

THESIS

FATHERING BEHIND BARS: *TESTIMONIO* AND THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

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ABSTRACT

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Chicano boys and girls are twice more likely to go to prison than grow up with their fathers compared to their White counterparts. This is due to the Prison Industrial Complex (P.I.C.), a term used to identify how government and industry work together to implement systems that oppress and marginalize “undesirable” citizens through surveillance, policing and confinement. It is a tool of power used to marginalize and displace Chicano men as fathers leaving over 2.3 percent of children of Latino descent to be raised with a father behind bars. The research questions guiding this study are: 1) How does incarceration affect Chicano fathers and their relationships with their families/communities? 2) How does spirituality affect how Chicana/os experience incarceration and perceptions of fathering; and 3) How do Chicano fathers understand what experiences led to their incarceration? This research project utilized interviews in the form of *testimonio* and extensive document data in the form of personal correspondences to explore the experiences of incarceration for Chicano fathers. A non-probability (purposive) sample was used for the document data and the 4 semi-structured interviews of formerly incarcerated Chicano men. A basic qualitative design and approach was used to analyze the document data. The purpose of this project was to expose how the P.I.C. empowered by Governmentality works to displace Chicano men as fathers. To also facilitate a theory on fathering from “behind bars” and to validate the use of *testimonio* as methodology in this under-researched area. Finally, to challenge traditional means of parenting and to validate the different forms parenting from behind bars can emerge.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my father for being the person in my life that encouraged me to believe that I could do anything I set my mind to. It was witnessing your resiliency and refusal to be overcome with the negativity that challenged me to be more than what I was; to find answers to questions that I thought were unanswerable. For many years I took for granted the father you are and the letters you wrote. I did not know about all the systems and structures that try and break familial bonds but now that I do I thank you for never giving up. These letters are proof of your resistance against being displaced as our father. These letters are our family's *papelitos guardados* and should be cherished as such. Thank you dad, I love you and look forward to the day that you will return to us and finally live the peaceful and happy life you've always wanted. Don't worry be happy.

This is as much for my father as it is for my mother, brother, sister, my nieces and all of my *primos, primas, Tios* and *Tias*. Though this is *mi testimonio* know that I thought of each and every one of you while undergoing this process and how all of our lives have and remain impacted by the Prison Industrial Complex. Brianna, Arianna, Lilianna, Viviana, Armando, Sixto, Santos, Mariah, Memorie, Melanie, Moses, Mateo, Monica, Joe, Leah, Miah and Elena this is for you guys and all other children being raised with a father (and mother) behind bars. I know what it is like to have a hole in my soul in the shape of my dad and to long for that hole to be healed. I know that there are not many people in this world that will tell you, you can be more and do more than continue the cycles of poverty, incarceration, addiction, gang violence and fatherlessness. But I will. I hope my actions have spoken louder than my words and that you are the first our generation to break these chains. Don't let the perceived failures of our

parents or societies damaging views of Chicana/os, Latina/os, Mexicana/os and Mexican-Americans limit your dreams. You all are capable of greatness and it is your responsibility to change the negative in your lives.

Lastly, this is for all the powerful, inspiring, intelligent and resilient women in my life that have encouraged and supported me through my academic journey. You were the ones who made the difference, you were the ones who saw my potential and you are the ones I envisioned myself being someday. Mrs. Barbee, Ms. Rendon and Mrs. Vargas thank you for guiding me towards higher education and encouraging me to make a decision that has changed my life for the best. Dr. Montoya, words cannot express the gratitude and appreciation I hold for you. You went beyond the call of professor, mentor and advisor and welcomed me into your family and for that I cannot thank you enough. I hope I have made you as proud as I am to call you my mentor. Roe and Karina, though our time together feels so brief the kindness, respect and care you have both shown me makes me jubilant that you are the women I get to share my story with. You both, along with Patricia and Caridad, have given me the confidence to finally share a part of my life that I have kept hidden, so thank you for allowing me to share *mi testimonio* and showing me that the experiences of the individual are valid.

Lastly, leaving home was one of the hardest things I have had to do but as Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, “I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me,” and I have (Anzaldúa, 1987). I know who I am and I know what I stand for. I stand for social justice, equity and compassion. I stand for women of all color. And, I stand for those left voiceless and powerless by the Prison Industrial Complex. What and who will you stand for?

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to mi abuelita, Maria De Jesus Medina. I will miss you every day, but I will never forget “Todo lo puedo en Cristo que me fortalece” Philippians 4:13. Te quiero mucho abuelita y que descanses en paz.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Dedication.....	v
Introduction: The Prison Industrial Complex and the Displacement of Chicano Fathers.....	1
Literature Review.....	7
Methodology.....	13
Methods.....	17
Sample/Data Collections.....	17
Data Analysis.....	19
Limitations.....	20
Chapter 1: The Prison Industrial Complex Rooted and Enabled by Governmentality.....	22
Governmentality.....	27
The 13 th Amendment and Neoslavery.....	34
Criminalization, Personhood and Social Death.....	38
The Value of Whiteness and White Privilege.....	41
Chapter 2: Fathering from Behind Bars: Chicano Fathers Resisting their Displacement.....	44
Chapter 3: Spirituality: Finding Hope in the Borderlands of Prison.....	63
Conclusion: Navigating Through the Borderlands.....	76
Works Cited.....	81

Introduction

The Prison Industrial Complex and the Displacement of Chicano Fathers

"Kids have a hole in their soul in the shape of their dad. And if a father is unwilling or unable to fit that hole, it can leave a wound that is not easily healed. "

*-Roland Warren, LifeClass:
Fatherless Sons (2013)*

I gave the quote above by Roland Warren much thought on a winter night as I sat in bed writing my thesis. I moved back and forth between the quote and the screen typing the following paragraph; ‘I have a hole in my soul in the shape of my dad and I am in the process of healing that wound. Children of incarcerated individuals often end up losing both parents, one to incarceration and the other to work or other relationships. Chicano boys and girls are twice more likely to go to prison and three times less likely to grow up with their fathers compared to their White counterparts (Morin, 2010). The Prison Industrial Complex (P.I.C.) is a tool of power used to marginalize and displace Chicano men as fathers leaving over 2.3 percent of children of Latino descent to be raised with a father behind bars.’

As the last few words emerged on the screen my phone rang. Looking over at the time I knew it could only be one person, my dad. We begin the usual banter, “Hi baby what’s crackin? How’s everything?” “Hey Dad, not much just reading, doing homework, you know same old same old”. After a few minutes of light conversation and life updates, he asked me, “Baby, have you talked with your sister?” I responded that I had not and asked “No dad, why, what’s up?” “Well, baby she’s not doing too good right now, they're trying to give her husband 5 to 10

[years]”. He always speaks fast and his words jumble together. He speaks in run on sentences; he has this stutter that often distorts the clarity of his voice as if his mouth is always playing catch up with his brain. Understanding him can be a challenge even to his children. Some may believe that this is due to his struggles with addiction, however, I think it has more to do with his limited allotment of time to speak on the phone, and in reality it is just who he is. As he explained to me the situation, I can hear the regret and disappointment in his voice and I know that at that moment he is reliving the mistakes he has made as a father. He asked me to call my sister, give her *consejo* (advice) and talk some sense into her because as he puts it, the way she is living is leading her down the same path our parents walked decades before.

My sister lives in an alternate reality, somehow, she has not been hardened by our childhood and remains naïve towards the consequences of her actions. My dad continues to share with me,

“You know baby, if I had a chance to do it all over again I would have rather been poor with you guys than trying to give you the world and end up where I am. It was not worth it, look where I am at, you guys are all out there living on with your lives and I am stuck in here, I am the one who lost out. Tell him [my sister’s husband] that, tell him that it is not worth it and to take care of his little girls and be there for them like I was not for you guys”.

In my family, we have a cycle of fatherlessness due to incarceration that continues over the course of four generations. Fatherlessness due to incarceration extends beyond my nuclear family and stretches far and wide into my extended family, although it affects my mother’s side of the family more than my father’s. My maternal grandmother met my maternal grandfather in prison, three of the four children they had together have experienced incarceration, and all of their grandchildren are being raised fatherless (some even motherless). Most recently, my nieces are also in the process of becoming fatherless. As of today, there are four women living on my grandmother’s property who have husbands in prison, and eight adolescent children with a father

in prison. Added to these numbers are my uncle's nine children who have experienced the incarceration of both their parents. In short, every single one of my maternal grandparents' grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren, have had either one or both of their parents incarcerated at one point in their lives. My external family is also dealing with generational incarceration, as my cousins have experienced incarceration and now they have children who are being raised fatherless as well. According to a study executed by the Sentencing Project (2013), Latino males have a one in six chance of experiencing incarceration in their lifetime; this has become the norm, not only in my family but for 1,559,200 children who have a father in jail/prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Remembering something I read by Leela Fernandez as I hang up, I think of what it means to witness the path of my father, my sister and her husband, to see the suffering of others, and how witnessing sparks the soul of the witness to accept the challenge of understanding and responsibility (Fernandez, 2003). Leela Fernandez in her book *Transforming Feminist Practice* (2003) writes that witnessing can become an active and potentially transformative practice, that there can be no more sacred endeavor than to see, to understand, the injustices inflicted on individuals/social groups-that is to bear witness to the suffering of others. Moreover, to witness suffering is to witness a part of the deepest unfolding of the soul, to witness the unimaginable horrors that human beings are capable of inflicting on each other. Witnessing implicates the observer and there is no such thing as a detached observer (Fernandez, 2003). Witnessing my father's incarceration, oppression, marginalization and exploitation sparked within me a fire to advocate against the injustices of the P.I.C. Witnessing the economic marginalization of my mother sparked within me the desire to advocate for Women's rights. Lastly, witnessing the devaluation of people of color sparked within me a Chicana who is driven by the aspiration of

social justice. Because I have endured and witnessed suffering, I feel a sense of social and spiritual responsibility to those who continue to suffer.

I return to the writing...

This project is motivated by the lack of scholarship on Chicano incarceration in general, and fathering from behind bars in particular, within the field of Chicano Studies. The absence of any analysis within the field of the Prison Industrial Complex is glaring and in need of an intervention especially since Chicanas/os are overwhelmingly subject to incarceration via the school to prison pipeline. This thesis initiates the assessment of how the overlapping interests of government and industry, and the uses of surveillance, policing and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems impact Chicanas/os. It is noteworthy to consider that the P.I.C. does not only target Chicanos and *Mexicanos*, it targets and marginalizes all low-income communities of color.

Born out of the restructuration following the Civil War and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution's exception clause, allowing for enslavement as punishment for crime, the system of corrections that would eventually evolve into the P.I.C allowed for a new version of slavery to exist. Utilizing the educational and judicial system to maintain a cycle of incarceration the P.I.C. perpetuates economic deficiency in the Chicano community. Not only does it displace Chicano men as fathers it leaves Chicano children economically, socially and culturally disadvantaged.

My method, *testimonio*, is a form of writing that entails a first person oral or written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious and narrative practices to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness (Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). This project utilizes *testimonio* as both a method and methodology, in other words, both as an applied approach and a philosophy of knowing/gaining knowledge. Applying *testimonio* and

witnessing as a lens, as well as document data in the form of personal correspondences (*papelitos guardados*) and semi-structured interviews (*testimonio*), this research seeks to explore the lived experiences of incarcerated Chicano men with fatherhood. *Mi testimonio* tells a story about how the P.I.C. has shaped and influenced incarcerated Chicano men and their perceptions about fatherhood. Further, it examines the uses of personal spirituality as a means of resistance against the displacement of Chicano fathers in order to heal and fortify familial relationships. The goal of this project is to facilitate a theory on fathering from “behind bars” and to validate the use of *testimonio* as methodology in this under-researched area.

Testimonio as a methodology then becomes a means to analyze my own perspectives. Taking into consideration that I am on multiple levels both an insider and an outsider; both observer and participant. I distinguish between being a subjective/objective observer. Chicana feminists have argued that getting to the voices of Chicanas/os and their families is essential to understanding marginalization in the U.S. When we begin an analysis by centering marginalized populations, we gain greater understanding of dominant power structures since marginalized populations are forced to navigate multiple worlds. Moraga (1983) argues for the need to produce a, “theory in the flesh,” a theorizing of *testimonio* as a method of creating a theory out of the lived experiences (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). Therefore, being transparent about the fact that I view the P.I.C. as a multifaceted industry motivated by the U.S.’s need of “security” allows the men that I interviewed to willingly share their stories with me. I could not expect the men I interviewed to bear true and raw emotions, thoughts and opinions about a vulnerable part of their lived experiences without allowing them to see into my vulnerabilities in return. However, I also stand in a position of being an objective observer; weaving sterile narratives of a “people’s

history,” trading in stories so confined by walls of self-preservation that left unexamined would ultimately hinder this *testimonio*.

When I first set out to write this thesis I tried to remain centered in my undergraduate discipline of Psychology. Everything from the way I wrote to the way I posed my research questions was objective and detached, a positivist approach. This proved to be more challenging than expected since I had decided to write about something so personal, something I have witnessed throughout my life.

Testimonio as a methodology provides a guide for analysis that requires collaborative work from the researcher, participant and the community (Chávez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Flores Carmona, 2012; Huber, 2009). It is the goal of the researcher to build understanding, trust *y amistad*, in hopes of breaking the silences and historical amnesias that are associated when acts of discrimination, racism and sexism are committed. The men I interviewed know that I have experienced and understand the real and direct consequences of the P.I.C. through the witnessing of my father's incarceration. I am not arguing that these men are innocent, or guilty, for me that is irrelevant, what I am arguing is that there are systems in place in this nation that ensure the economic, social, political and spiritual suppression and oppression of underserved communities of color. *Mi testimonio* becomes a way their voices can be heard and understood.

The purpose of this study is to recognize an aspect of the prison experience that has been under studied and unrecognized, that growing up with a Chicano father at home is a privilege not afforded to all. In order to shed light on this under-acknowledged area of study I center the ways in which Governmentality converges with color-blind racism to perpetuate the criminalization and under-education of Chicanos. The War on Drugs is implicated in this project since I argue

there is a relationship between the economic and educational marginalization and imprisonment of predominantly brown and underserved Latino communities (The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race, 2015).

However, it is critical to focus on Chicanos and Mexicanos because of the ways in which terms such as “Immigrant,” “undocumented” and “illegal” have become synonymous with Mexican. The single story that the U.S. tells about who Mexicans are as a people continues to be that of economic leeches overwhelming the country with drugs and driven by immorality. Presidential candidate Donald Trump has been quoted on numerous occasions unashamedly illustrating racist, sexist, classist and elitist beliefs, specifically targeting individuals of Mexican and Arab descent. During his speech announcing his candidacy for president Trump declared, “When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots problems, and they are bringing those problems to us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists”. It does not matter that Chicanos and Mexican-Americans are racially classified as White, we will always remain second-class citizens. Therefore, it is crucial that we begin to weave a different story that we begin to tell our own stories and histories and that we write scholarship that empowers, inspires and heals Chicanos.

