



Performing the Chicana Identity in Joséfina López's *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* (1996)

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المخلص

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على دور الأداء في عرض حياة نساء الشيكانا (Chicanas)، والاضطهادات التي يتعرضن لها، ومعاناتهن أيضاً. ومن ثم، تُبرز العوامل التي تؤثر في حياة الشيكانا، مثل: حركة الشيكانو/الشيكانا، وأنواع الاضطهاد الثلاثي التي يعانين منها، وأخيراً كيف تتكون وتُعاد صياغة الهوية في ظل هذه الظروف. يتسم الجزء النظري من البحث بالتركيز على تقنيات مانفريد بفستر (Manfred Pfister) في التوصيف الدرامي، وكيف تُستخدم هذه التقنيات لتحليل المسرحيات، وكيف تؤثر أساليب التوصيف على نظرية الهوية، إضافةً إلى دور الأدوات المسرحية مثل الإيماءات، والأقنعة، والأزياء، والعناصر الدرامية الأخرى في عرض النظرية الأساسية ومساعدة الأقليات على الكشف عن ثقافتهم. تتجلى هذه الموضوعات بوضوح في مسرحية اعترافات نساء من شرق لوس أنجلوس (Confessions of Women from East L.A.) للكاتبة خوسيفينا لوبيز (Josefina López)، إذ إنها — بوصفها امرأة شيكانا — قد شعرت واختبرت نظرة المجتمع الدونية تجاه نساء الشيكانا. تتناول مسرحيات لوبيز موضوعات مثل تقدير الذات، والوعي الطبقي، والاضطهاد، والتحيز الجنسي، والوعي بالجسد، وغيرها. وهي تسعى من خلالها إلى البحث عن هوية لها ولغيرها من نساء الشيكانا اللواتي وجدن أنفسهن بين نارين: التمييز من المجتمع الأمريكي السائد، وقلة الاحترام والتقدير من داخل مجتمع الشيكانو نفسه (الأباء والأزواج والأبناء). وبالتالي، تصبح مسرحيات لوبيز وسيلة للتعبير عن إحساس بالهوية لهؤلاء النساء، وللتأكيد على جمالهن وفق معاييرهن الخاصة، لا وفق معايير المجتمع الأنجلوساكسوني الأمريكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اضطهاد الشيكانا – الأداء والتمسرح – الهوية – تقنية مانفريد بفستر في التوصيف.

Abstract

This research highlights the role of performance in demonstrating the Chicanas' lives, the oppressions they undergo and their suffering as well. Consequently, it visualizes the factors that affect Chicanas; i.e. the Chicano/a movement, the triple oppressions they undergo, and finally how identity is reformed and (per)formed under such circumstance. The theoretical part is characterized by a concern with Manfred Pfister's techniques of dramatic characterization used to analyze a play, how techniques of characterization affect the identity theory, and how props, gestures, masks, costumes and all related drama elements are useful in displaying the main theory and helping those minorities in exposing their culture. Such themes find voice in Joséfina López's play *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* because, as a Chicana, she has felt and experienced society's underestimation of its Chicanas. López's plays are based on themes like low self-esteem, class-consciousness, oppression, sexual bias, body consciousness and others. López is eager to search for an identity for herself and for other Chicanas who have found themselves between two fires: discrimination by the mainstream society and lack of respect and value by Chicanos: fathers, husbands and sons. López's plays thus become tools to express a sense of identity for those women and to stress their beauty according to their own standards, not those of Anglo-America.

Key Words: Chicanas' Oppression – Performance and Performativity – Identity
Manfred Pfister's characterization technique.

This proposed research is an attempt to examine both the performance and the formation of the Chicana identity in Joséfina López's *Simply María* (1991). It surveys the various definitions, styles, techniques, and strategies employed both in performance and identity formation theories. The following paragraphs discuss one of the plays written by Joséfina López and blends the thematic and technical approaches by using performance studies to highlight the distinct identities of Chicanas in the USA.

The theoretical part is generally concerned with the formation of an identity, including its definition and its types, and in particular the reasons of forming Chicano/a identity. Accordingly, Chicano and Chicana movement is going to be displayed together with its reasons, history and consequences. First Chicano/as face some oppressions after their immigration to the USA, exemplified in racial, gender, and class oppression. Therefore these oppressions are tackled from a theoretical perspective together with some subcategories, such as the role of language in forming the Chicano/a identity, the macho culture or the patriarchal society, myth and religion and their effects on the Chicana woman. Finally, how performance is related to forming an identity, or how performance can picture these oppressions is the main idea that sums this research up.

One of the greatest minority in the United States is the Latinos, who are still perceived as an illegal aliens. Due to this, they try to form a powerful Mexican identity. They don't dream of motor cars and high wages only, they need to be recognized and appreciated for who they are and be respected as well. However, they face some barriers and oppressions in their way.

Those Mexicans – also known as Chicano/as – discover that their “American Dream” is a fake dream; an unfulfilled one. They were not greeted by the Americans as the treaty of Guadalupe states. They find that they are going to lose their identity in their search for a better life. Consequently, restoring and redefining their identity become a must. It is a challenge for those Mexicans living in multiple identities to gain a special identity for themselves.

On a broader shape, Identity can be divided into Negative and Positive identity as well as Personal and Collective identity: Positive identities are those that empower themselves. They are able to gain features that help them change their destiny. Negative identity – on the other hand – is the one that creates hatred. It is always static. It never changes, thus creating hatred and grudge:

Identity formation is never straightforward. There is always a tension between positive and negative identities. The risk of composing negative identities is always present. Everyone is shadowed by negative identities that threaten and confuse daily life but the key is to have the means of coping with, or mastering the urge to give in to the negative typing of oneself or others. (Müller 5)

This person of negative identity is always dominated by a superior group. An individual identity includes social categories as age, occupation, gender, ethnicity, and race in order for an individual to categorize himself or herself as a member in a social community. According to that, Mexican identity is a positive identity, because they try to find a way to cross the borders and redefine their identity. Hence, this identity has to pass by certain experiences until it becomes a collective identity. The Chicano/a identity has actually passed by some oppressions until it reaches to this collective voice which calls for its rights (Garcia 134).

The term “Chicano” or “Chicana” (deriving from the political movement of the 1960s that began with the Voting Rights Act) refers to Mexican American men or women who live within the United States (Christie 3), which demanded that Mexican American citizens enjoy the rights they were granted in the U.S. Constitution under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed after the war between Mexico and the United States. Thus, to identify as Chicano or Chicana means being both Mexican and American. In an attempt to restore their rights in the American society, Mexicans called for what is known as the “Chicano Movement,” which formally began in the 1970s. Sarcastically, as Chicanas were fighting alongside Chicanos in their struggle, they began to realize gender inequalities among themselves, and found a cooperative voice through the Feminist movement:

Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist, in her essay “La Conciencia de la Mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness,” offers an alternative by which to realize the hopes and expectations of Chicana feminism. She offers to set up a new consciousness of Chicana by reinterpreting history, shaping new myths and changing the perspective of Chicana self-identity. (Rosiandani 1)

They call for a reassessment of the role of the family in a way to resist the oppressive social conditions and redefining the concept of Chicana feminine identity constructed by Chicano men and American men and its subsequent mythical feminine figures, known as Le virgin de Guadalupe, La Malinche and La Llorona.

In their fight, Chicanas mainly face three main oppressions that hinder them from forming their identity; namely: gender oppression, class oppression and racial oppression (Gonzales 1). In terms of gender oppression in which a female is looked at as being passive, weak, docile, unintelligent, and dependent, whereas the Mexican husband is often portrayed as an authoritarian, patriarchal figure who enjoys the highest status in the family. Chicana women are thus subjugated to many oppressive tools: macho culture, religious doctrines and mythical believes.

