

FROM HISPANA TO CHICANA: LESBIAN TO QUEER OR TORNA-ATRÁS

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ABSTRACT

This biographical essay exams the personal identificatory markers used for a life lived across seven decades. It deploys various caste, racial, and ethnic labels following each era of personal growth or changing discernment. It historicizes categories, from my traditional New Mexican, “Hispanic” upbringing toward meaningful engagement with the subtleties of mixed-race ethnicity and LGBTQIT2 identity. Just as the racial markers have changed over time and became more complex, so have those pertaining to sexuality. The personal essay attempts to marry these journeys into a more unified effort to understand and historicize a *nuevo mejicana*’s Chicana lesbian historical experience in the United States.

KEYWORDS: Nuevo mejico; settler-colonizer; mestiza, mestizaje; torna-atrás/ torna-adelante; Spanish-Mexican; LGBTQQI2+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, two-spirit, plus); tricultural harmony.

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Bernal Díaz de Castillo’s *The Conquest of America*, a powerful reflection, appeared in his doddering old age, when upon residing in Guatemala and publishing his memoir in Spain, having borne witness to a world of conquest and terror, writing about personalities like Hernan Cortés’ and Malinche (Malintzin Tenepal), he continued to be amazed in his memoir by life itself¹. I, too, share such amazements especially when I look back at “all we have done” in Chicana Studies to create a field removed persistently from the malestream/mainstream’s visibility and riddled with maligned interpretation and historic, centuries-old, anti-Mexican sentiment. Our studies originate in anti-Mexican sentiment, that is, because of Spain’s conquest but also because of its views of the New World captured in the word or concept which would come later, México, from the Aztec, “me-shi-ca.” The Spaniards were approximators, Hispanicizing the native words they thought they heard. Their memoirs were the stuff of epics, of larger-than-life figures like conquistadores and colonizers, and semi-fictional some would later argue.

My story is hardly the epic tale spun by the *conquistador* or *adelantado*, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, but from his work I have drawn lessons. First, it takes decades to develop a perspective on one’s life, but especially so with an academic life, a vocation spent drilling down in the present while looking backward to the past. My message

to those seeking to make *academe* their life's work is simple: Let no one misguide or mislead you; academic life is intensely political, horrifically unwelcoming, always critical of everything having to do with you, the person, the human being, or the scholar-activist especially. There is doubt, envy, hate, sarcasm, and relegation heaped on every idea, comment, or written or performed word. Students, if not parents, accreditors, and politicians, are all interested in determining content as well as "tone." If less than friendly, the tone can mark immediately that an instructor will receive poor marks; review committees sift through these to determine merit pay or awards. Second, there is madness to the methods guiding *academe*, strange, archaic, or medieval although this may sound; learning is (or should be) hard, states one prevailing theme. But does it? Another might counter that learning can and should be fun. This is currently Generation Z's embrace; affirmation should be heaped at every opportunity. US Americans love the phrase, "good job." As if all action should be praised. None of these characterizations applied entirely or regularly to my teaching life, initially at Pomona College (1983-2001) on the eastern edge of Los Angeles County, next at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles (2001-2018), and now at Gonzaga University (since 2019) in the Pacific Northwest, but as I next explain, *academe's* pressures and expectations and more, its schedule, were familiar so I might have been better suited to it than others or to taking less offense at insults. If I have had success and no "torna-atrás or turning backward," but instead movement forward, it resides in aspects of a background that contained privileges necessary to succeed in a world still largely governed by, for, and with men in power.

First, let me review a few biographical details. I have stated in several interviews that I am a 14th generation New Mexican². Pride in such a statement is assumed. It should not be. First, descended from settler-colonizers carries its own baggage and the ancestors' "intermarriage" with indigenous people similarly coats our genealogies with age-old complications and necessary forthcoming explanations, many defensive in origin. The term *mestiza* is one I have used when describing myself, but we also need to problematize (understand) the caste system that the Spanish imported to the Americas. The named categories, more than forty, spelled not only

caste, but also cast lives in certain directions. “Torna-atrás,” selected for this essay as a pun to historicize racial understandings, my own, is an example. Racially, the term signified “moving backward,” or “a throwback,” to a darker race. My life certainly has taken such turns as I explain using genealogy next. The statement about longevity of place or residence must be contextualized in a New Mexican approach to US racism where the gold standard or referent lies in tracing Mayflower descent; many New Mexicans defy that by several decades because some of our ancestors had either been living in these continents far earlier than the first settler-colonizers who arrived in 1598, decades before Jamestown. But worth repeating, this makes the entire concept of “this country” or of US residency challenging. Some New Mexicans were in a territory they live in today before there was a US or before there was a New Mexico; some of mixed-race ancestry were there even longer.

