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The interplay of themes of homes and homelessness emerges as central within the literary landscape of contemporary Latinx culture. Home, of course, not only indicates material realities and architectural structures, but also the discursively constituted ideological spaces of individual and communal subjectivities. In a Latinx family, it is generally presupposed that the “normal” world is a heteronormative one. Gloria Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking feminist theory in *Borderlands/La Frontera* raises questions simultaneously about the overlapping of gender, class, sexuality, and the notion of home, making her a pioneer for what we now call “intersectionality.” This paper interrogates the gendering of notions of home and homelessness using the theoretical framework of Anzaldúa in a critical analysis on the works of Sandra Cisneros in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* and Helena Maria Viramontes’ *The Moths and Other Stories*. The women in these narratives struggle with the societal expectations that are imposed on them through patriarchal ideals that invade the spaces of their home. The Chicana protagonists I examine realize that they are being oppressed by a dominant culture, both inside and outside of the domestic realm, leaving them without a space of refuge and

comfort. An oppressive “home” space such as this can lead to a sense of alienation as well as feelings of homelessness and helplessness. The following examination traces the experiences of two very distinct, yet similar characters, as they navigate the problematic gender and power dynamics of their homes. Through a critical analysis on the gendering of home and homelessness in Latinx literature, by addressing the complex discourses of machismo, the role of the church, telenovelas, and Latinx legends such as La Llorona, this research speaks on the reinterpretation of rebellion. This analysis will allow us to argue the significant roles that these discourses play within the home, and how they affect women’s upbringings and cause them to feel a sense of homelessness within the home.

One of the most prominent Latinx legends that is often mentioned to Latinx children is La Llorona. According to Mexican folklore, La Llorona is the ghost of a woman who drowned her children and then weeps in search of them. In Gloria Anzaldúa’s seminal text *Borderlands*, she shares that she was once a non-believer of many Mexican superstitions. Gloria shares:

“Now, I wonder if this story and similar ones were the culture’s attempts to “protect” members of the family, especially girls, from “wandering.” Stories of the devil luring young girls away and having his way with them discouraged us from going out.” (Anzaldúa 36).

For Latinx families, it is common for parents to attempt the confinement of their daughters in the space of the home. At a young age, boys are encouraged to go out and play, while girls are denied permission to go out unaccompanied. This is done in an effort to raise girls in a domestic space, and mold them to be future wives and mothers. It reinforces gender roles inside of the home and aggravates gender inequality in society. The two narratives chosen for this research effectively display a reinterpretation of the tale of La Llorona.

Anzaldúa also offers the concept of “La Facultad” as that which has “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (Anzaldúa 38). Her work addresses the experiences of living in the physical borderland of Texas and Mexico, as well as the less literal psychological, sexual, and spiritual borderlands of their lives. She explains that those who do not feel safe in the world can develop the sense of “La Facultad,” and those who are most marginalized will have it the strongest.

Therefore, Chicanas—specifically—and Latinas, more broadly, fall under this category because they face different forms of oppression, which creates awareness, “La Facultad”, that ultimately has the power to redefine reality. “La Facultad” for Latinas is a response to the unjust expectations, but also inspires, if not necessitates a situation of violent uprootedness from the safe space of home and community. The very awareness of the patriarchal structures of power that subjugate us, comes at a significant cost evoking a startling awareness for many, because as Anzaldúa says, “we lose something in this mode of initiation, something is taken away from us; our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance” (Anzaldúa 39). We cease to buy into the narrative of the “American Dream” that promises that hard work guarantees the

achievement of almost anything. Most stunningly, we realize that there are ways in which we, albeit unknowingly, actively participate in structures that are built for us to fail.

