

# INTRODUCTION

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When Ana Castillo sent the literary world into a frenzy with her 1993 novel *So Far from God*, her first published poem, “Otro Canto,” was already sixteen years old (1977), not to mention that her first genre-bending novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, was seven years old (1986). The timeline of her first writings compared to her worldwide literary “success” is the foundation of this edited collection. Castillo has been a key literary figure in Chicana/o/x and American literary history for more than four decades, yet there is no critical collection examining her works to date. So why embark upon a journey that is long overdue and why focus this edited collection on the transnational Chicana context? This question has two answers. First off, Castillo’s writing offers us many roadmaps for how we can begin to navigate our current political and social moment. That is, Castillo’s work offers readers speculative trajectories through a Chicana feminist praxis, which creates a language within her novels that interrogates real world trauma and racialized violence (ongoing today) while simultaneously blending, breaking, and challenging genre conventions. Castillo is a Chicana feminist writer who deals with global issues. Secondly, and most importantly, there is a direct gap of interpretation between Chicana feminist literature and theory and that of other third world feminist theories and writings. Castillo deals directly with transnational and global issues in her literature; her work is read in an array of literature courses. This edited collection strives to expand the reach of her work by suggesting we broaden our categorization of her work as solely Chicana and acknowledge that it can and should also be read as a significant contribution to Latina/o/x studies, especially in how it fosters new conversations in gender/sexuality studies that help trace how early Chicana feminism contributed to the genealogy of work in Latinx feminist politics. Considered in this way, Castillo’s work transcends borders of literature *and* theory. In this collection, we refer to Castillo as Chicana; however, we honor the ways in which she identifies as Xicana, Mexic Amerindian, mestiza, *and* Chicana. We also employ the “x” in the spirit of ac-

knowledging the ways this category makes a bold statement about identity politics as noted by Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, who says it “carries the excessive and diverse affective load of a population in ways that other ethnonationalist and pan-Latina/o terms cannot.”<sup>1</sup> As this collection hopes to show, Castillo’s work has contributed to the discussions of culture, politics, history, and positionality across disciplines and across time.

A transnational Chicana perspective is evident in much of Castillo’s writing in the way she turns genre on its head, traverses space and place, and combines literary movements. She does this beautifully in her groundbreaking novel *So Far from God*, published in 1993 by W. W. Norton and Company. When the novel begins, the youngest daughter of Sofia/Sofi, three-year-old La Loca, has “passed away” of an epileptic seizure. Without explanation, La Loca rises from the dead, alive and well during her funeral. Before this happens, Father Jerome, the Catholic priest giving the funeral mass, questions Sofi’s faith in God and says, “As devoted followers of Christ, we must not show our lack of faith in Him at these times and in His, our Father’s fair judgment. Who alone knows why we are here on this earth and why He chooses to call us back home when He does.”<sup>2</sup> Father Jerome calls upon Sofi to have faith, but the faith he is forcing upon her is based on institutionalized religion: a religion of conquest, a religion that ties the Americas together in interdependent ways. As Sofi shows her aggravation and sadness, “The [coffin] lid pushed all the way open and the little girl inside sat up, just as sweetly as if she had woken from a nap, rubbing her eyes and yawning.”<sup>3</sup> La Loca flies to the top of the church but is not able to fly completely away from it, because she is restricted by the male-dominated space of the church. And it is in this moment that Castillo counters this male dominance by bending genre convention by subverting male authority represented by Father Jerome. She opens her novel with this scene of magical realism that can only be explained by Father Jerome as something to do with possession by the devil. Magical realism, a twentieth-century literary movement originating in Latin America, is marked by depictions of “the real” alongside depictions of the fantastical; Castillo pushes the boundaries of this Latin American genre made most popular by male Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez and Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges, and coined as *lo real maravilloso* by Cuban novelist, essayist, and musicologist Alejo Carpentier.

Whereas a general readership would—for potentially racist reasoning and ignorance of certain geopolitical locations—categorize Castillo in this Latin American boom, we read Castillo as taking the political form of magical realism as building off Latin American writers deliberately to play on the device’s popularity of the “fantastic.” She certainly moves transnationally through literary genres and geopolitical spaces. Wendy B. Faris defines

magical realism as “an ‘irreducible element’ of magic, something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them. In the terms of the text, magical things ‘really’ do happen.”<sup>4</sup> Through the lens of realism, magic details the phenomenal world through what we come to know as ‘reality.’ The phenomena of what cannot be explained in reality are narrated with a matter-of-fact tone in the texts. However, it was Alejo Carpentier who coined the term *lo real maravilloso*, which brought magical realism from German art criticism to Latin American literary criticism. In his essay “On the Marvelous Real in America,” originally published in 1949 in the preface to Carpentier’s novel *El reino de este mundo*, and later published in English translation as *The Kingdom of This World* in 1957, he suggests that the New World is intrinsically marvelous and cannot be fully and accurately represented by Western realists’ literary “ruse of Surrealism.”<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, his novel depicts the French colony of Saint-Dominique and later Haiti through the presence of ghostly phantoms and animal metamorphosis, which are all taken as fact by the Black characters in the novel. This highly political move to adjust how readers conceptualize “rational” Western thinking and “magical” Afro-Caribbean thinking makes room for a rejection of colonialism and conquest and opens up a space for readers to envision what “reality” might look like for non-Western thinkers, characters, and representation. Carpentier gave rise to the Latin American “Boom” fiction of the ’60s and ’70s that is associated with the term *magical realism*. In *So Far from God*, Castillo is building off this political genre, not to add a “Latin American” voice to the already burgeoning canon, but to playfully will readers in the United States to think about *how* the political informs the literary. It would be wise for us *not* to read Castillo as a part of the Latin American Boom, but as utilizing the literary technique to unsettle a US-centered readership. Marta Caminero-Santangelo notes that to lump simplistic paradigms of “magic” into magical realism is to essentialize Chicana/o/x “as part of its larger commodification within mainstream U.S. culture.”<sup>6</sup> Castillo borrows from the literary tradition of magical realism that blurs the lines between natural and supernatural and elasticized notions of time and space, but utilizes different narration styles to turn the genre on its head.<sup>7</sup> This collection brings together issues and questions of collective Latinx subjectivity through Chicana feminist literary history and culture, as we will later explain.

Father Jerome cannot fathom how or why La Loca could fly to the top of the church roof with such fervor and fierceness. However, as a narrative that is rooted in oral storytelling, the novel utilizes gossip to convey major events and characters. The novel begs readers to ask: Did La Loca *really* fly to the top of the church? How? Who is the narrator telling us the story of this flying resurrection in the first place? In an attempt to play with genre

convention through magical realism while challenging the male-dominated church, Castillo turns magical realism on its head as we consider that there is nothing magical about gossip. The narration of this event and all preceding events is told by the *señora* neighbor, who probably heard about it from another neighbor, as is common practice in impoverished neighborhoods. These women celebrate the highs and the lows together and talk about everything as survival strategies.<sup>8</sup> Readers are forced to read this scene for its literalness and symbolism combined. In an attempt to “fly,” La Loca symbolizes the female character that attempts to leave home. While Castillo gives us a magical realist component, she simultaneously undercuts it through narrative strategy. “Don’t you dare!” She [Sofi] screamed at Father Jerome, charging at him and beating him with her fists. ‘Don’t you dare start this about my baby . . . hombre necio, pendejo . . . !’<sup>9</sup> In this moment readers see, as Theresa Delgadillo notes, “Castillo’s narrative undoubtedly creates Chicana characters who actively participate in the construction of their world, yet the text goes beyond questioning to confront.”<sup>10</sup> Juxtaposing the entire genre of magical realism with the transnational conquest of the church in tension with female-centered spirituality, the female characters in the novel are (re)presented to readers in different shapes and forms as a way to link death with larger structures of power that link Chicana subjects across locales, places, and oceans, and Castillo does this in the first few pages of the novel.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, on June 15, 1953, Castillo is a copious writer of poetry, novels, short stories, essays, collected editions, plays, and more. She utilizes what she terms as “conscientized poetics” in her novels. This particular political poetics and Chicana feminist positionality works to raise people’s awareness and political consciousness while revealing the interconnectedness of diverse cultural traditions. Castillo strives to create a language within her novels that interrogates real world trauma and violence such as racialized and gendered violence while simultaneously blending, breaking, and challenging genre conventions. B. J. Manríquez reminds us, “Although Castillo experiments with generic form in each novel, she explores the same aesthetics of confrontation: the masculinized politics of power; the ineffectuality of racism specific to minorities under capitalism; and the complex nature of romantic love, its sexual expression, and its relation to the prevailing ideologies of social power.”<sup>11</sup> Castillo’s writing imagines queer, women of color-centered spaces as a direct comment upon a dystopian society that connects with larger cultural, political, and transnational concerns. As a practitioner of Xicanisma and a self-identified Mexic Amerindian, mestiza, and Chicana, Castillo hopes that Chicana feminism will be “rescued from the suffocating atmosphere of pedantry and carried out to our work places, social gatherings, kitchens, bedrooms, and the pub-

