

Abstract

With the rise of civil rights movements in the 1960s, Mexican Americans formed the Chicano Movement to tackle the political and cultural issues their communities were facing. It was important to Chicano activists to reclaim their indigenous roots taken away by European colonization during the 15th century. This reclaiming of Indigenous identity is called Chicanismo. As time progressed, women were being neglected within the movement and began challenging patriarchal values of their communities. During the 1980s and 1990s, Chicana feminists who were close to their indigenous roots, used it to challenge thought of gender roles. This paper explores how Chicana feminists reconstructed the Chicano Indigenous identity through spirituality, art, and folklore. To explore this topic, this paper will utilize primary sources such as books, oral histories, and artworks. This project will seek out the influences of Chicana feminists and their indigenous identity on traditional gender roles of the Chicano community. The intended audience of this paper is historians and the public who might be interested in Chicano, indigenous, and feminist studies.

Introduction

During the 1960s, Mexican Americans began to organize for their civil rights and empower their identities as mestizos by rejecting assimilation into American "Anglo" culture. Chicanos reclaimed their indigenous roots that has been taken away from their ancestors by Spanish colonization in the 15th century, also known as Chicanismo. As the movement progressed into the 1970s, Chicanas were not only being left out of the feminist moment but also the Chicano movements. This exclusion from these movements brought Chicanas to challenge the male-dominated Chicano Movement and beckoned a second wave of the Chicano movement focused on Chicana issues and feminism. Chicanas aimed to confront gender bias in the Chicano community (Caffrey 2023). During the 1980's, Chicanas started to use their Indigenous identities to express philosophies about gender in the political and cultural space. Norma Alarcón explains that "...many Chicana writers explore their racial and sexual experiences in poetry, narrative, essay, testimony and autobiography through the evocation of indigenous figures." (1990) Chicanas use their indigenous identity to fuel their spirituality and feminist political views. The study of Chicanas invoking their Indigenous identity are sparse and require more research as Lourdes Alberto states "...the study of Chicano indigenism also begs further investigation into the feminist revisions of it." (2016) This historical research seeks to explore how Chicana feminists influenced the Chicano Indigenous identity through spirituality, art, and folklore from 1985 to 1995.

Methods

This study utilizes oral histories and archival data. This qualitative study is a historical analysis of the Chicana Indigenism. It will use a narrative approach, examining the experiences and written accounts of people within the movement, specifically during the 1980-90s.

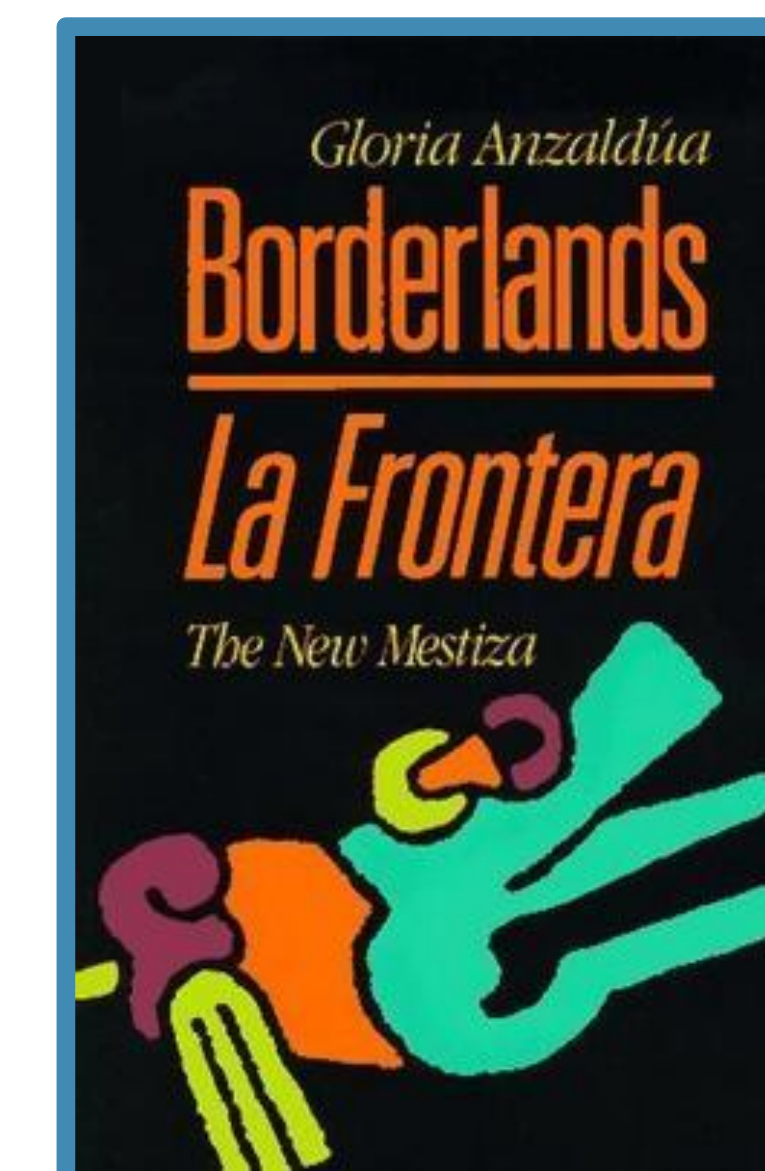
- **Oral Histories:** Participants will be identified who was an Indigenous Chicana and, using the snowball sampling methods, will find other interviewees. The interviews will be open-end questions and semi-structured. Interviews will be conducted in-person or over Zoom.
- **Archival Data:** The main archival sources will be books, artwork, and folklore created by Chicanas. These will provide most of the primary sources analyzed.

