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Elizabeth Jacobs

## *Shadow of a Man: Chicana/Latina* Drama as Embodied Feminist Practice

One of the most important influences on the development of Cherrie Moraga's feminist theatre was undoubtedly the work of Maria Irene Fornes, the Cuban American playwright and director. Moraga wrote the first drafts of her second play *Shadow of a Man* while on Fornes's residency programme at the INTAR Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Laboratory in New York, and later Fornes directed the premiere at the Brava-Eureka Theatre in San Francisco (1990). The play radically restages the Chicana body through an exploration of the sexual and gendered politics of the family. Much has been written on how the family has traditionally been the stronghold of Chicana/o culture, but *Shadow of a Man* stages one of its most powerful criticisms, revealing how the complex kinship structures often mask male violence and sexual abuse. Using archival material and a range of critical studies, in this article Elizabeth Jacobs explores Moraga's theatre as an embodied feminist practice and as a means to displace the entrenched ideology of the family. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Department of English and Creative Writing, Aberystwyth University, as part of the 2014 International Women's Day events. Elizabeth Jacobs is the author of *Mexican American Literature: the Politics of Identity* (Routledge, 2006). Her articles have appeared in *Comparative American Studies* (2012), *Journal of Adaptation and Film Studies* (2009), *Theatres of Thought: Theatre, Performance, and Philosophy* (2008) and *New Theatre Quarterly* (2007). She lectures in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Aberystwyth University.

Key terms: Cherrie Moraga, Maria Irene Fornes, politics of the body, family, trauma, sexuality, Catholicism.

IN THIS ARTICLE I examine the theatre of Cherrie Moraga and her staging of the Chicana body and feminist politics. Moraga is one of the leading feminist writers and activists associated with developments in Chicana feminism, and has become a leading practitioner in the field of Chicana feminist theatre. Moraga's early plays feature a number of radical revisions of patriarchal constructions of Chicana subjectivity in ways that conflate Chicana feminist practice with the female body. Moraga has stated that: 'my writings have always had bodies . . . and as such are best rendered through the physical space of staging.'<sup>1</sup>

The content of Moraga's plays, as well as a number of the staged productions, reflects strongly the emphasis she places on the body. The Cuban American playwright and director Maria Irene Fornes, who helped Moraga to develop her playwriting and staged two of her early plays, including *Shadow of a Man*, is

known for her 'intense physicality of approach', and the creation of 'embodied characters' that 'partially recuperate the fragmentation' of female subjectivity from the violence of dominant forms of representation.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, At the Foot of the Mountain Theatre, one of the earliest theatre groups to work with Moraga on staging her plays, frequently placed an emphasis on 'womb-like images in which 'stark lights focus on two or three actors moving against dark emptiness'.<sup>3</sup>

Other more recent productions of Moraga's works feature significant and dramatic corporeal sounds of heartbeats or heavy breathing (*Shadow of a Man*), and fragmented images of torn or disturbed body parts on screens (*Coatlicue's Call*). The effect of this staging, as well as the character development in Moraga's work, is a radical medium of expressing an embodied feminist practice.

## Theatre, Patriarchy and Body Politics

Moraga's work, like other Chicana feminist drama, emerged as a community-based theatre in the early 1980s, alongside broader developments in women's theatre, feminist movements, and Chicana literature in the United States. Like these more broadly defined developments in feminist activity, the emergence of Chicana theatre was fraught with difficulties and lack of due recognition.

rior to the 1970s and the rise of women's drama, Chicano theatre was dominated by the work of Luis Valdez and his El Teatro Campesino (Farmworkers Theatre) troupe, which was closely allied to the National Farm Workers' Association (UFW) and the male-dominated Chicano Movement. They performed a variety of *actos* at various sites, and provided the dramatic models for many of the theatre groups that arose thereafter. More recently feminist critics have closely explored the early theatre practices of Valdez and his troupe for the ways in which they reproduced gender inequality onstage, arguing that issues related to women and sexuality were subsumed by the overriding issues of *la causa* (the cause), and that this was the main obstacle for the establishment of a Chicana feminist theatre. Tiffany Ana Lopez states this more explicitly:

