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Nuria Morgado

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Ricardo F. Vivancos

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TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO
GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S THOUGHT

APROXIMACIONES TRANSDISCIPLINARES AL
PENSAMIENTO DE GLORIA ANZALDÚA

Publicación de la Asociación de Licenciados
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CUADERNOS DE ALDEEU

Volumen 34

Primavera 2019

ÍNDICE

NOTA DE LA EDITORA

Nuria Morgado / 9

ENSAYOS

LUGARES DEL QUIJOTE Y LOS CRITERIOS PARA
LA INTEGRACIÓN DEL ESPACIO Y DEL PERSONAJE
EN LA NOVELA MODERNA

Dominick Finello / 13

EL RECUERDO DE LA “ÚLTIMA GRAN CAUSA”:
PHILIP LEVINE Y LA GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA

Marco Antonio Antolín Lagunilla/ 45

IDENTIDADES EMERGENTES A TRAVÉS DE LA
CONVERSIÓN AL ISLAM DE LA MUJER ESPAÑOLA
EN *UN BURKA POR AMOR* (2007) DE REYES
MONFORTE

Marta Boris Tarré / 67

THE TRACE OF THE SILENCED VOICES OF LATIN
AMERICAN WOMEN POETS: A POSTCOLONIAL
AND FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF ALAÍDE FOPPA’S
POEMS IN *LAS PALABRAS*

Violeta Orozco Barrera / 89

SECCIÓN ESPECIAL

PRESENTACIÓN: EL PENSAMIENTO
TRANSDISCIPLINAR DE GLORIA ANZALDÚA
Ricardo F. Vivancos-Pérez / 111

THREE EXISTENTIALIST READINGS OF GLORIA
ANZALDÚA'S *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA*
Mariana Alessandri / 117

GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND PHILOSOPHY: THE
CONCEPT/IMAGE OF THE *MESTIZA*
Rolando Pérez / 137

WRITING EXCESS IN *LIGHT IN THE DARK/ LUZ EN LO
OSCURO*: ANZALDÚA'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF
WRITING AS A DECOLONIZING TOOL
Inmaculada Lara Bonilla / 161

ELLA TIENE SU TONO: CONOCIMIENTO AND MESTIZA
CONSCIOUSNESS IN LILIANA WILSON'S ART
Alicia Gaspar de Alba / 185

"NO BRIDGE LASTS FOREVER": THE HYBRID NATURE
OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S THOUGHT
Grazyna Zygodlo / 223

REVISITING MESTIZAJE AND ANZALDÚA'S BORDER
Norma E. Cantú / 249

"ALMAS AFINES," "KINDRED SPIRITS," LIKE-MINDED
SOULS: AN ANZALDÚAN MEDITATION ON IDENTITIES
AND TRANSFORMATION
AnaLouise Keating / 267

RESEÑAS

DESORDEN DE ESPÍRITU, POR JUAN CARLOS ELIJAS

José María Balcells / 283

EL POETA ES UN FINGIDOR. ANTOLOGÍA POÉTICA, POR
FERNANDO PESSOA

José María Balcells / 287

COLABORADORES

NOTA DE LA EDITORA

Tengo el honor de presentar un nuevo volumen de *Cuadernos de ALDEEU* en el que se destacan una serie de ensayos y reseñas cuyos autores y autoras se distinguen por su profesionalidad, rigor y conocimiento. Se cumple una vez más con el propósito de esta publicación: la de servir como vehículo para el diálogo e intercambio de ideas con sus excelentes textos de naturaleza interdisciplinaria que abordan temas sobre el mundo hispánico en general dentro del amplio ámbito de los estudios literarios y culturales. Este número está dividido en tres secciones principales: una de ensayos de temática general que presentan una perspectiva teórica original y cruzan fronteras entre distintas disciplinas, una sección especial editada por Ricardo F. Vivancos (George Mason University) en la que se plantean magistrales aproximaciones transdisciplinarias al pensamiento de la filósofa y escritora chicana Gloria Anzaldúa, y una sección breve de reseñas. Como se ha venido haciendo en números anteriores, cada ensayo comienza con un resumen o abstract de su contenido y unas palabras clave que anticipan la tesis tratada y la metodología aplicada.

Con este número doy por terminada mi labor como editora y directora de *Cuadernos de ALDEEU*. El primer volumen publicado bajo mi dirección fue el volumen 30, correspondiente a la primavera de 2016. Desde entonces se han publicado cinco volúmenes (más la monografía *Cervantes ilimitado: cuatrocientos años del Quijote*) cuyo propósito ha sido el de cumplir con los objetivos de ALDEEU: el de representar los variados intereses de sus miembros y lectores.

Aprovecho estas líneas para agradecer a Ricardo F. Vivancos su excelente labor como Editor invitado en este último volumen bajo mi dirección con su sección especial dedicada a Gloria Anzaldúa. Por supuesto que sin la profesionalidad de los colaboradores nada de esto hubiera sido posible. Agradezco también la cuidadosa lectura y revisión de los artículos por parte de los lectores y lectoras que han evaluado y revisado cada uno de los manuscritos que nos han llegado para considerar su publicación. Y, como siempre, gracias a Gerardo Piña Rosales por toda su ayuda y atenta revisión del documento final de

Cuadernos antes de enviarlo a imprenta. Por último, agradezco a la Junta Directiva y a los miembros de ALDEEU todo su apoyo y confianza durante estos años. Termino expresando mis mejores deseos para la Asociación y las futuras ediciones de *Cuadernos de ALDEEU*.

Nuria Morgado
Editora

ENSAYOS

LUGARES DEL *QUIJOTE* Y LOS CRITERIOS PARA LA INTEGRACIÓN DEL ESPACIO Y DEL PERSONAJE EN LA NOVELA MODERNA

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Resumen: Para establecer la unidad del *Quijote* es crucial relacionar a los personajes con los lugares y los espacios que ocupan. Tal ejercicio guía al protagonista y a los personajes secundarios de modo literal y abstracto a través de sus entornos para hacerlos completos y para explicar sus motivaciones. Cervantes propone caracterizar su novela tanto una historia castellana como universal. Los nombres de ciudades y lugares más pequeños tienden a ofrecer los límites de la vida en una España central desértica del siglo dieciséis. Por otro lado, el descubrimiento de lugares inusitados, el miedo a caminar en territorio desconocido y la experiencia de ver nuevas formas de vida en estos espacios agregan dimensiones a la trama de cervantina y enriquecen profundamente la comprensión del lector sobre el núcleo de la novela. El movimiento volátil desde el área al sur de Toledo colorea cada evento de una manera diferente. Esta técnica implica que la vida puede ser impredecible, incluso sorprendente, y demuestra que el viaje es tan interminable como el autor pueda dictar.

Palabras clave: espacio, lugar, *Quijote*, crítica geográfica, Castilla, Cataluña.

Introducción. Parte primera del *Quijote*

Las investigaciones relativas al valor de los lugares reales en la ficción se generan a partir de los criterios imaginativos de los principios estéticos aplicados al género novelístico. Sin embargo, durante algún tiempo los comentaristas se han centrado sobre todo en los aspectos literales de los lugares en *Don Quijote*.¹ Este enfoque causa complicaciones en cuanto a los modelos y fuentes de Cervantes para retratar personas, lugares y acciones. El

¹ Todas las referencias a *Don Quijote de La Mancha* se remiten a la edición dirigida por F. Rico en 1998.

lugar (a veces llamado espacio) es un parámetro fundamental en la literatura. Resulta crucial porque sus límites son desconocidos o, en el mejor de los casos, vagos. Las personas luchan en guerras porque temen quedarse sin espacio, debido a sus impulsos ciegos, posesivos. Buscan comodidad en su lugar elegido y esto permite sobrevivir al dar el terreno su fruto. Desde un punto de vista literario, el conocimiento del lector sobre las motivaciones de los personajes aumenta cuando un lugar está situado dentro de un entorno con el que él mismo convive en su vida cotidiana. El lugar y el espacio son, de hecho, denominadores comunes para el estudio de personajes, pues establecen el estado de ánimo e influyen en el comportamiento de los personajes, afectan a los diálogos, presagian acontecimientos, invocan una respuesta emocional y crean un marco de normas literarias.

El *Quijote* a menudo es citado como reserva vital para espacios o lugares en la novela, planteándose interrogantes como: ¿Cómo elige Don Quijote los pueblos que visita? ¿Es Rocinante su supuesto guía? ¿Por qué el viaje parece no estar planificado? Basta una mirada en el mapa a los pueblos que visita en las tres salidas para ver que los movimientos entre ellos no forman una red simétrica que pueda obedecer a un plan. Los primeros dos viajes transcurren en La Mancha: Argamasilla de Alba, Montiel, Villanueva de los Infantes, Villarta, Criptana, Puerto Lápice, Daimiel, Ciudad Real, Almagro, Santa Cruz de Mudela, Almuradiel, Sierra Morena.² ¿Es el deseo de Cervantes agitar las regiones del plácido centro de España mandando a un viejo excéntrico por sus caminos para desafiar a sus habitantes o viajeros con su conocimiento de los libros y las cuestiones morales? ¿Por qué se concentra en el área de La Mancha hasta bien avanzada la segunda parte? Quizá el diseño geográfico justifique lo profesado por el Canónigo de Toledo en cuanto a la árida extensión disponible para facilitar al autor la construcción de una historia extraordinariamente innovadora.

El novelista cree en los beneficios de la geografía a efectos de lograr sus objetivos, de manera que La Mancha se presenta como una apropiación artística que abarca también su dimensión humana, como era frecuente en las épocas victorianas

² Por supuesto, esta no es una lista completa.

y románticas. Si bien estos movimientos posteriores tienen mucho que ver con la vida urbana, las ciudades no abundan en el *Quijote*, por no decir que no existen. Pero, el discernimiento, por ejemplo, del lugar se encuentra al principio en los alrededores de Toledo, aunque no dentro de la ciudad misma. Toledo debe entenderse como una fuerza estética en el *Quijote*, pero no siempre podemos verla como una fuerza centrípeta. En cualquier caso, dado que el extremo norte del viaje de don Quijote está junto a la zona sur de la provincia de Toledo, su presencia no puede ser ignorada. La ciudad es una fuente genuina de la historia social y étnica española. Está situada sobre un promontorio y, hoy en día, las grandes estructuras de sus templos cristianos, musulmanes y judíos son puntos importantes para la industria turística. El paisaje del pueblo y su geografía le confieren la extraordinaria impresión de una belleza agreste, debido a su fusión de tradiciones sacras medievales y renacentistas. Iglesias, sinagogas y mezquitas aparecen yuxtapuestas o superpuestas unas sobre otras como una trayectoria de la historia de España. Su aspecto de fortaleza evidencia la defensa de siglos del catolicismo romano por parte de España. Su retrato nos da una correlación entre el patriotismo de España y la narrativa del Quijote, y profundiza en la función del espacio al contraponer sus torres con la planicie de las llanuras.³

Toledo también es un pueblo provincial. Al entrar en la plaza Zocodover, uno percibe la energía de la vida en un pueblo español, así como la impermeabilidad de sus habitantes, reforzada por una reminiscencia cristiana. Si bien Toledo está lleno de mendigos e hidalgos pobres, al entrar en la plaza Zocodover lo que destaca es su vitalidad castellana. J. B. García Álvarez define esto como una “simbiosis de naturaleza y cultura, esto es, en la valoración del paisaje toledano como un conjunto trabado por las condiciones naturales y la capacidad creadora del hombre”.⁴ Este triunfo de la topografía racional cuenta la historia de la

³ M. A. Teijeiro Fuentes se refiere a Toledo como una ciudad impersonal, especialmente por el impacto de su cathedral; en consecuencia, su lengua es la más castiza (en el sentido de lo natural) de los estilos castellanos. Véase *Cervantes: camina e inventa*, 90-93. Además, Alcaná es donde el narrador encuentra el manuscrito de Cide Hamete Benengeli.

⁴ “Toledo como paisaje de memoria”, *Paisaje e identidad en la cultura española moderna*, 82.

civilización española como un panorama humanizado, como lo reflejan, por ejemplo, los emotivos paisajes toledanos de El Greco, que revelan entornos cambiantes capturados en un escenario evocador. Este es el epítome de la aplicación del lugar a la historia. El aura de Toledo en el Quijote es exactamente lo que debe ser una unión de geografía y literatura. Esto es así porque los personajes de la obra pueden alinearse con lo que se sabe de la ciudad durante su etapa imperial. Uno siempre puede vincular personas a lugares en las zonas de población prevalente. De esta manera, Cervantes hace sombra a otros pueblos a las proximidades de Toledo.

Cervantes alude al tema del espacio en la primera cláusula del Quijote. Posteriormente, los comentaristas modernos han vuelto una y otra vez a las palabras “un lugar de La Mancha”, y a su posible relación con un vínculo entre el autor y sus personajes. J.B. Jackson argumenta con motivos que los lugares no están definidos solo políticamente, sino mediante capas de significado producidas por el actuar de la gente en su vida diaria. Todos los lugares que uno experimenta están configurados por la actividad humana. Así es que el resultado es el establecimiento de la importancia de los lugares ordinarios, centrales para la acción en la novela moderna⁵. Estos paisajes son el lugar donde los personajes tienen una conexión emocional y un sentido de pertenencia -o de no pertenencia- al mundo a su alrededor. Quizá podrían usarse las descriptivas palabras “arraigo”, así como “movimiento”, dependiendo del momento corriente. Por ejemplo, uno no puede pasar por alto la constante rememoración de la hacienda de don Quijote. Su relación con su hacienda fluctúa entre sensaciones positivas y negativas, entre evocaciones realistas y fantásticas, y una sustancia puramente mítica que se combinan para diseccionar su carácter. En otras palabras, hay una cultura por la que él evalúa al resto del mundo, gran parte del cual es una esfera de gente común dentro del viaje de don Quijote.

La hacienda de don Quijote es una combinación de realismo y ficción desde el comienzo. Leer, soñar y discutir con sus vecinos en la estática periferia de su propiedad sobre las

⁵ Este es un postulado principal de la filosofía de Jackson. Su voz es singular en la filosofía de la geografía. Véase D. W. Meinig, “Reading the Landscape”, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 195-244.

grandiosas aventuras de los caballeros andantes son actividades que ocupan gran parte de su vida diaria. Entonces un fantasma hace desaparecer su biblioteca y él sale de casa para probar lo que conoce por sus lecturas. En este punto, el tronco literario alimenta sus inquietudes sobre qué significa su vida a cada momento y crece figurativamente en una narrativa de encuentros y aventuras en el terreno de La Mancha. Estos lugares ordinarios son relevantes incluso si no nos revelan datos sustanciales. El prólogo a la primera parte no menciona el nombre de la villa o aldea específica; pero está claro que don Quijote está en el Campo de Montiel cuando comienza la novela.⁶ Desde este distrito de La Mancha, entre Ciudad Real y Albacete (I, 2, 47n23), hay un rápido movimiento (controvertible) hacia Puerto Lápice mientras Cervantes se salta pequeños lugares. Puerto Lápice, un enclave con un minúsculo núcleo de casas de quinterías situado junto a uno de los caminos que unían a Castilla con Andalucía.