Another idea in gender oppression is related to the Mexican submissive mothers who teach their daughters how to be a submissive and helpless wife in order to live safely and satisfy their husbands. Mexican mothers want their daughters to remain virgins only to please their future husbands: “Men continued to expect their women

to be submissive and their daughters to remain cloistered in the home” (Carr 256). They never tell them that they should remain virgins for themselves, for their principles and morals, but rather they tend to assure to them that the Mexican woman’s life relies mainly on man. The Catholic Church also contributes a lot to the way society perceives women and the place that is given to women in Mexican society. The Church requires that women should be subservient to men, that women renounce themselves in favor of men:

When not oppressively represented as spiritually superior to men (that is, the belief that women should emulate the Virgin Mary as the sacrificing, pious, and asexual mother), women's spiritual, sexual, and healing conocimientos have often been negatively coded as heretical, superstitious, diabolic, and/or primitive. Such ideologies are related to the construction of women as either hyper spiritual and asexual (or sexual within the confines of heterosexuality and marriage) or Bruja-like (anti-spiritual) and hypersexual. As such, they reaffirm the gendered spiritual/sexual binary. (Lara 13)

Obedience and self-denial define the “good” women. Consequently, the Mexican women tend to redefine their identity and reinterpret the three mythical figures that were attributed to them. Women came to be mythically represented by two opposing characters: the good-mother-virgin, represented by the Virgin Mary, or Virgin de Guadalupe and the bad one, represented by La Malinche. The mythical figure of La Llorona is about the Weeping Woman or the weeping mother who has lost her children and is condemned to wander eternally in search of her children. She regrets her transgression. The message here is directed from the church to all women: Conform in your role, or suffer the consequences.

La Malinche was widely known among Mexicans as a king’s (Cortés’) mistress; she bore his child, and is thus regarded by some as the mother of the mixed-race, mestizo Mexican. The Lady of Guadalupe is then the opposite of the two mythical figures namely La Malinche and La Llorona. Chicanas attempt to reinterpret the existence of La Malinche and La Llorona who have been regarded as negative images. Instead of viewing these figures as betrayers, as evil, or even as whores, Chicanas want to give them a new perspective. Chicanas interpret their roles as symbols of the power as well as of the strength of Chicanas (Roth 720).

Class oppression is the second type of oppression that the Mexicans face. The war that existed between America and Mexico and its consequences was the main reason for the triple oppressions Mexicans are facing now. To end this war, Treaty of Guadalupe was held. It guaranteed Mexicans with all the rights to live peacefully and preserve one’s language, culture, customs and habits. However the government breached its agreement. Mexicans who choose to remain in the U.S. were subjected to the power and domination of the Americans. Most Mexicans living in the U.S. during the nineteenth century were considered a class apart separate from the Anglo

– Saxons:

The first large wave of Mexican immigration came between 1900 and 1930 at a time when the demand for cheap agricultural workers coincided with the population growth and increased agricultural production in the American southwest. . . . During the Great Depression, Mexican immigrants were seen no longer as cheap labour but as drains on the United States' struggling economy. As such, hundreds of thousands of illegal Mexican immigrants were repatriated back to Mexico. . . . Despite the 20,000 immigrants per year cap put on Mexico in the 1970s, illegal Mexican immigration continued to grow while during this time the U.S. had adopted a "look other way" policy to deal with unauthorized Mexican immigration. (Light 282, 283)

This domination leads the Mexicans to be used as peasants or servants. The Americans called them "Cheap Mexican Labour". Hence, they were getting low wages in return to a great effort done. Hence, the class oppression appears. Proposition 187 was one of the other causes that threatens the future of the Mexicans. It sees all Mexican-origin persons as those who try to deprive White persons of their economic opportunities. It also portrays Mexican persons as foreigners that were out of control in California society. Hence, Mexican's identity becomes attached with a smirch that will never go away. Consequently, this proposition has contributed in forcing Mexicans to accept low wages in return to a long hours of working hard.

In this way, it is easy to claim that Mexicans are illegal aliens who cannot contribute to the society, who cannot understand well, and who cannot have a good education: Hence there are two major outcomes of lower educational attainment for the Mexican origin population: (1) Mexicans are placed in a lower-skilled position, and are given low-wage jobs; and (2) reinforcement of the image of Chicano culture as placing a low perquisite on education. Lower wages of a minority group reflect their low levels of education.

Racial oppression defines Mexicans as "suspect aliens". Americans depend on Mexicans race to justify their discrimination. Mexican children were being excluded from education because of their looks, their names and may be their languages as well, to an extent that the Anglos excluded girls from education claiming that they are socialized for marriage and child-bearing jobs only:

[Mexicans are] an ignorant and immoral race . . . [in] constant intercourse with aborigines, who were and still are degraded to the very lowest class of human beings" (quoted in Schoultz 1998, p.19). . . . In this ideological structure, Latin Americans are depicted as racially and culturally inferior, ignorant, degraded, filthy, childlike, and essentially unable to govern themselves. (Suárez-Orozco 22) The fact that Latinos are frequently positioned as foreigners, and that they do not enjoy the same rights as citizens, has fatal consequences for Latinos' economic, social, and political opportunities. For Mexican specifically, race has been more a

question of skin colour, nose shape, and height than of human dignity. Race therefore can keep Mexicans out of social economic political power.

The Spanish language in all its varieties plays a central role in the construction and transformation of the Mexican tribute in the United States. That's why Americans tend to punish those who speak Spanish. Consequently, deleting the Mexican identity. In order to fight these oppressions, there are two ways: 1- Mexicans have to conform to the norms of the American society while keeping their heritage. 2- Mexicans should revolte and call for their rights, and this can be done through performing their problems on stage. Here comes the role of performance.

A performance is about something that helps us understanding the past and staging it in the present. It thus mixes the past and the present together. The act of performing mixes the experience and the story told together. Performances are found in language. The presentation of self in everyday life is performance. Self is presented through the performance of roles, through acting, or through announcing that this person has undergone some severe transformations.

Definitions of performance are very significant in this context. In Webster's Dictionary, performance is defined as: "1- the execution of an action. 2- Something accomplished. 3- The fulfilment of a claim, promise, or request. 4-the action of representing a character in a play b: a public presentation or exhibition. 5- The ability to perform. 6-the manner in which a mechanism performs. 7- The manner of reacting to stimuli. 8- The linguistic behaviour of an individual and also: the ability to speak a certain language." They are all synonymous to each other: Performances are found in language. That is, certain words do accomplish things. "In the performance of a dramatic text . . . the power of representation is rooted in the many conventions of language, scene, meta-discursive figuration, character, and semiotics". (Arrizon 100)

They are all related to representation, acting, performing or pronunciation and announcement. These words are all referring to defining someone's behaviour or experience in life through acting it. Thus performance is very much related to our experience:

Performance studies, like many contemporary discourses, has engaged with a range of theoretical approaches, including semiotics, anthropology, sociology, cultural materialism, critical theory, gender studies and post colonialism. And performance research takes as its object a variety of practices from events, such as festivals, sporting contests or political rallies, to spectacles and speech acts, such as performance art, dramatic theatre or courtroom behaviour. In this field, feminist performance studies has provided important theorizations of gender representation in performance, as well as affirming the contribution to cultural production of women as writers, directors or performers . . . The female body has figured critically as both an imaginary and physical body, always shifting attention from

its meaning within an aesthetic system to its social subjectification and back again. (Fen sham 287)

Latina subjectivity deals with the experience of marginality as well as the desire to become powerful. As a performative signifier, the construction of the Latina body requires the support of cultural institutions such as theatre and performance art. Thus, the construction of the Latina subject and the performative mediation are linked.

