Assimilation, Space, and the Mother Goddess in Sandra Cisneros’s “Mericans” and “Tepeyac”

Insaf Khémiri
Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse
University of Sousse, Tunisia
insafkh@hotmail.com

Abstract

In the United States, Chicano/as try to preserve and defend their ‘mestizaje,’ that is hybridity, in an attempt to resist hegemony and assimilation. Chicano/as are denied an ‘American’ identity because of their ‘Métis’ or hybrid culture; they are, rather, ‘hyphenated Americans.’ For this reason, they go back to the past to revise ‘History’ and resurrect the ‘Myths’ of their ancestors, the ‘Mothers’ of their Motherland. La Virgen de Guadalupe is another face of the Mother Goddess Cōatlalopeuh who was disfigured and transformed into a ‘virgin’ Lady, leaving the dark ‘terrible’ side of the mask to the ghost/shadow: La Llorona. The article focuses on two short stories by Sandra Cisneros, “Mericans” and “Tepeyac,” to study how through re-visiting the ‘Mother,’ Chicano/as reread the ‘Hi(s)tory’ of the ‘Hero’ who brought ‘civilization’ and Christianity to the Aztecs, emphasizing the ‘ethnic’ presence of the Goddess and her ‘brown’ descendants and, hence, ‘reclaiming’ a space of their own.

Keywords: Assimilation, space, Great Mother, Virgen de Guadalupe.
Assimilation has been imposed on people of colour since the birth of the New Adam, a continuation of the “divinely sanctioned genocide” (Docker 114) that authorized the elimination of the white man’s ‘Others’ by killing or forcing them to renounce their ‘ethnic’ past. It was the duty of God’s Chosen People to protect the Promised Land and with the introduction of the melting pot myth at the turn of the twentieth century, assimilation has been endorsed not only by the white man’s God, but also by law. It has become the duty of the ‘Other’ to destroy the enemy that resides inside him, the Shadow. Therefore, assimilation represents a threat to space as a “dimension of multiplicity” because “without multiplicity space itself could not exist” (Massey, “Concepts” 17). By defining space as a ‘dimension of multiplicity,’ Massey means that “[s]pace is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of plurality, of the co-existence of difference” (“Some Times” 3).

The Hero’s Myth

According to Donna Rosenberg, a myth is the “moral” answer to questions like “How much control do I have over my own life? What must I do to survive? How can I balance my own desires with my responsibilities to my family, my community, and the powers that control my world?” (xxvi). Hence, the melting pot myth answers these questions to secure the white man’s control over his life; it assures the survival of his Western and patriarchal ideals and protects his ‘order’ by confining ‘the powers’ of the Other. The power of the Other increases with the space he occupies and by the turn of the twentieth century, the vision of ‘united states’ of America was almost accomplished and the white man crossed the boundaries of the West and invaded the space that used to be controlled by Mexicans, Italian-Americans, and Native tribes who started to question their ‘status’ in that ‘new order’ of the white man.

The white man’s answer was the melting pot myth to convince his Others that they can share ‘his’ space for he believes that this is ‘his’ land and that he is ‘the American’ and, thus, it is up to ‘his’ Others to adjust themselves to fit in. He offers his ‘Others’ a dream, an American ‘product.’ More importantly, by concocting the melting pot myth, the White man colonized the Other not only by invading the Other’s spatial space, but also by penetrating into his sacred space to efface the stories, myths, and ‘memories’ of the past. He provides his Others with ‘Hi(s)tory, ‘new’ myths and stories to “unify the members of that [society] by giving them a shared past” (Rosenberg xxv), a shared experience in the land of dreams. In this ‘dreamy’ story there is “the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space” (De Lauretis 119) and ‘Other’ characters, the “obstacle’ and “the boundary with the hero alone can cross” (De Lauretis 118). The hero is the ‘Savior’ who ‘perfects’ and “completes the world by making it habitable for man, thus bringing culture” (Flood 30).

Sollors notices that “alchemists used melting pots and searched for eternal youth” (80) and in the Western mythos, the alchemist is another archetype of the “culture hero” who wants to “embod[y] both the divine and the human” (Flood 30). As an alchemist, the white man is not ‘in’ the pot, but takes the role of a male ‘creator,’ a ‘god,’ or a ‘Devouring Father’ who seeks more power; and the transmutation of his ‘Others’ in the pot will provide him with the ‘prescription’ for the “eternal youth” of the ‘hero’s monotheism. In other words, the melting pot myth is not about various ethnic groups and cultures that co-exist; it is the white
man’s “myth of race” (Bottici 111) and “the mythical subject is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establishe of distinctions, the creator of differences” (De Lauretis 119). Assimilation means, then, that “the most heterogeneous human materials could be taken and absorbed into this nationality” (Gleason 22).

