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Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo's Intergenerational Women

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This book is dedicated to my grandmother, Bridget 'Birdie' Boyle, who, unbeknownst to her, is an inspiration.

Abstract

This book explores literary representations of the ways in which Mexican American women negotiate feminisms in the family across generations through the maintenance, contestation, and adaptation of traditional gender roles. Using the lens of negotiation to read the texts of Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros, this book analyses the ways in which intergenerational women are active participants in the complex interventions and mediations that make up family life. The term 'negotiation' is used to denote the ways in which intergenerational women resist patriarchal oppression. Negotiation in mothering is central in Chicana feminist writings for as Gloria Anzaldúa states, "*[la] gente Chicana tiene tres madres.* All three are *mediators.*"[1] In their writings, Cisneros and Castillo explore the complex mediations taking place within the Mexican American family and the various devices and strategies employed by women to reveal the nuances of the Chicana experience. These characters are compelled to negotiate their place in the family on unequal terms, within the confines of a framework that stifles the development of women by prescribing them restrictive and limited roles in their capacity as grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. The writing of Cisneros and Castillo demonstrates a politics of negotiation that critiques the gendered ideologies and roles of the family setup. Close readings of these texts allow for nuanced analyses of the variety of tactics employed by women to survive, and oftentimes

[1] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 52.

thrive, in the oppressive environment of the patriarchal family. In order to persist in an often misogynist environment, they undertake feminist negotiations to forge meaningful identities. Their contestation is further complicated by the desire to remain connected to a Mexican heritage in a hostile Anglo American society. This project not only engages with the literary representations of the experiences of women in the family, but connects these experiences to the contexts in which these families are found. In the struggle to realise independent and yet interdependent identities, women look to the stories of the lineage of marginalised women in the family for inspiration, foregrounding the stories of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. This book calls for a rethinking of women characters beyond limited, and limiting, familial roles and uses the framework of feminist negotiation as a means to explore the empowering possibilities of intergenerational female relationships.

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Negotiating Feminisms in *La Familia*

La gente Chicana tiene tres madres. [The Chicanx people have three mothers.] […] *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada (Malinche)*, the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *La Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children. All three are *mediators.*
—Gloria Anzaldúa

Negotiation in mothering is central in Chicana feminist writings. Chicana writer, poet, and theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa, gets to the heart of this by stating that the mothers of the Chicanx people are mediators.[1] These three women, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, Malinche (Malintzín), and *La Llorona* are conceptualisations of womanhood that construct the cultural script for mothers and mothering in Mexican and Mexican American communities and mediation is an integral part of this mothering.[2] The stories, myths, and histories of these three women present Mexican American women with an unattainable saintly figure on the one hand, and an all-too-easily achieved traitorous whore on the other. Women, Anzaldúa suggests, are caught in a social bind in which almost no manner of good is ever considered good enough, while the slightest error will result in social ostracisation. Consequently, as a result of pressures from the patriarchal framework of family life, Chicanas are compelled to negotiate feminisms in the family in order to forge meaningful identities. As Anzaldúa states, the explicit

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connection between motherhood and mediation is profound and the role of women in the patriarchal family is therefore often one that necessitates the adoption of negotiation tactics. For Chicanas, the very process of forming an identity involves what Alvina Quintana calls "a series of negotiations and mediation between the past and the future."[3] Quintana's understanding of Chicana identity formation not only highlights the importance of these negotiations but also the central position of intergenerational relationships in this process. That is to say that identity is relational and constructed via a process of negotiation.[4]

