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UNRAVELLING THE REBOZO:  
THE EFFECTS OF POWER ON THE BODY IN SANDRA CISNEROS'S *CARAMELO*

by

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A THESIS

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UNRAVELLING THE *REBOZO*:  
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University of Nebraska, 2010

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This thesis is a literary, cultural, and theoretical analysis of Sandra Cisneros's novel *Caramelo*. *Caramelo* traces the coming-of-age of its young protagonist, Celaya. Through this character, Cisneros reveals the impact of living between cultures. Born of a Mexican immigrant father and a working-class Mexican American mother, Celaya finds herself asked to choose sides. Celaya's grandmother, Soledad, is the central secondary character on whom all others react. She embodies the effects of colonialism on this family. Through Soledad's struggles, readers come to see the psychological damage caused by power relationships that privilege part of the self over the whole. In combination with the other characters, readers see how all marginalized peoples share these traumas, giving *Caramelo* a universal reach.

The work of Chicana critical theorists Gloria Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez, Chela Sandoval, and Edén Torres illustrate the growth of Chicana Feminism in relation to the novel. They speak to how power relationships have evolved over time and how these relationships translate through the body depending on class, race, and gender. In this thesis, German philosopher Hegel also aids in tracing how Western perceptions of the body developed. Cisneros constructs Soledad as a victim of these perceptions and simultaneously chronicles how Celaya begins the process of breaking them apart.

Through Celaya, Cisneros illustrates the many journeys an individual can take in examining and deconstructing power relationships and, thus, take vital steps towards healing.

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*Southern Baptists and Mexicans have a lot in common.  
Dorothy Allison*

In a picture that I keep with me from my only trip to Mexico when I was three years old, I am on my grandfather's lap. You can tell that he is tall, nearly six-feet, even though he is sitting. He looks like my father will look, with his wide nose, leathery skin, and the moustache over the top lip. I am sitting on his knee making a funny face. In the background, my Aunt Teadora has my baby cousin Raquel in her lap. On the table, glass bottles of Fanta, crumpled napkins, a clay pot filled most likely with beans or perhaps the menudo that made me throw up red, which worried my mother so much that she dragged my father through every shop in Morelia until she found dented cans of Campbell's chicken noodle soup to feed me. Even though my grandfather and I are the only two smiling in the picture, the four of us all have the same Linares eyes—eyes that are so dark brown that they appear black, eyes that crinkle into crescent-moons when we laugh, tiny slivers glinting in the light.

What is left out of the picture: my white mother whose hair is dyed yellow-blond, who paints her long fingernails bright red, who speaks only English with a thick southern accent. Half of my history is missing from the frame, and as an adult, I carry this picture with me and try to imagine what it might be like to have this be all there was of me—the clay pots, the brick walls, the grandfather who looks like he has never held anything more precious in his life. For the first part of my twenties, I pretend that this is all of who I am, because when I remember the part of me that came from Georgia, all I see is my maternal grandmother, who never smiles or laughs when I am around, who gives me no sympathy when I come in from playing outside with 30 or 40 mosquito bites on each leg, who takes and takes all of her children's love without giving enough back.

## I. Weaving the *Rebozo*

Though the focus of this essay is Sandra Cisneros's novel *Caramelo*, I begin with myself because the book emphasizes the importance of understanding and telling our own stories. As I read *Caramelo* for the first time, I felt myself growing along with the main character, Celaya. I see reflected in her story my own relationship with my family and with my cultures, and through her journey, I have come to understand why I privilege part of my history. I have found that it is simply easier not to see my mother's side of the family as human. Rather, I have been looking at them, and specifically at my grandmother, as though they are objects. Through Celaya's story, I am able to consider how detaching myself from part of my past also keeps me at a distance from my mother. In writing this essay, I choose to insert my own story because I want readers to see how these ideas play out in reality and also because I want to emphasize the importance of telling our own stories, even the ugly ones. *Caramelo* reminds readers of the connections we all have to our past and how those connections are translated through the body depending on class, race, and gender.

Sandra Cisneros opens *Caramelo* with the image a family photograph taken in Acapulco during the Reyes family's annual trip to Mexico.<sup>1</sup> The narrator, Celaya (Lala), tells us the names of everyone present, what they look like, what they are doing in the image, and that she is missing from it: "I'm not here. They've forgotten about me when

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<sup>1</sup> In my own family, the annual trip to Mexico was replaced by an annual trip to Georgia. At Christmas, my parents and I would drive the sixteen hours between Pennsylvania and Georgia in one stretch so that we could spend Christmas with my mother's side of the family. We always left early in the morning, when it was still dark, and I would lie down in the backseat. When it got too warm in the car and my skin was sticky with sweat, I would put my arms down against the seat and slowly lift them up one at a time to hear the sound my skin made against the vinyl—the sound of Velcro parting. In my memory, this sound is louder and more violent than it probably was in reality. In my memory, it is the sound of being ripped away from my home—Pennsylvania, the only place that I knew for certain was mine.

the photographer walking along the beach proposes a portrait, *un recuerdo*, a remembrance literally. No one notices I'm off by myself building sand houses" (Cisneros 4). Not until the end do we hear another version of this story. At her parent's anniversary party, Celaya shows the photograph to an unknown guest, telling the person that, when the photograph was taken, she had been forgotten by her family, "same as always." Her brother responds to her, saying: "What are you talking about? You weren't making sand castles, Lala. You want the truth? You were mad, and that's why when we called you over, you wouldn't come. That's the *real* reason why you're not in the picture. And I ought to know, I'm the oldest" (Cisneros 422). By challenging Celaya's interpretation of the photograph, her brother writes his own version of history. He defers to his ethos as the oldest child to convince the audience, suggesting that memory becomes more permanent with age. The way Cisneros uses the photograph, however, allows us to see that competing versions of history and truth happen simultaneously. One version cannot be true while another version is false; rather, each story reveals truths about the ones who do the telling.

Many of the stories within *Caramelo* are brief, condensed images that literary critic Ilan Stavans has described as "snapshots arranged in a family album" (32). Some of these images do not come from Celaya's life directly, but rather from her grandmother's life. The combination of these stories do have the effect of a family album, which reaches back generations, leaving only images whose details Celaya must fill in so that she can understand her family and her place in its history. As Celaya progresses in her journey, the Awful Grandmother about whom she speaks in the first section of the novel becomes a central character. Over the course of the novel, the



grandmother transforms from an abstraction (the Awful Grandmother) into a real person (Soledad). In the organization of the novel's three sections, we can see how this transformation happens.

The first section, entitled "Recuerdo de Acapulco," takes place in Mexico, and here we encounter most of Celaya's family. We meet her parents (Inocencio and Zoila) along with her six brothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, and paternal grandparents (Narciso and Soledad). The narrator also introduces the grandparents' servants, specifically the washerwoman Amparo and her daughter Candelaria, both of whom are at the center of the novel's tension. Along with these characters, the narrator reveals several important qualities that define this family. First of all, she puts this particular summer into the larger context of their lives. The summer trip to Mexico is a ritual repeated each year by all of the family members who live in Chicago. Along with this information, the narrator exposes how the relationship between Inocencio and his mother strains his relationship with his wife and children. His mother favors Inocencio, her first child, over the rest of her family. She cooks elaborate birthday dinners and dotes on him throughout the visit. The relationship between Inocencio and his mother serves as the driving force behind the tension between him and his wife. Inocencio remains torn between these two women, which causes both women to feel jealousy towards the other. Soledad has no respect or tenderness for Celaya's mother and uses skin color and class status to justify her feelings. Her jealousy eventually erupts. In Acapulco, Soledad reveals a family secret that has been kept from Zoila until then. Before readers find out the details of this secret, however, the narrative breaks to the second section entitled "When I Was Dirt." This

break serves to humanize Soledad so that readers can better understand why she would reveal this secret.

The second section of the novel traces Soledad's past, from her poor, rural roots to her rise as Narciso Reyes's wife. Though Celaya continues narrating the novel, her grandmother joins her. Readers have an established image of the Awful Grandmother as both selfish and judgmental. This section, however, serves to humanize the grandmother and explain the circumstances that have led her to this place. We learn that her mother died when she was just a girl, that she was sent away to live with family that she never knew, and that that family allowed her to leave once again to work as a servant for her future husband Narciso's family. We also learn that Narciso used her, that he impregnated her without any intentions of claiming her or the child, and that only his father had the power to make him realize that his own honor was connected to how he treated this young girl. Though the two eventually marry, their marriage is anything but idyllic. Though tenderness exists between them, Narciso is not faithful. His betrayal allows readers to understand why Soledad puts so much of her emotion into her son. Inocencio gives her something to love completely, something innocent. Inocencio is more than her first born; he represents the emotional freedom that she gains as the result of his birth. Once Inocencio enters the picture, she no longer allows the jealousy that Narciso inspires in her to rule her life. This understanding of Soledad's history becomes essential as we enter the third section of the novel and discover the secret that she reveals to Zoila.