With globalization, assimilation has become not only a national project but also an international dream called acculturation. Acculturation means, for the white man, that his social, political, and economic systems are viable regardless of the place and time and that his Civilization, his Culture, and his History, are ‘immortal’ and, thus, valid everywhere. This is the era of the Great West led by ‘the American’ and since Time belongs to the West, and “[w]ith Time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics, and Reason” (Massey, “Politics” 73), space remains the challenge: Is it possible to own space, hence, to eliminate it?

The Syncretic Mother

The case of the Métis culture of Chicano/as in the U.S. shows that religious border-crossing is one way to resist assimilation and acculturation. The syncretic Native Goddess of Mexican-Americans and their Native ancestors has been the main cultural symbol of resistance. La Virgen de Guadalupe is an ‘ethnic’ leading figure of a hybrid culture. According to Sollors, the term ‘ethnic’ is derived from the Greek word ‘Ethnikos’ which means ‘pagan’ (25). This entails that being ethnic is the same thing as being ‘un-Christian’ and, as a result, since “[t]his connotation gives the opposition of ethnic and American the additional religious dimension of the contrast between heathens and chosen people” (Sollors 25), then being ethnic means also being ‘un-American.’ Chicano/as and North American Latino/as consider themselves to be the descendants of the Aztecs who populated Aztlan, the U.S. southwest (Anzaldua 26). Though they were expected to be absorbed and lost in a white crowd, they managed to save their Mother and, hence, claimed their separatism as ‘brown’ descendents of the Native Mother; she is “the godwoman in [every Latina/o] . . . the divine within, Coatlicue_Cihuacoatl_ Tlazolteotl_Tonantzin_Coatlaloepuh_Guadalupe_they are one” (Anzaldua 72).

Coatlicue whose name means literally, “Serpent Skirt,” is portrayed usually with “a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents and taloned feet” (Anzaldua, 49). As a pre-Columbian Goddess, She is the Terrible Mother par excellence with her negative elementary character symbolized, usually, by snakes, skulls, hippopotamuses, panthers, lions, crocodiles, phantoms (Neumann 153). The Native goddess Coatlicue is a “symbol of the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror” (Anzaldua 69). Coatlicue represents the woman as an indivisible ‘complex’ creature for she is a unifying figure of the male and the female, the sun and the corn, the sky and the earth, the soul and the body, and light and darkness. The Aztec Mother is the snake that dwells in the darkness of the Earth’s womb, the body that contains the spirits of the growing fruits and the roots of their ancestors, but, then, She can ascend and reach the sky taking the form of an eagle.
After the Spanish conquest, another manifestation of Coatlicue appeared, La Llorona; she symbolizes the Terrible Mother in modern times. La Llorona appeared in the last days of the Aztec dynasty, ‘in the beginning’ of the ‘fall,’ and Natives identified her as ‘Cihuacoatl.’ “In the beginning, there was a woman. Throughout the streets of Tenochtitlan, the capital city of the Mexicas, . . . a woman was heard weeping about the fate of her children prior to the Spanish conquest” (Perez 16). She predicted the destruction of the Aztec empire and the doom awaiting her children. She is “mother, sister, daughter, seer, and perhaps goddess, yet in all instances she is a woman who is condemned to either foresee or bemoan the fate of her children (Perez 18).

Nevertheless, since the Terrible Mother is a disfigured face of the ‘original’ Great Mother and her ‘becoming’ is a deviation from the Great Round state, her monstrous and dangerous ‘appearance’ is connected to the ‘disappearance’ of her other aspect, the maiden. As Neumann states, the Good Mother “can emerge independently from the unity of the Great Mother” (21). Both the Terrible Mother and the Good Mother are differentiated archetypes, but in the case of Aztec mythology, the Terrible Mother was prevailing and banished the Good aspect, her daughter Coyolxauhqui: “Coyolxauhqui, She with Golden Bells, Goddess of the Moon, who was decapitated by her brother,” the Sun/Son Huizilopochtli (Anzaldua, 49). But, later, the Good Mother would develop from that same Terrible Mother and, hence, Campbell considers “early Coatlicue” as an “evil mother” while the “good mother” is “Coatlicue/Tonantsi;” then, another transformation would occur with “Tonantsi/Guadalupe,” who is the “chaste, protective mother” (18). The Good Mother contains the positive feminine and masculine elements (Neumann 20-21).

