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# "Listen to Me! I Have Good Reason to Say This": California Testimonios as Early Chicana Feminist Resistance

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When Henry Cerruti interviewed Rosalía Vallejo, he did not expect her to be reluctant to talk about John Frémont and the Bear Flag mob. After all, Mariano had promised that she would be more than willing to share her memories with him. However, she cut their interview short, telling him:

> Since I do not wish to detain you any longer, I will end this conversation with this: those hateful men instilled so much hate in me for the people of their race that, even though twenty-eight years have gone by since then, I still cannot forget the insults they heaped upon me. Since I have not wanted to have anything to do with them, I have refused to learn their language.[1]

She sensed that he was not listening to her, so she chose not to speak with him. The resistance could also be in response to her brother's assumption that she would talk with Cerruti because he had said she would. Instead, she suggested that Cerruti interview a servant in her household, Dorotea Valdez. Valdez's interview transpired quite differently. As a servant for the powerful, landowning Vallejos, Valdez had access to and a perspective on information about early California that was valuable to the history Cerruti was collecting, but it was unlikely that many had sought her version of events in the past. She seemed more willing to talk with Cerruti, even if she was concerned about her lack of education:

> My education has been very limited, yet my memory is good. I am aware of the fact that you have been sent by a learned man who is focused on the noble objective of writing the true history of this country. I would be very pleased to provide you with my recollections. You may proceed to ask me questions at your leisure.[2]

While she seems more cooperative, she had an agenda to discuss. The women's concerns often did not match the questions the interviews asked, and when this

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happened, ruptures in the texts reveal the ways that the women saw themselves in relation to patriarchy, capitalism, and Anglo America.

Between 1874 and 1878 Hubert Howe Bancroft's employees, including Henry Cerruti, interviewed seventy-eight people who had lived in California prior to the 1846-48 US-Mexico War. Because Bancroft did not speak Spanish, he hired three men, Cerruti, Thomas Savage, and Vicente Gómez, to collect oral histories and important documents from the Californios as part of a project to produce a definitive history of the region before its Americanization. Savage, probably the most respected by Bancroft, grew up in Cuba. Cerruti, from Italy, was unstable and flamboyant – so much so that when his financial speculations went awry, he overdosed on drugs. Gómez worked for the California government as a witness on land cases in the 1850s, and in a tragic irony, he ultimately lost his own claim.[3] Bancroft urgently collected as much information as he could about pre-1848 California from people who had lived during the time period because he realized that after they passed, valuable first-hand accounts would be lost. Six months after interviewing one subject, she died, which further underscored the importance of rapidly producing the history. In the end, the collection of letters, interviews, autobiographical narratives, and other materials comprised Bancroft's seven-volume *History of California*, published between 1884-1890.

The seventy-eight collected interviews include thirteen with women. They shared the experience of living in California before, during, and after the US-Mexico War. Most of the women come from privileged, land-owning families. However, at least one of the women (Isodora Filomena) was Native American; others worked for missions; and others were perhaps servants in the upper-class women's houses. Cerruti, Savage, and Gómez, recorded many of the women's testimonios as an afterthought. Privileging the male-controlled text, Bancroft wanted papers from missions, old family estates, and government buildings; lacking these he instructed his researchers to interview Mexican American men. The women were a last resort, and their testimonios factor only as footnotes in Bancroft's history. Thus, most of the recent scholarship on the testimonios collected for Bancroft's project focuses on Californio men, especially Mariano Vallejo's 1875 memoir *Recuerdos Historicos y Personales Tocante á la Alta California*. While this autobiographical document is the most thoroughly extensive of the testimonios, it presents only the perspective of a wealthy, land-owning man, even though the majority of the women interviewed were also well connected to the Californio haciendas (the aforementioned Rosalía Vallejo,

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for instance, was Mariano's sister). Yet the presence of some of the women, such as Dorotea Valdez, giving voice to different class positions makes the testimonios, when read as a collection, a much richer, more diverse articulation of experiences within and across California's nineteenth-century Mexican American history.

