



THE ATLANTIS EFFECT: AQUATIC INVOCATIONS AND THE (RE)CLAIMING OF  
WOMEN'S SPACE THROUGH THE WORKS AND ARCHIVES OF  
LYDIA CABRERA, GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND TATIANA DE LA TIERRA

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Hispanic Studies

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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By

Sarah Elisabeth Piña

May, 2017

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## ABSTRACT

Though writing and living within different times and places, Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera (1901-1991), Chicana scholar and writer Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004), and Colombian writer tatiana de la tierra<sup>1</sup> (1966-2012), all three US Latina or Chicana lesbian writers, consistently invoked water, water imagery, deities or goddesses associated with water, as well as many spiritual and mythological creatures of water in their work, and as will also be seen, in their respective archives, crucial for conceptualizations of gender, spirituality, queer sexualities, ultimately (re)claiming their space and therefore agency *vis á vis* their texts and archives. Cabrera, Anzaldúa, and de la tierra were initially linked as a focus for this dissertation because of observations of their connections and strong ties with the powerful feminine water deities Yemayá and Ochún from the Afro-Cuban religious tradition commonly referred to as Santería, but a much closer textual analysis coupled with archival research has revealed something more: an overlying spiritual connection with water and all associated with it, part of something I deem the Atlantis Effect, stemming from the feminist literary trope of the Atlantis Paradigm. The space and physical, metaphorical, and highly spiritual nature of water allow for fluidity on many levels in terms of gender, sexuality, and unhindered, unlimited possibilities and alternative meanings of womanhood as this vast water space is one of women, free from prescriptions and limitations imposed by patriarchal border/lands.

As such, this dissertation is a crucial contribution to studies of gender, female spirituality, queerness, and US Latina and Chicana literature, as it seeks to assert the decolonial and destabilizing spiritual-aquatic nature of three lesbian Latina and Chicana

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<sup>1</sup> Author's insistence on lower-case for her name.

authors, their works and their archives by utilizing the proposed theory of the Atlantis Effect as a lens to identify and analyze the significance of this female-centered cultural recovery of the feminine-queer divine by these authors and the women's spaces they reclaim through their lifeworks.

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*For Nico and Colin*

*Write! and your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed. “Ah, there’s her sea,” he will say as he holds out to me a basin full of water from the little phallic mother from whom he’s inseparable.*

*But look, our seas are what we make of them, full of fish or not, opaque or transparent, red or black, high or smooth, narrow or bankless; and we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, seaweed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves .... More or less wavy sea, earth, sky —what matter would rebuff us? We know how to speak them all.*

Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”

## **INTRODUCTION**

Water, as the most essential and pure of all elements, is central in countless myths of creation and religious rites and traditions spanning a myriad of cultures through the centuries to this day. At times chaotic, other times more tranquil, water and water imagery in literature have come to form abundant metaphorical meanings that take root in the physical properties of it or associations with spirits who are frequently characterized by water in religious and spiritual histories spanning the globe. This dissertation sets out to navigate these facets, specifically zoning in on the properties and spaces of water as related to their function for US Latina and Chicana literature by exploring the lives, texts, and archives of three authors who will serve as the focus of this study.

Though writing and living within different times and places, Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera (1901-1991), Chicana scholar and writer Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004), and Colombian writer Tatiana de la Tierra (1966-2012) all three US Latina or Chicana lesbian writers, consistently invoked water, water imagery, deities or goddesses associated with water, as well as many creatures of bodies of water in their writings, and as will also be seen, in their respective archives, crucial for conceptualizations of gender, woman's space, and queer sexualities *vis á vis* their texts. Cabrera, Anzaldúa, and de la Tierra were initially linked as a focus for this dissertation because of observations of their connections and strong ties with the powerful feminine water deities Yemayá and Ochún from the Afro-Cuban religious tradition commonly referred to as Santería, which will indeed be analyzed and discussed at length as well, but a much closer textual analysis coupled with archival research has revealed something more: an overlying connection with water and all associated with it in general, part of something I deem the Atlantis Effect, stemming from the literary trope of the Atlantis Paradigm which will soon be discussed. Sometimes explicit, sometimes more indirect, these aquatic invocations to be analyzed ultimately provided these US Latina and Chicana authors with an agency not available to them on land; decolonialism is inherent to the waters as they cannot be colonized, owned by man or "tamed"—essentially the ultimate space where woman and more specifically the marginalized queer woman of color is free to develop, heal, and nurture her identity on many levels without the restrictions of border/lands. The space and physical and metaphorical nature of it and allow for fluidity on many levels in terms of gender, sexuality, and unhindered, unlimited possibilities and alternative meanings of

womanhood as this vast water space is one of women, free from prescriptions and limitations imposed by patriarchal border/lands.

### **The Atlantis Effect: Reclaiming Herland, Recovering Herstory**

These bodies of water are also home to Atlantis, the massive sunken city-island that Marjorie Stone notes has been frequently utilized in feminist criticism and literature as a metaphorical way of denoting a “separate literary Herland,” a concept not unlike those presented in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. To this end, Stone writes,

For those who have long for a “room of their own,” there is a particular exhilaration in claiming an entire continent, peopled by “communities” of women, to use another common organizing metaphor of feminist literary histories. (124)

Indeed as Stone recalls, Woolf has written “As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” and then points out that “As a country that is no country, Atlantis accords with the paradoxes Woolf articulates” (124). Building on the literary trope of the Atlantis Paradigm then, which Stone presents and frames as a search for women’s traditions in regards to language and literature within a lost mythical motherland, I propose that what I am calling the Atlantis Effect shall be the underlying theoretical framework of this dissertation, working from the standpoint of Atlantis not solely representing the recovery of this sunken city-island, but the viewing the waters as non-territories filled with rich, seemingly forgotten spiritually charged feminine cultural histories and mythologies, that, like the myth of Atlantis form an

opposition and resistance to strong, which is to say, heteronormative, patriarchal forces. Furthermore, as Stone posits her paradigm in relation to only white Victorian female writers, this exploration is also a response to her recognition that “for women writers belonging to more historically marginalized groups, the search for lost genealogies and obscured traditions [remains] essential” (127). As a category of writers who belong to marginalized groups, as females, as Latinas or Chicanas, and as lesbians, this study explores how Cabrera, Anzaldúa, and de la tierra give rise to the surface of such “obscured traditions” through their literary trajectories, as well as their respective archives in placing a substantial emphasis on water in the forms, and many times associated with the feminine divine; in the words of Stone, “Atlantis has long figured as a potent symbol of a mysterious unexplored domain: a domain that is recovered as it is discovered” (122). Therefore, I will show that together these writers conjure feminine and queer water deities and creatures, not only through writing about these figures specifically, but through evocations of water and water imagery associated with the feminine-queer divine specific to “lost genealogies.” It is in this non-territory of Atlantis and surrounding waters where women, particularly marginalized queer women like Cabrera, Anzaldúa, and de la tierra, claim a space of their own by evoking all that is fluid, both literally and metaphorically in their text, thereby developing their truest identities free from patriarchal borders and limitations of land and an agency otherwise unavailable to them.

This more liberated way of being also reflects itself through these authors’ work – destabilizing standard literary genre forms – and through their archives – that is, ways of organizing one’s life that I view as aesthetically unfixed, visual representations of the

swirling, chaotic, ruptured waters that are invoked in varying ways and in the collections left by these three authors. Water is an element essential for life and also vital to the lifework and spiritual consciousness of these three writers; the presence of water, whether through explicit reference, imagery, or associations with feminist-queer spiritualities is a distinct driving force for the three. Yet, water and by extension spirituality as topics of analysis hold little to no scholarship in the field of literature in general, and even less in US Latina and Chicana literature. As Irene Lara and Elisa Facio assert in *Fleshing the Spirit*, within the academy the topics of spirituality and religion are not approached as often because they are not taken seriously within it, an institution branded by patriarchal hegemony and colonialism (3). Furthermore, as Merlin Stone points out in *When God Was a Woman*,

It is shocking to realize how little has been written about the female deities who were worshipped in the most ancient periods of human existence and exasperating to then confront the fact that even the material there has been almost totally ignored in popular culture and general education . . .

Descriptions of the female deity as creator of the universe, inventor or provider of culture were often only given a line or two, if mentioned at all; scholars quickly disposed of these aspects of the female deity as hardly worth discussing. (xv-xvi; xx)

This dissertation, then, is a crucial contribution to the studies of female spirituality as well as US Latina and Chicana literature, as it seeks to assert the decolonial and destabilizing spiritual-aquatic nature of three lesbian Latina and Chicana authors, their



works and their archives by utilizing the proposed theory of the Atlantis Effect as a lens to identify this female-centered cultural recovery of the feminine-queer divine by these authors and the women's spaces they reclaim through their lifeworks. Moreover, like Lara and Facio, it is "committed to decolonizing the academy that largely devalues or misunderstands spirituality, both as a serious academic topic and as an integral aspect of being alive" (3).

### **A Space of Their Own: A Brief Overview of Spiritual-Queer Connections**

But why African-inspired spiritual traditions, why queer deities? Why are their archives of key importance in connection with their feminist-queer identities and their construction of a heteronormative, patriarchal counterdiscourse that recovers feminine mythologies through waterways, which is to say, the Atlantis Effect? I will be looking at recent academic studies regarding these subjects in order to attempt answering these questions in regards to the life and work of Anzaldúa, Cabrera, and de la tierra. In the Yoruba tradition, the woman can play a very important role, one that is not generally seen in traditional Western religions. In *Where Men are Wives and Mothers Rule: Santería Ritual Practices and Their Gender Implications* (2005), Mary Ann Clark notes that

Santería, unlike many "mainstream religions," is a female-normative system in which both men and women are expected to assume female gender roles at various points [and] the beginnings of what would become Santería are marked by the organizational activities of women drawing from highly female-identified African traditions. (x)

This gender fluidity and performance, effectively the gender trouble of which Judith Butler has theorized in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* as found within Santería ritual and its deities are also that which Anzaldúa can highly identify with, especially when she states in *Borderlands*, "...I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within" (41). To this end, as Butler writes, it is a

recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of casual unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctiveness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (187-188)

For Cabrera, the draw to African-inspired traditions is in great part as Sylvia Molloy proposes in "Disappearing Acts: Reading Lesbian in Teresa de la Parra," that the personal experience of Cabrera because of her double marginalization as a woman and as a lesbian brought her to Afro-Cuban folklore and culture, "another group that has been marginalized and silenced by the hegemonic patriarchy" (77), something that also falls in line with the work of Anzaldúa's close friend and scholar Randy P. Conner. As Conner explains in his book *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Participation in African-Inspired Traditions in the Americas* (2004), he came to study African-inspired traditions particularly because of Gloria Anzaldúa and an interview she conducted with two gay practitioners of color of Santería. Furthermore, Conner, much like

Mary Ann Clark and Sylvia Molloy, has also observed the connection between African-inspired traditions and the lesbian and gay community, and especially gay practitioners of color precisely because of these interviews (1-2). Or, as Anzaldúa wrote in the chapter “Entering Into the Serpent” in *Borderlands*, “the females, the homosexuals of all races, the dark-skinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign” (60). Santería, despite all perceived misogyny, has undeniably become in some ways a religion that is not only more accepting of marginalized people but highly values them. As Clark writes, “All different types of people find acceptance in the religion, and few roles are closed to individuals because of their body type or other characteristics (64);” furthermore, sociologist Salvador Vidal Ortiz notes that

In possession, a practitioner is “mounted” by the deity—an expression that has obvious gendered and sexual implications, which are generally recognized by practitioners . . . non-heterosexual men and women of all sexual orientations tend to be possessed more often than their straight counterparts. So their presence is highly valued. (Street, “Animal Sacrifice and Sexuality in Santería”)

This acceptance and therefore validation of identity allows for an agency not commonly held by women and/or the LGBTQ community; therefore, it becomes easier to see why authors such as Cabrera, Anzaldúa, and de la tierra would evoke such strong water images and beings throughout their texts and archives, consciously and unconsciously, with the Atlantis Effect in full motion, reclaiming herstories by continually conjuring up these

feminine-queer spiritualities and feminine-queer mythological beings. In line with what Solimar Otero states in “*Yemayá y Ochún: Queering the Vernacular Logics of the Waters*,”

The way that Afro-Cuban religion reconstitutes itself—through writing and praxis—makes us understand that certain kinds of agency are found in liminal spaces. These in-between spaces can be found in many sites of symbolic and cultural production: between waters, deities, subjectivities, and genres of writing. (86)

Taking this statement as well as others presented here into consideration, then, one can begin to see how the intersectionality of liminal spaces shared by these authors have provided them with these “certain kinds of agency,” if in different ways. It is this agency, in part derived from their queer spiritual groundings that allowed Cabrera, Anzaldúa, and de la tierra to produce some of the most significant symbolic and cultural production by US Latina and Chicana lesbian writers in the twentieth century. The Atlantis Effect, then is shown as a useful device with which to analyze how waters that embody feminine-queer spirituality and ultimately serve as patriarchal counterdiscourse, as this sort of fluidity recovers these culturally feminine herstories and thereby overcomes any border/lands.

### ***Out of the Closet, Into the Archive: A Note on Queer Archives and Methodology***

Along with a transnational, queer literary analysis focused on the physical, metaphorical and ultimately spiritual implications of waters and all contained within for US Latina and Chicana writers, this dissertation intends to vigorously incorporate archival. I view my

work in the archive of each author and beyond as crucial to not only a greater understanding of each author as queer US Latina and Chicana women writing from different times and spaces, but to fully showcase the proposed Atlantis Effect, and simultaneously attempt to relay the experience I have had as a researcher over the past several years by incorporating these many images throughout it as a means of relaying the Atlantis Effect as a sensorial practice. Furthermore, only very recently has scholarship been greatly produced on queer archives. In *Out of the Closet, Into the Archive: Researching Sexual Histories* (2015) Ann Cvetkovich notes specifically in relation to the subject that

The archive even as conventionally understood has been transformed by queer collections as well as by the creative methods of queer archival research...the archives are not static collections to be judged by what they include or exclude but places where we do things with objects. (xvii-xviii)

This echoes Michel Foucault's proposal in that the archive is a "'system of discursivity" that establishes the possibility of what can be said"' (Manoff 18). As Foucault writes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*,

...we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use). They are all these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call *archive*. (128)

Furthermore, Robert Vosloo notes in “Archiving Otherwise: Some Remarks on Memory and Historical Responsibility” that “the archive can also be used as a broader metaphor or concept that relates to the body of knowledge produced about the past” (2). Such a rendering of the archive in my own methodological approach in the queer archive draws collectively from these archival theories, not excluding Jacques Derrida’s landmark work *Archive Fever*, where I endeavor to “[search] for the archive right where it slips away,” incorporating text, image, and ephemera, a “system of discursivity” as found in these authors’ respective archives as a means of analysis for a “broader metaphor.” This is to say, the archive, like the literature, can function as a space of resistance and opposition to heteronormative patriarchal forces, especially as archives of queer Latinas and Chicanas, and even more so if words, images, and ephemera in the archive simultaneously echo and powerfully fortify my proposal in regards to the literature itself.

It is significant to note that at least two of the three collections I am referring to – the Lydia Cabrera Papers at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, and the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers<sup>1</sup> housed at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas – Austin, are the prime reasons scholars come to visit each research center. To this end, I was told on more than one occasion by archivists during my fellowship residence at the Cuban Heritage Collection that Lydia Cabrera was the “Patron Saint” of their archives; the Cuban ethnographer’s collection was by far the most visited archive and by scholars from all around the world, approaching her papers from a variety of angles. The Tatiana de la Tierra papers were only very recently acquired by the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referenced as GEA Papers.

California – Los Angeles. So recent, in fact, that just before my visit in the Fall of 2015, an initial finder for the collection had just been put into place, with several more boxes still requiring organization. This collection, as a testament to growing LGBTQ archives and an incredible lesbian US Latina writer in particular, offers its own exciting possibilities as very few scholars to date have had the opportunity to conduct research in it. This dissertation as a whole, then, with literature and archive working in tandem, hopes to contribute to the bigger conversation regarding the vital importance of archives and queer archives of Latinas and Chicanas in particular for opposition, resistance, and ultimately, decolonization. This is precisely part of what the Atlantis Effect affords.

### **By the Chapter: Literary Herstories Uncovered and Recovered**

As previously mentioned, there has not been significant research regarding implications water and all associated with it or water spirituality in the field of US Latina or Chicana literature, apart from recent scholarship by folklorists Solimar Otero and Micaela Díaz-Sánchez regarding Afro-Cuban water deities like Yemayá, the goddess of the ocean or Ochún, the goddess of the rivers, both of whom will be discussed at length in Chapter 3. My intention then is to expand this conversation to include all associations of the element of water in relation to US Latina and Chicana literature, and more specifically explore the significance of what is arguably the most important and mysterious element in the texts as well as the archives of Lydia Cabrera, Gloria Anzaldúa, and *tatiana de la tierra* and the implications of such for gender, sexuality, space, and agency.

## Chapter 1: The Atlantis Effect: Liberation, Healing and Preservation

Chapter 1 will first analyze the explicit and sometimes general invocations of water present in the works of these three authors, both published and unpublished as this investigation is also interested in utilizing the archive as a lens with which to read their texts, effectively what I also view as an ascension of Atlantis, part of the proposed Atlantis Effect, that will help to fully coalesce the argument that water and all of its associations provided for a space of liberation for these female US Latina and Chicana writers, nurturing their alternative ways of being and providing them with a newfound agency. For Tatiana de la Tierra, this meant a greater freedom for sexuality and sexual practices; for Gloria Anzaldúa, it meant a site of transformative healing, knowledge, and the writing process as well as her identity as a self-described “Chicana dyke”; and for Lydia Cabrera, a lesbian who remained closeted her entire life, it meant a subconscious transference of all that she was unable to express during her lifetime as well as a preservation of female-centered Afro-Cuban religious traditions.

Gloria Anzaldúa writes often of water and of the ocean in particular in her landmark text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), as well as the recently published *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (2015) edited by AnaLouise Keating, a book that was intended to be Anzaldúa’s dissertation before her untimely passing from diabetes complications in 2004. With *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, the ocean is a powerful presence in her life, one that helped her heal in her life and aided in her writing process, a place where she often “walk[ed] along the ocean seeking a medicine, watching the waves rise and fall” (*Light in the Dark*, 21). In



Cabrera's texts to be analyzed in this first chapter, namely *Cuentos para adultos niños y retrasados mentales* (1983) and *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín* (1973), the aquatic nature of her writing is innate to these ethnographies, and wholly implicit in the latter two. Here, I propose a herstorical preservation of female-centered Afro-Cuban religious traditions by Cabrera, something that goes to the very heart of the Atlantis Effect. Then in the works of tatiana de la tierra—principally the collection *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from My Papaya* (2005) as well as the more personal aspects of her archive will also be studied—water is fully present in text and image, both as a geographical space where lesbian sexual encounters occur and the wetness is symbolic of overt sexual stimulation. In Chapters 2 and 3, further study of de la tierra and specifics from her stories as compared to the sensual, sexual Santería deity Ochún will be presented. This chapter, however, will focus on this very sexually queer nature of specifically the waters, such as in the title story of “Porcupine Love” where the main lesbian protagonist (very much likened to de la tierra, as she is from Colombia, and recounts travels with her lover there), tells the story of her lost love Antenna from New Zealand (notably surrounded by water as well, like Atlantis) with much nostalgia for their past together. In the present time, the protagonist has been separated from her once-love for many years, and finds her on the internet on a vacation website, where she observes Antenna again in a place of water, submerged in water, scuba diving. The main protagonist yearns to once again “to swim in her waters,” something that could be read both literally and metaphorically (33). She wants to literally swim in the waters that are located where Antenna lives; however, the desire is that she immerses herself in her sexual waters (31). We find these sexually charged, queer waters expressed

time and again throughout the rest of this short but powerful story, as well as the other aforementioned texts to be studied.

## **Chapter 2: Water Spaces and Gender-Queer Aquatic Beings**

Chapter 2 will then move into how these water spaces can be viewed as liminal spaces for gender queer development, specifically focusing on androgyny and androgynous water beings as it relates back to Afro-Cuban religious traditions as well as Chicana indigenous mythologies, or spiritual mestizaje. As will be discussed shortly more at length, Santería for example makes way for powerful women, as well as gay and androgynous individuals; oscillatory gender is natural within this religious practice. To this point, it is significant to note that the word “woman” does not exist in the Yoruba language, indicating that at least in the ancient Yoruba tradition, the origins of Santería, many times gender lines were blurred and in many ways ceased to exist. In the works of Lydia Cabrera, then, these aspects of androgyny reveal themselves in the forms of gender-oscillating orishas of Santería, or those that spend half the year as male and the other half as female, which will briefly be discussed. However, even more outstanding are the numerous stories and volumes she devoted to Jicotea, an astute turtle of the sweet waters that is not male or female. As Mariela Gutiérrez highlights in *Lydia Cabrera: Aproximaciones mito-simbólicas a su cuentística* (1997), Jicotea is indeed an androgynous figure that takes on feminine or masculine roles in various stories (45). I analyze this emphasis on Jicotea by the writer in her works as well as her archive as representative sublimations of her oppressed sexuality as well as her sexual ambiguity. In

this and other instances, this is truly the Atlantis Effect in its most literal form, as will be fully analyzed in this chapter.

For Anzaldúa, glimmers of androgyny come in several forms, especially when she refers to herself in several texts as “mitá-mitá,” half and half, or when as she states in *This Bridge Called My Back*, “Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me” (205). The idea of a turtle is also significant for Anzaldúa, one that is a part of her concept of nepantla, an in-between space, a place where she writes in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* is one where

we write and make art, bearing witness to the attempt to achieve resolution and balance where there may be none in real life. In nepantla we try to gain a foothold on los remolinos and quagmires, we try to put a psycho/spiritual political frame on our lives’ journeys. (21)

It is in nepantla, then, where these non-fixed water beings that refuse one label reside—such as serpents. The discussion of the serpent in regards to Chicana indigeneity in this section is representative of and draws on the fact that Anzaldúa’s spiritual life, though throughout much of this study will observe her ties to African-inspired religious traditions, did not reside in any one spiritual belief or religious practice; in effect, what is termed as spiritual mestizaje. The serpent’s importance to Anzaldúa’s life and writing will be fully examined, and I propose that the it is the basis or root for her seminal concepts of nepantla as well as la facultad and ultimately, a reconciled mestiza consciousness. Finally, in the case of de la tierra, this queerness comes in form of sirens or mermaids, which have grown to become strong symbols in feminism but that I will

also posit as queer water beings with which tatiana de la tierra embodied on a personal level, as well as in her written works and her archive. In all instances, I observe that each writer has a strong association with at least one queer water being, demonstrate how it functions in their texts/and or archive, and examine the importance of this connection in terms of identity—especially sexual identity—and simultaneously were a vehicle for some of their most well-known works.

### **Chapter 3: Mujeres al agua: Where Yemayá Meets Ochún**

These liminal spaces specifically tied to Santería then, lead to the discussion of the third and final chapter: a full-blown analysis of Cabrera, Anzaldúa and de la tierra with the two of the most powerful water deities of Santería: Yemayá<sup>2</sup>, a maternal figure and mother of all orishas and the owner of the ocean, and Ochún, Yemayá's younger sister and owner of the rivers and all fresh waters. For Anzaldúa, some examples that will be discussed include texts published post-*Bridge*, the work in which she declares she is an “hija de Yemayá,”<sup>3</sup> where Anzaldúa names Yemayá directly on occasion. In the collection *One Wound for Another*, she writes: “Down on the beach, drummers serenade to Yemayá, ocean mother, calling our souls back into our bodies. We are the song that sings us” (103). Then, in the very first pages of *Borderlands* she also appears, but in a way that encapsulates a more feminist spirituality:

But the skin of the earth is seamless

The sea cannot be fenced,

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<sup>2</sup> Though there are many variations of this spelling across several Afro-Caribbean syncretic religions, I will maintain the spelling of Yemayá as it is the most common spelling in the texts of the authors discussed.

<sup>3</sup> *This Bridge Called My Back*, 246.

*el mar* does not stop at borders.

To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance,

Yemayá blew that wire fence down. (25)

To this end and in reference to this specific passage, Micaela Díaz-Sánchez notes in “‘Yemayá Blew That Wire Fence Down’: Invoking African Spiritualities in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and the Mural Art of Juana Alicia” that in relation to Anzaldúa’s invocation of African-inspired religions, Yemayá is both “revered and feared for her power,”<sup>4</sup> as shown in an incantation recorded in Ketu, Senegal in the 1950s<sup>5</sup>. Throughout *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, distinct connections with Yemayá abound, as well as in her archive located at the University of Texas at Austin, a repository filled with renderings of the great ocean deity as will be showcased in this final chapter.

With Lydia Cabrera, her connection to Yemayá is undeniable, both through published work and archive as well. She is emphasized time and time again in her texts, including one of her most well-known books, *Yemayá y Ochún*. The main focus and title of this ethnography is, understandably, the water deities Yemayá and Ochún, which begs the point: while many other powerful and well-known (and characteristically male) orishas exist, such as Elleguá, Changó, and Oggún, for example, Cabrera spotlights these two

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<sup>4</sup> “Yemojá, the wind that whirls with the force into the land. Yemojá, angered water that smashes down the metal bridge,” as recorded by Pierre Verger (qtd. in Díaz-Sánchez 172). Verger was also commonly known as Fatumbí, a babalawo, a photographer, and an ethnographer, as well as a close friend of Lydia Cabrera.

<sup>5</sup> Yemayá “smashed down a bridge made of metal, a male deity of war and iron. This specific conflict comes to represent a binary opposition between the female reign of the waters and the male institution of metal. . . In the Anzaldúa passage, the female power that surges from beneath the water’s surface cannot be contained by the wire fence, a boundary violently imposed by colonialist and patriarchal forces,” Díaz-Sánchez observes (172).

specifically. The preference toward Yemayá begins to unveil itself, though, in *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín*, an ethnographic work devoted to Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies in the Sacred Lagoon of San Joaquín in Cuba, almost wholly dedicated to Yemayá, including descriptions and lyrics of songs used in ceremonies relating to the ocean deity, several pictures depicting these rites; even aesthetically the book calls to Yemayá, as the front and back cover are in Yemayá's characteristic blue and white. Cabrera's archive is resonant of these findings. One box in particular in the Lydia Cabrera Papers in the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami at Coral Gables holds all of her ethnographic research on specific orishas. The folder with overwhelmingly more material than the others is without a doubt Yemayá. And if any doubt remained, it will be emphasized that Cabrera many times signed her letters as Yemayá, as archival evidence shows

Finally, with tatiana de la tierra, strong connections to the sexual, sensual orisha Ochún, owner of the rivers, is undeniable. Ochún's water is a constant in de la tierra's *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from My Papaya* as well as the lesser-known lesbian Latina 'zines from the 90s she founded, edited, and contributed to—*esto no tiene nombre* and *conmoción*—and, as section of the chapter will show, in contrast to the Universal Mother Yemayá's multi-faceted manifestations in the works of Cabrera and Anzaldúa, Ochún's waters are symbolic of not only sexual identity but sexual *pleasure*, and ultimately support the construction of an empowered lesbian Latina identity through her work, also representative of the state of queer and feminist theory at the time that she was writing in, something that will also be discussed at length in this chapter. Ultimately, however, I will argue in this chapter that de la tierra, with her way of writing—"tatiana

didn't over-poeticize, she called a cunt a cunt"<sup>6</sup>—Chicana lesbian scholar and writer Alicia Gaspar de Alba has said—offers a patriarchal counterdiscourse as well, one that is constructed utilizing elements of Santería and, in particular, the very sexual and sensual orisha Ochún. In line with this idea, Vanessa K. Valdés notes in the recently published *Oshún's Daughters* that the feminine orishas and Ochún in particular serve as alternative models that break with Western patriarchal culture for women, allowing them to occupy other ways of being such as “the sexual woman, who enjoys her body without any sense of shame; the mother who nurtures children without sacrificing herself; [or] the warrior woman who actively resists demands that she conform to one-dimensional stereotypes of womanhood” (3). In this way, Valdés proposes, female authors and artists that derive inspiration from Afro-Caribbean religions are capable of offering more complete portraits of what it is to be a woman (3). This certainly applies to the works, ‘zines, and archives of the late tatiana de la tierra.

