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This is an **author produced version** of a paper published in:

Journal of Gender Studies 31.6 (2022): 684-694

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1910801>

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Growing up Queer: Crossing Gender Boundaries in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyze how Carla Trujillo discusses Chicana lesbian identity in her novel *What Night Brings* (2003) through the eyes of an eleven year- old Chicana girl. Trujillo questions gender boundaries and sexual identity in a patriarchal Chicano cultural context characterized by violence and homophobia. The protagonist, Marcia Cruz, takes the reader on a journey of sexual awakening in which the body becomes fundamental to the exploration, and definition, of her sexual identity. Trujillo frames this in a Christian context since Marci looks for answers and protection in religion and the Church especially in respect of her sexual identity. *What Night Brings* is a Chicana girlhood memoir that shows the uncertainties of growing up queer in a patriarchal culture and questions the gender boundaries in a Chicana girl's sexual awakening.

Key Words: Queer Theory, Gender Studies, Chicana Writing, Lesbian Literature.

Introduction

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa published *Borderlands/La Frontera*, one of the most revealing and fundamental texts of Chicana literature. Here, she theorized about both Chicana identity and Chicana lesbian identity: “for the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality” (2012, p. 41). In

1991 the writer Carla Trujillo published an edited volume titled *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls our Mothers Warned us about*, pursuant to Anzaldúa's idea of "ultimate rebellion" and to contribute to the theorization of Chicana lesbian theory. Following the wake of other Chicana lesbian writers such as Ana Castillo, Cherrie Moraga and Emma Pérez, Trujillo published her first novel, *What Night Brings*, in 2003, the story of Marci Cruz. *What Night Brings* narrates the experiences of an 11 year-old Chicana girl who has a sexist mother, a violent father and a dependent younger sister. Marci compels the reader to be the witness of her most intimate confession: she wants to become a boy in order to be allowed to love girls. Thus, this is the story of a Chicana girl awakening to her queer identity in a traditional, hostile Chicano context who will rebel against the impositions and moral prohibitions of her native culture (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 41).

In her novel Trujillo offers a thorough and revealing discussion about queerness and queer identity through the eyes of a girl who is trying to understand her sexuality, contributing a new perspective to Chicana lesbian literature. According to Jackie T. Cuevas it is "post-Anzaldúan" Chicana literature that ventures "into genderqueer and transgender representations" (2018, p. 9), however, Trujillo's novel, published one year before Anzaldúa's sudden death, was already discussing queer and gender representations from a bodily perspective, therefore becoming a precursor of what would later be called "post-boderlandia" Chicana lesbian literature. The aim of this article is to analyze how Trujillo discusses Chicana lesbian identity through the experiences and eyes of a girl during her sexual awakening and how Trujillo approaches queer identity by introducing the protagonist's bodily confessions in relation to her gender identity and her expectations of becoming a boy as a way to fulfill her queerness.

Patriarchal Chicano Discourse

From the beginning of the novel, Eddie Cruz, Marci's father, becomes an oppressive and scary presence in her life. In the physical description she gives of him, another fundamental aspect of the Chicano patriarchal world is revealed in which Marci is trapped: violence. Marci, and her little sister Corin, live with a violent father and a mother who does not protect them since she accepts her role within a patriarchal Chicano family without question. Marci describes her father as a sort of wild beast in a house that is not a home but a dangerous jungle for the girls:

His hair is black and his eyes are light green like a cat's. They stand out against his face, so you can always see him watching you, even in a room full of people. His arms are little, but hard. And he can whip off his belt faster than you can say son-of-bitch because that's what you're usually saying when you're about to get it from him. (Trujillo, 2003, p. 2)

As a reaction against this, Marci dreams of becoming a Supergirl who will protect and defend women from aggressive men like her father: "Every night I dreamed I saved beautiful girls..." (Trujillo, 2003, p. 6). It is through the image of the Supergirl that she confesses to the reader that she likes girls: "She would be so happy I saved her, she'd want to marry me. I'd say yes and the dream would end with me kissing her neck ..." (Trujillo, 2003, p. 6).

