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Espacios Alternativos, Alternate Spaces

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Comienzos, *Beginnings*:

“Hoy el sol
se escondió
y no quiso salir
te vio despertar
y le dio miedo de morir.”
—Calle 13

April 28, 2015

Dear *Ale*,

Be bold, take my hand, and run fast. If we take this path together, iron fences will be behind us. When we’ve crossed, see if you can come to forgive, but *recuerda*, you must never forget. *Nunca olvidas y respira el aire*—isn’t it different? This is chapter two.

Alexia, I have come back to you for reasons I will attempt to explain. These reasons are rooted in Norths, Souths, Easts, and Wests. In reasons that have been guided by “mythic spiritualities [infused and spurred] by political and cultural meanings” (Renée de la Torre, 2013, pg. 218). In reasons that have caused you to cross borders, territories, that have unaccustomed you to courage. If you are bold, you can come to understand the hand that is dismantling borders—the “steel curtains—chain link fence[s] crowded with tolled barbed wire[s]” (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987, pg. 2).

I hesitate to write this letter because I recognize your fear. I have seen it before. But, before you turn away, listen. Understand that what you are generating is “consciousness [situated in a] spiritual nation” attempting to rehabilitate you (de la Torre, 2013, pg. 220). Listen, for women like you, women unlike you, are in the middle of reaffirming a “territory, [an alternate route,] beyond borders,” a territory that will recognize your Chicana spirituality as concrete, as real (2013, pg. 220). So, don’t be afraid, because I need you to solidify our lives in the context of dominant structures. Here is where I tell you that my argument, our argument, will build off a primary site you have yet to acknowledge: your spirituality. By conceptualizing, understanding, and employing the latter, you will be able to see Chicana spirituality as a framework, a medium, capable of spurring artistic liberation and political leadership.

Ancient memories and legacies exist, but so do you.

Chapter Two, Part One: Erasure and Chicana Spirituality

Often times, Alexia, we don’t find spaces that “value [the] spiritual perspective and praxis grounded in [the] histories, politics, and dynamic cultures of our

Indigenous and mestiza/o ancestors” (Irene Lara and Elisa Facio, 2014, pg. 3). More often than not, we are squeezed into small, silent corners that translate into erasure and promote the legacies of patriarchy and colonialism. These small spaces, as a result of direct marginalization, then accumulate and transpire into “control over [our] spirits, [our] bodies, [and our] beings as women of color” (2014, pg. 4). Acknowledging the influence of this erasure and the ongoing role denial plays in our subjugation, we enable another alternative. This alternative is a self-determined, courageous state of process that sees personhood as essential. It requires a liberatory, personal—yet, communal—drive that can, in multiple fashions, enact a way of understanding our erasure. In seeing our position, we can come to create and maintain an inward-looking, critical lens that can lead us into dismantling and escaping the traps of current, hegemonic models. To attain this, we must look at the effects of our silencing and the possibilities this “alternative”—Chicana spirituality—is capable of generating.

Erasure, via the control of dominant, western culture, strikes away the “spiritual/material, inner/outer, individual/collective dimensions of [our] life that are parts of a larger whole, [a larger human experience]” (AnnaLouise Keating, 2008, pg. 54). In barring us from the stories and capitals that Chicanas are ready to create, leading structures of marginalization build an empire out of our “complex, interwoven” (2008, pg. 54) contributions. By invalidating our personal and communal “bodymindspirits,” our historical legitimacy and position as a “somebody” becomes irrelevant and unneeded—a literal stripping of inequity occurs (Lara and Facio, 2014, pg. 4). This current definition is unacceptable. As legacies, incubators, and perpetuators of resistance, Alexia, we will produce our own positions and consciousness. Our healing is based on this prospect. Therefore, it is in this battle against dominance, that “we will determine for ourselves what makes us feel whole, what brings us tranquility, strength, courage, to face the countless—not for one moment imagined—obstacles in the path toward being fulfilled human beings” that can, in the most basic sense, just be (2014, pg. 4). With this “interconnected web” in mind, we will defy and make sense of the erasure that has nullified our lived and living experiences (2014, pg. 4). To do this, we will adopt Chicana Spirituality in hopes of constructing a balance of personhood and creation.

