

GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA

# **The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader**

*AnaLouise Keating, editor*

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

DURHAM AND LONDON

2009

© 2009 The Gloria E. Anzaldúa Literary Trust  
and AnaLouise Keating  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper ♻️  
Designed by C. H. Westmoreland  
Typeset in Quadraat  
by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.  
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication  
Data appear on the last printed page of  
this book.

“Haciendo caras, una entrada.” From  
*Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo caras*.  
© 1990 by Gloria Anzaldúa. Reprinted by  
permission of Aunt Lute Books.

“Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman.”  
From *Conversant Essays: Contemporary Poets  
on Poetry*, edited by James McCorkle. © 1990  
Wayne State University Press. Reprinted by  
permission of Wayne State University Press.

“(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces.”  
From *this bridge we call home: radical visions for  
transformation*. © 2002 by Gloria E. Anzaldúa.  
Reprinted by permission of Routledge  
Publishers.

frontispiece: photograph of Gloria Anzaldúa  
by Victoria G. Alvarado

Based on a talk delivered at St. Olaf College on March 7, 1992, this previously unpublished essay, which Anzaldúa worked on at various points from 1995 through 2001, offers both a summary of her position in *Borderlands* and an important extension into the next phase of her theoretical development. Anzaldúa provides an expanded definition of her theory of the "new mestiza," emphasizing that, as she defines the term, *mestizaje* can take multiple forms, including some that go beyond biological/racial identity categories to include intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, and more. This essay explores a variety of additional topics, including multiculturalism, education, disciplinary boundaries, *nos/otras*, new tribalism, and the "Trojan mula," which she defines as subversive intellectuals and academics of any color, those who challenge the status quo. Anzaldúa also draws on her own experiences to discuss some of the difficulties women of colors and other racial/ethnic, intellectual, and/or emotional mestizas might experience in the academy.

## The New Mestiza Nation

### A Multicultural Movement

As we near the turn into the twenty-first century, we face a backlash and a dangerous regressive state inside and outside of education. The visibility of hate groups, the KKK, neo-nazis and other white supremacy groups has increased in the last few years. They proclaim that racial/ethnic others, working-class people, people of color are taking over their white territory and using affirmative action to drive them out of jobs. White supremacists, right-wingers, the advocates of family values, and academic elitists have made the political climate ripe for neo-conservatives who accuse multiculturalists of diluting the national identity, weakening the literary canon, and giving people of color, working-class people, gay men, and lesbians hegemonic control. They denounce the wave of multiculturalism on campuses, referring to it as a new tyrannical form of being "politically correct." When some of us criticize racism or homophobia in the academy they respond by pointing the finger at us and shouting their right-wing buzzwords like political correctness to silence dissenting voices.

True multiculturalism endangers white males and forces them to feel ashamed of their culture by presenting the histories and perspectives of ethnic groups. Multiculturalists disrupt the fantasy that has dominated the State's official version of this country's history. These radical multiculturalists seek to split open the fantasy of a monocultural nation, interrogate the history of internal and external colonialism by the U.S. government, and protest U.S. wars against the Third World and imperialist domination of the Americas. We stress that Others can't be lumped together,

bracing the four major races of the world.<sup>2</sup> We are creating ways of educating ourselves and younger generations in this mestiza nation to change how students and teachers think and read by de-constructing Euro-Anglo ways of knowing; to create texts that reflect the needs of the world community of women and people of color; and to show how lived experience is connected to political struggles and art making.

We bring to the present our political experience which is why we are wary of the ways concepts like multiculturalism, difference, and diversity can get co-opted. These terms can, and have, been used against us, making it seem as though difference and diversity are power neutral, thus diluting or stripping these terms of their emancipatory potential. A radical political agenda is often reduced to superficial efforts to serve international foods, wear ethnic clothes, and decorate corporate complexes and airports with native colors and art. This multicultural appropriation/misappropriation is an attempt to control difference by allocating it to bordered-off sections in the curriculum. Diversity is then treated as a superficial overlay that does not disrupt any comfort zones. It is reduced to a footnote or an appendix in people's psyches. Our cultures, languages, thinking, and art are color-coded, made into commercial products, and reified as exotic cultural tales devoid of human agency. The racial/ethnic other or "nos/otras" — a word I split to show that we and they are both us and other — seeks terms that identify our heritages. Mestiza, which is actually an old term, speaks to our common identity as mixed bloods. I have been exploring this as a new category which is more inclusive than a racial *mestizaje*. Most Chicanos, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans are mixed bloods. Many are half and half: half Chicano/half white, half Japanese/half white, and so on. The new mestiza is a category that threatens the hegemony of the neo-conservatives because it breaks down the labels and theories used to manipulate and control us. Punching holes in their categories, labels, and theories means punching holes in their walls.

