

ANDERSON: Among working-class and/or women of color, did you ever feel stigma or hostility around butch identity? Were there conversations among you where you needed to defend that or explain it?

MORAGA: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, I still feel that a lot among Chicanas, you know, especially the academics — you know, like they're as working class as I am, but they got their little academic positions, and I always feel like they present the cleaned-up version of lesbianism. And there were times that, you know — I mean, oftentimes, that would happen, where I felt like people — but I think it was more personal, that people would be upset with me, they didn't like it, they disagreed with me publicly, a lot of that public disagreement. But they weren't people who really necessarily had power over me. So I think discussion of sexual identity beyond the generic offends a lot of people. I think it still does.

But I never know how I'm going to be used. I have been introduced by a white woman to a group, a mixed-group audience with a lot of young Chicanas, Latinas, et cetera, as a butch-identified lesbian. And I'm going to kill her! I mean, it's like I'm going to kill that person who just introduced me, because to whose benefit is that? So it makes her feel good about her white middle-class politics, that, you know, she can identify me like that, but it sets me up to try to win all those kids back that she just turned off, that she just shut down, you know, because it's so threatening. I mean that's somebody who has no political sense whatsoever. That happens to me all the time, you know.

And conversely — I mean, I guess what I find is that I'm always strategizing every minute about who the audience is and how to open them. And so sometimes, if I find an audience very conservative, I will be very butch in my reference points just to agitate them a little. If I feel an audience is really very uninformed about lesbianism but might be open to it, then I'm going to strategize how to open them — I mean, because I'm teaching all the time, and also being political about it.

And so, you know, I feel, yeah, so you always are experiencing categorizations imposed upon you or you are offending people or people are attacking. I mean, that's just, all the time. And it's with white women and it's with women of color. So the butch stuff, though, I think it just makes people really uncomfortable, and if I think it's useful to bring up, then I'll do it — you know what I'm saying?

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: And I love talking, actually I love talking about desire. I mean, I really find it enormously productive, you know. So on that level I find that, you know, when you're talking about loving a woman and what it means to love a woman, I feel like I could convince anybody that lesbianism is a great thing. What I mean by that, not that they should be lesbian, but that they could understand what motivates lesbian desire from both perspectives. So that's just pleasurable, and my writing — some people are not going to like it. But I feel like more what happens

to me is— you know, but I'm saying this now at 52, where I worked really hard on how to use words. So, I don't think I encounter quite as much negativity as when I was younger.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: Also, you get older and they don't even mess with you. (laughs)

ANDERSON: Let's talk about Kitchen Table Press.

MORAGA: OK.

ANDERSON: Tell me how it started, what was your role.

MORAGA: Well, it started, just as I told you earlier, it started because Persephone Press had folded right away, and Barbara Smith's *Homegirls* was — due to be published by them. Basically they started having all these internal problems between them, you know, relationship stuff, and the press broke apart. And they were not just going to give us the book back, you know, the feminists that they were. So, you know, basically, we realized — I mean, the point of it was, is that we were really in this vulnerable position suddenly. The thing that we had hoped feminism had taken care of, you know, fair treatment among women and suddenly women of color were now in a vulnerable position with white women. So we got ourselves a white male lawyer, a kind of barracuda type. Got the *Bridge* back, got *Homegirls* back and basically started the press in the effort to get those books launched.

ANDERSON: Who was in the original formation of Kitchen Table?

MORAGA: Well, it was weird, because we had an initial conversation when Persephone Press had published that collection that Elly Bulkin did, *Lesbian Poetry*.

ANDERSON: OK.

MORAGA: Persephone were really good promoters, and they had this big promotion gig in Boston, and brought in Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, Audre Lorde, Paula Gunn Allen, and all these, you know, kind of the generation of lesbian writers before us, and we had this real great meeting at Barbara Smith's house — I was living with her at the time — about publishing, and how we were going to continue to make books and get them out there. And then, because Judy had done Diana Press with Pat Parker in the 70s in Oakland, well, there they were these resources, and we discussed the idea of starting a press for women of color. And so we decided — after *Bridge* came out, I never really liked living in Boston.

ANDERSON: Boston?

MORAGA: Yeah, this is where –

ANDERSON: OK. OK.

MORAGA: I first moved to Boston.

ANDERSON: OK.

MORAGA: And this is where all this happened, because Persephone Press was in Boston. So I didn't want to stay there, and so we decided we wanted to do this press, and we decided New York was a much better place to do it. So Barbara and I moved then to New York City. And so the initial group of people who formed the press was Audre Lorde and Barbara and poet, Hattie Gossett, who was also in *Bridge*. And Leota Lone Dog, who's a Lakota woman, who was living in New York City at the time. This woman named Myrna, I forget her last name, an African Caribbean woman. Oh, Leota came a bit later, because it was all black women and me at the start.

So, I remember saying to them — because Barbara and I were together at that time, and that's why I had come east initially. I mean initially I came east to promote the book, and then I met Barbara, and that's how that happened. But anyway, basically I had said to them, "Look-it. It's all black women and it's me. You guys want a black women's press, that's fine with me. I'll do some work for you." But no, they really wanted a woman of color press. So then we had to get some other women of color. That's when Leota came in, and also another sister, an Asian sister. God, why has her name gone out of my head? Anyway, it's documented somewhere. And then Alma Gomez came, a Puerto Rican woman. And then we started to work on *Cuentos, Stories by Latinas*, because there wasn't a collection like that.

So I was in New York for about five years and worked on the press for about four, I guess, something like that. And Audre stayed and Barbara stayed, Leota, too. I mean, most of those people, basically that core group of people kind of hung in for most of that time, and then people started to drop out. And then Barbara — basically when the collective disbanded, then Barbara took it over by herself.

ANDERSON: How did you decide who would do what kind of work?

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MORAGA: It was a collective. It was ridiculous. No, I mean, it was ridiculous. It was really — you know, kind of like a mom-and-pop organization. It was Barbara and me, you know, we were doing the bulk of the work. But we always had our collective meetings, and Audre was greatly inspirational. I mean, she'd come in and, you know, give us the dictum, what we needed to do. But everybody worked. Everybody worked. Everybody worked, but I really felt like Barbara was sort of the

visionary for the press. And I felt like I was the translator. I guess that's how I can put it. In other words, Barbara is really brilliant and really fast, and I felt at times I had to sort of translate to the majority of the collective what she meant in a way that seemed reasonable in terms of the work she expected from people. She was very demanding.

I mean, she worked enormously hard. She did the grant writing and all that administrative stuff, but I was like office manager. I always had those roles. And you know, I'm just a worker. We were the — you know, as a couple, we held that press together. So when we broke up, it didn't really — I mean, she wanted to keep it going. So it never really operated as a collective after that. It was really her press, and you know, she had some people that worked with her or, you know, as apprentices or whatever. And then tried to go through a period where other people, you know, tried to direct it and stuff.