Foundationally, Chicana Spirituality is “spirituality for social change, spirituality that posits a relational worldview and uses this holistic worldview to transform one’s self and one’s world” (Keating, 2008, pg. 54). It is a version of spirituality that revives ancestral traditions, spurs personal bravery, and can, in multiple forms, liberate us into life by reclaiming the spiritual world that was robbed by colonialism and imperialism. It is a groundbreaking innovation that, in reality, is ensouled into our state of processing. This spiritual development is an investigation and careful adoption “of indigenous and post-indigenous histories

and traditions” that permit us to remember the past (Keating, 2008, pg. 56). That permit us to “be the healing of the wounds” (Anzaldúa). Assuming this perspective, we will allow for room to “make sense of deaths and destruction, and pull the pieces [of our] life back together” (Anzaldúa). In doing so, we can take this meaning-making agency as an avenue that can guide our spiritual components of courage into recognition and out of invisibility. In using this Chicana Spirituality, we begin to

cope with racial and gender oppression and other modern *maldades*—not so much the seven deadly sins, but the small acts of *desconocimientos*: ignorance, frustrations, tendencies toward self-destructiveness, feelings of betrayal and powerlessness, and poverty of spirit and imagination (Anzaldúa quoted in Keating, 2008, pg. 57).

Beyond that, however, this approach encompasses more than the individual. Chicana Spirituality, in its practical sense, moves out of its small, silent corner to “expose, challenge, and work to transform unjust social structures, [and unlike rigid religious models] which often impose authority on individuals through external teachings, texts, standards, and leaders, spiritual activism locates authority[—independent of organized religion and rigidity—] within each individual” (Keating, 2008, pg. 57-58). It is a movement that allows us to emerge as powerful, as dynamic, as resistant in a society obsessed with silencing our self-awareness. Chicana Spirituality, in our inner-workings, is an ongoing journey in search for our personal explanations, fulfillments, and integrity midst historical trauma and contemporary subordination. And as such, it becomes an essence of living, a bridge of hope when no materials are present. It becomes home when home is undetermined. A third space that examines dichotomies, dualities, shakes off binaries and, most imperatively, sees intersectionality as a mode of recovery.

Alexia, Chicana Spirituality is a catalyst. It is a creator of selves, and as such, it produces meaning and manifestation. It leads to an understanding of self-politics and a construction of knowledge spearheaded by you alone. In dismantling erasure via Chicana Spirituality, you reap this tool’s greatest ability: creation. Understanding. A cultural production that speaks, seeks, and looks to interpret “Chicanas’ economic, political, and cultural subordination in U.S. and Chicano societies” (C. Alejandra Elenes, 2000, pg. 105). In being able to produce the former, in being able to adopt these social and spiritual capitals, women like you, and women unlike you, create and (re)discover master narratives that refuse to neglect the “multiple forms of oppression including race, class, gender, age, and sexual orientation” (2000, pg. 105). You, in mastering another space, can rearticulate the world that has been voided from you. You become a “*testimonio* that has...an urgency to communicate [and address] repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, [and] struggle for survival” (2000, pg.105). In communicating, you become the narrator of your own portrayal in the fight for

platform. This, Alexia, *this*, is what you must turn to. And in doing so, you will embrace the narratives you were once afraid to write. This story is about liberation, and under the influence of those words, you are responsible of producing your own reality. This spirituality, *Ale*, is transformative. It rebuilds.

“Las caras mas bonitas que he conocido
Soy la fotografía de un desaparecido
La sangre dentro de tus venas
Soy un pedazo de tierra que vale la pena”
—Calle 13

Chapter Two, Part Two: Chicana Spirituality and Artistic Liberation

“Soy, soy lo que dejaron. Soy toda la sobra de lo que se robaron”
—Calle 13

As the testament that it is, Chicana Spirituality hails back to the histories that are etched into our skins. It is a lesson characterized by a double consciousness, and as such, you must document it. In efforts to do so, artistic liberation becomes possible.

Chicana Spirituality spurs artistic liberation because “this sense of connection and community compels Chicana/artists to delve into, sift through, and rework native imagery” (Anzaldúa, 1998, pg. 257). By revitalizing and reviving our indigenous being and culture “as people who have been stripped of our history” (1998, pg. 257), we will use our “language, identity, and pride...to find what we have lost by imaginatively digging into our cultural roots and making art out of our findings” (1998, pg. 257). Artistic liberation, under this microscope, then recalls the pieces of who we are and what we were. Art, in this sense, “represents the cultural rebirth of the Chicana struggling to free herself from oppressive...roles” and stances (1998, pg. 257). This is imperative because cultural rebirth enables legitimacy in spheres that have kept us as still-borns, as subjects under reoccurring themes of oppression. What is more, this newly found artistic liberation via Chicana spirituality allows us to ask new questions. It allows us to think critically of the definitions that have subordinated us and the definitions we are in the process of creating. By being influenced by our personal spiritualities, we come to take our past as contexts needed to develop mechanisms of visibility and resistance to process and deconstruct marginalization and assimilation. In accepting this process of spiritual practice, we (re)build an alternate state of mind—a third space, a creative space—where expression happens. Through artistic, cultural productions, we picture and “render [the] world and its people [as] more than mere surfaces of life...[We] see [them as] a

