistakes of earlier social movements that were undeniably sexist and homophobic by challenging the static definitions of sexual identity offered in most places outside of this organization, including a Chicano nationalist movement, Chicana/o and Mexicana/o families and communities, and predominantly "white" institutions of higher education.[2]

Methods

This project is Participatory Action Research (PAR), of which the goal is to learn something from the people who are being researched, to develop positive relationships, and to act more effectively for the development of social justice (Crabtree and Miller 1999). More importantly, PAR includes the participants in every stage of the research process and the researcher partakes in the social justice agenda of the group that is being studied. Toward this effort, I attended weekly meetings with the participants for five years and helped organize the fifth through the ninth annual Chicana/Latina conferences, as well as several other Raza Womyn events. I assisted with the development of the conference programs, did extensive outreach to the community, presented workshops at the conference, hosted annual retreats, and helped with the day-to-day activities and events. I joined the women on full days of community outreach and recruitment. Some activities included poetry readings, Raza Womyn orientations, workshops, lectures; other activities included off-campus events such as rallies against the war, for Affirmative Action, labor strikes, LGBT Pride parades, community festivals, social gatherings, and much more. My participation and involvement in these activities was a reflection of my commitment to the goals of the organization and was also an attempt to meet the need of reciprocity in my research. The more time I was involved in these activities, the more I learned about the participants. Hence, I was simultaneously a researcher and a participant. This research included participant observation, document examination, surveys, and in-depth interviews. Every site of contact was an opportunity for education and critical thinking.

The limitations of this study include the fact that all of the participants are women in higher education who have access to an organization, peers, and classrooms that engage in dialogue about social justice and critical consciousness. Participants of this study reflect a group of women who simultaneously experience privilege and oppression/marginalization. They are an extremely small percentage (7 percent) of Chicanas/Latinas students in the United States who were able to navigate through the educational pipeline to the four-year university (Yosso 2005). Although many of them experience homophobia, sexism, classism, racism, and ethnic/linguistic/anti-immigrant discrimination, their ability to attend UCLA

and have access to a student organization dedicated to social justice provides tremendous resources and support that most Chicana/Latina students do not have.

The participants of study included: 101 virtual members on the Raza Womyn listserv—women that came and went over the years but continued to stay connected and supported Raza Womyn events. Thirty-one women between the ages of eighteen and thirty one completed a five-page survey. Fifteen were interviewed one-on-one and five focus group interviews were conducted. Individual interviews lasted anywhere from two hours to six hours. According to the survey results, most were first generation U.S. born (18.5) or immigrants (6); most identified as "poor" to "working class" (20) and "working" to "middle class" (7); most identified as Chicanas (19.5) or Latina (6) and Central American (4.5). The women were asked to report their sexual identities on the survey. The responses included the following: Queer (9), Bisexual (5), Two-spirited[3] (1), Lesbian (4), *Tortillera*[4] (4), Heterosexual (16), "Presumed heterosexual, but I don't like to identify" (1), and "Heterosexual, but not by choice" (1). Some participants identified with any of one of these labels or several of them at the same time. The broad responses are significant because although the majority of women who responded to the survey identified as "heterosexual," the organization, at the time of this study, was perceived as a "lesbian," "radical feminist" organization.

Muxerista: A Chicana/Latina Feminist Vision

A *muxerista* is a person whose identity is rooted in a Chicana/Latina feminist vision for social change committed to ending all forms of oppression, including but not limited to racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and citizenism.[5] Its definition is rooted in the scholarship and activism of Chicanas and feminists of color, but is extended by the work, experience, and theoretical understandings of the members of Raza Womyn.

Angelica, a member of Raza Womyn who identifies as a "Chicana, *feminista*, *muxerista*," first used the word "*muxerista*" in 2002. Soon, the other women started using it as a common way of writing or expressing a Chicana/Latina feminist identity. When asked why she started using the term, Angelica asserted:

> I was really interested in trying to create solidarity between the Chicana struggle here and the Zapatista women of Chiapas . . . [So at a meeting,] this older woman was reporting back after a trip to the Zapatista communities . . . She said that some women in Mexico were calling themselves *muxeres*—[to signify] this idea of linking their gender to their cultural and ethnic identity. And I adopted

> it immediately. I thought it was a more encompassing identity than Chicana. It focused around this idea of womanhood, sisterhood, [and] women of color.