The Trojan mulas in the academy, those who have been educated and assimilated in universities, run the risk of being white-washed in the academy's acid. They are held captive in the academic Tower, bashed by high theory discourses. They are tired of their minds being occupied by white men, *cansadas de la reconquista de la mente*, tired of being occupied and driven out of our minds. They are tired of being shot down by language, writing, theoretical discourse. The pen is a weapon used against them. The pen is the sword that renders us war prisoners in intellectual mind factories. But we are learning to wield the pen. Many of the terms

our issues collapsed, our differences erased. Women of color, working-class and gay people are refusing to let our histories, stories, and theories be appropriated, made invisible, or turned against ourselves. We resist neo-conservative attempts to invert notions of power which supposedly make us powerful and them powerless. We expose this notion as a form of racism designed to discount the voices of those who form the backbone of the heritage of the U.S. There are a few disciplines — Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, and some segments of American Studies and Latin American Studies — that are progressive and open to other ways of thinking and to the literatures of people of color. But most administrations and disciplines are firmly entrenched. They have had this power from the beginning of this nation, and they're not going to relinquish it easily.

Amidst this attack by conservatives, people of color, working-class people, and progressive whites in the academy continue to struggle fiercely to define multiculturalism as a movement that reflects and represents the real United States — the mixed, hybrid, mestiza, character of this country. I consider myself a mestiza multiculturalist teacher and writer informed by my identity as a Chicana Tejana dyke from a working-class background. I am involved in the anti-colonial struggle against literary assimilation, claiming linguistic space to validate my personal language and history. Mestiza feminists such as myself seek the means to transform pedagogical and institutional practices so that they will represent ethnic people and protect students of color, gay men, and lesbians against racist and heterosexist violence. Women of color and working-class people have been at the forefront of this multicultural movement, before multiculturalism was even a term widely used. We have been articulating the need for curriculums that represent us, pedagogical approaches that do not silence us, and scholarship that challenges existing power hierarchies. We want our histories, our knowledge, our perspectives to be accepted and validated not only in the universities but also in elementary, junior high, and high schools. The roots of multicultural education lie in the lived experiences and struggles of women of color and working-class people. Not that others have not also worked for this, but we have been there all along, knowing that education depends upon incorporating all different points of view, white, colored, and mestiza, drawing on and from *las lenguas* of our peoples.

Through our multi-layered experiences as mestizas, women of color, working-class, and gay people we claim multicultural education as a centerpiece of the mestiza nation. In 1920 José Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher, envisioned a mestizo nation, a cosmic race, a fifth race em-

that are now going around are not used by people of color, progressive whites, working-class whites, gays, lesbians, or disabled people. They are terms given to us by the new conservatives in the administration, in the faculty, and in the boardrooms. These conservative educators and students overshadow the few people of color and progressive whites in the academy.

### Identity Crisis

As leaders of this movement, the new mestizas are among those who often feel worn down by the costs of exclusionary education. These costs have been high for feminists of color, queer scholars, activists, and artists who are producing new scholarship and who see the possibility of self-representation in higher education. We, the mestiza multiculturalists, know well the dangers of this border crossing, dangers to be reckoned with as we continue to walk across the firing lines. As a Chicana tejana patlache mujer del nuevo mundo, I am tired of being the counter-emancipatory voice, tired of being the return of the repressed, the token woman with the prominent Indian features.

The United States is struggling with a crisis of identity. The new conservatives want to keep higher education a Euro-Anglo institution. They want to keep a Euro-Anglo country, expanding a Euro-Anglo world, imperializing into the Third World. But we problematize their hegemony. We say, "Yo también soy América." For me, America does not stop at the Mexican and Canadian borders. It encompasses North America, Central America, South America, and Canada. We have to stop appropriating the word America to only fit the United States. It is all of this, *el Nuevo Mundo*.

This crisis of identity is not restricted to the monocultural white heterosexuals denouncing the wave of multiculturalism on campuses. The crisis is also felt by mestizas, people of color, mujeres, and lesbians of color who inhabit so many different worlds. This new racism has pounded hegemonic theories into us, making us feel like we don't fit. We are alienated. We are exiled. Not only are they undermining us by assimilating us, but in turn, we are using these very same theories, concepts, and assumptions that we have bought into against ourselves. Mestizas internalize those theories, concepts, and labels that manipulate and control us. We buy into these distortions and then we use them on ourselves. Many of us have become split from our ethnic, racial, and class communities. We are trying to figure out terms and ways of being in the world so that we will

not be destroyed, so that we will not be co-opted or assimilated, so that we can make sense out of and teach our histories to ourselves and those who come after us. As we create a more diverse curricula we learn ways of teaching and knowing that are more representative of a mestiza nation.

The new mestiza finds herself inside the ivory tower, inside white-colored walls. It is hard to get through that gate and many do not make it. But once she passes through that gate, she becomes a sort of Trojan horse, a Trojan mula who has infiltrated in order to subvert the system, bringing new ideas with her. This work becomes such a weighty job because she does triple duty. She studies the dominant culture through the scholarship her professors require her to read. She tries to learn about her own culture, seeks permission to explore topics, write papers, and design a thesis that interests her. But her interests may extend beyond English or white American scholarship. Overwhelmed by her multiple tasks, she often ends up seduced and subverted by the system instead of subverting it.