“But look, our seas are what we make of them...” Hélène Cixous writes in her oft-referenced essay “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Indeed they are, and the exploration has just begun. The Atlantis Effect now moves forth through these chapters.

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<sup>6</sup> Guzmán-López, Adolfo. “Friends, Family Remember Lesbian Writer tatiana de la tierra.” <http://www.kcet.org>. 16 Aug. 2012. Web. 2 April 2015.

## CHAPTER 1: THE ATLANTIS EFFECT: LIBERATION, HEALING AND PRESERVATION

*Todas estas aguas, está más de decirlo, se utilizan como medicina interna y externa. Purifican el cuerpo y el alma. Fuentes de energía . . . Poco a poco sus dolores se fueron calmando, sus carnes sanando, y al cabo una serie de baños recuperó la salud.*

*All of these waters, it goes without saying, are used as internal and external medicine. They purify the body and soul. Sources of energy . . . Little by little their suffering felt relief, their flesh healed, and at the end of a series of baths they recovered their health.<sup>7</sup>*

—Lydia Cabrera, *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín*

The myth of the fictional island of Atlantis first began with Plato around 360 B.C. in his works *Timaeus* and *Critias*. The founders were half god, half human, and became a great naval power, only later to be forced to the depths of the ocean by fire and earthquakes when the gods became angry that its inhabitants began to exude immorality. This origin myth that functions as a complex, multifaceted metaphor has since been interpreted time and again through literature and art. Plato's ideas about "divine versus human nature, ideal societies, the gradual corruption of human society" were showcased in many of his works, with "Atlantis [as] a different vehicle to get at some of his favorite themes" (Drye, "Atlantis"). Such a timeless legend continues to serve as such a vehicle, including the proposed theoretical framework of this dissertation. The Atlantis Effect is

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.



one I will demonstrate is a useful tool to analyze the phenomenon of recovered female-centered personal, cultural, and spiritual histories and mythologies by way of lesbian US Latina and Chicana writers through their literature, coupled with research in their respective archives. In this chapter, I will be looking at the more general invocations of water and its significance for Colombian writer tatiana de la tierra, Chicana feminist scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa, and finally, Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera. The opening quote from Lydia Cabrera's *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín* (1973), though referring to a specific journey in the winter of 1956 that Cabrera took part in, on a bigger level assists in shaping the thought concerning the importance of consistently invoking water and spaces of water on part of each writer. Water is medicine, it is energy, it is relief from suffering as the epitaph by Lydia Cabrera that opens this chapter indicates, and I will also show, it is ultimately a space of autonomy from which these women can tell their stories.

### **Into the Sweet Waters: tatiana de la tierra**

Tatiana Barona, Latina lesbian writer, artist, activist, and librarian better known as tatiana de la tierra<sup>8</sup>, was born in Villavicencio, Colombia, in 1961, later immigrating with her family to the United States at 8 years old ("Finding Aid," Chicano Studies Research Center). Though she grew up in Miami, she lived, among other places, in Long Beach,

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<sup>8</sup> Apart from her published work which showcase the lower-case spelling of her name, several sources, including the article "Colombiana salerosa (in Memory of tatiana de la tierra" by friend Adan Griego indicate she insisted on this lower-case spelling of her name (<http://www.reforma.org/tatianadelatierra>). de la tierra wrote of this in her biography as a contributor to the book *The New Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book* that she "lives with a lower-case mentality, on the edge of herself in Mayami. Armed with a Colombian soul and an honorary degree from Marimacha University..." (13).

California; El Paso, Texas, where she earned a Masters in Creative Writing; and in Buffalo, New York, where she completed her Masters of Library Science. She is also considered an early pioneer of self-published “zines” which were focused on the issues of Latina lesbians.<sup>9</sup> Outside of her published books, her chapbooks and ‘zines to be discussed in Chapter 3, as well as the personal journals and photographs included in the collection are truly a testament to her legacy as a Latina lesbian activist, writer, and artist, as her archives tell a story of a woman who was fiercely unapologetic in terms of her identity and sexuality. The aquatic invocations involved in de la tierra’s published work and their resonations from within her archive go hand in hand with just that.

### ***Porcupine Love, and other Tales from the Archive***

Turning then to the texts of de la tierra, namely *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from my Papaya* (2005), de la tierra explicitly states in one section of *Porcupine Love* titled “snapshots of de la tierra”, a long list of responses to favorite things that her goddess is Ochún, the Santería deity of sweet water (discussed at length in Chapter 3), and her favorite “tribute to an element” is “watching water, hearing water, being immersed in water, becoming water” (38). In this chapter, archival documentation, particularly images, will be intertwined with the story’s analysis; as established in the introduction, archival research serves as a testament to the lives of these lesbian US Latina and Chicana writers and a reinforcement to the Atlantis Effect that occurs with each one.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Now, as previously recognized, water and specifically sweet river waters are abundant in her works in many forms, especially in the short story “Porcupine Love. In the story, the protagonist has a love affair with a woman named Antenna, but pushes her away as she fears true love; this, her psychologist tells her, is porcupine love. Antenna makes several appearances in de la tierra’s archive as well, which reveals that this story isn’t entirely fictitious; among a box filled with her personal notebooks and photographs, a photo appears of de la tierra and Donna, aka Antena or “Antenita.” If the story left any doubt, this image clearly notes Antena was the inspiration for “Porcupine Love”:



Fig. 1. tatiana de la tierra and Donna or “Antenita”<sup>10</sup> (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of

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<sup>10</sup> Captions for all photos, unless otherwise indicated as part of the finding aid description, are my own descriptions as these photos are together within one box of the tatiana de la tierra Papers at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

In the story, Antenna goes to live in Australia after she is pushed away by her lover, a place effectively surrounded by water. In one part of the story it is nostalgically recalled by the unnamed protagonist how the two, when together, spent their vacations in many places that were also geographically highlighted by water, such as Key West and Colombia. In the trip to Colombia in particular, the two bathe in springs, rivers, and waterfalls. The descriptions of these trips aren't unlike images found of de la tierra and the woman identified as Antenna in her archive. Several pictures place Antenna, affectionately known as Antenita, as well as de la tierra, in front of waterfalls, in river streams, or submerged underwater. In one photo, Antenna exposes her breast from a button-down shirt in front of the ocean; in others, Antenna and de la tierra place themselves in sensual and affectionate positions in or in front of these waters, just as in the above images. Below, Antenita is shown submerged in water, just as she is described many times in "Porcupine Love."



Fig. 2. Antena, or Antenita, submerged in the water, similar to other photos which show de la tierra snorkeling completely nude. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

She describes: “We went horseback-riding up a mountain road in the morning and found a spring along the way. There, we took off our clothes and climbed into the warm mineral waters” (28). They then keep horseback-riding until they come across a waterfall, where they again enter the waters:

The cold mountain waters rushed down, pelting our heads and invigorating our bodies. The waters had purified us and jolted us to our senses. Our nerve endings were pulsing. We kissed before getting back on

the horses, our tongues thrusting into each other's mouths. I grabbed her crotch—I could hardly control myself—unzipped her jeans and rammed my fingers into her. She was wet and desperate for my love. "I'm going to fuck you all night," I told her, yelling over the loud gushing waterfall. (28)



Fig. 3. Antenita horse riding in front of a waterfall, just as in the short story “Porcupine Love.” (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

This scene of two women making love, effectively queering the sweet waters both literally and metaphorically, showcases the waters as a space of liberation. The waters are

clearly a space of sexual expression and liberation especially for de la tierra as evidenced by images in her archive as well, free floating, nude, completely immersed in the water in several undated photos, including initial book covers for *Porcupine Love*:

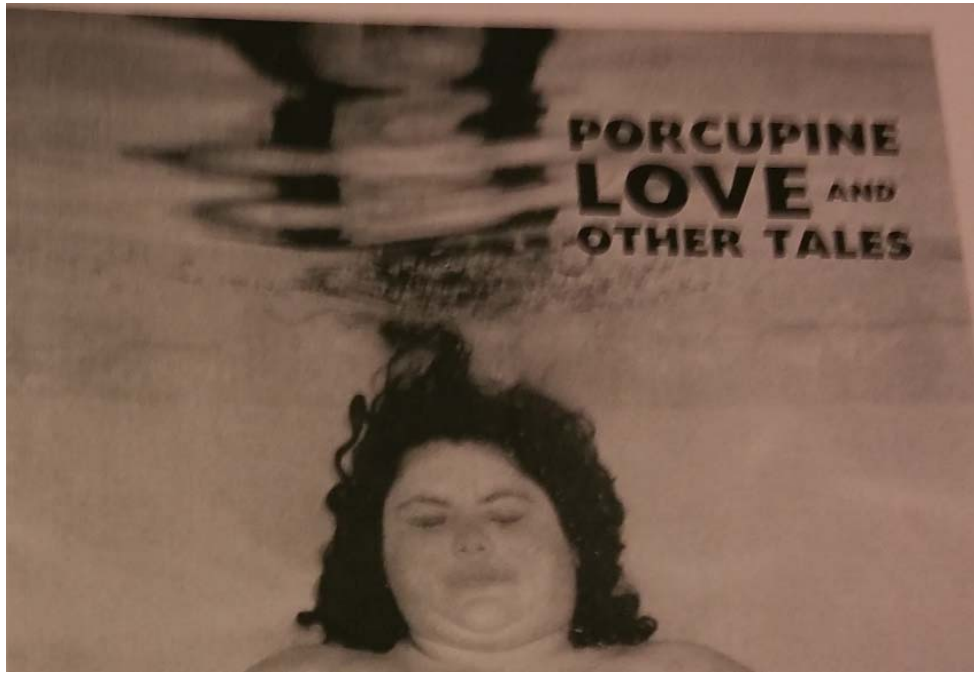


Fig. 4. Original cover of *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from My Papaya* showing de la tierra nude and completely immersed in water. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

To extend this further, her lover is also “wet” in terms of sexuality. This scene is explicitly sexual; de la tierra in this, just as in many of her other works, fully embraces her eroticism both in the story and the fact that she is writing this story, effectively a response to the call that Audre Lorde poses in “The Uses of the Erotic,” where she writes, “In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other

supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial” (342). This unwillingness to accept powerlessness provides an agency and a drive for de la tierra to write stories such as this and write herself into the text as a lesbian Latina, one that can fully express herself in and outside the water.

The Atlantis Effect in this sense is full-blown as published text and archival work are interwoven. Several places in the dozens of personal journals she kept echo the same—reading, writing, being lesbian are time and again expressions left for the lakes, waterfalls, rivers, beaches, and oceans. To this end, similar to references in “Porcupine Love” are found in the short story “A Letter from Colombia Written in the Sand” from *The Uncollected Fiction of tatiana de la tierra*, where the protagonist and an unidentified female lover take a trip to Colombia. She writes:

From there on, we were seduced by the natural beauty of the area —  
beaches, fishing villages, coral reefs, ancient woods, indigenous ruins,  
unfailing sunshine. We succumbed to our hedonist tendencies — swam  
underwater, napped in hammocks, rode horses, dug our toes in the sand  
... I play with silky sand and listen to the ocean speak.” (27).

Lesbian Latina identity and the waters even extended to the academic events she attended, as in the photo that follows which depicts de la tierra at the September 2010 event “Sueños by the Sea: Celebrating los Festivales de Flor y Canto,” at the University of South California.



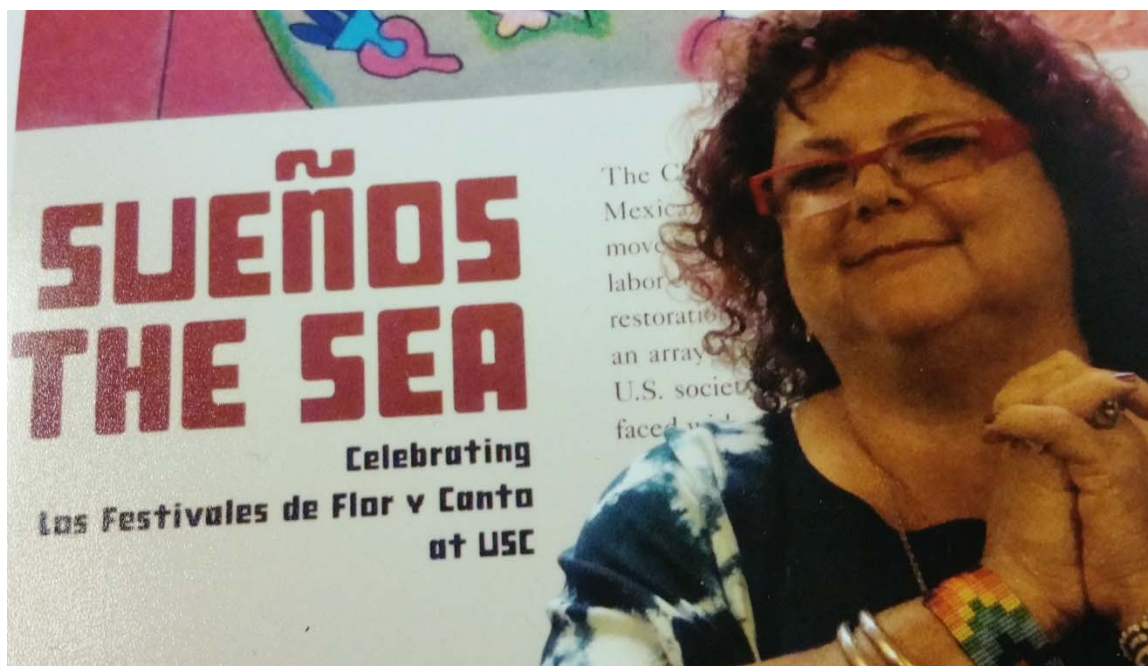


Fig. 5. tatiana de la tierra at the University of Southern California, September 2010. She is notably happy, posed next to the words “Sueños The Sea,” hands clasped and showing a rainbow bracelet representative of LGBTQ support and/or identity. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Also exemplary of such is one journal titled “Goddesses and Amazons;” in it, she recounts several days spent at an unidentified seashore, reflecting on women she desired and made love to during this time, while also writing, and reading about lesbians of color. One of the more exemplary entries reads:

17 nov. 85

Al lado del mar otra vez, medio día. Hoy sí está bullosa, ruidosa, en un rato entro al agua. Quiero que me tumben las olas... Yo he tenido seis noches en sus brazos, mañanas en sus piernas, horas dentro de ella, ella dentro de mí. haciendo el amor, como decimos yes baby, please, more, fuck me, do you like it . . . todavía la siento dentro de mí, como olas en mi cuerpo . . . Las olas vienen más y más cerca de mí...

[Next to the sea again, noon. Today it is strong and noisy, in a while I will get into the water. I want the waves to knock me over... I have had six nights in her arms, mornings between her legs, hours inside of her, her inside of me. Making love, as we said, yes baby, please, more, fuck me, do you like it . . . I still feel her inside of me, like waves in my body... The waves inch closer and closer to me...]

(“Goddesses and Amazons,” tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, Box 60, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center)

Again, reflecting upon the same essay by Lorde, she writes that for her, there is “no difference between writing a good poem and moving into the sunlight against the body of the woman I love” (342); for de la tierra, I would argue that there is no difference for her between creation of a text such as this and “moving to the body” of the woman she loves, within the sweet waters of her homeland or the geographical space of water or near water. For de la tierra, waters almost always bring about a spiritual and/or sexual awakening, as noted in other entries from around the same date:

9 nov 1985. Oceanside, finally, all decked out in the sun oil, bathing suit, water bottle, reading materials...the waves keep coming crashing, engulfing me...Kate walking on the beach near me...I was at the seashore most of the day. Reading *Saliendo a la luz como lesbianas de color*, sewing Spanish words, my tongue. When I got hot enough, I went into the ocean and got into the swing of the waves, diving under deep ones, bobbing w/ the manageable. Talk with Sandy about hairs, naturaleza....then Roz called! She's in NY, said to call her tonight....impatient to talk see feel.

10 nov. al lado del mar otra vez, sal fuerte, el mar bulloso...esta noche le voy a dar un masaje a Frankie...esta mañana leí *Womaneus*, saqué todos los libros y periódicos...hice un montón de lo que he leído y lo que no...quiero leer todo...

10 nov. Next to the sea again, the salt is strong, the sea noisy...tonight I'm going to give Frankie a massage...this morning I read *Womaneus*, I took out all of the books and newspapers...I made a mountain out of what I've read and what I haven't...I want to read it all...

(box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles).

Both entries again involve women in de la tierra's life, writing about her thoughts and interactions, as well as the hope of communication with them.



Fig. 6. tatiana de la tierra on the beach writing with other women. This image with other women in front of the ocean echoes the entries of her journal. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

In each instance these acts occur on the beach until she once again enters the ocean, which itself also has a strong presence, both aural and olfactory. The presence of the water lends itself to a sort of sexual as well as intellectual liberation and in effect can be viewed as an inspiration for de la tierra in this regard, or catalyst of such. These personal journal entries ultimately demonstrate the strong ties between the waters, female sexuality, as well as woman as reader and writer.



Fig. 7. One of dozens of images placing tatiana de la tierra near the waters. box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

We find these waters expressed time and again throughout the rest of “Porcupine Love,” this short but powerful story. In the present time, the protagonist has been separated from her once-love for many years, and finds her on the internet on a vacation website, where she observes Antenna again in a place of water, submerged in water, scuba diving. Then, upon seeing Antenna again after so many years, she suddenly wants to leave everything to be with her, because her love is in “New Zealand, where she is wet and writing me, where she is wet and calling me, where she is wet and whistling for me” (31). Let us recall that Antenna previously left for Australia, which, along with New

Zealand, heighten the Atlantis Effect: both island spaces, surrounded by water, which I read as locations of lesbian desire and sexuality; places of opposition and resistance to patriarchal heteronormativity. She then has fantasies that once again include many aquatic evocations. Perhaps most significantly, she wants “to swim in her waters,” something that could be read both literally and metaphorically, and greatly recalls her many personal journal entries as well. She wants to literally swim in the waters that are located where Antenna lives; however, the desire is that she swim in her sexual waters (31). Finally, after a reading with a Santería priest where she imagines herself in other places geographically characterized as close to the water such as Niagara Falls, Miami Beach, and Cuba, the story comes to a close. This is not where tatiana de la tierra’s sexual, spiritual, and textual involvement ends with water spaces, creatures, and goddesses, however, as the chapters to come will show.

***Queerness, Waters, Writing: Healing Waters in the Works and Archives of Gloria Anzaldúa***

The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa is a significant one: varying from previous editions, it celebrates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original publication of *Borderlands*. As such, it opens with several authors reflecting on the significance of Anzaldúa’s writing and her contributions “as an artist, as an activist, and as a political and social theorist” as “a powerful testament to the emotional and intellectual reach of Gloria’s work” (1). One of these notes is offered by prolific

Chicana author Sandra Cisneros titled “A Note to Gloria from the Bottom of the Sea.”

Cisneros asserts that

writing is like putting your head underwater. It takes a great effort to go under, to push yourself to the sea bottom, a tremendous courage to withstand the pressure and pain to stay down there . . . She was a fellow explorer. Someone I knew who was also studying from the bottom of the sea. (12)

Though it is impactful to note that another prolific Chicana writer chose to employ the sea as a means of expression in terms of the writing process, it even more so serves as a point of departure for what is to follow in both *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. In her published writing as well as what appears in her archive at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, the ocean is a powerful presence in her life, one that helped her heal in her life and was ultimately a vehicle for her writing process.

Though the title of her most well-known work is titled *Borderlands/La Frontera*, it is interesting to consider that that which I propose is a constant presence has no borders, nor is tierra firma. The ocean is, by nature, a free and fluid space. It is the force of nature of which Anzaldúa is most afraid, but also that which ultimately carries her creative writing process. “Miro que estoy encabronada, miro la Resistencia<sup>11</sup>—resistance to knowing, to letting go, to that deep ocean where once I dived to death—I was afraid of drowning,” she writes (*Borderlands* 70). The fear of the metaphorical ocean, that is, of

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<sup>11</sup> “I see that I am angry, I see the Resistance”

her own knowing and consciousness, is a constant throughout *Borderlands*. She later writes in the chapter “*Tlilli, Tlapalli*/The Path of the Red and Black Ink” that she was getting “too close to the mouth of the abyss” and

teetering on the edge, trying to balance while she makes up her mind whether to jump in or to find a safer way down. That’s why she makes herself sick—to postpone having to jump blindfolded into the abyss of her own being and there in the depths confront her face, the face underneath the mask. (*Borderlands* 96)

This cliff as representative of her consciousness always leads to a deep ocean that she fears, such as in the poem “Poets have strange eating habits.” This poem, found toward the end of *Borderlands*, is one where she finally “takes that plunge off the high cliff” where the only border is “between dusk and dawn” and the sky is described as fluid (162). In water, for Anzaldúa, there is a reconciliation of identity which propels the writing process. The ocean does not respect borders, and in borderlessness therein lie “These numerous possibilities [that] leave la mestiza floundering in uncharted sea . . . She has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries” which is fatal as “Rigidity means death,” she writes (*Borderlands* 101). A drought of water also signifies death, and in the case of Anzaldúa, the death of the writing process. In “Canción de la diosa de la noche,” (“Song of the Goddess of the Night”) when the earth empties of water “terror seizes me;” but with “the deep below, the deep above,” and waters in abundance, “La diosa lifts us” (220-221), signifying a positive process taking place. To this end, Anzaldúa explains in an interview that it is necessary for her to be near water in



a response to a question concerning her spiritual reality which she indicates is constructed from nature:

So this is why I like to live at the ocean, like I do now here in Santa Cruz. You know, to live near the ocean means that you just go there and then get another infusion of energy. All the petty problems you have fall away because of the presence of the ocean. (*Borderlands*, 240)

This “infusion of energy” is also present earlier in *Borderlands* when an unnamed poet, assumedly Anzaldúa, derives creative power from a water pump as the “cold sweet water gushes out, splashing in her face” (91), and later in *Light in the Dark*, when she returns once again to a cliff near her home, and not unlike the poet of *Borderlands*, is met with a cold shock of water: “as you peer into the depths of the crater, water shoots up along its walls like a geyser, drenching you. You gasp at the shock of cold, in a burst of light as a new awareness floods you” (113). This “new awareness” created by water is effectively the stimulus for her creative writing process which she constantly struggles with in both texts, or as she writes in the chapter “Geographies of Selves – Reimagining Identity:”

I picture these sources, like archetypal cultural figures, welling up from el cenote, el fuente fecundo or pool in the personal and cultural unconscious formed by the waters of many rivers: the spiritual and the mundane, indigenous Mexican, Chicano, Basque, Spanish, Latino, Euro-American, and cultures of color. As the streams flow upward, they co-mingle to create meaning, customs, and practices that spread to and are “borrowed” from and by other cultures through diffusion. (*Light in the Dark*, 88)

This newfound consciousness and identity as reconciled with the writing process is almost always associated with the waters: her immersion in them from a cliff jump, being “shocked” by cold water, drowning; journeys to and from a river bank, a seashore, or a bay, as in the chapter “Putting Coyolxahuqui Together: A Creative Process,” Anzaldúa returns to Monterey Bay, her writing and her thoughts on writing ever-present:

From the precipice you stare down at the waves crashing against the rocks, incessantly and furiously... De la orilla del mar you mull over el cuento de tu proceso: a metastory tracking the phrases of your creative process and touching on your writing habits, rituals, and emotional upheavals, your beliefs about writing, your relationship to it, and the support you get from your writing comadres...

*(Light in the Dark, 95)*

This aquatic relationship echoes within her archive held at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. One file in particular, “Gloria on beach with writing group incl. Virginia Harris, 1991,” contains several images of her as well as other Hispanic and African American women gathered at the shore of an unidentified beach writing, curiously similar in content to the previous image of tatiana de la tierra:



Fig. 8. (GEA Papers, Box 148, Folder 7. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.) ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Water is always involved when Anzaldúa is frustrated or stifled in her writing process as well; during this time, writing is like being caught up in a storm, one which she wants to leave but follows her into her home. “It’s too much. Throwing up your hands, you head for the beach again” (111) she writes, but the water returns. “Your backyard’s flooded... the roof leaks in three places, and the water is seeping up through the floor and warping the parquet in the living room” (112). The water is relentless in forcing her to write, and by the end of the chapter, she is “dreaming another story” by the seashore (116). The Atlantis Effect in terms of non-territorial spaces evokes all that is fluid and is ultimately

the catalyst for carving, or rather flooding, this space that makes way for Anzaldúa's agency as a queer Chicana writing from the margins.

### ***Herstorical Preservation: Lydia Cabrera's Sacred Lagoons and Short Stories***

Lydia Cabrera (1899-1991), ethnographer, writer, and authority of Afro-Cuban religious traditions, grew up in a privileged environment in Cuba; her mother, Elisa Marcaida Casanova, represented the traditional woman of the era, and her father, Raimundo Cabrera Bosch was founder and editor of the newspaper *Cuba y América*, as well as a lawyer and president and member of *La Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País*. As such, Lydia Cabrera began publishing for the first time in her father's newspaper at only 13 years old. Sometime after finishing school, she decided to leave Cuba to earn her own living. She could do so by selling antiques and furniture in a store called Casa Alyds, and in 1927 left for Paris, where she met her life partner Teresa de la Parra<sup>12</sup>, who she had met three years before in Havana (Rodríguez-Mangual 8; Vázquez-Vélez 15-16). Cabrera explains, "I made some money and when I thought I had enough to spend a long period in Europe and dedicate myself to the studies that interested me, I left"<sup>13</sup> (Hiriart 152). Some years later, she returned to Cuba, where she carried out the majority of her research about Afro-Cuban culture and religious traditions, and in 1960, she exiled to Spain and eventually settled in Miami, Florida, where she lived until her death in 1991.

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<sup>12</sup> Cabrera would later have a very significant relationship with María Teresa de Rojas, also known as "Titina." They spent almost fifty years together, until Rojas' death in 1985. In many collections housed at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami exists an extensive repository of photos and correspondence between Rojas and Cabrera that is deserving of further exploration and research.

<sup>13</sup> "Hice algún dinero y cuando creí que tenía suficiente para pasar una larga temporada en Europa y dedicarme a los estudios que me interesaban, me largué."

During this time she wrote and published some of her most renowned works, as well as her lesser-known, lesser-discussed texts, which shall receive merited attention here.

Though Cabrera is more well-known for her landmark works in the realm of Afro-Cuban religious traditions *El monte* (1940), *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (1954), and *Yemayá y Ochún* (1974), which are indeed significant and will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this particular chapter has the goal of analyzing her lesser-known and studied works as a means to underscore certain works that are more exemplary of water spaces as those that emphasize women, written by women, and therefore by nature highlight female (and queer)-centered religious and cultural traditions, and furthermore demonstrate the incredible value of her 30-plus trajectory of books as a whole.. This is the very heart of the Atlantis Effect, and in the case of Lydia Cabrera, she inscribes herself within these female-centered religious traditions based around water as an ethnographer as well as bringing them literally and metaphorically closer to the surface for further examination.

