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La Hermandad and Chicanas Organizing: The Community Rhetoric of the *Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional*

Kendall Leon

To address the need for situated accounts of community rhetoric, this article examines the legacy of the first Chicana feminist organization, the *Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional* (*CFMN*). The *CFMN* and their archival collection provide[d] Chicanas an education about how to interpret, be and act in the world. To invent a rhetorical identity, and an organization that makes change, the *CFMN* 1) invoked a remembering of a Chicana history of policy making to incite other Chicanas into political action, and 2) strategically drew on the use of the Chicana concept of "*La Hermandad*" to define a particular Chicana method of collectivity.

Chicana writer and activist Cherríe Moraga aptly writes, "Ironically, the most 'universal work'—writing capable of reaching the hearts of the greatest number of people—is the most culturally specific" (*Last Generation* 291). Likewise, our field's popular conceptualization of community rhetoric—that is, the theory and practice of being in and making communities—has operated on a notion that what has been treated as canonical is both universal and comprehensive. In other words, "community" has become the stabilized term of choice to indicate a rhetorical collectivity. For cultural and political reasons, the methods and discourse through which we organize and affiliate often emerge from something that is shared—whether that is geographic proximity, language systems, "visible" difference, or histories and memories. What we need more of are actual accounts of what this process of affiliation looks like when it happens, especially for those of us who have been typically been marked as the visible "other" in community based scholarship[1].

In a 2011 special issue of *Reflections* on African American Contributions to Community Literacy, editor David Green reaffirms the importance of "pay[ing] attention to the way people deploy literacy in communal settings to resist, negotiate, transform, and make sense of the power relations they experience" (2). Often, as Green points out, how to "deploy literacy" for strategic ends is learned in the "community classroom," particularly for groups who have been historically excluded from institutional spaces (6). As such, Green advocates for these spaces, like community organizations, to receive "more attention for the type of pedagogical training they provide" (6). Similarly, Terese Monberg researches the rhetorical practices of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) organization. According to Monberg, FAHNS creates a "rhetorical space" for Filipina/o Americans to uncover and share histories, writing, memories, and to negotiate relationships

with each other, and a larger American culture—and much of this work would go unnoticed using typical methodologies that focus on public texts (87-8).

To address the need for situated accounts of community rhetoric, and of community organizations as a site for "pedagogical training," I turn to my archival research on one of the first Chicana activist organizations, the *Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional* (*CFMN*). While they were an active organization, the *CFMN* — and later, their archival collection—provide[d] Chicanas an education about how to interpret, be and act in the world. Their practices were used to instantiate an organizing Chicana, which in turn, enabled an effectual organization (the *CFMN*) and a Chicana movement. Utilizing theory in the flesh as a methodological heuristic to analyze documents contained in the *CFMN* archival collection, in my larger research project I examine the way the Chicanas[2] of the *CFMN* use[d] experience to make things such as community organizations, textual histories and practices.

My focus for this particular article centers on these Chicanas' rhetorical moves to make organizing and collectivity part of what it means to be a Chicana, and thusly, to enable change. This is especially relevant given that Chicana emerges in response to a shared experience by Latin@s and/or Mexican@s of being treated as a-rhetorical. To achieve the invention of a rhetorical identity and an organization that makes change, Chicanas of the *CFMN* 1) invoked a remembering of a Chicana history of policy making to incite other Chicanas into political action; and 2) strategically drew on the use of the Chicana concept of "*La Hermandad*" (Chicana sisterhood) to define a particular Chicana method of collectivity. In writing this article, I want to contribute to the existent scholarship in community literacy by offering a situated account of communities and their organizing practices by examining the strategic practices employed by the Chicanas of the *CFMN* as evidenced in their archival documents.

About the *Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional*

The idea for a Chicana feminist organization originated at the 1970 *National Chicano Issues Conference*, when a group of Chicanas at the conference felt that that the Chicano leaders at the conference were not addressing their needs or concerns. In response, these women physically left and met separately. It was at this meeting they drafted the following series of resolutions, which would become the textual framework for the *CFMN*. In one draft of their forming resolutions, the *CFMN* pointed to a dissonance between the experience of being constructed by Chicanos as not leaders, and the reality that they were active and organizing. In the document "Resolution Adopted by the Women's Workshop 10/10/70 Sacramento, California; [A]Proposal for a Comision Femenil Mexicana," the *CFMN* leaders wrote:

> The effort and work of the Chicana/Mexicana women in the Chicano movement is generally obscured because women are not accepted as community leaders either by the Chicano movement or by the Anglo establishment.
>
> The existing myopic attitude does not, however, prove that women are not able to participate. It does not prove that women are not active, indispensable (representing over 50% of the population), experienced

> and knowledgeable in organizational, tactical and strategic aspects of a people's movement.
>
> THEREFORE, in order to terminate exclusion of female leadership in the Chicano/Mexican movement and in the community, be it
>
> RESOLVED, that a Chicana/Mexican Women's Commission be established at this conference which will represent women in all areas where Mexicans prevail.

This literacy event—the drafting of a series of resolutions—documented an exigency for an organization that would make visible the problems and issues particular to Chicana women, as well as provide an avenue for Chicana leadership development. Following this initial drafting of resolutions, in 1973 the Chicanas involved with the initial formation of the *CFMN* organized a conference in Goleta, California for Chicana women. It was at this conference that the *CFMN* became an official organization: by laws were passed and leaders were elected[3].