Thus, the term *muxeres* originates from grassroots activists who were engaged in the struggle for indigenous people's autonomy in Chiapas. Members of Raza Womyn adopted the term and developed it. They commonly use the term *muxer* in place of *mujer* or woman—reinforcing the intersection of gender, ethnicity, culture, feminist identity, and activist struggle. Based on observations and interviews conducted, a *muxerista* is a Chicana/Latina who considers herself a feminist *and* activist. The "x" replaces the "j" to denote a connection to indigenous ancestry/language and anticolonial struggle. It also signifies the multiplicity, complexity, and intersectionality of a Chicana/Latina activist identity. Therefore, *muxerista* signifies a layering of identities that speaks to the relationship between ethnicity/race, gender, and critical feminist consciousness and engagement. In this sense, a *muxerista* is simultaneously a Chicana/Latina, feminist, *and* activist—never just one or the other.

While members of Raza Womyn indicated that a *muxerista* identity is connected to womanhood and gender, it is important to note that some activists who are nongender conforming, transgender, Queer-gendered, and/or males also can and do identify as *muxeristas* today. They have expanded the definition of *muxerista* beyond the parameters put forward by Raza Womyn to include folks who do not fit into the gender binary, and they use the term to claim a political identity/consciousness.

The concept of *muxerista* is different from *mujerista* theology as described and defined by Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1996), although there are many similarities. According to activist-theologian, Isasi-Díaz (1996), a *mujerista* is a Latina feminist committed to social justice and the struggle against women's oppression within the Latino/a community.

There are many elements of *mujerista* theology as defined by Isasi-Diaz (1996), all of which are connected to a grassroots feminist movement for Latinas' self-respect, dignity, and entry into the world of theology. Similarly, Raza Womyn members adhere to a grassroots vision for social justice, but their articulation of a *muxerista* consciousness rarely invokes a connection to theology. When asked if they were familiar with the work of Isasi-Díaz, none of the Raza Womyn indicated that they had read or studied her work. Therefore, although there are parallel goals for *mujerista* theologians and *muxeristas*, the definition of a *muxerista* is rooted in the theoretical framings and actions of the women themselves. Raza Womyn offer their own definitions of feminism while also drawing on the concepts of Gloria Anzaldúa's (1999) *mestiza*/borderland consciousness and Cherríe Moraga's (1993) queer Aztlán.

The *muxerista* consciousness as described by the members of Raza Womyn is closely aligned with Anzaldúa's (1999) notion of the Shadow-Beast:

> There is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts. (Anzaldúa 1999, 38)

A *muxerista* is a resister and questions all authority and social constructs, "even those self-imposed." Specifically, gender and sexuality roles are vehemently questioned and rejected, even when they are painful *travesías* (crossings). Indeed, "We lose something in this mode of initiation [consciousness], something is taken from us: our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance" (Anzaldúa 1999, 61).

Muxerista is an alternative to Chicana, which is inherently connected to a Chicano nationalist movement. As Raza Womyn member, Osa[6] indicates,

> I had to deconstruct a lot of my shit on what I thought a Chicana was. I was also in MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlán] at the same time. And I took in a different ideology that was kind of like, not clashing, but like it didn't make sense in one organization, and it did in the other . . . it kind of hindered me from working with other women.

