

Introduction. *Papelitos Guardados*: Theorizing *Latinidades* Through *Testimonio*

papel. *nm.* 1. paper; 2. piece or sheet of paper; 3. document(s), identification paper(s); 4. paper money; 5. receipt; 6. bag; 7. part, role.

-ito. *suf. for n or adj.* 1. diminutive; 2. emotive; 3. superlative.

guardado. *adj.* 1. guarded, hidden away; 2. watched over, taken care of, kept safe or secret, protected, including by a deity or saint; 3. maintained, preserved; 4. retained, conserved, stored.

Harper Collins Spanish-English Dictionary

OUR VISION FOR THIS BOOK has been to illustrate how Latina feminists come together to engage our differences, face-to-face, and work to find common ground. Our Latina Feminist Group began to meet in 1993 to discuss our concerns as Latina feminists in higher education and to consider possibilities for doing collaborative work. We came from the Southwest, East, and Midwest, Latinas of multiple national and ethnic origins. As we introduced ourselves to each other, described the work we do and why we are compelled to do it, we spontaneously began to weave *testimonios*, stories of our lives, to reveal our own complex identities as Latinas. This book of *papelitos* grew out of these stories, told over the course of seven years.

Papelitos guardados has hybrid meanings for us: protected documents, guarded roles, stored papers, conserved roles, safe papers, secret roles, hidden papers, safe roles, preserved documents, protected roles. The phrase was offered by María Luisa Lomas, the mother of Clara Lomas. During one of our sessions, as we read our writings to each other, she revealed that she, too, had her *papelitos guardados*, writings tucked away, hidden from inquiring eyes. As she shared how she sought expression in writing, we realized that she had captured the essence of our project. *Papelitos guardados* evokes the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times. We keep them in our memory, write them down, and store them in safe places waiting for the appropriate moment when we can return to them for review and analysis, or speak out and share them with others. Sharing can begin a process of empowerment. Stepping out of the roles expected of Latina women in the academy and in our communities, we bring to life our *papeles* and render our *testimonios* through autobiographical narratives, short stories, poems, and dialogues.

Initially, we came together in a smaller group, intending to undertake collaborative, comparative feminist research on Latina issues.¹ Very quickly, we found ourselves limited by traditional academic approaches, which, in the move toward comparison, tend to simplify, aggregate, and reduce experience to variables. We wanted to engage in *testimonio* to reveal the complexity of Latina identities in the United States. As Caridad Souza made clear, “We have to figure out how to talk across *latinidades* rather than through disciplinary studies, you know what I’m saying?”

Many of us, in one way or another, are professional *testimoniadoras* (producers of *testimonios*), whether as oral historians, literary scholars, ethnographers, creative writers, or psychologists.² From our different personal, political, ethnic, and academic trajectories, we arrived at the importance of *testimonio* as a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure. However, we discovered that to move forward and develop theory as a group, we first needed to explore the complexities of *latinidad* — Latina/o identity — and compare how each of us had made the journey to become credentialed, creative thinkers, teachers, and writers. We were all proficient oral historians, ethnographers, and *testimoniadoras*, but we had never explored our diversity. We all professed in the classroom about the connection between life experience and new knowledge construction, but we had never made our own life trajectories a source of inquiry. In addition, while we were all accustomed to engaging other Latinas and/or Latin American women in giving testimony, many of us had not yet participated in public renderings of our own life stories. We had not yet experienced being on both sides of the process, sharing and generating our own *testimonios* with each other as Latina scholars. None of us was prepared for the intensity, despair, poetry, and clarifying power of our own *testimonios*. Meeting as a group over the course of seven years, we have become convinced that the emotional force and intellectual depth of *testimonio* is a springboard for theorizing about *latinidades* in the academy, in our communities, and in our lives.

Latina Feminisms: Creating Our Own Spaces

Creating spaces for Latina feminisms — *latinidades feministas* — means confronting established and contested terms, identities, frameworks, and coalitions that have emerged in particular historical contexts.³ In charting our own course through these contested terrains as Latina feminists, we have attempted to expand traditional notions of ethnicity and nationalism, question Eurocentric feminist frameworks, and situate ourselves in relation to the activism and writings by women of color. At the same time, as Latina feminists we have felt the need to create our own social and discursive spaces.

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Latina feminists come from a long line of workers, activists, theorists, and writers within their respective Latino communities. They have participated in various movements that denounce social injustice, including civil rights, anti-war, labor, human rights, progressive Cuban American politics, Puerto Rican Independence, Chicano political autonomy, Native American sovereignty, Central American solidarity. They have been central to the formation of Chicano, Puerto Rican or Ethnic Studies. They have taken part not only in the political but also in the literary and artistic activity around these movements — *teatro* and *floricanto* (street theater, poetry and music festivals) — which provide a language to celebrate cultural identity.

Along with participation in social movements, Latinas have also engaged in developing methods of political praxis. Inspired by Paolo Freire's practice of *concientización*, where communities construct self-reflective political consciousness, Latinas have contributed to empowerment efforts through literacy and giving voice, documenting silenced histories.⁴ *Testimonio* has been critical in movements for liberation in Latin America, offering an artistic form and methodology to create politicized understandings of identity and community. Similarly, many Latinas participated in the important political praxis of feminist consciousness-raising. The "second wave" feminist movement honored women's stories and showed how personal experience contains larger political meaning. Other feminists have developed self-reflexive research methods and social practices, creating oral histories and feminist ethnographies that capture the everyday lives and stories of women.⁵ Drawing from these various experiences, *testimonio* can be a powerful method for feminist research praxis.