If she is a progressive white teacher, she has to fight not only her own white sisters, but also those people of color who think, "What is that gringa doing with our stuff?" As a faculty member of color she does double, triple, quadruple work. She becomes a Trojan mula, stumbling with all this baggage. And sometimes the academy starts chipping away at her walls as she rams the academy's walls with her head to make room for others like herself; she ends up on the floor with a bloodied head as she comes up against classrooms where she and her communities are completely invisible. The mestiza must constantly find the energy to develop strategies, meet with people, form organizations, and build coalitions. And all of this depends upon funding so that she can do the Spanish festival, have lesbian, gay, and bisexual awareness week, invite a woman of color scholar or artist to the speaker series, build alliances among her own people and with other groups.

After the first, second, or third year in college, or by the time the mestiza is in graduate school, chances are she has been stepped on a lot—she has boot tracks on her face. Her head is already bloodied from going up against the walls. I call this *Pisando su sombra*, and it takes its toll. She may get subverted instead of doing the subverting. In such instances, her mind and imagination are taken over, and the mestiza is internally colonized: She is mined for her art, words, writing, and music, for her clothes, hair, and the way she walks. She is mind-mugged, violated intellectually as she faces the crisis of representation for women of color, queers, and other mestizas. This mind-mugging robs her of her soul, her spirit, and leaves

her tired, lethargic. She has been turned into una sombra, a shadow person, just another statistic in struggle.

These walls and gates around fields of study and around the actual buildings are designed to keep us out or to hold us captive if we do get inside. The mestiza is asked somehow or other to scale thick and tall walls. Without acknowledging the difficulties involved in bridging more than one reality, she is left on her own to do the best she can. Being true to and maintaining ties with her ethnic communities is sometimes at odds with developing her intellectual identities, especially if this intellectualism denies any notion of difference.

My experience is a case in point. When I first entered graduate school, I was one of only two Chicanas in the entire graduate program of the Comparative Literature Department at the University of Texas in Austin. I felt very isolated and marginalized. I left after completing all of my course work when a couple of advisors told me that we were living in "America" and there was no such thing as Chicano literature. In the early and mid 1970's feminist studies and feminist theory were not yet legitimate topics of study or research. I was not allowed to apply a multicultural approach to feminist theory, Chicano literature, and Spanish literature. I was dissatisfied with studying only American English and Latin American literature. Now I am all but dissertation in my second venture in graduate school, this time at the University of California at Santa Cruz. I am still dissatisfied with the methods of literary study. Like other graduate students of color, I've tried to de-construct the orals and dissertation criteria. Because of my privilege as a published author and a person who gets paid for her words as a speaker, professors listen to me. Whether they hear what I say is another matter.

For mestizas such as myself, the areas of study that professors want us to concentrate on do not appeal. We want new books, new areas of inquiry, and new methodologies. We want to study non-English and non-Euro-American literatures. We want more work by women of color on the reading lists. We are bookworms gnawing holes in the canon; we are termites undermining the canonical curriculum's foundations.

We struggle to make room for ourselves, to change the academy so that it does not invalidate, stamp out, or crush our connections to the communities we come from. For working-class and colored people this means breaking down the barred windows that have kept us out of the universities.

I come from working-class roots, and it has been quite a struggle to



negotiate the privilege I have received as a writer. Before gaining privilege, I was shut up, made invisible. As I move from the underclass to working class to middle class, I travel from being on the side of the "have-nots" to finding myself somewhat crossing over into the territory of the "haves," whom I've always viewed as oppressors. I am doing a lot of border crossing. Crossing over into the oppressors' terrain makes for a complex identity (and an identity complex). It problematizes who and what I am. Our attitudes toward money are programmed by our own class of origin. The indoctrination we receive is imprinted so deeply within us that it is hard to break through it. People from working-class origins find it difficult to get through the class barriers that exist in institutions of learning, writing, and art—barriers to being in school, to speaking out, to making our voices heard.

The new mestizas have a connection with particular places, a connection to particular races, a connection to new notions of ethnicity, to a new tribalism that is devoid of any kind of romantic illusions. The new mestiza is a liminal subject who lives in borderlands between cultures, races, languages, and genders. In this state of in-betweenness the mestiza can mediate, translate, negotiate, and navigate these different locations. As mestizas, we are negotiating these worlds every day, understanding that multiculturalism is a way of seeing and interpreting the world, a methodology of resistance.