Second, a caveat convinces me that increasingly we need to focus on and prioritize a concept historians tend to write about, marriage, but it is inherently presumptive to assume that girls or women of marriageable age had any choice at all about their partners and most certainly not if captured, enslaved, or indentured, as so many indigenous/Native New Mexicans were. My maternal great-grandfather was widowed in the 1870s, left to raise four small children in a small mountain village in central New Mexico among an extended network of relatives, including his mother. To ease his burden, he, Juan Montoya Trujillo, “married” Vidal, a young woman who spoke no Spanish at all. She was by origin Navajo, Dine, but she had been raised by an Apache family, likely taken into captivity, adopted, or exchanged as a baby. She raised his first four children and bore another five, including my grandfather. In the 1880 Census, they are all listed as Montoya, but at many other points in the next decade, they are registered using the surname of his mother’s family, Trujillo. It is likely that the first census taker found them living together in the home with his sister whose married name was “Montoya.” By 1890 and 1900, the Census lists them as “Trujillo.” What did my great-grandmother think living among Spanish-speaking Catholics and with children who in successive order were light-skinned, and two of them featuring green eyes? The eyes are also a memory of my mother’s because her eyes bore a greenish tint and she would frequently be asked

by strangers about them; she, like me, had mixed-race features common to so many New Mexicans. Adding more complexity, had my great grandmother been a Spanish-Mexican captive herself of raids on Spanish-speaking villages, and raised by Apaches, what do we make of the language she spoke? She spoke no Spanish when she arrived in marriage to my grandfather. Oral tradition in the family states this to have been the case, but she considered herself “Indian.” That much is “known.” Mestizaje captures some of what she might have been, but what if she was in blood, in DNA, and by birth, Spanish-Mexican raised as indigenous by indigenous people? Documents show her marriage and the names of her parents and describe her as soltera hija legítima de Leonardo Torres y de Maria Chaves.

These are the complexities that emerge when growing up in a society with a history stretching back four hundred and fifty years and comprised of diverse ethno-racial communities. As heirs to the traditions of color or pigmentocracy and ancestral racial and cultural historical animosities, I feel obligated to explore genealogies and to ask of them questions that remain mysterious or unresolved; for contemporary inhabitants of the borderlands, the question mirrors one that the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement posed: “what is our obligation when we say we are mestizo, mixed-race people, and that we are not solely of Euro-American descent, or that we, too, are ‘native’ to the Americas?” This central question in Chicana/o Studies has produced many books detailing the specific, deep tragedies that accompanied conquest in the colonial era and colonization in the “American” one. It satisfies neither tribal-identified indigenous residents nor immigrant Mexicans and mixed-race or native and indigenous Central Americans who come to the U.S. to escape political persecution that continues to seek the subjugation of native communities across the northern and southern hemispheres. It does not address a question students raised when I taught my first Chicano/a history class at the Native American university, DQ University (1980-81) outside of Davis, California: “If you Chicanos consider yourselves native or indigenous, why do you not call yourselves that?” As I explained, linguistic and religious baggage offers insights. Speaking Spanish and raised in Catholic traditions made Spanish descendants more likely to categorize themselves as

“non-native” and it is important to recognize that the label, Hispanic, in a new world populated by native peoples meant non-Indian, and not necessarily “of Spain.” The term was ambiguous if we consider that Spanish-Mexican heritage was so plainly influenced and shaped by indigenous ethnicity, color, culture, cuisine, and spirituality. What would it mean if historians turned the tables, in a *torna-atrás* methodology, and instead read Hispanic New Mexico or the borderlands primarily through native or indigenous perspectives? What if the word, Hispano/a, means being “not-fully Native/Indian/indigenous?” Some would argue that in such a diverse cultural and ethnic environment, the caste labelling of today might actually resemble recognition of a turning forward, that is, toward a future proud of racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual mixture; a move that is Queer or two-spirited rather than in some fixed sexual identity; into retrofitted concepts of Black, White, Brown, to name just three categories, rather than some “pure” color-based ethnicity; or beyond male/female, to name just two genders or sexes; or, more than homo/bi/heterosexual to name just three sexualities. *Torna adelante* seems more suited to our contemporary realities, if *torna-atrás* characterizes the burdensome, if proud, complex racial and historical experiences of our New Mexican pasts.