Literature Review

The scholarship I engaged for this project drew from the following fields; the literature on the prison industrial complex, critical race theory (CRT) and Chicana feminism. Within the literature emerging out of P.I.C. studies the P.I.C is defined by Herzing (2005) as a term used to depict the overlaying interests of government and industry that uses surveillances, policing and imprisonment as answers to fixing economic, social and political issues. Herzing (2005) argues

that the P.I.C. aids in the protection of authority for those who receive their power through racial, economic and other structural privileges. Further, it helps maintain the present system of supremacy by responding to communal and financial concerns such as economic, racial and gender inequalities with policing and imprisonment. In other words, the P.I.C. maintains power for those who already have power/privilege, for instance, (male) straight White Americans, U.S. citizens, affluent North Americans and citizens who own property.

However, as an industry the P.I.C. needs "raw materials," in this case human beings, in order to maintain itself. To ensure its preservation the P.I.C. is composed of several components that guarantee the continued "need" for the prison system as a whole. These components are ideologies like color-blind racism, the school-to-prison pipeline, the war on drugs and Governmentality. The ideology of color-blind racism aids in the systematic discrimination and criminalization of the Chicano community within the criminal justice system by sustaining the mass incarceration of communities of color. It frames cultural deficiencies as a rationalization for social and economic problems like food insecurity and exploitative labor practices. Bonilla-Silva (1998) argues that Whites have developed a new and powerful ideology that justifies contemporary racial inequality and helps maintain "systematic White privilege". This redefined ideology is referred to as color-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva (1998) defines color-blind racism as a matter of group power; a dominant racial group (Whites) striving to maintain its systematic advantages and minorities fighting to subvert the racial status quo. Color-blind racism supports the false assumption that racial discrimination is no longer the main factor determining minorities' life opportunities. In opposition to these claims, Chicanos and other dark skinned racial minorities are still behind in every appropriate social indicator; poverty levels, wage gap, inferior education, mass incarceration, abusive labor practices and discriminatory social

interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 1998). Bonilla-Silva (2006) goes on to argue that since the adoption of this ideology when an individual of color makes a claim of being a target of racism, it can often be seen as an attempt to “play the race card”. Also, when a person of color is given an opportunity over a White individual, affirmative action is given the credit not the merit of the individual of color.

Within the field of Ethnic Studies, the argument that race is a social construction has led some Whites to argue that race is an illusion and to deny the social reality of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This is problematic and it aids in the production of racialized social structures that support White privilege and are upheld and reproduced by Whites who materially benefit from the racial social order. J. Nier, Gaertner, C. Nier, & Dovidio (2012) discuss how the current trend of color-blind racism provides affluent North Americans a way to justify and exempt themselves from racism and injustices faced by many people of color. This in turn allows the racial order upheld by some Whites who view proof of racial disparity in income, wealth, education and other pertinent matters as evidence of cultural deficiencies. Minorities’ overrepresentation in the criminal justice system or on death row is then interpreted as evidence of their overrepresentation in criminal activity. The dominant racial group relies heavily on racial beliefs and power associated with race in order to justify and maintain the racial status quo. Racism may not be as socially accepted in contemporary society, but that does not mean it does not exist. Individuals have found covert ways to express their racist beliefs. A clear example of color-blind ideologies is the under-education and over-criminalization of Latino and Chicano underserved communities.

People of color are subject to unequal protection of the laws, excessive surveillance, extreme segregation and neo-slave labor via incarceration (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008). J. Nier et

al. (2012) claim that despite the decrease in individual expressions of observable prejudice against Latinos, there continues to be evidence aiming at systematic discrimination toward Latinos. This systematic discrimination is seen through over-criminalization and under-education of the Latino community. Criminalization is the process in which specific non-normative actions become illegal during which law enforcement targets certain subcultures or groups of people as deviants and therefore subject to surveillance, punishment and control (Herzing, 2005). Criminalization also helps to sustain the notion that the social, economic and political problems society faces should be left up to law enforcement and the government. While implying that security must be maintained through watching, controlling and containing. However, researchers have not found significant statistical evidence suggesting a connection between increased incarceration rates and a decline in crime rates (Herzing, 2005).

Gonzalez & Portillos (2007) discuss the implications of the 1992 Los Angeles (L.A.) Riots on the over-criminalization and under-education of the Latino community. They hypothesize that incidents such as the L.A. riots of 1992 help validate and perpetuate pre-existing images of Latinos as criminals which lead to educational and criminal justice policies that advance these narratives. For example, the Three Strikes Law of 1994 and the No Child Left Behind Act (N.C.L.B.) of 2001. The Three Strikes Law of 1994 was a policy that implemented minimum sentencing requirements and third time felons to serve a life sentence (Gonzalez & Portillos, 2007). This disproportionately affected Latinos and other communities of color as they were more likely than their White counterparts to receive third strike felonies. N.C.L.B of 2001 considerably increased the role of the federal government in undertaking the quality of public education for all children in the U.S., with an emphasis on increased funding for underprivileged school districts, higher achievement for poor and minority students and new measures to hold

schools accountable for their students' progress, and in the process significantly expands the role of standardized testing in American public education. Although the goals of N.C.L.B. are commendable, their plight to raise standards in public education based on the notion that all children can learn in a homogenous and linear approach is flawed. Standardized testing equates educational outcomes as a measurement of merit that diminishes the effects of systematic discrimination while simultaneously ignoring the racial language and cultural barriers presented in the Eurocentric based tests. Interestingly, more money has been allocated toward the imprisonment of individuals rather than into their education or welfare. California was a key example of this misplaced financial budgeting. In 1995 the budget for California prisons surpassed that for higher education (Davis & Shaylor, 2001). Less social welfare aid, racial and economic oppression and a harsher judicial system are all factors contributing to the immense numbers of people of color filling up the prison cells (Banks, 2013).

Another example that children of color are over-criminalized and under-educated is seen through the implementation of zero-tolerance policies in education. According to a fact sheet composed by the National Council of La Raza (N.C.L.R.) (2011) for “Models of Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice,” zero-tolerance policies were first seen in the 1980s within the criminal justice system in order to combat violent crime and drug related offenses. Since the implementation of them into schools there has been an increase in the amount of students being suspended and expelled for offenses such as dress code violations, profanity and misconduct. Furthermore, research confirms that the negative consequences associated with zero-tolerance policies have escalated with the placement of police officials on school campuses. This has resulted in an increase in school based arrest and referrals to juvenile court systems for infractions that were once the responsibility of school administrators (NCLR, 2011). This helps

enable the cycle of fatherless/motherless Chicano youth who, due to zero-tolerance policies have early and premeditated contact with the juvenile court system, and in turn are then at higher risk of becoming incarcerated parents. It is stated that Latino students are 1.5 times more likely to be suspended and twice as likely to be expelled as their White peers (NCLR, 2011). There is an obvious positive correlation between zero-tolerance policies, which have increased the severity of punishment by abusing suspension/expulsion with chances of being incarcerated at some point in their lives. Unfortunately, it seems as though the policing of brown and black bodies begin in the same structures and settings as their education. The militarization of education and schools with zero-tolerance policies specifically concentrated in the areas already contending with economic marginalization and limited life sustaining employment opportunities can produce young men and women of all colors who depend on sex work, drug work and/or both and who then become targets of the War on Drugs.

According to a report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (B.J.S.) on the prison population in the U.S. more than 36 percent of offenders sentenced in 2012 were sentenced for non-violent crimes. Also according to the report, 16 percent of the prisoners sentenced in 2012 were sentenced on drug related offenses. Interestingly, about 25 percent were females and 15 percent were males, 14 percent were White, 16 percent were Black, “Hispanics” composed 15 percent and all other racial minorities have been classified under “other”. “Hispanics” make up 22 percent of the prison population, of that 22 percent, 15 percent are there on drug related charges. This report not only paints the “Hispanic” community as inherently drug addicted but also prone to violence since they [Hispanics] are said to represent 60 percent of violent offenders. On the other end of that binary, scholarship has presented research that illustrates the opposite story, that “Hispanic” and Latino communities are less likely to get in trouble with the law than their White

counterparts, however, Latinos are twice as likely to be convicted and sentenced (The Sentencing Project, 2013). Furthermore, misguided and seemingly “equal” drug laws and sentencing requirements have produced profoundly unequal outcomes for people of color, although rates of drug use and misuse are similar across racial and ethnic lines, Black and Latino people are far more likely to be criminalized than Whites (The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race, 2015). With movements like The War on Drugs, The War on Terror and The War on Poverty the “free” world is beginning to look like zero-tolerance policies are being implemented across our so-called civil society. First prisons, then schools and now these zero-tolerance campaigns are factors contributing to Latinos’ mass incarceration; in 2013, there were 1.5 million drug related arrests but 80 percent were possession only. In sum, roughly 57 percent of people in state prisons and 77 percent in federal prisons are Blacks and Latinos sentenced on drug related convictions compared to 30 percent of the U.S. total population (The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race, 2015).

Methodology

This study utilizes *testimonio*, a Chicana feminist method to explore the ways in which the P.I.C. and personal spiritual practice converge to shape the experiences and perceptions of incarcerated Chicano men and their families. Numerous feminist scholars have deployed *testimonio* as a methodology particularly appropriate for centering marginalized voices, or subaltern populations. Furthermore, as a method, *testimonio* disrupts traditional Western notions of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). This approach (*testimonio*) draws from postcolonial theory, critical race theory, grounded theory, intersectional feminist theory and is akin to Indigenous methodologies, which center the voices and knowledge of

marginalized indigenous populations. This methodology, as Huber (2009) theorizes, “Disrupts a narrowly defined process of knowledge production in academia, informed by Eurocentric epistemologies and specific ideological beliefs” (Huber, 2009, p. 639). *Testimonio* has been deployed by Chicana/Latina feminist scholars working in the field of education in order to make visible public narratives that often go unheard and which further social justice and activist scholarship (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). Bernal Delgado, Burciaga and Carmona Flores (2012) argue that the scholarship of Gloria Anzaldúa situates *testimonio* “as a genre that exposes brutality, disrupts silencing, and builds solidarity among women of color” (p. 1).

The origins of “*testimonio*” have deep roots in Chicano/a civil rights struggles documented in Chicana feminist seminal works such as, *This Bridge Called my Back* (Moraga, & Anzaldúa, 1983) and more recently, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonies* (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). These seminal texts by Chicana feminist centers situated knowledge often obscured by conventional and non-community based research methods (Anzaldúa, & Moraga, 1983; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). In 2012, Rosa-Linda Fregoso argued that the use of “*sito y lengua*” as an underlying theoretical framework for *testimonio* sanctions the use of personal experience within a specific epistemological context and life history (Davalos, Perez, Fregoso, 2008). Chicana Feminism argues that place, language, gender and recognition of one’s history (as either being absorbed into the U.S. in 1846 or as immigrants to regions once controlled by Mexico) is related to the emancipation and suppression of Chicana/o people (Moraga, & Anzaldúa, 1983; Sandoval, 2000; Alacon, 1990; Zavella, 2011). The telling of stories via *testimonios* becomes a part of a transformative process to empower Chicanas/os and

promote change. According to Karen Mary Davalos (2008), Chicana feminism looks differently at silence, examining what is said, not said and what does being silent mean.

Testimonio as methodology is different from other categories of qualitative inquiry and oral histories. The participant becomes involved in a process of critical reflection around their historical experience as it relates to sociopolitical and economic realities, linking “the spoken word to social action and privileges the oral narrative of personal experience as a source of knowledge, empowerment and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change” (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997, p. 153). As such, *testimonio* is pragmatic in that it engages the reader to understand and establish a sense of solidarity as a first step toward social change. Additionally, *testimonio* differs from autobiography in that it involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experience within particular “sociopolitical realities” (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997). This project involves *testimonio* within the criminal justice system in the U.S. Thus this qualitative project considers race, gender and the phenomena of racism as an “ingrained feature of our landscape” (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008, p.15). Arguing that we in fact have not moved towards a post racial society.

Drawing from three specific fields within Ethnic Studies representative of interdisciplinary scholarship, I draw from Chicana feminist theory and methodology, critical race theory (C.R.T) and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCRT) and literature on the P.I.C. C. R. T. recognizes the ways in which legal structures formed and replicated economic, political and social dis/advantages thus racializing crime (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008). Additionally, critical race theorists maintain that legal decisions often mirror the intersectional ways racism, sexism and classism may not be applied uniformly, with race as the central differencing quality particularly as it relates to outcomes in the legal system. C.R.T. is also concerned with a

somewhat political agenda, since its focus is on racial discrimination, white supremacy and advocacy for rectifying past injustices whereas LatCRT centers a political agenda specifically addressing issues central to Latina/o populations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Chicana Feminists have emerged as a counterhegemonic force within Chicano Studies. Queering the masculinist definitions of “Chicana/o” identity as it was reclaimed and articulated during the Chicano social movements of the 60s and 70s. Chicana feminists have theorized the gendered ways in which Chicana/o is not only a term of empowerment but also an articulation of a political identity as detribalized Indigenous Peoples. Chicano/as are politically aligned differently than populations that identify as either Mexican-American or Latina/o. This particular study involves the combined *testimonio* of a Chicana graduate student and the collaboration from incarcerated Chicano/Mexican men. The term “Chicano” brings with it a particular history of colonialism and oppression. Many Chicano communities have a cross generational struggle in becoming legitimate Americans who are treated equally in structures and systems within the U.S. and not relegated to a status of second class citizenry.

This study engages qualitative inquiry using *testimonio* as both method and methodology (Zavella, 2000; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012) in order to understand the experience and perceptions of incarcerated Chicanos and their roles as fathers in their families and communities. *Testimonio* is crucial for this project for its centering of first person narratives and contextualizing of stories Chicanas/os tell to understand and make sense of their lives. The purpose of this research then is to understand the experience and perceptions of incarceration for Chicano fathers and the impact on their families. The institution under study is the Chicano/a family and their experiences with incarceration. The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ 1) How does incarceration affect Chicano fathers and their relationships with their

families/communities?

RQ 2) How does spirituality affect how Chicana/os experience incarceration and perceptions of fathering; and

RQ 3) How do Chicano fathers understand what experiences led to their incarceration?

