

**RENDITIONS OF THE “BOGEYWOMAN”
MYTH IN PICTUREBOOKS
BY GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND JULIA ALVAREZ**

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Albuja Aguilar, María Augusta. “Renditions of the “Bogeywoman” Myth in Picturebooks Gloria Anzaldúa and Julia Alvarez”. *Camino Real*, vol.15, no.18, 2023, pp. 127-144

Recibido: 31 de enero de 2023

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the Mexican myth of La Llorona and the Dominican ciguapa legend correspond to misogynist stereotypes; at the same time, there are versions of the folktales rooted in Azteca and Taíno cultures, combined with the influence and consequences of colonialism. In essence, La Llorona stands for a bad mother who drowned her children out of jealousy, and ciguapas, usually portrayed as beautiful creatures with backward-facing feet, embody the femme fatale as they entice and kill men. Moreover, both figures work as cautionary tales as they are often employed as bogeyman figures to scare children into obeying adults. Gloria Anzaldúa and Julia Alvarez challenge the patriarchal, colonialist and adultist versions, rewriting the myths through picturebooks that encourage agency, change, healing and love. In Anzaldúa's *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, settled at the US-Mexico border, La Llorona, instead of hurting children, guides the girl to find a plant to heal her mother's illness, while in Alvarez's *The Secret Footprints*, the ciguapas' tribe do not prey on humans but hide in caves underwater; when the young protagonist Guapa goes to the surface, she befriends a human boy, instead of hurting him. I argue that both narratives construct a new rendition of the bogeywoman myth through the transformation of these figures into kind spirits thanks to an intersectional feminist, decolonial and child-centered approach.

KEYWORDS: La Llorona, Ciguapa, Gloria Anzaldúa, Julia Alvarez, Bogey, Picturebook.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gloria Anzaldúa's (1942-2004) *Prietita and the Ghost Woman* (1995) and Julia Alvarez's (b.1950) *The Secret Footprints* (2000) are picturebooks dedicated to narrating renditions of well-known Latin American myths, the Mexican Llorona and the Dominican ciguapa popular in Central American and Caribbean folklore too. Traditionally, both myths correspond to misogynist depictions of women; for instance, La Llorona corresponds to the legend of a cruel mother who drowned her children out of jealousy and whose lost soul wallows at night by rivers or other bodies of water lamenting her actions, and ciguapas are often described as beautiful creatures with golden skin and backward-facing feet, who much like mermaids, live underwater and entice and hurt men.

Furthermore, both legends work as cautionary tales for children, and as the authors point out in the afterword of their picturebooks,

these creatures would work as bogeymen during their childhoods. According to Shimabukuro, bogey and bogeyman refer to realist or fictional figures used to scare others, specially employed to coerce children into good behavior (47-48). For instance, children were threatened with being caught either by La Llorona or a ciguapa if they were out late or did not fall asleep early. Since, “women are the repositories of family history as well as the many types of lore that never make it into the male constructed, ‘official’ history of a country” (Blauman 153) and are usually in charge of child-rearing (154), in both cases, it was female adults —grandmother, mother, and aunts— who would tell these stories to these authors to make sure they obeyed. However, Anzaldúa always taught that there was another side to La Llorona, and Alvarez, more curious than scared to encounter a ciguapa, challenged these frightening depictions of the legend; hence, both authors rewrite their childhood myths and redeem these “bad women.”

These adaptations into picturebooks are already transgressive of patriarchal master narratives that have promoted an apparent exclusivity of images and text (Kérckhy and Mcara 218). Moreover, considering that children’s literature has not often been given the same status as literature for adults within academia, commonly stressing only its didactic function, these are not mere translations of the folkloric tales to picturebooks, but an appropriation and personal interpretation of both myths, challenging patriarchal and adultist¹ versions. For instance, in *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, La Llorona guides the girl to find the rue plant so the *curandera* can prepare a remedy to heal her mother’s illness. In *The Secret Footprints*, it is the tribe of the ciguapas who are afraid of humans, so they only go out when it gets dark to gather food, but the curious main character Guapa goes to the surface when it is still daylight, meets a kind family, and befriends a human boy, rather than luring him into danger.

