

The New Mestiza: Negotiating Gender and Ethnicity in Josefina López 's Simply Maria, or, The American Dream.

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“A woman who writes has power, and a woman with power is feared.”
(Gloria Anzaldúa, *Speaking in Tongues* 171)

Abstract

This paper addresses itself to the representations of gender and ethnicity in Josefina López 's *Simply Maria, or, The American Dream* (1992). It highlights patriarchy and racism in Mexican- American culture and investigates whether marginalization and persecution silence people or lead them to fight in order to get their rights and achieve their full potential. The paper examines how *Simply Maria* deconstructs the stereotypes about Chicanas and shows them as agents of social change. Overall, this paper gives an insight into Mexican-American theatre and explores how Chicana writers use theatre to discuss the problems of their countrywomen and give voice to the disenfranchised.

Keywords

Gender, ethnicity, marginalization, persecution, stereotypes, the American Dream, Chicana theatre

Introduction

The term "The New *Mestiza*" was coined by the feminist Chicana writer, Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004). By *Mestiza*, she means a "hybrid" (*Mestizaje: half and half*). In her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa states that overriding colonial discourse makes borders that put those regarded as *others* on the margins. Chicana women are always put on the border between their American and Mexican entities. Although this border was created by colonizers to divide, Anzaldúa regards it as a transitional space where a new *mestiza* consciousness can be created. Chicanas can, then, claim both their Mexican and American identities. A Chicana is a Mexican-American female who is brought up in the United States. Over the years, the term has come to be associated with a woman who suffers from the supremacy of men in her own culture as well as discrimination in the dominant culture. In other words, the Chicana undergoes sexism and racism in both cultures. Moreover, this term refers to a woman who boasts of her Mexican culture and heritage, but, concurrently, realizes that she is an American citizen (Garcia 320-325). It also applies to those Mexican-American women who want to create cultural, political and social identities for themselves in America. The rewriting of Chicana

women's experiences and history is an important stage in this recovery of identities. Anzaldúa maintains:

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la Mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. (5)

Anzaldúa offers a mode of being for Chicanas who are always disconcerted with issues of cultural collision and assimilation. This mode of being cherishes their distinctive stance and experience. It reveals how a counter-stance can not be a perpetual way of living because it imprisons one into a battle of persecutor/persecuted. To be merely reactionary means that the dominant culture must remain prevalent for the counter-stance to exist. The "new mestiza" re-expounds what it means to be a Chicana. According to Anzaldúa, Chicanas must encourage all aspects of identity and accept diversity, inconsistencies, vagueness and hybridity.

Simply Maria, or, The American Dream (1992) is a semi-autobiographical play that accentuates how a Chicana can create a transitional space in which a new *mestiza* consciousness can be constructed. It emphasizes a Chicana's nationalist and feminist struggle against racism and sexism. The heroine of this play- who is victimized because of her gender and race- strives in order not to be treated as a sex object or a second hand citizen anymore. The play traces her journey as she tries to establish her own identity and be a self-assertive woman. Chicana women are central characters in this play as well as agents of social change. *Simply Maria* was written by the Mexican-American dramatist Josefina López (1969-) who is regarded as one of the leading figures in Chicana theatre today. Lopez decided to use the theatre as a vehicle by which she can give voice to the silenced and raise women's awareness in Mexico towards social change. Through this play, she tries to shatter the misconception of the inferiority of Mexican women and achieve cultural integrity for all Chicanas that were un-represented and victimized.

This paper addresses itself to the representations of gender and ethnicity in *Simply Maria, or, The American Dream* (1992). The play is discussed in the light of the Post-Colonial Feminist theory as well as the Chicana Feminist theory. This paper, therefore, highlights patriarchy and racism in Mexican American culture and investigates whether marginalization and persecution silence people or empower them. The paper examines how *Simply Maria*

deconstructs the stereotypes about Chicans and shows them as agents of social change. It, further, explores how Chicana women can create the transitional space that Gloria Anzaldúa stressed and build a new Chicana consciousness. Overall, the paper gives an insight into Mexican American theatre and explores how Chicana writers use theatre to discuss the problems of their countrywomen and give voice to the disenfranchised.

Post-Colonial Feminist Theory

Post-Colonial Feminist theory emerged in the 1980s to make up for the shortcomings of the Post-Colonial theory as well as the mainstream Feminist theory. While Post-Colonial theory handles the repercussions of imperialism on colonized people, it does not focus on its impact on women. Likewise, Feminist theory, which is sometimes referred to as Western Feminist theory, accentuates the problems of European and American women and neglects those of Third World Women. Raj Kumar Mishra defines Post Colonial Feminism as:

...a critique of the homogenizing tendencies of Western Feminism. Contrary to Western feminism, 'postcolonial feminism' as a new feather wishes to bring into light the typicality of problems of women of the Third World nations. This is mainly the initiative of those activists, and academics who belong partially or fully to once colonized countries. They are working for the all-round amelioration in the lives of women of postcolonial origin. (129)

Post-colonial Feminists assert that mainstream Feminism misrepresents Third World women when it disregards the historical, political, and sociocultural backgrounds of these women and overlooks important issues like social class, race, ethnicity and locations which play vital roles in the lives of these women.