Many members of Raza Womyn had a heightened critique of nationalism and some rejected it altogether for its fierce reinforcement of patriarchy and homophobia. They forge a complex relationship that embraces culture, community, family, while also demands autonomous identities, free of culturally accepted behavior. In Cherríe Moraga's (1993) "Queer Aztlán," she noted that "Chicano Nationalism . . . never accepted openly gay men and lesbians among its ranks" (148). Hence, Moraga envisioned "A Chicano homeland that could embrace *all* its people, including its *jotería* [gay men and lesbians]." Raza Womyn seek to reconstruct the notion of homeland and the notion of *jotería*. Thus, their "homeland" is a *muxerista* space that rejects the "fiction of heterosexuality" and the "modern colonial gender system," and expands the notion of *jotería* to include fluid sexual identities beyond gay and lesbian (Lugones 2007).

Maria Lugones (2007) writes that gender and heterosexuality were mythically constructed by coloniality and modernity—the modern colonial gender system. She argues that "heterosexuality is not just biologized in a fictional way; it is compulsory and permeates the whole of the coloniality of gender in the renewed, large sense. In this sense, global, Eurocentered capitalism is heterosexualist . . . this heterosexuality has

been consistently perverse, violent, and demeaning" (201). Lugones's thesis lends itself to the findings of this research in that the members of the organization, in an effort to create "safe space," reject heterosexualist tendencies and fixed Queer sexual identities.

Lessons learned?

The proceedings of the 1984 National Association for Chicano Studies (now known as the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies) conference documented a historical moment in time in which the experiences of women and feminists were heard collectively in the field as Chicana scholars critiqued the sexism they encountered in the movement, community, and academia, as well as the overall invisibility of women and feminism. Cynthia Orozco (1990), former member of Raza Womyn, wrote: "The Chicano movement was a nationalist struggle for the liberation of the Mexican people in the United States. . . . It must be clear that the movement did *not* attempt to end patriarchy, the system by which men dominate women" (11).[7] Thus, while the Chicano movement incorporated a race and class-based struggle, many early participants were years away from incorporating the intersectional analysis of oppression that we so commonly refer to today as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Still, feminists of color were the ones who first introduced the notion of the intersectionality of oppression and the interlocking systems of domination (Blea 1992; Alarcon et al. 1993; Garcia 1997; Beltran-Vocal et al. 1999; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002; Wing 2003).

The ongoing critique of feminists of color was that they were detracting from the "real" and "more pressing" issues of racism and classism by bringing attention to feminism and gender critiques. Because of the collective struggle against racism, many (including men and women) believed that they could not oppose male behavior and sexism in the movement for fear of losing sight of the essentialized "oppressor"—"the white man." Feminism was believed to be a danger to the essentialized *familia*, particularly because feminists were believed to be lesbians. There was an assumption that the rejection of patriarchy meant the rejection of all things male. In *Chicana Feminist Thought*, Alma Garcia (1997) indicates: "Chicana feminists came under attack for their specific critique of Chicano cultural nationalism. Some were criticized as followers of white feminists or as lesbians" (6). The "attack" was homophobic on at least two different levels: First, the accusers were obviously homophobic; and second, those feminists who felt "attacked," hurt, and/or scared to be perceived as lesbians were also being homophobic because they believed the lesbian identification was in fact an insult.

Many feminist scholars and/or women of color activists recognize these critiques as age-old issues within the field (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002; Wing 2003; Shah 1997; Smith 2005). The most common elements of early feminists of color writings are critiques of sexism in civil rights movements and racism in feminist movements. Hence, the reason for revisiting this history is to connect previous movements to the struggles of women of color activists of today. It is important to bring light to the continued prevalence of these issues for contemporary feminists/activists of color. Hence, learning that the most widespread assumptions about Raza Womyn were that they were "too radical" and that they were "lesbians" was predictable. Sexism and homophobia are deeply entrenched in activist spaces, yet people continue to believe that these were lessons learned from the 1960s and 70s and therefore we have no need to revisit or restate their insidious presence within organizations committed to social justice. This article speaks to this issue in one locale, but it is far-reaching and all too familiar for feminists currently engaged in grassroots social movements.

Are All Raza Womyn Queer?