As the epigraph of this introduction highlights, Anzaldúa specifically uses the idea of mediation in relation to the Chicanx peoples' three mothers, and this is integrated with a broader concept of negotiation that is outlined in this book. As such, mediation is understood as a form of negotiation, and the two concepts are connected in the Chicanx context as ways of understanding the strategies employed by women in the family. Jacob Bercovitch and Richard Jackson state that negotiation and mediation are not discrete activities; each involves a set of related processes involving actors, decisions, resources, and situations.[5] Deborah Kolb argues that "the institution of mediation" is "an enduring feature of social organization."[6] Furthermore, these mediations are feminist as they challenge the patriarchal system and are connected to the activist mothering and family-making found in Chicanx families. The actions of mediators in the family are part of a larger negotiation that is specifically connected to the cultural context in Mexican American communities. Indeed, in *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Emma Pérez contends that "Chicana history has been a conscious effort to retool, to shift meanings and read against the grain, to negotiate Eurocentricity whether within European historical models or within the paradigms of United States historiography."[7] Furthermore, Celia Cruz physically locates this negotiation in the borderlands with her affirmation that "the migration of the mestiza body is dialectical, negotiating the transcultural space of […] communities and equipped with tactics and worldviews that are forced to ever change and develop."[8] The Chicanx cultural context has in its historiography and its geography the concept and act of negotiation and the family is a key locus for this.

Feminist writers and critics have been engaging with the practical and theoretical relationship between mothering and mediation for some time; for example, Sara Ruddick imagines mothers "negotiating with nature on behalf of love, harassed by daily demands, yet glimpsing larger questions."[9]

Like Anzaldúa's declaration, this speaks to a recognition that the reasons behind women's negotiations are complex, suggesting that they are actions of love that are nonetheless placed under pressure by the day-to-day realities of mothering in a hostile environment. In the case of Chicanas, this is augmented by their experience of living not only in a sexist environment, but also a racist and classist one. Although much of the theory and praxis surrounding this topic focuses on motherhood, this book broadens the scope of research to include different examples of 'family-making' in order to capture the diversity of practice within the Mexican American family. Through the lens of negotiation, included in which is the practice of mediation, it is possible to read the actions and behaviours of women characters in Ana Castillo's and Sandra Cisneros' writing and to come to a clearer understanding of how and why women negotiate their feminisms within the context of the family.

The term 'negotiation' is used to denote the ways in which intergenerational women resist patriarchal oppression as seen in the works of Castillo and Cisneros. To this end, negotiation is understood here as a feminist praxis and a political act that Chicanas apply in order to understand and assert their place in the family. Reflecting on Chicanas' negotiation of their place in the family provides a set of sensitive and complex analytical tools for understanding not only the novels of Castillo and Cisneros, but also the experiences of Chicanxs more broadly. Reading through a framework of negotiation exposes the complex strategies women adopt as grandmothers, mothers, and daughters in the Mexican American family. Doing so speaks to the multiple meanings of the term 'negotiation' including communication, compromise, and the "action of crossing or getting over, round or through some obstacle by skilful manoeuvring; manipulation."[10] In the case of the Chicana, these obstacles are multiple as they face oppression not only from the patriarchal setup of the traditional family, but also from the realities of living in a racist, sexist, and classist society. Indeed, in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, Elizabeth Martínez states that the Chicana suffers from a "triple oppression," a feature of life shared by "all non-white women in the United States."[11] Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano also claims that the most important principle of Chicana feminist criticism is the realisation that "the Chicana's experience is inextricable from her experience as a member of an oppressed working-class racial minority and a culture which is not the dominant culture."[12] In Chicanx culture, Scott L. Baugh posits that "within a hierarchy of needs, aligned with survival strategies in abeyance of terror and amidst everyday

occurrences of violence and tyranny, remain methodologies (*transitory* yet *revolutionary*) surrounding the pursuit of humanistic consciousness."[13] This book suggests that negotiation is one of these methodologies, and one that is explored in the writings of Cisneros and Castillo as a constructive approach to nurturing female relationships. The reality of living in an oppressive environment then requires mediation on the part of Chicanas, and Jessica M. Vasquez positions this explicitly with the familial context, stating that the Chicana mother is required to act as a "mediator between children and racial messages from the 'outside world' (school, media, interracial social networks)."[14] This recognises that there are underlying structures and institutional forces that regulate the way that women understand and negotiate their roles within the family. In the Chicana context the racial, gender, and class system of the United States largely governs the negotiations performed by women. This book examines the ways in which Cisneros and Castillo depict the negotiations of Chicanas and, more specifically, how they characterise the grandmothers, mothers, and daughters who manoeuvre themselves in order to get over, around, and through these obstacles. In their novels, I argue, Cisneros and Castillo present women who participate in resisting and altering the system of gender relations in the family.