The presence of physical bodies in performance enabled the translation of the patriarchal nationalist ideology into an accessible vocabulary of community building. . . . Bodies on stage were used to symbolize what roles one could play in the Chicano political movement. In their attempt to forge a discourse of unity Chicano intellectuals drew upon family . . . The model for nationalist community building one exemplified by their references to community members, *carnales*, male brothers . . . but in translating nationalism into a visual realm Valdez staged the brown masculine body of the father as a representative figure of the community, and leadership.<sup>4</sup>

Within Chicano culture the traditional family replicated Freud's Oedipal economy shaped by the father as transcendental signifier. Both Moraga's earlier play *Giving up the Ghost* (1986) and the slightly later play *Shadow of a*

*Man* (1991/1994) articulate, however, a controversial use of the Freudian Oedipal complex in ways that yield an image of family pathology.<sup>5</sup> Before the emergence of Chicana feminist theatre and due to the dominant structures of representation, Chicanas on stage were confined to subordinate roles, especially in relation to the family that was traditionally represented as a safe haven and locus of culture.

The familial ideology that dominated Chicano theatre and discourse also worked towards masking a distinct gendered and sexual hierarchy that subordinated women and women's bodies within the organizational structures of the home and the traditional family order. Women's bodies were thus organized in a symbolic system that defined their worthiness in terms of sexual functioning and reproductive capabilities. By replicating these stereotypes on stage, the machismo politics of Valdez have come to be considered inherently 'sexist' and as representing 'Chicanas as "other" (that which is not male) and as objects of desire or derision.'<sup>6</sup> The Chicana theatre critic Yarbro-Bejarano stated that:

The phase that coincided with the heyday of cultural nationalism produced ordering narratives that tended to exclude the Chicana from the subject position and define her sexuality in terms of *la Malinche* or *la Virgen* within the heterosexual hierarchy of the family.<sup>7</sup>

### Abject Bodies: *La Virgen* and *La Malinche*

The sexual stereotypes of *la Virgen* and *la Malinche* were part of a binary logic that typified *la Virgen* as the good woman who obeys and is submissive to male needs. *La Malinche*, on the other hand, has been traditionally inscribed as the *mujer mala* (the bad woman), a translator from the colonial period whose sexual union with the conquistador Hernan Cortes is said to have made possible the defeat of the Aztec nation. Moraga states that *la Malinche* has thus been traditionally viewed not as 'innocent victim, but . . . the guilty party . . . ultimately responsible for her own sexual victimization'.<sup>8</sup>

Analyzing the stereotyping tendencies of

this discourse, Emma Pérez argues how the contempt for Chicanas within their own culture began with this Oedipal conquest triangle; and thus the bodies of *la Malinche* and, by implication, *la Virgen* are the most problematic to be reconfigured within Chicana feminist discourse.<sup>9</sup> Many critics have also argued how this discourse reveals that gender is a colonialist concept:

The scopic regime that emerged vis-à-vis the colonization of the Americas was gendered as well as racialised. The visual dynamic required for determining 'masculine' and 'feminine' categories emerged as a defining feature of colonial relations in tandem with epidermalization.<sup>10</sup>

Moraga's theatre aims to reclaim the Chicana body from this history of colonisation. She states:

In MeXicano terms, women's sexuality has occupied a fundamental site of abjection in the collective imagination since Malintzin Tenepal's fateful rape by the conquistador Hernan Cortes. Abjection: debasement, depravation, abnormality. We are despised from within and without – our bodies, the conquered nation.<sup>11</sup>

The legacy of bodily abjection has been closely explored in recent Chicana feminist criticism. Lopez, for example, argues that women's bodies have come to represent that which is most despised in Chicano culture. Female sexuality is considered terrifying in the sense that it has traditionally come to represent seduction and violation.<sup>12</sup> In more specific terms, the patriarchal inscription of *la Malinche* dating from the colonial period constructs 'the female body as "other" to male bodies', as 'the "mouth" (from which she spoke her translations) and the vagina (from which she was labelled *la chingada*)'.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently both these female body parts have become violently marked as sites of shame in the collective imaginary.

