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***RECORDANDO NUESTRA GENTE:***

***RITUAL MEMORIALIZATION ALONG THE CAMINO REAL DE TIERRA ADENTRO***

By

**Theresa J. Córdova**

B.S., Criminal Justice, New Mexico State University, 1998  
M.A., Southwest Studies, New Mexico Highlands University, 2003

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
American Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May 2012**

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation provides a contemporary study of the memorialization and ritual practices that serve as historical markers of community cultural mapping along the region of the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. The dissertation features two explicit case studies involving separate tragic stories of death of two women prior to consumating their marriage and the memorialization that intersects their cultural identities from distinct communities—one from the state of Chihuahua, México, who died in 1930, and the other from El Rito, New Mexico who died in 1997. By juxtaposing their stories I sought to interconnect the lives and experiences of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o people using the *Camino Real* to situate ritual and traditional practices as evident of an ongoing relationship with a historical connection of the peoples in México and New Mexico.

As a study that advances further exploration into cultural memory production today differing forms of memorialization are included that represent personal self-expression and the use of popularized cultural and artistic images produced by contemporary Chicana/os,

Hispana/os, and Mexicana/os. The survivors embrace memorialization as a cultural survival mechanism in which these narratives and cultural practices are sometimes the only means for culturally identifying peoples who have been separated in modern times by a political border. This is a study intended to open conversation on a broader, more complex analysis that will ultimately offer a critical understanding of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o culture today.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

*“La muerte no duele, es la vida que lastima”*

The collective memory of a community is a living truth, and its vibrancy comes through storytelling narratives that should be interpreted through various lenses of knowledge production that include history, art, science, and cultural studies. For me, these community narratives are transnational in nature, and obvious during a trip to Mexico in which I participated the spring of 2006. I traveled with a group of about ten people, including UNM professors and community members from northern New Mexico. We traveled by car along the legendary *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. The *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* is a commemorated and memorialized space, one that continues to connect the geographic area of México, D.F. with that of Ohkay Owingeh (formerly known as San Juan Pueblo), New Mexico in the United States.

My preliminary interest in this geographic space actually began in 1998, 400 years after the establishment of this historical route. At that time, the U.S. and México began a scholarly exchange about this route via a series of colloquiums on both sides of the border. The first colloquium was hosted by the Oñate Center in Alcalde, New Mexico. The event included conversations about the lived experiences of the residents of communities located along the *Camino Real*. These events commemorated the 400 years of Spanish presence in New Mexico sponsored by the National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the U.S. and the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (INAH) in México. Organizers selected historians and culture bearers to discuss and present at these colloquiums. Sponsors invited my music group,

*Grupo Sangre de Cristo*, to present our repertoire as representatives of the musical and cultural aspects that continue to remain present along the *camino*. As a means of documenting these cultural exchanges, the representatives of both governments created visual documentaries and audio recordings. Participation in these activities provided me the opportunity to travel up and down the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* (on both sides of the U.S.—México border) for many years and enabled me to foster and share in conversations, cultural interactions, and develop friendships in both countries that currently inform my intellectual ideas as to how the U.S.—México border functions as a fluid and interactive space.

The inspiration for my dissertation study occurred during the 2006 field trip to México with community members, professors, and musicians from New Mexico to observe and identify cultural commonalities shared between the Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* through fiesta and ritual practices (particularly in the State of Durango where similar observances in New Mexico occur during the Lenten season). On our way, we stopped in the city of Chihuahua, in the State of Chihuahua, México, a city of 2.8 million people. While there, we visited a wedding-dress shop made famous through a community memory featuring a highly publicized window dressing. According to legend, local residents believe the image in the window of La Popular Dress Shop is the body of a young woman who died prematurely from the bite of a black widow spider on the morning of her wedding day in 1930. This young woman's name was Pascualita Esparza Perales. The legend continues with claims about the mother of the young bride-to-be who could not cope with the tragedy and unexpected death of her daughter. The mother is said to have embalmed her

daughter and displayed Pascualita in her wedding dress in the window display of La Popular Dress Shop, an establishment that also sells wedding dresses. The legend has survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in spite of doubts regarding whether the dress-shop display is really the corpse of the young bride or just a mannequin, the important questions relate to constructions of the story and image, and about the purposes the narrative serves for the community, whether real or imagined.

As we learned more about the Chihauhua dress shop, one of the women on our trip through the region happened to share another story of a young woman from northern New Mexico who had also died prematurely prior to her planned nuptials. In 1997, Michelle Valdez died as a result of a car accident in El Rito, New Mexico, relatively close to Ohkay Owingeh, near the northern end of the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. Possibly in an attempt to cope, Michelle's mother buried her daughter in her wedding dress, much like Pascualita's mother displaying her daughter in state in the window of the shop. In 2007, the state of New Mexico included a photograph of Michelle Valdez on an official state of New Mexico billboard calling attention to drunk driving as an unnecessary tragedy. I am interested in the persistence of community narratives that involve death and memorialization practices for what they may reveal about the historical interconnectedness of the two geographic regions and about the maintenance of cultural practices. For this purpose, I will focus on the untimely deaths of two young brides-to-be, roughly half a century apart, one in México and the other in the U.S.

This study is meant to be culturally motivated, as it is intended to view and contextualize the cultural fluidity that exists and extends across this borderland through ritual and communal practices of death and dying. I engage my analysis with two

preexistent community narratives about young brides' untimely deaths to anchor a larger investigation of public memorialization as an important glue that binds together members of a community and cultural group over time and across vast distances along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. Drawing from culturally specific ritual experiences of marriage, death, and community mythologies that surround narratives involving loss, coping, and the memorializing of women, I propose to examine how physical death does not terminate spiritual and emotional ties between the departed and their loved ones or their community. Instead, survivors find comfort by participating in rituals that assist in the process of transition from physical life to a perceived spiritual afterlife. In fact, I argue that traditional death rituals often provide a transition for the survivors, allowing them to grieve, and to share stories and memories. In effect, the public memorialization of the deceased can bring a community together to recreate ritual practices constructed upon old values. These community practices, in turn, often strengthen the bonds among community members.

Moreover, I hypothesize that these narratives become transnational in nature, reflecting traditions, experiences, and a consciousness that transcend the U.S.—México border. In short, observers reproduce grief, memory, and ritual in similar ways along the approximate 1800—mile route of the *Camino Real*. My study seeks to reflect grief, memory, and ritual from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century in mutually evolving narratives that bind Old and New Mexico, despite the international boundary that separates them. I will also explore how such rituals may differ, both on opposite sides of the border and in specific communities. Finally, public and personal forms of memorialization in art,

music and celebration that honor the deceased in images and songs produced by contemporary Chicanas/os, Hispanas/os and Mexicanas/os<sup>1</sup> will complete my analysis.

### **Key Questions**

**How do contemporary memorials of those who die tragically bring a community together and recreate ritual that Reify older values which share a narrative thread in México and in New Mexico?**

The obvious features of the narratives are that the deceased are females who were to be married, they suffer premature death, and whose life stories are reconstructed as community stories that live on as symbols of loss and are embodied in public memorials. I seek to explore, these issues through community narratives, by asking: **What are contemporary thoughts about marriage within a Chicana/o, Hispana/o, Mexicana/o community experience of death?** The stories of Pascualita and Michelle suggest that physical death does not terminate spiritual and emotional ties between the departed and the community. Instead, public commemoration assists in the transformation of physical life to a constructed community afterlife, that is i.e. the construction of a continued presence that ascribes community value to the *difunto* (departed). I question whether traditional and non-traditional rituals simply provide a transition, allowing for ending bereavement through sharing stories and memories. In effect, a memorialization of the tragically deceased brings a community together to recreate ritual practices constructed by the reclaiming of old values. These community practices, in turn, strengthen the bonds among community members.

In summary, my research becomes an expression of cultural identity that seeks to answer: **What is the lived experience within a community context when death is publicly commemorated?** My study deals with the collective memory of communities

and how residents perpetuate that memory via storytelling narratives at multiple levels of society (individual, family, community, and/or ethnic group). An important premise of my study is that such collective memory—which is the core of the reproduction of culture—is transnational in nature, specifically transcending the political border between the U.S. and México. My study encompasses a series of communities along the legendary *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* which has been linked in recent history more to a space of conflict often referred to as the U.S.—México borderlands. I view the space as interactive in which meaning and culture are created in the context of a long history of interaction and migration back and forth, both north and south.

### **Goal of the Study**

A primary goal of this study is to demonstrate how and why the dissertation is formulated as a new reflection and contribution to a broader borderlands project that is based on a view of borderlands as integrated space in order to highlight the complexities of border subjectivity, ritual practices, and Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o community traditions that contribute to cultural memory and survival. Thus, I will explore how public rituals and memorials of persons who die in tragic circumstances may strengthen cultural traditions and collective consciousness in the vast region along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*, which, although separated by an international border, appears to constitute a historically rooted culture milieu. This research examines ritual practices associated with public memorialization of deceased persons. By definition, then, the study examines community rituals and individuals' reactions and participation in them when they have already chosen to put a public face on their expressions of loss over a loved one's death.

## **Intention**

The significance of this dissertation is to provide a contemporary view of the memorialization and ritual practices that serve as historical markers of community cultural mapping. My use of community cultural mapping, which I develop through ethnographic voices, involves drawing from two explicit case studies involving two separate tragic stories about women from two distinct communities—one from the state of Chihuahua, México, who died in 1930, and the other from El Rito, New Mexico who died in 1997. While preparing for their wedding, each is struck by misfortune, and their lives are cut short by tragedy. The families both chose to symbolize their intended wedding rites within their funerary rites by clothing the bodies in wedding dresses. By juxtaposing these young women's stories, the families of each use the wedding dress symbolism as a rite of passage that continues to define gender-based attitudes about the role of women and marriage and the resulting sadness over their aborted marriages. For Pascualita, her supposed embalming and dress as a corpse-bride placed in her mother's dress shop window creates a nostalgic and iconographic snapshot of the importance of marriage that keeps her memory as forever young and beautiful. The work by historian Ronald Grimes informs this study as it may provide a response to the question why do narratives circulate and remain present. Grimes proposes that "Rites of passage are ways of embodying meaning, and bodies are doggedly local, rooted in the entangled mess of events we like to call history or society" (Grimes, 2000: 9).

This study advances further exploration into cultural memory production today through differing forms of memorialization, including personal self-expression and the use of popularized cultural and artistic images produced by contemporary Chicana/os,



Hispana/os, and Mexicana/os. Memory is also served by producing narratives born out of grief as outlined by cultural feminist scholar Trinh Minh-ha: “The story never really begins nor ends, even though there is a beginning and an end to every story, just as there is a beginning and an end to every teller” (Minh-ha, 1989: 1). Thus, survivors embrace memorialization as a cultural survival mechanism. One main premise of this dissertation focuses on looking at these narratives and cultural practices as a means for culturally mapping the ways in which death is contextualized and managed along the corridor known as the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* in contemporary times. This study intends to open conversation on a broader, more complex analysis that will ultimately offer a critical understanding of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o culture today.

### **Methodology**

My study employs an interdisciplinary methodology including ethnography, primary interviews, participant-observation, historiography and incorporation of previous scholarship specific to my study focus. My fieldwork will provide a 21<sup>st</sup> century description of historically rooted communities and relationships connected through culture. I will seek to compare and understand their similarities, differences, and changes independent of each other along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. I draw my analysis of popular Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o visualization from participating in and observing rituals and events in the communities where memorials and other memorial activities occur both publicly and privately, and from conducted personal interviews. Prior to entering the field, my archival research involved a historiographic methodology, looking for changes over time and space in historical texts that identify community values and ritual connections between Old and New Mexico. In order to highlight my

work involving cultural memory, my interviews occurred with community members along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* in regards to grief, loss, and mourning rituals outside of the Euro-American spectator lens, which allowed me to situate myself in the research as a member of the communities I am studying. The view of Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o culture within the contemporary space of academia highlights a broad community that, in my view, has been documented most typically from cultural outsiders. I approach this study as a cultural insider belonging to a Chicana/o and Hispana/o community who identifies with rituals and forms of memorialization that are both Catholic and organic. Cultural insidership brings people together and means that I am one of them who was raised within the community being studied and understands to the extent of my lived experience the issues of colonization, political identity and fear of cultural loss and oppression. The ethnographic stories are the collective voices of members from six communities along the *Camino Real*.

### **Cultural Stories and Theoretical Perspective**

Among the scholars best known for feminist writing from a Chicana cultural insider perspective is Gloria Anzaldúa. Born into a migrant family, she used her autobiography or personal experience as a migrant child to critique the idea of the México and U.S. border. Anzaldúa's seminal work on borderlands theory posited her views of the U.S.—Mexico border as "*una herida abierta*," framing it as an open border. She describes the blood of these two worlds as merging into a third country, or what she calls "border culture" that I use to interpret as a community consciousness. For my study, the idea of community consciousness involved cultural identity and Catholicism at the core of my two case studies. In her book, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, she said

“Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa 1987: 25). Anzaldúa’s work recognizes the fluidity and interactions of people in spite of boundaries that have been placed along the U.S.—México borderlands. However, my use of border theory differs from Anzaldúa in that it is not autobiographical. My application of ritual practices and traditions are examined from a communal lived experience within the Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples who have become border subjects.

Marita Sturken’s research examines the politics of remembering, specifically cultural memory as something, “Shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet...entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning” (Sturken, 1997:3). She pays special attention to preserving memory through still images, dealing with a moment in time. Sturken equates memory with core identity and promotes the idea of recognizing ‘self ‘in the performance of everyday tasks. Her contention that life’s continuity gives meaning to the present through the past is important to my study in providing a base upon which I seek to determine how historical memory and current rituals are linked and reflect or promote cultural death and ritual practices in contemporary lives. My research follows Sturken’s trajectory of a search for cultural memory in the forms of memorialization and it is the idea that memory is preserved through images shared in stories and in cultural objects such as the *descanso*.

Among Donovan J. Ochs major focus on the Greek funeral orations and Roman consolatory literature posits that the consolation of survivors happens through cultural

ritual practices. He says emotions associated with symbolic rituals help survivors console their grief. He contends that painful grief requires a means of emotional defense that must be dealt with for the sake of the survivor that is often unresolved unless closure is public, communal or openly acknowledged. Ochs' work particularly informs my study in that public mourning or private rituals have been among the primary ways for communities to unite and honor their loved ones while retaining historical and cultural ties to the past that are site specific.

Ronald Grimes studies on rites of passage examines traditional and invented rites that occur within specific cultures and outsider understanding and mis/interpretation of such rites. His views on ritual as a series of before and after, he says organizes the life cycle into various stages. Ritual theory promotes the view there is no universal ritual in existence but Grimes' work allows for conversation and dialogue among people and societies to reflect upon their own unique experiences and practices in regard to rituals. Grimes promotes the idea that people integrate life on a global planet in order to sustain culture. I take the opportunity afforded by Grimes invitation to examine Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o rituals as dynamic yet historically oriented to the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.

Culture is dynamic and unpredictable, but it is organized around space and time and, more significantly, is variable even within similar regions. In addition, the range of themes. Rituals produce both cooperation and conflict. As such, my cultural analysis will point to indicators of culture that include seeing death, funeral arrangements, burial practices and pictorial and photographic images that match the stories I collected.

As I began developing my research, I learned about the work of Jim Enote who inspired an innovative way of articulating cultural studies. Enote is a Zuni tribal member, a farmer, artist, and practitioner of a culture of land use. Mr. Enote has over twenty years experience in cultural conservation and development in indigenous communities worldwide and is currently the Associate Director for the Indigenous Communities Mapping Initiative and Senior Advisor for Mountain Cultures at the Mountain Institute. He notes that indigenous people have always had maps: songs, chants, prayers, migration stories, shell arrangements, drawings on hides, and drawing on wood and stone. Enote states outright: “These maps aid our memories; they give reference to our places of origin, places we have visited, and places we hope to go. They also provide us with a reference of where we are within the universe and help to define our relationship to natural processes surrounding us-and because they are ours they function in our own languages and use scales we can relate to” (Scott, *et. al*, 2005: 12). I want to discuss my dissertation study as a ‘cultural map’ of ethnographic voices as it relates to grief, memory, and ritual within the time, place, and the ethnic group of *Hispana/os*. Each chapter of my dissertation will serve as the markers of such a map and unfold and mark the story in a progressive format.

Memory, included in the sense of place and culture, includes everyday life as well as death ritual. Marita Sturken states that, “Memory forms the fabric of human life, affecting everything from the ability to perform simple, everyday tasks to the recognition of the self” (Sturken, 1997: 1). Thus, ritual memorialization has embedded within these stories the answers of how grief and consolation are performed in some Chicana/o and Mexicana/o communities.

Traditions and rites of passage provide the more formal and defined spaces while dealing with grief. Ronald Grimes argues that rites, both traditional and invented, are utilized, “To facilitate or obstruct difficult passages in the course of a human life. Not every passage is a rite of passage. We *undergo* passages, but we *enact* rites” (Grimes, 2000: 5). By claiming this, Grimes recognizes the importance of ritual. In addition, Donovan Ochs offers: “A culture’s single most potent ‘containment practice’ is the funeral ritual with its symbolic behaviors, its rhetoric of consolation.” (Ochs, 1993: 25). His claim takes us to a more constructed place in which grief is enacted.

Among Hispana/o authors, Aurora Lucero-White, in Los Hispanos (1947), discusses the *velorio* and how it’s performed in Hispano culture. She defines it as a place where community is very unified and comes together in order to respect and value the community traditions and practices through *velorio*. Cleofas Jaramillo wrote two books. Her first book discusses the importance of culture, and the other is her autobiography. Both titles present her memories about death and grief from a personal and cultural perspective. Sombras del pasado (1972) deals with the performance of cultural practices and the importance of writing about these cultural practices before they are lost. Romance of a Little Village Girl (1955) details Jaramillo’s life, and several chapters expand on the tragic death of her daughter Angelina who was murdered. This autobiography also pays homage to her daughter and describes her grief. Tey Diana Rebolledo and Erlinda Gonzales Berry co-edited two works, Nuestras Mujeres (1988) and Las Mujeres Hablan (1992). In both texts, memorialization practices conducted by Nuevo Mexicana women are shown to have been often and widely culturally present within the autobiographical forms of writing in New Mexico. Martina Will de Chaparro

wrote, Death and Dying in New Mexico (2007), a text that examines ritual customs in the Hispanic culture of New Mexico. These prior and important studies inform my study as a integral whole not as individually centered pieces.

### **Limitations**

My study is limited to the geographic area of *The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* that serves as a borderland space of the U.S. and México. It also limits itself to Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o culture. My study seeks to contribute to a new dialogue about the significance of memory and ritual within a defined space that has been separated by the imposed border between Old and New Mexico. I am removing the psychologically imposed border and opening an expanded conversation with regards to cultural fluidity across Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o cultures that define a current and contemporary experience.

### **Roots of Death and Dying Practices**

This study focuses on a different aspect of death and dying rituals along *The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. Death and dying ritual practices will be examined within the context of formal Catholic practices, whereas communal and public memorialization of similar rituals such as rites of passage are examined as secular practices within communities along the historical corridor of the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. I argue that cultural identity transcends national identity within the scope of this study.