Latina feminists, however, have contested the exclusion of questions of gender and sexuality in ethnic studies curricula or political agendas. Cultural nationalism has defined some of these programs or projects, insisting on idealized notions of ethnicity, *familia*, and community. Cultural nationalists often repress women's voices by reaffirming heterosexist utopic visions of colonized peoples. At their most extreme, they discredit Latina feminists as separatist and divisive, and even bait them as "traitors to the race."⁶

In the same vein, Latinas have felt frustrated with marginalizations of difference and token nods in the direction of diversity in feminist political organizations or women's studies programs. The feminist movement often ignores the tremendous internal differences among women of color, including Latinas. The movement also fails to recognize distinctive standpoints of women of color and women of mixed race. In the effort to name and theorize these complexities, Latinas are increasingly finding themselves working with women within their respective national-ethnic communities, or with other Latinas who embrace feminist ideals, even when there is a reluctance to embrace the term "feminism."⁷

Latina activist traditions resonate with those of black and other feminists of

color, and form the basis for bridging different histories and origins, building cross-cultural coalitions and personal relationships. From this crucial political work, women of color theory recognizes the complex intersections of ethnicity, nationality, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and other markers of diverse identities and commitments. Latina feminists propose that difference is not a mask that can be put on or taken off; it forms the basis of who they are in the world, in their scholarship, and in their political practice.⁸ It is crucial, at this stage, to move beyond essentialism, which assumes a common Latina experience. Latinas must be placed in their varied histories, illustrating their positions within intersecting systems of power.⁹

Black, Asian American, Native American, and other feminists of color have shown how important it is to write about one's own experiences. Beginning in the 1970s, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, and many others inspired us and legitimized subject matters and modes of writing that were previously ignored or deemed unacceptable. They brought to print oral traditions, dialects, and characters that conveyed experiences which, with rare exceptions, had not been documented before. The work of women of color inspired many academics of color to expand the "ethnic" and feminist canons. Anthologies such as *Life Notes*, *Double Stitch*, *Making Waves*, and *All-American Women* brought the voices of women of color narrating their daily experiences into our purview.¹⁰ These texts and many more, along with the alternative publishing houses that produced them—Kitchen Table, Aunt Lute, Third Woman, Firebrand, South End—modeled possibilities of combining reading, writing, and social activism. They illustrated the possibilities of collaborative visions, creation, and production that bridged community and academy. The paths established by women of color also helped construct coalitions to negotiate differences among themselves as they moved toward significant moments of solidarity.

Chicana feminists centered in the Southwest also created theories and spaces of their own, exploring the complexities of identity and culture. As the largest group among Latinas, and able to gain access to institutions of higher learning, Chicanas served as a focal point for Latina feminisms. Moving beyond the black-white framework of racial discourse, Chicanas shed light on other facets of racialization, on those that form a continuum of color, phenotype, and privilege. Theorizing the intersection of racism, sexism, and heterosexism, Chicana writings contributed a new vocabulary of *mestizaje*, hybridity, oppositional consciousness, and the critical metaphor of "borderlands." These concepts helped mark a consciousness of resistance to the repression of language, culture, and race, and a recognition of the in-between spaces formed by those with complex identities. Chicana feminist theorists, both heterosexual and lesbian, also illuminated women-centered family life, a complicated ref-

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uge and site of male authority and privilege where women negotiate autonomy and support. Contesting their marginalization, Chicana lesbian writers took greater risks and opened up the exploration and celebration of women-centered sexuality, spirituality, and passion, attempting, as Cherríe Moraga put it, to “feed women in all of their hungers.” In these ways, Chicanas, in collaboration with other Latinas, contributed to rethinking feminism, women’s studies, Latino studies, and cultural studies in general.¹¹

In forging political connections with feminists of color, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other Latina writers facilitated a process of theorizing through social activism and autobiographical writing. *This Bridge Called My Back* broke the cultural nationalist paradigm by centering Latinas among women of color and by bringing lesbian identity to the fore in Latina writing. The spate of pan-Latina anthologies that followed *This Bridge*, namely, *Cuentos; Bearing Witness/Sobreviviendo; In Other Words; Woman of Her Word; Nosotras: Latina Literature Today; Latina; Compañera: Latina Lesbians; Infinite Divisions*; the special issue of *Third Woman* on The Sexuality of Latinas; and *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, has charted new directions for Latina feminist scholarship and theory. More recently, the organization of activist-scholars *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* (MALCS) has moved from a Chicana space to one that welcomes lesbians, centroamericanas, indigenous women, and other Latinas, including those of mixed race and from Latin America. Along with *This Bridge*, these works are precursors to our book.¹²

It hasn’t always been easy to negotiate a space where Latinas can collaborate to build scholarship and community. The process of creating oppositional discourses, social spaces, anthologies, or collaborative projects does not usually emerge from long-term group interaction among contributors. In the preface to the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, for example, Cherríe Moraga noted, “The idea of Third World feminism has proved to be much easier between the covers of a book than between real live women.”¹³ We acknowledge that we must walk the fine line of contestation and complicity, ever mindful that new hierarchies may develop even within Latina feminist projects, and we must constantly negotiate difference among ourselves.

Where and How We Enter

Our use of “Latina” recognizes these tensions, even as it builds on pan-Latina/o solidarity, however fragile. We seek those spaces within and across borders where women share parallel emotional and psychic terrain along with intersecting political agendas as a means of theorizing about our experiences. Familiar with the difficulties of solidarity with other women, we self-consciously use “Latinas” as a coalitional term. We are not homogenizing and

leveling our differences into an idealized, unified national/ethnic heritage, into what Eliana Rivero calls “the neutral soup of *Latinismo*.”¹⁴ All of us emerge from various mixed inheritances, whether through ethnicity, race, sexuality, regional culture, religious-spiritual formation, class, generation, political orientation, or linguistic heritage and practice. Included in our social identities are the various places we have inhabited and traversed, and the spaces in which we have worked. Our inherited historical and political formations — maps of our crisscrossing trajectories across borders — affected our professional, intellectual, and personal development. Our testimonials continually disrupt the essentialized, homogenized understanding of Latina as we present our respective genealogical and historical inheritances. As a coalitional term, “Latina” is neither exhaustive of the many ways that Latina women may self-identify, nor reflective of all the distinctive national-ethnic groups from “Latina América” and beyond who live in the United States. Our use of the term “Latina” builds on its emergence in coalitional politics in the United States and signifies our connections through praxis to the rest of the Americas and other multiple geographies of origin.

