A "Wild Zone" of Her Own: Locating the Chicana Experience in the Theatre Works of Josefina López

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Abstract:
The present study focuses on the different psychological spaces that Chicana women must occupy in order to develop an oppositional consciousness and discourse through an analysis of three plays by Josefina López: *Boyle Heights* (2005), *Detained in the Desert* (2010), and *Hungry Woman* (2013). The "Wild Zone" theory as posited by Cordelia Candelaria in "The 'Wild Zone' Thesis as Gloss in Chicana Literary Study" serves as the primary theoretical lens due to its usefulness in an intersectional analysis of Chicana experience and identity, both in the Southwestern United States and abroad, by theorizing the separate cultural and political spaces, or zones, that women inhabit in society.

1 One of the primary aims of the Chicana Feminist Movement, a group of women of Mexican descent in the United States theorizing the historical, social, economic, and political roles of women, that gained traction in the 1970s and 1980s, and continues to be a driving force in Chicano society today, has been to express and assert the validity of female discourse as well as the textual zone of Chicanas' experience. In "The History of Chicanas: Proposal for a Materialist Perspective," Chicana scholar Rosaura Sánchez, plants the seed for a feminist analysis giving value to the Chicana subject's "multiple subjectivities" of gendered, ethnicized, racialized, and classed identity and experience (1-29). Essentially, Sánchez demonstrates the necessity for gender-specific inquiry in the research and study of Chicanas as well as other women of color. One such theory, the "Wild Zone" Thesis, remains a useful tool in analyzing the Chicana experience in the United States. Proposed by anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener in their influential study *Perceiving Women* (1975) and applied to the study of Chicana experience by Cordelia Candelaria in "The 'Wild Zone' Thesis as Gloss in Chicana Literary Study," the "Wild Zone" signifies the separate cultural and political spaces, or zones, that women inhabit in society, which, coincidentally, are only recognized by women (Ardener 24). While not privileging gender over race, ethnicity, or class, the theory posits that women's lived experience has formulated specific female-identified subcultures marginalized within and outside of the male-centered patriarchy. According to the thesis, the patriarchy, in this case traditional Chicano society, has created learned gender differences, which are largely linked to the acquired stereotypes of masculinity and femininity in Mexican and Mexican-American society. In the case of Chicana womanhood, the age-old triad of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Llorona*, and *La Malinche* (or, virgin, mother, whore) exemplifies

this cultural stereotypification. Though being challenged largely today by Chicana feminists, activists, writers, and artists, these conventional ideals of Chicano femininity remain a consequence of the patriarchal values that have marked the Chicano experience in the United States. Josefina López, similar to other contemporary Chicana playwrights such as Cherríe Moraga, Monica Palacios, Milcha Sánchez-Scott, Adelina Anthony, and Virginia Grise, seeks to challenge, decolonize, and redefine these gendered stereotypes through her work. By empowering her female protagonists with feminist agency, her characters hold the tools to theorize the connection between their experience as women in a patriarchal society and their physical and metaphysical location.

2 This essay seeks to analyze the connection between Chicana identity and her location, *patria* (homeland), place, and land base in the theatre works of Chicana playwright Josefina López while demonstrating the possible uses of the "Wild Zone" Thesis as a means of creating female agency directly linked to her location and physical surroundings. In López's plays, *Boyle Heights* (2005), *Detained in the Desert* (2010), and *Hungry Woman* (2013), we will see, serve as protests against the silencing of Chicanas while highlighting the link between female experience and space and its expression in dramatic literature.

The "Wild Zone" Thesis

3 Ardener's "Wild Zone" Thesis, an essay from their book *Perceiving Women* (1975) which focuses on the anthropology of gender and their different ethnographic field experiences, posits that the female voice has been entirely muted, both silenced and marginalized, by the dominant patriarchy; the female's power has been blocked by the controlling entity of society so that she has lost all privilege and agency (Ardener 22-5). Essentially, this authority over women creates disproportionate sociocultural effects, thus producing a larger distance between female desire and actual choice, between female identity and the capacity to actualize that identity (Candelaria 249). The fundamental components of the "Wild Zone" Thesis are that of Zone and Wild. Zone connotes both the physiological-derived space (social structures limiting women due to biological distinctions) and the stereotype-derived space (in this case, the traditional Chicana stereotypes); notably, both of these spaces of appropriate Chicana womanhood are dictated by the beliefs of the dominating Mexican-American culture in the Southwestern United States. On the other hand, *Wild* suggests a female identity unrestrained by the mandated definitions and assumptions of traditional patriarchal Chicano society.

