Voices of Feminism Oral History Project

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

CHERRÍE MORAGA

Interviewed by

KELLY ANDERSON

June 6 & 7, 2005
Oakland, CA

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with generous support from the Ford Foundation.

Narrator

Cherríe Moraga, born in Los Angeles in 1952, is a poet, playwright, and cultural activist whose commitment to liberation struggles spans three decades. Moraga earned a BA in 1974 from Immaculate Heart College and an MA in Feminist Studies from San Francisco State in 1980. After a brief period in New York City (and the birth of Kitchen Table Press,) Moraga returned to her California roots, turning her creative energy and political vision towards playwriting, including a six year residency with San Francisco's Brava Theater. Her award-winning plays include "Watsonville: Some Place Not Here," "Heroes and Saints," and "The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea." In addition to Moraga's plays, she has published extensively as an essayist and poet. She is best known for the groundbreaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), co-edited with Gloria Anzaldúa and winner of the Before Columbus Award in 1986, and *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios* (1983). She is currently the Artist-in-Residence in the Departments of Drama and Spanish & Portuguese at Stanford University and resides in Oakland with her partner Celia and her son Rafael.

Interviewer

Kelly Anderson (b.1969) is an educator, historian, and community activist. She has an MA in women's history from Sarah Lawrence College and is a PhD candidate in U.S. history at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Abstract

In this oral history Moraga describes growing up with a *Mexicana* mother and an Anglo father, the significance of family to her life and work, and reflects upon the nuances of race, class, language and skin color. Moraga talks about her own politicization and her introduction to and sustained leadership in liberation struggles. The interview focuses on Moraga's involvement with the women's movement and feminisms, and her cultural activism, particularly around *This Bridge* and Kitchen Table Press. Moraga concludes with a discussion of her current work as a writer, her commitment to teaching and to young people of color, and creating *familia*.

Restrictions

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Five 60-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Rosemary Berkeley. Audited for accuracy by Kate Mitchell and edited for clarity by Revan Schendler. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Cherríe Moraga.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Moraga, Cherríe. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Video recording, June 6 and 7, 2005. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Cherríe Moraga, interview by Kelly Anderson, video recording, June 6, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

Transcript

Bibliography: Moraga, Cherríe. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Transcript of video recording, June 6 and 7, 2005. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Cherríe Moraga, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, June 6, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 23–24.

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Transcript of interview conducted June 6–7, 2005 with:

CHERRÍE MORAGA
Oakland, California

by: KELLY ANDERSON

ANDERSON: So let's start by saying that this is Kelly Anderson with Cherríe Moraga in her home in Oakland, California, on June 6th. 00:28

MORAGA: Right.

ANDERSON: And we're doing a taping of her life story for the Voices of Feminism Project at the Sophia Smith Collection. So let's begin by talking about your extended family. You can start with either your father's or your mother's side, but tell me what you know about the generations as far back as you know the stories about, can remember.

MORAGA: Well, I know very little about my father's family, particularly about his father. My father, for all intents and purposes — I always kind of think of him as somewhat of an orphan, only because he was sort of adopted by all of my mother's family, and they were really who I identified as my family. But his origins — his father, I believe he may have been — not even sure if he was English. I think he was Welch. There is some thought that he might have been Irish. They're not sure. His last name was Slatter, and he worked, I think, selling concessions or something on the train in Canada. And I think he did fairly well, but he was a drunk, you know, so he lost everything he had. But I think at a point at which he had something, he had met my paternal grandmother, whose name was Hallie. I actually don't know what her maiden name is, now that I think about it. And they divorced early on.

The name I grew up with as a child was my father's adopted name by his stepfather, who was Lawrence. Lawrence was an actor, and he and my grandmother — which I found out much later — he and my grandmother, during the Depression, were actors, like vaudeville-style actors, and they kind of traveled in those acting troupes up and down the coast and stuff, which was all very kind of attractive. I didn't know any of those things until later. And she did a little bit of work, actually, up in San Francisco, in the Geary Theater, and you know, places that years later, when I was starting to do theater, it was kind of a — I learned these things by virtue of doing theater, then my dad started telling me some of those stories. She was a kind of wild woman. She had five

marriages. My Dad and his sister were raised pretty much by a single mom, since none of the marriages lasted.

ANDERSON: So did he grow up in San Francisco then?

MORAGA: He was born and raised in San Francisco, and then moved to southern California, Huntington Beach, right before World War II. He lied about his age. At the time — he didn't know the war was going to break out — he lied about his age to get into the service, and ended up coming back up here and being stationed in Presidio, in San Francisco, and the war broke out, you know. So he was basically in the war for most of his later teen years and early twenties.

But my grandmother was, as I said, really sort of an exotic character. She was from Missouri, and I know nothing about that. She had a lot of sisters. Now that my mother — my mother is quite ill now, and we went through the house and found that we have all these pictures of people that I don't know who they are. But as I understand it, my grandmother had all these marriages. One time she was married to this gay man. So she had kind of a scandalous life a little bit, you know.

Years later, I saw my Auntie Barbara, who's my dad's sister, and she had a lot of kids. We were very sort of estranged from them. But years later, when she was ill with cancer, she came to see us. And I had already come out and everything. And it was very odd, because she was like kind of very drawn to me, very attracted to me in some way. And she said, "You remind me so much of my mother."

And as I said, my grandmother is a woman I had very little connection with because she had died when I was five, and I found her rather foreign because she was, you know, a gringa, because she was American. And my family, I really identified my family as all Mexicano, and she had like bleached blonde hair and drove this beautiful convertible Cadillac and wore red lipstick and sundresses. And she was very exotic. I thought she didn't fit what a grandma was supposed to look like. (laughter) And she was very close to my sister, but didn't really take to me so well. So it was kind of interesting, that sort of full circle about being recognized for something in me like my grandmother, and I think it's because she was a rebel, you know, on some level. But really, you know, my dad doesn't have that many stories to tell. He may, but he doesn't really talk about them too much.

ANDERSON: And what was your Dad's first name?

MORAGA: Joseph. Joseph. And he's alive.

ANDERSON: Joseph Lawrence?

MORAGA: Joseph Lawrence. So years later, when I started using my mother's maiden name, partly it was because Lawrence wasn't even our blood name, either. And as I said, you know, because we were really raised

within the context of my mother's family, those are the people we identified really as our relations. Second, third cousins — everybody seemed closer than that family, my father's side. So –

ANDERSON: So tell me about the Moragas, then.

MORAGA: The Moragas then are a huge family. And their origins are from Sonora, Mexico, but really at a time in which — you know, my grandmother was born in 1888, so it was really at a time in which the difference between what was Arizona and what was Mexico was kind of a line in the sand since the Mexican –American War ended as recent as 1848. Still there were some geopolitics about coming over. And I think she got baptized in Florence, Arizona, so it would appear that she was a U.S. citizen, but in fact she was born in Sonora. And my grandfather was also born in Sonora. Their origins, in terms of our particular, you know, race history, it's really hard to figure out. They just always said they were Mexicans. So in terms of what degree of Spanish and Indian blood and all those kinds of — you know, everybody always talks like they just got off the boat from Spain, you know. (laughs)

Anyway, so I'm not sure, but I know that the region that they were from is both Yaqui and Papago. Papago is really a misnomer, now they call themselves the Tohono O'odham people, which is all southern Arizona. This is our origins, and a place in which, when I return there, I really do feel like it's my origins. There's a kind of visceral thing that happens that I really respond to.

My grandfather was a contractor. I don't know if he was a really nice guy. I get the feeling he wasn't. But he was a contractor. He had 11 children, two of whom died, so my mother grew up with eight brothers and sisters. She was in the middle. And basically, the children were all born in the places where they moved to, where he was a contractor for farm labor. But he had the distinction of hiring his own children. In other words, his children, they were all farm workers, and basically, wherever they went — they sort of followed the different crops.

And it's kind of a curious relationship because, you know, the contractor is sort of the middle man, like the coyote. And so it's curious, because on the one hand it's sort of a preferred position because he's the middle man, but the children just experienced themselves working like everybody else.

09:19

My mother was born in Santa Paula, which is just kind of inland from Santa Barbara, California, in 1914, she's now 90, and the oldest sibling, who was 99, just died this year. Many of them have lived really long lives. So they range from about 80 to 100. So it was 20 years of having children. My grandfather died early on in Tijuana. During the Depression before World War II, moved — they all moved to Tijuana.

And that was the time in which my mother worked in the casinos, before they were shut down by the new government. The Cárdenas government basically outlawed gambling and such, and so then she came back to the United States. So she worked in casinos – the Agua

Caliente Race Track and the Foreign Club and different places as a teenager — like 14, she was working. Most of the older sisters had married. She was in the middle. So when her father died, she stayed, supporting the family.

So, you know, much of my work has talked about, the reality of her having to really work since she was a little tiny girl, and those class differences. I mean, you know, my work just makes it very clear that my affinities and my identity was very much hooked up with these Mexicanos, and in particular, my mother's life as a Mexican woman here in the United States. She met my father after World War II, and she married him right away, because she was much older, and she had had a previous marriage that did not work out.

But my mother was very smart. She's a real survivalist, — she's Catholic, you know, but she would marry by the state first because she never knew if it was going to work out or not and she didn't want to get stuck. She didn't marry my dad by the Church until I was nine years old. I attended their wedding, their Catholic wedding, because she didn't really believe. You know, she didn't believe. She was smart. So she married my dad when she was about 34 years old, and that was very old to not have children yet. And her previous husband couldn't have children, which he didn't know. So she was in a hurry to have babies and start a family, so they got married very quickly.

ANDERSON: Was there any stigma around her ending the first marriage, or the first marriage not working out?

MORAGA: She's never really said that. I think that — no, because I had lots of *tías*, aunties who ended up divorcing their husbands, and I think that more of the stigma is that some of them were abused, you know, and they left their men, and nobody ever thought anything about them leaving bad marriages. I mean, people were Catholic, but they weren't like Church Catholic. I don't ever remember her saying there was stigma attached to it for her getting divorced. I think that it was a big heartbreak for her, but she never expressed that.

ANDERSON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And how did she meet your father?

MORAGA: At a dance. They both liked to dance. They still do.

ANDERSON: And what stories did she tell you about meeting him and their racial difference, or –

MORAGA: Well, she never talked –

ANDERSON: – religious difference?

MORAGA: Well, she never — you know, it's really hard, like that generation — my dad is much younger than my mom. He's about eight years younger. So

the big deal that she talked about was that she was honest with him. Her whole thing was, you know, why would you want to have me because I'm not new, you know, she meant I'm not a virgin. She figures he's a young man, and why would he want her? She's already been with a man. I mean, it's more those values and my dad, you know, it sounded like he was crazy about her, and my mother married more out of a real desire to have family, I think. The way she describes him in their early years was that he's always been a good worker and a kind person, but very — I think because of all those marriages my grandmother had, he was very quiet. He's still a really quiet person.

And there's some story in there I've never accessed. I feel like I'm old enough now to really remember how young and naïve and boy-like my father was, and actually watching him become a man. I feel like my dad started to sort of become a man in his sixties. I don't think that's unusual. I mean, I have a lot of friends and cousins who talk that way about their fathers, where they just sort of begin to start to relate, I guess, have more emotional lives.

So there's not really a lot of romance or anything attached to their marriage. I think the romance was more that they were having children and raising these families within the context of this big extended family. I have cousins who are now turning 80, first cousins who are turning 80. That first generation of the older sisters and brothers married early, and then my mother married with the second wave, even though she was older, and so everybody was raising kids and grandkids together, all my uncles and aunts.

And that's what I remember, and that's what they remember, I mean, my sense of *familia* was really, you know, fostered in that period of time where you had at least 35 cousins in your house on a regular basis, where we basically always [had] the holidays together. And also just a sense that your cousins were like your brothers and sisters. There was one family in particular. My grandmother lived next door to us, and she raised two of my cousins, David and Cynthia, and they were like our brothers and sisters.

So, you know, my mother's philosophy was really— it's like, men can come and go, but what you have is your children. And that was how I was raised. It was just that what really mattered was that you took care of your kids, and you taught them the right way to be in the world.

ANDERSON: So when your parents met and married, where did they settle down?

MORAGA: Los Angeles. They always lived somewhere around the extended area of Los Angeles.

ANDERSON: And what did they do for work when you were a child?

MORAGA: When my father was in World War II, he learned to do telegraphy. And so it was that skill that basically got him to start working for the railroad. Ironically, his father had worked for the railroad too, but from

a very different class — my dad, it was interesting, because his class affiliations completely shifted, because he basically didn't have a high school education. He had to go back and get his GED. And whatever possibility of some class standing he might have had as a young child were lost as he grew into adulthood. You know, he talks about when he was a little boy going to this military school, because that was when somebody, I guess the first father, had money or something. I forget what the deal was. But that was totally wiped out, and so he basically grew up to become a working-class man.

And so he had learned this skill, and because of this skill, he got started working for the railroad, and basically spent his, you know, entire life working for the Santa Fe railroad, sometimes selling tickets, sometimes doing communication stuff. What he finally explained to me — he was sort of like a traffic-control man, like they do for planes, but he does it for freight. He always worked in freight. Always worked, you know, graveyard shifts. We never saw him. He was always working 16 hours a day or whatever. He'd work the graveyard shift because they paid you more. So my memory of my dad is he slept all day and was gone all night. And, you know, we were just used to that.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: Weekends, he would work, too. I mean, financially we were really struggling. And my mother stayed at home until I was nine years old, you know, to raise us. And even when she was staying at home, she took in laundry, she did childcare. She always had babies around. And then when I was nine and we moved to San Gabriel — had been living before in South Pasadena, Highland Park, different places, all in southern California. When we moved to San Gabriel, she started doing electronics work in those factories. Before she got married, she had always worked in factories, like rubber factories and a lot of stuff for the war.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: And walnut cracking, walnut companies. I mean, all these kind of factory work, assembly-line work. And that's basically what she did all through our high school and college. They just worked.

ANDERSON: Was any of it unionized?

MORAGA: That's a really good question. Well, my dad definitely had his union. My mother — I think yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yes, I think so. Because I'm remembering now — I do remember something about dues and, you know, that kind of thing. And, um –

ANDERSON: Do you remember union politics being discussed at home?

MORAGA: No. I just remember her always talking about the forelady. The forelady, the forelady. My mother, she always talked about how hard the work was. I do remember periods of time in which it wasn't unionized, because she did piecemeal work. And that was when she first started doing work. She would do circuit boards for TV sets and stuff. So she'd be home at night, and we'd help her. She'd start teaching us how to put the little copper wires on the circuit boards, you know?

ANDERSON: Mm -hmm.

20:05

MORAGA: So we'd be watching TV at night and doing this. That was like when she first started, so that was from maybe [when] I was nine to twelve. And then things got a little bit better. But I really can't say honestly how, because I just remember it was a big deal when she could stop doing piecework, because the pressure was enormous, you know, like how many you do is how much you get paid. And then mostly all she talked about work was the people, the politics of the people. And her whole thing was that she was a good worker, you know, and they knew she was a good worker. I mean, she always had stories about how she was like an exceptional worker, which I believe, (laughs) because she's really a good worker at home.

But when you ask about the union politics, the thing that was really interesting is that when she was in Tijuana, President Cárdenas, you know, had basically started to outlaw gambling — and partly, too, the unions came in, the *sindicatos*, you know, and my mother had a good little thing going before then. Also, there were some issues because she was actually a U.S. citizen. So there was hostility towards her about, well, why are you here? You could be in the United States, you know. But my mom really, since she was there in her formative years, really identified as Mexicana. So, you know, it's interesting, because, basically, I think her personal experience of Cárdenas was not favorable for her, in her individual life because she had made her little niche for herself there in the casinos, supporting all this family. It was only when I started to learn Mexican history that I went, "Oh, Mama, that was when Cárdenas came in. That's why you left Tijuana for the States."