We come to theorizing *latinidades* at the turn of the century from histories of racial-ethnic and feminist struggles. At the risk of actually losing jobs in “studies programs,” putting careers in danger, or losing important personal or political relationships, we realize that some of those struggles have not necessarily sustained us. As Celia Alvarez noted, “After all this time, why are our stories still invisible in the academy? What is happening to those spaces we fought so hard to create and where does this leave us? What will motivate us to engage and reposition ourselves?” Consequently, to theorize and write about our experiences, we must create our own social spaces.

Situating ourselves in relation to our foresisters and brothers, we acknowledge their enormous contributions, including the published works, histories of struggle yet to be fully documented, and theorizing which continues. However, we also offer the prospect of a new relational process. Through our collaboration, we have been able to negotiate the geographical, political, and emotional challenges of coalitional work. We have created a collaboration that contributes to new ways of theorizing. *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* differs from its precursors in that it is the result of a conscious relational politics and of collaborative *testimonio*, face-to-face theorizing and production.

Who We Are

Our backgrounds are as diverse as the continent. We reflect Latina experiences in the United States: some of us are of Native American heritage while others

are marked by histories of European colonization and U.S. imperialism, by multiple migrations and diasporas, economic, religious, or political. For us, *latinidad* acknowledges national origins, and at the same time explores the nuances of difference. Our identities include our heritages, cultures, lived experiences, and political commitments.

We are the daughters of field, domestic, factory, and service workers, secretaries, military officers, technicians, artists, and professionals. Our participation in various social movements fundamentally contributed to our political development. Regarding our religious influences, our group includes “Catholic girls,” Protestants, Mormons, Jews, women who grew up in the tradition of *santería*, indigenous spiritualists, and women now reclaiming spirituality that transcends institutional religions. We embody the expression of diverse sexual identities — heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, celibate, single, and those who move between sexual categories. We come from and have created a variety of “families,” including single-parent, nuclear, extended biological, and chosen families that may or may not include children. While some of us do not have birth-children, we are all involved in a variety of nurturing or care-giving relationships with our own children, stepchildren, parents, nieces, nephews, friends, students, colleagues, even pets. Our bodies display a range of physical beauty and voluptuousness. We might be described within our cultures by our skin color as “*las cafecitas, indias, negritas, trigueñas, güeras y blanquitas*” (brown, Indian, black, olive, light or white) — problematic terms of endearment that evoke racist connotations.¹⁵

We are intergenerational, ranging in age from early thirties to late fifties. Although not the case when our group began, when some of us were graduate students, we now all hold doctorates from U.S. universities. Our academic trajectories include community colleges, liberal arts institutions, public and private research universities, alternative colleges, and “the ivies.” We are disciplinary and transdisciplinary — crossing through fields of American Studies, Anthropology, Chicana/o Studies, Community Studies, Creative Writing, Cultural Studies, English, Latin American and Latino Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, Ethnic Studies, Linguistics, Oral History, Political Science, Psychology, Romance Languages and Literatures, Sociology, and Women’s Studies. All of us are professors although some of us do not teach full time. We have worked in traditional academic departments as well as interdisciplinary research centers, programs, and community sites. We are chairs of departments, deans, directors of research centers, pioneers of feminist research in women of color sites, and accomplished writers and scholars.

We have professional privilege, relatively speaking, even though some of us are not tenured, some of us write and do research without institutional support, and some do not have full-time jobs. Our professional privilege comes

from our locations in institutions of higher education, with good salaries and benefits, the luxury of pursuing our passions through our work, and, for some of us, tenure and sabbaticals. However, because of our professional choices — to research, think, and write about Latinas in ways that take the subject seriously — we become marginalized by institutional cultures that reproduce hegemonic relations of power. With so few Latinas in higher education and with intensifying faculty workloads, we are caught between multiple constituencies, needs, and institutional demands. So, despite our relative privilege compared to most Latinas, we are often overworked, exhausted, emotionally burnt out, and not appropriately validated for our contributions. In reaction to institutional violence or in response to our own talents and callings, many of us have created cultural, political, and professional worlds outside academia. Among us are published poets and creative writers, grassroots organizers, cultural workers, musicians, storytellers, healers, and visual artists. Whatever the medium, we yearn for creativity that provides balance in our lives and sustains our sense of wholeness.

The languages we speak come from our colonial and diasporic conditions. Some of us are Spanish dominant, others bilingual; some easily code-switch between English and Spanish; others struggle to learn Spanish or indigenous languages. A few of us negotiate multicultural situations where Black English and regional Spanish, or where different national and class dialects of Spanish, contribute to a complicated polyglot mixture. In writing this book, we made a conscious decision not to privilege standard English or Castillian Spanish, so as to honor our localized uses of Spanish, bilingual code-switching, and variety of dialects. As such, the languages of this text express the lived experiences of Latinas.

Theorizing Through Process

Our purpose in describing our process of coming together and collaborating over seven years is to illustrate how we came to theorize feminist *latinidades* through *testimonio*. While our writings may stand on their own, our collaborative process, which used the method of *testimonio*, ultimately was framed by common political views about how to create knowledge and theory through our experiences. In this way, product and process became inseparable.

By the 1990s Latina feminist thinkers and writers had been reading one another; however, geographical divides kept us enclaved. With Chicanas and Centroamericanas in the West and Southwest, and Puertorriqueñas, Dominicanas, and Cubanás in the North and Southeast, we each had our own feminist groups, but we did not necessarily know each other.¹⁶ Returning to New York after teaching in California, Iris López proposed: “It would be a great

idea to get funding to bring Latinas from the East and West coasts together, and maybe do collaborative work.” As distinct communities of Latina academics, writers, and cultural workers, we focused our theoretical development and production on the specificities of women in each ethnic group, which entailed a parallel process of constructing a women-centered space in *opposition* to masculinist or white feminist frameworks. Nevertheless, we all were inspired by reading Chicana feminist writings, which were more visible and accessible and spoke to us all, even if our particular histories and issues differed. In addition, our professional lives in academia led many of us to move out of regions where our respective cultural groups reside. We began to criss-cross the continent from East to West, West to East, South to North, across oceans and national boundaries to and from islands and countries south of the Río Grande, studying, working, and living in other Latina/o contexts. Our migrations mirrored larger global movements of cultures, capital, and peoples, transnationally and within the borders of the U.S. nation-state. Our geographic migrations enabled us to create a network. They also gave us insights and lived experiences on which to reconceptualize *latinidad*, as we could relate to the struggles of women in other Latino contexts. To write and theorize about a range of Latina experiences, however, required being in *sustained dialogue* with one another. Hence, we were motivated to convene physically in one place and begin this process.