According to Post-colonial Feminists, women of color suffer from "double colonization"; i.e. the oppressiveness of colonialism as well as patriarchy. Hence, they try to help these women get rid of male-domination and obtain their cultural, social, economic, and religious freedom as well. In other words, Post-colonial feminists endeavor to assist Third World women to fight patriarchy and racism. Thus, Postcolonial feminist theory uses the amalgamation between gender and race to highlight the problems of the silenced and marginalized women of color. In her essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*", the prominent Indian critic Gyatri Spivak states that it is the double colonization of women of color that makes them unable to speak for themselves and stress their suffering:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly affected. The question is not of female participation on insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is evidence. It is, rather that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow. (Marxism 287)

Moreover, Post-colonial feminist theory- which is also called Third World feminist theory- condemns Western Feminists' attitude to homogenize women all over the world. It attacks the term "universal sisterhood" that second-wave American feminists tried to promote and spread because it ignores cultural multiplicity, ethnic, racial and social differences between these women (Lorde116).

Heterogeneity or non- homogeneity is a remarkable feature in post colonial feminist works. Postcolonial feminists believe that distinctions between women of color and their American and European counterparts must be emphasized and esteemed, and that drawing attention to them is sometimes more significant to women of color than the individual rights of these women. Chandra Mohanty, the post-colonial feminist critic, believes that these distinctions can never be discarded because they work together and constitute women's personalities (Feminism without Borders 55). Western women have not suffered from racial discrimination, for example, and can not feel its impact. As Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga stated:

As Third World women we clearly have a different relationship to racism than white women, but all of us are born into an environment where racism exists. Racism affects all of our lives, but it is only white women who can 'afford' to remain oblivious to these effects. The rest of us have had it breathing or bleeding down our necks. (62)

Additionally, while Western feminists are "home-family- man haters" and regard marriage, family and home as "secondary" issues, post-colonial feminists do not want to destroy family structures, but seek understanding and appreciation. Likewise, they do not regard "motherhood / womanhood" as "constrictive " (Mishra 133) , but they hate the restrictions imposed on them by their male-centered societies. They want to be revered and regarded as partners, not as second hand people. They want to get true education and job opportunities similar to those of men. In short, they want to be recognized and to play vital roles in their families and societies.

Above all, Post-colonial feminists strive to give the chance for oppressed women to speak for themselves, whether these women are subjugated in their own countries or immigrants in other countries. They object to the idea of the "white savior", who tries to interfere in the affairs of women of color to put an end to their suffering, since it justifies colonialism. Besides, they reject Western feminists' portrayal of Third World women as victims of religious and patriarchal powers and retrograde regimes that oppress them, hence, they need the interference of the West to save them from these abusive conditions. Gyatri Spivak disagrees with Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze who assert that the West can speak for women of color and protect them from their authoritarian men. She strongly objects to the notion of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Marxism 297) and thinks that such notions are part of a political agenda that tries to legalize colonialism. According to Spivak, language is another barrier that prevents Western feminists, who assume sisterhood and solidarity with these marginalized women of color, to speak for them and express their problems accurately:

Rather than imagining that women automatically have something identifiable in common, why not say, humbly and practically, my first obligation in assuming solidarity is to learn her mother-tongue. You will see immediately what the differences are. You will also feel the solidarity everyday as you make the attempt to learn the language in which the other woman learnt to recognize reality at her mother's knee. This is preparation for the intimacy of cultural translation. (Outside in the Teaching Machine 215)

Post-colonial Feminists condemn those stereotypes that Western media portrays and spreads about Third World women. Mohanty disapproves of the depiction of Western women as "educated" and "modern" and that of Third World women as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized" (Third World Women 56). She affirms that such a classification is part of a hegemonic Western discourse that tries to belittle Third World women and show them as inferior creatures and elevate Western Women and show them as the role-models that all other women must imitate.

Chicana Feminism, or, Xicanism

In this regard, Post-Colonial Feminist theory is very similar to Chicana Feminism, also referred to as Xicanism, which emerged in the mid 1960's and endeavored to save women of color from both sexism and racism. During this period, many minority groups in the U.S. suffered from invisibility and marginalization. Following the Civil Rights Movement, some movements began

to arise, such as the Chicano Movement and The Feminist Movement which is known as the Second wave of feminism.