The psychological/archetypal development that transformed ‘early Coatlicue’ into a ‘Tonantsi’ and, then, a ‘Guadalupe’ is a result of a ‘historical development.’ The Native Totonacs could no longer accept the Aztecs’ bloody practices and, hence, begun to show great reverence to the mother goddess Tonantsi, who preferred the sacrifice of birds and small animals. It was they, and not the Aztecs, who built Tonantsi’s temple. Further, the Aztecs themselves were by then tired of the need to satiate and mollify their bloodthirsty god of war, Huizilopochtli, who had made them a conquering and prosperous people. Though the goddess Tonantsi did not displace the male deity, Huizilopochtli, she did triumph over Coatlicue, the malevolent mother goddess of snakes and skulls. (Campbell 12)

Tonantsi or Tonantzin, literally means “Our Mother” (Castillo xvi), was introduced to replace the Goddess of the Aztecs, but was accepted by the Aztecs after the conquest of their lands by the European military forces. Then, the Aztecs were no longer ‘a conquering and prosperous people’:

[T]he Conquered Mexic-Amerindians may have turned to the Mother, and it was She who responded to bring comfort, assurance, hope, when their mighty male gods became silent. As heirs to a militant imperialist patriarchy, the Supreme God was imaged as Father made manifest by the sun, too great to descend upon the earth and explain the terrible downfall of the empire. So it is the gentle nurturing mother archetype that appears and speaks with such melodious tenderness that it was compared to the singing of birds, flor y canto that is, beauty and truth. It sounded like music never heard before. (Castillo xvii)
In this stage, Tonantsi is not only the vessel, i.e. the shelter, the nurturer, the protective mother of Native nations, but also their ‘leader’ who will grant ‘eternity.’ Native people are no longer interested in earthly matters but in spiritual transformations that might save their culture and their races from being extinguished. This explains their need to “the static elementary character of the mother and the dynamic transformative character of the young woman” (Neumann 104).

Thus, as Anzaldua proceeds, the Aztec Goddess Coatlalopeuh/Coatlicue merged with the Christian Virgin Mary to become Lady of Guadalupe, a “brown-skinned, Indian-looking virgin [of] Mexico” (Blea 56). The Resurrection of this Mother Goddess took place in the sacred land of Tepeyac; when the colonizers were trying to occupy more space through enforcing Christianization and imposing their language and Christianity on the Natives, suddenly a story about the miraculous appearance of a Mother figure becomes shared among people. This is the story of Coatlalopeuh’s resurgence as narrated by Anzaldua:

Guadalupe appeared on December 9, 1531, on the spot where the Aztec goddess, Tonantsi (“Our Lady Mother”), had been worshipped by the Nahua and where a temple to her had stood. Speaking Nahuatl, she told Juan Diego, a poor Indian crossing Tepeyac Hill . . . that her name was Maria Coatlalopeuh. Coat is the Nahuatl word for serpent. Lopeuh means “the one who has dominion over serpents,” . . . with the serpent as the symbol of the indigenous religion, meaning that her religion was to take the place of the Aztec religion. (51)

It is through storytelling that the rhizomatic Coatlalopeuh succeeds in occupying the space of the male Christian God. The Fathers of the Church refused to classify the Aztec Virgin as a Christian religious symbol; her presence and ‘survival’ is a reminder of the Natives’ pagan religion, and those who acknowledged her as the representation of the Virgin Mary betrayed Christ by rendering him a son of a ‘pagan’ goddess.

The Christian Father cannot welcome a Native Lady to be approved in ‘his’ Christian canon and to occupy a space in ‘his’ Bible; her presence is a threat for as long as she survives, she is a witness of the fortitude of a race, a metamorphosed goddess, a ‘symbol’ of a Native identity that empowers a people who succeeded in reviving their ‘savage’ Mother and transformed her into a ‘Lady’. Though Latino/as lost their Mother Language, the land is still able to ‘speak’ with a Native Tongue; Tepeyac becomes the womb that protects Latin American’s cultural heritage. As opposed to the colonized and assimilated space where ‘masculine’ cities have started to dominate the American landscape, Tepeyac saves the virginity of the land in its myths and stories shared from one generation to another. It is thanks to this Mother’s womb that Latino/as “learn to develop separate spaces,” “nonhegemonic spaces,” and such spaces “cannot be labelled, controlled, or fixed” (Rojas 137).