Since their inception, the *CFMN* became one of the first and most influential Chicana feminist organizations. While their role as an activist organization dwindled in the 1990s, they continued to serve as a philanthropic and leadership development organization well into the mid 2000s. Many of the ideological arguments produced by this organization as well as the documents themselves served as foundational texts for the Chicana movement, and are later reproduced and used to invent what it means to be a Chicana[4]. In addition to the *Comisión* national board, there were over twenty active chapter organizations formed that focused on regional and local concerns as representatives of the CFMN[5]. During the over 30 year span of the organization's lifetime, the relationship between the chapter organizations and the national board was a source of confusion and at times, disruption, in the organization's formation. Underlying their organization's history was a tension between the chapters and the *CFMN* (the national organization), which was partly constituted by differences in localized goals and in the expectations for the relationship between the national board and the individual chapters[6]. Based on the contents of the archival collection, a considerable amount of time and materials were spent determining the relationship. For example, the *CFMN* structure was outlined at multiple moments, with varying relationships established between the chapters and the national board. Figure 1: Copy of an Organizational Chart, demonstrates one of many attempts by the CFMN to put in print the administrative work flow between the national board of directors, the chapter representatives and its various committees. In this version, the chapter representatives appear to be an offshoort of the national board of directors.

Leading up to a 1984 *CFMN* retreat primarily devoted to discussing this relationship, the *CFMN* sent a questionnaire to the local chapters inquiring about the role of *CFMN* in relation to the chapters and what the chapters wanted from the national board. The responses ranged from wanting the *CFMN* to be "a quasi dictatorship while concentrating on developing our infrastructure" to facilitating more opportunities for the chapters to meet and giving each chapter more recognition, as well as "…mostly to be left alone" ("CFMN Questionnaire")[7]. The

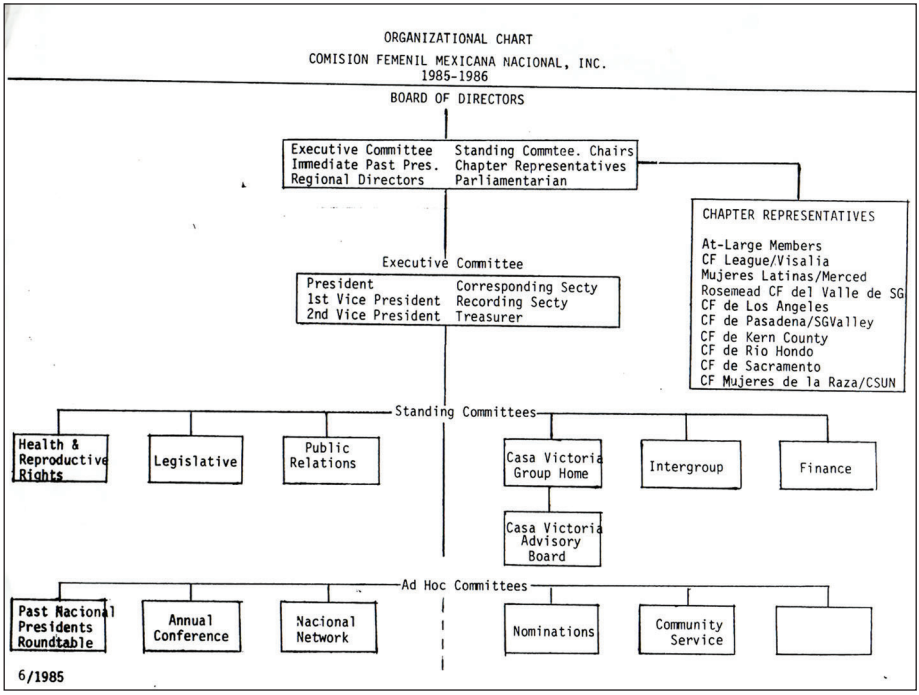

Figure 1. Copy of an Organizational Chart

retreat then was organized to address these concerns and "determine accountability and commitment of chapters to CFMN and vis-versa [sic]" ("CFMN Retreat"). While admittedly distinct from the national organization in terms of practices or concerns, the chapters fell under the scope of the *CFMN* because of a recognition that their members shared a history and goal.

Undeniably, the impact of the *CFMN*'s organizing efforts is widespread geographically and chronologically. Respective to our field's concerns with texts, the *CFMN* served as an amasser and disseminator of information and writings on Chicana related issues, which included writing and circulating a widely read newsletter (the *CFM* newsletter). The *CFMN*'s written testimonies, newsletter articles and activist writings are anthologized and referenced in Chicana studies[8]. As part of the California Ethnic and Minority Archives housed at the UC Santa Barbara and UCLA libraries, their extensive archival collection documents not only their involvement in the Chicana movement, but serves as a record of the movement and of the Civil Rights era in general. Their collection also includes the writings of other organizations, and information about various pertinent policies, measures and issues. In addition to the textual impact of the organization, the leaders of the *CFMN* also formed two offshoot organizations: the Chicana Service Action Center (a Chicana employment and education resource center), and El Centro de Niños (a bilingual childcare center)[9]. Another primary goal of the *CFMN* was to provide leadership development for Chicanas, particularly within the public sphere. Toward this end, several of the *CFMN* leaders went on to lead accomplished public careers;

most notably, former *CFMN* president Gloria Molina, was elected to the California State Assembly in 1982. As an activist organization, they are also well known amongst Chicanas and non-Chicanas for their participation in the cause to stop a Los Angeles county hospital from routinely performing involuntary sterilizations of Mexican women. The *CFMN* were co-plaintiffs in the landmark case Madrigal v. Quilligan in 1975 against the doctors who were culpable of compulsory sterilization[10]. Although the judge ruled in favor of the doctors, their participation in the case garnered the *CFMN* notoriety and influence on Chicana matters in politics: leaders of the *CFMN* were frequently called upon to present testimonies on public issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment, access to education employment training, and pro-choice advocacy[11].