My family’s paternal side is equally interesting and different than my mother’s in its placement in New Mexico and subsequent migrations from northern to southern New Mexico. The initial first great grandfather, Sebastian Gonzales (1592 – 1670), to the tenth power was born in Portugal and emigrated to New Spain and northward to *nuevo mejico* and Santa Fe in the early seventeenth century. It is said his descendants came north to Santa Fe once again with the Diego de Vargas reconquest expedition after the successful Pueblo Revolt of 1680 in which the northern New Mexican Pueblo Indian communities united and killed or swept the Spanish south to El Paso, Texas. A genteel portrait or painting reveals some resemblance to my uncles and cousins. Sebastian Gonzales’ Spanish-speaking, Catholic world, even when riddled with prejudices against the Portuguese, allowed for him to be classified as a *criollo* meaning that he was considered of Spanish origin, although it was more accurately European. In the racial classification schemes the Spanish and Portuguese transported to New Spain, across their empire and later

in independent Mexico, color, facial features, hair texture, as well as class status dictated the social and cultural hierarchies even in such outposts as northern New Mexico. Land grants, assigned by the Crown and usually in recognition of military service and bravery, but also successful business or mercantile dealings, created distance between laborers, indentured servants, slaves, captives, and the landowners or Church-sponsored enterprises. In New Mexico, class and racial lines could easily be blurred, as many criollos took native or indigenous women as wives or partners; my great-grandfather of thirteen generations ago witnessed his children marry into other prominent, land-owning families, but also into families with less status and no claim to elite society at all. The racial and social mixing, in other words, of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries did not stand isolated from cultural and economic mixing as well. *Genízaros* were traditionally viewed as Christianized Natives living outside their communities of origin, but more recently instead are classified as predominantly native or indigenous but partnered with Spanish-Catholics, Spanish-Mexicans, or Hispanos, with sustained ties to their native families of origin. The result of so many ethno-racial categories created a type of frontier where easy classifications based on color, or pigmentocracies, class or social location, and race or ethnicity had to be parsed by the residents or local *cura* based on familial and community knowledge, as well as historical memory and family lore³.

The history of the Gonzales (Portuguese) and González (Hispano) family provides a case study. The first ancestor, Sebastian Gonzales, had nephews and sons who left Santa Fe in the seventeenth century and purchased the land grant that encompassed modern-day Albuquerque. Literally. It stretched more than 20 miles in length. Juan Gonzales Bas I, followed by Juan Gonzales Bas II and III, settled outside of Albuquerque in Bernalillo and Corrales and then purchased the Alameda land grant, with its valleys, mesas, streams, and the Rio Grande stretching from today's southern Albuquerque valleys northward past Corrales. That these ancestors owned the site of contemporary Albuquerque is both historic and astonishing in terms of size or magnitude. The various branches of Gonzales and González clans and families, from the surnames of Griego to Armijo and Baca to Chávez, were numerous and lined the river north to south

including one that took up residence in present-day Socorro. Few retained or held on to the original land grant, but one branch of the family still hosts annual reunions, appears in local celebrations, and sustains a website dedicated to documenting its history. Sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, my great-great-great grandfather moved further southward over a hundred miles from present-day Socorro homesteading in what is contemporarily known as the Hatch Valley, one of the US's most fertile, chile-growing farmlands. What drove them from Corrales to Socorro (El Bosquecito) initially and then further south remains folkloric – better weather, farmland, cheaper land, and grazing rights for livestock. Family quarrels or rivalries likely are also part of the reason, but no one can confirm this today. Cultural arrogance, supremacy and class privileges migrated with them, tempered by affairs or partnerships with Native women, in some cases, and by strong Spanish-Mexican women who outlived most of the men.

