

MESTIZA SPIRITUALITY: COMMUNITY, RITUAL, AND JUSTICE

JEANETTE RODRIGUEZ

[The author explores the wealth and complexity that mestiza consciousness and spirituality contribute to the theological enterprise. The mestiza consciousness is grounded in community and promoted through ritual. A sense of justice is passed on through this communal spirituality that acknowledges the diversity of creation and its constant process of becoming. Latina culture, religion, and spirituality are so integrated that to try to define spirituality separated from culture would be a false dichotomy and would do a disservice to the Latino community.]

MESTIZA SPIRITUALITY is a spirituality that creates a new borderland space filled with a new meaning of self-in-community which bridges and balances two or more opposing worlds. It further manifests itself in the synthesis and reinforcement of regional popular religious practices and liturgical celebrations. Within this article, I seek to explore an understanding of mestiza spirituality and its relationship to ritual, community, and justice. I use the concept of an “oppositional consciousness” to shed light on the mestiza’s dynamic and continuing process of navigation and negotiation between two and often multiple worldviews. By worldview I am referring to the U.S. dominated culture and a variety of Latino/a ethnicities.¹

Critical to understanding the mestiza’s worldview is oppositional consciousness that includes the access and filtering of a myriad of values, thoughts, feelings, and understandings. Fundamental to this mestiza consciousness is a spirituality harnessed by conquest, marginalization, and resistance. These factors are galvanized by the mestiza’s borderland *facultad* that strategizes, translates, navigates, and bridges the self-in-

JEANETTE RODRIGUEZ received her doctorate from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She is currently professor in the department of theology and religious studies at Seattle University, and serves as the director of the Center for the Study of Justice in Society. Since publishing her *Our Lady of Guadalupe* (University of Texas, 1994), she has produced numerous articles in collected works on Latina spirituality and popular Catholicism. Her recent research has brought her to Chiapas to study its indigenous church.

¹ In this article I concentrate on Latinas as I witness a proactive phenomenon in U.S. society: Latinas creating a space, language, and rituals that display a way of being Latina Catholic.

community by means of forging a conjunctive, differential oppositional consciousness, and a tactical subjectivity. This subjectivity negotiates its survival, engages in shifting identities, becomes flexible and mobile, seeks to deconstruct binaries, develops solidarity and affinities, and allows contradictions in order to subvert these contradictions and dissolve them. Mestiza spirituality is a spirituality of conjunctive, differential oppositional consciousness that recognizes that “the experience of daily indignity at the hands of the dominant group” calls attention to a litany of injustices in a system of domination, exploitation, and oppression. These structures of oppression by the dominant group create an oppositional consciousness in subordinate groups that, in extreme cases, turns anger into hatred and these hatreds (racial, class, gender, etc.) in turn perpetuate other hatreds that lead to violence, intolerance, and separatism. Mestiza spirituality recognizes the ethical pitfalls and moral dilemmas caused by these hatreds, and counters them by subverting these contradictions through a “praxis of love” (Chela Sandoval), non-violent actions, and by taking seriously the Christian ethical command to “love thy enemy,” and not by dehumanizing or destroying the oppressor, but by transforming the oppressor and the structures of oppression through an ethical praxis of love.

When one reflects on the next generation (18 to 35-year-old) of U.S. Roman Catholic Latinas, one finds a population of women searching and experimenting but still grounded in traditional values within this *vida loca*. *La vida loca* is an expression that historically refers to the urban gang life of Chicanos in large cities such as Los Angeles.² I am aware that the Chicano community in general uses this term to refer to the drug and alcohol lifestyle of gang members and their code of loyalty, but I would like to expand the understanding of this term to include a more multifaceted, complex interplay of values and challenges within the Chicano community. The expanded meaning of this term is manifested most clearly in a film titled *Mi Vida Loca*, produced in 1993, that depicted the life of *las locas* (“home girls”) in Los Angeles. They were primarily single mothers in relationships with men who were addicts. The film also portrayed the women’s independence, strength, and friendships.³ If we were to apply this

² For a discussion of *la vida loca*, see Luis J. Rodriguez, *Always Running La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993). A Chicano/a is the son/daughter primarily of a person of Mexican descent, either born in the United States or in Mexico, but shaped by the ideological, social, and political forces of the barrio or of the United States. The term Chicano/a has deeply weaved connotations of rebellion and the search for freedom and justice brought about in the 1960s by the *Movimiento Chicano*.

³ Rafaela G. Castro, *Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican Americans* (New York: Oxford University, 2001).

expression with its expanded meaning to spirituality we must ask, what would a spirituality that emerges out of this *vida loca* look like? We have seen how this is reflected in music and popular culture. Nonetheless, the role of religion has been marginalized.

There is a dramatic raising of consciousness taking place in the Latino/a community today. Young people are asking why they are not included in the history books of their country, why they do not see themselves represented in the upper echelons of power and authority of the Church, and why their “home religion” is at the periphery of their institutional churches. At times embarrassed by their mothers’ popular religion, they long to find “soul” somewhere out there. How do these young mestizas navigate multiple cultural and epistemological venues? What is the impact of these multiple identities or experiences and evolution of their spirituality? Historically the term *mestiza* referred to the biological bringing together of Spanish and Indian blood. Today, this term further entails an intrapsychic, interpersonal epistemological synthesis. This ongoing process of synthesis and integration is imperative for understanding the *mestiza* as lived out in the contemporary Latinas in the United States. What insights of *mestiza* spirituality emerge from negotiating values, worldviews, perceptions, and ways of knowing?

My hypothesis is that a dynamic interplay between constructed identity, ritual, and community justice is the basis of spirituality for the *mestiza*. For the purpose of this article, spirituality is not “faith seeking understanding” in the classic Anselmian definition of theology, rather spirituality is self-transcendence seeking meaning, purpose, and wholeness in the way one perceives the ineffable mystery of everyday life. Defined in this way, spirituality is the innate human capacity to transcend our limitations through ideas, values, symbols, rituals, and other conceptual vehicles that elevates us to discover, rediscover, or uncover a hidden meaning or a hidden truth connecting us to God, our Ultimate Reality. Without this capacity toward the spiritual, human lives would remain in a world of utter despair. This is why people steeped in a situation of unbearable oppression, exploitation, and systematic domination develop a capacity to discern more clearly the healing power of life-giving force and the hope-filled power of a liberating spirituality. As Gloria Anzaldúa once said, “spirituality is the ultimate resort of people who are extremely oppressed.”⁴

Latino/a culture, religion, and spirituality are so integrated that to try to define spirituality separated from culture creates a false dichotomy and does a disservice to the Latina community. This understanding of spirituality seeks to capture the daily ritual practices that foster the habits of the

⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, ed. Analouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2000) 288.

heart, as revealed in the practices of a community. Perhaps the basic formative concept that must be highlighted for this argument is the manner in which community precedes the personal in Latino/a identity.