But through that collective period, which was really a wonderful collective in many ways, I learned a huge amount. There was really, just really good women in it. And everybody really did do their share. It's just that always, like any collective, a few people keep it together and it's usually a couple that are the core of it. So when we split up, it just couldn't hold together. So it published very little after that. But I think, more than anything, its short-lived history seemed really important politically, in terms of what it represented. But it was very interesting because it really kind of preceded women of color publishing nationally in greater numbers. By 1984, I'm saying, "But look-it, we accomplished our goal. It's happening now."

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: "It's happening. It's OK. We did it. We started it. It's good. Let's move on." You know, it's like, it's all right to let it go, which was my perspective. Because in fact, those five years were the difference between complete invisibility for the majority of women of color writers, with the exception of some Black women, to the burgeoning of Asian American, Latina, and Native American writers that began to surface in the mid to late 80s. So I feel like the press was significant because it anticipated. And I think that's what *Bridge* did, too: it anticipated where we needed to go. And so, politically I sort of feel like that's what is most interesting to me, is to sort of anticipate the next move.

And, you know, I've kind of learned over the years that when an organization doesn't sustain itself, it doesn't break my heart, you know, because I feel like it was really — you know, you're responding to all these elements that are historical. And when it's done, it's OK, and then move on to something else. I try not to get too wedded. I guess it's harder for me to believe in institution building. Now it's worse than you could ever imagine to try to get support to build institutions.

So I always feel like the quality is really important, if not the quantity of years. And it was a great quality organization. It was a great

quality organization just in terms of people really having to really deal with each other. All women of color, not asking anybody, you know, I mean, really us owning our stuff. And also to try to do things cross-culturally when it was a dominant black organization — that was really hard work. And it wasn't easy. It wasn't always successful, but valuable.

ANDERSON: What about class politics within the collective?

MORAGA: Well, I mean, that's partly it. I always kind of felt like the east coast black women had more — you know, white women loved them. I mean, now I'm just giving you my attitudes, you know, but I mean it was really clear that, you know, that well-educated African American women, including lesbians, had contacts with well-educated white lesbians. And really, in the end, Mexicans, Asians, and Natives we were like nobody. We were off the map. We were nobody. And it's weird, because when you're dealing with people where — you know, when you're really talking about African American women, I mean, these were incredible women, like Audre, you know, she's just like courage beyond — so it was really hard to challenge them.

These are really difficult conversations to have when people's understanding of race was so black and white, you know. I mean, the day I decided to leave New York, among other reasons, was when a white woman had asked me why I wasn't in *Homegirls*. And I said, "Well, *Homegirls* is a black women's anthology," which she knew, you know. And then I realized that they were still just thinking women of color were black, I mean really and truly. And I encountered that all the time, you know. So I said, "Why am I here in New York?" I mean, now it's different because there are all kinds of Mexicans in New York. I knew I needed to be around Chicanos and get much more culturally specific about what my work was. I mean, that's why the Kitchen Table experience was so great, because it taught me an enormous amount about having to really be specific. I think this was true for Leota and a lot of the Latinas in the organization as well.

At the same time I was running a rape crisis center in New York, so at that time, it was the same kind of politics of trying to do autonomous women of color organizing. We had organized the first women of color conference on violence against women of color ever. And it's interesting because there was one that happened in Santa Cruz like a few years ago, and they all said it was the first. I'm going, 1983, we did it, you know.

ANDERSON: Now there's INCITE. I mean, talk about being on the cutting edge of what's coming up.

MORAGA: Right. I mean, we did that in 1983 with these great sisters from D.C., black women who had this rape crisis center in D.C. It was a national conference. It was like Native women who were doing battered work up

39:18

in Minneapolis showed up. We had the Asian sisters meeting in Chinatown. It was also the idea that people needed to meet autonomously and then come together. So black women were in Harlem, you know. We, Latinas met in the Lower East Side. And it's like everybody had a spot. Then we all came together. I'd yet to see that kind of organizing going on.

So the whole notion of autonomous women of color organizing was just starting. And one of the reasons I started to work at the Rape Crisis Center is I felt like I didn't have enough non-cultural organizing experience of just doing grassroots organizing, basic organizing. I felt like I had always been dealing sort of with culture, you know, which is a form of work, but I wanted to really see what my worth was in terms of just being able to really, to run an organization or to actualize an organization and how women of color operated in it.

So one year, the coordinator was a white woman, and then finally I began to work with a Puerto Rican woman, who's now passed, Sandra Camacho, a great organizer. So those years were really important. I had gotten this visibility with *Bridge* so sudden — and it was too sudden. I felt like I couldn't speak publicly because I didn't know enough. And people were offering me money to speak and all this stuff, and I just stopped because I felt like I didn't know enough. So then I went to work. I feel like you have to still keep doing that all the time. Just stop and try to practice before you preach.

ANDERSON: What was it like for you living in New York versus California, specifically in terms of what the lesbian community or communities looked like, what it felt like to do your kind of cultural activism there? I mean, you've already spoken to feeling really isolated in terms of a Mexican American community.

MORAGA: It was great! I mean, it was fabulous. New York is just great.

ANDERSON: Did it feel like a whole different world to you then?

MORAGA: Yes, but I loved it. I mean, I loved it. I really felt like it was this incredible place to be a lesbian of color, you know, from the bar life to the politics. And also, working with Puerto Rican women, I credit them for really helping me in terms of my own Chicana politics. I mean, they would not allow you to speak English in a meeting. It's like they just wouldn't let you. And here Chicanas all speak English in their meetings and everything, and there it was like, Hey, girl. And as bad as my Spanish was, they would sit there and patiently wait. They never judged me. As long as you tried, you know. And my friend Sandra, too, you know, she was Puerto Rican, but she had some bad Spanish, and we would just be in these meetings sweating bullets. And they had a totally different accent and I couldn't understand it when they spoke so fast. But I credit those sisters because they really respected me, you know. And I came in and I felt like they gave me a break. And they were hard

on me, so I felt like they had some serious politics — I mean, *independentistas* and Cuban women. And meeting Caribbean women, you know, black Caribbean women.

Just, it exposed me to a world of culture and what it meant in terms of women of color, an international perspective, things that I could never have gotten in California. It was a beautiful time, a really beautiful time to be, and you know, it's a great place to spend your early thirties. And I feel so fortunate that I had those years. It was just five years there. And when I came back, I came back because I knew my next step of work was really Chicano-specific. I knew that's where I had to go. I was getting too generic, you know. My real questions were so specific to Chicano culture. My writing — I started to write plays — and so my writing needed that voice. I couldn't hear it anywhere. Because with plays, I started using much more Spanish, Chicano Spanish, and I couldn't find any actors who knew how to do it. Everything was just telling me I had to go back home, but it was great. New York's great.