Our process evolved from a small study group to several national and many regional meetings. At one of the meetings, Liza Fiol-Matta and others pressed for a new type of encounter: “What we need is a place so we can hang out, really get to know one another and see what happens.” From that proposal came the two “summer camps,” as we fondly came to call our institutes in the mountains of Colorado. Gradually and carefully, the composition of our group changed from a predominance of Chicanas and Puertorriqueñas to the broader group evidenced in this book (Chicanas, Puertorriqueñas, Dominicanas, Cubanas, Centroamericanas, Sefarditas, Native American, and mixed-heritage women). With careful nurturing and reflection, our process evolved into *un engranaje de deseo, respeto, confianza, y colaboración* — a meshing of desire, respect, trust, and collaboration. Over the course of these seven years, we have come to cherish the way we interact and work with one another, the atmosphere of mutual support and consultation we have built, and the liberating space of dialogue, debate, and disclosure that we have achieved. This project has been like no other intellectual endeavor we have experienced. The rewards have far exceeded the difficulties.

At the beginning, we were challenged by traditional research models, funding priorities, and different expectations regarding the scope and focus of a pan-Latina project. The expectations of our funding and conventional aca-

dem practice threatened to lock us into traditional models of comparative research that would predetermine the outcome of our labor. We wrote a proposal to the Inter-University Program for Latino Research to bring together Latinas of different origins, geographic areas, and disciplines to share work around established topics and analytical categories. We assumed that a comparative agenda would emerge through individual research contributions, but we found ourselves moving away from these more traditional frameworks.

Initially, we mistakenly assumed that we knew each other simply because we were Latina academics and writers. We had to work through different assumptions and expectations about the purpose of the group, its composition and politics, the direction it should take, and the power of representation — who would speak for the group and how they would frame what we were doing. We struggled against privileging certain aspects of Latina identity so as not to limit full participation by everyone. We learned to be more mindful of the complexities of negotiating collaboration among Latinas, and realized that a pan-Latina project entailed creating a new paradigm. Luz del Alba Acevedo explained the intent to move away from oppositional discourse to a more relational consciousness and practice *among* Latinas: “How we structure the ways we come together and tell our stories affects *how* we tell our stories. We can become more compassionate women, better feminists. And eventually new generations of Latinas will displace us, but instead of doing it in a fighting mode, they will build on our respect for one another.” Implicitly this was a key theoretical and political move away from a project that works within a “hierarchy of oppressions” to one in which all racial-ethnic groups and identity markers — sexuality, race, gender, age, ethnicity, national origins, class, etc. — carry equal force.¹⁷

In this new pan-Latina framework, we saw all sources of oppression as crucial in structuring the subordinate social location of Latinas. In the middle of a difficult discussion about this viewpoint, Luz del Alba further explained the motivation for pan-Latina collaboration: “We come to this meeting out of a deep sense of love. We want to learn from one another.” We realized that it was imperative to step back and learn more about our internal diversity and trajectories as historical groups and as women. Further, we wanted to situate ourselves in relation to our work, our communities, and our academic lives — while not privileging certain identity markers in a profoundly political project. Our goal became to move toward a different comparative research model that would seek mutually validating perspectives among Latinas, mindful of the complexities of our individual experiences.

In expanding participation to achieve greater Latina diversity, we sought to integrate women who represented other national-ethnic groups and whose work focused on Latinas in the United States. Rina Benmayor raised the

difficulty of negotiating “belonging,” by saying, “I hope we can think of *lati- nidades* not just in terms of nationality or ethnicity, but also in terms of lived cultural experience and political commitments.” The national-ethnic identity categories did not encompass the actual diversity of Latinas, as they ignored difference in class backgrounds, religious traditions, sexual preferences, races, ages, cultural experiences, regional variations, and women of mixed or Native American heritage. Implicitly, we were challenging ideas about Latina identities based on nationality-ethnicity, as our group configuration attempted to reflect the complexity and the multiple material realities represented in our communities.

It was also necessary to create a space where disclosure about ourselves was comfortable, given our new-found awareness that this project would not be easy. Early in the process, Pat Zavella bravely voiced her apprehensions: “It would be so much easier if we could just write out our life stories. That would be familiar to me. Telling them publicly is very difficult, frightening, ’cause I don’t know you all very well. Can we talk about this?” Other women voiced their fears of public story telling, which, in hindsight, given the stories we had kept private, was understandable. By discussing our feelings of vulnerability and mistrust openly, we began to build a space where we learned to listen, evaluate, and question each other in nonjudgmental ways. We learned how to construct a safer space that was not assumed a priori to be safe based simply on gender and national/ethnic affiliations. *Testimonio* was critical for breaking down essentialist categories, since it was through telling life stories and reflecting upon them that we gained nuanced understandings of differences and connections among us. These revelations established respect and deeper understanding for each of us as individuals and as Latinas. Through *testimonio* we learned to translate ourselves for each other.

We also decided that decisions would be made collectively, through consensus. Through the give-and-take needed for collective work, we repeatedly analyzed our group dynamics, noting misperceptions and incorporating debates about our differences into our work agenda constructively. Over time it became easier to say, “That doesn’t include me,” “My experience was different,” or “I disagree, and here’s why,” knowing that disagreement would not generate great tension and that the group would think through expressions of difference or disagreement and incorporate various viewpoints. When the framework does not rest on a hierarchy of oppression, then every form of systemic violence and human agency must be taken into consideration. In sum, we learned to negotiate political and theoretical disagreements among ourselves by adhering to the premises of collective decision making, making a conscious commitment to nonjudgmental listening, building trust, and constructing an alternative, inclusive framework.