Results

Gloria Anzaldúa in her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* published in 1985, states that she grounds her identity as a Chicana in the "Indian woman's history of resistance" (43). She discusses La Llorona and how her wail was the only means to protest. Whenever Anzaldúa talks about Indian and Anglo culture, she genders them, calling Indian feminine and Anglo masculine. She states that Chicanos police their indigenous side and blames the "male" culture for it succeeding. Later in the book, she calls for Chicano/as to reclaim their indigenous roots and believes that being Mestiza is being accepting of new ideas and progressive. "She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives towards the darkskinned, women, and queers." (104) By Chicano/as invoking their Indigenous roots they will be able to gain new ideas and put themselves in "nepantla" as state of healing their indigenous side.



Image of Gloria Anzaldúa by Annie Valva



Gloria Anzaldúa's book

Santa Barraza, in her artworks from the 1980's and 1990's, utilized Aztec gods and hieroglyphs to express spiritual healing of the Chicana woman. In *Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl Reversed* (1984), the roles of a classic Aztec legend is reversed as Iztaccihuatl is holding the deceased body of Popocatepetl. In *Nepantla* (1995), a darkskinned woman stands in between a cactus and lilies, along with the woman is an aloe vera plant to represent the subject being in a place of healing. Each of Santa Barraza's works are made to express her indigenous roots.



Image of Santa Barraza by Todd Yates

Discussion/Conclusion

Throughout the research, the evidence shows that Chicana Feminists have used their Indigenous roots to convey their thoughts about gender roles. They use it as a supporting vessel to reclaim their femineity and reject Anglo culture. They have created their own culture by using Aztec culture to inspire new thought and spirituality. Although, there were Chicanas who knew about their indigenous culture and could enact their Indigenous roots, many Mexican Americans were not able to even learn the Spanish language due to educational discrimination. There lies a privilege within the Chicana movement for the women who did know about their indigenous roots. For those Chicanas, they used it to change gender thought but also Chicanismo and fully explored what it meant to be Indigenous.

Limitations & Future Research

- **Limitations:** Reaching out to interviewees was difficult as not many Chicanas used their indigenous identities and the ones who did had passed away or not able to interview. Limited archival data also made this project difficult as books, artwork, and limited oral histories was all that was able to be analyzed.
- **Future Research:** This topic can be further explored by future research by collecting more oral histories from Chicanas who were active and used their Indigenous Identity. It would also be worth investigating how Chicanas from different regions of the United States used their indigenous roots.

References

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Acknowledgements

- McNair Scholars Program
- Dr. Alberto Rodriguez
- Dr. Jody Marín
- College of Arts and Sciences
- Department of History, Political Science & Philosophy