Because they were increasingly called upon to present "expert" testimony on behalf of the Chicana community, in one of their audio-recorded meeting minutes, the *CFMN* board members had a debate about setting standards and criteria for such testimonies in part to ensure that what they were speaking on should be considered a Chicana issue, and also what their take on such issues *as Chicanas* should be ("Board of Directors Meeting"). Thusly, in addition to their work within the public realm—work that might look more familiar and commonly studied in Rhetoric and Composition—the *CFMN* also contributed internally to the Chicana community, and to the making of Chicana identity. In the early stages of this project, it was because of their well-known orators and their involvement in highly publicized cases that I became interested in the *CFMN*. As I began my research though, my particular interest shifted elsewhere. I redirected my attention to the very fact that they were and are an organization instead of individual people. This is an organization that accomplished, among other things, significant documentation of their growth as a Chicana organization and what that meant for themselves and for other Chicanas. I noticed the prolific notes and cards, nestled alongside their programmatic writing, from people wanting to know the *CFMN*'s opinions on matters.

Turning to the *CFMN* for direction on how to be and act became clear at an early *CFMN* retreat on September 23, 1973 in California. At the retreat, board members asked attendees to respond to the following question: "what role would you like facilitators to take". The two choices were: "a) deal with the inter-personal relationships involved in working in an organization b) working with a group regarding sensitivity and self-awareness as Chicanas." The majority of the responses were "both." At the bottom of one of the responses an attendee went so far as to note: "Don't like facilitators to ask questions. Would prefer them to make statements" ("Comisión Femenil Retreat 1973"). As we can see, Chicanas associated with the *CFMN* wanted guidance from the leadership on how to work as an organization and how to be as a Chicana. Through their extensive archiving practices, their contribution to the making of Chicana in the collective continues. What became especially interesting to notice is the way that the members of the organization understood Chicana identity to mediate what they could (and should) do as an organization; in this way, Chicana shaped the rhetorical practices of the organization.

Studying the *CFMN* then for community literacy scholars is especially salient. The *CFMN* operated at the intersections of identity and collectivity as both emergent from shared experience as well as mediating how then to respond to such

conditions[12]. This responsive emergence in tandem with a correlative response is part of what also constitutes a theoretical tradition arguably born from Chicanadad, and which was used as my methodological apparatus: theory in the flesh.

Methodological Underpinnings: Theorizing from/about Experience

In her short introductory essay for a section in the edited collection *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherríe Moraga develops a theory of identity that stems from lived experiences from which a "politic" is built: "A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives . . . all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (23). Theory in the flesh is thusly recognition of our lived experience, which includes the way that we are articulated given the skin and positionality we inhabit. In my research, I adopt theory in the flesh as a empirical theory of existence that works in tandem and tension with a correlative action: "Our strategy is how we cope—how we measure and weigh what is to be said and when, what is to be done and how, and to whom and to whom, daily deciding/risking who it is we can call an ally, call a friend (whatever that person's skin, sex, or sexuality)" ("I Have Dreamed of a Bridge" xix). Despite what might be the painful experiences we encounter as women of color, Moraga asks us to consider our rhetorical ability to read our experiences alongside others and to connect as a strategy for survival. Theory in the flesh involves recognizing our lived experiences and coming to a critical consciousness about this, coupled with our responses, or actions to alter the worlds that produce such conditions.

Theory in the flesh has been extended by post positivist realists who further make the connection between identity and a physical reality that while subject mediated, is *real* (see for example *Martín-Alcoff*; *Martín-Alcoff and Mohanty;* Moya). Post positivist realists understand identity not as limitless or limiting, but rather as mediating yet grounded; and more importantly, as epistemic. Paula Moya argues that it "is precisely because identities have a referential relationship to the world that they are politically and epistemically important: indeed, identities instantiate the links between individuals and groups and central organizing principles of our society" (*Learning*, 13).

In other words, as community literacy scholars, we should be studying identity, and in particular Chicana identity, because it connects people and incites us to action. According to several intake surveys of the *CFMN*'s membership, when asked what they hoped to gain from involvement in the *Comisión* and secondarily, what the *Comisión* should do for its members, many of the responses centered on establishing relationships with other Chicanas:

- "It is important to meet and interact with other Latinas,'
- "..keep me informed of Chicana issues & how to be involved in these issues and how to mentor other Chicanas…"
- "I needed to relate to other women with initiative, be an active network and support system to fall back on; wanted to become active member in such an organization for Chicanas, to provide a supportive and encouraging environment where I can be with other Latinas…"