In 2003, there was a wave of members of Raza Womyn that "came out" as Queer, bisexual, lesbian, *tortilleras*, or womyn lovers, and several others who began to question their heterosexuality. Many had never before questioned their sexuality or considered the possibility that they were Queer. Therefore, it seemed that Raza Womyn was, indeed, Queer, as it became a safe space to explore troubled sexuality and sexual identity in ways that few other locations were able to do.

During the time this research took place, there was a common belief that members of Raza Womyn were all Queer or lesbians. It was well known and had a significant impact on whether or not women joined the organization. Furthermore, women who identified as "straight" or heterosexual found themselves in the unfamiliar situation of being surrounded by Queer women, Queer friendliness, and sexual ambiguity in terms of who was and was not Queer. When I asked Marina,[8] a Chicana, bisexual, "fierce femme" from East L.A., what impact Raza Womyn had on her sexuality, she replied:

> It opened my eyes to it because they were honestly the first Queer women that I had really had any interaction with. At Westridge, I didn't. In MEChA and LASA [Latin American Student Association], I didn't. It was in Raza Womyn that I did. And I remember when I first started mentioning Raza Womyn to other people that were not in it, they kind of mentioned that, "Oh, it's only lesbians that go there." And I was like, "No, that's not true because I'm not a lesbian, and I'm in Raza Womyn." I remember saying that . . . They had heard rumors about Raza Womyn.

At the time that I interviewed her, Marina had recently graduated from UCLA. She was active in Raza Womyn for over five years and had just started her first relationship with a woman. Because she is a private person, she did not talk much about her sexual identity in the Raza Womyn meeting spaces, but I probed during this interview for her to share what the process was like. Initially, when she learned that some of the members were Queer women, she became an ally and was supportive of them. She did not want to offend them and did not ask many questions because she was afraid to ask the wrong ones. She did not allow her initial discomfort to push her out of the organization, but she still struggled with it. She immersed herself as an active member and leader of Raza Womyn. Other members who thought that Marina was Queer but closeted, questioned her sexuality. Their constant urging that she "hurry up and come out" made her feel uncomfortable, so she confronted them at an organization retreat and told them that she felt they were pressuring her to identify as Queer. Osa recalls the incident, "'[Marina was] like, 'Well, it's just disturbing that everywhere I go, I hear that Raza Womyn is Queer, and I'm in Raza Womyn and I'm not Queer. And I'm sorry if I'm not fucking Queer, but I still wanna participate.'" This confrontation led to tears, tension, and dialogue. It ended in a discussion about supporting women regardless of their sexual identity. They agreed that they should not pressure anyone to identify one way or the other. Marina later acknowledged that the "pressure" she felt was likely to be her own internalized homophobia. However, at the time, she had no idea that she was not heterosexual. She remembers the incident clearly:

> I didn't want to offend them because I wasn't Queer. [Laughs.] Or at least I thought I wasn't. . . . But I started talking to them more about it and just questioning my own sexuality. If it wasn't for them, I don't think I would have questioned who I am or maybe I would have, but I don't think it would have been in the same [way]. I think I would have just brushed it off, like I did once before when I first started being with them. . . . That was the first time I had ever really allowed myself to even question.

Two years later Marina felt ready to question her sexuality again when her roommate and closest friend delia,[9] also a member of Raza Womyn, who identifies as a "chicana, *mexicana*, *immigrante*, *tortillera*, *revolucionaria*, *indigena y mujerista*," was questioning her sexuality as well. This time, Marina felt there were several people who she could turn to, including the women who were already out and delia. Marina states:

> I had delia, who was also in the process. And we kind of were helping each other and trying to hypothesize and answer questions within ourselves. I remember last summer after pride we came home, and I was like, 'Oh my god, delia! What if my mom saw me on TV? . . . And I remember I went through this big ol' panic attack. And I was like, "Oh my god! They're going to know." So she looked at

> me, and she was like, "What do you mean, they're going to know? Are you bi or what?" And I was like, "Yeah! I think I am. Agh!" So we went off on that. She understood me, so it was cool.