Throughout this article, I employ bogeywoman not as a term that refers to a female bogeyman, as it is sometimes used, but as an actual challenge to the traditional bogeyman tale, because the folk creatures in these picturebooks are kind spirits and these stories do not work as warnings for children, but instead empower them through the young heroines. Therefore, what follows is a comparative analysis of Anzaldúa and Alvarez’s picturebooks and their revisionary

readings of the bogeywoman myth. First, we look at the origins and versions of the two folktales; second, we analyze how Anzaldúa's and Alvarez's renditions are subversive to adult normativity, and the final section analyzes the multiple elements of border-crossing in the two picturebooks.

2. ORIGINS AND VERSIONS OF THE MYTHS

Anzaldúa traces the origins of La Llorona to Cihuacoatl, an Aztec goddess usually represented with a white dress (Borderlands 35) and Maya Christina Gonzalez's illustrations depict the ghost woman as an angel-like figure in the picturebook. However, the author stresses how "the male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes" (Andalzá, Borderlands 27). The introduction of Catholicism reinforced the monstrous aspect of these female legends by introducing the virgin-whore dichotomy and female stereotypes of the "good woman" and the "bad mother," and over three hundred years of colonization, the indigenous myths became transformed into European legends like the Spanish La Dama Blanca or White Lady² brought by colonizers to the Americas (Zuniga 9). At the same time, these European legends contributed to the normalization of submission and suffering among the colonized native populations (Andalzá, Borderlands 31; Pérez 95). The ciguapas myth is also believed to have its roots in pre-Columbian legends by Taíno native populations as Lazú points out (198); however, Candelario argues that the figure does not seem to predate Spanish colonization of the island but is in fact a "quasi-colonial myth"(101). Therefore, whether it has been the Aztec or Taíno culture that originated these patriarchal versions which later fit in with colonialist catholic legends, these narratives became dominant myths that since the 1980s have been challenged, revised, and rewritten by Chicana/Latina feminist authors, as we see in these two picturebooks by Anzaldúa and Alvarez.

In an interview, Anzaldúa points out how La Llorona, or ghost woman, is already a threat to the patriarchy by disrupting the nuclear heterosexual family that states that wife and children are subjects to an adult man and clarifying that: "I read her differently, I read her as a lesbian. In some stories she punishes men who beat their wives. She appears to drunkards in the middle of the night and scares them to

death” (Keating 191-192). In these picturebooks, the main characters are women and children and the young heroines, Prietita and Guapa, seem to be part of matriarchal communities. Through her rendition, Anzaldúa also recuperates this figure as a powerful symbol against the patriarchy, but instead of revenge, her version posits a “positive side, a side that represents the Indian and the female part of us” (*Prietita and the Ghost Woman* afterword), and which is grounded in nurturing, healing and love. According to Vásquez,

[t]his recuperation of the weeping woman represents a material intervention into colonial, patriarchal, and child domination ideologies. La Llorona’s persona has been put to use much as a bogeyman figure. However, this was not always the way the story was told. In older versions of the legend derived from indigenous culture, Llorona is a prophetic figure who forewarns the indigenous peoples of the brutality of Spanish imperialism(66).

Likewise, the ciguapas’ myth has similar connotations that refer to the Spanish occupation; for instance, in the afterword to *The Secret Footprints*, Alvarez points out how there are versions of the legend that refer to inspiration on the Taínos hiding in caves from colonizers and only leaving at night to hunt for food; the fact that these creatures are described as having golden skin and black hair could denote the native population. In this sense, Alvarez’s picturebook depicts the ciguapas as a matriarchal tribe, led by their queen, who are constantly looking out for each other for their protection and survival and who must follow certain precautions to avoid being discovered by humans as they could instantly be put in danger. Fabian Negrin’s illustrations show the inspiration of the ciguapas in native populations and mermaid-like folktale figures as males and females are all drawn with long hair, not wearing much clothing but dressed in white—as opposed to humans in the Dominican island who are portrayed in more western and colorful clothing—and living underwater in “cool blue caves hung with seashells and seaweed” (Alvarez 1). The tribe goes to the surface to gather food only when it gets dark and their back-facing feet make their footprints untraceable, but the young protagonist, Guapa, is always eager to explore.