By the time of the US Civil War and the Navajo removal to Bosque Redondo, one segment of the González' family was firmly inhabiting the Rio Grande farmlands and ranches to the south on the border of present-day Sierra and Doña Ana Counties in an area they named, "Loma Parda," or grey hill. A few decades ago, my father named the road running beside the family farmhouse, "Loma Parda Road," and the county authorities finally recognized the ditches and canal systems as the Gonzalez Lateral. To receive an official post office, in the 1870s, the town renamed itself "Garfield," and was composed of a store and a wagon stopover, and by the middle of the next century, a café, mercantile, and gasoline station. The mostly Euro-American, or Anglo as New Mexicans call them, farmers who put Hatch chile on the map rarely discuss the longevity and crops raised by the first Spanish-speaking farmers and ranchers in this part of the world. But they were the true settler- colonizers. And the lands were used by Apaches as trade routes centuries before the Spanish arrived. My great-great grandfather Santiago is buried on the ranch's grazing land across the Rio Grande farmlands after a skirmish with indigenous migrants or traders who killed him on the spot and where he was found days later⁴. Or so the family lore details. Some have asked if he was not involved in a rivalry between the Anglo ranchers and the local farmers in an era when grazing lands were diminishing

and the González family owned several sections of grazing rights and lands. My great uncle built a chapel at the site of Grandpa Santiago's demise which he maintained into the 1970s to sustain a memory so that the family would not forget. Despite the family story about the death or murder, several González male ancestors either married Native or indigenous women, or had affairs and children with them, as was not unusual across the centuries of interactions, hostilities, and periods of peace. How many of those women were captured or indentured is unknown. Not all were reluctant "wives" or partners in forced marriages, but not all would have had choices if they were servants or captives. Relations among different cultures and ethnicities, as my family's own history demonstrates, ranged from tense to amicable, depending on the economy, climate, and demography. From the historical records, we cannot conclude that New Mexico was a "Land of Enchantment" through most of its history despite the marketing and selling of such monikers designed to create a New Mexican mythical past.

New Mexicans frequently gloss over the harsher realities of land loss, poverty wages, and Spanish-Native relations because the fantasy heritage that produces the necessary tourist industry will not tolerate ambiguity or ambivalence. It is better to create an unrealistic history grounded on the notions of enchantment and tricultural harmony; this is taught officially to school children in New Mexico. Spanish, Anglo, and Indian all got along well enough to come together as a state and to promote their wares, plus a "unique" form of the Spanish language, and now, a farm crop, Hatch chile, sold to US and foreign companies many years in advance of its production. Inter-marriage feeds the fantasy as a solution to any racial tension. To question triculturalism is akin to not being from New Mexico. Suspect. An outsider. Using the labels "Chicano/a" similarly will likely get an officer removed from their job because the definition of the term or identity refuses to ignore mixed racial realities, cultural conflict, and other tensions⁵. Acknowledging the complexities of our lived histories and realities produces the kind of anxiety few classrooms, museums, business meetings, or church gatherings can tolerate except in small doses and with a great deal of explanation to remove frightening radical terminology⁶. We are now living in an era when this backlash will become more the norm, when politicians politicize education

and active learning as “indoctrination,” simplifying difficult subject matter as “woke culture.” Or, when so many sound out without apology not simply uneducated but fascist criticisms of inclusivity, diversity, and equity; any number of websites detail the attention to “coddled victims,” or to overly sensitive groups as their human rights are dismissed and undocumented immigrants are made scapegoats in a pandemic or in the resulting economic displacements, drug wars, and climate changes that force Latin Americans to flee their homelands. The documentation about children’s suffering and displacement is perhaps the greatest crime against humanity in the Americas today because of their poverty and lack of human rights. Parents are considered rightful “owners” of children to the point of determining their sexuality (heterosexuality) at all costs. And the migration routes, from south to north, remain unbroken or continue as they have for centuries, forcing refugees, many of them children, to pray for or dream of acceptance at the doorway of a country most in need of their labor.

Global histories tell us where such logic will carry us unless voters in the US challenge the threats and fears of race, gender, and immigrant mongering. From the late 1960s to the present, most scholar-activists, community organizers, grass roots leaders knew that to change the course of history in the US would take many centuries. That did not stop us from initiating these changes and then encouraging new leaders to take up the call for social justice, equality, and inclusion. If we all are created equally, why are we not all equal? Attesting to, and documenting, oppression or discrimination is one purpose in most Ethnic Studies’ explorations, certainly in Chicana/o/x Studies. The “recover to uncover” is a legitimate historical method if documentation remains central to the field of history. Recovering and uncovering queer presence or figures, captives and poor or enslaved people, women and members of non-mainstream religions, and achieving visibility, becomes important for students because the current generation of young adults will eventually argue cases in court, receive patients of color and/or LGBTQQI2+ patients, seek elective offices, teach elementary school, perform or paint, write plays, novels, or poetry. Prejudices and judgmental values can be suspended when questioning perceived knowledge or information about others, and formal education accomplishes this task. It is not the only

method, but it signifies that if interpretation is done well, it creates humans who can manage the crises the planet will face in the next century. This has also been a goal of Chicano/a/x Studies as a discipline or as an intellectual pursuit.