El *Quijote* es una obra de viaje que incluye una constante experimentación que provoca interminables debates; por ejemplo, sobre si Montiel y Argamasilla de Alba constituyen el auténtico “lugar de La Mancha”, cuna de don Quijote y/o el lugar donde se concibió la novela. Argamasilla es uno de los pueblos que más reivindicaba, defendía y promocionaba su vinculación con el Quijote. Argamasilla era un municipio de 3000 habitantes en Ciudad Real. Nadie allí duda que ese “lugar de La Mancha de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme” sea esta villa. Pero al menos cinco pueblos rivalizan en su reivindicación de la paternidad de don Quijote⁷. Una novela tan compleja como el Quijote necesita

⁶ Aunque dice Cervantes que su héroe provenía “del distrito del campo de Montiel” (Prólogo, 18); lugar, no.

⁷ A. Villaverde Gil, *Viaje por La Mancha*, 93-94. L. Román Alhambra dice de forma semejante que es un error proponer una ruta basada en mapas históricos, creyendo que eran fieles a la novela, sin comprobarlo. Véase “Una respuesta a *Ruta de don Quijote*”, 9-10. Las pretéritas opiniones monolíticas sobre el lugar han sido desafiadas por F. Parra Luna y un grupo de investigadores por medios puramente científicos, concluyendo que Villanueva de los Infantes, en la provincia de Ciudad Real, fue el auténtico lugar. Ellos explican que ciertas variaciones pueden conducir al lector al lugar donde vivía don Quijote. Véase Parra Luna, et al., “El lugar de La Mancha y la génesis del *Quijote*”, 151. Estas y otras localizaciones no son vistosas debido a la inexactitud geográfica conscientemente pretendida por Cervantes, propia de un autor que parece trasladar desde el presente en el que escribe los recuerdos de un pasado fraguado

formalmente un punto de partida a efectos de su credibilidad histórica. Sin embargo, puede que los acercamientos científicos como el de Parra Luna no logren autenticar el lugar al que Cervantes se refiere en I, 1. Esta controversia entronca con el tema referido al espíritu libre del protagonista. Dado que la confusión se mantiene en relación al lugar de origen del protagonista, enmarca la ambigüedad experimentada por Cervantes a su paso por numerosos locales en España que culturalmente entran en conflicto. Estos factores se ajustan a la paleta literaria de Cervantes en parte debido a una olvidada e inacabable sucesión de encantadoras aldeas cultivadas por sus sencillos locales.⁸

Pero echemos una mirada a estos espacios numerosos. Montiel es una comarca selvática compuesta por 23 aldeas, cuyas diferencias estimulan extravagantes divergencias: la tierra real se transmuta fácilmente en tierra histórica mediante una actividad rutinaria. Las descripciones evocativas que facilitan la apreciación de pueblos y provincias a menudo alcanzan el cénit del arte del geógrafo, pues la localización logra establecer un fuerte vínculo entre las personas y su entorno⁹. Suele haber uno o dos detalles que hacen que estos lugares se fijen en nuestra memoria. Además, el simple recuerdo de los nombres de lugares se multiplican en el *Quijote* e incluso pueden dar a la vez la apariencia de ser ficticios. Quizá la transmutación de la realidad inmediata sostiene que don Quijote se acerque al tema sublime de su obra. Por cierto, el lugar que cambió radicalmente la existencia de Alonso Quijano en el mundo se originó con creatividad absoluta, porque del lugar surgen estados psicológicos hasta lo absurdo. Por ejemplo, la legendaria fundación de la Casa de Medrano es central en el prólogo y en los poemas dedicados a los académicos de Argamasilla. El poema académico a menudo está compuesto por escritores que no son del todo profundos. Al final de la parte primera hay una parodia de los poemas inventados por los

en un continuo peregrinar por aquellas tierras. Véase *Teijeiro Fuentes Cervantes: camina e inventa*, 69.

⁸ Así lo dice C. Alvar, “Presentación”, *Territorios del Quijote*, ed. J. M. Navia, 11: La Mancha era una realidad poco definida en la que podía inventar muchos sucesos por vía de la imaginación. La batalla entre la historia y la literatura, otra vez.

⁹ No solo los paisajes, sino también sus viviendas, definen a los personajes. Véase D. Finello, “Viviendas del Quijote”.

supuestos propios académicos (I, 52, 592-597). Algunos son valiosos, otros no. En última instancia, los poemas de Cervantes parecen irrelevantes para la aldea mencionada en la primera parte, más allá de que los académicos modernos creen que aluden al comienzo del Quijote en la prisión de la Casa de Medrano en Argamasilla.

El tema ha sido discutido por críticos contemporáneos y sigue sin resolución. Lo que sabemos es que la afirmación de Cervantes de que el *Quijote* fue engendrado en una prisión reviste a la obra de gran ironía. Acaso la Casa de Medrano sugiera que las caricaturas de los académicos del pueblo podrían haber estado personalmente vinculados con Cervantes. Este juego de adivinanzas es un lugar común en la literatura académica. Esta es otra incongruencia del Quijote que enreda la cuestión de la concepción de don Quijote en Argamasilla por parte de su autor. La Casa de Medrano fue reconstruida tras años de declive y hoy en día forma parte del recorrido turístico del *Quijote*. Las casas a menudo parecen simples e inocuas, pero fácilmente pueden convertirse en estructuras inexplicables y complejas; qué duda cabe de que Cervantes era consciente de esta idea cuando dijo que comenzó a escribir su obra maestra en la cárcel (o cueva) de una casa.

Sí, Argamasilla tiene una historia, aunque sin grandes repercusiones en el mundo real. El asunto de la identidad de Argamasilla nos interesa a causa de los poemas burlescos dirigidos a sus inexistentes académicos (como ya quedó dicho). La palabra clave en torno a esta especulación argamasillesca es “invención”. Así, varios lugares del Quijote quedan establecidos como espacios legítimos de magnitud geográfica por su doble aspecto de ficción e historia. Por eso seguramente Argamasilla de Alba se asocia con la frase “de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme” (I, 1, 35). M. Panadero Moya, quizá con cierto cinismo, dedica unas detalladísimas páginas a la dificultad de ubicar el origen y trazar la pista de don Quijote en La Mancha. Revisa en primer lugar la crítica histórica de la ruta previa a los siglos XX y XXI. Experimenta con el escenario y concluye que a veces la fijación de una identidad es una empresa casi imposible. Después, Panadero Moya ensaya nuevas técnicas aplicadas a esta cuestión. Insiste, como Cervantes mismo, en que “El lector puede así

efectuar su propia valoración sobre este tan polémico tema”.¹⁰ Cita una confluencia de opiniones desde Pellicer (1787) hasta los comentaristas que concluyen que la literatura es un rudimento paralelo que se acomoda a la topografía real.¹¹ Esta comparación parece legítima, aunque no responde del todo a lo atestiguado por Panadero Moya.¹²

El viaje que arranca en Argamasilla de Alba no tiene por qué llevar la etiqueta de “literario”, lo que acaso implica que es intrínsecamente literario. Alcázar de San Juan es un pueblo y municipio en la provincia de Ciudad Real, en una zona de las llanuras de La Mancha cerca de Argamasilla donde don Quijote busca renovar sus votos caballerescos. Es en Alcázar de San Juan donde supuestamente tiene lugar el hito de los molinos de viento, a una distancia de 60 kilómetros de Toledo. Las geografías del *Quijote* se mueven, como no puede ser de otra manera, entre la realidad y la ficción, motivo por el cual siempre ha habido un gran empeño en desentrañar los itinerarios de don Quijote y Sancho, vistos como uno de los misterios que esconde la fantasía de Cervantes. El ir y venir de don Quijote constituye un detallado recorrido por la geografía de La Mancha, plagado de todas las contradicciones y saltos de tiempo y espacio que la ficción puede permitirse, si bien el orden de las salidas de don Quijote y los itinerarios seguidos dentro de los límites de La Mancha y que denominamos ruta literaria del Quijote resultan perfectamente reconocibles.

Estas observaciones remiten a uno de los fundamentos del trabajo corriente: el espacio geográfico se descubre mejor por medio de la literatura. Hace sentir la realidad del paisaje, aunque no debe determinar el sendero exacto de don Quijote. Como la búsqueda de una respuesta al misterio del lugar es legítima desde un punto de vista literario, los siguientes temas cobran importancia: ¿Qué relación tiene el primer escenario con el

¹⁰ “Elementos de geografía del *Quijote*”, *El espacio geográfico del Quijote La Mancha*”, eds. Félix Pillet Capdepón y Julio Plaza Tabasco, 204.

¹¹ “Elementos de geografía del *Quijote*”, 205.

¹² Quizá una de las raíces de la incertidumbre sea el increíble número de 126 reminiscencias de La Mancha, aparte de otros lugares, grandes y pequeños, que nombra Cervantes en el *Quijote*, según E. Torbert, *Cervantes’s Place-Names*, 92.

comienzo de una historia tan larga? ¿Cuál es el significado de la elección preliminar de localizaciones como plataformas de novelas o romances? La respuesta arrojará luz sobre los criterios literarios de la obra y marcará el tono. La información introductoria relativa a un héroe o a un lugar debe tener una base racional (o factual) de manera que el lector perciba la narrativa como algo sólido desde un punto de vista histórico. A continuación, la síntesis inicial de libros de caballería que hace Cervantes no debe ser pasada por alto en una visión global de la obra. Por otra parte, el comienzo de una novela debe capturar de inmediato el interés de los lectores. Debe presentar algún tipo de enigma para inducir curiosidad, de manera que aquellos interesados puedan avanzar. De lo contrario, los personajes y el contenido podrían pasar como mediocres. La frase inicial de la novela de Cervantes es una modulación inescrutable, acorde con los temas y el estilo desarrollados durante toda la obra.

Sigue el viaje: la ventaja estética de los nombres mencionados (y otros) es que, por sí mismos, evocan la experiencia manchega cervantina, aunque hayan sido olvidados por la historia. Dan fe de un viaje deliberadamente arbitrario (¿tal vez un guiño a la caprichosa actitud de Rocinante?). En cualquier caso, el camino no ha sido preconcebido, o no está hecho para parecerlo. La ausencia de carreteras en La Mancha anima a los personajes a alejarse de las vías principales y acercarse a las pequeñas aldeas. Los pueblos, su gente y el contexto nos dan mucha información sobre el sentido de don Quijote y su entorno. Y si bien no emocionan desde un punto de vista estético, las aldeas y pueblos nos ofrecen una oportunidad para alimentar la imaginación narrativa: “daban largo y espacio campo por donde sin empacho alguno pudiese correr la pluma...”, en palabras del Canónigo de Toledo (I, 47, 549). Observados en sí mismos, sus paisajes son encantadoramente simples, compuestos por casas de techos planos y con pocas funciones domésticas construidas sobre senderos trazados allá donde desearan los arrieros, todo ello rodeado de una flora y fauna imperceptibles y oprimidas por el sol.

El Campo de Criptana conserva una amplia muestra de los típicos molinos de la región manchega. Se trata de un municipio perteneciente a Ciudad Real cerca del cual pudo haber

tenido lugar el episodio de los molinos (I, 8). Luego, Quintanar de la Orden (de Santiago), muy cerca de Toledo, es cuna y asentamiento de hidalgos, que ya existían en tiempos de Felipe II. Quintanar mantiene varias casas blasonadas; la principal de ellas es la Casa de los Radas (1662). Quintanar está afiliada con un movimiento pastoril que de manera sutil y temporal inspira el escenario en el que don Quijote combate contra Juan Haldudo, quien castiga a Andrés, su ayudante, por perder una de sus ovejas (I, 4, 64-67). Más adelante, en las asperezas de Almodóvar del Campo (villa), don Quijote y Sancho se escondieron de la Hermandad después de la batalla contra los galeotes. Sin embargo, Almodóvar del Campo, al sur del extenso plano de los viajes de don Quijote, aquí es ignorado, eclipsado por la calamidad de Cardenio.

Este repaso de los primeros capítulos de la primera parte muestra cómo Cervantes pasa rápidamente por los escenarios de las primeras aventuras, dando el efecto de una narrativa cinemática. La batalla con los molinos ocurre en tan solo dos párrafos. Después, don Quijote se encuentra con los frailes de San Benito y con un carruaje que lleva a una mujer camino a Sevilla (I, 8, 94-104). El núcleo de los primeros capítulos termina cuando Cervantes encuentra el resto de su manuscrito perdido (I, 8, 107) en Alcaná de Toledo (una mera referencia basada en un sitio comercial).

Es claro que los lugares ordinarios se transforman en hitos de la azarosa aventura de don Quijote. Incluso el pasaje a la esfera de la historia de Marcela y Grisóstomo (I, 11-14) ocurre en una zona forestal sin nombre que casualmente lleva a una posada. Este primer episodio pastoril del Quijote está lleno de detalles folclóricos, especialmente en relación a los pastores y paisajes literales y ficticios que se combinan para mostrarnos cómo Cervantes se mueve entre la realidad y la ilusión en lo que es la base de su técnica y su estilo. Las aventuras de los ejércitos de ovejas (I, 18) son vagas en cuanto a la ubicación. Los encamisados salen de la nada durante la noche y la versión de Sancho de la historia de Torralba-Ruiz (I, 20) mide desde qué distancia huyó un pastor hasta el nacimiento del río Guadiana en los campos de Extremadura para evitar problemas con Torralba. El Guadiana tiene varios afluentes al norte y sur y emerge y desciende haciendo

que su recorrido sea difícil de trazar en las proximidades del fantástico viaje. Por lo tanto, el lugar revela el nivel de movilidad de los personajes de Cervantes.

Los geógrafos estudian las montañas porque interrumpen la planicie de la tierra y provocan cambios en las condiciones tanto geológicas como humanas. La gente de montaña a menudo no se comunica con lo que hay abajo y no siempre está informada de los nuevos nudos en la red del conocimiento. Tras el fracaso con los galeotes, don Quijote y Sancho huyen hacia algún sitio “por una parte” (I, 23, 249) cerca de Almodóvar y de las montañas de Sierra Morena.¹³ Aunque Cervantino indica dónde suceden, sí da un nombre genérico al lugar escenario de esta compleja serie de tramas que consume diez capítulos (I, 23-32). Sierra Morena es un sistema montañoso que da forma al borde sur de la meseta. Mide más de 250 millas de ancho y abarca el Valle del Guadalquivir, bosques, dehesas, colinas y picos. Es un entorno silencioso que invita a que muchos pastores y cabreros alimenten allí a sus rebaños en las estaciones generosas del año.