lic sphere.”<sup>12</sup> Castillo’s concept of Xicanisma is more than an expression of feminism in nationalism. Her Chicana feminist politics are instead better categorized as a “critique of Chicano nationalism [that] thus operate[s] as a powerful critique of neoliberalism that incorporates oppositional nationalism,” as Grace K. Hong notes in her discussion of Chicana feminist praxis in this era.<sup>13</sup> By the release of the twentieth-anniversary edition of *Massacre of the Dreamers* in 2014, Castillo’s Xicanisma also evoked a more transnational articulation of feminism in which gender politics must transcend national borders because they operate from unfixed and diverse positions. This shift in our conception of Chicana feminism is what has, in part, inspired this collection.

Castillo was one of the first Chicanas to be published by a New York publishing firm. As literary agents began to see success with Latin (American) literature, they needed a strategy to make Chicana literature consumable for a mainstream audience. Castillo was one of the first authors to be published on the heels of the “chica lit” boom. Chica lit, an extension of Latina literature, resulted from a definite shift away from Chicana literature (of the late ’80s and beyond); it was an attempt to make Chicana literature seem more foreign and not domestic, to seem more magical and less political.<sup>14</sup> This marketing strategy attempted to make the political Chicana more consumable to the mainstream public. Castillo took conventional genre and form and made it palpable for a mainstream audience, while simultaneously interrogating issues that Chicana/o and Latina/o subjects were experiencing.

Her various uses of literary form and genre make Castillo a transnational feminist with a Chicana feminist praxis, because quite frankly, she juxtaposes normative literary convention with more oral traditions of folklore from Mexico and across other international borders. This allows her not only to stretch genre and form to its absolute coherency, but it also allows her to play with convention, meaning she satirically brings to light transnational issues. Daniel Cooper Alarcón coins the term *literary syncretism* in thinking about how Castillo’s novel *So Far from God* “selectively draws on, combines, and reconfigures the conventions of her numerous source materials” in order to combine canonical texts and popular literary traditions that range from the “Bible and *Don Quixote*, to hagiography and Catholic legends, to popular Mexican American proverbs, folk legends, and remedies.”<sup>15</sup> This combining of different literary genres, conventions, and forms is a classic Castillo move. Through literary syncretism, she mirrors social commentary on racism and sexism in her novels and poetry. Castillo is able to explore many social issues in her novels because she is not wedded to a particular literary form or genre. For example, as Alarcón states, Sofi rejects and recasts the tale of La Llorona in *So Far from God*, which sheds light on

how sexism runs rampant not only in the small community of Tóme, but also within the institution of the Catholic church. Castillo's narrator tells readers: "The Weeping Woman astral-traveled all throughout old Mexico, into the United States, and really anywhere her people lived, wailing, in search of her children whom she drowned so as to run off with her lover. For that God punished her forever on earth."<sup>16</sup> The La Llorona folktale puts all the burden and blame on the female figure, but Castillo is quick to counter this historic folktale through her narrator, who states, "The idea of a wailing woman suffering throughout eternity because of God's punishment never appealed to Sofia, so she would not have repeated it to her daughters."<sup>17</sup> When Sofi's oldest daughter, Esperanza, a journalist, is held hostage while she is reporting and then dies in the Middle East, La Llorona appears to La Loca to inform her of her sister's death, and Sofi, her daughter Fe, and La Loca all weep for Esperanza. This weeping is *not* because Sofi "had left her children, much less drowned them to run off with nobody. On the contrary, she had been left to raise them by herself."<sup>18</sup> The three of them weep because war and nation-state violence took their family member. Castillo recasts the La Llorona folklore to put the onus on histories of war, not on the woman of color. Castillo employs literary syncretism to exemplify the interweaving of the "literary" and the pragmatic, of convention and the mundane.

This type of reading of Castillo's form would fit into a postmodern literary technique that elucidates a disjuncture of form, but pushes against the postmodern form because Castillo is a writer who is deeply connected to history.<sup>19</sup> The literary syncretism that Alarcón coins that takes into consideration this disjuncture functions along the same lines as Tereza M. Szeghi's concept of literary didacticism, meaning that Castillo's poetry and novels emphasize the idea that different forms of literature ought to convey information and instructions. In her 2008 novel *The Guardians*, she offers a raw political message that "effectively aim[s] to combat the cognitive defenses readers of human rights literature experience, which prevent them from taking action."<sup>20</sup> Castillo utilizes Regina, the narrator and protagonist, as a call to action on the borderlands. In fact, this postmodern form of disjuncture and theorizing its own condition of possibility was how Castillo crafted her novels *Sapogonia: An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter* (1990) and *So Far from God*, which originated in short story form; *Sapogonia* as "Anti-hero" and *So Far from God* as "Loca Santa." We see this exact form of the combination of many literary forms, genres, and conventions in Castillo's novel *The Mixquiabuala Letters* (1986). For example, letter thirty-two in the novel is one of two letters in which poet Teresa writes about herself in third person. The shift from first to third person is an obliteration of her sense of self. But as Lesley Larkin states, Teresa also becomes multiple in these letters. "There are at least three Teresas here: the self-possessed, feminist Te-

resa of ‘another life’ who speaks with ‘muffled shouts’; the shattered Teresa, attempting to piece herself together again; and the Teresa writing retrospectively about the act of recovery in which the second Teresa is engaged.”<sup>21</sup> In doing this, Castillo allows Teresa to be reader, writer, and subject of the text. These examples point to Castillo’s vastness and her expanse in the literary field. Just as Sandra K. Soto suggests, Castillo’s form explores “transcultural forms of belonging and desire,” meaning that Castillo’s narrative forms and characters are “constantly negotiating various forms of travel: outward journeys that move her characters across literal and figurative time, space, and sometimes even dimension.”<sup>22</sup> This edited collection was born where Castillo’s varied form and her varied transnational space meet.

The collection considers the large span and scope of Castillo’s body of work, from her beginning poetry and formidable novel *The Mixquiahuala Letters* to her critically acclaimed novel *So Far from God* to her raunchy aesthetics in *Give It to Me* (2014) to, finally, her gripping nonfiction piece *Black Dove: Mamá, Mi’jo, and Me* (2016). We are asking: What are the connections to be made between Castillo’s work, the US Chicana/Latina context, and the larger transnational and global context that considers Brown bodies and cultures to lay at the margins in the current moment? How does Castillo’s work allow a conversation to emerge between Chicana feminists and transnational feminists? In what ways does Castillo’s themes and language connect to a larger body of work, and in what ways is she solidifying Chicana feminism as a foundational theoretical body of work?