### ***Cuentos para adultos niños* and *La laguna*: Preservations of Water Herstories**

Water is inherent to practically all of Cabrera's works, a theme first discussed at length by Mariela Gutiérrez in *An Ethnological Interpretation of the Afro-Cuban World of Lydia Cabrera (1900-1991)*. She writes of the presence of water in Cabrera's works that

The enchantment of the waters takes the form of a symbolic language of the accompanying storyline; but these waters, always mythic in their sources and dimensions, do not embody a strict symbolism, but a sort of expressive quality innate to their own distinctiveness. The waters and their

currents are a medium, an element into which others are dissolved; they are intermediary agents, and the source and culmination of life. (115)

While I do not disagree that the waters serve this purpose in Cabrera's stories, the intent of this exploration is to examine them, as in the case of Tatiana de la Tierra and Gloria Anzaldúa, specifically in relation to gender and sexuality. Part of this more profound analysis also includes Cabrera's archival collection housed at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida and several of her lesser-analyzed works. *Cuentos para adultos niños y retrasados mentales* (1983) and *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín* (1973) are very different works; though both are ethnographic and creative in some way, *Cuentos para adultos niños* exudes more of the feeling of her earlier works like *Cuentos negros de Cuba*, her first published book of folktales based on Afro-Cuban religious *patakis*, or stories of how the pantheon of Santería came to be and other creative stories deriving from Afro-Cuban myths. Meanwhile, *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín* is also written with some creative liberties usually foreign to the ethnographic realm, but is a photographic as well as a textual-ethnographic journey, ultimately one that stands as a text preserving female-centered Afro-Cuban religious traditions and rites, entirely authored and photographed by women.

Several stories in particular stand out in *Cuentos para adultos niños* for their emphasis of the above-outlined themes: namely "La mujer del agua," ("Woman of the Water"), "Amor funesto," ("Fatal Love") and "El insomnio de un marinero" ("A Sailor's Insomnia"). The story "La mujer del agua" opens with a man named Sense fishing by the water. He catches a fish that is able to speak to "Madre Agua," telling her he is now

dying and being taken away. Madre Agua comforts the fish, telling it, “Algún día nos veremos”<sup>14</sup> (33). Sense then throws the fish back and rows back to shore. The story then cuts to Sense and his love for a girl named Moba, a beautiful girl who sold vegetables in a market. One day, a powerful man comes to the market, and a heartbroken Sense never sees Moba again. He then returns to the lagoon and falls asleep to the “deep peace” that the waters provide (34). He awakens to the love of another woman, Nifé, who is described as goddess-like, and is “el nuevo amor que halló en la laguna, no era Moba, pero era el mismo gran amor”<sup>15</sup> (34). Once Sense brought her back to the town, however, many strong men tried to take Nifé from him, though they were never able to. Nifé’s power and strength she had from being of the water made her invincible to the others, and in a subverted sort of fairy tale, Nifé is the woman who was able to protect her chosen mate Sense. It is important to note that indeed Nifé *chose* Sense, and not the other way around, as he came to *her* space of water searching for reconciliation for his broken heart, peace, and ultimately, love. He also was empowered by her, and astonished to see that she was not only from a place of water, she *was* water, and took Sense back with her to the lagoon with her forever:

. . . el cuerpo divino de aquella mujer . . . ¡era agua!

Un chorro de agua cerraban sus brazos. Un charco de agua  
quedaba en el suelo . . .

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<sup>14</sup> “One day we’ll see each other again.”

<sup>15</sup> “the new love he found in the lagoon, she was not Moba, but was the same great love.”

–Ven –le dijo Nifé a Sense –.Vamos donde nada podrá turbarnos.

Volvieron a la laguna. Bajo el agua tersa, en lo más hondo, allí se aman,  
allí duermen y sueñan sin despertar. (35)

. . . the divine body of that woman...was water!

A blast of water closed their arms. A pool of water  
was left on the ground...

“Come,” Nifé told Sense. “Let’s go where no one can bother us.”

They returned to the lagoon. In the depths of the tranquil water,  
they love one another, they sleep, and they dream without waking.

It was ultimately Nifé who was able to save her partner Sense; the powers she carried as a woman of the water, made of water, were what protected him and gave him safety in the end. Opening with a water scene, and closing with one as well, Cabrera constructs a story that subverts the typical fairy tale of a woman that needs saving. Empowered by the water, Nifé represents part of the Atlantis Effect in which an author such as Lydia Cabrera preserves and focuses on stories where women take the role of protector, and do so either within or around their spaces of water.

Likewise, the stories “Amor funesto” and “El insomnio de un marinero” heed warnings to men who dare think they abuse or own the waters that do not belong to them. “Amor funesto” opens up with what could summarize both stories in one sentence: “Era de tierra adentro y no conocía el mar” (“He was of land on the inside and did not know/was not familiar with the sea,”175). As emphasized in the Introduction and



throughout this exploration, I view land as the patriarchal boundary where limitations are in effect for women, whereas the free, fluid nature of the waters are where women naturally reside, can fully develop their identities, and are ultimately empowered. Therefore, stories such as the previous “La mujer del agua” are further illustrations of the Atlantis Effect and the preservation of herstories; here, by way of Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera, who incorporated time and again female-centered empowering stories for women, many deriving from Afro-Cuban folktales. “Amor funesto” continues telling the reader, “Allí el hombre que no había visto el mar conoció el peligroso amor de las sirenas” (“There the man that had not seen the ocean knew the dangerous love of the sirens,” 175). The unnamed man then spends time with one of the sirens, “una de tantas,” “one of many,”<sup>16</sup> and returns to his town smelling so badly of fish that the townspeople were disgusted and began vomiting from the odor and his wife and children rejected him. The smell was such that the townspeople wanted to kill him or at least send him into exile, very, very far away. He decided on his own to return to the siren; at midnight on the beach, he went back to her orchard. Suddenly, however, the wind kicked up and “el mar alertado de la presencia del hombre rio a espumarajos blancos como la nieve” (“the sea was alerted to the man’s presence,” creating “white foam-like snow,” 176). The following day upon sunrise, “las olas que cantaban adormeciendo, ya habían arrastrado su cadaver a la playa desierta” (“the lulling, singing waves had already taken their cadaver to the deserted beach,” 176). The woman’s sea space had been violated by the man; the only one with the right to choose was the siren. Though she welcomed him the day before, it was not his choice to be able to return, and the female power of the sea made

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

that abundantly clear, as it first rose in anger, then effectively took the man's life, leaving his body for the deserted beach.

In "El insomnio de un marinero," another man's fate is once again decided by women. A sailor, Mariano Lamar could not sleep, although "el sueño de los hombres de mar es profundo" as "los oídos de hombres de mar quieren el arrullo de las olas"<sup>17</sup> (183). These men of water are in need the "cooing" of the waves; still Mariano cannot sleep. He eventually returns to his home port of Havana, where his friend Lain, also known as "el Náufrago" ("Shipwrecked"), takes him to the town of Regla, where the great Goddess of the Sea has her sanctuary: "Reina de los marineros, Nuestra Señora la Virgen de Regla." As will be discussed more at length in Chapter 3, la Virgen de Regla is Yemayá, the great Mother of the Seas, one of the most powerful deities or orishas of Afro-Cuban religious traditions; she who, without her, life does exist<sup>18</sup> and is indeed the "patrona" of the port of Havana as Lydia Cabrera outlines specifically in one chapter<sup>19</sup> of *Yemayá y Ochún: Kariocha, iyalorichas y olorichas* (1980). Lain takes Mariano to a house painted blue, and presents him to a woman he calls Madrina, presumably his godmother in the religious practice of Santería. Mariano then stays for three days locked in her house, where she practices her rituals and he undergoes a process of purification, leading up to a "sacrifice." After the rituals are complete and Mariano sleeps for twenty-four hours, he is effectively cured, and then realizes the cause of his insomnia. A woman in the port of France whom he had loved and later spurned had fed a nightingale a piece of heart in order to exact revenge; the nightingales only sleep two hours a night, and now she cannot

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<sup>17</sup> "The sleep of men of water is deep; the ears of the men of water need the cooing of the waves."

<sup>18</sup> *Yemayá y Ochún* 21.

<sup>19</sup> "La Virgen de Regla, patrona del puerto de La Habana" (*Yemayá y Ochún* 9-19).

even sleep for those two hours (184). The men who suffer in the stories of Cabrera are either cursed or cured by them; on either end, it is important to note that at the end of the day, the woman holds their fate, or their cure. In this story, like many of Cabrera's stories, the woman connected to a water space—a very spiritual space, in this case—holds the greatest power and as such has the ability to reverse the man's misfortune.

The discussion now turns to a text that, although in the ethnographic style of Cabrera is written in the creative tone of her short stories, is a truly ethnographic text which continues the conversation of women and water spaces, and the correlation and significance of the two. What sets this particular text apart from her other work, or work of her contemporaries, including her brother-in-law, the Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz<sup>20</sup>, is that it is a text entirely “woman.” That is, it is written about women, by women, and the photographs included in it are also that of a woman, Josefina Tarafa, a close friend of Cabrera's. *La laguna sagrada de San Joaquín* also differs from Cabrera's other text in the sense that, aesthetically, it is not laid out as a large, lengthy book. Rather, it is more the size of a modern-day magazine, and the photographs, many of them evoking water, are as much a part of the book as the work itself. *La laguna sagrada* was written after Cabrera had gone into exile in the 1970s; it recounts her journey with informants to the sacred lagoon of San Joaquín, a “paradisíaco rincón de la isla-paraíso” (back matter) in central Cuba. It was a trip made by Cabrera, informants, and some

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<sup>20</sup> Fernando Ortiz (1881-1961) is widely regarded as the pioneer of documenting Afro-Cuban religious traditions through critical essays and foundational texts such as *Los negros brujos* (1906), *Los negros esclavos* (1916), and perhaps most-well known for *Contrapunteo del tabaco y azúcar* (1940). Ortiz is accredited with coining the term “transculturation,” and is also known for founding the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos and the journals of the *Archivos del Folklore Cubano* and *Estudios Afrocubanos*. His impact is such that the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí has a room named in his honor as the Sala de Folclor y Etnología Fernando Ortiz, where these and other rare journals may be consulted by researchers first-hand in their special collections.

friends (also Santería practitioners) in tribute to the ocean deity Yemayá in the winter of 1956, which is also immediately apparent in an aesthetic sense: the front and back covers are predominantly blue and white, which are characteristically the colors associated with Yemayá. The first photographs the reader encounters are those of water, and of women. Throughout much of the text, Cabrera discusses the fear and strength of Yemayá's waters, even outlining the rules and rites one must do to safely get closer to the water (15). This indeed also recalls the fear and violation of certain rules in the previous short stories analyzed. To this end, the lagoon itself is the main character of this ethnographic text, personified many times—it “awakens” and its waves appear as eyelashes (17), and takes away men, never to be seen again (27). Other “characters” include the informants Cabrera meets along the way, such as the vibrant Francisquilla Ibáñez, a 100-year-old woman with two daughters who are “hijas de Yemayá,” daughters of Yemayá<sup>21</sup>, and one son, all Santería practitioners. Perhaps the most interesting part of this initial encounter is that Francisquilla is described by Cabrera as “un verdadero prodigio de vitalidad y resistencia, “a true prodigy of vitality and resistance” (9). Francisquilla in this way, then, can be viewed as a representation of the preservation or even a pure encapsulation of not only Afro-Cuban religious traditions, but of the practicing Cuban *santeras*, all associated in some way with the ocean, which is to say, Yemayá. Such a phenomenon can also be observed in the Lydia Cabrera Collection, further strengthening the extent of this preservation.

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<sup>21</sup> In certain Santería religious practice, men and women are determined to be “sons” and “daughters” of a particular orisha and in their earthly state embody the characteristics of a given orisha who will also serve as their ángel de la guarda or guardian angel. David Brown details this process at length in *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (166).

## The Sea Within: The Lydia Cabrera Papers, 1910-1991

As a Cuban Heritage Collection research fellow at the University of Miami in the summer of 2014, my archival research was significantly affected particularly in regards to methodology, especially when looking beyond the text and reconsidering what I am calling an “archival aesthetic,” and what this means for reinterpretations and therefore new ways of knowing produced from within the archive by principally employing Diana Taylor’s concepts of archive and repertoire in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, also utilized by scholars such as Diana Bowen and maybe more notably so by Maylei Blackwell in her book *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Chicana Feminism in the Chicano Movement*<sup>22</sup>. My initial goal going into Cabrera’s collection was to hopefully identify documentation supporting my proposal that the closeted lesbian ethnographer consciously or not, emphasized the female, as well as the queer deities of Santería when researching and then presented that research as a means of an auto-ethnography of sorts with my observation being that it was an extension of her identification with a religious tradition that, for all perceived misogyny, was a means of escape, a place of belonging, and a source of agency for Cabrera, especially because Santería is a religious tradition that has proven to be more open to and also empowering for marginalized people as two scholars of Afro-Caribbean spirituality, Mary Ann Clark and Anzaldúa’s close friend who she also deemed her “comadre,” Randy P. Conner have established in their respective works *Where Men are Wives and Mothers Rule* (2005) and *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay,*

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<sup>22</sup> Blackwell “use[s] the concept of retrofitted memory to theorize how new gendered political identities are produced *through* history and how those historical narratives engender new contestatory identities and political practices” (2).

*Bisexual, and Transgender Participation in African-Inspired Traditions in the Americas* (2004). It is in these texts that both Clark and Conner evidence many times over through research and interviews how Afro-Caribbean religions such as Santería are more open to the LGBTQ community as well as offer positions of high authority for women, something not the norm of traditional occidental religions. To this end, Randy P. Conner notably writes that much of

what is said about these African-inspired traditions... called to mind ancient religions or traditions such as shamanism and those practiced by ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Maya, and others, traditions that embrace multidimensional reality, multiple manifestations of the divine, initiatory rites, divination magic, and healing. **It also became apparent to me that these were spiritual traditions practiced by gay people of color.** (my emphasis, 1-2)

Now, in Cabrera's archive, it was my finding that she, consciously or not, kept many articles and took several journals of notes specifically concerning the roles of women within Santería, especially those that were priestesses, such as copious notes specifically regarding "La cuestión del babalawo y las mujeres," ("the matter of a babalawo<sup>23</sup> and women) this letter to the editor titled "The Controversial Issue: A Woman Babalawo":

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<sup>23</sup> Priest of Santería.

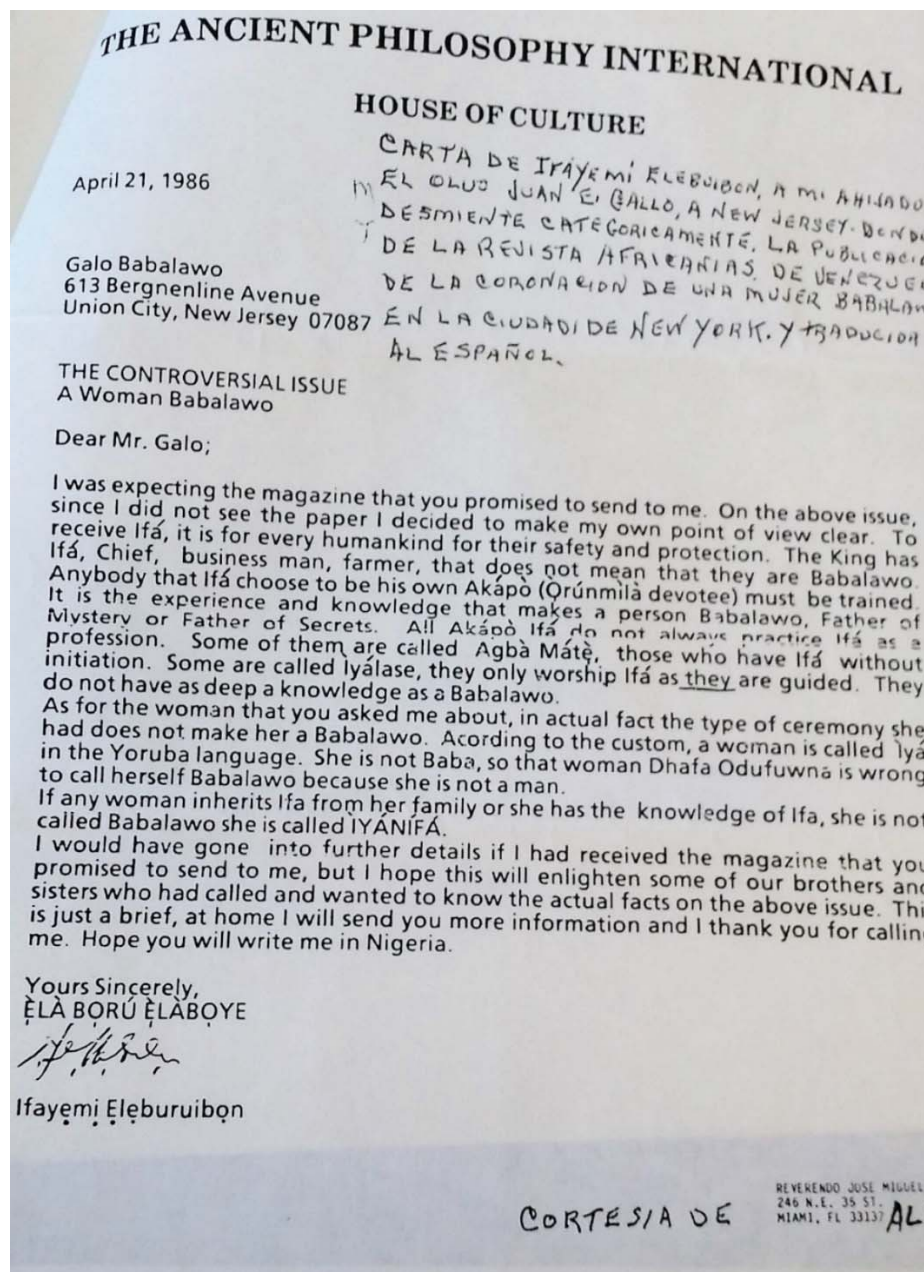


Fig. 9. "The Controversial Issue: A Woman Babalawo," Series III, Box 24, Folder 9. "Unknown. Libreta de Santos Transcripts, n.d." Lydia Cabrera Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Furthermore, general observation from within the archive reveals that Cabrera had a significant number of informants of the religion that were women (Boxes 22 and 23, Sub-Series 2: Informant files and notebooks (*libretas*), 1930-1987). This is a phenomenon that later manifests itself in some of her most important works such as *Yemayá y Ochún*, a volume dedicated to two of the most powerful water deities of Santería that is discussed at length in Chapter 3, who also happen to be female with the capability of having dual gender manifestations with marked queer characteristics, something that calls to mind a statement Anzaldúa makes in *Borderlands*, that she is "like other queer people...two in one body, both male and female. I am *the embodiment of the hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within" (41). However, something particularly telling from this archive that caught my attention were the great numbers of documents from her personal research notes to *libretas* from informants to correspondence to and from others mentioned or wrote about the names of queer yet female-centric deities such as Yemayá, considered to be a protector of gays and lesbians, as well as queer animals of Santería folklore, like the queer turtle of the sweet waters, Jicotea, over and over, a phenomenon which will be further explored in Chapter 2. Using Taylor's concepts of archive and repertoire as a center of interpretation and knowledge production, then, one can seriously consider for example, the "act" of writing a certain deity's name repeatedly or choosing to collect a great amount of information on female or queer deities and animals, or the "act" of signing some of her letters as Yemayá or Jicotea, as Lydia Cabrera often did. Ultimately, the texts of Lydia Cabrera and her archive come together as a great testament to the preservation of Afro-Cuban religious traditions and the women involved in them,



with Yemayá, which is to say, the ocean, the waters, the space of women at the center of it all.

In sum, the Atlantis Effect has been a useful lens in this particular chapter to analyze and describe the phenomenon of liberation—expressly sexual—healing and Latina and Chicana spiritual-cultural preservation though explicit and sometimes general invocations of water present the texts and archives of tatiana de la tierra, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Lydia Cabrera. For tatiana de la tierra, this meant a greater freedom for sexuality and sexual practices; for Gloria Anzaldúa, it meant a site of transformative healing, knowledge, and the writing process as well as her identity as a “Chicana dyke”; and for Lydia Cabrera, a lesbian who remained closeted her entire life, it meant a preservation of female-centered Afro-Cuban religious traditions, as well as subconscious transference of all that she was unable to express during her lifetime. To this point, the discussion of queerness initiated in this chapter will now be further explored as related to these subjects in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 2: WATER SPACES AND GENDER-QUEER AQUATIC BEINGS

Another seminal yet understudied aspect that I regard as part of the Atlantis Effect is the generally queer nature of the waters: more specifically, the queer, many times androgynous, superhuman, and mythological beings present in the works and archives of Gloria Anzaldúa, Lydia Cabrera, and tatiana de la tierra that are associated in some way with water. This present chapter will take into account Afro-Cuban folklore and religious traditions as well as Chicana indigenous spirituality, as transnationalism and the bridging of cultures *vis á vis* water mythologies is inherent to this study. Moreover, this bridge into Chicana indigenous spirituality is a necessary one, as Anzaldúa's spiritual ties were many and varied in her life. As she writes in the foreword to *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit*, for a "postcolonial mestiza" like her,

any single way is not "the way." A spiritual mestizaje weaves together beliefs and practices from many cultures, perhaps including elements of Shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity, Santería, and other traditions. Spiritual mestizaje involves the crossing of borders, incessant metamorphosis . . . in its disturbance of traditional boundaries of gender and desire and its narratives of metamorphosis—as amply presented here—as well as in its traversing of cultural and historical borders, *Queer Spirit* qualifies as a kind of spiritual mestizaje. (vii)

Therefore, although the present study has developed on a basis of religious and mythological associations with water, and particularly Afro-Cuban spiritual practices and beliefs, it is not only important but necessary to include a respectfully fuller picture of

Anzaldúa's spiritual life which, as she writes here, draws on a myriad of beliefs and practices. These are ideas that also echo in *Borderlands* as well as in her archive. In the collection, the series titled "Personal and Biographical, 1942-2004" alone demonstrates just this, with folders ranging from "Psychic Material (herbs, gems, dreams, etc.)" to "Astrological and I Ching," "Chinese Zodiac Info," "Hebrew Prayer Book," and "R. Conner Tarot Cards,"<sup>24</sup> to name a few (GEA Papers, Box 4, Folder 8; Box 5, Folders 4, 6, 9, and 12, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin). This said, there are major recurring creatures or beings of water that I find dominant in the works and archives of each author. Although there lies some overlap—for example, the turtle which I will discuss in regards to Lydia Cabrera, with Gloria Anzaldúa—this chapter will analyze and center on what I observe as the most prominent "water dwellers" for each writer, and their significance in regards to gender and sexuality. This, never losing sight of the fact that these are water beings and keeping in mind the importance of water spaces as delineated in Chapter 1, all seminal parts of the proposed Atlantis Effect, "rescuing" and bringing to the surface female-centered, aquatically rooted spiritualities and mythologies which I argue are part of a repressed sexuality or unaccepted identity in society, especially in the case of Lydia Cabrera. Parveen Adams approaches the topic of art and psychoanalysis in the text *Art: Sublimation or Symptom*, explaining that

Lacan's theory of sublimation involved a change in the nature of the object toward which the drive is directed. In the seminar on ethics he writes, "An object, insofar as it is a created object, may fill the function

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<sup>24</sup> "R. Conner Tarot Cards" are in reference to Anzaldúa's close friend Randy Conner, who is also one of the editors of the aforementioned *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit* as well as the author of *Queering Creole Spiritual Myths* along with his partner David Hatfield.

that enables it not to avoid the Thing as signifier, but to represent it.”  
(xiv).

It is my proposal precisely that the images found in the archive, working in tandem with Diana Taylor’s concept of repertoire, i.e. unofficial performances and iterations, enable these US Latina and Chicana lesbian authors to “channel through acceptable cultural forms,” (ix) many times unconsciously, that which they have been forced by society to avoid: their highly complex, intersectional identities, which in great part involved their repressed sexuality.

Now, regarding Santería, oscillatory gender is intrinsic, from those that participate in ritual to the rituals themselves<sup>25</sup>, as well as the pantheon of deities and folklore stories in general. Which is to say, as has been previously mentioned, there are traditional aspects of Santería that naturally provide power and strength to the woman, as well as queer beings such as lesbians, homosexuals and, the focus of this chapter, androgynous and generally queer beings and creatures (Street, “Animal Sacrifice and Sexuality in Santería”). This androgyny allows for performative acts as theorized by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, or acts we can perceive as performative in a textual space, and as will be seen, extend to Chicana indigenous spirituality as well. Androgyny in the form of Santería orishas, Afro-Cuban protagonists recurrent in mythologies such as the queer turtle of the sweet waters Jicotea, and the serpents that abound in Anzaldúa’s texts and archive resurrect these queer water mythologies in a variety of forms, echoed in their respective archives, as well as assist in the construction of a counterdiscourse that

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<sup>25</sup> Clark 10.

destabilizes and disrupts patriarchal hegemony as well as heteronormativity, creating a space for queer female agency via water associations.

### **“No era varón ni hembra”: Jicotea the Turtle in the life and archive of Lydia**

**Cabrera**

*Tortoise and Turtle: Among the Azande of Africa, the tortoise is sometimes symbolic of the phallus and/or homoeroticism . . . In the West, the turtle often signifies androgyny or transgenderism, with its round shell being perceived as womb-like and its head as phallic...*<sup>26</sup>

The presence of androgyny and therefore queerness as related to water in the works of Lydia Cabrera has a longstanding tradition that further sustains The Atlantis Effect. Beginning with one of her most referenced works, *Yemayá y Ochún* (1974) Cabrera spotlights orishas such as Obatalá, an androgynous orisha, and Inlé, a male orisha with feminine attributes, considered the patron of those in the LGBTQ community. To this end, Solimar Otero extensively writes of the complex nature of Inlé in her article “Entre las aguas/Between the Waters: Interorality in Afro-Cuban Religious Storytelling” that

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<sup>26</sup> Cassel’s *Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*, 324-325.

The exploration of the captivating figure of Inlé (Erinle) is an important connection to be made concerning the sexual fluidity of orichas associated especially with water. Inlé is an amphibious river deity who governs over aspects of healing and hunting. The orisha is also known for his/her alluring qualities as a transgendered being. (209)

To this end, in *Yemayá y Ochún*, Cabrera writes of the romantic relationship between Yemayá, the ocean deity many times considered a protector of lesbians, and the deity that Cabrera most associated herself with, and Inlé, this androgynous orisha considered the patron of homosexuals. Yemayá was madly in love with androgynous orisha Inlé, so much so that she took Inlé to the very depths of the ocean and kept her/him there until she bored of her young lover and decided to return to the other orishas; and to keep Inlé from telling of their relationship, cut her tongue before returning to the surface (*Yemayá y Ochún* 45). Furthermore, in the short story “Susudamba no se muestra de día” (“Susudamba Doesn’t Show Herself by Day”) from the collection *¿Por qué? . . . Cuentos negros de Cuba (Why? . . . Afro-Cuban Folktales)* appears Susudamba, la Reina de las lechuzas, the Queen of the owls. This is a character that Cabrera describes as not male nor female, or, as she writes “no era varón ni hembra” (110). We can again relate this to the way that lines of gender are in many instances blurred in Santería. It also lends to the fact that, in Santería, the orishas tend to have many *caminos* or avatars; when Cabrera presents us with protagonists such as Susudamba, it is clear that he or she is not one sex, reminding us of what Luce Irigaray writes in “The Sex Which is Not One,” where it is proposed that sexuality is plural and identity resists all adequate definition (355-356). Androgynous people, such as those that are orishas, have plural identities, something that

makes Susudamba effectively what could be the epitome of Judith Butler's theories in *Gender Trouble*; the androgyny allows for performative acts, or acts we can perceive as performative in a textual space (137-138). Cabrera consistently employs two techniques in the texts that will be analyzed, either highlighting the power that certain orishas, especially female and queer have in the Yoruba tradition, or is inventing *patakis*, these histories or myths of the orishas, in her vision, giving power to orishas that are otherwise marginalized in the same ways Cabrera was as a woman, as a Latina, and as a lesbian. Overwhelmingly, however, the figure of the turtle, the jicotea of African-inspired religious traditions appears time and time again in her creative works, and even has, like Yemayá, a complete volume dedicated to her/him.