The question of identity has been at the forefront of U.S. Hispanic theological concerns since the late 1980s. I argue that the fluidity of this mestiza identity, coupled with ritual knowledge within the context of community, leads significantly to a commitment to justice. Ethnic studies, literature, popular religion, feminist and cultural theory provide insight into “the lived experience” of mestizas. Often, ethnic studies underplay issues of spirituality. Religious studies tend to underplay ethnic understandings of self and spirituality. This article, therefore, draws from my previous interdisciplinary work and from insights of social and behavioral scientists, and from a recent survey of college-age Latinas that I developed. Here I connect these disparate threads and weave a creative tapestry of mestiza knowledge.

MESTIZA SPIRITUALITY: IDENTITY

In the late 1980s, writer and poet Gloria Anzaldúa articulated *la conciencia de la mestiza*.⁵ This *conciencia* is a consciousness of mixed blood. As she states, *la conciencia de la mestiza*:

is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed. . . . She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. . . . *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.⁶

Anzaldúa furthers this idea by proposing that the mestiza “develops a subjectivity capable of transformation and relocation, movement guided by the learned capacity to read, renovate, and make signs on behalf of the dispossessed.”⁷ This particular ability and skill Anzaldúa calls *la facultad*:

La facultad is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness

⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987) 79–91.

⁶ *Ibid.* 78–79.

⁷ Chela Sandoval, “Mestizaje as Method: Feminists-of-Color Challenge the Canon,” in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Mari Trujillo (Berkeley, Calif.: Third Woman, 1998) 352–70, at 359.

mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world.⁸

Philosopher Maria Lugones concurs with Anzaldúa and claims that the theory and method of U.S. women of color feminism requires of its practitioners nomadic and determined “travel” across “worlds of memory.”⁹ Thus Anzaldúa brings to this argument the formative process that constitutes the essential elements of Latino/a community: language, history, religio-cultural practices. This constitutive piece develops the subjective person as of the community, i.e., the individual’s important place in the process of community. Through the individual subjective dialogue with “other” the transhistorical identity of Latino/a is developed and understood. This identity, in brief, develops from the living words of a community.

Building on the work of Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, a cultural theorist at the University of California at Santa Barbara, develops an understanding of what she calls the “methodology of the oppressed.” Key elements include: engagement with multiple identities, resistance to the dominant culture group, and marginalization. Another expression of this activity is that it links theorizing with the concrete struggles of the people. Sandoval identifies five techniques used by marginalized groups as a form of survival and psychic resistance: (1) *sign reading* places one in the position of observation and deciphering cultural constellations while experiencing, observing and witnessing; (2) *deconstruction* of Western categories; (3) appropriating ideological forms in order to rework and reuse them; (4) *democratics*, the function of using techniques not just for survival but for active change; and (5) *differential movement*, “a polyform upon which the previous technologies depend for operation.”¹⁰

These technologies have a two-pronged utility: they galvanize psychic resistance to domination and become the source for social praxis. These twofold inner/outer *movidas* are the kinds of modes utilized by the oppressed for their own liberation. These two, among several others, are some of the survival skills that U.S. Latinas have been employing in the struggle long before they became recognized as a viable approach to political theory and practice. I now examine these “techniques” as they apply to the mestiza.

Whatever theory of signs is adopted, signs make explicit what is implicit and impart a concrete, historically situated knowledge that enables people

⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 38.

⁹ Sandoval, “Mestizaje as Method: Feminist-of-Color Challenge the Canon” 359.

¹⁰ Chela Sandoval, “New Sciences, Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed,” in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995) 410.

within a particular group to understand one another. From this type of sign-reading concepts like “borderlands,” “mestiza,” “*flor y canto*,” and other culturally laden sign-configurations emerge. These constellations of signs and their meaning to the mestiza provide a new language, a new grammar for liberation. The concept of mestiza, for example, already implies a new awareness of the mestiza herself as a mixed-race, bicultural woman, who is mobile, flexible, and at home in two or more cultures, identities, classes, sexualities, races, genders, and geographical spaces.

Central to Sandoval’s second technique is the idea of deconstructing binaries and decentering (or recentering). These two ideas are adopted from the philosophical approach known as deconstruction by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Logocentrism according to Derrida are privileged terms like male, mind, inside, true, etc. They represent an order and a classification of events and relations in everyday life. However, the meanings of these privileged terms are dependent on their opposites for its meaning. These oppositional terms, the hidden and less privileged ones, create an either/or dichotomy: male/female, mind/body, inside/outside, true/false, and so on. The idea of decentering (or recentering) involves making what was hidden and marginalized the new center, to emphasize the fact that without this supplemental term the central, privileged term means nothing.

This is an important analytical tool for the methodology of the oppressed. However, unlike Derrida who leaves binary dichotomies in a play of undecidability (unsolved), Chela Sandoval’s paradigm calls for the subversion of these contradictory opposites. Sandoval recognizes that extreme oppositional consciousness creates in oppressed groups a sense of anger, and anger sometimes turns into hatred (class, race, gender, etc.) and once this happens, hatreds turn into violence and destruction. The binary opposite of hatred is love, and Sandoval knows that in order to subvert hatred a praxis of love is needed that dissolves the hatred/love dichotomy that recenters love.