ANDERSON: You were still in New York when *Loving* came out.

MORAGA: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that was in '83? Yeah.

ANDERSON: Tell me about the reception that you got to *Loving* from your communities and your friends and also from your family back home.

MORAGA: Well, with all my books I can say is that my family didn't really factor in much, you know. Sometimes they'd end up getting them, but— that's where I always feel like being working class is a privilege, (laughs) you know, because they were not that identified around my work. And they kind of knew not to ask about it. And as long as I was making a living and I was doing all right, that was OK. They're not — you know, my mother is not literate. And my father — we didn't have books in our home or anything. So it was not like a thing.

ANDERSON: So you didn't have a lot of fear around —

MORAGA: I worried about it, you know, because I felt like I was telling stories that were true. (laughs)

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: But I also felt like, I really felt like the imperative was more important to get it out, and just sort of hope that really they wouldn't read it, you know. For the most part that's been true.

ANDERSON: Still?

MORAGA:

Yeah. They would like to come to the plays, though, and that's probably the most response I got around my work. They really, I don't know, intuitively I think that they knew not to pry too much into what I was writing. One time it came up because somebody who was really trying to hurt me had called them and told them I had written all of these horrible things about my father, which of course was not true, but one could look at it that way, I guess. It's always been amazing to me how people can read things so literally when your writing is trying to critique, in the effort to solve a problem. You know, you're trying to figure something out on the page. But I'm telling you, I have this incredible mother and father. And after getting the call, my mother said to me — her first response was, "Get away from that person as fast as you can." Now that's a good mother. She was more concerned about my safety than any thing I might have written. And then the second thing was she asked if it was true that I had written terrible things about my father. And I said no. I said, "Everything I have ever written about you or my dad has been motivated by love." This is exactly what I said to her. "You don't need to read my work, Mom, you have me. But the way I can love you is because I wrote those books. If I hadn't written those books, I would not be able to love you the way I do, because I'd be all tied up inside." So she didn't want to know what I had written. She was like, Fine, whatever, (laughs) because it's true. She had me, and the other stuff didn't matter.

45:29

But the reception to *Loving in the War Years* initially did not come from Chicanos. There was about a five-year lag period before Chicanos started reading the book — and in the beginning, there was a lot of homophobia, a lot of really, really deep homophobia. I was very afraid when I wrote the book, when it came out in '83. I knew it was too soon. And it was true, interestingly, because in those five years where the book sort of waited to be read, other Chicana feminist writings began to appear. That's also when Sandra Cisneros did *House on Mango Street*. Lorna Dee Cervantes and Ana Castillo were publishing. And then people started looking at my work. And then also Gloria's *Borderlands* had come out by then. So there was a little bit, kind of a bit more context for looking at Chicana feminist work.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA:

But Gloria and I were always the queers. I mean, we were just the weird ones, you know. So just even historically now, there are certain anthologies, and you can kind of do a study, that everybody is invited except Gloria and me. And yet, ironically, our work is used in more Chicano studies courses across the country than any other Chicana writers. So it's a very curious kind of phenomenon because the quality of the support is really solid, and yet there's still like some really diehard homophobia that doesn't put us in the Chicano canon. Still, there's no denying the enormous impact that the work has had on Chicano thinking. I say that for both of us.

ANDERSON: Who was your imagined audience when you wrote [*Loving*]?

MORAGA: I guess, I think it's never changed, you know. All my books, I always believed that —it's not so much that you write for an audience as that you write for your own questions. So you're really writing for yourself with the faith that if you're really specific about those questions, that somebody will respond, right? In those days, I did not have that faith, but I still wrote for the same reason, which was to solve, to respond to my own questions, my own contradictions. Of course, my ideal audience, you know, were Chicanos. And the fact that it also has, particularly that book, *Loving in the War Years*, had a really big lesbian readership and all of that, those are all great rewards. I want everyone to read the books, you know.

49:04

But I think that — like, for example, the other day I had a production of my play *The Hungry Woman*, which really went really beautifully. I haven't had a production in many years, but I co-directed this one, and Celia [Herrera Rodríguez] did the design, my partner. So it was really the best I could get at realizing a work out of my vision, which, seldom have I ever had that opportunity. And I got this letter from this Chicana lesbian organizer in San Francisco, Clarissa Rojas. It was a beautiful, beautiful letter, but what the letter said to me is, "Thank you once again for making me remember that I'm not crazy." And that's all that matters to me. That is *all* that matters to me. And every book I write is for that reason. I don't care who you are, if you feel a little less crazy because of the words I wrote, (laughs) then more power to you! It's all that matters to me.

And every single time — that's what motivates me to take risks in my writing, because it's right in that place where were going to censor yourself, that's where the craziness lies, you know. It's like right when you're going to censor yourself, that line, if you don't write the line, then nothing has been opened up. If you write the line, then the person who reads the line is allowed to go there with you, and something is opened up for them, too, and neither of you is crazy, because there's one other person who shares that sentiment, that experience. You are not alone.

And the thing with *Loving in the War Years* is that I wrote that book in the effort to not be crazy, because there was nothing to read, you see. So if there's nothing to read, you know, then you write against madness. You write against *I'm out of my mind. I'm the biggest freak that ever hit*. And for all that I know now, I still write the same way. I mean, I still believe [that] the things that I'm writing, they're going to kill me. (laughs) I'm really crazy. But now I know enough to know, *Of course you're not*. You know, I mean, after so many of years of writing, it's like then you go, *No, you're not. No, you're not. Just keep at it*.

And the only difference now is that I know that, and also that my requirement is deeper. I mean, I guess in terms of the craft, I require more of myself. I want to write better and better. I mean, you know,

that's the point. You always want to get better at what you do. But the impetus is exactly the same. So that audience winds up being like this one little person like, you know, *esta* Clarissa who wrote me and said, "Thank you once again," which meant that she had read other works that mattered to her. And then your work is done, you know, you've accomplished what you intended. I mean it's like, OK, thank you. And so you didn't get the New York book deal, but you got Clarissa writing you (laughs) that precious line. And you know, so that's my audience, I guess.

ANDERSON: And how did you fund writing that book?

MORAGA: How did I what?

ANDERSON: How did you fund it? Is it because you were working full time and so you just wrote it –

MORAGA: Oh, yeah, I was always working.

ANDERSON: Has that been true up until that point?