What solidified the group and the project, despite tentative beginnings,

were the compelling stories about our personal and professional lives; some deep, longstanding friendships and collegial collaborations as well as a new web of developing friendships; our commitment to *testimonio*; and the common cause of trying to define and work within a relational theoretical framework. For when we narrated our life stories within this framework, we found an emerging pattern of systemic violence and cultural ideologies that continually repositioned us at the margins, despite relative privilege; we saw incredible journeys of achievement despite expectations of failure. Because our stories so powerfully illustrated how these politicized experiences came to shape our lives' work and illustrated connections among Latinas, we abandoned the idea of comparing our academic research on Latinas and decided to become subjects of our own reflection. *Testimonio* would be the primary methodology used in whatever project we pursued. *Testimonio* would be a means to bring together our creative and research backgrounds, a more organic way of collecting and generating knowledge, and a method that would move us toward an understanding of *latinidades*. And *testimonio* was a process that felt comfortable, the familiar story telling that harkened back to our mothers' and other relatives' kitchens.

In the various national and regional meetings that followed, *testimoniando*—telling our stories—generated renewed energy and deeper trust. Initially, we addressed the following key questions: How do we bear witness to our own becoming? How do we define who we are? How have we made *testimonio* the core of our work? What are some important turning points of consciousness? What is our relationship to political identities and intellectual work? What is our relationship to building new paradigms or models? What are we transgressing?

Another area of implicit theorizing brought in dimensions of spirituality, creativity, and conscious caring for the body. We learned to acknowledge and tell how our bodies are maps of oppression, of institutional violence and stress, of exclusion, objectification, and abuse. Since our bodies hold the stress and tensions of our daily lives, we also shared stories of body breakdowns, of how we take care of ourselves, or how we do not. We discussed how our bodies express creative and carnal experiences, and compared our many styles of dancing, our appreciation of good food, relaxation, and laughter.

In 1995 we held our first Latina Feminist Summer Institute at the Baca Conference Center of The Colorado College in southern Colorado. Baca is literally on the Central Divide, in the middle of the country. Meeting at Baca was fortuitous, a real turning point for us as a group. Surrounded by the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and intersected by rivers, Baca is located in the highest valley in North America. Part of the magic of Baca is that historically it is a site of spiritual meaning, a sacred space for Native Americans where there

have never been wars between indigenous peoples. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains are the mythical place of emergence for the Navajo, who were displaced by the violent incursions of Spanish and Anglo settlers. Today Baca is home to a diverse group of spiritual traditions, including a Christian monastery, a Buddhist temple, a Zen meditation center, and a Hindu ashram.¹⁸ For us, Baca became a site that inspired narration.

Reconstructing *Testimonio*

Testimonio is often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere. Thus, scholars often see *testimonios* as dependent products, an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects through others, often outsiders, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity.¹⁹ *Testimonios* with women in Latin America have focused much of the critical attention to the genre in the last two decades.²⁰ These texts are seen as disclosures not of personal lives but rather of the political violence inflicted on whole communities. Here, the *testimoniante*s (subjects of the texts) admit that they withhold secrets about the culture or details of their personal lives that, for political reasons, are not revealed in the stories narrated.

At Baca we created our own *testimonio* process, in which the personal and private became profoundly political. “Summer camp” gave us the time and space, free from the pulls of our busy public and private lives, to engage more deeply in knowing one another’s experiences. In response to previous discussions about fear of disclosure, we carefully framed the first round of *testimonios*. We broke into small groups, each with diverse ethnic, national, or geographic membership, and addressed the following questions: Why did we pursue higher education? What did we think we were doing? What was the enticement? What did we get out of it?

These *testimonios* were critical because we began to see common themes and parallel experiences despite differences of national, ethnic, or regional background. The small groups traced what Aurora Levins-Morales called “genealogies of empowerment”: “How did our ancestors, parents and especially the women in our lives validate our right to think and trust ourselves?” We named the first section of our book after these *testimonios*. We discovered that our own passions for reading and learning, for stories, and for knowing more about our heritages and communities had led us to become researchers and writers. Yet despite our success in the academy and in our creative endeavors, we all could point to moments and events that were deeply painful.

In the next round—in a large-group setting—we began to explore these

difficult experiences. This time the questions were more probing: Where did the points of “breakdown” happen? How did collectivity and isolation figure in our lives? What was the process of resistance and recovery? During these sessions many of us told stories we had never shared with anyone. They were about institutional as well as personal abuses that we, the achievers — *las perfectas, las nenas buenas* — had endured through our lives. Breaking the silence, we uncovered the shame that came from abuse. Some of these *testimonios* eventually became the anonymous pieces in this book — *Latinas anónimas* — since they were about experiences that can and do happen to any Latina. Clearly, we needed to share the experiences that we had kept locked away and begin the healing process through spirited reconfiguration. For racialized ethnic women of subjugated peoples, achievement is always a double-edged sword. In becoming women of accomplishment, we have had to construct and perform academic personas that require “professionalism,” “objectivity,” and “respectability” in ways that often negate our humanity. Acknowledging pain helped to unveil the workings of power in institutional cultures, its human costs, and the ways individuals can and do overcome the ravages of power dynamics and abuses. Thus, honoring Clara Lomas’s phrase “the alchemy of erasure,” we named a section of our collective stories “Alchemies of Erasure.” The section “The Body Re/members” came into being through stories about how the alchemies had disfigured our bodies; and yet, somehow we had found moments or processes of resistance, memory, and recovery. Naming pain and using collective support to begin the process of empowerment became integral to our survival as individuals and as a group. In Gloria Cuádriz’s words, “I’ve been waiting for ten years to feel comfortable enough to say this publicly. I may never say it again, so I am grateful that we have created this opportunity.” Her sentiment was echoed by Clara Lomas, “I shared something that I never shared with anyone else. What a relief to finally let go!”