The novel's third section, "The Eagle and the Serpent, or My Mother and My Father," takes place on the U.S. side of the border. Celaya returns as the lone narrator,

and her family returns to Chicago, though this time with the grandmother. After Narciso's sudden death, she moves to the U.S. with Inocencio's family and quickly becomes a source of grief to Zoila, who has always been the target of her judgment and who later becomes her primary caretaker after Soledad falls ill. Details about Inocencio and Zoila's past are also revealed to illustrate the difficulty of being an immigrant, specifically a Mexican immigrant, in the United States. Zoila's own Mexican American upbringing exposes how growing up between cultures creates rifts within her family. In fact, Zoila's detachment from Mexico causes much of the tension between her and her mother-in-law.

In this part, the family moves back and forth from Chicago to Texas, and it is in Texas that Soledad finally dies and begins haunting Celaya. Though her grandmother had previously been a negative presence in Celaya's life, with her help Celaya gains the tools necessary for her to accept and understand her grandmother. The ability to do this then prepares her for the information that she learns about her father.

Shortly after Inocencio has a heart attack, Zoila tells Celaya the same secret she learned in Acapulco: that Inocencio fathered a child with the washerwoman Amparo. This child, Candelaria, is the same girl who Celaya played with during her childhood visits to Mexico. Though this information could have the power to radically alter the way Celaya sees her father, the narrative journey she will experience prevents this by providing her with a contextual understanding of her grandmother. The *caramelo rebozo* that we encounter during the novel's first section becomes symbolic of Celaya's connection to her grandmother. Though a physical and cultural border may separate the two, their histories remain tightly woven together.

The first section of the novel introduces the *caramelo rebozo*, which then follows us until the end. Defined in one of the many footnotes included in *Caramelo*, the *rebozo* is a specifically Mexican object:

The *rebozo* was born in Mexico, but like all *mestizos*, it came from everywhere... During the colonial period, mestizo women were prohibited by statutes dictated by the Spanish Crown to dress like Indians, and since they had no means to buy clothing like the Spaniards', they began to weave cloth on the indigenous looms creating a long and narrow shawl that slowly was shaped by foreign influences. (Cisneros 96).

In the beginning of the novel, the unfinished *caramelo rebozo* appears simply as a beautiful object that the grandmother owns. The second section gives it meaning and history, and finally it changes hands in the third section and becomes Celaya's. Because of the *rebozo*'s rich and layered history, we cannot deny that it acts as a symbol throughout the novel. The passing down of the *rebozo* from mother to daughter and grandmother to granddaughter also aids in the object's symbolism.

Literary critic Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs suggests that: "This material icon is a symbol for the four cultures that make up the protagonists in the novel" (28).<sup>2</sup> And indeed, this *rebozo*, an object at once native and colonial, symbolizes the various cultures from which the characters come. As intricately woven as the *caramelo rebozo*, these strands of identity cannot be undone without undoing all of the characters' history. Also, like Celaya's own history, the *rebozo* remains unfinished. Literary critic Carmen Haydée

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<sup>2</sup> According to Gutiérrez y Muhs, these four cultures stem from: "the Conquest, the Colonial Period, the Mexican Revolutionary period and Mexico in its current state of evolution, as well as the Mexican legacies that trail into the US" (28). We can also understand them as the four cultures Edén Torres points out in *Chicana Without Apology*: "Indian, Spanish, Mestizo, and the United States" (39).

Rivera points out the importance of this quality: “The intricate patterns of the *caramelo rebozo* that no one can finish is much like the story of Lala’s life and her generation, influenced by Mexican and Mexican American matriarchal figures yet existing in their own right” (81). Celaya’s identity and history remain in flux, and the *rebozo* itself comes with her for the journey. From an object devoid of history to an object filled with history, the *rebozo* reveals how different strands come together to make a complex web of identity. Not only does it represent all of the stories that make up Celaya’s history, but it also works to reveal how class, skin color, and gender all direct the patterns that emerge from this weaving together of stories. We see this reflected through the characters as much as we do through the *rebozo* itself.

In the first and last section of the novel, Soledad appears judgmental and selfish, which is also illustrated in the way that she treats Celaya’s mother and the favoritism she shows towards her father. In the second section, however, she appears to us as a wounded girl who carries with her an unfinished *caramelo rebozo* made by her deceased mother, described as “unfinished like [her mother’s] life” (Cisneros 94). In this image of a young girl who has lost her mother and has been forgotten by her father, only to be exploited by her future mother-in-law and betrayed by her husband, Celaya and the audience encounter a sympathetic character. Though Soledad’s actions are never justifiable, the motivations behind them become clear as we enter the novel’s third section.

## II. *Caramelo* and First Wave Chicana Feminism

Published in 2002, *Caramelo* adds a fictional perspective to the Chicana Feminist Theory that emerged in 1987 with the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa's text combines poetry, memoir, and theory to look at identity formation. In her book, the border between the United States and Mexico becomes symbolic of the unnatural division of self. This division happens both culturally and spiritually. We are asked to choose one part of our history, and in making that choice, we also choose one part of the self: the mind or the body. Anzaldúa exposes how Western culture has influenced how and why we make the choices that we do, and she also proposes the idea that we *do not* have to make that choice—that we can live in a place where we embrace all parts of the self.

Anzaldúa begins this conversation, but many other writers add to these foundational ideas. In the course of this essay, I will also look at three other Chicana Feminist theorists who contribute to this conversation: historian and theoretician Emma Pérez, whose book *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999) demands a place for marginalized peoples in the larger historical narrative; cultural theorist Chela Sandoval, author of *The Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) in which she traces the evolution of Chicana Theory; and finally, Edén Torres, whose book *Chicana Without Apology* (2003) theorizes the psychological effects of the emotional suffering marginalized peoples endure as the result of living between worlds. As we can see, these texts were all published within a four-year span and roughly ten years after Anzaldúa begins the conversation. Together, these theorists illustrate how Chicana

feminism has evolved and also gives fresh insight into Cisneros's coming-of-age novel *Caramelo*.

Reflected in the structure and content of *Caramelo* is cultural theorist Chela Sandoval's "hermeneutics of love." In order to understand her grandmother and in order to love her father completely, the character Celaya must apply the hermeneutics of love to see how her past has shaped her consciousness. Only by understanding this can Celaya let go of her anger towards her grandmother in order to live in what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as the *Coatlicue* state. In order to understand her anger, however, Celaya must also understand her place in history and the psychological damage that has been done by trying to ignore or suppress parts of her history. Here, Pérez and Torres help us understand how Celaya makes these steps in her journey. Each of these four perspectives offers valuable insight into how one can move towards the *Coatlicue* state.

As Anzaldúa explains in *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, the *Coatlicue* state does not come easily. Taking its name from the Aztec version of la Virgen, *Coatlicue* represents "the contradictory" (Anzaldúa 69). Anzaldúa tells the reader: "In her figure, all the symbols important to the religion and philosophy of the Aztecs are integrated. Like Medusa, the Gorgon, she is a symbol of the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror" (69). Anzaldúa tells us that the *Coatlicue* state "disrupt[s] the smooth flow (complacency) of life," but that the disruption itself is not enough (68). As a mere disruption, this can cause dissatisfaction or depression about the state of our lives. We must *do* something with these disruptions. Rather than living with disappointment or with awareness of shortcomings, we must "make meaning out of them" (Anzaldúa 68).

The *Coatlícué* state can be a way of letting in the knowledge that will allow one to escape complacency and avoid accepting what one is “supposed” to be based on social stereotypes. In order to escape complacency, however, we have to be willing to risk the pain that comes with knowledge. Anzaldúa writes: “‘Knowing’ is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before” (70). Knowledge, then, is a painful but necessary part of growth because it requires that we give up a comfortable understanding of our world.

The narrator of Cisneros’s novel *Caramelo* is no exception. In order to move forward with her journey, Celaya must battle her own understanding of her grandmother, who is aware of only one version of history and who, despite her own oppression, chooses to adopt the ideology that has suppressed part of her identity and left her to live too long with unspoken anger and hurt.<sup>3</sup> With the help of critical theorists Gloria Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez, Chela Sandoval, and Edén Torres, we can see the cultural factors that have shaped Celaya’s grandmother, Aunt Light-Skin, and her own mother. By telling the story of these women, Celaya does exactly what Pérez calls for in *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*.