Latina Performance “is about the spatial alliance of bodies, identity, commodities, and other fundamentals of culture that are at once the object of performance and the field in which it takes place”. (Arrizon 100)

Butler develops her theory of performativity through an analysis of sex and gender. In Butler’s view, the repeated acts that produce a man or a woman are dependent on cultural habits. Hence, in performative utterances the speaking subject is already spoken for and in language. As fluid on-going events, performances “mark and bend identities, re-make time, tell stories. The way a performance is enacted describes performative behaviour.

Clearly performativity and performance exist in a tension with one another, in a tension between doing, or performing, and the done, the text, the performance. Performativity is “what happens when history/textuality sees itself in the mirror—and suddenly sees double; it is the disorienting, [the] disruptive” (Pollock 1998b:43). Performativity derives its power in the remaking of the very textual frameworks that give it meaning in the rest place.

In mixing the text with the theory, it is important to display the text that is based on this theory. The play is Joséfina López’s play, *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*, (1996)¹. López’s second play is a powerful voice for women in general and Chicanas in the United States in particular.

It is about the stereotyping of Chicanas.

The characters’ roles vary from energetic Chicana feminists, to old lesbian Chicanas, sexy young Chicanas who misuse their bodies, old street vendor Chicanas, Chicana activists, soap opera addict Chicanas, and revolutionary Chicanas. Each character depicts a certain problem commonly faced by Chicanas. This chapter highlights manifestations of those problems and their effect on both the formation and the performance of Chicana identity.

Confessions of Women from East L.A. tells the story of nine women who differ

¹ *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* was first presented as a work –in- progress by Teatro Mascara Magica and The Fritz Theater, in association with Mercedes/López Productions, in San Diego, from April 25 to May 12, 1996. The production was directed by William Alejandro Virchis with set design by Gary Larson, light design by Ginger Harris, and costume design by Suzan Bennett (López, *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* 4). This play is one of the most prominent plays written by Jósefina López, as it has been presented on the Theatre Department of Southwestern College’s (SWC) School of Arts and enjoyed several at the Matrix Theatre in partnership with Mah-Dey Theatre.

from one another: a professor, an old woman suffering from Aids, a complicated girl who enjoys teasing men, a low class woman who sells corn, a Chicana trying to pass for Japanese, a self-defense instructor, a Chicana activist, a soap opera addict and a revolutionary Chicana. The play swings from melodrama to farce, as López depicts good and evil in terms of white and black. She highlights the ups and the downs of her characters using coarse wit. Joséfina López uses all these characters in a way to reveal as many types as possible of Chicanas living in the U.S. The purpose of this play is to highlight the challenge Chicanas face to change their identities in the eyes of the Other.

Confessions of Women from East L.A. is a play of empowerment and challenge. López sheds light on those Chicanas through using the direct presentation of the character technique by having the characters themselves tell the audience straight out how they are built as well as the problems they face. The style is portrayed in an intentional realistic manner mostly represented in the characters' monologues or soliloquies. These monologues let the audience feel that the play is an autobiography for each character aside. The play actually arouses the major problems faced by Chicanas, since each character performs the dilemma she faces in her monologues, interacting with the audience as if this problem is their own. López chooses to transfer her message and fight those oppressions through performance. Actresses gather together to call for a social identity change or redefinition. They perform what they really face in the American society. In this case the "performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 88). Social reality is created through language, symbols, gestures or any other social signs that we use every day. Such non-verbal techniques are elements of performance that López uses to create an alternate social reality. By enacting or through performing conventions, we do make them "real" to some extent; through a Performative utterance, the problem reaches the society (Felluga).

The play revolves around nine Chicanas, mostly representing different categories and types of Chicana. López has a distinct classification of Chicanas: "Latina women have always been categorized and portrayed as 'virgins, mothers, and whores' in plays, movies, and television" (López, *Confessions* 4). This is very much related to the history of Chicanas in the United States as being explicitly classified into three types: Virgen de Guadalupe, La Llorona, and La Malinche. Moreover, the play revolves around the macho culture, and how women should be dependent on men. In fact, the play has even been accused of over-classification: "*Confessions* suffers from an occasional tendency to backpedal from its own convictions, trafficking in stereotypes of other groups (Jewish men are "hard-

working" and eager-to-please; white men are passionless; etc.) while decrying and de-bunking assumptions about Latinas" (McKee).

There are many types of men in this play. Bernstein – the professor – prefers to marry Jewish men, as they are rich and can allow her to live in the standard she aspires for; while Yoko wishes to marry a Japanese man who is calm and will never hit her, as she believes white men are passionless. However, the audience ends up being convinced that no man in this play is up to the standard because every man in it has some flaws that affect his girlfriend in one way or another. Those men symbolize the patriarchal society or the macho figure that López criticizes. Due to this, no relationship within the play is successful; rather, Chicanas are depicted as dependent on men only as a means of earning a living, and not for human interaction.

Chicanas try to redefine their identity and change this perspective in the eyes of the others, as well as change the traditional negative concepts concerning the notions of La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Llorona and La Malinche. La Virgen is the symbol of a pure woman who is untouched. She highlights the passivity a patriarchal society promotes: "The equation of female sexuality with enslavement is translated through La Virgen into the cultural values of love/devotion, reinforcing women's subordinate position of servitude and obedience within a rigidly heterosexual hierarchy" (Yarbro-Bejarano 393). Consequently, she also symbolizes servitude, obedience and submission performed on stage.

La Llorona is a symbol of the bad weeping mother who has lost her children and is condemned to wander eternally in search of them (Fox 21). The patriarchal figure sees that La Llorona must be punished for being a revolutionary; revolting against the accepted doctrines and principles, which command a woman to be mute and submissive. Due to her revolt, she is punished by the wandering curse. According to the church and to the Mexican doctrines, women should either conform to a submissive nature, or suffer the consequences of their sin. The second figure is La Malinche who, historically, was the mistress of Hernan Cortes, a Spaniard conqueror. Her being a mistress is unfounded; however, the history that has been created states that she is considered a traitor to her people. La Malinche is equal to betrayal and treachery since she is regarded as the one who causes the downfall of her people (Rosiandani 4). She is portrayed as an evil temptress in all novels and poems: "From cultural scapegoat, this 'Mexican Eve' has been transformed into the prototypical Chicana feminist" (Fox 22).

La Malinche is thus being looked at from two perspectives: on the one hand, she is condemned as a vicious woman and an image of a bad mother, and on the other, she embodies positive traits such as adaptability, intelligence and leadership. These traits are called for to redefine the Chicana identity, a thing that distinguishes her as a revolutionary woman who wants to change the view of the mute Chicana.

Hence, the three mythical characters represent the “virgins, mothers and whores” (López, *Confessions* 3) that Joséfina López highlights in her production notes and pictures in her plays. López is yet critical of the categorization: “I don’t like that because I am none of them.

I am a combination of all of them. I have a little of the mother, the virgin, and the whore.

However, Latinas are much more than that. Latinas are complex, diverse and powerful” (4). This kind of allusion is always portrayed in all her plays as it is very much associated with Chicana history. López’s purpose of writing is to display how powerful Chicanas really are and how much more powerful they can be. Consequently, her dramatis personae in *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* exhibit both actual and mythical figures, in a marriage between themes and techniques within the play.