I am interested in how these women's testimonios provide a counter-history to Bancroft's that engages genre, gender, and language in ways that can be understood as quintessentially Chicana. Even though "Chicana" as a term may seem anachronistic, to restrict Chicana/o intellectual production to the Chicano Movement is limited and counter-productive, as many scholars have pointed out. In his analysis of Mexican American autobiography, including Vallejo's, for instance, Genaro Padilla discusses the problem that the focus on contemporary writing creates for Chicana/o scholars by having "largely ignored prior personal narrative formations in which ideological complications (historical repression as well as contestatory articulation) comprise the originary worry of autobiographical expression in Mexican American culture."[4] Indeed, the concept of what constitutes Chicana/o production has also been revived by Nicolás Kanellos in terms of the theatre when he shows that as early as the 1860s there was "nationalism and community involvement [that] represent the first example of the kind of social responsibility that would characterize Hispanic theatre in the communities of the Southwest, even up to the present,"[5] while in his analysis of Spanish-language newspapers, Gabriel Meléndez describes the concept of *una literatura nacional* desired by the *periodiquero* generation as a foundational moment in Chicana/o literature. He explains that this "was less an appeal to nationalism and nation-building than a means to mobilize community resources and engage them in literary codification by which questions of ethnicity, identity, and group participation might reflect the status of Mexican Americans in the national life of the country."[6] As Marisa López rightly describes, it is dangerous to place narrow definitions on Chicana/o literature, even as the canon expands, so the movement to include early Chicana/o literary and political production, as López does, allows more complete and complex readings of texts within contemporary Chicana feminist theoretical work. In doing historical recovery work, Deena González points out, "Chicana is a contemporary term, but can be applied to Spanish-speaking and Mexican-origin women in any area presently considered territory of the United States."[7]

I offer an analysis of the testimonios, then, as Chicana feminist texts that respond to cultural violence. Rosaura Sánchez's work on the testimonios provides a

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framework for understanding how they texts are "discourses of the subaltern, the Californios, who, acutely aware of their displacement, feel compelled to speak, to engage in cultural struggle, not as an end in itself, but as a strategy toward positioning themselves collectively."[8] Resistance to Anglo state domination and assertion of women's independent agency in California is evident in the text of the testimonios; also interesting is the way the women challenge the Mexican state and the romanticizing of pre-1848 California gender roles and familial responsibilities. In her articulation of the past, each woman emphasizes her contributions to the society she inhabited before American invasion and stakes a claim to a valued and influential place in the Anglo American California. In these testimonios, it is possible to find women's voices as well as their agency. One of the primary strategies they use is to create a third space that allows them to reveal what they cannot explicitly say. I will show how these women use their agency in ways that challenge patriarchal, heteronormative, hierarchical Anglo and Mexican American society. Their resistance to colonization (externally and in their communities) through sexual violence makes their interviews nascent Chicana feminist projects. A central concern for the women is resistance to sexual violence, publically from the state and church and privately within the family. Using this term broadly to address actions from rape and attempted rape to forced marriages and sexualization of their bodies, I show how the women's experiences necessitate responses to the Mexican government, mission priests, American army, and the interviewers themselves. Resistance to cultural violence (state, church, and family) reveals that the concerns for these women are not much different from those of Chicanas today. Their strategies may offer new ways of addressing these challenges. Because a Chicana feminist lens is necessary for understanding the testimonios, I begin my analysis by situating the testimonios as Chicana/o projects and examining their archival recovery. I then turn my focus to a close reading of the testimonios to illustrate women's multiple and varied responses to cultural violence.

## Decolonial Voices and Chicana Feminism

Since I read the texts as implicitly nascent Chicana projects, other aspects of the women's identities are important to uncover. The process of shifting from the colonizer to the colonized disrupts these texts and leads to an analysis of them as part of Emma Pérez's decolonial imaginary. She explains even though women's voices are traditionally unheard, "Women's voices and actions intervene to do what I call sexing the colonial imaginary, historically tracking women's agency on the colonial

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landscape."[9] The women are simultaneously critical of the American colonization and the Mexican government; through their criticism they delineate the ways that these states have imposed cultural violence on their bodies. They also see themselves as colonial and colonized subjects, which has made them into an oppressed colonial other. Pérez explains that because this positioning is not "simply oppressed or victimized" but both, it creates a liminal identity that means "one negotiates within the imaginary to a decolonizing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another."[10] The women deconstruct their own positions as privileged women and oppressed gendered subjects in both the Mexican and American social orders. The women seek recognition and continuation of their agency regardless of their place in the class and racial hierarchy.

The tendency to read the women as simply waxing nostalgic about their past is to read the testimonios as only declarations against American colonization. Padilla points out, "nostalgia mixed with anger functioned to mediate the manifold social forces that infringed upon the spirit of those people who resided in the vast territory that became the western United States in 1848."[11] This use of anger is complex in its ability to criticize institutions within the Mexican American community as well as the colonizer. Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana Rivero agree that anger and nostalgia mix in the testimonios to offer critiques on the state:

> The voices that come to us from these California narratives not only cement the place of women and their activities in the population of the new frontier but also show us their ingenuity and survival skills. And although the voices are sometimes accommodating to the new order after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, they are also the voices of resistance, anger, and loss.[12]

I argue that the women rarely invoke nostalgia; even as the women criticize the barbarity of the new regime, more importantly they critique the pastoral reminisces of Mexican American men who seek to relegate women's production in California life to domestic affairs. The women's accounts of experiences with government and management of the land or missions reinforce this argument. For the men, consenting to interviews was a way of contesting the violence of the American colonization and the process of becoming racialized Others. For the women, these interviews offered an opportunity to counter violence they experienced as classed, raced, and gendered Others. The men's testimonios have often been read as nationalist impulses against Anglo America; the women's testimonios should be read as simultaneous critiques on patriarchy in Mexican and Anglo social mores.