The Chicano Movement, which is also known as El Movimiento, was an extension of the 1940's Mexican American Civil Rights Movement. It tried to shatter the ethnic stereotypes that spread in America about the Mexican culture. It, also, fought for educational, social, and political equality for all Mexicans in the United States. One of the main organizations that supported the Chicano movement was the United Farm Workers organization, which was formed in 1962 and tried to call for the equality for Mexican-American workers in the agriculture business. The Chicano Movement was also motivated by other civil rights movements, during this time, like the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Many Chicanos struggled with African Americans to call for equality. Other organizations that inspired the Chicano Movement were the Young Lords, Brown Berets, and the Black Panthers. Moreover, the Chicano Student Movement was formed due to the educational inequality from which the Mexican-Americans suffered during this time (Garcia 315-337). All of these movements pushed the Chicanos to protest and call for their rights. However, although the Chicano movement tried to make Chicanos proud of their cultural identity, it was a male-centered movement and neglected the problems of women.

On the other hand, the Anglo Feminist Movement, which also appeared in the mid 1960's and included middle and upper class white American women, called for equality for women in employment and labor unions. However, it focused only on gender inequality and neglected other important elements such as ethnicity and class. It did not take into consideration how these elements intersect and affect other groups of people (Pérez 30-35). In the beginning, Chicana women were inspired by the white feminist movement. Nevertheless, the white feminists' refusal to handle the racial issues of colored women as well as problems of class inequalities led Chicanas, who regard themselves as Chicano first and women second, to discard this movement.

Hence, Chicanas felt that they are un-represented in the Chicano Movement as well as in the Anglo Feminist Movement. They want to be recognized and respected as both women and Chicana. Therefore, they founded their own school of feminism that addresses their own problems. It fights patriarchy, racial discrimination and class inequality and tries to attain economic, political and social equality for women (Saldívar-Hull 10-15). Chicana Feminists maintain that when they resist oppression, it is impossible to separate their gender from their race, culture, class and religion. Without putting one of these identities over the other, all these elements have great impacts on women. They intersect to make them who they are.

A fundamental text in Chicana feminist thought is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) in which she examines the incorporeal spaces between cultural borders. In this book, Anzaldúa debates how a Chicana can handle the conflict of living between two distinctive cultures. Moreover, she suggests ways in which Chicana texts might be dealt with or interpreted. Anzaldúa maintains that the *mestiza* consciousness is a place where a Chicana, who is torn between two cultures, examines gender and ethnic identities. Then, *la mestiza* consciousness congregates gender and ethnic cultures and integrates different cultural worlds to construct a new world to which the Chicana can belong.

The two main concerns of Post-Colonial Feminism and Chicana Feminism; i.e. patriarchy and imperialism are apparent in Josefina López's *Simply Maria* (1992).

Simply Maria is a semi auto-biographical play written by, the seventeen-year-old Mexican American playwright, Josefina López who was tremendously agitated by her father's ill-treatment for both her and her mother. Hence, she wrote this play to express her dissatisfaction with her father's attitude towards them as well as to condemn women's abuse in Mexico. Moreover, in this play, López expresses her anger with her mother's subordination to her father and urges her countrywomen to strive to put an end to the extreme violence to which they are exposed in their male-dominated families. Besides, López wrote this play to express her confusion in the United States to which her family migrated when she was a child. She lived in two different worlds and did not know to which world she must belong (Mendoza 70-75). Therefore, she wrote this play to express this perplexity as well as to show her attempts to reconcile her Mexican values with those of the United States.

Josefina López is an award-winning playwright, poet and novelist. She was born in Mexico in 1969. When she was five years old, she migrated with her family to the United States where they stayed in Boyle Heights, a region of Los Angeles, California, in which a great number of Latino immigrants live. Owing to some intricate immigration laws, she was regarded as an "illegal alien" and lived undocumented for thirteen years. This grieved her so much. She maintained, "I truly felt like I was an alien from another planet and was not a human being. I felt invisible. Being undocumented affected me so much; my self esteem. I started writing to affirm my humanity" ("Josefina López In Her Own Words"). Hence, she wrote her first play, *Simply Maria or the American Dream* at the age of seventeen, to stress her sufferings. In 1987, she got amnesty and, finally, became an American citizen in 1995.

López is one of today's distinguished Chicana writers who use theatre to speak the unspeakable and give voice to the voiceless. She has written numerous plays such as *Simply Maria, or, the American Dream* which won her an Emmy award. At the age of nineteen, she wrote her applauded play *Real Women Have Curves* (1998), in which she handled real life experiences and which won the Audience Award at Sundance Film Festival in 2002. Among her plays are *Food For The Dead* (1996), *Unconquered Spirits* (1997), *Confessions of Women From East L.A.* (2002), *Boyle Heights* (2004) and *Lola Goes To Roma* (2007). López's first novel, *Hungry Woman in Paris*, was published in 2009. Her plays are performed throughout the United States (Hudson 1-2).