Undoubtedly, Marci's rebellious spirit can be related to the myth of 'La Malinche'. Many Chicana writers have used the myth of Malintzín, Malinalli, and Doña Marina, known as 'La Malinche' (Rueda Esquibel, 2006, p. 23) to rewrite and reformulate the role of the Chicana woman in Chicano culture. According to Rueda Esquibel (2006), "This Indian woman has figured as the original/originating mother of the mestizo peoples of the Americas and thus as a symbol of the rape, conquest and

colonization of the native peoples under Spain” (p. 23). However, as a key to the downfall of the Aztec empire (1519): “La Malinche has been figured as a traitor to her people since the end of the colonial period. The stigma of *malinchismo*/*vendidismo* has been repeatedly used to keep Chicanas ‘in their place’” (Rueda Esquibel, 2006, pp. 23-24). Rueda Esquibel further asserts that Chicana lesbian authors recognized the connection between “La Malinche as victim of patriarchy and the nationalist representation of feminists and lesbians as Malinches” (p. 24). Norma Alarcón (1989) suggested that “not only is the lesbian in the Chicano imagination *una Malinchista*, but vice versa. Feminism, which questions patriarchal tradition by representing women’s subjectivity and/or interjecting it into extant discursive modes, thereby revising them, may be equated with *malinchismo* or lesbianism” (p. 81). Certainly, it can be inferred that Trujillo’s intention is to link the domestic violence suffered by the two girls with Marci’s homosexuality. Even though domestic violence is part of Eddie’s idea of a family, a home and raising children, it comes to punish Marci’s confrontation of patriarchal Chicano culture. As Carolina Alonso states, “Marci navigates beyond the boundaries of the normative gender expression and therefore jeopardizes the hierarchies of power in which Eddie, as a straight man, is placed higher than the rest of the family” (Alonso, 2020, p. 184). By rebelling against it, by desiring to become a Supergirl and by liking girls, Marci puts the patriarchal system, that sustains Eddie as the powerful figure in his family, at risk.

Violence can be interpreted from two different perspectives in the novel. On the one hand, Eddie’s aggression controls and oppresses women within the Chicano patriarchy. On the other hand, there is a strong link between violence and the body; concretely Marci’s body and her homosexuality. Violence marks Marci’s body and punishes the desire to become a boy **or transgress**. Marci’s physical punishment is

caused mainly by her sexuality that, at the same time, contributes to her condition as a *vendida* which Moraga summarized as follows:

Chicanas begin to turn our backs on each other either to gain male approval or to avoid being sexually stigmatized by them under the name of puta, vendida, jota. This phenomenon is as old as the day is long, and first learned in the school yard, long before it is played out with a vengeance within political communities. (Moraga, 1983, p. 98)

Physical violence becomes Eddie's way of rewriting Marci's body, and therefore her identity, not only as a homosexual child but also as a 'malinche' who defies the heteropatriarchal Chicano system. Eddie takes advantage of Marci's double vulnerability as both a child and as a girl. As Judith Butler (2004) explained, violence becomes the means through which certain individuals manipulate and control the other: "Violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another" (p. 22).

It seems that Marci's *malinchismo* gives her the strength and courage to fight her father, and to challenge the heteronormative structure, even when she still believes that her role as a boy is the sole mechanism for reaching a privileged position in the system that represses her: "Did I tell you that part of the reason I wanted to be a boy, besides loving girls, was so I could grow big muscles like the men in my Uncle Tommy's muscle magazines? Then, I'd be able to beat up my dad" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 15). However, Marci's *malinchismo* is dehumanized in a manner that Butler characterized as a "physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization which is already at work in the culture". (2004, p. 25)

Eddie's physical abuse towards Marci and Corin perpetuates this process; Marci and Corin are a work of dehumanization in progress, while Delia, the mother, represents the process completed, which accounts for her cold and cruel attitude towards her daughters. At the end of the novel Delia chooses Eddie over her daughters who escape to live with their Grandmother, Flor (Trujillo, 2003, p. 235).

Growing up Queer

To define and discover her sexual identity, Marci believes she needs to become a boy in order to love girls. She goes to the city library and asks the librarian for a book to explain this and the librarian finds for her *The Christine Jorgensen Story*¹. It is through this testimony that Marci comes to know the physical transformation of a transgender woman and realize that this is not what she wants for herself: "I didn't want to go to the hospital and have an operation. I didn't even really want a birdy. I just want Raquel" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 29). Even though Marci, in her search to understand her sexual identity, believes she needs a physical transformation to be able to love girls, she does not really want to be a boy.