I provide insider stories along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* from northern Mexico and New Mexico drawn from specific periods of two particular case studies that are the foci of my analysis featuring the 1930s, 1990s, and present day. I acknowledge

an ongoing historical relationship between northern Mexico and New Mexico, building upon their culturally shared experiences and ritual practices across multiple generations. I have chosen to speak of this shared history of relationships by identifying the people within three different markers of identities: Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o along the U.S.—México borderlands.

The two specific case studies of this dissertation feature Pascualita Esparza Perales, her story from México in the 1930s, and Michelle Valdez from northern New Mexico. Each was selected specifically because they represent unique rituals associated with both formal Catholic practices and secular or informal community memorialization. Between February and September of 2010, I traveled to northern México and New Mexico and collected forty-one ethnographic interviews from communities in Chihuahua City, Parral, and Valle de Allende, in Chihuahua, México, and in El Rito, Española, and Las Cruces, New Mexico in the U.S.A. that establish the basis of my dissertation findings.

For purposes of this study of ritual practices within México and the U.S. in this particular corridor of the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*, I refer to the formal sacramental rites associated with death and burial as required by the Catholic Church in New Mexico and Chihuahua. The Catholic Church has had to accommodate its rituals of this particular corridor by acknowledging the *mestizaje*<sup>2</sup> among Spanish and indigenous identities who have their own ways of coping and empowerment regarding rituals for birth, death, and feast days specific to their communities.

Scholars, including Ronald Grimes, who have studied ritual practice state that they become ritualized dependent upon repetition by communities throughout the world.<sup>3</sup>



The position of community memorialization then becomes significantly prominent as practiced by indigenous and Chicana/o, Mexicana/o, and Hispana/o communities. This postulates yet another opportunity to view the relationships between the indigenous peoples and Chicana/o, Mexicana/o, and Hispana/o communities as sharing a long interactive history.

The role of community memorialization serves to advance formal death and funeral ritual space. For example, the *velorio* or rosary (wake), a secular practice that is recited by the community on behalf of the deceased, does not require the presence of a priest and features community members to lead the prayers. The validity of the *velorio* in these communities becomes a requirement to carry it out based on a belief that the afterlife of the deceased is jeopardized if it is not recited. *Velorio* and other examples of secular community practices are substantiated in the ethnographic interviews.

### **Systems of Integration and Interaction**

Three subsets of community philosophy, practice, and experience emerge as a means to weave theory, ideology, and belief systems that highlight a collective community voice along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The first is a collective cultural consciousness; the second encompasses ritual traditions, rites of passage, community mores and values; and the third arises as forms of public memorialization that extend the memory of the deceased.

Oppositional concepts regarding a broad unified borderlands theory that are posited by artists, activists, and intellectuals from Mexico and the U.S. contest mainstream discourses of nationality and citizenship that resist a view the border between México and the U.S. as a fixed or static locus rather than a conceptual site of cross-

cultural exchange (Gaspar de Alba, 1998: 218). Privileging community voices across this borderlands region opens a space for conversation about cultural border fluidity among people who are separated by a national boundary.

American Studies scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba speaks directly to the complexity of geography, culture, and identity in her study of Chicano Art: Inside Outside The Master's House, referring to an “alter-Native culture-an Other culture native to this specific geography, once called an outpost of New Spain, then the Mexican North, then the American Southwest, and most contemporarily the Chicano/a homeland of Aztlán.” (Gaspar de Alba, 1998: 17).

Luis D. León, in his work about religion, life and death in the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, describes the borderland as a “Distinct grand pattern of eternal return: a place constituted by multiple crossings and mixings. Hence, its religious expressions reflect the tensions and ambiguities of a place in constant (r)evolution” (León, 2004: vii). Again, León’s perspective is distinct from my examination of the borderlands as an area of constant tension between U.S. and Mexican (to use León’s term) relationships. In addition, his use of ‘Mexican’ no longer refers only to the place of borderlands, but is identified as a people in conflict. The greater portion of borderlands theory focuses on structural inequality, cultural hybridity, social hierarchies and the legacy of colonialism that do not go beyond border-object subjectivity. The ritual practices and community memorialization reflects an interconnectedness that departs from discursive or separate cultural identities that force the choice of a national identity, in the U.S. or México.

Ritual traditions, rites of passage, community mores and values withstand the omnipresent role of national government policy and negotiation because of their organic

nature and innate survival held in trust by communities. I argue for community narratives along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* as proof that a collective cultural consciousness exists. However, according to Gloria Anzaldúa, theory becomes a problem in its formulation of apparent relationship or underlying principles of certain observed phenomena that has to be verified to some degree (Anzaldúa, 1990: xxv). The essence of the verification implied by theory is often absent in qualifying that community rituals associated with death and funerary practices, rites of passage and mores do in fact, transcend theorizing space because they are not formalized in scholarship or empirical and quantifiable research.

Donovan J. Ochs, through his studies of grief and consolatory rhetoric, defines grief experiences as associated with symbolic rituals that help societies console grief. He contends that survivors must publicly or communally acknowledge their grief. The idea of grief and funerary practices become interrelated and therefore, "Regardless of the culture in question, however, consolatory ceremonies must contain symbolic, persuasive behaviors addressed to those living in various states of grief and its attendant manifestations" (Ochs, 1993: 26). His study validates the importance of addressing public mourning and private rituals in Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o communities as a primary way to theorize how they come together to honor loved ones through site-specific grief rituals. Ochs' references to publicly shared grief is applicable across cultures yet Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, in writing about Mexico's intimacy with death, states: "The peculiarity of Mexico's death cult becomes apparent as we realize that what is at stake is not the sublimation of a stoic death (though this, too, exists in Mexico) but the nationalization of a playful familiarity with and proximity to Death itself"

(Lomnitz-Adler, 2005: 35-36). Both Ochs and Lomnitz-Adler suggest that public demonstration of grief becomes a treatment for acceptance of death.

Ronald Grimes, in his examination of rituals including weddings, coming of age rites, and funerals, uses a Ritual Studies Laboratory model in Canada to decipher Ritual Theory and claims there are no universal rituals in existence. Therefore, every time a ritual is performed although it is trying to recreate itself, each ritual performance is unique and not replicable but what makes it a ritual is the sheer belief in performing the re-creation of such rituals. He also identifies conversation and dialogue in which people and societies reflect their own unique experiences and practices as a means to integrate life and sustain cultures. Because rituals remain one of the oldest known forms of human activity according to Grimes, they also remain dynamic and are most significant to local communities.

Employing his thesis bridges my study as a dynamic project significant to regional practices. Recent efforts by México's Federal Government to nationalize the practice of particular traditions, such as the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead)<sup>4</sup>, reflects the state's concern regarding the erosion of cultural practice and national identity among the northern border populations. This perception is prompting people in northern México to create cultural meaning from rituals and practices originating in southern México.

In one of my ethnographic interviews from Chihuahua City, Javier Refugio Villanueva,<sup>5</sup> a community activist and artist explained that because of the influx and influence of the expansion of U.S. companies along the border area, i.e. *maquiladoras*,<sup>6</sup>

Chihuahua City has begun to include traditions from indigenous communities from as far away as Oaxaca.

In Death and Dying in New Mexico by Martina Will de Chaparro, she discusses formal and informal ritual practices in 18th and 19th century New Mexico, referring to these practices as innovations that prepare communities for the afterlife. Her collection of last wills and testaments provide the reader a view of in/formally established community mores and values that attached themselves to death and dying in New Mexico, outlining the beliefs and ideologies previously established during the colonial period by the Catholic Church.

Her work supplements my focus on women along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* in which last wills and testaments of women she identifies in New Mexico refer to completing rituals they believe directly affect the spiritual afterlife of the deceased. Themes concerned with mortality and the belief in the afterlife and the kingdom of heaven are changed after colonization took root and the courts became concerned with the former disposition of physical remains of the dead and considered these practices a health and safety hazard to the communities.

Interestingly, in my research, a community historian in México, Rita Soto-Torres spoke about *La Reforma* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that altered handling of human remains where bodies were no longer allowed burial in the Catholic Church under the altar or in private land. Everyone was required to utilize public cemeteries. This led to the establishment of funeral homes and directors who legally preserved and buried the dead, taking away the practice from the community's role in preparing the remains in México. This particular example demonstrates how the community's response was to effect the

construction of new forms of memorialization symbols such as the use of *descansos*<sup>7</sup> along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. No longer able to be near their deceased loved ones, i.e. through backyard family burials, they create new ways to honor and communicate with their deceased.

*Descansos* are the most explicit symbol of public memorialization within Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o communities. They symbolize and reinforce cultural continuity but are also located in other sites of ancestral connections like that of communally shared proverbs that I use to authenticate my study: “Death occurs three times. The first is when we breathe our last, the second is when we are buried, and the third and most tragic is when we are forgotten.”<sup>8</sup> Memory includes a sense of place and cultural concern in everyday life as well as in death. Marita Sturken, whose work deals with the politics of remembering, specifically cultural memory, states that “Memory establishes life's continuity; it gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past. As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity” (Sturken, 1997: 1).

During my fieldwork in Chihuahua City, I traveled on a rural isolated, curvy, two-way highway on the outskirts of the urban area. I was impressed by a major public memorial to children killed in a school bus accident that was located at the site of the accident consisting of a whitewashed wall featuring the actual faces of the children made from plaster casts. This particular public memorialization in Mexico has embedded within it a response to the community’s grief as an act of consolation and memory of the children lost as a result of the tragic event.

Cedric Mims, in his study When we Die: the Science, Culture, and Rituals of Death, explains that: "It is the fear of being forgotten that makes people want gravestones, monuments, and other memorials. These act as reminders, and can also be thought of as attempts to maintain the shape of a former life. Behind these impulses lies the alarming thought that one-day one's body, albeit lifeless, is going to decompose, disappear, and be physically destroyed" (Mims, 1999: 190). His thesis calls attention to the significance of validating community forms of memorialization that include proverbs, songs, and actual displays and exhibits honoring the life of community at-large.

Sturken's analysis also deals with the politics of remembering, specifically cultural memory, which is "shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning" (Sturken, 1997: 3). To this end, the public memorial of the school bus children killed in Chihuahua pays respect to preserving their memory through plaster casts of their faces or images at the time of death, suspending their memory. Sturken equates memory with a core identity and promotes the idea of recognizing 'self' in the performance of everyday tasks or in this illustration, children riding the bus to school. Her contention is that life's continuity gives meaning to the present through the past. The assertion is important for my study in providing a basis to determine how historical memory and current rituals interconnect death ritual practices in contemporary Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o lives.

Another example of public memorialization was noted in Parral, Chihuahua, México at the Pancho Villa Museum that I visited in April 2010. The historical significance of Pancho Villa's murder in Parral features a museum exhibition recreating the subject with a bronzed cast of his actual face attached to his body lying on a bed.

This public display demonstrates the consistent theme among Mexicana/o peoples honoring Pancho Villa's legacy that is not viewed as morbid or bizarre by the community. The exhibit, a bronze cast of Pancho Villa's face, I determine gives power to his symbolic importance in the peoples' struggle in their revolt against oppression during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Examples of contemporary memorialization of those who die tragically is led by communities who come together and recreate rituals that reify older values and history of shared narrative threads in México and New Mexico communities.

### **Amplified Conversations**

When Anzaldúa spoke of occupying 'theorizing spaces' in academia, she sought to encourage new scholarship by women of color particularly to formulate theory that is owned by communities of color who transform the space; so that when I refer to 'death as a rite of passage,' it is signifying memory that feeds the Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o cultural connection. As earlier mentioned, death as a rite of passage later in my study becomes embedded in the rituals and symbols created by the narratives born out of grief as outlined by cultural feminist scholar Trinh Minh-ha who acknowledges the story of community as forms of agency, remembering, and truth (Minh-ha, 1989). Survivors hence embrace memorialization as a life affirming practice that becomes a means for culturally mapping the ways in which death is contextualized and managed within the Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o worldview in contemporary times.

In order to broaden my conversation, a complex analysis that offers a critical understanding of Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o culture today must accept and be served by the narratives born out of these specific communities. Trinh Minh-ha's



analysis is a starting point for my thesis when she speaks of "Rites of Passage" for women of color who must endure baptism into the written word. Using a postcolonial framework, she promotes the "insider" within respective communities who is judged simultaneously by Western culture and by one's home community as an attempt to negotiate and deconstruct the idea of how the community has been judged in the past and rejudged (Minh-ha, 1989: 8).

I have chosen to take the methodology of 'conversation' as referred to by Minh-ha as a privilege to sit at the table with "us" for "us" to attempt a clear and autonomous writing that moves beyond a Western paradigm that in the past was a misdirection to speak of "us" as colonial provincial subjects. I am referring here to a lack of consciousness that leads to more complex readings of community in process and delves into living practices that are layered with symbol and meaning and not taken simply at face value, my point being that the collection of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o voices, stories, songs, testimonials, oral histories, and popular forms of expression, and their documentation is important. However, sometimes the mere collection of these narratives becomes the scholarship that forfeits critical analysis of the material collected by never taking these archival materials in an entirely new direction in the study of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples and communities.<sup>9</sup> My dissertation desires to move in this new direction as part of my responsibility to the integrity of both scholarship and the community.

A breakthrough in indigenous research led by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori scholar from New Zealand, brings fresh opportunity to Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o studies in need of being decolonized by utilizing its own language, ideology,

and beliefs. The decolonizing methodologies outlined by Tuhiwai Smith expands my research as a cultural insider who, like Smith, “grew up within the communities where stories about research and particularly about researchers (the human carriers of research) were intertwined with other stories about all other forms of colonization and injustice” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 6). Smith moves beyond deconstructing Western scholarship and privileges the retelling, or sharing of stories that reveal underlying texts, and give voice to intuitive knowing validated by members of the community (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 3).

The case studies I examine for the purposes of this dissertation give voice to *Hispana* women, one from Chihuahua, México and the other from El Rito, New Mexico who each represent a continuum of voices from the past, as well as address issues in this contemporary moment. Tuhiwai Smith’s methodology implies that colonization continues. Therefore, people of color must take the responsibility to question and activate scholarship that holds weight and depth within the community and academia itself.

My dissertation is a response to the decolonization of my own methodology using a critical remapping of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o cultural memory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of ritual practices along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. Indigenous research methodology opens new possibilities for the *Camino Real* by formulating a unique and significant borderlands project that does not separate Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o communities from scholarship, but reclaims the space. Past lessons and teachings about morality and the strength of community was a precept of the *Antepasados* through which we regain our communal strength. Scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith become, for me, a shared network of re-inscribing communities that have so often been silenced and judged as isolated “folk.”

Each subsequent chapter of my dissertation uses narratives to demonstrate a connection and relationship of Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o communities who share cultural rituals, stories, mores and values along the corridor of the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.

Chapter two establishes the themes of death and memorialization of my study beginning with the story of Pascualita Esparza Pérez in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, México in 1930 who died as a bride-to-be and was said to have been embalmed and placed in a dress shop window by her grieving mother. This narrative will explore how tragic and unexpected death is treated along with the idea of legend as a means to discuss cultural attributes within the communities along *The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. The other story of Michelle Valdez from El Rito, New Mexico who was killed by a drunk driver in Tierra Azul, New Mexico in 1997 and buried in her wedding dress emphasizes the wedding that never occurred as a tragic yet collective experience of grief shared by the community.

Chapter three focuses on an ethnography of voices along *The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. In-depth interviews reflect and situate death and burial rituals and traditions of the community, from the past into the present.

Chapter four addresses the purpose of *descanso* and other forms of memorialization for the deceased. The sites of Chihuahua, México and El Rito, New Mexico inform my analysis of public memorialization in creative expressions of art, community celebration to remember the dead, and music that memorializes the deceased. The significance of these community remembrances highlights interactive and ongoing relationships with the afterlife that are found in formal and informal ritual practices.

Chapter five presents my conclusion confirming an ongoing cultural and historical relationship of people, history, and culture along *The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.

## Chapter Two

### Bereavement in Chihuahua City, México and at El Rito, New Mexico, U.S.

Two stories of bereavement are my entry to explore Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o rituals involving death and the idea of immortality after death and what I refer to as public memorialization. The chapter is divided into three areas of discussion beginning first with the story of Pascualita Esparza Perales from Chihuahua City, México who died in 1930 followed by the story of Michelle Valdez from El Rito, New Mexico in the U.S. who died in 1997. Their individual stories, despite having occurred sixty-seven years apart, are connected to their shared destiny of dying as brides-to-be. One particular feature in both their stories involves their wedding dress or gown as an object of curiosity, or in my view, mourning. Studies have identified that there is a greater intensity of grieving among Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o families who experience a sudden unexpected death (Grabowsky & Frantz, 1992). The third area of discussion seeks to re-establish the historical and cultural connections that are being erased along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* as a result of the focus on separate border identities.

I argue that the stories of Pascualita and Michelle further exemplify Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o respect for rituals associated with death, and to a greater extent, involve public memorialization, that unify cultural identity in Mexico and the U.S. I have traveled to Mexico throughout my life as a young woman, first with my family and then as a musical performer where I lived with Yolanda Varela and her daughter who were from Casas Grandes, Chihuahua but relocated to San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato. I lived with them for several months in 1999. Most recently, I returned to

complete my dissertation field research between March and April 2010. I drove to El Paso, Texas where, I had made arrangements upon arriving to be picked by a friend and colleague Araceli Arceo, a history professor at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ). We agreed that, for safety reasons, she would be my host and travel companion to enter Mexico by car. I stayed in Ciudad Juárez for two nights with Professor Arceo and her family and purchased a bus ticket to Chihuahua City, a four-hour bus ride south. I was met at the Chihuahua City bus station by Jaime Morales Gutiérrez and his son and drove to his home where I stayed with his family for the duration of my fieldwork with several trips to other communities, including Valle de Allende and Parral, over a six-week period. Jaime Morales Gutiérrez is a curator and educator for the *Museos Comunitarios* in Chihuahua City.

My research schedule involved identifying and locating individuals with Señor Morales' assistance. I was seeking people to interview who could recount the story of Pascualita Esparza Perales. I was also to gather information about traditional weddings, funerals and funerary practices within the Catholic church and the community. My goal was to find people who could speak from direct experience about community practices, working from their retelling of Pascualita's story to sharing how rituals take place, the philosophies held by the community regarding these practices and their role as coping mechanisms in the spaces of death and dying.

After returning from Mexico, I began transcribing the twenty interviews I conducted in Mexico. By May 2010, I directed my research attention to New Mexico and began scheduling interviews from June through September, traveling to El Rito, Española, and Las Cruces, New Mexico. The interview questions regarding wedding and

funerary practices remained the same but with particular concern as to whether or not my research findings would reveal difference or similarity of cultural community practices along the *Camino Real*. The opportunity to conduct research in New Mexico allowed me to study my own community and decipher rituals in which I participated during my life. The interview process allowed me to listen in a different way as a researcher. My identity as a cultural insider born and raised in El Prado, New Mexico seeks to validate their voices and holds me responsible to tell their stories with depth, meaning, and accuracy.

Seeking to establish a flow of community voices throughout the dissertation, my findings reveal a necessity for Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o communities to carry out funerary rites in order for the souls of the dead to live on, thereby, creating a ritual space. In this area, the community shares not only its grief but the entirety of the person's life, memorializing what that person believed, what they stood for and how they interacted with everyone in the community. In this context, it is the public acknowledgement of life after death that establishes the existence of community. The juxtaposition of Pascualita and Michelle in the context of community reveals the interconnectedness, and relationship of shared history, culture and language across space and time.