Pérez asks for a revision of history that includes women as more than “appendages to men’s history” (Pérez 12). She accuses male historians of “contain[ing], rather than explor[ing]” women’s roles, which leads to the stereotyping of women. She writes:

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<sup>3</sup> My own grandmother reminds me of Celaya’s grandmother in this regard. Despite growing up in a poor rural setting, she appears to have no sympathy for anyone else who has endured great hardship. Now that she lives in relative comfort, she sees everyone who doesn’t have a comparable lifestyle as inferior or lazy. Even her children suffer from her judgment.



Adapting stereotypes—for example, women as wives and mothers—reveals more about what is unsaid and unthought than about gender itself. The stereotypes serve to produce particular systems of thought. These studies marginalized women as the mothers or wives of men and denied them any contribution to a community. (Pérez 12)

As Pérez continues, she reveals that women are brought into Chicano history only when they adhere to the stereotypical “good” roles and aid men in some way. In this vision of women, we see what humans are so often accused of doing—telling only the stories that we want others to know.<sup>4</sup>

When we look at the characters Soledad or Aunty Light-Skin in *Caramelo*, we can see this idea playing out. Soledad, for example, denies the parts of her past that are not seen as proper, just as the Reyes family denies anything in their blood that is not Spanish. In the second section, she constantly interrupts Celaya’s version of the story to insert her own. As the story moves from one about a poor orphaned girl into one about a woman who has some agency over her actions, she begins to accuse Celaya of lying and telling only the ugly parts of the story. She says: “Lies, Lies. Nothing but lies from beginning to end. I don’t know why I trusted you with my beautiful story. You’ve never been able to tell the truth to save your life” (Cisneros 188). Though we get Celaya’s version, we learn about Soledad’s version through her interjections. We learn that, left to

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<sup>4</sup> This, I believe, is true of women in the South as well. In an interview with Sandra Cisneros, she and Dorothy Allison compare Mexican Catholicism and Southern Baptists, stating that they “have a lot in common.” Cisneros, in this interview points out that Southern women, however, only have one option open to them in order to lead a “virtuous” life, since they don’t even have the possibility of becoming a nun. When my mother used to tell stories from her life before my father and before me, they were always sad and full of men hurting her, physically and emotionally. The saddest stories of all, though, were the ones in which my grandmother, who knew the hardships of being a woman in this place, denied her own daughter sympathy and understanding.

her own narrative, her story would likely take the form of a *telenovela* in which she would be both victim and victor.

Because Soledad refuses to see her story from multiple points of view, she has no sympathy for anyone else who shares the same history. Despite her own humble background, she practices the language of supremacy that Chela Sandoval speaks about in *The Methodology of the Oppressed*. This language of supremacy is inherited, stemming from colonial times. Sandoval borrows from psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon to explain the origins, stating: “The rhetoric of supremacy thus damages and enslaves the colonizer as well as the colonized...for the good citizen-subject is allowed entrance to dominate society, which in return provides regidification ‘in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolution, all gains, all progress, all discovery’ of difference” (128). Soledad, thus, uses this language of supremacy because she believes that adopting it is the only way for her “to survive with any dignity at all” (Torres 26).

In Sandoval’s descriptions of one rhetorical figure that supports this language of supremacy, she writes that: “Under ‘the statement of fact’ the citizen-subject is encouraged to speak and know with certainty, is trained to assert its own reality as if there were no other” (123). Out of fear, Soledad, like many women in the novel, refuses to live outside of the so-called proper narrative of a lady’s life. Having come from an oppressed background, she does not want to give up the luxuries that her new social status provides her. Throughout her childhood, she listens to the language of supremacy, internalizing what the honorable story of one’s life should be, and she tries to construct from her own complex history a simple narrative that places her in a position of

superiority. We can see other examples of this happening to many women throughout the novel.

Soledad's future mother-in-law, Regina, for example, shares similar lower class roots, but does not let that part of her past color the way she interacts with Soledad. In a footnote to Regina's name, Cisneros tells us: "Because a life contains a multitude of stories and not a single strand explains precisely the who of who one is, we have to examine the complicated loops that allowed Regina to become la Señora Reyes" (115). In the rest of the footnote, we learn about a strand of Regina's life that is not much different from Soledad's. She, too, marries into Spanish blood and, because of her own new status as a Señora, refuses to show sympathy to the servant women who work in her home. Though many parts of her history have had a hand in shaping her, Regina ignores the other strands in favor of the one that appears most acceptable within the larger societal narrative. Both Soledad and Regina feel that they cannot share the ugly parts of their histories without risking their reputations as mothers or wives. In a country where bloodlines are so important, one's familial roots must be guarded to ensure that the family's status is not lost or questioned.<sup>5</sup>

Aunty Light-Skin supports this idea in some ways, but challenges it in others. Her nickname illustrates how her culture privileges whiteness. Though Aunty Light-Skin does not fall into one of the stereotypical roles open to women, she lives somewhere between them. She has a daughter and no husband, yet her family still accepts her.

Because of her skin color, her family acts lenient towards actions that would otherwise

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<sup>5</sup> This is also true in literature of the United States South, particularly in the novels of William Faulkner. When we look at the Compson family, for example, we see a family that was once great and that clings to its name and its bloodlines as proof of that greatness. In the wake of the Civil War, however, the South collectively faced parts of its past that had been suppressed in order to keep up appearances. The Compsons are no exception.

shame them. When we finally hear her story, we see that she too clings to a proper version of it, saying: “I’m telling the truth. May the Devil come and yank my feet tonight if I’m lying. We were legally married. Married. I have a ring and papers to prove it. Lalita, you believe me, don’t you?” (Cisneros 264-5). Though Aunt Light-Skin defies traditional roles, the language of supremacy, which she has inherited, still makes her instinctively defend herself from outside judgment by stressing that her daughter was a product of an honorable relationship.

With these three women in mind, I return to Emma Pérez, who writes: “One is not simply oppressed or victimized; nor is one only oppressor or victimizer. Rather, one negotiates within the imaginary to a decolonizing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another” (7). In this passage, Pérez states that identity cannot exist within simple, opposing binaries. Though Soledad, Aunt Light-Skin, and even Regina are all oppressed, that is not all of who they are. As we see the characters develop, we can also see a pattern forming that begins essentially with similar stories of being oppressed or betrayed by men and ends in easy binary ways of seeing the world. Celaya’s mother, Zoila, shows us another example of this. As a reader, I am much more sympathetic to Zoila’s situation, but I also acknowledge that she behaves just as Soledad does.

While in Acapulco, Soledad reveals the secret about Inocencio’s illegitimate daughter to Zoila with the intention of making her angry. Though both women feel hurt by the situation, each refuses to be sympathetic to the other, and though Inocencio causes their hurt, they still pit themselves against each other. Soledad says of her son, Inocencio: “My son could’ve done a lot better than marrying a woman who can’t even

speaking proper Spanish. You sound like you escaped from the ranch. And to make matters even more sad, you're as dark as a slave" (Cisneros 85). Zoila replies by giving her husband an ultimatum, saying: "Inocencio, if you let that cow turd in our car, you can forget about ever seeing me or your kids again" (Cisneros 86). The two women refuse to see each other as anything more than evil, even though the real conflict lies with the man in this situation. Because they each view the other as the real problem, they are left to fight it out.

By the end of the novel, we see that Celaya also faces the danger of falling into this way of seeing the world and her family members in a good vs. bad binary. After she runs away to Mexico with Ernesto and her father suffers his heart attack, her grandmother's spirit refuses to leave her alone. She asks her grandmother: "Why do you keep haunting me?" Soledad replies: "Me? Haunting you? It's *you* Celaya, who's haunting *me*. I can't bear it. Why do you insist on repeating my life? Is that what you want? To live as I did? There's no sin in falling in love with your heart and with your body, but wait till you're old enough to love yourself first" (Cisneros 406). In this poignant moment with her grandmother, Celaya recognizes in herself qualities that shaped her grandmother into the woman she has called "Awful" for so many years.