### Re-staging the Chicana Body

The representation of the female body as a series of fragmented parts or physically separate pieces highlights the discursive and scopic dimensions of the colonialist con-

struction of gender difference, although this has now become part of a wider project of reconstruction and recuperation of the Chicana body in contemporary feminist writing and theatre. While the *la Malinche/la Chingada* paradigm continues to haunt systems of representation through reenactments of the drama of the colonial conquest and the gendered speaking body, feminist revisions allow for a partial recuperation of this fragmentation. Moraga states that

the violation of the collective body is re-membered in these staged enactments. Here the pieces of ourselves broken by racist and colonial incursions are re-collected and reconfigured through an art of social transformation.<sup>14</sup>

Moraga's staged female bodies are thus an act of re-seizing the word and the locus of the speaking subject in ways that disrupt dominant narrative patterns of representation. Her plays continue to explore how and in what ways the abject Chicana body has the capacity to disrupt hegemonic culture, including patriarchal models of the family that transmit and maintain sexualised hierarchies.

*Shadow of a Man* stages this quite literally and figuratively, as it is a family play and the stage and lighting are dominated by the appearance of huge and looming shadows both of the father and the crucifix. At the same time, and as Huerta points out, this sense of male dominance was originally less clear cut, as the play was

originally written for four women and two 'shadows', clouded images of the men in the story. . . . In an early draft, directed as a stage reading . . . Manuel and Conrado appeared only as shadows, behind a white scrim. They were never actually seen.<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, and having been developed by Fornes, this characterization changed and the male actors became 'visible entities' on stage, while the female characters more consciously embodied Chicana feminist politics.<sup>16</sup> In many ways *Shadow of a Man* also develops Moraga's earlier family play, *Giving up the Ghost*, as it extends beyond the traditional and immediate familial structures towards

an analysis of the kind of interaction sexual and otherwise that takes place between the family and its kin networks. One of the main characters is Lupe, a twelve-year-old girl who is visibly situated on the borders of adolescence and puberty. The other main characters are Lupe's primary and extended family including her father, mother, sister, auntie, and an uncle otherwise known as *compadre* Conrado.

### *Shadow of a Man*

The systems of relations within the family such as *compadrazgo* refer to the relationships within Chicano families that create 'fictive kin' among the community. People chosen as godparents by the immediate family become *padrinos* and *compadres* (godparents and parents who become co-parents) – Moraga stating that 'in Mexican culture, it is a very special bond, akin to that of blood ties, sometimes stronger'.<sup>17</sup> As I argue below, the play throws new light on these long-established relations. In *Shadow of a Man* she stages what she terms 'the visceral intimacy of oppression' that can occur within these extended family structures.<sup>18</sup> The twelve-year-old Lupe, a reference to the Virgen of Guadalupe and thus the good woman of Mexican mythology, is especially caught up in this nominally heterosexually-based family structure in a number of disturbing ways.

The drama takes place in the family home in Los Angeles in 1969 and at the height of Raza activism in the Chicano movement. The implications of this date, time, and setting for the play are also significant within Chicana feminist drama as this was the period of intense male political activity, which based many of its organizational structures and activity around a male-dominated family model. Moraga situates the Chicana body in ways that radically refigure the patriarchal structures of the family, exposing its hierarchy and potential for abuse. She states of her theatre work: 'It is as close to direct political activism as I can get as an artist, for theatre requires the body to make testimony and requires other bodies to bear witness to it.'<sup>19</sup>

*Shadow of a Man* restages the politics of the

Chicano family, revealing how the complex familial structures associated with *compadrazgo* mask male violence and sexual abuse. In many ways, it provides a testimonial evidence of sorts and demands that the audience bear witness to it. As a play it has been shaped and reshaped many times and in many contexts, providing a fragmented but fascinating record of its development and production history.

