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THE WEEPING LAND: POSTCOLONIALISM IN LA LLORONA

by

Kirianna Marie Florez

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

in

**English Literary Studies
in the Department of English**

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Many years ago, there was a beautiful young girl who married a handsome young man. In the first years of their marriage, everything was great. In about four years of marriage they had three children. After five years of being the supporter, the man started to become very bored and began to gamble and drink. He also began to see other women. One night, the girl was taking the young children for a walk around the park. There, she saw her husband kissing a young pretty girl. She became very angry and her anger turned to her children. Right next to her home was an arroyo. She grabbed all three and threw them into it, they instantly drowned in the low water, as they were all so young. She realized what she had done and was running along the arroyo trying to get them out. She tripped and fell into the arroyo where her head struck a rock. She died.

The next day the townspeople found all the bodies. Because of what she had done, she wasn't allowed to be buried in the cemetery [*sic*] by the church. She was buried by the bank of the arroyo, though her children were buried in the cemetery [*sic*].

The story goes on to say that she's always looking for her children. She goes from arroyo to arroyo and from river to river, hoping to find them. She constantly cries for her children, saying, "Aaaaiii... mis hijos.... Donde están mis hijos...?" (My children.... Where are my children). It is said that she is so crazy that, "she won't recognize you from her own child, so get home when it gets dark or she'll pick you up and we'll never see you again." (Denny)

Legends of weeping or vengeful women occur in diverse cultures throughout the world, such as Die Weisse Frau in Germany (Kirtley 157), the shrieking banshees in Ireland (Chiu), Kuchisake-onna in Japan (Wells), and La Llorona (“the weeping woman”) in the American continents. La Llorona legends can be found throughout parts of Latin America and the Southwest United States, but are most common in Mexico and parts of the Southwest where there is a high population of Chicanos/Chicanas and Mexican-Americans. The La Llorona legends vary remarkably throughout the places of their dispersion, and the different variations often highlight local fears, concerns, and history. In this thesis I will argue that La Llorona legends circulating in the Southwest U.S. often show a unique situation in the lives and cultures of U.S. Chicanos/Chicanas. The legends demonstrate the dispossession and disenfranchisement suffered by the men and women who, through the disparity between Spanish and Amerindian culture and the ceding of the Southwest to the U.S., have effectively become foreigners in their homeland.

The legend of La Llorona is, at its most basic, a legend of a woman who has lost her children and now wanders the land, weeping as she searches for her lost babies. This, however, is where the variations begin. Themes, motifs, and the status of the characters in La Llorona legends change with a remarkable fluidity, depending on the location and situation of the legend’s performance. La Llorona’s relationship status to her lover changes, from a wife to a mistress. La Llorona is always a mother, though at times she is a single mother who is tired of her children. The number of children La Llorona has ranges from one to as many as six, and the sexes of the children, though not always expressed in the legend, may be male or female. Some of the most interesting variations, however, relate to how and why La Llorona’s children are lost or taken away. In some legends, La Llorona’s children are lost due to neglect. In others, La

Llorona kills her children so she will be able to adopt an easier, freer lifestyle. Possibly the most common theme is that La Llorona goes mad when she is left by her husband or lover and murders her own children. With all of these possible variations, the number of La Llorona legends seems endless at times, with a legend ready to meet any situation or need.

Scholarship over the last sixty years has discussed how La Llorona legends are used as social rules of conduct, influencing lifestyles within cultural groups. Scholarship has also argued that La Llorona has been used to remark upon common fears and concerns, particularly within family life. While the arguments made by scholarship are valid, La Llorona should also be read as a more specific social and political commentary. My family circulates a version of La Llorona that, when viewed through a postcolonial lens, comments not only on the anxieties of family life, but also on the anxieties and tensions in colonizer/colonized relations. By recognizing the anxieties and tensions experienced by Chicanos/Chicanas in the U.S., a fuller understanding of Chicano culture, specifically the racial and class tensions experienced through internal colonization and postcolonialism, can be gained.

In order to apply a postcolonial lens to my family's variation of La Llorona, I will be advancing my argument in two major steps. In the first section, I will summarize and analyze the major works of scholarship in the field of La Llorona over the past sixty years. I will incorporate examples of La Llorona legends archived in Utah State University's Special Collections from the 1970s through the 1990s. These legends were collected by students of folklore at Utah State University and Brigham Young University, to exemplify the arguments of the scholarship. In the second section, I will give my paternal family history in order to place my family's version of La Llorona within a context. I will then discuss postcolonialism, and apply a postcolonial lens to my family's version of La Llorona. Finally, I will conclude that La Llorona legends, when viewed

through a postcolonial lens, express the anxieties and anguish felt by Chicanos/Chicanas in the U.S.

For the ease of the following argument, the terms Mexican, Chicano/Chicana, Latino/Latina, and Spanish-American must be (re)defined. There is little contention that Mexican implies a citizen of Mexico, so the definition of Mexican shall remain the same. Therefore, Mexican-Americans are people who are either descended from Mexican immigrants, or Mexican immigrants themselves. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines Chicano as a “person of Mexican birth or descent resident in the U.S. (*particularly in those areas annexed in 1848*), esp. one who is proud of his Mexican origins and concerned to improve the position of Mexicans in the U.S.; a Mexican-American” (“Chicano,” emphasis mine). To differentiate between people descended from Mexican immigrants and people who are native to the U.S. Southwest, I will define Chicano/Chicana as the descendants of the Mexicans who lived in the annexed territories. Chicanos/Chicanas were members of Mexico before the Mexican-American War. After the Mexican-American War, Mexico ceded the Southwest to the U.S., and the Mexican territories within the Southwest became U.S. territories. When the territories changed hands, the occupants of the territories became American citizens. Though Spanish may be their first, and possibly only, language, Chicanos/Chicanas are American citizens by birth, and often consider themselves wholly American. Therefore, a distinction must be made among Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Chicanos/Chicanas. Latinos and Latinas shall be used to define the entire population of Hispanic descendants. Latinos and Latinas include Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Chicanos/Chicanas, Guatemalans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and any other ethnicities that are descended from Hispanic culture. Latino and Latina, therefore, are the broad terms that encompass the smaller, more distinct terms of Mexican, Mexican-American, and

Chicano/Chicana. Spanish-Americans are descendents of Spanish immigrants. My contention in this thesis is that the use of La Llorona tales in the U.S. can and does show a cultural difference from the use of La Llorona tales by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. The use of a postcolonial lens on my family's variation of La Llorona exemplifies the different uses of La Llorona and the unique experience of Chicano/Chicana life in the U.S.

Part One: La Llorona in Scholarship

While La Llorona legends come in many different shapes, the functions are mostly the same, being used by men, women, and children to instruct and critique. Introducing La Llorona to a wide audience in her book *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*, Domino Renee Perez says that, “[f]or people of Mexican ancestry, La Llorona traditionally serves as a cultural allegory, *instructing people how to live and act within established social mores*” (x, emphasis mine). La Llorona has been used by parents to frighten unruly children into behaving, by adults to caution men and women to remain faithful to their spouses, and by society to warn parents to take better care of their children. La Llorona legends, by shifting themes, roles, and purposes, are able to permeate many aspects of the surrounding social structure. Whether used by men, women, or children, La Llorona legends are able to adapt to the situation, allowing a diffusion of the weeping woman through diverse folkloric groups.