connection to the spirit world, to the underworld, and to other realities” (Anzaldúa, 1998, pg. 258). Consequently, in adopting this examination and production, we connect to essential, burrowed experiences that can orient and define the art that we are creating as “tied to survival and sanity” (Anzaldúa, 1998, pg. 259). This is why Chicana Spirituality is persistent in our fight for more. Chicana Spirituality, under this artistic use, becomes our “locus of resistance, of rupture, of implosion and explosion, and of pitting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage...[our art, in every capacity,] *cambian el punto de referencia*”—change our points of reference and truth (Anzaldúa, 1998, pg. 259). In accepting the elements of our spiritual approaches, we grow to see and embrace our sites of protection and lived reality. We come to see silence not as crippling, but as a transformative, construction of knowledge that can allow us to “go inward, [to] attend to feelings and [creativities] where earth, [the woman], and energy emerge” (Anzaldúa, 1998, pg. 260). Living our artistic liberation through Chicana Spirituality means “surrendering to the rhythm and...grace of our artworks...[it means crossing] the border into another subjective level of awareness, [into another shift,] into different and new terrains” untainted by dehumanizing politics (Anzaldúa, 1998, pg. 260). Until we see Chicana Spirituality as capable of holding us up to this ever-present knowledge of resistance, we will always be presented to different outlets of marginalization. However, we are stronger than dominant culture, we are stronger than the vitality these hegemonic structures try to feed off of, but, in order to acknowledge this strength, we must see alternate avenues as possibilities of more. Chicana Spirituality is this avenue. And as can be seen from

las razas *running in my veins*, mezcladas dentro de mi...Mi cuerpo vive dentro y fuera de otras culturas *and [my expression of them]*. *For me,[after all,] being Chicana is not enough. It is only one of my multiple identities...[but], it is this site and time [spent in spirituality], en este tiempo y lugar [en spiritualidad], where...I[will] create my identity, [my salvation,] con mi arte* (Anzaldúa, 1998, pg. 262)

Recupera todo lo que te robaron. Recupérate what they’ve stolen.

Chapter Two, Part Three: Chicana Spirituality and Political Leadership

“Soy lo que me enseñó mi padre
 El que no quiere a su patria
 No quiere a su madre
 Soy América latina
 Un pueblo sin piernas pero que camina.”
 —Calle 13

Sensibility. Alexia, let no one tell you otherwise. Your ambition is valid—living it is your sensibility.

Ale, at the beginning of this letter, I mentioned our unaccustomed courage. This unaccustomed courage is a result of the standardized, universal confinements that our structures of thinking have been crammed into. I promise this is isn't permanent. Nothing is. What solidifies this claim is our existence; is *nuestra cultura de intersecciones*—our culture of intersectionalities—and legitimizing this means representing generations on our face and acknowledging the “skeletons within” (Lara Medina and Gilbert R. Cadena, 2002, pg. 69). When we affirm the latter under the influence of Chicana Spirituality, political efficacy and leadership surmises.

In order to “examine...spiritual and political significance”, we must consider the space Chicana Spirituality affords us to be politically active (Medina and Cadena, 2002, pg. 71). As mentioned prior, Chicana Spirituality is rooted in spiritual activism. It is a tool and sensibility that “enlarge[s]...collective historical memor[ies] that give life to past, present, and future generations...[it is a] connectedness of life [that defies] mainstream attempts to silence a culture and [is] a spirituality ‘forged in the struggle against domination’” (Medina and Cadena, 2002, pg. 72). As an alternate ideology whose purpose is to draft and redraft new discourses and routes of thinking, Chicana Spirituality catalyzes political leadership by grounding spiritual development in overcoming. In seeing spirituality as “luminosa y activa—luminous and active,” enough will never be enough (Anthony Lioi, 2008, pg. 73). For simply being, simply acting “is not enough. Many of us [on this spiritual journey, have to learn how to] sit perfectly still, [have to] sense the presence of Soul and commune with Her” (Anzaldúa quoted by Lioi, 2008, pg. 73). In achieving this stillness in action, we can come to commune with realization, a-ha moments, and light. In sensing our Chicana Spirituality, Alexia, “the realization that victimization can be overcome, and old stereotypes of the passive, powerless woman, ‘the defeated images,’ can be left behind” (2008, pg. 73). This leaving behind then constitutes the creation of a political philosophy that asserts your contributions as rational, as logical, as real. Consequently, in leaving behind the notions that “the spirit is understood as ahistorical, apolitical, and nonmaterial...[we can come to see that our leadership, our spiritual essence, is a] choice beyond orthodoxy” (Lioi, 2008, pg. 74). When we see the later institute and establish its self, we become intermediaries between the divides and standards that say that spirituality and political leadership cannot interweave, that say that these often-pitted “antitheses” cannot be seen as fusing syntheses.