In our collective debriefing after the *testimonios*, we realized that our experiences reflected oppositions of systemic violence and nurturance, injustice and empowerment. Grandparents, parents, and others noticed and nurtured us, provided guidance and encouragement, and believed in our capacity to succeed in our education. Our writings honor them, with *respeto*, love, and appreciation. On the other hand, in our homes, professions, and communities we struggle with racism, precarious economic circumstances, the consequences of being born female, and resistance to our presence in academia. A critical point in our process of theorizing was recognizing that we needed to acknowledge both dimensions of our experiences. Consequently, our writings represent an effort to name and understand the resources we were given as well as the pain that oppression produces for us. Reclaiming both memory and human agency is critical in a process of change. As the Puertorriqueñas said jokingly: *Nosotras estamos jodidas, pero también somos jodonas.*

Our collective process created other benefits. *Testimonio* engaged us at a deeper level than we had found in other feminist and womanist circles and in our own respective national communities. Our intense conversations, shared laughter, and emotional solidarity and bonding ultimately built trust, *confianza*. Despite being positioned at different points in the hierarchies of our professional lives, we worked together as equals. Invoking the Chicana criticism of people with attitude, Yvette Flores-Ortiz joked, *Aquí no hay chingonas*. In addition, bringing together the mind, spirit, and body, we shared meals and rooms, walked in the hills, went on field trips to the hot springs, the sand dunes, and nearby temples. We read our poetry and shared our writings in a night of *tertulia* we called “Café Baca.” We danced together and explored really important questions such as “What is the difference between Puerto Rican and Chicana styles of dancing salsa?” And “Will you teach me?” We did all of this with the aid of untranslatable jokes and hilarious bilingual one-liners that helped ease the weariness from our intense work sessions that often lasted well into the night.

Baca became our self-declared artists’ colony. We returned in the summer of 1996 to write our *papelitos*, conceptualize the structure of this book, and draft its introduction. We listened to the recorded narratives and read the transcripts from the long hours of *testimonio* and dialogue. We then sat down to write our own pieces, based on our *testimonios*. We shared them with one another, gave extensive feedback, and thus provided the support and courage to continue our writing. Ruth Behar told us that her Cuban *colegas* found that the best method for producing text was simply to put *culo a la silla*—butts to the chair! For most of us, testimonial writing was a new form, which, contrary to our academic voices, allowed us to speak with humor, beauty, spirituality, and sensuality. Many of these pieces form the section titled “Passions, Desires, and Celebrations.” After debate over whether these would reify stereotypes about Latinas as passionate rather than intellectual, Eliana Rivero reminded us: “*Mujeres*, we survived all this stuff and we’re still here, thriving, thank you very much. How can we ignore something so central to our existence?” Throughout, we were creating *comadreo*, the Latin American/Latina tradition of kinship, reciprocity, and commitment.

As we read our individual pieces to each other, the structure of this book began to take shape. For the introduction, we pursued a collective writing process where the whole group theorized the sections. Then, in smaller groups, we debated ideas, composed text, and brought drafts back to the whole, where we did line editing. Having eighteen women in a room, collectively writing and editing a manuscript, is a sight to behold! Of course, later, the introduction to this book was subjected to an intense process of recasting, expanding, deleting, clarifying, tightening, and polishing. A “virtual institute” created through e-mail allowed the designated subgroups and *jodomas* who took



Latina Feminist Group in Baca, Colorado, 1995
(l-r, front): Clara Lomas, María Luisa Lomas, Rina Benmayor,
Luz del Alba Acevedo, Pat Zavella; (l-r, back) Gloria Cuádriz,
Aurora Levins Morales, Celia Alvarez, Liza Fiol-Matta,
Caridad Souza

Latina Feminist Group in Baca, Colorado, 1995 (l-r):
Inés Hernández Avila, Caridad Souza, Daisy Cocco De Filippis,
Mirtha Quintanales, Aurora Levins Morales, Norma Cantú





Testimoniando in Baca, Colorado, 1995 (l-r): Caridad Souza, Mirtha Quintanales, Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Inés Hernández Avila, Eliana Rivero, Liza Fiol-Matta

responsibility for particular tasks to “nag” online. Smaller teams from two to eight participants have variously produced and edited drafts. We fondly designated these as the *culonas* of the group.

From our debates emerged a consensus that *testimonio* is a complex genre that has multiple antecedents and uses. From our various disciplinary backgrounds, we had each worked with a range of testimonial texts. These included oral traditions, such as those documented by nineteenth-century *folkloristas mexicanos* who gathered life stories to preserve their heritage in the face of conquest, Judeo-Spanish ballads preserved through five hundred years in diaspora, indigenous storytelling, and African slave narratives. We had also worked with witness narratives by Holocaust survivors and by Central and South American indigenous peoples and *campesinos*. Others had explored Inquisition “transcripts,” confessional narratives, and even the ethnographic work of the friars who came with the Conquistadores. In social science, we had extensive experience generating life histories about Latina workers, migrations, and family lives. On the literary side, we had worked with various forms of autobiographical writing and life hi/story with antecedents in the Latin American and Caribbean *novela-testimonio*. From this multidisciplinary legacy, we found that our muses are as diverse as Sojourner Truth, Jovita Idar, Anne Frank, Mercé Rodoreda, Rosario Castellanos, Julia de Burgos, Rigoberta Menchú, Adrienne Rich, Elena Poniatowska, Cherríe Moraga, Rosario Morales, Audre Lorde, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Isabel Allende, Toni Cade Bambara, Gioconda Belli, Ntozake Shange, Sara Estela Ramírez, Leslie Marmon Silko, Joy Harjo, Luci Tapahonso, Sandra Cisneros, and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Seeking to contest and transform the very disciplines that taught us the



Working with *testimonios*, Baca, Colorado, 1995
(l-r): Gloria Cuádriz and Iris López

Theorizing *Latinidades*, Baca, Colorado, 1995
(l-r): Norma Alarcón and Norma Cantú





Informal get-together, Baca, Colorado, 1995 (l-r): Yvette Flores Ortiz, Liza Fiol-Matta, Clara Lomas, Caridad Souza (in back), Ruth Behar, Ceci Lomas (from behind)

skills to recover our subjugated knowledges, we reclaimed *testimonio* as a tool for Latinas to theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity. Despite its complicated history, *testimonio* captures Latinas' complex, layered lives. In formulating a testimonial process, we engage the following questions in this book: How can a feminist critical imaginary transform the societies in which Latinas live, love, and labor? How can *testimonio*, as self-construction and contestation of power, help us build the theory of our practice, and the practice of our theory? As a collective, we have come to agreement that our use of *testimonio* takes place within a relational framework. Our group histories and lived experiences are intertwined with global legacies of resistance to colonialism, imperialism, racism, antisemitism, religious fundamentalism, sexism, and heterosexism. When theorizing about feminist *latimidades*, we reveal the interrelationships among these systems of power. Trained as critical thinkers, we are forced to acknowledge that occasionally institutions or discourses about which we are critical, such as religion or the family, produce contradictory effects on us, serving as sources of disempowerment and autonomy, repression and privilege. For example, several of us are critical of organized religion, yet religious traditions, practices, or schools developed our sense of confidence, discipline, and academic training. Our *papelitos* illustrate how we grapple with these contradictions individually.