López is the founder and artistic director of *Casa 0101* Theatre Art Space in Boyle Heights, where she teaches young Latinos screenwriting and playwriting. López regards *Casa 0101* as a place where Latinos can shatter the stereotypes that people spread about them: "We are making a community here". She maintains that at *Casa 0101*, Latinos can play roles other than servants; they can play "substantial, meaty roles" (Reyes 2). López is an activist and a public speaker. She has given lectures on several issues such as Chicano theater, minority representations in cinema, immigration issues and women's rights at more than two hundred universities such as Yale, Dartmouth, and USC. She has also discussed these issues in various television and radio interviews. López has obtained numerous awards such as Gabriel García Márquez award from Mayor of Los Angeles in 2003. Moreover, in 1988, she was regarded by California Sen. Barbara Boxer as a "woman who has made history in the entertainment industry" (3).

Simply Maria, or, the American Dream

Simply Maria begins with an elopement. Maria's parents, Ricardo and Carmen, decide to elope but Ricardo does not bring a horse on which they will elope. The absence of the horse might symbolize an incomplete dream. It might indicate that Carmen's marital life is not going to be as romantic and happy as she dreamt. It might, also, show that their immigration to America and their life, there, will not be as easy and comfortable as they expect. Moreover, the horse symbolizes freedom and speed, and the absence of the horse might show that the freedom of Maria's family will be restricted in America and that their dreams will not come true with the same speed they imagined.

The scene, in which Ricardo first arrives to America shows the humiliation that Third World immigrants undergo in this country. In this scene, we see immigrants from different parts of the world that came to America in search for better opportunities of living. Their words show how "America the beautiful" is their dream and their hope (120). The Statue of Liberty, which is

the symbol of freedom and equality, is personified in this scene to make a bargain with the immigrants. It promises to give them " life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" for the price of [their] heritage,...roots,...history, ...relatives,...language". Then, the Statue, which is, also, personified to act as the official spokesperson of America, orders the immigrants firmly: "...Conform, adapt, bury your past, give up what is yours and I'll give you the opportunity to have what is mine"(121). All the immigrants accept this bargain, which America offers them, in order to pursue the American Dream and make all their dreams come true.

The airport scene stresses the hegemony of the white and the subservience of people of color. This scene stresses the fact that although America is a multi-ethnic country, it does not deal with all ethnic groups equally. As Chandra Mohanty and M.Jacqui Alexander stated, such people of color are regarded as "resident aliens" (Alexander and Chandra xiv).They cannot be described as Western citizens without mentioning the names of their original countries first as Latin American, Asian American, Arab American and African American. From the early moments of their arrival to America, the dramatist describes how the Mexican immigrants are humiliated and treated as inferiors to the European ones who were received warmly since their arrival. The same lights that are used to "adorn the celebration for EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS become the lights from the helicopters hunting after the MEXICAN PEOPLE". The European immigrants and the Statue of Liberty are pointing at the Mexican people who "run around hiding, sneaking, and crawling, trying not to get spotted by the border patrol"(121). This scene shows the degradation from which the Mexicans suffer in America and foreshadows the racist discrimination that Maria's family will undergo in America. Ricardo realizes that this is neither "the city of angels" as Carmen calls it (122), nor "the torch of hope" as the other immigrants describe it (120). The superiority of the White and the inferiority of the colored are very apparent from the very beginning of the play.

Maria and Carmen are also panic-stricken when they arrive in America later. They feel that they moved from the serenity of Mexico to the noise and "organized chaos" of Los Angeles where vendors spread everywhere and where "Noises of police and firetruck sirens, along with other common city noises are heard"(122). The panic and perplexity Maria feels since the very beginning of her arrival to America foreshadow the bewilderment she is going to undergo throughout her stay in America. López describes Ricardo, who came to save his wife and daughter from this confusion, as "the hero" who is "rescuing Carmen and Maria from this nightmare"(123).

The borders that the Chicana feminist writer, Gloria Anzaldúa, referred to, as being created by the dominant culture to put people of color on the margins, are very apparent from the very beginnings of the play. Anzaldúa states:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (10)

Not only are these borders set in the scene of the airport in which Mexican people are chased and humiliated, but they are, also, very apparent in the "LITTLE HOUSE IN THE GHETTO"(123). The ghetto stresses the social injustice from which people of color suffer in America. Moreover, it highlights the poverty of these people and the low classes to which they belong. Furthermore, it sheds light on the isolation in which people of color live in America. Maria gets a shock when she arrives at the Ghetto because the situation, in which she finds herself, is contrary to all her expectations. It is, also, completely different from the image that her father portrayed for her about America as the land of dreams. She realizes that she has to struggle in order to get rid of this ghetto and have the life she dreamt of. As Chris Weedon stated, these marginalized minority groups have to strive for a long time in order to be recognized and accepted in the Western communities ("Key Issues" 1). These Mexican people, who came to America searching for integration in the American society, live isolated in the ghetto because of their color, low classes and their vernacular.