### A LITERARY GENEALOGY OF CASTILLO WITHIN CHICANA AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

Tracing a literary genealogy of Castillo in relation not only to Chicana literature, but also to broader American literature and the transnational feminist canon seems overambitious at first; however, upon further examination, it becomes a critical mapping project that is the foundation of this collection. This mapping begins with recognition of the integral work early Chicana feminists underwent to make their voices heard—a journey that begins as early as the 1960s. As Dionne Espinoza, María Eugenia Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell assert in their 2018 anthology, *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era*, Chicanas in the 1960s “enact[ed] a new kind of *política* (politics) at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality, they developed innovative concepts, tactics, and methodologies that in turn generated new theories, art forms, organizational spaces, and strategies of alliance.”<sup>23</sup> This foundation, or the *movidas* of women in the Chicano movement era described by Espinoza, Cotera, and Blackwell, worked to deepen resistance against the oppressive social, racial, political, and personal spaces within which these early Chicana feminists maneuvered and were forced to navigate. Liberation from oppression

was a common goal for Chicanos and Chicanas alike during the 1960s and 1970s, but as Sonia Saldívar-Hull reminds us, “A split also came between traditional, male-identified Chicanas who refused to recognize women’s struggles as legitimate areas of dispute, and feminist Chicanas, who insisted on liberation from oppressive cultural traditions.”<sup>24</sup> Saldívar-Hull’s assertion makes clear that the Chicana feminist movement was not based on a homogenous group of women; instead, the movement symbolized a moment of significant change that included the acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of women’s issues even within groups of Chicana feminists. In other words, the Chicana feminist movement brought to light the issues that came with classifying the Chicano movement as solely a fight based on nationalism and race. Movement rhetoric and actions that drove it neglected sex and sexuality—issues Chicanas faced daily. This absence motivated Chicana feminists to forge their own movement that acknowledged the importance of these issues in the national narrative; they created a political movement that propelled them into the public eye as dynamic subjects who contested the internalization of what we now identify as neoliberalist modes of power. Grace K. Hong reminds us, “Rather than attempting to resolve or compensate for the losses wrought upon Chicana/o communities by the racial state and capital and in this way overcome the state of abjection, Chicana feminism instead politicized abjection.”<sup>25</sup>

Castillo’s writing in the 1970s speaks directly to this politicized abjection. Alternativa Publications published her first chapbook of poetry titled *Otro Canto* in 1977. Coincidentally, this was the same year that the Combahee River Collective published their statement on Black feminism that stated their collective was “committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking.”<sup>26</sup> *Otro Canto* was the beginning of a call to form alliances between Latinas/os in the United States and was a coalitional model that stood among statements like the Combahee River Collective Statement in that moment of civil rights, nationalist movements, and activism by radical groups across the nation. Just two years after her first chapbook publication, Castillo published another chapbook, *The Invitation*, in 1979. Castillo was among the first Chicana novelists to be published, including Sandra Cisneros, who published *The House on Mango Street* in 1984 (Arte Público Press), and Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, who published *Puppet: A Chicano Novella* in 1985 (UNM Press); Castillo’s first novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, saw print in 1986 (Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe). These foundational authors set the stage for a Chicana literary canon that examined not only issues of gender, but also how race, sexuality, and class were intersecting structures of violence that second-wave feminism would

never attend to or accept. Around this time, Puerto Rican poets were also establishing their literary voice in New York City with the opening of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, where Sandra María Esteves was putting out her first book of poetry called *Yerba Buena: Poems & Drawings* (1980).

Simultaneously, Black feminists Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde were establishing Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. The women of color feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, published by Kitchen Table in 1982 (1981 by Persephone Press) and edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, is still a foundational text that mixes genres, essays, poems, and short stories to create a genealogy of women of color activism. Women of color feminists continue to recognize Moraga and Anzaldúa's *This Bridge* as one of the most notable dialogues about transborder feminism. When the collection was originally released in 1981 on the heels of the Chicano and the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it influenced feminist thought in important ways. This collection opened dialogue between women of color feminists that transformed feminist theory and practice in the most radical way when it emphasized the important role of collaboration and community building between and among feminists of color across the nation to contest neocolonial ideologies that continued to render them invisible or as second-class citizens. The women of color feminists who contributed to *This Bridge* aligned their own work with third world communities and cultures, though some scholars would say this was done erroneously, as the distinction between first and third world women of color was major. However, this coalition ensured political solidarity that further expanded Chicana feminist concerns as *transnational* feminist concerns.

When prominent Chicana feminist scholars responded by using politicized and gendered writing through such venues as Third Woman Press, spearheaded by prominent Chicana feminist scholar Norma Alarcón, then a graduate student at Indiana University, they began to fashion a space through which "written and visual expressions" and "intellectual activism" of women of color could be published and distributed to a broader audience and, in turn, created an alliance through which women of color from around the nation and globe could "imagine a new political class centering sexuality, race, and gender."<sup>27</sup> In fact, in 1980 Castillo was present at the Midwest Latina Workshop where Alarcón decided to create Third Woman Press.<sup>28</sup> In 1993, Castillo joined forces with Alarcón and Cherríe Moraga to coedit their own collection through Third Woman Press that examined the state of the Latina and Chicana in the United States (*The Sexuality of Latinas*). In 1996, Castillo edited her own collection, *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe / La Diosa de las Américas: Escritos Sobre la Virgen de Guadalupe*, published by Riverhead. Both collections examine the performativity of gender and sexuality in the Americas through

colonialism and imperialism.<sup>29</sup> And while the Chicana feminist canon is foundational and rooted in our theoretical politics of liberation today, this edited collection aims to break open the essentialist notions of womanhood and lesbianism, appropriated terms of indigeneity, and how “third world” is located and theorized in these early Chicana writings and through the work of Ana Castillo specifically. If we are truly looking toward liberation and writings that can give us a roadmap to liberation, we must be critical and engage in the nuances of the works that brought us to the moment we are in right now.

At the peak of this multiethnic art renaissance, Castillo began publishing at a steady pace. She wrote *Women Are Not Roses* in 1984 (Arte Público Press) and her most popular book of poetry, *My Father Was a Toltec and Selected Poems, 1973–1988* (W. W. Norton & Company), in 1995. In between those two, she published *Sapogonia: An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter* (Bilingual Press) in 1990 and her short story collection *Loverboys* (W. W. Norton & Company) in 1996, with her famous novel *Peel My Love Like an Onion* (Doubleday Press) coming out in 1999. But it really was her first novel, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, published in 1986 (Bilingual Press), that set the stage for all her future novels to come. Castillo dedicates the book to Argentine writer Julio Cortazar’s *Hopscotch* and tells the reader, “Dear Reader: It is the author’s duty to alert the reader that this is not a book to be read in the usual sequence. All letters are numbered to aid in following any of the author’s proposed options.”<sup>30</sup> This subversion of genre to express Xicanisma through a male Latin American writer begs the reader to ask, is this parody or pastiche in a novel? In American literature, postmodern parody finds itself without a trajectory. It has lived and that strange new thing, the pastiche, slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask or speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral “practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter. . . . Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs.”<sup>31</sup> Castillo uses and circumvents the literary tradition of postmodernism in her novels as she breaks down reality as a strategy to invoke not only literary history, but the materiality of history. In her latest novel, *Give It To Me*, which was published in 2014 by the Feminist Press, Palma, the main protagonist, functions against the norms of American integration discourse through multiple scenes of sexual vignettes that take readers on a journey with Palma but do not follow a plot; the narrative, therefore, does not allow us to become invested.

*Give It To Me* rejects a tidy plotline and follows its forty-three-year-old Chicana protagonist, Palma, on more than twenty sexual escapades transnationally. Palma, a bisexual Chicana, grows up in Chicago, where she lives

with her seemingly judgmental grandmother after her parents leave her to work on the migrant trail. Her parents end up in Los Angeles, where Palma finds them in her quest to fill a certain void in her life. While her roots are in Chicago, she moves to Albuquerque, New Mexico, with her ex-husband Rodrigo who gets a job there in education. When Rodrigo's brother calls to tell him his mother is ill and ailing, the couple flies to Medellín, Colombia, only to find out that Rodrigo's brother is disappearing people and is at odds with the cartel, a "family business" Palma knew had taken the two to Colombia in the first place. She lives most of the novel in Albuquerque, where she finds odd-end jobs and ends up in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Palma becomes the embodiment of what cannot be contained within the Chicana body, but at the same time she seems disinterested in her position as a racialized woman, her sexual excess, or her community at large. However, a closer look into her "empty" characterization allows for a generative supplement to the discourse of postmodernism that deems Palma without profound knowledge of herself. For Castillo, the postmodern splitting of the subject is the very condition of the conquered and colonized Westerners under all eras who utilize survival skills and is not particular to the conventional postmodern condition of the twentieth century. Castillo again turns movement and genre on its head.