Folklore scholarship on La Llorona has a short, sparse history. Much of the scholarship has focused on the broad generality of La Llorona, rather than the significance of La Llorona variations within small groups. One of the first works of research on La Llorona was by Betty Leddy who, in 1948, documented La Llorona legends and the prevalent themes. In her article, "La Llorona in Southern Arizona," Leddy brings to attention the prevalence of La Llorona

legends amongst the Spanish-speaking populations of Southern Arizona. Leddy says that La Llorona is found in “these forms: novel, novelette or short story, poem, drama, magazine article, folklore collection” (272), and that there is “considerable variety among the accounts of La Llorona in Arizona” (273). Leddy then goes on to discuss the reasons La Llorona legends may be performed, saying that La Llorona is a possible “outgrowth of the bogeyman concept” (274). One of the most interesting points that Leddy makes, however, is that “La Llorona is losing, if she hasn’t already lost, her power for evil,” citing the tales in which La Llorona appears to lead the worthy to buried treasure, or appears ““as a nun, all in white, she [wears] a large cross [crucifix] and [walks] with her hands folded in front of her”” (277).

An example from the Fife collection shows the change that is affecting La Llorona. The informant of this La Llorona tale, Grace Gallegos Kelsey, is Spanish and Navajo and was raised in Durango, Colorado. Kelsey related this tale to Nancy L. Hammersley, the collector, as an event experienced by her uncles. In the tale, La Llorona changes from a bogeyman to an aid in redemption and change:

Two of my uncles had been drinking in a saloon one night--when they started home they saw what looked like a beautiful woman, and started to follow her. They followed her for some time -- each time they thought they were almost caught up to her, she would suddenly be about one block ahead of them. Finally they called out to her -- when she turned, her face was a skull. They turned and ran as fast as they could; they never drank again after that. They said it was La Llorona. (Hammersley)

In this tale, La Llorona appears as a seductress with an agenda. Through her use of (mostly harmless) terror, La Llorona can convince men to return to a more socially acceptable path, whether that involves giving up liquor, women, gambling, or just their hell-raising ways.

In the conclusion of her article, Leddy brings to attention five questions or “problems” in La Llorona legends that should be explored by following scholarship:

- (1) The possibility of three general types of *llorona*--the siren, the grieving woman, and the woman who is dangerous to children; (2) the extent of Aztec influence, suggested by such details as the importance of water in the early religion, the drowning of babies as sacrifice to the water gods . . . (3) the admittedly slim possibility of European influences contributed by the soldiery . . .
- (4) the responsibility and occasional punishment of the father; (5) the fact that 50 per cent of the tales from the desert country of Patagonia mention the sea; and so on. (277)

The “problems” Leddy specifically names are intriguing, but should not be the sole point of scholarship on La Llorona tales. While Leddy mentions several different areas for further scholarship, such as the subtypes of La Llorona’s character, much of the scholarship after Leddy’s article has focused on Leddy’s second and third questions: the amount of Aztec influence, and whether La Llorona has been influenced by European sources. Other themes and problems of La Llorona have been forgotten, or only marginally covered.

In 1960, Bacil F. Kirtley published the article “‘La Llorona’ and Related Themes” in *Western Folklore*. In this article, Kirtley focuses extensively on the origins of La Llorona tales, arguing that La Llorona is “largely European in origin” (168). Kirtley traces La Llorona back to two possible sources, European and Aztec, through comparisons are drawn between La Llorona

and similar legends situated in other regions. La Llorona's "resemblances to the Aztec goddesses Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue" (157), which were recognized by Thomas A. Janvier, are acknowledged by Kirtley, but Kirtley cautions that La Llorona narratives may be more closely related to "Die Weisse Frau." According to Kirtley, "Die Weisse Frau," translated as "The White Lady," was first recorded in Germany the same decade La Llorona was mentioned in Mexico. The story of "Die Weisse Frau" involves a widow who murders her children in the mistaken assumption that her lover will not marry her because of her offspring. When the lover learns what the mother did, he is horrified, and the mother eventually leaves to live at a nunnery, where she tries to make up for her sins. Kirtley mentions the similar motifs:

- (a) a girl of humble origin is ruined and abandoned by a young aristocrat . . . (b) she murders her bastard infant(s) . . . (c) she goes insane and dies violently . . . (d) she returns as a malign ghost, sometimes a beckoning temptress . . . (e) those unfortunate enough to meet her die shortly afterward. (158-159)

A final argument that Kirtley makes for La Llorona's connection to "Die Weisse Frau" and similar European tales is that the "La Llorona' story [takes] place in a Europeanized milieu, and the characters' values, their responses, are thoroughly Spanish, not Indian" (161). Kirtley argues that Aztec values would not influence a male lover to abandon his mistress for a more worthy marriage. Therefore, Kirtley says, the La Llorona tale, with the common occurrence of the male lover leaving La Llorona for a more advantageous marriage, is being affected by entirely European values.

Kirtley then discusses the Aztec influences on the La Llorona legend. Like Leddy, he points to the correlations between La Llorona and Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue, but does not stop there. Kirtley mentions several Native American legends, spread across the North American

continent, but mainly in the Pacific Northwest, that share similarities with La Llorona. Most of these legends contain a weeping woman who is closely related to frogs and toads and associated with earthquakes and volcanoes. One of the examples Kirtley gives is that of “Dzelarkhons . . . whose very name, in Haida, means Frog. She was also called Weeping Woman” (164).

Interestingly, Cihuacoatl was also associated with toads, earthquakes, and volcanoes. Kirtley argues that “[t]he Weeping Woman of the Pacific Northwest peoples is a mythic concept which . . . diffused to them in fairly recent (that is, historical) times from the south” (167). Following this thread, Kirtley says that the narrative of La Llorona probably moved north as Spaniards explored the Pacific area, coming in contact with Northwest Native Americans. With this, Kirtley assumes that “one of the best known legends of Mexico is largely European in origin” (168).

Shortly following Kirtley, Michael Kearney wrote an article in 1969 entitled “La Llorona as a Social Symbol.” In the article, Kearney discusses the themes of La Llorona and its possible classification of a myth, since it contains “statements about ‘what should or ought to be’” (206). Kearney argues that La Llorona contains “the fragments of a creation myth . . . because it does two things: first, it relates important experiences . . . Second . . . the legend is also a statement about the world” (201-202). The important experiences that become a statement about the world are the acts of betrayal and revenge. Kearney maps out the legend sequence as follows: “(1) Man abandons woman; (2) Mother drowns male child; (3) God punishes mother; (4) Woman harms man (who is abandoning females)” (203). This sequence becomes a cycle, as the fourth event, a woman harming a man, occurs due to the first event, a man abandoning a woman. Within the cycle, there is a continual power struggle. First, the male is dominant, and hurts the weak. Second, a woman is powerful, drowning a (typically male) child. Third, God, a male entity, punishes the defenseless woman. Fourth, the woman enacts her revenge on promiscuous males.

Set in a linear pattern, the male starts the cycle of aggression by initially abandoning the female. Kearney argues that by containing such a cycle of aggression and revenge, La Llorona is “an elegant and economical representation of the underlying, covert concept of family and interpersonal relations, especially male-female relations” (205). Finally, Kearney states that “[t]o attempt identifying the main symbolic function of La Llorona . . . is futile and irrelevant What is important to realize is that this seemingly simple tale in fact expresses multiple covert values and perceptions with greater symbolic economy” (206).