Anzaldúa’s story is set in South Texas, close to the Rio Grande on the US-Mexico border where Prietita’s mother is ill, so the girl

seeks the help of a respected member of the community, Doña Lola, the *curandera* or healer, who explains that she can prepare the cure, but is missing one ingredient, the rue plant which can only be found in the King Ranch, where it is dangerous to go because they shoot trespassers. Drawing from Delgado Bernal's theory of pedagogies of home which refer to "how Mexican and Mexican American women transmit culturally specific knowledge, often inter-generationally, in informal teaching sites within the home and/or community," Terrones analyses Chicanas' picturebooks to see how these strategies are rendered through community memory and knowledge (140). These aspects can be found in *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, first, as stated, through informal spaces of storytelling from women to children, and also, through the transmission of knowledge.

According to Zuniga, Anzaldúa's picturebooks position the *curandera* as an agent of knowledge, a role that has often been delegitimized for women, but also by western science, modernization, Christian and colonialist discourses that have regarded *curanderismo* as primitive for having its roots in indigenous traditions (5-12). Since *Friends from the Other Side* (1993), the prequel to Anzaldúa's picturebook, the healer has been Prietita's mentor in her non-western medicine training. Thus, "the connection between the female *curandera* and Prietita further demonstrates Anzaldúa's feminist goals to center the experiences of women and girls" (Garcia 116), and how they are physically and spiritually healing from oppression from patriarchal and racist systems through decolonial practices (Garcia 114-116).

On a similar note, ciguapas are afraid of human behaviors that align with western practices; for instance, the queen tells Guapa that if a human sees them, they may be captured, and doctors will study them. Through this statement, the implication is that othered populations have been historically constructed as savage and uncivilized through Eurocentric discourses and such practices. For these reasons and out of concern, both the *curandera* and the queen of the ciguapas tribe warn Prietita and Guapa respectively, about the dangers of going to King Ranch or the surface in daylight, but they still disobey, which is subversive to adult normativity in children's literature, but still common in a bogeyman story intended to teach a moral lesson by punishing the child character for disobeying at the end; however, quite the contrary happens in these picturebooks.

3. CHALLENGING AETONORMATIVITY

Drawing from Queer theory that refers to heteronormativity, Nikolajeva has coined aetonormativity to indicate an age-based asymmetry in which adult normativity is privileged over childhood, which is considered devious in most children's narratives (Nikolajeva 16). This occurs because there is an imbalance of power between the adult as the author and predominant narrative voice, and the young person as both the focalizing character and intended audience (Nikolajeva 13). However, writers can employ different strategies to empower young heroes; in fact, some narratives might have a subversive effect and manage to challenge adult arbitrary authority and norms, especially through tales where children are temporarily or permanently dislocated from parental protection and set in extraordinary situations; even if in the end, these characters usually return to adult supervision, at least certain oppressive structures have been interrogated and examined through a different lens (Nikolajeva, Aetonormativity 17).

Nikolajeva explains how authors can empower young female characters by giving them qualities that contest sexist stereotypes by being strong, independent, and enterprising, while retaining traditionally feminine traits such as being caring and emotional (Aetonormativity 21). We could say that both heroines display these attributes throughout these stories. For example, Prietita defeats her community's internalized racism and sexism in the prequel when she befriends Joaquín, a boy from the Mexican side, defending him from her macho cousin Teté and his friends that intend to bully him. According to Garcia, "Prietita challenges the expected submissive role of girls. A typical trope in children's stories is that of the male hero whose purpose is to save the damsel in distress. In this case those roles are reversed and Prietita comes to Joaquín's rescue" (116). Furthermore, in *Prietita and the Ghost Woman* she ignores two warnings from her community; first, that King Ranch is "not safe for a little girl" as the healer advises her while drawing her the rue plant (Anzaldúa 6), and second, the tale of La Llorona as a bogeyman that takes children away.