#### Theories of mestizaje: border inscriptions

People who are initiating a new politics of difference and who are the carriers of difference must have boundary-crossing visions. As multiculturalists they are developing theories of mestizaje—border inscriptions which draw on a combination of cultural values and traditions that show how certain kinds of knowledge have been conquered and colonized. Notions of mestizaje offer another "reading" of culture, history, and art—that of the dispossessed and marginal. Multicultural texts show the writer's or artist's struggle to decolonize subjectivity. For mestizas it is not sufficient simply to reinscribe the traditional culture they emerged from and set up a we-are-right/they-are-wrong binary opposition. Perspectives based on representation problematize these binaries, asking how people negotiate multiple worlds every day. My identity is always in flux; it changes as I step into and cross over many worlds each day—university, home community, job, lesbian, activist, and academic communities. It is not enough for me

to say I am a Chicana. It is not enough for me to say I am an intellectual. It is not enough for me to say I am a writer. It is not enough for me to say I am from working-class origins. All of these and none of these are my primary identity. I can't say, this is the true me, or that is the true me. They are all the true me's.

Progressive whites who have friends from different worlds and who study different cultures become intellectual mestizas. They may not be emotional mestizas and certainly are not biological mestizas. But there can be empathy between people of color and progressive, sensitive, politically aware whites.

#### Discovery Theories

As political conservatives continue to put boundaries around knowledge and history, it is up to us, new mestizas, to tell the multiple histories and the influence that colonized and immigrant people have had on the construction of this country. If you study the waves of immigration, indigenous history, and the theories of the discovery, you will find that Africans came here hundreds and hundreds of years before Columbus. There are books that verify the existence of Africans in Mexico and South America. There is also a theory that Chinese and Japanese came over long before Columbus.

Foundational theories of the "discovery" show the devastation of colonialism (a word I've coined after Colón). Ours is a 500-year struggle against colonialism that continues as the U.S. government spends 87 billion dollars to publicize the commemoration of the 500 years of "discovery." They are sailing three ships—the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María—from England to three different U.S. cities: New York, Washington, D.C., and Boston. Some of the commemorators are saying, "Yes, let's show a little bit of Indian history." But that little bit is tokenized and assimilated, made palatable just as they make palatable their hegemonic "discovery" theory. We're not celebrating genocide and the resurgence of un nuevo racismo y la reconquista de al mente.

#### Creating work that cannot be assimilated

We need to create poetry, art, research, and books that cannot be assimilated, but is accessible. For example, take *Borderlands / La Frontera*: you can access that book, but hopefully it won't get consumed out of existence or

tokenized or assimilated to death. I know that as you read the ideas you will reinterpret them, but the ideas can't be melted down. The components are distinct; they're there to dialogue with one another. The different races and communities that make up the Chicana do not disappear, they are not repressed. In reading *Borderlands*, the intellectual Gloria, the published writer and the person with an academic identity, are present. Behind these Glorias are others: Gloria the campesina, Gloria the clerk worker in temp jobs, the unemployed Gloria who subsisted on potatoes, the coming-into-middle-class Gloria, Gloria the lesbian, Gloria the ex-campesina are all present. When I speak at an academic conference, Gloria the intellectual might take center stage. If I am with a group of Chicanas, the ethnic me comes forward and the other Glorias withdraw backstage. In a room full of socializing and partying dyke friends, a different me comes out. But it doesn't mean that in the different communities some parts of me are repressed; all of me is there. Nor does this mean that I am a fake when I present different faces.

As a mestiza, I have many true faces, depending upon the kind of audience or the area I find myself in. Using *mestiza* as an umbrella term means acknowledging that certain aspects of identity don't disappear, aren't assimilated or repressed when they are not in the foreground. Identity is a changing cluster of components and a shape-shifting activity. To refer to a person who is changing identity I use the Náhuatl term *nagual*. The *nagual* is a shapeshifter, a person who changes from human form to animal form. We shift around to do the work we have to do, to create the identities we need to live up to our potential.

#### Con los ojos y la lengua como pluma en la mano izquierda

Staying alive and not getting too battered in the university requires strategies to fight back—strategies of survival and resistance. One strategy brings together three different abilities—communicating, knowing, and doing which I represent in my hieroglyph of a left hand on whose palm are pictured a pair of eyes, a mouth with a tongue hanging out and the writing tip of a pen at the tip of the tongue. Los ojos represent seeing and knowing which can lead to understanding or *conocimiento*. It means getting to know each other and, as mestizas from many cultures, seeing from multiple points of view, from the viewpoint of a multiculturalist who takes in and tries to incorporate all the different perspectives. It means looking in, looking from more than one direction at the same time. La lengua is a

symbol for speech, for breaking silence by talking, communicating, and writing. The split forked tongue of a serpent is my signal for communicating bilingually.\*

To activate the *conocimiento* and communication we need the hand. The hand is an agent of action. It is not enough to speak and write and talk and communicate. It is not enough to see and recognize and know. We need to act upon what we know, to do something about it. The left hand has always been seen as sinister and strange, associated with the female gender and creativity. But in unison with the right, the left hand can perform great things. It is not enough to theorize and intellectualize—theory needs to connect with action, with activism. When theorizing, we need to ask of ourselves and others: *What does this theory have to do with working-class people, women of color, single women with children? What is the ideological and political function of this particular theory? How is this theory being used as an ideological weapon?*