MORAGA: Well, all of my — well, I've never supported myself through my writing. But all the collections of essays occur over periods of time, so I'm just always working. I mean, I have jobs. It's only now in recent years where I actually have a real, as I say, a really good gig, which is, you know, it's an ongoing artist-in-residence appointment. But, you know, up until 45 –

ANDERSON: Right. There would have been no funding for your kind of work.

MORAGA: When there used to be grants, I got some grants.

ANDERSON: Uh-huh. So you did for writing *Loving in the War Years*?

MORAGA: No. No, no, no, no, no. I said in the period of time when there were some grants. I got — like in the '90s I got some theater grants, and they're all gone now. But not in the 80s. No. No, you just work. (laughs) And you write. I mean, but you know, the biggest difference was I didn't have a kid, you know, so it's like there was time to do such things.

ANDERSON: Right. OK, we're going to stop there.

54:07

MORAGA: OK.

END TAPE 4

TAPE 5

ANDERSON: So we're sort of at the moment where you're going to leave New York and go back to California. But in terms of the women's movement at this point, is this — how are you feeling about your connection to the women's movement? Are you feeling that it still has a place for you? And are you calling yourself — tell me, too, about calling yourself a feminist.

00:11

MORAGA: Well, I always have. I never stopped. By the time I was doing the organizing I was doing in New York, when I was working for the Rape Crisis Center — I mean, certainly that's a feminist organization. But my politics were emerging to such a place, that I was ready to do a women of color rape crisis center. And myself, Sandra Camacho, and another friend — well, she was a girlfriend of mine at the time, Vienna Carroll, an African American woman who worked in reproductive rights, the three of us were all working for this. She was on the board, and Sandra and I were the co-coordinators. And we had this women of color caucus, and we basically wanted — after we did the national conference, we thought, Now we can just do it! We don't need these white women. We can just do this. You know, because there was a lot of problems, a lot of problems about how you work culturally specifically around rape working with middle class white women, particularly around sexuality, and you know, issues of sexual violence, and so we were all ready to go.

And basically the women of color caucus voted to stay with the white women, right? And I felt completely betrayed, you know. I was young, so you have this — you know, there's nothing like when you're young because you just believe you can do it, you can do it all, you know. And I was shocked. And I remember speaking to them and trying to explain to them what a mistake it was, what they were doing was such a mistake, that we were operating out of fear, that we didn't need them, that we could do it. And we had — the director of the board was a black woman, and we had all the skills and experience with us, right? And so I go like, We can do this. We can do this.

And I remember trying to speak to them, and I was speaking really from my heart.— and I always believed that if you spoke that way you'd be heard, you know, especially among your sisters. And they said no, you know. And I was like — I remember Sandra and me looked at each other, and Vienna, and we were like shocked. We were just shocked that they would turn us down, you know, on this thing. So I left. I was done.

But from then on I had decided I was a woman of color feminist. I was a Chicana feminist. I would never take away the word feminist, but I'm never going to take away the adjective, you know. So really and truly in terms of my own political work, even my teaching practices, even my work in theater, everything. When I started working in theater here in San Francisco, I was working for a feminist organization, but everything, you know — like when I had this group for queer youth,

there were white kids in it, but I defined it with the emphasis on kids of color. When I did a creative writing group, it was called “*Indígena as Scribe*”, for Native and Chicana women. It was like all my work from then on would be defined from a feminist of color vantage point.

So I’ve always claimed feminism to be our own. I can even say it up to this point even. Here I teach in the drama department at Stanford, and it’s a completely Eurocentric program. And all my courses are directed toward students of color. That’s where my work is. That’s where my emphasis is. I’m not thinking about integrating them. I mean, if white kids want to take those courses with me, great. They have the opportunity to learn from a feminist of color vantage point, but I don’t feel my job is to integrate that department.

So I’ve been shaped around this politic of autonomy, that only by autonomy then can you balance the power in such a way that you can actually have fair exchange and coalition, you know. That is fundamental. I believe this to my core. When I’ve done some support work, organizing for my son’s public school, you know, it’s like 98 percent white teachers and, you know, 98 percent students of color. I come in there with the same approach. You’ve got to give autonomy to these groups of parents of color. But you know when you say that the white administration, teachers, get very nervous.

It’s just the same old politic, over and over and over again, that the only way you can do progressive change where white people and people of color are working together is always to provide a base of autonomy for people of color first. So I feel like I’m not an integrationist, you know. And I feel like by doing that, ironically, I’ve made really good alliances with white people, you know.

I mean, so fundamentally, I can’t say that I identify with the feminist movement, whatever that — I don’t know who does, exactly, (laughs) and I certainly don’t [identify] with the queer movement absolutely, you know. But, you know, I feel like I am who I am, so there’s all these sites of intersection, obviously.

ANDERSON: That was one of my next questions, too, is about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, LGBT — however you want to define it — movement. It changes names over the last decades, but sort of what your connection to it was when you were in New York, if you did feel connected, and then, by extension, gay men, friendships or political connections.

MORAGA: I didn’t — no. No. I think I was just doing women of color organizing, and I was, and did some work with white lesbians. I worked for *Conditions* magazine and knew all those women and had really good friendships, and also we did some political work together. When there was that big anti-nuke march. I forget what year it was, in the ’80s. They had like a million people for that antinuclear march. We formed a coalition of a group of women of color and white women. Some of those women came from that magazine *Feminary*, the one from south with Minnie Bruce and Mab Segrest and all of them. Those were all

really good women, and I felt like feminist allies, lesbian allies. It was a really good time, a really good time. I felt like they were really solid, you know, organizers and people for whom I still hold a great deal of respect, you know, although I'm not in contact with them. But in terms of gay men, no. You know, those relationships happened later.

I did have some relationships with Chicano gay men who were my peers when I came back to San Francisco and also with the AIDS pandemic, we all became more connected to one another, you know, suddenly they were starting to pass — but not in New York. I mean, there were some. There was the Blackheart collective, a group of black gay men poets that I had some relationships with. We did some cultural work with them, with Kitchen Table. I mean, there were guys, but not really, you know, politically, that I can remember.

ANDERSON: So tell me about coming to California then, your motivations and your work.

MORAGA: Well, motivations — it's always, you know, the motivations are always political and personal. When I came back, I was really feeling like that my work — particularly because I was starting to do a lot of playwriting — that I really needed to be around Chicanos. And I took a trip to Mexico in the summer before I ended up leaving New York, which was in '85. And when I went to Mexico — I felt like I was either going to stay in New York when I returned and make it my home or I had to leave. I was in this good relationship, but I had to make the decision. So I went to Mexico, and once I went to Mexico, I knew I had to come back to California. After two months, I felt like this whole sort of, just like these really deep reservoirs of information and knowledges I needed to access were not inspired in New York. And I needed to come home. So I came back to this area.