Likely, as I worked my way toward such conclusions in graduate school at UC Berkeley (1974-1983) and later in my scholarship, is the fact that I have always lived an academic calendar, a life scheduled by semesters and breaks afforded only during key national holidays. My mother was a schoolteacher, an administrator of her working life and of our childhoods as well. My father was at times absent, given to PTSD as a member of the Greatest Generation, WWII veteran, whose demons often led to what he later would explain to me as a “constant nervousness.” Only alcohol calmed him, to excess. When he was in recovery, and sober for his senior and retired years, he, like my mother, supported our career goals, even if they did not understand mine fully. My mother would say that I was afraid of nothing. She was probably right, in so many respects, out in the New Mexico mountains on remote camping trips with my college roommates or partners, sometimes carrying a gun, sometimes forgetting it, where wild animals and unsavory characters lived; or the late night escapades later in my mid-20s, gay bars and private clubs in San Francisco during the era of the great “coming out,” the late 1970s, into the post-Harvey Milk years when not only free, liberated sex and drugs were everywhere, but so were all the causes that needed our attention, from the US involvement in Central America to the post-Vietnam heart ache of having wrecked a country far away, raining terror on a people classified as enemies, and then having lost the war. Those years were certainly not friendly ones for veterans or for those in the US who believed unquestioningly in “my country, right or wrong.” War was wrong, as was educational inequity, lack of access to institutional life, the courts, the schools, the hospitals/clinics, as people of color knew too well in the US. All of these were our causes, our fights, our struggles. We protested, signed petitions, made signs, stood in front of and in solidarity with, and the LGBTQQI2 movements were present everywhere, arguing about what radical approach worked best, or which compromise would cost us the most. I came out in that era, and in an economy shaped by costly rent and food, but gaps that were hardly as wide as those are today. My student loan was

manageable, and I recall that we were also frugal, likely having learnt something from our post-Depression parents. I did not drink much alcohol or take drugs and concert tickets were cheap. Things were not as expensive as they are today. Health care was accessible via clinics at universities or in community centers. We saw clinicians and therapists when we could afford to do so, but words or concepts in the classroom like “microaggression,” “cancelled,” “triggering” and “woke” were not in our vocabulary. I knew few people diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, or on pills to induce sleep or control various psychological conditions. Those came decades later, perhaps an offshoot of our activism about recovering traumatic pasts and healing ourselves or from pharmaceuticals and corporations that flooded cities and towns with drugs and cures. Feminist logic, goals, and aspirations also fueled the move toward inclusive language, and in the late 1970’s, such words as “ablism,” “homophobia,” and “heterosexism” began to develop a foothold on campuses and among community organizations. “Controlling the narrative,” “politically correct,” and “climate change,” came much later toward the end of the twentieth century.

In 1974, I had left New Mexico for Berkeley. A New Mexico education did not prepare me for life in the academic fast lane; I had to catch up. I was advised to audit courses of key historians and to fake it until I made it. This advice was not unusual as even the Ivy Leaguers struggled. We were twenty-one first-year Americanists among a cohort of ninety-eight new incoming graduate students; three years later, six of us remained because some lit out to law school while others just went into other fields or dropped away from academe. My decision was different. It seemed that I had few other talents; no culinary skills or carpentry, for example, and electrical panels frightened me, so it was either do history or learn farming; as the archives were my “happy place,” I chose the former and somehow told myself at each challenging, next-stop that I would make it. Several advisers who took my work seriously helped me stay and improve the skills needed to become an historian.

I took a three-year hiatus upon returning to Berkeley after having left the Bay Area again for New Mexico on a fellowship to conduct dissertation research; when I returned to campus, politics became my salvo as I served as graduate student body president and

began to develop a taste for administrative tasks. I enjoyed learning and working on projects related to women's advancement, to making room for students of color, and I began to see a place for myself in a university setting. We were all of 500 Chicana/os at Berkeley among 30,000 other students; two women of Mexican origin were on the faculty of over 1000; perhaps three Chicanos were tenured. The expanding Latino/a entry or rising numbers would not occur for another two decades. But we all knew one another, and we all engaged in different ways with communities, founding organizations, like *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* (MALCS), or expanding the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS). These were built on the work of the Chicana/o and Native first-generation pioneers who were committed to access, equity, and accountability. African American alliances and solidarity were real because they had been first to break barriers at places like Berkeley or the UC system. In the history department, we were perhaps four students of color of the larger cohort and in the end, two of us received Ph.Ds., both of us Latinas, and I, the first Chicana Ph.D. in Berkeley's history program.