Multiculturalist *mestizas* want to connect to all our different communities: the job, straight, and activist communities. The *mestiza* is in a position to make links. First of all, she is a borderland person, a bridge person. She connects from her ethnic community to the academic community, from the feminist group to non-political groups, from the Spanish language to the English language. She has the choice to be a bridge, a drawbridge, a sandbar, or an island in terms of how she relates to and defines herself in the world. She chooses when to do coalition and alliance work.<sup>3</sup> If she is colored, being a bridge means that she is always out there with white people, translating and mediating. As a drawbridge, she withdraws part of the time and says, "I don't want to have anything to do with straights, whites, males, etc. I need time to be with myself, my people. I need time to recharge, regenerate my batteries." The person who opts to be an island says, "I don't want to have anything to do ever with the straight or white folks." Being an island is basically impossible because we all depend on each other for necessities such as shelter and food. A symbol for another kind of bridge is a sandbar. One type of sandbar goes from island to mainland. That is my choice of a bridge because it's natural and it's under water, which means I can be alone when I desperately need to, or I can connect to people. My creativity starts with solitude,<sup>4</sup> but it also needs close contact with others in my different communities where we discuss mutual cultural

\* For a later version of this image, see figure 9 (and note that the later version includes an ear, thus indicating an important development in Anzaldúa's theorizing). Significantly, Anzaldúa associated this later version with her theory of spiritual activism.

and literary issues and support each other with our theories, experiences, and writing.

Doing bridge work brings up many questions, such as: *Where do I come from? What's my culture like? How do I position myself?* For whites this question means being clear about who you are and what privileges you bring into the group's dynamics. It means asking: *What can I do with my privileges? How can I use them for nos/otras? Instead of women of color being a resource for me, how can I be a resource for them? What kinds of knowledge can I offer nos/otras?* This means using your connections, your networks. It may mean making a way for nos/otras to get recognition, funds, or a grant. Or it could mean just being an empathetic ear.

I've seen that when white people align themselves with the struggles of women of color, their understanding of the struggles changes. When a white woman offers to work with nos/otras, we ask her the same thing we ask ourselves: *What's in it for you? What is the motivation behind your crossing? More often than not she'll ask herself: Am I one more white woman ripping off yet another culture? Am I one more white woman bringing her guilt and wanting to be exonerated? Am I one more white woman coming over and saying, "Look at me, I am not racist; otherwise I wouldn't be working with you."*

All of us carry multiple unconscious motivations—both positive and negative. Half the time we don't know why we do things. Ten years down the road a woman of color may deduce, "Oh! I did that because I wanted white people to like me." Because people of color have been oppressed by white people so much we often seek their validation, love, and acceptance. Because we have been violated, we demand so much, we hunger for that acceptance and love. Muchas veces when we don't get it some of us become hostile or rebellious, some of us knuckle under and assimilate, and still others become bridges. Most of the time we don't know exactly why we respond in certain ways. Ten years down the road when we identify as feminists or lesbians or post-feminists, we might look back and say, "Oh yeah. Back then my thinking was screwed up. What I wanted from these white folk, ethnic community, dykes, etc., was for them to tell me I was okay." This desire is dangerous for both women of color and white women because we get into this dialectic of the la patrona, the great white mother, and the needy colored kid.

Sometimes the tables are turned and it is the white person that wants something from the colored student. The white feminist, professor, wants to be accepted and validated, to hear, "This a great syllabus. You are being really multicultural. You are dealing with racism." Meanwhile, the student

realizes that the professor doesn't want to hear her call herself Chicana or Indian. She doesn't want the student to have any interaction with her ethnic community. The professor wants the university student to be cut off from all her cultural roots. The professor's rhetoric professes that student and teacher are on an equal footing when that is not the case. Within this dynamic, students play the role that professors assign them. The greater the cultural and class difference, the more intense the dynamic between them. Power is at the center of this dynamic. In the past, faculty were always in the position of power. But now things are changing—at least on the surface. In classrooms, a white professor and white students may defer to a black or Latina student. The professor will say, "Tell me about your culture, tell me about your writers, tell me about your art." The mighty weight to represent her culture is put on the colored student. Because she is supposed to come up with all the political and cultural theories, a tremendous amount of power is given to her. But this power can overwhelm her.

When whites tell *nos/otras* that white people have no culture, they are oblivious to the fact that this whole country and the dominant culture is their culture. What white people watch on television is their culture. The films that they see on the VCR, the foods they eat and the clothes they buy, the vacations they take—it is from their culture, yet they keep saying, "I have no culture." This statement means that the majority of whites don't have a sense of their historical roots, roots that may go back to ancient Ireland or England. They don't know what Celtic means, for instance. That's why they want to appreciate or appropriate black, Latino, Native, or Asian cultures. Appropriation is a dangerous act, *es muy peligroso*, if they are serious about doing coalition work.