It is a long-running project that has had multiple drafts, performances, and publications. Initially developed through the Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Project or INTAR (International Arts Relations Inc) run by Maria Irene Fornes in New York from 1981 to 1992, it was then staged as a reading in 1989 at the tenth Los Angeles Theatre Centre's New Works Festival. It was also read at a number of other venues, including the American Conservatory Theatre's Playroom and later that year at the South Coast Repertory's Hispanic Playwrights Festival. It received its world premiere in San Francisco in 1990 produced by Brava for Women in the Arts and the Eureka Theatre Company, where it was directed by Fornes, who also designed the set.<sup>20</sup>

The first published text of *Shadow of a Man* appeared in the anthology *Shattering the Myth: Plays by Hispanic Women* in 1991, and in 1994 it appeared in a collection of Moraga's drama titled *Heroes and Saints and Other Plays*. The 1991 and 1994 texts are based primarily on the Brava-Eureka production, with some later revisions by the playwright.<sup>21</sup> There are, however, significant differences between these published versions, the various stage productions, and the archival material that contains the drafts of Moraga's work, which call for closer examination when considering her staging and representation of Chicanas as an embodied feminist practice.

### **Sexuality, Catholicism, and Secrets**

Lupe, the young twelve-year-old daughter, opens the play dramatically in both the 1991 and the 1994 editions. Both editions also use the same settings, which present an interpenetration between domestic and religious

spaces. This setting is symbolized by the presence of a number of props that both suggest a domestic interior, particularly a bathroom, and the confessional or altar. The notes to Act I, Scene i, state:

At rise, spot on Lupe, staring with deep intensity into the bathroom mirror. She wears a Catholic school uniform. She holds a votive candle under her chin and a rosary with a crucifix in her hand. Her face is a circle of light in the darkness. The shadow of the crucifix looms over the back wall.<sup>22</sup>

As the lights rise on stage, the audience see Lupe's disembodied head in a strikingly lit liminal act of looking in the bathroom mirror. Her body is cast in shadow by the light of a votive candle, as is the rest of the set, which is dominated by the iconography of the Catholic Church. Due to the dramatic contrasts in lighting, the scenographic elements suggest the uncertainty of Lupe's place and sexuality within the parameters of the family and Catholicism. The atmosphere of the scene is heightened by the light cast by the votive candle, making the large shadow of the crucifix 'loom large' over the back of the stage.

The setting thus firmly establishes an atmosphere of intense and claustrophobic religiosity that dominates Lupe's physical appearance. By implication the scene suggests the predicament faced by many women, including young girls who are dominated and oppressed by the patriarchal, religious, and social institutions that are associated with Mexican Catholicism. The props used on stage also emphasize the clandestine aspects of hidden or censored desire, since the notes state that the play opens on to the interior of a house, in which there are three main rooms, including the kitchen, bathroom and daughters' bedroom:

Rooms are divided by representative walls that rise about sixteen inches from the floor, yet still give the impression of providing some minimal privacy for secrets both shared and concealed.<sup>23</sup>

As the play proceeds, the audience is made aware of the 'minimal privacy' in the house, of family secrets, and the tension surround-

ing clandestine desire. Although the setting is unchanged, Lupe's opening soliloquy is expressed differently in each version of the play. In the 1991 edition, she confesses a sense of guilt at how she is haunted by her sinful secrets, which she consciously withholds from the priest during confession.

LUPE: sometimes I think I should tell somebody about myself. It's a sin to have secrets. A'least the priest is a'pose to find out everything that's insida you. I try. I really do try, but no matter how many times I make confession, no matter how many times I try to tell the priest what I hold insida me. I know I'm still lying. Sinning. Keeping secrets.