As a result of the interlocking influences of race, gender, and class discrimination in America, Chicanas negotiate their role in the family in ways that link the personal and the political: their negotiations can be read as politically activist tactics of individual and cultural survival. They engage in a bargaining process in which Chicanas, either through compulsion or active choice, balance their needs as women in a patriarchal familial and social structure that works to stifle their development. These negotiations require striking a balance between acquiring what Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury understands as "a strong sense of self and self-definition (emotional survival)" while "challenging oppression (physical survival)."[15] For the Chicana, this balance can be acquired in the adoption of the mestiza consciousness. As Anzaldúa states,

> the new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradiction, a tolerance for ambiguity. […] She has a plural personality. She operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned.[16]

Within her "plural personality," the Chicana has the ability to negotiate the often turbulent political and social environment in which she lives—an environment that became significantly more tempestuous for people of colour with the election of a president in 2016 who was openly endorsed by white supremacist groups and who publicly denounced Mexican people.[17] In the "pluralistic mode," and in resonance with Chéla Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness which allows for a mobility of identities, women in the Mexican American family are able to negotiate a place for themselves in a traditionally patriarchal system.[18] Furthermore, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out, the mestiza consciousness involves "negotiating these knowledges, not just taking a simple counterstance," and such negotiations can be understood as actively encouraging an "uprooting of dualistic thinking."[19] Negotiation can therefore be understood as an important part of mestiza consciousness.

In contrast, the stories of the Chicanx people's three mothers and mediators, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, Malintzín, and *La Llorona*, rely upon the imposition of dualistic, binary, identities.

They are examples of what feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins refers to as "controlling images," or images that are used to dominate oppressed groups and foster internalised oppression by defining what is and is not acceptable.[20] Their stories represent the dual construction of womanhood in traditional Mexican culture of the good/bad woman that is framed through the mother/whore opposition. This dichotomisation is played out specifically through the historical and mythical figures of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* on the one hand, and Malintzín and *La Llorona* on the other.[21] These three women, and the stories and myths that surround them, have shaped persistent gender expectations in Mexican and Mexican American life. Within a patriarchal discourse, women are allowed to exist only in strict categories that constrain them in a good/bad woman configuration, denying them the plurality of mestiza consciousness. The Virgin of Guadalupe, Malintzín, and *La Llorona* are all deeply rooted in the nation's religious expression, history, and folklore. These prototypes of womanhood are artificially created and play an important role in determining the gendered identity of women of Mexican heritage, defining them in their expression of their sexuality. These images enforce feminine colonial passivity, promoting specific subjugated behaviours in women. In the specific case of La Llorona, but applicable to all three images, Domino Pérez states that La Llorona "traditionally serves as a cultural allegory, instructing people how to live and act within established social mores."[22]

Anzaldúa argues that *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is there "to make us docile and enduring, la Chingada [Malintzín] to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and La Llorona to make us the long-suffering people."[23] Further, as the quotation at the beginning of this introduction emphasises, this is fundamentally connected to motherhood: they are *las tres madres* (the three mothers) of the Chicanx people.[24] Through these archetypal depictions of femininity, Mexican and Mexican American culture identifies images of the good, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, versus the bad woman, Malintzín and *La Llorona*, and these value judgements are intimately connected to their role as women in the family.