But that history, the whole family — I mean, my grandfather was a bootlegger for a period of time. He was a *coyote*. I only found out about him being a coyote recently from one of my aunts. And I went, "Are you kidding? Auntie, that's terrible!" But it was a great thing to figure out, since it made so much sense because I also felt like this was a man who exploited everybody, including his children, you know.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: And in fact, that's why he was in Tijuana — I thought they had gone to Tijuana because of the Depression, it was economically better in Mexico. Which I think was part of the reason. But the other part is he had gotten busted transporting folks, you know. I mean, I don't think it

was like the way they're doing it now, but he got busted, so he couldn't come to the United States because he wasn't a U.S. citizen. So they stayed in Mexico to be with him, right there on the *frontera*. I just found all this out about a week ago. My mother just broke her hip about a week ago, and I was sitting in the hospital with my Auntie Eva when she told me, and she's the youngest, so her mind's really clear. I'm saying, "Auntie, I didn't know" –

ANDERSON: Did your mom know? Was she surprised?

MORAGA: I'm sure she knew, but she wasn't going to tell me. Now that is a stigma. I mean, my mother is very interesting, because she has revealed many, many things that were very difficult emotionally, but there are tons of secrets still, that she has a really hard time admitting, as a little girl, there would be so many things that didn't make sense, and we'd press her and press her. Then she'd start to confess. And the confessions were always that really and truly her father made them all suffer because he was an incredible alcoholic — which we have on both sides of our family — and because of that, she was supporting the family. And she'd see him in the street, you know, drunk, and would walk a different way home to avoid him. And those are the things that impact her more than any of the politics. I mean, what he did, whether it was right or wrong, she still is of that school of Mexicana that tried to disassociate themselves from being campesinos, like the rest of the obreros crossing the border back and forth. They were "a different class of people."

And I always knew that it was baloney, you know, but the class stuff is really interesting, because I do think there is something in her that was told that she was better, but her experience wasn't. I mean, her economic experience was absolutely always struggling on the other side of working poor. And, you know, she'd always insist "we wouldn't take welfare," and I mean, all of those kinds of attitudes really — it's really very typical of that generation of Chicano, you know, that we didn't do —

ANDERSON: Very proud.

MORAGA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, the secrets are, you know – [I'm] still finding out.

ANDERSON: So what kind of stories did she tell about her father? You said he wasn't a very nice man and he died sort of young.

MORAGA: Over the years she gradually began to reveal more truths about him, but when we were quite young she always spoke about him kind of romantically, that he was very charming and handsome, like that. Later she admitted her sadness that he would let his teenage daughter, you know, support the family instead of himself. I mean, he had an illness, obviously.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: But, you know, his story is that he was orphaned very early on. He was the youngest and only male of a family of older sisters. So he was the little *preferido*, you know, the only boy. There was a survivalist streak in him, like my mom I think, right from the beginning. He was perfectly bilingual. And we're talking about — you know, he was born in 1885, something like that. So, there are just stories of — I think it's pretty commonplace — about men in those days being very worldly and survivalists. And they'd have families and kids and everybody just fends for themselves.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So, it was a very different world.

ANDERSON: Mm -hmm.

MORAGA: I mean, we're really talking about nineteenth century, right?

ANDERSON: Oh, absolutely.

MORAGA: Yeah. So, it was a different time. So my mom, the fact that she's lived 90 years is really kind of amazing because over the years in the United States she really has become less the Mexican woman who raised me, and now she's a Chicana old lady, if that makes sense.

ANDERSON: What do you know about your mom's mom?

MORAGA: My mother's mother is Dolores Rodriguez. And she married Esteban Moraga when she was about 14, real young. They all married really young — he was 19, she was 14 — and you know, they basically had babies right away. All of her daughters speak of her with great reverence, and she certainly, assumed the role of the matriarch well. Her husband died when she was still in her forties. Of course they thought she was old by then. But these women were really quite liberated in many ways, in terms of convention.

So, right away she found this lover. His name was Pacheco. And in fact she lived with him and everything else for many years. And my mother was very upset because there were still kids in the house, you know, my younger aunt and uncle. So there was a period of time in which she rescued the kids from the house. If my grandmother was going to have her thing with this man, my mother was going to take the kids or move in to watch out for them.

ANDERSON: But it's not because he was dangerous or mistreating them?

MORAGA: No, it was because –

ANDERSON: It was just about propriety and –

MORAGA: No, it's just the propriety, yeah. So she moved in. And also, you know, it sounds like everybody loved him. It sounded like everybody really loved him, but the idea that there'd be an unmarried man in the house with children, you know. They're right. They're right. (Anderson laughs) So people would always say that was her husband, and all this husband this and husband that. And years later, we found out she never married him, you know, because she wanted to stay Moraga. Moraga was her children. 29:17

So that's really what it was like a lot, that they kept — and it always made me crazy as a kid, because it was really like a lot of stuff about appearances, even though everybody was just doing what they were doing anyway. One thing about my mom I can say though is that, because she started working so early — even though she would keep up these values, you know, or these appearances, whatever — she was very worldly. She knew what the world was like. She was not naïve in any way. And I felt like her guidance was sometimes really hard, but I felt like it was based on experience, you know, not on naiveté.

In a certain way, the way I felt about my grandmother is that she was more sheltered than my mother, you know since she had children right away, and her daughters were really the ones who were supporting her. My oldest auntie, Dolores, her namesake was like a little entrepreneur, you know. When they worked in the camps, the farm worker camps, she would throw like big parties, like dancehall parties for the workers, and get the profits and all this stuff. So my grandmother always relied on her daughters, because she had more daughters than sons. And the sons were less effectual than the daughters.

It's really interesting, and it's a phenomenon, you know — like, I mean, my uncle Steve, who was the oldest son, drank a lot. He was a party man in Tijuana and all anybody would ever say about him was like, Oh, he was so handsome. That's what they said about all of them. And they were. The men were drop-dead gorgeous, but you know, they're like, womanizers and, just didn't want to work much. My Uncle Bobby, whom I adore — he's passed now, he had that same charm and good looks, he did work though. He was a bartender his whole life, gorgeous, had his women, drank, you know. And then by sixty, he just turned into the most, lovable man in the world, right? But then the youngest one, Eddie, you know, he was more like the good son. I mean, he was a good provider, didn't drink. But it was the women who were really the strong ones. And there was an enormous amount of allowance given to men, which was passed on to the next generation of men, and the next. And my grandmother really imparted that, I mean, her preference for men was just obvious, you know.

And she was very affectionate to us, and I wish I had — you know, we learned to speak English right away, and she was dominant Spanish, and we had a really good relationship, but I wish I had known as much

Spanish as I know now. When I was a real little kid, you know, you kind of shut it off because of the language difference. I would have liked to have asked her myself a lot of things. She lived to be 96, so it was many years of knowing her. Many years.

ANDERSON: Right. So you had a long adult relationship with her.

MORAGA: Yes, yes.

ANDERSON: How did that evolve then over time as you did, as you changed and grew?

MORAGA: It was just a lot of affection, you know. She died when I had moved to New York, so she died I think in 1983, something like that. And before then, I had lived in the Bay area. So I was away a lot. But in my college years, I spent my college years in Los Angeles, and as I said, she always lived next door. When she got very ill, she lived with us, and you know, there was just a great deal of *cariño,* affection between us.

When I was real little, I used to spend the night at her house with my cousin, and you know, my grandmother was very, very religious. She prayed a great deal. She had a little picture, I remember, of her mother, this tiny little picture. And every night, you'd have to kiss her mother's picture before you went to bed. And the other thing I remember is that she had this picture of Purgatory above our heads. (Anderson laughs) I'd have to sleep in the little bed, and there was a picture of Purgatory with all the sinners waiting, stretching their arms up to the little baby Jesus and the Virgin. And they're all trying to get to them, you know, to get out of Purgatory, right?

But the part, of course, what struck me the most in my budding lesbianism is they had these women with these breasts, right, but the flames from Purgatory, right, would just cover, you know (Anderson laughs) the nipple or something. So it was just this portrait of this very voluptuous longing. I'm sure it formed my psychosexual, religious, spiritual –

ANDERSON: And your dream life!

MORAGA: Yeah, yeah. (laughter) So they would be there above my bed. But the thing about my grandmother is that she was the matriarch, so we had, you know, after her there was a hundred people, easy — easily, a hundred people. And she assumed that role, and she was very — I mean, with us she was really affectionate, but she was really hard on my mom, really hard on my mom, with a double standard and just very manipulative and, you know, my mother suffered a great, great deal from always trying to make her happy and pleasing her. Talk about a high maintenance woman! I just remember them always — the *tias*, all my aunties — trying to please her, you know. And they could never do enough to please her. She was always mad about something.

And we had a long streak of — in Spanish you say *enojonas*, people that get angry a lot. And we've all got this streak, you know — just a lot of unfairness. And I think because my mom was the most dutiful on a certain level to her, that she was treated the worst, too, but then the sons come in and they're like gods, you know, they don't have to do anything (laughter), you know.

Talk about early formation of feminism, that was absolutely — I mean, I knew it was wrong. I knew it. And my mother was doing the same thing to my brother, you know. It was just going to be passed on. I mean, feminism is born through oppression.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: I mean, liberation practices are born through oppression. How we were being raised as girls became first evident through my grandmother's relationship with her daughters.

ANDERSON: Yes, we should definitely pick up on that theme, but I want to back up a little bit because there's a lot still to fill in around –

MORAGA: Can I reach and get my tea?

ANDERSON: Oh, yeah, go ahead — around your parents. So you spent most of your childhood in San Gabriel.

MORAGA: Right. We moved there when I was nine.

ANDERSON: Uh-huh. And you have two siblings.

MORAGA: Yes. Oh, yeah, those little facts. I forgot.

ANDERSON: Yes, so just fill in some of the details about birth order and who your siblings are and –

MORAGA: My mother had us all right away, and so my brother was born in 1949, and my sister was born in 1951, and I was born in '52. And I was not planned. I think they wanted to have three, but I did learn I was a love child. That was a nice thing to find out, you know, the other ones were sort of more planned. She had certain ideas about how you didn't get pregnant. I'm not sure they were foolproof, but in her head, they were. So she kind of — she knew it was the wrong time, that she might get pregnant, and my dad, you know, convinced her, you know, to have sex. And it was such a nice thought, to think my dad could convince her. I thought that was great, because I'd never heard anything romantic about them, you know. And then she says, "Yeah, and then he didn't let me get up," she had this idea that douching with vinegar right after was perfect birth control. And I thought to myself, Oh, that must mean they were actually like having kind of post-coital friendliness — how nice.

She said, "That's when I got pregnant with you!" So I was like, Oh, good, I'm the love child, you know. That was a good thought. So, um –

ANDERSON: So how many years difference is there between the three of you?

MORAGA: Three years between me and my brother, and between my sister and I, about a year and a half.

ANDERSON: OK. And I want to talk about how they raised you in terms of gender, too, but let's fill in a little bit more. So we know your parents were both, your dad was unionized at this point and –

MORAGA: Mm -hmm.

ANDERSON: — working with the railroads. And your mom was working, doing factory work once you were a certain age.

MORAGA: Mm-hmm.

ANDERSON: So, describe a couple of things to me. One, describe your home and the neighborhood. Tell me who lived around you and what your neighbors were like. You said your grandmother lived next door, I think at that point. But start just from inside out. What did your home look like?

MORAGA: Well, we lived — I guess I'll just kind of stick with San Gabriel, because that ended up being the family home for the longest amount of time. We lived a couple of blocks from the San Gabriel Mission, and that's where we went to school. It was a Catholic school. That's where we went to grammar school and to high school. So it was a pretty small community in terms of that you went to school with the same kids for all those years. And there were tracks; literally, there were tracks splitting the city. One side of the tracks was Mexicano, and you know, real low income, and the other side of the tracks would be like kind of white trash, white working class. And then as you kept moving up and up, you'd get close to San Marino, and San Marino was where the wealthier white people lived. Our school at the time, because it was coed — now it isn't — our high school had Mexicans, Italians, and Irish kids — so all the Catholics, right? And there was clear sort of divisions about who got tracked into what classes and how race divides. We lived, as my mother always would make a point of saying, always on the better side of the tracks. I'm being interrupted.

ANDERSON: OK. Go ahead.

MORAGA: So we lived on the side of the tracks – 40:24

ANDERSON: Yeah, you said your mother would always say –

MORAGA: – always make a point to make sure we were on the right side of the tracks, "right" meaning "white."

ANDERSON: Mm -hmm.

MORAGA: But it wasn't very far over (laughter). It wasn't that far over. But the neighborhood — it's interesting, because now, as they stayed there for, you know, almost 50 years, it's completely Mexican now. I mean, that's what's kind of interesting about the demographics. When we were kids, there was a lot of old people, white old people, some Mexicanos, Chicanos, you know, families. You know, it was working class, a little bit middle class, depending on, you know, which street it was. I mean, things kind of moved back and forth from block to block. Where there were apartments; there were all working-class folks. And our neighbors were mostly old people, who thought we were such good kids, you know.

Three houses down, there was another small family of Chicanos, whose kids we played with — the Garcias, I remember. And so, I guess I would say that the area was trying to be — I mean, it's definitely suburban, definitely suburban — which even as a child I hated. I mean, I just felt like there was something about it that — when we were real little, I think some of the places we lived felt a little bit more vital to me. And maybe I didn't like it because there were so many old people, as a kid. That could have been why, you know. But it was really close to our school and everything.

But the politics in the whole town of San Gabriel, the race politics, there were no blacks to speak of. Now [there are] tons of Asians — throughout all of those neighboring communities, lots and lots of Asians. But San Gabriel, for some reason, has stayed Chicano and white. I'm not sure why — and I think less and less white, you know. But there was, in our high school and in the town itself, really clear divides between Chicanos and whites.

And we were always the ones in between. And my cousins went to our same school. I had my father's last name, you know. I look the way I look. And my brother just did this to the T, you know — that we were basically functioning as white kids going through school. And I tended to be the one who, in grammar school, who had more Mexican friends. And it was really weird because the town that we had been in before was — in South Pasadena, I had gone to a Catholic school there with all Irish kids, all white kids. And I remember feeling really a lot of discrimination that we were Mexicans. And I don't know if it was because we were Mexicans or because we weren't Irish — you know what I'm saying, because those were the politics of the time.

So when I got to San Gabriel, I was so happy, because there were all these kids who looked like my cousins, you know. And there was a certain way that I was an innocent, because my associations were always what was family — that family is the only thing that mattered — my son is the same way — that the world didn't matter. What mattered was family. And since my family was Mexican, when I got to a school that had Mexicans, I just sighed. I went (sighs), Oh, I'm OK. You know?

But as you go into puberty and suddenly the groups were changing — and so I remember that I was getting pushed out of who my pals were, you know. I remember not being able to understand. I knew it was race, but I felt like I was fighting to keep my Mexican friends. And they were kind of saying, You're on a different path, man. You're going to go a different way.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: Like, we can't trust your loyalty. And they were right, because by the time I got into high school, I was tracked A group. I mean, the kids who were my Chicano friends who were smarter than me— I knew they were smarter because I can't do math for nothing, and they'd get straight A's— they some how turned up in the C group. It was just totally blatant. The A group was Irish and Italian.

ANDERSON: Is your sister darker skinned? Did she pass in the same way?

MORAGA: A little bit, but not much.

MORAGA: All three of us can do all right.

ANDERSON: Mm-hmm. So she also got –

MORAGA: I mean, I think she looks a little bit darker.

ANDERSON: – tracked and –

MORAGA: Yeah. I think it was Lawrence. I mean the point of it was it was Lawrence.

ANDERSON: Mm-hmm, and your English skills and –

MORAGA: English skills, but all those kids could — we're not talking Mexican immigrant kids.

ANDERSON: No, but they didn't have any accent –

MORAGA: These were Chicanos.

ANDERSON: – because they spoke some Spanish at home, perhaps.

MORAGA: Yeah, they had accents.

MORAGA: No, exactly. But I mean, these were like generations of Chicanos who had been there a long time, but no, you're right. But it was about a Spanish surname, and, color of your skin, and you know, expectations.

ANDERSON: Mm-hmm.