A legend collected by Shawn Bond expresses the cyclical motion Kearney explored in La Llorona legends. Shawn Bond first heard this legend while living in New Mexico. In this legend, La Llorona kills her child due to her madness, which is brought on by her husband’s death:

The orona [*sic*] was married for only a short time when her husband was killed in the war. She had a small baby, and when she learned of her husband’s death she went crazy. She took her baby out and drowned it in a nearby stream. When she realized what she had done, she ran into the mountains nearby, never to be seen again. She is supposed to look for small children or babies to replace her own child. Many disappearances of all age groups are blamed on her however. She cannot find eternal rest until she finds her child, so she keeps taking people up to her hideaway, and when she realizes they are not her child she kills them. (Bond)

While many variations involve the husband or lover betraying Llorona, this variation involves a “betrayal” that is through no fault of the husband’s. The husband is killed in war, a random event for which neither the husband nor Llorona can be blamed. War is often thought of as a masculine event, involving armies composed of men. The husband’s death becomes the betrayal and La Llorona, victimized by this betrayal, begins acting in a likewise violent way, by killing her own

child. Bereft of her child's presence, which can be read as another "attack" or "betrayal," La Llorona begins kidnapping people "of all age groups." In a final violent act in the cycle, La Llorona kills her victims "when she realizes they are not her child." By killing men, women, and children, La Llorona bereaves another mother or wife of a loved one, perpetuating the cycle.

The cycle of loss and revenge conceptualized by Kearney was also discussed by Bess Lomax Hawes, who argued that La Llorona tales work dually as tales of loss and predictions of painful futures. In 1968, Hawes wrote the article "La Llorona in Juvenile Hall," which discusses legends that circulated Las Palmas School for Girls in California, in 1965. Las Palmas, which is situated in Los Angeles County, is a juvenile residential facility that accepted girls who, according to Hawes, "had been judged delinquent either for sexual offenses or for habitual truancy (which includes running away from home as well as absence from school)" (154). Hawes received the legends that were circulating Las Palmas from a social worker, Marcia A. Tichenor, who worked with the girls at Las Palmas. Hawes categorizes the legends, most of which involved female revenants, which are ghosts or spirits who return from the dead. The largest portion of the legends circulating Las Palmas dealt with La Llorona. Interestingly, the La Llorona legends that were circulating in Las Palmas, while clearly about La Llorona, contained elements that are not always present in other traditional tellings of La Llorona. Some of the motifs, whether new or old, were that La Llorona always murdered her children, always killed between two and six children, and the children murdered were always female. The most common themes in the whole of the tales are "infanticide and other aggressive crimes committed *by* women, punishment or aggressive crimes committed *against* women, inconsolable grief or loss, and mutilation (another kind of loss)" (164).

In Las Palmas, La Llorona began to change to fit the situations the girls at the school found themselves in. Hawes argues that:

The three faces of the traditional La Llorona--the temptress who is dangerous to men, the child killer, and the mourning woman--merge into one frighteningly ambiguous figure. Wildly revenging herself upon men, upon her children, and upon herself, this multifaceted, loving-hating ghost-mother seems the explicit embodiment of the emotional conflicts of the adolescent delinquent girl. It is especially notable that in the telling of any of these tales the teller can identify with either the punishing mother or the punished child or both. (165)

The overarching theme of loss that permeates the tales told by the residents of Las Palmas, particularly the La Llorona tales, echoes the loss the girls themselves are experiencing. Through the tales, Hawes argues, the girls can explore the "loss of children, loss of beauty, loss of life" (165). Even more interestingly, and arguably more importantly, the girls are able to explore *loss* from two angles: the loss experienced by the mother, who loses her children, and the loss experienced by the children, who are murdered. Therefore, as Hawes begins to argue, the La Llorona tales that are told in Las Palmas are exceedingly important *because* of their variance in motifs and themes. In order for a tale to be retold, it must contain significance to the participants in its performance. Therefore, the themes and motifs of the La Llorona tales retold in Las Palmas have a significant importance to the girls of Las Palmas. The girls of Las Palmas are "children of loss, children of need, children of lack . . . tragically, it would seem that their tales are quite accurate prognoses of their probable futures" (170).

The themes and motifs in the Las Palmas narratives can also be found in the Fife collection. The following legend was collected by Carolyn Ellsworth in 1976, and the informant

was Guillermo Fredrico Rittscher, who was born and raised in Guatemala. In this legend, La Llorona experiences multiple kinds of loss and, in turn, causes loss.

There is a cave on the side of a small canyon outside of town. The only road goes past this cave, so the villagers pass it often. There are no trees around the cave, unlike all the other nearby caves. But this cave is “carpeted” with leaves. Upon nearing this cave, the villagers’ horses will rear up, and refuse to pass. When it gets dark, one can hear Llorona (translated, means “weeping woman”) crying.

Llorona’s baby was kidnapped in the night ages ago. She still searches everynight [*sic*] for her baby. Sometimes, she has even been known to go into people’s homes, to see their babies. In the morning, if your baby is dead, it means Llorona touched it. (Ellsworth)

Though the informant of this version was from Guatemala, this version of La Llorona illustrates some of the themes Hawes mentioned in her article. In this version, La Llorona is both the victim and the victimizer. Excluded from her society, La Llorona resides in a cave “outside of town.” The initial tragedy in this version is not perpetrated by La Llorona; rather than La Llorona murdering her child, her baby is “kidnapped in the night.” Like the girls in Las Palmas, La Llorona is a child of loss, having lost both her community and her child. La Llorona then, in turn, begins victimizing other children through a perversion of a mother’s care. By touching babies, La Llorona commits infanticide, conflating a mother’s love and murder. Like the versions related by the girls of Las Palmas, this version of La Llorona expresses the fears of both children and mothers, who share the role of victim.

The use of La Llorona tales as “prognoses” of “probable futures” mentioned by Hawes reaches beyond the Las Palmas residents. In her article “‘There Was a Woman’: La Llorona in Oregon,” published in 1988, Pamela Jones discusses the La Llorona legends she collected from recent immigrant parents from Mexico and how the legends worked dually as childhood memories from Mexico and as cautionary tales to temper the behaviors of parents. The people interviewed by Jones were clients of Women, Infants, and Children, or, more commonly, WIC. All of the interviewed were parents of young children and, Jones notes, used the legends:

in three ways to address parental concerns: the stories released parental frustrations and tensions built up while coping with several children; the stories expressed unconscious anxieties about childcare; and third, the stories spoke about the difficulties of caring for children while living in poverty. (195)

The versions of the legend that Jones collected varied amongst the informants. Most of the variations had correlations to the lives of the informants, providing an insight into the lives of the immigrant parents. Impossible desires, such as an easy life, were related through the La Llorona tales, and Llorona suffered the loss of her children by giving in to these desires.

Jones’s claim that La Llorona is used as a cautionary aid for parents can be seen in the following tale from the Fife folklore collection, in which La Llorona’s child is killed through an act of neglect. The informant heard this legend from fellow students when he was studying photography at the University of New Mexico.

The story is about a woman by the name La Arona [*sic*]. Happened about 200 yrs. ago in New Mexico. La Arona [*sic*] was not home when this happened. Her baby was out by the ditch and fell in drowned and died. When she came home the neibors [*sic*] told her about the baby, she went out to look for her baby. She from

then on, spent the rest of her life looking for her baby and still does. People usually see her at night when she roams around looking for her baby. (Lewis)

La Llorona's crime of neglect is summed up in one phrase: "La Arona [*sic*] was not home when this happened." A child's death, which is a cataclysmic event, is caused by an action as small as leaving the home. This variation also suggests the shackling affect children may have on their mothers. La Llorona is, in effect, chained to her home. If she leaves, her child will die and La Llorona will be cursed to spend eternity searching for her child, unable to find her child or gain rest.