Meta-ideologizing deals with the “tactical subjectivity” of the mestiza that politically revises and reformulates ideologies so that it “denies any one ideology as the final answer.”¹¹ This position rejects the privileged presence of one hegemonic ideological form. As a woman of color, a Chicana/Latina mestiza’s identity is a fragmented self as more than one identity makes a claim on her subjectivity, for example, her race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, disability, etc. The mestiza does not view these iden-

¹¹ Direct quote of Chela Sandoval in an article by Rosa Linda Fregoso, “‘Differential Consciousness’ in *Despues del Terremoto*,” *Latino Film, Homes of the Films and Videos of Lourdes Portillo*, in <http://www.lourdesportillo.com/nepantla.html>.

tities as oppositional and these relationships have given her the skills necessary to survive and adapt by shifting identities whenever necessary. This kind of versatility requires that the mestiza “recenters” herself depending on the kind of oppression she confronts. Sandoval argues that it requires grace, flexibility, and strength: “enough strength to confidently commit to a well-defined structure of identity for one hour, day, week, month, year; enough flexibility to self-consciously transform that identity according to the requisites of another oppositional ideological tactic if readings of power’s formation require it; enough grace to recognize alliances with others committed to egalitarian social relations and race, gender, sex, and class justice, when their readings of power call for alternative oppositional stands.”¹²

Democratic is the technique, I believe, that requires imagination, creativity, and commitment to active social change using the survival skills learned in the last three techniques. Some Chicana/Latina mestizas utilize this knowledge and methodology by transforming oppressive cultural and religious discourses through ritual, film, *teatros*, and other media. Differential movement involves constant flux and dynamic movement as it performs the organizing, linking, and reformulating function of forces moving in different directions. It is the pivotal nerve center of differential oppositional consciousness.

These techniques may be conscious or unconscious but they increasingly produce and sustain oppositional activity. In other words, this activity creates a space between two or more forces that many times move in different directions. From this oppositional consciousness the spirituality of a U.S. Latina emerges. In the end, the dynamics of the *consciencia de la mestiza* and “oppositional consciousness” is the substance of an identity that is highly contextually specific and historically particular, and that this subject is always actively engaged in a process of becoming rather than achieving a fixed self.

The Latino/a culture has evolved from a tradition that is often described as *flor y canto*, flower and song. According to this worldview, the deepest recesses of being human can only be expressed in the poetry of metaphor and beauty, as Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs expresses in her poem *Las Granadas* (Pomegranates):

The chambers of my disposition
Divided by fleshly porous walls,
Blood filled portions of me.

¹² Direct quote of Chela Sandoval in Jane Mansbridge’s “Complicating Oppositional Consciousness,” in *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001) 26.

¿Could I be a Buddhist Catholic?
 ¿Will the Pope invest on my illegal condition of hope?
 ¿Have the Virgin of Guadalupe and Tonantzin
 Merged with Ixtazihuatl inside my pomegranate?

Cartas a nadie
 ¿Does Santo Clos live with The Three Reyes?
 ¿Do I write to my 98 cousins I will never meet?
 ¿Is there peace in the salsa made with fire?
 ¿Can I sup at the table of the monks
 That speak only Spanish?
 ¿Could the war of streets, barrios, and belongings
 end with agronada or with a pomegranate?

¿Can an alcoholic swim herself back to the tierra santa?
 ¿Does la madre patria marry a passport
 In her dreamy trench of identidad?

¿Is there soul food in the atrium of forgiveness?
 ¿Will the pomegranate evolve into a grapefruit?¹³

The pomegranate is a metaphor for *latinidad*, isolation, and unity. It is the perfect metaphor for suffering, blood, and alienation and also for greatness undiscovered. In Spanish, the word fruit is somewhat much more personified than in English: it has skin, bones, and heart. Food may carry multilayered meanings. For example, Mexico's most popular national dish is *chiles y nogales*. The colors that make up this dish represent the blood of the heroes (red), integrity (white), and hope for the future (green). In the case of the pomegranate, it has rooms, chambers, and cities. *La granada* in Spanish may either be a food delicacy or a weapon, a true antithesis. So many times Latinos are inside a *granada* suffering quietly, reinventing systematic pains, not knowing that in other chambers of our *latinidad* the same process has been repeated. We can isolate ourselves thinking that we are the only Chicano Muslims or Texan Buddhists; the only ones that criticize the Church for its hierarchical structure; the only ones that speak the language of our pre-Columbian ancestors, but really we all are part of the tree of *granadas* that feeds and softly kills part of us when we enter another chamber. Each of us a *granada*, or a chamber, whatever we resolve to be. Will we ever evolve into a citrus and see the rest of our own self? Henceforth, the dialectical discussion of the self becoming allows for a dramatic expansion of subjectivity to occur through a variety of interdisciplinary lenses.

Chicana scholar Gutiérrez y Muhs contends that subjectivity is constantly being reconstituted and that this subjectivity is constructed through "representations circulated by society's major institutions of social repro-

¹³ Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, unpublished poem (2002).

duction, the family, the school, the Church, advertising, culture, i.e., the ideological state apparatuses. These are systematically but independently organized to hail us as their subjects.¹⁴ U.S. Latinas' (mestizas in particular) self-concepts are determined in relationship to others. These relationships manifest themselves in the links that are woven between them and their families, friends, co-workers, and relationships with the saints, the divine, and creation. Chicanas in particular have enjoyed a multiplicity of roles. One needs only to look at their cultural tradition and context to see them in their roles as mothers, healers, basket weavers, community leaders, *rezadoras* (prayer leaders) and *curanderas* (faith healers).

MESTIZA WORLDVIEW AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

My early work exploring the significance of Our Lady of Guadalupe in relation to Mexican American women was grounded in a psychosocial religious framework.¹⁵ This perspective includes popular religion and a holistic model of the human that conceptualizes them in a psychosocial reality. I utilized the work of Jerome Frank, in particular his notion of the "assumptive world," William James's understanding of the religious, and more recently Chicana feminists, poets, i.e., Anzaldúa, Sandoval, and Hurtado.¹⁶

Jerome Frank, professor of psychiatry, begins with the assumption that human beings are social creatures, and as such one's worldview and behavior will be influenced and formed by the standards of the groups to which they belonged. He uses the term "assumptive world" to designate the psychosocial dimension of a person's life.

In order to be able to function, everyone must impose an order and regularity on the welter of experiences impinging upon him. To do this, he develops out of his personal experiences a set of assumptions. . . . The totality of each person's assumptions may be conveniently termed his "assumptive world." This is a short hand expression for a highly structured, complex, interacting set of values, expectations, and images of oneself and others, which guide and in turn are guided by a person's perceptions and behavior and which are closely related to his emotional states and his feelings of well-being. The more enduring assumptions become organized into attitudes with cognitive, affective, and behavioral components.¹⁷

Frank contends that not all personal assumptive worlds are the same. They vary as experiences and self-images vary. How we see ourselves and the

¹⁴ Griselda Pollack, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2003; orig. ed. 1988).