The heterogeneity of women of color, that Post- Colonial and Chicana feminists emphasized, is very obvious in the airport scene as well as in the scene of the Ghetto. These two scenes validate the Post-Colonial and Chicana Feminists' notion about the universal sisterhood that can never exist between women of color and their American and European counterparts who do not suffer from economic problems that lead them to migrate illegally and live in poor places as the Ghetto. Mohanty maintains: "Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis" (Feminism Without Borders 24). Maria and her family live in the poor Ghetto and suffer a lot in this place which emphasizes their socio-economic problems as well as the injustice of the dominant culture. Moreover, the unwarm reception, both she and her family receive in the airport scene, stresses the difference between Third World and First World immigrants. Mohanty affirms that overlooking these differences is the main reason that led to

the huge gap between Western and colored women (Third World Women⁵⁷). López accentuated the poverty and ignorance that prevailed in Mexico and led these people to migrate. She portrayed Maria's family as a very poor family whose members can hardly earn their living. They suffer from harsh economic problems that oblige them to accept to live in such a poor place as the Ghetto.

The double marginalization, which Post-colonial as well as Chicana Feminists accentuate, applies to the two female characters of the play. Not only are Maria and Carmen subjugated by the dominant culture, but by the men of their own culture as well. They live in a patriarchal society that oppresses them and deprives them of their rights. The scene, in which Maria is baptized, shows how far Mexican women are regarded as slaves. In this scene, three angelic girls are giving Maria some instructions and guidelines to follow throughout her life. They tell her that a girl must be "Nice", "forgiving", "considerate", "obedient", "gentle", "hard-working" and "gracious". She must like "Dolls", "kitchens", "houses", "cleaning", "caring for children", "cooking", "laundry" and "dishes". Moreover, they order her that she must NOT be independent as if being independent is a crime. Although a Mexican woman is considered a sex object by her society, she must not enjoy sex, but she must "endure it as [her] duty to [her] husband" and she must also "bear his children". In all cases, she has to take care of everything she does in order not to "shame her society". Not only do these angelic girls tell Maria what she must like and must not like, but they, also, limit her goals in life to reproduction as if she were an animal whose only function is to give birth to youngsters. They, also, tell her that her "only purpose in life is to serve three men", her father, her husband and her son (119). They do not, even, mention her mother as if her mother were a stranger that does not deserve to be served by her daughter. This is, mainly, because her mother is a woman that does not have any rights. Maria's parents, even, prevent her from playing football with boys because it "is not proper for a lady"(125). They always warn her of boys since they can harm her, "You're thirteen and you are very naïve about boys. The only thing on their minds is of no good for a proper girl. They tell girls that they are 'special sweet things', knowing that girls are stupid enough to believe it. They get pregnant, and shame their parents"(124). The word "shame" is always mentioned whenever they talk to Maria as if it is shameful to have a girl. In her article, *Mestiza Consciousness: An Examination of Two Plays with Chicana Protagonists*, Cecilia Aragón maintains that this passage depicts "Maria's personal awakening to confined gender roles and the cultural borders that define her state of reality. The voices of this internal dialogue, her mestiza consciousness, symbolize the cultural myths she is being forced to accept." Aragón believes that Maria "exemplifies the life la mestiza, caught between the social constructs of being born a girl in the Mexican culture and living within the matrix of the U.S. culture that offers her more

opportunities for change and growth"(36). Hence, since the early moments of her birth, Maria's patriarchal culture sets her role in life; she has to be a typical Chicana housewife and mother, not a self-sufficient or self-assertive one.