When Celaya asks her grandmother to explain why she revealed her father's secret to her mother in Acapulco, Soledad replies that she acted out of love. She says: "I told because of love, believe it or not. I wanted your father for my own. I didn't want to share him anymore. I told because your mother makes me sick with her smart remarks. I told because your mother hated me so, she still hates me" (Cisneros 406). Soledad's selfish explanation stands in direct opposition to Celaya's act of telling her grandmother's

story. In the comparison of these two women, we can see Sandoval's hermeneutics of love at work. Rather than love motivated by jealousy, which Celaya's grandmother, aunt, and mother experience, Celaya moves into a different space, one that allows her to love these women, flaws and all.

In order to move into this space, Celaya must strike a balance between listening to her instinct and listening to her mind. The women in her life perform their roles based on a set of rules that they had no power in constructing but that they nevertheless follow. These rules keep them submissive by using tradition as a form of control. Any break with tradition puts the characters, both male and female, in danger of losing their place in their community's hierarchy. To consider the origins of power and how its translated to the body, I turn to nineteenth century German philosopher Hegel's text *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

### III. Hegel & the Body

In the first part of *Caramelo*, Celaya's father asks her to stand up and sing a Shirley Temple song for her grandmother. Her father remembers how she used to sing the song as a small child and insists that she sing it again. Though Celaya protests and says that she does not remember, her father will not hear her. He tells her, "Nonsense! The body always remembers" (Cisneros 59). As the novel progresses, many of the characters echo this sentiment. Though the mind may forget, the body remains reliable. For some characters, the body also holds the answers to seemingly mysterious questions.

When we learn about the origin of the *caramelo rebozo*, for example, we find out that Celaya's great grandmother, Guillermina, made it, that she possessed great talent in weaving *rebozos*, and that she took no responsibility for their beauty: "Guillermina's signature design, with its intricate knots looped into interlocking figure eights, took one hundred and forty-six hours to complete, but if you asked her how she did it, she'd say, —How should I know? It's my hands that know, not my head" (Cisneros 93). In moments when characters privilege the innate instinct and knowledge of their bodies, the text asks its readers to upset standard Western ideas of where knowledge originates. The complications that arise from this upsetting can be analyzed via ideas presented in Hegel's work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

In the section entitled "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," Hegel writes: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists in being acknowledged" (§ 178). Hegel describes the evolution of the self-consciousness as a social movement between the 'I' and the 'other.' One becomes self-conscious by first leaving the self to

face the 'other' and, having recognized oneself in the 'other,' by superseding it. From the supersession, the 'I' then returns to itself receiving both itself and the other self-consciousness. Hegel explains the effects of this movement by using the relationship between the lord and the bondsman. As the reader comes to see, the power relationship in this situation reverses. Though the lord is traditionally thought to be the free one, Hegel complicates this relationship for the reader by showing how the bondsman gains independence through work. In his analysis, however, Hegel fails to account for how power is enforced on the body. Though the split in mind and body is characteristic of German Idealism, the example of the lord and bondsman reinforces the importance of the body, as it is the body that the lord can control. The bondsman may have spiritual independence, but the lord continues to control his physical being. Thus, Hegel leaves us wondering how to reconcile spiritual freedom when faced with a lack of bodily freedom.

In *Caramelo*, both Celaya and Soledad face a similar dilemma. Though their minds may be free, social convention keeps their bodies imprisoned. For Soledad, we see this most clearly when we learn about her youth. As a child, her father ignores her after her mother's death and later sends her away to live with an aunt who continues to ignore her. Because her aunt already has twelve children, Soledad disappears into the background of this family and, in her loneliness, seeks comfort and love from her future husband, Narciso. We quickly learn that Narciso does not know how to comfort a woman's spirit without acting on the body. The first time the two talk to each other, Soledad begins crying. Narciso's reaction shows his confusion. The narrator tells us: "Because he hadn't been raised with women, Narciso didn't know what to do with women's tears. They confused him, upset him, made him angry because they stirred up



his own emotions and left them in disarray” (107). From this quotation, the reader sees that Narciso acts not out of a motivation to comfort Soledad, but out of a desire to control his own reaction to her sadness. His instinct tells him to kiss her, which is to say that he attempts to comfort her mind by soothing her body. Though Narciso’s actions do in fact comfort Soledad, his inability to connect with her emotionally leads to a strained marriage.

After Soledad becomes pregnant and she and Narciso marry, Narciso begins to see Soledad’s body as a reflection of his own status. When she stops wearing shoes because her feet have become too swollen, he reprimands her, saying: “Don’t be seen like that; as if I didn’t have money to buy my wife shoes” (189). Rather than responding with anger, Soledad reacts to this treatment with sadness. She learns that Narciso does not understand her mind or her body and eventually accepts this. She becomes invisible, as she had been at her aunt’s house, and this invisibility accentuates her loneliness. As Soledad sees it, physical touch is reflective of a spiritual connection: “Didn’t a man know? Did he have any idea how important it is to hold a woman’s hand when walking down the street with her? Did he realize when holding a woman’s hand his body was saying, —World this is my *querida*, the woman I love, I am proud to be walking beside her, my hand in hers the flag of our love” (189). For Soledad, physical touch is a separate language that communicates to the world that she and Narciso feel love for each other. Narciso, however, does not understand the body’s language. Soledad appears as mere object to him, and this object reflects his own social status. Through her struggle with Narciso, Soledad gains spiritual freedom, but this freedom comes only as the result of the work she endures while carrying Narciso’s child in the face of his indifference.

In the moment of childbirth, Soledad “[does] not call out to her husband, not to God, la Virgen, or a saint” (191). Instead, her body releases a cry that sounds like: “Mamá!” (191). With the birth of Inocencio, Soledad begins to recognize herself as a consciousness independent of Narciso; however, she is not truly independent. Like the bondsman in Hegel’s *Dialectic*, her mind becomes separate and free from the controlling forces of the lord or, in her case, her husband. Still, her body remains in a state of submission because in her world the woman’s body is not merely subordinate to her husband. She is subordinate to all men and all women who follow men’s rules. As Gloria Anzaldúa states in *Borderlands/ La Frontera*: “Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them” (38). Masculine tradition keeps Soledad from a position of power by enforcing the split between the mind and the body, but along with this, the act of accepting these customs establishes her as women who will then “transmit” these rules. Because society privileges the mind over the body and men have gained power by claiming that they can separate intellect from instinct, women are dismissed as primitive creatures concerned only with their earthly existence.

In *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Anzaldúa acknowledges and explains this flawed understanding:

The female, by virtue of creating entities of flesh and blood in her stomach (she bleeds every month but does not die), by virtue of being in tune with nature’s cycles, is feared. Because, according to Christianity and most other major religions, woman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine,

she must be protected. Protected from herself. Woman is the stranger, the other. (39)

Anzaldúa attributes this distinction between the mind and body to Christianity and at the same time suggests that this distinction (and consequently, the distinction between genders) is itself unnatural. Rather, it serves to control what humans cannot understand about themselves. Because man cannot understand himself as an instinctual animal, he *creates* a distinction between instinct and spirit that does not exist. Power, of course, emanates from those who have the power to manipulate the bodies of others, so society lives with and accepts the illusion that this is a natural distinction rather than the product of misunderstanding or inability to understand. As *Caramelo* reveals, however, this relationship between the mind and body is complex. Dismissing it leads to the unbalanced Self that Edén Torres describes in *Chicana Without Apology*, which I will discuss in detail later.

Hegel's description of the lord and the bondsman provides insight into *how* the Self becomes unbalanced. To understand his idea, we must back up to see how the movement outside of the self first occurs. Hegel writes: "Self consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self" (§ 179). The first step of the movement requires that the 'I' and the 'other' become dependent on each other. When the 'I' comes out of itself, it recognizes the 'other' as more than object. The 'I' expects the 'other' to be passive, but finds instead that, like the 'I', the other has a self-consciousness. When these two singular self-

consciousnesses meet, they see in the other themselves. That is, they recognize the other as an independent being who also desires. In this way, the 'I' and the 'other' are the same.

We see this recognition take place as the relationship between Celaya and her grandmother develops. For the first part of the novel, Celaya, like her grandfather, views her grandmother as pure object. Because she has no sense of the context from which her grandmother comes, she finds it easy to call her the "Awful Grandmother." This moniker allows Celaya to distance herself from her grandmother and thus see her as a completely separate entity. Only through her grandmother's death does Celaya overcome this mindset. Once her grandmother dies and begins haunting her, Celaya must recognize her grandmother as a self-conscious being. For her part, Soledad also recognizes herself in Celaya, asking her: "Why do you insist on repeating my life?" (406). This question forces Celaya to see herself in her grandmother, and that action then alters the way she sees both herself and her grandmother. The woman who had previously been mere object in Celaya's vision moves to human status. Only after this has occurred can Celaya and her grandmother move on to the next step of the Hegelian movement.