Marci's naïve perception that she needs to be a boy arises from her cultural background and from the heteropatriarchal structures that sustain it; in what Adrienne Rich (1980) referred to as compulsory heterosexuality. In her study, Rich challenged the assumption that women are "innately sexually oriented toward men" (1980, p. 632) in contrast to the lesbian experience which "is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible" (ibid.). Rich further stated that "women have been convinced that marriage, and sexual orientation toward men, are inevitable, even if unsatisfying or oppressive components of their lives" (1980, p. 640). Marci's imagined

¹ *The Christine Jorgensen Story* is the autobiography of Christine Jorgensen, an American transgender woman who underwent sex reassignment surgery. Her autobiography was published in 1967.

desire to become a boy responds to this latter idea of compulsory heterosexuality since, for her, the union between two women, is unknown: invisible in her life experience. In contrast to Rich's premise though Marci does not believe that it is inevitable to feel sexually attracted towards men and is determined to do whatever is necessary to form a romantic relationship with a girl.

In this conviction Marci focuses attention on her body and how it behaves in order to materialize her sexuality and she prays to become a boy: "Every day I woke up, peeked into my pajamas and looked at my cuca. Nothing was happening. Nothing was growing. It was always the same. I wanted to believe that if I wanted something bad enough, God, Baby Jesus, or Mary would help me" (p. 31). In Butler's words, "'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls" (Butler 1999, p. 235). Butler adds that sex is not a "static condition of a body" (p. 236) but "a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' ... through forcible reiteration of those norms" (p. 236). Marci's drive to become a boy is trapped in this reiteration but Marci's body can never conform to the "the regulatory norms of 'sex'" (ibid., p. 236). Marci at first seeks to consolidate the heterosexual imperative of Chicano culture through aspiring to a transformation that will comply with the regulatory norms of heterosexual behavior.

Having a penis becomes an obsession for Marci since she believes it is the pre-requisite for loving girls. One night, she dreams about it and narrates how she can touch her new genitalia: "I woke up, lifted my pajamas, and looked down like I do every morning. Low and behold, laying against my leg in all its tomato-worm-like squishiness was a birdy! I pulled my legs up to my stomach in shock. It finally happened!" (Trujillo,

2003, p. 79). Although it is a dream, the reader has the opportunity to acknowledge how Marci would react if she had male genitalia. First she is scared, but curiosity and excitement take over: “I got braver using the tip of my fingers to stroke it. It was soft and smooth like velvet. [...] I slowly reached down below my birdy. I wasn’t sure what I’d find” (p. 80).

Marci’s first described experience with masturbation here suggests that it is only with male genitalia that she believes she can experience physical pleasure. As Marivel T. Danielson (2009) explains “As a female, Marci does not explore the physical pleasures afforded to her female body, yet within the fantasy of transsexual transformation, her male body immediately presents to her the opportunity for self-exploration, stimulation, and pleasure” (p. 75). Marci is unconsciously becoming aware of the homosexuality symbolized by her imaginary penis.

Butler (2006) discussed Lacan’s idea of “phallus” in order to include it in the homosexual discourse, more concretely in the lesbian sexual discourse, and stated that it enters “in the mode of a transgressive “confession”” (p. 86). Mindful of this, Marci’s confessions to the reader, to Father Chacón at the church and in her prayers to God, can be considered to be transgressive confession since they are kept secret. According to Butler such confessions unveil “the repudiated desire, that which is abjected by heterosexist logic” (2006, p. 86) and “a desire that is produced through a prohibition” (ibid.). Marci’s dream of her imaginary “birdy” is interrupted by her mother with the following shameful exclamation: “Marrana! Keep your hands out of there” (Trujillo, 2003, p. 80). The phallus as a phantasmatic structure operates as a ‘veil’ precisely at the moment in which it is ‘revealed’ (Butler, 2006, p. 86). Marci’s imaginary “birdy” exposes her bodily limitations but at the same time reveals her true sexual identity.

Butler (2006) also discussed castration and asserted that “if a woman refuses too radically her position as castration, she will be punished with homosexuality ... established through the exclusion and abjection of a domain of relations in which all the wrong identifications are pursued” (p. 103). Marci’s ‘wrong’ identification is as a woman wishing to have a phallus to form relationships with women. Marci refuses her condition of castration not only by desiring to be, and believing God can turn her into, a boy and this is her alternative to understanding what is happening to her, physically and emotionally. Rather than a actual desire for a penis, it might be inferred that Marci needs a “birdy” in order to attract Raquel. From Anzaldúa’s (2012) perspective, Marci is “two in one body, both male and female ... the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (p. 41). Marci erases the masculine/feminine binary and in doing so undermines the heteropatriarchal structure that condemns women to heterosexuality.