¹⁵ Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Author reflects the non-inclusive language of his time.

world around us, the values we attach to what we see, and the resulting behavior, all join to form the psychosocial dimension of a person.

Chicana feminists have added to this understanding of assumptive worldview by introducing the concepts of oppositional (Sandoval) and mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa and Hurtado). Chicana feminist discourse includes their daily clash with different languages, different belief systems, and cultural practices, so that their assumptive world is not contained, limited or circumscribed, nor is it a place of absolute certitude. At one point or another, U.S. Latinas, in their young lives had to explain to somebody—a teacher, neighbor, priest, etc.—how they felt, what they believed in, and why they lived the way they did. Those possessing a mestiza consciousness are forced early into becoming bridges between the “past” world and the “present” world, between their families and the bicultural world they live in, between the academic world and the community, the social, and professional worlds. Chicana feminists identify this ability to translate, to negotiate, to bridge as *la facultad*, or ability. This *facultad*, as already noted, enables one to view simultaneously multiple social perspectives. This multilevel discourse encompasses the ever important interplay of cultural analysis.

The culture concept is an integral element and plays an important role in this assumptive world. For this article, culture will be understood as: “Socially transmitted, often symbolic, information that shapes human behavior and regulates human society so that people can successfully maintain themselves and reproduce. Culture has mental, behavioral, and material aspects; it is patterned and provides a model for proper behavior.”¹⁸

Therefore, to appreciate another person, one must appreciate her assumptive world, or her psychosocial reality. The process of enculturation, or learning one’s culture, posits a worldview as a fact, and connects the variety of experiences that constitute reality. It is out of this reality that all rationality flows. One who functions from a mestiza consciousness is more apt to not only articulate her position but to help see the position of others. My generation would have discussed this in terms of *choque de culturas*, a clash of cultures.

The clashing or *choque* of two or more realities is highlighted by oppositional consciousness, i.e., by a consciousness borne out of direct conflict, marginalization, and oppression suffered by U.S. Latinas and their struggles to resist the structures of oppression in the dominant society. The mestiza refuses to accept this condition as an either/or *choque de culturas*. Instead, the mestiza views her own reality as the reality of living life as *la vida loca*. She bridges these two or more realities through a new synthesis,

¹⁸ John Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States, and the Global System* (Mt. View, Calif.: Mayfield, 2000).

by creating a new space, a new meaning, a new spirituality. The mestiza borderland *facultad* engages in a creative and constructive spirituality by strategizing, navigating, negotiating, and building a new universe of meaning, i.e., a new space where the self engages other selves in a new universe of meaning that is becoming, evolving and transforming. By rejecting the either/or dichotomy, the mestiza balances or bridges these two or more opposing realities by transforming the either/or dichotomy into a “this-and-that.” The operative word here is the conjunction “and.” This is the essence of what it means to be a mestiza. For example, if we use the racial and cultural meaning of *mestizaje*, the mestiza is both Spanish and (note here the conjunction “and”) Indian, but in reality, as a *choque de culturas* shows, she is neither Spanish nor Indian because her conjunctive, differential racial and cultural reality has transformed her into a new person. The mestiza, then, is the *disfratismo* par excellence of a new person, a new *rostro y corazón* (in *ixtli* in *yóllotl*, face and heart). This conjunctive “and” therefore is the conjunctive, differential consciousness of mestiza spirituality.

This present generation, I believe, has more history, consciousness, and awareness to be able to move its position to view a situation from different perspectives. Hence its members adopt and find resources for belonging in this *vida loca*. The danger, of course, in this gift, is also the temptation to relativize everything. All individuals belong to multiple groups, therefore may possess a variety of social identities. However, “social identities gain particular significance when they represent ‘master statuses’ and when they are stigmatized. Race, social class, gender, and sexuality are the significant social identities.”¹⁹ While a purely Western cultural consciousness would be fragmented, the mestiza consciousness navigates these realities with an equanimity that flows from a concrete spirituality.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE SURVEY

In order to further my investigation and to concretize it, I developed a simple questionnaire to distribute to a specific grouping of the Latina population in order to elicit information from a small sample of the variety that makes up U.S. Latinas. I am aware that this does not meet the criteria for a formal, complex, scientific research tool. My aim was to get a sense of the state of spiritual consciousness of Latina college-age students today. The targeted population was Latina women between the ages of 18 and 45, living in the United States. The criteria were that (1) they identified themselves as mestiza; (2) they were bilingual and bicultural, understanding the fact that levels of proficiency and preference vary; and (3) they were Roman Catholic.

¹⁹ Aida Hurtado, *Voicing Chicana Feminism* (New York: New York University, 2003) 101.

To this end, 100 survey questionnaires²⁰ were disseminated in the fall of 2002 to professional Latino/a staff and faculty at a variety of different universities (i.e., Chicago, Idaho, California, and Washington). These professionals were asked to distribute the questionnaire to their students who satisfied the criteria. In addition, the questionnaire was sent to parish and adult leaders in faith communities that were predominantly Latino/a (i.e., Florida, New Jersey, California, Washington, and Oregon). Of the 100 sent out, 63 were returned. The largest group of respondents (46) was between the ages of 18 and 24, primarily second generation, of Mexican roots, single, and attending university. Out of these 46, 39 met the criteria, and form the basis for the analysis that follows. I am particularly interested in the Pacific Northwest region where there is a growing Latino/a population. One does not find, however, the larger, easily identified Latino/a community as one does in California, Texas, or New York.

Twenty-seven of the 39 (69%) respondents in this age range considered themselves *mestiza* and 29 of the 39 (74%) thought it was an important classification in terms of identity. Seventy-two percent of the respondents pray regularly and attend weekly mass. Half of this percentage report praying the rosary, or having a devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe; 27 of the 39 (69%) participate in cultural/communal rituals: *Día de los Muertos*, *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), *Los Posadas*, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12, and *Los Tres Reyes* (The Three Kings), January 6.