### Origins

In the last few years, "origins" has become a bad word because the deconstructionists see everything as socially constructed. According to them there is no such thing as "origins." Deconstructionists and some feminist theorists assert that origins are falsely romanticized and idealized. In some ways this assertion is true. We do tend to romanticize origins and culture, but the new *mestiza* is aware of the tendency to romanticize. She tries to look at the past and examine the aspects of culture that have oppressed women. The past is constantly being constructed in a number of ways. First, the perspective of the viewer of that history changes from one

epoch to another; the perspective of a person changes from year to year. Second, the past has not been represented "truthfully" in history books. Written by the conquerors, history books distort and repress the histories of women and people of color.

Perhaps white theorists say that origins are passé or unattractive because they don't want to delve into their past. They may be afraid to discover that one of their ancestors enslaved people, raped indigenous women, or ripped off the land from Indians. As a mestiza, I also look at my white ancestors who did exactly that. I look at the Aztecs and their cruelty. I look at things in my past that are not attractive. But it is scary for white people to think, "Who am I? Who are my people?" It is scary to see that a lot of the European immigrants were released from jails or came here as deserters of various causes, as convicts and criminals.

Crossing cultural and class borders requires that one look at the blood in one's veins, examining the history of one's people, including its religious and spiritual practices. Taken back far enough, one discovers some kind of shamanism in their cultural pasts. Look for and build on the positive.

There is such a thing as collective guilt, just as there is individual guilt. I don't mean that the father's guilt automatically, genetically, is handed down to his children. If today a white person is operating under the same white supremacist ideology as his great great grandfather—the notion that white people are better than people of color—then that person is as guilty as his ancestors. If that white person is not living that ideology, has said, "No, this is not my ideology," then he is not accountable or responsible for the sins of his ancestors. However, the ideology that operated during the slave and early colonial times is still operating today. When Bush opens his mouth, you can still hear that old ideology.

As we continue the struggle with the new conservatism's onslaught, we find ourselves at an impasse—but we can't go back. We need a reminder of what this struggle is all about. At this time when the term multiculturalism is being completely subverted, it is important that this concept be sharply defined. Forcing down foreign concepts into our minds is analogous to the insistence on maintaining "family values"—a sign of how desperate they are to keep things the way they once were, because things have changed. But it's too late, the walls have chinks in them, and we refuse to give up our positions no matter how insistent their backlash. To allow depression or disillusionment to stop our struggle would lose the ground we've gained.

Multiculturalism is about including stories of difference. Se trata de otras narrativas. It is about alter-narratives. The stories of multiculturalism are stories of identity, and narratives of identity are stories of location. A story is always a retelling of an older story. This is my retelling.

### Notes

1. I am a seventh-generation American whose ancestors lived in a part of Texas that used to be Mexico; before, it was Indian territory. My ancestors were Tejanos from Mexico. Long ago a boundary got drawn up and the Anzaldúas found themselves on this side of the border while the other Anzaldúas (who call themselves Anzaldúa without the accent) found themselves split on the other side, and we lost touch with each other. This is what has happened to the Chicano/Mexicano race in this country. We are an in-between race. We are still Mexican in terms of racial ancestry but are Norteamericanos who have been educated in U.S. schools and raised imbibing and consuming the dominant values and customs. I am also a dyke Chicana. I call myself *patlache* which is the Aztec Nahuatl word for dyke. The word lesbian does not fit my background, my experience. The term comes from Lesbos, the Greek Island, and is a term of identity for white middle-class lesbians.

2. See José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica: Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana* (México: Aguilar S.A. de Ediciones, 1961). For more discussion of this work and concept, see my "La Consciencia de la Mestiza: Toward a New Consciousness," in *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990).

3. See my "Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar or Island," *Bridges of Power: Women's Multicultural Alliances*, edited by Lisa Albrecht. [Included in this volume.]

4. I promise myself I am going to do some unscheduled relaxation, even if it's only for five minutes. In my life everything is scheduled, even fun. I tell myself that I need to lie down or go out in the sun, even for just five minutes without trying to think about anything and leave the worries behind. The truth is I always have a list in my mind: I gotta do this speech, get ready for this gig, turn this paper in to a professor, do the revisions on my novel, or critique someone else's work. If I happen to be in a classroom or a bus or a car when I am trying to relax I do deep breathing (into my stomach) real slow. I listen to music. I have a tape of the sounds of dolphins, sea otters, and humpback whales. I play it in the airport while I am writing and waiting to board my plane. I do a lot of my writing in airplanes now.



## Appendix 1. Glossary

These brief glosses on some of Anzaldúa's most important terms and topics do not do justice to the theories themselves. Check the index to locate her discussions of these topics.