In “Alternative Rhetoric and Morality: Writing from the Margins,” David L. Wallace explores Anzaldúa’s work and suggests what an alternative form of rhetoric might look like. He writes, “Anzaldúa captures the difficulties of becoming aware of multiple identities: the loss of the simple cultural narratives that are often associated with homes and homelands...” (Wallace 31). Wallace explains that Anzaldúa is writing about the “sense of loss of her homeland” and in doing so, she sheds light on the obstacles that can result from becoming aware of the multitude of identities available to Latinas. Anzaldúa bases her work on her experience as a Chicana woman living on the borderlands between Texas and Mexico. Therefore, when she mentions her homeland, on the surface it can be inferred that she is referring to the land that Americans stole from Mexicans in 1848. Wallace makes an intriguing point that “this discussion both illustrates the complexities of identity and challenges the often too simplistic notion that gaining new insights or discourse practices is automatically empowering” (Wallace 31). Women who reside primarily in the domestic realm and who experience this notion of “La Facultad” are alarmed when they discover the depth of the challenges they face are a result of the power hierarchies that are built precisely to keep them in their marginalized places. These structures are deeply rooted in the community, and they prevent them from being autonomous and empowered,

which in turn restricts them from ascending the social ladder and achieving social mobility. For some Latinas, this awareness inspires rebellion, for others, the realization motivates them to reinforce the gendered norms that cause them to be submissive. One consequence of the latter posture, the impulse to be submissive in a phallogocentric society, often leads to a sense of profound homelessness among Latinas. Ultimately, this knowledge of the gendered power structures results in their feelings of alienation and outsider-ness. Latinas that decide to take a stand against the patriarchal structures in their homes, become homeless within their own homes. This new step towards agency is imagined as rebellious and disobedient by family members. However, this sense of rebellion, for some, becomes a source of strength.

When exploring Latinas in literature, characters who remain in the material home are likely to be alienated by their families and acquire a sense of un-belonging within their own homes. Latina characters may continue to reside in their physical homes (or they may leave); either way, they become homeless vis-á-vis a sense of familial and cultural belonging. Oftentimes Latina protagonists of the 21st and the latter half of the 20th century exert their agency and attempt to create a new sense of home by rebelling. Although in our rebellion, we may find a safe space, considering that we are able to be agents in our own lives, nevertheless our rebellion may also create a sense of alienation, considering that no one is immune to the restrictions that surround us. The structures and norms of daily life continue to inform us about every aspect of our lives. This realization is the concept of “La Facultad” that Anzaldúa discusses in her work.

Latina women are prone to grasp this sense of “La Facultad” because as Anzaldúa says:

Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest – the females, the homosexuals of all races, the dark-skinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign (Anzaldúa 38).

Possessing “La Facultad” thus presupposes a position of precarity, one of defending oneself from various assaults. Anzaldúa’s theory does not only apply to institutions and the media; her work also addresses the homes we are raised in, and the problematic gender norms to which we subscribe. In Latinx communities, most gender roles are initially taught in the home, and it may be where they are predominantly enforced. Latinx parents strongly impose rigid gendered expectations and insist on their children’s compliance as a matter of familial survival. Therefore, when we realize that our home is associated with the oppression that we face, it is as if our innocence is stolen. Home represents a place where you are safe, but with this new knowledge, we feel the need to keep our guard up, “so that we’ll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away” (Anzaldúa 38).

Gloria Anzaldúa’s work along with many others has changed the way Latinas in literature are portrayed; it serves to demonstrate the realities that Latinas face and takes a closer look at the stories that are told within the Latinx community. Another significant author that this research examines is Helena Maria Viramontes and her short story, *The Moths*. *The Moths* narrates the tale of a young Latina who experiences problems within her family as a result of her rebellious acts. In the story, the main character contends that she is not one of her grandmother’s favorite grandchildren because she does not have “the hands” to crochet or embroider like her sisters. She interprets her inability to participate in these activities as her grandmother’s reasons for withholding affection and approval from her and showing favoritism towards her sisters. Her inability to perform the expected activities of women creates a sense of profound discomfort for her, especially when she is home. Her feelings of isolation eventually turn into rebellion, which results in the abandonment of her home to take up residence in her grandmother’s house. She rebels as an attempt to escape the isolation and mistreatment in her home.