The first character in *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* is Marquez Bernstein. She is a 35 years old Professor who teaches her students lectures about women’s empowerment. She embodies contradictions; as she encourages her students to marry Jewish men in order to be financially secured and at the same time she pushes them to get educated and dispense with men in order to be financially secured: “Choose to be the heroine of your life, because, Mijita, ain’t no man gonna rescue you. Because as Latinas we don’t get to play the role of ‘Cinderella’ and ‘Snow White.’ No. As Latinas all we get to play are the roles of virgin, mother, whore, and the pinch maid” (9 - 10). Her choice of words like “Cinderella” and “Snow White” symbolizes that she wants her students to see the real world, not the fairy, dreamy world. Part of empowering a woman is to awaken her and make her strong so that she may be able to face difficulties.

In this play, López uses the character of Bernstein to prove two things: the first is that Chicanas do not need men in their lives to be successful; the second is that women can be successful and can raise their class and achieve their goals through empowerment. She inspires them to live in the real world and forget all about the American Dream. Bernstein’s speech actually changes the lives of her Chicana students: “social reality is not a given but is continually created as an illusion through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign” (Butler, *Performative* 270).

This power of language Bernstein utilizes alters the way Chicana students look at the world. Like a Priest’s pronouncement – “I now pronounce you man and wife – Bernstein’s words change a status and enact what the words say. For instance, in the play Bernstein tells words of enthusiasm like: “What you think matters. Shyness is a sin” (8). In another context she says: “Empower yourself with the knowledge” (8). Later on, Bernstein introduces to the audience an example of a female student who is really influenced by Bernstein’s words and views, which

accordingly raises her self-confidence: “I’m going to read you a poem from a graduate of my seminar. When I met her she had very little self-esteem, she didn’t like herself. She was involved with a man who would abuse her. So after she took my seminar, she wrote this poem and sent it to me. It’s called, very appropriately, “My Low Self-Esteem Days” (7). She then reads to her students this powerful and effective poem about her student’s low self-esteem days:

“Si te quise fue porque I had low self-esteem.

If I swore I’d always be by your side,
Was because I had nothing better to do.

...

Well then go ahead!

’Cause you ain’t my master, my father, my hero, my lover

...

To address your remarks.

Time has proved me stronger,

...

So today, I ain’t even gonna bother...

To let you know how good it’s been...

Without you. (7-8)

This poem shows the effect of Bernstein’s empowerment words. She succeeds in leveling her student’s identity up. This is how her words do what they say or perform. It is a symbol of the empowerment of the Chicana who is now able to dispense with her lover’s remarks and comments as she is able to know her true identity and her capabilities.

The body oppression theme is also highlighted in the play, when López illuminates her view through Bernstein’s ideas, as she believes that marriage is just a waste of time. It never adds any progress to the Chicana. Bernstein in this context advises them to be powerful and to master their lives. Bernstein asserts this saying: “you have been taught all your life to be quiet, but today I want you to speak up” (8). Bernstein believes that being mute is over. Women should stand and face their future out loud, and they should never be too shy to ask for their demands and rights. At this point stage directions indicate that “STUDENT2 does the sign of the cross” (8). Bernstein sees that Chicanas need a revolution to get over all the social conservative norms and traditions, in which they need to be daring. However, the student who used to live under such humiliating conditions does the cross sign, symbolizing astonishment, disapproval and condemnation of how a Chicana could talk in such a way. Bernstein’s answer to her students’ denouncement is that Chicanas should “empower themselves with knowledge,” (8) and dispense with men; as they are nothing but trouble. Bernstein tries to inspire her students by telling them that she gets \$120,000 a year without a man; so, “instead of living for weekends waiting for your boyfriend to pick you in his **chevy**, go to college and

you can pick him up in your Mercedes” (8). Chicanas – Bernstein says – need to be the heroines of their lives, because no man is going to help or rescue them. Gender oppression is thus very clear in Bernstein’s words, and her speeches are López’s means in order to fight such oppression.

Arguably, Marquez Bernstein represents the educated woman. She is a professor who enjoys a high class standard of living. She has a Mercedes. She has got all these luxuries out of education and marrying Jewish men. So, in order to gain their rights, Chicanas have to choose one of these two ways: either be educated or dispense with their identities. This is clarified in Marquez’s advice: “Marry Jewish men. They’re so giving; they work so hard that they’ll do anything to please” (8). This is their first option which is to marry Jewish men so that they can have lots of money, be respected and achieve all their dreams, or:

Your career can’t hug you back, but your career will never leave you, will never cheat on you, will never insult you, and will never abuse you. Whatever you’ve invested in your career you will get back, but it will be lonely, because when you’ve chosen to follow your dreams, people will not be able to identify with you. People won’t like you. Men won’t like you . . . know that the odds are against you, but your spirit has to be strong. Because people will always question your right to get an education. People will assume that because your last name ends with “ez” as in (She reads name tags.) Martinez, Chavez, Sanchez, López, and Ramirez that you got into college or you got your position because of your last name. (9)

Chicanas’ second option is to form an identity by asserting themselves through education and then through getting a career. Education has always been permitted for Mexican children while promoting the fake idea that they have poor learning abilities: “These Spanish-speaking students missed their familiar friends, surroundings, and activities associated with their culture . . . A myth has existed suggesting that Mexican American individuals do not value education. The myth reflected Mexican American children’s school experience and poor academic achievement” (Saracho and Hancock 257).

The myth’s aim is to assert the viewpoint that pictures how Mexican American children are stupid and unable to learn, in order not to provide them with their rights and deprive them of any chance to improve their identities: “One of the first things that students from Spanish-speaking households experience in white stream school environments is that their names are changed by their teachers and or peers (i.e. María del Socorro becomes Mary, Alejandro becomes Alex, Enrique becomes Henry, etc.)” (Murrieta 140). In a way to eliminate the Chicano/as identities, Americans change the Spanish name into American ones, similar to what Bernstein says about how Spanish speaking Mexican Americans will not get an education or a job if their names end in –ez. This is the reason why she calls for a revolution of the minds in order to call for their rights.

López uses an implicit authorial technique of characterization represented in characterizing names. Most of the names in this play are symbolic. For instance, Bernstein is “an ornamental name from German Bernstein ‘amber’ (from Middle Low German *bernen* ‘to burn’ + *stēn* ‘stone’; it was thought to be created by burning, although it is in fact fossilized pin resin)” (Bernstein). Though this Bernstein is an amber² - a plant - it becomes strongly electric by friction. It is lighted by being burned. These contradictions are crystallized in the character of Marquez Bernstein who sends mixed messages: “Marry Jewish men. They’re so giving; they work hard that they’ll do anything to please” (8). This is a direct call to depend on men, and in another context, she says: “you know what, boys/men are nothing but trouble, so if you can avoid them, do so. . . . Empower yourself with knowledge” (8). Marquez Bernstein is the leader of contradictions. She leads Chicanas to be successful in their lives, improve their work, and yet advocates marriage as a means of financial security.

López also uses costumes to highlight her ideas: in Marquez Bernstein’s property list at the end of the play, she wears a designer bag and one pair of gold earrings (29). Her costume shows how rich she is. Her first appearance on the scene gives the audience a vision of a wealthy educated woman, who encourages Chicanas to get educated to be at the same level. On the whole, Bernstein is a contradictory character; her advocating of marriage to Jewish men confines Chicanas to the submissive and dependence mood. Yet, her call for career development, self-independence, and redefinition of Chicana identity constitute an undeniable inspiration to the generations she teaches.

The second character is the old widowed grandmother Doña Concepcion who is sad because her husband died. She grieves over him for being helpful at home: “I miss him . . . who’s going to take out the garbage at night? Who’s going to take dogs to the park? Who’s going to eat the leftovers?” (10). Domesticity is the only reason she is going to miss him as he never affected her romantically. Doña Concepcion is an example of the victimized Chicana who gets married to a man she has never loved though he cheated on her and betrayed her with other women, giving her AIDS. Despite the disease, she believes that it is unethical to be happy he is dead. She is like any Chicana who faces gender oppression and macho oppression.