Considering the fusions we have validated, Alexia, there is something you must remember. In the creation of this spiritual responsibility and medium, you have to constantly take back the pieces of you that are and were robbed. To do so,

you must “find strength and renewal in [the] struggle to survive and prosper as part of a [collective]” (Medina and Cadena, 2002, pg. 86). This collective is your reason to reinvent and lead. It is in the

reinvention of traditional ways to express contemporary concerns [that] renews and (re)centers people hungry for spiritual nourishment in their continuing struggle for justice. Continuity with our ancestral ways, whether conscious or not, heals the wounds incurred by the historical memory of European and Euro-American colonization and challenges ongoing attempts to silence Indigenous and mestizo peoples” (2002, pg. 86).

In the rewriting of this historical memory through political efficacy, you will be establishing and claiming a space that is designed for resistance and valuing. This is significant because Chicana Spirituality can create a new narrative, and in the construction of it, more women like you, and women unlike you, can come to build a unified front empowered enough to silence the legacy of exclusion. By being enabled by Chicana Spirituality, your political leadership can come to recover the social realities and cultural histories that do not see openings in mainstream discourses. What is more, by seeing Chicana Spirituality as a vehicle available for political leadership, women like you, and women unlike you, can come to

creatively maneuver the fissures, boundaries, and borders and consciously make choices about what aspects of diverse worldviews nurture the complexity of [your] spiritual and biological mestizaje, and what enables [leadership] with transcendent powers (Medina and Cadena, 2002, pg. 88).

Liberty, under this fight, means reflecting and ensuing a process that honors the intersection of politics and spirituality. In joining these together, we can present our transformations and contributions as valid, necessary, and alive. Leadership is multi-faceted and purposeful, and as a concept that should be rooted in transformation and awareness, it should be able to move out of dominant containers.

En Vueltas, In Turnings:

“Vamos caminando
Aquí se respira lucha
Vamos caminando
Yo Canto porque se escucha”
—Calle 13

Ale, in this time together, we have examined how Chicana Spirituality has enabled artistic liberation and political leadership under the legacy of erasure. In

this time together, you remembered the whispers of your ancestors, the potential of our spirit, and have seen the sources of your creation. You have tried to find home in what is left of your hope, and you have constructed a chance at life in rewriting your unwritten and neglected histories. You have done much and I hope you aren't tired. There is so much more to do. There is so much more you and I haven't said. Haven't deconstructed. Haven't decolonized.

I know you have yet to explore spiritual assets, let alone come to comprehend the push and pull factors enabling it, but know that it and you are there. You are enough, it is enough. There is value in this writing, in your search for more, because *you, you*, decided to write again. You got tired of your exhaustion. You got tired of blinding anger, crippling legacies, and invisibility. And in that weariness, you chose to remember. Your untraced stories remind you that there is much left to say and much left to form. **So, *continue***. Alexia, *continue*. **Continue**.

Little *Ale*, I wrote this open letter to you because clarity is attainable. Clarity, existence, is not a question left up to meritocracy and privilege, it is inherent—you own slices of yourself that you have yet to unbury. **So, *dig***. And in your excavation, I need you to listen. Listen because there are borders in front us and borders in back of us. What you do with them is up to your own volition, but search for me if you need to run. I will be here to hold your hand, listen, and run. I will be here because we, regardless of structures, are true, we are here, and like our histories, we are worthy of memory. We are worth of memory because our winds come from and are constructed by the Norths, Souths, Easts, and Wests. **So, *the air?*** It'll always taste different because it is a reminder of the work left to do. **So, *celebrate this***. Celebrate it because we need reminders of our contributions midst multiple battles. **So, *take this letter as your next reminder***. Take it because you wrote this to argue the power of Chicana Spirituality and its creation: artistic liberation and political leadership. In arguing this, you battled a contender, erasure. In arguing this, you built another master narrative that legitimized your resistance and spirit. In speaking unspoken words, you reminded yourself your relevance—you are alive, little one, you are alive. For this reason, I need you to keep catalyzing, to keep continuing, because the importance of this argument can no longer be marginalized. Your spirit is calling for you, and if you didn't consider her and/or her potential, then letters wouldn't be possible. **So, *make it possible, because another chapter is waiting***.

“Hoy el sol se escondió, y no quiso salir.
Te vio despertar y le dio miedo de morir.”
—Calle 13

Today, the sun hid and refused to come out;
but he saw you wake up and was scared to die.”
—Calle 13

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