> Women as politically subordinated subjects must, for survival, know and practice the dominant patriarchal discourse and conventions, but equally they must maintain an unmediated, affirmative identity of self and class. They develop an/other culture and discourse – one not required for the survival of, and therefore largely unavailable to, the empowered members of the dominant class. (249)

This is to say that woman, as an alleged subordinate being, must occupy the interstitial space between the dominant culture and their own self-identity as a method of survival. Furthermore, Chicanas' compound oppression – that of being a woman in an ethno-racial underprivileged group– must be recognized considering that the additional burden of gender is substantial in all patriarchal societies. Nevertheless, one must not privilege gender over race because Chicanos themselves belong to an economically and politically subordinated class in the United States, a country which throughout its history has privileged an Anglo narrative (Candelaria 250). Still, the Chicana experience cannot be examined outside of the gendered differences she faces simply by being born female. Through the process of locating Chicana womanhood within a zone of experience and power inaccessible to those in the dominating group, the authority of Chicana artistic and literary expression, such as that of playwright Josefina López, is directly defined within Chicana experience (Candelaria 251).

Writing the "Wild Zone"

5 Essentially, playwright Josefina López embeds, whether consciously or not, "Wild Zone" theory into several of her plays as a strategy to accurately portray Chicana experience and identity, a process that draws attention to Josefina Ludmer's canonical text on Latin American feminism, "Las tretas del débil" ("The Tricks of the Weak," 1984), in which she illustrates the ways in which subordinated women develop strategies to give them agency and power.[1] In this manner, the act of writing the "Wild Zone" serves as a strategy that the marginalized playwright, López, integrates into her work to empower her Chicana protagonists. Effectively, by incorporating her very own "Wild Zone" into her theatre works, Josefina López is capable of rewriting women's lived experience in a way that more genuinely reflects their complex nature. This procedure functions as one of revision according to Gilbert and Gubar in their essay "Infection in the Sentence"; because the majority of male Mexican-American writers historically have defined women along the lines

[1] Ludmer, through her analysis of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's La Respuesta theorizes that there are certain strategies that the weak must develop in positions of subordination and marginality. The principal strategy is that of female writing, taking the pen and writing regardless of thematic content, style, or intended audience. Furthermore, Ludmer establishes the empowering tricks associated with silence, knowing when and when not to speak so that women are able to think about what to say as a tool to create a more effective, and empowering, discourse (47-55).

of rigid stereotypes, female writers must revise the work that has been done previously in order to appropriately define themselves as women and create an active female subculture, distinct from the male-dominated counterpart. Gilbert and Gubar claim:

> Not only do their precursors incarnate patriarchal authority (as our discussion of the metaphor of literary paternity argued), they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of her self – that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity. (23)

Gilbert and Gubar reinforce the notion that women are largely and overtly defined by the identified patriarchy, and to a more extreme level in a culture as traditional as that of the Chicano Nation. For this reason, the Chicana writer must pen her own "Wild Zone" as a space to create accurate definitions and imagery associated with the female subculture.

6In a similar vein, Hélène Cixous calls women to reconsider the patriarchal traditions by which they are defined in her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." By claiming their role in history, past and present, through the act of writing, the pen serves as a tool to problematize the traditions previously used to define women based on exclusionary practices of male-centered discourse, Freudian and Lacanian psychology, and other rhetorics of desire. Cixous demonstrates the value of the female writer as she has the power to ignite social transformation through the process of liberating women from their silence:

> Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them… (347)

By writing a zone only identified by women, female writers can criticize the patriarchal culture that has given more value to men's writing while undermine its female counterpart. Noteworthy to this study, Josefina López began to write as a way to break the stereotyped gender narrative that was typically seen during the height of the Chicano Theatre Movement (1965-1980). As a high school drama student, she noticed a glaring absence of multi-dimensional female characters in the majority of plays being produced and presented in theaters across the Southwest United States; this experience urged her to pen her own plays in which a variety of multi-layered female characters are featured, essentially exhibiting a more accurate depiction of the multiplicity of the Chicana experience. López's experience reinforces the notion established by Cixous that the act of writing as a woman provokes women to enter into the public sector and, in doing so, ignite a change in society.