Methods

This research project used interviews in the form of *testimonio* and extensive document data to explore the experiences of incarceration for Chicano fathers. The goal of this project is to facilitate a theorizing on fathering “behind bars” and to validate the use of *testimonio* as methodology in this under-researched area. Further, this research will aid in bridging the knowledge gap between the preexisting literature of the P.I.C., Chicana feminism and Latina/o critical race theory.

Sample/Data Collection

A non-probability (purposive) sample was used for the document data and the 4 semi-structured interviews of formerly incarcerated Chicano fathers. As Merriam (2009) states in her chapter on designing your study and selecting a sample, the type of sample I use is a convenience sample. The document data in the form of 100 pieces of personal correspondence were chosen due to the extensive document data accessible to the researcher. Chicanos in Los Angeles, California represent a significant population of formerly incarcerated Chicanos. As a Chicana from Los Angeles I have Facebook friends and Instagram followers. I recruited participants by using a dedicated Facebook page to directly recruit formerly incarcerated participants. Participants were able to access a hyperlink to the consent form and details about the project on my Facebook and Instagram social networking dedicated pages. Due to the delayed approval of

the IRB I was able to connect with one Chicano from the L.A. community through the dedicated Facebook page. He then connected me to his network of formerly incarcerated Chicano fathers and I was able to conduct four interviews using snowball or chain sample recruitment.

Four Chicano fathers were recruited and interviewed. The interviews took place in the house of a community member and ran for about 30-45 minutes. Three of the four men were middle aged fathers in their forties. The fourth was a younger father in his mid-twenties. All four participants are from Los Angeles, California. Each of the men interviewed were provided or selected a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. The first participant interviewed will be referred to as Red. Red is a happily married father of eleven children ranging from the ages of seven to seventeen. He first experienced incarceration at 13 years old and served a term of about thirteen years. For the purposes of this study I focused on his (and all other participants) time incarcerated while he was a father. Currently, Red only maintains relationships with ten of his eleven children. Red is in his mid-forties. The second participant will be referred to as Bass. Bass is a father of two toddler children, at the time of his incarceration, Bass had a two-year-old and an unborn child. Bass's first experienced incarceration in his early twenties. Bass struggles to maintain contact with his children due to his estranged relationship with their mother. Bass is now in his mid-twenties. The third participant will be referred to as Jiminie. Jiminie is a single father of four currently raising his two younger children. Jiminie first experienced incarceration at thirteen years old. Jiminie does not have contact with his two older children. Jiminie is also in his mid-forties. The fourth participant will be referred to as Roger. Roger is a married father of three children, two step children and one biological child. Roger first experienced incarceration at fifteen years old. Roger does not have contact with his eldest biological child

but is currently raising his two step-children. Roger is also in his mid-forties. Below is a sample of some of the questions asked:

1. How has incarceration influenced your perception of yourself?
2. How has incarceration influenced your relationship with your family (prompt for child, community)?
3. How have you maintained connections with your children and family (email, phone, letters, text)?
4. How has incarceration affected your personal relationships with your children and family (role as a father, partner etc.)?
5. Can you tell me about a time where you felt marginalized from others because you had spent time in prison (prompt for employment opportunities, reactions from professionals etc.)?
6. Tell me about your experience with legal representation (prompt for funds to hire an attorney, having court appointed counsel, immigration challenges)?
7. Tell me about how spirituality has shaped your experience with incarceration and your relationships with your family, if at all?

Data Analysis

A basic qualitative design and approach was used to analyze the document data. According to Berg (2004) letters provide a captivating view into the life of the author since they are not created by the writer with the intention of having them used by a researcher. As a result, they often reflect the inner worlds of the writer including their views, values, attitudes and beliefs about a wide variety of subjects. Approximately 100 letters were included in this study as they chronicle the incarcerated life of a Chicano father over the course of 16 years and are

document data and property of the researcher. Document data in the form of 100 letters from an incarcerated participant to his children were used in an initial and focused coding process. Utilizing principles of basic qualitative methods initial coding was done followed by more focused coding. Focused coding was refined into initial categories such as fathering, spirituality, parentification, education, and failures as a father. Next, the researcher used a constant comparative method to compare data with data to refine data into categories and themes (Charmaz, 2014).

Throughout the research and data analysis process memos were used as both a form of self-reflexivity and a cognitive process for data analysis since, “thinking is the heart and soul of doing qualitative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 163). Lastly, a form of triangulation discussed by Merriam (2009) was used in data analysis by including two additional researchers to assist in coding the extensive document data and provide an outsider perspective for validity purposes.

Limitations

There are five limitations to this study. First, *testimonio* is not as of yet widespread or traditional Western method of inquiry. Second, use of *testimonio* is more often used in Latin American scholarship on civil rights and activism and has more recently made inroads into Chicano Studies, Chicana Feminism and the field of education. Third, given the small sample size of the interview data issues surrounding transferability and validity of the study may also be of concern. This project does not profess to be objective nor is the methodology of *testimonio* attempting to provide an objective stance. Fourth, although there was a concerted effort to address the researcher’s position by engaging a self-reflective process given her standpoint this

type of project still presents challenges for any researcher engaging a project when document data originate from members of their family. Finally, although there are currently 100 different letters for analysis in this study the document data gathered thus far originates within one family of which the researcher is a part of.

Chapter 1

The Prison Industrial Complex Rooted and Enabled by Governmentality

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

- Nelson Mandela

“When children attend schools that place a greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending prep schools for prison.”

-Angela Davis

In the book *Telling to Live* (2001), the authors theorize about *papelitos guardados* (protected documents, stored papers, or preserved documents) writings that are treasured and stored away from inquiring eyes (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). *Papelitos guardados* evoke the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). I have come to the realization that the letters my father wrote to us while he was/is in prison are my *familia's papelitos guardados*. It was through these letters that we remained a family despite the distance and it is through these letters that my father is able to parent us even when he is not physically present. Even though I have grown up with a father who was in and out of prison I do not feel in my heart that I am fatherless because every time I receive a letter I am reminded that my father loves me and in all of the ways that he takes the time to express his love through his writing. “*Esa niña es rara, she weird man*” is how my mother use to classify my love for school and knowledge. I have always loved school, ever since

I started pre-kindergarten and this was considered strange by my mother. "I don't know where you get that from cause it ain't from me, I'm a *burra* when it comes to school". However, as I look back on all the letters my father wrote me I know that he is the one who influenced my passions. My father always encouraged me to read, write and get good grades in school; he even encouraged my passion for psychology before I ever decided to major in it. In every letter it never failed, "Baby, I need you to keep going to school okay? I need you to get good grades and be real smart so you don't have to work as hard as me and your mom so you can live a good life, be anything you want" (Martinez, J. C.,2003, September 1). My father understood the importance of education, he understood that education was one of the only ways his children would be able to surpass his socioeconomic status. In his mind he connected having an education with social mobility and having a "good life".

My mother still has resentment towards my father because of his absence and because of that she is hesitant in sharing credit for their parenting which she made very clear in my most recent trip back home:

"I know you love your dad *mija* but he was never there for you, he was always gone" she says bitterly her voice seeping with years of anger and resentment.

"How can you say that to me when I'm here conducting interviews for a thesis I am writing about him, about how he was there for us through the letters. Just because he wasn't there physically he always wrote, always" I say with tears coming down my face. She still knows how to hurt me.

"What good is a dad or husband if he is not there when you need him?" she says accusingly.

“But that’s what I’m saying! He was there! Through the letters! You act like he’s dead! He’s not dead!” I shoot back angry that once again she is painting my dad as an absent father.

In her eyes that was not good enough, his physical absence equates to his abandonment. One of the main reasons I decided to write this *testimonio* is because I want him (and her) to know that even though he was not always there, physically, his letters never failed and I am thankful for that. I want him to know that his letters had more influence than he probably intended and to thank him because I would not be where I am today conducting the research I am without him. Unfortunately, the gratitude I am able to express was not always there. Before gratitude there was anger, pain, confusion and hatred. There was a mix of emotions that I had to learn how to deal with and understand. These emotions were not felt toward anyone or anything specific (except maybe the police) but more toward life in general. I was angry that my dad could not “get his act together” and how his absence left us to start over repeatedly. It hurt to see my mother in pain and my family struggle and I could not understand why my dad was too often the target of racial profiling, criminalization, racial stereotyping and police brutality. Moreover, I hated the oppression and fear I felt from individuals whose job it was to “protect and serve”. I came to understand at an early age that the police were not there to protect and serve us; they were there to control, surveil and instill fear against anyone who might look suspect.

Having a father, or a mother, in prison is reality for approximately two million Latino children; this does not include fatherless/motherless individuals over the age of 18 (BJS, 2013). This is my reality and has been for the majority of my life. I was, and still am, a statistic represented in the Bureau of Justice Statistics (B.J.S.) reports of “children” with an incarcerated parent(s). However, this is the first time I am able to write about this reality without fear or

shame. I understand now more than ever that being fathered from behind bars is the reality of countless other Chicano children and by sharing my story I hope to deconstruct that fear and/or shame that is often times imposed on us.

At 24 years of age, with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and being a Masters of Art Candidate in Ethnic Studies, I am proud to say that I am a child of a convict. Having a father in prison did not hinder my success but motivated it, it helped me to understand how structural racism worked to seal my father's fate and ignited a desire in me to deconstruct how race, class and immigrant status set the stage for my father's incarceration. There is a silencing that occurs when you have a parent who is incarcerated, we learn from a young age how to preserve our self-image and that of our family by not speaking about our incarcerated loved ones. Sometimes this silencing is perpetuated through fear, other times it may be shame and beyond that it happens because as our parents' children we do not want outsiders to make assumptions about our lives and our parents. We do not want people who do not understand our reality making judgments about our parents; we do not want to explain why or how they came to be incarcerated, but most of all we do not want to be seen as tainted or lacking in some way. I will not assume to know the realities of every fatherless/motherless Chicana/o; I will only speak to my truths, *mi testimonio*, in hopes that it reaches the countless others who are the forgotten victims of the prison system in order to demonstrate that we are not limited by our parents' circumstances. Even though we are children of felons and (ex) convicts we should not internalize those oppressions but rather show those who deem us and our parents as always deviant and criminal that felons and (ex) convicts do not breed and raise deviant children. If this research does nothing but encourages another child of a prisoner that they too can surpass the limitations set upon their parents than I will consider this project a success. In addition to providing a positive *testimonio* for children with

incarcerated parent(s) to connect to I wish to vocalize and advocate for the needs and agency of the countless children left fatherless/motherless and voiceless.

Utilizing the concept of Neoslavery, (including the temporal box, structural dehumanization and natal alienation) I argue that the P.I.C. ensures that prisoners live in an “in-between status” of not fully living, but not dead. Due to their incarceration, two participants, Roger and Jiminie, still do not have relationships with their older children, during their interviews they shared that prison impacted their relationships with their children, wives and family members. When asked about how he maintained contact with his child while in prison, Roger shared, “I use to write to him a lot but I felt like he put up a barrier and really didn’t want to know me. His mother told me to stop writing and that it would be better if he thought I was dead.”

In 2002, the United States' (U.S.) prison and jail population surpassed two million for the first time in national history. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, this is roughly the same amount of individuals incarcerated in state and federal prisons to date. The U.S. has the highest rate of incarcerated individuals at 726 prisoners per 100,000 people. Black Americans compose 12.7 percent of the total population but 48.2 percent of the prison population, Latino Americans compose 17 percent of the total population but 22 percent of the prison population and Native Americans compose 1 percent of the total population but 4 percent of the prison population (BJS. 2011). Our prisons are being packed with underserved communities of color already contending with issues of racism, sexism, elitism and criminalization. According to Carson (2013), Bureau of Justice Statistics (B.J.S.) statistician, though “Hispanics” are said to make up 22 percent of the total prison population this number may be skewed due to the limitations of self-reporting data by inmates and the inconsistency of the categorization of race

and “Hispanic” origins by the National Prisoner Statistic (N.P.S.). According to a report completed in 2007 by the B.J.S., 52 percent of prisoners held in state prisons and 63 percent held in federal prisons are parents of children under the age of 18. In other words, by midyear of 2007, 2.3 percent of American children of Latino descent in the United States had either one or both parents incarcerated and were parenting their children from behind bars. Within the last eight years the number of incarcerated individuals has increased, with that, it is not a far leap to assume that the percentage of children with incarcerated parents has also increased. Also in 2007, 92 percent of incarcerated individuals were male, 1,559,200 children had a father in jail/prison and roughly 10 percent of children of color were growing up fatherless. The over representation of Latino fathers in prison is only one issue, beyond that there is a lack of scholarship in Chicano Studies investigating the trickle down effects of incarceration beyond the prisoner to their children and families. One of the only scholarly interventions is the book by B.V. Olguin on the racialized and gendered nature of criminalization in the United States, and the broader effect this exercise of juridical power has on extended families and communities (Olguin, 2010). It positions Chicana/o criminality in relation to larger structures of crime and the exercise of punishment in the broad history of U.S. colonization. The existence of imprisoned fathers and the impact on their children needs to be addressed within Chicano Studies, in doing so there will be a better understanding of this cycle in which incarcerated men impact their children's "perceived" success or their children's "perceived" failures.

Governmentality

The word 'governmentality' refers to both the processes of governing and a mentality of government, such as, thinking about how governing happens. According to Dean (2009)

governmentality deals with the ways we think about governing, it emphasizes the ways in which the thinking involved in the practices of government is overt and embedded in language and other technical instruments. It is thus both a practice and rationality or a way of thinking about government. As a way of thinking, governmentality represents an important methodological *tool* (not theory) within Foucault's 'tool-box' that he offers to 'users', not 'readers' (Dean, 2009). The Prison Industrial Complex is a byproduct of Governmentality and utilizes imprisonment, and all forms of policing/surveillance, along with education, as multifaceted apparatus that operate in tangent to ensure that underserved communities of color remain at the bottom of the economic wealth distribution, un-educated, socially stagnant and marginalized. Here, the word "government" must be allowed the very broad meaning it had in the 16th century. 'Government' did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the *conduct* of individuals or of groups might be directed – the government of children, of souls, of communities, of the sick. To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others (Fegulla, 2011; Dean, 2009). In this sense, government involves some sort of attempt to deliberate on, and to direct, human conduct; human conduct is then conceived as something that can be regulated, controlled, shaped and turned to specific ends (Dean, 2009). Furthermore, government encompasses not only how we govern others or abstract entities (i.e. states and populations) but how we govern ourselves. During the interview of one participant, Red, he shared that he actively tries to change his appearance, he governs himself to try and change the perception others have of him:

Personally I try to change my way and my look and I guess I cannot lose the gangster look. When I try and get a job they see my tattoos on my head, face, neck, arms and they automatically judge me. If I could go back, I would take it all back, the life style, the tattoos. It stresses me out how people look at me (Red, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Another interviewee, Bass, a father of two in his mid-twenties shared that finding employment after incarceration can be difficult. He shared that even though he is a citizen it is difficult for him to gain employment since employers judge him based on his “record and race (ethnicity)” (Bass, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

The automatic judgments and contempt both Red and Bass face for their appearance and incarceration is an example of external governing by society, this in turn impacts how both govern themselves. Red understands that as long as his appearance associates him with a “gangster” he will always have to live with the stigma of being inferior, deviant and prone to violence. Trying to portray himself as society considers “normal” or “non-gangster” causes him unrest and anxiety. Both men are constantly being governed, surveilled and marked as criminal. Society only sees one layer of their identity and judges them accordingly. Olguin (2010) argued though the art of tattooing has been commodified and consumed across cultures this does not erase the fact that tattoos classify individuals differently depending on the body wearing the mark. Prison and barrio tattoos maintain their abject status specifically because of their unsophisticated, homemade, and culturally specific styles and, above all else, the brown bodies that bear them (Olguin, 2010).