Hay que destacar (si no lo hemos hecho ya) que el *Quijote* trata sobre la vida rural y que, si hay un lugar en el *Quijote* que sea la definición del carácter rural, son estas colinas solitarias donde las personas y el entorno se entremezclan sin esfuerzo. Figuras centrales de la primera parte llegan ahí huyendo de complejas relaciones humanas pese a tener que lidiar con los sacrificios de la vida rural. Don Quijote y Sancho hallan una maleta y un librito que los llevan hasta Cardenio. La poesía de este último provoca la admisión por parte de don Quijote de que conoce las habilidades de un trovador (I, 23, 252-253). Los pastores y cabreros abundan e informan a don Quijote sobre la historia de Cardenio. Le hablan de la desdichada condición de Cardenio debido a su aventura amorosa causada por la supuesta traición de su novia Luscinda (I, 23, 257-260). Cardenio se ha convertido en una víctima de la naturaleza, pues apenas hay diferencia entre las asperezas de las montañas y las de sus habitantes. Cardenio está obsesionado con la falsa historia de que Fernando se casó con Luscinda. Es difícil distinguir entre los

¹³ “El cambio de paisaje y la situación fronteriza marca una delimitación en el carácter de la narración en lo que se refiere a personajes y aventuras” (I, 23, 248n1).

lamentos cortesanos, caprichosos, llenos de desdén y locura de Cardenio y el entorno áspero lleno de rocas, arroyos, barrancos y árboles. Estos fenómenos naturales intervienen en todo momento.

La historia de Cardenio es pasional y parece interminable (I, 27).¹⁴ Cardenio vive en el tronco hueco de un árbol. La biodiversidad de Sierra Morena significa que cualquier árbol grande podría servir como refugio. Pero no hay fascinación por la naturaleza en los oscuros bosques de la montaña. Están henchidos de tinieblas. No cabe duda que su entorno afecta al comportamiento de Cardenio. Y la locura es contagiosa: don Quijote y Dorotea se conocen en la lóbrega, sombría soledad de aquellos que inventaron los lamentos de sufrimiento poético que hacían eco en la densidad de la sierra (I, 27, 302-303). El bosque opaco es como un laboratorio en el que Cervantes estudia minuciosamente los traspiés en las aventuras amorosas de sus personajes.¹⁵

Don Quijote se introduce en el paisaje montañoso por motivos estéticos; Cardenio por una suerte de drama personal; y Dorotea halla que el bosque intimidante le es útil para elaborar argumentos retóricos convincentes para salvaguardar su estatus¹⁶. Dorotea es introducida en un escenario pastoril, a la orilla de un arroyo, disfrazada de hombre para protegerse. En resumen, el núcleo de capítulos dedicados a Sierra Morena nos presenta un lugar específicamente elegido para revelar la psicología de la gente, en parte por su geografía y en parte debido a lo que tiene de subrepticio.

Lugares selectos de la parte segunda

El adelanto de la segunda parte depende más de la profundización de las relaciones entre don Quijote y sus adversarios, como los hidalgos ricos y los personajes de

¹⁴ Para un análisis en profundidad de la historia, véase Finello, *Cervantes: Essays on Social and Literary Polemics*, 47-80.

¹⁵ El espacio físico juega un papel simbólico en las penitencias de los caballeros. El paraje tiene el tinte del *locus amoenus* que se aprovecha para desentenderse de la sociedad, lo que lo conduce a la regeneración (Tal como declara Finello, “En la Sierra Morena”, 244). Véase M. Llorca Serrano, “Amadís, Tirant y don Quijote”, *Literatura catalana medieval*, 617.

¹⁶ Véase F. Márquez Villanueva, *Personajes y temas*, 21-82.

Avellaneda. Llegados a este punto, el desarrollo de la trama es tan fiero y extenuante porque don Quijote debe adaptarse a numerosos espacios geográficos creados por la naturaleza y más aún por el hombre: bosques, terrenos, ciudades, pueblos, aldeas e incluso diversos ambientes aristocráticos, en un recorrido que termina por conducirlo a su casa en un regreso con aroma a fatalidad. Hay pocas ocasiones para organizar y proyectar un futuro viaje puesto que don Quijote es menos provocador. Debía adaptarse a nuevos sistemas y hábitos culturales. Las viviendas, los caminos, los bosques y la incertidumbre del viaje aún delinean la geografía de la segunda parte como lo hicieron en la primera, pero la confianza humana ha cambiado. Sus adversarios intentan romper su amistad con Sancho y desestimar el idealismo hacia Dulcinea. Así, don Quijote se engaña en cada ocasión. En consecuencia, desde un punto de vista más amplio, los lugares integran el espacio exterior e interior de los personajes porque son espacios crudos que invitan a la aventura e historias tristes.

El Toboso, tierra de Dulcinea, el mayor de los pueblos y aldeas de La Mancha, es importante para nuestra investigación porque es el pueblo más explorado por Cervantes. Su descripción de El Toboso (II, 9-10) ejemplifica cómo Cervantes fusiona un pueblo con la relación entre la estética y la geografía. Una recóndita aldea donde los ruidos de los animales pertenecientes a los pobres penetran el aire a intervalos. Por la distancia física, el contexto rural, la oscuridad de la noche y lo que tiene de mítico, en el camino al pueblo escasamente poblado, don Quijote se descubre desconcertado. Este modesto camino, colindante a un bosque que coincide con una fila de casas bajas crea una atmósfera en la que Cervantes puede jugar con las diferencias apenas reconocibles entre realidad y fantasía. Cabe citar el viaje de Azorín por el pueblo en tiempos modernos, que refleja su extraordinario retraso:

El silencio es profundo; no descubríis ni un ser viviente; el reposo parece que se ha solidificado. Y en el fondo, más allá de todas estas ruinas, destacando sobre un cielo ceniciento, lívido, tenebroso, hosco, trágico, se divisa un montón de casuchas pardas... Y no percibís ni el más

leve rumor; ni el retumbar de un carro, ni el ladrido de un perro, ni el cacareo lejano y metálico de un gallo.¹⁷

Paradójicamente, don Quijote y otros reclaman que de hecho había un palacio atribuido a Dulcinea en las profundidades del pueblo. Sin embargo, lo cierto es que no hay conexión alguna entre ambos. El ambiente de El Toboso es engañoso en dos sentidos: primero, el pueblo gradualmente se va convirtiendo en un escenario insólito y oscuro, incluso para Sancho, que ya conoce esos lugares; y, en segundo lugar, su topografía y su paisaje humano contribuyen a la desfavorable impresión de don Quijote, sobre todo luego de su conflicto con tres labradoras del pueblo. El fondo y el tema convergen sucesivamente para dar comienzo a las aventuras del Quijote en su tercera salida, II, 9-29, que sobresale por su fracaso intencional: “Dios lo remedie que todo este mundo es máquinas y trazas, contrarias unas de otras. Yo no puedo más” (II, 29, 873-874).

El resultado del desafortunado viaje a El Toboso fatiga a don Quijote, a quien le es difícil comprender cuán austera es la cultura de sus habitantes. La visión histórica de los espacios mayores nos ayuda a comprender los espacios desnudos, más pequeños, donde operan los personajes. La rudeza de la esfera cervantina satisface parcialmente la curiosidad del lector. Esta geografía castellana en El Toboso, por ejemplo, se inclina hacia el mundo interior de don Quijote, porque incita una inquietud metafísica en la que los objetos naturales y humanos puestos en escena reflejan su humor.

El mapa de La Mancha de mediados del siglo XVI muestra que el terreno que se extiende desde el sur de Toledo hasta los pies de la cordillera de Sierra Morena, donde los sucesos de la novela ocupan muchos de los capítulos previos, se encontraba excepcionalmente desierto. Esta es una de las razones por las que el viaje de don Quijote suele caracterizarse como solitario. Los críticos afirman que dicho aislamiento encaja con la personalidad

¹⁷ *La ruta de don Quijote*, 146. A continuación: “El Toboso era antes una población caudalosa; ahora no es ya ni sombra de lo fue en aquellos tiempos. Las casas que se hunden no tornan a ser edificadas... acaban ahora son sin descendencia”, 147.

de don Quijote. Si bien esto parece exagerado, no limita la inesperada variedad de su personaje, a veces meditabundo y a veces locuaz. Cuando Azorín habla de El Toboso prevalece una visión romántico-decadente de España que combina su topografía con el carácter de sus habitantes. El aire castellano está impregnado de la tierra del suelo castellano; de forma similar, estos elementos endurecidos se acoplan al temperamento castellano, como fundidos en él. Por consiguiente, Azorín insiste en que la visión del paisaje es tardía y deudora del Romanticismo. Azorín, a partir de su propia visión irónico-idealizada (aunque dentro del contexto de la recuperación de Castilla), descubre una sugestiva relación entre planicie y locura que se traslada a la interacción entre geografía y clima y a su influencia sobre el carácter.

Por ello, Azorín cita el texto de Cervantes para llegar a su visión de El Toboso envuelto en un silencio nocturno. Pero, al leerlo hoy, este silencio es simbólico, de forma que termina por retratar un pueblo castellano que tiene paralelismos con otros. Azorín, consciente de la intención literaria, y tal vez grandilocuente, de Cervantes en su aproximación a El Toboso, emplea su extravagancia y sus excesos para reforzar la paradójica postura de su consideración para este y otros lugares de La Mancha. Por último, don Quijote se refiere a El Toboso como gran ciudad, mayor que otras que encuentra en su viaje. Hay hidalgos y alguna gente principal, pero poca o ninguna nobleza. Su descripción de El Toboso es cómica y grandiosa por los contrastes entre el pueblo y la imaginación de don Quijote (por ejemplo, los animales yuxtapuestos a las princesas).

Nos interesan sobre todo los sitios de La Mancha cuyas alusiones o sugerencias breves llegan a una síntesis, casi a una letanía, de la geografía manchega con el fin de que don Quijote reinvente un terreno real y fantástico para su plan consciente de ser caballero andante según sus propios principios y criterios estéticos. Además, los inevitables cambios de escenario en la segunda parte sostienen esa visión caleidoscópica al incluir pueblos y sitios que van más allá de lo abarcado en la primera parte. Nos remitimos al bello comentario de C. Antonio Molina, que también reinventa con etimologías la inmensa llanura de La Mancha descrita por Cervantes desde una perspectiva propia:

“molinos, cuevas, palacios, iglesia, conventos, campo de tierra roja (Montesinos), y añadimos la elegancia del color profundamente azul de las lagunas en medio del desierto.”¹⁸

La topografía de la gruta de Montesinos de don Quijote no se hunde demasiado en la tierra. Su profundidad se conforma al plan de don Quijote para quienes puedan dudar de su interpretación de lo que allí ve. La aventura tiene lugar en el camino que va de Ossa de Montiel a las espléndidas lagunas azules de Ruidera (II, 22-24). Estos espacios casi milagrosos en el corazón de La Mancha son un prelude genuino a la aventura de Montesinos. La cueva consta de una cavidad de unos 80 metros de profundidad generada por procesos de disolución debidos al impacto de las aguas de lluvia en el roquero de la zona, y representa el punto culminante de los descubrimientos del Caballero. Sin embargo, el goteo de agua desde la piedra hasta un estanque no evita que don Quijote entre en la cámara para examinar de cerca su petrología. Los restos se asemejan a formas y figuras humanas. Algunos incluso dicen que podría haber sido la forma de estos materiales osificados lo que inspirase la historia de Montesinos a don Quijote, dado que los accidentes geográficos en el interior de la cueva a menudo parecen cadáveres humanos. La historia de la romería tiene su origen en la muerte de Durandarte en la batalla de Roncesvalles (778), dando lugar a toda una mitología local relacionada con las lagunas y las lágrimas de duelo de los parientes de los reyes que los crearon. En última instancia, don Quijote, abrumado por el entorno de piedra y roca, decide vincularlo al tema general de verdad y ficción.

La geografía y la geología refuerzan el pensamiento de don Quijote, dado que los personajes mitológicos se ven transformados en héroes encantados y en parte vivientes en una de las historias más tragicómicas de la novela. Los vestigios de civilizaciones antiguas estimulan la imaginación de don Quijote en su soledad, de manera que puede diseñar cualquier narrativa. Entra en la cueva cuando el sol se encuentra en parte oculto por las nubes, y desciende a la “oscura región” (II, 23, 818), que irónicamente lo ilumina. De hecho, llega a admitir que al principio

¹⁸ “Breve paseo por La Mancha de don Quijote”, *Territorios del Quijote*, 39-44.

no podía ver. La primera vez que uno entra en una cueva siempre hay un momento de ceguera porque los ojos tardan en ajustarse al momento. Es difícil determinar distancias porque el resto de la cueva es una extraña neblina de texturas alienígenas, aunque el instinto lo guía antes de que llegue la oscuridad de la noche.

La cuestión ahora es en qué medida la oscuridad afectó la mente de don Quijote, si es que lo hizo. Tras un breve periodo de tiempo el cerebro humano alcanza a ver lo que no veía antes. Uno se pregunta si en ese caso la prueba dota a don Quijote de una mayor visión. Tiene sentido que se vea limitado a sus propios medios cuando es libre para inventar. Aquí, a medida que la cueva y su topografía se entremezclan, la combinación temática de literatura, geografía y clima afecta la mente de don Quijote hasta el punto de que imagina que es el espíritu de un pasado encantado. La balada del ciclo de Rolando interviene y la aventura se transforma en un cuadro espantoso: [Durandarte] “llevéis mi corazón adonde Belerma estaba,/ sacándomele del pecho,/ ya con puñal, ya con daga” (II, 23, 821). Esta solicitud es evidentemente absurda. Sin embargo, don Quijote afirma haber visto figuras encantadas de otro mundo que solo él podía distinguir. Sus palabras son explosivas. J. González Cuenca dice:

Tengo para mí que es el momento en que Cervantes toca el cielo de la literatura, dicho sea sin hipérbole. Porque construye el relato administrando sus componentes con singular habilidad y porque con medios estrictamente narrativos suscita planteamientos gnoseológicos de la máxima hondura. Raras veces la literatura se ha cargado de tanta responsabilidad y raras veces ha salido del trance de una manera tan airosa. Las maravillas subterráneas son estrictamente aplicadas en un sentido literario y humano. Además, a diferencia de su acostumbrada técnica, Cervantes plantea este paisaje desde el más estricto realismo geográfico. Si no precisó siquiera el pueblo natal de don Quijote, llama la atención su precisión para las referencias toponímicas en la aventura de la cueva.¹⁹

¹⁹ “*El Quijote. Crónica de una itinerancia*”, *Territorios del Quijote*, 27.