### **Pascualita Esparza Perales**

The story of Pascualita Esparza Perales is located at La Popular Dress Shop in Chihuahua City, Mexico. The dress shop is located in Chihuahua City's center with heavy foot and vehicle traffic at the corner of Victoria and Ocampo Streets behind the city's Cathedral. I made my first dissertation field research visit to La Popular Dress

Shop on a weekday afternoon on March 24, 2010. My attention was immediately directed to a sign that read *¿Leyenda o Realidad?* (Legend or Reality) placed beside the mannequin wearing a wedding gown. This text was written by Luis Carlos Chávez-Arriola in 1998 and it replaced the former window dressing that I had previously witnessed. The dressing contained a period-like installation of the 1930s<sup>10</sup> as a memorial to “*La Casa De Pascualita.*” The features in the window included a mannequin known to the community as “Pascualita” or “Chonita” who represented the daughter of the former owner of the dress shop. Among the objects in the window were a sewing machine, clothing iron, and photos of Chihuahua City featuring brides of that period. La Popular Dress Shop today features none of the past accoutrements. Only the mannequin in a wedding gown and the signage next to it appear in the window. Prior to this, one could purchase a pamphlet in the dress shop that recounted the story of Pascualita in the dress shop window. The current store owners have placed the written story next to the mannequin and removed the previous installation.

According to *¿Leyenda o Realidad?* written in 1998 by Jorge Luis González-Piñón, on March 25, 1930, *Día de la Encarnación* (The Feast of the Incarnation) a human-like image appeared that bore a resemblance to the daughter of Pascuala Esparza Perales de Perez, the owner of a wedding dress shop named La Popular Dress Shop in Chihuahua City. *Día de la Encarnación* was also an ominous feast day as members of the community began referring to the image or figure dressed in a wedding gown in the dress shop window as “Chonita,” a nickname for *Encarnación*. Community members began to speculate about the image in the window, believing it was the embalmed body of the owner’s daughter who had died just prior to her wedding ceremony. Her death was



said to be the result of a venomous spider bite. González-Piñón speculates in *¿Leyenda o Realidad?* that the figure could have been a wax mannequin with real human hair, not uncommon in those days. However, such an image required special care instructions similar to caring for a human body, hence using shampoo to wash the mannequin's hair.

The police initiated an investigation to determine if the figure was human, as claimed by the community. The dress shop owner asked the police to return later because she was washing the mannequin in the bath. She insisted it was a wax figure in the window, but the community continued to challenge her with dramatic attempts to touch and dig their nails into the figure to determine if she was human.

*¿Leyenda o Realidad?* as written by Jorge Luis González-Piñón is the documented history of La Popular Dress Shop. It is also the only written story about Pascualita. An analysis of the text reveals that he has taken control of the interpretation of events as a performance of exaggerated behaviors (Lomitz-Adler, 2005). González-Piñón implies that he is a spokesman for the family of Pascualita and concludes his narrative with the following quote: "*Es una leyenda bonita, que tiene poco de base en la realidad.*" (It is a beautiful legend but has little truth in reality.) This kind of story is produced when conventional documentary evidence is not available (Rebolledo and Gonzales-Berry, 1992). According to Verónica Vázquez, other forms of documentation take their place, including legend and myth that traverses community experience and becomes an extension of popular myth making, according to Verónica Vázquez. The community identifies with these stories and legends as an avenue to express or reveal subaltern social sectors that are often contested spaces (Vázquez, 2002).

An interview with Dr. Rubén Beltrán Acosta, city historian of Chihuahua and also known as ‘*La Cronista*,’ began with his observation of my travel to Chihuahua to make historical connections between northern Mexico and northern New Mexico because of our common history. He indicated that when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) was signed, it ended the war, but we are still the same people.<sup>11</sup> Regarding his views about the story of Pascualita, he said in Spanish: “*La Historia de Pascualita es pura leyenda, pura mentira.*”<sup>12</sup> (The history of Pascualita is pure legend, pure lies). He discounted her relevance as a part of the official history of Chihuahua and referred to his own involvement in writing legends for high school students that were popular stories circulating about Chihuahua. If Pascualita’s story is pure legend, as Dr. Rubén Beltrán Acosta states, then the peoples’ use of vernacular storytelling and/or legend serves to uphold their own beliefs. The community’s retelling of Pascualita’s story works as oral history, but from the perspective of Dr. Beltrán Acosta it is not legitimate history. He implied that my interest in Pascualita was not worthy of academic investigation.

Veronica Vázquez provides additional explanation as to why legend and myth are created in the community: “... *mitos, cuentos y leyendas expresan (bajo formas simbólicas) los contenidos inconscientes de los valores sociales; asimismo, desempeñan un papel importante en el funcionamiento de las relaciones sociales entre los sexos.*” (“...myths, stories, and legends express (through symbolic forms) the unconscious contents of social values, and in that manner create an important function in social relations between the sexes”). (Vázquez, 2002: 239).

There are several variations in the stories about Pascualita, including the cause of her death. A contemporary song written about her titled “*La Hija de Pascualita*”

suggests she died in an accident, but the most commonly repeated story about the cause of her death involves a venomous spider in her veil that bit her. The timing of Pascualita's death is said to be on the day of her wedding. Other stories focus on her as a spirit where people claim to see Pascualita wandering the city streets in her wedding dress. The legendary associations with Pascualita give her miraculous powers to help people, as one young woman believes Pascualita saved her life after the girl was shot by her boyfriend (*El comercio en la Historia de Chihuahua*. 1a edición 1991).

I observed numerous passersby in front of La Popular Dress Shop window where the figure of Pascualita was placed, pause in reverence, make the sign of the cross, and continue on their way. The sign of the cross is a known formal practice that is performed numerous times in the Catholic Mass, and also a very common practice in the community as well. Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o Catholics will often make the sign of the cross when they are walking or driving past a church, a *descanso*, at the scene of an accident, or in front of a cemetery. The sign of the cross has multiple uses in the Catholic faith, including to pray for those who have died, to pray for those who are in danger, and to remember those who have gone before and are thought to be in Heaven or the afterlife.

However, Gilda Rizo Barajas, owner of a small local store that produces regional candies, gifts, and tourist souvenirs in Valle de Allende, Chihuahua, "I respect Pascualita. Her mother was named Pascuala and I am not sure if it was a daughter or niece but they say that, the young girl was hit by a car just before her wedding. Her figure remains in the capital city of Chihuahua and people go and stand in front of her to make a wish. People claim that she makes their wishes come true. But these types of stories are myths. That is what Pascualita is to me."<sup>13</sup> This quote reflects the necessity to recognize the pivotal role

that myth and legend still play in the retelling of these stories that circulate around the region despite the tellers's skepticism of the veracity of the story. The stories also shed light upon the blurred lines and complexities that that are often misunderstood while trying to understand myth and legend as corridors of truth within Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o culture along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.

Chihuahua City residents such as Aide Enríquez, a college student working at the Copymart where I collected short reflections, said: "Pascualita to me is beautiful. What it does, is it preserves her memory and reminds us of how beautiful she looked on her wedding day. It is beautiful. It is not strange at all. It is in remembrance and in honoring her memory."<sup>14</sup> This young woman speaks directly to the visual representation of Pascualita that in her view becomes a memorialization. Enríquez also acknowledges the importance of the visual images associated with weddings and what marriage represents to her and her community at-large.

A different perspective regarding Pascualita was provided by Brisa Jaret Chávez Ovaíz, a Chihuahua City artist and *danzante*<sup>15</sup> who said, "I do believe she is real. The reason I believe she is real is because the love for her husband is there forever because she had that desire that she was about to realize."<sup>16</sup> The focus on the expectation of marriage and family is highlighted in the region while also acknowledging the memory of Pascualita as someone the community remembers.

### **Michelle Valdez, El Rito, New Mexico**

*Memorate* is a traditional form of memoir identified by Rebolledo and Gonzales-Berry and other scholars of Chicana literature who write about the lived experiences of women who share their stories orally. The structure of *memorate* happens with the

telling and is a commemoration of experience, knowledge and witness to truth that has not been archived in official history. The story account of Michelle Valdez, her life and death was told to me by her mother Donna Valdez and represents a *memorate*. It is a first person account of lived experiences situated in a rural community in northern New Mexico, El Rito, with a population of 1,000 members, that reflects their traditions, rituals, beliefs, practices and the values they share. Tey Diana Rebolledo observes: “Where conventional documentary evidence is not available, we must turn to evidence of a different kind: folklore, ritual, religious ceremonies and even the history of food preparation. And although no official “literary” text written by women during this time period have been found, nevertheless, we see glimpses and hints of their lives in songs and plays, *dichos*, *cuentos*, and *memorates*; popular stories of local origin in which people tell their own history” (Rebolledo, 1992: 1).

In 2006, while in Mexico with a group of New Mexicans, on our way to Durango, we stopped in Chihuahua where a waiter at a restaurant told us we should go see the image of Pascualita. We went to visit Pascualita at La Popular Dress Shop. Afterward, we continued our tour. In conversation with Rose Montoya from La Madera, New Mexico after seeing Pascualita, she began speaking about the image and connected the story to a young woman from El Rito, New Mexico who died just before her wedding and was buried in her wedding dress. She said the young woman’s picture was on a billboard between Santa Fe and Española.

On March 25, 1997, *Día de la Encarnación*, Michelle Valdez was a passenger in a vehicle driven by her fiancé, Melvin Jaramillo. The vehicle was hit head-on by Dwayne García who was driving while intoxicated. She died as a result. News of the tragedy

spread quickly throughout the community because Michelle and Dwayne were both from El Rito. In small rural communities in New Mexico, high school sports are a focal point of community involvement. El Rito's Mesa Vista High School in 1997 enjoyed a winning basketball season. The community was celebrating their athletic success.

Donna Valdez, mother of Michelle, began her interview<sup>17</sup> by relaying the events. Michelle would typically call her parents to meet her at the games. Despite the fact that she had already graduated from high school, Michelle still supported the school activities, especially sports. Michelle saved seats for her parents at the games and on one occasion, her mother recalls that as they sat and watched the team prepare for the game, Michelle pointed to Dwayne García. García was a member of the winning basketball team for Mesa Vista High School. Mrs. Valdez remembers how Michelle referred to him as a sweet person who was different from the other young men on the team because he was not selfish with the ball, passing it to other teammates during the game. In 1997, the Mesa Vista Trojans placed first in the state tournament.

Michelle Valdez was born June 8, 1975 at Española Hospital. Her parents Michael and Donna Valdez raised three daughters. Michelle was their first-born followed by her sisters Sara and Martina. At age three months, Michelle became dehydrated and was so extremely ill that her family believed she might not live. Her parents took her to Los Alamos Hospital for more specialized treatment. Michelle regained her health. Donna Valdez was a substitute teacher and left Michelle in her maternal grandmother's care. Valdez recalled how Michelle liked to be held throughout her childhood. Michelle liked playing with dolls, was motherly and caring with them. Moreover, Michelle treated her younger sisters like daughters and remained in close communication with the family.

She loved her family and was always willing to do whatever she could to take care of them. Mrs. Valdez emphasized Michelle's service at San Juan Nepomuceno Catholic Church, noting her active community involvement.

Michelle often sought approval from her peers and teachers. In high school, she met Melvin Jaramillo. They became close friends and later lovers, although at one point after high school graduation, they broke up. Valdez recalls how heartbreaking this was for Michelle, and she watched her daughter grieve over Melvin. Eventually, Michelle and Melvin renewed their relationship and engaged to be married. Michelle worked part time in Los Alamos, and was enrolled in a nursing program at Northern New Mexico Community College, hoping to pursue her dream to help people.

When not at college or working, Michelle used her free time to plan her wedding. Mrs. Valdez recalled that when it was time to decide on a wedding dress, Michelle traveled to Albuquerque and Santa Fe in search of a gown but eventually found the perfect dress at a shop in Española. Once the dress was purchased, Valdez recounted that Michelle was so excited about her wedding that she would often try on the dress in her mother's presence. Michelle wanted to make sure that it fit. At the same time, says Mrs. Valdez, Michelle and her fiancé had purchased some land at Tierra Azul and were planning to move a mobile home there and start a family.

Around this time, Michelle's sister Sara also worked in Los Alamos and had moved in with one of her friends, Anita Gallegos (Dwayne García's girlfriend). Mrs. Valdez said Sara called one evening asking for Michelle, who wasn't home. According to Mrs. Valdez, eventually the sisters spoke about Sara's dream in which Michelle was in a car accident and died. Mrs. Valdez recalls how Michelle spoke to her about Sara's

previous that had come true. Mrs. Valdez says Michelle was always a little superstitious and asked her, “Do you think anything can happen to me, Mom?” Valdez said, “No.” Michelle responded, “But in the back of my mind I think, what if?” Mrs. Valdez did not tell Michelle’s father about the dream, saying he too was superstitious. Michelle told her fiancé Melvin, that if anything happened to her, he should move on with his life and, find someone with whom to have a family just as they had planned. Then, she told her mother to be sure to take care of her dad, “Because you know how he is.”

Michelle and Melvin moved forward with their marriage plans and had decided to purchase a mobile home, declining her father’s offer to build them an adobe home on the land in Tierra Azúl. Mrs. Valdez says Michelle just wanted a home to move into right away. Her father did not understand her need to move quickly. Michelle explained that if they were going to have a big family, as she desired, she and Melvin had to be married soon. After the conversation, Michelle sought her father’s help with preparing the mobile home sewage hook ups and water sample for inspectors. He reluctantly agreed. Michelle became more impatient because her father did not want to collect the water sample until the weekend. Michelle wanted it done immediately. Mrs. Valdez intervened and convinced her husband to go. Again, he could not understand his daughter’s rush, but because this was so important to Michelle, he agreed. Michelle came home early from work on the day she and her dad would drive to the property in Tierra Azúl. Mrs. Valdez recalls Michelle walking into the house looking ‘beautiful, her hair was perfect, and she was glowing.’ Sara was also at their house and told Michelle, “You look so beautiful, you would think this was your wedding day.” Mrs. Valdez had wanted to go with



Michelle and her husband to Tierra Azúl but scheduled a parent/teacher conference for her daughter Martina.

The afternoon of March 25, 1997, Michelle and her father Michael Valdez went to Tierra Azúl. Mrs. Valdez says while driving to Martina's school, she saw a group of young men drinking alcohol by the "*Descanso del Padre.*"<sup>18</sup> As she drove by, she noticed Dwayne García was with the young men and was totally "out of it." She remembers telling Martina, "This poor kid. I hope he's not driving." Martina replied, "I hope not."

Entering the school building with Martina, Mrs. Valdez's brother was standing there. He told her Michelle had been in an accident and he was going take them to the Española Hospital. A family friend offered to take her car home. En route to the hospital with her brother, she recalls being confused, assuming that her husband and Michelle had both been in the accident. The hospital staff said that Michael was not involved in the accident, but that it was Michelle's boyfriend who was driving. The hospital staff said that Michelle was okay and suffered from a broken leg and wrist but was not in any pain. She and her husband went into the emergency room to see Michelle who was in a hospital gown. Mrs. Valdez recalls standing at the foot of the bed and that Michelle wanted them closer saying, "Why are you guys over there? Come here. Mom, give me a kiss." Mrs. Valdez kissed her. "Dad, kiss me." He began to cry and squeezed his wife's hand. She recalled looking at him and said for him to kiss her. He finally did. As they left the room, looking at his wife, he said, "You know she only kisses us when she says hello or good-bye. It's not hello. I've been with her all day."

They went to the hospital chapel to pray. Within moments, the doctor entered, saying they were transferring Michelle by helicopter to a hospital in Albuquerque. But soon after, the doctor requested their permission to operate on Michelle immediately. Then, he returned to say they had lost Michelle.

The Valdez family remained at the hospital for a time, with many people from the community. While standing in the hospital lobby, Mrs. Valdez saw Dwayne García in handcuffs with the police and thought, ‘You did this’ and turned away. At this point in her retelling of what happened, she said it was a nightmare. When they returned home, people were waiting in their yard, ready to offer their help and support. Mrs. Valdez said she realized sweet, beautiful daughter’s impact on the community.

Mrs. Valdez buried her daughter in her wedding dress. Reminiscing, she stated that, “She loved her wedding dress. What could we do with that dress at home? It was hers. She looked so beautiful in it. She took it with her. It’s probably still with her in the coffin.”

Mrs. Valdez says she continues to have dreams about Michelle. Although she cannot see her face in these dreams, she hears Michelle’s voice and knows that she is present. The dreams occur at times when the family is in need of help. Mrs. Valdez says that had Michelle lived, married life may not have been all that she imagined, with all the sadness and heartache that life contains.

Mrs. Valdez presents a composite picture of how their lives are woven together as a family that belongs to a Catholic community where religion, family, school and working lives are interactive. Michelle’s life, as described by her mother, is focused within the space of community involvement that is traditional to Chicana/o, Mexicana/o

and Hispana/o peoples. The details of Michelle's life, as offered by her mother, acknowledge her role in the community and the significance of her contributions to it that honors her life and death. The way in which Mrs. Valdez shared openly about the family's belief in matters of the spirit and their intimate conversations involving their daily lives reflects her desire to honor Michelle's memory as having lived a beautiful life, even though it ended prematurely.

I spoke to Reverend Pat Chávez, pastor for San Juan Nepomuceno church in El Rito, New Mexico, for the past 24 years. He stated, "You will see identity is formed in the church. As you have seen and noted with the life of Michelle Valdez, the church records prove an individual's existence and it is essential to show family ties with the sacraments. These sacraments record Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion, Marriage and Death. These records are all intact with a person's journey. This is likened as a ladder to heaven (Jacob's Ladder in the Old Testament—with sacraments), *escalera pa'l Cielo*. At the funeral ceremony for Michelle Valdez, the young men who were the pallbearers were also supposed to be groomsmen for the wedding, so they wore their tuxedo tops. Michelle's mother dressed her in her wedding dress, which represented a connection of love and respect, and reflected the aspiration of marriage. So it continues. The body is there, but the soul is raised."<sup>19</sup> This particular quote reflects the role that clergy play as representatives of the church, but more importantly, the pivotal role they play in the community. As clergy take on the role of spiritual directors of the community, it is also their job to allow the grieving process to take place with honor and respect.

The family and community prepare and participate in their process of honoring the life and death of the deceased, while at the same time mourning and participating in

the rituals that ultimately allow for sadness and grief to be fully expressed. It is the responsibility of the clergy to allow for a healthy, healing, and meaningful ritual that includes the cultural attributes and respect of culture that is accompanied in these formal traditions. Reverend Chávez, in his interview, gives important insight as to the intended identity formation formalized in the church through ritual that begins with the celebration of birth and follows that person until their final ritual celebration of death. In other words, the person's life through ritual is presumed fully celebrated and documented and is attributed importance and meaning by the family and community who are present to honor these events.

A young woman from La Zorra, New Mexico, Amy Ortiz, librarian and student at Northern New Mexico College was a student at the Mesa Vista School and remembers Michelle Valdez. She said, "Michelle's death was a big deal. Everyone knew her family. Her death was a shock for the entire school. There was a memorial service in the gym. It was very emotional with lots of people. Her life was cut short and ended in tragedy. It was a huge deal in our community. This had all the elements of drama and tragedy."<sup>20</sup> Amy Ortiz's quote demonstrates the integration of the community, school, and the church within the community of El Rito and the surrounding rural communities as they shared in mourning the death of Michelle Valdez.