**autohistoria** Anzaldúa coined this term, as well as the term *autohistoria-teoría*, to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms. Deeply infused with the search for personal and cultural meaning, or what Anzaldúa describes in her post-Borderlands writings as “putting Coyolxauhqui together,” both *autohistoria* and *autohistoria-teoría* are informed by reflective self-awareness employed in the service of social-justice work. *Autohistoria* focuses on the personal life story but, as the *autohistorian* tells her own life story, she simultaneously tells the life stories of others.

**autohistoria-teoría** Theory developed by Anzaldúa to describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection on this storytelling process. Writers of *autohistoria-teoría* blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and/or other forms of theorizing. By so doing, they create interwoven individual and collective identities. Personal experiences—revised and in other ways redrawn—become a lens with which to reread and rewrite existing cultural stories. Through this lens, Anzaldúa and other *autohistoria-teoristas* expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation. Anzaldúa described *Borderlands/La Frontera* as an example of one form *autohistoria-teoría* can take.

**borderlands** When Anzaldúa writes this term with a lower-case b, it refers to the region on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border.

**Borderlands** For Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, with a capital B, represents a concept that draws from yet goes beyond the geopolitical Texas/Mexico borderlands to encompass psychic, sexual, and spiritual Borderlands as well. These B/borderlands—in both their geographical and metaphoric meanings—represent intensely painful yet also potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict, and transform.

**La Chingada** Literally translated to English as “the fucked one,” this term is often associated with Malinche, the indigenous woman given to Hernán Cortés upon his arrival on the continent and, as such, the symbolic mother of the Mexican people.

**Coatlícue** According to Aztec mythology, Coatlicue (Kwat-LEE-kway), whose name means "Serpent Skirts," is the earth goddess of life and death and mother of the gods. As Anzaldúa explains in *Borderlands's* fourth chapter, Coatlicue has a horrific appearance, with a skirt of serpents and a necklace of human skulls. According to some versions of the story, after being impregnated by a ball of feathers, Coatlicue was killed by her daughter Coyolxauhqui and her other children.

**Coatlícue state** An important element in Anzaldúa's epistemology; she coined this term to represent the resistance to new knowledge and other psychic states triggered by intense inner struggle which can entail the juxtaposition and the transmutation of contrary forces as well as paralysis and depression. Anzaldúa associates the Coatlicue state with a variety of situations, including creativity and her own writing blocks. These psychic conflicts are analogous to those she experiences as a Chicana; she explains that the opposing Mexican, Indian, and Anglo worldviews she has internalized lead to self-division, cultural confusion, and shame.

**conocimiento** A Spanish word for "knowledge" or "consciousness," Anzaldúa uses this term to represent a key component of her post-*Borderlands* epistemology. With *conocimiento*, she elaborates on the potentially transformative elements of her better-known *Borderlands* theories of mestiza consciousness and *la facultad*. Like mestiza consciousness, *conocimiento* represents a nonbinary, connectionist mode of thinking; like *la facultad*, *conocimiento* often unfolds within oppressive contexts and entails a deepening of perception. *Conocimiento* underscores and develops the imaginal, spiritual-activist, and radically inclusionary possibilities implicit in these earlier theories.

**conocimientos** While *conocimiento* refers to the theory in general (see above), *conocimientos* refers to specific insights acquired through the process of *conocimiento*.

**Coyolxauhqui** According to Aztec mythology Coyolxauhqui (Ko-yol-sha-UH-kee), also called "la diosa de la luna" (goddess of the moon), was Coatlicue's oldest daughter. After her mother was impregnated by a ball of feathers, Coyolxauhqui encouraged her four hundred brothers and sisters to kill Coatlicue. As they attacked their mother, the fetus, Huitzilopochtli, sprang fully grown and armed from Coatlicue, tore Coyolxauhqui into over a thousand pieces, flung her head into the sky, and killed her siblings.

**Coyolxauhqui imperative** Drawing from the story of Coyolxauhqui, Anzaldúa developed this concept to describe a self-healing process, an inner compulsion or desire to move from fragmentation to complex wholeness. As she explains in "Speaking across the Divide" (included in this volume), "The path of the artist, the creative impulse, what I call the Coyolxauhqui imperative, is basically an attempt to heal the wounds. It's a search for inner completeness." Anzaldúa often associated this imperative with her desire to write and the writing process itself.

**la facultad** Anzaldúa's term for an intuitive form of knowledge that includes but goes beyond logical thought and empirical analysis. As she explains in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, it is "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning[;]. . . . an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings." While *la facultad* is most often developed by those who have been disempowered (or as Anzaldúa puts it, "pushed out of the tribe for being different"), it is latent in everyone.

**Guadalupe** Also known as "La Virgen de Guadalupe," she appeared to Juan Diego in 1531 with a message. Generally viewed as a more recent version of the indigenous goddess Tonantzin, Guadalupe represents a synthesis of multiple traditions. In *Borderlands / La Frontera* Anzaldúa describes her as "the single most potent religious, political, and cultural image of the Chicano/mexicano."