MORAGA: Now the high school, it's no longer coed, and a lot of those Irish and Italian girls were going to those schools because there were boys there, because most of the Catholic high schools for girls were, I mean, were just girls. So once it turned into being an all-girls school, all those white kids left. And it's all Mexicanas now, all Chicanas. You know, I go by there and I see all these Chicanas — but I felt like the town, the Church, everything remained very, very racialized, you know. I mean, they always had the Spanish Masses. And the community began, I think, to get more Mexicano, meaning immigrant, as opposed to Chicano, too. And the only reason I was sort of privy to this is my parents stayed there for so long.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So I got to sort of watch, you know, everything.

ANDERSON: Did you all attend the Catholic Church?

MORAGA: Yes.

ANDERSON: Every Sunday?

MORAGA: Yes.

ANDERSON: And did you go to Mass in English or Spanish?

MORAGA: In those days, it was mostly — they only had like a couple of –

ANDERSON: Or Latin, I guess.

MORAGA: No. It was Latin in the beginning. It was Latin in my early school years.

ANDERSON: And nobody understood it! But then –

MORAGA: We went to English Masses. You go to the ones you could make, you know, (laughs) that's at the right time. I remember in May, they had that May ceremony, whatever, that I would go to sometimes, and that was all Chicanas and Mexicanas. But, you know, primarily, you know, yeah, you'd just check out the parish schedule, and at whatever time you woke up, you'd get there to fulfill your obligation, the language didn't matter.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: I'm thinking of high school more. When we were little kids, I don't remember there being Spanish Masses because the Spanish-speaking priests came later.

ANDERSON: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I'm trying to think of where I want to go. Let's talk a little bit more about the politics of race in San Gabriel. You said you

lived just on the other side of the tracks with mostly white families and white neighbors. So what did they make of your family that was mixed race? Was there –

MORAGA: I don't know. It's really weird because I think that, you know, my mother speaks, her English is good, is fine, you know. So I think that — I don't know. I don't remember — where I experienced difference, the gap was always just in relation to my mom. When all our relatives were there, frankly, I didn't give a damn. You know what I'm saying? It's like, we had so many relatives and stuff, so there was a way in which we had our own culture within this other context. And my mother always raised us to really — it's such a double message — to really feel like gringos were foreigners. We weren't the foreigners, *they* were the foreigners. You know, that Anglo people were cold. She had (laughs) all these attitudes about "Americans," they're cold, they don't know how to have family, all this stuff. So there is a way — as opposed to feeling inferior — I always felt that we were better, because we had more family, that family was better, our style, you know.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: But where I felt the difference was because of my mother's lack of education, which, of course, is because she's Mexican. She only got as far as the third grade. So where race came into it was often when we began to negotiate the school system, and any of the systems. So the fact that my mother — you know, I've written about this — but the fact that my mother couldn't really read and write well . . . I mean, she would feel nervous about even writing out a check in front of a cashier. This is where we experienced ourselves different from our peers. Because when we started to go to high school, and we got into that A group, then we're suddenly around these kids that are from a little bit further up, right up in the northern part of San Gabriel, which, had more money and parents with more education. And that's when things began to really – I mean, so class and race were very connected. So there was alternately shame and righteousness, you know. Like first I'd be embarrassed or something, and then I'd be righteous. You know, and that's what's so hard is that, because your belief in your mother, in our case, was just so complete, so that when she was ever made to feel less than, we would just get so righteous, I mean, my sister and me, just righteous. We're still that way. So whenever she experienced prejudice, which we didn't experience — which did happen, pretty much on a regular basis — we associated it a lot with lack of education.

50:06

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: But I think later, I began to understand what it meant about race and all of that. I do know, as a child, that people would always say to me, Oh, well, you're different. You're not like those Mexicans. You're different. You're Spanish, probably. I'd be like, I'm Mexican. My sister and

brother would say they were Spanish, (laughs) you know. It was something I felt that always stayed with me, that I just felt like — even if my mother would say she was Spanish, I'd say, No, I'm Mexican, you know. When we were kids at school and my cousins started to go to the school and they were dark skinned, they said, They're not your cousins, they're Mexicans, and I would just — you know, I mean, that formed me probably more than anything, just this sense of loyalty, and knowing that the world was bent on us being separated from each other.

ANDERSON: Where do you think you learned that?

MORAGA: Where'd I learn it?

ANDERSON: Mm -hmm.

MORAGA: That they were bent on separating us?

ANDERSON: No. Where did you learn that self-possession, that sense of righteousness from a young age. When you're saying that even your mom and your siblings would react differently to the same question –

MORAGA: Because to me, my mother was the most ethical person in the world. I mean later I learned that she was also hypocritical and that she had double standards. But I felt like that fundamentally she was good, and that she was the one that had courage, you know, I think, because I saw my father didn't have courage. And I saw her fight for us, you know, defend us and have to take risks that were hard for her to take. And in relation to all the sisters, she — everybody came to her for counsel. She experienced abuse and lack of recognition and was treated dishonorably by relatives and still would open the door to them and offer them something to eat. I mean, real decent values. Like she's *gente decente,* decent people, so to me, you know, it's like I saw the world was full of a bunch of liars and hypocrites and no-goods and greedy people. And, you know, my mother has never had a greedy a day in her life.

And just — so it's like, when you have that kind of foundation, then, even though she had all of these contradictions, I felt like she taught me loyalty on a certain level — I mean, as a young person, as a kid, coming of age. I see it in my own son. I mean, that's what's so heavy about it, is that they — can I do a little anecdote?

ANDERSON: Please.

MORAGA: Because it's not in chronology.

ANDERSON: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MORAGA: Well, it's like there's two events that happened in the last couple of years I think that relate to this. In 2003, my mother was diagnosed with Advanced Alzheimer's, so we had to move her out of her home. We

were having this — like a yard sale. I guess they call it an estate sale, but I think that's a little grand for what happened, (laughs) but anyway, we were having this yard sale, and it was a whole day long, and at the end of the day, some friends brought us some tacos and stuff. And we had been working all day, my sister and I and her kids and my son, and we go in to eat, take a little break, and when we came out, two pieces of furniture had been stolen, you know.

And there had been a neighbor right next door who had spent the whole day kind of hanging around, going all through everything, and never bought anything, but kept hanging around. And we saw him right before we went into eat pull up in a pick up truck. So I knew he had done it. So the thing is, is that we end up calling the police, you know, but I go to his door first, you know, and I say to him, "I think you stole this stuff," but it's the wife that answers. I said, "I think your husband may have stole this stuff. I'm trying — you know, I want to be respectful of you, but all these incidents are sort of suggesting that he's the one, and I would just like to talk to him."

So the police come, so he's righteous, you know. He's like, How can you do this? I mean, he was so guilty. I knew he was so guilty. And so there's the police, and all these people are there, and I'm talking to the man. You know, the wife is defending him, and I'm talking to the man. So I'm saying to him, "I'm just asking." I said, "My mother's ill. I'm just asking just to think about what you've done here." I said, "I can't prove it, and you can just walk away" —

Well, my son, Rafael, is watching this whole thing, right? So, after — you know, of course [the neighbor] never admitted it, and the police, we talked to the police and everything. And then at the end of it, you know, Rafael comes up to me and says, he goes, "God, Mom, that was really brave," you know, like that. I mean, he was really impressed, right. So I say that — this is all related to my mom.

And then about a month ago, we're walking down the street in the barrio in Oakland, pouring down rain, and there's this man that's lying face down in the street, right? And it's a four-lane street, two lanes in one direction. And he's like halfway into the right-hand lane, half into the parking area, and you can see like he's completely passed out, you know. So I see all these people. Everybody is going by ignoring him, all the families are going by, and you know, you have your kid there. And so I say, "God, the guy is going to drown." It's like there are deep puddles everywhere, you know what I'm saying? So I go, I start to pull him out, right, and again, Raphael was watching.

So I start pulling him out, and I say, "We've got to take care of him. We've got to get him out of the street." So I start to pull him out, and then finally these two men come and they help me. So we're pulling him. He's this dead weight. He's passed out drunk, and stinks of booze, and then we put him under this tree, and then the guy says — I have a cell, and he says to me, "Aren't you going to call 911?" And, you know, these are Mexicano guys. And I said, "Well, I was nervous, because I don't know if he's documented or not."

And he said, "Well, he's going to die. It's better they ship him back than he's dead." I go, "Well, that's true." So I call. The next thing you know, there's an ambulance, the fire engine, the cop, I mean, everybody comes at once. So I say to Rafa, we can go now. So we just slipped out while all this drama is going on. And, again, we're in the car, and he goes, "Mom, you're my hero. You're just my hero, Mom." And I go, "Why?" And he goes, "You're just so brave," you know, like that. And, you know, they're not big deals. They're not big deals, but they are instincts about what's right to do. The right thing to do, right? And I think if there's anything that you want your children to have is that instinct about the right thing to do.

That's what my mother did. I mean, I just felt like she always did the right thing when it was really moral questions or survival questions or safety questions or, you know, any of those things. And so I think that's what I'm responding to, that I felt like that's what formed me so much, you know. And I felt like she was really singular in that in our family, you know?

ANDERSON: Yeah. So some of her parenting you're preserving and passing on, and some of it you're doing a little differently, I imagine.

MORAGA: Well, yeah. Yeah. But I think, fundamentally, lots I'm preserving. I mean, even more so now than I would have thought. I mean, if I had been younger, I wouldn't have, I don't think. But having Rafa at 40, you know, just what I know now –

ANDERSON: OK. We're going to stop there. 58:43

MORAGA: OK.

END TAPE 1

TAPE 2

ANDERSON: If we could talk a little more about your siblings and sort of what it felt like within your family, some of the dynamics in your family, your father, but any of the dynamics between the siblings, too. And we should certainly go back to talking about the role of gender and the different expectations for girls and boys. So where would you like to pick up, in terms of – 00:15

MORAGA: You tell me, really. (laughs)

ANDERSON: OK, so let's talk about how your parents raised the three of you, in terms of gender expectations. What was it like being a girl versus a boy in your family?

MORAGA: Well, I think, when you ask the question how our parents raised us, you know, my dad really didn't. I mean, I really can't say that he really raised us, you know. But I can say that he was a person of — I've said this before —of very little prejudice, much less prejudice than my mother, which is really interesting. Less race prejudice, less gender prejudice. I mean, I don't think he has a trip too much about girls and boys and all of that. He's a kind of soft man, you know. But as a white man, you know — it's really amazing to think about. I don't even use the word biracial, but the thing about being raised, you know, with a white parent and a parent of color, particularly when it's a woman of color and a white man, how the authority given him by the outside world has been amazing.

I mean, I have watched this since I was a little tiny child, knowing that my dad was the one scared of so many social situations. He didn't know what to say. He was completely inarticulate. And people would go, Mr. Lawrence, da-da-da, you know, deferring to my father and my mother would be kicking him under the table to speak up. Often he was simply unable to respond out of insecurity, you know, and yet was afforded all of this built-in knowing. He knows, because (laughs) he is a white man. I don't think he questioned the privilege because he — I mean, it's invisible to him, you know.

But as a human being, I never felt like he didn't think I could do something because I was a girl or something. I mean, like I played the trumpet when I was really young, which was not a girl thing to do in those days. And he was all ready for me to be the next Louis Armstrong. I mean, he was desperately disappointed when I quit, and I quit because of gender. I did. I quit because none of the cool kids, I mean, girls didn't play the trumpet at 14. At 11, I didn't care but at 14, I took up the guitar. It was much more acceptable. And my dad was really disappointed. He had every expectation of me becoming a jazz artist. It never occurred to him I couldn't do it because I was a woman. So on that level, I have to say, well, it really certainly impacted me that he was not an obstacle in those ways, you know.

That would have been having sort of a double whammy, of two parents thinking of you in those conventional ways. And the same way, racially, I think the thing about my mother being Mexican was never an issue to him. Really, I can say that it wasn't. I never remember in my life a moment of embarrassment, ever, for my father in relation to my mother — ever. I don't think it could occur to him, you know. It just couldn't occur to him. I don't know how that happened, but it did. I think because their relationship, the power in the relationship was so the opposite of that, that she had so much personal power that how could he.

My mother, though, was an incredibly prejudiced person. And I always felt, you know, my dad had the privilege of not being prejudiced, in an ironic way. It's kind of like how they say, Oh, men of color are so much more sexist than white men. It's just privilege, you know. White men may have the luxury to look more liberal, because their societal power is a given, but when it comes right down to it, (laughs) you know. So my mother, given her survival issues, which were the case since she was so young, you know, had a lot of rules, a lot of judgments, heavy judgments about everything.

But the conflict around gender only really began to hit when I reached puberty. For my sister, it hit much earlier. She was the one who experienced a lot of gender expectations as the oldest girl. We were only a year and a half apart, and you would have thought that we were five years apart, I mean, the level of work she had to do, the kind of little lady she had to be, you know, the *senorita* she had to be. It was really old school.

I mean, she had us doing embroidery and everything, like girls our age did in Mexico back in her day. Right? We're these Chicanas. (laughter) It was like, we were hip, man. And it was like, we're sitting there doing embroidery. I'm going, "This is the weirdest thing." But I was interested in it for a while, and I knew lots of other Chicanas that were raised by Mexican women of my mother's generation, like my partner Celia, her grandmother raised her, and she was there doing the same thing, you know, that's what she did in Mexico.

So there was kind of these contradictions in how we were being raised, because in certain ways, we were sort of these modern kids, you know, American kids, and in these other ways being raised with these really pretty traditional Mexican values as girls, you know. And my brother's role was to protect, and it was always the expectation that we would wait on him and his friends. I mean, there was no acknowledgement that my mother's world was different from ours, because that's what she did with her brothers, you know. From her perspective these boys were all potential suitors, on a certain level, but to us they were just dudes. They'd be all there like sweaty, coming in from playing basketball, and we're brining them drinks and they're kind of like, Why is this girl waiting on me?

ANDERSON: Right. They felt awkward about it, too.

MORAGA: Yeah. You know what I mean? Some of them loved it. But I mean, I knew they weren't looking at us like potential girlfriends or something, you know.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So there was a real conflict when I reached puberty because I had been free before, you know. I'd been a tomboy, and I was so free to be in sports— as little as they had for girls in those days – You know, my brother had honed me to be this really good athlete, and I was good at it. And suddenly everything stopped. He stopped, too. He completely betrayed me, which I only sort of figured out later, that when I reached that age, he wasn't interested in me, either. It was like, you know, suddenly I wasn't somebody he could play ball with. I mean, it was just like my world just ended, really tragically. And I remember years later, he said to me, "Oh, I remember. You must have been like in seventh grade or something," he says, "and I saw you walking down the street, I could tell you were really trying to walk like a lady, it was really cute."

That summer they had sent me to a school to learn how to walk, you know, like one of those charm schools or something like that, which my sister really wanted to do, and I didn't want to do it, and they threw me in with her. But I was convinced that I was this freak, you know, so I'd better learn how to walk. I remember working really hard, trying to keep my knees together when I sat. It was like so hard. And so my brother says this to me, and I said, "God, Joe, the thing was, what you thought was cute," I said, "that was hell. That was pure hell for me." But he had already — didn't see me. You know what I mean?

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: My brother and I were like really close when we were kids. And then the minute I hit 12 or something like that, it was over. And he was raised the same way, but from an opposite place, which was like, his life was going to be great. I mean, his life was an open-door policy. Our life – my sister's and mine – was over, you know. I never felt like there was any kind of gender limitations on what we could do intellectually necessarily, or in school, you know. Because she didn't have education, my mother was so emphatic about us getting one. So she would never stand in our way for that. So when we wanted to go to college, she never said, "Don't go to college." She did say, "Don't go away to college." I mean, that was a scandal, you know. So there were limitations. My brother got to go away right away; that was no big deal. But she didn't tell us we couldn't attend college, you know.

But her expectations for us were lower. One time I remember I had come home from like my first month or so in college. I didn't have that great of a high school education, and it was really hard, you know, because I didn't have the training. And my mom said, you know, "That's OK, *Mi'ja*, you got your high school diploma if you want to go work in an office or something like that." That was the best thing she

could say, because it just really threw me right back into school. (laughs) The thought of wearing stockings in an office was more than I could handle. But, you know, it was like, she would never have said that to my brother, you know.