*She pauses before the reflection, then blows out the candle. Fade out.*<sup>24</sup>

The 1994 edition is notable for its development of this opening soliloquy and differs considerably from earlier versions of the play. Here, Lupe's soliloquy again expresses a confession while looking in the bathroom mirror, although her speech has been developed since the earlier version and now articulates a much more intimate and bodily sexual transgression, including that made against the conventional morals of society and the church.

LUPE: I think there's somethin' wrong with me. I have ex-ray eyes. (*Staring.*) I can see through Sister Genevieve's habit, through her thick black belt wit' the rosary hanging from it, through her scapular and cotton slip. She has a naked body under there. I try not to see Sister Genvieve this way, but I can't stop. (*Pause.*) I look at other kids' faces. Their eyes are smart like Frankie Pacheco or sleepy like Chela la Bembona, but they seem to be seeing things purty much as they are. Not ex-ray or nuthin'.<sup>25</sup>

Lupe's speech relates her sense of disquiet at the sexual nature of her private thoughts. She has been heterosexually conditioned by family and church laws to consider same-sex desire as wrong. She secretly sees the nun's naked body as she undresses her and denudes her of her Catholicism item by item and in ways that signify her growing sexual awareness and same-sex desire.

Judith Butler states in her discussion of

‘veiling and unveiling’ in Lacanian theory, and in her reconfiguration of the associated phallogocentrism, that ‘what is unveiled is precisely the repudiated desire, that which is abjected by heterosexist logic. . . . In a sense what is unveiled or exposed is a desire that is produced through a prohibition’.<sup>26</sup> Lupe’s imaginary undressing of the nun clearly signifies clandestine and transgressive crossings within a heterosexually configured Chicano culture, and suggests what can and cannot be spoken of and what can and cannot be publicly exposed.

It is clearly inconceivable to the family, who are steeped in Catholicism and heterosexist logic, that Lupe could look at another woman in a sexual way. Ultimately what Moraga is proposing through the staging of Lupe’s sexuality here reflects what Butler terms ‘the displacement of the hegemonic symbolic of heterosexist sexual difference’ that, in this instance, dominates traditional familial ideology and forms of female representation within Chicano culture.<sup>27</sup>

### ‘Censored Sites of Knowing’

The audience becomes aware of how Lupe’s sexuality has been compromised by dominant heterosexist structures and systems of thought, as Moraga gradually but ambiguously reveals that Lupe is possibly a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her father, Manuel. His character is staged as powerfully domineering and violent, and as the primary cause of the traumatization experienced by several women in the family. During Act I, Scene viii, the mother re-enacts a violent but imaginary suffocation and drowning of Lupe following physical abuse from her husband, which causes Lupe to faint:

HORTENSIA: I have to turn off the sound. No llores más, bebita. (*Smothering LUPE’s cries, she pushes her head on the floor.*) I cover your little head with my hand and push it down into the water. (*LUPE stiffens.*) Your piernitas stop kicking. Your skin turns white and your little hands float up like a toy baby. Sí. Eso. Everything is quiet.

LUPE passes out. She lies limp on the floor. There

is a pause, then HORTENSIA suddenly realizes what she has done.<sup>28</sup>

This scene highlights the tension in the family that has been brought about not only by Manuel’s violence, but also by clandestine heterosexual relationships facilitated by *compadrazgo*, as Hortensia knows that Lupe’s real father is the *compadre* Conrado and so she attempts to destroy the evidence. The victimization and powerlessness of the women in the family is thus ultimately a result of the traumatization brought about through male sexualized and bodily violence, with Manuel frequently beating and abusing his wife as well as his daughter.