In their writings, Cisneros and Castillo explore the complex negotiations taking place within the family and the various strategies employed by women, revealing the nuances of the Chicana experience. As the family has been described as a "suffocating social institution […] that [confines and harnesses] full development," these negotiations are crucial for individual development.[25] The women characters in Castillo's and Cisneros' writings demonstrate the tension between the desire for personal empowerment and the maintenance of familial bonds. The six novels chosen for the study of negotiation in Cisneros and Castillo's writing cover an extensive time period from 1984 to 2016. The diverse range of periods from which these novels emerge demonstrates the cyclical and intergenerational nature of the theme of negotiation in Cisneros and Castillo's writing. Throughout this book, contextual analysis of the period is therefore integrated into the analysis of the negotiations employed by the characters in these works. In *The House on Mango Street*, *Woman Hollering Creek*, *So Far from God*, *Peel My Love Like an Onion*, *Caramelo*, *The Guardians*, and *Black Dove: Mamá, M'ijo, and Me*, the exploration of the feminist praxis of negotiation is particularly evident, because they focus centrally on interfamilial relationships. It is a theme that recurs in these works and through writing these female characters and their role in the family, neither author proposes a unified solution to the question of negotiation but rather explores the diverse range of tactics employed by intergenerational women. These tactics range from upholding patriarchal rule of law in order to maintain a position of influence in the family, to adopting feminist mothering practices that transform the familial framework, and synthesising the lessons of foremothers in order to discover new independent yet interconnected pathways. Their exploration of this idea is not limited to their novels, nor is it limited to Cisneros and Castillo within Chicana literature, making it a difficult task to select a limited number of texts for analysis. What does

connect these texts is their explicit consideration of female intergenerational relationships, a theme that persists across the over thirty-year span of these works. Their writing demonstrates a politics of negotiation that critiques the gendered ideologies and roles of the family setup. Close readings of these texts allow for nuanced analyses of the variety of tactics employed by women to survive, and oftentimes thrive, in the oppressive environment of the patriarchal family.

Of the three figures described as the three mothers of the Chicanx people, Malintzín's story, both real and imagined, is the most intrinsically connected to the concept of mediation and negotiation in motherhood. Malintzín, also known as *La Malinche*, was a member of the Aztec nobility named Malinalli Tenépal who was renamed by the Spanish as Doña Marina. Although of noble birth, she was sold as a child into slavery to Mayan merchants, allegedly by her own mother. In 1519, she was one of the women given as a 'gift' to Hernán Cortés when he landed in Mexico. She became Cortés' translator, tactical advisor, and lover. Although Malintzín bore only one son by Cortés, according to Mexican and Chicanx folklore, she is said to represent the raped Indian woman who produced all of the *mestizo* (mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry) peoples of Mexico.[26] It is through her relationship with Cortés, as a negotiator, that she is remembered, represented, and reviled. Her negative portrayal in history, and thereby in popular belief, can be attributed to "misinterpretation of her role in the conquest of Mexico" and "an unconscious, if not intentional, misogynistic attitude toward women in general, especially toward self-assertive women."[27] As a key negotiator for Cortés, Malintzín had access and influence that was only granted to a very small number of people, least of all a woman. So central was her place in Cortés' negotiations with the indigenous peoples that, according to the seventeenth-century chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Cortés himself was often called 'Captain Malinche' or simply 'Malinche.'[28] Malintzín was an important figure in the heart of Cortés' negotiations with the indigenous leaders he encountered. Historians have argued that Cortés' strategic movements in Mexico-Tenochtitlan can be attributed in equal measure to the use of rhetoric as to the use of force, recognising that interpreters were as crucial to the success of Cortés' enterprise as the soldiers in his army and his allies.[29] Díaz del Castillo's account of the 'Conquest of Mexico' reveals how Malintzín positioned herself as a negotiator: "as an agent of intervention and change."[30] Thus, in her role as translator and mediator, Malintzín was potentially key to the strategic manoeuvres of Cortés.

Yet, misogynistic attitudes towards her role in Cortés' entourage have meant that she is portrayed in a negative light in historical documentation and Malintzín's role as a negotiator is a particular target for those who accuse her of betrayal.[31] The misogynistic attitude that dictates that a woman should not have access to influence has tainted Malintzín's history. In particular, soldier's accounts of the so-called Cholula Massacre and Moctezuma's captivity, for which she is blamed, are employed as sources for the cultural construction of Malintzín as a traitor to the Mexican peoples.[32] Since she embodies the betrayal of one's own people or culture, Malintzín as *La Malinche* serves as the female scapegoat for Mexican society. Her 'seduction' of and by Cortés has marked her as a traitor for generations of Mexican and Mexican American peoples, to such an extent that the term *malinchista* has entered the vocabulary as a slur to someone who commits an act of betrayal.[33]