**Huitzilopochtli** An Aztec sun god and god of war, Huitzilopochtli (Wee-tsee-lo-POCH-tee) sprang, fully developed and armed, from his mother, Coatlicue, and dismembered Coyolxauhqui (see above).

**La Llorona** Sometimes referred to as the "Weeping Woman," La Llorona is a central figure in Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano/a folklore, as well as an important presence in Anzaldúa's work. There are many different versions of the story, but in most versions La Llorona is the ghost of a beautiful young woman, seduced and abandoned by a man. The woman kills her children (usually by drowning) and then commits suicide. She is destined to wander forever crying for her lost children.

**mestiza consciousness** One of Anzaldúa's best-known concepts, this "consciousness of the Borderlands" is a holistic, nonbinary way of thinking and acting that includes a transformational tolerance for contradiction and ambivalence. For her most extensive discussion, see *Borderlands / La Frontera*.

**mestizaje** The Spanish word for "mixture," *mestizaje*, as Anzaldúa generally uses it, refers to transformed combinations.

**El Mundo Surdo** Anzaldúa's original spelling of *El Mundo Zurdo* (see below). Although *surdo* is typically spelled with a z and pronounced as a z, Anzaldúa intentionally altered the spelling in order to honor and reflect the way the word is pronounced in south Texas—with a soft s sound. The shift in spelling from *surdo* to *zurdo* occurred during the copyediting stage of *This Bridge Called My Back*, without Anzaldúa's knowledge. Although Anzaldúa was not pleased with this alteration, eventually she accepted and even adopted the revised spelling. For more on this issue, see her archives, located in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, Austin.

**El Mundo Zurdo** One of Anzaldúa's earliest, least discussed concepts, *El Mundo Zurdo* (The Lefthand World) has various ethical, epistemological, and aesthetic definitions. Most generally, *El Mundo Zurdo* represents relational difference. Applied to alliances, it indicates communities based on commonalities, visionary locations where people from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs and concerns coexist and work together to bring about revolutionary change. In the late 1970s, Anzaldúa initiated a reading series and writing workshops called "*El Mundo Surdo*." These readings and workshops, while grounded in women-of-color perspectives, were diverse and open to progressive people of any identity. See figure 1 and Anzaldúa's early poem "The coming of el mundo surdo."

**nagual** The Náhuatl word for shapeshifter.

**nagualismo** shamanism.

**nepantla** Náhuatl word meaning "in-between space." Anzaldúa used this term to develop her post-*Borderlands* theory of process, liminality, and potential change that builds on her theories of the *Borderlands* and the Coatlicue state. For Anzaldúa, *nepantla* represents temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of crisis. *Nepantla* occurs during the many transitional stages of life and describes both identity-related issues and epistemological concerns.

**nepantleras** A term coined by Anzaldúa to describe a unique type of mediator, one who "facilitate[s] passages between worlds" ("(Un)natural bridges"). *Nepantleras* live within and among multiple worlds and, often through painful negotiations, develop what Anzaldúa describes as a "perspective from the cracks"; they use these transformed perspectives to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics enabling them to reconceive or in other ways transform the various worlds in which they exist.

**new mestiza** Anzaldúa's theory of the "new mestiza" represents an innovative expansion of previous biologically based definitions of *mestizaje*. For Anzaldúa, new *mestizas* are people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their gender, sexuality, color, class, bodies, personality, spiritual beliefs, and/or other life experiences. This theory offers a new concept of personhood that synergistically combines apparently contradictory Euro-American and indigenous traditions. Anzaldúa further develops her theory of the new *mestiza* into an epistemology and ethics she calls "mestiza consciousness" (see above).

**new tribalism** Anzaldúa develops this theory to describe an affinity-based approach to alliance making and identity formation. This post-*Borderlands* theory offers provocative alternatives to both assimilation and separatism.

**nos/otras** A theory of intersubjectivity Anzaldúa developed in her post-*Borderlands* writings. *Nosotras*, the Spanish word for the feminine "we," indicates a type of group identity or consciousness. By partially dividing *nosotras* into two, Anzaldúa affirms this collective yet also acknowledges the sense of divisiveness so often felt in contemporary life (*nos* implies us, while *otras* implies others). Joined together, *nos + otras* holds the promise of healing: We contain the others, the others contain us. Significantly, *nos/otras* does not represent sameness; the

differences among “us” still exist, but they function dialogically, generating previously unrecognized commonalities and connections. Anzaldúa’s theory of *nos/otras* offers an alternative to binary self/other constellations, a philosophy and praxis enabling us to acknowledge, bridge, and sometimes transform the distances between self and other.

**spiritual activism** Although Anzaldúa did not coin this term, she used it to describe her visionary, experientially based epistemology and ethics. At the epistemological level, spiritual activism posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs nonbinary modes of thinking. At the ethical level, spiritual activism requires concrete actions designed to intervene in and transform existing social conditions. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation.

**Yemayá** According to Yoruban beliefs, Yemayá is the orisha (spirit force or goddess) associated with the oceans and other waters.