"Nevertheless, Anzaldúa underscores Prietita's subversive and nontraditional interventions by having Prietita clearly defy the restrictions of her age and gender" (Rhodes 271). In this regard and referring to female authors and young characters, Nikolajeva suggests

that since women are usually writing from a disempowered position, they have more experience with alterity and might be able to show more solidarity and empathy with a young character even though they are adults (Power Voice and Subjectivity 137). Furthermore, Chicanas and other Latinx women experience even further degrees of oppression and have been infantilized in a similar way to children, considering them as innocent or ignorant, savage, irrational, and primitive not only due to their gender, but also because as stated, colonized populations and people of color have been regarded through such derogatory and diminishing perspectives.

As for Guapa, even if her name means beautiful, bold, and brave as the narrator in the picturebook explains because she is not fearful of humans (Alvarez 4), the tribe is worried that her boldness might reveal their secret as she is used to wandering outside human homes, playing and trying on the clothes that are hung to dry, and hence, the queen reprimands her: “Stop being such a mischief!” (Alvarez 8). The illustrations show Guapa and the queen face to face underwater, capturing how the girl is defying adult authority, and the text stresses her curious personality with phrases like “no ciguapa has ever dared ask the queen *that* question before” (Alvarez 8). In this sense, both girls seem to have what Anzaldúa calls *la facultad*/the faculty or a deeper perception to see what lies below the surface which she explains as follows:

Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (...) Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest—the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign (Borderlands 38).

In the afterword to the picturebook, Anzaldúa also declares that she intends to encourage children to look beneath the surface and find what may be hidden; thus, she wants her young readers to develop a certain faculty. As Vásquez points out, “we may read Prietita’s patient yet bold and unobtrusive mastery over multiple struggles as an expression of an exceptional, and potentially queer, *facultad*” (68), and the same could be said about *The Secret Footprints*’ heroine. We

read in *Borderlands that*, as a lesbian, Anzaldúa constantly felt pushed out of the tribe for being considered a “deviant” in her culture; and while in Alvarez’s picturebook, Guapa is not rejected for differing from what is expected of her, she is considered a potential liability since the girl is challenging what ciguapas do without understanding that remaining invisible to the human world is for the tribe’s protection. In fact, like many women and children in borderline locations, both Prietita and Guapa are in permanent danger, with constant threats to their survival. *Friends from the Other Side* depicts the difficulties of living in the borderland, even for U.S.-born Mexicans like Prietita; for undocumented immigrants like Joaquín, who lack access to social services and live in constant fear of being deported or killed, the dangers are even more pronounced. This may seem age-inappropriate problematics for a young audience, but it is the real experience of actual children in liminal situations (Vásquez 64).

4. ELEMENTS OF BORDER-CROSSING

According to Vásquez, transgression and translation are part of border literature; in this sense, “transgression may signify —as in the case of Prietita’s trespassing on King’s Ranch— a movement across boundaries. Translation involves the movement of languages toward one another” (74). In this regard, both narratives deal with a formal and textual duality as the picturebooks not only blur the lines between images and words but combine languages through different forms of bilingualism. In this regard, *Prietita and the Ghost Woman* displays the text in English and Spanish simultaneously, but the English text keeps untranslatable words in Spanish, while *The Secret Footprints* is written in English, but the dialogue includes Spanglish.

At the same time, these stories mix western and non-western spiritual conceptions and magical places with real ones following the usual conventions of Latin American magical realism. This can be noticed when Prietita departs from a realistic place in the South Texan frontier, and enters a fantastic quest in King Ranch where she encounters various mystical animals —deer, salamander, dove, jaguarundi, and lightning bugs— that “may also represent los nagueles, animals whose spirits accompany people through life” (Vásquez 73), that work as guides to the cry of La Llorona, who seems

to be a deity at one with the beasts (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 29). The landscapes, flora and fauna are also represented through colorful illustrations in *The Secret Footprints* where Guapa goes from her magical world underwater to a terrestrial island.

Lazú argues that the island trope offers the possibility of adventure and the creation of fantastic worlds, especially in children's books, and explains how authors from the Caribbean diaspora, like Alvarez, subvert and challenge Eurocentric representation of islands as nothing more than exotic places, without any specific sociological or geopolitical location linked to a particular ethnic or cultural group (189-192). For example, Alvarez reprises the survival objective of the Robinsonnade, but differently by reappropriating her cultural heritage of folklore and myths and translating them to English (Lazú 190-191, 198-199).