Antes de contar su experiencia en la cueva, don Quijote dice que durmió y se despertó: “desperté dél y me hallé en la mitad del más bello, ameno y deleitoso prado que puede criar la naturaleza ... vi que no dormía sino que realmente estaba despierto” (II, 23, 818). La interrupción corta el relato caballeresco. Su extraña versión, incluso clínica, del asunto Belerma-Durandarte es apenas comprensible para Sancho y el primo que le esperan arriba²⁰. Esto se debe a que el tema tratado es la conciencia literaria y la percepción de don Quijote de que puede ignorar las leyes de la ciencia refiriéndose a lo extraño para desestabilizar el juicio de sus oyentes. Entonces Cervantes podrá relatar el terrible comportamiento de Dulcinea vestida como una campesina para mendigar. El drama culmina cuando equiparamos

²⁰ Para un comentario más detallado de su significado, véase Finello, “Metacriticism and Metamorphosis in *Don Quijote*, Part II, *Metacritical* Cervantes, ed. S. Hessel, 44: Cervantes juxtaposes banal reality with the brutal and unpredictable cave scape. Don Quijote does not fear the emaciation of his fantasy since it was spawned by his own mind. That is why the reader may feel awkward about the juxtapositions in the cave. That the journey is characterized by contradictory patterns and morbid symbolic inventions does not shatter Don Quijote’s claims about what he witnessed, despite the fact that those listening to the narrative find it highly improbable. Montesinos, for example, is bizarre in his appearance, abnormally large, dressed in a long-hooded cloak, a scholar’s sash, a round cap, a hood of green satin, and a beard that reaches below his waist, with a rosary whose beads are the size of walnuts and ostrich eggs. It is likely that the exaggerated breadth of these dimensions is a mockery of chivalry books because Don Quijote dresses the mythical hero with gargantuan ornaments. Further, the portrayal of Montesinos is tantamount to a caricature pushing Don Quijote’s story into a disturbing phase. Montesinos tells don Quijote that except for the measurements of the instrument he used for the surgery on Durandarte’s heart, he employed a “puñal buido” and not a dagger with a point sharper than a “lezna.” A “lezna” is an awl resembling a narrow, curved knife for picking stitches from fabric or leather. The cousin is happy to capture this tiny fact. Fiction, it seems, has been forced into a crude, clinical posture. Even the partially living (or enchanted) Durandarte hears Montesinos tell him that he put salt on the heart so that it would not smell when he took it to France along with the rest of the company. One may argue that the manner in which events in the cave are related is more humorous than it is somber. The narrative stirs up a rhetorical clash between the way people in the real world remembered the ballad and the hilarity of Don Quijote’s embellishment of the results of Montesinos’s removal.

el extraño comportamiento de Dulcinea con la retórica falaz que Sancho previamente le había dirigido.

A menudo se dice que la experiencia de Montesinos es un sueño, ya que Don Quijote lucha contra bestias nocturnas y símbolos maternos que alimentan su curiosidad al entrar en la cueva. Sin embargo, su actitud no tiene raíces en un contexto freudiano. La aventura saca las que acaso sean sus mejores metáforas y transformaciones y es un punto de inflexión en la novela por la maduración de su sistema de pensamientos y creencias. La narrativa se termina abruptamente puesto que no hay testigos. Poco más puede decirse aparte de repetir la afirmación de don Quijote de que su invento no podía ser refutado. Él está al margen de pretensiones y traiciones y es difícil contradecir su imagen mental cuando sale de la cueva. Don Quijote es astuto porque debido a sus escrupulosas y perspicaces observaciones sobre el submundo es difícil cuestionarle. Sus conocimientos de geografía y ciencias relacionadas refuerza sus actuación y, por tanto, también su autoconocimiento. No cabe duda de que este lugar es una poderosa determinación de la interpretación profunda del carácter de don Quijote.

Por azar, tras salir de Castilla, don Quijote y Sancho se tropiezan con los duques. Los capítulos 30 a 58 de la segunda parte reproducen un mundo inconcebible fuera de la acostumbrada llanura. El escenario del encuentro inicial con los duques no está descrito minuciosamente, salvando la mención a una pradera donde se cazan pájaros. Sancho está impresionado por la riqueza de los duques y espera encontrarse con la misma abundancia de comida que había en la boda de Camacho y en casa de don Diego de Miranda. Dado que su casa de placer (“casa de campo”) está fuera de los límites de Castilla y no en La Mancha, tiene poco sentido situarlo en un mapa, es decir, el narrador/autor no quiere darle a ese lugar la dignidad que implica un nombre. La casa queda indefinida en términos de estabilidad nativa. La estructura no está formalizada -castillo, hacienda, ínsula, casa-. No hay secuencia de tiempo ni espacio. Las estancias no están organizadas; se encuentran disparatadas, como viñetas de los múltiples episodios y personajes.

Parece acertado concluir que el espacio está restringido para don Quijote y Sancho dentro del domicilio de los duques,

debido al ejército de sirvientes y lacayos. Para ellos resulta incómodo dejarse limpiar por doncellas. Doña Rodríguez de Grijalba, una mujer mayor con una historia de desgracias, también tiene su participación y molesta a Sancho. El espacio y el lugar se vuelven más imperativos que nunca: “Seis doncellas le desarmaron y sirvieron de pajes [a don Quijote], todas industriadas del duque” (II, 31, 883). “La doncella barbera, cuando le tuvo con un palmo de jabonadura, fingió que se le había acabado el agua y mandó a la del aguamanil fuese por ella, que el señor don Quijote esperaba. Hizolo así, y quedó don Quijote con la más estraña figura y más para hacer reír que se pudiera imaginar” (II, 32, 893).

La geografía humana resulta inquietante, y ni siquiera hay un intento por hacerla parecer genuina, aunque resulte horripilante. Dan testimonio de ello las extrañas y amargas invenciones y lugares: el cortejo de los sabios, el Diablo, Lirgandeo, Arcaláus, Merlín (II, 34, 917-923), hasta las dueñas barbadas que se preguntan: “¿adónde podrá ir una dueña con barbas?” (II, 29, 949). Aquí, el escenario bastamente construido de clarines, cornetas, cuernos, trompetas y tambores es un intento mezquino de burla hacia la repugnancia que sienten los duques por las primeras aventuras de don Quijote (II, 34, 919). Pero el resultado es la geografía de un mundo nada atrayente, fabricado por los juegos a los que juegan los aristócratas. Un ataque de gatos agrava los insultos hacia don Quijote, haciéndolo vulnerable en su estancia

...sobre la reja de don Quijote a plomo caía, descolgaron un cordel donde venían más de cien cencerros asidos, y luego tras ellos derramaron un gran saco de gatos, que asimismo traían cencerros menores atados a las colas. Fue tan grande el ruido de los cencerros y el mayar de los gatos, que aunque los duques habían sido inventores de la burla, todavía les sobresaltó: “¡Fuera malignos encantadores! ¡Fuera, canalla hechiceresca, que yo soy don Quijote de la Mancha, contra quien no valen ni tienen fuerza vuestras malas intenciones.” (II, 46, 1002)

Los duques ni siquiera son capaces de construir una escenografía falsa, dado que la horrible aparición de Trifaldín (II, 36, 933), embajador de la Condesa Trifladi, es una broma más que exagerada que va más allá de ser un juego de niños. El nombre viene del italiano *truffa*, que significa engaño.

En esta parte de la novela no se presta mucha atención al consuelo y armonía que brinda el campo debido a la disonancia con el estruendo creado por los duques y sus súbditos. Como visitantes, don Quijote y Sancho están atrapados en el territorio de los duques. La explosión del caballo de madera, Clavileño, sirve de dramatización para ejemplificar las evidentes tonterías de los duques, pese a que no les falta acceso a la tecnología mecánica más moderna (II, 41, 966). En suma, el espacio abierto y la geografía perceptible son mundos aparte del territorio carcelario de los duques. Cuanto menos capaces seamos de definir una geografía, más difícil resultará delinear la humanidad de los personajes de la novela. El lector estará bien tentado a reconocer estos esquemas como humor o inclinado a aceptarlos como elementos inocuos de confusión. Su teatro no puede atribuirse a un esfuerzo para crear un entorno creíble, pues va más allá de los límites de una localización humana. Ahí emerge un contexto viciado porque los duques no son conscientes de lo que han hecho.

El espacio ofrece modificaciones en función de las apariciones espurias del Diablo (II, 34 917), la Dueña Dolorida (II, 47, 936), las dueñas barbadas (949) y el resto del disparatado elenco. La conciencia de espacio no es necesariamente una génesis de la acción de la novela en torno a la casa de campo de los duques. Lo teatral del desfile de estos personajes tiene en cambio el efecto de constreñir el espacio y desorientar a don Quijote. El intento de dar la ilusión de movimiento en el viaje del caballo de madera Clavileño (II, 40-41) es torpe y superficial, y como los otros episodios que suceden en o cerca del palacio sólo divierte a aquellos que tratan de escudriñar las complejidades de la ilusión. No podemos comparar las travesuras con los experimentos diseñados por don Quijote en lugares pequeños. Por lo tanto, lo que tenemos aquí es una localización no específica en Zaragoza (II, 30). No es un pueblo, sino una propiedad acondicionada para las fantasías pseudo-simbólicas de tipo simplista. Está llena de gente que desea abrir espacio a sus

ambiciones, incluyendo a don Quijote, que no tiene tiempo para la paz debido al acoso de los duques. Asimismo, el episodio es una parodia diseñada con artificios teatrales probablemente nunca vistos por personas rústicas como don Quijote y Sancho. Después de la desgracia de don Quijote en II, 29 hay menos preocupación por la fisiografía. El contexto y la geografía, especialmente los caminos que comparten hombres y animales, son la génesis de sus aventuras y presentan dudas sobre lo ilusorio hasta que estos primeros conflictos se terminan. Tras la reunión con los duques en II, 30, estas cualidades se vuelven tediosas, paródicas, incluso abiertamente repetitivas.²¹

Vale la pena sondear los espacios grandes y poco familiares de don Quijote fuera de La Mancha aparte de la casa de los duques. Aquellos sitios son tranquilamente repudiados porque no llegamos a conocerlos íntimamente. Las reacciones de parte de don Quijote hacia Barcelona remiten más bien a un lugar como el castillo de los duques. Así, cuando don Quijote decide ir a Barcelona su viaje vuelve la hoja de su configuración. La ciudad se compone de una geografía nueva e impactante: él y Sancho “vieron el mar, hasta entonces dellos no visto; parecióles espaciosísimo y largo” (II, 61, 1130). El panorama ofrece un notable contraste con La Mancha. Cuando los dos entran a la ciudad están sorprendidos por los ruidos, los juegos, y otras diversiones de la nobleza. El primer vistazo es breve pero chocante. Don Antonio Moreno, su huésped en Barcelona, encarna, como los duques, un mundo donde la decepción es una costumbre. El espacio poco familiar reprime a don Quijote. Le hacen marchar a lo largo de la calle mayor y luego le hacen bailar con las hidalgas (II, 62, 1136). Barcelona y la casa de los duques son dos espacios distintos pero lo cierto es que Cervantes no hace un esfuerzo por distinguirlos. En este sentido el clima es de gran importancia aunque le es inexplicable a don Quijote. Por

²¹ El hosco eclesiástico de los duques obliga a don Quijote a declamar su más destacada autodefensa en la novela. Le interesa menos la fantasía porque teme al recinto ducal más de lo que cree en responder a sus juegos. Su tendencia a guardar secretos personales es sutil hasta este punto, pero ahora don Quijote tiene que revelar su concepto de Dulcinea (II, 32, 896).

consiguiente la visita del propio Cervantes al terreno todavía siguen discutiendo los investigadores.

El contexto arcádico es fluctuante y recurrente en el Quijote. Arcadia es enigmática porque retrata lo rústico y las tensiones utópicas con sutiles variaciones. A veces es difícil adivinar la motivación de Cervantes o el sentido que quiere dar a estos episodios. El terreno de Camacho podría entrar en una categoría de espacio similar a un moderno jardín paradisíaco, algo hedonista hasta la derrota de su corrupción moral (II, 18-21). La ubicación es específica: la granja de un hombre rico, Camacho, que iba a casarse con Quiteria hasta que un campesino, Basilio, vestido como pastor en duelo, finge matarse por ella.

Este primer lugar arcádico de la segunda parte está construido con prosa y respuestas teatrales: un excepcional prelude de una alegoría del amor frente a las posesiones materiales con un final tranquilo. Sin embargo, el disgusto del pastor de pronto irrumpe en escena y el repentino cambio de eventos concluye con su falso suicidio seguido por su boda con Quiteria y su milagrosa resurrección, un truco más que un milagro (II, 21, 806-808). La parte central del recuento -la aparición de Basilio- tiene que ver con la visión, y así la mirada incrédula de la audiencia es capturada por su figura desnuda: “todos volvieron la cabeza y vieron que le daba un hombre vestido de negro sayo ... coronado de con una corona de funesto ciprés” (II, 21, 802-803).

Las tornas cambian rápidamente porque el drama pastoril de Cervantes está ubicado entre actores y audiencias comunes.²² Con Basilio, Cervantes introduce un cambio en la fórmula pastoril clásica, siendo su protagonista un simple pastor enamorado de una joven local. Viven en casas colindantes y el drama nace de un lugar local concreto más que de un mito (aunque Píramo y Tisbe sea un vago antecedente). Asimismo, el episodio de Basilio y Quiteria debe tomarse como una historia didáctica procedente de un conflicto que involucra a los habitantes del territorio de Camacho, lo que explica la justificación por parte de don Quijote del engaño de Basilio al principio del capítulo que sigue al drama del matrimonio de Quiteria y Basilio: “No se pueden ni deban

²² Véase Finello, *Pastoral Themes and Forms*, 206-207.

llamar engaños los que ponen las miras en virtuosos fines” (II, 22, 809).

En el segundo lugar arcádico (II, 58), un paisaje artificialmente aislado donde los personajes fingen ser zagalas atrapadas en unas redes, anima a don Quijote a salvar heroicamente a las mujeres, como es su obligación caballeresca. Pero confunde su cometido caballeresco por no entender la defensa de la propiedad femenina. El lugar es revelador y sorprendentemente original²³. Y al margen de si realmente es original o está influenciado por los mitos de Virgilio, Sannazaro, Montemayor u otros, la invención cervantina presenta un raro tipo de ironía. El episodio sigue un modelo arcádico estándar, y las normas en este breve pero importante capítulo son restringidas porque el marco espacial es pequeño y muy concreto. La zona atrae virtualmente a todos los habitantes de los pueblos cercanos, que van a ser felices vestidos como pastores tras estudiar églogas de Garcilaso y Camoes. La intención es que no haya melancolía, y don Quijote es invitado a compartir esta celebración, sobre todo porque los habitantes del pueblo han oído hablar sobre o han leído la primera parte.²⁴ El jardín creado por los aristócratas y su comportamiento debe corresponderse con ese contexto: Tiendas, arroyos abundantes y tranquilos y teatro y poesía son parte de este ejercicio ecléctico que conjuga lo pastoral y lo heroico. Los árboles están conectados a redes para cazar pájaros cuando se acerca la festiva fantasía. Pero la armonía pastoral es interrumpida cuando algunas personas se dan cuenta de que don Quijote es el hombre que recorrió el mundo derrotando a inexistentes caballeros andantes.