The reader may well wonder why we call our own pieces *testimonios*, since they are written and published by us, relatively privileged women who are

writers, scholars, and activists. Indeed, some of us have already written and published autobiographical texts in varied genres (poetry, short stories, chapbooks, *teatro*, music, essays, and self-reflexive scholarship), exploring issues similar to those presented here. Although mediated by our privileges, the pieces in this book are closer to the genre of *testimonio* for several reasons. Formally, these writings are the products of narratives lodged in memory, shared out loud and recorded. As such, they follow a common process of generating *testimonio*. In a parallel manner to the way that Rigoberta or Domitila's narratives speak not for the individual but for the experience of a community,²¹ we see our stories as expressing the lives of many Latinas in and out of the academy. We hope our collective bearing witness conveys our outrage at multiple forms of violence toward women. Finally, we identify with *testimoniantes* because our collectivity nurtures utopian visions of social formations—families, work teams, social networks, communities, sexual relationships, political groups, social movements—that are formed on the basis of equality, respect, and open negotiation of difference. Like the polyphonic *testimonios*, constructed by accounts from different participants in the same event, this book illuminates the lives of Latinas, making our histories visible.

As feminists, however, we want to go beyond the limitations of *testimonio* and reveal the institutional violence and personal assaults that we have experienced as Latinas. This is not always possible, since many of us feel like “outsiders within,” marginal to the academy, mainstream views, political groups, or even our own families. And despite the feminist mantra that “the personal is political,” as Latina professionals we feel restricted in acknowledging painful personal experiences. Particularly within political projects that include multi-racial groups, or men and women, or are situated within academia, we are often reminded that our needs as feminists are secondary to the “real struggle,” and some of us feel vulnerable to professional or political consequences for personal disclosures.

Our book expands the construction of *testimonio* in our feminist desire to make visible and audible our *papelitos guardados*—the stories often held from public view—and to express the full complexity of our identities, from the alchemies of erasure and silencing to our passions, joys, and celebrations. In dialogue with other hybrid autobiographical modes (ethnoautobiography, “native” or feminist ethnography, autobiographical fiction), we have infused traditional literary genres of poetry and short story with the spirit of testimonial disclosure. At the same time, our *testimonios* express multiple subjectivities of individual lives, marked by uniqueness as well as shared history and context. Departing from the heroic autobiographical tradition, we are not speaking from the voice of the singular “I.”²² Rather, we are exploring the ways in which our individual identities express the complexities of our com-

munities as a whole. As Latinas who now have experienced being on both sides of the microphone, we view *testimonios* as a practice that seeks to mediate the power relations between ourselves and our subjects. In this way, our book represents a unique praxis within *testimonio* traditions, as we have made ourselves the subjects and objects of our own inquiry and voice.

Papelitos Guardados

“Genealogies of Empowerment” begins this book, affirming that we all carry within us the memory of homelands, communities, families, and cultural traditions that situate us in our life trajectories as writers and teachers. Not merely celebratory or nostalgic, these “stories” also capture the ironies and difficulties of becoming successful, accomplished women. “Alchemies of Erasure” speaks eloquently to the many ways in which our identities have been compartmentalized and made invisible, particularly within academia. “The Body Re/Members” inscribes the corporal memory of pain and recoveries, while “Passions, Desires, and Celebrations” gives voice to moments, symbols, and relationships of sustenance and creativity. Some of the writings in this book retain the flavor of oral speech, others are more stylized. Poetry, fictionalized personal account, interior monologue, dramatic dialogue, novelistic writing, and other forms evolved from the creative process of how best to represent the range of our life experiences. In capturing our experiences, however, we relied more on what we had to say than on producing highly crafted text. We sought to preserve the raw edge of *testimonio*, and to use the voice most accessible to each of us.

Throughout the long effort to make this book a reality, we broke the enclaves, sustained meaningful dialogue, crossed the borders between disciplines and academic practices, and proposed a framework for theorizing feminist *latinidades*. In the process, we ventured into new writing modes, and built a sustaining practice of community where we remain committed to continued dialogue, collaboration, and contact, as a whole and in smaller groups. We affirmed a relational ethic of care and support for each other and for the group. In our experience this is Latina feminism at its most nurturing and creative. We think of this book as a gift to other Latinas, particularly young women, to inspire them to create their own expressions of feminist Latina identities — *latinidades*. We encourage you to carry forward, *testimoniando*.

Notes

1. The original agenda included these six topics for research: Political Economy of Latina Lives; The Mapping of Toxicities: Environmental Racism; Violence and Human Rights:

Health, Sterilization, and Addiction; Geographies of Resistance; Cultural Citizenship and Community Development; and Production and Political Use of Knowledge.