ANDERSON: Is that when you started with Brava Theater? Was that then?

MORAGA: Several years after. I think I did the first play with Brava in 1990. So I taught some classes at UC Berkeley, I taught some at San Francisco and Hayward State. I was like the itinerant teacher. I finally got a kind of ongoing gig in Chicano Studies, teaching composition. And it was through my time at Berkeley where I really began to meet a lot of Chicanos and start working with Chicano students, and really, even though it was just a lectureship and all of that, it really changed kind of my daily experience to being much more immersed in Chicano culture and identity and our *politica* and all of this.

And working with the students, you know, which I just — that totally changed my life — that was like in the middle, late '80s — to really be working with young *raza*, I just loved it. And I was giving them feminism, lesbianism, all this kind of political stuff through their required composition classes. But you know, now I have relationships with those kids that I taught there who are now, you know, in their

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thirties, and a lot of them came out, young Chicanas and Chicanos. A lot of them came out. They're now getting their MFAs and making films, doing all this stuff in LA. That's sort of the period of time where I felt like I began to really see how much — and I had fought it — how much teaching was my work.

And I had fought it and fought it and fought it and fought it, because I always thought teaching was going to take me away from writing. And I also felt like it wasn't really like organizing, you know. But it was so good. I was good at it, you know, and the students really responded, and that's where all the *raza* was. You know, they were there. They were like at these schools, you know, first generation college students. And you could see it immediately. I mean, I didn't have to wait until they were 30 to find out I changed their lives. They were there. They were open.

So I did that for several years, and again eventually I felt like I needed to leave because I wanted to refocus on my playwriting, and so I ended up starting to develop this relationship with Brava. And when Ellen Gavin, who's the artistic director, approached me about doing my first play there — I also got these state grants to teach — it gave me the opportunity to teach outside of academia. I never thought of myself as an academic.

So for four years I had a class called *Indígena* as Scribe, and worked with Chicanas, Latinas, and Native women writers, which was also reflective of my growing politic, that I was beginning to look at questions of indigenous identity in terms of Chicano identity, and also the politics that come out of that, a re-envisioning of ourselves as in fact native to this land, but without the *machismo* and misogyny of cultural nationalism. Many of my Chicana feminist sisters do not agree with me, that we can identify ourselves as a 'nation' and still be feminists.

ANDERSON: And so how do you square the supposed contradiction between saying nationalist and feminist right next to one another?

MORAGA: Because — I mean basically, my belief is that our allegiance to the nation state of the United States is killing us as a people. It translates into cultural genocide, you know. So there is no contradiction in trying to retain our own cultural integrity in this country as indigenous pueblos and struggling for feminist principles. Feminist principles are indigenous principles if we define feminism from the multi-issued perspective first proposed by women of color. Chicana feminism should require the abnegation of a nationalism built on war and profit and a racist patriarchy. It should also provide a strategy for cultural survival of our Chicano nation, our *pueblo*, ourselves as a people. What I see happening to Chicanos is that we're told when our families first arrive here that no matter how much Indian blood we have that we're just Mexicans. If we're lucky, our kids in the next generation become Mexican Americans by virtue of speaking English and moving to some working class suburb. Or they stay in the barrio and become Chicanos,

and then you have generations of, you know, inner-city poverty, et cetera. If they do assimilate, they become Mexican Americans, then Hispanic, then they marry white. By the third generation, they're white people, just like my relatives.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: Right? So when you begin to realize it's been a 500-year conspiracy for us to forget who we are, my politic begins to change along with this consciousness and consciousness changes action. And if you can convince these young kids that they're still Indians, then they have somebody to be. And they begin to dis-identify with the goals of the nation-state that they're supposed to have allegiance to. And they begin to look at alternative ways of making home, making family, making economic structures, based on models that indigenous peoples are still trying to practice that have to do with collectivity, that have to do with a reciprocal relationship with the environment, that have to do with women's counsel. I mean, all these kinds of things that we used to know but have been totally lost to us, that in many of our cases are just one generation back.

So my job, I feel like, since I have access to all this youth now, is to re-Indianize them, you know. And that's my *politica*, you know, that's what I feel impassioned about. What I'm trying to say is that, as early as that *Indígena* as Scribe class, I wondered what it would mean if you got a group of Chicanas and Latinas and Native women together and tried to write remembering, you know. And that lasted for four years.

And then at the same time, there was this other part of my identity. So I was doing the Drama Divas, which was for queer youth, and that was a theater class, and that's when I began to get involved, too, with more queer men, young men, and develop relationships with them. And through the teaching at Brava and at Berkeley, many queer young men of color have come and gone through my tutelage, if you will, and in some cases, we have developed life-long relationships.

So, you know, I feel like what happens oftentimes is that I sort of intuit what the next step is in terms of my own development politically and as an artist and I do something to try it out, you know, and that's what *Indígena* as Scribe was. And then my plays, you know, if you look at them, they have some of this same thinking in them, you know, if you really begin to follow the symbols and references in them.

So those are my questions, those are my hunches. That's all they are. And my work as an artist is just to try to realize those hunches in some form and see where they fall, you know. But it feels more dangerous to me these days —

ANDERSON: Because?

MORAGA: Because you bring up indigenism now and everybody hates you. Since 9/11, all culturally specific language is regarded with great suspicion. It

is too dangerous to talk like this, and I feel like that's exactly why we have to talk like this, because democracy, the way we understand democracy in this country, you know, it's like this failed experiment. How can you have a corporate democracy? It's a contradiction in terms. So it's not like I feel like everybody has to have the same strategy as I do, but I feel like I have to have some political strategy to offer my students if I'm teaching them. How do I teach them? What values am I teaching? With what values do I raise my child? So this is what it looks like right now.

ANDERSON: How is the writing different for you, writing a play versus poetry or prose? What's your process for each form?

20:04

MORAGA: Well, I mean, the great thing about writing plays or fiction is that you write characters, so they can really contradict themselves all the time. In essays, people don't like you to contradict yourself. But you do, of course. Of course you do. So playwriting, it's like a painting, you know. It allows you to create a portrait of a problem, and watch people fail. I mean, I feel like I'm more drawn to tragedy than I am to anything else, even though there is a lot of humor in my plays. But I usually show people failing. We fail each other. In *The Hungry Woman*, which is my last play that was produced, you see a lesbian relationship that's just going to fail, you know? But I always feel by the portrait of that failure you portray their desire, and if you can portray desire, there's hope. So kind of the beauty of doing theater is that you can do it from all these multifarious kinds of perspectives, showing bodies up against each other, trying and failing, which then always points to what needs to happen for this to change.