The research on La Llorona has expanded the information on La Llorona and has given interesting insights on the legend, but many issues about La Llorona have been glossed over or ignored. Little of the scholarship has discussed the context of La Llorona legends or what the legends say about the specific Latino culture in which they are performed. The debate over the origin of La Llorona arguably detracts from the legend's importance. While the similarities between La Llorona, Die Weisse Frau, and the Aztec goddesses Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue are interesting, the parent source of La Llorona should not be studied to the extent that scholarship is detrimental to the actual La Llorona legend in La Llorona scholarship. More emphasis should be given to scholarship such as that by Kearney, which discussed the depth of social contexts within La Llorona, and Jones and Hawes, which discussed the performances and social contexts of La Llorona in the latter half of the twentieth century.

One final area of contention is La Llorona's supposed area of initial circulation. Many folklorists describe La Llorona as coming up from Mexico, or crossing the border. While La Llorona legends do come to the United States with Mexican immigrants, the La Llorona tradition is also alive and well within the United States borders. Families descended from American

Indians and Spanish immigrants in the American Southwest have passed down the legend for several generations, without a needed influx from Mexico. To ignore the La Llorona legends that have existed within the U.S. borders for generations is to pass by a rich field of study, as well as to simplify a legend tradition that has immense depth. Due to the lack of scholarship on U.S. La Llorona traditions, the exposition of Chicano/Chicana relations with the U.S. has been largely missed. With the ceding of the American Southwest by Mexico, the Chicano/Chicana culture came into contact with foreign cultures, which led to forced reconciliations between the two cultures. These reconciliations, such as language, religion, and cultural practices, as well as race relations and class issues, have created a rich history in the U.S. Southwest. This history is accessible through the folklore circulating within Chicano/Chicana groups in the U.S.

In recent years, La Llorona has found a rebirth as a feminine power within poetry, novels, film, and drama. La Llorona has begun to appear on commercial goods from coffee mugs to bumper stickers. While La Llorona's appeal is spreading, her influence is changing. As Leddy mentions in her article, La Llorona's power of evil is waning. Instead, La Llorona is beginning to embody the difficulties of motherhood and womanhood faced by Chicana women. In the introduction to his book *La Llorona's Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands*, Luis D. León explains a trinity nearly parallel to the Godhead of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This second trinity consists of La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona:

La Virgen de Guadalupe is the mother of Jesus--she is an Indian and Mexican regional manifestation of Mary [La Malinche] was the indigenous Mexican woman who acted as Hernán Cortéz's translator and lover and proved essential to Spain's conquest of the Americas in the sixteenth century [La Llorona]

mediates between the two . . . As the ghostly apparition of the weeping woman, reputedly guilty of infanticide, she appears in anguish, searching for her children.

(10)

León discusses the polarity of La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche, as La Virgen de Guadalupe embodies virginity, the most idealized virtue of womanhood, while La Malinche is considered a Jezebel and traitor to the Mexican people. According to León, La Llorona fills a position between the binary forms of Guadalupe and La Malinche, becoming the “universal symbol of the eternal soul who never completely disappears but whose form, whose shape, is shifted and changed” (10). La Virgen de Guadalupe is the ideal to which Mexican and Chicano/Chicana society expects women to rise, even though it is unattainable by Mexican and Chicana women. La Malinche, in contrast, is the depths to which Mexican and Chicana women can fall if they do not achieve Guadalupe’s virtues, particularly virginity and chastity. Stuck inbetween the Virgin and the Jezebel, La Llorona is the shifting form of Mexican and Chicana women, who are unable to achieve Guadalupe’s virtues, but do not want to fall to La Malinche’s level of derision.

Instead of a bogeyman who kidnaps children, La Llorona is, for many people, becoming an icon of a wife who is betrayed and a mother who is driven into madness. The guilt that previously rested on La Llorona’s shoulders is becoming lighter, and is splitting between La Llorona and her lover. La Llorona, by containing the fears, anxieties, and anguishes of Chicano/Chicana men and women, is becoming a character to be pitied, rather than to be hated. As La Llorona’s character is changing, the contexts of legend performances are changing as well. La Llorona is becoming a legend told to recount history, instruct members of society, and to even give hope to the dominated members of a culture.

The following legend, taken from the Fife folklore collection, contains many of the changing elements in La Llorona tales. La Llorona becomes a betrayed wife, and the tale is used to instruct. The collector, David Hewett, describes in the legend's context that his sixth grade teacher, who had related the legend to him, taught her students legends "because the legends helped shape the people of Texas" (Hewett).

In the days of the conquistadors, there was one Spanish officer who had a land grant in the province of Tejas. His nearest neighbor was a friend of his, with whom he had served. His wife was a very beautiful woman and their young children were healthy and strong. One year the husband had to go to report to the king's emissary at the capital on Cuba, and was very sad that he could not take his family with him as it was a very long trip to the island. He asked his neighbor to keep an eye on his place and see that nothing went wrong in his absence [*sic*].

So the husband left on his mission trusting his friend to take care of his family and land. The neighbor, however, was jealous of his wife, for she was very beautiful and he wanted her for himself. She refused his advances, telling him she was a faithful wife and would wait for her husband to return. The neighbor feared she would tell her husband about his advances and decided to meet the husband first and lie about her so that he would not believe her accusations.

Several months passed before the husband returned and his jealous friend met him along the road a couple of days from his home. The neighbor told the husband that his wife had been unfaithful and that the father of her latest child was a common peasant. For the rest of the way, the neighbor poisoned the husband's mind with his lies. When the husband arrived home, he found his wife

was indeed several months pregnant. She was happy he was home and told him the [*sic*] had a new child on the way. But the husband could only remember what his friend had said. He accused her of being unfaithful and that a peasant was her unborn child's father. She denied and said she had been faithful to him. But he would not listen, he even asked her if the other children were his. She said they were his, as was the one she now carried. But he would not listen.

He called his most trusted servants in and commanded him [*sic*] to take his unfaithful wife away. The servants knew that there was no changing the master's mind, so they saddled the horses and loaded the wife and her children on them. Following his orders, they rode four days to the north and there looked for a tree to hang them by. The wife begged and pleaded with them, denied that she had been unfaithful and asked them to spare her and her children. Finally, as night began to fall she convinced them and they took pity on her. They told her they would let her go and would return to tell him they had hung her and the children. But they would never get a chance to tell him, for after they took away his wife and children, he rode south for four days then found a tree and hung himself.

As the servants rode away from the wife and the children, leading the horses they had ridden on, the wife looked around for shelter from the storm that was building. She led them as best she could but soon became lost in the darkness before she found shelter. They ended up on a ledge overlooking the river when the rain started. They were still looking for a cave when the ledge under the children collapsed, dumping them into the river. She called their names and made her way downriver searching for them. She searched all night in the rain, calling

them and crying. In the morning she was sick and soon died but never stopped crying and calling them. It is said that she looks for them still, near rivers and especially during storms and always she is crying. (Hewett)

The main tension within this La Llorona variation exists between spouses and friends. The legend critiques the husband's quick acceptance of his friend's account and refusal to trust his wife. The legend serves as a cautionary tale for husbands and wives, warning spouses to trust their marriage partners before trusting outside informants. The legend also cautions against hasty actions, warning that a hasty argument and equally hasty decision can cause ruin in the marriage.