The main character’s rebellion is also greatly influenced by her father. Fathers, too, have a central role to play in the narratives of gendered expectations among Latina families. Fathers, who, as Latino men, are often portrayed as hot-tempered, contribute to the theme of female homelessness. Throughout the story, the father of the narrator is depicted as easily angered and aggressive. Her father displaces his disappointment over his daughter’s rebellion by reprimanding his wife. He blames her “for her lousy ways of bringing up daughters, being disrespectful and unbelieving” (Viramontes 34). This statement gives a glimpse into the dynamics within their household. He asserts that the mother is wholly at fault in this situation and is unaware of the role that he plays in his daughter’s life. This expression of the father’s feelings reveals his expectations of the roles women are to play in both the home and in society. The home is the source that continues to perpetuate expectations in the community and in the larger society. The father believes that it is the mother’s responsibility to ensure that daughters

turn out well. He resides on the outside of this process of molding the next generation of women.

Patriarchal sensibilities designate that women should have the following traits: women are expected to have maternal instincts and be more connected to their children than their husbands are and a mother and a daughter are expected to have a tighter bond, since mothers are expected to show their daughters how to be a woman in a male-dominated society. Latinas are traditionally brought up to be respectful and obedient, therefore the father is tormented when his daughter does not display these qualities.

A significant factor in the father's anger is the main character's rebellion. For example, she fails to show any desire towards attending mass every Sunday. Her behavior stirs trouble between the sisters and her religious decision causes her father's abusive outrage. "He would grab my arm and dig his nails into me to make sure I understood the importance of catechism. Did he make himself clear?" (Viramontes 34). The church is an institution in the community that reifies gender roles and consequently holds sway over the space of the home. The majority of Latinx families are Catholic and they follow the teachings of the Church, which were established on patriarchal laws. Latinas are expected to be holy by attending mass every Sunday and accepting the hegemonic masculinity which is validated by the Church. [JB2] The main character strongly experiences feelings of homelessness as she sits in front of a chapel. She thinks to herself: "I was alone. I knew why I had never returned" (Viramontes 34). Apart from being physically alone at that moment, she further feels abandoned seeing that she has nobody to confide in. The Church has failed her because it reinforces the gendered dynamics that are set up in the home. As a result, she questions her religion, and her lack of faith is the reason behind her negligence to attend mass on Sundays. The church is supposed to be a sanctuary, although, the main character does not feel it is one. It can also be a substitute for the home; however, since it is strongly influenced by patriarchy, the main character challenges her religious beliefs. For many, the Church can provide a space of peace and unity with God, but for her, it brings the paradoxes in her life into full relief. As a result of her failure to fit the feminine standards that are imposed on her by immediate family, she is considered aggressive and singled out for not wanting to attend mass. The only place and person she can turn to is her abuelita and her grandmother's home, which is a sort of refuge for her.

As previously stated in my explanation of Anzaldúa's description of La Llorona, *The Moths* reinterprets the problematic discourses which surround the Latinx legend. In "Cultural Reclamations in Helena Viramontes' "The Moths," Ashley Denney focuses her research on how "Chicana authors use cultural traditions to show that it is not necessary to choose between being a Chicana or being a feminist, while simultaneously criticizing the patriarchal aspects of their culture" (Denney 58). Denney explores Chicana authors who reinterpret the figure of La Llorona in their texts. However, she makes a point of emphasizing how Helena Maria Viramontes has managed to turn the story around with an inverted tale of La Llorona. In her research, Denney explains that "instead of a mother weeping near water for a child she has drowned, Viramontes presents readers with the story of a child weeping for the loss of her