2. For references to contributors' scholarship, see Bibliography.
3. Like any term of identity, "Latina" is open to multiple interpretations. In the 1970s, when the term "Latino" (the generic masculine) gained popular currency, it reflected an anti-assimilationist political consciousness arising from community-based organizing. The aim was to be more inclusive of the multiple national compositions of our working-class communities, especially as they became more complex with new migrations from Latin America. During the 1980s, a variety of Latino research centers and programs were established throughout the country for the purpose of studying and comparing distinct national histories and experiences. In the 1990s, we witnessed the term "Latino" used in the academy as a means of reflecting common interests and transnational experiences by Latinos and Latinoamericanos living in the United States. A more recent development is the reconfiguring of Latino and Latin American Studies programs into "area studies." However, when Latinos and Latinoamericanos are seen as one category, important differences such as class, experiences of colonialism or racialization, and moments and conditions of insertion into U.S. society, are erased. Further, even though it emerged in opposition to the homogenized "Hispanic," the term "Latino" is not immune from being co-opted and reconceptualized. "Latino" can easily become a "hip" term used by the mainstream to promote corporate and political interests and agendas.
4. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1973); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, notes by Ana Maria Araújo Freire, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Continuum, 1997); Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, ed. Brenda Bell et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
5. The Bibliography includes substantial sections on "Native" and/or Feminist Ethnography and Oral History/Life History/*Testimonio*.
6. Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).
7. A full history of Chicana/Latina activism, creative writings, and manifestos published in alternative journals, small presses, or social-issue magazines, particularly prior to the 1960s, has yet to be written. However, for important texts that begin this project, see Celia Alvarez, *Intersecting Lives: Puerto Rican Women as Community Intellectuals* (Temple University Press, forthcoming); Katherine Angueira, "To Make the Personal Political: The Use of Testimony as a Consciousness-Raising Tool Against Sexual Aggression in Puerto Rico," *Oral History Review* 16/2 (fall 1988), pp. 65–94; Rina Benmayor, Ana Juarbe, Blanca Vazquez Erazo, Celia Alvarez, "Stories to Live By: Continuity and Change in Three Generations of Puerto Rican Women," *Oral History Review* 16/2 (fall 1988), pp. 1–46; Rina Benmayor, Rosa M. Torruellas, Ana L. Juarbe, "Claiming Cultural Citizenship in East Harlem: "Si Esto Puede Ayudar a la Comunidad Mía . . ." in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, ed. William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Alma M. García, ed., *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Carol Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics: Gender, Culture, and Political Participation in Boston* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Mary S. Pardo, *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Rosa M. Torruellas, Rina Benmayor, Anneris Goris, and Ana Juarbe, "Affirming Cultural Citizenship in the Puerto Rican Community: Critical Literacy and the El Barrio Popular

- Education Program, in *Literacy as Praxis: Culture, Language, and Pedagogy*, ed. Catherine E. Walsh (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1991). See also Section VII, Latina Feminisms and Latina Studies, in the Bibliography.
8. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990).
 9. For key texts that theorize the intersection of race, class, gender, etc., see Section VI, Women of Color, in the Bibliography.
 10. See Patricia Bell-Scott, *Life Notes: Personal Writings by Contemporary Black Women* (New York: Norton, 1994), and *Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers and Daughters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1991); Asian Women United of California, *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Johnnetta B. Cole, *All American Women: Lines That Divide, Ties That Bind* (New York: Macmillan, 1986). See also Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (New York: Feminist Press, 1982).
 11. For references to key works in Chicana and Latina feminist theory, see Section VII, Latina Feminisms and Latina Studies, in the Bibliography.
 12. See Alma Gómez, Cherríe Moraga, and Mariana Romo-Carmona, *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983); Evangelina Vigil, ed., *Woman of Her Word: Hispanic Women Write, Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, 2d ed. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1987; first published in 1983); "Bearing Witness/Sobreviviendo—An Anthology of Writing and Art by Native American/Latina Women," *Calyx* (A Journal of Art and Literature by Women), vol. 8, no. 2 (spring 1984); Roberta Fernández, ed., *In Other Words* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994); Maria del Carmen Boza, Beverly Silva, and Carmen Valle, eds., *Nosotras: Latina Literature Today* (Binghamton: Bilingual Review Press, 1986); Lillian Castillo Speed, ed., *Latina* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); Juanita Ramos, ed. *Compañera: Latina Lesbians (An Anthology)* (New York: Latina Lesbian History Project, 1987); Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero, *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993); Norma Alarcón, Ana Castillo, and Cherríe Moraga, eds. "The Sexuality of Latinas," Special Issue of *Third Woman* (vol. 4, 1989); Gloria Anzaldúa, ed., *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990).
 13. Cherríe Moraga, "Refugees of a World on Fire: Forward to the Second Edition." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983).
 14. Eliana Rivero, "Fronterisleña, Border Islander." *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Special Issue, *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*, ed. Ruth Behar, vol. 33 (fall 1994): 672.
 15. It's only the darker hues that are used in "endearing" ways. One rarely hears anyone say, "Oye, blanquita, mi amor . . . !" (hey little white one, my love). It is always "morena" (dark one or mulatta) or "negrita" (little black one) that convey the sense of "we love you even if you are dark." While "guerita" or "colorá" (light skinned, blond or redhead) are used in some instances, their use connotes a positive process of whitening: "You are special because you are light."
 16. For references to Latina autobiographical anthologies, see Section I, Latina Mixed Genre Literary Anthologies, in the Bibliography.
 17. "The Combahee River Collective, A Black Feminist Statement," in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, et al., pp. 13–22.
 18. At the same time, water and land rights disputes among Native Americans, Hispanos, and

Anglos continue to erupt in social tensions. Ironically, we also remember “*una vieja loca*,” a liquor store owner who, visibly uncomfortable with a group of Latinas in her store, complained, “They’re all chattering, chattering, chattering [in Spanish].” When we objected to her attitude, she became threatening and said, “You want trouble? I’ll give you trouble!” and threw us out.

19. For a discussion of *testimonio* in Latin American literature, see Section III, Latina/Latin American *Testimonio*, Section IV, Oral History/Life History/*Testimonio*, and Section V, “Native” and/or Feminist Ethnography, in the Bibliography.
20. For primary texts in the genre of *testimonio*, see Section III, Latina/Latin American *Testimonio*, in the Bibliography.
21. Doris Sommer, “‘Not Just a Personal Story’: Women’s *Testimonios* and the Plural Self,” in Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 107–30. The recent controversy raised by David Stoll, who applies a positivist notion to the “truth” of *testimonio*, illustrates that the genre includes partial renderings of complex experiences that extend beyond the personal. See David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999.
22. Betty Bergland, “Postmodernism and the Autobiographical Subject: Reconstructing the ‘Other,’” in Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters, eds., *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 130–65.