Finally, Marina allowed herself to come to terms with her sexuality because she no longer felt pressured to proclaim a Queer identity. Instead, she felt supported, understood, and able to take steps toward claiming her sexual identity on her own terms.

There were two crucial events that facilitated this process. One was the Mujer a Mujer conference, a Queer Latina conference, organized by La Familia (a Latina/o and Chicana/o Queer student organization) and Bienestar (a nonprofit Latina/o Queer community organization). This conference was the first of its kind, bringing together both students and community members at the university to discuss a variety of issues related to Latinas' culture, gender, sexuality, and community. Several members of Raza Womyn, who identified as heterosexual or were not openly Queer, attended the conference as allies. This event proved to be a catalyst for them because many of them had already been questioning their sexuality in separate spaces but not collectively. After the conference, we learned that Carmen, Angelica, delia, and Marina were all having discussions about their sexual identity but not with one another, so they decided to organize a get-together to have a safe space where they could talk more about it. The gathering was the second event that pushed several of these women "out of the closet."

Carmen, a "leftist, organizer, *muxer*, lover, and writer" from Wilmington, hosted the gathering. It was a sleepover where only the *mujeres* who were questioning their sexuality were invited to come and dialogue about their process. The sleepover was simply a space where the women could feel comfortable to voice the fact that they were no longer sure if they were heterosexual. There was some nervousness and laughter, but mostly it was acceptance and the ability to admit that yes, their sexual identity was being reconsidered. All but one of the women, Angelica, "came out" that night or soon after.

Only one woman who openly identified as Queer previous to this event was invited to the sleepover. Erica was asked to come because she was the only lesbian-identified Raza Womyn who never pressured "hetero" women to come out. Therefore, she was seen as supportive and nonjudgmental to women who were in the process of coming out. Erica's personal experience with coming out speaks to why she was so sensitive about this issue. During an interview with me, Erica, who identifies as a "lesbian, activist, teacher, and Latina," explained that she left MEChA because she felt she was tokenized. Because she was Queer and a strong leader and organizer in MEChA, she was often used as "proof" that MEChA was

not homophobic merely because she was a member. Erica explained her coming out process in the following way:

> So I talked about [being Queer in MEChA], but I wasn't necessarily getting feedback from people . . . And that continued until friction between the acknowledged Queer organization, which was *La Familia*, and MEChA, which was the homophobic, nationalist organization [took place]. And there was a battle after "the token Queer." . . . I was caught in between, so [this left] me not wanting either of those spaces.
>
> And that's what led me to Raza Womyn, which was not only a safe space, but which housed people that had gone through the same shit . . . where they were in MEChA or where they had gone to La Familia and just not felt a comfortable space like the one that was present in Raza Womyn. So when I got there, it was like, "Oh my god. Why didn't I start here?"

Several other members of Raza Womyn, who were members before and after Erica was in the organization, voiced similar experiences within MEChA and La Familia. In particular, women who felt that they were not "Queer enough" because they were not out to everyone or because they identified as bisexual were very hesitant about being active in La Familia. For example, Coral (a Chicana from South Central) indicated that at the first meeting she attended she was asked point blank, "So, who are you fucking?" She felt that the question posed to her was an attempt to make her come out as a lesbian when she really identified as bisexual. She decided that La Familia was not the organization for her at the time, and she had already decided that she was not interested in participating in MEChA at UCLA because she believed it to be a "patriarchal, heteronormative organization." Hence, the reason she was drawn to Raza Womyn was because she perceived it to be both a safe space for bisexual/Queer women and an organization committed to organizing for Chicana/o communities and women's rights. All of the members indicated a desire to organize with a race/ethnic-based organization struggling for Chicana/o and Latina/o communities' well-being, but only some of them were specifically seeking an organization that dealt with race, class, *and* gender/sexuality. Some women were drawn to Raza Womyn because it was a women's organization and others because of the openness to sexual fluidity. Overwhelmingly, they sought a gender and Queer Chicana/Latina organization only after experiencing alienation or rejection in predominantly heterosexual or nongender specific organizations.