When I'm writing an essay, I feel like *I'm* the character, that after many years of writing theater my essays are more and more like fiction. I mean, I find — and *Waiting in the Wings* was a case in point, that I have really begun to honor that dramatic tension matters in most forms of writing, and so the genres begin to sort of influence each other a lot more now than they used to, and I like to make sure that the essays read like a good story as well.

ANDERSON: Which one of your works was the most difficult to birth?

MORAGA: Well, I'd have to say — but that's the most recent — I'd have to say this last play, *The Hungry Woman*, because it's a Mexican Medea. I was trying to understand what would make a woman murder her child from a Chicana feminist perspective, there had been plenty of patriarchal interpretations. It's a play that I'd really kind of written over ten years. I began writing it before I ever had a child and let it rest for several years afterwards. Of course, it was different returning to it after the birth of my son.

I think it's [been] the hardest to birth, because it needed to be realized on stage before it could be really completed. And the politics

right now, for me, the kind of work that I write, the issues that I write about, I don't have a stage forum for them. People won't produce my work. So I've had to live — I mean, the only censorship I experience is just complete disregard, disinterest, from theater producers.

So still believing that the work has merit in spite of getting no response for it, that's hard — and so the birthing is really difficult when everybody keeps telling you your child is ugly or deformed or something in some crazy way, and you see the beauty. So finally, with this play, I got to realize it myself since I controlled the means of production. But it cost me, and I did it through Stanford, and it cost me a great deal politically to do it. And I realize really and truly that the politics of being a Chicana-identified, lesbian-identified person, and having a politic that goes along with that, you know — including what I'm talking about, including a dis-identification with the United States — it really made for very difficult relationships with my department. And you know, I had a co-director who was a young Chicana lesbian, I mean, there were all these young queer kids of color working on the play, and just seeing the degree of disrespect and humiliation they experienced. I mean, things that had been invisible to the eye became really clear. And everything we do, we have to do ten times better, and then get no affirmation for it. I mean, all this kind of stuff.

You know, I don't know why it's a big deal to me. I mean, I always really know what it means to be queer and colored in the world, and then every time I experience it, I'm always a little shocked! Oh, yeah, that's right. Why would you think everybody is going to embrace it?

ANDERSON: You've been at Stanford for a while now.

MORAGA: Yes.

ANDERSON: What kind of a home is that for you?

MORAGA: Oh, it's not a home. No. And I've written a lot about this, too. I have a really good position, because, as an artist in residence, I get to teach. You know, I have a very light teaching load, and I'm paid well, by my standards, and I get to teach creative writing and Latino performance, Chicano theater, Native theater, all this stuff. I mean, I basically get to teach much of what I want to do. So, you know, 80 percent of my students are students of color, a third of them are queer. So I feel like I'm not getting the standard Stanford student. I get these really exceptional kids, and you know, all of that is very good. But I do not make my home there. That's why it's a big commute. You know, I live in Oakland. I don't live around there.

And it's really made me really aware — I really have come to understand that, for the most part, the academy now in this country, unlike when I did feminist studies at San Francisco State in the '70s, that the academy now is really intended to serve the interests, you know, of corporate America. I mean, absolutely. And it's the most tragic when

you see these really, really gifted students of color. They're like the crème de la crème, just really super-super smart and talented, everything. And you realize that, you know, it feels like my job there is to sabotage their education, so that corporate America cannot own them.

And these are conversations we have. It's so confusing to me because I feel like, Well, am I on their side or am I not on their side? Am I the bad news or the good news? Because in many ways the questions that emerge through our classes always end up being, can they keep doing this, you know, I mean, including particularly the graduate students who are getting their PhDs. They are learning a language that's completely inaccessible to the majority population. So how is it going to ever have any impact, and that's the only language they start to be able to speak.

As my *compadre* says, Well, the academia is like the Indian boarding school of the twenty-first century, and I go, Damn. And he's so right, you know. Because it has all these — I always say — it has the finest colored minds in the nation, you know, colonized. You know, it's like this neo-colonization going on. It is that deep. My experience of being in, not in teaching, but being in that ruling-class institution is I am ever, ever, you know, convinced that the colony is alive and well and that academy's purpose is to have us completely colonized in our thinking — you know, everybody. And I never — ironically, it's made me more desperate almost about what has to happen with these students, you know.

And it's always — every time questions of conscience come up like this and I have to take political positions in relation to my students, and I always go, OK, well, now we've got the mortgage and the kid needs this for his education and the teenager needs the braces, and all those middle-class things, and I say, Am I willing to speak up and risk not having this job. And the answer is usually yes, you know. But it's like a curious thing because they have their tokens. They allow me to conduct my classes from my own political vantage point. They pretty much leave me alone. I always refer to my position there as benign neglect, and everybody is kind of happy ignoring the Department's Eurocentrism and it's like that. So I just make my work be about, the students, my classes. But I would rather — I feel like I'm done there.

ANDERSON: What would you rather be doing?

MORAGA: Oh, I just want to write right now. I just really, really want to write. And the thing about the job is it's built in such a way that I have more time to write than I normally would teaching elsewhere, but you know, I feel like the work that I need to do, I mean, the questions I need to ask, it's all-consuming to me. And you know, (laughs) if someone paid me the same amount of money just to sit there at that computer, at least for a few years, I'd be really happy to do that, you know, because I just feel like —

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Also, the culture has it such that we are slaves to our debt, working working working. I mean, it's a perfect little system, you know, so you can't *contemplar*. That's what I'm always talking about, is like you can't *contemplar*. And if I can't *contemplar*, and they always keep giving me — you know, we're on the little wheel, you know, (laughs) the little hamster wheel. And so, you know, and then suddenly you're 52, so then you're supposed to be thinking about retirement, making sure you have enough savings, so you work work work some more. I mean, it's a perfect system, you know, to ensure your entrapment, particularly when you have kids and all of that.

So I don't feel like I'm cynical. I feel like I'm really aware. And ironically I feel angrier than ever, you know. I mean you're supposed to mellow out (laughter) with age. And I think my writing has mellowed out on the level that the way you get to things — I mean, I guess I feel like I'm not fighting in my writing as much, and I think, again, that with age, you get a certain authority, but I'm as angry as ever, you know.

I think, too, that I just feel like Gloria's death, I mean, she died needlessly. Diabetes is not something that we should all be having. I mean, it's out of whack for people of color, you know. I mean it's like there's so many deaths now that I can attribute to racism and sexism, all of it, you know, misogyny. It hasn't gotten — of course, we all know this — it hasn't gotten better. It's gotten — the state of the country is something I could never have imagined. I could never imagine it getting this bad, in terms of the lack of democracy, you know, this word. You know, that everybody sits around and just believes that somehow corporations represent our interests. I never could imagine that — you know, because I came of age with the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement and the race movements, and you're thinking, This couldn't have been the case. But everybody is going for it, so.