### **Easement Through the Border to Reconnect the *Camino Real de Tierra de Adentro***

I argue that the historical flow of stories between Mexico and the U.S. along The *Camino Real de Tierra de Adentro* creates opportunity that is not contested because there are still people of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o identity who recognized it as a memorialized cultural space. It makes sense to use the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* to

connect their commonalities that are exemplified in the stories of Pascualita and Michelle.<sup>21</sup> Their stories, because of their differences, enable us to explore cultural phenomenon as a bridge to language, religion and cultural symbolism through *leyenda* (legend) and reflections about belief systems. In this context, memorialized space becomes a shared experience and expression among Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o communities across geography and time.

The historical feature present in Pascualita's story that resonates with Michelle's story begins on the occasion of March 25<sup>th</sup> a Catholic day of observance known as *Día de la Encarnación* (Day of the Holy Incarnation), which coincides with the day of Pascualita's purported appearance and the day of Michelle's death. The feast commemorates the day when Jesus took flesh in the womb of Mary, and in the Catholic belief, when the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary, the Mother of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> The second connection they share is having died just prior to being married, and the third marker includes the role their mothers' play in the construction and maintenance of their stories.

The significance of marriage and the presumed subsequent birth of children, for a Catholic community, is a time of celebration. It is poignant in both stories that neither Pascualita nor Michelle, due to their premature deaths, would wed or have children and thus, were not to contribute new life to the community. The Day of the Holy Incarnation becomes a symbolic connection with this Catholic feast day as women who will never complete this rite of passage. This is why the wedding dress becomes an obvious feature in both their stories, Pascualita in a wedding dress in her mother's store window and Michelle who wears her wedding dress in burial.

Pascualita by her association as legend, as a person who actually lived in Chihuahua City, cannot be substantiated because of the way the community identifies with her as a legend dating back to 1930. This may confuse the comparison with Michelle whose birth and death is verifiable by her community. Because of the way the stories come together as having a shared destiny, the question of Pascualita's actual identity is by-passed in favor of keeping her memory alive. Her legendary status functions in unique ways that encourage the idea of a fantasy-like transformation of what a wife-to-be represents as potential child-bearer. Michelle's mother interprets her actions in deciding to bury her daughter in the wedding dress for what it meant to Michelle. Mrs. Valdez acknowledges her daughter's idealized belief to be married but, as a mother, concedes that the reality of marriage may have disillusioned Michelle.

Abstracting from these two stories brings together the meaning behind the title *¿Leyenda o Realidad?* where Pascualita represents the legend and Michelle the reality. Stories along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* that appear to be disconnected are the result of disempowered belief systems once shared by Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o communities. The rituals are also reflective within the interviews. They are significant because they formalize, celebrate, and memorialize the importance of birth, marriage, family, and death in a way that honors and remembers those who have gone before. We also gain an understanding of the important role cultural identity plays within the lives and deaths of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o people along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.

A key goal of this dissertation is to culturally reconnect the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. As I crossed the United States border in El Paso, Texas to enter Ciudad

Juárez, Chihuahua, México, it felt like one large city divided by the Río Grande.<sup>23</sup> There are two bridges that serve as the official gateway or border crossing that lead to México and the United States, the Santa Fe Bridge and the Córdova Bridge. At the time I arranged my trip, there were multiple warnings that strongly discouraged travel into México by United States citizens. In fact, just a few days before my journey was scheduled to begin, the local news reported the murders of two United States consulate representatives in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, who were shot as they were traveling toward one of the official bridges in attempt to cross the border into El Paso, Texas. Because of the warnings and notices, I phoned ahead and spoke to the people that would be hosting me during my research. They stated that although violence was present, they would take precautions in order to avoid any confrontations. They reminded me that people are still living, working, and surviving in México. Based on their reassurance for my safety, I decided to go ahead and complete my fieldwork in México.

As mentioned earlier, I left my vehicle in El Paso, Texas, and I crossed the border with Araceli Arceo Guerrero, (UACJ). As we crossed the border into Ciudad Juárez, armed U.S. Customs agents checking people entering from the U.S. Once it was established that we were not carrying contraband or weapons, we were waved through and allowed to enter México. Mexican armed guards then officiated the entry into México. At the entry into Mexico, two traffic lights say, *PASE* with a green light and the other with a red light that says, *ALTO*. Depending on which sign lights up determines whether or not your vehicle would be searched by the armed guards. For us, the green *PASE* light lit up and we moved pass the checkpoint. The next step then included my official entry into the country. This occurred at the building on the right side of the

checkpoint. At that time, I had to show my U.S. passport and receive a visa to travel within the country. On prior visits to México, one was allowed to check in with either a birth certificate and ID, or a passport. Now, it is a requirement to use a passport. I was granted permission, was given the official paperwork, and instructions that paperwork must be with me at all times. I then entered Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.

Among the first stops that I had planned on making while in Chihuahua City was *La Popular Dress Shop* where the figure of Pascualita stands in the window wearing her wedding dress. My host, Jaime Morales Gutiérrez accompanied me to La Popular Dress Shop. I introduced myself as a student seeking to interview the dress shop owner. I was referred to a young woman named Carolina González, the head of public relations. At this first meeting, she appeared interested in speaking with me and even referred me to a Youtube video titled “*La Historia de la Pascualita.*” I was able to watch it while in Mexico and noted that it was produced by a television show in Mexico called *Extranormal*. In the video, Pascualita was featured as a phantom or ghost bride in her wedding dress appearing throughout the city with most of the images featuring the figure of a body in a wedding dress. I briefly explained my interest in learning more about “Pascualita” and my desire to connect the history and cultures along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* for my dissertation. I also explained that I was from New Mexico and mentioned there was a similar experience of a young girl in New Mexico who had also died prior to her marriage and had been buried in her wedding dress. I left and was given a formal appointment a few days later.

I returned to the La Popular Dress Shop expecting an interview with the head store manager and Ms. González, but neither appeared. I waited for some time, but soon



after, realized they were not going to show. Finally, a young employee informed me that Ms. González declined to be interviewed. The clerk said it would bring bad luck to their shop. I left the store and realized how the story of Pascualita was the dress shop's marketing tool in a city with multiple wedding dress shops. The owner and public relations director viewed my study as negative publicity.

Afterwards, I decided to walk a few blocks down to the *Catedral de Chihuahua* where I would seek to reconstruct the real or actual life of Pascualita by locating documents in the church archives that would substantiate her birth, baptism, First Holy Communion or death certificate as I had previously done in El Rito, New Mexico for Michelle Valdez. In the Pascualita legend, it is clear that she and her family were Catholic and lived in the 1920s and 1930s in the community of Chihuahua, Chihuahua. Therefore, I was sure to find something to prove her existence. At the church office, I explained what I was seeking to a woman working in the church office. She told me that the story of Pascualita was just a legend. I would not find any record of her life in the archives because she did not, in fact, exist. I was unable to rely on any historical archives, written obituaries, or church documents in order to reconstruct the life and death of Pascualita. Instead, I was going to have to rely on the community to reconstruct and remember the story of Pascualita. I would also have to entrust this reconstruction on the popular forms of expression, for example, retelling of the legend from the people, the pamphlet that recounts the legend of Pascualita, including popular music that keep her story present in the community.

Chapter three will reconnect and deepen the conversation along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* through an ethnographic focus on peoples' continuing knowledge and

ritual practices that validate their connection as one region. Connected by history, historical memory, and cultural ritual practices, the communal commonalities will not only reconnect the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* geographically, but will reflect in more meaningful ways the honor, respect and values placed upon belief systems that have existed in this particular region for generations and are re-inscribed in contemporary times.

## Chapter Three

### **Ethnography of Voices<sup>24</sup> Along the *Camino Real* Today**

The numbers of historical writings are staggering, but only a small part of what happened in the past was observed; and only a part of what was observed was remembered by those who observed it. Only a part of what was remembered was recorded; only a part of what was recorded has survived; only a part of what has survived has come to historians' attention; only a part of what has come to their attention is credible; only a part of what is credible has been grasped and only a part of what has been grasped can be expounded or narrated by the historian. (Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, and Cooley, 1945). I am seeking to reconnect the people of my study who identify as Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o, and their shared cultural history, by using oral history along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. From my view, these communities have been overshadowed by the historical attention being paid to “illegal immigrations” of people from Mexico into the U.S. The deleterious effects of this political divide are fast eroding the peoples' shared history. I situate myself as an ethnographer within this current milieu with the purpose of collecting “what is credible” using oral documentation to re-claim their history of these communities belonging to the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* near the end of the twentieth century and into the present.

This chapter will “expound and narrate” themes of time-honored rituals, traditions, religious and spiritual beliefs shared by Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples that began five centuries ago. Professor Beltrán in México reminded me of the following:

“You are trying to connect the entire region of the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*, the road from México D.F. to San Juan de los Caballeros for a very simple reason. In 1598 Juan de Oñate traveled from Zacatecas to San Juan de los Caballeros to colonize and Christianize the region. So naturally, because the people were connected until 1848, you would have historical and cultural connections. In fact, until 1848, the (whole) region was under the Catholic Church Diocese of Durango.”<sup>25</sup>

The relationship between Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples is a historical one that I argue has not been forgotten and is traced through shared beliefs, practices and rituals that remain situated “in community.”

To establish a context for the stories of Pascualita and Michelle, I begin with the exploration, through oral interviews, of the importance and function of marriage, and then examine the nature of prayer and preparations of the deceased body or *difunto* that naturally follow with a discussion of varied expressions of grief involving death. Because the customary role of clerical views of the Catholic Church concerning marriage and death rituals are key to historical community practices, I interviewed Catholic priests who themselves are from New Mexico and establish from the outset a context as to the significant role of the church in the community..

I conducted three types of interviews, both in México and New Mexico, for my research. The first type of interview is what I refer to as “community narratives,” interviews that explored details of actual traditions that performed and invoked personal reflections, usually lasting an hour in length. The second kind of interview I collected is what I refer to as “Catholic ministry interviews,” consisting of interviews of local priests serving communities in New Mexico who themselves are Chicano or Hispano<sup>26</sup>. The stories of Pascualita and Michelle appeal to their Catholic heritage, and two of the clergy interviewed serve the communities of El Rito and Española, both featured communities

of my study. The third type of interview conducted was “person-on-the-street” interviews, consisting of spontaneous, informal conversations in México about the story of Pascualita. The interviews were conducted in México and New Mexico between November 2009 and September 2010. Of these 41 interviews, 33 were community narratives, five were informal person-on-the-street interviews; and three were Catholic ministry in-depth interviews. In addition, during multiple trips to México, I engaged in field observations in public spaces, including bus travel while in México, walking city streets and visiting sites suggested by my hosts. In New Mexico, my field observations were by personal vehicle, driving five different times during my research year between Las Cruces and El Rito to conduct interviews. I photographed *descansos* that I will explore in greater detail. In this analysis, I engage regional material culture including *descansos* representing public visual displays of memorialization, art, music, and communal celebrations in the following chapter.

Of special importance and unique to my study was language use; I spoke to people in Spanish, English, or using both languages during a single conversation, depending on the preferences of those whom I interviewed. The interviews collected in México were entirely in Spanish and required transcribing and translating into English. The interviews collected in New Mexico were primarily in English with distinct uses of Spanish in mid-sentence by the interviewees to express cultural sentiment when a subject or topic under discussion was mentioned and included particular words such as *difunto* (deceased body), *velorio* (wake), *velar* (pray with the deceased), and *sepulcro* (open burial site). The switch to Spanish was fluid and involved no explanation on either my part or theirs when they used the word *difunto* instead of the “dead body.” I interpret this

cultural sentiment as respect for the deceased. Briggs (1988) stresses that researchers must be open to modes of knowledge transmission and communication that are locally specific and may not correspond with preconceived categories and/or concepts that the researcher may bring to the field.

I listened to lived experiences, practices, and beliefs of people alive today who are sharing their intimate thoughts about marriage, and even more serious, about death and rituals associated with death. I found, through my research, people who were generous in offering details and openly aware of how they have been affected by changes in their lives. There is not a separation within the narratives as such between gendered voices for the reason that the intention of the study is to identify personal voices within communal structures, not political divides of men and women. The extensive literature addressing Chicana/o, Hispana/o, Mexicana/o gender critique (Anzaldúa, 1999; Gutiérrez, 1991; Moraga, 1993; Segura and Zavella, 2007, et.al.) lies outside the scope of this study. I am relying upon a metaphorical view that provides a basis from which my study can traverse the *Camino* less encumbered. In her book Women, Native, Other, Trinh T. Minh-ha writes “If feminism is set forth as a demystifying force, then it will have to question thoroughly the belief in its own identity” (Minh-ha, 1989: 96). Minh-ha refers to the work by Judith Kegan Gardiner whose view of attempting to reach a theory of female identity (as one) that varies from the male models of identity, she says, “Do not, in any way, attempt to remove its fence” (Minh-ha, 1989: 96). The “fence” is a metaphor that I am seeking to remove, and borrow the perspective of demystifying voices that speak for themselves, not for them or about them, but with them.

The story of Pascualita as *leyenda* and the story of Michelle as *la realidad* share the common themes of marriage, tragic death and its associated burial rituals. The spheres of emotion, grief, mourning, and memorialization are, to a degree, intangible qualities and characteristics within the Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o communities that can only be accessed through what people express and are able to describe. In the similar way that rituals are thought of as repeated acts that may become habits, feelings of grief and of grieving processes, they are not habitual in the sense that they are not rehearsed actions that happen the same way every time. As I learned through the interviews that follow, the nature of meaning comes through acknowledgement, respect, and self-expression.

### **Thoughts About Marriage**

I begin with views about weddings and how weddings are about people getting married for some purpose. A common view of marriage is that of an alliance between two people that implies an agreement, according to Brisa Chávez Ovaíz from Parral, Chihuahua, who states, “Weddings represent a union of souls where you truly have an equal partnership. It’s something where you grow together and are challenged with experiences that you can only have together.”<sup>27</sup> This idea of “growing together as a lifetime commitment,” she added, is “an alliance that is created by God.”<sup>28</sup> If weddings, and thereby a marriage, is an alliance created by God, it is not simply a secular union, but a religious and spiritual one. Marriage in the Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o experience through history has been formalized by Church-officiated wedding ceremony, but evidence of generational changes regarding when one marries and whom one marries appear to be changing. Brisa’s mother wanted to choose her daughter’s future husband,

someone her mother considered to be “a traditional *Mexicano*.” Brisa recalls, “My mom told me she was going to pick my husband, and in fact she did, but I escaped. The man she wanted me to marry was from Torreón. The moment she tried to keep me from marrying the man of my choice, the more I wanted to get married to him, and we did.”<sup>29</sup> Brisa’s independence in choosing her own husband resulted in her escaping a potentially unhappy marriage with what she considered her mother’s choice of a “traditional *Mexicano*.” When I asked her to explain just what she meant she said her husband with whom she eloped understood her need to make independent decisions within the marriage, and that they were happy.

In comparing notes in New Mexico, Nikki Bustos from Española is about the same age as Brisa Chávez Ovaíz, and makes this claim: “I may be considered to live a promiscuous lifestyle because, as a 28 year-old Nuevo Mexicana, I am still unmarried and have no kids.”<sup>30</sup> For Bustos, clearly there is an expectation that she is ‘supposed to be married’ already. Because she is not married yet, she is of the opinion that the community views her as “promiscuous” because she is still single. Bustos says she enjoys and lives the life of an artist with different goals for herself. However, her use of the word ‘promiscuous’ is severe. The pressure to marry must be high, suggesting that young women in her community are still perceived through a traditional lens in which their role in life is to be married and have children. The viewpoint is customary in her community.

Bustos’ story invites a reflection from the 1955 memoir by Cleofas Jaramillo, *Romance of a Little Village Girl*, which presents the classic identity of womanhood in this Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o traditional context. The book recalls the



proposal she received from a suitor. Cleofas waited a year before she accepted his proposal in order to complete her secondary education. Then, she went from schoolgirl to wife. She writes, “I want a quiet wedding in the *capilla*, I told the family.” Her fiancé Venceslao Jaramillo immediately said to her, “That will never do,” instead wanting a large community gathering of family and state officials (Jaramillo, 1955: 74).

Self-identified unmarried “housewife” from Chimayó, New Mexico, Amanda Salinas in her interview spoke of the formalities of older marriage proposals, saying, “In my opinion, with regards to marriage traditions, the guy comes to the girl’s dad to ask permission. This is an old tradition, but I still believe in it. Our tradition includes a Catholic wedding, a *marcha*<sup>31</sup> and an *entrega*.”<sup>32</sup> Salinas believes that marriage is sacred and wants a traditional New Mexico wedding. “When I get married... I want a white cake, a ball gown dress, and a big dance with friends and family.”<sup>33</sup> It is so interesting that Salinas already feels like a “housewife,” a term she used to identify herself because she has children and lives with her partner. However, she still wants a traditional wedding. The wedding represents the public acknowledgement by the community of friends and family as well as the blessings associated with the rituals of a wedding Mass, the wedding march and the song that honors the bride and groom. She also made special mention of the wedding dress, calling it “a ball gown.” In many ways, Salinas’ wedding images typify what Pascualita and Michelle would have shared had they lived to go through with their wedding ceremonies.

Beyond the marriage ceremony is the expectation of having children, an extension of family and community. The interview with Chihuahua City college student Erika Aguirre Polanco highlights the role of women in Mexican society. Today, she says, still

“Has much to do with motherhood and the image of mother and family.”<sup>34</sup> In responding to my reference to Pascualita, she paused and said, “Her image is a beautiful one and a reminder of who we are and what we represent and who it is that we are as mothers,” suggesting Pascualita’s intention to bear children after her marriage. The identity of women that is associated with motherhood and family remains fixed for many within community belief systems. Erika also shared her view that the identity of women is not limited to motherhood, but that is the way history has documented women in Mexican society.

Irma Hinojas, a tour guide at the Pancho Villa Museum in Parral, Chihuahua, revealed a somewhat resentful perspective about the ritual and formality of a Church wedding was revealed in an interview:

“I do not have much to say because I never got married by the Church. This is because I do not believe very much in the Church. But I do go to weddings here, and after the Mass, they have a big dance. The next day, they have a post-*fiesta*. It just did not interest me. In order to get married to my second husband in the Church, I was going to have to register my children from a previous marriage as illegitimate and I do not believe in rules like that. I want a harmonious relationship and I do not believe that the ceremony or rules of the traditional woman or marriage are for me. I am a liberated woman I love to ranch and love to read and study when I want.”<sup>35</sup>

Hinojas dismisses being married through the Church because of the requirements that would force her to claim her children are illegitimate, which they are not. In this regard, she took agency and liberated herself from the Church saying, “I do not believe in rules like that.” There is a constant in Hinojas’ view that remains vital to cultural practices since she continues to attend weddings and takes part in the big dance and post-*fiesta* activities when people marry in her community. I would add that these traditional

wedding practices have maintained continuity across generations whereas the Church rules have become less enforceable and possibly less relevant in peoples' lives today.