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These texts mirror narrative strategies Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Castillo use in their essays. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa traces the image of *la Virgen de Guadalupe* through forms in the 1660 Roman Catholic Church to the 1965 grape strike.[13] Ana Castillo locates the trace more personally and forcefully: "I stand firm that I *am* that Mexic Amerindian woman's consciousness … and that I must, with others like myself, utter the thoughts and intuitions that dwell in the recesses of primal collective memory."[14] The women's testimonios also call on traces in their memories to form connections to the past – not to romanticize the past but to claim it as their own. In my analysis, I show how the women excavate the archive of memory and how that memory can serve as the trace for further scholarship. I rely on Jacques Derrida's discussion of the trace within the archive: "The archive has always been a *pledge*, and like every pledge [*gage*], a token of the future. To put it more trivially: what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way. Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives."[15] In this sense then, the structure of the archive (the interviews conducted by Bancroft's employees, the storage of the women's testimonios in the archive, and the recent recovery) has enabled the women to fulfill their pledge to the future. As Rebolledo points out, "The importance of family, the preservation of traditions, folkloric elements of healing […] are present in early writings as well as in contemporary ones. Common concerns and themes link the past with the present, weaving together the fabric of which women's lives are woven."[16] That these narratives exist in some ways validates the trace (the specter) accorded to the past by Anzaldúa, Castillo, Rebolledo, and others. Seeing these women's voices reinforces that their concerns mirror concerns women facing state, church, and family violence continue to address.

Chicana feminists over the last three decades have described how Chicana feminist discourse responds to overlapping and intersecting identities. In a 1989 article examining the Chicana feminist projects of the 1970s, Alma García describes how the discourse developed "primarily as a result of the dynamics within the Chicano movement," but ultimately had to deal with questions of "the relationship between feminism and the ideology of cultural nationalism or racial pride, feminism and feminist baiting with the larger movements, and the relationship between their feminist movements and the white feminist movement."[17] Ultimately, this means that within the Chicana feminist critique, there always exists a reference that Chicanas are negotiating experiences as ethnic, gendered, classed, and heteronormalized subjects.

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This position demands that Chicana feminist projects examine the ways these identities influence each other in Chicanas' lived experiences. Aída Hurtado's more recent project, *Voicing Chicana Feminisms: Young Women Speak out on Sexuality and Identity*, consists of interviews with 101 Chicana women in colleges and universities. These interviews return to the testimonio tradition, but Hurtado's approach is more sympathetic to the women she interviews than those of Cerruti, Savage, or Gómez, who only interviewed women as an afterthought. The women in Hurtado's study don't all claim a feminist label, but they all voice feminist identities through their understanding of their life experiences. Hurtado discovers that theorizing about Chicana feminisms is actually reflected in the ways Chicanas live. Validating and asking about lived experiences as modes of understanding feminist experiences with women subjects is central to feminist research methodologies. The women interviewed for the Bancroft project share their lived experiences, which allows us to understand how the personal is political for them, and perhaps as Hurtado suggests, how the political is also personal, in that the political changes act on the individual.

Through their critiques of Mexican power structures as well as Anglo invasion, the women provide a 19th-century example of how Mexican American women were able to recognize multiple oppressions as women and as colonized subjects and begin deconstructing the ways that patriarchal power was used against them. Their interviewers did not receive blatant criticism well, as seen in Vallejo's interview with Cerutti, so the women had to code their analysis. Like the women of the Chicano Movement who questioned the male dominated leadership and the subservient roles the leadership expected women to take, the women giving testimonio risked the other members of their communities seeing them "as subverting Chicano/Mexicano culture and as potentially betraying their communities."[18] If part of the reason Mexican Americans participated in Bancroft's project was to give themselves "a historic good name," then the women had to carefully frame their answers in order to represent themselves and their communities while taking advantage of the opportunity they had to tell their own version of events in California. Sánchez explores how the testimonios present women in "conflicting and negative" constructed images. The women did not simply contest these roles by assigning power to inherently gendered roles, such as manager of the mission, but instead they challenged the images "by countering male expectation in spaces of production, family, and culture, by engendering productive spaces that are no more inherently masculine than feminine and that are suggestive of female agency."[19] The

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engendering of productive space separate from patriarchy is difficult in that the women inhabit patriarchal space – that of the Mexican mission system as well as California's emerging US colonial system. The testimonios embody the lived experiences of the women by giving them voice and marginal control of how they respond to the questions posed. The space the women create within the interview gives them some ability to suggest female agency within the patriarchal society of Mexican California.