But you're talking, too, about a family where— my brother and my sister and I — and it's no accident that we're also the only mixed-blood people in the family — we're the first to go to college. You know? My brother was the first to graduate. My sister is the first girl to graduate, you know. It was true that my mother was really distinct from the rest of the relatives in the sense that she really encouraged education, because she suffered so much from not having it. But I also say, and everybody hates me for the fact that I say it, Well, we're also the *güeritos* of the family, you know what I mean, the light ones.

But I think, in terms of one's feminism, you know, coming of age in the late '60s, '70s, you know, I graduated from high school in 1970, so I was in college in the early '70s, it was this period of all this radicalism. And nothing in my family had prepared me for it — like, there was such a contradiction between my intimate, familial life and this great changing politicized world.

And it would be ridiculous— like I remember this one woman. I was a freshman in college, and I had this enormous crush on her, but I didn't know it yet. I mean, I wasn't quite sure yet about the lesbianism. I had this enormous crush on her, and it was mutual to my surprise because, she was really cool, you know. She was like this filmmaker's daughter, you know, a cool person. I mean, I say that because I never thought I was cool, and she liked me, you know. And that's when it was starting to occur to me, too, that I might have some kind of — that somebody could be — that a woman could be attracted to me. But she was so out of my class. She was so everything, you know. She was kind of this dark-skinned woman, but I don't know what ethnicity she was.

But anyway, so she invites me to go to the desert with her, right, with this little group of friends, which I thought was the coolest thing to do. And I make up some lie to her about why I can't go, you know, because to ask my mother was out of the question. She'd say, *No*, *eres senorita*, you're this virgin, you can't go any place overnight. It'd be so embarrassing at 18 to say, My mom says no, you know, so I just started to isolate my life, because it didn't have any kind of connection with this more liberated world.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: And so I sort of fell into this kind of small sort of heterosexual world like within our suburban area, like the boy I dated and all this stuff, was conventionally OK, you know. Whether or not I was having sex with him on the sly, and all that, that was not what was known, so it looked conventionally all right. So gradually there began to just be this incredible tension between what I understood as freedom politically, you know, and the values, the philosophy and viewpoints that were

being imposed upon me because of being a woman. It was just about being a woman.

Because if I were a boy —I just felt my brother made such conventional, stupid choices, you know, (laughs) because he was free and he made just these ordinary choices: the wife, the job, the church, the kids. If I could be him — I used to dream about it — if I could be him, I'd have all these women. (laughter) He had one girlfriend, whom he married, I'd joke, God, if I had been a man, I'd be like the horriblest Mexican man possible, you know? I sometimes really felt that, because I thought, God, it's like, you'd be free, and you could go to school, and you could travel to Europe, and your mother has convinced you that you have all this power. If I was a boy, I could do all of that stuff! And instead he made these really ordinary, conventional choices.

And so, I just began to try to actualize freedom as a woman and that's when all hell broke loose. I mean, it was horrible. It was the most horrible time of my life, you know, because my mother had also taught me to be honest.

ANDERSON: Right, right. What was the role of the nuns in your life in terms of your Catholic education?

MORAGA: I have very mixed feelings about them. There were a couple of nuns — there was one when I was in high school who was very close to my sister. My sister had much better relationships with the nuns than I did. But this one, her name was Miriam Rose, I remember, and she was young. She was probably in her early twenties at the time, very pretty. And she ended up leaving the order. They were Dominicans who taught us, and that's a pretty fierce order. Really fierce. When we were in high school nuns were all leaving the nunnery in droves and changing their habits and doing all this stuff, so we kind of experienced that liberation right along with them, which in certain ways was very cool, you know. The ones that were really progressive, who were really challenging their ideas about God and all this stuff, they would share this with us sixteen-year-olds and it mattered a great deal to us.

But a lot of them, I think I was really mad at them, because I knew on kind of an intuitive level, I knew that many of them were lesbian. And it was sort of a love-hate relationship, because I'd keep running into these models of repressed lesbians that I really hated, (laughs) you know. And it's so confusing, because I'm sure there was attraction there — whatever.

I had a couple of lesbian friends in high school, and people ended up coming out by the time they were 18 or so.

ANDERSON: Who identified as such at the time?

MORAGA: No.

ANDERSON: OK.

MORAGA: There was only one who did, and she was the one — you know, she and I practically fist-fought. But this other one, Donna, was in love with me, this girl. And I was really — she was older than me, and I was really attracted to her, not physically at all, but I was attracted to the fact that she would fall in love with me. And I thought, Wow, you know, it's like she's not afraid to go there with another girl. And I wanted that. But the person I was sexually attracted to was like her best friend and was straight, you know. And I remember really suffering over her friend. Her name was Theresa. Really suffering. That's when I began to know that I was a lesbian, because I remember she was graduating from high school, and we were going to be separated and I knew there would be no context for our relationship to continue, not as girls together outside of school. Our high school was a co-institutional school, so the boys had classes separate from us.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: So the flirting that went on, you know, between girls, I mean, all the time, was like really intense. When I came in as a freshman, my brother was captain of the football team, student body president, all that. So all these senior girls all wanted to relate to me, right, because of Joe, you know. And we'd go on these field trips together, and I just remember always being with these senior girls who could drive, and sitting on girls' laps, you know, and I was so cute and they think of you like you're two, you know. But I was 14, and it was like, I was in heaven! But it was all about my brother, right? In some cases, it wasn't, you know, but he was the pretext for all this affection.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: But I knew physically — I mean, it's like, the weird thing is that for me it was always completely sexual. I knew it. And so, it was hard, because I knew it. So I had to work really hard not to know it, and so what bugged me about the nuns is their repression. That's what got me really, really mad, because I felt them messing with me, and they *were* messing with me. And I knew they were messing with me because I wasn't dumb, you know. And so this girl Donna, who had fallen in love with me had also fallen for the principal, and the principal was this Chicana Dominican— gorgeous. I mean gorgeous. She was this beautiful woman. She was short and very full breasted and really sexualized. I mean she used to talk to the senior girls in religion class about who wanted her before she was a nun. I mean, all this.

18:57

ANDERSON: Wow.

MORAGA: You know, and this stuff was going on all the time in that school. I mean, all kinds of sexual stuff going on. And she was really attractive, and it was like that kind of you know, Miss Jean Brodie phenomenon, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. And it was where, you know, this

teacher had all these girls and stuff sort of sexually-emotionally manipulated. What this principal, Sister Mara, basically did, was she had this line of her favorite girls, and if you got close to her and you were lucky, then she would take you under her wing. And so this friend of mine, Donna, fell in love with her. And she would like knock on her door for a hug, you know. This was going on all the time! You know, even then, I knew it was weird. So whenever Donna needed it, she'd knock on the door: Sister Mara, I need a hug — you know, like that. And Sister Mara would give her a hug.

I'm thinking, There's something wrong with this picture. But what really upset me is that — this is when I was beginning to kind of doubt my feelings about God and Catholicism anyway — Donna ended up entering the nunnery. She graduated and entered the nunnery. And I was furious, you know, because what I knew was that it wasn't God, it was that she was in love with this nun. And the nun knew it, and she let this happen to her, that she was giving her life away because she was just repressed, you know.

I wasn't willing to come out, but I did know lesbianism was about sex not repression. They were the perverts, somehow. But the perversion to me was not the acting it out, it was the *not* acting it out, but I would never admit that I wasn't acting out, you know. So I dumped Donna like big time the soonest she admitted she even wanted to act out. I remember spending the night at her house, and she goes, I wish I could touch you, or something like that, and my thought was, "Well, either touch me or don't!" You know like her repression irritated me. But that's where all the lesbians were in high school. I mean, they were all —you know, we were all repressed. But somehow I imagined I wasn't repressed.

ANDERSON: But you weren't having any sexual experiences with girls at this point?

MORAGA: No. No.

ANDERSON: But you had the desire, which it sounds like you could name.

MORAGA: I could name it.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: But I guess, too, because I wasn't really being heterosexually active — I had boyfriends and we never did anything— I could somehow work it out in my mind that I wasn't for sure a dyke.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: And also because the first real lesbian I knew personally, who actually acted out her desire, frightened me to my core. I mean she wore holsters with pistols over her catholic school uniform! I mean, she was out there,

girlfriend was out there! She would hold hands with this girl in assembly, somebody I had a crush on, you know.

ANDERSON: Mm -hmm.

MORAGA: And she hated me, and I hated her, you know. And it was totally obvious that it was just, you know, lesbianism. But somehow in my mind I worked it out that I wasn't like her. And you know, she was really butch. I mean, she couldn't pass if her life depended on it. And then she got kicked out of school because she was such a behavior problem, because she was always like, F you, F you, you know. And it was really tragic: she ended up committing suicide years later. And so that was always a sort of — I mean, you get these messages about what it means to be you.

ANDERSON: Right, right.

MORAGA: But so the nuns I had very ambivalent feelings about, because this Mara, you know, basically did the same thing to me. A year later, she calls me into her office, tells me I have "leadership potential," you know, all of this stuff. And I'm looking at her, and like on principle, I'm not going to let her have me. You know, so she goes, If you ever need a hug, and I go, Thank you, you know, (laughter) but there was undeniable attraction on both our parts. But mostly what I was learning is that I was attractive, you know what I'm saying? It's like suddenly you get this thing going on where they're wanting you, like people are wanting you. And I felt this from the nuns. But it would kind of give me the creeps because it was repressed, you know. But I think if it was ever not repressed, I probably would have run a hundred million miles an hour out of there, and then again, maybe not. Not with Theresa. But somehow I allowed myself to feel superior. I don't know why I thought that, but I think it's just what you do in your mind to survive it, you know.

So they were odd to me. It bothered me on some level, because I saw a lot of girls be really manipulated by the nuns. And of course now I have much more compassion because of their own oppression, and this was these really radical times where things were changing. But I saw a lot of girls hurt, you know, kind of messed with. And this went on even to when I was teaching, when I taught in Catholic high school — same thing. I've seen that happen with other girls, even after I came out.

ANDERSON: Did you feel like you got a lot of intellectual encouragement from them or confidence building, in terms of what you could do as a girl or a woman? Were there ways that they were refuge in any way?

MORAGA: I don't think so.

ANDERSON: No?

MORAGA: I mean, I think, as I said, there was this one. Miriam Rose was one who made me think I could write. And that was in freshman year, and I had her freshman and sophomore year, and she said, "You really have talent for writing." And then there was another nun who was a biologist, who was just solid good people, you know, she was a science teacher and believed girls could do science. I really liked her. But my relationships with the nuns were not good. My sister had great relationships with them. I think I didn't because I was too rebellious. My sister was really much more cooperative and she liked to help the nuns. And I would do it, too, with her, but — you know, we'd stay after school, and we did spend lots of times with the nuns. That is true. I do remember, but particularly with this one, where you could talk about ideas, you know. Still, I think there was something threatening in my relationship with the nuns, about who I was and how they were. I don't know. But there was occasionally some — this one in particular, I remember, that really made me think I could write, and that really made a difference to me. That confidence took me all the way through.

ANDERSON: Right. So how did you rebel? Give me some examples of your rebellious behavior.

MORAGA: Well, I was – I think I was probably kind of a smartass, if I think about it that way. It's hard to remember now because in the context of our class, you know. It was the times, too. I always think about it now because it was 1952. We were all born in '52 — that's the dragon people. And I think, Oh, that's why. Because my sister's class was this really good, they were just good girls. In our class were all the antiwar kids, you know, we were just rebellious, politically rebellious. And really, compared to what other people were doing, it was nothing. We were good Catholic girls. Like my best friend Joanne, who is heterosexual, but she was the first girl I was with — she was this photographer, quit school early. I mean, she graduated early so she could do her photography and moved to San Francisco, you know what I mean?

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: It's like that we were about freeing ourselves, you know, in our own little pitiful ways. But we did the antiwar moratoriums and all that. And I organized all of those things.

ANDERSON: Right. At your school?

MORAGA: At our high school, yeah. And it was pretty nothing compared to what people were really doing, but in our little ways, and compared to the harsh strictures of the Catholic Church, you know –

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: – I questioned the Church a lot. But I think, when I said that I was a smartass, since I was a little girl, always in school, I was not — I always had bad grades in deportment. My mother didn't give a damn about –

ANDERSON: Deportm ent. (laughs)

MORAGA: That's what it was called, right? (laughter)

ANDERSON: Took me a while to figure out what you were talking about. They don't use that word any more.

MORAGA: Conduct. Deportment. Conduct. Well, you know, it's like, you look at the report card, and I look at it now, and she didn't care if I got A's, it was always the conduct grade that mattered most to her. That was it: deportment and conduct. Shoot, I got another C-minus. You know, I think I was probably kind of a smartass, you know, that I talked back. That probably was it.

ANDERSON: Were you punished for that quality in your family? I mean, was there a lot of pressure?

MORAGA: No, not in my family.

ANDERSON: There wasn't any pressure for you to sort of rein it in and be more –

MORAGA: Well, you weren't supposed to talk back to your mother, but you certainly could talk about your opinions. I mean, one thing I can say, in our home there was no prejudice about that, girl or boy. At our dinner tables, we talked, you know. And my mother loved it. She always supported our debates, and she was interested in it because she was, herself, such a storyteller. And my dad always had really progressive politics. He's like an FDR Democrat guy, so he always had really progressive politics. So did my Uncle Eddie, who's his peer, and they were great on that level. That's what I remember kind of best about my dad. I mean, to this day he's much more radical than any of his age group, you know. But certainly we were not to be disrespectful, you know. And I suspect at school I was a little bit, but that's all I remember, is talking a lot.

ANDERSON: Yeah, yeah.

MORAGA: Talking back.

ANDERSON: Yeah. How did you get information about the changing social environment and the movements that were getting off the ground as you were in high school? Was it from television? Was it from newspapers? Family discussion? Did you go into Los Angeles? I mean, what kind of information was coming in about the social movements of the time?

29:30

MORAGA: What I regret very much, if I could rewrite my own biography, you know — our proximity to East L.A. is like ten minutes – I wish I could say I had been involved politically as a teen. I think being who I was, mixed blood and soon-to-be queer, I didn't really, you know, feel connected to the Chicano movement in the late 60s.

ANDERSON: But you were aware of it?

MORAGA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. And how I got that, I think was — I assume it's mostly TV and just because we were Mexicans. I mean, that cultural proximity. They were us, you know? Certainly the college I went to, Immaculate Heart College, which was very progressive politically impacted my awareness. It doesn't exist any more, but it's where the American Film Institute is now in Hollywood. But the nuns who founded that college were the first ones to take off their habits and were basically kind of de-frocked by the archbishop at the time — Cardinal. McIntyre. It was big scandal. And they were some fierce, brave nuns. I mean, that was a different period of nuns. I wasn't close to any of them, but as an example, they were fierce. I mean, they were the first to do it in the world, you know. So the school, as a result, became nonsectarian and coeducational in like 1969, 1970. And I started going there in '70. So it was the first time they really had men in the classes, and it became a big hippie school. It was just a hippie school. But my mother didn't know it because it was called Immaculate Heart College, right.

ANDERSON: And it was Catholic just two years before.

MORAGA: And it was Catholic. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Sister Corita Kent was this famous artist who did all this antiwar artwork and stuff. So the school became sort of famous for their antiwar positions and all this. So we got attracted to going there because of these politics — and we didn't want to go where my brother went. My brother was going to Loyola University, and it was like conservative Catholic and everything. And even then, we said, We're not going to do what he did. You know, my sister and I went together, right?

ANDERSON: Oh, I didn't know that. OK.

MORAGA: So I followed her. I followed her, but it's really weird, because I think, ironically, the school had a reverse effect on some levels, because it terrified both of us. I mean, when we went there, everybody is dropping LSD, you know. It's like, there are lesbians everywhere, I mean everywhere. And I think that it just overwhelmed us— I mean, both my sister and I talk about that. I feel like I lost some time because it was (laughs) –

ANDERSON: Just scared you, huh?