The jicotea is a water creature of extreme importance to African-inspired religions such as Santería, to Cuban culture in general<sup>27</sup> but more importantly, will serve as the focus of this section in regards to Cuban-born writer Lydia Cabrera. In terms of queerness and androgyny, one is unable to determine the gender of a jicotea unless it is opened and/or when it is, can be observed to contain eggs, a general determinant of gender that is unknown unless this occurs<sup>28</sup> It is here that the discussion of the gender-fluid, multi-faceted myth of jicotea may begin in regards to the work and life of Lydia Cabrera.

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<sup>27</sup> It was remarked to me after my presentation regarding this topic at a conference in 2014 in Havana that “cada cubano tiene una jicotea en la casa” and in 2016 in Miami, a priest of Santería informed me that jicoteas are also found in the house of every Santería priest in a basin, with the water of the jicoteas used for different ritual purposes.

<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to Alexander Fernández, also known as Ala Leke, who is a priest of Obatalá Ajaguna and Obá Oriaté, master of Lukumí ceremony and divination for his comments regarding “jicoteísmos.”

Cabrera's archive, located at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami is telling of the sublimations and significance of repetition one can observe in an archive as relayed in the previous chapter regarding the large collections of notes from mostly female informants and the role of women within Afro-Cuban religion. Similarly, in many random places Lydia Cabrera wrote names like "Jicotea" over and over, on any number of random scraps of paper, recipe cards, or in margins of the many small notebooks she kept, not to mention an innumerable number of sketches of jicoteas, something I view as Cabrera's emphasis on deities and animals that are female or queer or both, not to mention the dozens of stories in which she Ayapá<sup>29</sup> as a central character.



Fig. 10. Various sketches of "Jicoteas" by Cabrera from the Josefina Inclán Papers.

Josefina Inclán was a close friend and scholar of Lydia Cabrera and her collection is also

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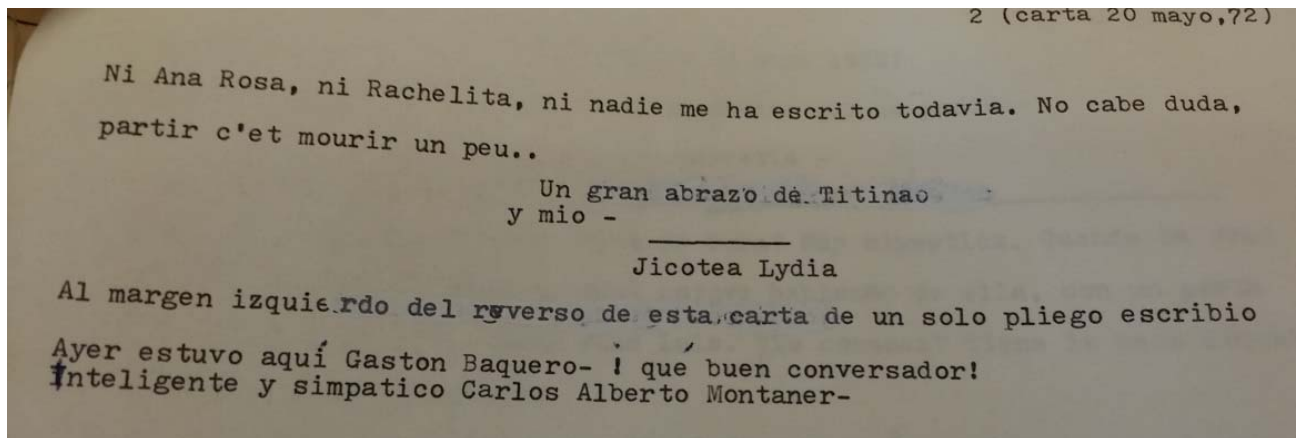
<sup>29</sup> "Ayapá" is from the lukumí dialect of the Yoruba language meaning "turtle."



held at the Cuban Heritage Collection in conjunction with the Lydia Cabrera Papers.

(Left: “Josefina Inclán Papers”, Box 1, No folder specified, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Just as she embodied the ocean deity Yemayá (as will be discussed in the following chapter), in certain instances Cabrera even signed her name as Jicotea and was addressed as such in personal correspondence, as in this letter to Cuban writer and scholar Josefina Inclán:



2 (carta 20 mayo, 72)

Ni Ana Rosa, ni Rachelita, ni nadie me ha escrito todavia. No cabe duda,  
partir c'et mourir un peu..

Un gran abrazo de Titinao  
y mio -

Jicotea Lydia

Al margen izquierdo del reverso de esta carta de un solo pliego escribio  
Ayer estuvo aquí Gaston Baquero- ¡ qué buen conversador!  
Inteligente y simpático Carlos Alberto Montaner-

Fig. 11. Correspondence from Lydia Cabrera to Josefina Inclán dated May 20, 1972, signed as “Jicotea Lydia.” (Josefina Inclán Papers, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

This embodiment of Jicotea continues in short stories found in *Por qué...Cuentos negros de Cuba* and especially the collection entirely dedicated to the turtle, *Ayapá: Cuentos de Jicotea* (1971)<sup>30</sup> which will be discussed at length shortly.

As Mariela Gutierrez highlights in *Lydia Cabrera: Aproximaciones mito-simbólicas a su cuentística*, Jicotea is indeed an androgynous figure that takes on feminine or masculine roles in various stories (45). Though Gutiérrez also observes an emphasis on Jicotea and the relationship of Cabrera's various human, god-like, and animal characters to the waters at length in *An Ethnological Interpretation of the Afro-Cuban World of Lydia Cabrera (1900-1991)*, the analysis offered in the text largely centers on the characters' concern with their mortality, with waters serving as the intermediary between life and death (114).

However, I analyze this emphasis on Jicotea by the writer in Cabrera's works as well as her archive as representative sublimations of her oppressed sexuality as well as her sexual ambiguity. The drawings throughout her archive are incessant, not only found in folders pertaining to her stories of jicotea, but in many instances in correspondence as previously shown, and in other notebooks pertaining to different topics, such as below:

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<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that her father, Dr. Raimundo Cabrera, also wrote a short tale entitled "Jicotea" that he notably included in his *Obras Completas*. Though the story is not comparable to the style of Lydia Cabrera's folktales and instead is more anecdotal, recounting some of his childhood memories, I view it as representative of the permeation of the turtle figure in Cuban culture. Moreover, as revealed in the archives that I consulted in Havana, Cuba, of the Afro-Cuban Folklore Society (Sociedad del Folklore Cubano) held in the Sala de Etnología y Folclore Fernando Ortiz, Raimundo Cabrera was named as an honorary president of the society, which makes a story involving Jicotea perhaps not as surprising (*Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, Vol. 1, Num. 1., Sala de Etnología y Folclore Fernando Ortiz, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí). The former revelation was made within volume 4 of his complete works titled *Sacando Hilas* (1922), which I also consulted in its original first edition in the Sala de Libros Raros y Valiosos of the Biblioteca Gener y Monte in Matanzas, Cuba, in Fall of 2016. I am grateful to the personnel of this library and their rare collections, as well as those in the Sala de Etnología y Folclore Fernando Ortiz for their generosity and guidance in materials regarding Afro-Cuban folklore and Lydia Cabrera.

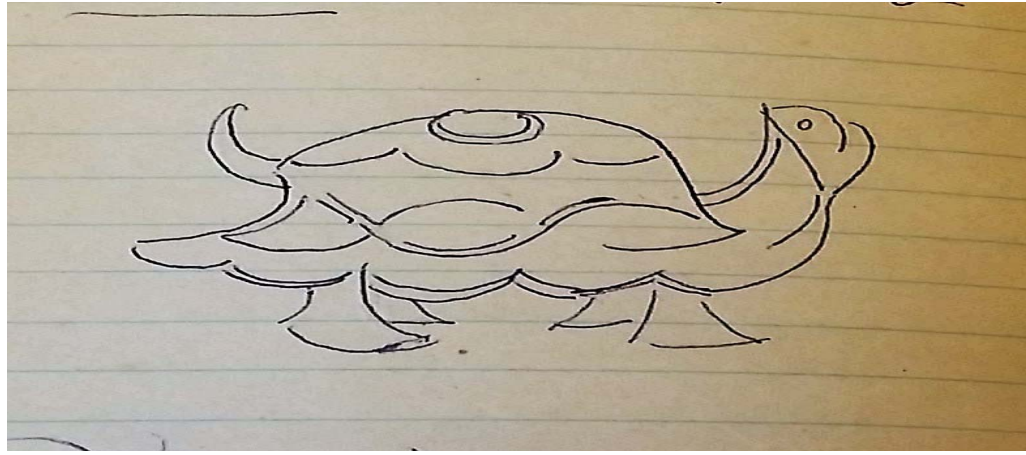


Fig. 12 One of various drawings of jicoteas by Lydia Cabrera in her archival collection found in the notebook “Cantos a los orishas [notebooks],” Series 3, Box 27, Folder 5. Lydia Cabrera Papers 1910-1991. Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

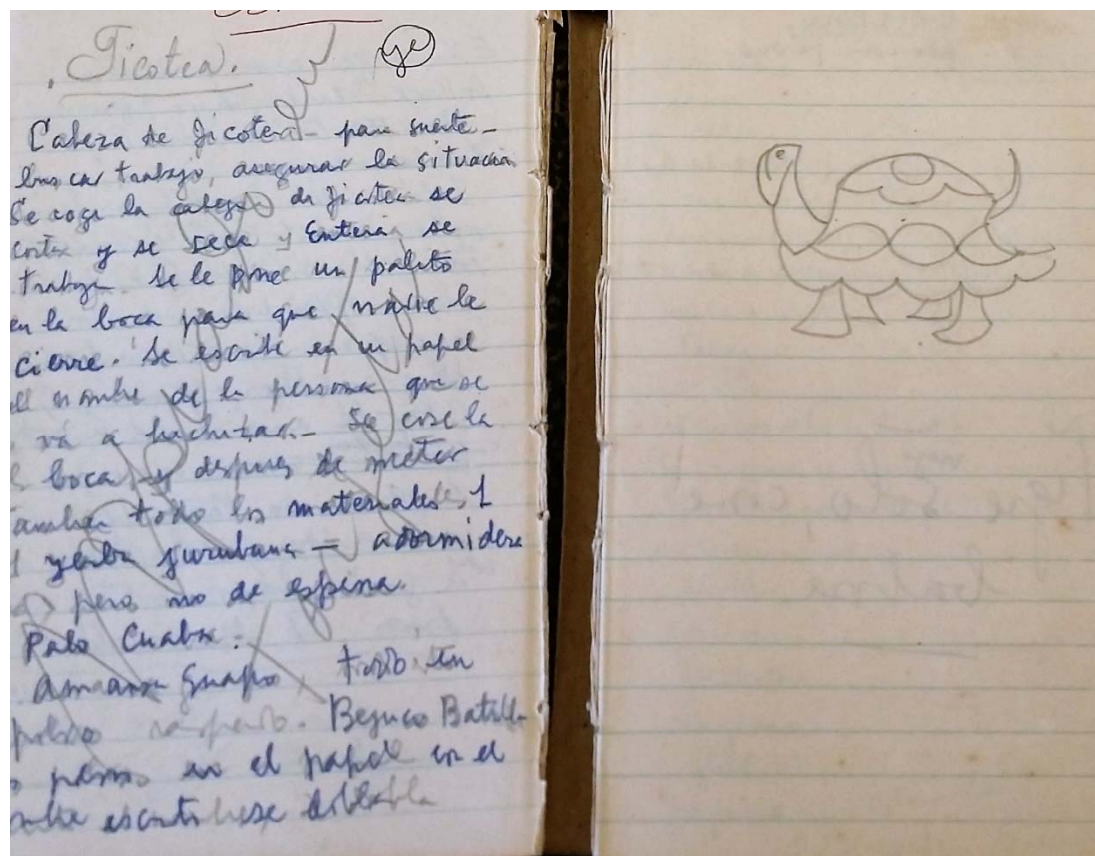


Fig. 13 Further drawings of jicoteas by Lydia Cabrera in her archival collection found in the notebook “Cantos a los orishas [notebooks],” Series 3, Box 27, Folder 5. Lydia Cabrera Papers 1910-1991. Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

However, it is difficult to ignore the abundance of texts dedicated to jicoteas by Lydia Cabrera, particularly *Ayapá: Cuentos de jicotea* (1971), a volume of twenty-one stories entirely dedicated to the turtle figure of Afro-Cuban folklore.

The introduction of *Ayapá* opens with remarks about the turtle figure, jicotea or Ayapá, who the reader will follow through a series of adventures (and misadventures).

From the very first pages, the jicotea is immediately described as an astute being, but one that is marginalized and imprisoned by its shell (9). There were turtles both big and small on the island of Cuba before the Africans arrived, Cabrera writes, but all of Jicotea's stories are of African origin<sup>31</sup>.

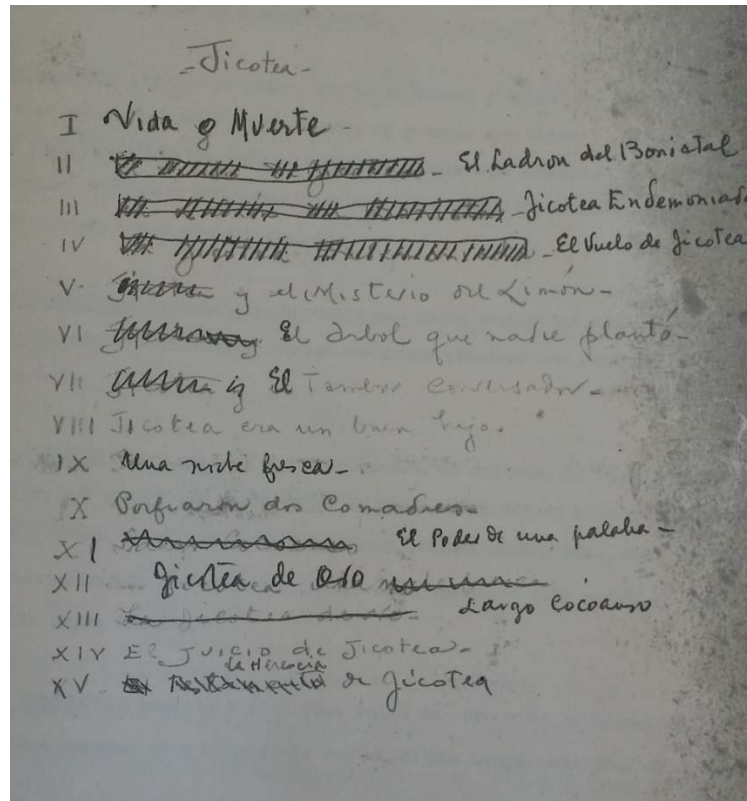


Fig. 14. A draft of jicotea short shories in progress of what would become *Ayapá: Cuentos de Jicotea*. “Libreta de santos/transcripts, n.d.” Series 3, Box 24, Folder 6. Lydia Cabrera Papers 1910-1991. Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

<sup>31</sup> “Había tortugas grandes y chicas en la Isla de Cuba cuando aún no había africanos en ésta, pero todo lo que allí se narra de Jicotea, tiene origen africano” (“There were turtles small and large on the island of Cuba before Africans were here, but everything that Jicotea narrates is of African origin,”10).

And like the Africans that were forcibly brought to Cuba as slaves, “al margen de la sociedad,” (“in the margins of society”) so too was Jicotea relegated to the margins as a being described from the very first page as an inferior being (9-10). This marginalization of the Jicotea, as associated with Cabrera herself, is incredibly important, especially when taking into account what Cuban scholar Sylvia Molloy suggests in “Disappearing Acts: Reading Lesbian in Teresa de la Parra,” that “the personal experience of Cabrera because of her double marginalization as a woman and as a lesbian brought her to Afro-Cuban folklore and culture, another group that has been marginalized and silenced by the hegemonic patriarchy” (251). Which is to say, there lies a relationship between Cabrera and the jicotea that extends beyond the page: there is an identification with a water being marginalized in many ways just as she was as a woman, and as a lesbian. I view the queer turtle then as an extension of Cabrera’s repressed sexual identity. Mariela Gutiérrez further notes that “Turtle is a natural medium of Yemayá,” (116) which is yet another link to Cabrera as I discuss at length her association with the ocean mother deity in the following chapter, and writes of jicotea’s queerness that

Cabrera’s Turtle is androgynous, that is, Turtle may suitably take a masculine or feminine role in the different short stories in which she plays the leading role. However, from a structural viewpoint, one may define Turtle as either masculine or feminine, exclusively, according to the function or role exercised by the character of the story in question. Nonetheless, those who are familiar with Cabrera’s short stories, when speaking of Turtle, unconsciously go from “he” to “she” as if guided by magic. (“Turtle” 116)

And by writing androgynous protagonists into her work such as Jicotea, Cabrera attributes power and strength to these beings that are otherwise marginalized in society, at the same time underlining what is innate of Santería, all possible sublimations of the life, which is to say, repressive sexuality and marginalization Lydia Cabrera lived. Or as Cabrera writes of the turtle itself in the first pages of *Ayapá*, “Jicotea es, además, un ser misterioso que sabe manejar fuerzas secretas de la naturaleza, por lo que, quizás, también podría clasificarse en la categoría de genio o de duende” (9).<sup>32</sup>” and a small, cunning animal that is able to defeat such grand creatures as tigers, lions, elephants (11). Just as the queer turtle manipulates and overcomes many obstacles, Cabrera manipulates the ethnographic and folkloric genres with her own female-centered world full of queer waters and water beings not customary of the fields dominated by men such as her brother-in-law Fernando Ortiz, considered *the* ethnographer of Cuba, as previously mentioned.

Though the introduction to *Ayapá* is alone rich in analysis for associations of Cabrera with jicotea, the short stories contained within it further substantiate the argument at hand. Perhaps most representative of these suggestions is the short story “La porfía de las comadres.” The story begins with two comadres, or close female friends, both turtles, arguing over their character—who is better, who is worse—in a competition of sorts before making their way to the local market. Continuing their “porfía,” or stubborn rivalry, one of the two comadres that is carrying a basket eventually stuffs the other in it “para curarle la altanería,” to cure her of her arrogance (240). From this point, the comadre who won the argument, at least for the moment, decides to take them both to

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<sup>32</sup> “Jicotea is also a mysterious being that knows how to manipulate secret strengths of nature, for which s/he could also be classified in the category of genius.”

their Madrina's house, to help put their competition to rest. They then realize they cannot go without an offering or gift for their Madrina, so, as the astute creatures they are, the comadres work together to trap a chicken in the basket as well that they see along the way. The basket now very heavy, the carrier comadre puts her acting skills to work to trick a beggar named Tañumiendo into helping carry it to Madrina's house by crying and lying that the basket contains her mother's cadaver who just passed earlier en route to their town. "¡Ay, desgraciado el hijo que tiene que cargar el cadáver de su propia madre!" ("What an unfortunate child who must carry the cadáver of their own mother!") the jicotea says, lamenting further: "¡Ay de mí! ¡Quién me ayudará, para que a su hora le ayude Yewá!" (Poor me! Who will help me, so that when they need it Yewá will help them!" 243). The jicotea also claims that whoever helps her would be rewarded with a treasure she knows about in a ceiba tree, and would teach them the prayer to open the trunk of it. Tañumiendo overhears and agrees to help, because he believed Jicotea in all her pain was of good faith: "creyó de buena fe que Jicotea, a toda su dolor" (243). Their secret is eventually uncovered by Tañumiendo when one of the chicken's eggs hatches and makes him suspicious that there is not really a cadaver in the basket. By this time, however, they had already arrived to Madrina's house, where a whip flies out of her window and runs Tañumiendo off. The story then ends with the two jicoteas being affectionate with one another, and visiting with their Madrina, who "gives them her blessing" (247).

Though on the surface thus far this short story does not appear queer, feminist, and/or strong associations with Lydia Cabrera herself and her connection to jicoteas, it is useful to first consider the story for what it is: two astute queer water beings, comadres,



or close friends, on their way to consult with their Madrina. Though they do not have certain physical capabilities because of their small stature (“Con estas piernas cortas, el caparazón, y mi quebradura, ¡no adelanto, hijo!” says one jicotea)<sup>33</sup>, they managed to gather an offering or gift and also get someone to help carry it on their way. Furthermore, it is possible to read the act of one turtle stuffing the other in the basket as being placed back in the proverbial closet. That is, reflecting on Lacan’s theory of sublimation, and José Quiroga’s insistence to read between the lines for queerness in the works of Lydia Cabrera, however, it is possible to interpret this stuffing of one turtle into a basket as a repressed, hidden queer love; as Eve Sedgwick writes in *Epistemology of the Closet*, “The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (70). Furthermore, what is not being said is significant as well. In this and many stories by Cabrera, “there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (Foucault, qtd. in Sedgwick 3).

Additionally, in the moment of getting the beggar to help them, one jicotea calls out to “Yewá,” (“¡Quién me ayudará, para que a su hora le ayude Yewá!”)<sup>34</sup> which is also significant to the queerness involved in this story. In Santería, though Yewá is the orisha generally associated with death and cemeteries, she

insists that her priestesses abstain from sexual intercourse with men. This has led to the belief that Yewá is a patron of lesbian women. Certain

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<sup>33</sup> “With these short legs, the shell, and these breaks, I can’t get ahead, son!” (244).

<sup>34</sup> “Who will help me, so that Yewá can help them when it’s time!” (243).

accounts indicate that lesbian women have numbered among her spiritual daughters. (“Yewá,” 354)

The invocation of Yewá by the jicotea in the story seemingly appears as a connection to death and the mother’s cadaver, though it does not exist. What does exist is the close relationship of two jicoteas, who, against all odds journey together to see their spiritual mother, their Madrina. Perhaps the most telling piece of the story also comes at the end. Once the beggar is run off by the whip, “Las dos comadres se abrazaron y besaron, ya del todo reconciliadas, sin sombra de rencilla” (247). This close affection of the two female jicoteas, when taking into account the life of closeted lesbian Lydia Cabrera and her female partners who also faced much adversity as Latinas and lesbians in Cuba and the diaspora throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, brings forth a different lens with which to analyze jicoteas, both in her stories and her archive.

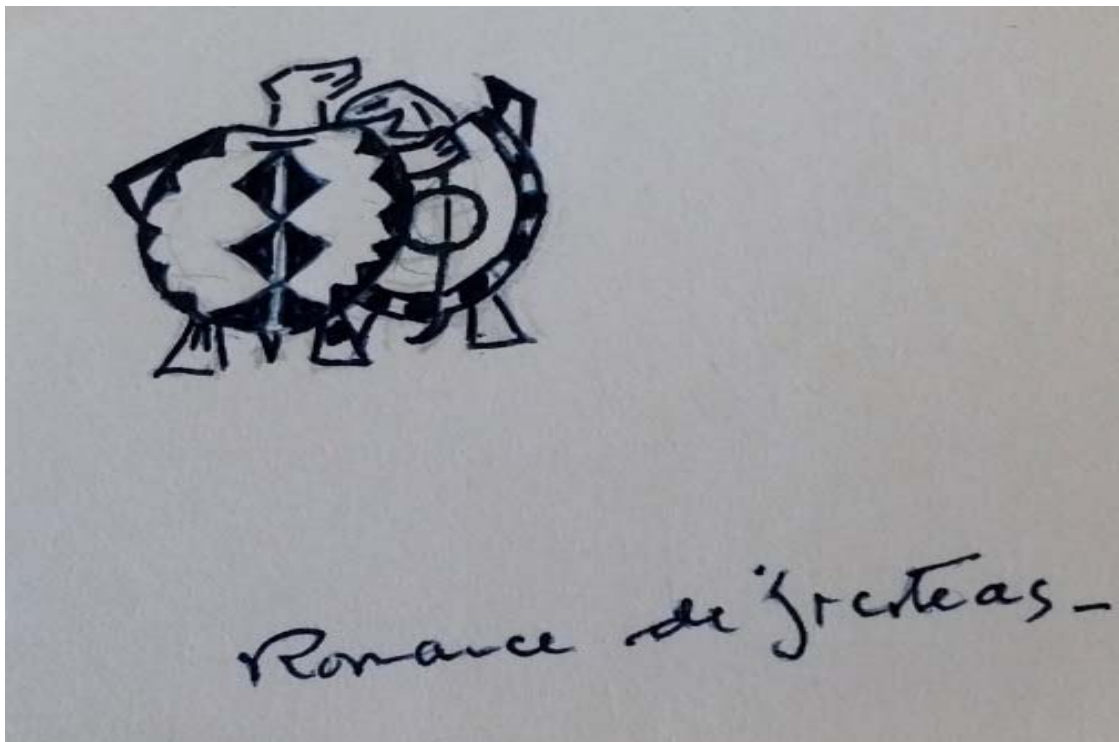


Fig. 15. “Illustrations by Lydia Cabrera”, Box 1, Rosario Hiriart Collection, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Though I previously demonstrated this association with jicotea with Cabrera in the archives, it is striking to take this story and pair it alongside a drawing she created titled “Romance de Jicoteas.” In the drawing, the protagonists leap from the page in *Ayapá* in an image that materializes and draws back to the aforementioned theory of sublimation as conceptualized by Jacques Lacan where the object in question (in this case, Jicotea) represents the significance and does “not avoid the Thing as signifier,” (xiv) while also enabling Cabrera to express the repressed, which is to say her queer sexuality, together through her short stories, unofficial performances, and iterations as found in the archive following Diana Taylor’s notions of archive and repertoire, profoundly projecting the queer potentialities of the jicotea who strives against all marginalization, which is also to say, Cabrera and her romantic female partners in her lifetime.

**“Cubierta con serpientes vengo yo”<sup>35</sup>: Gloria Anzaldúa, Snake Woman**

*Serpent: Animal frequently symbolic of eroticism, the feminine, masculine, fertility, metamorphosis (including of gender or sex) death, regeneration or rebirth, and infinity. The serpent is frequently identified with the RAINBOW.<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> *Borderlands*, 175.

<sup>36</sup> *Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*, 302.