Whether it was called affirmative action or something else, the key lesson from creating committees or organizations was that such engagement was costly; many faculty of color did not achieve tenure as their listening audience would not accommodate their views or values and no allies occupied the highest leadership positions. This was the case in the legislature, courtroom, boardroom, and classroom. Still, we persisted including taking on that private name reserved for the lowest members of a society, "los de abajo," "the subaltern," *Chicanos/as*, people of Mexican descent and today, agonizingly, largely, and utterly invisible over a half century later in US society, despite being the largest ethnic minority bloc in the country. Today, Hollywood, the newsrooms, the federal courts, and higher education leadership have not taken notice. You might be asking what we struggled for, then, or what success did we have? It cannot be measured entirely by the data, or put another way, in the field of education, via the number of college graduates or entering undergraduates that we now see, or by the rise in faculty and in the five extant national graduate, Ph.D. degree Chicana/o Studies programs and over 50 undergraduate Chicana/o Studies departments, some renamed to include "Latino/a/xs"⁷. Instead, we measure it for ourselves at the end

of each academic year when we see entire extended families crossing stages at commencement exercises, when we read the story of the STEM student who daily rode buses beginning at 5:00AM across Los Angeles to become the class valedictorian with a perfect GPA at Loyola Marymount University, or the undocumented students who at a minimum, if still undocumented and nearly one million strong living without proper recognition of their value, cannot be robbed of their degrees if deported⁸. This was our intellectual and academic ethos in the last half century no matter what our sexuality, gender, class, or community of origin and we made many alliances along the way. A key distinction in the present is the many more interventionists (allies) who understand and value our work today than in earlier years despite setbacks in the political arena, the economy, and the post-pandemic era.

Perhaps another way to understand academic growth and respond to the legacy question of “what was it like when you were...?” is to look at what one teaches. Teaching courses in a university or college provides structure, allows for tracking scholarly interests, presumably because it also keeps a professor or scholar-activist up to date on disciplines and fields of study. In my case, it certainly proved challenging to have to create new courses that had never been taught before, from material that was not yet published. Here is some data. Up until 1987, when two important books were published, one by historian Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* and another by Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, most readings for courses in Chicana feminism and Chicana history consisted of chapters and essays and in anthologies focusing on Latin America. In the early 1980’s, only three or four monographs detailed the Chicana experience⁹. When I began teaching at Pomona College in 1983, in all the world as I knew it, there were five (5) Latina historians with Ph.Ds. in the U.S. Three were Chicanas. Today that number exceeds 108 and that would be Chicanas, not inclusive of all Latinas¹⁰. This also meant that on Chicanas and their pasts or presents, there were about five (5) published academic monographs, in English. There were novels and newsletters and self-published works, but in terms of classified academic work based on original or primary research, few volumes allowed a curriculum to develop, or advance. I taught the first Latina Feminist Traditions class in the country, quite possibly, at

Pomona College and in my first academic appointment as an instructor because I was hired before I completed my Ph.D. degree. In fact, I had written only one chapter of my dissertation and was asked to finish it within two academic years to move on to an assistant professorship. The course on Latinas derived from an ax I had to grind concerning the singularity of Chicano/a Studies courses then on the books, “La Chicana,” included. The pedestal- sounding title grated upon me and so I decided that I would explore Latinas in history and let students know that I held a feminist perspective. In the two years of full-time teaching, I taught seven (7) new courses, five offered in the Pomona College curriculum for the first time. Most faculty taught three courses per semester as it was a “teaching college.” Thinking back on this absurd schedule and commitment, I do not recall ever speaking about “triple burdens,” “microaggressions,” “unconscious bias,” or “unrealistic expectations.” It was assumed that academic life was hard and to earn tenure, the key was to turn humiliation or abuse into something that instead sounded original, fun and engaging. If you understand this process or method, you understand a great deal about elite liberal education in the United States. When I arrived at Pomona College in 1983, one other Latina was on the faculty. When I left eighteen years later, over fifteen women of color teaching in subject areas having to do with underrepresentation were on the faculty. This, too, was the work I assisted, and it mattered in creating a strong sense of community for women of color and white feminist allies who supported the hiring agenda. Almost all the women of color received tenure and later promotion to full professor, the highest professional ranking or rung when not in an endowed chaired position¹¹. But in places like the Pacific Northwest, political growth is slow because of the demography, the climate, and a long history of poor Euro-American/Native American relations.