MORAGA: It was so terrifying. I mean, there were all these Anglo people there. There was also a group of Chicanos who were heavily involved in Chicano politics, boys and girls. So it was the times. There was no way you could not know these things. I remember, for example, driving to school, and it was when Proposition 14 was up on the California ballot, and I remember seeing these young Chicanos, and they had these protest signs and everything. And I pull up to a corner, and I was seeing these kids screaming like that with all this passion, and I said, That's me. They don't know it yet, you know. But that's me. And it was like the birth of consciousness.

Those times were like amazing because, you know, it's always painful to have awareness but be unable to change. It would take me a lot of years to finally be able to embody that knowing. But it really was like the revolution was ten minutes away, you know, and I was trapped here in this suburb. (laughter) It was like that's how I felt. But in the context of my family, I was considered this raving radical, you know. I mean, I came home and I said, "I'm not going to Church no more." I came home, I said, you know, "I'm going to live with a man." I would just come home and say what I was going to do. Everything, all the way to coming out. And this was the value I was raised on, honesty, and you take the repercussions where they fall. So within my context, it was very brave to act on these internal changes. But still you look back and you say, damn, the revolution was close, you know.

I mean it's like I talk with Celia, my partner, and she was there. She was there! In the early 70s, she came down from Sacramento and started doing communist organizing and everything else. That wasn't my story, you know. So it's like, when I teach now I say, "Sometimes courageous acts are very, very invisible." Because I see a lot of them, they're coming from really traditional Mexicano families and just for them to do these small little acts of change is really a big deal. And somebody else looks all cool, and they're out there all righteous on the street and they're the real rebel and everything, but then you're asking them, What's at stake? You know, what do they have to risk? Do they risk their family's disapproval? Do they risk being, in fact, rejected from that family? Do they risk their livelihood? You know, what are they really risking?

So I always sort of try to kind of look at political activism in terms of our levels of risk, what was at stake in each action. And that's what I tell Rafael about what courage is. I say, What's brave to somebody else may not be brave to you, you know. But still, in my fantasy life, I would have rather, you know —been out there doing all of that activism as a young woman. And it's taken me a lot of years to sort of figure out exactly what all that was about. Because I knew what was happening in the family. And the Chicano movement was really threatening to our family — really, really, really threatening, you know, because this is a generation of people who did a lot to become part of the United States, to really become American. And still they gave you this total double message that we're not like the Americans. (laughs)

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: I mean, I had a cousin who sold Gallo wine when *El Movimiento* was boycotting Gallo, and it's like, I just thought I was going to lose my mind, our family is a bunch of *vendidos.* The only exception was my Tío Eddie, you know, he just stayed so politically on the right path, you know. Him and my Dad, so there was always somebody to talk to. My Tío even considered Che a hero (laughs) which was like an amazing thing.

ANDERSON: Yeah. Were some of your cousins then involved in the Chicano movement?

MORAGA: His family was. And then I had some second cousins that were. And I do remember once trying to get this job that was for Chicanos. I was in college or something. And one of my cousins, Fernando, who was older, you know, he was already in his 30s, and he was organizing — it was for young Chicanos to work in the health industry. So my cousin Eddie went down, this uncle's son, and we both applied for this job. And Eddie got the job, and I didn't get the job, right? And basically they didn't give me the job because they didn't feel like I needed the job, that I hadn't really been deprived as a Chicano, you know. And I feel I guess that's true, but it was weird, because I felt like I kept missing — I mean I felt like I kept being pushed out of opportunities as well that would have helped me to be in the mix and to get to identify more with the Chicano Movement. But that would have to wait until I got the wherewithal of being able to figure out how to take those risks and do it myself, which is, you know, ultimately what we all have to do. But there were a lot of moments of those kind of rejections, but I think that really politicized me, because I began to see this conspiracy going on, which I always felt my brother was a model of, that the world is really more than willing to let you be something other than a Mexican, if you can.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: (laughs) I think for those of us who are third- and fourth- and fifth-generation Chicanos, what keeps us Chicano? Right now the only thing that keeps you Chicano is poverty. I mean, really. I mean, this has been my biggest issue. I found that out with my son. I kept trying to get him into these bilingual child care and educational situations and they kept sending us away saying I make too much money. They say, No, these are for, you know – 30:57

ANDERSON: – the real Chicanos.

MORAGA: Yeah. And I said, "Well, I will pay you the money for your institution. Just let him be in the program," And this is the contradiction, you know.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: I think it's really different than African Americans, where you can, you know, have a viable middle class — you know, you can be middle class and contribute to African American culture and identity and be part of it. With Chicanos, I feel like, with the exception of some places in Los Angeles and some places in San Antonio where you have a real viable political presence, you know, basically our institutions are built to respond to the needs of the impoverished and that should definitely be the priority, but we haven't also figured out how to, as we move up in class, to stay Mexican, to stay Chicano, you know, to build cultural and educational institutions to support that. And I think, for this reason, our movement is in deep crisis. We lose our middle class to mainstream American culture. We don't know how to leave the barrio and stay brown. I think this is something in all my years, that has never left my consciousness and kind of got reborn again as I had my own son.

ANDERSON: Let's back up a little and talk about the language around that. When did you start calling yourself Chicano and when did you change your name? Was it when you went to college? I mean, was that the moment when you –

MORAGA: Yeah.

ANDERSON: In the early '70s?

MORAGA: More the mid-70s, I think, referring to myself. I didn't say it to my mom, you know, but we started saying it certainly in college.

ANDERSON: About yourself?

MORAGA: If somebody asked, What are you, I usually would say I was Mexican and white or Mexican and Anglo. I think that's what I usually said. And then I think it kind of was sort of a gradual thing. I began to say Chicana. I mean, it was the correct word to use politically. So I think that by the '70s I was starting to do that because that's what you were supposed to do, but I never felt comfortable with the term, and I think that happened probably more after I had come up to San Francisco.

ANDERSON: OK.

MORAGA: When I came up to the Bay area, it was so politicized here. I came in with very clear class politics. I moved up to the Bay area with good working-class politics. I felt I could say what that was about. I couldn't say what it was to be a Mexican, I felt. And that I felt like I kept experiencing my mother's oppression, not as racial so much but as language — which is racial — and class, you know, which is racial, but somehow, I guess because of me being English speaking and being light skinned I couldn't speak to racism. I could say I was working class, you know, and stand with that and know what that was. The other, race, was

more questioned, and questionable, to me. I moved up here after I came out. So that's another story.

ANDERSON: Yeah, we'll go back and talk about that more.

MORAGA: And I began to work in some feminist organizations and lesbian-feminist organizations. But it was through those feminist lesbian organizations that I began to start to get even an idea about my race as different from white women. In L.A. right before I left, I started doing some work with the Women's Building, and the class attitudes there tore me up. I mean, I just thought, who are these women? I mean, it was so privileged, you know. I said, If this is what feminist is, I ain't here. I mean, I felt that at the college, but there was also working-class kids around. But feminism was so middle class — not just middle, upper-middle class. You know, these people were like intellectuals from New York. (laughs)

And I experienced an amazing amount of prejudice because of my class background, and that really radicalized me. I always feel grateful when those things happen, you know, because my response is always to get angry, you know, so that was good. And so it was with that that I came up north with that kind of class righteousness and clarity about that, which I could articulate. And yet it had very little to do with Marxism or anything like that. I mean, I came to a lot of this stuff really late, I mean, by whatever standards those are, but absolutely organically. I had to be educated to understand that somebody else had thought this before me. (laughs) My thing was, is that class was an identity, it was a culture, you know. And I mean, I think mostly because I've always been attracted to culture, my interest with class was that it forms a culture, you know?

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So I came up with all of that. And, again, I started to do organizing, and it's like the class difference was really out there again. I was really getting much more politicized around it, but I felt so alienated that — I mean, what's weird is that I kept feeling like it wasn't sufficient. So this was the period where every conference you went to, everything you did, anything you organized, there was a working-class group, there was a women of color group, there was a middle-class group, all this stuff. So I'd be in there with the white working-class women, and I'd feel, This isn't it. This isn't it, you know. And like sometimes I'd meet an ally — like I met this one Italian working-class girl, and hooked up with her. It was like more ethnic, you know. It certainly wasn't with Jewish women, because Jewish women tended to be middle class, the ones that I was meeting out here. New York was a different story –

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So you know, sometimes I'd hook up politically with an Italian. (laughter) That's sort of like where I was at. And it was, as I'm saying, because it was a period of time in which everybody was being categorized to such a degree, you could really tell whether you fit or you didn't fit, you know. So then I started to articulate that I was also Mexican, So this was like kind of middle '70s, and then what was weird is that I heard there was a group of women of color and I became interested in it. I wish I could remember the woman's name who ran it, a black woman who spoke at some conference I went to or something about identity or something. This was probably around 1977, '76, '77. And she was really great. And I had just started to really get involved in reading black women's literature, and everything was just kind of getting opened up for me. And when I looked into the group, this woman was so quick to make me a woman of color, you know what I mean? It was like she was really quick at it. I say quick because, I mean, I thought she was very respectful and everything, but I knew that she thought I knew all these things about race I didn't know. I didn't know those things.

So it's like, you take a little step out, and you say, this has to be where I go next. But then you go there and you realize it's a whole area that you can't know more than you know. And so it felt very dangerous to me because it was a time politically when there was so much need for that articulation in terms of feminists of color. So I kept kind of falling back on the class stuff because I felt grounded in that, and then say, within the class framework, I have this version, you know, I'm this.

But then it would be also difficult because sometimes I would meet mixed-blood people, but I would also feel distinct from them — my experience was largely if the mother was white, it was different, you know, because, particularly in terms of feminism, if you're raised by colored women, (laughs) if you're raised by a colored woman, you're just colored. I mean, it just always seemed that way to me. And so I was just kind of figuring all this stuff out. They weren't like rules.

And so then what happened is that I just started to get much more politicized, and I was also working. When I came up here, I was just starting to finally write a great deal, and through those circles, meeting other people, and that sort of thing. So it was through that, through the writing, really that I began to articulate all these things that I'm talking to you about, that the writing began to sort of look at these areas of disconnects, you know: What's class? What's race? I mean, all of this stuff that would eventually have me move to San Francisco. Folks that I met through San Francisco State when I was getting an MA over there, women of color that I started to meet, Gloria Anzaldúa, whom I met, I mean, all of that, which then finally got me to writing "La Güera," "La Güera" for *Bridge* is the thing that articulates this whole journey.

But I can say that the journey never has stopped, in terms of all these issues — I mean, I feel like the way race and class function is that you're always, in every new situation that you go into, forced to examine your identity. I mean, I'm still to this day questioned. I mean if

I walk in with my books, and I walk in as Cherríe Moraga, no one is going to say to me, You're not a Chicana. In most regular community-based places, it's not even an issue because we're every shape and shade. But in certain politicized circles, you walk in, and if I don't have all my books there, [they say], Who are you, you know. And usually that's come through men, you know, kind of old politicos, you know, those guys. But you don't know when the hostility is going to hit.

ANDERSON: So when did you start calling yourself Cherríe Moraga?

MORAGA: So that was when I was in New York.

ANDERSON: Oh, that's later. OK, but tell that story anyway, and then I think that might be our last one for today.

MORAGA: When I was in New York — I'm trying to remember how –

50:40

ANDERSON: And we'll fill in a lot of the gaps up until that. I don't want you to think we've just skipped over all this other stuff.

MORAGA: Yeah. I do remember when it happened. *Bridge* was just going to come out, and I changed it right before publication. My brother had read "La Güera" because it was published in a collection called *The Coming Out Stories* that Adrienne Rich had written the foreword for. Adrienne Rich had read "La Güera" and she wanted it included in *Coming Out Stories*. So it was published, and that press had really good distribution, so the essay got around a lot, and I guess my sister or somebody must have sent it to my brother.

Now, I've always been very estranged from my brother, as has my sister. So he read it, and so — he's a lawyer — and he wrote me this letter back. And he said to me that he was, you know, very impressed — it was very condescending, but it was his effort to be nice — he was very impressed he said by my ability to write. Then he goes on to say that he was alternately dismayed — or something like that, I forget the language now, to see that his namesake was associated with homosexuality. And I said, "Thank you very much. Let's get rid of the name." I mean, that was all I needed. "You can keep your name. You can have your name, and I will take my mother's name." And I said, "It's an adopted name, anyway." The hardest part was dealing with my dad, you know. So I said to my father, I said, "You just have to know," I said, "the work that I'm doing, the writing that I'm doing," I said, "it's all so much about our family. And you know our family is Moraga." I kept it as my middle name, Lawrence. And I said, "So it's not personal to you." You know, he's all right. I probably hurt his feelings, but ultimately, he knows I love him. So that was more problematic to me on a personal level, but certainly, politically, I have never missed the name. And, you know, I felt like my brother did me a service writing me that. It was like he absolved me of that connection— because my brother, he owned that name and he could be a white man with that name and never

look back. And so I said, "You can have your name. I bequeath to you your name." And really I knew that I would not be free of his claim on me at a certain level as long as I had his name, you know, since I wasn't going to get a married name, right? And he's a real patriarch, you know, really, really, deeply patriarchal, I mean, fundamentally. So that was an easy thing to decide. You get angry enough you make really clear decisions (laughter). So that was easy.

ANDERSON: And were you called Cherríe when you were a child?

MORAGA: Oh, yeah.

ANDERSON: So it was just changing the last name.

MORAGA: Yeah, I just switched it actually, because I had started using my mother's name anyway because I felt like there was no way to make it clear that I was mixed blood if I didn't use her name. So I had been using Moraga Lawrence. I just switched it.

ANDERSON: Right. And what about your sister? Did she stick with Lawrence until she married?

MORAGA: Yeah. Now she's back to Lawrence.

ANDERSON: Uh-huh. She never felt compelled to take Moraga?

MORAGA: No, not at all. Not at all. And, you know, JoAnn, my sister, has a pretty good sense of her Mexicanism, I would say more than *chicanidad*, you know, her Mexicanism. And I think she's faithful to that, but it's really hard for her to politicize it in any way. It's more personal, familial, you know. But it's interesting, because her kids — I mean, she married a Jewish man, and so the kids are kind of, you know, they're another generation removed. But they're all dating Latinas, even the lesbian dates, you know, women of color. They're all kind of attracted to men or women of color you know.

ANDERSON: That's interesting.

MORAGA: Yeah. So it's interesting. And their grandmother, my mother, has impacted them so deeply. I can see that culturally, she was the strongest influence in their lives. So.

ANDERSON: OK. We're going to stop there.

55:27

MORAGA: That's good.

END TAPE 2

TAPE 3

ANDERSON: OK. Second day of taping with Cherríe Moraga at her home in Oakland. So let's just go back to yesterday. I want to pick up on your growing awareness and involvement in social movements, but first let's go back to coming out, because that, at least your coming out to yourself, your awareness of your lesbian or queer identity, predates college.

MORAGA: Mm -hmm.

ANDERSON: So why don't you take it wherever you want to go, with me saying, just tell me about coming out, to yourself and to your family, and what that meant.

MORAGA: Well, I mean, I knew, kind of on an unarticulated, just lived level since I was really young, you know, that I was queer. I never had language for it or anything, but I remember as early as eight, you know, seeing my first kind of obvious lesbian couples. They were sort of late '50s-esque, sort of early '60s-style old butch and femme, you know high femme, traditional butch. I was enormously attracted to them and repelled by them, you know, but fascinated, just really fascinated — and somehow felt there was something to it. That's all. I've written about that. And then when I was in high school, it wasn't so much that I thought I was a lesbian as a child. I just knew I was such a tomboy, and so when I began to experience desire, it was always, you know, attached to women and girls, but particularly women. I remember as an adolescent, [going to] movies, you know, movies having these feelings, just seeing cleavage in movies or something. I was just like — I would feel it. I would feel it. It was never theoretical. It was completely visceral.