### WHERE X MEETS THE HISTORICAL POSITION OF THE CHICANA

As Chicana feminism is met with the changing landscape of the studies (Chicana/o/x studies, Latina/o/x studies, and feminist studies), the debate within labeling continues. And just as Chicana feminism must contend with the ways it overlaps with transnational feminism and hemispheric Latina/o/x political conditions, it also must contend with the ways in which people of color are attempting to transcend the restraints of markers of differentiation: race, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. Castillo coined the term *Xicanisma* in *Massacre of Dreamers* published in 1994 by University of New Mexico Press. As Suzanne Bost writes, "In *Massacre of Dreamers* (1994), she traced the 'strength and endurance' of Chicana feminism back to ancient Mesoamerican spirituality, taking the 'X' from the Mexica tribe (whom the Aztec people claimed as ancestors) and creating an opposition between the patriarchal and hierarchical cultures imposed by European conquest and a supposedly more peaceful and egalitarian indigenous worldview."<sup>32</sup> The way Castillo employs the X centers the power of the female and interrogates the colonial gender binary. In her writings, while she examines the X, we are convinced that Castillo is dedicated to a Chicana feminist praxis, which as Guidotti-Hernández tells us is "nationalism in feminism [that] called for a politically active social feminism that relied on the recuperation of Mexic-Amerindian women's experience."<sup>33</sup> Through evoking

wholeness, Castillo coins the term Xicanisma to reclaim subjectivity during a struggle for political recognition within Anglo society and her own community of patriarchal Chicanos.

Castillo articulates gendered sexual and violent politics that navigate and circumvent the X through textual poetics. She utilizes death in her novels as a vehicle to comment upon the social maladies that plague women of color. In *So Far from God* (1994) when Caridad, one of Sofi's middle daughters and the most beautiful of the four, is physically attacked after she was out drinking one night at bar, she is left completely unrecognizable. The police blame Caridad for her situation as a consequence of her sexual promiscuity, and no one is ever held responsible for her physical attack and mutilation. Instead of a "man with a face" that attacks Caridad, it is the "malogra . . . a thing, both tangible and amorphous. A thing that might be described as made of sharp metal and splintered wood. . . . It held the weight of a continent and was indelible as ink, centuries old and yet as strong as a young wolf."<sup>34</sup> Francisco, the Penitente and man who rapes Esmeralda (the woman with whom Caridad falls in love), is indirectly linked to the malogra. In this indirect link, the novel comments on the Spanish conquest of the Americas and the soulless methods used to colonize, specifically the gendered violence of colonial and imperial violence. Gender and sexuality in Castillo's writings are defined within the context of the social constructions of patriarchy and heteronormativity. After her restoration, Caridad enters a new spiritual life with curandera Doña Felicia and eventually meets Esmeralda during a pilgrimage in northern New Mexico. Caridad's queerness, not just in regard to her sexuality, but in the way she positions herself in direct opposition to institutional religion and violent systems of power, allows her to form alternative kinships and women-centered spaces that are in direct contrast to her neoliberal sisters. While the identifying category of Latinx came after much of Castillo's own work and is defined as "a person of Latin American origin or descent used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina," Castillo interrogates and undoes the performativity of gender and sexuality within white supremacist boundaries.<sup>35</sup> The distinct violence that Chicanas experience in the world is the focus of much of Castillo's writing. Chicanas embody the histories of colonialism, migration, and displacement/dispossession and historical legacies of sexual violence as tied to positions of domination and servitude. This is not to say that there are not nuanced positions of power that Chicanas hold within history that maintain white supremacy, patriarchy, and capital; however, Castillo's representation and stereotypes interrogate and procure the "excessive" Chicana female body that is voluptuous, open for sex, overproducing, yet not productive.

While we use Chicanax in this collection to build upon the "X" that has become so popular in contemporary popular culture, we are well aware that

the “X” in Chicana/x is relational to Latina/x. We want to open up a discussion not only on the “X” in relation to Chicana feminism, but also on how Chicana/x can be in critical conversation with Latina/o/x studies. Becoming popular by Latino millennials in the late 2000s, Latina/x has come to mean the diverse and those whose subjectivity cannot be verbalized within the naming of Latina/o and Chicana/o. In *Latina/x Literature Unbound: Undoing Ethnic Expectation* (2018), Ralph E. Rodriguez encourages literary scholars to challenge their own assumptions about identity and to embrace the diversity of Latina/x writers, who, he argues, are better categorized as heterogeneous.<sup>36</sup> Claudia Milian in *Latining America: Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latinola Studies* (2013) traces the same critical thought as Rodriguez, in that she acknowledges the importance of a Latino identity, but she also engages the ways in which the Latino literary canon misses the epistemological and ontological differences of the many peoples who fall under Latino.<sup>37</sup> However, Rodriguez’s work encourages us to shift away from, rather than embrace, Latina/x solely as a strategic category that effects political outcomes. Instead, he says, we must “evaluat[e] the very rubric under which we do our work,” which, for Rodriguez, is returning to understanding the importance of genre in literary studies. This edited collection takes both Milian’s and Rodriguez’s arguments one step further to ask not only *what* is particular about Latina/x aesthetics, but *how* the X forms aesthetics *and* genre.

We also take into consideration Antonio Viego’s discussion of Latina/x, which he states is the general indeterminacy that marks the moment with respect to conceptualization of the human subject.<sup>38</sup> Latina/x makes room for the subject with the understanding that it is an impossibility to do so. The “always becoming” subject is that with which Castillo’s work reckons. The Latina/x body is always already becoming through the term *Latina/x*, which gives us the space to imagine what possibilities are ahead for the liminal body. Guidotti-Hernández wrestles with the historical position of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os when she utilizes José Esteban Muñoz’s (2000) notion of Latino affect to state that we need to move beyond the notions of ethnic identity as fixed and instead understand it as performative; in other words, brownness is what people do.

If we examine the breadth of Castillo’s cultural production, it is evident that she does not shy away from bringing to the forefront of her work issues pertinent to communities of color, including women of color feminists; she has addressed sexuality and bisexuality and the various ways in which they are represented are significant to queer communities; she has challenged normative conceptions of the family and discrimination against peoples of color; and she has emphasized the importance of cross-border perspectives and critically focused on the border space and its subjects. Over time, Cas-

Castillo has remained committed to these issues. The genealogy of her work also reveals how she transcends the borders of genre, gender, and space. From her 1984 book of poetry, *Women are not Roses*, in which she demarcates how women defy societal and cultural norms, to her 1990 novel, *Sapogonia*, where she vividly details the destructive powers of civil unrest, misogyny, and how issues of racial identity impact geographical and physical bodies, to her 2014 novel, *Give It to Me*, in which her protagonist faces all the makings of complex family life because of divorce, pseudo incest, and the ways the protagonist defies the boundaries placed around sex and sexuality, to her 2016 memoir, *Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me*, where she shares personal stories about motherhood, family life, and being a bisexual Chicana feminist—we get a glimpse of the ways Castillo's work confronts, reveals, and attempts to make sense of our constantly changing world: the becoming of X that we see in Chicana. She has, over time, considered how local, regional, national, and global geographies intersect with gendered, sexualized, racialized, and politicized subjects and how those intersections have impacted subject positions. Through her own process of identity formation and conviction as a Mexic Amerindian woman, she has rejected the confines of a heteropatriarchal society that has historically rendered her race, culture, gender, and sexuality invisible. Castillo's attention to bisexuality is both public and private. As Aldama (2005) notes,<sup>39</sup> she “self-reflexively clears a space for the story of a Xicana lesbian border-erotic to unfold,” which can be seen in her short story collection, *Loverboys*, and in many of her novels, including *So Far from God*, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (addressed by Ximena Keogh Serrano, Szeghi, and Liliana González in this volume), and *Give It to Me* (addressed by Cruz in this volume). Her work continues to resonate with contemporary scholars, who embrace ideas such as the one expressed in Castillo's assertion that “the very act of self-definition is a rejection of colonization,” a statement that conveys the shifts that have occurred in women of color feminism and queer/transnational feminist theory and praxis.<sup>40</sup>