The Bancroft project offered the possibility that Mexican Americans could maintain a position in the changing political and economic landscape of 19th century California. As Tomás Almaguer points out, the emerging definition of non-white identities in California established a "eurocentric cultural criteria to hierarchically evaluate and racialize the various cultural groups" despite the initial ability of the Californio elite to "attenuate more virulent expressions of anti-Mexican sentiment" and "challenge Anglo-domination for a time."[20] These testimonios can be read as challenges to Anglo-domination and insurances against erasure. The historical urgency Bancroft exhibited to get the testimonios before the givers passed away is mirrored by the efforts on the part of the interviewees to retain vestiges of the lives and contributions to the Mexican and American societies.

Testimonios and autobiography are necessarily mutable. The women's testimonios have recently been recovered from the Bancroft archive and published in Spanish; they have also been translated into English. I have also filtered the testimonios by my choices in what to focus on in the women's recollections. Where possible, I have opened space for the women's words, rather than my summary of what they said. While these testimonios are not self-generated works, they allow a rare glimpse into the daily lives and concerns of different classes of women in California.[21] Allowing them to speak in this article is important, even though the words have already been heavily filtered.

**Responding to Marriage as State, Church, and Family Violence**

While some of the women were able to choose who they married, most of the women experienced forced marriages for strategic (land or wealth-preserving) purposes. Their responses to the circumstances of these forced marriages show how these women embody nascent Chicana feminism. Sánchez remarks that "the testimonios reveal stringent patriarchal domination in Alta California … This

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domination is especially clear with the marriage contract, for here women become commodities to be exchanged by their fathers."[22] Before 1848, Anglo men had to marry Mexican women in order to become citizens capable of owning land in California. After 1848, Mexican fathers wanted their daughters to marry Anglos in hopes of preserving the land grants. As the women discuss the circumstances of their marriages with the men interviewing them, it is evident that they are criticizing Mexican patriarchal interests that commodify women's bodies. They also challenge the Anglos' claim through these marriages to Mexican women and Mexican land.

Isidora Filomena, an Indian woman, describes the occasion of her first marriage to Solano, leader of the Suisun nation, to Cerruti as one coerced by kidnapping and rape. She notes, "I belonged to Solano before I married him and even before I was baptized … On a trip Solano took [to Cache Creek] to do some negotiating, he stole me. My father and many Satiyomi went after him, but they could not catch him."[23] Her kidnapping takes place during raids on her tribe conducted by Mexicans and Suisuns. This rape and subsequent forced marriage puts Filomena in a position to critique Mexican government and patriarchy prior to American invasion. As an Indian who married into an alliance with the Vallejo family, she is given protection after Solano's death. However, she is forced to marry again. She describes her union with Solano as one in which, despite its violent origins, she participates as an equal within their society. Her discussion of her later marriage reveals a critique of American institutions and the effects of them on the Indian and Mexican population:

> I have already gone downhill. I drink a lot of liquor because I do not have very much land filled with cattle. The blonde men stole everything. They left nothing for poor Isidora, who married Bill after Solano died. Bill is not a very loving man. I did not give birth again. With Solano I gave birth to eight little ones.[24]

Filomena dissects the ways that she has become disempowered through the second marriage and the American invasion. As Sánchez suggests, "Escape from a patriarchal structure is not to be found in a different caste, station, or order, as seen in neophyte women who married *gente de razón*; there are only shifts from one patriarchal structure to another."[25] Neither marriage gives Filomena explicit agency in a patriarchal system; however, the phrase "did not give birth again" suggests some sort of agency on Filomena's part. Either Bill was infertile, or she exercised birth control, which would be a strong use of agency in the face of patriarchy. Yet, she

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could not protect her land through marriage and the patriarchy imposed by Anglos has led to losing land, love, and powers of reproduction.