The serpent and serpent imagery hold a myriad of meanings and interpretations across cultures in spirituality and religion; indeed, the serpent's symbolism is complex and varied among the mythologies of the world. Perhaps the most well-known story is that of Eve who was led by a serpent to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, though there exist a plethora of others. In Norse mythology, for example, it is a symbol of the sea, enveloping the earth; in Indian symbolic tradition, they are "guardians of the treasures of earth;" and in parts of Africa, they represent rain and water in general (Biedermann 311-312). However, there are commonalities across these many stories that anchor the serpent as an ambiguous creature, much like the jicotea and liken its shape to that of a river or stream (not unlike the African symbolism noted here) which I will discuss shortly in conversation with both *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark*; and recognize its ability to reside in the waters in general. Ultimately, the serpent is indeed one that is a recurring water animal in the works of Anzaldúa, particularly in *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark*. Anzaldúa herself writes of the serpent in *Borderlands* that

The eagle symbolizes the soul (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother). Together, they symbolize the struggle between the spiritual/celestial/male and the underworld/earth/feminine. The symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the "higher" masculine powers indicates that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order of pre-Columbian America. (27)

Though previous analysis of the serpent in Anzaldúa's texts draws on symbolism in terms of feminism and/or Anzaldúa's construction of the new mestiza as a Chicana<sup>37</sup>, I propose it is not necessarily as much a focus on the obvious presence of the serpent—after all, Anzaldúa dedicates a full chapter to the serpent in its various forms in *Borderlands*, drawing on Chicana indigenous mythologies, and her relationship to *la víbora* and its meaning for her—so much as fresh interpretations in light of queer identity and spirituality, and the overturn of patriarchal order through the reclamation of the serpent. Or, building on what Sheila Marie Contreras notes in *Blood Lines: Myth, Indigenism, and Chicana/o Literature*:

Anzaldúa's emphasis on these female figures rejects the phallicism of serpent imagery and the conventional treatments of the Aztec pantheon. She combines a number of goddess figures—Coatlicue, Cihuacoatl, and Tlazolteotl, for example—with characteristics drawn from male gods, such as Quetzacoatl/Feathered Serpent and Tezcatlipoca/Smoking Mirror . . . Virtually all expressions of indigenism contain spiritual elements in the form of recovered mythic narratives and reclaimed deities. Figures such as Quetzacoatl and Coatlicue make available spiritual and religious systems that came before and therefore disrupt the hegemony of European-Judeo-Christianity. (77-78)

The Atlantis Effect in relation to Anzaldúa and the serpent, then, is the association and emphasis of this powerful symbol that the self-proclaimed “Chicana dyke” embodied;

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<sup>37</sup> See Lioi, Anthony. "The Best-Loved Bones: Spirit and History in Anzaldúa's "Entering into the Serpent"." *Feminist Studies*: 34.1 (2008): 73.

ultimately, it assisted in a female agency that generated landmark concepts within her most-well known texts, which also echoes throughout her archive.

Just as the jicotea embraced by Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera in the face of marginalization as a woman and as a lesbian, the serpent is a symbol with religious and mythological associations who frequently appears in Anzaldúa's texts as well as her collection held at the University of Texas at Austin. It is also, again like the jicotea, a queer creature, androgynous, and therefore one that defies Western gender norms upon which lesbian Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa drew strength and power that together formed a female agency which allowed for a queer spiritual mestizaje. To this end, Theresa Delgadillo in *Spiritual Mestizaje* proposes that "Anzaldúa's new image of the divine, or her new mythos, is one capacious enough to include the impure, mestizo/a, queer women and men for whom there is no room in dominant religious traditions" (26), while Jungian psychology states that the serpent "represents powers from the depths of the psyches of others, powers as old, we might say, as this primordial reptile itself" (Bidermann 313). In light of mythological and psychological analysis, then, it only seems natural that Anzaldúa titles a section "Ella tiene su tono" within the chapter "Entering Into the Serpent," meaning "she has supernatural power from her animal soul, the tono" (*Borderlands*, 115). Furthermore, as a decolonial force, "Anzaldúa's subjection to and resistance of colonial religious paradigms happen in her body, psyche, and intellect . . . She initiates a decolonial project in the very action of engaging all aspects of her being in unmaking her subjection" (Delgadillo 10).

In terms of relating to queerness, it is the snake in its varied names and forms throughout this same chapter that drives Anzaldúa to another level of consciousness

where she introduces her concept of *la facultad*, or “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities... an instant ‘sensing’... an acute awareness,” which on the surface is not necessarily a queer concept, except when one considers that she then states that this consciousness is more strongly developed by those who do not feel safe and more prone to violent acts in the world, both psychologically and physically; in other words, “the females, the homosexuals of all races, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign” (*Borderlands*, 60). The form or shape of the serpent itself is also representative of this consciousness; Anzaldúa notes that women in stories religion and mythology were truly the first to take agency as “they took a bite of awareness” (*Light in the Dark*, 120). She writes

Xochiquetzal, a Mexican indigenous deity, ascends to the upper world to seek knowledge from “el árbol sagrado,” the tree of life, que florecía en Tamoanchan. In another Garden of Eden, Eve snatches the fruit (the treasure of forbidden knowledge) from the serpent’s mouth and “invents” consciousness—the sense of self in the act of knowing. Serpent Woman, known as Cihuacoatl, the goddess of origins, whom you think of as la Llorona and sketch as a half-coiled snake with the head of a woman, represents not the root of all evil but instinctual knowledge and other alternative ways of knowing that fuel transformation.

(*Light in the Dark*, 120-121)

Therefore, it is interesting to observe, then, the frequent journeys to bodies of water, like the river/serpent, that are common in Anzaldúa’s texts as well as her archive, an aquatic heteroglossia of sorts that serves as a vehicle for agency for a queer woman

and also as a site to journey within oneself and heal. Just as she opens the text with a call to Yemayá, ocean mother, in the beginning of *Borderlands*, it closes full circle with the river emptying into the ocean. In “*La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness*,” when Anzaldúa is in search of recuperation and a reshaping of her spiritual identity, she goes to the river, which effectively is also the serpent, and writes: “I stand at the river, watching the curving, twisting serpent, a serpent nailed to the fence where the mouth of the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf” (111). This could also be viewed as the serpent who many times coils and closes on itself, “both the eater and the eaten” as in pre-Columbian America (56) and even in Anzaldúa’s own drawings as observed in her archive:

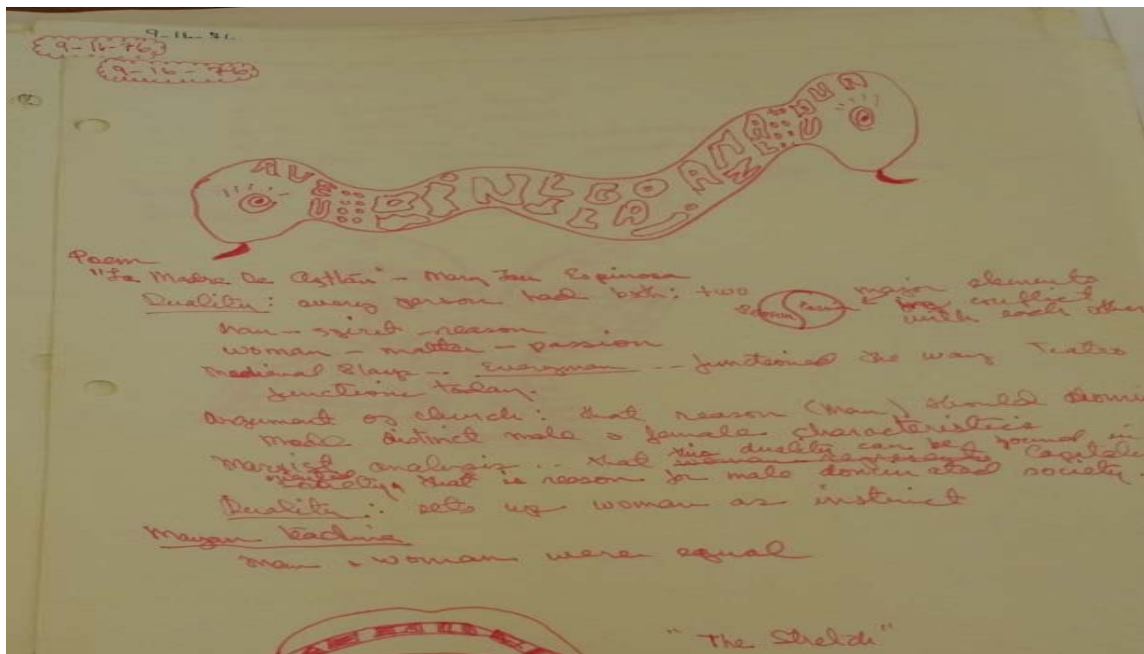


Fig. 16. “Notebook and Journal on La Mujer Xicana, 1976,” Box 104, Folder 2, Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, 1942-2004. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not



be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

The above image found in a journal where Anzaldúa was in the stages of planning a course titled “La Mujer Xicana” in 1976 shows a double-headed serpent, drawn in red ink, encapsulating her name, quite literally representative as an image of Anzaldúa’s beginning embodiment of the serpent; ten years later, she would write in *Borderlands*: “Forty years it’s taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul” (48).

The serpent as a metaphorical shape appears again in *Light in the Dark*, and just as it led to an introduction of one of Anzaldúa’s seminal concepts of La Facultad, this serpentine figure leads to other bodies of water which are representative of Nepantla, a concept stemming from the Nahuatl word signifying an in-between space, essentially a space where queerness is at home. Anzaldúa writes that

Nepantla is the place where at once we are detached (separated) and attached (connected) to each of our several cultures . . . Nepantla is the midway point between the conscious and the unconscious, the place where transformations are enacted. Nepantla is a place where we can accept contradiction and paradox.

Others who find themselves in this bewildering transitional space may be people caught in the midst of denying their projected/assumed heterosexual identity and coming out, presenting and voicing their queer, lesbian, gay, bi, or transgendered selves . . . All people in Nepantla—

Natives, immigrants, colored, white, queers...relate to the border and to the nepantla states in different ways. (*Light in the Dark*, 56)

It is fundamental to note, particularly in light of the Atlantis Effect, that this “lugar/no-lugar” is also connected to waters. It is metaphor for various water spaces, including el cenote, or Mayan well which Anzaldúa writes is “the archetypal inner stream of consciousness, dream pool or reservoir of unconscious images and feelings... a mental network of subterranean rivers of information that converge and well up to the surface,” also noting that the Maya dedicated their cenote to the god of rain (*Light in the Dark*, 98). Opposite to this aquatic imagery based on serpentine shape is an image Anzaldúa drew to bring these concepts into graphic form. In *Light in the Dark*, another coiled image, a remolino or vortex to represent this “traditional nepantla space” (17). Coiled images appear time and again throughout different places in her archive, not unlike Lydia Cabrera’s recopulatory acts depicting turtles in her own collection. Of these images, the drawings of Anzaldúa contain many coiled serpents—explicitly serpents, which take on different meaning than those that appear as rivers.

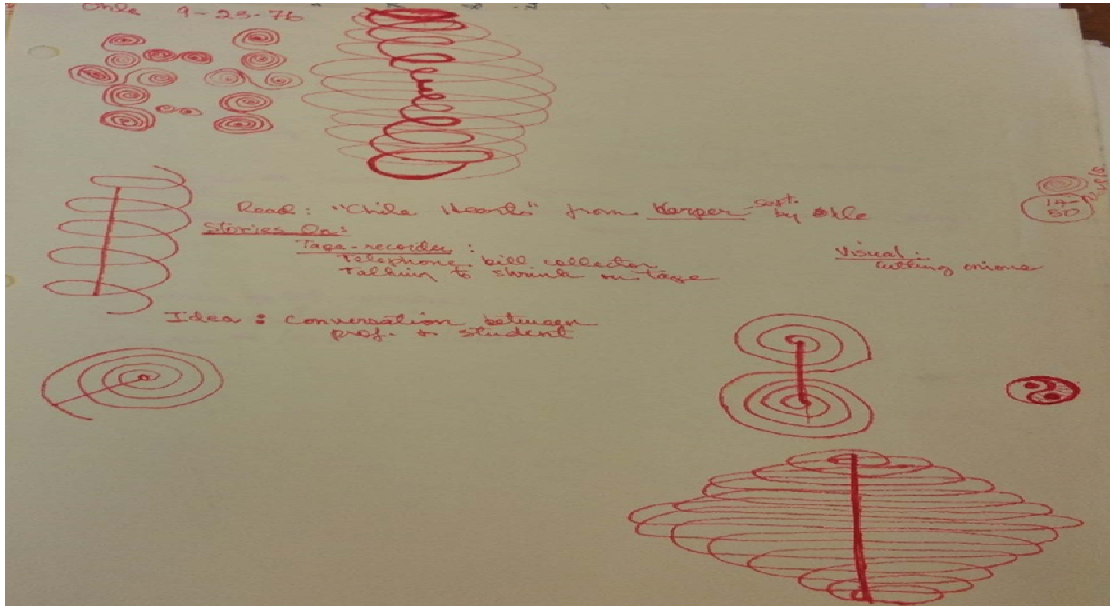


Fig. 17. “Notebook and Journal on La Mujer Xicana, 1976,” GEA Papers, Box 104, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Indeed, the coiled serpents of her archive are more explicitly representative of queerness, and her identity as a lesbian. Appearing much like the cenote that is depicted in *Light in the Dark*, images for Anzaldúa, and particularly the water-dwelling serpent are of utmost importance to her, sometimes even more so than the text. She writes of her own “doodles” and the coils—where she confirms them as representative of serpents—the following, as indicated in an early draft of the essay “Altars: On the Process of Feminist Image Making” in her archive:

I doodle a lot. I’ve always doodled. Especially when on the phone. The single most repetitive image is the spiral or shell, which is the same as the

coiled serpent. The image of continuancy, of cycle of time unfolding in space of a woman's vagina. In the Aztec codices, a woman's private parts [are] depicted by a shell where two women or two men are depicted with shells over their genitals that indicated homosexual behavior. (GEA Papers, Box 57, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin)

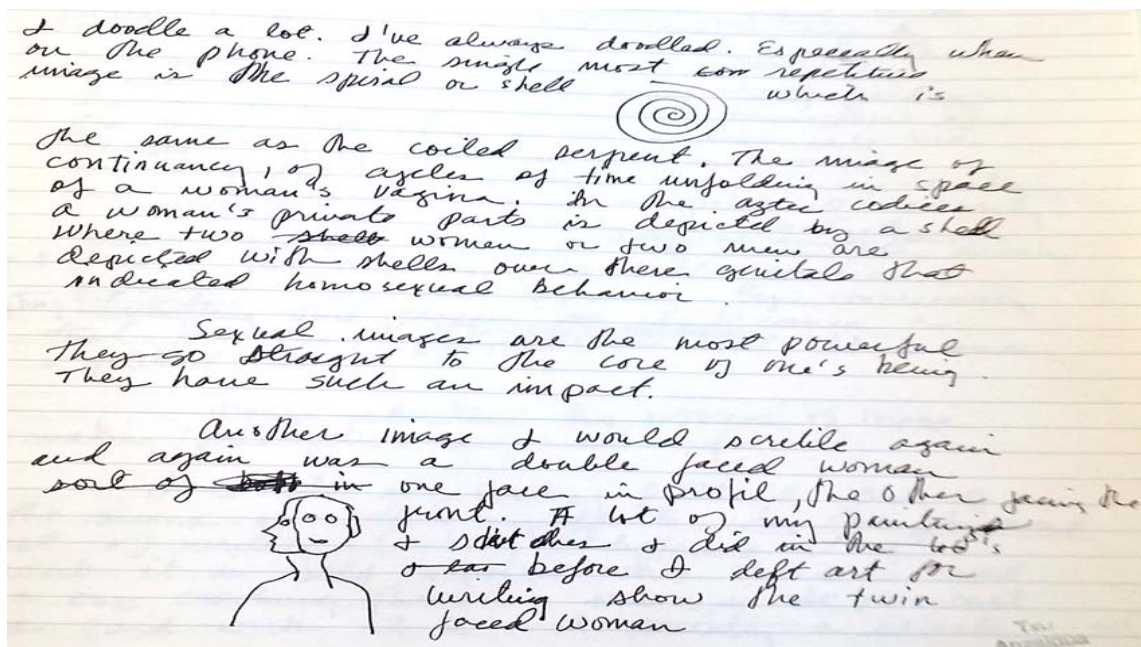


Fig. 18. "Altares: On the Process of Feminist Image Making," GEA Papers, Box 57, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

This early draft also helps to confirm a consciousness about these findings synthesized from published text and archives, inextricably tied to not only spirituality but feminism and sexuality as well. She writes:

The process of image making contributes to the growth of feminist consciousness by nature as this process is self-generated, not put on us by outside authority. Images emerge from the self—go to yourself for the answers. I make images to heal myself.<sup>38</sup>

Returning to the published texts, Anzaldúa turns to the serpent many times, seemingly for the same demonstrated reasons related up to this point; the snake, the creature she embodies, with form and habitat of water spaces, affords a place in which she can reside that ultimately creates female agency through alternative knowledges as “the snake of my imagination is female: Serpent Woman... possessing la facultad, the capacity for shape changing from and identity . . . Whether material or imaginal, este animal symbolically represents transformation for me” (*Light in the Dark*, 26). Finally, her writing, or her literal writing process, the serpent is even present as material object assisting in this transformation, knowledge, and agency, when she writes in *Borderlands* that “My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit and etherealize the body” (97). The words themselves furthermore create a “bridge of serpents”:

I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become. The word, the image and the feeling have a palpable energy, a kind of power.

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<sup>38</sup> GEA Papers, Box 23, Folder 3. University of Texas at Austin.

Con imágenes como mi miedo, cruzo los abismos que tengo por dentro.  
Con palabras me hago piedra, pájaro, puente de serpientes arrastrando a  
ras del suelo todo lo que soy, todo lo que algún día seré. (93)

From queer turtle to serpent, this chapter now turns to the feminist-queer notions of the ever-present mermaid in the texts and archive of tatiana de la tierra, the final water creature of significance to *The Atlantis Effect* in the lifeworks and collections of these three prominent lesbian US Latina and Chicana writers.

### **Suerte Sirena: tatiana de la tierra, the Mermaid Myth, and Feminist-Queer Consciousness**

*Mermaid: Beautiful hybrid woman-fish who customarily sits on a rock in  
the sea, combing her long, flowing hair and singing in the company of  
other mermaids  
... [a] symbol of women loving together in harmony and tranquility.*<sup>39</sup>

It is in this section that the presence of mermaids or sirens in the work and archive of tatiana de la tierra and the significance of this presence, as well as embodiment by tatiana herself—not unlike the serpent for Gloria Anzaldúa, or the turtle for Lydia Cabrera—will be explored. Like the serpent, mermaids or sirens have a long history in various cultures and mythological stories. As a water being, or water spirit, they represent the “feminine

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<sup>39</sup> Cassel's *Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*, 232.

half of the cosmos. For the analytical psychologist, water spirits—occasionally masculine, but usually feminine—personify specific material from the unconscious” and are in some stories described as seductive creatures who lure men to their deaths with their beauty and songs, or as “shy nymphs inhabiting springs” in medieval European and Greek mythology (Biedermann 375-376). However, feminist critic Emily Culpepper’s *Philosophia in a Feminist Key: Revolt of the Symbols: a Thesis* provides profound insight as to the association of mermaids with feminism and also with sexuality, one of the only studies of its kind that I wish to build on to emphasize the importance of mermaids and mermaid imagery in the works and archives of tatiana de la tierra. She writes that

Mermaids have recently begun to appear in feminist and especially in Lesbian-feminist art. Primarily, I see the Mermaid functioning as a gynomorphic symbol for the exploration of the Self by women. She personifies that aspect of our consciousness that is at home with the process of "diving deep and surfacing" . . . The ocean is a primary natural metaphor for interior consciousness. Mermaids symbolize female selves that explore and are at home in the ocean of consciousness. (380-383)

Mermaids were a frequent source of inspiration for de la tierra, and almost always in relation to herself and her sexuality. Whereas in Chapter 3 I will address her specific association with Ochún—also with a mermaid-like figure, but with a more specific spiritual history—here I will highlight the instances in her published work and her archive that are more general ideas of mermaids or sirens, but significant nonetheless, especially taking into account the rendering of mermaids as posited by Culpepper.

First, however, it is interesting to note that even those close to her viewed this embodiment as a mermaid for tatiana de la tierra. In “Dancing with the Mermaid of Yesteryear,” a piece of remembrance by Olga García Echeverría for her late friend tatiana de la tierra, she writes of her death as a metamorphosis into the being de la tierra always felt she was. The moving dedicatory reads that

*In May of 2012, the doctors diagnosed her with terminal cancer, but tatiana de la tierra, who believed in the power of metaphors, created an alternative reality for herself. The cancer cells blooming wildly inside her were not evidence of imminent death; they were proof of a metamorphosis. tatiana would not “pass away” into heaven or hell. Instead, she would shed flesh and blood and swim back to her divine beginnings, the Cosmic Ocean. During the final months of her life, tatiana of the earth renamed herself Suerte Sirena, blessing her journey with luck because who doesn’t need a little luck when leaving the human body and traveling into the depths of the Magical Unknown. It was in July that tatiana’s human body really began to wither, but on a spiritual plane, she grew glittery scales. When her lungs began to wheeze, she sprouted gills. When her legs clung together, waddling and then flapping instead of walking, those of us around her knew that her metamorphosis from earth-grounded woman to free-flowing mermaid was nearly complete. She swam out of her body on July 31st, 2012.<sup>40</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup> See <http://labloga.blogspot.com/2013/07/dancing-with-mermaid-of-yesteryear.html>



The piece, found on *La Bloga* as well as de la tierra's still-active website, is accompanied by an illustration which literally presents tatiana de la tierra as a mermaid, perched above a papaya, the fruit of lesbian sexual connotations that is also present in the title of her book *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from My Papaya*:



Fig. 19. Illustration presenting tatiana de la tierra as a mermaid. The inscription reads:  
“Suerte Sirena Diosa Papayona. Con amor, Ina y Rotmi.” (<http://delatierra.net/>).

This excerpt itself, however, demonstrates de la tierra's true embodiment as a mermaid, where she would return to the origin of it all--the ocean, where García Echevarría powerfully notes that she created this “alternative reality” for herself so as to escape her

current reality of being diagnosed with a terminal illness. I would suggest that this is not the first time she created this other reality for herself in order to enter the mythological world of the sea which allows for the possibility no longer being a marginalized woman, as a Latina, and as a lesbian, but a space of women to fully express themselves without fear or discrimination. This is in direct dialogue with what Culpepper notes as mermen are indeed an anomaly to this world and that the “basic symbol, far back into the mists and currents of oral tradition, is one of female Mermaids” (386). It is significant that García-Echevarría specifically notes that this is an alternative reality that Tatiana de la tierra created for herself so that she could cope with her diagnosis, as Culpepper denotes this other space, this female dominion, as a source of independence and liberation. She writes:

Because the Mermaid-realm is not invaded by men, it represents a place where there is female freedom and self-sufficiency. Living in water (usually the sea, but also rivers, lakes, streams) physically conveys the idea of a different world, a different one from the patriarchal land in which we find ourselves struggling for female freedom and self-sufficiency. There is also here an implicit suggestion of parthenogenesis, since this is completely a world of mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, cousins, and female friends. (386-387)

The embodiment on part of de la tierra as a mermaid did not only mark the end of her life, however; I would argue that this was a constant for her life, as evidenced from personal calendars to journals of unpublished materials. Although previous photographs

from the archive are images that are very much representative of de la tierra's strong connection with the waters, not unlike in the above quote—almost always among the sweet waters of lakes, waterfalls, and, streams—archival materials of text are also key.

Perse, mayer, latice, mabo & tiana 11 de abril de 2008 (tiana's  
 (tiana's  
 adnan's  
 size) garbanzo african stew, garlic bread, multiple rice,  
 eggplant parmese, sangria (mango, blueberry, orange),  
 cold stone... con regalitos de perse - libritos from thailand  
 Fish girl N<sup>a</sup> tierra libro regalitos for the tals  
 she saw herself in the ocean, not on the surface  
 but inside, that world being all hers,  
 the ocean floor, the dark coral reefs, streets of  
 sunlight filtering like an opalescent underwater  
 rainbow... all the colored and multiple-shaped  
 beings of the sea, that world they shared.  
 mermaids in children's stories and fairy tales  
 and scores of mythology schools -- but  
 mermaids in my bedroom, my music room, my  
 earrings, my words --- from where do they  
 come? Because I say I am earth yet in me  
 also is the fairy tale of woman and fish at once,  
 that muscular midsection that impulses me  
 forward, the extended & fancy root curled  
 and sequined, glistening in the moonlight,  
 the hardy plucky feminine babe singing and luring  
 and being all beautiful, the mermaid of  
 me from another time and place with me now  
 fish woman, take me to your tribe,  
 I wanna hang out

Fig. 20. "Fish Girl" as found in one of many personal journals tatiana de la tierra kept during her lifetime. box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

One such unpublished poem found in a personal notebook titled “Fish Girl” is very much representative of the feminist-queer analysis Culpepper offers of mermaids. Dated April 11, 2008, the handwritten poem reads as follows:

Fish Girl

she saw herself in the ocean, not on the surface  
but inside, that world being all hers,  
the ocean floor, the dark coral caves, streaks of  
sunlight filtering like an opalescent underwater  
rainbow... all the colored and multiple-shaped  
beings of the sea, that world they shared.  
mermaids in children’s stories and fairy tales  
and scores of mythology schools—but  
mermaids in my bedroom, in my music room, my  
earrings, my words... from where do they  
come? because I say I am earth yet in me  
also is the fairy tale of woman and fish at once,  
that muscular midsection that impulses me  
forward, the extended and fancy root curled  
and sequined glittering in the moonlight,  
the hardy flirty feminine babe singing and luring  
and being all beautiful, the mermaid of  
me from another time and place with me now.  
fish woman, take me to your tribe

I wanna hang out

de la tierra is the “fish girl” in search of another like her, and the water is a world that is “all hers;” this is her space, this is woman’s space. Furthermore, even more remarkable are the lines “streaks of/ sunlight filtering like an opalescent underwater/ rainbow...all the colored and multiple-shaped/ beings of the sea, that world they shared.” Underwater a rainbow, quite symbolically associated with the LGBTQ community appears to the “colored and multiple-shaped/ beings of the sea” in a “world they shared,” or rather, mermaids of all shapes and sizes, anyone who is perhaps “different” or relegated to the margins—a place where de la tierra finally feels she belongs as a Latina lesbian, as well as a space that offers the possibility of finding a “fish girl” of her own. Though this poem is not as direct in terms of a female lover she may find among the waters, and her relationships with other women, the following two pieces of text help to create a more complete picture.

In her life, tatiana de la tierra also published several lesser-known chapbooks, which only survive in her archive for consultation, such as *Pajarito: Regáleme una canción* that includes the poem “Advertencia Solar.” It is a piece that reads as a love poem for a “water lover.” The first words of the poem read “te quiero dar el mar,” (I want to give you the sea”), and the mermaid/water theme in relation to her lover continues throughout, describing her body, as well as her desire for her lover’s body along with

promesas de sirenas saltando  
en tus aguas

en tu sol

en tus aguas

en tu calor

ojo que tu sol me enrojece las tetas (l. 18-23, 14-15)

*Ese sol indiscreto que te puso esos pechos*

*rosados, no te perdono por haberlos tenido*

*tanto tiempo guardados*

promises of leaping mermaids

in your waters

in your sun

in your waters

in your heat

watch, your sun reddened my tits

*This indiscreet sun that gave you those rosy*

*breasts, I don't forgive you for having them*

*hidden for so long*

Regarding sexuality and its association with mermaids, Culpepper notes that

given the sensual and often explicitly sexual nature of a Mermaid's

appearance and behavior, this symbol becomes one connoting women

sensually together. Thus, Mermaids carry implicit nuances of Lesbian eroticism. It is not surprising then, that Lesbian Feminists are especially interested in collecting and developing Mermaid lore. (405)

However, in other works by tatiana de la tierra, the significance of mermaids shifts though the strong presence remains. Mermaids and specifically lesbian mermaids also make an appearance in the rare lesbian Latina zines of which she was founder and editor. The purpose of these zines was to establish a network of Latina lesbians in the United States as nothing at that time had been published to showcase their experiences, which is important, de la tierra would later note, because “To not see yourself in print is the equivalent of not existing,” further writing of her zines that

I consider *esto no tiene nombre* and *conmoción* as examples of activist and survival publishing. These magazines were tools that we used to establish a dialogue within our community. They palpated the poetry and politics of the moment. And unfortunately, there is no contemporary equivalent to these publications. (“Latina Lesbian Literary Herstory”).