### TRANSNATIONAL CHICANA FEMINIST POLITICS AND DECONSTRUCTING BORDERS

There is a cross-national concern in Castillo's writing that constructs links between the United States and Latin America, establishing the most evident transnational connection her work confronts. *The Guardians* published in 2007 is a prime example. Set on the Juarez border towns of Cabuche and El Paso where people live in constant danger and crossing the border often results in disappearance or murder, *The Guardians* is a story told from four perspectives: Regina, Miguel, Gabo, and Abuelito Milton. Following a journey to find Regina's missing brother Rafa, the novel is a critique of how state and global structures function on the space of the border, where

transnational goods and tariff policies are sent back and forth every day; however, bodies are also watched, managed, and killed every day. Transnationalism is theorized by, as Katharyne Mitchell states, “Capitalism, money, information, and a hegemonic narrative of modernity . . . [a] narrative that privileges a singular, western-centric vision of capitalism, information or modernity.”<sup>41</sup> To think about this term void of “placeness” puts strict limits on its connectivity and how locales are implicated in the homogenizing capitalist machinery. Transnationalism also runs the risk of taking the nation as an undisturbed framework where one does not question the effects of economies, migration, or hierarchy. However, the Chicana transnational focus in this collection interrogates, examines, and unsettles how Castillo’s texts form, circulate, and mitigate by focusing on several zones of contact and discussing the ways in which her different genres—the novel, short story, poem, critical essay, and autobiography—knit the extended Americas and the globe together in complex narratives of interdependence. Focusing on how literature produces meaning through the interconnected relations of different sites, we seek to unravel how Chicana (and other people of color) transnational connections are possible forms of coalition.

For Castillo, situating herself physically along the US/Mexico borderlands enables this type of interconnectedness. The author moved to southern New Mexico in 2005, which she describes as “right on the border of Land Management. It’s almost Texas, but El Paso, Texas, and El Paso almost considers itself part of New Mexico because El Paso has been so disenfranchised by the rest of Texas.”<sup>42</sup> This geopolitical border space within which Castillo resides has influenced much of her writing, and especially, the settings in some of her most recognized works, including her novels *So Far from God* and *The Guardians*. The former is set in the village of Tóme, situated twenty-five miles from Albuquerque, and part of the Town of Tóme land grant settled in 1739 when the grant was issued by the Spanish crown to early settlers of the region. *The Guardians* is also set in New Mexico, along the border region between New Mexico, El Paso, and Ciudad Juárez. These select New Mexico settings are significant because they trace a long line of border politics—both demarcated by racial and political lines that reveal the importance of transnational politics addressed in Castillo’s work. Tóme is situated along El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, the route taken by Spanish colonizers as they made their way from Mexico City to Ohkay Owingeh, New Mexico, from 1598 to the late 1800s; in other words, it is a space that traces the path of settler colonialism in what is now New Mexico. The US/Mexico border space in *The Guardians*, on the other hand, is tied to other forms of border crossing. At the time of this writing, the border community in El Paso is still healing from an August 3, 2019, incident in which one of the deadliest mass shootings that targeted immigrants occurred at a

local Walmart. This act of domestic terrorism was fueled by white nationalist and anti-immigrant attitudes. More recent immigration stories are present in texts like *The Guardians* (addressed by Sandra Ruiz in this volume); however, Castillo traces a longer line of migration in other works, including her memoir *Black Dove* (addressed by Elena Avilés in this volume).

Transnationalism was already always central to Castillo's life and the narrative she shares with us about her mother in *Black Dove*; it serves as a stark reminder that the borderlands from which her family departed are defined by a legacy of colonialism and imperialism that begins with the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their homelands. Embedded within her fictional and nonfictional work, Castillo incorporates pieces of this significant history and draws attention to its broader implications to our national and transnational narratives. When westward expansion drove settlers west and southwest, dispossession continued for minorities, and like the Indigenous peoples who suffered at the expense of colonialism before them, the identities of Mexicanas/os also changed almost overnight in matters of citizenship, national identity, and belonging.<sup>43</sup> The US/Mexico border space thus became a ubiquitous symbol of erasure—a place in which Anglo domination reigned superior and any other identities and cultures were shattered and reshaped to fit the imperialist project that guided the forming of the US nation-state.

During their moves north, many Mexicanas/os, like Castillo's family, settled in Chicago, where a vibrant immigrant, working-class community emerged. Even though Chicago is considered a global city, sociopolitical borders were present in very visible ways. As Castillo recalls her experiences growing up, the reader sees that despite Chicago's multiculturalism, multilingualism, and internationalism, she was exposed there to ongoing resistance to unequal social, political, gendered, and cultural injustices occurring around her and told to her by her mamá. As she came of age in the "Windy City," Castillo recognized the fact that "racial tensions were high then" and that "color and ethnicity were important . . . , particularly in a white-dominated city" where she was constantly reminded, "I wasn't white. You had only to ask what any European-descended individual thought of me. With my reddish-brown hue, indigenous features, and dark hair I inherited mostly from my mother, the usual comment was that I couldn't even be American."<sup>44</sup> This passage in Castillo's memoir, *Black Dove*, and most of the chapter entitled "Peel Me a Girl," renders visible the ways in which the author was already always contemplating not only the role of identity in understanding her own place in the world as a woman of color, but also the ways in which her feminist praxis was always transnational as it was influenced by the move her mother made to protect herself and her children. Castillo's feminist discourse—influenced significantly by her

mother's journey north—serves as a reminder that feminist practices travel across geographical and cultural locations. Considering Castillo's work in this way reveals how she pushes temporal and spatial boundaries of Chicana feminism and Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x literature and how her feminist praxis intersects with and impacts identity formation.

What Castillo articulates in the short passages that describe her mother's migration north and her own coming to consciousness about race invokes a transnational feminist frame from which she makes connections between gendered identity, race, culture, and nation, and the ways that patriarchy—stemming from its colonial roots—impacted her mother and then *her* inherited place within the US nation-state. With all of its global culture, and despite its physical location in relation to the US/Mexico border, Chicago becomes a space within which Castillo is demarcated by her gender and the color of her skin and where she becomes even more cognizant of the various forms of borders that surround her. Her family story of migration across the US/Mexico border and her experiences in Chicago and later, in New Mexico, also emphasize how gender, space, race, and place came to shape her work. These experiences also reveal what Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Mino Moallem describe as “feminist practices as part of the transnational circulation of cultures and politics as well as material goods.”<sup>45</sup> This type of feminist production is influenced by “spatiality (territoriality/deterritorialization), temporality (time of national culture, timelessness of the nation), nationalist body politics (national body, body as landscape, landscape as feminized body, national hero as masculinized body), and nationalist heterosexual and kinship metaphors of state fatherhood and motherhood.”<sup>46</sup> This collection interrogates and uncovers how Castillo's work functions in these ways.

Castillo's autobiographical writing gestures toward the ways these zones of contact have impacted her family history of migration, especially evident when she relays in *Black Dove* that her mother moved to Chicago with her two older siblings from the Texas/Mexico borderlands—a move her mother made because of her need to escape the older and married man who had taken advantage of her when she was just a teen. Although she experienced the impacts of patriarchal violence while still in Mexico, her mother, armed with a “machete in hand,” made her way north with her children to establish her life away from Nuevo Laredo and within the bustling city of Chicago to provide for her family and to escape her traumatic past.<sup>47</sup> It is almost ironic that Castillo returns to the borderlands in New Mexico in her adult life to further address the politics of border subjectivity in this politically significant moment in the twenty-first century.

In *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (2003), editors Gabriela F. Arredondo, Aída Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, and Pa-

tricia Zavella remind us that Chicana feminists have long been interrogating the relationship between geographical space and especially the US/Mexico border space, and their histories and lived realities. They argue, “The particularities of the histories of Mexico and the United States and the realities of continuous movement within and across social locations mean that Chicanas increasingly deploy a transnational perspective that enables us to confront the clash and confluence of cultural, political, and economic disparities.”<sup>48</sup> Castillo employs this transnational perspective and also contributes to the growing body of queer scholarship in the ways she addresses the politics of identity, gender, and sexuality that continue to impact our transborder publics. Working in tandem with Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s “theory in the flesh,” what they describe as

one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience. We are the colored in a white feminist movement. We are the feminists among the people of our culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight. We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories in our own words.<sup>49</sup>

Castillo uses her fiction and nonfiction to confront and acknowledge the multidimensionality of Chicana/o/x identity. In *Black Dove* for instance, Castillo bridges the personal and the political, as she provides readers with particulars about her familial and romantic relationships, bookended by a critique of current immigration issues and her experience living along the US/Mexico border in southern New Mexico. This memoir offers confirmation of the complexity of Chicana/o/x identity, including a testimony to what it means to be a queer woman of color.