In the next step, the 'I' supersedes the 'other.' Having recognized in oneself the 'other,' the 'I' has also become the 'other.' At this point, the 'I' is no longer singular, as it contains both itself and the 'other.' In order to return to the self, the 'I' must overcome its otherness. Though Hegel is not clear about how the 'I' is able to do this, we know that this step is necessary because it allows the 'I' "to become certain of itself as the essential being" (§ 180). In his return to the self, the 'I' changes. Therefore, this movement is not a simple return to self because, having left the self, the 'I' returns with a more complete

picture of itself within the larger context of the world. If we look to the self-consciousnesses that will become the lord and the bondsman, we see that both can exist as separate self-consciousnesses at this point, but the existence of the ‘other’ as a separate self-consciousness challenges the notion of being-for-self. The ‘I’ now recognizes itself as dependent on the other, and in a desire to regain its independence, the two self-consciousnesses must enter into a life and death struggle.

The narration of *Caramelo* partially models this step in Hegel’s movement.

While Celaya and her grandmother recognize their dependence on each other, they stop short of the life and death struggle. Celaya recognizes herself in her grandmother, and in this way, becomes the ‘other.’ Celaya’s movement differs from the Hegelian movement at this point. In Hegel’s version, the ‘I’ must *overcome* the ‘other.’ That is, the ‘I’ must assert power over the ‘other.’ While one could argue that Celaya does assert power over her grandmother because she has control over how to shape and revise her grandmother’s story, we cannot ignore Soledad’s interjections. Celaya reluctantly allows her grandmother to speak at times, though even if she did not, the very act of telling the story gives her grandmother a voice. In the end, however, Celaya’s version of her grandmother’s story is not part of a struggle for Celaya to regain her independence.

Whereas the idea of overcoming the other is a gesture of power and inevitably leads to the denial of the other as an independent self-consciousness, Celaya’s gesture is one of empowerment. She does not overcome the other, but rather embodies it. Soledad’s story becomes part of her own story. To use Gloria Anzaldúa’s terminology, Celaya “enters into the serpent.” Just as a *rebozo* is intricately constructed, so is Celaya’s history. By entering into the serpent, she begins to understand how history constructs her identity,

and only through knowing this history can she better understand herself. Celaya's knowledge and acceptance of her history has the power to alter the Hegelian movement. Were it not for her willingness to examine the past, she would likely move on to Hegel's next step.

In the next step of Hegel's dialectic, the 'I' desires to "transcend the immediacy of pure life," and it is through this struggle that the relationship between the lord and bondsman develops (Butler 51). Both self-consciousnesses stake their lives, but one emerges as a being-for-self: "They exist as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is the lord, the other is the bondsman" (§189). This life and death struggle brings the body into a dialogue that had previously been concerned only with the mind, and it is from this bodily struggle that the being-for-self emerges as one who is not afraid to die for freedom. Only through this willingness to give up the body does one transcend it. Philosopher Judith Butler explains this seemingly contradictory notion in the first chapter of her book *Subjects of Desire* when she states:

In order to discover itself as a negative or self-surpassing being, self-consciousness must do more than merely live; it must transcend the immediacy of pure life. It cannot stay content with the "first nature" into which it is born, but must engage itself in the creation of a "second nature" which establishes the self, not merely as a presupposition or a point of view, but as an achievement of its own making. Autonomy can be achieved only through relinquishing an enslavement to life. (52)

As Butler explains, the one who achieves independence also gives up the body because the body keeps one grounded in the material existence of life. The lord, thus, exists within a spiritual realm, and the bondsman lives in a bodily realm because his duty to work for the lord requires him to physically act in the world.

Returning to Soledad, we can see how this step in Hegel's dialectic plays out. During the scene in which Soledad gives birth for the first time, we witness a complex change in her character. Though she gains independence through the work of carrying Narciso's child, this independence only exists within the home. Though spiritually free from Narciso, Soledad remains trapped by the social constructs that shape the society from which she comes. As a result, Soledad occupies the space of both lord and bondsman. While she remains most like the bondsman in relation to Narciso, the birth of Inocencio changes the way she interacts with the outside world. Rather than sympathizing with others who share her humble beginnings, she belittles them. Inocencio's birth causes her to internalize these power relationships without question and begin to reenact them. At the moment of the birth, the narrator tells us:

When the labor began she felt her body lurch forward of its own accord like a piece of machinery, like a chariot, like a wild horse and she dangling from a stirrup. There was no going backward and no changing your mind. And your life a little flag fluttering in the wind. Your life nothing but a ragged bit of cloth. —*Muh*. Like all orphans and prisoners condemned to death, she heard a voice she recognized as her own call out from someplace she didn't remember. —*Muh, muh, muh*, with every breath like a dagger. —*Ma*, she heard herself say, and it was as if she were all the

women in history who had ever given birth, a cry, a chorus, the one and only, never-ending alpha and omega yowl of history, guttural and strange and frightening and powerful all at once. —*Ma, ma, ma...Ma-má!* (191).

In this quotation, the narrator reveals the body as a separate entity that has its own power and knowledge apart from the mind. At the beginning of this paragraph, the body is compared to a piece of machinery, a chariot, or a wild horse. After this, the narrator switches to second person, invoking the reader. She tells us that there was “no changing *your* mind.” The narrator shows us that Soledad is not alone in this moment. *You* are with her. From the moment of birth, there is no going back for Soledad or for the reader. With the birth of Inocencio, Soledad comes to a new understanding of the world, and she brings us with her in the story. We see her smallness at this moment (life is described as “a little flag fluttering in the wind”), but we also see her grow to massive proportions. Her voice becomes the voice of “all orphans and prisoners condemned to death.” Her voice contains in it all the pain of those who are powerless and who have been lost in the world. At the end, this cry is described as “guttural and strange and frightening and powerful all at once.” With this experience, Soledad gains some power in her life. In conquering the pain that she experiences during the birth, she has become a being-for-self. She has faced death, in a sense, and has emerged as the victor. This causes Soledad to give up her body for the sake of a spiritual calling—that of being a mother. This newfound role as mother gives her access to a form of power within her home. As a result, Soledad is at once the lord and the bondsman.

In the larger context of society, Soledad remains in the position of the bondsman. In the context of her *home*, however, she becomes lord. The birth of Inocencio solidifies



her as the matriarch in the household, and she becomes willing to give up the notion of living fully in both mind and body for the social status offered to her as wife of Narciso Reyes. In her small world, she experiences power through the relationships she has with other women, including the servants who work in her home and, later on, Celaya's mother. Because Soledad internalizes the class structures that she has grown up with, she can easily dismiss these women whose stories are all too similar to her own. Soledad becomes trapped in Hegel's circular movement. In Hegel's dialectic, it is impossible for anyone to ever be completely free. If the bondsman tries to overcome the lord by entering into a life-and-death struggle and if he somehow wins, transforming into the lord would inevitably lead him to another state of imprisonment. This happens to Soledad. Her name, Soledad, which in Spanish means loneliness or solitude, becomes her sentence in life. No matter whether she is in the position of power or not, she is still trapped by social constructs.

Despite the lord's success in achieving autonomy, Hegel explains that the bondsman transforms into the "truly independent consciousness" through work (§193). The lord sees the bondsman as pure object, but the bondsman recognizes the lord as 'other,' which allows him to repeat the movement out of and back into the self. As confusing as the explanation of this movement can be, the result of the bondsman's independent consciousness is ultimately convincing. In the end, however, the bondsman is still a bondsman. His body is limited by his servitude, though his spirit is theoretically free. Hegel's dialectic presents a problem because there seems to be no way for both the spirit and the body to be free.

With the character of Celaya, we can see how one works to break free of this simplistic construction of the self. As seen in the first part of the novel, Celaya also internalizes these power relationships. Her body is small in the world and at the mercy of those around her. Her father orders her to dance, cuts off her braids, and gives her favorite doll away. Of course, we do not see him as the villain, despite these actions, and we should not. His actions are not motivated out of insensitivity or callousness but out of love for his daughter. Still, these actions show us how little control Celaya has over her body at this point in her life. In an attempt to assert control over her world, Celaya eventually runs away with a young boy, Ernesto.