7 Literature provides a platform to voice the concerns of women, thus operating as a liberating force. By revising stereotypical representations of women in literature, writing serves as a tool to decolonize the Chicana experience through multi-layered portrayals of self-representation that are inextricably connected to the physical spaces they inhabit. According to Alvina Quintana, writing "provides the stage for a multiplicity of voices, experiences, issues which speak to the subordination of women to ideology and thus replaces the oversimplistic stereotypes so often used to categorize and define women" (209). By seizing the pen, the Chicana writer is able to enter into history, which according to Cixous "has always been based on her oppression" (351). Only by doing so will the opportunity for liberation materialize, allowing her to be truly detached from patriarchal stereotypification.[2]

8 While many writing tactics can be utilized to theorize the condition of womanhood, perhaps none is more effective in studying Chicanas than the Ardener's "Wild Zone" Thesis, as it focuses on the connection between space derived from both social structures and stereotypes. López, similar to other contemporary Chicana writers, deconstructs the previously monolithic gender paradigms that have defined their history in an attempt to decolonize Chicana subjectivity. Within Chicano and Mexican-American culture, women are expected to adhere to the traditional triad of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Llorona*, and *La Malinche*. Gloria Anzaldúa affirms: "La gente Chicana tiene tres madres. All three are mediators: Guadalupe, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, la Chingada (Malinche), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and la Llorona, the mother who seeks her lost children and is the combination of the other two" (30). In this way, Anzaldúa suggests that the legacies of these figures be reinterpreted so that Chicana women can be free to become multi-dimensional subjects. Nevertheless, Chicanas face a double-marginalization, that of women and members of a racial minority group in the United States. Essentially, they have been colonized by their own people. As colonized subjects, active Chicanas in the Chicana feminist movement:

> seek to de-colonize ourselves by learning about our own history, by conducting research that sheds light on our behavior and by creating images that are concordant with the images we have of ourselves. Through a de-colonization process, we see to destroy those images upon us by an outside world hostile to women and ethnic peoples 'different' from the so-called mainstream. (Herrera-Sobek 14-5)

[2] Cixous adds that women can be liberated through the act of writing, gaining feminist and political agency in the process: "She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history, first at two levels that cannot be separated" (350).

Chicana feminist attempted to affirm their position in not only the Chicano community but also within the larger United States society by writing themselves into history. By means of this process of decolonization, Chicanas gained self-worth and enhanced their significance within their culture and history. Essentially, this process was marked by not only a physical liberation but a psychological one as well in which Chicanas contested oppression and unearned male privilege within Chicano cultural nationalism. In light of these premises, the portrayal of compelling Chicana women whose personifications coincide directly with their physical environments in Josefina López's *Boyle Heights*, *Detained in the Desert*, and *Hungry Woman* indicates the significance of place, notably geography and home, as metaphor in locating Chicana experience and identity. López, whose works are filled with strong references and connections to physical space and geography, demonstrates a Chicana expression directly linked to home and to homeland while giving her plays a newly discovered feminine territory within the "Wild Zone" of her Chicana-identified identity.

Boyle Heights

8 *Boyle Heights* (2005) represents Josefina López's vision of the importance of 9ome and returning home. The play depicts a struggling writer and actress, Dalia, who is forced to move back in with her parents after she breaks up with her boyfriend. It is no coincidence that López chose to set the largely autobiographical work in her hometown neighborhood of Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles. By doing so, this work embodies Adrienne Rich's ideology about "Revision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction…an act of survival" (24). Even though López spent the majority of her formative years in the neighborhood, her early opinions and beliefs about the space were largely associated with negative connotations about her experiences as a Chicana growing up in the neighborhood. López describes what it was like to grow up in Boyle Heights: "I felt invisible because not only was I undocumented and felt there was something wrong with me, but as a young girl I was treated inferior to my brother" ("On Being a Playwright" 45). Therefore, her struggle becomes a revisionary one in which she chooses to redefine both herself and her thoughts about her surroundings. Part of redefining Boyle Heights involves putting herself back into the neighborhood, as manifested in the play, and as artistic director of her own cultural arts space, Casa 0101, which still serves Boyle Heights to this day. In a sense, López has given back to her community more than just a play set in Boyle Heights, but a cultural arts space to promote the advancement of the arts in a socio-economically underprivileged East Los Angeles neighborhood in need of more positive

opportunities for personal growth and development. Both López and the fictional Dalia are reclaiming the neighborhood for themselves and other marginalized individuals, calling attention to the play's graffiti artist Chava who establishes one of the key themes of the play: "we're reclaiming it for ourselves – we're saying 'This community belongs to us'" (*Boyle Heights* 188).