Space and the Roots of the Mother

Sandra Cisneros thinks that “every space either frightens you, makes you ill because you have to clean it or liberates you. Spaces give you a feeling” (Muy, 72), but sometimes
“[i]t’s not a pleasant feeling” and, hence, “you can’t daydream or imagine or create” and it becomes necessary “to create a space” where one can feel “peaceful and happy” (Muy, 73). Cisneros’ short stories, “Mericans” and “Tepeyac,” highlight the devastating effect of assimilation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, demonstrate that the spiritual attachment to places like ‘La Basilica de Nuestra Senora,’ a church devoted to the worship of La Virgen de Guadalupe in Tepeyac, empowers not only the individual but also the whole community of the city of Mexico and, most importantly, the different communities of Latinos in the U. S. or from Central and South America.

Silverstein and Chen define “acculturation of Mexican American families as the erosion of traditional Mexican values, and practices due to exposure to American culture” (189). Indeed, the sacred space refers not only to holy places like temples, churches, altars or lands, such as Tepeyac in Mexico city, but also to the spiritual value of such sites for the individual and the community. As Guettel Cole explains, sacred spaces are “for communication between human and divine” (15) and, at the same time, “[encourage] expressions of regional authority and [foster] communication between cities” (15). The events in “Mericans” and “Tepeyac” take place in Tepeyac. However, while the protagonist of “Mericans” is a little Mexican American girl who is in a visit to the ‘tourist site’ of the Basilica, the central character in “Tepeyac” is an adult woman who comes back from “that borrowed country” (23) to her childhood souvenirs in Tepeyac.

In “Mericans,” Micaela tells the story of her Mexican American family’s visit to the Basilica of “La Divina Providencia” (17). Micaela feels that she is trapped in the world of her “awful grandmother” (17) who seems to be faithful to her Mexican roots by maintaining the traditions of her ancestors and “stress[ing] continuity with younger generations” (Silverstein and Chen 190), “the sons and the only daughter who never attend mass” (17) and “the grandchildren born in that barbaric country with its barbarian ways” (19). The ‘barbaric ways’ of that ‘barbaric country’ affected Micaela’s family and “weake[ned] the otherwise strong obligation that family members feel toward each other” (Silverstein and Chen 189). They no longer respect their grandmother and consider her as an ‘awful’ old woman who bores them with her long prayers and “[m]umbling, mumbling, mumbling” (17) in the dull church that “smell[s] like the inside of the ear” (19).

For the ‘Mericans,’ the Temple of La Virgen de Guadalupe lost its ‘sacred value’ and, for this reason, they do not want to “stay near the church entrance” (18) as their ‘awful grandmother’ ordered. The idea of the border is favoured by the white man because it allows him to ‘fix’ space and “to hold places and things still” (Massey, “Some Times” 2). When a place is transformed into a mere “tourist site, an object of veneration and curiosity” (Brady 128), it becomes frozen in the past. When a holy place is ‘invaded,’ it loses its ‘sacred’ purpose of maintaining relationships between members of a community. The sacred temple becomes a mere site where Micaela and her brothers can play games and act like ‘tourists.’ They prefer to “wander over to the balloon and punch-ball vendors,” “spend [their] allowance on fried cookies or Familia Burron comic books or those clear cone-shaped suckers that make everything look like a rainbow when you look through them,” “run off and have [their] picture taken on the wooden ponies,” and “climb the steps up the hill behind the church and
chase each other through the cemetery” (18), but they cannot because they “promised to stay right where the awful grandmother left them” (18).