I stepped back in time at Gonzaga University, in the Pacific Northwest or eastern Washington. It is not that time has stood still. It is that the Latino/a/x tsunami has not reached that far inland. But it will. I have in the 2022-23 academic year taught the first “Introduction to Chicana/o History,” and first “Chicana Feminist Traditions” classes at Gonzaga University. Almost a half century has lapsed between the time such classes were introduced in southern California and other

parts of the US southwest. I hope there will be others to pick this up after my retirement to follow shortly. That is, for such universities as Gonzaga to continue the highest level of educating people for others, as the mission statement advances, it will have to reach out aggressively to the one out of four Latino/a/x high school graduates eligible for undergraduate entrance. For tuition-driven institutions, it is more pressing to ensure healthy numbers of applicants and admittees, but it is equally the case that the stellar Gonzaga record of retention and graduation sustain itself into the next decade and with greater diversity in its membership. The history department, the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies department, and the Gender and Women's Studies departments spread themselves thinly to assist the new core curriculum which flags or marks courses that add diversity to a student's liberal arts education, but they are not overstaffed or lacking enrollments. The intellectual curiosity and commitment to learn and explore the lived experiences of women of color, queer women of color, people of color, underrepresented groups, a thing we have created, exists, and plays a role in marketplaces where employers seek to hire students who can solve problems and think independently. Practical, life-long skills needed in multiracial settings is one outcome of strong, well-trained, confident students of the future¹².

Gonzaga University, where I am spending these final years in academe, is a Jesuit-based, Catholic University. There are many debates and points of view about what constitutes a Catholic university in today's academic landscape. There is a formal relationship to the established Catholic Church and its officers, as there is to the Jesuit-led "provincial" offices. Fewer and fewer Jesuits, across the twenty-eight US-based colleges and universities occupy university faculty positions or academic leadership positions. Their voices and institutional memory have laid the groundwork, however, for educational aspirations, values, and a moral compass that engages members of the university community. The educational landscape is hardly perfect and there are legacies of omission and criminal behavior; the priests and authorities who were credibly accused of child sexual abuse and other crimes affected the Pacific Northwest Jesuit Province. To settle the lawsuits and create a path toward restoration, the Province dissolved entirely as it faced bankruptcy and merged with the Jesuit's West Province of which it remains a

member. Many campus lectures, guest speakers, and community organizers, over the past five years, have discussed and debated the right direction for the university in its relationship to Catholic core values, campus climate, and historical legacy as these recent charges, cases, and crimes have revealed. The conversations are especially fraught because of Gonzaga's touted legacy of Native/indigenous-serving origins, something that has not come to fruition in terms of Native American student enrollment or Native American faculty and staff hiring but has remained in the background because Jesuits are encouraged to seek and become part of the communities they serve. Native American Studies remains a program offering a minor and not a major; Native American hiring has not expanded either. The university is my academic home, however, and I remain committed to finding ways to assist the task of creating a growing and more inclusive academic institution¹³.

The days of reckoning, for the Catholic Church, Catholic higher educational institutions, but also private and public institutions of all varieties, is upon us. The US population's changes and diversity has increased in the past fifty years and the labor market suggests that to remain competitive in technology, medicine, science, and education, the US will have to allow more immigration and growth in women of childbirth ages¹⁴. We might imagine that the country has instead buried its head in the sand as it cannot resolve its largest problems of poverty, immigration, homelessness, gun violence or carbon emissions despite expertise and strong voter interest in these issues. Where does Chicano/a/x Studies fit if the nation's realities seem insurmountable and if formal education is increasingly criticized for its cost and lack of accountability? With its strong focus on community engagement and a stated recognition of social injustices, people knowledgeable in Chicano/a/x experiences, histories, and traditions, will tend to be less surprised by barriers and be prepared to reach creatively for solutions to social, economic, and political barriers. Our courses in this field or discipline teach students not to ignore discrimination or subordination, but they also evidence historic resilience, creativity, and talent. The curricular achievements at Gonzaga University are rooted in core Jesuit educational values and in social justice commitments particularly in the articulated principals of standing in solidarity with the marginalized and the poor. We exist in a complex