10 *Boyle Heights* manifests a heightened interest in writing the protagonist's self as a simultaneous observer, antagonist, and embodiment of place. Through an intersectional depiction of Dalia's gender, race, and economic circumstances, López is able to highlight the parallels between her protagonist and Boyle Heights. Dalia's position as a Mexican-American woman in an impoverished neighborhood draws attention to the marginalized location both occupy in relation to Mexican-American men and Greater Los Angeles, respectively. In this way, Dalia, as a writer, frequently documents both her current situation and that of the neighborhood by means of her poetry and journal entries. Through her writing, Dalia is able to analyze her individual situation and genuinely, perhaps for the first time, comprehend the profound connection she has with Boyle Heights. In this sense, the play serves as a "love song to the playwright's hometown" (Huerta 9). When Dalia arrives in Boyle Heights, she identifies her life transition with failure and negativity, but, in time, the neighborhood acts as a sort of mythical homeland – perhaps paralleling the Chicano Nation's connection with Aztlán[3] – that gives Dalia strength. When Dalia's ex-boyfriend begs her to take him back, she utilizes this recently discovered strong mental connection with her physical space, reclaiming it as her own, as well as her feminist agency of the pen to write him a poem titled "My Low Self-Esteem Days"; Dalia writes:

> Si te quise fue porque I had low self-esteem.
> If I swore I'd always be by you side,
> was because I had nothing better to do.
> Si te dije you were a great lover,
> was because I had nothing to compare it to.
> If I said you and me were meant to be,
> was because I thought I couldn't find better.
> Si te dije que te amaba con toda mi alma,
> was because I hadn't found myself.
> […]
> Time has proved me stronger,
> I don't need your approval any longer.
> So today, I ain't even gonna bother…

[3] According to Aztec legend, Aztlán was the original home of the Aztec people. Today, this land is thought to be the American Southwest. The term was adopted by Chican-rights activists during the Chicano Civil Rights Movement which began in 1965. In this way, it was meant to connect Chicanos with their indigenous pre-conquest roots and stake claim to the conquered land.

To let you know how good it's been…
Without you. (*Boyle Heights* 196-7)

Notwithstanding the poem's code-switching between English and Spanish, thus reinforcing the hybrid identity of the Mexican-American, Dalia's poem effectively draws attention to her own feminist-derived space in which she is able to battle against the monolithic gender expectations and stereotypes associated with a submissive woman. As Jaime tells Dalia earlier in the play, "If you were in Mexico, you'd be married with five kids and pregnant with another" (*Boyle Heights* 154), essentially making the association between location and cultural expectations. If Dalia's parents had remained in Mexico, the likelihood of cultivating positive agency and a feminist voice would be significantly limited under the traditionally patriarchal Mexican society to which López frequently criticizes throughout her dramatic works. Only through living in Boyle Heights does the opportunity emerge to not adhere to a dated stereotype; Dalia does not have to be *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Malinche*, or *La Llorona*, but can instead be herself. In a sense, this reflects a Chicana feminist revision of the American Dream in which women have the agency and voice to make their own decisions instead of adhering to the cultural guidelines established by patriarchy. Dalia is given the opportunity to select her own path, a possibility that would remain out of reach if Dalia were to have been raised in Mexico.