Cerruti also performs an individual form of violence on her story. In order to interview Filomena, Cerruti gave her alcohol, and took her testimony while she was under the influence. He used alcohol to misrepresent himself, to lower her defenses, and to help himself acquire her valuables. Clearly showing how land and property dispossession results in trauma and personal violation, Filomena tells Cerruti that the blonde man has stolen everything, and the implication is that Cerruti himself is complicit in this theft. He tricks her into selling her only valuables to him for very little money and a bottle of alcohol. This treatment is a form of sexual violence, especially considering that the articles he buys from her include her wedding dress that she had planned to be buried in.[26] He literally undresses her without her consent. As a Native woman, Filomena receives much less respect from Cerruti than he bestows on upper class Mexican American women. His actions toward her work to erase her presence at the same time he is recording her words. His treatment of her follows Andrea Smith's analysis of perceptions of Native women that reinforce a colonialist agenda. Cerruti does not think there is anything amiss in his method (plying Filomena with alcohol and essentially stealing her possessions), and he does not see this because he views her as "conquestable." Smith describes how this phenomenon works: "Because Indian bodies are 'dirty,' they are considered sexually violable and 'rapable,' and the rape of bodies that are considered inherently impure or dirty simply does not count."[27] The way Cerruti treats Filomena reinforces his gender, race, and class privilege over her in an uneven power arrangement. He feels justified taking her things because he wants to preserve them; this is a racist idea that Smith dissects by explaining, "Non-Natives feel justified in appropriating Native spirituality and Native identity because they do not believe existing Native communities are capable of independently preserving Native cultural practices."[28] Cerruti's appropriation of Filomena's things makes him the custodian of her words and her possessions. She tells her story, but he marginalizes her even in comparison to the other marginalized voices in the testimonios. The blonde man truly has stolen everything from Filomena, but she responds by using her voice and defending herself by describing her people's history, explaining why she drinks, and providing an oppositional subaltern voice to the dominant narrative.

Even women who claim agency for themselves in their marriages must still submit to patriarchal dictates concerning sexuality from Mexican fathers and Anglo

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laws. Josefa Carrillo begins her interview by naming herself. Then she explains the origin of the word California, and then she levels a strong critique of "Yankee savants" who have presumed to change the names of many places and peoples in California. She tells Cerruti that "what amazes her most is that all those name changes were made by people who did not have the right to baptize anyone."[29] Naming herself and her people shows a strong Chicana feminist tendency toward claiming agency and claiming space. As Mary Pat Brady shows, creating space is vitally important to asserting a Chicana identity:

> Chicanas write with a sense of urgency about the power of space, about its (in)clement capacity to direct and contort opportunities, hopes, lives. They write also with a sense of urgency about the need to contest such power, to counter it with alternative spatial configurations, ontologies, and genealogies.[30]

Carrillo makes this space by contesting naming power and countering it with the already existing alternatives. In her marriage, she also creates the capacity to direct her own life, even if she is only marginally successful. She is one of two or three women who makes her own choice in marriage. She notes that Henry Fitch asked her to marry him before he talked with her parents. They approved, but the Mexican governor halted the ceremony, because as Carrillo supposes, "I concluded that his persecution of me and my husband was no more than an act motivated by the despair that had taken hold of his soul. He was convinced that I had shown preference for a rival whom he detested."[31] Governor Echeandía attempted to control the sexuality of the women within California. He tried to stop the marriage of an Anglo man and a Mexican woman, but more importantly, he saw her relationship as a direct personal affront. This seems strange because marriages between Californianas and Anglos were fairly common. Castañeda remarks, "In the early periods of contact, when whites sought to establish trapping, trading, and other commercial relations with Indians and Mexicans, intermarriage and consensual unions were as much economic as they were sexual or romantic alliances."[32] That the Governor found her marriage to be a personal affront seems to indicate that what he may have resented most was a Californiana who exerted her sexual and romantic appetite in a way that the state and church did not control. It is important to note that there is a double-edged aspect to the women's testimonios regarding marriage. As Norma Alarcón has described:

> The myth contains the following sexual possibilities: woman is sexually passive, and hence at all times open to potential use by men whether it be seduction or rape […] the use of her as a pawn may be

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> intracultural, "amongst us guys," or intercultural, which means if we are not using her then "they" must be using her. Since woman is seen as highly pawnable, nothing she does is perceived as a choice.[33]

Carrillo's assertion of her own sexuality allowed her to make a choice. She rejected the state and the church's control over her sexuality, but she still desired her family's approval. This shows that even in making a personal choice, Carrillo could still have felt ambivalent about challenging the patriarchal status quo.

After the couple returned from their elopement, Carrillo found that her father had not forgiven her for leaving. She asked for her father's blessing which Sánchez suggests shows that "The patriarchal structure is in no way rejected, though Josefa does make clear her prerogative to choose one patriarchy over another."[34] She did choose her husband's patriarchy, but she becomes a full participant in their union, running a store and fighting to keep her land after 1848. If she chooses one form of patriarchy over another in her marriage to an American businessman over a Mexican governor, she certainly does not support American institutions encroaching into California. Her discussion of place names is a strong rejection of American claims to power in California. Again this critique makes a trace for environmental critiques that Chicanas will make regarding gentrification and urban and rural development. Brady connects the concern over the environment to assertion of civil rights: "Chicanas have also been deeply attentive to the struggles for civil rights, a struggle that must be understood at least in part as a struggle over the use of space to maintain or disrupt social, political, and financial power."[35] Imposition of Anglo law subjects Carrillo to a traumatizing loss of power. However, she realizes the temporality of space, and Carrillo's choices about how that space acts upon her makes her assertion of rights a nascent Chicana struggle that connects to a contemporary Chicana consciousness.