mother and grandmother” (Denney 64). She presumes that the main character in *The Moths* is represented as “a resistant Llorona character” simply because she attempts to disengage from the strong culture of masculinity represented by her father. Denney interprets the ending of the short story as the moment where the main character is “most closely connected to the story of La Llorona” since “as the narrator weeps in the bathtub, she is mourning two losses: the death of Abuelita and the separation from her mother” (Denney 64). However, this moment also represents the growth of the main character’s rebellion. Gloria Anzaldúa says: “Aqui en la soledad prospera su rebeldía. En la soledad Ella prospera” (Anzaldúa 23), which translates to “Here in solitude her rebellion grows. In solitude, She prospers or grows.” This quote is reflective of the struggles of the main character throughout the story. As a result of her experience of homelessness within the home she, in turn, becomes defiant.

Once her grandmother passes away, her sense of home is once again shattered, at the same time this enhances her rebellion. Her abuelita’s death carries a new sense of understanding of the oppression that has confined her throughout her life. The story ends with the following lines: “the sobs emerging from the depths of anguish, the misery of feeling half-born, sobbing until finally, the sobs rippled into circles and circles of sadness and relief. There, there, I said to Abuelita, rocking us gently, there, there” (Viramontes 32). The words “sadness” and “relief” are essential to understanding how the main character’s sobs are ones of angst and freedom. The feeling of sadness comes from the sense of La Facultad, considering that at this time she understands the structures which are beyond the surface and affect her at home. As Denney mentions she is also sad seeing that she has lost her sense of safety, which she had found in her grandmother. She understands that all she has left is her mother who fails to provide the same sentiment for her. Thanks to her abuelita, the main character experiences a world outside of her home, in which she felt welcomed. Her grandmother’s home represented what her own home could not: it made her feel comfortable and she felt free to be herself. Within her parent’s home, she experienced homelessness, which caused her to feel neglected and unable to express herself. Ultimately, however, her grief turns into relief and then empowerment. Along with sobs of sadness, they are also of relief because she recognizes that although she no longer has her grandmother or her mother, she has herself. When she is in the bathroom with her dead grandmother she sobs, “until finally the sobs rippled into circles and circles of sadness and relief” (Viramontes 32). The ripple effect that is caused by the sobs signifies the diverse lives of Latinas facing these circumstances in the space of their homes. The ripples of sadness and relief represent the feelings of not belonging in the home and realizing that things do not have to remain this way. Throughout the story, the main character exemplifies a resilient Latina. Therefore, her sob of relief indicates that she is a woman who will create agency in her life. On the other hand, the gendered-structures that lie within the home are deeply ingrained, and the mother is a prime example of the submissive and passive housewife, who is dominated by her machista husband. If the main character were to relocate to a home of her own, the feelings of homelessness would accompany her. Latinx families look down on women who move out of the home to live alone because they are expected to move out once they are prepared to settle down with a husband. An independent woman finds herself caught in a bind of gendered expectations.

There are other authors such as Sandra Cisneros who use the original tale of La Llorona and reinterpret it in their own context. In Cisneros' short story, "Women Hollering Creek," La Llorona is indicated by the creek that references the legend and thus aptly named 'La Gritona', which plays an important role throughout the narrative. The main character Cleófilas is a woman, born and raised in Mexico, who moves to the town of Seguin, Texas with her husband, Juan. Cleófilas and her husband get married fairly quickly, and her father seems to anticipate some trouble. He says to her, "I am your father, I will never abandon you" (Cisneros 43). The main character does not know much about her husband. She says "He has a very important position in Seguin with, with... a beet company, I think. Or was it tires?" (Cisneros 45). All of the financial responsibilities fall on the husband, and Cleófilas is not at all conscious of the major details in her new life, such as her husband's occupation. Her main concern is how comfortable she will be in her new town, far away from home, and fulfilling her telenovela-inspired life. The thought of being married to a man who is financially stable and will bring passion to the relationship carries a sense of reassurance for her. The disappointment begins when Juan first hits Cleófilas, and she does not do anything about it.