- "..because I wanted to meet other Latinas and be able to learn from others as well as to share my knowledge; to become more involved in community activities and to be more aware of my culture.."
- "I did volunteer work at NOW and noticed one summer and I saw there was a noticeable lack of contact with the Chicana community so I looked up Chicana organizations and decided to join…"
- "..allow me to work with other like-minded women on projects, campaigns, etc which benefit the Latina and her community, seeking a means by which I can utilize my energies in constructive ways.."
- "to have an impact in my community and not be so isolated from it.." (CSAC, "Mexican/Chicana Women's Survey")

Tellingly, many of these responses demonstrate both an expectation that a Chicana organization would serve to create and maintain relationships between Chicanas. At the same time, this expectation incited people to join and participate in this organization. The sentiments conveyed in this list also indicate that a primary purpose of the *CFMN* as a Chicana organization was definitional. For instance, in the quote in the second bullet point, the prospective *CFMN* member stated that she was interested in joining in order to "keep me informed of Chicana issues & how to be involved in these issues and how to mentor other Chicanas…" It was through affiliation with this organization that people hoped to find out what was important for Chicanas, how to act and ostensibly, how to treat people. Affiliation to this identity then mediated even day-to-day actions. As I will later discuss, part of this mediation involved changing the methods for activist practices. Chicana identity and its relationship to the formation of communities is especially salient precisely because Chicana is a constructed identity that reflects and refracts a material existence.

On the Term ''Chicana''

Scholars have argued about who or what is included in the domain of Chicano or Latino (see for example Grosfoguel et al). Some of these names explicitly center culture within the colonial moment—such as "Hispanic" or even "Latin American" (Mignolo). This tension in names and naming is evident throughout the textual artifacts that I examined produced by various members of the *Comisión*. For example, on speeches, resolutions and meeting minutes I read hand written notes on the documents that changed Chicana to "Latina"—or visa versa—based on the rhetorical purpose of the document, or if the author felt the term violated the concept of *la hermandad* governing the organization and its practices.

Undoubtedly, "Chicano/a" is a rhetorical and intentional term. Chicano/a people created "Chicano" identity to speak to the experiences of living in the United States, with a connection to a Latino/a background, and for most, recognizing an indigenous affiliation as well.[13] Chicano/a then acknowledges a mixed blood and cultural background— a reclamation in the face of a society that privileges mythic "purity." Foundational to the Chicano movement is a productive nostalgia for a pre-conquest Atzlán as a response to a literal and metaphoric displacement from our homelands[14]. Chicano also has historical and contemporary connections with the United Farm Workers (UFW) movement, with its initiation as an independent organization in 1962 often serving as origin moment of the national Chicano

movement. As with any "origin" story, the Chicano movement is constellative. Interwoven with the UFW political struggles, including the well-known national boycott of grapes, other activist organizations and actions emerge. Alongside these emergences, the Chicano movement also began within academia, with Rodolfo Acuña teaching the first Mexican American history class in 1966. Chicano therefore connotes an activist and oppositional identity (Castañeda; for criticism of this narrative see Pérez *Decolonial Imaginary*).

Chicana was developed to identify the particular gendered experiences of women, which the Chicano movement was criticized for forgetting, or only admitting to service Chicanos as helpmates. For those who identify as Chicana, the degree of tangential relation to the Chicano movement varies. Likewise, the Chicana movement is treated as distinct from the predominately Anglo-centric feminist movement as being historically unable to address the particular concerns of women of color. But again, any relation to the feminist movement varies for each Chicana. In addition to Chicana as emerging or responding tangentially to other movements, there are frequently similar origin stories for Chicana identity as a distinct identity. For example, Chicanas often point to Chicana literature as pivotal to Chicana identity and to the Chicana movement broadly. In her edited "collection," the *Chicana Cultural Studies Forum*, Angie Chabram-Dernersesian interviewed well known scholars in Chicano and Chicana studies about the relation to Chican@ studies and cultural studies. Many of the Chicanas in the forum mention the edited collection *This Bridge Called My Back* as foundational to their own identities and to Chicana studies in general. The writings of Ana Castillo, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others, are referenced as pivotal to what it means to be a Chicana.

While both theory and the flesh and its offshoot post positivist realism understand identity to be connective and grounded in reality that can be articulated and read through writing, the emphasis thus far has been on literary writing. In my following case study of the *Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional Organization*, I extend the reading of the reality and epistemic of identity in the programmatic writing of an organization.

Chicanas Inventing Histories and/of *Reglas* in the Archives

People like organizations, rivers, mountains and valleys, all have their beginnings, their turns, their ups and their downs. However, one characteristic common to all things physical, is that they leave their mark in spite of the changes which occur over the years.

Francisca Flores, "Chicana Service Action Center"

As scholars of color know, history matters. It matters a great deal for those of us whose histories are often constructed for us. And it matters even more for Chicanas as it is a "contemporary" identity and thusly, histories must be invented and re-remembered[15]. Change, according to Chicana historian Emma Pérez, "is formed discursively, in the past, by the present" (32). The ownership over the making of a history— of cataloging experiences and the emergence of Chicana activist identity and its effects on action—is one way that history and historicizing is part of a Chicana community rhetoric both in terms of what is valued and what is practiced. The attention given to the creation of their archival collection and the

level of documentation the *CFMN* included in their archival files demonstrates that history for Chicanas matters a great deal. History of course matters for everyone, but as we see, part of claiming a Chicana identity means that you are aware of a history, claim an affiliation to it, and commit to sharing and teaching histories. Such an experience for those of us who are constructed as a-rhetorical or ineffectual becomes the fodder through which we invent, remember and organize our communities. Chicanas understand that their interventions in history mediate present and future positionalities and their associative rhetorical actions. Chicanas had (and have) to invent histories of organizing as part of their subjectivity; in this way we see that the contemporary identity of Chicana is an epistemic for the creation of histories.