Therefore, the seemingly constant presentation of water and water beings among zines that shamelessly depict Latina lesbian lives in a myriad of graphic form—“unofficial enactments” as Diana Taylor would indicate—specifically related to mermaids, suddenly becomes more significant in light of the original intentions of these revolutionary zines. Perhaps the most striking is an image of a ceramic piece by artist

Dina Burstzyn entitled “Totem Pole to Scare Lesbophobia” that de la tierra as editor included in the second issue of the zine *conmoción* as observed in her archival collection.

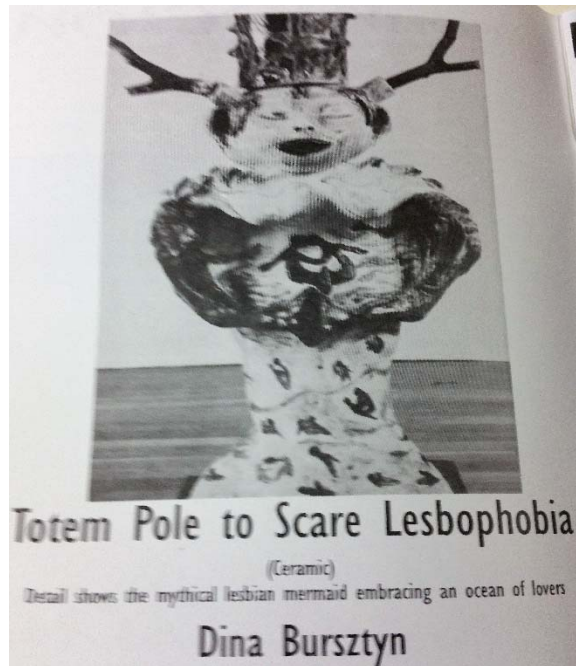


Fig. 21. “Totem Pole to Scare Lesbophobia,” from *conmoción* #3, p. 2. (box 6, folder 3, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

On its opening page, below the image it reads: “detail shows the mythical lesbian mermaid embracing an ocean of lovers,<sup>41</sup>” further recalling Culpepper’s positing on mermaids and lesbian expression.

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<sup>41</sup> *conmoción* #2, p. 5, Box 6, Folder 3. tatiana de la tierra Papers, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.



However, though known for her more sensual and sexually explicit works as discussed throughout this study, de la tierra also wrote a children's book *titled Xía y las mil sirenas* (2009), also of great importance for feminist and LGBTQ studies as related to the mythological creatures known as mermaids. This illustrated children's book was written as part of the book series "Todas las familias son sagradas" (All Families Are Sacred), published by Patlatonalli (Asociación Civil de Lesbianas Mexicanas/Civil Association of Mexican Lesbians) (*Xía*, iv). In the story, the main protagonist Xía is born by the seashore:

Xía nació a la orilla de la mar,  
sin mamá y sin papá,  
sin saber si algún día iba a tener  
su propia familia...  
Xía was born by the seashore,  
without a mother or a father,  
without knowing if one day she would have  
her own family... (1)

An orphaned girl<sup>42</sup> who does not know her parents, she is taken by a woman across the sea to meet her new family: two mothers, a little brother, a pony, and a dog. On her way to meet her new family, representative of the "non-traditional" home of having two same-sex parents, she dreams that she is accompanied by thousands of

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<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to note that the name Xía is generally regarded to be of Greek origin, and meaning "guest" or "stranger" (<http://www.thinkbabynames.com/meaning/0/Xia>). In the story, though she begins as one who does not belong, she ultimately finds love, safety, and happiness with her new family of two mothers.

mermaids who ultimately bring her to her new home, a place where she feels loved and safe. The mermaids welcome her and invite her in:

Las sirenas la saludaron.

-¡Hola Xía!

-¡Qué tal!

-¡Te saludamos desde la mar

-¡Te invitamos a nadar

-¡Y a cantar

-¡Y a saltar

-¡Y a sirenear!

The mermaids welcomed her

Hello Xía!

How are you!

We welcome you from the sea!

We invite you to swim!

And to sing!

And to jump!

And to be a mermaid with us! (3)

The mermaids then sing to Xía, inviting her to come and play with them, that they are “sirenas de alegría” (mermaids of happiness) (4). The storyline is significant for the feminist and queer aspects it offers when also reflecting on the life of tatiana de la tierra. Indeed, Culpepper also notes that

For many women, the Lesbian dimensions of Mermaids are readily apparent. For others this aspect may function on a more subconscious level. Many women who now identify as Lesbians and who were familiar with Mermaid fairytales as girls, feel that their early fascination with Mermaids (reading about them, pretending to be Mermaids when swimming, etc.) was an unrecognized expression of Lesbian and/or female-identified energy. (405)

This fascination with mermaids continues for Xía as well. In the story, once Xía is with her new family, she asks her mothers to take her to the sea the next day so that she may again see the mermaids. While she sleeps that evening, her new pony appears in her dreams and she asks the pony to take her to the sea:

Se fueron volando con el viento,  
atravesaron cosmos y continentes  
hasta que Xía sintió sal marina en su aliento.  
They went flying with the wind,  
crossed cosmos and continents  
until Xía smelled the saltwater of the sea. (15)



Fig. 22. Illustration from the book *Xía y las mil sirenas* of Xía and her guiding mermaids.

However, once she finally arrives, she doesn't see or hear any mermaids and begins to cry. From each tear comes a mermaid:

Pero nada pasó.

Xía cayó sobre la arena.

Lloró y lloró.

Y de cada lágrima

le salió una sirenita. (17)

But nothing happened.  
Xía fell on the sand.  
She cried and cried.  
And from every tear  
Appeared a little mermaid.

In the end, the mermaids were all within her, the pony tells her: “las sirenas, con sus colas, y sus melenas, con sus encantos, están todas dentro de ti” (“the mermaids, with their tails, and their songs, and their charms, are all inside of you,” 19). Therefore, Culpepper’s proposal speaks more to the author than the protagonist, although, as in de la tierra’s other fictional tales, all reveal aspects of her life within the pages, as a lesbian Latina who moved from Colombia to the United States at an early age, always fascinated herself with mermaids, to the point of embodying them herself just as Xía does in this story. The proposal also falls in line with many early renderings of mermaid imagery in the archive of Tatiana de la Tierra, including a plethora of astrological calendars and journals she kept which resonated with such themes with lesbian-erotic writings as related in the first chapter of this study:



Fig. 23. Box 60 of the tatiana de la tierra collection held at the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California-Los Angeles holds these materials in abundance. The above image is one of dozens found in this specific box from a journal titled *Goddesses and Amazons*. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

From mermaids, to serpents, to turtles, these aquatic-queer beings as presented in this chapter have a strong presence in both the published works and archives of de la tierra, Anzaldúa, and Cabrera. As water dwellers and “rescued” figures as part of the Atlantis Effect, I have argued that these beings, both in text and image, resonate as sublimations; they serve as culturally acceptable mediums for transmission of highly intersectional and complex identities of these authors, and at the same time exemplify Taylor’s concept of repertoire through unofficial performances and iterations, as Latinas, as women, and as lesbians. With this in mind, the Atlantis Effect now transitions to center on two of the most prolific mermaid-like creatures with specific ties to Lydia Cabrera, Gloria

Anzaldúa, and tatiana de la tierra: the ever-present, ubiquitous transnational figures of Yemayá and Ochún.

### CHAPTER 3: MUJERES AL AGUA: WHERE YEMAYÁ MEETS OCHÚN

The only diabolical thing about women is their lack of a God and the fact that, deprived of a God, they are forced to comply with models that do not match them, that exile, double, mask them, cut them off from themselves and from one another, stripping away their ability to move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfillment.

—Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*

Whereas in Chapter 1 there was more of a broad emphasis on spaces of water, progressing to water creatures and their symbiology in Chapter 2, this study will close with the specific water goddesses Yemayá and Ochún, who up until now were only briefly mentioned and analyze their significance in the works and archives of Anzaldúa, Cabrera, and de la tierra.

In the landmark anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) edited by Chicana lesbian scholars, writers, and professors Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, Anzaldúa clearly identifies herself in the biographical notes as a daughter of Yemayá: “Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa. I’m a Tejana Chicana



poet, hija de Amalia, Hecate, y Yemaya. [...] In my spare time I teach, read the Tarot, and doodle in my journal” (246).

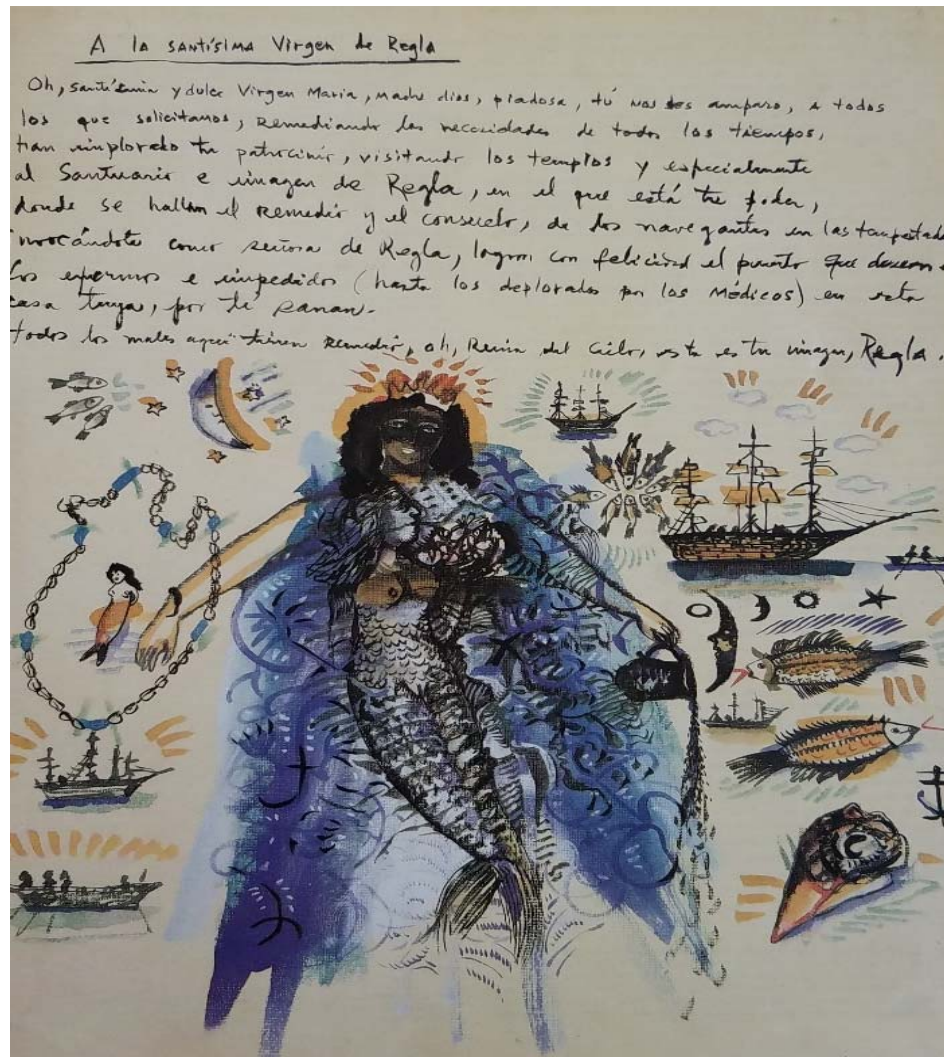


Fig. 24. One rendering of Yemayá by Cuban artist Zaída del Río. Image taken in Sala de Fondos Raros y Valiosos with permission from the Biblioteca Gener y Monte, Matanzas, Cuba, October 2016.

Yemayá is the Afro-Cuban deity associated with oceans, as one of many renderings by Cuban artist Zaída del Río illustrates above, though a transnational figure as well, which opens the discussion and analysis of Anzaldúa's strong spiritual-queer and healing connections with bodies of water, particularly the seas. As Nahayeilli Juárez writes in *El don de la ubicuidad : rituales étnicos multisituados* (2012), Yemayá represents many things, in many places, but has basic commonalities across the board. It is an ethnographic text celebrates Yemayá's manifestations in several places, including the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. To this end, Juárez opens the section dedicated to Yemayá titled "Yemoja/Yemaya/Iemanjá: Rutas Transnacionales y Avatares Relocalizados" with the following passage, to help fully encapsulate this ubiquitous figure from the beginning:

Yemayá de azul y plata, deidad de dos aguas, símbolo de la maternidad.  
Iemanjá: La sirena; Yemayá: La Virgen de Regla; Iemanjá: Nuestra Señora de los Navegantes y de los pescadores; Yemayá: La joven Muerte encarnada; Yemanjá: Reina del mar; Yemonjá símbolo de resistencia identitaria; Yémojá: la africana madre de los peces. (181)

Yemayá of blue and silver, deity of two waters, symbol of maternity.  
Iemanjá: The siren; Yemayá: The Virgin of Regla; Iemanjá: Our Lady of Navigators and of fishermen; Yemayá: The young death incarnated;  
Yemanjá: Queen of the Sea; Yemonjá, symbol of identity resistance;  
Yémojá: the African mother of the fish.

Though she carries many names throughout several Afro-Caribbean syncretic religions, the spelling Yemayá will be maintained here as it was the most common spelling for the authors at hand. Now, whereas the first chapter was concerned with the significance of principally bodies of water, this section of the study will focus on specifically how and why Anzaldúa evokes Yemayá specifically and in light of the proposed Atlantis Effect theory. For the purpose of synthesis, Anzaldúa's groundbreaking *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1986) will be set as a bookend against the recently released *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (2015).

Before turning to the archive, however, it is useful to first look at specific instances in her published work where there are direct references to Yemayá as well as several indirect references to the ocean deity, all very much a projection of the queer/feminist/spiritual self and a site for writing and healing for the preeminent Chicana scholar. In the opening chapter of *Light in the Dark*, "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound," she writes<sup>43</sup>: "Down on the beach, drummers serenade to Yemayá, ocean mother. I'd like to think they're beating the drums of peace, calling our souls back into our bodies. We are the song that sings us" (22). Then, in the very first pages of *Borderlands/La Frontera* she also appears, but in a way that encapsulates a more feminist spirituality:

But the skin of the earth is seamless

The sea cannot be fenced,

*el mar* does not stop at borders.

To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance,

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<sup>43</sup> Similar passages appear in the collections *One Wound for Another* (103) and *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (314).

Yemayá blew that wire fence down. (25)

To this end and in reference to this specific passage, Micaela Díaz-Sánchez notes in “‘Yemayá Blew That Wire Fence Down’: Invoking African Spiritualities in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and the Mural Art of Juana Alicia” that in relation to Anzaldúa’s invocation of African-inspired religions that Yemayá is both “revered and feared for her power,”<sup>44</sup> as shown in an incantation recorded in Ketu, Senegal in the fifties, where Yemayá

. . . smashed down a bridge made of metal, a male deity of war and iron. This specific conflict comes to represent a binary opposition between the female reign of the waters and the male institution of metal. . . In the Anzaldúa passage, the female power that surges from beneath the water’s surface cannot be contained by the wire fence, a boundary violently imposed by colonialist and patriarchal forces. (172)

In addition, there are many more of these indirect references to Yemayá, very much part of the Atlantis Effect and its patriarchal counterdiscourse concerning feminist-queer spirituality, especially when writing or speaking about the ocean, with the presence of this powerful embodiment coming in waves; one could almost imagine her coming and going as the ebb and flow of the ocean, metaphorical representations of the fluidity of gender, sexuality, and borders. I would attribute this to something that she expressed about her spiritual reality in an interview included in *Borderlands*:

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<sup>44</sup> “Yemoja, the wind that whirls with the force into the land. Yemoja, angered water that smashes down the metal bridge” (172, recorded by Pierre Verger)

... what I want to do is to leave all that as an awareness or consciousness. Because what happens if you give these forces a human figure and a name is you start limiting them and their power... They are all cultural figures, and what's important is their consciousness and the things they are aware of. (241)

Besides evidencing why Anzaldúa never went through Santería initiatory rites to become an Iya L'Orisha, or priestess of Santería, this also shows why, as in *Borderlands* as in other works and interviews, it is much more common to read lines such as "*Oigo el llorido del mar, el respire del aire/ my heart surges to the beat of the sea*" (*Borderlands* 24) or "I stand at the river, watching the curving, twisting serpent, a serpent nailed to the fence where the mouth of the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf," (111) a more general spiritual location, without a name, but one that would indicate where the sweet and salty waters meet: the crossing of Yemayá and her younger river sister, Ochún. The healing aspects of these waters for Anzaldúa become more apparent, however, in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*. In a section titled "Ritual...Prayer...Blessing...For Transformation" she writes:

Every day you visit the sea, walk along Yemayá's glistening shores. You want her to know you, to sense your presence as you sense hers. You know deep down she's not independent of humans, not indifferent, not set apart. At the lips del mar you begin your ritual/prayer... voice your intention: to increase awareness of Spirit, recognize our interrelatedness, and work for transformation. (156)

This healing that the water brings for Anzaldúa is also a process of coming to terms with not only identity but the writing process itself. Continuing through *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, in “Geographies of Selves,” she writes that “Struggling with a ‘story’ (a concept or theory), embracing personal and social identity, is a bodily activity” and because she sees herself, her body, connected to everything around her, including “sea, wind, trees” (66) and later, that “de la orilla del mar you mill over el cuento de tu proceso” (“from the seashore you mill over the story of your process,” 95). These connections of energy she has with all nature around her, especially the sea as Yemayá, is incredibly important for new knowledges and insights, and greater understanding of her existence in the world. In this particular section, she once again visits the ocean and “listens to the sea breathing us in and out with its wet sucking sounds” (67). This is also true not just for her many times stream of consciousness prose, but her poetry as well. However, there is a shift from writing process and identity to queerness in the Chicana community. One such poem exemplary of these general references to the ocean, which also encapsulates this queerness, can be found in *Borderlands*. “Compañera, cuando amábamos” feels familiar after reading some of the writings and personal journals of Tatiana de la tierra in previous sections. In the poem, Anzaldúa writes of a queer love that she wonders will ever return to its previous state:

*¿Te acuerdas cuando te decía tocáme!*

*Cuando ilesa carne buscaba carne y dientes labios*

*En los laberintos de tus bocas?*

*Esas tardes, islas no descubiertas*

*Cuando caminabamos hasta la orilla*

[...]

*Dos pescadoras nadando en los mares*

*Buscando esa perla.*

*¿No te acuerdas cuando nos amábamos, compañera?*

*¿Volverán esas tardes cuando vacilábamos*

*Pasos largos, manos entrelazadas en la playa?*

[...]

*Esas tardes tiñadas de mojo*

*Cuando nos entregábamos a las olas<sup>45</sup>. . .*

*(Borderlands, 168-169)*

Once again, Yemayá's ocean and all associated with it becomes a site for lesbian love, much like in the *tatiana de la tierra* writings and papers to be explored. Just as Anzaldúa walks along the shore, listening to the ocean, searching for new knowledges as she connects to Yemayá's energy around her, she recalls visiting the beach with her lover, "dos pescadoras nadando en los mares/ Buscando esa perla," and fully being able to develop a loving lesbian relationship in and around the space of water as related to Yemayá who allows for a fluidity that patriarchal, heteronormative structures do not. Such is also the case, quite visually, in Anzaldúa's archive.

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<sup>45</sup> Italics have been maintained from the original text.

## Archival Aesthetics and the Anzaldúa Papers

Following the research experience at the Lydia Cabrera Papers at the Cuban Heritage Collection, the research conducted on consequent visits to the Gloria Anzaldúa Papers was greatly affected in terms of methodology and exactly what was being analyzed. That is, just as Cabrera often sketched and scribbled on everything from correspondence to notes to personal journals, as well as kept photos, other drawings and articles that specifically referenced the powerful female deities of Santería, it can be observed that Anzaldúa did something quite similar and for possibly some of the same reasons, something perhaps not quite as surprising when one considers that both Anzaldúa and Cabrera came from artistic backgrounds before turning ultimately to writing. Before dedicating her life to studying Afro-Cuban religious traditions, Cabrera studied art in Paris, one of the many theories as to why Cabrera became interested in Afro-Cuban religious tradition as will be explored shortly. Anzaldúa, on the other hand, also studied art; within her extensive collection at the Benson Latin American Collection held at the University of Texas at Austin many boxes and folders contain sketchbooks from art classes she took or drawings she created during her lifetime. Although not all that she drew contained spiritual figures as in the Cabrera collection, the importance of art in general for Anzaldúa was always spiritual, as noted in the epigraph that begins this chapter, as well as how it is presented in the chapter “*Tlilli, Tlapalli* / The Path of the Red and Black Ink” in *Borderlands* as explored in the previous chapter in terms of gender and sexuality with the repetitive coils that at once represented serpent imagery and also had homoerotic meanings. As for the significance of images in general, something also applicable to what I propose in regards to Cabrera, she writes:



An image is a direct bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness. (91)

Although Anzaldúa, unlike Cabrera who remained closeted for her entire life, lived a great portion of her life as openly gay, after reflecting upon her words as well as Lacan's theory of sublimation it came into question that perhaps systematic repression in terms of sexuality, in addition to the complications of race, class, and gender, could come in the same forms of this spiritual archival aesthetic I had witnessed in the Cabrera collection. This being so, research then went beyond folders that explicitly were identified as belonging to a spiritual collection and dug deeper into more generally labeled personal journals as well as more closely examining any other papers, letters, recipe cards, photographs, and more, to see if this spiritual aesthetic existed and if it did, what were the implications for the collection, for her texts, for her life?

Part of my visual witnessing of the archive inextricably tied Anzaldúa with the great deity of the sea, Yemayá; principally, the files of Anzaldúa's personal photos that show her in many instances in front of or gazing at the ocean. These images, when considered more profoundly, and in light of her spiritual life, are possible further substantiations of her connection with the ocean, which is to say, the ocean deity Yemayá. One file in particular, "Gloria on beach with writing group incl. Virginia Harris, 1991," contains several images of her as well as other Hispanic and African-American women gathered at the shore of an unidentified beach writing (GEA Papers,

Box 148, Folder 7, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin). In another file, we have her again posing in front of the sea:



Fig. 24. Gloria Anzaldúa posing in front of the ocean. (“Villa Montalvo Residency,” GEA Papers, Box 148, Folder 16. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin). ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

These are only two of several images in the archives that show Gloria on, in, or in front of the sea. And again, when taking her spiritual life, as well as the previously related “ocean passages” and poems from *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, into consideration along with these images, they transform into something more powerful than just an image of a writer by the ocean—they are further pieces of evidence of a spirituality closely connected to the ocean deity of Yemayá. Furthermore, AnaLouise

Keating also evidences this connection briefly in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, where she presents a poem from her archive, previously unpublished, titled simply “Yemayá.”

Keating writes:

Throughout much of her adult life, Anzaldúa felt particularly close to Yemayá, the Yoruban orisa (goddess) associated with the oceans and other waters. Anzaldúa’s house in Santa Cruz was located about one block from the Pacific Ocean. Almost every day Anzaldúa took a long walk along the ocean, on West Cliff Drive. This previously unpublished poem, last revised in January 2001, reflects Anzaldúa’s intimate relationship with the ocean Yemayá. (242)

This passage provides further insight regarding Anzaldúa’s connection to the great ocean deity, revealing that she geographically placed her living space near these waters, presumably to help maintain this close relationship with Yemayá.<sup>46</sup> To pay daily tribute to her, not only did she take walks along the ocean, she kept documentation of these rites as well, as evidenced by the walking meditation journals found in her archive,

Shifting back to this aspect of identification with Yemayá and archival aesthetics, then, I found one such journal, a small notebook aptly titled “Walking Meditation Journal” from 1994 in her archive held at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. Among these pages, a *sirena*, or a mermaid that can be likened to Yemayá appears, drawn by Anzaldúa. The writing is in blue on white paper;

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<sup>46</sup> Both Lydia Cabrera and Tatiana de la Tierra placed themselves near the water as well, for most of their lives, if not their entire lives. Furthermore, all writers lived near the ocean at the end of their lives (if not throughout their life, like Lydia Cabrera), in California and Florida, respectively.

aesthetically, this is also significant as each deity in Afro-Caribbean religion is associated with specific colors, and Yemayá's are indeed blue and white. Beside it, she writes:

“Walking along the cliff, I see the siren carved in the rock, not to lure to dangerous waters but to the right path, and stand on top of the cliff, stare down at rolling waves.”

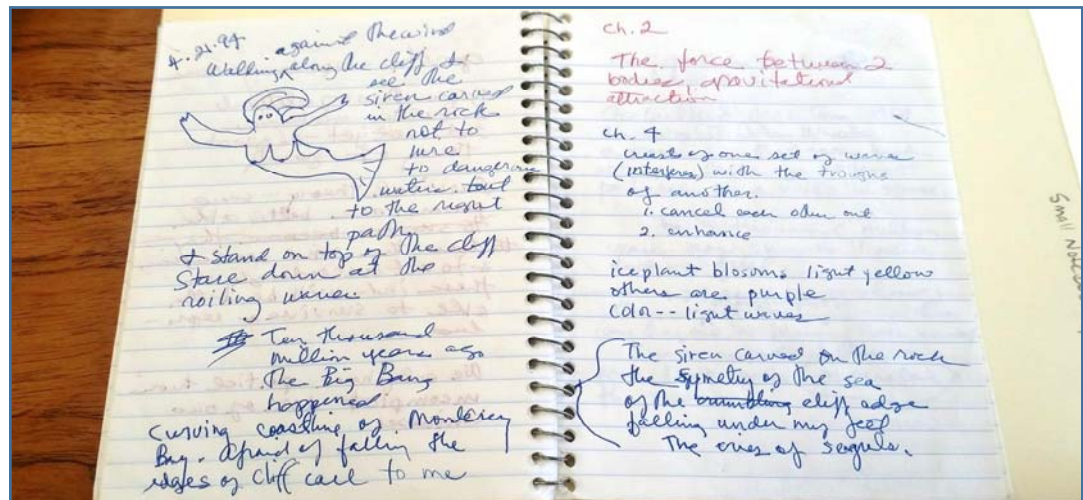


Fig. 25 “Altares: On the Process of Feminist Image Making,” GEA Papers, Box 57, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

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It seems to be no coincidence, then, that Anzaldúa seemingly greatly identified with the goddesses considered the most powerful in their respective religious traditions, and this appears not only written in her published works, but is expressed in a clear, purposeful, aesthetic manner as observed within her archive. And as previously mentioned, the ocean in Anzaldúa's writing many times metaphorically represents a consciousness or spiritual

awakening for her; therefore, to live near the sea, walk along it, as well as document it in word and image is not only exemplary of the Atlantis Effect but of Diana Taylor's concept repertoire and the archive, further gestures from "unofficial enactments" that can account for this oscillation between it and the official or the published texts.

To this end, In a personal interview with Luisah Teish, a well-known Santería priestess and writer based in California who Anzaldúa first consulted when beginning to learn about this syncretic religious practice, these speculations are further confirmed<sup>47</sup>. When asked about Anzaldúa's connection to Santería and the proposal of her strong connection with Yemayá, Teish responded that

Indeed Gloria was devoted to Yemayá and made regular journeys to the ocean for offerings, prayers, and guidance. She consistently made connections between African and Indian-based spiritual practices and addressed both with the utmost respect and reverence.

She did not go through the initiation to become an Iya L'Orisha but it was not in her path to do so. It was Gloria that made me realize that Our Lady of Tonantzin and consequently La Guadalupe holds a place of honor on my shrines also.