Many *mujeres* who maintained a "hetero" or straight identity in Raza Womyn also felt strongly for the need to include Queer rights in their vision of social justice. In response to the question, "how does Raza Womyn create safe space," Morelia, a self-identified "heterosexual (??!!)," [10] indicated:

> I've felt the influence of the Queer friendliness. It's not only how we as minorities feel the pressure, how we as people of color feel the pressure, how we as women feel the pressure, but how we as Queer women of color, minorit[ies], feel the pressure . . .
>
> I didn't know what I was getting into when I first got into Raza Womyn. I didn't know that the women in there were Queer friendly or Queer themselves . . . And now . . . it's something that I don't fully understand because I'm not Queer, but that I'm trying to understand and be conscious about and call myself out when I become homophobic because it's something that has been instilled in all of us.

For many heterosexually identified women, this was huge shift from their previous experiences in their homes and in other organizations. Because of the incredible work that the organization as a whole did to connect the different struggles, many of them embraced all of the different aspects of discrimination that members of the organization faced regardless if they themselves experienced the same or not—this goal reflects the *muxerista* vision as discussed above, which is purposefully based on an intersectional analysis of oppression. Furthermore, they allowed themselves for the first time to question their own sexuality. Morelia, who identifies as a "*loca, mujer, bella, inteligente*, sister, daughter, *tia*, role model, *indigena, nacionalista, internacionalista, organizadora, enojona*, stubborn, baby, critical, *hocicona*, *chingona, desmadrosa, cabrona*, HERstorian, *nieta*, friend, student, teacher, y *revolucionaria*," talked about her questioning process:

> Raza Womyn gives me that space to question everything, including my sexuality. Because at one point, I got so frustrated. I was like, "I hate men!" You know. But then I started realizing, the same thing can happen with women. Look at the girls in Conciencia [a Latina/o student organization focused on Latin American struggles]. Just because I would be with a girl doesn't mean that the girl would be gender conscious . . . I learned that!
>
> Ever since we're born, things are imposed on us . . . I'm telling you Anita, I've been thinking so freaking much. My mind is going so fast and thinking so much. I was like, "Oh my god! I hate men. And a woman would always understand me." That's what I thought! . . . I felt comfortable thinking about it. I've never voiced it out until right now, that I felt comfortable thinking about it. And it scared me at first. It did.

Raza Womyn members again and again declared the incredible feat of allowing themselves to question their sexuality. It was an experience that few of them had encountered in other activist organizations. In Raza Womyn, there were many ambiguities of sexuality. Because sexuality and Queer issues were never the sole foci of the organization, there was lots of space to explore Queer identity while also focusing on other aspects of identity including race/ethnicity, class, gender, and immigration status.

Angelica felt strongly that sexual fluidity was something she embraced as part of her critical consciousness and *muxerista* identity, which she developed as a member of Raza Womyn. She says,

> Sexuality is the one major factor that I was never exposed to before [Raza Womyn]—the idea of questioning, the idea of it being okay to question. And I think that the space for you to question is incredibly important because I really myself have never questioned. And what's really amazed me is how, when the space is there, you really start to question.

She explains that within Raza Womyn a safe space was purposely constructed for her and others to get to this point where they could consider the possibility of sexual fluidity. Angelica asserts:

> And to me [sexuality is] really, really fluid. It's so fluid. It's really the space you are in, the people you're with. I don't know how to explain it . . . Sometimes I feel that if I did meet a woman and I fell in love with her, I feel that that would be so natural for me, and maybe months before it wasn't. I was like, "No. I'm heterosexual. I can't go there." But it's like my mind allows me, my body allows me to go there. And that's a huge thing in Raza Womyn. And I think that the women who don't come back are intimidated by that, they don't want to challenge that yet, and that's fine. I think everybody goes through their own process.

The need to construct safe space is an extremely important factor in building a *muxerista*/Queer consciousness in an organization that is not exclusively created for Queer people. While Angelica continues to identify as heterosexual today, she warmly embraced the *muxerista* consciousness-raising that allowed her to question her sexual identity and commit to Queer activism along with the race, gender, labor, immigration, and anti-war efforts.