Returning to the introduction of the *CFMN*'s founding resolutions, the organization emerged as a response to not being treated as "experienced and knowledgeable in organizational, tactical and strategic aspects of a people's movement" ("Resolution"). Therefore, the *CFMN* understood that part of their role as an organization was to be just that. But, I must point out that they were not saying in the resolutions they drafted that they have to *become* these things. Rather, they indicated that they were *already* knowledgeable about organizing. The problem they identify is that this history and their current activism were not being recognized. What the *CFMN* did was to remind their members that Chicanas were always organizing.

While part of Chicana identity is to be responsive and to incite change, this happens in dialogue with a past that has either been forgotten or misread. Therefore, the Chicanas of the *CFMN* incorporated history to legitimize activism and its purposes. More often than not what this looked like was using histories of Mexican American women as precedents for activism. The purpose was to demonstrate to other Chicanas that their concerns and involvement were both warranted and, in fact, part of what it means to be a Chicana. Several examples of the strategic use of history can be found in the documents contained in the *CFMN* archival collection that demonstrate Chicanas turning to a forgotten history of active women to create a productive lineage with contemporary Chicanas. Some of this remembering took place in the rhetorical moment; others took place in the recounting of these events as an interpretive framework. For instance, in "The Woman of La Raza[16]," Enriqueta Longauex y Vásquez reads a Raza conference through a history of women who have been active, but were often overlooked when recounting the history of revolutionizing:

> While attending a Raza conference in Colorado this year, I went to one of the workshops that were held to discuss the role of the Chicana woman. When the time came for the woman to make the presentation to the full conference, the only thing that the workshop representative said was this: 'It was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated' . . . Surely we could have at least come up with something to add to that statement. I sat back and thought, why? Why? . . .Looking at our history, I can see why this would be true. The role of the Chicana woman has been a very strong one, although a silent one. (1)

In this recollection of Raza conference, Longauex y Vásquez uses history as a way to understand her experiences at the conference in Colorado that lead a presenter to claim that the "Chicana woman" does not want liberation. As a response, Longauex y Vásquez then *uses* history to subtly support while at the same time question the actions taken given the history of Chicana women in the revolution in Mexico.

> When the woman has seen the suffering of her people she has always responded bravely and as a totally committed and equal human. My mother told me of how, during the time of Pancho Villa and the revolution in Mexico, she saw the men march through the village continually for three days and then she saw the battalion of woman [sic] marching for a whole day. The woman [sic] carried food and supplies; also, they were fully armed wearing loaded 'carrilleras.' In battle they fought alongside the men. Out of the Mexican Revolution came the revolutionary personage 'Adelita,' who wore rebozo crossed at the bosom as a symbol of revolutionary woman [sic] in Mexico[17]. (1)

The implications for this narration are that women have always fought "alongside men" and perhaps this is the reason why Chicana women do "not need to be liberated"; we have always been equals, and the problem is that we have forgotten our history. The purpose then was to remember this lineage.

Likewise, in an article about the *CFMN*, "La Chicana Organizes: The *Comisión Femenil Mexicana* in Perspective," Gema Matsuda narrates a lineage of Mexican women as active contributors in and to histories. This lineage is used not only as a heuristic to interpret the *CFMN* as an organization. Matsuda also then locates the *CFMN*'s leaders as part of this history of women who make change:

> Recorded history of the Mexican woman goes as far back as the Indians who first populated our continent. In Chichén-Itzá Mayan gods were appeased with the lives of young maidens. And many scholars agree that the conquest of México City by Cortéz was possible only because of the invaluable help of La Malinche. At first glance, one may not see the connection between the above named incidents because the lesson learned is a philosophic rather than historical one…The importance of the women in both of these cases was of a crucial, if not indispensable, nature. Their contribution to history extends beyond their recognized role as child bearers" (25).

In this opening Matsuda begins by demonstrating that Mexican women have played an instrumental role in shaping history, but this role "at first glance" may not be recognized or recognizable. Matsuda then traced the involvement of Mexican women/Chicana women, noting names of leaders in historical struggles, leading to "a few women who have risen above the type-casting to which we are all subjected and have become valuable leaders of the [Chicano] movement" (26). A pivotal move in this recounting happens next.

After demonstrating that Mexican women contributed to change in history that has not been recognized, Matsuda uses this illuminated history as a way to both establish the exigency for the *CFMN*, and to place the leaders of the *CFMN* as part of this history as agents of change. As such, Matsuda's narrative turns to an introduction of Francisca Flores, one of the founders of the *CFMN*. Matsuda specifically describes Flores as an interventionist, responding to and altering the cultural frameworks that were preventing Chicanas from seeing themselves as effectual:

> Francisca Flores saw this problem and recognized the cultural trends which perpetuate it—maternal overprotection, male chauvinism, lack of incentive for female higher education, and, by extension, lack of Chicanas in the professional fields. With the purpose of combating these very problems, she and other women who, like her, had learned the art of organizing got together in order to discuss the feasibility of forming an organization which would promote Chicanas in all professions. ("La Chicana" 25)

In this case, Matsuda narrated the historical involvement of Mexican and Chicana women that serves to establish a legacy to the *CFMN*'s endeavors; Flores in turn becomes part of that historical legacy. The strategy to remind audiences of a historical legacy that the *CFMN*'s leaders were building upon garnered a type of legitimacy for the leaders, and for the Chicana movement more broadly. It normalized activist practices as a way to compose Chicana subjectivity as always already effectual, or rhetorical.