Malintzín's agency in her role as negotiator has often been dismissed, most famously in Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in which she is described as "*la chingada* [the fucked one/the raped one]."[34] Even in his use of the past participle, Paz positions her within the passive voice, effectively rendering her role in the history of Mexico passive as a result.[35] Yet some accounts do detail her active role as a negotiator and reading her story from a feminist perspective demands that her agency be taken into account. Margo Glantz vehemently refutes Paz's description of La Malinche, declaring instead that "*La Malinche no fue, de ningún modo, una mujer pasiva como podríamos deducir de la descripción [de Paz]*" ["La Malinche was not, in any way, the passive women that can be inferred from Paz's description"].[36] In Paz's examination, it is Malintzín who is blamed for the evils of the Spanish colonisation of Mexico. This indictment not only ignores the often cruel treatment of Malintzín at the hands of Cortés but also discounts his role in events. Paz's work serves to render Malintzín passive while simultaneously blaming her for the violation of the Mexican peoples. Yet her ability to betray actually implies agency; in her role as negotiator Malintzín wielded power, albeit in a limited way, and she was in a position to sway the outcomes of Cortés' political and military campaigns. If she were a man, she might instead be referred to as an astute political strategist. Even still, it is in Paz's analysis that Malintzín the woman is distilled into *La Malinche* the mythic figure, and this view has been preserved in the annals of history. This book engages with a reaffirmation of agency within narratives of negotiation. In doing so, it aims to show the ways in which Cisneros and Castillo portray women who are

active agents and live an existence more complex and richer than some (hi) stories have suggested.

With Malintzín's history in mind, the concept of negotiation that underpins my argument is one that deliberately highlights agency in which women characters are active participants in the complex interventions and mediations that make up family life. Thus, these negotiations can be read as feminist acts because they attempt to redefine the limited and limiting roles imposed on them. In their writing, Cisneros and Castillo's depiction of women in the family is not limited to oppression; their grandmothers, mothers, and daughters are not entirely powerless. They allow for a distinct womanist space that involves moving outside of stereotypical thinking.[37] Literary critic Phillippa Kafka's reading of Chicana feminist Yarbro-Bejarano attests to the importance of highlighting agency when reading Chicana texts; she states that the subject (the Chicana) is self-reflexive and can choose how to conduct herself.[38] This resonates with Fiona Green's understanding of agency in mothering; she states that "even when restrained by patriarchy, motherhood can be a site of empowerment and political activism."[39] Expanding this position to include other women's roles in the family, specifically those of grandmother and daughter, allows for a more nuanced analysis of the ways that women reclaim agency under oppressive conditions. Yet, because as Roberta Villalón asserts, "[agency] does not occur in a vacuum, but is always structurally limited and relative to others' agency," these endeavours require a complex negotiation.[40] Agency, in this analysis, can be understood as the capacity to realise one's own interests despite the encumbrance of tradition, custom, or other obstacles. Furthermore, women's agency in negotiation is analogous with resistance to patriarchal domination.

Thus, Cisneros and Castillo take part in a re-narrativisation of stories of archetypal Mexican folklore that centralises women, families, and agency. In the Mexican American context, this comprises complex negotiations as the Chicana attempts to "define herself" as she navigates realities that "fail to acknowledge her existence."[41] Responding to this lack of acknowledgement, Chicana writers engage with pre-existing narratives that have marginalised female figures and re-appropriate them and assert their agency. Malintzín, for example, has been re-appropriated by several Chicana feminists, particularly since the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s, and for many she is now a figure of empowerment. In such texts, there is an acknowledgement of the powerful institutional and cultural forces imposed on these women—both historically and through mythology—that

provokes a re-reading, and rewriting, of their representation. Norma Alarcón asserts that "[Malintzín's] almost half century of mythic existence [… has] turned her into a handy reference point not only for controlling, interpreting or visualizing women, but also to wage a domestic battle of stifling proportions."[42] The figure of La Llorona undergoes this same transformation by Chicana feminist writers and artists; in "Looking for the Insatiable Woman" in *Loving in the War Years*, Cherríe Moraga explains:

> When La Llorona kills her children, she is killing a male defined Mexican motherhood that robs us of our womanhood. This ancient myth reminds Mexican women that, culturally speaking, there is no mother-woman to manifest who is defined by us outside of patriarchy. We have never had the power to do the defining. We wander not in search of our dead children, but our lost selves, our lost sexuality, our lost spirituality, our lost sabiduría [wisdom].[43]

Chicana feminists see that diminishing the understanding of, and disparaging these female figures, "and by association denigrating all women, is a political act of a patriarchal system."[44] Yet, reflecting on Moraga's observation, Larissa Mercado-López says La Llorona can then become a "metaphor to empower the mother archetype as an adversary of patriarchal motherhood, and a figure that can be embodied by all women."[45]

Tey Diana Rebolledo underlines this process of re-appropriation and the ways in which the three mothers of the Chicanx people have been adapted to become useful figures in the lives and works of Chicanas, announcing that "they have incorporated them into contemporary life, dressing them in karate suits, making them talk-show hostesses, making them active and wise."[46] Alicia Gaspar de Alba's book, *[Un]Framing the "Bad Woman"* (2014), analyses the ways in which archetypal female figures including *La Virgen*, Malintzín, and *La Llorona* "have all struggled against the cultural logic of capitalist, racist, heterosexist, phallocentric domination, wittingly or by necessity."[47] Challenging this cultural logic is a major undertaking as these tropes of womanhood have become "entrenched in the Mexican and Chicano cultures, providing major stumbling blocks to women in their quest for self-determination."[48] Therefore, Chicana writers who challenge these archetypes are committing a political act of negotiation that aims to undermine and ultimately dismantle the patriarchal systems forced upon women. As Irene Lara argues, "[u]nlearning the virgen/puta dichotomy is part of the decolonial feminist project."[49] These revised images of motherhood are central to the writings of

Castillo and Cisneros and are vital to analysing and understanding the complexities of their female characters.

As a woman Malintzín negotiated within a system that would not recognise her power as a political strategist. Likewise, the negotiations carried out by Chicanas in the family are necessitated by the prevalence and persistence of gendered perceptions of women that influence negotiations and in turn can dictate the ways in which women negotiate. As discussed above, agency does not occur in a vacuum and is structurally limited. As such, agency does not always equate resistance and can instead be compliant—that is "expressed by following norms, rules, regulations, ideals, and expectations."[50] Marci R. McMahon explores this concept in relation to the perceived domesticity of Mexicana and Chicana women in her 2013 book, *Domestic Negotiations*. McMahon argues that some domestic representations "may not refuse gendered or racialized hierarchies, [but] instead use dominant ideologies as a route to resistance."[51] Thus, even in the context of negotiating feminisms in the family, the familial framework itself is not always radically altered and the maintenance of patriarchal structures can also be a part of the compound tactics employed by these women. Deborah Kolb states that mediation, as a form of negotiation that is compliant rather than resistant, can serve to "preserve the institutional fabric of the system."[52] Sometimes the negotiations of women in the family, particularly those of the older generations, serve to reinforce the norms and structures that oppress women.[53] Nevertheless, this does not mean that negotiations that seem to maintain the status quo are anti-feminist, rather it opens up the possibility of "recognising the 'empowering' elements of acts that might at first sight appear 'disempowering'."[54] As Andrea Cornwall and Jenny Edwards observe, it is often necessary "to work within existing strictures to achieve some positive gains, with the hope that these may eventually ripple out and bring about wider changes."[55] So by reading these types of negotiations as feminist acts, the critical reader is forced to question why women may behave in a seemingly misogynist way and, in asking this, unearth their resistance and their agency.