This short story displays a few of the problematic discourses around telenovelas. Cleófilas lives in terms of telenovela ideologies, and she attempts to apply it to her own life. The narrator expresses to the reader that the one thing Cleófilas has always wanted in her life is passion; "But what Cleófilas has been waiting for, has been whispering and sighing and giggling for, has been anticipating since she was old enough to lean against the window displays of gauze and butterflies and lace, is passion" (Cisneros 44). Cleófilas' bears abuse from Juan, because the soap operas portray a love where suffering is involved, "Because to suffer for love is good. The pain all sweet somehow. In the end" (Cisneros 45). She understands her life in relation to the telenovelas she watched back in Mexico. Telenovelas have a dominant narrative that stems from a phallogocentric way of thinking. They reinforce strict gender ideologies that oppress women and contribute to a patriarchal society.

Telenovelas, which are often watched at home, can influence the ideology of a woman. Many of the telenovela scenes begin to represent what they should expect in their own lives. In "To Undermine the Feminist Telenovela: Unveiling and Redefining Gender in Cisneros's 'Woman Hollering Creek,'" Thamarai Selvi states that "When Cleófilas lived in Mexico, one of her few sources of entertainment was the telenovela, which also contributed to the formation of her social identity and raised her expectations about passion and romantic love" (Selvi 119). Selvi makes a valid point based on the formation of Cleófilas social identity. Cleófilas is influenced by what she has seen on the screen; it is what keeps her from going back home to Mexico. Cleófilas does not leave her abusive relationship immediately because she is ashamed. Although Cleófilas remembers her father's words before her departure to the U.S., fear of shame and humiliation from the town prevents her from reaching out to him for help. She is afraid that she will be cast as disgraceful by her family and her community. She discloses to the reader that she "thinks of her father's house" (Cisneros 50), but also expresses her concerns regarding returning home "but how could she go back there? What a disgrace. What could the

neighbors say? Coming home like that with one baby on her hip and one in the oven. Where's your husband?" (Cisneros 50). Cleófilas remains in her marriage, under the impression that the suffering will pass and it will be worth it, however, it does not pass. Her husband, Juan, is awfully controlling and he barely agrees to allow Cleófilas attend her doctor's appointment. He is paranoid that she will tell someone of the physical abuse that he puts her through. Living with Juan has developed the sense of La Facultad in Cleófilas, since she constantly has to monitor what she says to him and how she expresses herself. Throughout the story, she contemplates leaving her husband or staying, and for an instance, it seems as if she is on the verge of giving up because she says, "Cleófilas thought her life would have to be like that, like a telenovela, only now the episodes got sadder and sadder. And there were no commercials in between for comic relief. And no happy ending in sight" (Cisneros 53). She continues to compare her life to the telenovelas; however, this is not helpful since the telenovelas support a narrative that encourages women to fight for what they think is love.