After 25 years of not confessing, because she believes she never committed any sins, Doña Concepcion goes to confession to atone for her feelings of happiness that her husband died. However, the Padre or the priest does not care about how victimized she is. López implicitly symbolizes the patriarchal indifference of the

² Amber. A yellowish translucent resin resembling copal, found as a fossil in alluvial soils, with beds of lignite, or on the seashore in many places. It takes a fine polish, and is used for pipe mouthpieces, beads, etc., and as a basis for a fine varnish.

priest through sleeping while Doña Concepcion is confessing: "so how can I be happy he's dead? I don't want to be. But I am . . . Padre, are you listening? (*She looks closer, checking to see that there is a padre there listening. The Padre is falling asleep.*) (10). The padre's negligence and disregard continue to appear when she says that she got AIDS from her husband: "I went for a medical check-up to check my diabetes and that's how I found out I have AIDS" to which the Padre reacts by moving "*his chair to give himself some distance just to be safe*" (11). His gesture symbolizes his fear he might get AIDS. The padre is a symbol of the patriarchal figures that never care for women, cheat on them, and mistreat them. Hence, Doña Concepcion is a victimized Chicana who lives all her life without any pleasure or hope. Her patriarchal society allows her husband to cheat on her and betray her, but restrains her and blocks her from divorce or even from asking for a right. She actually visualizes the stereotyped Chicana who accepts her doomed life just as the macho society orders her to do.

Dolores³ Corazon⁴ or Lolita is another significant character introduced by López to show the effect of the repressions imposed on women. She is considered to be quite symbolic, as Dolores Corazon means a painful heart. Contextually, Dolores in the play is hurt as a result of the mean and humiliating relations she faces with men. Additionally, López uses an explicit technique of telling names when relating the name Lolita to the context. Lolita – as a name – is very much associated with whores and prostitutes; similarly, Lolita in the play represents the other sexy self of Dolores.

Firstly, López describes this character in her stage directions twice. Each of Dolores and Lolita is given a separate description and different costumes. In describing Dolores, the stage direction says: "she is Dolores Corazon, a shy Latina wearing a plain pastel floral print," (12) while with Lolita, the stage direction describes her as: "flamboyant, a sexy Latina who is not afraid to express her opinions and doesn't need anybody's approval. She wears her hair high and loose" (12). Thus the contradiction is quite vivid. Lolita Corazon is the other daring and rebellious self of Dolores. Dolores is a shy, simple Chicana who wears a regular plain floral dress as any polite, conventional Chicana, while Lolita is a sexy, showy, flashy and daring Chicana who is ready to express her opinions freely and even call for her rights and stand before the macho figures. As a result, the costume and the property list are functional implicit non-verbal techniques of characterization. Techniques of characterization are used to externalize the inner reality of the character of Dolores. Her bodily gestures and movements show that she hates men

³ Dolores. means "sorrows", taken from the Spanish title of the Virgin Mary María de los Dolores, meaning "Mary of Sorrows". It has been used in the English-speaking world since the 19th century, becoming especially popular in America during the 1920s and 30s (Dolores).

⁴ Mi Corazon. My heart.

and she wants to prove that she is more powerful than them. Thus, her gender is exemplified in her non-verbal aspects.

An example of La Malinche is in Joséfina López's play *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* in which Lopez presents the new Chicana, picturing her in two selves, or two psyches that both represent the pure Chicana and the whore-like Chicana. López introduces to the audience Dolores Corazon as "a shy Chicana wearing a plain pastel floral print" (12). Whereas she visualizes the other self of Dolores when she introduces Lolita as a: "flamboyant, sexy Chicana who is not afraid to express her opinions and doesn't need any body's approval" (12). This is the typical assimilation between La Virgen de Guadalupe and la Malinche represented in Dolores' two selves. However, it is important not to take López's view with all its defects. Women should be independent without being unethical. López, in addition, highlights this character who suffers from gender oppression creating another sexy character for herself – Lolita – who in turn is avenging all the males she meets in her life as a result of living in such a patriarchal society: LOLITA. . . . The day I start wearing a female condom is the day the Equal Rights Amendment is passed; women are no longer raped and beaten up in this country; baby girls in China stop getting killed for being born female; brides in India stop being burned alive; women in Africa stop having their clitorises cut out; women in Brazil stop getting killed by jealous husbands who get away with it; and young women all over the world have equal opportunity to get an education and get fed properly. (12)

In this monologue, Lolita explicitly comments on her other personality, Dolores, and all other Chicanas after Dolores' first appearance on stage. This dynamic character actually portrays how Chicanas are suffering from gender oppression and pain all over the world:

The lives of Mexican American woman is too often characterized by poverty, racism, and sexism not only in the dominant culture, but also within her own culture. The effects of poverty and discrimination should not be misattributed to culture. These are just some of the cultural and social complexities to consider when exploring how gender is constructed in Mexican culture and how it might shape the meanings and consequences of rape and sexual abuse in traditional, acculturated Mexican American women. (Lira, Ramos, Koss and Russo 243)

Thus, López advises every woman to be powerful and get the weapon that can empower her. When women begin to be independent, they would realize that women all over the world should gain their rights, and be treated fairly.

The next character that visualizes racial oppression is Calletana. She is the embodiment of the working class category since "Employers have come to rely increasingly on Mexican immigrant labor to meet their need for cheap, seasonal labor" (S. Gonzales 60). This old woman – Calletana – who sells corn in the street symbolizes the working class labor that are misused and mistreated. She does not

have any place to live in and is always arrested. She also works as a maid and is treated as a slave, so she quits this job. Calletana is living proof that Chicanas are not lazy; they are powerful and they deserve a secure life where they can earn their living:

People are stratified into various classes and some of these classes have more privilege than others. The owning class has enough power and privilege to not have to give a good whinney what the rest of the folks have on their minds. The power and privilege of the owning class provides the ability to pay off enough of the working class and offer that paid-off group, the middle class, just enough privilege to make it agreeable to do various and sundry oppressive things to other working-class and outright disenfranchised folk, keeping the lid on explosive inequities. (Anzaldúa 24)

Calletana represents those working class people. She waits for the leftovers of the owning and the middle class. Though she is classified as the lowest class ever, she does not complain, but works hard and fights to get some money. However, the owning class still wants to oppress her as it firmly believes that in giving people such as Calletana a chance to earn money will affect their prosperity since earning money may help her to be a rich trader.

Calletana has a dialogue with the court judge where she explicitly highlights the tyrannical society she lives in and the oppressions most Chicanas face: "I came here and worked as a maid until I got tired of being treated like a slave . . . I don't like it when they say that Mexicans are lazy, because we are not. **Prietos y sensillos tal vez, pero** lazy no. Because we didn't cross a river and risk our lives to get here just to be tourists. We came here to work" (15). Her words sum up the racial oppression Chicanas face. This kind of injustice Calletana faces creates in her a sense of tyranny. She wants to shout out loud in order to be heard. She is not an illegal alien. Calletana is a stereotypical character who calls for the rights of those belonging to the same class. However, Americans arrest them, and still treat them as animals which in turn angers Calletana:

We are here to tell you that we are just trying to survive. We are not taking away any big profits from the stores where we sell at because whatever we make is only to get by. To feed our families. We are not on the streets robbing, committing crimes, or hurting the economy like we are blamed. But just because we're "illegal aliens," as you call us, doesn't mean we have no voice. But why are we "illegal"? I don't understand. What is our crime? Wanting to survive and feed our children? That is the right of every human being. Because even if we are undocumented we are part of this city and we contribute to the economy. Today I come to remind you that the streets, the land, and the sun belong to no one. They belong to all of us. And that's why I come to ask you that you give us the right to earn a living. (16) Calletana is a hard-working member in the American society, who, nevertheless,

is looked down on. Her inability to demystify the stereotypes that describe her as a lazy alien hinders the formation of her identity. Hence, her struggle is centered on proving herself as a fully-fledged member of society.