ANDERSON: We probably don't have too much time left, maybe another 15 minutes. So let's turn back to family, which is at the heart of so much of your work — family in the broadest sense. And we can't do this interview without talking about your son. You've written *Waiting in the Wings* about his birth and first years. So I'm interested in sort of, one, how you teach the world to him. And then, conversely, what he brings to your work, your shifting priorities, or a different lens. So let's start there and then we'll talk more broadly about your both queer *familia* and blood family, too.

MORAGA: Well, I mean, he actually, he features in so much of my essays, particularly because since I write things so much based on like my home life. So I feel like, you know, I'm always — luckily, I feel really blessed in my life that I found — it took me a lot of years to get there, but that I found a partner that I felt like that we come into the day with a shared sense of values. And I always knew on some level I'd have to sort of return back to my Mexicanism for that, you know. I always kind of, I mean, that's partly what coming back to California was about, you

know, finding a partner who just was raised the way I was, as a Chicana. And my partner, you know, as I said, was raised by someone the same generation as my mom.

So I say all of that because I feel like if I didn't have that support it'd be really, really difficult, because I feel like every time — and you know, we're also raising her granddaughter, who's four years older than Rafael, so it's like every day there's a conflict that comes up, something. And it's always about values, you know. It's always just like what's the basis on which you're telling your kid to do anything, you know. So I feel like it's easier now because he's older, so I can articulate things better to him and he's understanding more. But when he was littler — you know, so you keep kind of changing. I mean, you keep kind of emerging in the language with their level of understanding.

But I think the biggest challenge for me has been to try to teach him, to have him feel safe and to teach him that this country is not on his side. That's the hardest thing to do, you know. And so, you know, you send him out in the world every day. (laughs) And so the first thing he learned was about how greed functioned. I mean, I feel like that's the one concept I could get to him with. And it started with him not being greedy, right? On a small level, not assuming he deserved more than he needed. But like how do you explain race politics when your kid is five, six, and seven years old? Because he'd hear us talking, "That white man ... blah, blah, blah, blah," And then he'd be like, "Well, Papa Joe's white, Mom," you know — my dad, right? He loves his grandfather. He loves him. So I say yeah, but you know. I mean, how do you teach a child the difference between individuals and institutional racism— you know, all of this stuff. So I always would talk about it simply as greed. How do you be aware of what you have and how much you get, and then when people make a life out of taking from other people. So it's like you sit down to the table. Someone brought the food here, and how did that happen — so literally it's like always trying to teach this awareness about how we got all this stuff, you know, in these United States. They've got so much stuff.

Ironically, I have spent much more time teaching about race and class than I have around feminism. And I think because he's being raised in this house that I just feel like — and you know, he has three women, three older females in the house — and that there's a certain way in which, like the respect for women, you know, kind of goes with the water system, you know what I mean? It is a daily assumption and a lived experience. And so I think he experiences more questions around gender and sexism, all of those kinds of things, in terms of his role as a boy, you know. And so those are other sets of questions about how you be a boy in this world without sexist assumptions, which he pretty much doesn't have.

There's nothing like raising a son to make you aware that really being a boy is an incredible oppression. You know, I never would have thought I'd say that, but when you realize the layers that are put onto them about masculinity, it's just like ruthless. I mean, it's nothing like

what we experienced. But at the same time, trying to sort of figure out what privilege is — I've tried to always talk to him on a really basic level about respect and values, you know, that we don't take each other for granted and how you respect elders and how if you're walking in the door and someone's got bags in their hands — and Celia's really good about this — bags in their hand, and you're little, so you get to run in front of them. And at what point are you not little? At what point do you hold the door and ask to carry the bags? I mean, that's what I find, and I think that I said that on the first day, that I find myself returning to the ways that I was raised that are so fundamental about awareness of those around you. And I think that in this country, the thing that's the hardest for us to work against is that egocentrism that is so integral to the dominant culture. So the dominant culture keeps telling you you've got to be — it's like, watch out for "I."

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: And you're trying to always teach them "we," and that you have reciprocal relationships with everybody in the household, with your classmates, with — you know. So that's the best way I can try to sort of articulate it, and it's just kind of a daily challenge. I feel also that we're lucky in terms of that we do have our own sort of manner of spiritual life or a manner of practice that I feel like gives him some sort of point of reference. And I think you asked me —

ANDERSON: Well, I want to know the reverse of that, too, which is what kind of impact has he had on your work, in terms of —

MORAGA: Well, I mean, it's like — it just is everything, you know, because you're not alone anymore. It's like my mother's thing: 'Lovers can come and go, but all you've got is your children.' I mean, on a certain level, you still feel that way. It's like you will never not be connected to this person. And I feel like what he's — the best thing, and I think I wrote about this in *Waiting in the Wings*, the best thing is realizing that you can genuinely be selfless, that your response is really for somebody else, not for yourself. And I think sometimes — I don't even know if I can say fathering — I think mothering really makes you know that, it's just this sense that you'll be ruthless. I mean, I've been ruthless around this kid. I've had to make some really tough choices and really politically incorrect choices — I mean, lots of things — out of pure survival for this kid, what I believe is fundamentally the best thing for him, regardless of anybody's ideas, you know.

39:09

So he's given me that, you know, where I feel like, Damn, you know. It changes even your view of yourself, where you realize that there's a capacity that you have that you can count on, that he can count on. And I feel like that's a great gift. I feel like for me, motherhood has really forced me to rise to the occasion over and over and over again. Like I can't wimp out, you know. And even with Camie, my partner's

granddaughter, like there's times in which — you know, I've got the Moraga anger streak, and it's like there's times I've had to go into her room and apologize. And it's the hardest thing to apologize to a teenager, you know. I say, "I've really blown it." "That's OK," she says, and I know I have intimidated her, "No, that's not OK. It's not OK," I insist. And just — I mean, kids are so great that way, because it's like you can bullshit them, but you can't. I mean, you can and get away with it because you have so much damn power, but you can't. I mean, ethically you can't. And they're right there, so they teach you this accountability that, with other adults, we lie to each other all the time, we're manipulating, you know. But with children, you really can't.

And I feel like — for example, I was saying about the anger stuff. My son has it like in his blood. I never saw it in myself so clearly as when I saw it in him. We sit down and we have conversations about it, and you know, he tells me, "Oh, Mom, I'm working on my anger." (laughs) But it's true, you know. And I can see that, God, my mother never was able to do that with me, but I can see it. And he sees it in his grandmother, you know, her rages, because especially with the Alzheimer's, he's seen all this stuff that she does, and he can see the blood line to him. And so there's like an enormous amount of joy in that hopefulness that, you know, people can change. It's just not a legacy you pass down.