Chanddra Mohanty asserts that "Women in the Third World have been more oppressed by indigenous patriarchy than women in the West" (Third World Women 321). The scene, in which Maria tells her parents that she was awarded a four-year scholarship and that she wants to be an actress, stresses Mohanty's opinion and emphasizes the severe oppression which women of color undergo in their male-centered societies. Maria's father gets scared, when she expresses her desire to join the university and become an actress, and rebukes her violently, " I did not know you had to study to be a whore"(129). According to him, being an actress means being a whore. He wants her to work as a secretary because this is much safer and "to get married like most decent women and be a housewife because that is "respectable". They assure her that if she wants to be a real Mexican woman, she must marry and give birth to children and forget having a career as if being Mexican means that a woman must be unambitious, passive and servile. Then, Ricardo declares his most shocking opinion which accentuates his oppressive patriarchal ideology, "It is such a waste to educate women"(127). Conversely, education is very important for ethnic groups. It is the only way by which they can get rid of the economic problems. Through education, Maria can leave the Ghetto, have more respectable jobs than those humble ones that people from her country always have and get rid of the dreadful conditions she lives in. She wants to learn in order to have an identity of her own and make all her dreams come true. However, whenever she expresses her wish to get educated and have a career, her parents always tell her "You are a woman"(129). Instead, they always urge her to learn cooking and housework chores because "No Mexican man is going to marry a woman who can't cook"(127). This scene highlights the Post-Colonial and Chicana feminists' notion that a Third World woman is denied an identity by her oppressive patriarchal cultures.

The attitude of Maria's parents towards her is a striking example of a situational irony. Although Ricardo and Carmen suffer from the oppression of the dominant culture, they are the ones who oppress her and prevent her from accomplishing her dreams. They believe that when they oppress their daughter, they preserve their Mexican identity. As Anzaldua stated, "We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be 'real' Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience"(41). Most importantly, the binary opposition that Maria's parents make, between working as an actress and being a whore on the one hand and

between getting married and being respectable on the other hand, stresses the patriarchy that Chicana women undergo in their male-centered society.

Strangely enough, in patriarchal societies, oppressed women internalize the misogyny they face and replicate it with younger generations. Although Carmen is an oppressed woman that has suffered much from her oppressive patriarchal culture, she oppresses her daughter harshly. She always tells her that she must "Be submissive" and that "women will always be different from men". When Maria asks her mother why a woman must be submissive, she orders her to "stop questioning and just accept". Carmen believes that marriage is "the most important event in a woman's life" and that "women need to get married, they are no good without men"(130). Carmen is Maria's foil. She is a typical example of the subservient and dependent woman that Mexican men prefer. Although she knows that her husband has many relationships with other women, she does not object or complain till the very end of the play because a Mexican woman must endure her husband even if he "commits adultery" (132). Carmen has always been a dependent creature who does not know how to face life alone. The extreme grief that she felt, when Ricardo told her that he would travel to America to find work at the beginning of the play, is not the common sadness of a woman that will miss her husband, but it is the anguish of a helpless and fragile woman that realizes that she is going to be lost after the departure of her master. She wants her daughter to marry and be an exact copy of her and of all her Mexican counterparts, "I married your father when I was eighteen and I already knew how to do everything ". Nevertheless, the ambitious girl, Maria is not convinced of her mother's opinions. She believes that "there are other more important things" in life (127). She disapproves of her mother's passivity and subservience and does not want to endure the same oppression from which her mother has suffered throughout her life.

Maria's parents always try to create the counter-stance, which Gloria Anzaldúa referred to, in order to protect her from being spoiled by the dominant culture. They always remind her that she must preserve her Mexican customs and traditions. Hence, they insist on marrying her to a Mexican man and preventing her from going to the university and working as an actress. Anzaldúa maintains, "Within us and within la Cultura Chicana, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance"(32). Maria's parents are always worried that she might be influenced by the American culture. Therefore, Ricardo always reminds her that she is a Mexican, "I don't want you to forget that you are a Mexican. There are so many people where I work who deny they are Mexican. When their life gets

better they stop being Mexican! To deny one's country is to deny one's past, one's parents. How ungrateful" (129). Maria's parents' attitude towards her emphasizes the trials and tribulations that a Mexican woman faces because of her cultural heritage which always binds her to prioritize being a mother and a wife to being an independent career woman.

As Mohanty asserts, Third World women are oppressed by their patriarchal societies as well as by the hegemonic Western ideologies (Third World Women 322). In order to stress the patriarchal ideologies which dominate the lives of women of color and which Mohanty emphasizes, Lopez portrayed two characters (Girl1 and Girl3) that symbolize the conflict inside Maria. Not only does the mother ask Maria to sacrifice her dreams and be submissive, but Girl 1, also, does. Girl 1 symbolizes all the subordinate and traditional Mexican women who believe that they must be submissive and must not object to the orders they get from their parents as well as from their men. Girl 1 asks Maria to "stop questioning and just accept... it is not up to us to decide what is right and what is wrong. Your parents know best, Maria. They love you and do things for you". On the other hand, Girl 3 symbolizes the revolutionary Maria and all those girls who have dreams. She always supports her and says, "God gave you a brain to think and question. Use it". She also tells her that her parents "are not always right"(126). Maria is torn between her Mexican culture and the American one. She does not know to which one she must belong. As Anzaldúa states: "The struggle is inner. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (49). Throughout the play, we see how Maria suffers from an internal conflict. However, it is this inner struggle that leads her to achieve her dreams at the end of the play.