But for me, because I was raised so traditionally Catholic, it was really hard to sort of distinguish in my mind just what was sexual, therefore bad, versus what was lesbian and bad, you know — worse. So there was a period of time in my adolescence then that I just interpreted it all as that I was really bad, that I was a sinner. I mean, it wasn't the family that raised me so traditionally Catholic, it was the Catholic schools. So since I felt — I mean, no one ever talked to me about desire — so since I felt desire and I felt desire for females, my adolescence was horrible.

I mean, I was really, really tortured, and I had incredible really erotic nightmares. But the imagery was always very mixed with Catholicism. So it was heavily — sexuality and sin and desire and, you know, Church and gods and saints, and they were all mixed up in my really deep unconscious. And so my dreams really freaked me out, and I felt like nobody in the world had those dreams, and so I must be, you know, I really believed I was marked.

And you had all the lessons of the Bible that there is a tribe of people that were marked, and I guess — what is it? The mark of Cain or something, I forget — I believed I was. I believed I was condemned. So

for about three years of my life, I remember, almost all the way up through the end of my seventh grade, I was completely tortured. I'd wake up three and four times a night. I prayed all night long. You know, in another context, you would say that, you know — I mean, I think class has a lot to do with it. In another context, you see your kid like that, you'd know something was wrong. I used to get up and lock the doors every night, go to sleep, two hours later, wake up, go do it again, just like, you know, prayed all night. I would pray and then I would forget the prayers I prayed, so it didn't really count. So I'd pray some more.

But my whole obsession was impure thoughts. They told us if you had impure thoughts, it was as bad as the deed. And I had them all the time. (laughs) And then the Catch 22, of course, is the more you're not supposed to have them, the more you have them. So I'd go to confession every few days. The priest would kick me out, you know, say you're crazy. They were really useful, you know, the priests. They'd just kick you out and say you're crazy.

And so, you know, it was a really horrible time in my life as a child, and so when I began to think about lesbianism, the only thing I understood — I didn't understand lesbianism. I understood trans-genderism. I mean, that's how I understood it. So I just figured, you know, I was one of them, you know, I was transgender. There was no way to be a girl and feel like the way I felt. The only option was that you were really a boy, you know. So I found myself, occasionally, I'd look at magazines – I do remember seeing this magazine picture of this guy being — a male to female. And he/she was in a dress, and she was having her dress hemmed. And I was like, Wow, that was a woman, you know. It was a man who was a woman. So somewhere in my mind I figured out that's probably who was I, which was — you know, I might as well die. I mean, from my perspective, I might as well be dead. I remember a particular bad time was around my confirmation. I was twelve. You have to be in a state of grace in order to do your confirmation, and so this is a very public event. And, because of the impure thoughts, I hadn't received Communion for two years, which was a very big deal. I got ridiculed by my classmates. I got ridiculed by the nuns. You know, it's like, what's wrong with you? And I'd lie, say that I'd forgotten and eaten something. You were to abstain from eating for at least 3 hours before Communion. And then when they changed the rule to one hour instead of three hours — you couldn't lie that you'd eaten because I'd been in school, you know. So then it really meant that you were just really a sinner, you know.

And I remember a teacher, the nun, taking me up in front of the classroom and saying how come I didn't have stars for any Communions on this chart they had during advent or lent or something. Everybody had all these Communions and I didn't. But I wasn't one of the bad kids so, you know, it didn't make sense. And so I felt like I suffered a lot of ridicule, and, I mean, I did. And then finally, it came time for the Confirmation ceremony, I had my sponsor, all the family

was coming, and then I remember I just went to — so, it would be a public act of receiving a sacrament in the state of sin, right? And so if anybody knew, I'd be excommunicated from the Church. I mean, this is what your brain does at this age, my son's age, and you know— I was 12. So I just decided I'd fake it.

So I remember I went to church, and it was a middle-of-the-day visit to the church, and I remember saying to God, you know, that I had done everything possible not to sin, and I couldn't fight it any more. I was really tired. I remember, because it was like two years of this struggle, I was really, really tired — I was praying, and there was the huge crucifix on the altar. But the oddest thing is I remember every time I prayed out to this crucifix, I could feel all the energy coming back to me, you know. I kept praying out, and the energy kept coming back. I kept praying out, and the energy kept coming back.

And I felt like I was getting this message that, you know, if there was a God in fact that it was here, inside me, not there on that altar. So basically, I just kind of made a deal, you know, with God. I just kind of said I'm going to fake it like I'm good. Every single day, I'm going to wake up in the morning, and every time I do that thing —it was like I'd count my impure thoughts, which would be thousands, you know. So all day long, I was counting, worrying, you know — I mean, it was just an obsessive place that just was very sad. And so I just said, I'm going to fake it. I'm going to fake it. I'm going to fake it. And I just told him I'm going to fake it because I couldn't endure the ridicule of announcing I wasn't going to do my confirmation. And that's what I did.

And so, basically, I felt like I got myself out of this deep nightmare, so by the time I got into high school, I was 14, I was all right. You know, I had sort of survived that thing. And all of that was OK until I started having sex with a boy, and then all of those feelings came back again. And all it was, was lesbianism. (laughs) That's what it was then at 12. That's what it was at 19, you know. Once I just kind of came out sexually, with my first real boyfriend, I realized I was much more fascinated in his desire for me than having sex with him. You know? I go, Wow, he's really lucky. (laughs) You know, it was so blatant. I mean, it was really blatant.

It was horrible because there was no map for me about living with this knowledge. I mean, to me it was death because it meant that I would lose my family. As far as I was concerned [if] I lost my family, I'm dead, because all of my images of being queer were so horrific. So I really started to have incredible — I don't know what they're called, maybe now they're called anxiety attacks. I don't know. But I was obsessed with terror all the time, and I couldn't let myself feel anything. So I believed, I mean it was about a two- to three-year period of time in which I was with this guy but I couldn't relate to anybody. I had no friends. I believed I was dreaming. So I was really, really, you know, like on the verge of really a complete breakdown.

But there was again — because of class, you know — there was no context to describe that. I mean, nobody ever asked me what was wrong

10:56

with me. My mother used to go, You're crazy. What are you doing? *Estas loca.* And then, because I was having sex, that was the next mortal sin, you know. But I didn't feel like having sex was bad. What I thought — what happened is that, in order to do that, the person I had to be to do that, I had to remove myself from the act. Me and my body couldn't be in the same place because also then I would have felt my feelings for women. So I just extracted my mind from my body. And so literally I believed, like if you and me were talking now, I'd believe that I'm just dreaming this whole thing. Which might have been a kind of insight anyway, spiritually, (laughs) I think, you know. But it wasn't that. It was like pure terror, you know. So finally the only thing that happened really positive in that period is there was a psychologist I found at school that had taught my sister in a psych class. Jo Ann was the only person I had told I remember sitting in our little green Volkswagen and I said, "I think I'm homosexual." I knew it freaked her out, but my sister basically said to go talk to this woman.

Liz Broome, I think was her name. And she was great. I only had like three sessions with her. I think that was probably it. And I came in and I said, "I think I'm a homosexual," right? I remember she was smoking a cigarette, and she says, "And?" (laughter) I was like, "What do you mean, 'And'?" You know, it was like, this is the end of my life. This is the end of my life. And I mean, that was the beginning of just this incredible other point of reference, you know. And she goes, "OK, so if you're a lesbian, then what do you have to do?" And I said, "Well, I have to leave my home. I have to leave my family. I have to find a woman." You know, there was not even a woman I wanted at the time. It wasn't like — it was just that I knew it.

ANDERSON: Right, yeah.

MORAGA: You know? And so she said OK. But the picture I drew of it was really horrible, and so then she said, "OK, well, do you have a woman?" And I said no. And she said, "The only thing that matters — it doesn't matter if you're straight, it doesn't matter if you're gay, none of that matters — the only thing that matters is how you feel about it." I mean, she was great. She said how you feel about you in it, whatever it is, how you feel is all that's important.

ANDERSON: That's so unique for her field at that time. I mean –

MORAGA: Totally. I mean she was this heterosexual woman. And I had like three sessions with her because it was right at the end of the school year, you know. And I never got help again, I mean until after I had come out years later. But she was marvelous, you know. So the process with that was finally really like three years of trying to come back. It took me a long time to come back and to believe that whatever I decided to do, I'd be OK. And this is where the women's movement came in, because the women's movement was the only — when I graduated from college —

so basically, I can say my college years were taken up in this kind of this bubble of terror, sort of. And that's really how I was for most of my college years while all of this heavy political movement was going on around me. And I felt like I could barely live, you know.

And then what happened is, towards senior year, I started to get kind of well. I started to get well. And I began to sort of — you know, there was a lot of lesbians on campus and stuff, and I was getting less afraid. And people were kind of hitting on me all the time, but I didn't know what it was about. (laughs) So it was like I began to feel more comfortable sort of — I mean, I guess just because I was starting to understand what was going on.

ANDERSON: So did you socialize with lesbians on campus?

MORAGA: No. Never.

ANDERSON: No, but you were aware –

MORAGA: I didn't socialize with anybody, you know.

ANDERSON: Uh-huh.

MORAGA: I was really — I mean, also, it's class. I worked three jobs to get through school. I was like always working, working, and then doing my studies, so there was really no life. And then my boyfriend at the time was drafted, so it was very convenient, because it was right at the end of the Vietnam War and so there was little threat of his going to combat. So he was gone, you know, so it was great. (laughs) You know, I was sort of taken care of by having this boyfriend at a distance. No one was going to bug me about it. And it was really the conventional choice, and he was a sweet person. But by the time — I think it was senior year, I decided to leave him, that I knew he wasn't who I wanted. And very, very soon after that, I met a woman, Lyn, who was just like me, you see. It had to be somebody who had had — because I had had this one sexual encounter with my best friend, who was not a lesbian. I had that — that was recent. I had had it like the year before or something, and Lyn and I admitted to each other that we had had this thing with our friends, you know. It was just how we were getting to know each other. And she wasn't a lesbian. And I wasn't a lesbian, you know. So it was safe to find each other. And it was within the context of this kind of burgeoning women's movement, so I was starting to sort of feel like there was a way to be a lesbian, and I wasn't going to have to — you know, it was all these kinds of class stuff, that I wasn't going to have to be really hard core in terms of roles and I wasn't going to have to — it was almost like your own stereotypes. You couldn't have an education and be a lesbian. And somehow feminism cleaned it up, you know. I mean, that's really what it was. It kind of lifted it in class and, you know, all this kind of stuff. But that was only — I think that was the thing that helped me.

It also was a political justification for my desire, which ultimately I knew had nothing to do with it. I mean, ultimately, I had to come back around to the fact that I had always just wanted women, and that's what the dialogue, *Rolling Around in Bed With* is about, the one I did with Amber Hollibaugh. Feminism was my way to come out, but it wasn't what formed me, you know. Several years later, I would see a lot of feminists who were lesbians go back to being with men and all that, because it was political and ideological, as opposed to visceral, you know?

ANDERSON: Right, right.

MORAGA: So basically, after I left him, it was like within a year later I was out. I mean, I had come out. I was actively sexual, you know, with a woman. And right away what distinguished me was I knew this was a life. I wasn't going to go back. So there was no — it was just I knew it. It was a hundred percent, no question. I wasn't bisexual, you know. And I'm very grateful that I knew that, because it made everything enormously easier, in terms of having to deal with family, because I was not ambivalent, you know. Because the minute you say you're bisexual, they're so happy (laughs) because maybe there's a chance you'll change back. It's like, then you have to take care of that later when you don't change. So this kind of made it really clear.

ANDERSON: So did you tell your family right away?

MORAGA: Oh, no. No, no. I wasn't — I had not intended to tell them. What happened is that I was living in Hollywood and then Silver Lake in L.A. Suddenly I had all these lesbian friends. And I was keeping my life very separate from my family, which was just 15 minutes away, really, but I was really living this dual life. And they all knew it. They all knew I was living this dual life, but they didn't know what it was about. I had graduated from college. I was working. And so, you know, basically, I had made the decision that I was going to move up north so I could have an out life, you know.

ANDERSON: And that was just about distance from your family? Or was there something up north that was appealing to you?

MORAGA: It was really — well, I had friends who had moved up. I had friends who had moved up. And I had seen the Bay Area as a younger woman — like in college, had taken trips up here. My friend Joanne, who — we were best friends in high school, you know — I got to know it through her, and it was a very cool place to be, obviously, and very progressive. And I never was happy in Los Angeles. It really was the site of my repression, so I felt like I wanted to get out and be free. And I could do it if I had distance from my family. I could lie better.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: I was perfectly willing to lie, because I wanted to keep them. I still was convinced that they would never be able to accept it. So the thing was, is my mother, in her usual style, you know, knew it. I mean, like I was leaving, and I was — actually, the next day I was supposed to pack up to go to move to San Francisco or to Berkeley, I forget where I went first — and so it was my father's birthday or something. It was in June, and they were having a barbecue. And she says on the phone, "When are you coming?" And I told her when I was coming and that I was going to be there just a couple of hours. She was like, "I don't understand. You're going to leave and you're going to move out of the area and you can't give us more than two hours?" This is typical. Parents are always nagging you about how much time you spend. But it was getting so painful to be around them in a lie. I said, "Oh, Mom, you know," and I made up some weak excuse. And she says, "You're leaving with a secret." (laughs) That's how my mom is. I mean, I had been honest about everything. Everything. Everything, I'd been honest about, and this time I just decided I couldn't do it. So I said, "Mom, you're right," I said, "But this one, you don't want to know." She goes, What could it possibly be? You already did this! You lived with a man! You did the other, you know listing all of my transgressions. She goes, I've accepted it all. I haven't liked it, but I accepted it. And then I said, "This one, Mom, you're not going to accept. You can't." And she just started screaming. She was screaming, crying, dying, you know, on the phone. "*No me digas"*. Don't tell me. Don't tell me.

19:44

It was my worst fantasy. She was dying. She was dying on the other end of the phone. I didn't even have to say it. She knew, you know. So then, she got — typical of my mom — she got really mean, because that's always her strategy, you know, scaring you into submission. So she was like really mean and said my friends had influenced me and all this kind of stuff. And I said, "How can you say that? You've always taught me to think for myself, to not be a follower, to be really individual in how I am. You taught me that, so how can you say my friends have influenced me? How come all of a sudden I'm not smart enough to make my own decisions?"

And she says, "Well, you don't know." And then she got really dirty and she says, "I don't know how you can get satisfaction from a woman." So she was right out there, you know. That's one thing about my mom, she is right out there. She knew it was about desire. And I said, "It's none of your business." I said, "You have no right to ask me that. It's none of your business." I was like 23, you know. And it was so nasty, the way she said it. But I'm grateful because it was much easier when she got mean to say no to her than when she's dying, you know? So if she would have kept the dying strategy, I might have stayed, you know? (laughter) But she got dirty. She got really mean on me and threatened me, you know.

So then I said, "I'm going to tell you one thing." I said, "It's none of your business. You have no right to ask me that." And I said, "I want you to know, too, it's not going to change." I said, "So if you make me decide — if you make me choose between my family and this life, I have to choose the life," I said, "Because I don't have a choice, Mom. This is it." And then she says to me, "How could you think that there was anything you could do in this life that you wouldn't be my daughter?" I go, OK, that's it. I said, "All right. That's fine." I said, "So you don't have to like it. You don't have to understand it. That's enough for now. That's enough." And it was that. It was enough for now.

I mean, certainly, our whole life, there's been layers and layers of her having to go through the fact that I would have a girlfriend that wasn't necessarily The Girlfriend. I mean it would be different if I just had one woman for 30 years, but that certainly wasn't the case. And some she liked, and some she knew were dangerous and bad. And she endured them all. She endured them all.