ANDERSON: Let's just talk very briefly here at the end then about your changing definitions of family. I think if you just looked at your body of work it would be very different from *Loving in the War Years* to *Waiting in the Wings* and your creation of an alternative queer *familia*, so if you could just speak to that journey in these last years for you.

MORAGA: Well, you know, I'm working on a collection of essays, and it's called *A Chicana Dyke Codex of Changing Consciousness*, and that's what all this has been about. That's all that we are — you can take these little portraits of our consciousness changing.

So, you know, I think because of having my son, who is my blood, and also developing simultaneously a relationship with his father who is not my blood but who's queer, all of our queer relations, you know, my partner, her adult children and grandchildren— it's like, I think that Rafa figured out a way to hold all these relations and at the same time stay so connected to his blood *familia* on both sides. He's really so much like me as a kid — he knows who his blood relations are, and they really matter. They really matter to him. And he makes a distinction between his blood relations and Camie and Celia, who's always just been Celia, not Mom, but he says "Celia" like "Mom," you know.

I think through him I can see our capacity to have all these relationships, to hold all these relationships. And ironically, it's just like when I was a child, we had this huge extended family. And the difference for us is that some are related and some are not, I mean blood-wise. But I think that, you know, I guess I'm just fortunate that

there hasn't — I mean because of Rafa, too, that's he's kind of been the link of connecting the queer *familia* with the blood *familia*, because you can't really deal with Rafa without dealing with I'm queer and, you know, how I had him and everything else. And it really gives me an enormous amount of faith, because my family has never tripped on that. I mean, whoever did, no one told me about it.

ANDERSON: Not even the extended cousins that hadn't really —

MORAGA: Well, I'm sure they probably did, but it's of so little interest to me. But like my aunts and uncles, all he's gotten is an incredible amount of love and all of that. So I think, you know, I just feel very blessed in that regard, and that's why I feel it's possible to go to work at Stanford, you know and not try to make it home. I have a home.

We do — Celia and I do some organizing with some young Chicano *indígenas* and also have some kind of ceremonial life with Chicano *indígenas*. And those are not easy places to be as lesbians. She's better at it than me. And I've written somewhat about this, where you kind of go from *familia* to tribe, you know.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So these are our tribe. Who is our tribe? And the fact of the matter is that it's always changing all the time, you know, because we are so many aspects. And there is very little safe space really, when we're all our parts at once. But I do feel really blessed to have this extended *familia*, not that it's not without conflict, but that somehow we can hold all the parts of ourselves there, and that I can actually go to my family's home, you know, whatever that is now, and feel I can still bring the same person there that I am in my own home. I mean, not completely, but the fact that you can have a home life where you are all those things at once, even with your partner and your children, is an amazing thing. I have not yet encountered homophobia from either of these kids, you know, and they're already pretty grown. I'm not saying that won't happen ever, you know, but I never have yet. And I think part of the reason is because the kind of queer world and straight world as it comes into their lives, they kind of witness it all, you know. And people break up and get together, the queers as much as the heterosexuals, you know.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: And of course they have to negotiate the outer world, and I suspect that's going to be a little bit harder for Rafael than Camie, just because he's a boy, but up until now, you know, it's like been fine, fine.

ANDERSON: Last question — then I promise we'll be done.

MORAGA: I'm OK. I'm really OK. I'm OK. I'd rather be thorough.

ANDERSON: Well, we've got probably just a couple of minutes of tape, but I just want to get your take on this current state of movements. Do you see hope in the current state of the LGBT movement in its mainstream, predominantly mainstream articulation of that, or the women's movements, the WTO stuff. I mean, are there political things happening right now that give you hope?

MORAGA: I would say I have more hope in this pan-indigenous movement that's emerging, you know, from the south all the way up north. I mean, I guess that's kind of politically where I'm at more now. I'm observing; I'm not a part of it. It gives me hope that, you know, people that are pretty much considered the bottom of the hierarchy are actually doing autonomous organizing amongst themselves and across nation-state lines and all that. That just is like — that just blows me out. And women are at these leadership positions, you know. I think in terms of the WTO stuff, you know, it's like I always say, I run into particularly young middle-class white kids that are involved in a lot of stuff, and I say, More power to you. That's exactly what you're supposed to be doing. Go right to the core. Go right where the money is. Those are your relatives. Go, you know. So of course that makes me feel — I obviously think that's great. I mean, any kind of really confrontative activism is always good, you know.

I think the only thing that I'm kind of not that interested in is really the whole gay marriage thing. I find it assimilationist. I'm kind of old-school queer in that way, that I thought I was queer because it was a good thing to be queer.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: I mean, I believe, of course — I want all those rights and privileges and everything else, but it's almost like I wanted everybody to get queer, to keep up that resistance, as opposed to, Let's all be like straight people, you know. So I'm not interested in that. I worry a little bit about these aspects, of particularly the gay movement that seems assimilationist. I feel like it's fine to do that, but I don't feel like it's cutting-edge work. I would not consider it that and, you know, when gay marriages were allowed in San Francisco, I can't tell you how many straight people called me up and said, Aren't you getting married? And I realized it was only straight people who called me up, right? So then you think, Oh, they think we want to be like them, you know. And I said, Well, why would I want to do that? You know, I said, I've worked really hard to be queer. (laughs)

ANDERSON: And what about the women's movement? Did you go to the March for Women's Lives, for example, last year?

50:50

MORAGA: No. I don't feel like that's where my work is, you know. Ironically, I feel like everything, my feminism, Marxism, everything — I feel like everything that has influenced me as a political person, you know, it goes with me everywhere I go. But I just feel like when I came back to California that I had to be really, really specific to make any kind of impact, and that ironically — because my writings are the things that go far beyond my person, my human person, so ironically I feel like in that specificity, lots of people still respond. Do you know what I mean? Like I might be talking about a Chicana issue, this very specific thing, but if I'm writing about education, or whatever it's about, I feel like there is a potential impact that reaches beyond the Chicano community.

But I can't — it's really hard for me to generalize anymore, I think, because I'm really aware of what moves me — and there's so little time — and what challenges me and what scares me. So I usually like to go to the places where I'm scared, because then it means that there's something I need to learn and know, and that I'll probably be wrong at first, you know. And so things that I don't feel that way about, I'm not drawn to. Of course, you know, all the antiwar stuff and the mass movements, you'll always see us there. We'll be there, you know, because sometimes you just need to be the body there. But I think things change, too, in terms of age, where you begin to sort of prioritize where's the best — where is your work in terms of how you can best impact certain communities. So that's where I'm at.

ANDERSON: OK. Thank you.

MORAGA: OK.

52:53

END TAPE 5

END INTERVIEW

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