Recent studies that link American literary history, Chicana studies, and transnationalism, such as William Orchard and Yolanda Padilla’s edited collection *Bridges, Borders, and Breaks: History, Narrative, and Nation in Twenty-First-Century Chicano Literary Criticism* (2016), argue for the need to “loose[n . . . ] commitments to nationalism that animated an earlier generation of Chicano thinking and politics.”<sup>50</sup> Orchard and Padilla’s collection builds on Ramón Saldivar’s foundational 1990 study, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, in which he honors Américo Paredes’s early methods and theoretical contributions to border studies. Paredes’s work is identified by many border studies scholars such as Saldivar as the first scholarly intervention that emphasized a “transnationally oriented approach to US literary studies.”<sup>51</sup> Paredes grounded his discussion of border studies in Greater Mexico, emphasizing how Chicanos remain

connected to and influenced by place, even when they are not physically anchored to it. Post-Paredes's early work, in the 1960s and 1970s, Chicano nationalism became grounded in a cultural and nationalist paradigm. As Marissa K. López asserts, "Chicana/o nationalism is often understood as an ethnic nationalism that makes specious claims to indigeneity, working-class roots, the myth of an Aztec heritage, and the patriarchal family."<sup>52</sup> This volume demonstrates how much of Castillo's work responds to the limits of the ideologies guiding this Chicano nationalist paradigm while also acknowledging the historicity and transnational construction of Chicana/o identity itself.

Like other scholars who consider Chicana/x studies beyond the confines of a physical border or who understand Aztlán as "part of a broad geographic and historical continuum,"<sup>53</sup> in this volume, we too call for thinking beyond the boundaries of nation when we define Chicana/x studies. We examine Castillo's oeuvre to demonstrate how place is but one component of Chicana/x identity; however, she also challenges us to reconsider belonging in relation to place through characters who embody multiple subjectivities and who are often unbounded to place. Re-envisioning Chicana/x studies as transnational allows for embracing Paredes's original emphasis on Greater Mexico as integral to border studies, while simultaneously acknowledging the ways in which Chicana/x-identifying peoples transcend borders and are also connected to Latin America more broadly. This transborder approach expands how we understand the politics, culture, traditions, and memories associated with Chicana/x identity. Castillo's subject matter aligns with this broader transborder focus, as she often addresses global topics such as *mestizaje* and environmental, economic, social, and racial (in)justice, but she also expands these discussions by drawing attention to transnational feminism, queerness, gender, and sexuality not only across the US/Mexico border, but also beyond and into the greater Americas.

Castillo's literary contributions can thus be read as transnational *and* Chicana/x, or as Chicana/x transnationalism, as she develops characters who build and maintain (sometimes very complex) relationships across borders. As Olga Herrera reminds us, these exchanges occur *beyond* borders, not in the service of reinforcing them.<sup>54</sup> In other words, national borders are designed to be dismantled. We might better characterize Castillo's Chicana/x transnationalist approach as one way through which she renders visible an opening for what Saldívar labels the "transnational imaginary," a metaphor for the "complex differential double bind that the socially symbolic and the historically real always enact in the space of the transnation."<sup>55</sup> The transnational imaginary is a form of consciousness rooted in acknowledging the diaspora of peoples (in the case considered here, Chicana/x/Latina/x peoples) from their homelands, which results in cultural hybridity that transcends

physical borders. Marissa K. López's assertion that "the Chicana/o struggle in the United States is intimately connected with the global struggle against oppression"<sup>56</sup> is useful here for better understanding why we urge reading Castillo's work through a transnational Chicax sensibility that extends beyond Greater Mexico and into Latin America and beyond. Castillo also connects her characters, plots, and critical essays to her own experiences in which she was part of a large cadre of Chicana feminists, many of whom are queer, who united with the third world feminist movement, an important move for many feminist scholars/activists of color. The "transnational turn in Chicana/o studies," as literary scholar John M. González emphasizes, ". . . is the powerful lesson of Chicana feminism and queer studies in their own transformations of Chicana/o studies, challenging the field's imaginary of a universal Chicano subject through the specifics of bodily experience and social positionalities."<sup>57</sup> As we consider how and why Castillo's feminist solidarity extends beyond borders, we must understand that for Chicana feminists like her, the transnational turn extends to including what Sergio A. Gallegos identifies as transversal politics that acknowledges the need for solidarity between feminists of varying identities and perspectives of/against oppressive systems.<sup>58</sup> Castillo's fiction, critical essays, and memoir illustrate a distinct Chicana consciousness, one that challenges Chicano nationalism's limits around issues of gender, queerness, and sexuality. Importantly, Castillo also employs her literary work and critical scholarship to connect her plots and characters to political and cultural concerns in Latin America *and* emphasizes her commitment to rooting her work in a transnational Chicax feminist sensibility.

For Castillo, and many Chicana authors including Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, Lucha Corpi, Demetria Martinez, Denise Chávez, Norma Alarcón, Emma Pérez, Norma E. Cantú, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, to name but a few, gender and the US/Mexico borderlands are an inherent part of their identities and their narratives. In this critical moment in time, this border space is a geopolitical one embedded with diversity in the ways that Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x, and Latin American authors theorize and translate this space and its impacts on identity formation and gender politics. Together, their work contributes to a transborder feminist political network that has engaged in transnational feminist dialogue for decades.

### SO HOW DO WE TEACH CASTILLO?

Our experiences teaching Castillo's corpus of work inspired this collection a great deal. Her writings invite the exploration of constructs of gender, sex, class, and race that can be traced through multiple lenses of inquiry. Castillo's writing invigorates the curriculum with an interdisciplinary pedagogy

that takes historical, political, social, and cultural context into consideration while “elasticizing” the text through multimedia forms and “mapping” the geography of the text. When introducing students to Castillo’s novel *The Guardians*, for instance, it is crucial to introduce them to the 1965 Border Industrialization Program in conjunction with *The Borders Trilogy* by Alex Rivera. Looking at the history of the border in relation to the cultural production of Rivera’s short films that examine the border through technology, familial ties, and transnationalism, students map the material spaces of the border in the novel and consider how filmic and historical representations of the border work in conjunction with state-sanctioned violence, racialized labor through globalization, and patriarchal violence from the text.

Along similar though not identical lines, transnationalism is also central to Castillo’s 1990 novel, *Sapogonia*. Although it is less frequently taught in literature courses than her other novels, *Sapogonia* connects the United States to the broader “Americas” and the state-sanctioned violence that surged during civil wars in Central and most of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. Through her antihero, Máximo Madrigal, a character students love to hate, Castillo reveals how, for Máximo, the concept of “nation” carries with it an inherent conflict of identity and state of mind. When taught from an interdisciplinary perspective, this novel encourages discussions about what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined as intersectionality,<sup>59</sup> as it can be used to interrogate colonial histories and their residual effects, to examine sexuality, gender, and patriarchy, and to understand how Castillo’s use of place and time is symbolic of nationalism, identity, and belonging. *Sapogonia* can also be discussed in relation to Chicana feminist theories, such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s new mestiza consciousness. In this vein, Castillo’s narrative can be used to demonstrate to students how the author dissolves borders to forge a new mestiza/o world, Sapogonia, where characters like Pastora Velásquez Aké reflect Indigenous, Mexican, and Spanish identity. Essays in the Teaching and Pedagogy section of this collection similarly explore the diverse ways Castillo’s fiction and nonfiction work has contributed to curriculum across disciplines.

The breadth of Castillo’s work is evidence of the consciousness with which she writes and lives—knowledgeable, critical, and truthful. This collection is designed to illustrate the multifaceted ways she has contributed to our understanding of literature, Chicana/o/x identity, Chicana and transnational feminism, sexuality, gender, race, and class. It is organized into five sections: I. The Chicana Letters: Transnational Poetics, Language, and Form; II. So Far from Nation: Borders and Immigration; III. Give It to the Globe: Considering Gender and Sexuality; IV. Mamá, Mijxs, and Me: Connecting Chicana Feminism and Transnational Feminism in the Era of Globalization; and V. Teaching and Pedagogy. The essays in this col-

lection are written by scholars from diverse fields, with differing ideological lenses and perspectives, and provide a robust and dynamic perspective of Castillo's work. To cultivate an even richer discussion, we invited foundational Chicana feminist respondents to dialogue with the authors to demonstrate the diversity of Chicana/o/x identities and the ways in which scholars across generations and gendered identities have cognized Castillo's cultural production.

### CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Essays in section I of the collection, "The Chicana Letters," address how Castillo expands boundaries around traditional literary form when she leads readers to actively engage with her work and the concepts of identity formation, nationhood, memory, and gender. Authors in this section emphasize how Castillo employs a defined Xicana feminist praxis that reveals how she navigates and responds to gender politics, sexism, and the colonial histories that have dictated our national and transnational narratives.

In her essay, Ximena Keogh Serrano calls attention to the important role that memory plays in Castillo's cultural production. Her essay, "Lettered Encounters: Ana Castillo's Poetics of Spilling in *The Mixquiahuala Letters*," centers on Castillo's 1986 novel by considering how *The Mixquiahuala Letters* reflects a "narrative style of self-weaving" that Keogh Serrano identifies as a theoretical praxis of a "poetics of spilling" that which cannot be contained. In her reading of Castillo's work, Keogh Serrano describes how letters written by one of the novel's protagonists, Teresa, to her friend, Alicia, are evidence of how Castillo creates an epistolary production that becomes a site of self-making and a record of a "*fronteriza* state of being." Keogh Serrano's engagement with Castillo's work contributes to the transcultural and trans-feminist debates of other Chicana/o/x feminist scholars, including Norma Alarcón (1989), Emma Pérez (1999), Chela Sandoval (2000), Sandra K. Soto (2010), among others.

In "For the Pleasure of the Chicana Poet: Spatialized Embodied Poetics in Ana Castillo's *My Father Was a Toltec*," Shanna M. Salinas offers a nuanced reading of Castillo's poetry, in which she considers how it can be read as a response to the pervasive sexism and racism that exists in intellectual and academic institutions, as well as in the mainstream literary market. By claiming and making space for Chicana poetics, Salinas argues, Castillo "remakes the Chicana body as a *poetic* body on her own terms, as informed by pleasure and desire." This examination of Castillo's poetry reveals how she establishes a legacy of literary work deeply informed by racialized and gender-coded spaces that challenges Western paradigms. She uses the poem "A Christmas Gift" not only to introduce her argument, but as a guiding mechanism to interpret Castillo's poetry collection, *My Father Was a Toltec*.

In her reflection “Unbounded and Limitless: Ana Castillo’s Poetics of Place and the Body,” literary scholar and Castillo’s fellow Chicagoan Olga L. Herrera addresses the ways the authors whose work comprises this section of the collection culminate in a critical assessment of the importance Castillo places on form and language in her work and the ways the transnational border space inherently permeates within her poetics; she also challenges the fixity of reading Castillo and her work as transnational, and instead suggests the author’s “work is deeply invested in notions of unbounded place, nation, and belonging.” As Herrera notes in her reflection on Salinas’s and Keogh Serrano’s essays, the authors articulate how the Chicana figure can be read as a site for negotiating subjectivity. For Castillo, this embodied Chicana subjectivity is one that transcends borders to give emphasis to women’s experiences across a globally shared experience for women of color. Together, the essays in this section give new readings of Castillo’s contributions to “Chicanx letters.”

Section II, “So Far from Nation: Borders and Immigration,” brings attention to current conversations about citizenship, national and transnational border space(s), and “border subjects” methods of survival and resistance. The essays included in this section call attention to the ways Castillo uses her fiction and nonfiction to emphasize how the historical malleability of geographical borders impacts language, culture, and identity for those whose lives are intimately intertwined with contested border spaces.

In his essay “¿A’ca’o qué, comadre?: Border Languages and Xicanisma in Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*,” Ayendy Bonifacio engages Alfred Arteaga’s theory of the linguistic borderland to emphasize the intersections between border languages and *ciudadanía* (citizenship) in Castillo’s 1993 novel. Although Tóme, New Mexico, appears to be far from the US/Mexico border, Bonifacio reads the space as a linguistic contact zone, one in which Castillo introduces her readers to a larger geopolitical history that destabilizes how we conceive of nationality and citizenship. Read in this way, Bonifacio argues, the narrative guiding *So Far from God* reveals a new way to understand border languages and how they function as “transnational and malleable cultural heuristics subject to change and hybridity” that is distinctly embraced by the women in the novel.

Adding to the conversation about the complexities of border space, Tereza M. Szeghi addresses the idea of the porousness of borders in her essay, “Identity Formation and Dislocation: Transnationalism in *The Mixquiahuala Letters* and *The Guardians*.” Szeghi argues that though the characters’ experiences in these two seemingly diverse novels render border crossing visible in different ways, they emphasize Castillo’s conviction that transnational migration is a basic human right. In *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, Teresa crosses the border with relative ease, while in *The Guardians*,

Gabo is prohibited from crossing because he lacks the legal documentation that allows him to do so. Written in 1986 and 2007, respectively, the novels appear to forecast the attempt through current “zero-tolerance” policy to reinforce fixed borders, and as Szeghi reveals, through her narratives, Castillo argues that we should instead advocate for making borders more fluid by transcending the concept of the nation. Electra Gamón Fielding also considers the porousness of borders in her essay, “Selling the ‘Authentic’: Performance and Hybridity in Carlos Saura’s *Carmen* and Ana Castillo’s *Peel My Love like an Onion*.” In her analysis of Saura’s and Castillo’s work, Fielding both challenges and seeks to understand how “authenticity” impacts identity in a dynamic global world. She situates flamenco as a performative act that has been understood as a symbol, or “true representation of Spain” and Spanish identity, and then reveals how in *Carmen* and *Peel My Love Like an Onion*, Saura and Castillo challenge the idea of “authenticity” when they suggest through their narratives that flamenco is really a symbolic performance of identity. Fielding’s essay calls our attention to the need to recognize that hybridity, rather than authenticity, is the means for survival in today’s global society.

In her response to the essays in this section of the collection, Chicana scholar and fiction writer Amelia María de la Luz Montes stresses the importance of recognizing, as do the authors in this section, how Castillo calls her readers to acknowledge the complexities of nationhood and identity for those who live in the liminal space of the borderlands. In this discussion that is more pressing than ever, de la Luz Montes expands the conversation to also address how Castillo, like Gloria Anzaldúa, gestures in her work toward the idea that to analyze oppressive power structures, develop a “new consciousness,” and in fact survive, we might remain “far” from and, perhaps, on the margins of the nation.

“Give It to the Globe: Considering Gender and Sexuality,” section III of the collection, calls attention to the ways that Castillo’s cultural production transcends geographical, gendered, and sexualized borders. Thinking beyond a US Chicana context, the essays in this section address how her work can be read as a significant contribution to both US and third world transnational feminist theory, especially in the way Castillo employs an epistemology rooted in oppositional consciousness that fashions queer spaces designed to defy boundaries.

In his/their essay “Queering Space in Ana Castillo’s *Give It to Me*,” Daniel Shank Cruz contends that Castillo’s 2014 novel can be read as much more than an illustration of bad pornography. Rather, through this narrative, Castillo creates a “conceptual queer space” that is both political and sexual in the way it defies boundaries and archives queerness—what Sara Ahmed calls “an archive of rebellion”—through her acknowledgment of

queer history, spirituality, and theory. Cruz emphasizes the importance of acknowledging Castillo as a Latinx queer author, one whose literary production traces a “transnational landscape that teaches readers how to live intersectional lives.”

In her essay, Elena Avilés examines Castillo’s most recent publication, *Black Dove: Mamá, Mi’jo, and Me* (2016), to make visible how the author centers motherhood through queerness, and specifically, bisexual motherhood, in her memoir. Avilés connects her discussion to the borderlands, which she argues make visible the ways Castillo revises narratives of “sex, gender, and sexuality for border-crossing women through the lens of desire.” Considered in this way, Castillo’s memoir can be read as a form of new poetics that calls our attention to the important relationship between motherhood, queerness, and place, and outside the “borderlands” of the straight-gay paradigm.