And the only thing I agreed to do is not tell her family, I mean, not tell my uncles and aunts — like respect the fact that, if she wanted to keep lying, she could keep lying and that would be all right, you know. I wasn't going to lie, but I wasn't going to come out to them. And so that was all right. And I mean, ironically, everybody figured it out anyway when enough years pass and you're not completely — from their perspective, you're not a complete dog in terms of looks, you know, like somebody would marry you. And they see all the women that came with me, you know, to family events. So I feel like that whole experience really informed a lot in my life, because I felt like that was the biggest test, you know, that I could do anything after that, because I felt like that I had what some other people, some of my other friends didn't have, which was really fundamental loyalty from my mother.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: You know, I mean, what else? I did the worst thing possible within the context of my family, and if they could still love me, then I had a lot, you know, I had a lot. So I think that really impacted — and talk about politicization, or sort of how I then got more politically involved, it was like that was the hardest thing to do. If I couldn't free myself in relation to my family, I couldn't be anybody in the world. So by opening that up, it opened everything up. It opened up the possibility that I didn't have to be afraid of consciousness, and that's what I had been afraid of all those years — you know, since I was so young, I mean really, really young. I was five, six, seven where I knew about— I mean, I knew hypocrisy, I knew greed, I knew injustice. I knew it. And it was like, you know, completely inarticulated.

And the thing is, is that I always felt that my consciousness — it's like I have a character in one of my plays who says, "It's like the more you see, the more you've got to be afraid of." And that's how I felt. I felt like I was a little kid with these eyes wide open, and there's so many

children like that. And you're afraid of what you know. You're afraid of what you see. It's like, when I was telling you about feeling like I was in a dream. The dream was, I mean, the way I imagined it, the metaphor for it was that I was laying on this table and there were white doctors in white coats around me putting dreams in my brain, you know. And later I'm going, What a great insight, (laughs) you know. Because there *are* white men putting these ideas in your brain, controlling your life, you know. So there was kind of this intuitive sense of a lack of — that we were powerless, you know.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: And that the sin is to believe you could be empowered, that you could create change for your life. That was the sin. And it still is the sin. I mean, I look at my family, the hundreds of cousins I have and everything, and, you know, the majority have decided to not be free. And you say, OK, well, so — and they're all going to church, and they're all going to heaven. I'm the only one not going there, you know. (laughs) I feel like there's so many children like that, you know. And you're just basically told to not see. So finally at that moment, I felt like when I was able to bridge that gap between my family and who I needed to be, I felt I was then on the road to really do stuff in my life. I didn't have to be afraid any more, because no risk was as difficult as making a choice where I could lose them. And saying, OK, I'll lose you then if I have to, you know.

ANDERSON: And you also — not only in terms of consciousness, but you allowed yourself to become so visible just a few years later.

MORAGA: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

ANDERSON: So I wonder if you would have been able to freely make those choices to put your name out there and –

MORAGA: Oh, no!

ANDERSON: I mean, not that –

MORAGA: Without my family, yeah. Yeah.

ANDERSON: Yeah, so it really did impact the way that you intersected with the women's movement and the kind of writing I guess you felt comfortable publishing. Let's talk about your introduction to the women's movement. You said that you were sort of aware of it when you were on campus, and then once you graduated, how would you describe your introduction to feminism? Did you easily adopt the term?

MORAGA: Well, ironically, it was my sister who introduced me to feminism, which I think is so funny now, kind of in retrospect. And she also claims it. She says, "You know, I was the one who introduced you to it," because she had read the feminist — is it *The Feminine Mystique*?

ANDERSON: Yeah, Friedan's book, uh-huh.

MORAGA: She had read that. And I think that, you know, so she began to talk to me about how we were raised, and the double standard that we were raised in. We never put class and race to it, you know. So basically, it was this kind of white, middle-class woman's interpretation of sort of this '50s model of the housewife and then, you know, the rebellion that women 10 and 15 years older than me, you know, like the Gloria Steinem generation, were experiencing.

ANDERSON: So even though that was reflecting a very different experience, you felt some resonance with the literature?

MORAGA: Yes! Oh, definitely, because it was that — I mean, just the notion [of] making the invisible visible, you know, that there was such a thing as oppression of women, I just thought that was the most marvelous thing that could ever be, you know. And so it was like pretty much that, the articulation of what I perceived as the site of my greatest repression — you know, because I was light skinned, because I was getting an education — was really my second-class status in our family as a female. And I hadn't really understood really to what degree culture and class had to do with that, but I was connecting on the level that there was the difference, you know, and that this was institutionalized. 29:00

And the notion that an oppression is institutionalized, not individual, was a profound thing to figure out, you know. And I think because my oppression as a woman was so visceral to me, that was the thing that really — and because of the lesbianism, obviously — that was the thing that I felt like I could un-ambivalently embrace, you know. It was through getting involved in the women's movement that I began to understand its racism and its classism, and also understand my oppression as a woman within a culturally specific context. So that it wasn't just that there was a double standard in my family, but there were certain sort of historical reasons, including colonization, (laughs) that impacted the ways in which I was oppressed as a female, and why my mother passed down certain things to me and to my sister. So it was really the women's movement that really politicized me around race and class by its racism and classism.

ANDERSON: Describe your early involvement in the women's movement. What kind of organizations or groups or events did you find yourself –

MORAGA: It mostly was when I came up here and I was involved with an organization called Break Away. It was a free school for women. So

I've always been attracted to teaching and writing. And so I worked with them, and that's when I got involved with the Feminist Writers Guild.

ANDERSON: OK.

MORAGA: And the Feminist Writers Guild was then, you know, really, a lot of really upper-middle-class women, a lot of Berkeley Hills women that were divorcees who came out and, you know, they had their husbands' alimony (laughter) — and child support, had some nice houses. It was like a whole — ironically, here I'm supposed to be dealing with oppression, you know, and it's like I've never seen so much wealth in my life.

So it was — and I'm trying to remember. Because with this Break Away School for Women, what we did is we basically organized a free school for women, so we organized all these kinds of — you know, feminists would come in and offer workshops and classes, like from mechanics to, you know, something esoteric, whatever. And we put out this bulletin and –

ANDERSON: What was the makeup of that group?

MORAGA: Oh, these were all white women that I'm remembering, but definitely some working-class women.

ANDERSON: OK. So it was all white women in Break Away and –

MORAGA: Yeah, there was working-class women though, and the Feminist Writers Guild had some women of color. But there were some good working-class women in the Break Away School for Women, and so they helped me a lot around, I feel, like class stuff. And my memory — now this is a long time ago now — my memory is that we did organize. There was like some conferences and teach-ins and different kinds of things that we began to organize in that community. And the Women's Union that was just ending at that time — it was like there were some people that had been in the Women's Union that I had heard about that started to be like in these other newer organizations and stuff, but it was kind of like an odd sort of time, because there was sort of like this burgeoning cultural feminist movement, radical feminist movement, I mean, as opposed to the socialist feminists. And they were having — they had their history.

I was very new to all of this. I didn't know what that was all about. So it wasn't until — when I got involved in the Feminist Writers Guild is when I met Gloria Anzaldúa, and that's also the same period of time in which I met Amber Hollibaugh. And so that was the organization that I was doing, you know, most of my work with. And then with Gloria, then we started to do these kind of — I mean, basically, it was always around cultural work. So with Gloria, we started

a series call *El Mundo Zurdo*, which means a left-handed world. It was a poetry series for queers and people of color. It's sort of like how she already was conceptualizing her idea of *La Frontera* and all these people who resided there, you know, kind of all the 'others' of the world.

ANDERSON: Where would you host the readings? Were they in people's homes or –

MORAGA: No, no. We would find little venues.

ANDERSON: In cafés?

MORAGA: Cafés and little poetry places in the city.

ANDERSON: Would you read your work, too?

MORAGA: Yes, yes. I'm trying — you're just kind of making me remember stuff. I came up here, I think, in 1977. I was here from '77 to '80, and then I moved to New York.

ANDERSON: And where were you living at the time when you were here — Oakland?

MORAGA: I was mostly in Berkeley. Berkeley, and then in the last year and a half, I lived in San Francisco with Gloria, as friends. And I'm just trying to remember. Because in that period of time, too — oh, and it was also during that period of time, for example, that I met some of the people that would end up being in *Bridge*, like Luisah Teish and Aurora Levins Morales. Now she was a socialist feminist, right? So what I started to do is that I came up to write — this is the other thing. It wasn't just that I came up around — you asked me that question around the lesbianism. I came up to write. So I had been seeing —a really good therapist down in LA around the lesbianism and stuff. What I have to say is in those two years when I was in LA after I came out, I spent a lot of time working on feeling OK about being queer. And I had a lesbian therapist, and she was good. And I did some really, really, like really old like primordial stuff in my therapy work. So when I came up here, I was pretty, like — I thought I was doing all right.

ANDERSON: Pretty stable.

MORAGA: Yeah, yeah. I thought I was doing all right. But the idea was to come up and write, and I started like painting office buildings and doing all this, you know manual labor, cleaning houses, doing all this stuff with my BA, you know, and my parents are going, What the hell is she doing? Because I wanted to write, and I thought no matter what I wasn't going to do nine to five.

So basically, I started to get involved in writers groups. And that's where I met the poet, Aurora Levins Morales. She was a socialist

feminist, and she started to educate me, you know, in areas I had been really ignorant about. And so it was kind of through the cultural stuff that I was starting to get exposed to all these ideas. And then my reading began to change, you know, and that's what Amber Hollibaugh was for me, my introduction to Marxist Feminism and the like. I had moved to the city and started working in a vegetarian restaurant. And I met Amber because she used to work at Modern Times bookstore, the socialist bookstore in town. At the end of her shift, when she closed the bookstore, she'd come in for a late dinner. I had two more hours on my shift. It was slow. She'd eat and bring in all these commie books and that's how we got to know each other.

So I really can say that this period of time in the Bay area in those late '70s was really about my education. I did organizing, but it was — you know, I always did organizing around culture, but it was really to educate me about things that I had no exposure to. Up until 1975 I was just trying to survive, you know. I was trying to figure out how to free myself. It was like a full-time life, (laughs) you know.

ANDERSON: And you were also getting a formal education, too. I mean, you were getting your master's, right, in feminist studies at San Francisco State during this time.

MORAGA: Right. Right.

ANDERSON: What was that like?

MORAGA: Well, I decided to go to San Francisco State because I saw — what's the name of it now? That famous first gay and lesbian film that Sally Gearhart was in? [*Word is Out*]

ANDERSON: Oh, yeah.

MORAGA: God, I forgot the name now. It was like really famous. It was like the first of its kind in the late '70.

ANDERSON: Not *Desert Hearts*, was it?

MORAGA: No, no, no, no. It's a documentary.

MORAGA: I mean it's this famous, famous documentary. Why did it just go out of my mind? Anyway.

ANDERSON: Yeah, I know.

MORAGA: It's something we should look up I think because it's — I mean, the name of it — it's really important.

ANDERSON: Is it the one Betty Powell is in, too?

MORAGA: Yes, Betty Powell and Tede Matthews when he was a little skinny little queen.

ANDERSON: Yeah, OK.

MORAGA: Anyway, so I see Sally in this, you know, in this film, and she's articulating all these things, and she's butch, and it's like — and I hear she's at San Francisco State, and I go, I want to study with this woman. So I went there, and I created my own master's. It was not like a very elite graduate education — it was really pretty grassroots. At the time, San Francisco State had a great women's studies program, totally grassroots, totally activist oriented, which is no longer the case. It was really the old-school women's studies, you know, none of this gender studies. It was really it, you know.

So that was a great political education for me, because you could really study the difference between radical feminism and cultural feminism and all this kind of stuff. And so Sally was my advisor, along with this woman who was her lover at the time, Jane Gurko, who taught in English**.** All of these — you know, all white women, all very supportive of me, and I was going to do this master's on feminist writers, because I was reading them anyway. So we read all this feminist material, Mary Daly, Juliet Mitchell, Monique Wittig, De Beauvoir Engels, Gayle Rubin and all these people. And again, I came in with really clear class politics, a really good class critique and everything.

And then suddenly all this stuff around race just exploded for me and I just said, I can't go on like this, you know, I just have to deal with it. It made everybody enormously nervous, because everybody thought I was one of them, basically. It made me nervous, too. And it was really with Gloria that I felt like — Anzaldúa — that I felt like I finally got, you know, the kind of the alliance that I needed, like somebody who basically saw me, who I really was, you know.

And so it was by the end of that graduate study program in 1980 that I basically told Sally and Jane that I wasn't going to do my master's thesis on Feminist Writers. I had already begun working with Gloria on *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1979. So, I said to them, "I want *Bridge* to be the master's thesis, because I'm doing it anyway. Everything has changed." I said, "I can't do white feminist writers." I said, "I can't do that. I know too much now. I can't do it. I want this book to be it." And they said, "And if we say no?" And I said, "Well, then I don't get my master's degree, because this is what I have to do." You know, now I see my graduate students and I say, God, they're so polite. (laughter)

And so basically Sally said, "Write us a ten-page justification for the book." They were worried about my critical writing skills. And I did. Because in fact *Bridge* had been the logical outcome of the dearth of women of color material in my graduate program. I said, "If I can edit this damn book," I said, "my critical skills are all right. I can organize

something." And I credit them both for giving me this allowance, for allowing my mind to change, which of course is the point of truly feminist graduate study.

40:36

So everything changed after that. I mean, everything changed. Everything started to move so quickly because, as I said, I feel like the '70s were this education process for me. I mean, I started working on *Bridge* when I was — the idea came when I was 27. That's when Gloria and I had met each other. I mean, it was her idea, but I was 27 when she approached me about it. And then through the Feminist Writers Guild, and also there was the Radical Women organization and the Freedom Socialist Party – Nellie Wong and Merle Woo –all these, you know — activists feminists were all around. So as we were starting to do all this cultural organizing, once I moved to San Francisco, there were all kinds of women of color coming up from all over the place. Aurora was still around. And so, it was like basically this idea for *Bridge* emerged based on all of these women that we were beginning to know through all the various sort of collaborations we were doing, conferences, readings, political forums. And so, it was a San Francisco base of women of color through which we were able to then emerge the idea for the book.

ANDERSON: Do you remember your earliest conversations with Gloria about the book and the ideas that you started with?

MORAGA: Yeah, we were initially just going to — you know, it says this in the introduction — it was initially supposed to be a book that responded to white women's racism. We were very focused, you know, on that, and then it became so [much] less important, you know, when finally we began to really look at our conversations with each other, and then it just got so much more interesting. So that ended up being a chapter of the book. We had not — I mean, racism was a chapter, as opposed to the six chapters of the book.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: We had never imagined we'd get a really good publisher. At that time, everybody was doing chapbooks. We just thought we'd self-publish, mimeograph, whatever. Sally Gearhart had just published with the press called Persephone, a feminist press, which had a very short-lived life, but they did damned good distribution. And so she recommended them — she had worked with them. And then Adrienne Rich had done the forward to the *Coming Out* stories, which they had published. That's how it happened, too, is that she told them that she wanted my essay in that book, because I had sent it to her.

And the reason I sent it to her is that I had been reading her work for years. I did, you know, a kind of focus on her in graduate school. She had written *Twenty-one Love Poems*, which was her first text of openly lesbian poems in 1977. And when I landed on them, I was prompted to write one of those letters, where you say, "Your work really impacted

me." I sent her "La Güera," and she said she wanted it in *The Coming Out Stories*. So all of a sudden — it was very fast, because all of a sudden this one essay got this national distribution, but I was originally writing "La Güera" for *Bridge.*

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So that's how then the idea of going to the same Persephone Press for *Bridge* came about. So, you know, they published it. It sold 10,000 copies in two weeks. Then the Press proceeded to fall apart. Then there was the horror of trying to get the book back. But Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press emerged from that, you know.

ANDERSON: Did you and Gloria have any conflict over what to include or how to organize the book?

MORAGA: Oh, yes.

ANDERSON: Can you describe some of that?

44:15

MORAGA: (laughs) Well, it wasn't conflict so much as it was like — I mean, Gloria is a trip, you know. I love her very much, and we always had a relationship that was very much like family, you know. But it's like family, you're like cousins, you know. So it just — it was very familial, that's all I can say about it. So, you know, it was very hard because Gloria is an incredibly inspirational person. She has a very highly developed — what is it? — right brain. So the organizational stuff, the left brain, was not her best skill. You know, it's like she has great ideas, and she's really inspirational and she's incredible, but the hardest part was how to organize the book. I mean, the editing was like, you know — I wasn't prepared to do something like that, and it was an enormous project. Later, she always kind of laughs about how, you know, she picked the right person to do the job because I'm so dogged.