The low-wage women workers actually do much of the hard work on which middle-class life and happiness rely. They clean offices, hotels and homes. They plant and serve food. They sew clothes they cannot afford to wear. Yet, they find themselves hated and called lazy citizens. López wants to clarify how oppressed Chicano/as are in this kind of society, how they simply want to survive: “Wage differences between white men and women and Chicanos illustrate stratification by race within the labor market. The result of the interplay between race and gender is the consistently lower income and status of Chicanas relative to Chicano males and to the majority white population” (Segura 65).

This wage difference creates a very wide gap between Chicanas and Chicanos which in turn results in more hatred to the gender oppression issue. Women tend to work hard, yet they are so despised and maltreated by Chicanos. Calletana becomes the heroine of all Chicanas who suffer from the same problem of underestimating the Chicanas’ work. Chicanas just need a chance to prove that they can work hard, and can attain higher positions: “Employers restrict those who are or are perceived to be foreigners to low-wage, menial labor others don’t want; in this work their language skills do not improve. Their income and perceived racial and cultural difference seriously limit their housing options; they thus [end] up living far from other possible employment, learning, and training opportunities, and so on” (J. Garcia 162).

Lopez uses costume to shed light on Calletana, as she wears “an apron, knee highs, a colorful dress, pants, and a red baseball cap” (15). Though she is very poor, works on the street, gets arrested many times, she seems to be happy and enjoying her work. She wears a colorful dress and a red shiny cap. She even sings while she is working. In the stage direction López comments on Calletana’s words after the latter was complaining about what she faces and how she is humiliated and ill secured, saying: “*she prepares another corn, taking her time and doing it with a certain pleasure. She sings a love song in Spanish*” (15). Her clothes and her verbal and nonverbal expressions show that she is contented with what she has. Her songs, her gestures and body alignment show that she just needs a chance to prove that she is professional at work and that she can succeed.

Using an explicit figural technique represented in Calletana’s monologues characterizes those low class workers who work hard and have nothing in return. Her monologue reveals her subtle revolt against this system: “What I didn’t like when I first started was that I would be selling corn and the police would pass by and they would tell me it was illegal what I was doing. That they would have to arrest me . . . every week they would do this and I just acted like a **mensa** (stupid) and I’d tell them ‘yes, mister! Okay, okay.’ Then they’d leave, but I’d always come

back” (15-16). Calletana is very persistent despite the American society’s refusal to allow her or any other Chicana to work and elevate their position. Though she got arrested, she still comes again and again and is never sad. Instead she sings a love song symbolizing her hope against all odds.

Another vibrant character in *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* is Yoko, who is a 28 year old Chicana, trying to pass for Japanese. She is one of the weighty characters in this play, as she represents all the oppressions mentioned above: “she is a difficult character to be performed” (López, *email*). Yoko is another vivid example that shows how people evaluate Chicanas by their bodies. Her monological self-commentaries and her self-interpretations show her as a woman of low self-esteem:

YOKO. You see, you see. I do know Japanese . . . I need this job! You don’t know what I’ve been through. I tried getting a job at a French restaurant but they were so rude I had to quit. Then I went to a Brazilian restaurant but they said I needed to be darker, but I don’t tan, I burn. Then I worked at an Italian restaurant, but the owner kept pinching me in the ass, and I had to quit because I told his wife. (17) Concerning body consciousness, Yoko suffers from the way people look at her body, and never care about her abilities. Whenever she gets a job, she gets harassed and attacked by men, and she has to bear that or she will be fired; so, she does not continue in any job.

Yoko reveals most of the Chicana’s inner strength. She is more powerful and beautiful than what she thinks she is. In one of the dialogues, Yoko is trying to prove to Mrs. Ito – the manager of the Chinese restaurant – that she is really a hard worker, and that she can learn Japanese in a very short time. Yoko attempts to impress Mrs. Ito by listing the names of all the fish in Japanese:

You want me to list the names of all the fish used in sushi, in Japanese? Sure! Hai! Maguro, Toro, Katsuo, Saba, Shake, Tai, Hirame, Tako, Suzuki, Ebi, Uni, Hamachi, to...to...ah... ah...ah.... (YOKO has difficulty remembering the rest. She tries to remember, but can’t. She breaks out of character.) . . . I forgot! What’s it called? I know, I know, I was supposed to have learned all my Japanese lingo by now, but it’s hard remembering all those “K” sounds . . . (Yoko runs to Mrs. Ito 2 and bows) . . . (Yoko runs to Mrs. Ito 3) Wait, Wait, I can learn this language. (17) Yoko believes that in forgetting one kind, she may lose her job. She, thus, tries to beg Mrs. Ito to forgive her and give her another chance. This is what López calls low self-esteem because Yoko does not know that she is a very powerful and highly educated Chicana, who can speak English, Japanese and Spanish. In this dialogue, Yoko repeats several words and uses many gestures that stress the low status she feels.

In one of her articles, López says, "I firmly believe that Latinos and other minorities are never going to be given equal status in this country. They have to create it for

themselves” (López, *Chicana Playwrights*). López uses verbal and non-verbal techniques to show how Yoko underestimates herself. This is manifested in Yoko's gestures and soliloquies. The verb (runs), for instance, is repeated 13 times. This repetition symbolizes how hard Yoko is striving to get this job. She combines verbal repetition with non-verbal running, bowing and begging to get that job. She has no self-confidence, which is evident in her repetition of many words like (I know, I know) and (Wait, wait). At the end of her monologue, she gets the job. In her dialogue with Mrs. Ito, she tries explicitly to comment on her life and to tell her how much she suffered in order to get her to sympathize with her and let her have the job. In another context, she speaks on behalf of Josefina López and all Chicanas when she portrays the hardships she faces in this patriarchal society: “I want a man who is gentle, kind, who doesn’t scream. I’m tired of men screaming at me . . . I just can’t deal with screaming. It’s not the actual screaming that bothers me, it’s the face of a man screaming, it’s his expression, it’s his aggression, it’s his fist screaming at me . . . I just don’t want to end up marrying my father” (17-18). Yoko highlights the aggression she faces in living with a man. The Stage directions indicate that “YOKO is about to start crying. Then, she strikes a Kabuki theatre crying pose instead” (17). The non-verbal implicit technique exemplified in Yoko’s facial expressions and gestures externalize her frustration. The crying pose becomes symbolic of her constant feelings of low self-esteem and inability to escape her Mexican heritage.

Yoko is also not satisfied with her body and wants to change her body, her character and even dispense with her identity. In this scene, the audience sees Yoko’s high potentials. Yet she falls down when she underestimates herself, arousing in the audience feelings of pity and fear for her:

YOKO. I’m Mexican, and aside from having large breasts I’ve also got huge hips and sometimes I wish I were Japanese so I’d eat a lot of fish and rice and not have to worry about my weight . . . You see, that’s another reason I want this job. So I can go on a diet, eat lots of fish, and get down to a marriageable size . . . aside from the Japanese, I’m a great waitress. I’ve been a waitress all my life. In fact, it’s the only thing I know how to do . . . I know how to take orders, I smile, and I don’t water. Please give me one more chance . . . I just need a chance. (18)

These two dialogues with Mrs. Ito show how oppressed she feels, and how ready she is to do anything to get a job. Yoko’s diction symbolizes her gender oppression: “large breasts”, “marriageable size”, “hips”, etc. are all phrases that indicate her gender oppression and body consciousness.