My first review of the surveys indicates that this generation is more institutionally educated than the generation that came before them, which means that they are more acculturated. There are remnants of the first generation's popular devotion, i.e. expressing devotion to the saints (i.e., St. Martin de Porres, St. Miguel, St. Veronica), in particular prayer (rosary), novenas (for home, children, special objects), blessings, and pilgrimages (to Chimayo of New Mexico and the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico). This age range also identified themselves as being part of a community and as participating in community. Community is important to them. It gives them belonging, identity, and purpose. The celebration most practiced after attending Sunday liturgy is the *Día de los Muertos* celebration. This particular celebration underscores the ongoing connection of the dead with the living and their active participation the life of the community.²¹ Once a year, the portals of time are opened, and communities of believers gather to remember those who have gone before them, to

²⁰ This survey was self-administered with no interview or follow-up.

²¹ For historical origin and celebration of the *Día de los Muertos*, see Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer, *The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas, 1982); Hugo G. Nutini, "Pre-Hispanic Component of the Syncretic Cult of the Dead in Mesoamerica," *Ethnology* 27 (January 1988) 57-78.

be cognizant of those who are with them, and commit themselves to those who will follow. Warmed by candles, consoled by the company of the living, and the spirits of the loved ones who have gone before them, Latinas/as will remember their dead. This ritual in particular acknowledges, affirms, and nurtures the ongoing relationship between the living and the dead.

This data, while not in depth, does reveal some significant trends and challenges. It is inspiring to witness how U.S. Latinas/Chicanas seek to reclaim their roots, foster their identity, and nurture their spirituality in resistance to a social context that pressures them to assimilate. Of particular significance is the remembering or the reconnection with the ancestors. I am reminded of a recent healing group in which I participated, where the *cuarandera* (traditional faith healer) utilized a number of practices from various traditions: prayer, smudging, blessing with holy water, singing, calling for the aid of ancestors and saints, and soul retrieval. I wonder if there is any correlation of the dismissal of our saints in the Church and the increasing search for mediators who can reconnect people with their past? This connection with the past not only enhances the relational self but also demonstrates a place and purpose for those people who have been continuously marginalized by dominant cultures. Perhaps this challenge creates new memories. Understanding how Latinas construct their identity is a key ingredient in this process.

Marina, one of the Latinas from the survey, captures a frequently articulated experience of being a mestiza in 2003:

Initially, for me, mestiza acknowledges my Spanish and indigenous blood. More profound is my experience as a Chicana living in the Northwest. It would be one thing to be a Chicana living in the Southwest or East Coast where there are significant Latino populations. It is a completely different experience to be a Chicana living in areas that have small populations of Latinos. The visual image that best describes my experience is the teeter-totter, where you are up on one end while the other is down. Experiencing success in one cultural group (Latino vs. mainstream) has historically meant that I have been down in the other cultural group. This experience has been physically, mentally and emotionally draining. Balancing was an act that took me a long time to learn. I became motivated to balance my Mestisaje experience after being down on both ends of the teeter-totter for long periods of time. I came to the conclusion that there had to be a way to balance this experience. However, it took me a long time to come to this conclusion because those before me had always accepted one reality over the other, never attempting to balance. Who knows, maybe they did try to balance but the experience became too emotionally draining. Throughout my experience, I have learned that it is okay to be up on one the end of the teeter-totter and down on the opposite. I have also learned that it is possible to balance both experiences but that doing so requires a lot of thought and emotional energy.²²

²² Interview with "Marina," November 2000.

My previous research was primarily with Mexicans and Mexican Americans who were first and second generation and over the age of 40.²³ In that age range there was significant evidence of popular devotion, the saints, praying of the rosary, home altars, blessings, processions, and communal celebrations such as *Día de los Muertos*, *Las Posadas*, *Semana Santa*. The results from the survey of university students revealed a more educated second generation that integrates the home practices of popular devotion with Sunday liturgical practices and reading the Bible. My past experiences with second, third, and fourth generation Latinos/as indicated and affirm an involvement in popular practices to the extent that these practices celebrate and affirm their identity as mestizas.

THE BUILDING OF COMMUNITY

The psychosocial factors that form identity are often considered the primary and exclusive avenues by which persons understand their world. As has been noted, the “assumptive world” includes one’s intrapsychic life and one’s interpersonal relations. It is from these intrapsychic and interpersonal influences that one’s personal identity is developed.

Hurtado’s work on personal and social identity provides me with insight for understanding the foundation for a mestiza spirituality.²⁴ She argues that for any human, personal identity contains some universal processes such as ability to love, work, and mate. In many cases she argues personal identity is much more stable than social identity.²⁵ Social identity is defined as “those aspects of the individual’s self-identity that derive from one’s knowledge of being part of categories and groups, together with the value and emotional significance attached to these memberships.”²⁶ These social identities are the consequence of three sociopsychological processes: social categorization, social comparison, and psychological work.

Social categorization includes one’s nationality, language, race, ethnicity, and skin color. People often self-designate themselves. Language is second only to religion in identification of the people’s group. It is an important way of categorizing oneself. Race is a category that was created out of colonial empire building, through the interplay of power relations. Ethnicity has to do with the self-identity of a group of people within a culture, as being somehow culturally distinct from the more general culture, for instance, Indians within Guatemala, or Chicanos in Los Angeles, as opposed to Latinos/as within the United States. Ethnicity constitutes a language,

²³ Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*.

²⁴ Aida Hurtado, *Voicing Chicana Feminism*.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

dialect, religious customs, manner of dress, etc. Skin color can also be a significant factor.

Social comparison, the second process, achieves “significance in relation to perceived differences from other groups.”²⁷ This is a socially constructed element that is important in cross-cultural communication. The question is how do people see themselves as really being different? A great example of this occurred at the turn of the 19th century when the Philippine community of New Orleans were considered white and not colored. Native American, African American, and Asian, on the other hand, were considered colored, non-white. Social comparisons are fluid. They do set up markers. However, the key question becomes, who decides?