These voices from women provide a continuum of experiences that are intergenerational, but are still rooted to an identity that is communally based but not necessarily defined by religious practice. Retired college employee Erlinda Portillo from Las Cruces, New Mexico, recalls weddings throughout her lifetime: “There was a civil wedding at the house the night before the wedding and one the next day at church. There was a dinner. The weddings of the past in México had the same traditions as those of today—*padrinos* and *madrinas* (godparents) of the *postre* (cake), *aras*,<sup>36</sup> and *lasso*<sup>37</sup>. The parents of the bride bore much of the expense. The groom purchased the dress. The groom also gave land and cattle for the wedding, and the *padrino* bought the beer.”<sup>38</sup> The distinction of who was responsible for what part of the wedding preparations shows mutual agreement between the couple to be married. The tradition of *padrinos*, referring to both male and female godparents for weddings in México, are different from New Mexico practice in that, there are *padrinos* selected to help with providing the music, *postre*, and *lasso*. The *padrinos* are active participants, but contribute to the wedding couple beyond just attending the ceremonies.

The story of Michelle Valdez was a focal point of my interview with Amy Ortiz from La Zorra, a neighboring community of El Rito. Ortiz was in elementary school at the time of Michelle's death and recalled attending a school memorial service for Michelle Valdez with all grades K-12 attending. Today, Ortiz is a librarian at Northern New Mexico College and views Michelle's death as a tragedy because “The wedding dress honored the person she was to become and Michelle didn't get to receive that part

of her life.” Ortiz sees marriage as defining who you are both as a wife and extension of the community with the birth of children. She went on to say, “The woman wants all the sacraments, and couples are usually married in the woman’s home community.” Amy expects to be married in her community at La Madera.

Leopoldo Medina resides in Parral, Chihuahua, México. His life revolves around his art and *danza* performance that he integrates into his daily life which he regards as spiritually grounded by *danza*. His views about marriage reflect his respect for marriage as a lifelong union,

“With regards to marriage, you must always respect a married woman. In our community, there still is much respect for marriage. Men are also respected more if they are faithful to their wives. Because Parral is a small community, everyone knows what happens, so it is important to be true and direct to ensure a good marriage. Within the ritual of weddings and marriage, he claims that marriage is until death; if not, you will be banished. We know and see each other everyday. Weddings here are three celebrations, that of the church, *fiesta* at the house and a rented dance hall for the dance. The bride has to dance. You must make the bride dance to have a good night for the couple. The post *fiesta* is also very fun.”<sup>39</sup>

Marriage is a moral obligation described by Ray Fajardo, a retired federal probation officer from Las Cruces, New Mexico who says, “Weddings are culture-based rather than sacramental.” “People,” he believes, “don’t understand how sacred marriage is-it is a covenant between man and God, never to be broken.”<sup>40</sup> This very strong claim by Fajardo that marriage is a “covenant between man and God” holds the husband to a code of honor to uphold the marriage covenant, and as I understand his perspective, is separate from the cultural wedding festivities that are secular, not sacred.

Tom Borrego is a local barber and artist in Española, New Mexico whose pre-marriage fears revealed his, and that of his peers’, thoughts about marriage. “For men, marriage is a mental preparation before the wedding. Men get scared. They think,

‘You’ll be with this woman for the rest of your life.’ You must be committed to that person. My wedding was at the Church. Afterward, we had a reception meal and enjoyed a DJ for two hours and did a little dancing. We had not yet moved into our house, so it was empty. We invited our friends and family to the (empty) house for a party afterwards.”<sup>41</sup> In spite of his fears, he went through with his wedding and enjoyed himself. The question of commitment for him was in relation to being with your partner for the remainder of one’s life appears to be a shortcoming of marriage but as Borrego says, “You must be committed to that person.”

What these voices say about marriage in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century suggest change and continuity, a theme repeated in ethnography when one looks back at where people have been in order to see how they have changed or are moving forward. Even if weddings are slowly ebbing away from the Church ritual and ceremony, a communal spirit and belief in marriage has not ebbed, as was the case with Michelle Valdez. A sense of loyalty to the idea of marriage is still present while thoughts about what marriage actually means linger in these Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o voices whose interviews represent a generation in whose hands the traditions of *marcha*, *entrega*, and *padrinos* will either continue or fade away.

### **Responsibility for the *Difunto***

Clifford Geertz reminds us that, “The shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements” (Geertz, 1983: 4). In this section, my use of the research interviews give special attention to a discussion about caring for the *difunto* and the ways in which the practices are similar, distinct and/or based on older practices within communities of Chicana/os, Hispana/os, and Mexicana/os

along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. The sensitive nature of talking about death and dying and funerary practices are significant discussions that reveal local practices and knowledge about following protocols passed down from previous generations.

Conceiving of “death to be the most powerful force in life,” (León, 2004: 124), as stated by Luis D. León, advances my view that the care and attention given to the *difunto* becomes the second most powerful force for the living.

Alfonso Hernández Ramírez, an ethnomusicologist living in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua believes “Death is all a ritual,”<sup>42</sup> thus implying there is a particular order to follow in dealing with the deceased. He told me about the death of his mother-in-law who had died at his sister-in law’s house. Until the funeral home came to retrieve the body, everyone prayed the entire time, reciting the rosary and “we were more peaceful because we had prayed and felt acceptance.”<sup>43</sup> The family selected a funeral home and the body was embalmed. According to Hernández Ramírez, his wife and sister-in-law combed their mother’s hair, put make-up on her, and dressed her in her favorite clothing. He said they honored “his *suegra* (mother-in-law) by having her daughters dress her.” He idealizes his own memory by stating: “The purity of the body and soul still remain and there are two of her daughters preparing her for her journey.”<sup>44</sup>

The traditional responsibility for preparing the deceased was remembered by Amanda Salinas who said, “In older generations, women prepared the body, washed the hair and skin and dressed the body. The men prepared the grave. Everyone gathered to talk about memories of that person.”<sup>45</sup> Today, she says that is not always the case now since many are taken to the funeral home and so they go there to help dress the body.

In reference to burial practices, Joe Ciddio, from Cañoncito, New Mexico, elaborates on his knowledge,

“The men dig out the *sepulcro* (grave) and it’s about *juntando con la plebe* (getting together with the people of the community), exchanging jokes, and telling stories about the *difunto*. While the men are doing this, the women are usually preparing the body of the deceased, washing, combing, and clothing the recently departed. When people are cremated, it is very different and no longer has the impact as a *cuerpo presente* (the body being present).”<sup>46</sup>

Care for the *difunto* is a shared responsibility, says Ciddio, because it gives purpose and meaning for the people coming together to remember the deceased. But when the body is cremated, there is no *cuerpo presente* to ritually care for, and that is when the ritual practices are also absent.

Regarding cremation of the *difunto*, the experiences of Reverend George Salazar, a Catholic priest at Immaculate Conception in Las Vegas, New Mexico, demonstrate that cremation has become more common in his community than any previous time during his priesthood. He described how cremation affects long-standing rituals as people adapt to the absence of an actual body, “Regarding cremation, sometimes, people pass the remains around. This speaks to us because there hasn’t been closure. This is very important to us. For some people, cremation means that people keep the remains for over a year. You hear, ‘Grandma’s still on the mantle.’ The church rule is to bury them, but it doesn’t say when, just ‘soon.’ The church is against scattering ashes. The body was the temple of the Holy Spirit. It should be ‘together.’ We must place a cross on or near the remains. Cremation is not foreign to us.”<sup>47</sup>

Fellow Reverend Larry Brito is originally from Las Vegas, New Mexico and serves San Juan Parish in Ohkay Owingeh. Father Brito views cremation as creating a

separation from death because, “When you see a dead body, it really hits you. The spirit is gone. Viewing the body is very important.”<sup>48</sup> Reverend Salazar and Reverend Brito, while representing the Catholic Church, were born and raised in New Mexico, and their knowledge of local community traditions and practices in caring for the deceased prior to becoming priests is another window of experience about the community and resonates with what people in communities are sharing.

Honoring and caring for the deceased also remains a ritualized practice in México as described by Jesús Herrera Morales, “Here in Valle, we still do everything in the house. We dress the person in the best clothing they have and as elegantly as possible. In our community, we ring the bells when someone from our community dies. We all hear them and inquire about who it was.”<sup>49</sup> As a community, they honor those who are from there, even when people move away “They always request to come to the Valle to be buried because here in Valle, people come to the funeral.”<sup>50</sup> In Mexicano tradition, “The child with the most education usually gives the eulogy. People want the local music and they usually give a list of what they want before they die.”<sup>51</sup> In this way, the community comes together to meet one another’s need for support that gives both the living and the dead a completion of what is important for cultural and spiritual healing of grief.

A place named Ojo de Talamantes located near Valle de Allende is an open space park area highly regarded by members of the community. A warm water spring empties into the Río Valle de Allende and is highly regarded by “*gente mas onda*” (a humble people). The owner of Ojo de Talamantes Joaquín Rodolfo Acosta Quevedo refers to the space as “Land that has been witness to life and death.”<sup>52</sup> The community goes there to



celebrate rites of passage and many have had their ashes spread at Ojo de Talamantes.

Quevedo says,

“Traditionally, when someone is about to die, they say what they want. Within death, you find life, and out of one’s death is born the memory of the positive things about that person, or the negative things if it’s an extreme death. Death is a time for celebration. The person who died is gone, but the people who remain celebrate their lives. We know that our time is coming and we have a little time to enjoy life. Other people say that you cannot prepare for death, but I think you can. We all know that we are going to die, so we may as well celebrate and enjoy the moment and have an enjoyable exit. Generally, if someone asks for music, we give him music.”<sup>53</sup>

The place and space where rituals occur vary, but the intention remains with attending to the *difunto* which may include digging the grave, cooking food, or simply coming together as a community to pay their respects. As reiterated by José Archuleta, “Men watch the bonfire sometimes with drink. Men dig the graves with a shovel while women are inside cooking.”<sup>54</sup> In this way, grief is shared through a system that integrates celebration, remembrance, and obligation for care of the deceased until they are released.

### ***Velorios, Grief and Ritual***

A fluidity of grieving is what differentiates and resonates within the Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o tradition and draws attention to carefully constructed practices that over centuries of enactment illustrate signs of some change as suggested in this section. Donovan Ochs writes that, “One of the consequences of an individual’s death is the need for a funeral rite with its attendant modes for removing and disposing of the physical remains. From a rhetorical perspective, the ceremonies of the death affirm the values of the living” (Ochs, 1993: 28). The societal need for funeral rites serve as an expression, not only for the living, but is also a preparation for the afterlife of the

deceased. The community traditions highlighted in this study parallel the Catholic Church that remains a focal point in coalescing a relationship with ritual practices that honor the deceased.

From the perspective of the clergy in overseeing funerals and other Church rites, Reverend Pat Chávez speaks from experience saying, “Religion opens doors in our culture.” In El Rito, where he presides, there are usually two *velorios* (rosaries)<sup>55</sup> for ‘convenience and tradition.’ He says, “This is a time of mourning, prayer and respect. It allows people not to rush. The rosary reminds us to pray, it’s the circle of life. The burial is simple, an *entrega*, or in his words, ‘returning the person to God.’ People are already tired, so at the burial, it’s the quality, not the amount of prayer. The important thing to remember is that we start with Christ, we walk with Christ, and we end with Christ.”<sup>56</sup> Reverend Pat’s description gives insight into actual practice within the community as to how the ritual happens, but does so with sensitivity and acceptance for the needs of the aggrieved community that I argue demonstrates his familiarity and comfort with both the Church and community practices.

Identities are grounded in particular relationships as pointed out by Adrian Martínez from Santa Cruz de la Cañada, New Mexico who said, “Being that I grew up near [in close proximity to] the Church and because its size was incredible, being there reminded me that the Church was the center of the community.”<sup>57</sup> He also spoke about rituals as ‘very human’ making reference to hunting game and growing crops. For him, it is all ritual. His understanding that if rituals were no longer practiced, “It would erase the connections to family and community going back thousands of years.” In speaking about

death rituals, he said, “Without the death ritual, you don’t fully understand death. If that experience or memory does not exist, they become imaginary.”<sup>58</sup>

The observation made by Carlos Daniel Arrieta Baca, a college student and music teacher in Valle de Allende, corroborates the *velorio* practice, stating: “When someone dies, everyone prays for the dead and they have the traditional *velorio* in their home. They usually pray for one or two nights depending on if they have to wait for family to come from the United States or some other far away place.”<sup>59</sup> The community of Valle de Allende does not have a funeral home, so the wake occurs in the family home. Baca also noted, “They offer a Mass in honor of the dead after one year, and a memorial Mass every year thereafter.”<sup>60</sup> Variation on the practice of the *velorio* is also heard in Erlinda Portillo’s experience, “The *velorios* were at home as part of the celebration. Even now when there are funeral homes, some people still use the home for this practice.”<sup>61</sup> She vividly explains that in the past, “Sometimes, a casket had fruit or vegetables to kill the odor when a person was not embalmed.”<sup>62</sup> She connects faith and prayer in God with a continual offering of rosaries for the deceased as a reminder of an ongoing relationship between the community and the deceased. This idea of keeping practices alive is reiterated by Española resident Andrew Herrera, who believes, “If we don’t keep traditions going, our culture will die. We pray for someone on the anniversary of death. There is no right or wrong way to deal with death. Doing so is personal.”<sup>63</sup>

Two individuals that I interviewed live in northern New Mexico communities. These persons help lead the *velorios*, and identified themselves as *Penitentes*.<sup>64</sup> They spoke directly to their thoughts regarding the changes they experience in the practice of *velorio* in northern New Mexico. José Archuleta says, “I think we need to get back to

traditions. People request the *Hermanos* to say a rosary, but then they don't want them to sing the *alabados* (chants that are sung) because they sound too sad.”<sup>65</sup> He was critical of the changes expected of him in carrying out his role. In his view, the *alabados* are prayers sung acapella and as important as the spoken prayers. Joe Ciddio, also a *Penitente*, simply stated: “The *Hermanos* are called out to pray rosaries for the *velorios*, whether it is done at the funeral home or at the church.”<sup>66</sup> He said *velorios* should be performed in the home because that “is where it should take place, it is a more intimate gathering.”<sup>67</sup>

The communities featured in my study give agency to time-honored and historical practices that are still observed. The Catholic Church provides that historical connection and represents the sacramental rites required for burial, but are not in conflict with traditions that have evolved separate from the Church. Reverend Brito lends support to this mutual regard: “There are unique ways in which people choose to bury their dead. As a child, I remember that the graveyards were called *camposantos*. Everyone has the right to mourn the way they want. People get criticized for the way in which they cope with death. Faith allows them honor in their way. We can't judge how people deal with grief.”<sup>68</sup> Reverend Salazar lends his observation about grieving, “For funerals, there is a period of mourning. Close relatives mourn for a year. To me, this is very psychologically sound. It's a time to heal.”<sup>69</sup>

Ochs argues that it is the performance of grief that allows for consolation for the living. Such performance in Parral, Chihuahua, as we learn from Irma Hinojas, brings together the living relatives and friends who stay “With the body all day and all night and have a Catholic Mass the next day.” They take the body to the cemetery and bury it,

afterwards return to the house of the family where they share a meal to remember the life of the person they just buried.<sup>70</sup> Lydia Armijo from Española speaks to the need that “The community members should be there for funerals and support those who die.”<sup>71</sup> Ray Fajardo contends, “Funerary traditions are rooted in the church.”<sup>72</sup> He recalls as a child, it was a time of mourning and you weren’t allowed to listen to the radio or watch TV. He didn’t understand it all, but remembers how a wreath on the door signified that someone had passed away.<sup>73</sup> Rudolfo<sup>74</sup> Gonzales also recalls his childhood memory, “At *velorios*, everyone prayed with the families. The homes were not big, and people prayed both inside and outside. There was no such thing as children playing outside while the adults prayed. We, as a community, had an obligation to ensure a healthy journey for the *difunto*.”<sup>75</sup>

Recalling Pascualita and Michelle’s stories as the basis for this entire exploration about death prior to being wedded lends an air of sadness to the entire exploration. The circumstance of Pascualita’s deceased body comes into question as an imaginary figure about which historical details are unsubstantiated. Her legendary status as a symbol of a young bride-to-be becomes an unintended real story based on the life of Michelle who was a living being and died tragically as a bride-to-be. This study intends to make visible the tangible or actual connections of the history and cultures they embody as Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o women. In speaking to the idea of how important it is for the deceased to be remembered and memorialized, the manner in which they both have appeared in this context has given them another afterlife.

## Seeing Death

This section highlights personal stories and the experience of having lived through the death ritual of someone and how lives are shaped by death through memory. The core of shared rituals and traditions that honor or remember the deceased are emphasized by Marita Sturken who writes that, “I use the term ‘cultural memory’ to define memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning” (Sturken, 1997: 3). Recollecting memories about death gives meaning to the rituals and serve as personal examples of death, dying, and ritual that manifest in communal practice and reality.

Reverend Larry Brito recalled two memories of his youth: “There was a whole family killed in a car accident in Las Vegas, New Mexico when I was a child. The family was named Wildsteins, and the entire family except the baby were killed. There were about six or seven of them and the coffins were all lined up at the church at Our Lady of Sorrows. This impressed me in many different ways. Another time, a neighbor girl drowned in Storrie Lake. She was younger than me. She was buried in her First Communion outfit.”<sup>76</sup> Regarding his recollection of details in the first story, he mentions the coffins in a row. In the second story, he remembers the girl in her First Communion dress. His childhood memories remain with him today as he goes about conducting his work as a Catholic priest.

Alfonso Hernández Ramírez recalls, “Before the funeral home came for my mother-in law at my sister-in law’s house, the grandchildren arrived. They prayed and they still honored her as though she was present. Each went up to her to tell her what they felt about her. Even though it was painful, it was what had to be done. It is very painful

saying good-bye to the body that once held the spirit and soul of your loved one. The reason it is so painful is because one feels that the greatest love one felt is being taken away and it is the most painful feeling anyone can feel.”<sup>77</sup> His memory is vivid in its detail of what happened as the events unfolded when his mother-in-law died. The family was able to speak to the *difunto* before being taken from the home, allowing them to share their grief openly.

David Martínez recalls, “In my own personal experience, when my father died, there were rituals performed before the funeral home even came to pick up my father’s body. My mother placed any pictures of him face down and covered all the mirrors with material. In order to keep his eyes closed, she placed two silver dollars over his eyelids and tied a bandana under his jaw and around his head before the rigormortis set in. This is what was done even before we bathed him. It was like my mom was taking care of him both physically and spiritually.”<sup>78</sup> His memory brings forth particular traditions and practices that are culturally determined such as putting the photos face down, covering the mirrors in the home and placing silver coins on the eyelids to respect the body.

Ray Fajardo states, “As I remember, my father-in-law wanted to be buried in Chihuahua, but he lived in Doña Ana County for 60 years, so he was buried there. He said this was his idea of wanting to go back to his homeland. My parents were raised in the Hatch Valley. As I drive through the area, I remember the smells. There’s a longing for home. There is an ugly little Catholic cemetery in Las Cruces. I want to be buried there because it’s blessed ground and I don’t care what the cemetery looks like.”<sup>79</sup> His memories reflect a longing by his father-in-law wanting to return to his Mexico homeland.

Annette Ortiz recalls, “I remember when I was young and my aunt’s husband passed away. There was a rosary to ensure the soul’s passing. My aunt would wail; it was a tradition. This occurred in Grant County. In the past, special ladies went to pray the rosary and were accompanied by criers.”<sup>80</sup> Her recollection from childhood is of a wailing woman at a funeral, but seems to suggest this was tradition from the past.