After Maria failed to convince her parents to get the scholarship offered to her, she slept and had a dream. In this dream, she gets married to a traditional Mexican man. She, also, encounters two girls in the dream, Mary and Maria 2. While the former believes in "...liberation! Self independence, economic independence, sexual independence", the latter believes that if Maria behaves according to Maria 2's pieces of advice, she will become a "bad woman" and a "bitch". Mary represents the American part in Maria, while Maria 2 embodies the Mexican one. Mary, the ambitious girl that urges Maria to achieve her dreams, always reminds her that "before you are a wife, before you are a mother, you are a woman!"(131-132). On the contrary, Maria 2 always echoes the words of the three girls, who baptized her, that a woman's purpose in life is to serve three men: her father, her husband and her son. All these different characters, i. e. Mary and Maria 2 as well as Girl 1 and Girl 3, represent the

different conflicting voices inside Maria's mind. Gloria Anzaldúa depicts the inner struggle inside Mexicans who live in more than one culture:

Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incomparable frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision". (48)

Maria is perplexed between two worlds and does not know which one is the most appropriate for her. She wants to achieve the American dream and, at the same time, she wants to preserve her Mexican culture.

The worst kind of patriarchal humiliation is shown when Maria's husband gives her a dog collar, instead of the wedding ring, during the wedding ceremony. This dog collar symbolizes the degradation and subordination of Chicana women in their patriarchal society. It, also, sets the rules for Maria's future marital life. A Mexican wife must not be her husband's partner, but, his follower. Since she accepts this dog collar, she must follow her husband as the dog does with its master. Even the priest, who is supposed to be pious and merciful, asks Maria, during her wedding ceremony, whether she is ready to accept Jose as her "lawfully wedded husband to love, cherish, serve, cook for, clean for, sacrifice for, have his children, keep his house, love him even if he beats you, commits adultery, gets drunk, rapes you lawfully, denies you your identity, money, love his family, serve his family, and in return ask for nothing?"(132). Moreover, another striking irony is presented in the priest's advice to Maria's husband, "You may pet the bride"(133). These words emphasize how the Mexican patriarchal ideology regards a Mexican wife as an animal, not as a human being. The most telling satire, used by the dramatist to expose and condemn the Mexican patriarchal ideology, is shown in the comic scene in which Maria gives birth to six daughters simultaneously. Her husband becomes so furious that he chooses very humiliating names for them; he calls them "Sacrifice", "Obligation", "Abnegation", "Frustration", "Regret" and "Disappointment"(135-6). These names show how far he disrespects women and regards them as inferior creatures. Moreover, people in the hospital regard this Mexican woman as a "REPRODUCING MACHINE" that gives birth to "millions" of children (135). They describe her saying "It's cheap! It cooks! It cleans "(136). Although Maria exerts every effort to be a good wife and mother, her husband as well as her parents always rebuke her and describe her as "a bad wife" (137). Lopez, here, satirizes the Mexican patriarchal culture which regards women as inferior creatures and restricts their role in life to marriage and motherhood.

According to Audre Lorde, the hegemonic doctrine of patriarchy and colonialism is "an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns...This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repletion of racist patriarchal thought" (26). Maria, unable to endure all this injustice and oppression, has a nightmare in which she sees the different oppressive powers, that Audre stressed, try to hinder her and prevent her from accomplishing her goals. In this nightmare, she sees her wedding dress chasing her. The personification of the wedding dress emphasizes how Maria regards marriage as a prison and the wedding dress as a wild animal that tries to kill her. She bursts out and says, "I am a woman...a real woman of flesh and blood. This is not the life I want to live; I want more! And from now on I am directing my own life!" (137-8). Since her arrival to America, Maria was struggling with "the conflict between what she has been told she can be and what her parents tell her she must be. Faced with the possibility that their daughter might pursue the American Dream, Ricardo and Carmen admonish her to embrace instead their dream of an ideal Mexican daughter" (Malcolm 112-113). Another situational irony is presented in this nightmare in which Maria is on trial. Similar to the Priest in the previous dream, the judge deprives her of all her rights. He decides to punish her for being an irresponsible wife and mother without giving her the chance to defend herself or, even, to have a lawyer to defend her. According to Cecilia Aragón, the dream is "a conventional strategy that allows an opportunity to critique the presupposed socially constructed gender and ethnic roles in the Mexican culture". Aragón believes that, through this dream, Maria examines herself "in relationship to the 'other,' either American or Mexican culture" (Mestiza Consciousness 39). Maria wakes up from her nightmare to the cries of her mother, quarrelling with her husband that used to betray her with other women for a long time. Carmen, who has spent all her life as a submissive woman, decides not to be subservient anymore. She revolts against her unfaithful husband and threatens him that if he does not stop having relationships with other women, she will leave him because she is unable to endure this humiliating life anymore, "I have endured so much for you .I knew you were no angel when we ran off together, but I thought you would change...because you loved me. I love you, Ricardo! But I can no longer go on living like this or I'll be betraying myself and I'll be betraying Maria"(140).