Liliana González continues the discussion of desire driving much of Castillo’s work through her examination of *The Mixquiabuala Letters*. González plays on the notion of nostalgia as a way to look not only at the past, but also to a future envisioned by the character Teresa, one in which queer desire, social justice, and sexual futures merge. González heeds the calls of José Esteban Muñoz and Juana María Rodríguez, who note that often, queers of color are “framed as non-existent and as limited,” as she addresses queer and sexual futurity by emphasizing how the letters in Castillo’s novel articulate lesbian erotics and desire that offer hope for intimate connections across time and space, even in the current contested geopolitical space of the US/Mexico borderlands.

Chicana borderlands historian and gender studies scholar Emma Pérez comments on the essays in this section of the collection, especially in their treatment of the ways Castillo’s novels and critical essays confront dominant ideologies about queerness, transnational feminist theory, motherhood, and gendered and sexed history. In her scholarly work over the past three decades, Pérez has similarly called attention to the fact that we need to further consider sexuality and queerness as central to our discussions of theory and resistance; in other words, she, too, leads us into a queer futurity that liberates Chicana/Latinx generations through a potential “undoing” of heteropatriarchal constraints.

The essays that comprise the collection’s section IV, “Mamá, Mijxs, and Me: Connecting Chicana Feminism and Transnational Feminism in the Era of Globalization,” bring nuanced readings of Castillo’s work and its contributions to female spirituality, ancestral memory, and transnational feminist solidarity. Authors included in this section also address the significant role of social justice and injustice that guides Castillo’s theoretical framework.

In her essay, Laura Elena Belmonte compares Castillo's novel *So Far from God* with María Amparo Escandón's novel *Esperanza's Box of Saints* to reveal how Castillo's work is in dialogue with transnational feminist works in its representations of religion and culture across the borderlands. Through her interrogation of these two significant novels, Belmonte also demonstrates the healing and saving powers of "la madre," as she explains how Castillo and Escandón re-center women's spiritual roles and challenge the patriarchal institution of male headship in Mexican and Mexican-American religious life and culture, and across the US-Mexico border.

Rebecca Kennedy de Lorenzini's essay examines how Castillo's concept of Xicanisma can be understood within other transnational feminist and racial/ethnic experiences of the broader "Americas," especially in her poetry. In "The Unbreakable Link": Ancestral Memory in Xicanista and African Diasporic Women's Poetry," Kennedy de Lorenzini reads Castillo's poetry alongside African Diasporic poetry and explicates the connections between the two approaches to poetic expression by linking memory, border crossing, and transcultural dialogues alongside the physical and spiritual connections that are guided by "ancestral memory." Kennedy de Lorenzini's reading of Chicana and African Diasporic poetry makes clear the global contexts that bond African and ethnic Mexican women and imagines the possibilities of a more liberated future of the Americas.

Continuing this discussion and establishing a global feminist perspective that traverses transnational borders, Araceli Esparza's essay, "Feminist Imaginaries of Justice: Ana Castillo, Sister Dianna Ortiz, and Political Violence in Guatemala," considers how Castillo's poem "Like the people of Guatemala, I want to be free of these memories" and her collection of plays, *Psst . . . I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor*, center the disappeared as a form of justice-making, especially in how Castillo narrativizes the disappearance and torture of Sister Dianna Ortiz at the hands of the Guatemalan military. In addition to analyzing Castillo's writings, Esparza examines Ortiz's testimonio, *The Blindfold's Eyes* (2002), in which Ortiz recounts the violence she endured. Further, Esparza problematizes the contradictions of desire for solidarity and justice across geopolitical borders, and cautions against US-centered writers and scholars marginalizing and appropriating the experiences of histories of violence of Central Americans.

In her response to the essays in this section, multiethnic literary, Chicana, and gender and sexuality studies scholar Ellie D. Hernández highlights how the authors noted above draw attention to how Castillo's oeuvre of literary production renders visible transnational subjectivity as a movement that reorients us within a new world—one in which motherhood, love, politics, justice, and identity intersect. Together, Hernández argues, the essays further contribute to discussions about how feminist of color

scholarship has, historically, employed political activism and theory to disrupt systems of power. In this way, Castillo's writings reveal her commitment to a transnational feminism that is both resistant and collaborative.

The large array of Castillo's work has been taught across the nation and across the globe. Section V, "Teaching and Pedagogy," highlights four essays that address how the authors employ her novels, memoir, poems, and critical essays to expand students' understanding of transnational feminism, linguistic hybridity, identity formation, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x literature, and regionalism. In her essay, "Replanting You as *Winyan, Uarhiti, Kwe*: Transnational Indigena Mothering from Michoacán to Mni Sota Makoce," Gabriela Spears-Rico uses *testimonio* to reflect on her experiences as a P'urhepecha/Matlatzinca woman and mother whose personal and pedagogical work contributes to a Xicanista feminism guided by Indigenous epistemologies that allows her to reclaim traditional knowledge and embodied experiences. As she reflects on her personal history and "Xicana motherwork," Spears-Rico also describes how, as an Indigenous feminist, she employs Castillo's philosophy of Xicanisma alongside Indigenous epistemologies in what she calls a "radical feminist praxis" for which we have a pressing need, especially in our current political moment. This radical feminist praxis, Spears-Rico argues, is demonstrated in the ways Castillo encourages Chicana/o/x and Indigenous women to empower themselves through embracing ancestral, spiritual, and medicinal knowledge.

Leigh Johnson continues the conversation about the ways in which Castillo's cultural production contributes to a growing transnational feminist epistemology that challenges and confronts social constructions of family and gender identities. Using what she labels "transvisionaria poetix," in her essay, "Teaching Ana Castillo: Transnational Feminist Theory, Transvisionaria Poetix, and Practical Tips for the Classroom," Johnson argues that this praxis imagines and then enacts ways of being that are not dependent on white- or Western-dominated feminisms. For Johnson, literature is significant to this "transnational, hemispheric feminist movement and the possibilities for agency." The practical classroom tips she offers detail how she pairs Castillo's novels *So Far from God* and *Give It to Me* with her memoir, *Black Dove*, her stories in *Loverboys*, and her play, *Psst . . . I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor*, to render visible the agency Castillo's characters inhabit that influences them to fight for economic and political power, or her transvisionaria poetix.

Sandra Ruiz's essay reminds us to "never *stay* silent" about political issues around immigration, such as those with which we are currently faced: "mixed-status families, transborder politics, faith, and intergenerational trauma." Ruiz describes how she uses Castillo's novel *The Guardians*, alongside Héctor Calderón's notion of California as part of "Greater Mexico," to

connect her students' experiences in Southern California to ways for them to better understand how marginalized and transnational communities are forced to confront these political issues in their daily lived realities. In *The Guardians*, Ruiz suggests, Castillo humanizes the experience of anxiety and trauma experienced by those who migrate, and Ruiz details how she employs new and emerging technologies and social media platforms in her classes to guide her students to become content creators who use Castillo's literature, classroom lectures, and historical documents to challenge systems of oppression.

In her essay on teaching *So Far from God*, Danizete Martínez addresses how she uses this unique and effectual novel to introduce students in the Southwest to regional writing, to have them consider the significances of folklore in contemporary literature, and also to help them understand Chicana/o/x literary production from a Chicana perspective. This approach to teaching Castillo's work from a regional perspective does not solely focus on the local, as Martínez emphasizes. The issues confronted by the characters in the novel are based on long-standing national and transnational discussions that center race, class, and gender in a global context that expands discussion of Latinx identity more broadly. Martínez's essay interrogates the challenges of teaching from this global perspective in a regional community college setting.

Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x cultural studies scholar Norma E. Cantú brings her expertise in US Latina/o literatures and creative writing to the forefront of her response to the essays in this section of the collection. Cantú recognizes the vast contributions Castillo's work has made on pedagogical approaches to Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x literature, Indigenous/Chicana feminisms, and identity across various campuses and addresses how the authors included in this section build on the pedagogical approaches to teaching Castillo's broad range of work. She notes that the authors whose work comprise this section also incorporate first-person narratives in their essays—perhaps a gesture to the way Castillo draws her readers into the life stories of her characters. Cantú notes that the essays in this section leave us “at a crossroads,” and she reminds us that further examination of Castillo's work in our classrooms and in our scholarship will continue into the foreseeable future.