Erlinda Portillo remembers, “My mom died, and I did not go to the gravesite. I was the second to the youngest. It bothered me for years. I wondered- where did she go? The *velorio* was held in our house. My brother and I were the two youngest children. We were seven and nine, and nobody would tell us what was going on or that my mom was going away and would never return. My oldest sister’s first husband made me go touch my mom. The memory stayed with me forever.”<sup>81</sup> Her grieving for her mother’s death was complicated by not being able to attend the burial where she may have found closure and consolation.

Johnny De Vargas recalled, “Michelle’s (Valdez) funeral occurred at another funeral home two years prior to me opening my own business, but I was present at her funeral. It is traditional here to plan a wedding, not a funeral, for a person so young. Her wedding was incorporated in her funeral. The floral arrangement was the same as for her bouquet and the groomsmen were the pallbearers. Michelle was about to become Mrs. Someone Else, not Miss Valdez. God had other plans for her.”<sup>82</sup> His memories are connected to his business as a funeral director and highlight the duality of this particular funeral for Michelle Valdez as an unfinished wedding.



The following chapter will illustrate visual culture in the form of *descansos*, art, community celebration and music and throughout Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o culture that honor the dead.

## Chapter Four

### *Descanso and Creative Processes of Memorialization*

There exists an organic quality to community forms of memorialization produced by Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* that retain an insider interpretation that previous scholarship (Alessi, 2007, Dickey, 1949, Weigle and White, 2003) has not entirely addressed. Born into a New Mexico Hispano family of musicians I have always been interested in collecting oral histories and sharing those stories written in songs about people who have died, and songs that I now realize continue to memorialize the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. In this chapter, I present locally produced individual artistic expressions of grief in response to a death, examples of which I was shown while conducting my field research.

Significant personal experiences, shared by those for whom such roadside memorials known as *descansos*, are relied upon to remember loved ones who have died on the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* which become actual living memorials. As I have indicated, community celebrations held in memory of the deceased such as the annual *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebrations in México are significantly different in substance from those in New Mexico. Finally, I demonstrate how musical traditions have persisted throughout the *Camino Real* over centuries of performance.

The use of deeply situated spaces to investigate the making of reality is one of the objectives in the study of visual culture and communication (Pink, 2007: 10, Morphy and Banks, 2007). Visual culture study and communication provides a way to explore the community identities of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples who maintain their historical traditions and rituals of memorialization in art, music and celebratory

performance. But rather than approaching visual anthropology<sup>83</sup> exclusively on images, this cultural region shared by the Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o people represents a collective cultural consciousness where places and spaces of remembering extend the memory of the deceased. El Rito, New Mexico and Chihuahua City, México were obvious choices to investigate material and visual culture because my dissertation features Michelle Valdez who was born and raised in El Rito, and Pascualita Esparza Perales in Chihuahua.

### *Descanso*

The beautiful stretch of highway that runs between El Rito and Española in northern New Mexico is located between the Jemez Mountains to the west and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east. El Rito in Spanish means “the ritual” and is highly symbolic of the fifteen miles one drives down from the El Rito *llano* (foothills) on highway 554 into the Española Valley. Along the drive are juniper trees and along the way are *arroyos* (dry washes) and scattered home sites. Some homes are made of adobe and reflect the traditional architecture of northern New Mexico with tin roofs and mud colored walls. Newer sites are mobile home and modular homes that have replaced the older homesteads. After reaching State Road 84, a few small businesses such as a car repair shop or gas station with attached convenience store are on the main highway that traverses north to the Colorado state line and south to the city of Espanola.

Visibly noticeable from the car as you drive along the highway are *descansos* (resting places), located alongside the road. Each *descanso* is unique. Some feature crosses made of wood or metal, many are decorated with plastic flowers, flags, stuffed animals and small wind wheels. At Christmas, many *descansos* are decorated with

holiday lights. Flowers and candles are a constant, but seasonally changing memorial to a loved one. Erected at the actual site where someone has died, often the result of some kind of tragic accident, the *descansos* are public memorials placed by the family, relatives and/or friends of the deceased. Historically, *descansos* were simply marked by a pile of stones where someone has died and that over time people continued to add a stone to the pile in memory of that person.

In my exploration for contemporary interpretations as to the meaning of *descansos* for Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o people today, an idea presented by Adrian Martínez from Santa Cruz, New Mexico revealed a different tone and sensibility as to their meaning. He said, “You could say the whole valley is a *descanso* because people inhabited that land and lived, died and will be buried there. It’s that land and that energy that resonates and speaks to the people.”<sup>84</sup> The practice of *descansos* becomes a marker for where one’s ancestors are buried, but over time also serves to define the boundaries of a people’s homeland. Martínez’s suggestion goes beyond the traditional interpretation of *descanso* as “memorials erected at the places where the funeral procession paused to rest on the journey between the church and the cemetery” (Anaya, Arellano and Chávez, 1995: Introduction). The association with place is more than an interrupted journey where death is a destination as suggested by previous cultural insider scholars.



**Figure 1. Traditional *Descanso*, Medanales, New Mexico<sup>85</sup>**



**Figure 2. Contemporary *Descanso*, Tierra Azul, New Mexico**

The traditional view of *descanso* becomes a commemorative statement about an unexpected death as when a car accident claims a life and the *descanso* marks that place where, Amy Ortiz says, her family makes sure the person is not forgotten and celebrates each anniversary of their loved one by tending to their *descanso*.<sup>86</sup> Besides the family

erecting a *descanso* for a loved one, it is not unusual for a community to engage in the construction or maintenance of individual *descansos*. Tom Borrego referred to his brother, who died on El Llano Road in Española, and noted that a neighbor took it upon himself to place a *descanso* for his deceased brother within a couple of days. Borrego says, “We went as a family to see it afterward and it was a wooden cross with a design.”<sup>87</sup> The tone of Borrego’s voice did not appear to find it unusual, but as a matter of fact he seemed moved by the neighbor’s gesture on behalf of his deceased brother.

Ray Fajardo, from Las Cruces in southern New Mexico, said that between Las Cruces and Albuquerque, he passes numerous *descansos* and says a prayer for each person. The prayer he offers is, “God bless you. God rest your soul.”<sup>88</sup> Fajardo believes it is very important to place crosses to remember that person who has died tragically. In this reflection, there is a bridging of the secular and religious where the *descanso* takes on continuing importance in daily life and sheds light on *descansos* as inspiration to say a prayer or make a sign of the cross as I have witnessed people do as they drive by a *descanso*.

The care and/or tending to a *descanso* is cited by Joe Ciddio who recalls, “The other day I saw a pick up truck pulled over and someone was attending a *descanso* and it made me aware in a different way as to what it requires. They *are* (italics mine) maintained.”<sup>89</sup> A connection to and reminder of one’s mortality and future journey is a familiar theme associated with *descansos* that are meant to serve as warnings. But some people do not like them because, “Some people don’t like reminders (such as) a statue, stop sign, reflector, or a yield sign,”<sup>90</sup> suggests Reverend Pat Chávez. The *descanso* forces some to remember the reality of tragedies within the community. They also

transform the tragedy into a shared memory symbolized as a physical representation (the *descanso*) that keeps the spirit of the *difunto* alive. The construction of *descansos*, especially those with greater ornamentation and extra attention to details appear at times to be a distraction on the roadway because of their size or gaudy appearance. Christmas, and more specifically Halloween decorations, demonstrate in my view, the influence of American commerce that allow people to magnify their loss and perform their grief publicly around these dates. Because *descansos* are historically, culturally and locally-defined as suggested by Jose Valenzuela Arce, “We need to validate and affirm cultural difference to make sure cultural identity remains a relevant place in the conformity of cultural identities” (Arce, 2000: 133). The *descanso* functions as a symbol of cultural identity that keeps cultural dissolution from occurring since they continue to be erected and maintained.

The practice of *descansos* in México is a custom that I did not find being spoken of as often as in New Mexico during the course of my research. However, according to Jaime Alberto Morales Ramos, *descansos* ‘represent a great love and compassion for other people.’<sup>91</sup> In Chihuahua City, an elaborate use of a *descanso* was erected by political and cultural activists in response to the multiple numbers of uninvestigated deaths of young women many of whom worked in the factories said Javier Refugio Villanueva,<sup>92</sup> a community artist and activist who contributed to the mural *descanso*. He stated that it was intended as a call for action: *¡Ni Una Más!* (Not One More!) It is a large wooden bas-relief sculpture with 8,000 nails representing each murdered woman. Details on the sculpture featured a life-size wooden cross with a dismembered hand and a factory-issued shirt hanging from the cross. There is a sign with the words *Paz con*



*Justicia* (Peace with Justice) and on the ground in front of the sculpture is a shallow grave representing one of the murdered women. The *descanso* was built in front of the Governor's Palace intended to bring attention to the deaths of women factory workers. Driving around Chihuahua City, I noted *descansos* in certain areas along the road, but of particular interest were pink colored crosses more recently erected also as memorials to the women who died violently.



**Figure 3. ¡Ni una Más! Memorial Chihuahua, México**





**Figure 4. Cruces Rosas Descanso Chihuahua, México**

The opportunity presents itself to introduce an entirely different approach to viewing a *descanso* when I analyze the customary function of public memorials that are erected to memorialize someone who has died. To be reminded of a tragic death more specifically, is at the core of most references to roadside *descansos*. And in the case of a public *descanso* calling attention to the murdered *mujeres de Chihuahua*, it becomes possible to draw a parallel with the representation of Pascualita in her wedding dress in the window display at La Popular Dress Shop as a *descanso*. Pascualita's story evokes a particular historical identity for women (in México) as a bride to be. As noted in my interviews, the community of Chihuahua remembers Pascualita as having died tragically but it is the stories about her mother who is overcome by grief and "puts her daughter in her wedding dress in the shop window," possibly to immortalize Pascualita that reveals the importance of remembrance. Over time Pascualita has become a *descanso*, as people pass by they remember her story and in some cases offer prayers or make the sign of the cross as noted in my previous chapter. Jaime Morales Gutiérrez relates the legend of

Pascualita is long standing in his memory, “The legend of Pascualita is one that I have known about since I was a child. It is a mannequin that preserves the memory of the young bride that had died. The figure is used to remember and memorialize the young woman. She (her mother) put her in the window. This proves that we as *Mexicanos* want to live on forever in memory. She did not want to lose the memory.”<sup>93</sup> The symbolism associated with erecting a *descanso* is to mark the location of where a fatal death has occurred, thus, the dress shop as the location where Pascualita died is transformed into a form of *descanso*.



**Figure 5. Pascualita Figure as *Descanso* Chihuahua, México<sup>94</sup>**

There is no disconnect for Alberto Morales Ramos in accepting the idea that Pascualita functions as a *descanso* when he said, “Pascualita holds the symbolism of being a traditional Mexican woman. It is also a very beautiful tradition because of all the trouble her family went through to memorialize her. This what you are witnessing is the great love for their daughter.”<sup>95</sup> Pascualita is a public memorial and is spoken of as someone who represents the people as Jesús Miguel Ramos Morales says, “What I think she represents culturally for our people is the significance and the beauty of keeping her memory alive. She is a symbol for the living.”<sup>96</sup> Erica Aguirre Polanco also recalls hearing about Pascualita and how she believes her to be someone who was real, saying,

“I moved to Chihuahua City ten years ago and a lady started to tell me about the figure of Pascualita but they never told me of the real history which I think would be of much relevance and importance. They say that Pascualita, that her spirit walks the streets of Chihuahua. But what the lady told me is that she represented something very important to the city and to the state of Chihuahua and what I realized at that moment was that Pascualita did have life. Only recently, have I started learning about her story and I think that it is very important because I think knowing who she is, is important to our identity as people from Chihuahua and Mexican people.”<sup>97</sup>

The second protagonist in my dissertation is Michelle Valdez, the young Hispana who died tragically just before her wedding, a destiny shared with Pascualita. Michelle’s afterlife takes a different turn when her photograph is featured on a state campaign roadside billboard promoting anti-drunk driving. According to her mother Donna Valdez, she was approached by a local representative of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) of New Mexico asking her permission to use her daughter Michelle’s high school graduation photograph for their new campaign. Mrs. Valdez says she initially worried that she’d have to relive her daughter’s death but the County DWI Program

rationalized that this (billboard project) could help save someone's life. She allowed them the use of Michelle's photograph. It appeared alongside six other photographs of young people who were killed by a drunk driver. The commercial sized billboard was placed on Highway 84 between Pojoaque and Española and remained there for ten years from 1997 to 2010. The billboard was replaced by a new campaign against drunk driving. Mrs. Valdez explained how she viewed the image of Michelle on the billboard in that it might bring healing for the community. But when the campaign took down the billboard with Michelle's photograph, she was upset. In part, because they had led her to believe the billboard would be permanent. Further, she later realized the DWI Program had a different agenda that was aligned with punishment of drunk drivers, and rejected its use as not allowing for healing saying, "our way of grieving is not punitive, God knows what He's doing. He has a plan. He helped us."<sup>98</sup> She wanted people to remember Michelle as a force for good and the billboard was a way to keep her daughter's memory positive, not for a political or social purposes. She also viewed the billboard as a way for the community to accept what had happened and heal from the tragedy. So when the billboard was changed out and Michelle's image was no longer present she said it was as if her memory was erased.



**Figure 6. Billboard with Michelle Valdez as *Descanso*, Pojoaque, New Mexico<sup>99</sup>**

When the billboard was first erected the response by the community in El Rito was mixed. The photographic image of Michelle Valdez was not considered offensive but others felt the anti-drunk driving message reflected negatively on El Rito as a whole because the driver Dwayne García who killed Michelle was also from the community. One adverse comment about the billboard is by Amy Ortiz who said, “The billboard was placed shortly after her death. It didn’t sit right with me. I know Dwayne’s family also. The billboard made him a monster. He’s a nice guy. It was an accident.”<sup>100</sup> During the interview Ortiz repeated the billboard’s words, “How many drinks is your loved one worth?” and then said, “This billboard was a stab at the community...(and) outsiders were coming in and telling us we were at fault.”<sup>101</sup> Ortiz confirms my contention that Michelle’s photographic image became a kind of *descanso* as a public memorial evoking

reality and tragedy but one that Michelle's mother wanted to believe would heal the ruptures not provoke them as Ortiz suggests. In fact, it recalls the idea of *descansos* as a kind of warning that some people do not like because they raise one's consciousness.



**Figure 7. State DWI Road sign Memorial to Michelle Valdez Tierra Azúl, New Mexico**

### **Remembering Their Dead in Art, Celebration and Song**

Locally produced ritual practices and memorializations that honor the dead along the *Camino* came to my attention as I interviewed people who overcame grief through the act of creating while grieving a death. Death itself, when considered as a passage, provides the opportunity for remembering those who have died. Some of the few samples I located of artistic memorialization are presented as ethnographic memorials that belong specifically to the individual who are speaking about their creative production. This artistic production serves as symbols of that individual's involvement with the community. Thus, the productive process is not just for whom one creates a work of art, which is highly personal, but also reflects the aesthetics understood by the community



(Gaspar de Alba, 1998: 74). Adrian Martínez showed me a painting that he said he painted for his sister and her son, and entitled it “*La Tormenta*” because they were having a hard time following the death of her boyfriend. He said, “I did this piece of a woman and child at the top of the mesa with wind blowing their hair standing in front of a *descanso*. On top of the *descanso* is a Raven—a special bird in our culture where the raven is seen in higher elevations around here and become more apparent so that’s why the bird is there.”<sup>102</sup> The details of this painting were intended for the artist’s sister and his nephew to help them recover their lives after a tumultuous relationship with the boyfriend who committed suicide and was not intended memorialize him. Martínez noted that where they live in northern New Mexico ravens represent messengers from a higher being and he intentionally place the bird in the painting to help redeem his sister and her son recover their lives.



**Figure 8. “*La Tormenta*” Adrian Martínez, 1996**

Another kind of memorialized artistic expression was shared in my interview with artist Tom Borrego from Española who described it as follows: “We celebrate a person’s life when they go. I tie in death with art pieces. They are symbols. My only brother died in a car accident at age 24, and my uncle who was my father figure died of cancer at age 53. I carved a piece to memorialize (both of) them. It is a woodcarving of “*La Muerte*” (death), playing the guitar. You don’t want to forget people who are close to you. You want to remember the impact they had on your life and the piece helps others to remember as well.”<sup>103</sup> “*La Muerte*” personifies death and Borrego’s use of this image to remember his brother and uncle is part of a long tradition of stories and images that invoke *Doña Sebastiana* who in Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o culture represents “*La Muerte*.” Typically crafted as a *bulto* (three dimensional carved figure) standing in a wooden cart, she is death in skeletal form usually constructed with actual human hair holding a bow and arrow. Her image is often present in older churches and *capillas* (community chapels) throughout northern New Mexico. Borrego said that he and other wood carvers known in the region as *santeros* typically and always produce a carving of “*La Muerte*” to honor death. He feels she is just as important as other *santos* (saints) they carve.<sup>104</sup> In my interview with Angelo Sandoval he recalled, “The images of the *santos* give us a reality. It is a spiritual process when making a *santo*.”<sup>105</sup> He identified *santo* carving as a religious practice. While there is an emphasis on producing art within the community that is tied to spiritual beliefs or religious practice, making art to memorialize the dead is a natural outgrowth of communal art production to preserve local memory.





**Figure 9. “La Muerte” Tom Borrego, 1995**

Communal reverence for the dead is perhaps most obvious in the celebrations associated with *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). The differences in celebrations in New Mexico of *Día de los Muertos* with celebrations in México has its’ own unique story and has become a national celebration throughout the México. But it was the absence of any mention of the Church’s role in *Día de los Muertos* celebrations that led me to the question, why was the practice México different? *Día de los Muertos* is an indigenous

practice pre-dating the arrival of Catholicism in México and in deference to the history of “civilizing” the indigenous peoples’ with baptism to Christianity, *Día de los Muertos* remained a fixture in the local communities and became one of many cultural practices that have become a fixture of Mexicana/o culture. The issue is a striking topic for another study that runs counter to the quiet memorial and mass services practice that honors the ‘souls of the dead’ in New Mexico that is led by the Catholic Church. The form taken of this tradition, as a religious observance, successfully separates the Hispana/o communities from the indigenous practice of honoring their dead which would be considered pagan.

Remembering the *Día de los Muertos* in México surfaced repeatedly in interviews when talking about memorials to the deceased. *Día de los Muertos* is traditionally celebrated on November 2, with its sister ritual, *Día de todos los santos* (All saints day) taking place the day before. Brisa Ovaíz Chávez described the way her family celebrates as “the coolest tradition I remember is *Día de los Muertos* and on that day we remember the dead and honor them with the things they liked the most and the food they loved the most. At my house we put a candle at the main entrance of the bedroom we put a glass of water in the room so that the bad spirits can’t enter only the good ones. You open the channels when you call upon the spirits and the good as well as the bad sometimes enter that space. In (our way of) *danza* we have a shell dedicated to opening the channels for the dead to come and visit and that too is very cool. You stay all day at the cemetery and drink tequila. That type of tradition is very interesting and great.”<sup>106</sup>

The function of *Día de los Muertos* as explained by Claudio Lomnitz-Adler involves reciprocity with the deceased that is incorporated into daily life as people make

the sign of the cross, pray and live with sacred images in their homes (such as statues, carvings, pictures of the saints, crosses, etc.). This relationship further invokes the names of deceased and requests of the saints, in times of difficulty the adoption of patron saints are added to the relationship. Survivors also receive the privilege of praying to a familiar and blessed soul in heaven. On *Día de los Muertos* the living set out food for the dead souls, and because of the belief that evil spirits would not disturb the corpses of those buried near the churches, survivors took care to make certain their loved ones rested in hallowed ground (Lomnitz-Adler, 2005: 253-59).