There are a number of significant scenes in both published versions of the play and in the staged productions that hint at the incestuous relationship between Manuel and Lupe. Moraga terms it ‘an unwanted intimacy’ that determines the theatrical place of Lupe’s twelve-year-old body as she is forced to ‘occupy censored sites of knowing on the Anglo-American stage.’<sup>29</sup> The archival material that contains a variety of drafts of the play substantiates the incestuous aspects of Manuel’s and Lupe’s relationship while simultaneously deviating radically from the later published editions of the work.<sup>30</sup> At the end of Act I, Scene iv, in the 1991 edition, and Act I, Scene iii, in the 1994 edition, the stage directions and dialogue between Manuel and Lupe are expressed thus:

MANUEL crosses to the girls’ bedroom. . . . Lights rise on LUPE in bed, the covers pulled up tight around her. She clutches a rosary in one hand. MANUEL stands at the doorway, his shadow filling it.

MANUEL: I know la Chiquita is waiting for me. She’s got a soft heart, mi ni ita. She makes sure her papacito comes home safe.

HORTENSIA: If he doesn’t give a damn about himself, why should I care?

MANUEL (*going to LUPE*): Lupita! . . . ¿Stás durmiendo, hijita? (*He lays his huge man’s head on LUPE’s small shoulder.*) You’ll never leave me ?no, mijita?

LUPE: No, papi.

MANUEL: Eres mi preferida, ¿sabes?

LUPE: Sí, papi.

MANUEL: You're different from the rest. You got a heart that was made to love. Don't ever leave me baby.

LUPE: No, papi. I won't.

*He begins to weep softly. Her thin arm mechanically caresses his broad back. A muted tension falls over the scene. A few moments later, LETICIA enters the bedroom, brings MANUEL to his feet.*

LETICIA: C'mon, Dad. Let's get you to bed now.

*He gets up without resistance. LETICIA holds him up as they exit. Fade out.*<sup>31</sup>

### Trauma and the Chicana Body

Archival material reveals that the drafts of these scenes were originally somewhat differently expressed. In one disturbing instance the father goes to the daughters' bedroom and forces Lupe under great duress to strip off her pyjamas for his pleasure. Later, the father's sexual transgressions are recounted through a traumatic dialogue between the brother (Rodrigo) and the other daughter (Leticia). Moraga drafts the scene in ways that reveal the damaging effects of incest (if we consider that Lupe is Manuel's daughter) and/or non-consensual under-age sex (as it is obvious that Lupe is in fact the *compadre* Conrado's daughter) on those who bear witness within the family.

The archival papers reveal how the sister Leticia is profoundly traumatized by her inadvertent witnessing of the abusive relationship between her father and Lupe, as can be seen by her disrupted speech patterns and modes of expression when recounting the details of the incestuous relationship to their brother Rodrigo. In many ways her traumatization suggests Christina Wald's point that:

Trauma is that which cannot be narrated, as a sudden and chance event, it breaks with narrative patterns of making sense of one's past and instead returns in forms that are distinct from narrative memory.<sup>32</sup>

The frequent pauses in Leticia's speech suggest both the difficulty of expressing the incestuous relationship and her delayed response to the traumatic events she has witnessed and encountered. Throughout the dialogue with her brother, Moraga's notes

state that she is said to have 'a frozen expression', or a lack of expression, as she recounts the details of Lupe's abuse. At times this suggests an automotive dissociative state commonly associated with a traumatic experience, and her sense of guilt at her compelled but complicitous silence when the abuse took place. In the drafts of the play, both daughters and mother are victims of the father's actions, and articulate the long-lasting psychic effects of his abuse in the sense that they are all unable to respond to it adequately at the moment of its occurrence.