Like Hewett's text, the next La Llorona version contains European influences and characters, but whereas Hewett's text focused on the relationships between men and women, this text turns the focus to colonialism and the effects of the Spanish conquistadors on the indigenous populations of the Americas. This version places La Llorona into a historical context, naming both the lover and Llorona. By naming both characters and placing them in a concrete place and time, the legend gains a sense of realness. The names and situations, however, should also be read as a social commentary:

The lady told a story about a Spanish conquistador (she said Hernan Cortez) who came to the New World. He met a beautiful, young Indian lady, La Malinche, who fell in love with her [*sic*]. He, seeing the beauty in her, used her. She became pregnant and had a child (the sex was not mentioned). She discovered that he was going to take the child back to Spain without her, and rather than let that happen, she took the child and drowned the baby and then herself. This is where the legend begins. When she went to heaven, Heavenly Father was angry with her because she had killed her child and herself, so he punished her to roam the land

for eternity, searching for her child. Sometimes at night people will hear her crying for her baby, usually near a river or other body of water. Therefore she is called the Weeping Lady or La Llorona. When she finds any children she drowns them too, because she has gone insane. (Woodbury)

Though nothing may be said outright, a tension exists between the characters of Hernán Cortéz and La Malinche. While the legend is a critique of La Llorona's act of infanticide, it is also a silent critique of the conquistadors' subjugation of the indigenous people of the New World. The subjugation also takes place in the overlaying of European onto indigenous themes. La Malinche, an indigenous woman who aided the conquistadors in the defeat of the native population, is both a betrayer and the betrayed. Unlike Die Weisse Frau, who betrays only her family, La Malinche betrays entire populations, an event that is placed into a strong historical context.

Despite La Llorona's overwhelming presence in forms of folklore and media, from legends and songs to poetry and film, La Llorona remains little studied. What scholarship has been completed on La Llorona has illuminated several facets of the legend, from its possible sources to the influence La Llorona has on lifestyles and ideology. La Llorona must also be viewed as an expression of a Chicano/Chicana worldview. Through a postcolonial lens, La Llorona can highlight the affects the colonialism of America has had upon the indigenous populations, as well as populations of Spanish-Indians.

In this next section I will give a summary of my paternal family history, particularly on my paternal grandmother's side. This history will help contextualize my family's variation of La Llorona. After my family's history, I will describe how and when the legend is passed down within the family, and give an account of the legend. Following the legend, I will briefly discuss postcolonial theory and its relevance to folkloristic scholarship, then apply a postcolonial lens to

the legend. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that postcolonialism allows a more intimate understanding of Chicano/Chicana cultural experiences.

Part Two: The Florez Family and Legend

My family has lived in New Mexico since before the Mexican-American War in the 1840s. My family is Chicano on my grandmother's side and Spanish-American on my grandfather's side. In Conjilon, New Mexico, in 1932, a young American Indian woman named Epfania Maestas began a relationship with a Spanish-American man named Leonardo Mansanares. In time, Epfania became pregnant out of wedlock, and gave birth to a baby girl on March 22, 1933. When Mansanares' family learned about the relationship, and the illegitimate child, the situation was quickly hushed up. Leonardo Mansanares either refused, or was not allowed, to marry Epfania Maestas, and Epfania had to begin a life as a single mother in a strictly Catholic town.

The daughter born to Epfania was named Mary. Much of Mary's childhood was spent moving between her mother's household and her grandmother's household. Mary's grandmother, a widow named Piedad Maestas *née* Padilla, was an Apache woman who ran a very traditional household. Piedad Maestas was the matriarch of her family, and nearly all of the family descendants retained their family name of *Maestas*, and built their homes around Piedad Maestas' house. It was in this family group that Mary Maestas grew up, surrounded by aunts, cousins, and a grandmother who prized a traditional lifestyle. Leonardo Mansanares, Mary's biological father, was never mentioned by Mary's family, and Mary remained unaware of who her father was for more than half a century.

When Epfania finally married, it was not to Leonardo Mansanares, but to an American Indian man named Esquibel. Though Mary was raised in part by her mother and stepfather, she still retained the name of her mother's family, Maestas. In 1947, when Mary was fourteen years older, her mother passed away due to a tumor growing in her stomach. Mary was sent to live with her grandmother, who spoiled Mary a great deal. Within a year, however, Mary's grandmother, Piedad, also passed away, and Mary was without a home. Mary was shuffled between the homes of several aunts and cousins; she never found herself truly welcome, or at home, in the homes of her extended family. The next year, in 1949, Mary Maestas met a young Spanish-American man named José Bernardino Florez, called "José B." and "Joe" by his family and friends. Mary and José were introduced to each other at a dance by José's older brother and sister-in-law, Alonzo and Loretta Flores. Interestingly, and a sign of how quiet the community was about the circumstances of Mary's birth, Loretta Flores was the younger sister of Leonardo Mansanares, Mary's father. Though Loretta knew that she was Mary's aunt, she did not tell Mary, or even her husband, Alonzo Flores.

The Florez/Flores family was a Spanish-American family that had deep roots in the American West. José's father, Toribio Flores, was a sheepherder who had been born and raised in Colorado. Toribio joined the United States Army during World War I, and fought in Europe as a doughboy. When Toribio was honorably discharged from the military after the end of WWI, he found himself in Texas. From Texas, he moved to Lumberton, New Mexico, where he met Luisita Valdez. They were married on July 2, 1923, and settled in Ensenada, New Mexico, Luisita's hometown. The Flores family traced their roots back to Europe, with no marriages or relationship with American Indians. One of Luisita's most highly prized traits in the family was her complexion of pale skin, light hair, and blue eyes. The family was Caucasian, and

differentiated themselves from their Native American-descended neighbors. The family also spoke both English and Spanish in the household, and prided themselves on their closeness to a white America. José, the second oldest son, had joined the U.S. Army near the end of World War II. While in the army, José was a member of the military police, and when he was discharged, he remained connected with the military.

José and Mary were married on February 27, 1950, and moved to Utah within a year when José applied for a job with the Naval Supply Depot at Anchorage, in Northern Utah. Soon after they arrived in Utah, Mary gave birth to her only child, a son named James. When Mary moved to Utah, she found herself in a community where Spanish was no longer the dominant language. Unable to communicate with the majority of her neighbors, Mary turned her attentions to her son, and spent most of her time raising James. When James began kindergarten, he learned English, which he in turn taught to his mother. Once Mary learned English, her social circle opened up; she was no longer restricted to family members from New Mexico who also spoke Spanish. Interestingly, however, Mary's circle of friends remained small, with most of her friends being English-as-a-second-language speakers.

When James was a child, Mary was a stay-at-home mother and homemaker. During the summer and fall, Mary took James with her to fields and orchards where they picked tomatoes, chilies, cherries, and peaches for extra spending money. When James started junior high school, Mary began working as a cleaning lady in the houses of other families. During this time, José was working as a mechanic at the naval supply depot. When rumors of the depot's closure came, José applied for another transfer, this time from the naval base to the Hill Air Force Base. After his transfer, the family moved from their home in Anchorage to Ogden, where there was a higher percentage of Spanish-speakers.

When James was twenty-six years old, he met a woman named Audrey Coleman. Audrey was from Oregon and was of English and German descent. James and Audrey began dating, and were married in 1979. Mary was furious at the marriage for several reasons. Audrey was a member of the Latter-Day Saints, or LDS, religion, and James converted to the LDS faith in order to marry Audrey. Mary was afraid for her son's soul, and believed that Audrey had hurt James' chances for salvation. Another reason Mary disliked Audrey, however, was that Audrey was, in Mary's words, "white." Mary disliked Audrey because Audrey was an outsider, and as such, did not understand the world that Mary's family lived in. Mary's presumption that it was due to Audrey's whiteness, however, does not quite hold water. Mary's own spouse, José, was considered "white/Hispanic descent" in the U.S. Census. Therefore, the problem with Audrey was not so much Audrey's skin color as Audrey's culture.