As Anzaldua explains, “[b]orders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line . . . A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary . . . The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (25). In “Mericans,” space, Tepeyac, is frozen in the past with its inhabitants, the awful grandmother; the Other, Micaela, is no longer present and, consequently, this Other, this Latino/a, becomes “outside of historical time and beyond the boundaries of [his] own cultural experience” (MacCannell 77). They have internalized racism and are ashamed of their mixed ‘Mud’ blood:

I’ve already made up my mind to be a German when Keeks [Micaela’s little brother] swoops past again, this time yelling, “I’m Flash Gordon. You’re Ming the Merciless and the Mud People.” I don’t mind being Ming the Merciless, but I don’t like being the Mud People. Something wants to come out of the corners of my eyes, but I don’t let it. Crying is what girls do. (19)

Micaela and her brothers are neither with the Mexicans inside the church, nor outside with the tourists who are enjoying their sightseeing; ‘they’ are ‘Mericans’ and cannot move without thinking about the place where to belong, and since they do not belong or fit, they do not move. While the ‘awful grandmother’ “disappeared behind the heavy leather curtain and the dusty velvet inner” (18-19) and the tourists are taking photos of ‘Mexican people,’ Micaela and her brothers are trapped in-between, “hunkered against the wall with [their] eyes shut” (18), dreaming and imagining, or “running around in circles” (18), uncertain about their direction and whether to follow the grandmother or the ‘American’ tourists.

The tourists who are mostly ‘outside’ of the Basilica see with a ‘Westener’s eye,’ a “totalizing eye” (de Certeau 128) that notices only the “false fronts” (MacCannell 95) of Tepeyac. Assuming that they are ‘Mexican’ children because of their ‘brown’ skin, the tourists take photos of Micaela and her brothers who are “squatting against the entrance” (20)

“¿Quieres chicle?” the lady asks in a Spanish too big for her mouth. “Gracias.”
“Por favor,” says the lady. “¿Un foto?” pointing to her camera. “Sí.”
She’s so busy taking Junior’s picture, she doesn’t notice me and Keeks.
“Hey, Michele, Keeks. You guys want gum?”
“But you speak English!”
“Yeah,” my brother says, “we’re Mericans.”
“We’re Mericans, we’re Mericans, and inside the awful grandmother prays. (20)

The lady and her man are surprised to know that the children they regarded as an ‘object’ of admiration, an accessory that ornaments the Basilica and adds a more ‘original’ touch to the photos, can speak English and are, thus, not Mexicans. These tourists look ‘up’ to the Temple, trying to “ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below” (de Certeau 127). They situate themselves in an ‘upper’ position in an attempt to feel
superior to their ‘Others.’ The awful grandmother, on the other hand, is ‘inside’ with the Mother:

La Virgen de Guadalupe is waiting inside behind a plate of thick glass. There’s also a gold crucifix bent crooked as a mesquite tree when someone once threw a bomb. La Virgen de Guadalupe on the main altar because she’s a big miracle, the crooked crucifix on a side altar because that’s a little miracle. (18)

There are two main characteristics of a Goddess that do not eclipse when She goes through a process of differentiation and, thus, they eternally shape and influence women regardless of the archetype with which she identifies: these are “the qualities of rootedness and wandering” (Engelsman 105).

The Goddess is always ‘the’ “genetrix” (Neumann 213) and the “creatrix” (Neumann 218). Therefore, “[t]he primordial mystery of weaving and spinning has also been experienced in projection upon the Great Mother who weaves the web of life and spins the threads of fate, regardless whether she appears as one Great Spinstress or, as so frequently, in a lunar triad” (Neumann 227). She exemplifies ‘rootedness’ and, hence, the ‘house,’ that might take the form of a ‘cave,’ a temple or even an urn, is “the navel, [the] centre of the world” (Neumann 132). In “Mericans,” La Virgen de Guadalupe is “inside,” she is the leading female ‘deity’ and the “miracle.” With her, the ‘awful grandmother’ “knits the names of the dead and the living into one long prayer fringed with the grandchildren born in that barbaric country with its barbarian ways” (19). The awful grandmother being inside the Basilica and Celaya’s entrance to the Basilica to “look for the awful grandmother” (19) are acts of rootedness. Celaya recognizes that La Virgen de Guadalupe is the ‘big miracle,’ the Great Mother who, along with the grandmother, “intercedes on [the] behalf” of everyone (17). The Temple of Tepeyac contains the ‘root’ of Micaela and her ‘Mud’ people: Coatlaloqueh/Guadalupe, the vessel, the womb.