The equivalent scenes in the published editions are not as traumatic as this, and neither are many of the staged productions, which range quite widely in the degree of their interpretations of the intimate or incest scene, but which nonetheless suggest a degree of censorship of Moraga's original drafted material. The inappropriateness and invasiveness of Manuel's actions, even in the published versions and in stage productions, nonetheless imply a potentially violent blurring of boundaries for Lupe physically on stage as, during the published and staged scenes, his intimacy with his young daughter provides a disturbing physical image: namely, that of a 'huge man's head' which contrasts grotesquely with the little girl's 'small shoulder' it is laid on. Moraga expressed her own shock at her first viewing of this scene under Fornes' directorship:

I had written the scene, seen it enacted numerous times in other rehearsals and staged readings by actors sixteen years and older, but never by a real live girl whose body balanced itself precariously and quite beautifully on the verge of puberty. So when that two-hundred-pound man playing the father dropped his drunken head on to Lupe's blanketed, eleven-year-old belly, I was not prepared for the holy terror of that moment. Although I had written the scene, I had not anticipated my own sense of revulsion, as I felt the audience gasp at the embodied experience of Lupe's vulnerability. It was exactly the effect I conjured in the words of my writings, but it took the Chicana/Latina stage to realize it in just this manner. For women in the audience, such visceral, unromantic staging made public an oppression reliant on its secrecy for its power. And for me as a *teatrista* the conscientized enactment of the oppressed body of the girl-child proffered, for a moment, the imag-



ined possibility of an end to such clandestine violations.<sup>33</sup>

As the play progresses the audience becomes more aware of how the father and the *compadre* Conrado play a central and pivotal role in Lupe's early sexual experiences, and, to a certain extent, how Lupe's body, as well as that of her mother, function as a location for the displacement of her father's repressed homosexual desires.

### Male Bonding and the Female Body

Moraga's play reveals how both Lupe's mother and father, Hortensia and Manuel, desire the *compadre* Conrado, with devastating effects for Lupe, as well as for themselves and for the other members of the family. The play stages how *compadrazgo* or the networks of fictive kin also facilitated a system of male relations that maintained men's privilege and excluded women from any form of empowerment. As Leticia states:

Sometimes a man thinks of another man before he thinks of nobody else. He don' think about his woman ni su madre ni los children, jus' what he gots in his head about tha' man. . . . But when he opens his eyes and sees that he's as empty as he was before, he curls his fingers into fists and knocks down whatever he thinks is standing in his way.<sup>34</sup>

The systems of *compadrazgo* and brotherhood and the relationship between Manuel and Conrado resonate with homosocial bonding.<sup>35</sup> *Carnalismo* or brotherhood, like other forms of homosocial bonding, created 'a great variety of partially covert relations', including 'sexism and its sharing'. Moraga's drama shows how the Conrado-Manuel dynamic is based on an economy of homosocial bonding, and calls attention to the way women's bodies are used as vehicles to facilitate 'sexism and its sharing'.

Hortensia, the wife, is treated as an object of exchange between her husband and Conrado to strengthen the men's relationship with each other. In Act II, Scene ii, Manuel appears on stage alone in a space outside the family home, and informs the audience that

on one occasion he tried to prevent his *compadre* from leaving by giving him his wife for the night. This has haunted the psyche of the family ever since.

MANUEL: I am a lonely man. I bring the bottle to my lips and feel the tequila pour down behind my tongue, remojando the back of my throat. Corre down la espina, until it hits my belly and burns como madre in there. For a minute, I am filled up, content . . . satisfecho. (Pause.) I look across the table and my compadre's there y me siento bien. All I gotta do is sit in my own skin in that chair. (Pause.) But he was leaving. I could smell it coming. I tried to make him stay. How did I let myself disappear like that? I became nothing, a ghost. I asked him, 'Do you want her, compa?' And he said, 'Yes.' So I told him, 'What's mine is yours, compadre. Take her.' (Pause.) I floated into the room with him. In my mind, I was him. And then, I was her too. In my mind, I imagined their pleasure, and I turned into nothing.

*Blackout.*<sup>36</sup>

The exchange of the woman's body between the men then has the adverse effect in terms of strengthening their relationship, as it turns Manuel into a 'nothing' and later contributes to his suicide.