The third process is psychological work, and includes cognitive and emotional dynamics that support a positive sense of distinctiveness. The Latinos/as’ greatest values and aspirations—faith, hospitality, family—while not exclusive to Latinos/as, are highlighted as significant for Latinos/as. The groups that are most problematic for a sense of positive distinctiveness, are disparaged memberships that have to be negotiated frequently because they are visible to others, ones that are politicized by social movements and so on. These are the most likely to become social identities for individuals.”²⁸ It is these identities forged out of challenge and resistance that become especially powerful psychologically. Hurtado goes further to say that those group memberships that are socially affirmed, or valued or given privilege, may not even become social identities. This understanding of both personal and social identities is significant for this research in that it helps explain some of the responses on the survey. In particular, the women’s identification and full importance of the term *mestiza*. “The distinctions between home, school, community, and mainstream institutions are . . . not clear cut and delineated, but are rather part of a web of multiple interacting communities . . . [F]amilies [however] are the starting point for surviving and effecting resistance to cultural assault, to valorizing and (re)creating a family education which stresses dignity and pride in language and culture.”²⁹

The primary metaphor utilized in the writings of women of color for women’s consciousness is that of multiplicity. Many women of color, and in particular Chicana writers, speak about developing this multiple identity at an early age, juggling a variety of social groups, serving as bridges between their traditional monolingual family context and the dominant culture.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sofia Villenas and Donna Deyhle, “Critical Race Theory and Ethnographies Challenging the Stereotypes: Latino Families, Schooling, Resilience and Resistance,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 29 (1999) 425, 441.

Many Latinas joke that while they see this ability as an asset, it has come at the price of being walked on by both sides.³⁰ This constant crossing becomes the most ordinary thing in mestizas' lives. Although they cross back and forth between these dual identities, they sometimes feel terribly unaccepted— orphaned. Some do not identify with the Anglo American cultural values and some do not identify with, for example, the Mexican American cultural values. Mexican Americans are a key example of this synthesis of these two cultures with varying degrees of acculturation, and with that synthesis brings conflict. Latinas describe their experience with a litany of words such as conquest, resistance, borderlands, integrity, anger, pain, economically and politically marginalized, and multiple identities. The nexus of rationality in this potentially fragmented *realidad* is found in the very spirituality that explains and reinforces the cosmology of *latinidad*. "Borderlands refers to the geographical, emotional, and/or psychological space occupied by mestizas, and it serves as a metaphor for the condition of living, between spaces, cultures and languages (Elenes, 1997). A Chicana feminist epistemology acknowledges that Chicanas and other marginalized peoples often have a strength that comes from their borderland experiences (Delgado Bernal, 1998b). So another part of a mestiza consciousness is balancing between and within the different communities."³¹

Gloria Anzaldúa captures a compelling description of what it is like to cross between cultures and epistemological perspectives. "Indigenous like corn, like corn, the mestiza is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn—a female seed-bearing organ—the mestiza is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernel she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth—she will survive the crossroads."³²

Especially significant in the mestiza consciousness is the importance of Catholicism in the cultural practices. Many consider themselves deeply spiritual, drawing from both their Catholic roots and familial indigenous practices. In order to fathom this complex arena, some background of the religious history of U.S. Latinas or mestizas includes 16th-century Spanish Catholicism along with Native American and African indigenous religions must be understood. For example, Mexican American women inherit the legacy of the Spanish Conquest. This conquest was motivated by empire and expansion facilitated by military and economic interest and in many

³⁰ Race, social class, gender, and sexuality are the significant social identities that are considered "master statuses, and the reason is because individuals must psychologically negotiate their potential stigmatizing effects."

³¹ Dolores Delgado Bernal, "Learning and Living Pedagogies of the Home: The Mestiza Consciousness of Chicana Students," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 14 (2001) 632.

³² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 78–81.

cases resisted by religion. Religion, however, facilitated the Conquest through missionaries who assimilated the Indians and through a church structure that controlled them. Given the pervasive role that religion and the Church had in the colonization of Latin America and the Caribbean, it is not surprising to find elements of this impact upon the family and tight-knit Latina communities.³³ Henceforth, a religion forged from the combination of 16th-century Spanish Catholicism, and indigenous African religion would still influence the faith of Latina Catholic women. Women's "collective spiritual practices and faith have formed part of the bedrock of day-to-day survival for marginalized communities. Many of those most socially and economically marginalized—indigenous women—have steadfastly served as the unacknowledged high priests and healer of our working communities under siege."³⁴

Thus, while the Conquest in many ways destroyed a people's public cultural expressions, in fact, the culture resisted total assimilation and reinterpreted Western values to fit their cosmological scheme. Hence, the synchronicity so prevalent in Latino/a culture. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church and its traditional teachings has not precluded mestizas from playing an active role in the practice of popular religion, nor development of their spirituality. Popular religion is considered home-based, with non-cleric led expressions and celebrations of faith, such as pilgrimages, processions, fiestas, and community created sacred shrines. They are spontaneous and not mandated by the official hierarchy. Although popular religion has its historical roots in 16th-century Catholicism, it has evolved a life of its own that captures the identity, values, and inspirations of the people. The new spirituality of mestizas can no longer be compartmentalized or limited to organized religion.³⁵

Popular religion also functions as a powerful form of resistance to assimilation. At the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1989, Orlando Espin and Sixto Garcia pointed out that popular religion is an important guardian of culture, history, and identity; without it, we would not be the people we are. "Our identity as an integral part of the Catholic Church would not have survived the frequent clashes with the non-Hispanic—and often, anti-Hispanic—ways of the church in America."³⁶ Faith expressions of popular religion are readily accessible to

³³ Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens, "Latinas in the Church," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Deck (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994) 240–77.

³⁴ Yolanda Broyles-González, "Indianizing Catholicism," in *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*, ed. Norma E. Cantú and Olga Nájera-Ramírez (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002) 118.

³⁵ Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1994) 147.

³⁶ Orlando Espín and Sixto Garcia, " 'Lilies of the Field': A Hispanic Theology

anyone without exception and no one is excluded from participating in them. They provide a deep sense of unity and joy, while providing a forum for shared suffering. They are participatory and everyone takes an active role in them. For those who participate in the realm of popular religion, religious experience permeates all space and time. There are spaces and times of special strength and power that are part of the religious experience. Mestizas today practice a polyfaceted spirituality that connects the ancestors to the present, balance the fragmented world of the post-Conquest, and create a deep emotional attachment to the land and its processes.