When her family plans to move from San Antonio back to Chicago, Celaya refuses and escapes to Mexico with Ernesto. The two make love in a hotel room after which Ernesto leaves her to attend mass the next morning. When he returns, he tells her that they can't be together, explaining: "So we're a sin, Lala. You and me. We can't just run off and then expect to marry and make it better. Sex is for procreation only. The Church says so. And we're not married yet. And the fact is, I can't marry you; you're not even Catholic" (386). Having internalized the Catholic ideology that privileges the spiritual aspects of life (the divine) over the bodily aspects (the undivine), Ernesto cannot help but believe in this split between mind and body. He wants to be a spiritual person and sees Celaya as the person (or perhaps object) that holds him back from this. Celaya, though, sees through his logic. She says to him:

You just had to get God's permission to get you off the hook. You're scared. You're too chickenshit to think for yourself and become a man. So you have to ask the Church to tell you what's right and wrong. You

can't brave listening to your own heart. That would cost you too much.

After all, we wouldn't want to upset your mother. (387)

This statement shows Celaya's skepticism regarding the cultural narrative that dictates gender roles. Though she went to Mexico fully expecting to marry Ernesto, she sees through him in this moment. He is afraid of his body, of his heart and his instinct, and thus clings to a narrative that keeps them separate.

Like Hegel, Ernesto places more importance on the human mind than the human body, and this division causes him to see the world in binaries. In Hegel's dialectic, a person is either the lord or the bondsman—so either the body is free or the mind is free, but in this construction, one cannot have both. In the context of this scene, we see that Ernesto believes that he cannot have both, and he has certainly learned to privilege the mind over the body. Though there are many power relationships throughout *Caramelo* that echo back to Hegel's idea of lord and bondsman, Celaya's response to Ernesto in this situation reminds us of this reality: without control over the mind *and* the body, one can't be free. Just like Soledad, custom imprisons Ernesto and tells him not to listen to the body. Though he has power, he is also powerless.

Celaya begins to move us past this either/or construction. With the help of her grandmother, she comes to see that there exists a muddy borderland between the mind and the body or the spiritual and the physical. The mind wants to listen to the body and the body wants to be heard. Just as Emma Pérez writes about bringing a voice to people who are not always heard in places that are not always seen, Celaya also bridges the metaphorical borderland between the mind and the body.

Anzaldúa states in *Borderlands/ La Frontera*: “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (25). *Caramelo* reveals how the boundary between the interior self and the physical world is an unnatural boundary, one that Celaya tries to break through. As we come to see, Hegel’s lord and bondsman are trapped in an inescapable circle. The bondsman is free, but only because he has experienced servitude. He cannot revolt and overcome the lord because, for that to happen, the lord would have to see himself in the bondsman. Even if that could occur, it would lead simply to a reversal of roles in which the bondsman, having transformed into the lord, would lose the independence that he gained through servitude. In this cycle, there exists no way of reconciling the body with the mind. Celaya, however, finds one way out.

As I have already pointed out, Celaya refuses to enter into the life-and-death battle about which Hegel speaks. Rather than pit herself against her grandmother, Celaya embraces the woman who she once referred to as “the Awful Grandmother.” This growth echoes the work of many third world feminist writers and thinkers, and Celaya’s change can be best understood with the help of Chela Sandoval and Edén Torres.

#### IV. Rebuilding the Unbalanced Self

In the previous section, I analyze how Anzaldúa breaks away from Hegel's construction of the Self and how *Caramelo* reflects this movement. Now I will use Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* to explain how readers can rethink this construction and begin to rebuild the unbalanced Self. In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval asks her readers to reconsider their ways of defining love. When Sandoval talks about love, she does not mean the kind of romantic love that Soledad warns Celaya against—the kind that makes one jealous and makes one hate. Rather, she means the kind of love that leads one to a place of understanding. Sandoval aligns her definition with other authors, stating:

Third world writers...similarly understand love as a “breaking” through whatever controls in order to find “understanding and community”: it is described as “hope” and “faith” in the potential goodness of some promised land; it is defined as Anzaldúa's *coatlicue* state, which is a “rupturing” in one's everyday world that permits crossing over to another; or as a specific moment of shock, what Emma Pérez envisions as the trauma of desire, of erotic despair. These writers who theorize social change understand “love” as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement. (140)

The differential mode of consciousness mentioned in this passage is similar to Pérez's idea of a third or interstitial space and to Anzaldúa's *Coatlicue* state. Like Pérez and

Anzaldúa, Sandoval asks for a space, real or imagined, in which one can live without the painful division of binaries. In Celaya's case, this would mean finding a place in which she does not have to choose between one version of her own history, but has freedom to play with time and space in order to tell the story correctly, even if that means telling, in her father's words, "healthy lies" (Cisneros 188).

In order to find this place, however, Celaya must first enact the hermeneutics of love. To do so, she has to learn to live within what Sandoval calls a "differential" mode of consciousness. Sandoval identifies four other modes of consciousness, these being: equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes. These four modes exist within everyone, and we can see each of them occurring within both Celaya and her grandmother. The differential mode, however, is one that must be learned. Sandoval writes that: "the differential depends on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence; the differential is thus performative" (58). Sandoval compares this mode to the clutch of an automobile, which allows the driver to switch between gears. In my own extension of this metaphor, I compare it to fifth gear, which, as one shifts between the first four, seems to encompass all of the gears that come before it. While the differential mode is the mechanism that allows one to shift forms of consciousness, it is also important to note that differential consciousness also signifies the ability to live within all forms of consciousness at once and, moreover, to allow others to do the same. As Celaya performs each mode of consciousness, the differential mode helps her rise above the jealousy and anger that we see in her grandmother. This mode is, as Sandoval states, learned.

To explain how Celaya learns to enact this state, I turn once again to Gloria Anzaldúa. In *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Anzaldúa writes:

The soul uses everything to further its own making. Those activities or *Coatlicue* states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The *Coatlicue* state can be a way station or it can be a way of life. (68)

Towards the end of the novel, we begin to see how Celaya uses her own painful experiences for growth. Her experience in Mexico with Ernesto, as well as her father's illness, become moments that, in Anzaldúa's words, "increase consciousness." These events on their own may not inspire change in Celaya's consciousness, but these moments in combination with a new understanding of her history help her learn how to enact Sandoval's differential mode.

As Soledad speaks to Celaya about love, she tells her: "You're not even a whole person yet, you're still growing into who you are. Why, all your life you'll be growing into who you are. That's the trouble. God gives us the urge for love when we're still children, but the age of reason doesn't arrive till we're well into our forties" (Cisneros 407). Though, in this moment, Soledad has obviously gained some insight into her own consciousness, this happens only after her death. Because she has been the cause of so much pain and anger for Celaya's mother, she cannot rest. She tells Celaya: "Listen to me, jealousy is a terrible thing. Look where it got me. *Ay*, Celaya, no wonder I'm here,

neither alive nor dead” (Cisneros 407). Because Soledad could not engage the differential mode of consciousness during her life, she remains, even in death, trapped in a language of supremacy, unable to accept people who fall outside of what the colonial mindset has told her is right and, thus, unable to accept the parts of herself that do not fall into that easy binary. This mindset allows her to treat Celaya’s mother poorly, and it allows her to stop talking to her own daughter. But it will not allow her rest.

Anzaldúa, in her description of the *Coatlicue* state, tells us that: “Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are.” Through her actions, Soledad shows us that her own disappointments have been meaningful to her; otherwise, she would not have changed so dramatically within the course of her life. The key to Anzaldúa’s statement, however, lies with the word “we.” She states that “if *we* make meaning out of them,” these experiences can cause change. The pronoun use indicates that people must be the ones who make meaning—not outside forces. Because Soledad allows outside forces to dictate the meaning of her own experiences, she gives up agency over who she is. She is left as the product of the very history against which Emma Pérez fights. By refusing to ignore the ugly parts of her history and by becoming an active participant in the story, Celaya gains the sensitivity that her grandmother lacks. She not only moves between different modes of consciousness, but she also begins to allow those around her to do so without passing judgment.

When, near the end of the novel, Celaya finds out from her mother that her father had another child with a different woman, a child who turned out to be Candelaria, the servant girl in her grandmother’s house, she is able to forgive him. Before her mother



even begins the story, Celaya knows that it will be hard to bear: “A pain flutters through my chest like a fish darting through a current of cold water, and I hear a voice inside my head say, *Pay attention! Listen. Even if it hurts. Especially if it hurts*” (Cisneros 403). Because this exchange comes so close to the end, and we know from previous stories within the novel that historical erasure is much easier than remembering, Celaya makes a bold move in forcing herself to hear the truth about Candelaria, as it will forever change the way she sees her father. As her mother tells the story, she becomes angry at Soledad all over again, saying: “I mean what kind of woman...? And how the hell do you think *I* felt? No respect for me, his wife. What kind of lowlife? And los Reyes always pretending to be better than my family. We were poor, but we didn’t do filthy things like that, that’s for sure. Christ! I feel like slapping the crap out of somebody even now!” (Cisneros 402). Rather than share her mother’s anger, Celaya simply replies: “Poor Papa.” Because she loves her father, she finds herself able to see past this action, even though it goes against everything for which the Reyes name supposedly stands. Even her mother, to have stayed with him despite this part of his past, must love him. The key to Celaya’s transformation happens after this moment, however.