11 Near the end of the play, Dalia finally understands what Boyle Heights means to her. Dalia writes:

Poetry is being…Being here… Being home… Being Boyle Heights.
My beautiful little barrio.
Since I can remember I swore I'd leave you like all the rest,
But when I'm in Paris, Rome or New York I just want to come back.
Everyone thinks you're East L.A.
But I know who you really are.
I know what they say on the five o'clock news isn't true.
I know you are a beautiful place where families like me loved and lived.
I know you are located near the L.A. River, somewhere close to my heart. (199)

Although Dalia previously connected the neighborhood to personal failure, she now understands the significance of the place. Boyle Heights is more than just a mere concept; it is an actual place, one in which both playwright and personage matures (Huerta 9). Dalia, now more enlightened having understood her spiritual connection to her homeland, is grateful for what the neighborhood has symbolized to her: "Boyle Heights, thank you for the stories. Thank you for the memories. I will return when I have something to give back to you. Goodbye" (*Boyle Heights* 146). Cognizant of the prospect of developing feminist agency as a

writer, Dalia will return one day when she is ready to give something back to the community, paralleling López's founding of CASA 0101, thus granting other Chicana women a positive connection to home.

Detained in the Desert

12 Similar to *Boyle Heights*, Josefina López's *Detained in the Desert* (2010) validates the connection between the cultural and political space that Chicana women inhabit in society. *Detained in the Desert* is López's response to Arizona's Senate Bill 1070. While the law adheres to United States federal law requiring undocumented immigrants over the age of 14 who stay in the country for more than 30 days to register with the United States government, it also inadvertently allows law enforcement officers to try to determine an individual's immigration or citizenship status. In this way, the controversial bill allows police officers to question the citizenship of anyone whom they believe could be undocumented, essentially legalizing racial profiling in the state of Arizona (Koven 18-19). By concentrating on gendered oppression, López engages the United States-Mexico border as a geopolitical site of increased violence, racism, and legislative abuse against brown bodies in an effort to better understand the experience of being a woman of color on the border in the current sociopolitical climate. The play exemplifies López's use of writing and theatre as a form of political protest; the playwright seeks to create "some degree of understanding that goes beyond the immigration rhetoric and fear mongering that is happening right now in this country. Hopefully with this play I've shed some light on the darkness of ignorance" (*Detained* 19). López explores this "darkness of ignorance" through the play's two narratives: one focusing on Sandi Belen, a recent college graduate who is disconnected from her Mexican heritage, and another centering on a radio talk-show host, Lou Becker, who incites anti-immigration propaganda among his audience on the Arizona-Mexico border, an open wound as Gloria Anzaldúa calls it: "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (3). As Sandi and Lou question their thinking about immigration and the role they occupy on the geopolitical landscape that is the border, López forces her audience to consider the consequences of anti-immigration laws such as Arizona SB 1070.

13 Josefina López incorporates the emblematic use of place, in this case the border and, on a deeper level, Aztlán, as a source of spiritual energy for Sandi Belen. After being racially profiled and believed to be an undocumented immigrant, Sandi, responding to her boyfriend Matt's lack of understanding, comments on the oppression one faces in a country that privileges white skin and European origins: "you will never know what it's like to be me.

You don't have dark skin. Nobody ever questions your right to exist or succeed. You have no clue how hard it is to be an American when you look like me!" (*Detained* 43). After recognizing the injustices that she faces in the borderlands, Sandi is capable of tapping into her own experiences with the aim of developing self-defensive tactics and, in such a way, fighting against the injustices of the region that she faces. To this end, as a result of being racially-profiled by the Arizona police officer, Sandi chooses to cultivate her own "Wild Zone" discourse in order to successfully navigate this geopolitical space of increased racial and gendered violence, drawing attention to Mary Louise Pratt's theory of the "contact zone" as seen in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). The "contact zone" serves the site where the fusion of inequalities and differences is manifested; concurrently, it pairs with Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the multiplicity of border crossings, both physical and metaphysical as seen in her seminal text *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Pratt 53).