For the *CFMN*, a legacy of being active and resistant had to also coalesce with organizing and being organized. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes: "…the new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode" (*Borderlands*, 80). Mestiza, and by association, Chicana, is grounded in the ability to operate at a contradictory nexus. This framework can also be applied to the *CFMN* organization.

In a paper written for a Mexican Literature class on the 1973 *CFMN* conference in Goleta, which is included in the *CFMN* archival collection, attendee Amelia Lorenzo Wilson reflects on the purpose of the gathering: "The first convention of CFM Nacional, Inc was held June 2nd and 3rd in Goleta, California, with the implied purposes of building a strong Mexican women's organization. It was considered imperative by the founders of CFM that such an organization would demonstrate that the Chicanas had finally discovered a need for an identity and a willingness to express confidence in her ideals" (2). Lorenzo Wilson comments though that this purpose was lost amidst a disconnect between the need for organizing principles with the desire for activism:

> The convention organizers took an authoritarian-defensive stand in the attempt to preserve "Roberts Rules" to try to stay on the main line brought out some very important disputes that practically destroyed

> the convention [. . .] For the majority of participants it was the first immersion in parliamentary procedures and a cold bath it proved to be [. . .]Without generalizing too much, camps formed almost from the start. The organizers and founders of La Comisión [. .] justly wished to protect the three years' work that had brought them to the point of founding a national organization. Another camp—composed of a varied age group, but basically younger and nosier—were interested in ideology and vastly impatient with the bureaucratic slowness inherent in any organization. (3 of 6)

The nature of being an organization necessitates that it achieves stability often through rules or routine procedures. As an organization that was based on an identity of resistance, the *CFMN* had to presumably operate as a contradiction. Throughout the *CFMN*'s 30-year history, the extent to which the *CFMN* should adopt rules and regulations as an organization without going against the premises of Chicana identity remained a source of contention. In an article for their newsletter, the *CFM Report*, the CFMN board members reflect upon less than productive meetings in which the organization "has been split and the sessions 'busted' so there was natural concern, that some present were there to break rather than build" ("The Experience 1). The meetings were divided because of the contention between the board, who wanted to adhere to organizing techniques like Roberts Rules of Orders, and other members who saw these organizational practices as at odds with being a Chicana activist as they "claim that rules and parliamentary procedure is the 'man' bag" (1). However, in the CFM report, the authors—presumably the *CFMN* board members—respond that "[t]his claim, although used very successfully to divide meetings of Mexican Americans and Chicanos, time and again, is false, because Mexicans and Mexican organizations have their 'reglas' and know how to use them when someone does not observe them. So, rules and procedures, by-laws and constitutions are not the exclusive property of the 'white man.'" (1) Instead, the opponents to *reglas* "still have not learned the history of the movements or of their own people" (1). To conceptualize Chicana activism as legitimately achieved through organizational practice, the authors of the *CFM* report instantiated organizing into a pre-colonial history:

> The Aztecs had their judicial system and their order to their society. They had a system of laws. And the Spanish came along with theirs, so the Mexicans have a longer history of parliamentary procedures than do the Anglos of the United States. As a matter of fact, from the Spain, whose law dates back to Roman law, we have a longer history in this respect than does the 'melted pot American.' Young people, and some of the older folks should learn their history and quit falling for the wrong 'cliché' such as the 'white man's bag' because we have a longer history or can compare our history with anyone else's on any aspect of social organization, etc. ("The Experience" 1)

As evidenced in the above excerpt about the tense meeting, problems arose when Chicanas forgot a pre-colonial history of "reglas." Having such rules is what enables the continuity of organization, and the ability to act. As the above article notes, such divisiveness within the organization planning sessions "busted" up planning meetings; it appeared that people were intent on breaking rather than building. In response then, seemingly to "build," the article reminds the *CFMN* members, who may in fact have been the people mentioned in this article, that the Aztecs, and the Spanish, had rules before the colonizers ever came. Remembering a history of rules and regulations here is used by the *CFMN* to redress divisive actions. The *CFMN* leaders intervened in an idea of history that some Chicanas held that *reglas* were only part of the "white man's bag" which rendered themselves as not part of a legacy of rule makers in order produce a construction of Mexicans as organizing. The *CFMN* leaders do this to make organizing part of the repertoire of Chicana identity and rhetoric. This is likewise achieved materially through the creation of objects like their archival collections as a mechanism through which community is further built between generations, whereby lessons and evidence of Chicana organizing are remembered. Not only did the *CFMN* leaders instill organizing as part of the habituations of being a Chicana, but they also documented a method of organizing particular to Chicana identity: the concept of *La Hermandad*.