Raza Womyn, the organization, has undergone several different identities. Before the "Queer" identity came into existence in the late 1990s, Raza Womyn was seen as simply a Chicana/Latina organization dedicated to the advancement of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education. It was also more social and sometimes included male participation. However, there were several women who changed that identity and introduced LGBTQ rights and safe space for Queer women as one of the priorities of the organization. Osa was one of the members most responsible for the continuation of that goal.

> [I told delia] that even though we had found a place, we had to create it and make it the way it was, and do me the favor, that even though there may not be "out" Queer women, that to make sure that the space was still there and that it still would be safe if someone were to come out because the last thing you need is to reinvent the wheel, and that's hard because we had to do that. We had to make it Queer friendly. We had to make it so fucking radical that everyone was scared. We had to or else we wouldn't get respected.

Osa's mentorship and teachings were warnings to delia and other members that they had to work to keep Raza Womyn safe for Queer women. While Osa did not want them to "reinvent the wheel," she reminded delia that this was ongoing work. In other words, just because it is Queer friendly at one time does not guarantee continued safety. There must be a commitment from all the members in the organization, but in particular the leadership of the organization must prioritize these goals in order to sustain them.

Osa actively educated women about her own sexual identity as well as the struggle that Queer folks have within higher education, Chicana/o families and Chicana/o communities, and student activism. She insisted that Raza Womyn, as an organization, not lose sight of that struggle, but it came at a high cost. On the eve of the twentieth anniversary of Raza Womyn and her last year at UCLA, she recalled her struggle, "I'm glad that I'm leaving now because I'm leaving with that peace [of helping Raza Womyn grow]. I had to go through a huge healing process though. That was with a lot of different people and a lot of people that I'm like, 'You really destroyed me. You took my spirit away.' And now I feel like I'm a much better person. And I'm ready now for that transition."

delia pointed out how instrumental Osa was as a mentor in this process as well as in many other areas. delia repeated the organization motto and credited Osa for helping her learn the true meaning of the phrase, "You don't join Raza Womyn, you are Raza Womyn." Osa states:

> It's just that you have to find yourself. We provide and support each other to create that space. I know that all of the *mujeres* here have helped me so much to understand that, especially Osa, my mentor. You are beautiful. . . . By having badass women around you, you learn. When you recognize that beauty within you . . . You find yourself.

Conclusion

According to Maria Lugones (2007), we must understand the origins of the colonial/modern gender system and its connection to global colonial capitalism in order to engage in "liberatory/decolonial projects" (187). Toward this end, she explains the legacy of heterosexualism, its social construction and enforcement upon men and women historically and contemporarily in order to deconstruct it and identify its damaging effects. Heterosexualized/gendered configurations are a powerful tool of the colonization process because they marginalize and create violent social processes to police and maintain a structure based on a heteronormative frame to build the "nation." Those that stand in the margins reject this and other forms of institutionalizing behavior for the benefit of the empire

and nation. The rejection often takes all the energy available, and in the case of Raza Womyn they focused on creating a Queer, fluid, *muxerista* space in stark opposition to Chicano nationalist spaces that reinforced the colonial/modern gender and sexual system. They also rejected fixed notions of sexual identity represented by other Queer organizations.

Moraga (1983) writes, "The difference now is that as we begin to organize and create our own programs and institutions, we are building a political base so that we no longer have to fall prey to the tokenism and invisibility we have encountered in other movement work" (124). By challenging and creating spaces of resistance that create a different reality for fluid/Queer resisters, Raza Womyn created the space for radical transformation in the identity and politics of *muxeristas*.