14 In this "contact zone," Sandi is able to cultivate certain tricks, or tretas according to Josefina Ludmer's theory as established in her essay "Las tretas del débil," and strategies to defend herself from gendered and racial oppression experienced on the border at the hands of White males. Pratt argues: "While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for" (6). Pratt suggests the necessity of developing a counter discourse in which subjugated peoples seek ways of developing certain strategies of resistance. For example, Trevor Boffone in "Detenida en la frontera: 'La conciencia de la mestiza' en *Detained in the Desert* de Josefina López" analyzes the feminist coming-to-consciousness of Sandi and her development of a self-defense tactic, Gloria Anzaldúa's *la facultad*, "a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate" (39), as a means of navigating and ultimately surviving her surroundings. *La facultad*, a form of oppositional consciousness, connotes the moment when the individual loses their ignorance and innocence, thus producing a transformation in their viewpoint that adds multiple meanings and interpretations to the ways in which the person views society and the world (Anzaldúa 39). By means of gaining self-enlightenment, the woman is able to obtain consciousness in order to develop a feminist agency. To this end, *Detained* portrays a zone of psychological alienation and socio-political subordination. Because Sandi has brown skin, she is racially profiled and believed to be an undocumented immigrant, even though she has rejected her Mexican heritage in an attempt to pass in White-American culture and society. Sandi recognizes as a young girl the privilege that white skin and Anglo-association carries in mainstream United States culture. After being discriminated against in elementary

school, she alters her identity because, as Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes, "The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites" (3-4). When the Arizona police officer pulls over Sandi and Matt, he immediately believes that she is a prostitute because she has been performing oral sex on her boyfriend. Furthermore, after seeing Sandi's brown skin, he tells her: "You are six miles away from the border and you look – I mean…you have given me reason to suspect that your status" (*Detained* 32). Even though he should not question Sandi's citizenship based on her appearance, he does so, thus highlighting the subsequent racial-profiling that the bill allows. Despite her rejection of her true heritage, she is discriminated due to her connection with the space in which she finds herself, six miles from the Arizona-Mexico border. Given that the police officer focuses on Sandi rather than her Anglo boyfriend, it is in this space that she truly comprehends her subordinate condition as a woman of color in Arizona; her identity as a discriminated minority woman and her geographical location on the border are inextricably connected to her experience (Boffone 12-3).

15 López's enigmatic depiction of the borderlands as a threatening geopolitical space to women of color in response to the unconstitutional nature of Arizona SB 1070 functions as a practice of igniting a dialogue with regards to possible social and political transformations. In this sense, López's writing of the border as a Chicana empowering "Wild Zone" serves as a type of "Retrofitted Memory," as theorized by Maylei Blackwell in *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. Blackwell establishes:

> Retrofitted memory is a form of countermemory that uses fragments of older histories that have been disjunctured by colonial practices of organizing historical knowledge or by masculinist renderings of history that disappear women's political involvement in order to create space for women in historical traditions that erase them […] By drawing from both the discarded and suppressed forms of knowledge, retrofitted memory creates new forms of consciousness customized to embodied material realities, political visions, and creative desires for societal transformation. (2)

Understanding Blackwell's "Retrofitted Memory" helps contextualize López's rewriting of Chicana history on the border within the masculine tradition of Chicano theatre. In other words, the feminist "Wild Zone" space of *Detained* is precisely where the playwright inserts an oppositional consciousness, such as Anzaldúa's *la facultad*, that permits her to inject Chicanas' realities, political aspirations, and creative ambitions in an effort to revolutionize the way women of color, and people of color as a whole, are seen on the Arizona/Mexico border.

16 Josefina López, as a Chicana playwright, searches for a woman of color model, Sandi, to legitimize her own coming-to-consciousness and development of feminist agency. Nevertheless, as *Detained* demonstrates through the police officer's targeting of Sandi, being a woman is an obstacle in a patriarchal society, an interference that is victimizing (Gilbert and Gubar 24). Yet, this gendered inequality is what allows Chicana women to tap into the "Wild Zone." In the case of Sandi in *Detained in the Desert*, accepting her authentic identity as a Chicana permits her to develop and implement various strategies of self-defense, most notably Anzaldúa's *la facultad*, as a means of maneuvering her marginalized physical and metaphysical location in the borderlands. As seen in the final scene of the play, Sandi demonstrates her newly found Chicana identity and oppositional consciousness when she calls into the radio program "Take Back America" and presents herself as "Sandra Sánchez" (*Detained* 65), the use of her real name being the first stage in the process of modifying her identity and image as a woman of color. In addition to her changing her name, she changes her opinion regarding Ranchera-style music, a traditional genre of Mexican music featuring only one performer with a guitar. Whereas in the initial scenes of the play she was not interested in this type of music, in the final scene she decides to reconsider her opinion. Nevertheless, her final act of positive Chicana identity rests in her decision to dedicate her future towards social change. Sandi tells Ernesto: "I want to help. Next time you go deliver water, I want to join you" (*Detained* 64), manifesting her need to participate in the dialogue towards immigrant rights and immigration reform on the Arizona-Mexico border. López employs specific zones intertwined with cultural and psychological perceptions to demonstrate how the intersecting zones influence Sandi's life and experience and also how they serve as catalysts in the formation of her Chicana identity and feminist agency.