I have experienced the raw power of Governmentality in my life as well as in the lives of those around me. Governmentality is a complex system that situates control, dominance and power over others as well as yourself in relation to sovereignty, discipline and government. One must have discipline (self-control) in order to be fit for sovereignty (power of self and others) which should then be managed by the government (the dominating force). Governmentality is intergenerational meaning that over generations some form of Governmentality has been imposed on children and society; in the general sense of there have always been norms to live by.

My understanding of Governmentality was shaped even before I knew how to identify and articulate this Foucaudian tool, the first encounter I remember having with Governmentality was when my family and I would take "vacations" to Tijuana and Rosarito, Mexico. When it would be time to cross the border back into the States my mother would coach us on the proper way to speak and interact with immigration officials. We were to clearly state, affirm and support our U.S. citizenship, we were to make eye-contact and speak with conviction. This was during my preadolescent years of life and I never fully understood what I was actually saying. "I am an American citizen...I am an American citizen...I am an American citizen, but what does this mean"? At that time what I experienced was that being an American citizen gave me privilege, it gave me value and it relayed to the immigration officials that I was entitled to that land across the border. Somehow repeating that simple sentence was supposed to mask my Mexican affiliations and bring me closer to my Americanness even though at home we were taught to be proud of our culture. My mother understood that in order for her family to safely, without any harassment or doubt, return home we needed to perform and portray ourselves as the traditional American family returning home from a family vacation. Though my mother did not receive higher education and was not exposed to ideologies of xenophobia, she had lived long enough to understand foreigners were not welcomed in U.S. society. To be valued and allowed certain privileges you must conform and assume the identity of the dominant racial group (White American).

Governmentality also known as the "art of government" emerged in the 16th century, it outlined how to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed and how to become the best possible governor (Foucault & Senellart, 2008). In his piece, *Governmentality* (2008), Foucault argues that there are three different forms

of government, the first being, the art of self-government, connected to morality; secondly, the art of properly governing a family, which belongs to the economy; and lastly, the science of ruling the state, which concerns politics. The most important piece in his argument is that all three forms of government are interdependent. They are dependent on each other, meaning, that the governing of the state (the U.S.) is dependent on the governing of the economy (the 50 states) which is then dependent on the governing of morality (each independent U.S. citizen). He goes on to assert that the art of government is to establish a continuity, both upward (meaning that a person who wishes to govern the state well must first learn how to govern himself, his goods and his patrimony) and downward (when a state is well run, the head of the family will know how to look after his family which means that individuals will, in turn, "behave as they should") (Foucault & Senellart, 2008). In other words, the job of governmentality is to create a connection between the government of the state, the government of the family and the governing of oneself. The governing/control of the family and the individual brought about the need for police which I will discuss later as a tool used both by the P.I.C. and Governmentality in the suppression of the Chicano community and other non-normative bodies.

Governmentality as a tool is used to dehumanize and devalue the Chicano community as well as other bodies of color and any other individual who does not conform to what Euroamericans' value as moral. Morality is defined as principles concerning the distinctions between right and wrong or good and bad behavior, it is also defined as a particular system that values the principals and conduct especially ones held by a specific person or society. Since the creation of this nation the principals and conduct valued have always been those of the "true" Americans (Euroamericans). White, affluent, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual and males have always drawn the lines of what is considered "right" and "wrong," bodies of color challenge

heteronormative and heteropatriarchal standards of living. Chicanos do not fit into normative standards of morality, some by choice and others by necessity. Self-governing looks differently for Chicanos as it does for Black Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and they all differ in some variation from White Americans. A simple example of this would be the disciplining of children in each culture; another example would be the selling of drugs, or sex, as a means of financial income, in my experiences these occupations exist due to the lack of "moral" employment possibilities available to certain communities.

Imprisonment has become the primary response to many social problems that affect individuals contending with poverty. The criminalization of actions such as vagrancy, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness and illiteracy has allowed incarceration to become a suitable and even favored solution to many problems in our society (Davis, 1998). Social problems cannot simply be swept under the rug and forgotten (or in America's case locked away in a prison cells), our society must no longer be content with the "out of sight, out of mind" ideology when dealing with prison populations. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 20 percent of the total Hispanic/Latino population in the U.S. is living under the poverty line. Twenty-five percent of these are of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican and Guatemalan descent. The court and prison systems are seen as working together to charge, prosecute and convict minorities at higher rates than their White counterparts. It is common knowledge that our criminal justice systems are overburdened and underfunded, especially since many individuals who are charged and cannot afford legal representation are in need of public defenders or pro bono lawyers. However, as depicted by the men interviewed public defenders are not always on the side of their defendant, they encourage their clients to take deals and are

not too concerned with the “innocent until proven guilty” part of the law. When asked about their experiences with legal representation Bass, Jiminie and Roger responded:

The public defender, I felt like they weren't doing anything for me. They were trying to make me take a deal and take a strike (Bass, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

I have never heard of a public defender that actually wants to help you get out of jail they just want you to take a deal (Jiminie, personal communication, March 12, 2016).

You mean public pretenders. They never paid attention much they just wanted to hurry up and move forward with the next person. I could never afford a lawyer. They always come at you with a deal they never defend you (Roger, personal communication, March 12, 2016).

None of these men felt as though public defenders were really defending them, they did not feel supported and were being advocated for by some individual who had no real interest in their allegations. These experiences are perpetuated due to the limited amount of qualified public defenders. They are often overburdened and underpaid which adds to the limited amount of effort and attention paid toward cases involving already criminalized bodies of color. This is an example of governmentality, the law may require court appointed lawyers however, these lawyers are not required to “have enough time” or sufficient training. Three of the four of these men had their first encounters with public defenders as adolescents and due to the lack of interest and encouragement by their advocates they agreed to non-negotiated deals and served excessive sentences. As adolescents, the participants were not aware that they had the right to dismiss their court appointed lawyers. Now, as men whose presence and person continue to challenge “The Law” they have learned to advocate for themselves and not to depend on their “public pretenders.”

There are also discrepancies when it comes to the death penalty and those sentenced to death. According to a report by the Uniform Crime Report completed in Maryland, even though 81 percent of the state’s homicides involved Black victims, 84 percent of death sentences come

from cases involving White victims. Ninety-five percent of all people sentenced to death could not afford their own lawyer while those who can afford to hire their own lawyers often avoid jail time (Herzing, 2005). Imprisonment as punishment for a crime has its connections to the passing of the 13th Amendment to The Constitution.

The 13th Amendment and Neoslavery

The 13th Amendment of The Constitution has long been viewed as the policy that helped abolish slavery and transition the U.S. to a post slavery society. However, Dennis Childs in his book, *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (2015) illustrates how the Amendment's exception clause, which allowed for enslavement as punishment for crime, has aided in launching forms of racial capitalist misogynist incarceration. Throughout his book he demonstrates how chattel slavery, a concept that has been repressed along with our nation's colonizing past and continues to flourish under the guise of today's prison systems. Childs (2015) argues that the U.S. system of mass imprisonment represents a centuries old regime of cartelized prison-industrial genocide. A liberal, white supremacist, misogynist “shit-stem” that has submitted an uncalculated number of Black people and other racially and criminally stigmatized groups to collectivized natal alienation, excremental internment, (un)productive forced labor, serialized corporeal rupture and manifolds of death, ranging from the social, to the civil, to the biological. The concepts I integrate within this study are chosen due to their manifestations in my personal life. The first concept is neoslavery. Neoslavery is defined by Child’s as a ritualized dilemma of living death shaped through the mutually constitutive state-terror modalities of temporal dislocation, structural dehumanization and collectivized natal alienation. Neoslavery can be seen in the P.I.C. through all three modalities

of state-terror, first and foremost, the result of imprisonment can leave incarcerated individuals in a space of "time warp" or in a "temporal box".

The Temporal Box works to enact both a time/body freeze-with the death simulating routine of imprisonment initiating a virtual stoppage of time-and a time/body warp, wherein the civil death of penal entombment performs a horrifying repetition of the social death of chattel enslavement (Childs, 2015). When my father would go to prison he was not the only one to experience the 'temporal box,' after his incarceration it would take our family some time to readjust to life without the "governor" of our home. There were many instances where I heard my mother protest about how not having a husband gave her less creditability and respect and how people (specifically men) would take advantage of her due to her absent husband. My father has experienced the temporal box in more severity, he has watched his children grow up through letters, phone calls, the occasional visit and not chronologically. Every time my father was incarcerated it was like his life stopped, or at least was put on a very long pause.

Unfortunately for him and the countless other inmates' life on the outside never stops. The only thing that I can compare that feeling to was when I decided to leave my home state of California to attend school here in Colorado, I remember going back home for holiday breaks and realizing that even though I left, the people closest to me had continued on with their lives. There were experiences and family moments I was not a part of, like the birth of my three nieces, my brother's graduation, countless birthdays and family reunions/ parties. It felt as though I had been displaced, that my absence meant nothing and that a part of my identity had been taken from me, this is what I imagine my father and countless other inmates feel. These feelings are only amplified through structural dehumanization and natal alienation which are other concepts discussed in Child's piece.

The displacement of whole communities is perpetuated by the P.I.C. through its physical structures of constant surveillance, dehumanization and methods of punishment within prison walls, such as solitary confinement. Structural dehumanization occurs through several different aspects of the prison experience. It can begin with racial profiling, then continue into the conviction and sentencing of bodies of color since they are often stigmatized as immoral which then results in Chicano, Black and Indigenous communities being convicted at higher rates with harsher sentences implemented. Structural dehumanization is a powerful social and political tool utilized to rationalize violence; solitary confinement is one of the worst forms of violence inflicted on the incarcerated body. The solitary prisoner is not only removed from communicating with their family, but from social contact all together thus causing them to occupy a space of not fully living but not being fully dead, a kind of social death. In *mi familia's papelitos guardados* my father would always write that he would be home soon, or how he was going to be moved to a facility closer to home though they were futile attempts at bringing hope into our lives. This removal of family connections is how prisoners become socially dead, either by moving prisoners out of state or enforcing lock downs to suspend visitations. It was not uncommon for my dad to write about his time in the hole or lock down, "Baby as for me, I'm doing okay just on lockdown. I was sad cause I was really looking forward to see you for Father's day but were still on lockdown, but I guess everything happens for a reason" (Martinez, J.C., 10, June 30). Natal alienation (to be separated from loved ones) is one of the foundational elements of slavery which enables entering a status of social death. Childs (2015) defines natal alienation as one of the foundational elements of world-historical slavery and social death that is performed through the slave's systematic severance from loved ones. Maintaining contact with loved ones outside of prison can be difficult and requires both the prisoner and the prisoner's

family to have resources to pay for contact via phone and visits. As Red shared, “phone calls are really expensive plus at the time my wife was really struggling and I didn’t like to call so I wrote since it is cheaper” (Red, personal communication, March 10, 2016). He also shared that the state facility only provided three envelopes which for someone like him, with nine kids, was not enough so he had to purchase writing materials and that required resources (personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Unfortunately, what the available scholarship on prisons has ignored are the long term effects that these levels of structural separation from loved ones, and dehumanization have on families. Families of prisoners are often the forgotten victims of the prison and the scholars critiquing the P.I.C. Though my father was often physically absent from my life and was not able to father my siblings and me through traditional approaches of parenting he used letters that my siblings and I held on to (*papelitos guardados*) and phone calls as a means to father his children from behind bars. The act of parenting from behind bars for Chicanos is an act of resistance in the midst of mass incarceration and the perpetuation of systems of inequality. My father, and numerous other men and women of color who maintain their relationships with their families and communities are fighting back against their dehumanization and natal alienation. However, this battle seems never ending, in order to maintain these connections one needs currency on both ends; inmates need money in order to purchase writing instruments and postage and their families need money in order to accept collect calls from their incarcerated loved ones. If inmates are unable to maintain connections to their outside relatives, they are often displaced and live a version of social death.

Criminalization, Personhood and Social Death

Lisa Cacho, in her book, *Social Death Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (2012) argues that to infer that some groups form the foundation for law is to infer that law is dependent upon the eternalness of certain groups' criminalization. These always criminalized individuals are the groups to whom Cacho refers to as ineligible for personhood, "as populations they are subjected to laws but refused the legal means to contest those laws as well as denied both the political legitimacy and moral credibility necessary to question them" (Cacho, 2012). She continues in her argument that the bodies and localities of poor, criminalized people of color are signifiers for those who are ineligible for personhood. To be ineligible for personhood is a form of social death; it not only defines who does not matter, it also makes mattering meaningful. Criminalization justifies people's ineligibility for personhood because it takes away the right to have rights. Inevitably, criminalization makes sense of the contradictions that ensue when according unequal access to legal universality as mentioned above in my paragraph covering imprisonment. Nonetheless, Cacho asserts that there is a significant distinction between being stereotyped (often used interchangeably with criminalization) and being criminalized. Even though being stereotyped and being criminalized are not mutually restricted and often overlap, they have different connotations in U.S. law. To be stereotyped as a criminal is to be misrecognized as someone who committed a crime, but to be criminalized is to be prevented from being law-abiding (Cacho, 2012). For all legally ambiguous populations, the law penalizes but does not protect, regulates but does not defend. When the state renders criminalized populations of color ineligible for personhood and, consequently, ineligible for the right to ask for rights, they are excluded from rights-based politics. The last concept in Cacho's (2012) piece I would like to integrate is that targeted populations do not need to break laws to be

criminalized. Their behaviors are criminalized even if their crimes are nonviolent and often victimless—unless one considers the one engaging in the crime as the primary victim (i.e. using drugs). Criminalization can operate through instituting laws that cannot be followed (such as the laws that regulate gang activity and association). People subjected to laws based on their (il)legal status—“illegal aliens,” “gang members,” “terrorist suspects”—are unable to comply with the “rule of law” because U.S. law targets their being and their bodies, not their behavior; for example, the criminalization of men of color with tattoos and short hair-cuts. Alone tattoos and short hair does not equal deviant, but when placed on an already perceived deviant body the combination depicts criminality.