These bodily discussions, in Marci’s search to understand and embrace her sexuality, are immersed in domestic violence suggestive of a homophobic response to Marci’s *malinchismo*: “‘Oh, poor Marci’, he said when he saw he was making me mad. ‘What’s the matta, chiquito?’ He talked like I was a little baby. ‘You don’t like it that I called you hombrecito? Well hell, that’s what you are’” (Trujillo, 2003, p. 144). The combination of violence and homophobia in the domestic space echoes Anzaldúa’s reflection on homophobia as the “...Fear of going home. And not being taken in” (p. 42). For Marci her home is a domestic hell in which she experiences fear and persecution as a consequence of ‘abnormal’ behavior. From Anzaldúa’s perspective, Marci would be a deviant as a female family member, because she does not play the role of obedient daughter in Eddie’s family, instead she rebels against his orders and behaves ‘like a boy’:

Women are at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants. The Chicano, *mexicano*, and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for deviance. Deviance is whatever is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants. Most cultures have burned and beaten their homosexuals and others who deviate from the sexual common. (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 40)

Marci is “afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 42) and this is the message she receives at home: “Este, mira, Marci. Your mother and I made a big mistake when we named you. We should have called you Mauricio. No? Mauricio. Pero, how did we know you’d be a boy when we saw your little bizcocho? We just went with what we saw” (Trujillo, 2003, p. 144).

Even though Trujillo does not use the term “butch”, Eddie uses masculine words to refer to Marci. Jackie T. Cuevas links the representation of a masculine Chicana lesbian with the term “chingona”, which, at the same time, is “a vulgar colloquialism for La Malinche, or Malintzín” (2018, p. 30). Cuevas argues that this Chicana butch, is “one who fucks gender, fucks with gender, fucks things up, questions the boundaries and limits of traditional authority” (2018, p. 30) and this is what Marci does in her confrontations with Eddie. Eddie’s reference to Marci’s masculinity is a projection of a “butch emotional style” and draws attention to her “failed femininity” (Cuevas, 2018, pp. 32-33).

However, Marci is not the only “deviant” of the family, it is with Uncle Tommy that Eddie’s homophobia is made explicit. Marci hears the word queer for the first time in reference to her uncle:

‘Well, well, well’, Eddie sneered. ‘So my queer little brother thinks he can kick his big brother’s ass, huh’? He folded his arms up like it would be nothing to

beat him up. ‘Now I sure as hell know that no queer can kick nobody’s ass. Just because you got a few extra muscles don’t mean shit. Because a queer with muscles—is still a queer’. (Trujillo, 2003, p. 131)

Uncle Tommy’s queerness challenges not only Eddie’s masculinity but also his heterosexuality. Nonetheless, as Anzaldúa (2012) explained: “the queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe’s fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore subhuman, in-human, non-human” (p. 40). Evidently, Eddie’s words are no more than a reflection of his heterosexual fear and excessive self-confidence: “Uncle Tommy slammed his fist into Eddie’s face. I saw my dad knocked down in one punch. Mom went over to help him, but he threw his arm out to push her away” (Trujillo, 2003, p. 131). Eddie’s pride is hurt but he is supported unconditionally by his wife even when he rejects her. At the end of this episode, Marci asserts: “I didn’t know what queer meant, but I could tell it was bad” (p. 131). From this point onwards, Marci will reflect on what queer means and how it explains what is happening to her.

The word “queer” becomes fundamental to Marci defining her identity: “I think I figured something out. I mean about this word, queer. As far as I know, it means being different. I don’t know how it means something bad. But I know if Eddie is calling Uncle Tommy queer, then it probably is” (Trujillo, 2003, pp. 133-34). As on previous occasions, Marci will look for answers in books, this time in a dictionary but this does not help her. Among all the different entries, she finds words like “eccentric, unconventional” (p. 134), “mildly insane: touched” (p. 134) or “*slang*: sexually deviate: homosexual” (p. 134). In order to understand what all this means, she tries to link the meaning of these words to her Uncle Tommy and his way of living. She ultimately tries to find an explanation for “queer” in the context of the Church since, according to Eddie, “Uncle Tommy’s a holy roller; someone who goes to church a lot. Does going to

church make you queer? The nuns go to church every day, and they for sure seem queer, especially that Mother Superior. The priests go to church, and they seem different” (p. 134).