²³ De hecho, ambos episodios dan la vuelta a los finales pastoriles convencionales. Cervantes deja actitudes no resueltas en tanto que salta constantemente entre ficción y realidad. Quizás don Quijote no se encuentre seguro entre los lectores pudientes y aristocráticos: “gente principal y muchos hidalgos y ricos” (II, 58, 1101).

²⁴ ...entre muchos y parientes nos viniésemos a holgar a este sitio, que es uno de los más agradables de todos estos contornos, comandando entre todos una nueva y pastoril Arcadia, vistiéndonos las doncellas de zagalas y los mancebos de pastores ... tenemos entre estos ramos plantadas algunas tiendas, que dicen se llaman de campaña, en el margen de un abundoso arroyo que todos estos prados fertiliza” (II, 58, 1101).

Cervantes ha definido un espacio para lo pastoril y lo ha aislado de las otras zonas de bosque castellano. Lo define con precaución y quizá podría haber inventado más material teatral para esta localidad, de manera similar a los episodios de Grisóstomo y Camacho. Sospecho que los diálogos contenían más que el desafortunado atropello sufrido por don Quijote y Sancho después del evento. La fingida Arcadia es provocativa y tiene repercusiones. Es lo que marca el comienzo de la decaída de don Quijote.²⁵

A la derrota de don Quijote en una playa cerca de Barcelona le sigue el sombrío viaje a casa, a un lugar que le confunde (II, 64). El “lugar de La Mancha” es la contracara de su visita a otro lugar notable: la casa de Don Diego de Miranda, que es elegante y posee varias funciones. Su hogar es típico del paisaje manchego de los señores como don Diego, que son “más que medianamente ricos” (II, 16, 754). El ambiente del hogar representa el ritmo sereno de la vida de un caballero/patrón de aquel dilatado espacio geográfico. Del mismo modo, la astronomía nos lleva al ámbito de una vida de paz y agrado. Aquí se da la concepción de una estructura académica por la discusión sobre poesía y otros temas humanísticos por parte de don Quijote, don Diego y don Lorenzo.²⁶ La dimensión trascendental del hogar de la filosofía de Jackson, poco frecuentada anteriormente, nos permite comprender por qué, en el contexto quijotesco, el hogar se convierte en un paraje adversario.²⁷ Quizás esto sea más afín a la oposición entre la “casa” de los duques y la de don Quijote. La casa de campo está equipada de todas las formas posibles en oposición al bienestar del hogar. Más triste y melancólica es la

²⁵ Dichos episodios también marcan la cultura intelectual y la naturaleza dramática del género pastoril y su nacimiento en España. Es mi creencia que aún quedan muchas festividades por descubrir. Véase Finello, *Ambitos y espacios*, 131-132 y *The Evolution of the Spanish Pastoral Novel in Early Modern Spain*, 164; véase también J. Irigoyen-García, *The Spanish Arcadia*, 90.

²⁶La casa de don Diego tiene muchísimas implicaciones. Véase Márquez Villanueva, 155-234.

²⁷ Véase D. Sopher, “The Landscape of Home”, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 136; y también E. Bou, *Invention of Space*, 17: “Many texts evoke the transformation of places in states of one’s soul and the soul of the landscape as they are being read”

última llegada a casa de don Quijote en II, 73-74. El espacio hogareño se vuelve problemático, porque don Quijote está algo desorientado. Cuando el caballero regresa al confinamiento de la pequeña aldea de donde partió, en la geografía humana prevalecen y abundan los malos agüeros sobre la desaparición de Dulcinea: “Malum signum! Malum signum! Liebre huye, galgos la siguen: Dulcinea no aparece” (II, 73, 1210). Mientras Sancho está contentísimo de volver a su aldea, don Quijote está agobiado y percibe su hacienda como discreta. Por eso, el enfoque aquí es simbólico-ilusorio más que realista. De hecho, en la segunda parte del Quijote se emplea una simbología más extensa²⁸. Don Quijote dejó la casa por su ansia de metamorfosear la identidad, y por eso hay trabas relacionadas con una locura personal: un intento de pasar a un mundo nuevo y extraño.

El final de la tercera salida no es la redención de un héroe. La colocación geográfica a la entrada del pueblo funciona contra el mito del regreso del héroe a casa. La hacienda de don Quijote se parece a una vivienda vacía; le faltan calidez y comodidad. Don Quijote no se decide a celebrar el regreso porque sus fracasos como caballero andante se lo impiden. No hay vestigios de la grandeza en su viaje, aunque al principio el panorama parecía claro. El poder interno del hogar no emerge cuando llega el drama final de don Quijote. Así se convierte el hogar en símbolo contrario o de negación.

Conclusiones

Hagamos unas conclusiones: Los lugares, reales o no, son una (auto)biografía inconsciente. Dicen más sobre nosotros de lo que pensamos. Como se viene manteniendo este estudio, la literatura es una fuente principal de localizaciones, y las localizaciones son una forma restringida de geografía. Sin embargo, los espacios históricos (normalmente un área nombrada), sirven como punto de partida para que el autor tenga algo que inventar, o que narrar o imaginar a efectos de su credibilidad. En el *Quijote* puede que el tiempo haya emborronado estos lugares, sobre todo los más pequeños, pero Cervantes los

²⁸ Véase D. Finello, *Ámbitos y espacios en autores y obras pastoriles*, 43-59.

revive de manera que un proceso de memoria selectiva puede servir como estructura para la trama y su gente. Más aún, Cervantes utiliza la geografía real que conoce para enmarcar las aventuras de ficción de don Quijote, aunque el estímulo sensorial toma su impulso en otra dirección en la tercera salida.

Al interrelacionarse con la ficción, esos lugares extraen los momentos dramáticos de la vida. Hemos examinado varios de estos episodios y cada uno descubre una capa de la psicología de don Quijote: de los lugares semiáridos y silenciosos de La Mancha a zonas pobladas donde don Quijote y Sancho se encuentran con gente poco culta, revelando atributos que dejan al alcance del lector la comprensión de la mente del Caballero.

Como estos lugares albergan prácticas culturales de la época, desde festividades hasta victorias o fracasos caballerescos, se deja mucho a la imaginación, como suele pasar al leer un texto cervantino. Entre la batalla de los molinos e viento y el fallecimiento contra los del agua, la mente del lector es libre de especular. Ambos episodios son estilísticamente análogos y abarcan la trayectoria caballeresca de don Quijote.

Puesto que aquí nos hemos enfocado en el lugar o el entorno, cabe apuntar que este último alberga personajes y trama y los sostiene para mantener la consistencia a lo largo de la novela. El lugar es parte de la atmósfera y marca una ubicación fija; y el lugar tiene un sentido personal al designar dónde vivimos íntimamente. La intimidad es, me parece, un fuerte subtema del Quijote. Comienza en el título -"La Mancha"- y se mantiene constante mediante la familiaridad con su cultura. Cervantes crea lugares fruto de los recuerdos de su experiencia en La Mancha. Los documentos hallados al día pertenecen a zonas específicas de esa región, los hay más o menos ordinarios, aunque es claro que en el Quijote lo ordinario gana un importante grado de reconocimiento. Dicho enfoque es seguido en la prosa de los siglos XVIII y XIX.

El lugar tiene muchas dimensiones: topografía, historia, paisaje, territorio y, por supuesto, geografía. En este trabajo he intentado explorar el punto focal de lugar, que hasta ahora no había sido muy comentado por la crítica de Cervantes. El estudio de lugar tiene sus raíces en una forma de historia local, aunque el Quijote no se limita a la historia de una localidad específica.

Resulta más acertado acordar que su énfasis en lugares locales es clave para la interpretación de la obra. Sin embargo, Cervantes sabe elevar el significado de los espacios pequeños. La atención de Cervantes por los detalles relacionados con la gente y sus circunstancias en La Mancha es ciertamente una de las ventajas del desarrollo de la novela moderna como él la concibió, puesto que las páginas del Quijote mencionan lugares en los que Cervantes vivió y caminó. Estos detalles son cruciales para la ficción moderna que tiene en su centro a un narrador (o narradores) porque en este campo hay personas cuyas voces deben ser oídas antes de que uno pueda ser capaz de restaurar la unidad fundamental de las acciones y eventos humanos.

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EL RECUERDO DE LA “ÚLTIMA GRAN CAUSA” PHILIP LEVINE Y LA GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA

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“The Spanish Civil War was the war of my growing up, and many young men from my neighborhood went to it. About half of them came home. So this was my war, in a sense. I was growing up with the mythology of it” (Levine, So Ask 137).

Resumen: Este artículo explora el legado poético de la Guerra Civil española en la obra del poeta Philip Levine, figura central en la poesía estadounidense de las últimas décadas. A través de poemas representativos, analizaré las causas que le llevaron a desarrollar una fascinación especial con el conflicto y las particularidades de su poética dentro de la tradición de poesía de la Guerra Civil española en los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: fascismo, antisemitismo, Guerra Civil española, Brigadas Internacionales, anarquismo.

A pesar de que solo tenía ocho años cuando estalló la Guerra Civil española y de los más de 6.000 kilómetros que separan su Detroit natal del territorio español, el laureado poeta Philip Levine (1928-2015) sintió los acontecimientos históricos que entre 1936-1939 devastaron España como una tragedia personal. Su minoría de edad le impidió alistarse como hicieron algunos de sus vecinos, sin embargo, creció con la mitología alrededor de una guerra que acabaría dejando una profunda huella en su obra poética. Décadas después, tras estudiar la historia del conflicto, una estancia durante un año en España entre 1965-1966, y posteriores visitas, su interés no hizo más que aumentar.

Pero, ¿qué llevó a un poeta como Levine, hijo de inmigrantes judíos de Rusia en una de las ciudades industriales más fuertemente golpeadas por la Gran Depresión de 1929, a

recrear sucesos de una guerra en la que Estados Unidos fue oficialmente neutral, revivir recuerdos relacionados con la contienda o dedicar elegías a quienes para él se convertirían en héroes caídos? ¿Por qué unos hechos que estaban ocurriendo al otro lado del Atlántico alteraron la vida y moldearon la obra de un escritor que viene de un contexto social diferente, marcado por la desilusión generalizada ante los fracasos del sistema económico, un fuerte antisemitismo y la lucha por los derechos civiles?

Levine es uno de los poetas que más ha contribuido a la tradición de poesía sobre la Guerra Civil española en los Estados Unidos en la que destacan poetas centrales como Wallace Stevens, John Berryman, Genevieve Taggard, Langston Hughes, Kenneth Rexroth o Randall Jarrell. La mayor parte, en palabras Cary Nelson, “often voice a generalized antifascism” (8) creando un corpus poético que surgió como reacción a la lucha por lo que se dio en llamar “la última gran causa”, según recoge el libro de Stanley Weintraub *The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and The Spanish Civil War*, en referencia a la última oportunidad de detener el avance del fascismo en el campo de batalla español y aspirar a un mundo más justo ante las enormes diferencias sociales que existían en ese momento.

A través de algunos de los poemas más representativos de Levine, analizaré cómo se originan sus vínculos con España y su obsesión con la Guerra Civil. En “My Father with Cigarette Twelve Years Before the Nazis Could Break His Heart” y “The Old Testament” combina recuerdos personales con elementos históricos para reflejar su miedo al fascismo y al antisemitismo. Sobre el destino de un voluntario anónimo que fue a luchar a España y nunca regresó, reflexiona en “To P.L., 1917-1936”, mientras que el protagonista de “I Could Believe”, otro voluntario anónimo, pudo sobrevivir para contarlo. Finalmente, en la elegía “Francisco, I’ll Bring You Red Carnations”, exploraré su filosofía política moldeada por el destino de quienes lucharon por un ideal con el cual se identificó.

El impacto poético de la guerra civil española

A las pocas semanas de comenzar la guerra, el poema “The Men That Are Falling” de Wallace Stevens, que planteaba

una reflexión sobre los ideales que llevaron a un soldado a luchar en España, se llevó el primer premio del certamen de poesía que la revista *The Nation* patrocinó en el otoño de 1936. Según los editores, de los 1.800 poemas que se enviaron a la redacción, “the overwhelming majority were concerned with contemporary social conflicts either at home or abroad” (Longenbach). Pero además, la positiva valoración que recibió este poema, en el que un herido de gravedad en el hospital trata de conciliar el sueño mientras se cuestiona su decisión de haber arriesgado su vida: “In the catastrophic room ... beyond despair” (Stevens 10), ponía de manifiesto no solo la preocupación por lo que estaba ocurriendo en España, sino también, la ruptura de moldes en el canon poético al reflejar la inevitable irrupción de la política en la cultura de aquellos años.

Cada vez era más difícil que los escritores se quedaran aislados en su universo de valores estéticos al margen de los conflictos que estaban azotando el mundo. “No one, now, could devote himself to literature as single-mindedly as Joyce or Henry James,” (Writers 338) escribía George Orwell. La Guerra Civil española, como se afirma en uno de los documentos más citados para evaluar las simpatías políticas de los más renombrados escritores del momento, “Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War”, obligaba a tomar partido ideológicamente hablando: “We are determined or compelled, to take sides” (5). Suscrito por poetas de diferentes países como Louis Aragon, Nancy Cunard, Stephen Spender, Pablo Neruda, Tristan Tzara, el proyecto tenía una clara posición ideológica, pero reflejaba también la necesidad de posicionarse frente a una lucha que entendían vital para la supervivencia de la cultura y que obligaba al escritor a salir de su torre de marfil: “The equivocal attitude, the Ivory Tower, the paradoxical, the ironic detachment, will no longer do” (5).

El impacto de los dramáticos acontecimientos que sumieron a España en una de las mayores crisis de su historia y que conmocionaron a buena parte del mundo fue de tal envergadura en todos los ámbitos, incluido el poético, que tal y como señala Marilyn Rosenthal en *Poetry of the Spanish Civil War*, “seldom has a single socio-political event provoked so many poets to write so many poems” (1). Para Stanley Weintraub, “never since has a cause so captured the moral and physical

influence of so many makers and molders of the language, or created such relentless pressure upon so many members of the intellectual communities in the English-speaking world to take sides, to make a stand” (2), mientras que Pablo Neruda, que se encontraba en Madrid cuando empezó el conflicto, afirma que “no ha habido en la historia intelectual un suelo tan fértil para los poetas como la Guerra Civil española” (168).

En los Estados Unidos, concretamente, hubo poetas que escribieron desde las trincheras, como Edwin Rolfe. Otros fueron testigos en calidad de corresponsales, Langston Hughes o Muriel Rukeyser. Desde la distancia, compaginándolo con una intensa actividad política, escribió Archibald MacLeish. Son muchos más, pero no menos relevantes, quienes se inspiraron en la cobertura de prensa, como los ya citados Stevens, Berryman o Rexroth. Todos escribieron mientras ocurrían los hechos, pero Levine, por una cuestión generacional, dará cuenta de su vocación de dar voz a personas cuya vida estuvo marcada con el conflicto a partir de la década de 1970, logrando traspasar fronteras no solo temporales y geográficas, sino también lingüísticas y literarias.