In this regard, there are complicated connotations related to both the Dominican island and the US- Mexico border, and hence, both girls reclaim these colonized spaces. The King Ranch "comprised of almost one million acres of non-continuous ranchland and located in Southern Texas where Anzaldúa grew up" was seized from Mexican indigenous natives during various conflicts such as the U.S.-Mexican War, and in the story it is well-known that trespassers are shot (Rhodes 470), which does not go too far from reality. Therefore, both narratives deal with issues of migration and prejudice that are still relevant; for example, when the queen of the ciguapas points out that if they were to be found, they could be put in cages, this moment reflects a current problematic for Latinx children of deported migrants.

Moreover, Prietita and Guapa both befriend a boy from the other side depicting the multiple vulnerabilities and risks in a transnational friendship between two children who through solidarity, humanity and courage can pass through politically imposed boundaries (Vásquez 65). After all, according to Anzaldúa, bridging is loosening one's borders, opening to others, and moving to unfamiliar territories (qtd. in Rebolledo 283). This is illustrated in detail in the prequel when Prietita meets a young newcomer from the Mexican side and helps him and his mother to hide during a Border Patrol's raid as they are undocumented migrants, becoming "an agent of civilly disobedient story-making" (Vásquez 65). Prietita's heroism lies in

crossing these limits (Vásquez 67), and as an agent of activism and change, she is contributing to healing the wounds of the border.

For Anzaldúa, the mestiza is in a liminal state of nepantlism, “an Aztec word meaning torn between ways,” as she is multicultural and plurilingual, in between cultural and spiritual values and in constant transition, so she develops “a tolerance for ambiguity” and has the role of a bridge between contradictions and paradoxes (Borderlands 78). The myth of the ciguapa is also born from contradictions (Candelario 107); through her reversed footprints, the ciguapa stands for the duality between progressive and regressive sentiments of “a people whose ancestors were both colonizers and colonized, enslavers and enslaved, (im)migrants and native born” (Candelario 102). Therefore, to *ciguapear* is to undo or deconstruct imperialism and racism through political, intellectual, and cultural strategies (Candelario 107).

By crossing the fenced area, Prietita (re)connects the two spaces, in essence reclaiming the land that had historically been illegally taken away from the native Mexican population of the region. Yet creating this bridge between the two spaces is not without its challenges. Prietita becomes lost in the unfamiliar woods. She’s all alone, afraid, hungry, and bruised, but she’s still determined to find the rue plant for her mother... (Garcia 120).

Facing her fears, now as a border-crosser herself, she is aided by someone from the other side, La Llorona who “instead of killing or capturing Prietita, she guides her out of the woods so she can complete her mission” (Vásquez 66) and deliver the rue plant to the *curandera* who will heal her mother. Guapa is also aided by someone from the other side, a human family who was having a picnic and whose leftovers, she intends to pick, but instead falls. The family members think that the girl has hurt her feet and go to call the doctor, but only out of concern; meanwhile, the son stays to take care of her, feeding her *pastelitos* and making sure she feels better. While he goes to look for water to give her, Guapa manages to escape, leaving a seashell for the boy who is unable to retrace the footprints. However, he keeps the gift as a lucky charm and from then on, leaves *pastelitos* for her inside the pockets of the clothes hung outside to dry.

McCulloch argues that “literature for children often concerns itself with a journey or quest which the young hero or heroine must

undertake in order to advance themselves and, often simultaneously, their society” (174). In these picturebooks, the quest allows them to be on their own, free from adult supervision where they can exercise their self-agency and feel empowered. At the same time, the journey can work as a rite of passage in the sense that “the ciguapa’s footprints physically leave an imprint that simultaneously points to the past while moving forward into the future” (López 223), as a process of coming-of-age. In this regard, Lazú argues that island stories work as a vehicle that symbolizes the process of growing up thanks to paradoxes like the “desert and paradise, shipwreck and home, nightmare and daydream, limitation and refuge” that work as metaphors to paradoxes of life, especially childhood and adulthood (191). Something similar happens with Prietita in the picturebook, which Perez explains as follows:

The search for the ruda plant becomes a symbolic search for Prietita’s own strength and power to aid in healing. When she faces her fears and finds the ruda with La Llorona’s help, her transition into adulthood is marked by the knowledge that what people believe about the Weeping Woman, including members of her own family, is not true. Prietita’s discovery about La Llorona directly challenges the authority of her grandmother as well as Anglo colonial endeavors, as represented by the King Ranch. Anzaldúa’s version of La Llorona’s story emphasizes the importance of women working together and relying on each other, and the book reinforces the idea that young women can have adventures and be strong (185).

Therefore, these narratives are not only about adventure and discovery, but also about empowering children to be independent, to explore and question dominant social structures and adult-normative values and constructions. Back home, both girls share their experiences challenging misconceptions within their communities, and their word or *testimonio* —which stands for another type of knowledge transmitted informally from personal experiences between the members of a community (Terrones 152)— is respected. For instance, when Teté, as a representative of male discourse, referring to La Llorona says that “everyone knows she takes children away. She doesn’t bring them back,” the *curandera* replies: “Perhaps she is not what others think she is” (Prietita 28). Doña Lola even tells

the heroine that she is proud of her and that she has grown through this experience which matches with an illustration of the healer, Prietita and her little sister holding each other to symbolize this coming-of-age and how different generations of women can work together and learn from each other.

As for Guapa, since some members of the tribe were already hiding in the bushes and witnessing the girl's interaction with the boy, when they return with *pastelitos*, they left the queen speechless, leaving her no option but to admit that "some humans can be kind" (Alvarez 26). In the end, the young heroines have altered adult normative values and constructions which is uncommon in a cautionary tale as they do not learn a moral lesson for disobeying, which is the objective of the bogeyman story. Although these settings will remain unsafe for chicanxs and ciguapas, at least the heroines have more information and have trespassed mental boundaries, knowing now that they can find kind spirits on the other side too.

5. CONCLUSION

Referring to *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, Perez suggests that "young readers of the story are encouraged to explore such issues as coming of age, female power, community, colonization, folklore, and culture" (185). *The Secret Footprints* offer an approach to similar problematics and themes that have been studied throughout this comparative analysis aimed to enlighten us about how these authors have taken a scary bogeyman story with patriarchal, colonialist and adultist connotations and transformed them into bogeywoman stories, or intersectional renditions of the myth told through picturebooks that encourage agency, change, healing and love in children.

Through a feminist, decolonial and child-centered lens, Anzaldúa and Alvarez demystify these figures which were once intended to frighten women into playing the virginal good daughter role by punishing disobedience and independent thinking, neither of which are qualities of the the good wife and good woman stereotypes. In this regard, following *el camino de la mestiza*, Anzaldúa "reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers" (Borderlands 82), and "questions the ways in which culture is defined by male discourse, and guides the reader towards a more matriarchal

transmission of cultural knowledge” (Zuniga 11). “In essence, [Anzaldúa] harnesses all of the mythological power contained in la Llorona, re-appropriating her beauty and magic for children’s empowerment rather than subordination” (Vásquez 68).

As Maya Christina Gonzalez points out in an interview about illustrating *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*: “Here was another queer Chicana, whose voice and wisdom began informing my work. I no longer felt so alone. Rather, that I was being guided by these beautiful rainbows to doorways that took me to these secret places of personal healing as well as cultural connection” (Aldama 106). In a similar way, La Llorona not only guides Prietita out of the woods, but also indirectly saves her mother working like a deity without the monstrous attitudes. On the other hand, Guapa does not intend to entice any men, only to explore new places, have adventures, and make new friends like any young girl.

While the legend of la Llorona is used culturally to haunt bad girls, Anzaldúa saw the weeping woman as an empowering figure of Mexican mythology that inspired her “to yell out, to scream out, to speak out” (Keating 229), and for this reason, she points out how she has “recuperated la Llorona to trace how we go from victimhood to active resistance, from the wailing of suffering and grief to the grito of resistance, and on to the grito of celebration and joy” (Keating 180). On a similar note, López refers to collective and historical trauma and violence suffered by Latinx children and argues that “*The Secret Footprints* represents a profound alchemy of violence, a refusal to see a boogeyman where a ciguapa might exist” showing how “stories of violence can be read as stories of hope” (225).