Religious law also compelled women to marry, even against their wishes. The class of the women working at the missions is evident in that their status through the land and their name comes directly from the mission system. Eulalia Pérez had been married and given birth to twelve children. When her husband died she became the *llavera* at mission San Gabriel. She recounts to Thomas Savage her duties at the mission, which included overseeing a large staff of Indian indentured servants. With her daughters married, Pérez faced pressure from the fathers to marry again:

> I did not want to get married, but Father Sánchez told me that Mariné was a very good man, which turned out to be the case. He also had

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> quite a bit of money, but he never handed the box where he kept it over to me. I gave in to the Father's wishes. I did not have the heart to deny Father Sánchez anything because he had been like a father and mother to me and to my entire family.[36]

This marriage devastates Pérez, personally and professionally. The money box story indicates that she moves from a position of relative power within the missions to a subservient position as a wife who cannot handle money. But, she does not feel that she can say reject the marriage because she has a familial obligation to Father Sánchez. She must repay her debt for living in the mission to him through this marriage. The missions, under pressure of secularization, were looking for ways to transfer land to those loyal to the missions. This plan backfired because the land did not stay in Pérez's hands. Mariné's son sold the land after his death.[37] Pérez not only resented this marriage but also saw it as robbing her of the agency she had cultivated at the mission. Her inability to access the couple's finances ("he never handed the box where he kept it over to me") clearly is antithetical to her position as the "keeper of the keys" at the mission. Through this line she contests the division of economic space into masculine and feminine realms. She escapes the sexual violence of the forced marriage by remaining at the mission; as unsatisfactory as it may be to remain with those who had commodified her, she does not have to consummate the marriage with Mariné. Ironically, she did not need to get married in order to have owned the land on her own.

These marriages reflect the concern Anzaldúa shows regarding the rigidly prescribed roles for women: "For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons."[38] While this statement may overgeneralize, the themes are constant. Forging a fourth way is more like forging multiple ways of being. Carrillo found agency within and against the church and the state as these institutions attempt to control their sexuality. Significantly, they accomplished their resistance in different ways showing that there are many ways to resist the rigid gender roles enforced on women.

**Responding to Rape and Threats of Rape**

Castañeda, reflecting on the ways that patriarchal frontier histories disregard women, especially women of color, discusses violence: "Because racial inferiority

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was equated with sexual impurity – even prostitution – nonwhite women could be raped with impunity, just as they could be enslaved, killed, or worked to death like beasts of burden."[39] Rape in the West was a tool of social control, a way for men to control women through seemingly unrelated incidences of sexual violence. However, when examined in context these individual events show that the threat of violence was pervasive and formed another way that the state exerted power over women's lives. As current scholars focus on the role of rape in war, the narratives provided by the women Cerrutti, Savage, and Gómez interviewed reveal ways that women responded to this atrocity.

Almost all of the women interviewed share a story about rape or the impending threat of rape at the hands of Mexican, American, or Indian men. These stories are complicated and the women use them to illustrate power dynamics in California both before and after 1848. Complicating the narrative of sexual violence at the hands of the colonizers, three of the women describe an event in which two young girls were abducted by a revolt orchestrated by Indians. Their testimonios of this event gives a glimpse as to how multifaceted race, class, and gender relations were in California even before American colonization. The women use the threat of rape from Mexican men to challenge patriarchal norms of Alta California. Just as Chicana feminists challenge machismo and sexual violence, these women level strong critiques of state sanctioned violence against women. The testimonios contest representations of women as sexually vulnerable. Resisting this characterization serves to reinforce Alarcón's analysis that "As long as we continue to be seen in that way [open to sexual exploitation] we are earmarked to be abusable matter, not just by men of another culture, but all cultures including the one that breeds us."[40] The women use stories of how they thwart the threat of rape at the hands of American soldiers to show how their resistance has been successful. Finally, stories of rape and abduction by Indians serve as historical allegory to level a critique of American invasion that they cannot express directly to their interviewers.