The only thing that Marci deduces from this is that being queer means being different. That Uncle Tommy is a “holy roller” or that he goes to church too much leads Marci to another discovery. One day after catechism, she hears laughter in the confessional booth and sees two people coming out of it:

I turned back toward the confessional. After about a minute I saw a priest come out of the very same door as my Uncle Tommy. It looked like—it was—Father Chacón! Híjole! Father Chacón and Uncle Tommy were in the same confessional! Why the heck were they in there? (Trujillo, 2003, p. 78)

This episode explains why Eddie calls his brother a queer and also why Uncle Tommy goes to church a lot. Uncle Tommy and Father Chacón coming out of the confessional signifies their homosexuality and how they are confined by the confessional booth which is representative of the repression that the Church exercises over Chicano culture. Marci decides to write down on a piece of paper all the different conclusions she reaches in her attempt to define what queer is:

Too much church makes you queer, or
You’re already queer and that’s why you go to church
The church is queer.

If the church is queer, then God must be queer (Trujillo, 2003, p. 135).

Through her innocent deductions, Marci decides that both the Church and God are queer. Yet, she is not convinced that the word queer can define her identity in comparison to Uncle Tommy and Father Chacón: “I’m still not so sure what queer is.

They don't seem queer like the dictionary says, they only seemed a little different. I wanted so bad to ask them if they were queer, but I knew I couldn't" (p. 167).

Remarkably, Trujillo never uses the word lesbian to define Marci's sexual identity nor does Marci mention or reflect on it. In the book *Living Chicana Theory*, Anzaldúa (1998) discussed the term lesbian as "a cerebral word, white and middle-class, representing an English-only dominant culture, derived from the Greek word *lesbos*. I think of lesbians as predominantly white and middle-class women" (p. 263). Anzaldúa proposed instead the word queer but with reticence: "Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities, and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our difference" (p. 263). The heterogeneity of the word explains why Marci is never sure what "queer" means and especially not sure if it labels her since she risks erasing all the other persons that live in her (Anzaldúa, 1998, p. 263). Marci's attempt to understand what "queer" means and the fact that she uses it to label her identity is part of her "survival tactic" (Anzaldúa, 1998, p. 263). Trujillo exemplifies through Marci, and the construction of her queer identity, what Anzaldúa proposed in her definition of homosexual Chicanas. However, bodily discussions that transgresses gender boundaries are also authored by Anzaldúa's discussion of gender and Marci constantly questions her own body. In this respect, Trujillo approximates her discussion about queerness to Jackie T. Cuevas' definition of queer in which she used the term "queer" to express "nonnormative gender expression ... to signify the desire to disrupt normalized categories of social location" (2018, p. 19).

The consequence of Marci's queerness, her *malinchismo*, is rejection by her mother. Apart from her role as a wife, Delia's abandonment can be understood as a

reaction to Marci's queer behavior, which challenges the pillars of the Chicano patriarchal structure that her mother seeks to uphold. Moraga (1983) explained this phenomenon as follows: "lesbianism, in any form, and male homosexuality which openly avows both the sexual and emotional elements of the bond, challenges the very foundation of la familia" (p. 111). From the beginning of the novel Marci describes her mother's coldness and lack of affection and this is summarized in Delia's rejection of Marci's affection while attending mass: "I put my head against her arm. She didn't look at me or, say anything. Instead, she shook her shoulder and used her elbow to push me away. Hard. Then she just stared at the dumb priest. It made me feel bad, like I was shriveling inside" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 45). The fact that this incident takes place in church is not insignificant, since the Church as an institution protects and controls marriage, the family and heterosexuality and the role of women (Moraga, 1983, p. 109). Danielson (2009) compared Delia's behavior to Eddie's, acknowledging that "the devastation of this physical rejection from her mother appears to be equal to the horrendous physical assaults by her father" (p. 74).