Through these stories, both authors encourage collective protection and healing for vulnerable communities, as well as a new appreciation of non-western knowledge, practices, and cosmovision. That which is often a motive of shame should be a reason for pride, and those mental borders that come from sexism, racism, and adultism should be removed to trespass imposed borders and limits that intend to keep Latino communities confined and oppressed. It is a strength and a source of power to be in more than one place at a time and in constant transition; to have intersecting identities as border-crossers or *atravesados*, which for Anzaldúa means the queer, the mixed-raced or people living in these liminal spaces

(Borderlands 3), or even bridges between childhood and adulthood like the girls in the stories. Thus, these picturebooks are not meant to scare child readers into obeying a patriarchal, colonialist and adultist normativity, but instead to have their own agency.

In this regard, according to Vásquez, what Anzaldúa “theorizes and relates in her writings addressed to adult audiences concerning personal, gender, and political liberation, is here recounted in the form of childhood experiences authored for children readers” (64). She acts as a critical witness suggesting that some events are pivotal and need to be addressed and expanded (López 206) and offers her *testimonio* in the form of storytelling. Likewise, López explains how Alvarez’s picturebook establishes a dialogue with the history of political violence of the Dominican Republic, as well as its culture, community and people (222); for this reason, “she makes clear for readers that her storytelling comes from a deeply personal place that should be honored and celebrated, a gesture with the potential to inspire other readers to be both witnesses and writers” (225).

In essence, both authors root for rewriting history and myths and retelling counter-versions of their cultural stories. As Zuniga points out, “counterstories not only center the experiences of otherwise marginalized groups, but also offer complexity to the intersectionality of their identities, particularly race/ethnicity and gender” (4). For this reason, thanks to the images, these picturebooks help underrepresented communities to find themselves at the center of the narrative, as heroes, in the sense that “while the text narrates experiences many Chicanx people are familiar with, the images provide the “mirrors” in which Chicanx and other Latinx children can see themselves represented” (Garcia 113). The same occurs with *The Secret Footprints* where little girls can also see themselves as capable of activism, change, and challenging dominant narratives through *testimonios* of their own experiences and counterstories of their distinct, multilingual, and multicultural visions of the world.

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NOTES

- 1 UNICEF describes adultcentrism as the asymmetrical relationship between adults and young people that privileges adulthood which is established as an ideal, superior, and normative stage which creates an unfair situation of oppression and domination (18). Due to this imbalance of power, adultism can be defined as the systemic mistreatment, discrimination, marginalization, and disrespect towards young people expressed through attitudes, behaviors, language, etc. as they are considered inferior and subordinated to adults (UNICEF 19, Pease 213-214).
- 2 The European origins of this legend could come from deities from Celtic, Christian and Norse mythology, or even paganism, for example, in Germanic

folk there is the *Weisse Frauen* (white women) or light elves. According to Beck, these goddesses were attributed fairy-like virtues, for example, they often appeared nursing children, but were later demoted into ghosts (303-306). Hence, their depiction in legends from different countries as female figures dressed in white, usually wearing long hair that had been victims of a violent death—murdered as young virgins, dead during childbirth, drowned—and that depending on the version, like to appear to men, exhibit some kind of disfiguration, or even, weeping eyes as *La Llorona*. Other sources could come from Greek mythology; for instance, drawing from a Mesopotamian child-attacking demoness, there is the story of Lamia who is said to have had an affair with Zeus, and out of jealousy, Hera murders their offspring, driving Lamia into madness, until she snatches and murders other children (Ogden 97-99). Since this character is usually attributed monstrous features, like removable eyes or snake body parts, and is described as a child devourer or even, an enticer of young men, it has often been employed as a bogey figure (Ogden 98-107). Therefore, Warner refers to Lamia and other similar mythological characters—usually jealous childless women—employed as bogeymen in different cultures to explain child mortality (39-40).