Gloria did what she came to Earth to do. She is received proudly into the Land of the Ancestors. (Teish)

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<sup>47</sup> Teish is most well-known for her book *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals* (1988), and is referenced and/or included as an interview in both *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). By all accounts, it was Teish who first relayed to Anzaldúa that the orisha most connected to her was Yemayá.

Although the possible interpretations of this strong connection with the ocean deity are limitless, Teish's confirmation of Anzaldúa's devotion to Yemayá, along with other archival "puzzle pieces," assist in the construction of a more complete picture of her spiritual consciousness. This archival mining is not only helpful but I believe it is necessary to read her texts with a new lens, or the Atlantis Effect, as provided by Teish and others closely involved in her spiritual life that informed her work in great part and that I have further analyzed here with both *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* as testaments to spirituality, sexuality, and healing for Gloria Anzaldúa. This discussion shifts now to female-centered spirituality and waters in the works of Lydia Cabrera.

Now, there are several theories as to how Lydia Cabrera came to study Afro-Cuban religious traditions, and why she was drawn to them. First, there was the influence of the stories that her African nannies would tell her as she was growing up; then again, there was also the fact that her European studies, which led her to Paris surrounded by artistic greats such as Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Wifredo Lam (1902-1982) left their mark on Cabrera, as they both also were very much influenced and inspired by African traditions, which is evidenced in their most famous paintings (Vázquez-Vélez 15-16; Rodríguez Magal 8-11). Lastly, it is difficult to not acknowledge the fact that her brother-in-law Fernando Ortiz was one of the most important ethnographers of his time the first to ethnographically document Afro-Cuban religious practices, as referenced in the previous chapter, and who undoubtedly influenced his sister-in-law in this regard also. According to Ortiz himself in the prologue to Cabrera's first published collection of short stories

*Cuentos negros de Cuba* (1931), it was indeed because of his influence that Cabrera dedicated herself to Afro-Cuban studies. Ortiz writes:

Este libro es el primero de una mujer habanera, a quien hace años iniciamos en el gusto del folklore afrocubano. Lydia Cabrera fue penetrando el bosque de las leyendas negras de La Habana por simple curiosidad y luego por deleite; al fin fue transcribiéndolas y coleccionándolas. Hoy tiene multitud de ellas. (xiii)

This is the first book written by a Havana-born woman. She began studying Afro-Cuban folklore with me years ago. Simple curiosity first led Lydia Cabrera to delve into the forests of Havana's black legends, and she found them truly delightful. She began transcribing and collecting these stories, and has gathered a large number.

However, Cabrera contradicted him years later in an interview conducted by Rosario Hiriart, one of few scholars who have dedicated themselves to the study of her life and lifework. She clearly states in this interview that it was her time in Paris that led to her interest in Africa (*Lydia Cabrera: Vida hecha arte* 73-74). My personal research in the archives of Afro-Cuban Folklore Society (Sociedad del Folklore Cubano), founded by Ortiz and now held in the Sala de Etnología y Folclore Fernando Ortiz at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, however, is more in line with Ortiz's declaration. Her father, Raimundo Cabrera, was named as an honorary president of the society, and archives show that the minutes from the meeting place him, Ortiz, and Lydia Cabrera present at the first

meeting of the Afro-Cuban Folklore Society on January 6, 1923 (*Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, Vol. 1, Num. 1., Sala de Etnología y Folclore Fernando Ortíz, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba). At this time, Lydia Cabrera would have been in her early 20s, and less than ten years later she publish her first book regarding Afro-Cuban folklore—the previously mentioned *Cuentos negros de Cuba*.

However, the theory that Cuban scholar Sylvia Molloy presents in “Disappearing Acts: Reading Lesbian in Teresa de la Parra” is duly profound in light of this study centered on Afro-Cuban culture, gender, and sexuality, and in this section in particular which zeroes in on the ocean deity Yemayá, who, as previously mentioned is considered to be a protector of the gay community and counts among her spiritual children many gay and lesbian sons and daughters. To this end, Molloy proposes “the personal experience of Cabrera because of her double marginalization as a woman and as a lesbian brought her to Afro-Cuban folklore and culture, another group that has been marginalized and silenced by the hegemonic patriarchy” (251). Furthermore,, María Vázquez-Vélez in “Sexualidad y raza en la escritura femenina de Lydia Cabrera,” a study that focuses on the maternal and feminine aspects of the ethnographer’s works, indicates that Cabrera was looking for a mother after the death of her life companion Teresa de la Parra, who for her was like “a young mother” and found a figurative mother in Afro-Cuban culture. Vázquez-Vélez also states that, upon meeting Omí-Tomí, a “spiritual mother” who allowed her to enter the religious world of Santería, became another mother for her, which had much significance for Cabrera’s life:



in the same way that Cabrera's literary writing... begins with the loss (death) of Teresa de la Parra... the religious knowledge that Cabrera receives from Omí-Tomí marks the recuperation or return of the mother figure as a source of knowledge... for Luce Irigaray, the symbolic Mother-Daughter establishment is essential in the construction of an autonomous feminine identity, not only as mothers but as women.<sup>48</sup> (214)

Furthermore, there is evidence that shows that Cabrera identified with "la Gran Madre," the Great Mother of the orishas, Yemayá, a connection that folklore scholar Solimar Otero makes in one of her most recent studies and will now be further explored. All the previous connections now lead me to discuss the importance of Yemayá in her work and then I will also analyze other queer aspects of them.

### **Afro-Cuban Religious Traditions and Feminist-Queer Connections**

Building on recent scholarship by Solimar Otero in her edited anthology *Yemojá: Gender, Sexuality and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (2013), a collection of essays dedicated to Yemayá and her connection with literature and art with a focus on the intersections of gender and sexuality, here it will be observed that Cabrera highlights the feminine role and its importance in Afro-Cuban culture, particularly in Santería, in various of the over 20 books she published in her lifetime. This is to say, she emphasizes the importance of the more characteristically feminine orishas, particularly Yemayá, and the impact of women in Santería creating later what critic Lynda Hoffman-Jeep has termed a "feminist ethnography," and at the same time opening a space for what

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<sup>48</sup> See Irigaray, Luce. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977.

could be considered queer orishas (or queer animals within the Afro-Cuban oral storytelling tradition, such as the Jicotea discussed in Chapter 2), whether they be lesbian, homosexual, or androgynous. Indeed, many of her works emphasized women and queer subjects as scholars such as Otero and José Quiroga have previously examined, even including homoerotic scenes between the orishas in her most celebrated works such as *El monte*, a text that has since its publication in 1954 become one a Bible of sorts for Santería practitioners both in Cuba as well as the diaspora, a book which Quiroga has notably said “is the queerest text ever written by a Cuban author; the full extent of its queerness can never be exhaustively decoded” (76). I will propose various reasons in this regard, especially taking into account Cabrera’s personal life upon re-thinking and re-interpreting her works.

To begin with this analysis of the texts themselves, as is mentioned in the introduction of this study the focus of Cabrera’s *Yemayá y Ochún* is, indeed, the water deities Yemayá and Ochún. While there exist many other powerful and well-known characteristically male orishas, such as Ellegúa, Changó, or Oggún, for example, Cabrera focuses on only these two riverain goddesses. Each orisha in Santería has their *pataki*, or history of the orishas and how they came to be, their personalities and relationships with other orishas. Therefore, in the prologue of *Yemayá y Ochún*, the reader is presented with their importance from the very beginning:

Sin agua no hay vida. De Yemayá nació la vida. Y del mar nació el Santo, el Caracol, el Ocha verdadero. El santo que primero habló y le dijo a las criaturas lo que podían hacer. Yemayá es quien dio luz a la Luna y al Sol,

de su vientre salió todo lo que existe y alienta sobre la tierra. Ochún, su hermana menor, a quien Yemayá “crió a sus pechos”, es dueña del río [y] del amor... (10)

Without water there is no life. From Yemayá life was born... Yemayá gave birth to the Moon and to the Sun, from her womb came everything that exists and nourishes the Earth. Ochún, her younger sister, who Yemayá took “under her wing and raised,” is owner of the river and of love....

The power of these two orishas then goes without argument. As is described here and as one reads throughout the text, Yemayá is the orisha of the sea and of maternity; she is a Universal Mother, the creator of the world, a guide; one who is wise, authoritative, and demands respect. Her waters are sacred and can cure the sick. However, of utmost importance to this study, Otero reminds us of the following in the introduction to the *Yemojá* anthology:

Indeed, though often depicted as the eternal mother, Yemojá can perform different kinds of gender roles, and she has the power to shift, change, and display an ambiguous sexuality in mythology and ritual . . . Afro-Cuban religious cultures place Yemayá at the center of discourses about race, gender, and homosexuality. Yemojá is believed to protect gays and lesbians... (xxi-xxii)

This being so, it can reveal another aspect in regards to the focus on feminine orishas; which is to say, other motives, although unconscious, of why Cabrera focuses on the

deities, especially Yemayá but also Ochún, and Afro-Cuban religious tradition in general given that she was a lesbian and a woman, a marginalized being in both of those senses. In contrast to other religions such as traditional Occidental religions, for example, the woman plays a very important role in Afro-Cuban religious traditions. As María Margarita Castro Flores notes in “Religiones de origen africano en Cuba: un enfoque de género:”<sup>49</sup>

Si analizamos el panorama religioso cubano actual, observamos que, al igual que en el resto de las esferas sociales, la mujer ocupa un lugar muy importante . . . Sin la presencia de estos personajes femeninos, el ritual no puede realizarse. He ahí, en gran medida, la esencialidad de la mujer en la Regla de Ocha. (68-69)

If we analyze the current religious panorama in Cuba, we can observe that, like other social spheres, women have a very important place in it . . . Without the presence of women, rituals cannot be carried out [in Santería]. There, in great measure, is how essential the woman is in Regla de Ocha.

Which is to say, as has been previously mentioned, there are traditional aspects of Santería that naturally provide power and strength to the woman, as well as queer beings such as lesbians, homosexuals, and androgynous people as previously noted by Randy P. Conner.

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<sup>49</sup> I am grateful to all library personnel at the Instituto Cubano de Investigación Cultural Juan Marinello (ICICJM), especially to Frank Hernández for his time, patience, and knowledge, during my research period in Havana, Cuba, in October 2016 for their assistance in guiding me to materials on this subject matter, including the publication *TEMAS*, rich with studies on these subjects, and for also directing me to rare and underutilized texts such as *El don de la ubicuidad: Rituales étnicos multisituados* (2012), regarding transnational religious traditions utilized in this study as well.

Indeed, gender roles were “independent of anatomy,” as Clark notes, and never a “fixed category, but one that varies according to context” (144). Furthermore, viewing Afro-Caribbean religious practices in general as sites or forms of resistance, anthropologist Reéne de la Torre notes in the introduction to the ethnographic text *El don de la ubicuidad: Rituales étnicos multisituados* (2012) that they have been “prácticas de resistencia de las culturas étnicas subalternas, frente a la imposición colonialista del catolicismo y de la cultura europeizada” (“practices of resistance of ethnic subaltern cultures, against the colonialist imposition of Catholicism and the Europeanized culture,” 18).

Furthermore, María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman state in their article “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for ‘The Woman’s Voice’” that telling one’s history is constitutive of the feminist method (18). Regarding feminism in Cabrera’s work, then, one can then interpret the focus on not only feminine orishas but those considered queer in some aspect as a projection of Cabrera’s own life, an idea planted in the introduction of this study and that also permeates her archive. Lynda Hoffman-Jeep relays in “Creating Ethnography: Zora Neale Hurston and Lydia Cabrera” that

Although perfect silence has surrounded Cabrera’s lesbianism in scholarly studies, her sexual orientation informed her creativity, and in part her lifelong identity with Afro-Cuban minority culture. Still, her lesbian identity was a trump card that she never risked playing. (345)

Even if she was not conscious of this perspective of her studies, it is seen here that her works focused in some way on the sexual orientation or femininities of the orishas,

represented in a powerful way, and this in part supports Lugones and Spelman's argument that upon relating one's history or story, one is participating in the feminist method.

### **Archival Aesthetics and Lydia Cabrera**

Turning to the archive as a support to the above analysis, then, research conducted in the Lydia Cabrera Papers in the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, will now be considered regarding Cabrera's connections to Yemayá. I am referring to especially when looking beyond the text, as proposed in the introduction of this study, and reconsidering what I term "archival aesthetics" and what this means for reinterpretations and therefore new ways of knowing produced from within the archive by continuing to weave throughout this final chapter Taylor's concepts of archive and repertoire from her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. As with the textual analysis, my archival research proposes to support my argument that both create a counterdiscourse, both important to the decolonialization and destabilization of patriarchal hegemony and at the center of the Atlantis Effect, recovering and emphasizing these feminine-queer spiritual herstories.

Just as in the case of her connection or sublimation of the queer figure Jicotea, Cabrera in many random places wrote these very names of Jicotea and Yemayá repeatedly, on any number of scraps of paper, recipe cards, or margins of the many small notebooks she kept, not to mention an innumerable number of sketches of jicoteas as previously discussed, something I view as a true significant emphasis on deities and animals that are female or queer or both. José Quiroga has written in regards to Cabrera that "A homosexual text does not necessarily proclaim its own identity in words but in

acts—in the coded secrets that it tells, and in the decoding that it *wants*” (author’s emphasis, 77;100). From here I am proposing that not only could these statements be taken into account in regards to the archive of Lydia Cabrera, but in building from Diana Bowen suggests in her text “Visuality and the Archive: The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers as a Theory of Social Change,” that visuality as linked to the archive can assist in its decoding, but from my perspective in terms of *spirituality* as linked to a highly complex identity, particularly employing Taylor’s aforementioned concepts of archive and repertoire.





Fig. 26. Images of files containing an abundance of “Yemayá” repeatedly written by Lydia Cabrera. (Box 26, Series 3, Works and Research Files, 1930-1987, Lydia Cabrera Papers (1910-1991), Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

That is, as the archive is a center of interpretation and site of knowledge production, using Taylor’s concepts one can seriously consider for example, the “act” of writing a certain deity’s name repeatedly or collecting, consciously or unconsciously, a great amount of information on female or queer deities and animals, or the “act” of signing some of her letters as Yemayá<sup>50</sup>, as Lydia Cabrera often did as evidenced by archival research. Cabrera is addressed as “Chére Yemayá” in many of the letters that her close friend Pierre Verger<sup>51</sup> or “Fatumbi” sent her, as found in his archive in

<sup>50</sup> Cañate Ochoa, José. “Cartas de Yemayá a Changó. Epistolario inédito de Lydia Cabrera y Pierre Verger”. n.d. Web. <http://www.archivodelafrontera.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/07/CLASICOS037.pdf>. 2 April 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Verger was also commonly known as Fatumbí, a babalawo, a photographer, and an ethnographer, as well



the Fundação Pierre Verger en Salvador de Bahía, Brasil, after they initially met in 1954 in Paris (Ochoa 12). Similarly, she many times signed or closed her letters as Yemayá instead of her own name. The below image is one of several where such is the case, and she closes with “Reciba un fuerte abracote [sic] de Yemayá” (“Yemayá sends you a big hug”) in a letter dated August 16, 1983, nearly thirty years after their first encounter:

Coral Gables, agosto 16 e3 1983

Mi siempre querido y recordado Fatumbi:

Ya sé que es imperdonable que no le haya escrito desde hace tanto tiempo... pero usted me disculpará cuando le diga que casi no veo, que "tengo los faroles apagados." Esto, aunque no me quejo, pues pienso que así no veo a Miami, que detesto, y al mundo que se ha puesto tan feo, ( y vaya por todo lo bello e interesante <sup>dictar</sup> que he visto) me quita el impulso de escribir a tientas o de escribir. No sabe la alegría que me dan sus libros y saber, como me asegura , lo bien que estpa usted, joven et imbatable, fuerte y animoso.

Su último libro es una preciosidad - cincuenta años- y así como los otros que me ha enviado, no me canso de hojearlos y mirarlos con la mejor de las lupas que me han regalado.

Yo hago una vida muy solitaria, siempre en casa y trabajando poco. Imprimir cuesta muy caro, lod cubanos leen no leen y los libreros rinden mal las cuentas. Mi último libro que se imprimirá pronto trata de la medicina popular en Cuba. En cuanto vea la luz se lo enviaré. ¿Será posible que volvamos a reunirnos algún día?

Tenemos aquí muchos Olorishas y muchos Babalaos, casi to dos impostores; se pierde el idioma y se ha perdido la vergüenza. ; Todo se pierde en este país por ganar dinero; Yo no lo tengo però no me hace falta.

Oyra vez gracias mi querido Fatumbi por sus libros, por su recuerdo, por su amistad.

Reciba un fuerte abracote de Yemayá.

Dama Titina tampoco lo olvida.

Fig. 27. One of many pieces of correspondence where Lydia Cabrera closed a letter or signed her name as Yemayá. (“Correspondence from Lydia Cabrera to Pierre Verger

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as a close friend of Lydia Cabrera.

(‘Fatumbi’) 1983,” Box 1, Series I, Folder 10. Lydia Cabrera Papers (1910-1991), Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

In light of this correspondence, and the connection Lydia Cabrera had with Yemayá, that there also exist letters from Isabel Castellanos<sup>52</sup> written to Cabrera on the day that Yemayá is celebrated in Cuba, or as Cabrera writes in the opening lines of the first chapter of *Yemayá y Ochún*:

El ocho de septiembre —antes de Castro— era una fecha importante en la devoción del entonces alegre y despreocupado pueblo habanero. Ese día, negros, mulatos, y blancos acudían al Santuario de Nuestra Señora la Virgen de Regla, al otro lado de la bahía, en el pintoresco pueblecito de Regla. (9)

September 8th—before Castro—was an important date in the devotion of the once happy, without worries people from Havana. That day, blacks, mulattos, and whites flocked to the shrine of Our Lady of the Virgin of Regla, in the picturesque little town of Regla.

The letter is precisely dated September 8<sup>th</sup>, and closes with Castellanos wishing her and her partner Titina (María Teresa de Rojas, Cabrera’s partner of almost 50 years) blessings from the water goddesses:

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<sup>52</sup> Isabel Castellanos is a prolific professor, writer and scholar who specializes in Afro-Cuban culture also known for her work on Lydia Cabrera.

A photograph of a handwritten note on aged, slightly textured paper. The text is written in a cursive script. The first line reads 'Que las dos Ochas del agua se den', followed by 'salud y alegría. Un fuerte abrazo para' on the second line, and 'Titina y para Ud. de,' on the third line. Below the text is a large, stylized signature that appears to be 'Isabel'.

Fig. 28. Closing of letter from Isabel Castellanos, dated September 8, 1977, “Día de la Caridad” to Lydia Cabrera with regards also to her longtime partner Titina.

(“Correspondence from Lydia Cabrera to Pierre Verger (‘Fatumbi’) 1983,” Box 1, Series I, Folder 10. Lydia Cabrera Papers (1910-1991), Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.*

It is particularly insightful to keep in mind that Yemayá is also a protector of the gay and lesbian community as this is addressed on her day of celebration to both Cabrera and Titina. This is to say, even the correspondence as observed in Lydia Cabrera’s archive is both queer, female-centered, and spiritual in nature, strengthening the impact of the Atlantis Effect as archive and text are embraced and viewed alongside one another. The correspondence, much like Cabrera’s text, have much more to say than the text itself when “reading between the lines” and taking a panoramic inventory of everything within it that at once “rescues” feminine mythologies, breaks with heteronormativity, and shows itself as a repository which creates a patriarchal counterdiscourse.

## **Queering the Sweet Waters of Ochún**

To begin as this analysis shifts to the work of de la tierra, let us first remember the words of Lydia Cabrera in reference to the great river water orisha Ochún:

A Yemayá Olokun, inmensamente, inagotablemente rica, le debe Ochún, su hermana menor, la amable y pródiga dueña del Río, del Amor, del Coral y del Ambar, su proverbial riqueza.

Sería imposible al hablar de Yemayá en la Isla de Cuba, silenciar y menos separar de ella, la popularísima Ochún, con quien comparte el dominio de las aguas. Es mucho lo que Ochún debe a Yemayá. (55)

Yemayá Olokun, immensely, incredibly rich, owes Ochún, her younger sister, the sweet and prodigal owner of the River, of Love, of Coral and of Amber, her proverbial wealth.

It would be impossible to talk about Yemayá on the island of Cuba, to silence her and much less separate her from the very popular Ochún, with whom she shares the dominion over the waters. Ochún owes Yemayá so much.

As is established with Cabrera's foundational text and her eloquent words about the water goddesses of Santería, we cannot talk about Yemayá without also taking into consideration the "very popular Ochún," who is characterized by the color of yellow, she owns the sweet

rivers, coral, amber, and, as will be shown to be most significant for de la tierra's text, is the deity most associated with love.

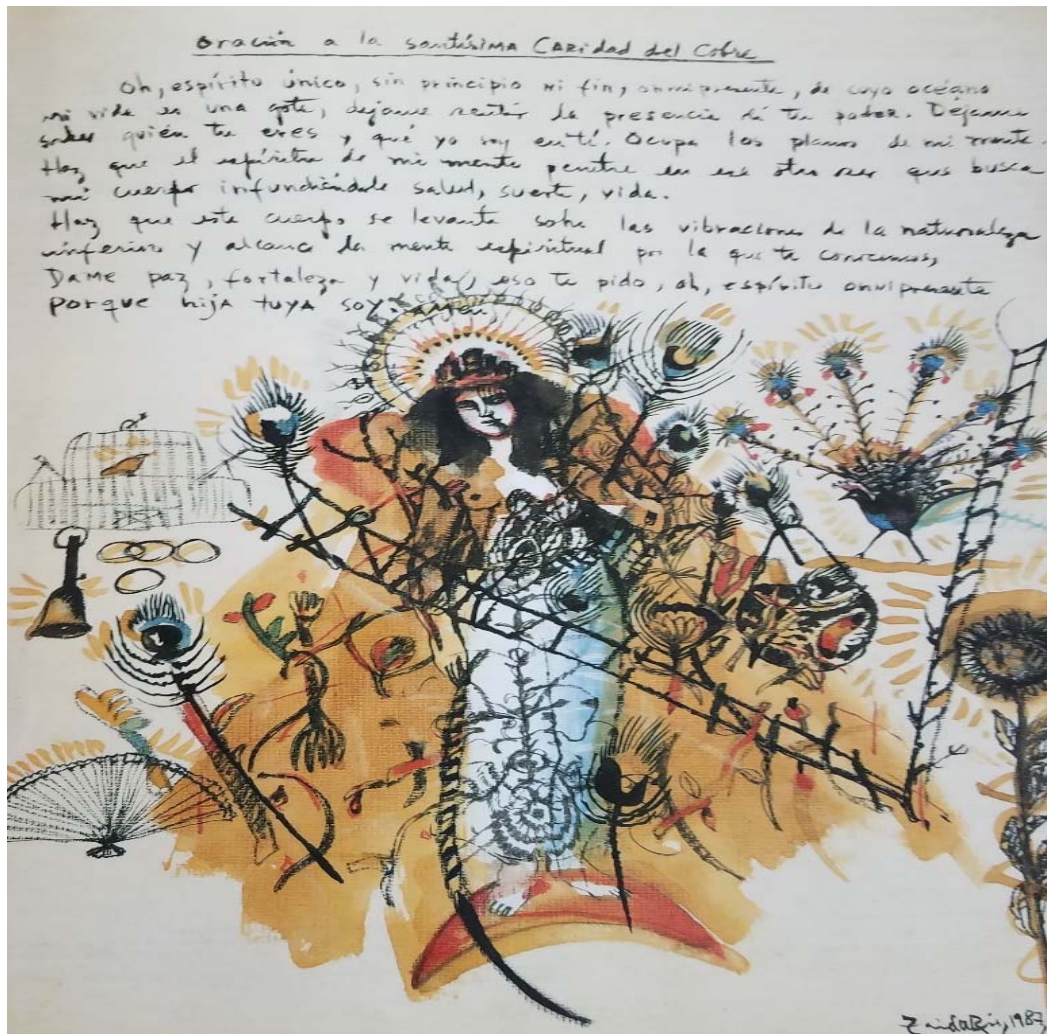


Fig. 29. Rendering of Ochún by Cuban artist Zaída del Río. Image taken in Sala de Fondos Raros y Valiosos with permission from the Biblioteca Gener y Monte, Matanzas, Cuba, October 2016.

The sort of love that Ochún is known for is not only a romantic love but also a sensual love, however, which is important to note, as much of de la tierra's work is about

reclaiming and boldly affirming and writing about her intense sexuality and sexual encounters with other women. Cabrera states of this characteristic of Ochún that she is “coqueta, enamoradísima and correntona” (*Yemayá y Ochún* 69), and in more than one instance, like in her short story “Susudamba no se muestra de día” from her collection *Cuentos negros de Cuba*, emphasizes the very flirty and sexual nature of this deity through the character Dolé. Again, it must be noted that although the works to be discussed are completely distinct from Cabrera’s work, the association of yet another powerful Santería deity with another lesbian Latina author is significant, as the power of both deities were instrumental for these authors’ texts—the process, what is contained within the them and most importantly, the agency to be able to create them because Santería, as previously shown, is one that provides empowerment for women and the LGBT community.

Turning then to the texts of de la tierra, namely *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from my Papaya*, there is a definite encapsulation of these characteristics of Ochún as de la tierra is devoted or, as is said in Santería, is an hija de Ochún, a daughter of Ochún, just as Cabrera was a daughter of Yemayá. De la tierra explicitly states in one section of *Porcupine Love* titled “snapshots of de la tierra,” a long list of responses to favorite things that her goddess is Ochún, and her favorite “tribute to an element” is “watching water, hearing water, being immersed in water, becoming water” (38). It should be noted, before moving to the focus of the function of water in de la tierra’s “*Porcupine Love*,” that other characteristics of Ochún are very present in many of the Colombian poet and author’s works. In *The Uncollected Fiction of Tatiana de la tierra*, the color yellow that is associated with Ochún is overwhelmingly present, from yellow earrings to yellow cake to yellow pages, to name a very few.



Returning then to the texts of de la tierra, namely *Porcupine Love and Other Tales from my Papaya* (2005), de la tierra explicitly states in one section of *Porcupine Love* titled “snapshots of de la tierra,” a long list of responses to favorite things that her goddess is Ochún. In “Porcupine Love,” the title story from the collection, the protagonist Antenna goes to live in Australia, a continent literally surrounded by water. In one part of the story, it is nostalgically recalled by the unnamed protagonist how the two, when together, spent their vacations in many places that were also geographically highlighted by water, such as Key West and Colombia. In the trip to Colombia in particular, the two bathe in springs, rivers, and waterfalls—all inland waters, the proverbial “sweet waters” associated with the sensual, sexual Santería goddess Ochún. As in Chapter 1, the women and their relationship with waters echoes in tatiána de la tierra’s archive in the form of an abundance of “sweet water” images, including the following that depicts de la tierra in the river—again, characteristic of Ochún.

We find these waters expressed time and again throughout the rest of this short but powerful story. In the present time, the protagonist has been separated from her once-love for many years, and finds her on the internet on a vacation website, where she observes Antenna again in a place of water, submerged in water, scuba diving. The protagonist then admits that she had

... set up an altar for Ochún, the spirit of pleasure. I offer her flowers, oranges, and honey and light yellow candles for her. I wasn't looking for love when I found Antenita on the Internet. I was looking for a vacation spot, a getaway plan, a back-to-nature place for a few weeks.

But I found her. And the memory of her love found me.