It is true that Delia's unconditional support of, and devotion to, her husband provokes a rejection of both of her daughters. However, in the case of Marci, that rejection is also motivated by Marci's rebellious spirit and homosexuality. This is another way that Marci is characterized as a 'vendida'. As Moraga remarked:

The woman who defies her role as subservient to her husband, father, brother, or son by taking control of her own sexual destiny is purported to be a 'traitor to her race' by contributing to the 'genocide' of her people—whether or not she has children. In short, even if the defiant woman is *not* a lesbian, she is purported to be one; for, like the lesbian in the Chicano imagination, she is una *Malinchista*.

Like the Malinche of Mexican history, she is corrupted by foreign influences which threaten to destroy her people. (Moraga, 1983, p. 113)

According to her mother, Marci is a traitor who contributes to the demise of traditional Chicano values. Delia's treachery is equal to this - since every time she is a participant in her husband's domestic violence, she betrays her daughters. Moraga remarked on how the Malinche is betrayed by her own mother: "It is this myth of the inherent unreliability of women, our natural propensity for treachery which has been carved into the very bone of Mexican/Chicano collective psychology. *Traitor begets traitor*" (p. 101). Delia exploits Marci's 'deviant' behavior to justify distancing herself from her and reiterates 'her place' as a Chicana woman within the patriarchal system. As the end of the novel shows, Delia's position is unresolvable and she gives up her daughters for her husband. The complicity of women reinforces, supports and benefits the patriarchal Chicano system that can only be dismantled through the figure of the Malinche as a Supergirl, as Trujillo describes in the novel. Marci is a "malinchista" and a "vendida" in the eyes of both her parents but, most importantly, in the eyes of her mother.

Coming out of the "confessional booth"

From the beginning of the novel, the presence of God, religion and the Church is fundamental in Marci's life. Marci's faith and religious convictions become the refuge from her aggressive father and the violent environment of her home, while at the same time providing the discourse in which Marci looks for answers and finds hope for a better life. Every night, she prays for things that will make her life better, mainly "to make my Dad disappear" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 1) and "to change into a boy" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 9). Moraga (1983) accounted for the importance of religion and spiritual life for a Chicana who grows up in a religious household: "I learned early on to respect the

terrain of the spirit as the place where some of the most essential aspects of one's life are enacted. [...] A place from which I derive strength and perseverance. A place where much internal torture has taken place" (p. 132). In Moraga's words, the spiritual world for a Chicana girl becomes a place of resistance through which she "derive [s] strength and perseverance" (p. 132). Moraga linked Chicana sexuality with spiritual capacity and concluded that: "Patriarchal religions—whether brought to us by the colonizer's cross and gun or emerging from our own people—have always known this. Why else would the female body be so associated with sin and disobedience?" (p. 132). **Marci's attempts to find answers about her sexuality in religion.** As a *malinchista*, and in her need to become a boy, Marci is already committing a sin, as well as through her disobedience of Eddie. Moraga stated that "Female sexuality must be controlled, whether it be through the Church or the State [...]. Patriarchal systems of whatever ilk must be able to determine how and when women reproduce" (1983, p. 109) but Marci is convinced that the church is the place where she can find an explanation for her concerns about her sexual identity.

Marci's narration is structured in the form of a series of confessions. Her first confession takes place when she tells the reader of her memories as a girl. By confessing her most inner thoughts, Marci is establishing an affective link with the reader that she lacks with her family. She takes the reader into her confidence, sharing her deepest secrets and the reader is a witness to the violent incidents of her life while also observing her inner truth. In *Borderlands/La frontera*, Anzaldúa (2012) discussed "*el secreto terrible*" (p. 64):

When I was older I would look into the mirror, afraid of *mi secreto terrible*, the secret sin I tried to conceal—*la seña*, the mark of the Beast. I was afraid it was in plain sight for all to see. The secret I tried to conceal was that I was not normal,

that I was not like the others. I felt alien, I knew I was alien. I was the mutant stoned out of the herd, something deformed with evil inside. (pp. 64-65)

Here, Anzaldúa (2012) used the words beast and alien to refer to the woman as the “stranger” or “other” (p. 39) but also to explain how her secret, or sin, was her lack of normality - of not being “like the others” (p. 64) but as “something deformed with evil inside” (p. 65). Anzaldúa used words with religious connotations, such as sin or evil, in order to express her difference. Marci shares the same “*secreto terrible*” that she confesses to the reader and to God. Butler (2004) asserted that “the confession forces the secret into view. And it may be that by the time the confession is made, the delay in making it becomes a new cause for guilt and remorse” (p. 166). By confessing to the reader her “*secreto terrible*”, Marci shows a growing awareness of her difference and her sexual desires but also her guilt. As Butler (2004) explained: “In the confession, the body acts again, displaying its capacity for doing a deed, and announces, apart from what is actually said, that it is, actively, sexually there. Its speech becomes the present life of the body” (pp. 165-66). So too Marci’s confessional speech becomes a place of resistance and sexual identification.

