

Prior to this lecture, my exposure to the concepts of ancestral healing and religion was deeply complicated, serving primarily as a framework of behavioral control, psychological fear, and erratic coping mechanisms rather than an empowering spiritual journey. Raised Roman Catholic, I experienced institutional religion strictly as an authoritarian tool used to enforce compliance and patriarchal surveillance. In my household, mental health was completely dismissed as an illegitimate concept. My mother struggled with severe depression and manic episodes; rather than receiving clinical psychiatric or medical support, she attempted to self-soothe by combining herbal remedies like St. John's Wort with hyper-religious prayer. Her interest in our Mexican American ancestral roots was highly performative, surfacing only during manic intervals before fading back into rigid dogma. Whenever my mother internalized her own perceived moral failures, she projected that religious guilt outward, punishing our entire family. For example, prior to my parents' divorce, whenever my mother cheated on my father, her immediate reaction was to drag us to an isolated, historic stone church for a traditional Latin mass. The service regularly lasted over two hours without air conditioning, and we were forced to be completely covered from our wrists to our ankles, our hair hidden beneath traditional veils.

Consequently, I am entirely non-religious and non-spiritual. While I maintain respect for other people's cultural traditions, I view the concepts of spirituality and religion as extremely antiquated. From my perspective, these practices are not grounded in reality but are fabricated comfort mechanisms that people use to soothe themselves in a volatile world they do not understand. Philosophically, I believe there was absolutely nothing before we were born, and there is nothing after we die; life moved on before us, and it will continue to do so after we are gone. Therefore, it makes no logical sense to remain preoccupied with a hypothetical spirit world when our collective energy and resources should be directed entirely toward tangible, material reality. The recent lecture material did help me understand the historical context of curanderismo by illustrating how marginalized communities were structurally denied access to real medical institutions and were forced to rely on localized herbalism out of survival. However, I firmly believe that continuing to rely on antiquated religious and spiritual frameworks in the modern era is counterproductive to establishing genuine material healthcare progress and structural autonomy.

The assigned readings by Luz Schweig, Erica Gonzalez Martinez, and Dr. Martha A. Rivas provide an essential critical lens for analyzing how colonial institutions weaponize spirituality to enforce compliance and how reclaiming an indigenous identity serves as a rejection of that internalized trauma. In the required text *Somos Xicanas* (2024), author Luz Schweig outlines how reclaiming the identity of "Xicana" with an "X" is an intentional political act of historical recovery. The text demands a conscious unpacking of how Eurocentric structures and colonial censuses systematically stripped women of color of their indigenous Nahuatl lineage, replacing autonomous history with forced assimilation. Schweig's work establishes that understanding Chicana indigeneity requires peeling back layers of institutional amnesia to recognize that

ancestral knowledge is a tool of sovereign survival, not merely an antiquated relic, as I personally believe it is.

This necessity for structural deconstruction is vividly illustrated when contrasting the indigenous reclamation of the “Xicana” identity with the colonial traps detailed in Erica Gonzalez Martinez’s 2002 essay, “Dutiful Hijas: Dependency, Power and Guilt.” Martinez exposes the crushing weight of marianismo, an ideological script originating from the Catholic Church that models women after the Virgin Mary. This script forces women of color to become an “impossible fusion of Wonder Woman’s strength and La Virgen Maria’s sanctity and sacrifice,” grooming them to believe that “the more you suffered, the more saintly you were” (Martinez). I can attest to this. I was held to impossible standards that I could see through, even as a Kindergartner. This religious conditioning inflicts a paralyzing sense of dependency and emotional guilt, perfectly mirroring my own childhood experiences where the physical enforcement of the veil and the stifling atmosphere of a two and a half hour Latin mass were used to pacify my mother’s internal trauma through hyper-religious penance. Continuing to revere the psychological blueprint of the oppressor functions as a form of internalized defeat, trapping women in a fabricated cycle of sacrificial suffering instead of allowing them to pursue material self-development.

To counteract this spiritual confinement, Dr. Martha A. Rivas’s 2019 poem “Representation Matters” reclaims ancestral knowledge as a form of active, living resistance. Rivas utilizes the sharp, piercing imagery of the nopal to physically ground Chicana indigeneity, writing, “You see the nopal on my forehead...like a nopal, resilient through generations.” His deliberate positioning serves as both a visual protest and an act of ancestral magic, proving that identity is an inherited strength carried forward to empower future generations. For my own mother, turning to St. John’s Wort was not a flawless spiritual awakening. It was instead a fragmented, desperate attempt to reclaim control over her own body in a society and culture that offered her no tangible mental health infrastructure. Ultimately, these three readings together demonstrate that the true role of ancestral knowledge lies in rejecting colonial religious guilt.

Works Cited

Martínez, Erica González. "Dutiful Hijas: Dependency, Power and Guilt." *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*, edited by Daisy Hernández and Bushra Rehman, Seal Press, 2002, pp. 142-156.

Rivas Maravilla, Martha Alicia. "Representation Matters." *Inland Xicana (IX) Press*, Riverside, CA, 2019.

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