In another context, the owner of the restaurant “Tokyo House of Sushi” - who is a woman too - does not like Yoko, so Yoko believes that she doesn’t like her because of her body: “I know that by the very fact that I have large breasts practically disqualifies me from passing for Japanese, but I’ll tie them up” (18). This is the trend that exists in treating Chicanas, and this is what López tries to criticize in her

play.

She highlights the idea that Chicanas have great minds, and they can be successful in their work if they are respected and evaluated according to their merits and not according to their bodies:

Any serious study of the Chicana is a study in contradictions. On the one hand, the Chicana is viewed as passive and submissive and on the other, she is de-scribed as the strength of the family and community . . . Women find themselves on the periphery of a male-dominated, male-invented world. They neither decide nor influence national policy except in isolated cases. (S. Gonzales 48)

It is thus clear that López wants to assert that Chicanas' perspective must be changed in the eyes of the other. By performing the Chicana identity onstage, López is calling for a redefinition of her role so that she may be moved out of the marginal and into the center of the family and community.

Yoko is actually the center of the play as she represents the three oppressions. She is also a difficult character to be performed: "It's a real challenge" – as Joséfina López puts it – "to switch from acting Japanese to returning to Chicana and then go into Japanese and then into French and Italian. It's a killer monologue to perform" (López, *email*). López wants, by portraying this character, to show not only how talented this young woman is, but also how much she underestimates herself, in an attempt to show how many Chicanas are suffering from low self-esteem. Therefore, Yoko is the embodiment of low self-esteem (race), body consciousness (gender) and class-consciousness.

López uses the explicit authorial technique of telling names in giving Yoko such a significant name. Yoko is derived from the Japanese name "Youko" which - "From Japanese" - is defined as "陽 (you) 'sun, sunlight' or 洋 (you) 'ocean' combined with 子 (ko) 'child' (Youko)" (Campell, *Youko*). This definition characterizes Yoko as a bright, shining and pure woman. It actually elevates her to a higher position in the eyes of the audience, which is what López aspires for a Chicana to attain.

Another vivid example is portrayed in Yoko's costume and property list. She has one kimono, one black wig, one pair of Japanese sandals, and one Japanese fan. Though she is Chicana, she has nothing in her property list and costume to prove her Chicana identity. All what she has are Japanese identity costumes and masks. This reveals how much she underestimates herself. López wants to highlight this racial oppression problem which Yoko portrays. Chicana identity is about to diminish because they do not have money to spend, and because Americans do not offer them suitable jobs. Chicanas tend to dispense with everything they have, even if they will renounce their identities for the sake of money. That is what López tries to solve. She wants to restore the Chicana identity through fighting these

oppressions. Lopez employs non-verbal techniques of characterization - props, costumes, gestures, facial expressions, etc. - to highlight the themes of the play. One of the other important techniques applied by López in her play is the use of gestures. Body movements are very significant in a way that conveys to the audience certain features that characterize the *dramatis personae*. For example, if the character usually runs, speaks quickly and is never in a stable status, then s/he may be lying or has a weak personality. Butler hints that gender can be shaped through the movements of the body: "Gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (Butler, *Performative Acts* 519).

This is manifested in *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*, where Yoko's body language shows her inner conflict and confused self: "Stage Direction: (YOKO runs to MRS. ITO 1 fanning herself.) . . . (YOKO runs to MRS. ITO 3 fanning herself.) . . . (YOKO runs to MRS. ITO 2 fanning herself)" (17). Her constant fanning and running show that she lacks confidence and self-esteem. Such non-verbal, implicit figural techniques show that she is ready to turn to Japanese and dispense with her identity. Yoko's running also creates a kind of comic relief, highlighted by López in order to lessen the tension created by the actresses when facing those oppressions.

The next character in the play is Roxie, who is a 30 year old self-defense instructor. Undoubtedly, she is also another serious character crystallizing the importance of telling names technique. This name stands for "Diminutive of ROXANA: Latin form of Ρωξάνη (Roxane), the Greek form of the Persian or Bactrian name روشنک (Roshanak) which means "bright" or "dawn". This was the name of Alexander the Great's first wife, a daughter of the Bactrian nobleman Oxyartes. In the modern era it came into use during the 17th century. In the English-speaking world it was popularized by Daniel Defoe, who used it in his novel 'Roxana' (1724)" ("Roxie"). In *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*, Roxie adopts a new trend in the lives of Chicanas. She asks them to take self-defense lessons in order to be able to defend themselves. Her adopted method of defense is a way to totally reject the old conventions which were not useful at all to women. Roxie truly represents the dawn of a new world for Chicanas where they can take their rights.

In another context, López uses the character of Roxie who also faces gender oppression: "I got harassed so much by men. I got tired of their threatening remarks so I took a self-defense class. I got so good at it I decided to teach it" (19). She believes that Chicanas are living in a macho culture, in which all men believe that women are their property. to use any way they like. Consequently, Roxie believes that she can change this submissive Chicana and create a powerful one who can defend herself: "In order not to be a victim, you have to stop acting like one! Lift your heads high, walk with confidence. Defending yourself is only a matter of using

your five weapons. Your hands, fingers, knees, legs, and your voice” (20). Roxie’s self-defense lessons actually redefine the Chicana identity so that a Chicana may trust her abilities and be safe and strong. Butler argues that “By enacting conventions, we do make them ‘real’ to some extent” (Butler, *Performative Acts* 279). By teaching other Chicanas her self-defense lessons, Roxie takes Butler’s message a step further; she enacts the new conventions and (per)forms a new identity onstage.

López utilizes another non-verbal technique through Roxie’s costume. The stage direction says: “Roxie . . . , a tough looking Latina, wearing jeans, cowboy boots with steel heels . . . she could be mistaken for a ‘butch’ lesbian, but she’s not. Her core is very feminine, her exterior is very masculine” (19). Roxie’s exterior outlook is very symbolic as it signifies her as a woman who does not care about men. Roxie hates men who abuse her to the extent that she is seen by others as lesbian though she is straight. Moreover, López draws a significant parallelism in her words “her core is very feminine, her exterior is very masculine”. This parallelism implies how much she is attractive, feminine, but also how much she tries to hide this femininity by her tomboyish costume

Another significant character within the play is Tiffany, a 20 year old valley girl and Chicana activist. López explicitly describes her as “the born again Chicana” (21) in the stage directions, thus authorially branding her as the change agent and symbolizing the challenge Tiffany takes to redefine her identity. Tiffany adopts the feminist viewpoint together with the goals of the Chicana movement to redefine the Chicana woman and change her from a silenced object to a daring doer who is able to call for her rights. Through having more self-respect and self-esteem, Tiffany becomes a new born Chicana.

Tiffany adores artistic works. She is a big fan of Frida Kahlo⁵’s paintings and sees her life in them. She is ready to defend Kahlo’s paintings from being stolen by others. Tiffany’s admiration of Frida Kahlo is symbolic since she was a bi-sexual woman who had a moustache and Kahlo refused patriarchal norms. Tiffany finds in Kahlo’s life the role model she really needs. She lives with low self-esteem, believing that she only lives to please her boyfriend who is always criticizing her, and never accepts her as she is:

You know, I used to think I was Italian several years ago when I was ‘in denial about being Mexican,’ or at least that’s why my Chicano boyfriend has convinced

⁵ Frida Kahlo de Rivera (July 6, 1907 – July 13, 1954) was a Mexican painter, born in Coyoacán. She was best known for her self-portraits. Kahlo's work is remembered for its "pain and passion", and its intense, vibrant colors. Her work has been celebrated in Mexico as the symbol of national tradition. Her work has also been described as "surrealist". Kahlo suffered lifelong health problems. These issues are reflected in her works, more than half of which are self-portraits of one sort or another.

me I did . . . Julio thinks I should stop wearing these clothes or I should dye my hair black and get some sun because I'm too pale. I remember when I thought I was better because I was a light-skinned Mexican, but now I wish I had like jet black hair, like brown, brown skin, and like really full, full lips. (21-22)

Tiffany's desire to look more "Mexican" indicates her inner shift of values and signals her appreciation of her roots.