time for higher education. At this very moment several states are passing legislation against Ethnic Studies, Gender Studies, and Queer Studies. Designed to undermine the knowledge and training required to resolve the gaps between the uber rich and the poor, between the privileged and the marginalized, educational governing boards are allowing politicians to determine content and curriculum, and local communities are translating transphobia and the study of sexuality into a vocabulary they lodge in family values and “classical” studies. Are LGBTQI2+’s not born into and part of families? Do these advocates really know histories of the Greeks and Romans specifically in their sexual practices? I suspect the conservative or under-informed vocal minority mean the study of dead, white men who never have been absent in books or anywhere else. The hypocritical politicians and local board members recognize that a knowledgeable population is far less likely to accept bureaucratic justifications like that of a train’s spilled and contaminated contents in Palestine, Ohio; an educated citizenry demands rights and knows policies and laws, so the propaganda perpetuated by the company’s officers or shareholders or knowledgeable parents will not allow for easy solutions on disasters or on questions about what books to order for a public or school library or in movies about the creators of nuclear weaponry whose mock trials in New Mexico unleashed radiation contamination downwind from the Trinity site.

I end with a note about where I am physically located after several decades of having had job security, much of it characterized by hard work, a dedication to serving, and the assistance of many mentors and allies including different collective groups of Chicanas formed during my academic journey; they know who they are. I also attribute any successes to coming from a family history of mixed racial, cultural, economic, and political legacies. Bilingualism, Catholicism, and rural life characterized our method of survival and of accommodation to the changing world following World War II. It prepared our generation to assume leadership and preserve traditions. Sometimes I think of my cousins, all twenty-four surviving ones on the paternal side, and the fourteen surviving on my maternal side, and of the ten who have passed away, as the last generation to experience a safer, simpler childhood. There were dangers and challenges, to be sure, but we did not experience the type of threats that the nuclear age

eventually engendered. We all had basic facility in Spanish and more dominant abilities in English, attended Catholic services and events that brought us frequently together in the Church, and completed high school and college educations. Our parents provided us with necessities and a few luxuries, like vacations, and in the case of my siblings and I, college educations through graduate school. Family, church, and school organized our childhoods, and our culturally expressive culture provided an outlet for our creativity, from dances to plays or *obras*, celebrating US holidays along with older New Mexican traditions. The privileges of middle-class life in New Mexico were many, but hardly extravagant. I saw service and social justice modeled by my family and observed a great deal of humility and self-awareness in helping others because our small, village life depended on it.

Today I feel that the caste phrase in the title of this essay, “torna atrás” can be re-fashioned to carry a different meaning entirely. It still means to go backward, but it is not like enslavement or the reservation or prison against which many people of color measure oppression and lack of freedom. It is akin to indenture; for a period, our labor, whether compensated or not, our invisible labor, supports structures that have done great harm to the differently abled, to the underrepresented, to the marginalized. But I am using it more literally; for me, to turn back means to look at what came before you, recover and uncover your history, write, and rewrite your own, your family’s, and your culture’s stories. We are in the thick of a march that will not stop, moving toward a time of greater balance in equity and achievement, in visibility and access.

Recognition of difference as something to embrace and not hide from was a key lesson based on my family’s history, difficult though it was when I became a Chicana to speak within but also against a discourse of “Spanish purity,” of Hispanic ancestry, of settler colonialism, and of U.S. conquest and colonization. To ignore the past, however, became impossible and so, I chose to study it and help create a field, Chicana Studies. To it, I bring and brought the intellectual energy and commitment such a history grounded in difference demands. Searching for truth or truths is a basic desire in this new field of study, but equally, engaging critically with invisibility and restoring women to the historical record has been a goal. If there

is any stepping backward, it is to rectify historical absence and to challenge the idea of a singular or unified historical legacy.

Díaz del Castillo, the conqueror, reflected in his old age and back in Spain, upon what he had observed and seen in the Americas; he was arguing against the prevailing narratives that assigned heroism to slaughter and overlooked tragedy and indigenous agency. He was with the winning team. He was also a bit wiser, hoping to set the record straight, but through his own version of what had transpired. The narratives of the conquered emerge in not only writing against the grain —his grain— but in examining perspectives, languages, gestures, and actions against one another. *Torna-atrás* can provide the methodology we need to shape new chronicles and restore missing people to a history worth re-telling. Our descendants, like our *antepasados*, deserve a different reconciliation with the complicated past to turn it forward, not backward. Adelante!

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