> I guarantee you, there will be no change among heterosexual men, there will be no change in heterosexual relations, as long as the Chicano community keeps us lesbians and gay men political prisoners among our own people. Any movement built on the fear and loathing of anyone is a failed movement. The Chicano movement is no different. (Moraga 1983, 130)

Moraga's (1983) prophecy is a painful reminder to participants of Chicano/a movements of the past and present that change is inevitable and it behooves us all to ensure that we are engaging in action and dialogue that is pushing us forward, away from stagnation. Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) point out that the enemies of the past may no longer be our enemies, and the allies of the past may no longer be our allies. Activists of today push us to examine these evolving struggles in our movement. This is the case of Raza Womyn.

Raza Womyn not only engaged in activism and consciousness-raising about multiple, interlocking identities, but it also pushed members to reconstruct their sense of self and identity. Often, people who are not accustomed to struggling against multiple oppressions or working outside of fixed and binary constructs are scared away from organizations that do so. Organizations such as Raza Womyn are not common and are difficult to sustain. Doing so would mean constantly working to expand a personal vision of social justice to actively incorporate the next challenge and "new" oppression.

Osa, the Raza Womyn Queer-tor (primary mentor and educator of Queer issues), states:

> Raza Womyn was Queer because we culturally defied a lot of those cultural norms that were established. . . . And if that's what being Queer was, then fuck it. We're Queer. Fine. Raza Womyn is Queer. Good, that means we're doing something good. We're inciting people to think. We're scaring the fuck out of them. We're disturbing the comfort zone.

"Queer" reflects the politics of the organization—as a space of resistance that rejects cultural/"nation" norms and patriarchal and homophobic notions. She notes that because the leadership of the organization, those who participate most in the organization and throughout campus, identify as Queer, the whole organization is believed to be Queer. She welcomes this identity because, to her, it signifies a break with the comfort of mainstream and heteronormative expectations. Indeed, because women who identify openly as lesbians/Queer are huge contributors to academia and activism, they become the target of resentment and sexist backlash. And as Osa aptly argues, if being feminist and breaking with patriarchal confines means you are "Queer," then perhaps more organizations should welcome both a feminist and Queer identity.

Anita Tijerina-Revilla *is an assistant professor in Women's Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her research focuses on the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the experiences of students of color, especially as it relates to feminist and Queer student activism, social movements, and social justice education. Her expertise includes Chicanas/os in Education, Critical Race Feminism, and Chicana/Latina Feminism. She received her PhD from UCLA Graduate School of Education in Social Sciences and Comparative Education with an emphasis in Race and Ethnic Studies. Her most recent publication is a co-authored book titled,* Both Sides Now: The Stories of Desegregation's Graduates *(UC Press). She can be reached at anita.revilla@unlv.edu.*

Notes

1. The word "Queer" in this article is used as an umbrella term that encompasses all sexual/gender identities that break with heterosexual and heteronormative identities, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. It is used as a political term common amongst community activists rather than its academic use.

2. I write "white" in quotes to indicate that whiteness is a social construct created for the purpose of colonialism and racism.

3. Two-spirited is an identity chosen by some people who identify as bisexual and who connect their sexual identities to their indigenous heritage. According to Native American scholars, people who are two-spirited contain both masculine and feminine spirits.

4. *Tortillera* is a tortilla-maker. It is a common term used to refer to lesbian women in Mexico and Latin America. It is a reclaimed term used by Queer women who are Chicanas/Latinas.

5. Citizenism is anti-immigrant behavior and/or ideologies that result in the belief of the superiority of people who are classified by the state as citizens of a nation. This state and federal sanctioned classification results in a system of unearned advantages for citizens and unwarranted discrimination of noncitizens, such as denial of basic human rights and dignity.

6. "Osa" is a pseudonym. All real names used in this article are the real names of the participants, used at their request. Osa did not wish to be identified by her real name.

7. Cynthia was a member of Raza Womyn when she was a graduate student in the 1980s. At the time it was called "Raza Women's Organization."

8. "Marina" is a pseudonym.

9. delia does not capitalize her name by choice in resistance to formal, academic English regulations.

10. Morelia included the exclamation points in "heterosexual!!??" to indicate the excitement and nervousness around the issue of sexual identity and the fact that although she continues to identify as heterosexual, she has questioned that identity.

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