So it was hard. It was hard. It was a very difficult process because, you know — I mean, I guess it actually was a good process in the sense that I think sometimes that collaborators, if they're really equal collaborators, then you're always like that, balancing your fortes in that way. She kind of said, in terms of the editing, "Go ahead. That's fine. That sounds fine." (laughter) I felt like it was hard also with the authors, because what we first got when we first tried to solicit pieces was from academics. And I'm going — that's the last thing we wanted. So like, for example, Rosario Morales' stuff — we ended up publishing her letters that explained why she couldn't write the essay, you know. Because the letters were stunning in and of themselves.

And the great thing about editing that book is that it really taught me about how to have an eye for work — you know, that the real work is not necessarily what the person who sits down to write. So we were trying to find the work in lots of inventive ways. And it really was the

state of women of color writers at that time. The only people that were really publishing in any numbers were Black women, people like Audre Lorde or, you know, Pat Parker and Barbara Smith— they were great; right from the beginning they wanted to contribute, so it put the book on the map. But most of the non-black women of color, there was nothing — you know, Native women, nothing. So, I mean, this was not the time of Louise Erdrich, you know what I'm saying? This just was not the time. It just wasn't happening yet.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

MORAGA: So the editing process with them was then really difficult because they had to be able to trust me. And they were used to having their work torn apart, and I was opening the work and saying, "No, that's all rhetorical. I don't want that. Tell me the story in here." And I was young, you know. "Tell me the story in here. Tell me the story in here. Tell me the story inside here." And so sometimes it was very painful because you had to go through them not trusting you. And sometimes it was wonderful. It was just heaven, you know, working with folks. But ultimately, I have to say that the end result of it I think was good because it was so well intentioned on everybody's part. I mean, there was never — what motivated the book was pure need, you know, for us to be able — for women of color to, in all of our variations, to find a place with each other when we were so separated. And politically, I mean, that we didn't know of each other. And a lot of other people often ask me when are you going to do another *Bridge*, but I don't think there could ever really be another *Bridge.*

But that's why I was never involved in editing other women of color collections. Gloria did a couple of others, and I just — I felt, because I really trusted what motivated *Bridge*, which could never be reproduced because the times would never be reproduced, you know. And what these times needed was something else. And I think I've never done an anthology like that because I've never been quite sure exactly what that is yet, you know. And also knowing what it takes to do it. (laughs) But I feel still that there's a certain integrity about that book that comes out of every contributor's pure need to communicate and to be heard and to connect, you know. And 80 percent of those writers had never published a book, and now all of them have books. So it also did this great thing in terms of exposing them as writers to a national readership.

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

49:11

END TAPE 3

TAPE 4

ANDERSON: I want us to go back to the piece you did with Amber, but could you talk a little bit, too, about, in the context of *Bridge* and feminist politics at the time, the language of "women of color"? Was that the identity — the label "women of color" — was that something that felt comfortable to you? And how did that change your sense of self? Because that's a very particular moment that that term was invented. And a lot of people even attribute it to the publication of *Bridge*. I mean, it gave it national visibility and a label that people could really grab hold of who may not have otherwise heard it. So can you talk about when you first heard the term, in what kind of political context, and if it was a contested terminology, language for you?

MORAGA: It was in the late '70s. People were kind of using "third world women" and "women of color" interchangeably. And, you know, our decision — I think it says somewhere in the book why we decided to use that. I think we decided not to use third world women because we wanted an affirmative position that didn't have to do with relation to white people, you know, or first world status or whatever. So we were third world women in a first world country. But the term "women of color" was an act of self-naming. It referred to all of these groups of women of color as we defined it in 1978, '79. So of course we wanted the language that we felt was the most progressive. And I think that when we did the Spanish version later, if I'm remembering correctly, we called it *tercermundistas*, because in the context of Spanish, women of color would mean black women. So there's always kinds of adaptations you have to do.

And it was problematic, I think, for — it was a place of discussion for all of us who were not visibly women of color, what it meant — and it came up again with the naming of Kitchen Table Press What did it mean for us to names ourselves "colored" when in fact, you know, we could pass for white or something other than women of color? And it came up, for example, with a couple of the Cuban women, who actually could say that they had more European blood or whatever the deal was.

ANDERSON: Yes.

MORAGA: But we made a decision and we sent it out to the contributors that we wanted [to know if they all] could stand with the term. I remember Norma Alarcón asking us about that. She's a light-skinned Chicana. And you know, it came up again with Kitchen Table, and at the time Kitchen Table was all black women, and then there was me, right? And you know, basically the discussions revolved around the fact that if we were going to then name ourselves on the basis of shade that we would get ourselves into a lot of problems because, even within our own families, we've got every shade. So how is one a person of color and one not, within your own family? It just didn't make any sense. So we

were going to affirm the positioning of women of color not based on these arbitrary notions of shade. And also, what's really interesting is like one person says that they look colored, and yet another person says they look white. And the person saying, Oh, well, I can always pass for white, really looks colored. You know what I mean? It's like from whose vantage point do you decide — so we just had to take a political position, and that's what that was about.

ANDERSON: Yeah. So that was a comfortable fit for you?

MORAGA: No, no. Of course it wasn't. It still isn't. It still isn't.

ANDERSON: Can you say more about that?

MORAGA: Well, I mean, I think that because you always have to say what it means, you know. I mean, you know, lots of women don't. I mean Barbara Smith doesn't say what it means, or my partner, Celia, doesn't have to say what it means, because they are visibly recognizable on the street as women of color. But I have to, you know. It's always potentially open for being contested, on some level. For the most part that doesn't happen, but it's because I come in saying I'm a Chicana and that I made a political decision to name myself in that way. The point is I hold the privilege of being able to decide unlike my more visibly colored counterparts.

Because there's a lot of mean spiritedness in this world, sometimes the most horrible reviews I've gotten on my writings have been from other Chicanas. And it's just the way it is, you know — or not. All kinds of people give you horrible reviews for whatever reason. Maybe they just don't like the book. But it always would strike me when people would say, in the early days when it was very threatening that a half-breed and a lesbian would claim chicanidad, Well, who is she? Look at her, her father's a *gringo*. And I'd go, Well, if you open the book, it'll say, my father's a *gringo.* It's not like I'm hiding that fact. I am just another version of the Chicana story. But somehow that version threatens.

There is legitimacy to the suspicion that light-skinned and mixed blood people of color are given more literary access. This is certainly the case among many native writers. Still, this does not de-legitimize the writer's work. I feel one also has to look at, you know, questions of appropriation, people claiming histories and stories that are not theirs. For example, in recent years, I certainly have been doing a lot more articulation in my writings around issues related to Chicana indigenism. I'm also doing some organizing around it with other Chicanas who are verifiably indigenous, you know. I cannot say that. I'm sure I have indigenous ancestors, because every Mexican usually does — I mean working-class or poor Mexicans. But I can't tell you my nation, I can't name it, only guess by virtue of the geographical origins of my forebears.

Still, I can't suppress where my evolving ideology and political work takes me. And you can't censor yourself from asking questions that move you and from standing inside those questions. And if you stand in there, you're going to get it. You'll get it because they love you, you'll get it because they hate you. But every day you have to ask yourself: Am I being true? And that's not just for light-skinned people. It's like every day we have to ask ourselves, you know, Am I assuming something I don't know? So for the most part, I feel like I've solved that problem by just always asking, proposing everything as questions, as opposed to answers, (laughs) you know. Because I don't know.

But I think if we continue to move politically, you know, that we always have to be negotiating on some level this act of self-naming, how that happens. Because we're not static. I'm not the woman at 52 I was at 22. Like you're asking those questions of all those years ago, and she feels like a different person, really. I have a lot of compassion for this girl that's no longer me, you know. And that's fine. That's why you can write books and say, Well, that was then and this is now. Because in our lives — I mean particularly the way people are living so long now — one would hope that you continue to emerge and develop in your ideas. And I think that, typically, we imagine that identity is static, you know, and I don't think it is. It's always sort of being culturally informed. But I think there are certain sorts of things that remain true. So, no, I'm usually never comfortable about most things. (laughs)

ANDERSON: What about the piece of Amber? How much of the Cherríe Moraga in that piece would you recognize as still part of –

MORAGA: Well, you know, I always tease Amber about that piece, because she really wanted me to do this and I was somewhat reluctant. (laughs) Amber and I — it's interesting, Amber and I really disagreed in that piece, you know, at times and some of what we couldn't really resolve got edited out. And it's always so curious to me because I don't think she really noticed how much we disagreed. I think she was just very eager for a forum to talk about these very censored ideas and with good reason since the women's movement had been quite repressive in terms of discussions of actual sex.

Yes, and I feel that there are certain things that seem unshakeable to me, and one of the things that seems unshakeable to me is how I formed being a lesbian, you know, and so therefore the courage required to be that lesbian. And I think at various times in my life I've shaped it differently, but I would still say — and even now, the older you get, it's sort of like the less invested you are in certain things. But I'm still always — I bug my students so much because I have lots of lesbians, a lot of lesbians of color students, lots, and I'm always bugging them because I'm always, Oh, you're just butch, or, You're just femme. Oh, they get so mad at me. They get so mad at me. They really, they get upset with me, you know, because I'll say, Hey, I'm just old school. And then truly, I'm not, you know, I'm not that hard-core or something.

But I know who I am. I know who I am. And then they'll say, Yeah, but your woman— it's not like she's high femme or something like that.

And I say, Yeah, but it's about desire, so how do you shape desire? Who's the object of desire and how is that shaped? And I say, You go down the line and you're looking at who you're with. And it doesn't break down [like that] for everybody, I said, but for me, it breaks down like that, you know, is that idea of who is the beloved in the relationship. I'm not the beloved. I mean, I think I'm really loved, you know. I'm really loved, and I can certainly be desired, but the way the framework is for the kind of butch that I am, is that there's the beloved, and my job is to love. You know, I say that's like from babyhood. I say it's like from Mama love, you know, that you shaped in your mind. It's a real butch thing that you shape in your mind, how can I make this woman happy. It's all that matters, is how can I make her happy. And so you do that sometimes — unfortunately, we do that at great expense to ourselves. We make horrible mistakes. We get with the wrong people, you know, we do all of that. But then sometimes you get lucky and you find the person in which that is so appreciated, and that's what makes you attractive, and that it's reciprocal, you know.

11:22

So I don't think that's ever changed for me, and that's what that piece was about for me. But I think differently than Amber. I didn't romanticize butchness, I mean, because she really wanted to romanticize these butches who were really broken, you know— you know, like she would say her role was to make the butch feel OK about their brokenness or something like that. I don't remember now, all this stuff.

But I remember saying that I felt like our job as butches was to feel OK about being women. I said, "I don't know about other women. I just know that I couldn't be whole until I could feel OK about being a woman, you know, whatever that is," that I had to live in this body. And I think that's still why I have trouble with transgenderism, you know, particularly among youth, a lot of youth, because there's kids that I've worked with who were lesbians who are now men, which is a phenomenon that never would have happened in our generation. So, you know, it's not like I have judgment, because I can't judge because I don't get it all the time. You know, I don't really get it all the time. I do know that I was butch enough that had I followed a certain road and had I not really found feminism, you know, that it could have been that I could be convinced that I was transgender. You know what I'm saying? Even though, to the world, it may never have looked like that. I mean, I wasn't as extreme as lots of girls, you know, who are really just guys. They're just really guys. But I do know that, you know, some of the female-to-male people that I know weren't that different than me. I knew them as young women.

ANDERSON: And the difference is the tool of feminism, in large part, then?

MORAGA: I'm not sure about that. I think the difference is that transgenderism is so available as an option now, you know, that the drugs are available.

And so some people who are largely in the in-between area, you know, are opting to go that route. And I'm still confused about it. I'm confused about what that means about women. Because all they are is dykes to me, anyway. I mean, afterwards they're still just queer. I mean, they're never going to be men. They know it. They say that to me, you know. Because they're not men, they're queer. And that's a hard place to be.

So somehow you figure there's got to be such great motivation because to them transgender beats feeling like you're always in drag, you know. And so that's why I'm saying I have no judgment, but I have an enormous amount of confusion because I don't trust this country. I don't trust how we're manipulated. I don't trust our — you know, I guess some deep place in me really believes in — like I look at the notion of two spirit, you know, from an indigenous perspective, where there are human beings that like, they just shift. One minute they're a man, one minute they're a woman. And they're just going back and forth like that all the time. And there was a place for them to be. There was a place for them to be in some societies. And I just think, so why should we have to cut ourselves and drug ourselves up to live in this society when it's the society that's messed up. It's hard for me to not believe we just have to keep working on the society. That's what feminism was about: not having to choose a gender.

But anyway, so I feel like, yes, so the person that was in that interview, I mean that dialog with Amber, still holds fast, I think, to certain beliefs: one is about origins of the formation of butch identity, and two, about wanting our wholeness as women. And I don't necessarily feel like we've resolved that problem, you know. Part of what I have written about since then was when I did have my son, of getting to the place in my sense of my womanhood that I could let my body do that —get pregnant, give birth — and didn't feel like it diminished what I came to understand as my attractiveness, you know, like what made me desirable as a butch. And I survived it, (laughs) more than survived it. I felt like it really kind of taught me an enormous amount about what we really can hold inside of us, you know, as women.

And I know some really hard-core butch women that have had babies, you know, they don't necessarily talk about it the way I do, but it's not uncommon now. I do remember some young butches that were very upset with me for having a baby — I had a few confrontations. At the time I was working with a lot of queer youth in theater. And you know they were like, She's supposed to have it — you know, my girlfriend at the time, who was obviously more acceptably femme. She's supposed to have it, not you. These youth were like 16, and I remember saying, "Well, I look forward to the day where you're confident enough in your butchness to be able to have a baby." And they'd get so mad at me, you know. But that's really where it was at, you know. It messed with their little system.

ANDERSON: Amber has talked about a lot of kind of hostility that she faced as a result of that piece and others, but it was right at the beginning of what they now call the sex wars, for lack of a better term. Did you feel the same sort of hostility or anger coming from feminists or any of your community about that?

MORAGA: No. I'll tell you, honestly, I feel like it was a white women's thing. I mean, I felt, the Barnard conference was really a white on white conversation. I had some really good allies there. Dorothy Allison and Jewelle Gomez are really dear friends. So is Amber. These are women that I would back them, you know, no matter what. And I didn't feel like our positions on sexuality that were presented at the conference were anything other than expressive of our class and cultural experiences. But what I didn't like — what happened in that conference is I felt women of color were viewed as oppositional just by virtue of being of color. I mean, I felt totally exploited, where afterwards I was being quoted out of context in white feminist newspapers and Kitchen Table Press was viewed as supporting SM when our name was printed on a fundraiser flier for an SM event without our permission. In other words, I began to feel that women of color were being used to legitimize outsider sexuality on one hand and then on the other, treated as sexual outlaws just for being women of color. All of that is just to say that intuitively, I felt like it was not about us. And I didn't trust what was going on.

It was virulent and horrible, what was happening. I mean, what happened as a result of that conference in terms of blacklisting people, was a kind of feminist McCarthyism. Of course I was totally opposed to it and backed up my sisters who were being censured, I mean people were losing work. I felt like these are deep friends, you know. But as the conflict kept evolving, I felt they were really white-women debates. And so most of us women of color stopped engaging in them.

ANDERSON: Right.

MORAGA: So it was really a little —I was really very disheartened at that time, not only because of how these middle-class white feminists responded, but also I think even how working-class white feminists responded, bringing women of color into the debate for their own purposes. And they needed legitimacy because they were being so ostracized. So I understood the intent of it, you know, but in fact we were being used by them. And these were sisters, you know, these were like, I thought, my good, working-class sisters.

So those are hard moments in which you have to say, I'm sorry. At the same time, [you] feel like you don't want to contribute to people's repression, etcetera, but you will not be exploited, you know. So I was disinterested in the debate.

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.

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

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

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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*]?

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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.

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. 09:30

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

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 Englsih 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.

20:04

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

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 —

30:05

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 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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