Collective Practices and *La Hermandad*

La Hermandad is a concept of Chicana sisterhood employed by the *CFMN* as reflective of how Chicanas organize. It is also used at times to produce Chicana organizational practice. In an article for *Encuentro Femenil*[18], *CFMN* leader Francisca Flores reflected on the production and subsequent impact of *La Hermandad* as produced at the 1973 Chicana national conference in Goleta:

> Chicanas expressed a dire need to establish a national means of communication among women. This communication system would strengthen a new feeling of '*Hermandad*' (sisterhood) among Chicanas. This communication system and the new philosophy of *hermandad* would motivate Chicanas to identify, understand and work against the racist and sexist economic social forces adversely affecting the Chicana and her people. (Italics in the original, "Chicana Service Action Center" 5)

Note that the philosophy of *hermandad* is described as inciting change in Chicanas and Chicana activist practice. This philosophy and way of communicating is responsive to outside forces yet inwardly focused in its production and employment. For the *CFMN*, this concept is used most frequently to redress and then redirect action.

One example is in a response to a series of memos amongst members regarding tension between the members of the national board and chapter leaders. The memos decried member behavior that is seen as antithetical to connectedness and as unsupportive of the *CFMN,* and by association, the Chicana movement in general, which included disrupting meetings and negative talk about the Board and its

particular leaders. In one memo written by a past president (Christine Fuentes) and circulated amongst its membership and chapter organization, Fuentes reminds the *CFMN* members that the organization's foundations were:

> …built on such concepts as unity, goodwill and *hermandad*. Achieving these goals calls for a tremendous amount of work and dedication from all members. Obviously this cannot be accomplished if the present leadership elects instead to focus its energies on the negative…One cannot help, but question the leadership capabilities and moral judgment of a Board displaying conduct, which is divisive and alienating. At a time when unity is imperative for success, Comision members must insist on being guided by a Board sensitive and responsive to the needs of all Chicanas. Let us seek to work together in constructive and positive ways. Comision's survival is dependant on this.

Within the archival collection, this memo is included in the "Administrative" files, which highlights its importance as an organizing mechanism. What the record of Fuentes's redress indicates is that adherence to *hermandad* is used to question the actions of its members and its boards whenever they appeared to not be positive or constructive. In other words, to be a Chicana [organization] means that one does not operate through negative behavior; rather, its actions should be productive and in the spirit of building community.

Not only did the *CFMN* use *la hermandad* to help define what it meant to be a Chicana organization, it was also used to redirect action. In a follow up memo to Fuentes regarding the behavior of the *CFMN* board, the Pasadena chapter of the organization wrote to *CFMN* president Gloria Moreno-Wycoff to convey their disappointment in the circulated memos, primarily because *La Comisión* should be dedicated to promoting Chicanas and their welfare:

> Should not such a sensitive information be dealth [sic] with by the CFMN board in a more discreet manner? 2. Are we (Comisión) not as a whole supportive of all our members and does not the letter make reference to the CFMN taking action against one of our sisters? 3. Does sending out such letter suggest that the CFMN Board cannot handled [sic] its private matters? 4. In its accusations, it not the letter somewhat slanderous to one of our members reputation? 5. Are we as Chicana women striving for all Chicana women not contradicting ourselves by attacking one of our own? ("Memo to Gloria Moreno Wycoff")

The understanding that Chicana identification implied a shared commitment to *la hermandad* became a lens through which the activists interpreted and altered their actions. This sentiment to redirect activist efforts reflected the understanding that Chicana action should operate on the unit of the community. The invocation of their commitment to sisterhood, which was sent out via the above memo to the organization, served to shift, or perhaps remind the organization members of the way that Chicanas should be: in essence, reestablishing its epistemology.

This makes sense given that Chicana identity is one that specifically emerges as a response to conditions in which one is marked as *not* productive. As a result then of being compelled into a position of non-action, Chicana identity emerges as a position of action; more specifically, a particular type of action that not only builds on experience, but is instantiated each time that *la hermandad* is invoked. Therefore, through its invocation of this concept, it can be assumed that the *CFMN* hoped that *la hermandad* would become a habituated practice of its members, and by association, of those who affiliate as Chicana. *La hermandad* becomes then part of the positionality of Chicana as built from the flesh. It serves as heuristic through which Chicanas view change or the purpose of their work[19]. Through examining the use of *la hermandad* to produce activist practice, we can see how these particular habituations are realized collectively.

Implications

As a response to the need for more situated accounts of community organizations as sites for education, I traced the specific practices employed by the *CFMN* to make a Chicana feminist organization. In doing so, this article has demonstrated that studying the rhetoric of marginalized groups—marginalized in politics, in publics, and in research that studies "communities"—can teach us about the different ways that people might affiliate, and how that affiliation can be used to make change. While *la hermandad* was used to redirect and alter the actions of members that were seen as violating part of their Chicana identity, to be a successful organization and by association, an effectual organization, the *CFMN* had to productively invent—or rather, remember— their legacy of organizing. In this way, we see that claiming one is a Chicana carries explicit political implications that mediate performances of what it means to be a Chicana—and by association, what it means to be a Chicana organization. At the same time, Chicana is a rhetoric that is emergent from experience in so far as those who affiliate as such tend to share similar experiential knowledge, which we might say constitutes a "community." Arguably, this community has been created and sustained in and through literacy artifacts. For Chicanas the focus has often been on poetic texts, but as I have demonstrated, the making of Chicana identity, community organization and an associative rhetoric is also evident in programmatic and archival texts. During their tenure, the *CFMN* organization built a legacy of collective Chicana activism in the face of an experience in which being identified as Latina/Mexicana was considered to be decidedly not effectual. This legacy continued being built through the creation of an expansive archival collection of the organization, and it is rebuilt each time another Chicana learns from the *CFMN* collection what it means to be a Chicana—organized, impactful, and collective.