Other disclosures about *Día de los Muertos* came from Carlos Daniel Arrieta Baca who remembers that on “*Día de los Muertos* we take flowers to the grave and honor the dead. Share food and remember the dead.”<sup>107</sup> Erika Aguirre Polanco follows the narrative saying, “In the traditions of the Mexican people is that we continually dedicate ourselves to celebrate traditions to honor our dead. This is a tradition that we celebrate all the time. We visit the gravesites of our dead often and it is one of the most celebrated traditions of the Mexican people and they always take flowers to the gravesite.”<sup>108</sup> Gilda Rizo Barajas brings her own family rituals to bear, on “November 2 as they go and stay in the graveyard all day and play music and offer the dead loved ones food that they love the most in life because the belief is that around *Día de los Muertos* the spirits come to visit and come to eat, the living also share the food. We still have a tradition that celebrate and commemorate November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> when All Saints day and All Souls day are celebrated and we have a tradition where the children of the community go out and dress the children like angels to go out and ask for candy. We pray and ring bells. They are very beautiful because they bring the community and the family together.”<sup>109</sup>

The juxtaposition that Mexico has with death in celebrating *Día de los Muertos* predating Catholic tradition is clarified by Joaquín Rodolfo Acosta Quevedo who says, “When the Spanish traveled to what we call *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* they were looking for riches, but they knew what the people felt and they exchanged customs, and they knew that there were already traditions and rich culture here so they were also enriched and learned much from the people. Many of the customs of the Mexican people were lost when the Spanish came. Hopefully they can be recuperated. They began to evangelize México and then covered the temples and sacred sites that were utilized by the indigenous people. The Spanish thought the customs of death were scary and wanted to change them because they were uncomfortable with those rituals. The *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* was important for the riches but also for its people. But many resisted changes that the Spanish tried to make. They fought for their culture with their own blood and many of the Spanish were just here for the riches, not for the possibilities of what the community culture had to offer.”<sup>110</sup> His explanation reveals the history and commitment of remembering the deceased that continues into the present.

The growing movement to celebrate *Día de los Muertos* in Parral, Chihuahua was highlighted by Irma Hinojas who witnessed *Día de los Muertos* become a national holiday for all of México saying, “Memorial and remembering—here in México there is a national memorial day called *Día de los Muertos* that takes place on November 2 and nationally we celebrate it with *musica nortena* [northern México regional music] or mariachi music and flowers. There is a move to recuperate traditions from the southern part of México that is more indigenous and from where the ritual of altars’ and food at the cemetery began.”<sup>111</sup>

Traveling from New Mexico into México and observing celebrations such as *Día de los Muertos* captured Nikki Bustos attention when in México saying,

“My favorite holiday is *Día de los Muertos*. That event alone is enough to give anyone culture shock. If you are not strong or open-minded enough it could really scare you. The image of the *muerte* has always interested me. I got to see the more popular forms of those images in the celebration of *Día de los Muertos*. Even in death you see the images of the *muertos* in celebration. The people in México just use it as a way to honor and remember their loved ones who are physically gone but alive spiritually.”<sup>112</sup>

I began this chapter referring to my life as a musician and a major influence that has opened many doors allowing me to learn from other musicians and perform for audiences at weddings, funerals, and public spaces that inspire identification with the songs that I perform. Playing music has always been more than performing to entertain people. I was taught the responsibility of keeping the poetics of Hispana/o culture alive through the language, stories, and memories that you share with the community as a gift. In recognizing the values carried by playing music, the relevance of music within Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o experience becomes a way to “memorialize their loved ones with songs, poems, and *descansos*. They highlight landmarks in people’s lives, and people take them seriously.”<sup>113</sup> Rudolfo Gonzales has a similar story to my own when he says, “My family played music and my dad played the violin. My mom wrote verses for many occasions (baptisms, weddings, deaths, etc.). My three sisters Beatriz, Eloida and Elsie also wrote verses and mom played the harmonica. I was 3 ½ years old when my father died, but I still remember the sight of dad playing the violin. My parents played at weddings and my brothers Eloy and Elmer also played music.”<sup>114</sup>

Intersections with music and my study involving sites of connection between peoples along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* was validated in May 1998 by the

Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez on its twenty fifth anniversary when it hosted a gathering of popular musicians from the State of Chihuahua and the upper Río Grande (including Texas, Arizona and New Mexico) who shared notes, lyrics and sentiments of a musical tradition that was thought to be near extinction.<sup>115</sup> The gathering established a network of communications among musicians and produced a recording titled “*La Música del Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*” to honor the event and place this musical tradition in its proper historical and geographical context that “possess very peculiar characteristics, that the political borders have not been an obstacle for the interchange of rhythms and themes.”<sup>116</sup> This project was the first effort in modern history to preserve and strengthen the values that bind the cultural identity of the country (México). The organizers of the project sought to unite with the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez in an effort to disseminate to the general public a selection of *corridos* (popular songs) “that represents part of the culture which long ago was known as *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.”<sup>117</sup>

A second connection to music directly related to my study is a popular song written specifically about Pascualita. The song is written by Tito Villalobos who recorded it in 2004 with the title, “*La Hija de Pascualita*.”<sup>118</sup> The song nearly mirrors the entire Pascualita legend beginning with the phrase of “some time ago in Chihuahua”: “*Hace tiempo, mucho tiempo, que en Chihuahua una novia, modelando su vestido.*” Reference is then made to modeling her wedding dress and continues to speak of her beautiful figure. The reference to her name, “Chonita is forever,” “*Es Chonita para siempre, se quedó con su hermorsura. Ella cuentan muchas cosas, dicen que de blanco estaba, en la iglesia ya en su boda,*” she was open to possibilities in white and was in the

church at her wedding and she died by an accident and her life is finished. The song's lyrics tell about her mother, that in order to conserve her daughter, embalms her to retain her beauty. The song goes on to reiterate how very pretty she was and now that she is a sculpture those that pass by it admire it and some say they fall in love. A few more verses mention that at night Chonita leaves to take a walk wearing her dress in the streets of the city. The song concludes that one does not know if this is truth because there are several legends about Chonita and her mother. The song ends with "*lo que sé es que Pascualita si vivió, pero hoy no está, lo que sé es que Pascualita si vivió, pero hoy no está.*" The song asks the listener to wonder, what if Pascualita had lived, but today it is not, what if she had lived, but today is not. The song tells a story that sounds near to truth but detours to reflect on the legends about Pascualita's body and of her walking around the city at night in search of young men to attract. This is where the story becomes dramatic and tests reality. It functions within the realm of popular music but gives no amplified meaning beyond what has already been written or shared about the life of Pascualita and remains fixed in legend. It does however work to remember that death is a natural part of life, but when death is unexpected tragic songs are written to commemorate the person.

From descansos to song lyrics we find embedded stories intended to stir emotion and remember the dead. In my research I located a uniquely appropriate song to conclude the theme of loss that was written from the perspective of the bridegroom or groom who has lost his bride. "*La Boda Negra*"<sup>119</sup> is from a collection of songs *Música de los Viejitos: Hispano Folk Music of the Río Grande del Norte* (1999) reproduced in New Mexico by ethnomusicologist Jack Loeffler. I have translated the song in its'

entirety to illustrate dramatic prose about a grieving groom who symbolically represents the grief felt by Michelle Valdez's husband-to-be Melvin Jaramillo following her death:

### **La Boda Negra**

Oye la historia que contó un día,  
el viejo enterrador de la comarca.  
Era un amante que por suerte impía  
su dulce bien le arrebató la parca.

Todas las noches iba al cementerio  
A visitar la tumba de la hermosa.  
La gente murmuraba con misterio,  
!Es un muerto escapado de la fosa!

En una noche horrenda hizo pedazos  
el mármol de la tumba abandonada.  
Cavó la tierra y llevó en sus brazos  
El rígido esqueleto de su amada.

Y allá en la triste habitación sombría  
de un cirio fúnebre de llama incierta,  
sentó a su lado la osamenta fría  
y celebró las bodas con la muerta.

Ató con cintas los desnudos huesos,  
el yerto cráneo coronó de flores.  
La horrible boca le cubrió de besos  
y le contó sonriendo sus amores.

Llevó la novia al tálamo mullido,  
se acostó junto a ella enamorado  
y para siempre se quedó dormido  
el esqueleto rígido abrazado.

Oye la historia que contó un día,  
el viejo enterrador de la comarca.  
Era un amante que por suerte impía  
Su dulce bien le arrebató la parca.  
(Loeffler, 1999: 94-95).

### **Black Wedding**

Listen to the story that was told one day  
by the old gravedigger of the region.  
There was once a lover who by impious luck  
had his sweet love snatched away by death.

Every night he went to the cemetery  
to visit the grave of the beautiful woman.  
The people would murmur with mystery,  
He's a corpse escaped from the grave!

One horrible night he smashed  
the marble of the abandoned tomb.  
He dug in the earth and carried in his arms  
The rigid skeleton of his beloved.

And there in his sad shadowy room  
by the funeral flicker of candlelight,  
he sat the cold skeleton by his side  
And celebrated marriage with her.

He tied her fleshless bones with ribbons  
and crowned the staff skull with flowers.  
He covered the horrible mouth with kisses,  
and smiling, told her of his love.

He carried his bride to the downy bridal bed  
and lay down with her enamored,  
and he remained asleep forever,  
embracing the rigid skeleton.

Listen to the story that was told one day  
by the old gravedigger of the region.  
there was once a lover by impious luck  
Had his sweet love snatched away by death.

To conclude this chapter the words of Adrian Martínez from Santa Cruz de la Cañada, New Mexico comforting as he contemplates how “the writers will write about it,



painters will paint about it and musicians will write and sing about it. The *raza* and their belief about life and death lend themselves to the artists to document.”<sup>120</sup> The *descanso*, the artist, the community and the music together form a web of celebration in memory of those who have died but are kept alive in spirit.

## Chapter Five

### Epilogue

#### *Una historia y cultura*

After I attended the first series of colloquia commemorating the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* at the Oñate Center in Alcalde, New Mexico coinciding with the 400th year anniversary of Juan de Oñate's settlement in New Mexico, I was stimulated by the discussions. The panels of scholars, cultural preservation curators, musicians, community historians and artists were finally and openly acknowledging the historical and cultural connections between México and the U.S. Annual colloquia continued to be sponsored in México and the U.S. that led to formal exchanges and workshops between community peoples sharing stories, musical traditions, food ways, and familial histories. These exchanges encouraged and reawakened interest in Chicana/o and Hispana/o commonalities with Mexicana/o daily life through ritual practices and shared communal values and belief systems. The major outcome of the colloquia was the acknowledgement of a shared history and culture and the opportunity to reclaim it. Thirteen years later, my journey to complete a dissertation that investigates the ideas and practices celebrating Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o commonalities brings me full circle as an ethnographer. My approach has not been to test the knowledge of what Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o peoples' ideas were about the *Camino Real* but how they live, practice and thrive as descendants of history within this unique region.

The stories of Pascualita and Michelle surfaced as muses for my study about reconnecting Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o experience. Their stories 'as brides to be' became a meaningful way for me to discuss the continued performance of ritual

practices associated with death and memorialization along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. While conducting my research I encountered viscerally embedded emotions of drama and grief surrounding not only the tragic story of Michelle Valdez but as a vehicle for all persons I interviewed to share about their losses and memories which I regard as truthful representations of cultural experience. My study engages the story of Michelle Valdez who represents the real and actual experience of a life that can be documented through memories of her family and community whereas, Pascualita has no documented identity but who's story has been retold for nearly seventy years and is now legendary for the people of Chihuahua yet, symbolizes traditional Mexicana identity.

Grounding my study in localized communities in New Mexico and México was intended to cultivate the idea of a “cultural construction of reality” (Vila, 2003: X), that respected the perspectives of local cultures across the *Camino*. I did not separate their stories as belonging only to México or the U.S. but as a region connected by history and origin. The lived experience remains complete and real when woven into stories even with the case of Pascualita becoming legendary. Stories are an integral part of older cultures and it is in their re-telling that memories are kept alive. To solidify my point about the function of storytelling, I present two unique stories that were told to me during my research that were based on actual lived experienced that when heard out of local context in the community could possibly be misconstrued or fabricated. The first story is about a ritual burial and the second, about the symbolism of a wedding dress. Jesús Herrera Morales from his local community in Valle de Allende said, “When we were little there was much death and the mortality rate was thirty percent. They would dress children who died young like Santo Niño de Atocha and this was very impressionable.

There was a special area in the cemetery that was called the ‘*Angelito Place*’ that was specifically reserved for the children and it was a custom to bury the kids there. There was no money (for a box) so parents carried the child in their arms to bury them.”<sup>121</sup> Morales shared his memory from childhood but as he told me this story it was clearly rooted in his community and the features noted in his telling about the child being dressed as a saint and of the special place in the cemetery for children became real as I recalled in my own memory the reference to babies and children who died and were thought to become ‘*angelitos*’ (little angels.)

This story from Española, New Mexico presents a straightforward telling by Amelia Gonzales of a conversation she had with her mother as she was preparing to get married. She recalled, ”I was married at age 17 and was told by my mother if I was going to get married in white, I better be deserving of the dress. There were rumors in the community about women who wore white and were not deserving, and ‘would burn up in their dress.’ As I got older I figured that the women got so scared they lit their dresses on fire with the candles (they were holding). I was so nervous for my wedding I was shaking all over the place and could have started my dress on fire. It was not that I was not deserving but that I was nervous.”<sup>122</sup>

These stories are special because they tell of real events within a lived experience unique to the community where they occurred, Valle de Allende and Española. The symbolism of the shared value concerning childhood death when there is no money to buy a casket and dressing them like little saints, and the other, a belief in being virtuous to marry in a white wedding dress point to the s shared values held by the communities and “they have a longer history than man can even understand,”<sup>123</sup> says Dolores Aracelí

Arceo Guerrero. Guerrero's work in oral history suggests that such stories and/or legends have very little value in academic studies because they are hard to understand and reconstruct as fact. This approach acknowledges the purpose of retelling stories as a means to empower historical relationships.<sup>124</sup> My analysis of these stories serves as a contribution to the study of Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o oral history in giving voice back to local communities for the reason that it's the most organic and real space to examine and learn about culture.

### ***Memorias***

I entered this study to tell a broader and more personal story that encompasses a complex history of related peoples and bypasses a narrow focus on the political narratives of the U.S./Mexico border. I went in search of shared Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o identity along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* and found an ethnography that demonstrates how history and cultural practices are still relevant and very active. My qualitative research interviews give attention to the working knowledge in communities that show signs of change but which remain interactive in multiple ways to remember who they are and how they want to be remembered, 'I heard them say it.' My research further locates profound experiences embedded in rituals and traditions that invite comment on tradition and marriage, communal roles and responsibilities in death and dying practices, and identifies grief as a process of creative expression. My analysis combines a formulation of legend and reality that speaks to the politics of cultural memory, in particular to grief and consolation, bereavement, and grief performance as a discourse of historical memorialization and remembrance.

The articulation of Pascualita Esparza Perales and Michelle Valdez within the context of *descansos* presents the idea of evolving ritual memorialization practices that, while they are historically rooted people accommodate and integrate current trends that help to keep the traditional practices alive. When I drive by *descansos* today and see various holiday themes adorning *descansos* I smile with recognition for the deceased who are still thought of as part of the present. With regard to Michelle Valdez, the use of her photograph on a DWI billboard for ten years based on the comments of her mother who wanted the community to heal from its loss, in contrast to another young woman who felt the billboard was an insult to their community ‘suggesting they were all drunks,’ demonstrates how this contemporary *descanso* provoked differing responses. The primary audiences for the billboard campaign were residents from northern New Mexico and driving by it on a regular basis for ten years was identical to driving by the *descansos* on that, and every other, road in the region.

The story of Pascualita is a prime example of how stories reach legendary proportion based on dramatic retellings that magnified Pascualita’s mother’s behavior as unnatural and crazy ignoring the reality of Pascualita’s death. I propose that Michelle’s mother, Donna Valdez is a true representative of a mother who has lost her child and therefore, is able to give meaning to behaviors that could be mistaken as strange based on her decision to bury her daughter in her wedding dress. Based on the narrative shared by Donna Valdez, her lived experience represents a grieving that finds comfort in being able to remember her daughter as a form of memorialization. My theoretical foundation regarding Chicana/o, Hispana/o, and Mexicana/o belief is that the *difunto* cannot be forgotten. The necessity for remembering the ancestors becomes a greater responsibility

for maintaining belief systems, values and guiding philosophies that attach us to their memory. They are remembered in songs such as *Antepasados* (ancestors) which tells of a grandmother who appears to her grandson in a dream as she's walking down the road, he asks, 'who are you? She answers 'I am your great grandmother.' She says to him 'Come to me and I want to tell you something...don't ever forget your ancestors.' She gives *consejos* (advice) to her great grandson about not to forget who you are or where you come from, and she says she is appearing to him because she has been forgotten. She says 'My memory is asleep and I want to be awakened by having you retell my story so our culture can be rejuvenated and reconnect with that which is important to us—land, water, language and traditions—and the only way to awaken me is by telling my story to your children and grandchildren. The young boy says 'I promise you Grandma that I will never forget you and to my children and grandchildren I will sing about you.' The grandmother walks away and continues on her path with a smile and tears in her eyes. I conclude my study with these song lyrics as a representation of the people interviewed who have helped awaken sleeping memories that are the essence of my dissertation findings as to how remembering ancestry exemplify how ritual memorialization still lives along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.

In 1998 the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* was commemorated by highway markers along its route between New Mexico and into México acknowledging a shared history. As a memorial to this geographical space however, there were no voices to explain what these signs mean. These uniquely designed road signs are purple with script lettering reflecting a 'royal' theme but makes no connection to the actual people whom the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* is supposed to represent. Instead the signs appear to

represent a dead history when in fact my study illustrates a cultural richness and integrity of a living history with a continuing legacy of survival through four hundred years of memory.



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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> I will use all three identifiers throughout the study in order to be as comprehensive as possible to give the people of this study voice because the geographic region spans acrossnational borders.

<sup>2</sup> A term utilized in order to identify the cultural and physical blending of Indigenous and Spanish identity.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Grimes, Donvan Ochs, Luis León.

<sup>4</sup> Day of the Dead celebrations is found both in Mexico and New Mexico. In southern Mexico the celebration involves the entire community where altars and food and drink are offered to the souls of the dead. In New Mexico traditionally it is celebrated or honored in the Catholic Church and among the Indigenous Pueblos in New Mexico there are similar practices as in Mexico where food and drink are offered to the ancestors. It is celebrated annually on November 2 in Mexico, and among the Pueblos it is celebrated on November 1.

<sup>5</sup> Interview conducted with Javier Refugio Villanueva in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua on March 30, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> A referent to U.S. factories in both the U.S. and Mexico in which companies hire Mexican laborers to assemble products for mass consumption and are oftentimes in violation of humane working conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Public, often roadside memorials placed in memory of deceased loved ones.