Marci’s first confession with Father Chacón takes place in the same confessional booth that some pages later will witness Uncle Tommy’s and Father Chacón’s secret encounter. Butler (2004) considered confession the speech act in which “we show that we are not truly repressed, since we bring the hidden content out into the open. The postulate that ‘sex is repressed’ is actually in the service of a plan that would have you disclose sex” (p.162) and this is what happens to Marci as she confesses to Father Chacón. It is true that at the beginning she feels forced to do so since that is what she is supposed to do as a Christian. Indeed, she tells the reader, she had rehearsed her confession in front of the mirror as a way of trying to identify herself and her words

with her own face and body. Throughout the confession, Marci feels afraid, uncomfortable and bothered by Father Chacón's attitude, she considers him a "damn detective", "nosy" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 70) and pushy in his questions, especially when he wants to know more about her bad thoughts: "the priest wouldn't quit" (p. 71). She becomes so scared that she decides to tell Father Chacón the truth: "like wanting my dad to go away, wishing I didn't have Miss Boo-chaump for a catechism teacher, liking girls, and wanting to squeeze chiches. How's that?" (p. 71).

In the course of the confession described by Marci, we see how she depicts what Butler (2004) explained as authoritative discourses: "We say what it is we have thought or done, and that information then becomes the material by which we are interpreted. It lays us open, as it were, to the authoritative discourse of the one who wields pastoral power" (p. 162). Marci, scared and intimidated, has told Father Chacón a truth that she has only previously told the reader. In this act of revelation, "the imposed compulsion to disclose relies upon and exploits the conjectured thesis that sex is repressed so that we might force it out into the open. The idea that sex is repressed thus prepares the way for our confession" (Butler, 2004, p. 162). Marci feels forced to confess her repressed sexual desire however, it is the confession that liberates her, putting it into words, telling it to someone else and above all listening to herself saying it, is an act of recognition. As Butler stated:

In the case of sexual confession, the speaker is usually saying something about what the body has done, or what the body has undergone. The saying becomes implicated in the act that it relays since saying is, one might say, another bodily deed. And the body that speaks its deed is the same body that did its deed, which means that there is, in the saying, a

presentation of that body, a bodying forth of the guilt, perhaps, in the saying itself. (Butler, 2004, p. 172)

Marci's deed is confessing she likes girls and also "wanting to squeeze chiches" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 71) evidencing her sexual desires. A surprising feature of this passage is Father Chacón's response to Marci's sexual confession:

And as for liking girls and wanting to squeeze chiches. I don't see a problem with this, except it seems you're still a little young to be squeezing chiches. I don't think this is a sin either, unless the girl doesn't want them squeezed. In that case, it is. But, you might think about waiting till you're a little older before you start. (Trujillo, 2003, pp. 71-72).

There is a certain ambiguity in Father Chacon's reaction since, as Marci suggests, in the secrecy of the confessional booth, Father Chacón could have believed that Marci was a boy: "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He said it was okay to squeeze chiches. I was happy. But then, wait a minute, I forgot we were in the confessional. He can't tell who I am. He thinks I'm a boy!" (p. 72). The reader will come to know that Father Chacón has a homosexual relationship with Uncle Tommy enacted in secret places in the church, one of them being the confessional booth, and so his reaction might also be interpreted as an act of empathy and understanding. At the end of this episode, after accomplishing her penance, Marci walks out of the church and concludes:

Even though I didn't like catechism and Miss Beauchamp, or having Father Chacón know my whole life story, I didn't care. I told the truth to that priest and didn't have to lie. He acted like everything I said was normal. It didn't even seem like my sins were that bad. I don't know what he would have done if he knew I was a girl. But I didn't care because the worst was over. (Trujillo, 2003, p. 73)

There is a tone of liberation in Marci after her confession, firstly because she has told the truth about her sexual desire and secondly because everything seemed normal. The ambiguity here resolves when the reader learns of Father Chacón's homosexuality and that Marci's behavior might seem normal to him. Mainly, Marci's confession "presumes and solicits recognition and constitutes the first act as public, as known, as having truly happened" (Butler, 2004, p. 165). Marci finds recognition in the figure of Father Chacón who represents the Church and this allows her to feel free: "Now I could do Holy Communion, eat Christ's cracker body, and even drink his white port blood. Communion was nothing. Communion I could handle" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 73).