The spiritual practices of many Chicanas emerge from a purposeful integration of their creative inner resources and the diverse cultural influences that feed their souls and their psyches. Accepting their estrangement from Christianity, . . . many Christians (re)turn to an *indigena*-inspired spirituality, learn to trust their own senses and bodies, recreate traditional cultural practices, and look to non-Western philosophies—all of which offers us a (re)connection to our selves, our spirits, and to the ongoing process of creating *nuestra familia*. . . Chicanas define and decide for themselves what images, rituals, myths, and deities nourish and give expression to their deepest values.³⁷

These deepest values are formed in the everyday common struggle for life referred to as *lo cotidiano*.³⁸

RITUAL KNOWLEDGE

All human beings are symbol-creating creatures who use ritual behavior to organize socially meaningful ways to express values and tradition. No one living in society is free from some form of ritual. Ritual and ceremony are elements and expressions of being human. Ritual is not just an activity with no purpose but rather is the way in which human beings construct their worlds. It is also a means to gain epistemological access.³⁹ Jennings argues that there are three moments in the poetic function of ritual:

First, ritual action is a medium to attain knowledge. It may function as a

of Providence and Human Responsibility,” in *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 44 (1989) 70–90, at 71.

³⁷ Lara Medina, “*Los Espíritus siguen hablando: Chicana Spiritualities*,” in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. C. Trujillo (Berkeley: Third Woman, 1998) 189–213, at 189.

³⁸ See Orlando Espin, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) xvii; Miguel Diaz, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001); and Ana Maria Isasi-Diaz, “*Lo Cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology*,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 10 (August 2002) 5–17.

³⁹ Theodore W. Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge,” *Journal of Religion* 62 (1982) 111–27.

mode of inquiry and discovery.⁴⁰ What this means is that the participants discover who they are in the world and how the world can be reconstituted. This ritual knowledge is gained through bodily action that “alters the world and the place of the ritual participant in the world . . . it is primarily corporal rather than cerebral, primarily active rather than contemplative, primarily transformative rather than speculative. There is an incarnate character of ritual knowledge that is gained through embodiment.”⁴¹

One of the most common forms of ritual involves acting or dramatizing religious stories such as the narrative of Our Lady of Guadalupe, *las Posadas*, and the Passion of Jesus. Religious symbols, stories, and rituals draw individuals and community into a deeper understanding of God by accessing the mind and heart (devotion to the Sacred Heart, rosary, baptism, blessings). In Latino/a culture, everything is interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent, and people identify themselves through their relationships to others (hence the importance of *comadrazo*). These relationships between people also apply to the relationships between people and the Divine. The saints are Jesus’ friends and therefore friends of mine; Jesus is my brother, God is my father, Guadalupe is my mother. This parallel dichotomy of identity of self and other is a legacy of the institutional churches’ separation of genders within the lay clergy continuum. While consecrated males held the liturgical powers of the sacraments, women developed a unique, deeply religious parallel spirituality. The power of women, then, to formulate and express religious consciousness in the home was both a result of oppression and an expression of liberation. This spirituality of relationship emphasizes the possibilities of being fully human within an extended community. It permeates all aspects of one’s life and is fundamental to one’s belief system. This community is a network of extended social relations, bound by mutual obligations articulated by the matriarchs of the various families.

Within popular religion, social organization is predominantly horizontal, with temporal responsibilities that do not separate persons or give unequal weight to functions. In preparation for *las Posadas*, *Día de los Muertos*, or *Semana Santa*, everyone plays a role and each is important, whether their task is to make the tortillas or proclaim the Word. In celebrating these rituals, social organization is paramount in that elders are recognized as spiritual leaders and children are trained to assume those roles. All are essential to the celebration, all are valued and affirmed. Thus, “the performance of ritual . . . teaches not only how to conduct the ritual itself, but how to conduct oneself outside the ritual space.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid. 112.

⁴² Ibid. 118.

⁴¹ Ibid. 115.

RITUAL THAT FOSTERS JUSTICE

“Justice” is a complex term, and I struggled to decide which aspect to highlight. Is the mestiza consciousness focused on the concept of justice as equality? Is it a concept of justice that levels the playing field and develops a new grammar of life? A sort of utopia introduced or manifested when horizons are fused in a play of ritual practices? Is it in ritual practices that the players (participants) are transformed by gaining a new knowledge of themselves vis-à-vis one another? I understand justice in at least two ways: as cosmic order, that is, its relationship to every living and non-living thing in the universe, and as an individual and social rendering of one’s due. From these two understandings of justice, I have come to understand justice as the idea of making someone or something whole (shalom). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God’s righteousness (Latin: *justitia*) or justice was biblically conceived as God’s “right relationship” with all creatures (humans included), and the natural and cosmic order.

The second part of the concept of justice is rendering persons their due. In the concept of justice where giving others their due in order to make them whole (shalom) justice demands that this be done on the basis of equal treatment. Unequal treatment because of one’s skin color, race, gender or some other trait or behavior is for all practical and theoretical purposes, an injustice. To deny a group of people justice on the basis of race, gender, etc., is not only to deny them their due, but on a deeper level, it denies them their worth or dignity as human beings.

Central to the concept of justice is our understanding of what a person is. A person is a child of God endowed by God with human dignity. To declare someone worthless is to deny one justice. What are humans due in order to sustain their humanity? Minimally, justice requires that their essential needs be met. What are these? Food, shelter, clothing, health care, etc. In our dealings with one another, to fail to give the other his or her due is to do an injustice. This concept of justice as shalom is to restore others by making them whole, by restoring their worth.

Social justice is the way in which we relate to the social whole (or “the common good” as Thomists call it). Social justice as understood here is our contribution through financial, socioeconomic, cultural, educational or other means to make the social whole sustain human life and, if possible, even make it flourish. If it fails to do this, we have social injustice. In liberation theology, God’s justice is conceived as directly concerned with the plight of the poor and those oppressed by racism, sexism, classism and other isms. Justice as understood in liberation theology is not “blind justice” or the liberal standard of justice as impartial, i.e., of siding with no one. In the struggle for liberation, justice does, indeed, take sides and it does so because God’s justice has always been an option for the poor in the

Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament. It sides with the poor and the oppressed in the barrios of Latin America and in the barrios of Los Angeles. The God of the oppressed is the God who sides with the lives of people who live in a situation of internal colonialism, exploitation, oppression and subhuman conditions. The distortion of God's justice (right relationship) to the oppressed by those in positions of power through their raw economic and political might, and through their racist, sexist, and class structures, as well as through other instrumentalities, signals a new understanding of justice that emphasizes the eschatological dimension of the gospel of Jesus who was raised by God as a new creation, a new person (a new face and heart).