‘Wandering’ is Her second attribute and can be translated in Her multiplicities, but with wandering there is a return to the ‘navel’; this quality maybe the result of “reducing the power of the goddesses by splitting up their attributes and assigning them to a variety of goddesses” (Engelsman 106). Wandering means, thus, “searching” for the fragmented shadow/Other that is hidden or lost elsewhere. Wandering results in a ‘return’ to the ‘navel,’ the root and, hence, the story that follows “Mericans” is about a ‘heuresis,’ a reunion of the ‘daughter’ and the Mother Goddess/Land. The protagonist of “Tepeyac” is a woman who makes a ‘return journey’ to her homeland after years spent in the U.S. She is not visiting, she is ‘coming home’ and, thus, unlike the ‘Merican’ Micaela who found herself trapped in a ‘timeless’ strange space, the Protagonist of “Tepeyac” ‘takes her time’ to feel the “microbo-like, singular and plural [everyday] practices” (de Certeau 130) and to experience a “lived space” (de Certeau 131). Ignoring the ‘totalizing eye’ of the white man, the story “begins on ground level, with footsteps” (de Certeau 131).

The protagonist’s eye is not focused on the grandeur of the Basilica; instead, her ‘footsteps’ are attracted by “spaces that cannot be seen” (de Certeau 128) by a ‘voyeur.’ She remembers walking:
past the basilica, where each Sunday the Abuela [Grandmother] lights the candles for the soul of Abuelito [Grandfather]. Past the very same spot where long ago Juan Diego brought down from the cerro the miracle that has drawn everyone, except my Abuelito, on their knees, down the avenue one block past the bright lights of the sastreria of Señor Guzman who is still at work at his sewing machine, past the candy store where I buy my milk-and-raisin gelatins, past La Providencia tortilleria where every afternoon Luz Maria and I are sent for the basket of lunchtime tortillas, past the the house of the widow Marquez . . . to the house on La Fortuna, number 12, that has always been our house. (22)

She is interested in the “intimate reality” (MacCannell 95) and “refuses to surrender her memory of dangerous tenements to a romantic spatial construction” (Brady 118). Her walking around and her labyrinthine movement translate also the movement of these spaces because “an encounter is always with something ‘on the move.’ The voyager is not the only active one. Origin and destination have lives of their own” (Massey, “Some Times 2) and the protagonist accepts to ‘live’ space as it is in the ‘present,’

years afterward when [she] return[s] to the shop on the corner of Misterios and Cinco de Mayo, repainted and redone as a pharmacy, to the basilica that is crumbling and closed, to the plaza photographers, the balloon vendors and shoesine thrones, the women whose faces I do not recognize serving lunch in the wooden booths, to the house on La Fortuna, number 12, smaller and darker than when we lived there, with the rooms boarded shut and rented to strangers, the street suddenly dizzy with automobiles and diesel fumes, the house fronts scuffed and the gardens frayed, the children who played kickball all grown and moved away. (23)

Accordingly, the protagonist liberates space by liberating herself from “something irretrievable” (23), memory, and by liberating her body to wander “down below” (de Certeau 128). As Brady observes, the narrator’s “trip is an effort to acknowledge the loss of a memory, to indicate its unavailability and lay it aside” (129). By doing so, the main character claims her right to ‘the present’ of Tepeyac to restore her sacred space and, thus, re-establish her relationship with her community.

She moves far from the ‘false fronts’ of the Basilica as a mere tourist site to immerse herself in a “back region” (MacCannell 93). This back region is where the local inhabitants ‘hide’ themselves to protect their space from intrusion by strangers, like tourists, (MacCannell 93) who come to visit the ‘appropriated’ space of the Basilica. This does not mean that the Basilica lost its value as a sacred space, but that these people are trying to save what is more valuable than the walls of a monument like the Basilica: the intimate authenticity of a real ‘lived space.’ The protagonist refuses an in-between status when she defies assimilation and expresses her will to remain a ‘Mexican’ inside the sacred space of her community for “[b]eing ‘one of them,’ or at one with ‘them,’ means, in part, being permitted to share back regions with them” (MacCannell 94).
Conclusion

Assimilation disfigures the Other, allowing the ‘culture hero’ to invade and manipulate space. Acculturation is a reproduction of assimilation and is meant to invade the ‘sacred space’ of Latino/as, such as the Basilica of La Virgen de Guadalupe in Tepeyac, Mexico. In their attempt to decolonize space, Chicano/as embrace the Great Mother, the leading deity of their ancestors as a symbol of survival and resistance. By re-visiting the roots of their Mother, Chicano/as seek to empower themselves and create a space that liberates.
References

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