Audrey Coleman's first language was English, and she grew up near Coquille, Oregon, where the majority of the population is Caucasian. Audrey herself was a convert to the LDS faith, and the rest of her family were either LDS converts, or members of Protestant religions, save one Catholic sister. While the Coleman family was closer to the poverty level than the Florez family, most of the Coleman children were able to attend college and university and held middle-class jobs, such as teachers, architects, and nurses. In nearly every way, Audrey was an antithesis to Mary's worldview. While José Florez, Mary's husband, spoke English, he also spoke Spanish, and grew up in the same region of New Mexico as Mary. Even though José was a different ethnicity than Mary, they shared many of the same experiences, such as religion, language, and childhood experiences. With the move to Utah, Mary was taken away from center of her world, and placed at the periphery. Surrounded by an English-speaking majority who had different religions, beliefs, and even food customs, Mary was able to see the difference between

herself and those surrounding her every day. Constantly bombarded with an us/them situation, Mary clung more tightly to her traditional lifestyle of New Mexico. Therefore, when Audrey married into the family, Audrey became a physical manifestation of Mary's feelings of isolation and detachment from her cultural center.

James and Audrey have two children: Joseph Benjamin, who was born in 1983, and myself, born in 1986. Our household has spoken English as the primary language since my childhood; the family's religion is LDS. Despite these changes from the Florez family's life, some practices remain the same. Mary, my grandmother, is my immediate family's closest relative, both literally and figuratively, and much of my childhood was spent at her home. Though Mary only spoke in English when talking to my brother and myself, she helped my parents raise the children on traditional tales and legends that Mary herself learned as a child in New Mexico. One of the legends I learned from Mary was the legend of La Llorona.

I first heard about La Llorona when I was about six or seven. My family was driving to my grandmother Mary's house. My brother, who was about nine or ten, and I were going to spend the night at my grandmother's house. While in the car, my brother and I started arguing, and my brother told me that I should be careful, or La Llorona would get me. Because my brother was older than me, I viewed him as infinitely wiser as well, and thought that everything he said was unquestionably true. Worried about this mysterious La Llorona, I asked my parents who she was. My mother did not know anything about, but my father did, and he said something rather cryptic about La Llorona being a woman who cries all the time, and our car ride continued. When my family arrived at my grandmother's house, my mother and brother went to get the beds ready in the back of the house, and I sat with my father and grandmother on the couch.

When I asked my grandmother who La Llorona was, she told me a very short story: “She was a woman who lost her babies. Now she cries all the time, and she’s looking for her babies. You have to stay inside at night, or she’ll kidnap you” (M. Florez) This was my first contact with La Llorona. After that day, I thought of La Llorona whenever I heard the wind blowing through the cracks around the windows. As a child, I incorporated what I knew of La Llorona into my life. Perhaps I was already aware that La Llorona was a legend mainly specific to Spanish-speakers, because when I played with children in my grandmother’s neighborhood, La Llorona was a constant theme, but in my own neighborhood, I never mentioned her. The children in my grandmother’s neighborhood incorporated La Llorona into all sorts of play, from running down the dark spaces between the houses to scream her name, to pretending to be looking for her children while playing hide-and-seek.

As my brother and I grew older, our grandmother and father told us more about La Llorona. Soon, we learned that La Llorona’s children had not disappeared in a completely arbitrary event, but had been murdered by La Llorona. Then we learned that she murdered her children by drowning them in the river. Eventually, we got the whole story, or as much of a story as my grandmother and father knew. The following variation was related to me by my father, who learned it from his mother:

Once there was a woman. She was an Indian, she was very beautiful. She had long black hair, like Jovana, your cousin. She lived in the mountains in New Mexico, in a little village. This was a long time ago, before New Mexico was part of America. There was [*sic*] a lot of Spanish there.

This Spanish man came once. He was a soldier, I think, and he came with other soldiers. He and the Indian girl fell in love, and they lived together for a few

years. They had some babies—I don't know how many. Three or four. I think the other soldiers left, but he stayed.

He missed Spain, though, so he left. He wanted to go home and marry a Spanish woman, so he left the Indian woman and their kids. When he left her, she went crazy. She went mad, you know, with grief. She was mad because she thought he betrayed her. So she took her kids and she went down to the river. She threw her kids in the river to kill them and they drowned. She was mad, that's why she killed her kids, her babies.

Later, after a while, she realized what she did. Now she wanders around the rivers and the mountains, crying. She's looking for her babies, because she killed hers. When she finds kids outside at night, she takes them. Or if you're bad, or if you cry at night, she'll hear you and she'll reach through the, um, the window and grab you. Then she'll, uh, take you with her, but you'll die. Sometimes she kills kids, and sometimes she just forgets about them and they die, because she's crazy. (J. Florez)

My grandmother, Mary, first heard the legend when she was about eight years old. The tale, she remembers, was used as a bogeyman to help children behave. Mary remembers that men and women used to wear masks to make themselves look like La Llorona. According to Mary, different men and women would come to different family homes every night, scaring the children and asking if they, the children, were behaving individually or in small groups. Even though the children knew which adult was behind each mask, the adults were terrifying for the children since the adults adopted different demeanors while wearing the masks. The adults, pretending to be La Llorona, would threaten to kidnap the children if they did not behave. These

masked encounters occurred through November and December, up until Christmas. Mary believes that the encounters usually began right after El Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. In this instance, La Llorona seems to be experiencing a conflation with El Día de los Muertos activities. La Llorona, a separate entity from the celebrations, becomes a main focus or theme of the celebrations. La Llorona permeated the surrounding culture in Conjilon, finding a place for expression in customs and practices that originally had little or nothing to do with La Llorona. By bringing La Llorona legends to life by acting out the threat of kidnapping, the people in Conjilon swelled the importance of La Llorona legends in the social context of Conjilon. For Mary, therefore, the character of La Llorona was an important facet of life that Mary brought with her to Utah, and passed down to her child and grandchildren.

James, my father, remembers Mary telling him the legend of La Llorona when he was in elementary school. Mary, however, never used La Llorona as a bogeyman to scare or threaten James into behaving. Instead, James remembers hearing the legend as a sad story about a lady who killed her children because of her madness. For James, the emphasis on the legend was not on the possibility of La Llorona reenacting infanticide on James, but the tragedy that befell La Llorona and her family. Due to Mary not using La Llorona as a way to force James into behaving, James believes that La Llorona, or at least, the La Llorona that was used in Mary's childhood, was beginning to die out. James' assumption that La Llorona was dying out is both correct and incorrect. As stated above, La Llorona's penchant for evil and violence is fading away. La Llorona is being used less and less by parents in order to manage child behaviors. La Llorona, though, is not dying out. Instead, La Llorona is shifting her shape in order to stay relevant in her surrounding cultures. Like La Llorona's shift into a nun's habit and La Llorona's

permeation into Día de los Muertos celebrations, La Llorona legends are being adapted to fit the needs of the performers.

Within my family, La Llorona has been translated from Spanish to English, affecting La Llorona's cultural significance. My grandmother learned the tale in Spanish, and told her son the tale in Spanish. My father, however, told my brother and me the tale in English since my brother and I are not fluent in Spanish. The adaptation of La Llorona from Spanish to English has turned La Llorona into a cultural bridge. There is a cultural separation within Chicano/Chicana culture, particularly within my generation. Children are growing up without learning Spanish, and a difference in lifestyles is creating a gap between older and younger generations. The legend of La Llorona allows the younger members of my family to feel a part of Chicano/Chicana culture. La Llorona, by bridging the gap between English and Spanish Chicanos/Chicanas, works as a transitory aid. By being transitory, however, La Llorona becomes impermanent, adding an air of fragility to the culture in which it is circulated. Since La Llorona has a significant effect on Chicano/Chicana identity, it can be used to express Chicano/Chicana culture. By applying theoretical lenses to La Llorona legends, La Llorona can further remark upon Chicano/Chicana culture, from Chicana feminism to Chicano/Chicana family structure.