The title of the play– in which the dramatist employs the rhetorical device, the "anti-thesis"- summarizes the dilemma of the heroine throughout the play. It emphasizes the bewilderment of Maria whose oppressive patriarchal ideology wants her to remain *Simply Maria* as the rest of the simple Mexican girls in her mother country while she wants to pursue *the American Dream*.

“I want to create a world of my own”: An Empowering Ending

At the end of the play, Maria leaves a letter for her parents telling them that she will not follow their path, but she will create her own world. She will work, create an identity of her own and develop her individualism without forgetting her roots, "Now I know that your idea of life is not for me –so I am leaving. I want to create a world of my own. One that combines the best of me. I won't forget the values of my roots, but I want to get the best from this land of opportunities" (140). She decides to take the best from the two cultures and create the *mestiza* consciousness that Gloria Anzaldúa emphasized. As Cecilia Aragón maintains, "Maria does not fully reject her culture, rather, she discards the gender constructs and male dominance oppressive to Mexican women. By leaving the family and disengaging from Mexican culture, she decides to cross the border into a new and separate territory from that created by her mother and father". Aragón believes that, in this way, Maria "arrives at a new self-definition which combines, on her own terms, the elements of American and Mexican culture" (*Mestiza Consciousness* 37-38). In her pursuit of self-identity, Maria comes across many obstacles, but she learns how to overcome them. She rejects the supremacy of patriarchy and imperialism.

The two heroines are victorious in the end. Both of them refuse to be dealt with as sex objects by the men of their own culture. Besides, Maria rejects the gender roles assigned to her and refuses to be treated as a second hand citizen by the people of the dominant culture. She decides to join the university and to work. As Aragón states, Maria demonstrates "a hybrid and 'betweenness' in her recognition of the U.S.A and Mexico border spaces, and finds pride in her ethnic identity. She desires freedom for herself, in all of her abilities and aspects, a freedom often denied by traditional Mexican culture" (*Crossing Borders* 23-24). The ending of this play is very optimistic. Maria decides to "embrace tradition without allowing tradition to define her, and she can carry her roots with her into a life she defines for herself. She can be both a good Mexican daughter and an empowered American woman. To pursue her version of the dream" (Malcolm 118). The two Mexican women of this play do not hate marriage or family life, but they want to have a family life in which they are appreciated and respected. They wish for their husbands to treat them as partners, not as servants. Maria and Carmen want to lead a marital life which is built on respect and mutual understanding, not on humiliation and degradation. Most importantly, this ending shatters the stereotypes that Western Feminists spread about Third World Women that they are weak and helpless, hence, they need the assistance of the *white savior* to rescue them from their dreadful conditions.

Conclusion

Through the amalgamation of race and gender in *Simply Maria*, this paper explored how, Josefina López managed to stress the dilemma of Chicana women and depict their dreadful conditions. It examined how the dramatist rejected the hegemonic misrepresentation of women of color in Western discourse and presented, in her play, a powerful woman who could fight to get independence and self-assertion. Moreover, it illustrated how the dramatist, with the use of some dramatic tools such as symbolism, irony, personification, satire, foreshadowing and anti-thesis, used this play to raise people's awareness of the dilemma of marginalized women in their patriarchal societies and encourage women to be self-empowered. Besides, it, emphasized how this play contributes to Latin American theatre and showed how theatre can be used as a medium of social change that gives voice to the silenced and stirs people to action.

Furthermore, this paper investigated the elements of Post Colonial and Chicana Feminism in this play. It showed how far *Simply Maria* throws light on the tribulations women of color encounter. Maria and Carmen, who are victims of the patriarchy of their culture as well as the hegemonic powers of the dominant culture which regard them as inferiors, present examples of postcolonial and Chicana feminism. Moreover, the paper refuted the Western feminists' claim about the universalization of women and supported the Post-colonial and Chicana Feminists' notion about the heterogeneity or non-homogeneity of women. Besides, by presenting two Mexican women and tracing their journey from being subjugated to being self-asserted, this paper explored how *Simply Maria* shatters the stereotypes that Western Feminists spread about Third World Women, accusing them of being fragile and helpless; hence, they need the interference of the *white savior* to rescue them from their oppressive regimes. Moreover, it emphasized how Maria presents a model of Mexican-American womanhood through her challenge against patriarchy and segregation and how she manages to create the transitional space that Gloria Anzaldúa emphasized and build a new Chicana consciousness.

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