The tumultuous revolts in California prior to 1848 mark political upheaval in which women had taken part, as I showed earlier. However, these also mark the inability of the Mexican government to create a stable social space that values women and their contributions. The disruptions of daily life and the sexual violence women face as a result are central to some of the testimonios. Juana Machado explains that during one revolt,

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> Micheltorena brought with him a large retinue of officers and an infantry battalion that our people called *cholos* … It was made up of thieves and criminals taken from the prisons in Mexico as well as prisoners from Chapala … We were so afraid of them that we hid everything. There were some good men among them and the officers behaved well.[41]

Machado accomplishes two things with this seemingly contradictory passage. She articulates the fear women had of the Mexican troops through her implied analysis that they will take whatever property strikes their fancy, including women. However, she also acquiesces to the need to cast Mexican Americans in a good light for the Bancroft project. She attempts to defend and condemn at the same time. A deeply layered, ambivalent discussion of Mexican Americans, her analysis shows a class bias toward the officers and a critique of the government's choices in troops that threaten the stability of the landed California regime. The possibility of rape by the lower, prisoner class is a real fear that she exposes later in the testimonio. Machado says that in San Diego, "We heard little about the governor's actions, but there was no shortage of rumors about his troops' bad behavior."[42] The bad behavior could have suggested many things, but in this Victorian context, it likely describes sexual deviance, as it certainly does when Lorenzana uses it to refer to the women in the missions. The disruptures in Californian society through rape and the threat of rape by the Mexican soldiers precede the more graphic discussions of rape by American troops. Castañeda notes: "Bancroft treats sexual and other violence against native women primarily in relation to the bitter conflict between the institutions of church and state, and attributes it to the moral degeneration of the racially mixed soldier-settler population."[43] The women's testimonios refute his analysis, which is probably why he chose not to include their interviews in any meaningful way. The testimonios show that sexual violence was a way men of all races exerted power over women.

The women show that rape and the threat of rape represented by the American soldiers is another dangerous extension of Anglo power. Rosalía Vallejo, who was particularly querulous with Cerruti during her interview, may have sensed his resistance to represent her counter narrative of John Frémont's actions during the Bear Flag revolt. She says, "Many paid writers have characterized Frémont with a great number of endearing epithets, but he was a tremendous coward. Listen to me! I have good reason to say this."[44] It seems that she had to get Cerruti's attention and proceeded to tell the story of the soldiers' atrocities in detail:

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> The women did not dare go out for a walk unless they were escorted by their husband or their brothers. One of my servants was a young Indian girl who was about seventeen years old. I swear that John C. Frémont ordered me to send that girl to the officers' barracks many times. However, by resorting to tricks, I was able to save that poor girl from falling into the hands of that lawless band of thugs who had imprisoned my husband.[45]

She shows that she had to protect the members of her household from the threats of rape by the American troops. Direct intimidation of women in the town is accomplished by threats of sexual violence. The women respond to this threat from American patriarchy by creating bonds with each other to protect themselves from violence. Vallejo takes over as head of the household while her husband in jail. In this way, she assumes responsibility for protecting the virtue of the women within the house. Her domestic environment becomes the site of a political struggle, and she uses the tools available to her in order to conduct a political act of resistance. She will not cede her domestic space to the threat of the violation by the invaders. Vallejo works within the system in which she lives. Her analysis refocuses on the women's roles in domestic resistance. Castañeda's discussion of borderlands historians as giving "descriptions of rapacious attacks on Amerindian women by soldiers focus not on the women but on the conflict over authority that these attacks exacerbated between officials of church and state."[46] Vallejo's description offers an alternative way of reading this history. She focuses squarely on women's perceptions of events and the ways women worked together to resist violence from outside their communities. Naming the violence and working with other women and men in the Californio community to prevent it is a nascent Chicana feminist act that also provides an alternative history to popular historiographies of the period.

The responses to threats of rape show that the Californianas developed strategies of resistance that they narrate for their interviewers. These acts allow them to change the focus of the interview and subvert the system that dictates their position as vulnerable subjects. This gives a trace of the Chicana goal articulated by Beatriz Pesquera and Denise Segura that: "The American Women's Movement should be less dedicated to finding ways to integrate women into a male-dominated world and more devoted to developing strategies to end structures of inequality and exploitation produced by American capitalism."[47] Their commitment to working with the tools available to them to resist cultural violence reflects a strong critique of the Anglo state and economic system that threatened women on the ranchos and the missions.