Yet, her confession has taken place in the secrecy of the confessional booth. Certainly, by uttering it, by saying it out loud, Marci exposes her secret but solely to Father Chacón rather than publicly. Trujillo could be using the confessional booth as a metaphor for what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick referred to as "closetedness" (1990, p. 2) and Marci, Uncle Tommy and Father Chacón coming in and out of it. According to Sedgwick (1990), this closetedness "is a performance" and secrecy can be considered to be a subjective practice in which oppositions are established (p. 67): secrecy/disclosure as well as private/public. Marci's confession of her secret becomes a disclosure in the moment she relates it to Father Chacón. In the moment she verbalizes the truth about her sexual identity, she is making it public but only to Father Chacón and her truth remains largely closeted. The same can be said of the meeting between Father Chacón's and Uncle Tommy. Sedgwick (1990) asserted that "In many, if not most, relationships, coming out is a matter of crystallizing intuitions or convictions that had been in the air for a while already and had already established their own power-circuits of silent contempt, silent blackmail, silent glamorization, silent complicity (pp. 79-80). Father Chacón and Uncle Tommy physically emerge from the confessional but their secret

remains largely private except to Marci who does not understand what she has seen. Like Father Chacón, once Marci comes out of the confessional booth, the homophobia and therefore the “fear of going home” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 42) persist.

After the last violent incident with her father, which forces Marci and her sister to run away to ‘Grandma’ Flor’s house, Marci takes a more skeptical view of religion: “I don’t go to church anymore, but I still think about God. It’s not like I’ve given up on him, like Grandma. I think he’s here. I just don’t think he’s going to do what I asked him [...] All I lived for was to be good so I could get my wishes. Grandma Flor says God doesn’t grant wishes” (Trujillo, 2003, pp. 238-39). Marci’s experiences leave her reluctant to believe in the Church, as she has neither found answers nor protection there and once she escapes Eddie she distances herself from those institutions that sustain patriarchal Chicano culture. Marci becomes free to express her rebellious spirit and be different in Grandma Flor’s world, where both are “vendidas”, “malinches” and where “*traitor begets traitor*” (Moraga, 1983, p. 101). It is at the very end of the book that Marci discovers that she does not need to be a boy in order to form a romantic relationship with a girl. She holds hands for the first time with her friend Robbie: “without a word, she leaned in and kissed me. And you know, I didn’t know what to do or think. But for once I could say I felt so good it didn’t matter” (p. 242).

Conclusion

During her journey of sexual identity realization, Marci overcome the obstacles imposed by patriarchal Chicano culture to achieve freedom. The journey to Grandma Flor’s house takes her to a space when she can answer the questions that the patriarchal institutions could not. *What Night Brings* is Marci Cruz’s testimony of how violence, the Church and a patriarchal Chicano family mark her body and attempt to ascribe her

identity. Violence is Eddie Cruz's method for teaching obedience and the Church is the institution in which Marci searches for both answers and protection. Violence marks Marci's body as a punishment for her rebellious attitude towards her father and her queer identity. The physical scars are to remind Marci that her sexual attraction towards girls challenges the patriarchal Chicano system, as well as the institutions of marriage and family which are controlled by the Church. However, the scars, the patriarchal lesson her father seeks to imprint on her, makes her into the Supergirl who saves her sister. At the same time, Marci struggles with her sexual identity which she, since she is still young, does not understand; she only knows that she likes girls. These events allow Trujillo to embark on a discussion of Chicana homosexuality and how Chicana girls are treated when their sexuality is interpreted as a direct attack on Chicano culture. While Marci's body experiences her father's violence, she imagines physical changes caused by her desire to become a boy which would allow her to 'like girls' and confront her father. Within the compulsory heterosexuality of Chicano culture, Marci explores her body to find her real identity as a Chicana girl, and also through sharing her secret in a confessional tone with the reader, with God and in the confessional. Marci becomes the Supergirl who "can fly over people's heads" (Trujillo, 2003, p. 5) - she leaves her house, her parents and the Church behind to become the girl she wants to be.

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