The scene that follows contains the aforementioned interaction between Celaya and her grandmother. They are both looking over the ailing Inocencio, and though the conversation begins with the two women fighting over the sick man, it quickly progresses so that we see Soledad confessing to Celaya her jealousy and her misery. In acknowledging her fear and loneliness, she allows Celaya to see her as a real person rather than an abstraction of social laws and customs. After this happens, Soledad says to Celaya: “You’ll tell my story, won’t you, Celaya? So that I’ll be understood? So that I’ll

be forgiven?” (Cisneros 408). At the end of this chapter, we get to see exactly where the second section of the novel began and what needed to transpire in order to have this happen. For Celaya to make it to a place where she could tell her grandmother’s story, she first needed to see her as a person rather than an abstraction on an unnatural scale of morality. In seeing her humanity, she becomes able to forgive the woman who caused her so much pain throughout her childhood. The ability to forgive is the key element necessary for Celaya to move towards the *Coatlicue* state: not only must she find meaning in her own painful experiences, but she must also find a way to forgive all of those who had a hand in creating them.

## V. Conditions of Forgiveness

As Sandoval points out, in order to move into a space in which Celaya can love her grandmother, she must first forgive her. In Celaya's case, forgiveness is a complicated act that requires her to deconstruct her own protective defenses. In *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Anzaldúa tells us:

There are many defense strategies that the self uses to escape the agony of inadequacy and I have used them all. I have split from and disowned parts of myself that others rejected. I have used rage to drive others away and to insulate myself against exposure. I have reciprocated with contempt for those who have roused shame in me. I have internalized rage and contempt, one part of the self (the accusatory, persecutory, judgmental) using defense strategies against another part of the self (the object of contempt). (67)

Celaya, Soledad, and all of the other characters (both female and male) have defense mechanisms designed to keep the reality of their shame outside of the psyche. For Soledad, this creates a distance between both the self and the outside world. Like Anzaldúa, she disowns parts of herself, insulates herself from her family, and despises those who cause her to remember her own shameful past as a servant. Soledad, however, cannot break down these defense strategies in her lifetime. Though she cannot do this for herself, she is able to help Celaya begin this process. To understand why Celaya is capable of this level of change while so many of her other relatives are not, we must consider a further analysis of forgiveness.

In *Chicana Without Apology: The New Chicana Cultural Studies*, writer and activist Edén Torres adds to Anzaldúa's discussion in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Like Anzaldúa, Torres tells readers that the first step to growth comes through understanding one's journey. In the first chapter of her book, Torres focuses on the trauma that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have experienced as the result of internalized shame. Torres explains that "shame can act as a form of social control even in the absence of direct oppression" and that shame is a learned behavior stemming from a feeling of inferiority in relation to the dominant culture (33). Looking at *Caramelo*, we see how this plays out for many characters, but specifically for Celaya's grandmother, who encounters shame from the moment she moves to Mexico City after her mother's passing and continues to feel the shame of being a poor woman with Native roots until she marries Narciso Reyes.

Torres goes on to explain that this kind of internalized shame typically leads to two responses: either the desire to assimilate into mainstream culture or the refusal to do so.<sup>6</sup> This response comes with its own set of troubles within Latino communities, and Torres explains that these troubles arise because the communities do not understand the effects of internalized shame. Shame prohibits individuals from feeling anger and thus stifles valid emotional responses to traumatic experiences. Because of internalized shame, Celaya's grandmother cannot acknowledge the wrong done to her by her father, her aunt, and her future husband, Narciso. Rather, she suppresses this shame and

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<sup>6</sup> I reluctantly admit to my own desire to assimilate. Where I grew up in south central Pennsylvania, there is a large Mexican and Mexican American population. In school I tried to set myself apart from the other Mexican American students so that the teachers would see me. Though they eventually did, it came at the cost of my own internalized shame. I recall wishing that my father had been white, like my mother, so that I could be white, too. Now, I am ashamed of this, though I try to forgive my younger self, who only wanted belong some place in the world.

assimilates into the mainstream culture. She becomes the wife she is supposed to be and, in doing so, erases her painful past. Because Soledad never grieves her losses, she keeps herself at a distance from those around her. Torres tells us: “If we avoid grieving, which necessarily includes thinking about the trauma, then we never face the injured Self. Failure to do so can result in inappropriate emotional responses to stimuli in our everyday lives” (35). As we then see from Anzaldúa and Torres, acknowledgement of loss and of pain is a key component in understanding one’s journey to Self. Without this, Soledad will never be able to forgive anyone, including herself, simply because she will not acknowledge that there is anything to forgive.

Torres reminds us: “In order for us to be able to help succeeding generations make healthy connections to our spiritual mothers and blended cultural traditions (Indian, Spanish, Mestizo, and the United States), we have to deal with our own wounds” (39-40). Because Soledad will not acknowledge her own wounds, she has no hope of coming to terms with her pain. Rather, just as Torres tells us, she internalizes her anger and expresses it in destructive ways. For example, the previously mentioned trip to Acapulco in which Soledad reveals to Zoila that her husband fathered a child with one of the family’s servants illustrates one destructive way that Soledad’s anger shows itself. The news stuns Zoila, and Soledad tells her this simply so that she can see her daughter-in-law’s reaction. She uses this information to wound Zoila and to remind her that she is not in control and that she has little power in her own life. In the course of the argument that develops between Zoila and Inocencio, a crowd gathers as Soledad asks Inocencio to choose between his wife and his mother. She tells him: “You’re better off without her kind. Wives come and go, but mothers, you have only one!” (Cisneros 85). This

statement causes the members of the crowd to take sides. Some cheer for Soledad, while others side with Zoila. Here, we see how the community splits. The fight inevitably asks the crowd: do you side with mainstream tradition (represented by Soledad) or do you refuse the European hierarchical structures that mainstream culture embraces (represented by Zoila and her refusal to acquiesce to her husband)? The answer to this question speaks loudly to the others in the crowd.

As the spectacle continues, Soledad accuses Zoila of using her son, saying: “You climbed up in life marrying my son, a Reyes, and don’t think I don’t know it. Now you have the nerve to talk to me like that. My son could’ve done a lot better than marrying a woman who can’t even speak proper Spanish. You sound like you escaped from the ranch. And to make matters even more sad, you’re dark as a slave” (Cisneros 85). Here, we see exactly how much Soledad has assimilated. Forgetting her own rural upbringing, dark skin, and “climb up” in status, Soledad models shame for her children—shame of one’s history and of one’s culture. Torres warns readers: “In some cases, shame can take the place of anger in our understanding of what we feel. This is especially true for women, who, are told as children and as adults that we are not really angry, that what we think is anger is really fear, jealousy, or insecurity” (41). Because female anger in particular is belittled, women learn to replace their true emotions with more acceptable emotions. But as we see through Soledad’s example, this anger does not disappear; rather, it takes on another shape.

The question then remains: how does one stop living with internalized hatred and how does one learn to both feel and express true emotion? Torres suggests: “Perhaps the first step is to realize that this anger is justified” (40). She goes on to legitimize feelings

of anger, telling readers: “Irritation is the only sane response to someone who tells us to transcend our pain or forget it...Our fury is justified anytime we are ignored, silenced, negatively stereotyped, incorrectly labeled, or otherwise not respected” (40-1). These empowering words come with a warning, however. Though anger should be felt and should be dealt with, Torres also tells us that we must “respond in healthy ways” (41). Though Soledad does feel anger and does respond to her anger, her response is destructive. Because she is not allowed to feel anger, she does not recognize *what* she has to be angry about and therefore directs it towards a specific *who*. This response comes easily for Soledad precisely because she does not need to be aware of herself to feel angry with Zoila. She remains static in her identity, and as Anzaldúa tells us, it is precisely this refusal to move or reconstruct the Self that keeps one trapped: “But if I escape conscious awareness, escape ‘knowing,’ I won’t be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious” (70). Without knowledge, Soledad does not have to be aware or conscious. From Anzaldúa and Torres, we learn that awareness, while rewarding, does not come without pain. Because Soledad chooses not to see the trauma of her past, she can live pretending that it does not exist. If she were to acknowledge it, however, her understanding of the world would shatter. Thus, ignoring pain acts as another defense mechanism, one that she learns early in life.