La amenaza del fascismo

En el poema “My Father with Cigarette Twelve Years Before the Nazis Could Break His Heart”, que Levine publica en *The Simple Truth*, libro con el que obtuvo el premio *Pulitzer* en 1995, explora el temor ante el apetito expansionista de Hitler en los años 30 del siglo pasado. A pesar de lo que el título sugiere no es un poema autobiográfico, proviene de un cuadro titulado “My Father with Cigarette” (Powers 294), del pintor judío Harry Lieberman, que emigró en 1906 de Polonia a Estados Unidos y que en 1933, siendo consciente de lo que ocurriría a sus familiares si Hitler llegara al poder, regresaría para tratar de convencerlos de que se mudaran a Estados Unidos.

Inspirado también por el hecho de que cuando Levine observa el cuadro se dio cuenta, con cierto alivio, de que dentro de la tragedia, al menos su propio padre no llegó a presenciar el Holocausto: “For the first time, I realized that awful as that event was it did spare him the knowledge of what was ahead for all those he’d left behind” (Powers 294), y escrito desde el punto de vista

de un adulto que recuerda retrospectivamente un momento de su niñez, la voz poética en primera persona empieza evocando una escena en la que su padre está prendiendo una cerilla en la cocina para encender un cigarro:

I remember the room in which he held
a kitchen match and with his thumbnail
commanded it to flame: a brown sofa,
two easy chairs, one covered with flowers,
a black piano no one ever played half
covered by a long-fringed ornamental scarf. (1-6)

Manteniendo la ambigüedad de que el hablante sea el propio poeta, Levine muestra un trozo de lo que era la realidad que él percibía antes de haber desarrollado sus facultades críticas y de que estallara una guerra que ya se intuía. Mediante los detalles más insignificantes que permanecen en el recuerdo, (descripción de objetos en la habitación, “a black piano no one ever played” (5), la conversación con su padre sobre dinero “asking why it matters” (10), cómo estaba vestido su padre, “held up by suspenders” (24) o cuando su abuela le leía “*David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*” (60) antes de irse a dormir), hasta los sucesos importantes que ocurrieron ese año, se crea una tensión que tiene su efecto emocional cuando se alude directamente a la Segunda Guerra Mundial. No se mencionan los dramáticos sucesos, pero actúan como elemento presente en el temor del protagonista acerca del futuro:

Everything tells you this is a preface
to something important, the Second World War,
the news that leaked back from Poland
that the villages were gone. The truth is---
if there is a truth---I remember the room,
I remember the flame, the blue smoke,
how bright and slippery were the secret coins,
how David Copperfield doubted his own name,
how sweet the stars seemed, peeping and blinking,
how close the moon, how utterly silent the piano. (53-72)

En esta última escena, con la expansión imperialista de Hitler en Europa como telón de fondo, “this is a preface / to something important, the Second World War” (63-64), el significado de los recuerdos cobra sentido para el protagonista, que ahora es adulto. La elipsis, como recurso fundamental, al no entrar en detalles sobre las decisiones internacionales que están fuera del entendimiento del niño, constituye el marco para la resonancia emocional. De la misma manera, la lógica del momento en el que el padre está fumando un cigarro adquiere significado por las reacciones fragmentarias y entrecortadas que sugieren los recuerdos de una realidad en crisis.

Levine, como judío que creció en una ciudad donde había un fuerte sentimiento antisemita, vivió el ascenso del fascismo en Europa como una cuestión personal. “Coming from a Jewish household” señala en una entrevista, “I had a very heightened sense of what fascism meant. It meant anti-Semitism; it meant Hitler...and I saw the threat reaching right into my house and snuffing me out if something wasn't done to stop the advance of fascism (Don't Ask 93). El estallido de la Guerra Civil española, al igual que muchos escritores de su generación, significó la primera gran derrota de las democracias ante el fascismo y el preámbulo de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Claude G. Bowers, embajador de los Estados Unidos en España entre 1933-1939, lamentaba en *My Mission to Spain. Watching The Rehearsal for World War II*, cómo las fuerzas democráticas españolas fueron abandonadas por sus supuestos aliados y “succumbed to the strange indifference of democratic nations in whose defense they were valiantly fighting. World War II began in Spain in 1936” (vi). Orwell, que estuvo en el frente, coincide con esta interpretación cuando expresó su frustración por el desconcertante papel de los países aliados que miraron para otro lado: “The most baffling thing in the Spanish War was the behavior of the great powers (Looking Back 446).

A medida que se hacían evidentes los fracasos diplomáticos de la política de *No Intervención* con la que Francia y Gran Bretaña pretendían “procurar el aislamiento del conflicto español” (Aróstegui 60) y se producía la ruptura de acuerdos previos de colaboración, como el que se firmó en 1937 en Londres para llevar a cabo un embargo de armas, se constató “que los

países vecinos se escudaban en la hipocresía de las palabras -el sostenimiento de la paz mundial- para tapar la realidad de los hechos” (Núñez 121). El *Pacto de Munich* en 1938 entre Alemania, Francia, el Reino Unido e Italia supuso “la dimisión que los países democráticos hicieron de sus valores y sus principios” (Tuñón 479), terminó por confirmar una claudicación que Levine recuerda con estas palabras:

The things I was hearing everywhere were true, that the Nazis and the Italians were there supporting the fascist army, and it was just more of the advance of fascism, which had already claimed Austria and during the Spanish Civil War took Czechoslovakia and began to move in on Poland, demanding the Polish Corridor. So that you didn't know where this threat was going to end. And so-called western democracies were doing a pathetic job of combating it. They were looking the other way. And if you look into the history you know that they wanted fascism to succeed. (Don't Ask 93)

A diferencia de muchos de los poemas que se escribieron durante los años del conflicto, en “My Father ...” no hay recuento de detalles de los combates o referencias a decisiones políticas, sino la mezcla de recuerdos del padre del autor fallecido en 1933 con los del pintor Lieberman, que ese mismo año fue a Polonia. Se nos ofrece así, una imagen de la tragedia que se avecinaba y que marcó a Levine en un momento específico de su infancia de manera muy diferente a como refleja, por ejemplo, quien fuera su profesor en la universidad, John Berryman, figura clave de la escuela poética que se denominó “Confessional Poetry” en la década de 1960, en el poema “Nineteen Thirty-Eight”. La evidencia de la futilidad de las políticas de apaciguamiento y las pretensiones expansionistas de los estados totalitarios es también el trasfondo, pero contrasta con el poema de Levine al utilizar impactantes imágenes visuales de manera directa dentro de un fuerte tono de denuncia. El título hace referencia al *Pacto de Munich*, que se firma ese mismo año de 1938.

Across the frontiers of a helpless world
the great planes swarm, the carriers of death,
germs in the healthy body of the air,^[1]_[SEP]
and blast our cities where we stand in talk
by doomed and comfortable fires. (1-5)

La catastrófica situación en la que se encontraba España se pone de manifiesto en este primer quinteto de los siete que contiene el poema, donde la imagen del “mundo desamparado” (“helpless world”) alude al abandono en que habían dejado a España las naciones que firmaron el acuerdo. Los bombardeos son personificados en “gérmenes” (“germs”) que contaminan el aire y destruyen las ciudades mientras nadie hace nada y todo el mundo sigue inmerso en sus conversaciones diarias y la comodidad de sus rutinas, “doomed and comfortable fires”.

Cabe destacar la pregunta retórica que abre la quinta estrofa en la que la voz poética intenta encontrar una respuesta lógica al equívoco de tratar el conflicto únicamente como una guerra civil, cuando en realidad era ya mundial. “What was a civil war this year but strangers / overhead, guns at sea, and foreign guns/and foreign squadrons in the plundered town?” (21-23). La desesperanza aumenta cuando se incrementan los bombardeos sobre civiles y a pesar de los acuerdos no intervencionistas, la Alemania de Hitler y la Italia de Mussolini siguen apoyando a uno de los bandos de la contienda: “a Spaniard learnt that any time is time / for German or Italian doom” (24-25).

Con la descripción de los supervivientes huyendo para escapar de los brutales crímenes: “Survivors, lean and daring and black men, / lurked in the hills. The villagers were gone, / the land given to rape and colonists” (26-28) y con la imagen, en la última estrofa, de las armas letales de los aviones (“fatal wings”) se describe la destrucción provocada por el acuerdo en ese fatídico año:

The winter sky is fatal wings. What voice
will spare the aged and the dying Year?
his blood is on all thresholds, bodies found
in swollen rivers curse him as he dies:
criminal, to stand as warning. (30-35)

“My Father ...” y “Nineteen Thirty-Eight” presentan dos maneras diferentes de crear impacto emocional para reflejar la conmoción en dos generaciones de un conflicto que empezó siendo interno pero que pronto se internacionalizó. Berryman por medio de apocalípticas imágenes visuales sobre la destrucción causada por los ataques a la población civil, donde hay sangre en “todos los umbrales de las puertas” y los cuerpos aparecen en “ríos hinchados”. Levine, a través del valor sugestivo de las noticias que están en el aire en ese momento histórico específico con la amenaza nazi y la Guerra Civil española.

El resurgir antisemita

Cuando un día al salir del colegio se le acercó una niña no mayor que él y le dijo que no era más que “a dirty Jew, a Christ-killer, and I deserved everything I got” (So Ask, 19), Levine, que tan solo tenía 5 años, no auguraba que esta sería una de las primeras demostraciones de animadversión por su condición de judío. A una temprana edad adquiriría una conciencia de la desaprobación hacia los judíos en su entorno, desde donde además ejercían su influencia notorios antisemitas. Por ejemplo, el empresario Henry Ford les acusaba de ser los que dominaban el mundo de manera oculta y de que habían “llegado a ser ricos no en mutua competencia, sino a costa de los pueblos no judíos” (9) o el cura Charles Coughlin, celebridad nacional de los medios de comunicación, que comparaba a Franco con George Washington y Abraham Lincoln por ser un “rebel for Christ” (Warren 112).

Coughlin, que era conocido por sus incendiarios discursos en los que denigraba al presidente Franklin D. Roosevelt, culpaba a los judíos de todos los males del país y proclamaba sus simpatías hacia el régimen nazi mientras alimentaba leyendas sobre la colaboración entre los judíos y el comunismo: “If Jews persist in supporting communism directly or indirectly, that will be regrettable. By their failure to use the press, the radio and the banking house, where they stand so prominently, to fight communism as vigorously as they fight Nazism, the Jews invite the charge of being supporters of communism” (Rudin 87). El propio Levine recuerda este periodo de la siguiente manera:

My Detroit, that is, the Detroit of my growing up, was a viciously anti-Semitic city possessing such outstanding Jew-haters as Father Coughlin, who spouted his Nazi filth every Sunday from the Church of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, a few miles from where I lived, and Henry Ford, whose Dearborn newspaper published the so-called Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It's little wonder I was in the eyes of many-schoolmates and others-first and foremost a Jew, nothing else. (Barron 102)

La rápida evolución del fascismo en Europa y la precariedad laboral de la peor depresión económica en la historia de los Estados Unidos aumentó el odio hacia la comunidad judía, que aunque siempre estuvo presente alcanzaría en esos años niveles nunca vistos. Esta fijación con el pueblo judío tuvo también su equivalente en España durante los años de la Guerra Civil y la Posguerra. Si en Estados Unidos eran discriminados en trabajos, colegios y universidades, y hasta se les culpaba por la crisis económica mundial y de conspirar para controlar el gobierno, en España tampoco gozaban del favor ni de Franco ni de algunos de sus compañeros de armas, como Millán Astray o Queipo de Llano que establecieron como una de las justificaciones morales de la guerra los ataques contra las conspiraciones judías, “cuyos planes conducían inexorablemente al comunismo” (Chillida 492).

La propaganda antisemita alcanzaría una difusión hasta entonces desconocida siendo frecuentes los ataques verbales porque, según Astray, “querían encadenar a España para convertirnos en esclavos” (Fernández 28), y por eso se justificaba una guerra, que en palabras de Queipo de Llano en una de sus charlas radiofónicas, era “una guerra por la civilización occidental contra los judíos del mundo entero” (Lisbona 67). Por eso, cuando se produce el alzamiento de Franco, las alarmas de la comunidad judía en los Estados Unidos se disparan, y no solo por los vientos antisemitas que soplaban en ciertos sectores del bando nacional, sino porque el temor a una alianza con Hitler ayudaría a expandir el fascismo a ambos lados de Atlántico. El periodista judío del *New Yorker* Maury Colow afirmaba, “that the success of Franco

would signal the beginning of world collapse. For us it wasn't Franco, it was always Hitler" (Hochschild 100).

La descripción que hace Levine de sí mismo, cuando tenía 13 años en el poema "The Old Testament", capta lo que para él significó ser judío en la América de los años de la Gran Depresión, con un presidente Roosevelt incapaz de dar un giro a la economía, el aumento del descontento por parte de grupos proletarios y los ataques antisemitas que habían dado lugar a una "explosion of unprecedented antisemitic fervor" (Dinnerstein 105). El hablante del poema (que coincide con el propio Levine) es caracterizado, según lo que dice de él su hermano gemelo sobre cómo reaccionaba ante el acoso constante de otros chicos, desde los que le llamaban "kike" (palabra peyorativa para referirse a los judíos) a los que le provocaban intentando humillarle: "My twin brother swears that at age thirteen / I'd take anyone who called kike / no matter how old or how big he was" (1-3). Desde la perspectiva de un adulto, como en el anterior poema "My Father...", el hablante en primera persona recuerda cómo se refugiaba en su pasión por la jardinería: "dreaming of the tomatoes coming into fullness" (36) y su necesidad de que le dejaran tranquilo: "begging for a moment's peace" (42), aunque siempre con el recuerdo de Hitler presente:

I remember putting myself to sleep dreaming
of the tomatoes coming into fullness, the pansies
laughing in the spring winds, the magical wisteria
climbing along the garage, and dreaming of Hitler,
of firing a single shot from a foot away, one
that would tear his face into a caricature of mine,
tear stained, bloodied, begging for a moment's peace. (36-
42)

La lógica de esta escena, en la que la voz poética recuerda cómo se evadía de los problemas que le afectaban, no depende tanto de la acción que se está desarrollando, en la que el niño (el propio Levine) trata de dormirse evadiéndose pensando en la naturaleza, sino del contraste entre las flores (pensamientos "pansies" y glicinias "wisteria") con reacciones fragmentarias y entrecortadas de la realidad que se insinúa: "dreaming of Hitler".

Una realidad que representa la amenaza que encarnaba para Levine y la comunidad judía el racismo antisemita, y a la que el mismo Levine se ha referido como “the ultimate source of his pain, Hitler” (Barron 105).