As I have discussed above, incarcerated populations occupy a space and life style that renders them socially dead. They are purposefully alienated from their kinship to their families and communities and exist only abstractly. Growing up in Los Angeles, California I have witnessed the criminalization of my father and community. Cacho (2012) writes of the connections between who is eligible for personhood and who is not and that those who are not can often be identified through their class and perceived deviancy. I was fortunate enough to have a home in the suburbs of Pomona, California a city roughly 40 miles east of South Central Los Angeles (South Central) were my grandmother has lived for generations and currently still resides. Going back and forth from South Central to Pomona I was able to observe structural forms of oppression ranging from police brutality, racial profiling/stereotyping and criminalization and internalized oppression being expressed through Black on Brown crime. Pomona was a city with fewer amounts of surveillance and policing in comparison to South Central, it was a city that felt safer to raise a family which is why my parents moved there, to give their kids a better quality of life and “proper” education. From an early age I came to

understand that cops were not on our side (“our” meaning underserved bodies of color), they were not placed in our communities to "protect and serve" but rather to surveil and police.

The majority of encounters my family and I have experienced with police officials were always hostile, negative and resulted in one of my parents/relatives going to jail (mostly my father or another man of color). Laws enacted around the control and regulation of gang affiliated individuals and activity such as the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act of 1970 and the establishment of “Gang Units” (G unit) disproportionately affected Chicano men/woman and all other underserved communities residing in South Central. These laws specifically criminalized non-heteronormative behaviors taken on by communities of color such as a group of Chicano men (and women), with tattoos, short hair, an array of skin tones congregating and drinking in front of (but behind the fence of) my grandmother's house. It was not until the majority of the men in my family were either incarcerated or absent in some way that we were able to enjoy family gatherings without the harassment of police. Our family parties were constantly being criminalized due to the population in attendance, location of residence and non-normative activities. Witnessing police brutality against my father and *Tios*, I was fearful that my brother would be the next (and eventual) target. I learned through my vicarious experiences with law enforcement to govern not only my behavior but those around me such as my brother. I would insist that my brother wear a cap to cover his bald head when driving around because even though he was not affiliated with the gang life, he was often the target of racial profiling/stereotyping and criminalization. He was sometimes mistaken as a deviant body but the majority of the time it was assumed that he was a criminalized body engaging in criminal activity because his race, body, class, skin-color, location and behavior signaled him as such. Lisa Cacho is pessimistic in believing that particular bodies of color

cannot be restored (healed) because no opposing evidence of alternative framework reinterprets the facts of criminality, exposes how people of color are criminalized, or exposes how whiteness is valued (Cacho, 2012). These theoretical and real world applications of how criminality correlates to underserved, racialized and non-heteronormative communities and how people of color (specifically Chicanos) have been criminalized and rendered ineligible for personhood.

The Value of Whiteness and White Privilege

Lastly, Cacho's final critique of how particular bodies of color cannot be restored (healed) is due to the lack of exposure of the value of whiteness. Aileen Moreton-Robinson stated that the aim of her book, *White Possession and Indigenous Sovereignty Matters* (2015) is to reveal how racialization is the process by which whiteness operates possessively to define and construct itself as the apex of its own racial hierarchy. Furthermore, from the sixteenth century onward, race and gender divided humans into three categories: owning property, becoming propertyless and being property. These three categories of proprietaryness are born of the episteme of Western culture, which has made manifest the existence of order functioning through the logic of possession (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Moreton-Robinson (2015) defined the concept "possessive logics" to denote a mode of rationalization, rather than a set of positions that produce a more or less inevitable answer, that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control and domination.

Moreton-Robinson argues that "race matters in the lives of all peoples; for some people it confers unearned privileges, and for others it is the mark of inferiority" (2015). There is a hierarchy of race that designates White (European) Americans as superior and all other communities of color inferior, White (males) are often the prototype that the rest of society is

compared to and judged against. This is problematic since it designates Chicanos and other bodies of color as non-normative, immoral and assigns them to a second class citizenry. This began with the colonization of this territory which has been marked by and through violence and race (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Chicanos have a history entrenched within the three categories of propriety; before colonization Indigenous communities inhabiting the North America continent were considered the possessor of their land, however, after colonization the Indigenous communities lost fee simple ownership of their land through treaties, violence, warfare and mass murder. When the North American continent was taken over, Chicanos (the offspring of the original Indigenous communities and Spaniards) became property and were often exploited in terms of labor, wages, and pushed to live toward the outer skirts of the town, often plagued with poverty, policing and higher rates of crime.

I recognized the value in whiteness during our family vacations to Mexico; I saw how our U.S. citizenship, and the connection to American power it confers, gave us certain privilege south of the border. However, the social construction of the White identity and its value was more significant in the U.S. than Mexico. The same way being an American gave us privileges, it also produced disadvantages. For example, my family was often targeted by corrupt police officials in Mexico for bribes, my siblings and I were often cheated by vendors due to our ignorance of currency exchange rates between dollars and pesos, and the poverty we witnessed in Mexico made me extremely aware of social class. Although the White population in my California community was small and of a low socioeconomic level, I often witnessed the value of whiteness via class location. I was conscious that those individuals who looked like me were not represented in the middle class occupations; it was rare for me to see people of color in

positions of power, outside of a few select professions, such as education. As Anzaldúa (2007) wrote:

We need to voice our needs. We need to say to White society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 108).

Chapter 2

Fathering from Behind Bars: Chicano Fathers Resisting their Displacement

“Prison is the punishment that keeps on taking. Long after the individual has regretted his or her sin and wishes to go back to living a productive life, he must stay in prison wasting his precious years on this earth. Almost anything you take from a man can be given back except time. He can never reclaim the time that was stolen from him. He can never experience his children growing up for they are already grown.”

—Author Unknown

(<http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poems/family/prison/>)

“Wha-what was that? Wa-was that a sign? Ar-are you telling them to come and get me? Stop, stop doing that, stand right there in a straight line...” I remember my mother handing me two white pills and telling me to crush them and to put them inside my father’s Corona when he would ask me to get him a beer. “He trusts you, he’s not going to know, his just going to fall asleep so we can get him the help he needs, no you have to do it!” Sure enough, “Baby get me a beer” as I break the line to get him his beer I worry that he could tell that I am conspiring against him, that he could read the fear and hesitation on my face. I walk over to the kitchen, open the fridge and am thankful that I am out of his eyesight. I can hear him accusing my mother about being “in it” with the cops to get him and take him away, “I’m crazy, not stupid, I know they are outside waiting for the sign.” Something inside my dad had snapped and he was consumed with paranoia, he was convinced that we were all in cahoots with the cops to take him away and lock him up. I take out the pills from my pocket and am hesitant to follow my mother’s orders, earlier that year I participated in Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) I know that mixing pills

with alcohol is dangerous. I do not want to hurt my dad, I do not care that his paranoia is causing him to act irrational and erratic, he is still my dad, or some version of him. Finally, pulling at all the courage I can manage to find I crush the pills and slip them into his beer making sure to hide the evidence from the neck of the bottle. There, you cannot even tell, I just might get away with this...I return to the *sala* and hand my dad his Corona staring at his eyes that seem to belong to a stranger and watch him as he takes a drink. He knows! I know he knows! Aww shit! I messed up! ...but nothing, he does not say anything just puts the beer down, goes to the kitchen and grabs another.

My father missed the birth of his first born, my older brother Jr., because he was in jail, I think that this was the first time my father felt that he had failed as a father, but after he was released he married my mother and assumed the role of father, husband and provider. I came roughly two years later and my little sister a year after that; at 23 years of age my dad had become a father of three. He and my mother lived with my maternal grandparents for a few years but my father's perception of what a man should be motivated him to move his family to a home of their own. He wanted us to have something we could call our own, a place where we could live and grow up without having to abide by another's rules, basically, he never wanted us to live *arrimados* (forced upon another's home or intrusive). To him being a man equates to being a provider, a hard worker and someone who does whatever it takes to make sure his family is taken care of. Though he may be old-fashioned in some areas, for example he did not like his teenage daughters to wear make-up or acrylic nails. He was also liberal in terms of empowering his daughters. I do not remember him ever imposing sexist or misogynistic ideals onto me, even when I went through my tomboy phase, he never reinforced the "right" way to do gender. He may not know it but he holds feminist values, he always advised his daughters to be independent

"don't depend on nobody (especially a man) because they may not be there" was something he preached constantly. My father is someone who struggles with addiction, however, he can usually stay sober for long periods before going on a binge. His prison time began long before I was born, but had lessened after the birth of my siblings.

As a father, he never cursed at us, he was not the one who usually disciplined us, except for the occasional *coscorrón* (knock on the head) when we were being "hard-headed" and the subtle *pellizco* (pinch) when we would act up in public. He usually left that job to my mom, he was not the negative image of machismo that Western culture has painted of Mexican men. He was always a provider, a teacher and at one point even a single father during a time of separation between my parents, who would wake up in the mornings, put on a *Chivas* pancho, beanie, *pantuflas* (flip-flops) and drive his daughters to school in a blue Pontiac Grand Am that took forever to accelerate. I remember driving to school embarrassed because we had a beat up car that pissed off other parents on the road since it would not surpass 10 miles per hour. The Pontiac was so slow my dad would cut and go through alleys to ensure he would beat traffic and drop off his girl's right in front and if he would see other kids walking in the opposite direction he would call out his window "hey schools that way isn't it?" The kids never said anything back; they just nodded in guilt, interpreting his constant squinting as a glare rather than a blind man trying to force his vision. My father is *moreno* (dark skin) and tall about 5'11, though he may appear shorter because of his hunched posture, he is not too slim and not too wide, about 175-180 pounds. At first glance, he may appear very stern, serious and intimidating but his smile changes all of that. His smile earned him the nickname *Mueludo* (showing his molars); my grandpa referred to him as *el pinche mueludo* because he was always smiling. He has big teeth that are straight, rounded and off white. His four front teeth are veneers because the police

knocked out his original teeth. He has long and full arms, bare of all but one tattoo on his upper right arm just under the fold of his elbow that identifies his neighborhood. Once, as a child I noticed nickel sized patches of skin that look smooth, puffed, and slightly raised on his arms, two or three, I don't remember now it has been a while since I have been able to really exam my father's arms. All the things I know about who my father is are from memory, letters and verbal communication, it has been seven years since I have been able to interact with and observe my father free from constant surveillance.

He has an easygoing personality and can definitely be a *payaso* or jokester. As kids rather than rejecting our *gusgueras* (junk food) he would look at us, shrug his shoulders, point at each of us individually, making circular motions encompassing us, mimic breaking a pencil signifying sorry kids but "we're broke" and laugh. "Whatever you want you have to do it yourself," this is something I learned early on because it was my reality. Life is uncontrollable, things happen and people become absent either by choice or circumstance that is what he was trying to tell us. He always encouraged us to be resilient and to stay in faith to a higher power because everything happened for a reason, even when he became physically absent our *papelitos guardados* were always signed off "be strong, don't worry, be happy and hakuna matata, your daddy that loves you" (Martinez, J.C., 2004, October 16). He never attempted to withhold who he was or his mistakes, he was very honest about his shortcomings and how his perceived failures as a father sanctioned feelings of self-loathing and regret. He never hid his problems with drugs and often used his *testimonios* as a way to steer our paths as far from his as possible, "I have been using drugs as my medicine. I ask God to make me a better person and dad without the drugs so remember I don't want you guys to depend on drugs the way I have been doing almost all my life" (Martinez, J.C., 2003, September 17).

This was not the case for all interviewees of this study, some of the participants, like my father, used their experiences with drugs, gangs, and prison to steer their children toward another life. Others shared that their children had little to no knowledge about their history with the law/drugs. Jiminie, a 42-year-old substance abuse counselor and father of four shared, “I have a 14-year-old and a 5-year-old. They do not know I have been incarcerated; I want them to know me, who I am, not who I was. He knows I was part of a gang but little about who I was then” (Jiminie, personal communication, March 3, 2016).

Both my maternal and paternal grandparents migrated here from Mexico in the 70s. My father was born in Mexico and arrived to the U.S. as an undocumented child at the age of six. My grandparents established their lives in Los Angeles a place they hoped would bring boundless opportunities for them and their children. They arrived in L.A. in the same era of the Chicano, Black Power, Asian-American and Native American movements and living in Watts, California, they had front row seats to it all. My paternal grandparents are very religious Catholics who attend mass religiously and hold traditional beliefs and values. They raised their children with their conservative beliefs and unconsciously reinforced gender hierarchies. This often left the women in the house at the mercy of their brothers, including cleaning after them, washing/ironing their cloths or cooking dinner. The brothers remained in charge in their parents’ absence and as working class Mexican migrants with six children to support both my grandparents worked 40 plus hours a week. The lack of employment, suitable salaries and the broken education system led to a deficiency of adult supervision/guidance. This in correlation to the era in which my father grew up and the location (Watts, California in the 1980s) contributed to early exposure with drugs and gang life. At sixteen years old my father was incarcerated, incited into a cycle perpetuated through four generations. By 1992 my parents had my brother

and I and as young parents witnessing the upheaval of the Watts Riots of 1992, my parents knew that they, like their parents, wanted better opportunities for their children. They did not want to raise their kids in a community that was in a constant battle with the Los Angeles Police Department (L.A.P.D.) over police brutality, which my father had already experienced firsthand on numerous occasions. In their early twenties, together my parents were able to afford a house in the suburbs of Pomona, California and for all intents and purposes my parents had accomplished and were living the “American Dream”.

When both of my parents were employed, we fit into the working middle class. Even though my father did not complete his high school education, he is a quite intelligent man who often held blue-collar positions. He raised his children to understand the importance of hard work and always surpassing expectations, he accepted and believed in the fallacies written about in Gregory Mantsios's (2012) article, “Class in America”; that if an individual worked hard enough they could excel and gain social mobility, that in the United States everyone had an equal chance to succeed. This fallacy was dismantled when he lost his papers in 2000 (after incarceration), overnight he became an undocumented citizen. My father learned that the same blue collar positions that were accessible to him when he was a legal resident were no longer available, his skills had not changed, his level of education had not decreased, his ability to work had not been altered, the only thing that had changed was his legal status. According to my father, they revoked his residency unjustly for a Grand Theft Auto (G.T.A.) he had done when he was 18. In my father’s eyes the loss of his papers was what initially triggered his relapse, from 1991 to 2000 my father had been clean, a productive member of society and a dad. The loss of his papers was a significant economic trigger that sparked a 16-year long battle with labor exploitation, economic marginalization, relapses and financial instability. In other words, the

loss of his papers did not allow him to live up to the expectations he held for himself as being able to provide for his family thus challenging his masculinity and manhood. The modern meaning of the word “machismo” as well as the concept, is actually an Anglo invention. For men like my father, being “macho” meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us, yet being able to show love. Today’s macho creates doubts about his ability to feed and protect his family. His “machismo” is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of the hierarchical male dominance. The Anglo, feeling inadequate and inferior and powerless, displaces or transfers these feelings to the Chicano by shaming him. In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation (Anzaldúa, 2007).