Although it is the telenovelas that negatively shape Cleófilas's life, they are also one of her only modes of escape from reality. Amid the abuse from Juan, she also loses access to watching her telenovelas and is forced to resort to having one of her neighbors verbally explain what happens in each episode. Not having access to the telenovelas, decreases the influence that it has on Cleófilas, and as a result, she builds the courage to ask for help at her doctor's office. Her dream of having a life like the ones in telenovelas rapidly begins to dissipate. She is left with no other option but to take matters into her own hands. Cleófilas solicits help at the doctor's office, to get away from Juan; here is where she encounters a woman named Felice, who helps her escape. Felice embodies masculinity, therefore disrupting gendered expectations that Cleófilas is used to seeing in the telenovelas, and this comes as a surprise her. Felice owns a truck, she drives, she is loud, and she curses, Felice is everything that Cleófilas is not. In the midst of her escape plan, they pass by the infamous creek that ran behind Cleófilas's house and Felice hollers, this amazes Cleófilas. Earlier in the novel when Cleófilas asked a laundromat attendant what the arroyo represented, she thought "La Gritona. Such a funny name for such a lovely arroyo" (Cisneros 46). When she drives over the bridge with Juan as newlyweds she says, "Such a funny name for a creek so pretty and full of happily ever after" (Cisneros 47). Cleófilas comments foreshadowed the creek's representation of freedom from her abusive marriage. It is also indicative of the fact that she can only read the creek in terms of a fairy tale structure, which is a result of the role of the telenovelas. In the town, they associate the creek with a woman hollering in anger or in pain, but no one is certain. Therefore, when Felice hollers it represents a holler of freedom for herself, for Cleófilas, and for all the Latinas in similar situations. Cleófilas is running away with the help of a woman who shows her that independence can be accomplished, and this as Felice says, "Makes you want to holler like Tarzan" (Cisneros 56), Anzaldúa contributed to the reinterpretation of this legendary tale, that was once told to confine women in the space of the home. She believed that "la Jila is Cihuoacoatl, Snake Woman; she is la Llorona, Daughter of Night, traveling the dark terrains of the unknown searching for the lost parts of herself" (Anzaldúa 38). Considering Anzaldúa's work, the lost parts of herself that she refers to signify Latinas who break out of their imprisoned spaces within their homes and society. This represents characters such as the narrator in "The

Moths” and Cleófilas in “Woman Hollering Creek,” because they are Latinas who come to an understanding of the oppressive systems that affect their lives. Similar to the story of La Llorona being redefined, the ways in which Latinas in Literature are portrayed is changing. Authors are sharing the experiences of Latinas and the gender norms that we are expected to face, which affects our lives and our relationships within the space of the home. Gloria Anzaldúa’s Feminist Chicano theory in *Borderlands* has worked as the framework for this research. Her work on La Facultad plays a role in the stories that are told by authors in the field of US Latinx literature.

In 21st century Latinx literature, all characters are caught in the trap of rigid gender norms. They are forced to decide between remaining submissive in their homes, or rebelling and facing the consequences that their resistance will have on the relationships in the home. We can live life in fear of oppression and do nothing about it, or we can go out into the world aware of the challenges of gendered expectations. Taking control of your life, the way the characters studied in this research have done is one way that Latinas assert agency, and ultimately rebel. Something that might seem minimal in the space of the home can be received a rebellious and disrespectful, from what has been discussed we see how it affects the characters in an instrumental way. Once we are aware that we have the sense of La Facultad, and we have the information, what do we make of it? In Audre Lorde’s poem “A litany for survival” she says: “but when we are silent we are still afraid. So it is better to speak remembering we were never meant to survive.”

The sad reality is that gender roles are strictly enforced in the community and they are perpetuated in the home. Latinas are not meant to survive the oppression that they face; it is set up to confine them in the spaces of the home and provide reinforcement for a patriarchal society. Therefore, the women in US Latinx literature and Latinas all around the world are forced to ask themselves: are they better silent or is it better to speak? As we move forward in the context of U.S. Latinx literature, we can further reinterpret spaces that have once oppressed us and subvert them to authentically represent our real lived experiences.

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Maria Ahumada recently graduated from Florida International University (FIU) where she obtained her B.A. in English and a minor in Education. She was born in Barranquilla, Colombia and grew up in Queens, New York. During her undergraduate years at FIU, she worked as a front desk assistant at the Women's Center and the Center for Leadership and Service. Her work experience, the various English courses that she took as an undergraduate at FIU, and becoming an HSI Pathways Fellow inspired her interest in U.S. Latinx literature. Maria is pursuing her Ph.D. in English at the University of California, Davis. Her research focuses on the role that gender norms play in the home in U.S. Latinx literature. She aspires to become an English professor and engage undergraduate students with literature that voices their experiences, the way that it did for her.