As Castillo writes in *Peel My Love*, "[people] think of silence as passive, but as good warriors, tough government and mediators of high stakes everywhere know, silence is a special method of negotiation."[56] Silence should not be perceived simply as acquiescence, nor should apparent compliance be read as capitulation. While Cisneros and Castillo represent those women who oppose yet sometimes uphold the specific gendered ideologies of their generation, it is nonetheless through perceiving their

negotiations as feminist that the agency of these characters is asserted. This approach pushes against assumptions that women are the passive victims of domination and recognises their individual power. Negotiation is therefore understood as a form of feminist defiance and endurance. It also acknowledges the plurality of the Mexican American experience by providing space for the many and varied tactics adopted by intergenerational women. The tensions that exist between perceived compliance on the one hand and radical resistance on the other mark out one of the important spaces that has not been addressed in the scholarship on Castillo and Cisneros. Therefore, negotiation is understood not as mere submission to the mainstream, mere assimilation or concession, but a strategy that encompasses a wide range of feminist tactics that include resistance and subversion along with mediation and accommodation.

The type of negotiating that women undertake in the family has generally been framed in their roles as wives and mothers and understood as mediation on behalf of others in the family or on behalf of the family unit as a whole. Indeed, one of the definitions of 'mediation' states that it specifically refers to "intercession on behalf of another," while 'negotiation' more broadly means "an act of dealing with another person."[57] This is particularly important for intergenerational women in the Mexican American family as it is generally assumed that they work in the best interests of the family, while their own individual needs are often ignored. As Aída Hurtado notes, women are expected to demonstrate a high degree of concern for others and may pay a social price when they do not do so.[58] In the wider context, gender-linked stereotypes make it difficult for women to advocate freely for themselves as individuals, but negotiating on behalf of others is seen as more consistent with the gender schema.[59] Furthermore, early studies into gender and negotiation in the 1970s and 1980s tended to rely on the premise that gender was a stable and reliable predictor of bargaining behaviour and performance.[60] However, in the 1990s, feminist researchers in the field of negotiation offered an alternative conceptualisation that viewed the role of gender as "a belief system that structures and gives meaning to social interactions."[61] They argued that previous studies of negotiation had used an androcentric bias to understand what was deemed successful in negotiation.[62] By reifying the image of the effective negotiator in masculine terms, any feminine model would fail to fit the model for success.[63] Subsequent feminist studies in the field of negotiation have moved away from the androcentric model that gauges success in terms of transactional advantage, to models that bring social and relational

dynamics to the fore.[64] It is to this scholarly perspective that the activist feminist concept of negotiation used in this book connects. By focusing on the social and relational dynamics of women in the family, the negotiations of the women in Cisneros and Castillo's texts can be understood as successful negotiators, negotiators who look beyond immediate individual gain in order to secure futures for themselves and their families.

A key influence on women's behaviour in negotiations and mediations in the family is the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, which dictates and polices the subservient position of women in society, assuming that women will act in support of the family over their own interests. In the family, the institutional and cultural influence of the Catholic Church is profound; as Castillo states: "[one] of the guiding principles in our life is Catholicism. […] [It is] completely permeated into our psyche."[65] Cherríe Moraga also states that the legacies of archetypal Mexican womanhood as well as that of the Catholic Church influence the writings and feminisms of many Chicanas, arguing that "Chicanas' negative perceptions of ourselves as sexual persons and our consequential betrayal of each other finds its roots in four-hundred year long Mexican history and mythology."[66] Thus, understanding the context in which Mexican American women are brought up is critical to a robust analysis of their roles in the family.

As the ultimate Catholic mother, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is representative of the sacred and holy position afforded to motherhood in the Mexican and Mexican American family.[67] However, the combination of those values for which she is most revered, namely her asexual femininity, virgin status, and motherhood, make her an impossible role model. Cisneros laments the impossibility of *La Virgen*'s version of femininity, testifying that "I was angry for so many years every time I saw la Virgen de Guadalupe, my culture's role model for brown women like me. She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable."[68] Yet, Mexican American women are held accountable to a self-sacrificing and pure image of femininity that is unattainable but still stands as the exemplar. Over and above the biological impossibility of virgin motherhood, there is the added incongruity of ideal motherhood contrasted with the reality for most women. As philosopher and mother Sara Ruddick candidly states, "our days include few if any perfect moments, [or] perfect children perfectly cared for."[69] Cisneros addresses the impossibility of living up to the example of *La Virgen*, highlighting the disparity between ideal motherhood and the reality in *Caramelo* when the Awful Grandmother