The most dramatic shift in my family's economic status was when my father would go away to prison. My mother also did not complete a high school education, but unlike my father, she never gained employment beyond the secondary labor market. Now, I understand that this was due to the gendered and racialized aspects of capitalism that are embedded within its structures through the long history of racial and gendered segregation of paid labor as well as the minimization of domestic work (Acker, 2006). Even though my mother is an American citizen who could pass as White, her ethnicity, class and education manifest through all that she does; her language, skills and customs. Due to the low wages, high turnover rates, little job security and abuses of power, my mother could not sustain a living wage so we went on public assistance/welfare. Beyond the characteristics of the secondary labor market, she fell victim to both the gender income and wealth gap, not only was she paid significantly less than my immigrant father was; she also had the debt of three children, a mortgage and other bills (Center for Community Economics Development, 2010). It was as if we were always trying to play

catch up, as soon as one bill/debt was paid three to four more replaced it. We went from being the working middle class to the underserved in a matter of months after my father's incarceration.

One night as I was talking with my dad over the phone he shared with me that the loss of his papers really hurt him, “when they took my papers baby I felt like my life shattered” (Martinez, J.C., 2003, June 16). It hit his ego and I think it caused his self-esteem to deflate, but more than anything I sensed feelings of betrayal. Though he was born a citizen of Mexico he was raised here in the States, this is his home, this is all he knows and he believes he is a Mexican-American, a citizen of these United States. Unfortunately, his undocumented status hindered his ability to find suitable employment to support his family and that challenged his perceptions of manhood. My mother also shared with me that my dad’s biggest weakness was not being able to provide for his family. Not being able to provide caused turmoil within and made him feel “less than a man” and that is when his struggles with addiction came to the forefront. His addiction was the only way he knew how to cope with his perceived failures, it was his escape and it was through our *papelitos guardados* that he tried to teach his son to be a man and cope with the pressure of life without depending on drugs:

Mijo, learn how to deal with pressure [don’t be weak], I was and I turned to drugs and all it did is make things worse. Okay Big Papa, please listen to me and be strong don’t let the pressure get to you. I want you to learn [to cope] without drugs. *Mijo*, I cry sometimes cause I hate myself for not being strong out there and not staying off drugs (Martinez, J. C., Sr. 2003, June 23).

The same year he lost his papers was the first time he went back to jail for possession charges, for trying to support his family the only way he had access to, and knew. We hired a lawyer and he got out on bail, but, ultimately his failing battle with addiction led us to seek out a drug rehabilitation center in Mexico since we could not afford a facility in the U.S. However, I believe this also had to do with his perception about what a man should be, and the ways

traditional masculinity fails men. Battling an addiction was one thing, but I do not think his manhood allowed him to become a financial burden on his family. In 2001, I found myself going once again to one of my least favorite places, Tijuana, Mexico (T.J.). We had gone on family vacations to T.J. before and had lived there for a couple of years when I was a toddler, but I never enjoyed going. The food always made me horribly sick, I guess my American stomach preferred processed foods.

At that age, I understood class in terms of wealth, income and the ability to support/sustain your family. Now I see that social class is much more complicated than that, it involves access to resources such as education, quality food, health care and housing, it involves power, political, social and economic. Social class is a main determining factor in biopower; it allows a select few individuals to model what is “right” while those who do not fit into American standards of heteronormativity are socially dead. I understood that money was not a limitless thing, or in my parents’ words, “Money did not grow on trees”. I understood that in comparison to my family and cousins in Mexico, we were fortunate and had certain privileges, such as, being able to go back to school shopping for new clothes and shoes at the beginning of every academic year. Also, my father’s perception about fatherhood meant that his kids always needed to look presentable, he equated fathering with providing financially and materially. I knew the difference between the poor, the working class and the rich. I understood that though my parents were not rich they were fortunate enough to hold jobs and have a stable income. My father always had jobs in the subordinate primary labor market whereas my mother was only able to gain clerical or low level administrative jobs, together they made enough to support a house in the suburbs, two cars, three children and countless pets.

As we were driving down the dirt streets of T.J., I remember being excited that we were going to see my dad. It had been months since we were able to be with my dad without a glass window reminding us that he would not be returning home with us. No matter how many times I visited my dad in prison the goodbyes never got easier. It was always harder when we were the ones leaving, having to look back and see my dad in his county blues, with a big smile plastered over his face and countless other men of color looking the same way is one of the worst feelings I have ever felt. However, where we were going would be different; there would not be a glass window and we would be able to go outside and not be barricaded behind concrete walls with barbed wire ornamenting the top. For a few hours, we could pretend that we were a normal family bonding over normal things without the restrictions of being watched by and having to self-regulate for the corrections officers. They were going to allow us to be a whole family again even if it was temporary.

When we finally arrived I was taken aback by the “prison,” it looked like a normal house and the “inmates” were allowed to roam freely outside, but for some reason all the men there looked a little “off”. Something about them was different, they did not look like other convicts I had come to know, and they seemed more erratic and senseless as if we were not living in the same reality’ it was then I realized they were not prisoners but patients. We had gone to visit my dad at an asylum. All the excitement that had initially taken over my body was replaced by confusion and empathy; prison I could understand. Prison meant that my dad had broken the law, he had done something illegal and therefore had to pay with jail time. But why was he in an asylum, what had someone needed to do to be placed here? After some time, the visitors all gathered into a small plain white room filled with rows of mismatching chairs and a brown podium at the front, the visitors sat on the right while the patients sat on the left. They had asked

for volunteers to step up to the podium and share a little about who they were and what had brought them, my mother encouraged me and my siblings to step up, but I was afraid. I knew that I would not be able to control my emotions long enough to say what my heart wanted and I was intimidated because of my broken Spanish, besides public speaking has always been one of my biggest impediments. My little sister proved to be the bravest of the Martinez children at that moment, with all her courage and same broken Spanish she was the first to step up to the podium. She stood up there barely 4 feet tall, skin so pale she earned the nickname *la huerita* or *la huera* with her innocence still overt in her rounded face. I do not remember her words exactly, they did not matter, what mattered was that she was up there pouring her little heart out, crying with no shame and pleading to my dad to get better so he could come home and we could be a happy family again. That has always been her wish ever since the first time she begged a police officer to let her daddy go on a dark Pacific Coast Highway. As I sat there, watching my little sister shamelessly expressing her emotions and blatantly letting her pain seep through her words I held back tears of my own. I could feel a huge knot in my throat, my face reddening with heat, my eyes watering with tears despite my attempt at holding them back and my heart constricting itself so tight as if it was trying to disappear.

Unlike her, I could not give in to the overwhelming emotions taking over my body and mind; I told myself that I had to be the strong one. I had to be strong for her, for my mom and brother but most of all I had to be strong for my dad. I knew that the same way her words were tearing at my heart they were crushing his. At that moment I saw my teary-eyed dad with his head bowed slip out the back door. I think my aversion to expressing my emotions stemmed from there; to be strong I had to remain rational, logical and wise despite the feelings clouding my heart. I would not allow myself to give into my emotions and this is something I still

struggle with, I learned to compartmentalize my emotions and always looked for the logical explanations. Since I never allowed myself to process, grieve and overcome the adversities experienced in my childhood they are still salient in my adult life. The more I try to write *mi testimonio* the more I cannot, the resurfacing of these memories and emotions take me back to that helpless, angry and confused little girl that could not fathom the need for asylums or why her daddy needed to be in one. I do not think any one of us could stand leaving my dad there, how could we abandon him when his only crime was trying to provide for us. That was the first time, my siblings and I helped my mother bring my father back into this country, to his home and it would not be the last.

I do not think we had fully acknowledged what type of life we were bringing him back to, all we wanted was for our dad to be home and our family to be reunited. This was the first time my family had ever been dismantled and I could not understand how some faceless entity could have the power to restrict my dad from being our dad and living the life he built. At nine years old I did not fully understand citizenship or “illegal presence” and could not understand how my father was expected to stay in Mexico away from his family. I did not understand that we had brought our dad “home” to live out the rest of his life in fear of being caught, imprisoned and deported. It was then that I began to see the discrimination of undocumented peoples and people of color, it was then I began to fear the police and the power they had over my family and it was then that I became aware that though I was an “American” I was also Mexican and that made us targets. My father became the feared immigrant that was here to take away employment from deserving “Americans.” Even though we lived in Southern California, a place of alleged tolerance, the attention both of the public and of policymakers has increasingly focused on the costs rather than the benefits associated with the arrival of newcomers specifically

undocumented migrants (Morris, 1985). For example, two-thirds of the respondents in a recent Southern California survey agreed with the statement that "undocumented workers tend to bring down the overall level of wages in some occupations" (Bean, Telles & Lowell, 1987, p.133). Further, the legislative discussion on illegal immigration has turned to the effects of undocumented migrants on the labor industry, predominantly from Mexico.

Though I was raised to always be proud of my cultural heritage my parents failed to explain that being Mexican-American automatically marked us as different, inferior and as second-class citizens. The constant battle of finding suitable employment to support his family took a toll on my father, it made him feel like a failure and pushed him towards a life style that would ensure his incarceration. Prison ended up being a place where he could access rehabilitation, and I think this was intentional. My father knew that we could not afford to send him to a real rehab facility so when he needed help getting clean he would get himself incarcerated. His struggles with addiction is what ultimately took my father away from us again in 2003, when he relapsed and my mother was forced to file charges against him in order to get him the help he needed. During one of his binges my father's paranoia got the best of him, he went on a "mission" to remove all "the bugs the police planted in the house" resulting in him destroying and breaking everything in our home. Everything we owned became "lawn ornaments" thrown outside in broken pieces. When the police finally arrived they told my mother that they could not take my father to jail because "it is not illegal to break your own stuff." The only time we actually wanted the police to take my dad they could not, not unless my mother pressed charges against him, which is ultimately what she did.

In 2003, he was sentenced to four years and, though it hurt, I began to understand that prison was better than death, which was always a possibility being a brown man living in L.A.

At least in prison he could get clean, we could still communicate through letters and phone calls and were able to visit once in a while. However, it would be years before we could visit my father in Tehachapi, only a few hours away from our home in Pomona, California. After the first several months of his first long term stint the only communication we kept with our father was through letters. In the beginning he would call but the collect calls were too expensive for my mother to afford so she was forced to put a block on the land-line. My mother did not make it a priority to visit my father, she had completed visiting forms for us, but not for herself, so we had to wait until my father's family went to visit him so we could tag along. In the beginning I doubt it mattered, though at least for myself, I remember being mad at him for what he did and making my mom suffer. I remember being glad that he was locked up and telling him that my mother (and his children) did not love him anymore the first time we talked after his incarceration. I was the kid that held him accountable, I was the one who challenged him and asked questions you would not expect from a 10 year-old. I made sure he knew that he caused our family pain and suffering and that he would not be forgiven without some sort of atonement. My brother and sister were humble and understanding, they had more patience and were easy to forgive, it was not until their teen years that we all began to challenge him.

When my father came back into our lives from his four-year sentence it was difficult settling back into our original roles. After the initial feelings of bliss that our family had been reunited passed the magnitude and consequences of his four-year absence emerged. The temporal box that he had been in caused him to have a false perception of the family he was returning too. I think in his mind he was coming home to his three little children, but instead he had returned home to three teenagers that had spent the last four years making decisions independently. So when our dad returned, we rebelled, we were not accustomed to having rules,

curfews, or having to mind someone other than our mother, who rebelled as well. Having to support three children, a mortgage and never-ending bills my mother was often working, at times having to maintain two jobs, to make ends meet so adult supervision was not as constant. As long as we were home before my mother arrived from work, and the house was clean, she had no reason to discipline us. The only rule we really had was to fly under the radar, we were not supposed to do anything to bring too much attention to the house, or ourselves. We knew that if our teachers found out that our dad was in jail, and our mom worked over 30 minutes away in Pico Rivera social services could be called for leaving minors unattended. We learned to be vague and give as little detail as possible when people inquired about our dad or family life, we could never share too much for fear of getting our parents in trouble.

My father, having grown accustomed to a rigidly structured prison routine complained that our way of life clashed with his desire for the family to be more involved in activities. By nature, my father is an active person always on the move and constantly doing something, I remember him always saying, “Come on! Let's go! Let's go! Let's go! We have places to go and people to see!” When he came home, he returned acting like a corrections officer whose absence allowed his inmates to gain too much freedom. His perceptions about fathering had been shaped by his time in prison, unconsciously, he was recreating the authoritarian environment he had just been released from, and this approach is not uncommon among formerly incarcerated populations. I believe that my father's perception of fatherhood, at this time, was tied to the idea that we should be obedient and listen to him. The colonized soon became the colonizer. I remember him waking up at what felt like the crack of dawn, trying to force us to get up with him and clean. He would start off the morning with, “Get up! Get ready! Chow time! Chow time!” When that did not work, he would grab some weights we had laying around the house

and begin to hit them together in an attempt to recreate the sound of metal trays banging against the iron bars. At this point everyone else in the house was pissed off and defiantly staying in bed refusing to get up and help him, one of the things my mother, siblings and I have in common is our love for sleeping in when possible. His assertive attitude did not sit well with any of us, especially me, I became resentful. When my father went to prison, the roles in our house shifted, my mother became the provider, my brother the “protector,” I was the “mother” and my sister remained “the baby.” I was the second in command after my mother. I was the one who gave the orders since my brother had a more laid back and passive personality. I learned to be my mother's “right-hand woman” and assumed the role of the second mother and did not like returning to my powerless role of daughter. Nevertheless, his return meant that our roles had reverted to the basic family unit that was led by the man. We gave him a hard time, though we were respectful kids we had grown to question and resist my father's status as the “man of the house.” Before his absence he gave me high expectations of what a father was, he had showed me that a father was someone who was there when you needed him to be physically, emotionally, mentally but most of all economically. His incarceration and absence contradicted all of that which is also what he believed. His battle with addiction would be thrown into crisis when he felt less than a man, when he could not assume the role of the provider and giving in to addiction became his medicine and coping mechanism. This cycle would continue every time he returned home and as we grew older, we grew more rebellious and critical, not wanting to understand just wanting him to simply stay healthy and sober.