Hungry Woman

17 Josefina López's latest work *Hungry Woman* (2013), the stage adaptation of her novel *Hungry Woman in Paris* (2009), foregrounds the intersections between experience and place by removing the Chicana from East Los Angeles and placing her in Paris. In the play, Canela, the protagonist, is able to forge her identity as a Mexican-American in a city that does not seem to understand this particular hybrid identity (she is frequently mistaken for a Middle-Eastern immigrant). In this sense, Paris serves as the catalyst in her development of positive feminist agency, a power which she takes back to California as a stronger and more self-reliant woman. López dramatizes Canela's personal growth utilizing the thematic contrast between Parisian and Chicano cultures and values.

18 East Los Angeles is associated with the traditional Chicano value system in which Canela is expected to adhere to the virgin/whore dichotomy and other gendered stereotypes, such as *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona*. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, cultures such as the one Canela finds herself in expect "women to show greater acceptance of and commitment to, the value system of men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males" (17). For López's protagonist, home signifies suppression under the relentless authority of her family and male-identified values. The death of Canela's best friend, Luna, serves as the catalyst that drives Canela's decision to call off her wedding and depart for Paris. Canela, in delivering a monologue depicting Luna's backstory, effectively depicts the gendered reality that she is trying to avoid in East Los Angeles:

> In our story, Luna met a guy and I remained single. I was never jealous of him, but he wasn't good enough for her. He was Mr. Now, but Luna was forced to make him Mr. Forever when her parents grew concerned that 'the neighbors were talking,' They married her off before she 'got knocked up,' to this poor guy who could barely afford to support her and keep her gold-plated birdcage locked. Luna couldn't go to college and had to play the housewife, a role she was never born for. […] Her world kept shrinking, but her body kept growing. Her dreams were larger than life, too big to exist in this world in a woman's body. (*Hungry Woman* 4)

Oddly enough, it is not her father or Armando, her fiancé from whom she later separates, who reinforces these patriarchal values in *Hungry Women*, but Canela's mother, a technique López also incorporates in the play *Real Women Have Curves* (1996). Because Armando is a "good man," her mother urges her not to break off the wedding, culminating in her plea: "Do you realize how hard it is to get a good man in Los Angeles?" (*Hungry Woman* 3).[4] In her mother's opinion, Canela's happiness and well-being are not as important as being married and financially secure.

19 On the other hand, Paris and the culinary world of Le Coq Rouge, the cooking school that she attends in order to remain in France longer than her passport will allow, represent freedom and choice to Canela; they serve as a world in which the protagonist is able to seek the positive self-identifying powers of her previously suppressed eroticism and independence. In terms of stereotypes, it is noteworthy that Canela decides to go to a cooking school. López does this in order to decolonize her opinions of the kitchen as a restricting space for the female, typically linked to Chicano culture in which traditional sociocultural values suggest

[4] Canela's mother frequently reinforces traditional gender stereotypes throughout the play. For example, when Canela tells her that she has decided to remain in Paris for a year, her mother responds: "If you finally get married, I won't have to worry about you anymore. Now I'll be stressed out even more with you in another country. Come back now!" (Hungry Woman 21)