Tiffany's boyfriend does not allow her to do so, leading her to breaking up with him. He characterizes Tiffany's low self-esteem. With him, she is always stuttering, stammering and repeating words: "like the world beyond . . . like the cosmos, like the kingdom of God, like I don't know" (22). In another context, she keeps repeating the same word: "like brown . . . like really full, full lips . . . like I should be something else. Like he's in love with what I could be" (23). These repetitions serve to assert the fact that she is weak, hesitated and lacking trust in herself. However, when she reads the letter she has written to Frida deeply, she realizes how strong she must be:

Now everybody loves you. People worship you, you're a fad. They have discovered you like they discovered the Americas. You're a newfound treasure, and your paintings are selling in the millions. And it doesn't bother anyone you were bisexual or that you had a moustache. People love you even more... Love, you know, like what is love? I think I love Julio, but I don't think he loves me. Or at least it seems he's always saying like I should be something else. Like he's in love with what I could be but not with what I am. (23)

After this monologue, Tiffany realizes the strength in her. She overcomes her lack of trust and gender oppression, and convinces herself that if she cannot trust herself and her abilities, no one will. As a consequence, the stage direction visualizes her high morale: "TIFFANY becomes serious and continues reading the letter more passionately. Her Spanish has gotten a lot better now" (23). She now feels confident of herself. The improvement in her Spanish is yet another indication of her holding on to her roots.

Similar to Doña Concepcion is Doña Florinda in being victimized. The dramatic conflict of all the characters in the play is their struggle to be happy, to possess the human dignity that they deserve. Doña Florinda is a TV soap opera addict, who does nothing but watching TV. This has led her to ignore her children causing their destruction. She is a stereotypical character standing for all the empty minded Chicanas who do not think of the policy practiced on them.

Whereas most old Chicanas have no awareness of the aim of distracting them, Doña Florinda is fully aware of it as her husband used to tell her that "Spanish TV soaps, telenovelas, are the 'opium of the Latino masses,' the work of the CIA to keep Latin America pacified through the transmission of subliminal messages and micro x-rays which in the long run deteriorate brain cells at a rate faster than marijuana and alcohol" (24). She is quite aware of the American policy. They need to let the

whole world know that the Mexican Americans are lazy, do not work hard, have low acquisition of language and are considered a burden on the society.

López introduces this character to the audience to wake them up from the soap opera they are living in, to let them see their defects and flaws. She also presents the consequences resulting from this addiction to soap operas through the words of Doña Florinda:

I could tape them and watch them at midnight when my husbands were sleeping. So I wouldn't sleep at night and during the day I was a zombie. I would just sleep and my youngest son Tomas would go hungry. I'd give him money for fast food or heat him a frozen meal. He is twelve years old and weighs two hundred and fifty pounds . . . my daughter was holding up a K-mart and she was holding the 'Blue Light Special' announcer hostage . . . I saw my son as a 'transvestite' who wants to get a sex change. (24)

In her dialogues with the women desiring to support her, Doña Florinda expresses how her children have been tremendously affected by her neglect of them.

The government does its part to turn the public opinion against the Chicano/as; as they arguably convince the people that for those who believe that Mexicans are hard workers and do not deserve such treatment, the Chicano/as behavior shows the opposite: they cannot be reliable; they pass time watching TV; mothers neglect their husbands and children's needs and they do not work at all. Doña Florinda is López's signpost to attract attention to the war waged against the Mexican community in the United States.

Valentina is the mouthpiece of the playwright. She is the only character who actually makes a public revolt against proposition 187, awakening the Chicanas and all her people. She combines the merits all the other characters have, and fights against the triple oppressions payoff gender, body and class. López lets Valentina herself define her name: "my name is ... Valentina. Named after "La Valentina," for those of you who haven't taken a Mexican History course, take one ... she was the Mexican woman general that fought alongside Pancho Villa" (25). She symbolizes a leader who can gather the entire nation around her. She awakens the Chicanas to ask for their rights as women, working class, mothers, wives, and Mexicans.

The message Joséfina López wants the audience to get is that Chicanas should work hard; they should know that it is time for them to restore their identity and be respected by all Americans. It does not matter how many obstacles they will face. What really matters is how they will reach their goals. She sums up her ideas in a symbolic technique, using Valentina's last words: "Our Raza needs your help. Times are getting scarier and dangerous for us. If you don't believe me, just open your eyes . . . I want you to stand up and turn to one another . . . With Proposition 187 everybody is a suspect . . . awake! Awake, Raza" (27-28).

This monologue summarizes all the incidents that take place in a Mexican–American society. It symbolizes all the problems and dilemmas Chicano/as are facing. López makes it her mission – as Valentina does – to help Chicanas find their power through their own voice and their own story. She ends the play by showing the audience how this can be done. The stage directions indicate that "In the darkness VALENTINA circles the stage in the air and passes it on. Each woman does the same and lights fade out" (28). Circling the stage symbolizes gathering all her views and opinions in one circle and passing them on to the audience to adopt. Moreover, circles are often symbols of unity and protection:

Circles commonly represent unity, wholeness, and infinity. Without beginning or end, without sides or corners, the circle is also associated with the number one. In some cases, there is a distinction between that which is contained within the circle and that which lies without . . . Circles are often seen as protective symbols.

Standing within a circle shields a person from supernatural dangers or influences outside of the circle. Conversely, a circle can also be containing, keeping that which is inside from been released. (Beyer)

Circles symbolize the unity of all Chicanas who must wake up and defend their rights, who must change and call for a new way of life. It is also a symbol of protection. They are gathered in a circle – an act that symbolizes that their unity will protect them from the outer world, and from the invader; whether it is the figure of the tyrannical Man or the Americans.

Valentina depicts social identity. She speaks about all the problems her society and her gender suffer from. She is a stereotypical character who represents her gender of the same race and status. Valentina (per)forms both a personal and a social identity as she calls for the right of every woman to have medical care, the right to vote and to have a say regarding the constitution. She represents her personal identity when she revolts against the tyrannical constitutions, and also when she decides to call for her rights. She decides, in addition to that, to change her people and call for their rights, thus converting from personal identity to a social one and from a small aim to a big revolt.

Identity formation in *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* is highlighted through the explicit, implicit, authorial and figural techniques of dramatic characterization techniques as well as Butler's theory of performativity and gender. Through López's dramatis personae and the "repeated acts" performed by the actresses in many scenes the play. The Chicana identity gets to be (per)formed on stage.

López uses four types of characters and various characterization techniques to highlight racial, body and class oppressions. She creates the low-class woman, represented by Calletana, the educated woman, represented by Marquez Bernstein; the under-estimated woman, represented by Yoko; the low self-esteem woman represented by Tiffany and the revolutionary women, represented by Roxie and Valentina. In *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*, Joséfina López creates a play

with which people may intellectually disagree, but are united with spiritually and emotionally. López tries to shock the audience using dark comedy - making them laugh and cry at the same time - and then show them the absurdity of their societal mask.

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