En este contexto histórico no es de extrañar que cuando estalla la Guerra Civil, de los aproximadamente 2.800 voluntarios estadounidenses que se embarcaron hacia España para luchar al servicio de las Brigadas Internacionales, casi un tercio fueran judíos. Aunque en un principio, como muchos voluntarios han afirmado, no iban para defenderse de la amenaza contra ellos, sino como una oportunidad de luchar contra la opresión internacional. “When we went to Spain we saw ourselves primarily as internationalists”, señala el brigadista George Watt, “we internalized this feeling of internationalism, that we were citizens of the world” (SCJS). La Brigada Lincoln se convertiría en el vehículo por el que los judíos se enfrentarían al enemigo, como demuestran otros testimonios de brigadistas. Para Gene Wolman: “For the first time since Fascism began systematically throttling and rending all we hold dear, we are getting the opportunity to fight back”, mientras que Milton Wolff explica la razón por la que se enlistó: “I am Jewish, and knowing that as a Jew we are the first to suffer when fascism does come, I went to Spain to fight against it” (ALBA).

Las brigadas internacionales

El autor del libro *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade: American Fighting Fascism in the Spanish Civil War*, Don Lawson, recuerda que en sus años de universitario la Guerra Civil española ocupaba el centro de las conversaciones de los estudiantes con conciencia social de aquella generación. Considerada una “romantic cause” (Lawson vii), el estallido de la guerra despertó el espíritu aventurero de muchos que pensaban que la manera de aportar algo en la lucha contra el fascismo era unirse a la Brigada Lincoln. Existía el convencimiento de que a menos que Franco, ayudado por Hitler y Mussolini, fuera derrotado, Europa estaría abocada a una guerra total contra la opresión nazi y fascista. “Spain” señala Paul Preston, “was the last bulwark against the horrors of Hitlerism” (6).

Tanto Lawson como Preston reconocen que muchos de los voluntarios tenían un componente ideológico radical y las brigadas internacionales estaban organizadas por comunistas con intereses que iban más allá de los derechos democráticos y libertades de los trabajadores, pero ante todo creían que “by fighting fascism in Spain they were also fighting it in their own countries” (Preston 6). Poetas como Rafael Alberti, Miguel Hernández, Pablo Neruda o César Vallejo, celebraron en sus versos su solidaria heroicidad y contribución a una épica colectiva, sin embargo, para historiadores como Pío Moa, las Brigadas Internacionales son uno de los grandes mitos de la Guerra Civil española, cuestionando que aquellos voluntarios se movilizaran en realidad para ayudar a la República entregando “su sangre generosamente por la libertad de España” (346).

La perspectiva de poetas estadounidenses que escribieron sobre los brigadistas no se enfocó en la alabanza de su solidaridad internacional o sus hazañas en el frente sino en el drama personal o el alto precio que acabaron pagando los que lograron sobrevivir. Por ejemplo, en “Love Letter from Spain (1937)”, Langston Hughes se mete en la piel de un soldado para expresar el deseo de estar con su novia mientras desde la trinchera siente “the bullets whining” (7) y suspira por la idea de que su amada en el estado de Alabama esté pensando en él: “Are you thinkin’ about me, honey / over here where I’m!” (13-14). En otro poema, “Letter from Spain (1937)”, es un brigadista afroamericano el que lamenta su desconcierto al descubrir que un combatiente moro al que han hecho prisionero tiene la piel oscura como él: “We captured a wounded Moor today. / He was just as dark as me” (2-3), y que el bando que defiende va contra sus propios intereses como individuo y los de su pueblo: “I said, Boy, what you been doin’ here / Fightin’ against the free?” (4-5).

Hughes, que entendía la guerra en términos de colonialismo al considerar que “los moros están engañados” y que son “un pueblo colonial de color oprimido y utilizado por el fascismo” (37), mantenía la esperanza de que si triunfaba el bando, que según él defendía la libertad (el poema está escrito en 1937), también desaparecería la segregación racial:

Cause if a free Spain wins this war,
the colonies too are free.
Then something wonderful'll happen
to them Moors as dark as me. (22-25)

La interpretación que hace Hughes sobre las posibles consecuencias de la Guerra Civil española muestra que no menos temor que el fascismo despertaba en la comunidad judía era el que producía en la afroamericana. “Si el fascismo sigue avanzando por España, por Europa y luego por todo el mundo, no quedará ni un solo lugar para los jóvenes negros inteligentes” (36), afirmaba en septiembre de 1937 desde Madrid, donde estaba trabajando como reportero de las Brigadas Internacionales y había conocido a personas de origen africano de varias partes del mundo que estaban luchando en el frente. Precisamente, uno de los brigadistas que él propio Hughes conoció, su compatriota James Yates, escribió en su novela autobiográfica, *De Misisipi a Madrid: memorias de un afroamericano de la Brigada Lincoln*, sobre el temor a la expansión del fascismo en Europa, también presente en los Estados Unidos: “Nosotros los negros teníamos nuestro propio fascismo contra el cual luchar. El Ku Klux Klan y los que se dedicaban a linchar aquí en casa eran una amenaza omnipresente” (85).

Hughes escribió sobre los voluntarios brigadistas desde una perspectiva directa, como testigo. Stevens como ciudadano que reacciona a las noticias de prensa, y Levine, inspirado por la tragedia de conocidos que fallecieron en la batalla o los testimonios de los que regresaron. En “I Could Believe” da voz a un soldado que ha vuelto de las trincheras “... I came / home from Spain, bitter / and wounded...” (34-36), y consigue poner un negocio en su ciudad: “...opened / a small portrait shop / in an office building / in Detroit...” (37-39). El recuento de su vida actual se mezcla con recuerdos de su experiencia en el frente como soldado en la batalla del Ebro:

...7.000 miles
from my lost Spain,
a lifetime from the Ebro
where 7 men I came to need

went under in a small boat
and I crossed alone
to a burnt shore and kept
running... (60-67)

Menos suerte que este excombatiente, agradecido por no ser otro muerto más, “or a body fallen away / to the dust of Spain” (75-76), es la del soldado gravemente herido que protagoniza la elegía “To P.L., 1916-1937: a soldier of the Republic”, donde se recrean el lugar y circunstancias de sus últimas horas. Después de tres días postrado con la cara congelada por el frío de la nieve en el suelo, le dan por muerto despojándose de su cuerpo y se esconde tras unos pinos.

Gray earth peeping through snow,
you lay for three days
with one side of your face
frozen to the ground. They tied your cheek
with the red and black scarf
of the Anarchist, and bundled you
in canvas, and threw you away. (1-7)

Una mujer que pasaba por el lugar donde ocurrieron los hechos le robó sus pertenencias: “stole your black Wellingtons, / the gray hunting socks, and the long / slender knife you wore” (11-13), para después caer su cuerpo en el olvido entre los pinos donde se escondió y murió: “...no one / to look on the farthest tip / of wind breathing down from the mountains / and shaking the stunted pines you hid among” (52-55). Tanto el protagonista como los hechos que se narran en “To P.L., 1917-1936” y “I Could Believe”, carecen de cualquier tipo de sentimentalismo, celebración laudatoria o mitificación, al igual que los poemas en que Levine rinde tributo a figuras literarias marcadas por el conflicto como Miguel Hernández y Federico García Lorca e históricas como los líderes anarquistas Buenaventura Durruti o Francisco Ascaso.

El tributo a una utopía

Cuando Levine empezó a alcanzar reconocimiento literario en la década de 1970 y en diferentes entrevistas, publicadas después en libros como *Don't Ask* (1981) y *So Ask: Essays, Conversations and Interviews* (2002), se le preguntaba por sus simpatías políticas, siempre se definió como una persona intensamente política pero no adscrita a ningún partido, un anarquista que desconfiaba de la validez de los gobiernos que bloquean, según sus palabras, la esencia del individuo, “the essential oneness” (*Don't Ask* xi). De su temprana experiencia trabajando en varias fábricas de la industria automovilística desde los 14 años ante la necesidad de contribuir a la economía familiar, viene su primer contacto con el anarquismo y donde conoce un mundo que generalmente ha estado al margen de la poesía, pero al que se comprometió a dar voz: “I just wanted to tell the stories of people whom I found extraordinary and dear. I saw them pass from the world, and nobody said a goddam word about them, so I said, ‘Well, this is a subject matter that is mine and mine alone’” (*So Ask* 132).

Posteriormente, tras conocer en profundidad la historia de la Guerra Civil a través de libros como *The Spanish Civil War* de Hugh Thomas, considerado en su momento como una de las primeras historias oficiales de la guerra, o *Homage to Cataluña*, en el que George Orwell narra sus experiencias como miliciano, Levine descubre su afinidad ideológica con los anarquistas españoles: “They had by far, I thought, the most interesting vision of the future. Their willingness to sacrifice in an endless battle for human justice and decency--their willingness to take everything the world could dish out and still keep coming back--seemed boundless. I was just so filled with awe” (*So Ask* 137-138). Comprometido con el lado humano y los valores de solidaridad que encarnaban y consciente del carácter utópico del ideal anarquista, él mismo se ha encargado de reconocer no haberlo podido llevar a cabo en su propia vida, pero sí de haber tratado de incluirlo en su poética:

No--I wasn't crazy! I thought it was something I could incorporate in the way I lived -- and incorporate in my

poetry. But after four or five years I felt that if even I couldn't incorporate it in myself -- and I was given to a kind of awe toward it -- how the hell was it going to grab onto the American earth? (So Ask 138)

En uno de sus homenajes más conocidos, el poema "Francisco, I'll Bring You Red Carnations", rinde tributo a quien para él fue símbolo de solidaridad, el anarquista que falleció en la Guerra Civil Francisco Ascaso. Publicado en *7 Years from Somewhere* (1979), la portada del libro muestra una foto en blanco y negro de la tumba de Ascaso, Durruti y Guardia Ferrer en el cementerio de Montjuich, lugar donde también sitúa otros poemas como "Montjuich" y "For the Fallen". Es allí donde el yo poético hace un peregrinaje para cumplir la promesa a la que hace referencia el título del poema.

Here in the great cemetery
behind the fortress of Barcelona
I have come one more to see
the graves of the fallen. (1-4)

Entre referencias a Ascaso, ahora encarando "eternity with only a stone" (35) y la ciudad que fuera centro del anarquismo español: "Your Barcelona is gone" (70), con una evolución en su desarrollo social muy diferente de lo que se había imaginado el líder anarquista, "the old town swallowed / in industrial filth and / the burning mist of gasoline" (71-74), la voz poética se dirige en segunda persona al líder anarquista, lamentando que los ideales de libertad por los que luchó no se hayan materializado y su sueño de un mundo más justo, en cuanto a las desigualdades sociales, siga lejos de haberse cumplido. "The poor packed in tenements / a dozen high; the rich / in splendid homes or temples" (12-14).

De esta manera, Levine, que ha sido definido como "a late, ironic Whitman of our industrial heartland" (Hirsch 345) por haber dado voz a la clase trabajadora de Detroit, conecta su experiencia en el mundo industrial de su juventud con el yo poético cuatro décadas después, donde sigue encontrando el mismo desequilibrio social lejos del sueño por el que murió

Ascaso. “Both cities” señala Charles Molesworth para explicar esta identificación entre las dos ciudades que Levine hace en varios poemas, “are built on the backs of sullen, exploited workers, and the faded revolution in one smolders like the blunting, racist fear in the other” (151), mientras que Herbert Leibowitz describe la afinidad entre las dos ciudades en el contexto de que para Levine simbolizan el fracaso de una situación que pudo haber cambiado, pero no se logró: “The poet’s ‘Spanish self,’ as he calls it, is kin to his Detroit self. Both bear witness to the visionary ideal destroyed” (15).

El poema concluye con la promesa de atravesar el Atlántico para llevar los claveles rojos a la tumba de su héroe fallecido, uniendo una vez más, su experiencia personal con su conciencia social dentro de un imaginario poético que se enfoca en sus sentimientos y no en el compromiso con un programa político colectivo. En esta estructura de apropiación del sentimiento, Ascaso actúa como símbolo de lucha por una determinada causa pero con sus contradicciones reales y particularidades de la historia:

Francisco, stone, knife blade,
single soldier still on
the run down the darkest
street of all, we will be back
across an ocean and a continent
to bring you red carnations,
to celebrate the unbroken
promise of your life that
once was frail and flesh. (93-101)

Fiel a su promesa de dar voz a la desilusión y confusión de los que lucharon por una causa que creyeron digna, Levine huye, una vez más de la idealización de acontecimientos históricos o de caer en juicios políticos o clichés propagandísticos. Ya sea expresando el temor ante el fascismo, dando voz a los brigadistas o lamentando el sueño perdido de una sociedad más justa, sus poemas son una crónica del contexto cultural e histórico de los Estados Unidos y la Guerra Civil española y un legado que

trasciende cualquier tipo de simplificación o mitificación romántica de lo que fue la “última gran causa”.

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IDENTIDADES EMERGENTES A TRAVÉS DE LA CONVERSIÓN AL ISLAM DE LA MUJER ESPAÑOLA EN *UN BURKA POR AMOR* (2007) DE REYES MONFORTE

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Resumen: La emergencia de unas conversiones al islam por parte de unos sujetos españoles no solo constituye una realidad social cada vez más usual, sino el reflejo de un tráfico ideológico del presente siglo. En este ensayo me propongo analizar la emergencia de una nueva identidad producto de la conversión religiosa de la mujer española, cuando ésta es producida por medio de un factor afectivo con la pareja, y cómo aquélla ha propiciado unos cambios identitarios en términos de género, sociedad, y nación, lo que llevaré a cabo mediante el rol que tiene el *burka* como parámetro identitario más visible en *Un burka por amor*. Asimismo, examinaré si la identidad de esta conversa, tanto si ésta es ubicada en un territorio español como fuera de éste, implica una desterritorialización de unos valores con los que se asociaba a España y el fin de lo que se entiende por una “identidad española”.

Palabras clave: Desterritorialización, islam, identidad, burka, género

La escritora Reyes Monforte, conocida por su trayectoria periodística, se lanza al mundo literario con su primera novela, *Un burka por amor* (2007), novela que la hizo saltar a la popularidad literaria. Como característica esencial a sus novelas, se destaca no solo el elemento romántico, –una extraordinaria historia de amor–, sino también el elemento intercultural/interracial que se presenta en todas las sociedades creadas por esta autora, el cual emerge de unas historias narrativas basadas en hechos reales, y que Monforte pretende resucitar. Asimismo, con esta novela, Monforte se lanza al mundo musulmán mediante un tema de conversiones religiosas al islam, cuestionando con ello tanto unos mitos como unos estigmas sobre esta religión. Aunque esta autora haya ganado popularidad con todas sus novelas, existe asimismo un vacío académico en cuanto al estudio de su obra dentro de un panorama literario peninsular.