This aspect of Moraga's drama is reminiscent of scenes that take place in *Giving up the Ghost*. Just as Moraga's characters in the earlier play narrate and question the circumstances that change them into ghosts, so, too, Manuel is a character who loses himself, becomes disembodied, and turns into a phantom. Moraga's play thus refigures previous and traditional representations of the violated Chicana body, which often appears in theatre and literature as being violently erased, as a ghost or 'nothing', but which in this instance, stages the father as being violently erased, and thus losing his bodily self.

By giving his wife to his friend, Manuel undermines his primary familial relationships in a number of ways. First, he destroys his marriage to Hortensia, and his primary role as father, as doubt is cast on who is the biological father of the daughter Lupe. Second, it undermines the traditional macho characteristics associated with Chicano masculinity as Manuel confesses in his soliloquy

that he has been emasculated by the exchange of his wife between himself and Conrado. And finally, rather than strengthening their bonds with each other, the act of exchange leaves Manuel with a repressed and unfulfilled desire for Conrado. As Yarbrow Bejarano states:

With these scenes the audience are invited to explore the interconnections between homosociality and homosexuality. . . . The same cultures that promote male homosocial relations through the exchange of women simultaneously prohibit homosexuality or even homosexual desire that is not mediated through the body of a woman.<sup>37</sup>

Manuel's obsessive and repressed homosexual desire is represented in dreams of being inside Conrado's skin. Leticia notices that 'He closes his eyes and dreams, "If I could get inside tha' man, then I'd really be somebody!"'<sup>38</sup> The night he goes to meet his *compadre*, even after a thirteen-year absence, he consciously dresses like Conrado in a dark suit and hat, and 'he imagines himself a different man, in Conrado's image'.<sup>39</sup>

But it is during his soliloquy at the beginning of Act II, Scene ii, that he comes closest to admitting his desire. When he utters the phrases 'I was him. And then I was her too', it is the nearest he can come to admitting his homoerotic desire for Conrado. The repression of homosexuality within Chicano culture is again linked closely to machismo and sexual stereotypes. As Yarbrow-Bejarano states: 'The male homosexual is held in contempt because he voluntarily assumes the role of woman, the penetrated *chingada* ['fucked one']'.<sup>40</sup>

In casting Manuel's relationship with Conrado as a repressed homosexual relationship, Moraga's play reveals the homophobia underpinning the *la Malinche-la Chingada* sexual and colonial conquest paradigm. Within this heterosexually configured matrix, same-sex desire is always configured as a gendered binary, so Manuel's homoerotic desire means that he assumes the *la Malinche* role. In effect, by turning into 'nothing', Manuel simultaneously becomes 'woman', whereas Conrado 'maintains his privileged position', retaining his sense of masculinity.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

Moraga's plays foreground an embodied feminist practice in ways that disrupt the heterosexually configured norm within Chicano discourse of the obedient daughter and unselfish wife/housewife derived from colonialist logic, machismo politics and an overbearing Catholicism. At the same time, the female body is staged in such a way as to foreground the repressive system of familial and brotherly bonds and previous modes of theatrical representation for women.

It could be argued that Moraga's Chicana bodies on stage actively resist the violence of traditional forms of representation. By the end of the play, the women have been tentatively liberated – the mother from physical and sexual abuse, while both daughters become radicalized in various ways as Chicanas, as an activist in the Chicana feminist movement or, in Lupe's case, a young woman pursuing her same-sex desire. This is echoed in her closing speech in ways that also suggest a doubling of her father's earlier remarks about his *compadre* Conrado:

I wanna be in her body. . . . If I could, I'd like to jus' unzip her chest and climb right inside there, next to her heart, to feel everything she's feeling and I could forget, about me. (Pause.) It's okay if she doesn't feel the same way. . . . It's my secret.<sup>42</sup>

From the final scenes of the play we can deduce that Moraga's intentions were to close her play on a note of hope. As she has said of this play in particular, 'The revolutionary promise of a theatre of liberation lies in the embodied rendering of our prisons and in the act, our release from them'.<sup>43</sup>

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