<sup>8</sup> This philosophical proverb appears in songs and poems written by Chicana/o, Hispana/o and Mexicana/o authors including a published composition titled *Antepasados* (1997) by Arsenio Córdova.

<sup>9</sup> One example of this archival documentation is identified in the celebrated historical study by Ramón Gutiérrez, When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away : Marriage, Sexuality and Power in New Mexico, 1500 to 1846. Though he researched extensive archival materials, he used them to create his own social construction of independent community hierarchies without explicitly seeking to understand rituals and traditions as practiced and spoken of by the communities he studied. Without listening to community to establish his thesis about marriage, sexuality and power in this historical period, it retained the colonizing methodology for the study of indigenous and Hispana/o communities in New Mexico about which he writes. As a result, his study came under strong negative criticism by said communities. Gutiérrez explained colonial New Mexico through the lens of power exercised by the Catholic Church during the initial period of colonization that he says had changed by the 17th century. Early on the Franciscan friars had authority to keep order within the communities by holding full power and consent of the crown to maintain order within the communities. However, by the 17th century the crown had established a secular authority that had taken the power to punish and control the social orders of community away from the friars. This caused much conflict amongst Christian and secular authorities and the vie for power continued. The conflicts had become so great that the Franciscan Friars attempted to excommunicate members of the secular government by claiming their lack of order with regards to the values and mores

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that had been set by the church. As conflicts continued stemming from the lack of support by the secular authorities, was apparent according to Gutiérrez," By the mid 1640s it had become clear to many Indians that the Franciscans were no longer the supermen they had once seemed. The novelty of their gifts had worn off and their magic had proven ineffectual in producing rain, health, prosperity, and peace. As some of the original mission personnel died and younger, less experienced friars replaced them, the charisma with which the original friars had established their authority as town chiefs did not easily transfer over and only fed village factionalism" (1991: 127). As this order attempted to be established, the secular authorities supported the ideas that the Indian people revitalize their old traditional practices and call upon their deities to re-establish their cultural ways of life. As the secular forms of government supported and allowed these rituals to be practiced Gutiérrez adds: "It did not take the fathers long to discover that their children had reverted to idolatry, were invoking the devil, and were clandestinely wallowing in the forbidden pleasures of the flesh. They responded as a father would have with disobedient children--punishments began. None of the backsliders was spared the whip and some were even beaten to death out of fatherly love"(1991: 127). As this response toward these practices, punishments were carried out accordingly and many of the native people were beaten and punished rather severely. As a result blood, burns, and scars were common symbols of marginalization and punishment inflicted by the Christian sect of the Spanish crown. Gutiérrez points to, "Fray Francisco Letrado likewise awaited his persecutors joyfully. With crucifix in hand, as the manuals on martyrdom instructed Letrado uttered words that 'would benefit the souls of bystanders.' As the Indians treacherous arrows pierced his body, he must have thought those things that he was taught to visualize at the moment of death: the Passion of Christ, and Mary and many angels awaiting his soul with a crown in their hands. Bear in mind that though the martyrdoms of these Franciscans may appear like supreme acts of pacifism, they were, quite the contrary, supreme acts of aggression. The Indians were provoked to murder only when they were pushed beyond their human limits. More to the point, the Spanish soldiers always retaliated with brute force whenever the Indians killed their friars. For the friars, then the means justified their ends" (1991: 129-130).

I do not agree with Gutiérrez on this point, as the Franciscan friars were continuing the practices that they were set out to achieve in New Mexico. As the Spanish hierarchy was reestablished during this period, separating Christianity from secular authorities, there were many struggles. As a result the extreme ideas of Christianity and fear of loss were driving these particular acts of martyrdom. I believe that martyrdom became the symbol of a loss of faith not only for the indigenous peoples but as a symbol of loss amongst the established community values and mores with regards to the secular practices. In another argument, Gutiérrez arrives at the statement that "honor was a polysemic word embodying meaning at two different but intrinsically related levels, one of status and one of virtue" (1991: 177). Gutiérrez begins to introduce us to the ideas of status and virtue within the broader space of honor, he brings us to a folk tale that comes out of colonial New Mexico. This is the story of La Constancia and José María. La Constancia, a young beautiful woman who lived with her husband in New Mexico was often looked upon and admired by men of the community. One day a vagabond came in

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to town set his eyes upon her and immediately tried to seduce her. Because he failed in this endeavor he decided to attempt to ruin her marriage. The vagabond with the help of a witch, stole the necklace gifted to Constancia as her wedding present and presented her necklace to her husband as proof that Constancia had committed adultery. As a result José María surrendered his public honor and wealth because of the alleged acts of his wife. In punishment, José María locked Constancia in a box and threw her into the sea. After many days the box landed on the coast of Spain, and as she emerged she discovered the battle of the Christians and the Moors. Because Constancia did not know what to do she prayed to the Virgin Mary and in an apparition following, was instructed to put on armor and become a man and kill as many infidel Moors as possible. Because of her act, the Catholic monarch bestowed upon her honor, wealth, and the crown because they thought she was a man. She then returned home avenged her reputation, restored her husband's honor and placed her crown upon his head. Ultimately, when she removed her armor she emerged a woman (1991: 177). This particular folk tale gives us a glimpse as to how the issues of honor as both status and virtue functioned and at times continue to function in colonial New Mexico. He says practices and defining aspects of honor were established because, "Honor to men who colonized New Mexico and forced the Indians to submit was one of the core values of the moral system they were to establish. Honor mediated social relationships between individuals and groups on the basis of ethical choices" (1991: 177). Ultimately, Gutiérrez argues that honor codes were established and utilized as forms of control over the indigenous communities. I also believe that these codes were utilized to control women and their behaviors as well. In surveying the practices of colonial New Mexico it is learned that, "Honor was first a value judgment concerning one's social personality, a reflection. It was not only the value of a person in his or her eyes, but also the recognition of that worth in the eyes of others. Honor materialized when deference was paid or when preferential access to scarce resources was gained because of it" (1991: 177). This constructed idea of honor allowed mores, values, and controls to come into play. By allowing honor to function in different ways, Gutiérrez argues that, "Honor was a polysemic word embodying meaning at two different but intrinsically interrelated levels, one of status and one of virtue. When José María thought that La Constancia had lost her sexual purity, the honor that concerned him was honor as social virtue. When La Constancia defeated the Moors, the honor she won was honor as social status" (1991: 178). This proves this constant idea that there is always a way to rectify your honor and proves that honor as social status trumps honor as virtue. The interesting aspect to me, is that there were always behaviors to rectify the virtuous honor that was lost in this particular story. So Gutiérrez furthers his division of honor as virtue and honor as social status he claims that, "In the Spanish body politic, first of all was the honor of God. The honor of the king was next, for his sanction to temporal power was divinely imbued. The honor of the corporate church followed, then that of religious orders, the aristocracy, the landed peasantry, on down the line to those persons who had no honor, Indians and Genízaro slaves" (1991: 178). However, the story of Constancia reflects this idea of failing in the area of honor as virtue, but because she kills the infidels for the church and kingdom she then becomes almost beloved. In the end, she is



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ultimately looking for the approval of her husband, the man whose honor she has threatened.

<sup>10</sup> Based on the history and culture of Mexico during the post-revolution period according to Octavio Paz writing in Labyrinth of Solitude, concerning the post revolution period, “The history of our culture is not very different from that of our people, although the relationship is not strict. It is not strict or inevitable because culture is often in advance of history, prophesying what is to come. Either that or it fails to express it, and thus betrays it, which is what happened at certain moments during the Díaz dictatorship (151).” The post dictatorship was replaced by democratic process and Lázaro Cárdenas became President who completed the work by Zapata and Carranza in reestablishing indigenous identity which was incorporated into the national Mexican agenda including education reform, artistic expression and literature and the motto of positivism, “Love, Order and Progress,” was replaced by “The Spirit Shall Speak Through My Race. (155).” The story in New Mexico during this same period in Mexico according to Forgotten People by George Sanchez reflects a status as second-class citizens because the people retained their language and cultural practices which were considered inferior, obsolete practices resulting in poverty (28).

<sup>11</sup> Interview conducted with Dr. Rubén Beltrán Acosta in Chihuahua City, México on March 30, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> IBID.

<sup>13</sup> Interview conducted with Gilda Rizo Barajas in Valle de Allende Chihuahua, México, April 5, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Interview conducted with Aide Enríquez in Chihuahua City, México on March 29, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> *Danzante* is a warrior and performer of the Aztec dance that honors and respects the culture of the Aztecs and recreates that vision and practice within their personal lives.

<sup>16</sup> IBID.

<sup>17</sup> Interview conducted with Donna Valdez in El Rito, New Mexico on November 6, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> A site referent given by Donna Valdez to give detail as to where the young people in the community were celebrating that day. However, also demonstrates and gives insight to the active role *descanso* plays in the activities and lives of people in El Rito, New Mexico.

<sup>19</sup> Interview conducted with Reverend Pat Chávez in El Rito, New Mexico on November 24, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Interview conducted with Amy Ortiz in Española, New Mexico on December 2, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that in the 1930s Mexico nationhood, the return to indigenous identity was led by the government after the peoples’ revolution and in my contemporary interviews in Mexico, the same narrative is mirrored today as the national agenda calls for the observance of *Día de los muertos* as a national holiday in response to the heavy influence of the United States holidays.

<sup>22</sup> Clarification defined by Rev. George Salazar, pastor at Immaculate Conception Parish, Las Vegas, New Mexico.

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<sup>23</sup> The river that divides the United States and México, but it is important to note that after the Mexican-American War the name of the river was changed from the Río Bravo to the Río Grande. In talking to people, let it be noted that the river is still referred to as the Río Bravo by citizens in México.

<sup>24</sup> University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board requires the use of pseudonyms. Therefore, all of the interviewees names have been change to preserve their anonymity.

<sup>25</sup> IBID.

<sup>26</sup> In México, the priests were inaccessible to interview.

<sup>27</sup> Interview conducted with Brisa Jaret Chávez Ovaíz in Parral, Chihuahua on April 3, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> IBID.

<sup>29</sup> IBID.

<sup>30</sup> Interview conducted with Nikki Bustos in Española, New Mexico on August 16, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> *Marcha* is the traditional popular dance, danced at weddings in northern New Mexico. It is led by a couple, and the males follow the man and the females follow the lady. At the end of the dance the married couple dance in the center of the circle the people have formed.

<sup>32</sup> Song of blessing, welcoming the couple and their marriage into the community. Verses are specifically written for the bride and groom, the family, and the wedding party, and reflecting the community obligation to welcome God into the marriage. Still an active tradition in the communities of northern New Mexico. Usually someone in the community composes and performs the verses. The song can at times have up 100 verses. Can either be performed in the church or in the dance hall. However, until the *entrega* is sung and the bride and groom receive the actual blessing of their families and the community as the song reflects, the community can still steal the bride for a ransom. What usually happens is the bride is stolen and the community collects a ransom that is later given to the bride and groom. Upon return the *entrega* is performed. This tradition is still very present in Catholic weddings.

<sup>33</sup> Interview conducted with Amanda Salinas in Española, New Mexico on August 18, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Interview conducted with Erika Aguirre Polanco in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, México, on March 29, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Interview conducted with Irma Hinojas in Parral, Chihuahua, México, on April 3, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Two coins placed in a little box or special case as a symbol of coins and money so the couple always has enough abundance to survive.

<sup>37</sup> A double rosary placed around the couple at the wedding ceremony. The symbol and actual, rosary keeps them bound together through prayer and represents the meaning of the rosary.

<sup>38</sup> Interview conducted with Erlinda Portillo in Las Cruces, New Mexico on September 19, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Interview conducted with Leopoldo Medina in Parral, Chihuahua, México, on April 3, 2010.

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- <sup>40</sup> Interview conducted with Ray Fajardo in Las Cruces, New Mexico on September 17, 2010.
- <sup>41</sup> Interview conducted with Tom Borrego in Española, New Mexico on September 9, 2010.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview conducted with Alfonso Hernández Ramírez in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México, on September 19, 2010.
- <sup>43</sup> IBID.
- <sup>44</sup> IBID.
- <sup>45</sup> IBID.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview conducted with Joe Ciddio in Alcalde, New Mexico on December 2, 2009.
- <sup>47</sup> Interview conducted with Reverend George Salazar in Santa Fe, New Mexico on September 13, 2010.
- <sup>48</sup> Interview conducted with Reverend Larry Brito in Pojoaque, New Mexico on August 18, 2010.
- <sup>49</sup> Interview conducted with Jesús Herrera Morales in Valle de Allende, Chihuahua, México, on April 5, 2010.
- <sup>50</sup> IBID.
- <sup>51</sup> IBID.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview conducted with Joaquín Rodolfo Acosta Quevedo in Valle de Allende, Chihuahua, México, on April 10, 2010.
- <sup>53</sup> IBID.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview conducted with José Archuleta in Española, New Mexico on December 9, 2009.
- <sup>55</sup> The rosary represents the circle of life and honors the death of Jesus Christ through the repetition of prayers and acknowledgement of the last hours before and after Christ's death. It is almost mantra-like in its essence. However, depending on who is praying the rosary is how the ceremonies of community are led.
- <sup>56</sup> IBID.
- <sup>57</sup> Interview conducted with Adrian Martínez in Albuquerque, New Mexico on August 17, 2010.
- <sup>58</sup> IBID.
- <sup>59</sup> Interview conducted with Carlos Daniel Arrieta Baca in Valle de Allende, Chihuahua, México, on April 4, 2010.
- <sup>60</sup> IBID.
- <sup>61</sup> IBID.
- <sup>62</sup> IBID.
- <sup>63</sup> Interview conducted with Andrew Herrera in Española, New Mexico on August 18, 2010.
- <sup>64</sup> *Hermanos Penitentes* are a religious order of layman, a Third Order of St. Francis. In New Mexico, they are called to lead the prayers at funeral wakes. The reason they are included in my study is because people I interviewed mentioned them as key participants in the *velorio*. Three of my interviewees self-identified as *Penitentes*.
- <sup>65</sup> IBID.
- <sup>66</sup> IBID.

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<sup>67</sup> IBID.

<sup>68</sup> IBID.

<sup>69</sup> IBID.

<sup>70</sup> IBID.

<sup>71</sup> Interview conducted with Lydia Armijo in Española, New Mexico on September 9, 2010.

<sup>72</sup> IBID.

<sup>73</sup> IBID.

<sup>74</sup> Rodolfo Gonzales from New Mexico is a different person than Joaquín Rodolfo Acosta Quevedo from México.

<sup>75</sup> Interview conducted with Rodolfo Gonzales in Española, New Mexico on September 9, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> IBID.

<sup>77</sup> IBID.

<sup>78</sup> Interview conducted with David Martínez in Española, New Mexico on August 16, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> IBID.

<sup>80</sup> Interview conducted with Annette Ortiz in Las Cruces, New Mexico on September 19, 2010.

<sup>81</sup> IBID.

<sup>82</sup> Interview Conducted with Johnny DeVargas in Española, New Mexico on September 23, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Contemporary visual anthropology is a branch of anthropology that includes ethnographic film and video analysis of production, and relies on the use of visual research methods that engages visual systems, or more broadly defined visual cultural forms.

<sup>84</sup> IBID.

<sup>85</sup> A small rural community between Española and El Rito, New Mexico.

<sup>86</sup> IBID.

<sup>87</sup> IBID.

<sup>88</sup> IBID.

<sup>89</sup> IBID.

<sup>90</sup> IBID.

<sup>91</sup> Interview conducted with Jaime Alberto Morales Ramos in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, México, on March 29, 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Interview conducted with Javier Refugio Villanueva in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, México, on March 30, 2010.

<sup>93</sup> Interview conducted with Jaime Morales Gutiérrez in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, México, on March 29, 2010.

<sup>94</sup> The memorialized image of Pascualita Esparza Perales at “La Popular” Dress Shop.

<sup>95</sup> IBID.

<sup>96</sup> Interview conducted with Jesús Miguel Morales Ramos in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, México, on March 29, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> IBID.

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<sup>98</sup> IBID.

<sup>99</sup> Michelle Valdez is the second to the last image on the right.

<sup>100</sup> IBID.

<sup>101</sup> IBID.

<sup>102</sup> IBID.

<sup>103</sup> IBID.

<sup>104</sup> IBID.

<sup>105</sup> Interview conducted with Angelo Sandoval in Española, New Mexico on August 18, 2010.

<sup>106</sup> IBID.

<sup>107</sup> IBID.

<sup>108</sup> IBID.

<sup>109</sup> IBID.

<sup>110</sup> IBID.

<sup>111</sup> IBID.

<sup>112</sup> IBID.

<sup>113</sup> IBID.

<sup>114</sup> IBID.

<sup>115</sup> From introduction notes in *Músicos del Camino Real de Tierra Adentro: Encuentro de Corridistas*, México: UACJ, CONACULTA, INAH, Recorded, 1998.

<sup>116</sup> IBID.

<sup>117</sup> IBID.

<sup>118</sup> *Hace tiempo, mucho tiempo, que en Chihuahua una novia, modelando su vestido, con su bonita figura. Es Chonita para siempre, se quedó con su hermosura.-Ella cuentan muchas cosas, dicen que de blanco estaba, en la iglesia ya en su boda, murió cuando se casaba, que fue por un accidente, que su vida terminara.-Que su madre Pascualita, para conservar a su hija, dijo que se embalsamaran, y tener siempre Chonita, lo siendo Hermosa de novia, porque era muy bonita.-Ahora posa ante la gente, que su escultura y belleza, los que pasan y la admiran, hasta dicen se enamoran, A sus ojos las suspiran, como si tuviera vida.-Por ai dicen que en las noches, Chonita sale a pasear, con su vestido de blanco, por calles de la ciudad, con un gran enamorado, que a veces le va a cantar-De todo lo que se cuenta, no se sabe si es verdad, porque hay varias leyendas, de Chonita y su mamá, lo que se que es Pascualita si vivió, pero hoy no está, lo que se que es Pascualita si vivió, pero hoy no está.* English translation of the song “**Daughter of Pascualita**” Time has passed, much time has passed, since a bride in Chihuahua, modeling her bridal gown with her beautiful figure is Chonita forever whose preserved in all her beauty.-Of her, are told many stories, they say she was dressed in white, in the church she was to be married, she tragically passed away, because of an accident her life was taken away.-Her mother Pascualita in order to preserve her daughter, ordered that she be embalmed and preserved forever as Chonita, because she was very beautiful.-Now displayed before the people, in her sculpture and her beauty, those who pass will admire, and some say they will fall in love. And her eyes they are admired as if she were still alive.- They say as nighttime Chonita walks dressed in white through the streets of the city with a great lover who sometimes gives her serenade. Of all the stories that are told,

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we don't know what is the truth, because there are various legends of Chonita and her mother. What is known is that Pascualita did exist but now she's gone.

What is known is that Pascualita did exist but now she's gone.

<sup>119</sup> Loeffler, 1999: 94-95

<sup>120</sup> IBID.

<sup>121</sup> IBID.

<sup>122</sup> Interview conducted with Amelia Gonzales in Española, New Mexico on September 10, 2010.

<sup>123</sup> Interview conducted with Araceli Dolores Arceo Guerrero in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México, on September 18, 2010.

<sup>124</sup> IBID.