Endnotes

1. In particular, I am reminded of work like that of two-spirit Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill, who has written about the Cherokee concept of "duyuk'a" as a way to theorize relatedness and a harmonious balance as well as challenging our field's attention on the written word as evidence of and the mechanism through which we

achieve relatedness and affiliation. Recently, Cherokee scholar Ellen Cushman has explored "gadugi", which might run parallel to our understanding of "community." While perhaps not typically published within the realm of community literacy proper, they do include discussions of rhetorical and literacy practices that emerge from shared experiences or beliefs as challenging how we define and decide on community.

2. A Note on the Use of the Term Chicana: In this article, I focus on *"Chicana"* as this is the term used by the CFMN community members. More recently, Chicanas have adopted Xicana as a way to remember and honor our indigenous heritages, as well as Chican@/Xican@ for complicating the gender identification and binary of Chicana/o.

3. For a more thorough recounting of the history of the *CFMN* and its accomplishments as a political organization, see Sonia R. García and Marisela Márquez's recent 2011 *Atzlán* article, "The *Comisión Femenil :* La Voz of a Chicana Organization"

4. See Alma García and Angie Chabram-Dernersesian for evidence of the organization's influence.

5. While the majority of these chapter organizations were in California, several were formed in Arizona, Colorado and Illinois.

6. Another point of contention expressed by the chapter organizations is geographically based. The *CFMN* collated responses to the questionnaires sent to its chapters and then used these responses to write their agenda for a board retreat. Written on the agenda under "DEFINED WHAT IS CFMN TODAY," is "Perceived as LA based" ("Retreat and Questionnaires"). This observation mirrors a general critique leveled at Chicana identity in general as it is primarily seen as affiliated with and speaking to Chicanas in California.

7. For writing researchers, it is interesting to note that several responses focused on the newsletters produced by the *CFMN* and its chapters as they equated recognition of chapters with the placement of chapter news in the national newsletter ("Retreat and Questionnaires").

8. See for example Alma García's comprehensive collection *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, which includes several texts written by the *CFMN* or its leaders.

9. These organizations later became independent entities.

10. Rhetoric and Composition scholar Jessica Enoch details some of the CFMN's organizing efforts against sterilization in her article "Survival Stories: Feminist Historiographic Approaches to Chicana Rhetorics of Sterilization Abuse."

11. Because they were increasingly called upon to present "expert" testimony on behalf of the Chicana community, in one of their audio recorded meeting minutes, the *CFMN* board members had a debate about setting standards and criteria for such testimonies in part to ensure that what they were speaking on should be considered a Chicana issue.

12. Similarly, Dora Ramirez Dhoore is Chicana scholar who studies tropes that have emerged within the Chicana experience and have been used for invention in a variety of creative and political works. As a type of organizing principle, in her article "Cyberborderland: Searching the Web for Xicanidad," Ramirez-Dhoore examines how the concept of mestiza Xican@s *use* mestiza consciousness to negotiate their

racialized, gendered, and othered discourse." While not writing to a community literacy audience, we can see how mestiza consciousness is a concept that identifies both the shared experience of Xicanidad *and* a trope through which similarly identified people write from and to, and continue to organize around.

13. This creation of Chicano/a *by* Chicanos/as is especially important to juxtapose to other ways that groups can be made; for example, the creation of the identity and group "Hispanic" which was developed in the 1970's for the U.S. Census.

14. While this is understood to be the Aztec homeland that was taken by the United States in the Treaty of Hildago in 1848, which is now the American Southwest, Atzlán functions as more than just a literal translation to the geography.

15. Chicana literary and philosophical writers, for example, have examined and reimagined the rhetorical functions of historical figures such as *Malintzin*, La *Virgen de Guadalupe*, or *La llorana*, to reposition these *Mexicanas* as positive contributors to cultural narratives (see for example Calafell; Castillo; Gaspar de Alba).

16. This document was a column written by Vásquez for one of her columns in the Chicano newspaper, *El Grito Del Norte*. A typed copy of this without the article references was included in the *CFMN* collection.

17. The construction of Chicanas as always a part of revolutionary action is also made evident in the use of revolutionary symbols and images. For example, Figure 2 found in the *CFMN*'s archives is a very familiar image of the Chicano/a movement.

Figure 2. Copy of a Drawing of a Chicana Revolutionary

18. *Encuentro Femenil* was a Chicana feminist journal started by Chicanas such as Anna Nieto-Gómez, Adelaida R. Del Castillo, Cindy Honesto, among others. Francisca Flores (one of *CFMN*'s founders) worked closely with Nieto-Gómez. The *CFMN* also included copies of *Encuentro Femenil* in their archival collection.

19. "Alicia García," a contemporary Chicana scholar, also invokes this sense of connectedness to negotiate how she produces scholarship. She states that she questions "how much do we do as educated Chicanas that are not part of community," and, to redress this sometimes forgetting of our community ties, she "tr[ies] to use language that can be used by larger audiences." For Garcia, being a Chicana means taking the knowledge she has learned as a Mexican American in the academy and sharing it with her community (Interview).

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