According to Dyer (2005) in his article, “Prison, Fathers, and Identity: A Theory of How Incarceration Affects Men's Paternal Identity,” incarceration interrupts the father from his supportive roles, this in turn not only effects the children but also the father since he is not able

to conform to his identity as a father. Further, incarceration often influences father's perceptions about masculinity and this shapes the perceptions of what fatherhood means. Dyer argues that "as the destabilized fatherhood identity interacts with the norms of the prisons context, new meanings for fathering behavior begin to emerge" (2005, p. 212). Within prison, customs of masculinity have severe repercussions for a fathers' connection to his children and the prison custom of performing masculinity becomes the foundation for a new standard of fatherhood. If the norms picked up in prison are adopted and implemented by men, this can lead them away from a positive father identity that fosters positive child development. Also according to Dryer (2005), identities formed in prison linger long after release and hamper familial relationships. In addition, prison is a source of disruption for fathers since men may be less inclined to enact fatherhood roles that would be perceived as weak and bring sanctions from other inmates.

Two years out of prison, my father's behavior shifted and we had just begun to function as a harmonious family unit. Though my father had finally earned back his position as our dad, his role as a husband was still being challenged. My parent's relationship was struggling and my mother had decided to leave the house and live on her own with a man she had met while my father was in prison. At that point my dad found himself a single father, the roles were reversed and he was now the one struggling to make ends meet to support his three children, the mortgage and bills. Although my parents' marriage was ending other aspects of my father's life were beginning to improve. My father had employment as an electrician, and he felt he was making up for lost time. He had become our dad again and his children were beginning to trust and accept him, but it did not last long. One day my uncle pulled up in his truck without my father. They had left that day for worked together. Now my uncle looked glum and guilty, as if he has done something wrong. He called us over to his car and explained that while on their way home

he convinced my dad to stop at a friend's house to look at some rims he was interested in buying. While there, they had been racially profiled and harassed outside the home for "suspicious" activity. My uncle, an American citizen, felt it unnecessary to comply with the police and began to resist them, talking shit. Not being able to arrest my uncle they moved their sights to my father, when his undocumented status had been revealed he was arrested and sent to a federal prison in San Pedro. This was the cause of my uncle's guilty look, he felt as if he had provoked the police and that was the reason my father had been incarcerated once again. He served two years for illegal presence in the United States. Because our father had been arrested after leaving work we felt guilty, we felt guilty because each time he left the house to go to work he was putting himself at risk, but mostly I know we felt guilty because we had given him a hard time and did not make his transition back home easier. The reality is that his return to prison was inevitable. If it had not been that time with my uncle it surely would have happened eventually, not only was my father a man of color commuting back and forth from Los Angeles to Pomona, he was also now an undocumented citizen, an addict and an ex-convict.

Ultimately, I believe that it was this incident that broke my father. It was this moment when he felt that no matter how hard he tried to be there for his kids our society would never allow him to be anything other than an "illegal immigrant" with "his problems and drugs." It did not matter that he saw himself as an American that he lived and believed in the social norms of American materialism and individualism, he would always be the feared "other." He would never be allowed to live and make a life in this country without the constant reminder that he held no real power, that at any moment he could be pulled over by the police and sent back to his temporal box.

This guilt was felt the most by my mother and to compensate she made an effort to take us to visit my dad most weekends. After two years he was released and sent back to Tijuana, and once again my mother, brother and sister crossed the border to bring our dad home. My mother had allowed me to stay home this time since she knew how much I hated going to T.J., she knew I hated seeing the level of poverty besieging Mexican people, but more so, I was scarred during one of our visits where I witnessed a man's attempt at suicide. He had attempted to hang himself from a tree nearby my Tia's trailer home but had been cut down by some men nearby. When they asked him why he wanted to end his life he responded, "*No tengo nada para vivir, no puedo conseguir un trabajo y tengo tanta hambre,*" (I have nothing to live for, I can't even get a job and I'm just so hungry). Unfortunately, the scholarship examining the connections between food scarcity with prison, suicide and/or depression is also underdeveloped.

My father is currently on his 7th year of a 15-year sentence not including the three additional years he will spend in federal prison for his "illegal presence" in the U.S. After he returned from Mexico this last time the battle to rebuild his life, once more, took its toll. He had decided to give up, writing to my brother he shared, "Papas *mijo*, I gave up for about three months and believe me it was the worst three months of my life. I felt like I failed at everything in my life and that I was all alone even though I had you guys" (Martinez, J.C., 2003, September 28).

Chapter 3

Spirituality: Finding Hope in the Borderlands of Prison

"I believe in God. God has helped me but I was not spiritual in there [prison] but I have always had the faith."

-Jiminie

"Before I didn't pay no attention to God. I always believe that when you carry God with you don't have to do church and stuff but when I was in jail I reached out. I guess I felt hopeless at the time."

-Bass

"Coatlicue is the consuming internal whirlwind; it gives and takes away life. She represents: duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective-something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality."

*-Anzaldúa, Borderland
La Frontera*

Foucault (1995) in his book, asserted that punishment has evolved its focus from the prisoner's body to his soul, he writes that "the prison, an essential element in the punitive panoply, certainly marks an important moment in the history of penal justice: its access to 'humanity'" (p.231). He continues that it was also important since it established the colonization of the legal institution by the dominant class, therefore, defining the power to punish as a general function of society. Foucault (1995) argues that the reason the prison has been valued as the most civilized form of punishment is two-fold, "juridico-economic on the one hand, technico-disciplinary on the other" (p. 233). The prison, since its establishment, has been utilized to

deprive individuals of liberty and to transform them into docile subjects. C. Alejandra Elenes asserts:

Spirituality, then means, more than one's relationship with God or a Creator because it is tied to struggles for social justice and gender equality. It is a way of understanding someone's (or a community's) position in the world by trying to make sense of unfair economic conditions and gender inequality, and to do something about it (Lara-Medina & Facio, 2014, p. 4).

Though a Catholic, my father seldom imposed Catholicism onto us, we went to church once in a while for *bautismos*, funerals and weddings. As captured in the quote that opens this thesis, this displacement of Chicano fathers leaves a hole in the heart of Chicano children in the shape of their dad. In order to heal that wound we must embark on a journey of spiritual activism, a spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation. Spiritual activism requires both the personal and the structural; it locates authority within each individual, individuals often scarred by oppressive contacts with those they have encountered. It combines self-reflection and self-growth with outward-directed compassionate acts designed to bring about material change (Keating, 2006).

What is my Coatlicue state? Is it the duality of the personality I have created, one as a scholar and the other a believer in faith? Is it the conflicting aspects of my morals that sympathizes with prisoners and addicts because they remind me of my father? Is it a new understanding of morality one that does not fit into an "American" or Judeo-Christian belief? Is it the knowledge that "The Law" bends and changes according to the hegemonic structure? Is it the refusal to see my father as a criminal even though that is what the dominant society depicts him as? Is it the duality of the strong independent women I want to be, but that cannot because I have not healed the wound in her heart left by the absence of her father? Am I a scholar or am I

a believer, can I be both? Will I always have to navigate between being rational but accepting the irrational? And, will I always be the daughter of a convict or can I someday, just be a daughter?

The Coatlicue state, as Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) defines it in her book, *Borderlands: La Frontera*, is a space that represents internal conflict, a conflict between an individual's intersecting identities. It is in this space that an individual is on the border of experiencing something life altering; my Coatlicue state was ignited when my father became a target of the Prison Industrial Complex in 2000 when his legal status had been revoked. At the time I did not understand the emergence of this internal conflict, it has taken me years to really understand that my father going to prison sparked my Coatlicue state and it brought into question my perceived morality. Here was this person who represented all the good in my life, someone who encouraged my spiritual growth by modeling a positive and faithful attitude. He always reminded us to be humble, respectful and hardworking; for me his spirituality was connected to being a good person with a good heart and helping out those who may need it. For example, he regularly gave his money to homeless people we encountered and reminded us that if we were in a position to help we should do so. He encouraged us to communicate our problems, that violence was not the answer. He never implanted hate in our hearts and instead encouraged us to have love for everybody because we are all humans. This is the man I know and this is who my father is. He is not the immoral, illegal, violence prone and drug tempted machismo Western culture perceives him to be. But, how can I make the world see my father the way I do? How can I rationalize my love for someone Western culture paints as criminal and deviant? This brought about an internal struggle. I know my father as a good man, a hardworking husband and father whose only flaw is his addiction and Western embedded ideology of materialism. In my

eyes he is not a criminal, but in the eyes of the dominant society he will always be a criminal. My father's imprisonment shifted how I defined my spirituality, he was all that was good and now "The Law" and the P.I.C. defines him as evil. This is my Coatlicue state, looking for acceptance as a scholar defined by the institution yet fighting the institution of the P.I.C. that defines my father as evil.

My father's undocumented status added another layer of criminalization onto his person, it revoked his privilege of being an American citizen and made him vulnerable to financial instability, exploitative labor, racial profiling/stereotyping and identified him as a criminal. But, for me his "illegal presence" depicted a man who went against the law to be with his family. In my eyes he wanted to maintain the Mexican definition of machismo which is a man who is strong enough to provide for his family yet still show affection (Anzaldúa, 2007). For him, his undocumented status was living in the emotional residue of an "unnatural border" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 25).

It was through witnessing his experiences with "The Law" that I saw the devaluation of people of color, specifically Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. The P.I.C. and my father represent my Coatlicue states, they have merged and morphed to create all the good, bad and in between in my life (Keating, 2006). This in between state is best described by Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantlas*, to live in between opposing cultures. To hold conflicting ideologies is to see through the falseness of monocultures and to see through the fallacy of the superiority of the White race. During nepantla, "our worldviews and self-identities are shattered, it is a time of self-reflection and potential growth" (Keating, 2006, p. 9). I have absorbed the negative, positive and created a new idea of spirituality that does not include "The Law". I have witnessed how the P.I.C has both weakened and strengthened my relationship with my father, how it has

both taken him away but kept him alive. Through my father, I have observed the false hope this country embeds within its subjects of equality and social mobility but have witnessed his resiliency and refusal to internalize domination.

As a child I felt like I had no control over my life. Anything and everything that happened to me or my family seemed unescapable. There was nothing I could do to help my dad stay sober, there was nothing I could do to stop him from going back to jail and there was nothing I could do to ease the pain and suffering we all felt when our family was broken. I had no control and I felt powerless. The instability of my childhood helped foster a need for security, rationality and autonomy. I knew from an early age I wanted to have the power and ability to create my life and not continue the cycle of oppression and marginalization experienced in my childhood. I wanted control, I needed it, but it was never attainable. My spirituality, as shaped by my father, means being a good person with pure intentions, helping those who continue suffer and creating a change that can help relieve some of that suffering. For me, my spirituality is about being a positive change in this world and in the lives of those around me, it is as simple as speaking kind words onto others, being a non-judgmental ear or just letting someone know you believe and support them.

Our family used the concept of God as a means to make sense of all the negativity experienced in our lives and release some control. This concept of God has always been an integral part of our lives and even though we have the freedom to practice the religion we please, overtly expressing your religious beliefs can also cause slight ridicule in the free world, specifically in academia. This caused me to split my personality between my home life and my academic life, I lived in an in-between space of being a rational student and a believer. I have become comfortable with ambiguity, with not knowing, with releasing control but this was only

made possible because of my faith. As Anzaldúa (2007) wrote, “I am cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (p. 100). Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. As a child ambiguity scared me, I hated living with uncertainty it made me angry and caused a lot of pain but now as an adult I connect ambiguity with having faith. To me, having faith is being able to let go of the rational and accept that there are some things in this world we cannot explain. This helped me create a borderland of my own, a place where I can assume the role necessary for the time and location at hand,

I have discovered that I cannot hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. Rigidity means death. As a new *mestiza* I have to constantly shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. As a new *mestiza* I have learned to cope by developing a tolerance for contradictions, tolerance for ambiguity. I have learned to juggle cultures. I have a plural personality, and I operate in a pluralistic mode (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 101).

When my Coatlicue state first emerged I did not know how to define it but now I see it as a part of my new *mestiza* consciousness which urges me to fight against the oppression and social injustices experienced by all peoples.

As I have grown into my own adulthood I have come to know parts of my father that he keeps locked away. Like any person who has endured suffering and oppression he harbors over thirty years of pain, anger and regrets. As a person who recently began to deal and understand her own emotions, I know letting go and learning to forgive is not an easy task. That is why spirituality is an important component to fathering from jail/prison. Through an analysis of the writing on spirituality by my father and interviews conducted with men that have also contended with fathering and incarceration.

In a *papelito guardado* to my brother my father wrote:

I pray to God to keep me strong and to don't have hate or anger towards nobody cause God made me a humble man to have love for everybody no matter race or religion or beliefs they have. All I want is peace in my life and happiness in my heart because I'd rather be locked up then living the life I was leading (Martinez, J.C., 2009, October 18).

Expressing his feelings about the current path his life was on he shares with my brother how his concept of God is important as a means to forgive and to remove lingering anger or hate he may still hold. He hopes that with God he is able to let go of any unrest caused by his lifestyle. For him, God is the one who can bring him inner peace and happiness. For him, being in prison was favored over continuing his destructive lifestyle.

My father encouraged us to keep faith in a higher power because for him God helped us in life and it was through this concept of God that we would become better people with ourselves and others:

God will help you in life and will make you a better person with yourself and others. Baby just keep praying to God cause he will listen especially prayers coming from you cause you are my little angel. Don't lose faith and keep talking with God it will make you feel really good (Martinez, J.C., 2002, December 8).

For my father, God was a means to promote spiritual growth in his children and pacify any negative emotions that came with our family being apart. For him, God was a source of bliss and an ever present ear ready to hear out the struggles and adversaries faced by his [God's] children.

Whenever my father's confinement got to him and he lost hope God was his anchor that grounded him, in a *papelito guardado* to my brother he wrote:

Sometimes I feel like giving up that all I did is hurt the people that love me and everything I do goes wrong that I don't deserve to have the family I do. But *mijo* all I could do is pray to God and ask him to keep me strong and to try to be happy (Martinez, J.C., 2003, September 5).

He sought out God for strength and as a means to forgive himself for his perceived failures. He also used God as a way to uplift his mood whenever feelings of shame, failure or disappointment conjured in his heart.