When we learn about Soledad’s past, we find out that her father, Ambrosio Reyes, loved her dearly but that he began ignoring her in response to the pain he felt after her mother’s death: “If only he had chosen to think about her more often and dissolve that evil with tears. But Ambrosio Reyes behaved as most people do when it comes to painful thoughts. He chose not to think. And by not thinking, he allowed the memory to grow

infected and more tender” (Cisneros 95). Like her own father, Soledad chooses not to think for most of her life. Celaya comes to understand that her grandmother’s refusal to think stems from a history of oppression and of being ignored. Moreover, it evolves from social conditioning that encourages the oppressed to ignore parts of the self.

“If we want to visualize how the Self is affected by trauma,” says Torres, “we can imagine the four primary aspects of a person, which surround the vulnerable, as well as the secure, ego: the mental, the spiritual, the emotional, and the physical.” She goes on to explain that these four components “compose the façade or face with which we operate in the world” (18). Any attack on one of these parts causes the Self to become unbalanced. Soledad, like so many of the characters in *Caramelo*, is unbalanced. As Torres points out, she becomes disconnected with her emotions because social constructs force her to redirect feelings of anger. These misunderstood and misdirected emotions are only *part* of her unbalanced life, however. Throughout the novel, the narrator constantly reminds the readers of our *physical* presence in the world. Soledad must ignore her emotions in order to assimilate, and this also comes at the price of ignoring the body.

*Caramelo* asks readers to pay particular attention to the body. The title itself references both the color of bodies (Candelaria’s skin is described as the color of a *caramelo*) as well as the color of the *rebozo* that follows readers throughout the novel. The silk *rebozo* that Soledad inherits from her own mother and that Celaya indirectly inherits from her grandmother adorns the body and becomes an outward indicator of class. In fact, the body’s knowledge is privileged early in the first section when Celaya tells us: “Every year I cross the border, it’s the same—my mind forgets. But my body always remembers” (Cisneros 18). This idea of the body knowing more than the mind



becomes a refrain repeated throughout the novel by both male and female characters. The body has knowledge that the mind does not. Though the characters understand this, they still accept mainstream culture's willingness to privilege the mind over the body. Because this refrain repeats so often and because Soledad seems detached from her own physical existence, we recognize that the first step in Celaya's forgiveness is that she must become whole. The mental, the spiritual, the emotional, and the physical have to balance.

To consider where this imbalance begins, I return to the following passage from *Chicana Without Apology*:

When we do not mourn what we have lost, or deal with the shame, when we deny our emotions, avoid any thought of the events in our lives or memories of our past that cause us pain, we only increase or prolong the symptoms of PTSD. If we avoid grieving, which necessarily includes thinking about the trauma, then we never face the injured Self. Failure to do so can result in inappropriate emotional responses to stimuli in our everyday lives. (Torres 35)

I see all of the central female characters reflected in this statement. Soledad, Zoila, Aunty Light-Skin, and Celaya all avoid painful parts of their past. Celaya, however, is the only one who makes the move to start paying attention. By allowing herself to feel pain, she takes the first step towards forgiveness. Forgiveness, by Torres's definition, is not an act of selflessness motivated by morality or guilt, but rather a form of protection. She states: "We do not necessarily have to let them continue to bruise us, but it is in our best interest to forgive and feel compassion for them as human beings" (45). Celaya's

motivation for forgiveness, then, stems from a genuine desire to love her family, her culture, and herself as completely as possible.

Again, I must return to Sandoval to remind us of how we are defining love in this situation: “This form of love is not the narrative of love as encoded by the West: it is another kind of love, a synchronic process that punctures through traditional, older narratives of love, that ruptures everyday being” (142). This kind of love is not a utopian vision; it encompasses all of the pain visited upon us throughout life and transforms it into compassion that allows us to “puncture through.” Only with this movement can one find Anzaldúa’s *Coatlicue* state, Pérez’s interstitial space, or Sandoval’s differential consciousness.

In *Caramelo*, we can see the exact moment when Celaya comes to this realization. At her parent’s anniversary party, it hits her:

And I see inside her heart, the Grandmother, who has been betrayed so many times she only loves her son. He loves her. And I love him. I have to find room inside my heart for her as well, because she holds him inside her heart like when she held him inside her womb, the clapper inside a bell. One can’t be reached without touching the other. (Cisneros 424-5)

In this moment, Celaya understands that in order to love her father completely, she has to love *all* of him, even the part that is the Awful Grandmother. She also has to acknowledge the part of *her* that is her grandmother. In doing this, Celaya can forgive her grandmother, though she does not excuse her.

We see in Celaya’s act Torres’s vision of forgiveness, as well as Cisneros own vision. In an interview conducted by Dorothy Allison, Cisneros said that one must get

past anger in order to see the truth. She also says that one must make peace with the past in order to be more generous to those around us. We can see in Celaya's actions at the end of the novel that she has made this move. Though her father refuses to admit to his own errors, and though his silence hurts Celaya, she also recognizes that she cannot expect this man to be what she wants him to be. Rather, she must love him all the same—not in spite of nor because of his flaws, but rather *with* them. They are part of him, just as she is part of him.

Accepting these parts of her father also means that Celaya must *acknowledge* them. That is, she must tell the story, record the history, and be perpetually aware of this piece of her history. Torres tells readers that: “When we learn and share our documented and oral history, we can release our anger and tears with confidence—with the support of our ancestors, with the knowledge that we are neither crazy nor alone, not stupid or out of control” (44). Storytelling becomes an important element in the journey to healing because it creates community and relieves us of our loneliness and solitude. Through Celaya's story, we see how knowledge of the past frees her and allows her to live in peace with her ancestors.

The intertwining histories revealed throughout *Caramelo* are reflected in the use of the unfinished *caramelo rebozo* as well as footnotes within the text. Celaya's family history, like all family histories, exists only partially complete, dependent upon future generation to undo the knots left by the previous. Like the footnotes that weave their way throughout the novel, her history exists in relation to many other histories, some local and some national, and just like photograph, it changes depending on who is looking.

## Epilogue

My full name: Guadalupe Virginia Linares. I am named after both of my grandmothers. As a child, driving to Georgia, I hated the sound of Virginia—the longest state, nearly five hours from top to bottom by car. It seemed fitting that my grandmother would be named after a place that sounded, to me, like torture. When I was a child, it never crossed my mind that her name, just like mine, came with a history all its own—a history outside of my knowing.

Now, my middle name is the only thing I carry with me that reminds me of where my mother comes from. If I have to say it out loud, I say it reluctantly. Though I love my mother, I know that part of me has not forgiven her for being from Georgia or for giving me a name that that won't let me forget it.

Growing up in south central Pennsylvania, I intuitively learned to be ashamed of my father's heritage. This place taught me its own version of the language of supremacy, and in that version, my father and my uncles were at the bottom of the feudal pyramid. In order to move forward there, I thought that I had to give up the only part of me that was physically recognizable. Not until I moved to Vermont to attend college did I realize what I had done or what I had given up. For the first time in my life, I proudly claimed my father's bloodline and racial history. Doing so helped me understand how to love my father as completely as possible. I recognize now, however, that choosing only one side of my history prevents me from joining Celaya in her journey to the *Coatlicue* state. In order to do that, I must purge myself of the anger and resentment I still hold towards my maternal grandmother, who always said she loved me even though her actions suggested otherwise.

Celaya's journey tells me that I can never forget this part of myself if I have any hope of finding my own interstitial space, my own peace. Her journey tells me what I intuitively know, even if I can't always accept it, which is that I am not merely one strand of my own history. I am, all at once, the little girl on her grandfather's lap in Mexico, the girl in Georgia with legs bumpy from mosquito bites, and the one in Pennsylvania who chooses to deny the other two because it makes it easier to live through each day.

As Dorothy Allison points out when talking to Sandra Cisneros: "Southern Baptists and Mexican Catholics have a lot in common." As the child of both a Southern Baptist and a Mexican Catholic, I can attest to this. Both are plagued by shame and guilt, which leaves me haunted by more of the same. Celaya, in combination with others, teaches me that I must allow myself to feel these emotions in order to grow from them, and moreover, I have to acknowledge that my family feels them too. I have to acknowledge that, though they may choose not to talk about their own painful experiences, they carry them all the same.

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