Of all the love I repelled, Antenna is possibly my biggest regret. And now my biggest hope. It is foolish, a near-impossibility, a sign of insanity—or maybe proof of some sort of faith in the goddesses and the spirits—in Venus, in Aphrodite, in Tlazoltéotl, in Ochún, in Changó. (30)

Through Ochún, the deity of sweet river waters and love, the protagonist finds love again, and this protagonist, just like the author, created an altar for her favorite goddess Ochún. Then, upon seeing Antenna again after so many years, she suddenly wants to leave everything to be with her, because her love is again in New Zealand and “wet” for her (31). She then begins to fantasize, and these fantasies once again include many references to water, which is then to say, Ochún and the sensuality associated with her. She writes that Antenna had

promised that one day she would make me a water fountain carved with goddesses. That she promised me that if I go to New Zealand she will take me swimming with the dolphins. And I want her stars and artistry and I want the gardens and the goddesses and I want to swim in her waters. (32-33)

First, we have the water fountain carved with goddesses—an object that could be read as representative of her queer spirituality and sexuality; then, another mention of going on a water adventure with Antenna by swimming with the dolphins. The water fountain of goddesses could be read as representative of her queer spirituality and sexuality; after all,



her lesbian lover is creating it for her. Then, she mentions a water adventure with Antenna by swimming with the dolphins. And, most significantly, she wants “to swim in her waters,” something that could be read both literally and metaphorically. She wants to literally swim in the waters that are located where Antenna lives; however, the desire is that she swim in her sexual waters, which is to say Ochún’s waters, from which she desires her lover (31). Finally, after a reading with a Santería priest where she imagines herself in other places geographically characterized as close to the water such as Niagara Falls, Miami Beach, and Cuba, the story comes to a close, and de la tierra writes of the protagonist’s, which is also to say the author’s, own identification with Ochún as she has built an altar with for her orisha, and asks for guidance from her in regards to this love that she cannot forget:

Here is my altar for Ochún. Above the altar is the photograph—I am kissing Antenna on the side of her neck. Her hand is in my hair; she is pulling me into her. Beneath us is a color photograph of two mermaids underwater. They are seducing each other. (35)

The spiritual altar that has been constructed in “Porcupine Love” has effectively been queered by the protagonist’s personal altar for Ochún. Additionally, we are presented with a photograph of two mermaids seducing one another. It should be noted that in the many representations of Yemayá and Ochún, in many instances they are portrayed as mermaids—and in fact, they appear this way as well as can be observed on the cover and back cover of Lydia Cabrera’s *Yemayá and Ochún*. Culpepper notes of mermaids and their association with lesbian sexuality that

This message of female-bonding is a powerful part of Mermaids' appeal to contemporary Feminists. Further, given the sensual and often explicitly sexual nature of a Mermaid's appearance and behavior, this symbol becomes one connoting women sensually together. Thus, Mermaids carry implicit nuances of Lesbian eroticism. There are women who identify the sexual aspects of Mermaids as very important for themselves, but see this significance primarily as the affirmation and expression of free and unselfconscious sexual self-acceptance, self-loving. Yet, female self-eroticism too has its Lesbian dimensions. When a woman makes love to herself, she is making love to a woman. (407-408)



Fig. 30. tatiana de la tierra bathing in an unidentified river. It is assumed based on the

order of photos that Antenita was the photographer of this image. box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.



Fig. 31. One of several photographs placing de la tierra in or around rivers, lakes, or in this case, waterfalls. box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Such lesbian eroticism and sexuality as shown and discussed this point and in relation to Ochún was fully present in de la tierra's published books. However, her archive also reveals further connections to Ochún in the rare lesbian Latina zines for which she served as founder, editor, and writer: *esto no tiene nombre: revista de lesbianas latinas*,

published from 1991-1994, and *conmoción: revista y red revolucionaria de lesbianas Latinas*, which succeeded *esto no tiene nombre* and was printed from 1995-1996. Both zines were published in Miami and approached a variety of topics geared toward Latina lesbians, primarily living in the United States, and were composed of fiction and non-fiction, photographic spreads, illustrations, and more, regarding these subjects. It is within these zines that Ochún also made appearances, perhaps not surprisingly, given Ochún's sexual and flirty nature. Her transnational nature and appeal is not unlike that of Yemayá; reflecting on Nahayeilli Juárez's words in the aforementioned *El don de la ubicuidad*, she writes that

La multiplicidad de sus apropiaciones resulta un ejemplo claro de la relocalización a la que son sujetos los símbolos, rituales y creencias, que circulan a través redes transnacionales y en diversos ámbitos, dentro de un contexto contemporáneo caracterizado por una intensa movilidad física y virtual. (181)

The multiplicity of her appropriations is a clear example of the relocations which are subject the symbols, rituals, and beliefs, that circulate through transnational networks and in various fields, in a contemporary context characterized by intense physical and virtual mobility.

I believe this same draw that occurs with Yemayá also occurs with Ochún, as the water deity presents herself throughout the zines—again, Latina lesbian zines published in the United States— in a variety of ways; she is notably found in the second issue of *esto no*

*tiene nombre* published in winter of 1993, where the riverain goddess appears in the story “a positive fairy tale,” written by de la tierra. In this special edition devoted to the topic of AIDS, however, the “fairy tale” takes a grim turn. A woman named Brunilda goes to the river to “ask Ochún to bring me a lover. I fed the river honey and shook my little bells to call her, and I prayed. I asked her to open me up to the energies, to bring me someone positive” (13). de la tierra writes later in the story that “Too many women led Brunilda to the river” and Brunilda herself then states that “I had an active year, maybe a little too promiscuous” (ibid). The story broaches a topic that is not often written about in the mainstream press, or any press for that matter; the “positive” in the positive fairy tale highlights AIDS in the lesbian community, as its protagonist graphically describes how she must participate in sexual activity as a lesbian to protect both herself and her partners, which is perhaps even more of a challenge than for gay males. In contrast to the loving, sensual stories presented in “Porcupine Love,” or even the flirty, Ochún-esque characters Lydia Cabrera presents in her short stories, de la tierra in this instance puts a story at the forefront that at once challenges heteronormativity while also highlighting rarely heard, real-life stories that again create a space for female Latina lesbian agency in her pages.



Fig. 32. "a positive fairy tale" from *esto no tiene nombre*, vol 2., no. 2. (box 6, folder 1, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Ochún later appears in the first pages of the magazine that de la tierra founded after *esto no tiene nombre*. The second issue of *conmoción* published in 1995 presents itself as an issue that will celebrate lesbian eroticism on every page. De la tierra writes regarding this particular issue that "El deseo de seducir y ser amada por una mujer es la esencia de nuestra identidad como lesbianas latinas" ("The desire to seduce and to be loved by a woman is the essence of our identity as lesbian Latinas," 5). So it perhaps seems only natural that Ochún is summoned once again, invoked with a piece titled "Pídeselo a Oshún." The text begins, "Si tienes ganas eróticas, cítese con Oshún. Ella es la diosa de las aguas dulces y le ofrece oportunidades sensuales" (If you have erotic desire, make a

date with Oshún. She is the goddess of the sweet waters and offers sensual opportunities”), and explains further all associated with Ochún, including the number 5<sup>53</sup>, the color yellow, gold, pumpkin, coral, and honey, and a recipe of what one must make as an offering in order to receive blessings from her.

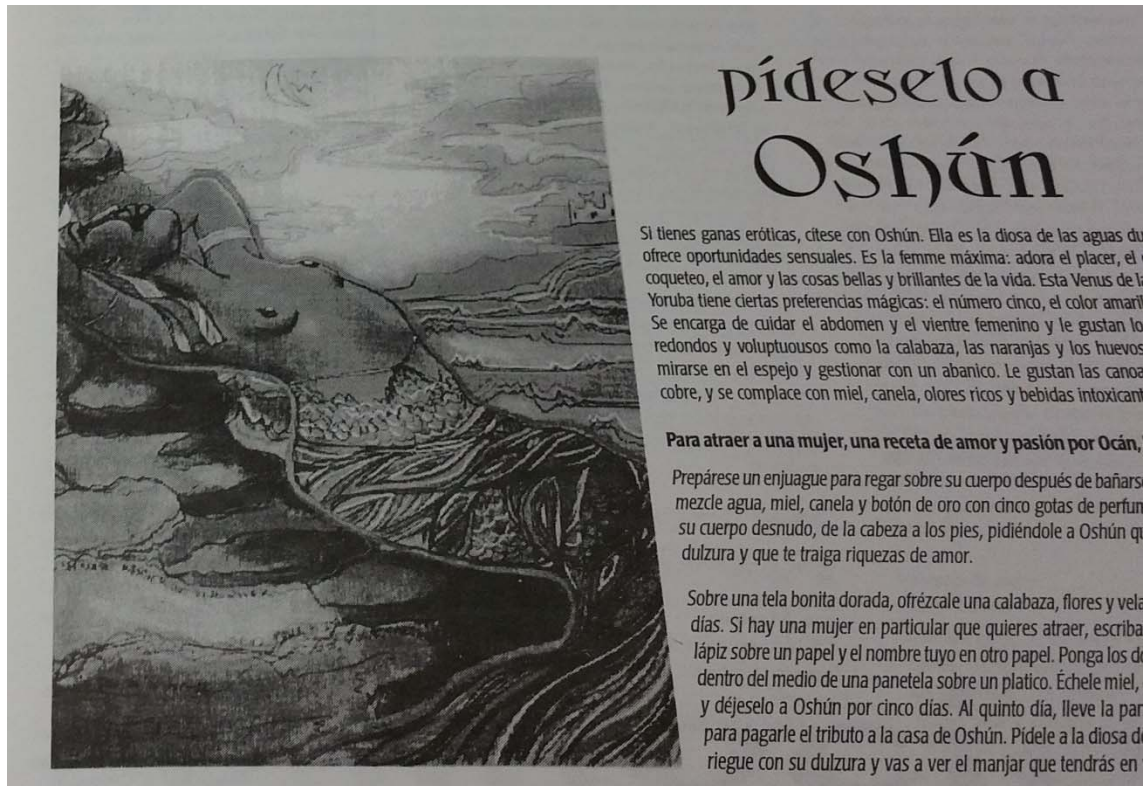


Fig. 33. “pídeselo a Oshún.” From *conmoción* #2, 1995. (box 6, folder 3, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>53</sup> To this end, it is probably not a coincidence and noteworthy that this piece is indeed found on page 5 of this issue.

Within the same issue, then, the biographical piece written by tatiana de la tierra takes on greater meaning. Titled “True Cunt Stories,” de la tierra writes of her first sexual experience with another woman, in her trademark graphically sexual way. The setting of the encounter is, indeed, sweet water. She writes:

The first time I had real, official lesbian sex I fooled my suitor, a seasoned dyke whom I’d trailed secretly and incessantly until she led me to her king-size waterbed. All it took was a 3 am moonlit skinny dip in a cold lake, a few hits of marijuana, and decades of desire... By sunrise I was a man-hating-lesbian and a witch-in-the-making. Finally! (35)

The lake is the first setting that establishes the encounter, followed by an actual waterbed; they make love within and literally on top of the waters, and de la tierra later writes of this experience that this, for her, was a “new-found freedom” and that “My cunt, along with the rest of me, was just beginning to wake up” and began to “cast spells” to attract more female lovers and describes their encounters in graphic detail. The waters, then, once again are the catalyst for these lesbian experiences; not only that, Ochún’s waters are the location of her very first sexual experience with a woman. It is also notable that here she employs the term “witch” and describes attracting lovers as if to cast spells, recalling the “recipe” for a lover text regarding Ochún that opens up this issue.





Fig. 34. tatiana de la tierra with a female companion by an unidentified lake, one of many images that echo throughout her archive which speak in tandem to her published material and personal journals. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

To this point regarding “witch” terminology and the sweet water goddess, Robert Farris Thompson writes of Ochún in *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (2002) of her and other “riverain goddesses” that

Imperially presiding in the palaces beneath the sands at the bottom of the river, the riverain goddesses are peculiarly close to Earth. In the positive breeze of their fans, the ripple of their water, there is coolness. In the darkness of their depths and the flashing of their swords, **there is witchcraft**. And within the shell-strewn floor of their underwater province there is bounteous wealth. **Yoruba riverain goddesses are therefore not only arbiters of happiness of their peoples but militant witches... But this is power used against the human arrogance of Western technocratic structures**. The natural goodness within the evil of these water spirits is involved by righteous devotion. (my emphasis, Thompson 75)

de la tierra established these zines, including *conmoción*, which break with heteronormative, patriarchal structures as lesbian Latina magazines that included graphic stories and pictures illustrating their intimate lives. This profound look at their lives, including de la tierra's, also revealed associations with Yoruba religious traditions and particularly the sensual, sweet water goddess Ochún. The deity is invoked many times over through image and story, almost always present as means to attract a lover or during a sexual encounter: a true break with Western structures, revealing themselves as disruptive decolonial forces that through Ochún and these waters create a space, indeed, as "arbiters of happiness" by which they, especially de la tierra, acquire a different kind of female subjectivity rooted in non-Western, water-based origin mythologies, and stake claim to a newfound female Latina lesbian agency through their texts and archives

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

This exploration is the result of research spanning over six years. It began with what later became my first published article analyzing the role of Santería in Nuyorican poet Tato Laviera's poetry collections. In order to carry out this analysis, I set out to study Afro-Cuban religious traditions and how they have transformed, from their origins in West Africa, to the Caribbean, and then how they have developed over time in the United States, first in published books and journals. Later, my first-hand ethnographic research would take me to Matanzas, Cuba, a port city known for its strong concentration of many Afro-Cuban religious traditions. I would return to Cuba two times for further study in various institutions in Matanzas and Havana before the completion of this dissertation, and along the way conduct archival research in sites now familiar by name: in the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California-Los Angeles; in the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin; and at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami-Coral Gables. Throughout this time, I also actively participated in Chicana/o Studies courses, events, and conferences, learning the ways of Anzaldúa's spiritual mestizaje and Chicana indigenous spiritual practices, which also greatly informed my research, and of which this is the result.

Though initially I began with a Nuyorican poet at the center of my research, I began to observe a strong literary trend overall of these religious practices in contemporary US Latinx literature. Elements of Afro-Caribbean religions can be found in Tato Laviera's poetry collections, especially *AmeRícan* (1985) and *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* (1979); *Yerba buena* (1980) by Sandra María Estevez; Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams* (2000) and *Changó's Fire* (2004); Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

(1992) and *The Agüero Sisters* (1997); and *Beautiful Señoritas and Other Plays* (1991) by Dolores Prida, as well as in the Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Junot Díaz and *La isla bajo el mar/Island Beneath the Sea* (2009) by Isabel Allende, to name a few. Puerto Rican author Judith Ortiz Cofer has said of Afro-Caribbean religions that “In the United States, they function like psychologists, and the people that practice them are in search of help and relief, and also to feel some sort of connection and control over a world that is extremely confusing” (Ocasio 737). I would argue this to be the case in all aforementioned works; however, it was especially striking during the course of this research the strong association that appeared to exist between queer US Latina and Chicana authors and syncretic religious practices and/or elements thereof. Various ethnographers of these topics in the initial stages of this enquiry confirmed these connections; primarily Mary Ann Clark, with her book *Where Men are Wives and Mothers Rule*, and Randy P. Conner’s *Queering Creole Spiritual Religions*.

Lydia Cabrera, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Tatiana de la tierra became the focus of this study as they seemed to exhibit strong ties to two of the most revered deities of Santería, Yemayá y Ochún, in their published works. In the case of Ochún, it was explicit in de la tierra’s works; for Anzaldúa and Cabrera, some connections had been made or mentioned, but not explored at length in previous studies. It was a lucid moment, then, to discover that Yemayá—mother of all orishas, and she who has dominion over the oceans, as previously discussed—was also considered a protector of the gay and lesbian community and many of her earthly devotees were indeed queer as well. However, it was not enough to simply make the connections—a more profound inquiry was necessary to

begin to understand this significance and what it possibly meant for the fields of women's studies, LGBTQ studies, and US Latina and Chicana literature. After amassing a significant amount of archival research that fell in line with these connections, something further was necessary to articulate the feminine-queer-divine associations that I had begun to observe between text and archive. That is, the "bigger picture" required a new theoretical framework from which to first synthesize and then analyze text and archive of these three authors in tandem. This is when the Atlantis Effect was conceptualized.

The Atlantis Effect throughout the construction of this study has been indispensable. Working from the standpoint that Atlantis was a sunken-island place, a nowhere place in the middle of the unknown waters that in Greek myth was pushed down until its resurfacing, this framework contributes as the base to this study for the conceptualization of the phenomenon of marginalized, queer Latina and Chicana women bringing forth to the surface what once was and continues to be in not only Afro-Cuban religious traditions, but to some extent Chicana indigenous spiritualities and mythologies as well in the case of Gloria Anzaldúa—both of which carry at the epicenter the power of water spaces, and the empowerment that these women draw from these origins, as feminine-queer deities or beings tend to be at the center of them. As such, it is a crucial contribution to US Latinx and Chicanx studies, as well as feminist studies, LGBTQ studies, and also makes way for further scholarship of female spirituality.

To this end, the first chapter focused on the waters as a whole: on a larger level, the water spaces as shown in their works and archives, many times placing the authors themselves within places geographically marked by oceans, lakes, waterfalls, rivers, and more. The literal and metaphorical fluidity of the waters broke from heteronormative and

patriarchal “borders;” their identities could not be boxed, and for Cabrera, Anzaldúa, and de la tierra as lesbian Latina and Chicana writers meant transformative healing, liberation, knowledge, and/or preservation of forgotten feminine cultural histories and mythologies.

The following chapter, then, delved deeper—literally deeper, into these waters—and centered on the constant presence of certain gender-queer aquatic beings, such as the turtles, serpents, and mermaids. As noted, there is a bit of overlap with which author was primarily associated with one or the other, especially with the presence of the turtle. It is also interesting to note that featuring turtles as protagonists or themes in stories is indeed not exclusive to Lydia Cabrera—this fascination with turtles can be seen in the works of other Latina lesbian writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (also in her archive in form of drawings like in Cabrera’s archive) and Puerto Rican writer Yolanda Arroyo-Pizzaro in her lesbian erotic novel *Caparazones* (2010). Future research, then, intends to focus on this phenomenon, which has never been held to in-depth scholarship, and analyze its significance for lesbian Latina and Chicana writers.

In any case, I proposed the not only presence, but embodiment, of these queer water dwellers on part of each author: Cabrera with the jicoteas, or turtles; Anzaldúa with serpents; and de la tierra with sirens, or mermaids. In each instance, the analysis showed that the creatures in and of themselves exhibit queerness, at which point Lacan’s theory of sublimation, or channeling repressed sexualities through acceptable cultural forms, also “came to surface,” as well as Emily Culpepper’s research regarding lesbian ethos and mermaids. Finally, the last chapter became more specific with its concentration on

the figures of Yemayá and Ochún, an in-depth analysis of the presence and associations of each author with the two most powerful female deities of the Yoruba pantheon.

In all circumstances, the Atlantis Effect was conceptualized and employed by incorporating archival theories from Jacques Derrida to Marlene Manoff, but particularly drew from the work of Diana Taylor regarding gestures and enactments as a way to field the significance of the constant iterations that seemingly echoed from within the respective archives. Visuals and archival texts of these queer Latina women in and around water; writing with other queer women of color by the seashore; lesbian acts of love in and around the waters; the jicoteas, the serpents, the mermaids; and the specific figures of Yemayá and Ochún, all abound in their collections. It was the intention of this study to simulate the experience I have had as a researcher over the past several years by incorporating these many images throughout it as a means of relaying the Atlantis Effect as a sensorial practice. It carries to the reader the findings of the archive as it simultaneously draws them in to the experience of it, recalling once again Ann Cvetkovich's words in regards to the transformative power of queer collections and queer archival research in *Out of the Closet, Into the Archive: Researching Sexual Histories* (2015) that "the archives are not static collections to be judged by what they include or exclude, **but places where we do things with objects**" (my emphasis, xvii-xviii). Such a rendering of the archive in my own methodological approach—in the queer archive especially—drew collectively from these archival theories, incorporating text, image and ephemera, a Foucauldian system of discursivity<sup>54</sup> as found in these authors' respective archives as a means of analysis from a gendered and spiritually-queer perspective.

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<sup>54</sup> "...we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use). They

What remains to be seen, and studied, however, is where Latino and Chicano gay authors may possibly fit in this context. The queer women of this study have (re)claimed their water space via works and archives; however, a gendered study of queer Latino or Chicano men in relation to this theory could see the space of these marginalized women allotting a realm to men to have also been relegated to the margins who similarly employ evocations of water in their works, though, thinking metaphorically, mermen have always been an anomaly to the world of mermaids (Culpepper 386). I am principally thinking of how waterways function in texts such as *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets to the Universe* (2012) by Benjamin Alire Sáenz; *Still Water Saints* (2007) by Alex Espinoza; and Reinaldo Arenas' *Antes que anochezca/Before Night Falls* (1992). In each text by these gay male authors, most with explicit LGBTQ themes, water is also prevalent, and many times even a main character. The differences or possible parallels could shift the Atlantis Effect, revealing an even more complex, highly intersectional theory than initially anticipated.

Through the Atlantis Effect, the shared identification with what could be considered the female and queer aspects of feminine cultural histories and mythologies was explored *vis á vis* their texts and archives, and I demonstrated how these authors found spiritual fulfillment and agency through them because they provided them with a home, which is to say, a space of belonging—specifically, the water spaces—as these feminist-queer spiritualities that originate from the waters have been more open to marginalized and oppressed groups such the LGBTQ community and women within it.

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are all these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call archive. (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 128)



Ultimately, it is in this way that all three lesbian Latina and Chicana authors construct a counterdiscourse, one that breaks with established heteronormative practices and destabilizes patriarchal hegemony. For the many things that seemingly separate these authors and their writing, this transnational as well as transgenerational inquiry into the works and lives of these authors unveiled and analyzed these spiritual connections to further contribute to crucial studies of these areas, draw together the parallels of identity and spiritual consciousness, and further examine the intersections of syncretic spirituality, gender, and sexuality and their significance for these authors— one that transcends eras, oceans, and borders.

## APPENDIX: LIST OF ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Fig. 1. tatiana de la tierra and Donna or “Antenita”<sup>55</sup> Fig. 1. tatiana de la tierra and Donna or “Antenita” (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 2. Antena, or Antenita, submerged in the water, similar to other photos which show de la tierra snorkeling completely nude. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 3. Antenita horse riding in front of a waterfall, just as in the short story “Porcupine Love.” (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 4. Original cover of Porcupine Love and Other Tales from My Papaya showing de la tierra nude and completely immersed in water. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 5. tatiana de la tierra at the University of Southern California, September 2010. She is notably happy, posed next to the words “Sueños The Sea,” hands clasped and showing a rainbow bracelet representative of LGBTQ support and/or identity. (box 60, tatiana de

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<sup>55</sup> Captions for all photos, unless otherwise indicated as part of the finding aid description, are my own descriptions as these photos are together within one box of the tatiana de la tierra Papers at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 6. tatiana de la tierra on the beach writing with other women. This image with other women in front of the ocean echoes the entries of her journal. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 7. One of dozens of images placing tatiana de la tierra near the waters. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 8. “Gloria on beach with writing group incl. Virginia Harris, 1991.” (GEA Papers, Box 148, Folder 7. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.) ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Fig. 9. “The Controversial Issue: A Woman Babalawo,” Series III, Box 24, Folder 9. “Unknown. Libreta de Santos Transcripts, n.d.” Lydia Cabrera Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 10. Various sketches of “Jicoteas” by Cabrera from the Josefina Inclán Papers. Josefina Inclán was a close friend and scholar of Lydia Cabrera and her collection is also held at the Cuban Heritage Collection in conjunction with the Lydia Cabrera Papers.

(Left: “Josefina Inclán Papers”, Box 1, No folder specified, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 11. Correspondence from Lydia Cabrera to Josefina Inclán dated May 20, 1972, signed as “Jicotea Lydia.” (Josefina Inclán Papers, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 12. One of various drawings of jicoteas by Lydia Cabrera in her archival collection found in the notebook “Cantos a los orishas [notebooks],” Series 3, Box 27, Folder 5.

Lydia Cabrera Papers 1910-1991. Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 13. Further drawings of jicoteas by Lydia Cabrera in her archival collection found in the notebook “Cantos a los orishas [notebooks],” Series 3, Box 27, Folder 5. Lydia Cabrera Papers 1910-1991. Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 14. A draft of jicotea short stories in progress of what would become *Ayapá: Cuentos de Jicotea*. “Libreta de santos/transcripts, n.d.” Series 3, Box 24, Folder 6. Lydia Cabrera Papers 1910-1991. Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 15. “Illustrations by Lydia Cabrera,” Box 1, Rosario Hiriart Collection, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida. *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 16. “Notebook and Journal on La Mujer Xicana, 1976,” GEA Papers, Box 104, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Fig. 17 “Notebook and Journal on La Mujer Xicana, 1976,” GEA Papers, Box 104, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Fig. 18. “Altars: On the Process of Feminist Image Making,” GEA Papers, Box 57, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Fig. 19. Illustration presenting tatiana de la tierra as a mermaid. The inscription reads: “Suerte Sirena Diosa Papayona. Con amor, Ina y Rotmi.” (<http://delatierra.net/>).

Fig. 20. “Fish Girl” as found in one of many personal journals tatiana de la tierra kept during her lifetime. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 21. “Totem Pole to Scare Lesbophobia,” from *conmoción* #3, p. 2. (box 6, folder 3, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center,

University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 22. Illustration from the book *Xía y las mil sirenas* of Xía and her guiding mermaids.

Fig. 23. Box 60 of the tatiana de la tierra collection held at the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California-Los Angeles holds these materials in abundance.

The above image is one of dozens found in this specific box from a journal titled *Goddesses and Amazons*. box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 24. Gloria Anzaldúa posing in front of the ocean. (“Villa Montalvo Residency,” GEA Papers, Box 148, Folder 16. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.). ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Fig. 25 “Altars: On the Process of Feminist Image Making,” GEA Papers, Box 57, Folder 2. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. ©Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Literary Trust. May not be duplicated without permission from the Literary Trust.

Fig. 26. Images of files containing an abundance of “Yemayá” repeatedly written by Lydia Cabrera. (Box 26, Series III, Works and Research Files, 1930-1987, Lydia Cabrera Papers (1910-1991), Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 27. One of many pieces of correspondence where Lydia Cabrera closed a letter or signed her name as Yemayá. (“Correspondence from Lydia Cabrera to Pierre Verger (‘Fatumbi’) 1983,” Box 1, Series I, Folder 10. Lydia Cabrera Papers (1910-1991), Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 28. Closing of letter from Isabel Castellanos, dated September 8, 1977, “Día de la Caridad” to Lydia Cabrera with regards also to her longtime partner Titina.

(“Correspondence to Lydia Cabrera from Isabel Castellanos, 1976-1984” Box 3, Series I, Folder 13. Lydia Cabrera Papers (1910-1991), Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). *Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.*

Fig. 29. Rendering of Ochún by Cuban artist Zaída del Río. Image taken in Sala de Fondos Raros y Valiosos with permission from the Biblioteca Gener y Monte, Matanzas, Cuba, October 2016.

Fig. 30. tatiana de la tierra bathing in an unidentified river. It is assumed based on the order of photos that Antenita was the photographer of this image. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 31. One of several photographs placing de la tierra in or around rivers, lakes, or in this case, waterfalls. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 32. “a positive fairy tale” from *esto no tiene nombre*, vol 2., no. 2. (box 6, folder 1, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 33. “pídeselo a Oshún.” From *conmoción* #2, 1995. (box 6, folder 3, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Fig. 34. tatiana de la tierra with a female companion by an unidentified lake, one of many images that echo throughout her archive which speak in tandem to her published material and personal journals. (box 60, tatiana de la tierra Papers 1980-2007, CSRC-0124, Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles). ©tatiana de la tierra, courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.



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