At every stage in our lives, my father would remind us that it was God who made all things possible and it would be him who would lead us towards the “right path” all we needed was to remain in faith, “Baby God will bless you and he will help you get into a good college and also help you major in whatever you want. Just have faith and everything will fall into place” (Martinez, J.C., 2009, August 23). For my father, God was ever present and through faith in him all the struggles we endured would eventually lead towards something better.

However, my father always taught us that God was with everyone and everywhere, not only in places of worship. He always encouraged us to speak to God and to converse with through prayer. In a *papelito guardado* to my brother he wrote:

Look Big Papa I need you to be strong and you know whenever you feel like crying do it, don't hold it back cause it gets worse when you do. Look *mijo* I learned through life that it helps to cry and after you cry talk to God and ask Him to help you pray. I know that me and your mom didn't take you to church a lot but pray because he listens (Martinez, J.C., 2003, July 18).

Through our family's *papelitos guardados* he constantly reminded us that God would provide for us when he could not, that with God all things would be made better and that He would “bring us back together someday soon” (Martinez, J.C., 2004, November 04). He never excused his mistakes instead he would ask us that we understand, not only him but our mother as well, “Try and understand her [mom] cause I know how hard it is not to be able to pay the house or buy food for you guys. I use to cry sometimes but for some reason God always took care of us and I made ends meet” (Martinez, J.C., 2003, September 19). He would write how he was always thankful toward God because despite his circumstances his children and wife were alive and

healthy. “You guys are everything in my life because of you I'm still alive you keep me going. Family, God has been good to me because He gave me all of you and been watching over you and keeping you healthy. I thank God for keeping me alive and for you guys” (Martinez, J.C., 2009, February 24). My father’s spirituality while incarcerated has focused on maintaining and repairing his relationship with his family.

As I began to explore my own spirituality I began to have those conversations with my father, I encouraged him to attend Christian services because I had begun to attend a Christian congregation. At that point my father shared with me that while in prison he attended all available meetings for, Christians, Catholics, Buddhists and Native Americans, “It doesn’t matter what religion you are, God is God and I am willing to try anything to change my life for you guys (Martinez, J.C., 2003, June 23). I always assumed that incarceration promoted his spirituality, that in prison it was easy and acceptable to discover and actively engage in spirituality as a form of pacifism this was in fact not the case. I always assumed because my father was so open with his spirituality in our *papelitos guardados* that being in prison motivated and encouraged his spiritual growth, I assumed that prison bred “believers”. To seek out hope in a place that often lacks hope just seemed acceptable if not encouraged. I never thought that my father's spirituality represented a rebellion to the institution of prison and towards the traditional beliefs of some faiths that damn anyone who is seen as deviant. I remember my father sharing with me that “God is God” and that it did not matter what way people identified in terms of religion all that mattered was having a relationship and talking with God. He needed spirituality in order to heal, to forgive (others and himself) and a means to make sense of his life when he could not. Mostly, he sought out God as a means to help him cope with his addictions, “Baby I

pray every day for God to help me leave the drugs because I know I can be a better daddy without them” (Martinez, J.C., 2003, September 9).

During the interviews with other Chicano fathers who experienced incarceration they shared that they also engage in spirituality, however, not in prison. In order to safeguard their lives all four men interviewed had hidden their spiritual beliefs while in prison. All had been exposed to spiritual ideas during their adolescent years from their families, but prison was not the place to overtly express and share religious beliefs or spiritual inclinations. In prison it is expected that a man remains masculine and dominant, that they portray a bravado of machismo and to remain the stoic under any and all circumstances. As Red put it, “I have chosen God as my Lord and savior but you cannot express that to others because they look at you like you are weak...everyone wants to be big and bad and if you are a believer you are a target” (personal communication, March 10, 2016). For the men interviewed allowing themselves to be seen as weak in prison is life threatening and to be seen engaging in spiritual practice is a taboo. As a result, their spiritual practices are performed in private in the confines of one's cell and only witnessed by their cellmate. However, the length of my father’s incarceration has afforded him a different status within the prison and a different relationship to spiritual practice. My father could care less who saw him attending the varying forms of religious meetings even when it causes ridicule. As an undocumented Chicano who spent the majority of his adult life in conflict with the law, who is also battling addiction, he is the ultimate “deviant” and that is why I believe he never fully embraced traditional religious beliefs. Although he baptized his children Catholic, like many Chicano children are, his teaching about God differed and contrasted from the traditional Catholic Church.

Though he did not agree or accept all traditional Catholic beliefs, my father's idea of spiritual practice remained in the confines of the colonized Catholic religion. Though he believed that God was everywhere and encouraged his children to have individual relationships with God, he also encouraged his children to attend some sort of spiritual service. He reminded us that in order to receive God's favor we needed to "honor our mother" and remain obedient. His Coatlicue state was trying to find the balance between the Judeo-Christian's beliefs of deviancy and forgiveness. He took the positive aspects of the traditional Judeo-Christian ideology but morphed it with his spiritual practice of acceptance and open-mindedness.

For me my father's practicing of religion and having spirituality seems contrary to the image of men imprisoned. The image of Mexican and Mexican-American outlaws is that of heartless, cartel running deviants who butcher people throughout Mexico's northern borders. This image of imprisoned men as spiritual beings challenges this social construct (or single story) that the United States has erected for these men similar to my father. My father's spirituality like his imprisonment in many ways comes to represent the colonized world in which he was born into and the colonized space that the prisons/jails represent. His colonized religion emerged from the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Deployed as a ruse to "civilize and save" the indigenous peoples from their own savagery it became a tool of power used to control and subdue the Native populations in order to gain access to their land and resources. Before the Conquistadors, Native peoples grew strength from nature-based and numerous deities and practices. With colonization European patriarchy and the belief that men were the superior sex, as well as heteronormative definitions of family predominated. With colonization emerged the belief that men are the superior sex (patriarchy) and family meant the union between a man and a woman (heterosexism). The loss of a sense of pride and esteem in the macho breeds an untrue

machismo which leads him to put down women. The battle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one. As long as *los hombres* believe they have to *chingar mujeres* and each other to be men. As long as to be a *vieja* is a thing of contempt, there can be no real restoration of our psyches (Anzaldúa, 2007). Religion, was an original tool used by the Spanish as a means to define right and wrong and normal versus abnormal. For the Natives of the Americas it completely invalidated their ways of being, dressing, worshiping and values and how and whom they should love.

As an incarcerated man the prison system has colonized my father for a third time. His clothing, hair, language, body, public and private spaces, the food that he eats and his ways of worship are all shaped by the P.I.C. His behavior is constantly monitored by those who have the power to physically punish him for not fitting into this new world. Prison is a legitimate method utilized by the affluent society to control, surveil and punish individuals whom they deem deviant and therefore criminal. The prison system emerged through colonization and it evolved as a sanctioned institution used to marginalize low-income communities of color and gender non-conforming peoples. What my father does not realize is that he is engaging in a *Nepantla* Spirituality; a spirituality based in the center, a space that is fluid that is shaped by diversity and gives Chicanas/os the power to choose, critique, integrate and balance multiple cultural and biological inheritances. Being in the middle requires body, heart and head knowledge to make sense of and come to terms with the forces of colonization. We need to move away from our colonizers versions of spirituality and religion, we need to decolonize our ways of relating to and viewing the world as well as each other. *Nepantla* is a more inclusive spirituality that we need to learn to practice and teach future generations, we need to move away from the traditional ideologies of religion that perpetuate a hierarchy of gender and race. Quoting Ana Castillo, Elisa

Facio and Irene Lara-Medina in their book, *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* (2014) assert that recuperating, refashioning and combining spiritual and healing knowledge(s) and practices in the process of proclaiming one's spirituality is a freeing and empowering act.

Once processed, pain offers the challenge and opportunity to transform shame, confusion and anger into creative thinking and healing action. For Chicanas/os, Indigenous ancestral knowledge is key to healing historical trauma; wounds we are conscious and not conscious of; wounds that have impaired our voices and our agency. Ancestral knowledge is key because it is a way of knowing and being in the world that values community and understands our interdependency (Lara-Medina & Facio, 2014, p. 170).

The colonization of the Indigenous populations of the Americas brought about a Spanish sanctioned way of practicing religion. This established Spanish ideologies of “good” and “evil” and encouraged Western expansion of punishment thus laying the foundation for the Prison Industrial Complex. The Prison Industrial Complex has created a space of *Nepantla* for my father and me.

Conclusion

Navigating Through the Borderlands

“I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me.”

-Gloria E. Anzaldúa

“Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.”

-Angela Davis

About two years ago in my Ethnic Studies History and Theory course we were asked to complete a research project, a project that could potentially turn into a thesis. I met with my instructor to discuss possible research interests and topics, during that meeting I shared with her my interest in prison research. It was then she asked me if I had ever done research on the Prison Industrial Complex (P.I.C.) and I communicated that I had never even heard of that term. The Prison Industrial Complex is a term used to identify how government and industry work together to implement systems that oppress and marginalize “undesirable” citizens through surveillance, policing and confinement. These “undesirable” citizens can be anyone who does not fit into (Anglo Americans) standards of normativity or challenge the “American way of life.” When I began to conduct my research on the P.I.C. I was mystified that I had not been educated, or at least exposed, to understand a system that has had such a major impact on my life. Growing up I

saw that in comparison to my home in Pomona, California (a more suburban town), my grandmother's home in South Central had an escalated amount of police presence. I witnessed the militarization of my high school as they began to add city police officers, fences and zero-tolerance policies. But, at that time it just seemed like the norm just like going to jail/prison, it was inevitable. I chose to research the P.I.C. because of my ignorance, because just like me I know there are other individuals of color who share my experiences but that do not know the role the P.I.C. plays in the displacement of our mothers, fathers and children. I wanted to name the oppressor because it is then that we can begin to fight against the criminalization and erasure of our communities. Ethnic Studies has allowed me the freedom to turn my lived experiences into viable and valid research.

Ethnic Studies introduced me to new ways of writing, thinking and seeing the world. It taught me about intersectionality and how an individual's race, class and gender converge to sustain multiple systems of discrimination and disadvantage. It taught me how our identities are multifaceted, interdependent and interconnected. It allowed me the space to turn my lived experiences into a positive *testimonio* for other children of color contesting with the dislocation of their families and communities. Ethnic Studies validated me and my story and this is why it should be implemented in all levels of education beginning with grade school. It helps marginalized populations name and identify structures like the P.I.C. that work to suppress our communities and it puts the agency back in the hands of the oppressed.

As a member of an oppressed population this scholarship has allowed me the agency to vocalize the needs of a community that is often the forgotten victims of the P.I.C., the families of prisoners. My dad's imprisonment is a secret I have had to keep; I was made very aware of the consequences that would come if the wrong person found out that three minors were left home

alone. I hate when people ask me questions about my dad, fair as they are they always make me defensive and force me to lie. I lie not because I am ashamed but because I know the moment I share that my father is in prison they will ask, “What for,” like I really want to divulge the sad memories of my childhood. I know that whatever I say next the people who ask me such questions will not see my father the way I see him, they will not see the intersecting layers of his identity; all they will see and hear is that he is a convict. Pity and sadness will overshadow their faces as they strip me of all my identities but one, a fatherless child, “I am so sorry *mija/sweetie*” is what they always leave me with after the awkward silence is over. That look has conditioned me to be vague and tell half-truths when people become curious about my family, specifically my dad. It makes me angry that people take it upon themselves to have opinions about my father. It makes me even angrier when they question my love for him as if love is negotiated via care, “how can you love him when you don’t even know him.” For a long time, I questioned whether my father really loved me or if his “love” is just a conditioned response a man has for his offspring. I internalized outsiders’ questions and I began to harbor feelings of anger and resentment, “If he really loved you guys don’t you think he’d stop using? It’s a choice you know and he obviously chooses his addictions over you.”

These are the type of fallacies that we as children of convicts and addicts hear and internalize from outsiders. That if our parents really loved us enough they would choose to stay sober and out of prison, we are not taught about the long term effects drugs have on the physical and psychological dependence of users. We are not exposed to systems like the P.I.C., the school-to-prison pipeline, Governmentality and how the structures of prisons are established to dehumanize and remove familial kinship of its prisoners, to make them socially dead. Or, how laws and policies that are portrayed as “equal” and “fair” really target our communities. The

purpose of this project was to create a space where Chicano fathers and their children could share their experiences with incarceration and how it impacted their familial relationships. To expose how the P.I.C. empowered by Governmentality works to dominate and control non-heteronormative communities that are seen as ineligible for personhood. To illustrate how the value of whiteness perpetuates the inferiority and suppression of communities of color and despite that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are classified White in terms of race we will never be their equals.

For many years I took for granted *mi familia's papelitos guardados*. I did not understand the effort my father made to maintain his relationships despite all the structures in place that try and erase him from our lives. I never saw his writing and calling as his resistance to being displaced as our father. Not many fathers who have been incarcerated are able to preserve their familial kinships, like some of the men interviewed, many of their relationships are broken and irremediable not just with their children but with their siblings, parents, friends and communities. Not many are able to resist the effects of Neoslavery that leaves them stuck in an in-between status of not fully dead but not fully living.

My family utilized a decolonizing concept of God as a means to resist the effects of Neoslavery and to sustain our bonds. It was through my belief in faith that taught me to forgive and understand my father. Most of all it, it is my faith that keeps hope alive in my heart that my dad will return to us someday and live out the rest of his life in peace and liberty. Even though I know that this is a false reality I have created. I know that as long as my father remains an undocumented citizen he will never be able to live in liberty and peace on this side of the border. Borders are meant to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them, but the truth is that borders are set up to maintain power and control over perceived property. I live

in a borderland between the scholar and the believer, I live in a borderland with the half-breeds and half-dead and I feel an urgency to help others who live in these borderlands with me. Why am I fit to tell this story? Because I have lived in these borderlands. This was, is and will remain my reality as long as “security” fosters the rationale for xenophobia.

In the future I would like to expand this research by moving beyond the region of Los Angeles, California to get to the voices of other Chicano fathers outside this area. I would also like to expand by increasing the amount of interviews conducted to include the voices of current incarcerated Chicano fathers. This research would also benefit by researching the experiences of Chicana mothers who have also contended with incarceration and who are currently incarcerated. Further, I would like to recognize the children’s experiences who have had both of their parents incarcerated to compare the differences between having a father incarcerated, a mother incarcerated and both parents incarcerated. This under-researched area needs to be expanded in order to recognize the needs and struggles of children who lose their primary advocates and caregivers.

As Caridad Souza wrote:

I have defied the odds, the very people who expected nothing from me celebrate my achievements and after struggling to get beyond the structural constraints on my life, I have become successful by my own standards. But the damage is still there (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 120).

This is *mi testimonio* and by sharing it I hope to heal the hole left in my soul in the shape of my dad.

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