The mestiza as a new person, a new face and heart, who is neither Spanish nor Indian, but both, is always already the eschatological presence of the new person raised in Christ at the resurrection. She is the presence of God's justice at work in the world of the poor and the oppressed in the barrios of San Antonio, Los Angeles, Denver, and elsewhere. This eschatological presence is seen most vividly in the rituals, the customs, and the celebrations of mestiza spirituality. It is in this way that the *Dia de los Muertos* becomes an eschatological communion with our resurrected past and present. The celebrations of the *Dia de los Muertos* become a vehicle for communication with ancestors who were raised in Christ and now commune with us, as the present order and values of the oppressor are rapidly passing away. This communion with our resurrected past united in our present time during the *Dia de los Muertos* is shalom, our becoming whole again. It is God's justice embodied in us and in the midst of our colonized, exploitative, oppressive and subhuman conditions.⁴³

For this reason Guadalupe is such a profound experience for Latinas in general, Mexican Americans in particular. This devotion and ritual is one that invokes a God who brings justice to the world. God's presence is reestablished among the conquered people and they are raised up. The Nahuatl language and culture, i.e., their ethnic identity as a people, are made whole by a God who validates their existence and restores their dignity and personhood. In the celebration of *Dia de los Muertos*, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, God's justice is revealed once again. No one is forgotten, the dead return among us, and continue to be among us. They sustain life for all of us. This life giving, life affirming, life sustaining is justice expressed and revealed. This life sustaining activity is nurtured primarily in the home space. Home altars form the moral and ethic tone for the community. In each home it is more important than the TV set. In this space it is remembered that the companions in the house are the ancestors,

⁴³ I am indebted to my colleague Juan Alvarez Cuauhtemoc for his feedback and assistance in developing these ideas.

the saints, Jesus, and Guadalupe. Intimate relationships flow out from there to the community. What is remembered at home, what is shared around the home altar, around the dinner table, is the “water” that flows out to the community and connects them, sensitizing the participants to what are right relationships. So the basis of justice is relationships, ritual action, sharing, generosity, remembering, remaining connected, maintaining one’s dignity, restoring dignity to others.

In the beginning of my article I mentioned entering *la vida loca*. Entering *la vida loca* of the barrio, one hears the crashing noise from the ghetto blasters, one sees multiple colors, dogs, children in the streets, women hanging out wash, cars in the yard—everything is chaotic, or is it? Could there be order here if you were to see through the spirituality that God is present? “[T]he street is a central locus of much of the religious display. . . . Ritualized actions such as pilgrimages, processions, *posadas*, passion plays and the repaying of *mandas* often take place in the public space of the street. Similarly, bodily religious display such as tattoos of the Virgen de Guadalupe or the wearing of an emblem or medal often fulfill their testimonial function for other viewers in the public space of the street. . . . In many ways the street is now brought inside the church.”⁴⁴ Thus, the mestiza spirituality’s contribution to the larger Church is one of ongoing creativity, the continual transformation of the remembrance, transformation of an exodus experience in their own lives. From the conquest and experience of oppression, Guadalupe leads the people to cross over the bridge from cruelty and genocide to one of real hope.

There is also a struggle within the Latina community; it is a struggle demarcated along the lines of color (those who are light skinned versus dark skinned), class (those who are rich versus the poor), ancestry (those of African ancestry versus those of Indian blood), and status (those who are privileged and those who are underprivileged). This is an ongoing struggle at all communal celebrations, and yet, in prayer and ritual, at the Basilica for the feast of Guadalupe, the rich kneel alongside *los pobres*, the dark with the fair skinned, the privileged, and the despised. This happens, for example, nowhere else in Mexico.

I have drawn attention to the daily ritual practices that foster the habits of the heart. My contention is that it is those rituals that transmit an ethics to the people which, when lived in community, fosters compassion and a care for justice that gives them a grammar for life. Ritual is a repetitive pattern that constructs a worldview, and is essential for revealing the loved

⁴⁴ Ellen McCracken, “Contemporary Chicano Narrative and Public Religious Display: Recuperating the Sacred in the Barrio Street and Literary Text,” in *Cultures de la Rue: Les Barrios d’Amérique du Nord*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Catherine Lejeune (Paris: Université Paris, 1996) 163–77.

process of a culture's spirituality. While the harsh realities of a world of injustice constantly threaten *la Raza*,⁴⁵ rituals reinforce the ideals of a world that existed, is now possible and is hoped for in future generations. In the gathering of the home altar or celebrating of the *Día de los Muertos* one learns that one is not only connected to others across time, but that one is never alone.

Ritual knowledge is gained not by detached observation but through the action, the gesture, lighting the candle, the placement of flowers, the walking in a pilgrimage, etc. The re-enactment is how ritual knowledge is gained.⁴⁶ It serves to transmit knowledge and forms a way of knowing, being and acting in the world. It is in this understanding that ritual action transmits the "knowing" gained through ritual action itself.⁴⁷ The very basis of this access is through an emotional affirmation of being in a community that expands beyond the temporal. The key contribution that Jennings makes is that ritual action does not primarily cause us to see differently, but to act and know differently.⁴⁸

At the conclusion of this article, the term *mestiza* may take on a meaning beyond a specific ethnicity of Latinas. Here I addressed the *mestiza* consciousness of U.S. Latina Catholic, but the process and the dynamics of *mestiza* can also be applied to other groups navigating or negotiating two or more cultures. What would be the *mestizo/a* construct be for an African American, Chinese American, Korean American, Russian American, bi-racial individuals? Understanding this process of *mestiza* is significant given the increasing multicultural changes in our parishes. My use of literature, cultural theory, theology, psychology, and fieldwork challenges the established notions of spirituality. In particular, it challenges how U.S. Latinas' spirituality or other minority cultures with their spirituality are viewed by mainstream theologians.

⁴⁵ *La raza* means, literally, "the people," and it is a term that refers to the *mestizo*, that is, to the children of mixed blood. The term also has the feeling of giving voice, name, status to the underdogs.

⁴⁶ Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge" 116.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 113.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 117.