Applying postcolonial theory to my family's legend allows us to see that La Llorona can highlight the effects the colonialism of America has had upon the indigenous populations, as well as populations of Spanish-Indians. Unless marginalized literatures are studied, the different human conditions and experiences unique to each culture shall remain unknown and possibly misunderstood. Edward W. Said, in his article "The Politics of Knowledge," discusses the marginalization of literature by women and Third World writers. Said argues that the creation of alternate canons or the eviction of previous canon members was not "what the great revisionary

gestures of feminism, subaltern or black studies, and anti-imperialist resistance originally intended” (195). Instead, Said says that a door must be opened to allow the entrance of marginalized literatures. Marginalized literatures, such as literature written by women, have existed side-by-side with the canonized literature, but have often been overlooked by scholars due to the literatures’ origins. By extending the classification of *canon* or *mainstream* to encompass the marginalized literatures, it becomes possible to create a more rounded canon, which, instead of portraying the experiences or ideology of the majority, will include the worldview and ideology of the minority. Fawzia Afzal-Khan argues that “[i]n a world polarized into the West and the Rest, the rest of the world has the ‘ethicopolitical’ responsibility as well as the authority to ensure that postmoderism does not mandate itself as *the* human condition” (“Margins” 25, emphasis in original). Afzal-Khan’s argument ties in nicely with Said’s, giving a clear example of why it is important to open the door to marginalized literature.

These views of postcolonial theory in literature work equally well in folklore. While the La Llorona legend, as performed in the Southwest, is not considered literature in the canonical sense, it is part of a marginalized culture. The scholarship in the field of folkloric legends should expand into more areas of study, such as context and theory, in order to ensure that legend scholarship, such as the scholarship on La Llorona, reaches its full potential. One area that needs expansion in folkloric scholarship is the understanding of postcolonialism. The term *postcolonial* relates to the period succeeding colonialism. Postcolonial theory, therefore, is the study and application of postmodern theories to allow the voice of subaltern ideas and themes.

Postcolonialism is neatly tied with anticolonialism and involves the analysis of colonial effects on the colonized. Postcolonial theory is currently active in African, Indian, and other Third World literatures. This localization of postcolonial theory in primarily Third World literatures

creates two areas of contention: first, that postcolonial theory is almost exclusively applied to English-language literatures, and second, that postcolonialism is a theory that deals mostly with Third World literatures.

The first problem with current postcolonial theory is its preoccupation with the English language. Because most postcolonial literature has been written in English and French, literatures written in other languages have been ignored until translated into English or French. Walter D. Mignolo mentioned the dominance of English literature when he discussed the problem of Spanish colonialism being marginalized in his article “(Post)Occidentalism, (Post)Coloniality, and (Post)Subaltern Rationality.” Spanish colonialism and Spanish colonial literature has not been studied very extensively by postcolonialists, due, in part, to “Spanish as the dominant language of the early modern/colonial period [losing] its prestige as a ‘thinking language’ with the fall of Spain and the rise of England and France” (96-97). With the overwhelming prominence of English and French colonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spanish colonies diminished, and now the “Eurocentric” idea of postcolonialism applies to the English, French, and only rarely the Spanish, Portuguese, or Dutch. The overlooking of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism means that South and Latin America, as well as smaller colonies around the world, are overlooked in scholarship on both literature and folklore studies. Mignolo gives the example of Caribbean literature, remarking that “[t]he Caribbean contribution to postcolonial theorizing is already well known, basically because a good deal of writing is in English and French . . . the dominant languages for the modern/colonial period. The Spanish Caribbean contribution is less familiar” (96). The unfamiliarity of Spanish literature extends beyond the Caribbean into many of Spain’s previous colonies, including the U.S. Southwest. Most of the postcolonial work done on Spanish literature has taken place after the literature has

been translated to English. This trend carries over to scholarship on La Llorona, as much of the scholarship has been on English-language La Llorona tales.

The term “Third World” is a problematic one, particularly among postcolonial theorists. The categorization of countries as “Third World” relies on the identification of First World countries, which, in turn, rely upon the existence of Third World countries to create their own identity. The use of the “other” to create a self-identification leads to a cycle where the *other* (in this case the Third World) must remain dominated, possibly dehumanized, or at the very least, less modernized or less economically modern, in order for the *self* (or the First World) to remain assured of its identification. Ella Shohat discussed this risk of postcolonialism in her article “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial,’” describing the “colonial discourse of an allochronic other, living in another time, still lagging behind us” (131). The implications of the term Third World, then, can cause a prejudiced rhetoric much like the rhetoric used for colonizing missions.

Another problem with the term Third World is the preconception it lends to “postcolonial.” In many instances, postcolonial has become synonymous with Third World. Like English literature becoming the main focus of postcolonial theory to the detriment of Spanish and Portuguese literatures, Third World literature has become the main focus of postcolonialism to the detriment of First World countries that were recently colonies. For example, Canada and Australia were British colonies, and are now members of the Commonwealth. Due to their recent history as colonies, the literature of both Canada and Australia is considered to be postcolonial, but Canada and Australia are not rated as Third World countries by the modern world. Due to the preconceptions of what postcolonialism entails, many places that are experiencing postcolonialism are overlooked by both theorists and folklorists since they do not meet the “requirements” of postcolonialism. One of these places is the American Southwest, which was

initially colonized by the Spanish, and is now experiencing internal colonization. Internal colonization occurs when a minority group within a nation is exploited by the country or government. The exploited group gains little or no profit, and is kept in a subaltern position. Mignolo explains internal colonialism as “[enforcing] the colonial politics toward indigenous communities” (97). The concept of internal colonialism was proposed by Pablo González-Casanova and Rodolfo Stavehagen, who used the concept to “account for the relation between the state [of Mexico] and the Amerindian population” (97). Further examples of internal colonialism include the treatment of Native Americans in the U.S., the Ainu in Japan, and the Apartheid in South Africa. Taking this into consideration, the application of a postcolonial lens to La Llorona legends can show how the effects of past and present colonization are theoretically present in all places, including legends told among Chicanos/Chicanas, Mexicans, and Mexican-Americans.

In applying a postcolonial lens, certain themes must be acknowledged, such as race, gender, land, and violence. One such theme that stands out in my family’s variation of La Llorona is the clear racial categorization. La Llorona is identified as Indian woman, while her lover is Spanish. Not only are they categorized by race, but their racial identities are the first traits used to describe the characters. At the beginning of the legend, La Llorona is described as an Indian woman, living in a village in New Mexico. By the end of the paragraph, the second race, Spanish, appears in the line, “[t]here was [*sic*] a lot of Spanish there.” Just as “[s]he was an Indian” modified La Llorona’s character, “[t]here was [*sic*] a lot of Spanish there” modifies the region where La Llorona lives. In postcolonial theory, land is often gendered as female. The use of gendered land becomes an act of violence. Spanish colonization of the Americas heavily affected the landscape, from deforestation and plowing to mining and mineral extraction. The

heavy use and exploitation of the land, which is gendered as female, becomes conflated with sexual violence such as rape. The land can also take the place of La Llorona, the indigenous woman. When La Llorona is thus modified as the land, the beginning of the legend sets the stage for a potentially violent act of colonization: “Once there was a [land]. [The land] was Indian, [it] was very beautiful . . . There was [*sic*] a lot of Spanish there.”