that women must serve men. In this way, away from the American Southwest, Le Coq Rouge grants Canela the opportunity to develop positive self-identification with the physical space of the kitchen; her time at the cooking school is a liberating experience, the antithesis to the patriarchal Chicano kitchen to which her mother is confined, forced to utilize the space as a means to satisfy and serve her husband. Canela tells us on multiple occasions of her mother's confinement to the kitchen and the bedroom, hence serving as a faithful wife to her philandering husband. According to Tey Diana Rebolledo, writing the kitchen and the Chicana as a cook functions as a strategy of claiming authority over gendered space and self-representation (132-3). Precisely, Canela's restructuring of Chicano gender roles and gendered spaces is made possible through the positive qualities of the French kitchen. In a flashback scene, Canela questions the Chicano male/female dichotomy of this space: "How come the men aren't in the kitchen? How come they're drinking beer and laughing and we are in this hot kitchen doing all the work?…We are not in Mexico anymore" (*Hungry Woman* 26). As a result of this experience, Canela decides to never go into a kitchen to cook for a man. All of her memories of the kitchen are associated with female suppression and unwavering faithfulness to men. These negative associations are reversed in the physical space of Le Coq Rouge, a space that is able to fill her hunger for a world that allows her to have positive female agency and voice and to not be equal to a "piece of meat" (*Hungry Woman* 28). Canela's reconstruction of positive associations with food and cooking is symbolically affirmed when Henry, her love interest while in Paris, not only fills her erotic desires, but cooks a meal for her after her graduation from Le Coq Rouge. While Chicano gender roles are flipped in this scene, Henry is surprised: "You're joking. None of your lovers ever cooked for you?" (*Hungry Woman* 53), thus reinforcing the East Los Angeles/Paris dichotomy of gendered experiences and spaces. Parisian society allows for men to occupy the kitchen, a gendered space reserved for women according to East Los Angeles culture.

20 Nevertheless, Canela returns home to East Los Angeles a freshly revitalized woman: "Henry and Le Coq Rouge had revived me and awakened my senses. I was alive again" (*Hungry Woman* 57). Canela's positive "Wild Zone" experiences in Paris grant her the ability to take this newly forged positive self-association with place and carry that feminine power to East Los Angeles, thus returning with a positive connected with home. When she becomes engaged again to Armando, she now has the power to decide what is best for her; she calls off the wedding, reinforcing her independence. Furthermore, in a final act of self-liberation, Canela metaphorically kills La Calaca Flaca (The Skinny Skeleton), a Posada skeleton-like

character, associated with Day of the Dead celebrations in Mexico and the United States, created by her imagination to link her Mexican roots with pessimistic opinions about her self-worth and womanhood. In this way, La Calaca Flaca represents Canela's low self-esteem. Canela declares: "I know I created you to protect me but I am no longer scared of life. I am no longer scared to be in my body, I want to stay. I'm going to stay and continue fighting" (*Hungry Woman* 77). Thus, the play ends with Canela at peace with herself, all enabled as a result of her occupying the positive spaces of Paris.

21 Through the process of forging Canela's personal hungers and aspirations in terms more extensive than her own intimate psychology, in the sociopolitical and dimensional dualities of place and culture, López's *Hungry Woman* articulates one facet of gendered experience and identity pertaining to the Ardeners' "Wild Zone" Thesis.

Conclusion

22 Josefina López's *Boyle Heights*, *Detained in the Desert*, and *Hungry Woman* represent just three of the many theatrical expressions of creative agency that are part of the Chicana Feminist Movement in the United States. While providing a Chicana-identified perspective of female experience, these works do not privilege Chicana womanhood over ethnicity or race. Instead, the playwright inserts Chicana voice, agency, and authorship into the discourse about woman in her multiple meanings. Gloria Anzaldúa claims that women's struggle has always been an inner one that is materialized on the outside, stating that: "Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before change to society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless first it happens in the images of our heads" (109). It is essential that Chicana playwrights, such as López, become aware of their past and write their history; they should take action so that positive depictions of the Chicana's multiple subjectivities are represented in dramatic literature. Anzaldúa sees language as an ideal tool to call attention to the economic, political, and social inequalities which largely mark the collective Chicano experience in the United States. Only by taking ownership of one's life can a change materialize. To Josefina López, writing offers the opportunity to localize a Chicana experience that more accurately reflects reality while simultaneously validating what it encompasses being a woman in an underprivileged minority group. López writes:

> By making myself the protagonist I am saying to the world that my experience, that of a woman and a Latina, is important and valid. I put myself as the protagonist in my writing and in my life because I refuse to allow a 'white man' to rescue me. I, like my characters, am in control of my destiny. By writing about myself and Latinos I am

> reclaiming my humanity that was taken from me not just when the Spaniards raped Mexico, but when the first man raped the first woman. ("On Being a Playwright" 45)

By writing a Chicana "Wild Zone" of her own, López provides women with an authentic portrayal of a Chicana experience that is interconnected to dignity and courage, positive qualities representative of female identity in its multiple forms.

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