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## Conclusion

The testimonios do provide a rich, diverse look at women's experiences in pre- and post-1848 California. The ways the women respond to cultural violence – actual and perceived – shows their resistance to American colonization and their emergent Chicana feminist voices that insist on recognition of their contributions to and place in Mexican American social structures. The articulation of their place challenges gender stereotypes perpetuated by the men's testimonios. They resist romanticizing Mexican California at the same time that they resist erasure by Anglo squatters and lawyers and Mexican American men's stories. The long silence, from their time in the archives, did not diminish their voices. Close examination of their words reveals a multiplicity of experiences, identities, and struggles. As Emma Pérez suggests, "These silences, when heard, become the negotiating spaces for the decolonizing subject. It is in a sense where third space agency is articulated."[48] Opening these spaces while encouraging discussion of these spaces is a valuable way to understand how the subaltern speaks. Their voices disrupt dominant histories of California, especially Bancroft's project. The disruption allows a rewriting that places nascent Chicana feminist voices in a position to name themselves. Reading these texts as nascent Chicana feminist projects expands conventional parameters defining both Chicana history and the American Women's Movement. Feminist acts in pre- and post-1848 California deserve to be included in descriptions of how these projects function.

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## Endnotes

[1] Rosalía Vallejo, "Testimonio," in *Testimonios: Early California Through the Eyes of Women, 1815-1848*, eds. and trans. Rose Marie Beebe & Robert Senkewicz (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2006), 29. The women's participation in the project had been mostly erased until recently when scholars turned their attention to the women's testimonios. Recovery work on these testimonios has led to renewed interest. Recent new Spanish transcriptions have also been published of the women's texts in *Critica* by Rosaura Sánchez, Beatrice Pita, and Bárbara Reyes. Their work resulted in an influential availability of the archival presence of these texts. A new English translation by Rose Marie Beede and Robert M. Senkewicz makes the testimonios even more accessible. Until this century much of the testimonio material, men's and women's, had not been published. That which had been included mistranslations. Past English translations have left out sentences or paragraphs of the women's words, substantially altering their meaning; instead of showing that Angusitas de la Guerra opposed the American invasion, a 1956 translation suggested that she supported it. While Beede and Senkewicz acknowledge the inevitability of their own filtering of the translations and contend that their project provides more accurate translations.

[2] Dorotea Valdez in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 34

[3] Beede & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, xxiv

[4] Genaro Padilla, *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 6.

[5] Nicolás Kanellos, "Two Centuries of Hispanic Theatre in the Southwest," *Mexican American Theatre: Then and Now*, ed. Nicolás Kanellos (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1983), 22.

[6] A. Gabriel Meléndez, *Spanish-Language Newspapers in New Mexico, 1834-1958* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 136.

[7] Deena González, "Chicana Identity Matters," *Aztlán* 22.2 (1997), 125.

[8] Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio* testimonios (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xiii.

[9] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 7.

[10] Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 7.

[11] Padilla, *My History, Not Yours*, 11.

[12] Tey Diana Rebolledo & Eliana Rivera, eds., *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 13.

[13] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 51.

[14] Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (New York: Plume, 1994), 17.

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[15] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 18.

[16] Tey Diana Rebolledo, *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 39.

[17] Alma García, "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980," *Gender and Society* 3:2 (1989), 218-221.

[18] Aída Hurtado, *Voicing Chicana Feminism, Young Women Speak out on Sexuality and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 259. Obviously they didn't call it "Chicano/Mexicano," but there is a strong sense of preserving the dignity of the race through the testimonio.

[19] Sànchez, *Telling Identities*, 227.

[20] Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 8.

[21] I refer to the interviews as testimonios because that is the title of Beede and Senkewicz's book, and to prevent confusion with the other commonly used "testimonials."

[22] Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 195.

[23] Isodora Filomena, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 11.

[24] Filomena, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 11.

[25] Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 221.

[26] Henry Cerruti, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 15. Henry Cerruti gloats over his many purchases from Filomena in his metanarrative of her interview. He also believes that her husband Bill is her son. The lack of concern with which he conducts the interview brings ethical questions to the forefront.

[27] Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005), 10.

[28] Ibid., 123.

[29] Josefa Carrillo, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 78.

[30] Mary Pat Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 9.

[31] Carrillo, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 79.

[32] Antonia Castañeda, "Gender**,** Race and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California," *Frontiers* 11 (1990), 15.

[33] Norma Alarcón, "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin /or Malintzin Putting Flesh Back on the Object," *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Cherríe Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), 205.

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[34] Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 215.

[35] Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies*, 10.

[36] Eulalia Pérez, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 106.

[37] Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 97.

[38] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 39.

[39] Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture," 15.

[40] Alarcón, "Chicana's Feminist Literature," 205.

[41] Juana Machado, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 139.

[42] Machado, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 140.

[43] Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture," 9.

[44] Vallejo, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 28.

[45] Vallejo, in Beebe & Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 29.

[46] Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture," 14.

[47] Beatriz M. Pesquerq & Denise A. Segura, "A Chicana Perspective on Feminism," *The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader*, eds. Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 524.

[48] Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 5.

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