La Llorona’s lover is described as a Spanish soldier who came to La Llorona’s land in the company of other soldiers. The term “soldier” implies violence: soldiers are the members of an army, and armies are used to wage war. With the soldier’s arrival in La Llorona’s village, there is a threat of violence, whether in the form of physical warfare or psychological relations. The number of participants is also important. La Llorona is the only indigenous character mentioned in the legend, but there “was [*sic*] a lot of Spanish” near La Llorona, even before the entrance of the soldiers. La Llorona, whether in the form of the land or a lone indigenous woman, is overwhelmingly outnumbered by the numerous Spanish soldiers. The domination of La Llorona is enacted, if not through actual warfare, then by the very real threat of violence.

The arrival of La Llorona’s lover is presented as a certain event. The performer knows how the legend will end, and the certainty in the chain of events affects the performance. The Spanish soldier is acknowledged as “[*t*]his Spanish man” (emphasis mine), rather than *a* Spanish man. It takes a specific man to set the events in motion, and the soldier’s individual importance is underscored in the use of “this.” Initially, the soldier seems to be faithful to the Indian woman. He lives with her for several years, fathering children and presumably supporting both his children and La Llorona. When his fellow soldiers leave, the lover remains behind with La Llorona. It is at the phrase “but he stayed” that the legend is at its turning point. If the performance ends here, there is no legend. The soldier remains faithful to La Llorona, La

Llorona never goes mad, and the children are never murdered. Without the push of betrayal, the tragedy of La Llorona never occurs, and the legend remains unfulfilled in its purpose.

With the next line, however, the tragedy is set in motion. The soldier, missing his homeland, leaves. The soldier's desertion of La Llorona seems surprisingly sudden, coming immediately after "but he stayed." The juxtaposition of "but he stayed" and "so he left" emphasizes the opposition between the two lines. The immediate switch between such polarities, with no forewarning, causes a mental and emotional whiplash in both the audience and La Llorona. The soldier's actions are so immediate, they seem nearly inconceivable. La Llorona is driven into madness by her lover's departure, an occurrence that is repeated several times: "When he left her, *she went crazy. She went mad*, you know, with grief. *She was mad* because she thought he betrayed her . . . *She was mad*, that's why she killed her kids" (emphasis mine). La Llorona's madness, however, is closely tied to her anger. The third and fourth time La Llorona's insanity is mentioned, "[S]he was mad," it is with phraseology that carries a double meaning. La Llorona is mad with insanity, but she is also mad with anger. With this double meaning, it is difficult for the audience to be sure why La Llorona killed her children, whether out of insanity or anger at her lover's betrayal.

The children born from the union between La Llorona and the Spanish soldier have become the dispossessed, voiceless victims of both the La Llorona legend and Southwest U.S. La Llorona's children are descended from two different cultures, Native American and Spanish, and as such, are stuck in a middle ground. When La Llorona and the lover live together, the children have a place to orient themselves, since they have parent for each part of their identity. When the lover leaves, however, the identity of the children becomes unstable, and the children are victimized by their parents/cultures. Some versions, such as the legend recorded by Woodbury,

mention that the father wants to take the children with him. In these variations, La Llorona responds to the threat of erasing the children's Amerindian culture by the dominant Spanish culture by drowning the children, effectively disinheriting the Spanish-Indian children from their Spanish ancestry. Legend variations where the lover leaves the children behind are far more common than their counterparts. In these legends, La Llorona is unable to care for her children, and like in other legends, drowns them. Now the children are actively disinherited by their Spanish-culture before they are likewise disinherited by their Amerindian-culture.

My family's version of La Llorona particularly emphasizes the fragility of La Llorona's children. La Llorona and the lover are each given a place and time. Their relationship takes place "before New Mexico was part of America." La Llorona lives "in a little village" in the mountains of New Mexico, while her lover is a soldier from Spain. While both La Llorona and the lover have concrete centers to which they can return, the children, as products of two differing centers, are transitory. When La Llorona and the lover move throughout the legend, it is in relation to their centers. La Llorona moves from her village down to the river; after she drowns her children, she "wanders around the *rivers* and the *mountains*" (emphasis mine), places already closely related with her sense of home. The lover/soldier moves in relation to Spain; as a Spaniard, he travels through what was once Spanish territory. As a Spaniard, he returns to Spain, which he considers his true home. In comparison, the children of La Llorona and the lover only move when they are under the control of a parent/culture. It is La Llorona, who has a center of belonging, who takes her children down to the river to drown them. Unlike the Amerindian and Spanish characters of the legend, the Spanish-Indian children are unable to control their homes, nor their moving to and from home.

The very real children of Spanish and Amerindian culture, Mexicans and Chicanos/Chicanas, have likewise been disinherited, particularly the Chicanos/Chicanas in the U.S. With the ceding of the American Southwest by Mexico, Chicanos/Chicanas found themselves as a double minority in a new country, speaking Spanish and practicing Catholicism in a mostly English-speaking, Protestant land. Chicanos/Chicanas also found themselves a racial minority, being neither European nor Native American. Instead, as the in between children of both cultures, the Chicanos/Chicanas began to straddle a line in their new country, trying to resolve both their traditions and their new expectations. With the conflicting values of the old and the new, it is no wonder that Chicanos/Chicanas began to feel like foreigners, even though they had never left the land they had been born on. Chicanos/Chicanas became an *other* within the U.S., and are even today dominated in a system of internal colonization. In the U.S., Chicanos/Chicanas are often conflated with Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, and under the blanket term of Latinos are often scapegoated by media, politics, and loud members of the majority. A system of dispossession of language, culture, and land has, at different times in the recent past and even now, been laid upon the Latinos. Though some Latino men and Latina women have been able to succeed in reconciling traditional culture and modern American culture, and have become successful in integrating themselves into societies beyond the Southwest, the majority of Latinos and Latinas are still seen as outsiders and others. The anguish and pain felt by Latinos/Latinas, both from Mexico and from the U.S., can be felt through La Llorona's descent into madness from the betrayal of her Spanish lover, and by the violence suffered by La Llorona's nameless and landless children, as well as La Llorona herself.

Though La Llorona contains elements of European folk legends, such as Die Weisse Frau, it remains a uniquely Latino/Latina folk expression that reflects the culture and life

experiences of men and women, particularly Chicanos/Chicanas.. Through the conflation of European and Aztec legends, La Llorona has become a bicultural entity, much like La Llorona's children and Chicanos/Chicanas. The variations of La Llorona legends allows La Llorona to adapt to surrounding cultures and to validate its own performance. La Llorona legends are used to scare children, comment on family and social life, and coerce members of the community into accepted social standards. La Llorona also expresses the feelings of communities. By viewing versions of La Llorona through theoretical lenses, it is possible to gain a richer understanding of the culture in which the La Llorona legends are circulating. By applying a postcolonial lens to the version of La Llorona circulated within my family, it is possible to see how La Llorona comments on colonization and the relations that occur through colonization, such as race and class relations. The application of a postcolonial lens also underscores the dissatisfaction and anxieties felt by Chicanos/Chicanas in the U.S.

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Biography

Kirianna Marie Florez was raised in Roy, Utah, where she attended Roy High School. She graduated from Roy High in 2004, after which she began to attend Utah State University as a Presidential Scholar. Kirianna will be graduating as an English major with an emphasis in Literary Studies and minors in Folklore and British and Commonwealth Studies. During the spring semester of 2008, Kirianna studied abroad at the University of Innsbruck in Innsbruck, Austria, where she studied German and American literature. While a junior, Kirianna was awarded the Lillywhite Scholarship. She will be using the financial support to spend her last semester studying at Kansai Gaidai in Osaka, Japan.

After graduating, Kirianna hopes to continue her education by attending graduate school for a Masters in Theology.



*Kirianna Florez at Buckingham Palace in
London, Summer 2008.*