Por consiguiente, la relevancia del estudio de su primera novela se debe a varias razones; una, desde una perspectiva sociológica, es el reflejo de una realidad española cada vez más

común, pero también de una global, producto de unos movimientos sociales que implican migraciones, diásporas, exilios y desplazamientos; y dos, porque todo ello es reflejo de una ideología cultural fluida y nunca estática que conlleva nuevas prácticas culturales e identitarias que Monforte quiere ensalzar como parte de una realidad nacional y global, lo que se materializa en esta novela a través de la conversión religiosa al islam de una mujer española. Monforte, contribuye con ello, pues, no solo a un mapa literario español que refleja nuevas tendencias sociológicas, sino a un importante discurso feminista y cultural con relación a unas percepciones bidireccionales entre el mundo islámico y el no islámico, espejo de numerosos eventos tanto políticos como sociales que se están dando históricamente con relación al islam.

Los objetivos de este ensayo son dos; primero, analizar el papel que la conversión religiosa al islam juega en la emergencia de una nueva identidad que la conversa española va adoptando en un nuevo rol de género, social, y de nación mediante el estudio del *burka* como parámetro identitario más evidente; segundo, me propongo examinar si la identidad de la nueva conversa española es representativa de una nueva “identidad española y/u occidental” en la que ésta ya no está asociada más a unos valores cristianos y/o seculares contemporáneos con los que se ha vinculado a España y a Occidente, o si aquella, por el contrario, debe ser interpretada como ejemplo de una identidad múltiple, producto del gran tráfico ideológico característico del siglo XXI.

En *Un burka por amor* se cuenta la historia real de la joven mallorquina María Galera, que, en su búsqueda de independencia, emigra a Londres, se casa con un hombre afgano del que se enamora perdidamente, –Nasrad–, y se convierte a la religión de su marido, –el islam–, más como un acto de amor y de lo que ella percibe como gratitud hacia aquél, que como un acto genuino de conversión *per se*. El desplazamiento de María y Nasrad al país de éste va a consolidar la transformación identitaria en María, que ya se había iniciado en Londres a raíz de la conversión y matrimonio con un hombre musulmán, identidad que emerge como un intento de darle sentido a una serie de elecciones religiosas y culturales que ella misma ha iniciado.

Aunque los motivos de la conversión no sea el tema explorado en este ensayo, sino la identidad que emerge producto

de aquélla, es importante contextualizar brevemente algunas de las razones por las que se produce dicha conversión para entender cómo se hacen posible unas interacciones entre conversión e identidad. Para ello, es necesario partir de la premisa de que la conversión de María no se inicia como resultado de una búsqueda espiritual sino mediante un elemento afectivo con su marido, del que surgirán otros incentivos importantes que agregarán sentido a la conversión. En efecto, ésta representa una estrategia pragmática para lograr una armonía en su matrimonio, una aceptación por parte de su nueva familia política y en definitiva, la inclusión social y familiar a una nueva comunidad musulmana que la hará sentirse arropada y protegida. Adicionalmente, aunque el Corán permite al hombre musulmán la unión conyugal con una mujer cristiana, la práctica de una endogamia religiosa siempre asegura unas mejores relaciones intrafamiliares, así como la garantía de que los futuros hijos nazcan asimismo en el islam. La importancia de tales relaciones intrafamiliares entre la mujer conversa y su familia política, así como entre el cónyuge musulmán y su familia de origen, quedan explicadas por Stefano Allievi, quien afirma en referencia al consenso religioso entre ambos cónyuges que: “It may also concern women as a *social* obligation, for them to be accepted by the family of the Muslim partner, or by the ethnic and/or religious community to which he belongs, and whose judgment he might fear in case of exogamy” (122).

La conversión de María “como muestra evidente de su amor hacia él [su marido]”, (*Un burka* 21), aunque no implica una transformación ideológica, – lo que muy bien podría ocurrir con el tiempo–, desencadena, no obstante, una serie de cambios identitarios, tanto internos emocionales, como externos y tangibles, que se manifiestan en unas prácticas corporales imposibles de omitir y que afectan la vida diaria del converso y de la pareja. Estas prácticas, significativas para el individuo y nunca ausentes de una carga simbólica, constituyen estrategias mediante las que este individuo exterioriza, tanto su identificación intelectual y emocional con esta religión, como un nuevo rol social, cultural, de género y político, producto de la conversión. Asimismo, aquéllas no adquieren el mismo significado en todos los conversos, sino que: “Islam might mean different things to different people, and some people might adhere to some of its

elements but not to others” (Abu-Raiya y Pargament 105), dependiendo del momento vital de éste, del nivel de compromiso religioso con la nueva religión y de la necesidad de este converso en establecer unos límites entre él/ella y la comunidad foránea no musulmana con la que coexiste a diario (Allievi 145). La comprensión, por parte tanto de un lector como de una sociedad, de unas acciones que María inicia, producto de una conversión y nueva identidad que va evolucionando en ella, –y que en el caso específico de esta conversa se materializan con el uso del *burka*, unas prescripciones alimenticias, la oración y lectura del Corán o las visitas reiteradas a la mezquita–, se hace imposible sin la exploración de unos valores previos a la conversión, así como de la “reinterpretación de un pasado” en referencia a un contexto biográfico de este converso (Bourque 242). Ejemplos de algunos eventos personales que son revisitados por María y que ahora observa adversamente a causa de su conversión, lo constituye “un pasado repleto de fiestas, alcohol y desenfreno” y unas experiencias vivenciales traumáticas de María previas a su conversión y relación con Nasrad. Los valores ideológicos occidentales con los que María ha crecido en referencia a unas relaciones familiares y sociales, no la han asistido en su condición de huérfana de madre durante su niñez, al haber sido relegada a vivir en un orfanato; como tampoco la han auxiliado ante una experiencia migratoria autónoma en Londres, al no recibir ninguna ayuda de otros grupos de migrantes occidentales o de unos autóctonos británicos, contrario a la inclusión social y apoyo que María experimenta por parte de la comunidad musulmana en este territorio foráneo.

El estudio del impacto de la conversión religiosa en la emergencia de una nueva identidad, así como el análisis de las intertextualidades que se producen entre ésta y la conversión requiere de la exploración del género de esta conversa con respecto a unos nuevos roles familiares y sociales que ésta adopta. En primer lugar, existe la transferencia de unas creencias y conceptos sobre el papel de la mujer en la sociedad que Nasrad y la religión que él profesa, mantienen, que se transfieren a la dinámica de la pareja y que se materializa en unas relaciones hegemónicas sobre la mujer, las cuales María acepta. Desde una perspectiva de género, las relaciones que existen entre María y

Nasrad en cuanto a unos roles como esposa, madre y mujer que forman parte del nuevo rol de género de María, son posibles mediante la emergencia de una nueva identidad, –producto de la conversión–, que va desarrollándose en el personaje, y que ocurre de forma contingente a la relación de pareja, causa por la que se ha producido aquélla. Es decir, la dimensión afectiva con la pareja proporciona el contexto emocional necesario mediante el cual el converso se adhiere a una ideología religiosa islámica y a unos valores culturales y roles sociales determinados, de lo cual emerge una nueva identidad de género.

Tal y como afirma Janet Jacobs, se produce la transferencia de una jerarquía sexual a una jerarquía religiosa dentro del matrimonio (166) que permite la adherencia de María a unos valores religiosos islámicos. Por consiguiente, la nueva identidad de María con respecto a un rol de género que ésta adopta responde no solamente a unas normas sociales de género que vinculan religión con sociedad y que María va internalizando con el tiempo, sino de forma mucho más importante, a un elemento afectivo con Nasrad, quien es realmente el que determina esa nueva identidad. Asimismo, la relación de poder que Nasrad ejerce sobre María, especialmente cuando viajan al país de éste (Afganistán), legitimada por una visión que el islam sostiene sobre la obediencia y sumisión de la mujer en este territorio, crea aún una mayor dependencia emocional de María hacia su marido, y, por consiguiente, hacia la afiliación religiosa de éste.

La transformación identitaria en María producto de una conversión mediante un componente afectivo, es asimismo materializada no solo en la sumisión hacia su marido, sino en unos cambios en la dinámica de pareja en cuanto a unas actividades que solían ocurrir y que ya no, y que concuerda con las palabras de la narradora: “María notaba cómo lo que hace unos meses eran continuas salidas a discotecas, bares de copas y divertidas fiestas nocturnas, ahora se reducían a cenas con los amigos de Nasrad, paseos o sesiones de cine” (*Un burka* 19). En segundo lugar, la emergencia de una identidad de género transcurre a través de unas prácticas corporales a raíz de la conversión que María debe acoger, producto de unas prescripciones religiosas que se sostienen últimamente por su relación sentimental con el hombre por el cual se ha convertido. Es, pues, su matrimonio con Nasrad

y no una normativa islámica con relación a tales prácticas corporales, lo que toma precedencia. Algunas de estas prácticas corporales se refieren al cambio de dieta y abandono de la ingesta de alcohol. No obstante, la más visible está relacionada con un cambio de indumentaria que determina una imagen de lo femenino y de ese nuevo rol de género que debe exteriorizarse en un contexto geográfico determinado [Afganistán] según una interpretación que del islam se hace en este lugar. Los cambios de indumentaria de María quedan expresados por la narradora al afirmar que: “Aquel día María dijo, con cierta tristeza y con notoria contrariedad, adiós a los vaqueros, a las camisetas y a las faldas cortas” (*Un burka* 110).

Las conexiones que se producen entre un rol de género y la indumentaria quedan ejemplificadas en la novela, no solo con el abandono de una indumentaria sugestiva previa a la conversión y matrimonio con Nasrad, sino con el uso del *burka* por parte de María ya en tierra afgana. La relevancia de esta transformación de imagen y el vínculo que se produce entre ésta y la emergencia de una nueva identidad en María se muestra no solo por el título de la novela, sino por las numerosas referencias que Monforte realiza en cuanto al rol de esta prenda y que constituye en la novela el parámetro identitario más importante, símbolo, asimismo, de la conversión de María.

En efecto, tanto el *burka* como el velo islámico, –el *hijab*–, no solo han despertado un controversial diálogo en referencia al papel que juegan estas prendas en la identidad de la mujer islámica, sino que continúan constituyendo uno de los elementos centrales en un debate político y cultural en un espacio público en el que un occidente no musulmán y una escuela feminista occidental lo han interpretado como una sumisión de la mujer al hombre y opresión de ésta, un peligro a una seguridad pública y una transgresión a la igualdad de géneros, contrariamente a la escuela feminista islámica que lo concibe como parte de la identidad de la mujer islámica. Con relación a un feminismo islámico, la mayor parte de la literatura se centra en cuál es o cuál ha sido la reinterpretación de los textos coránicos que la mujer islámica (Ali, 2006; Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999) ha llevado a cabo con relación a temas como igualdad de género, el rol de la mujer en la sociedad o en roles de liderazgo religioso por poner unos

ejemplos. No obstante, existe menos literatura sobre cómo estas reinterpretaciones deben ser implementadas por parte de la mujer musulmana y en específico de la mujer conversa dentro de un contexto occidental. Por consiguiente, y aunque el personaje ficcional y real de María Galera no se identifique como feminista islámica específicamente, la profesión de una fe islámica, el uso libre de una indumentaria como símbolo de aquélla y unas prácticas corporales islámicas específicas, al mismo tiempo que unas experiencias vitales concretas, hace que, de una forma implícita, profesen un discurso de género que debe ser interpretado dentro de un marco feminista islámico.

Para analizar el rol que juega el uso del *burka* en términos de identidad y en la mujer occidental conversa, es necesario hacer dos puntualizaciones; primero, resaltar la omisión en el Corán sobre la obligación de aquél, que, en contraposición, la cultura afgana e interpretación religiosa que como país se hace de ello, ha impuesto y legitimado. Es por ello, que puede concluirse que cualquier controversia que exista sobre el uso del *burka*, no tiene ninguna base religiosa, sino cultural y política. Segundo, el uso de esta prenda es extremadamente inusual tanto en países de mayoría musulmana como no, y es mayoritariamente usado en Afganistán y en algunas zonas rurales de Pakistán (Hill 78). No obstante, es importante contextualizar su uso en sociedades occidentales a causa del bagaje ideológico del que parte la conversa portadora de esta prenda, y de la idea que occidente tiene del *burka*, lo que constituye parte de todo un aparato de creencias que aquélla debe combatir para mantener sentido a una elección, tanto sobre su uso, como asimismo sobre una misma conversión religiosa. Por consiguiente, es debido a esta ausencia u omisión explícita en el Corán sobre el *burka*, que la pregunta que debe realmente explorarse no es si su uso responde a la conversión de María [al estar éste vinculado a un parámetro geográfico en el que es obligado], sino el efecto que tiene en la identidad de la conversa tanto en términos religiosos como culturales y de género. Para ello, es necesario explorar cuál es la reinterpretación que la María *conversa* hace del uso de esta prenda en conexión a su matrimonio con Nasrad y a un territorio en el que el *burka* es prescrito, pero también con relación a un territorio europeo del que la conversa

procede, el cual considera el *burka* como símbolo de retrógrado y opresivo para la mujer.

Todo ello, nos va a ayudar a entender uno de los puntos a los que se hizo mención previamente, es decir, cómo un discurso feminista islámico es implementado en la vida de la conversa en términos cotidianos en contraste con una escuela feminista occidental que visiona el *burka* como necesariamente opresivo. Primero, el *burka* representa para María, una identificación ideológica con una nueva religión a la que se ha entrado a formar parte, al no poder desvincularse religión de *burka* en Afganistán. Esta identificación intelectual con el islam a través de esta prenda ayuda a cumplir una función tanto religiosa como cultural en tierra afgana. En efecto, el *burka* ayuda a María a implementar una modestia que el islam sí prescribe, y así el cumplimiento de unas normativas religiosas dentro de un contexto geográfico en el que se ubica que se rigen por la *burkarización* de la mujer y que otorgan sentido no solo a la conversión sino a su nueva vida como musulmana. Segundo, esta indumentaria representa para María las nuevas relaciones sociales hegemónicas establecidas entre ella y el territorio en el que vive, legitimadas por una religión en este país que interpreta el uso de esta prenda como una obligación y que se manifiesta tanto por la imagen de la mujer como por el rol de género que esta imagen impone, lo que puede verse en las siguientes palabras de Nasrad a su esposa: “María. Te tienes que poner el velo y también ropa más amplia. Cúbrete todo lo que puedas, sobre todo la cabeza... No vas tapada y corres peligro. Y nos lo haces correr a nosotros” (*Un burka* 62, 75).

La armonía que el uso del *burka* aporta a unas relaciones sociales y familiares adquiere relevancia al considerar que María representa el máximo exponente de otredad en Afganistán, país en el que no cuenta con ningún recurso social, económico o familiar de ningún tipo, con excepción de su marido y la familia de éste. Por consiguiente, el inicial rechazo de María hacia esta prenda, así como las constantes reprimendas de la familia de Nasrad hacia ésta al no llevarlo de una forma prescrita, es asimismo recordatorio no tanto de los riesgos que asume tanto ella como la familia de Nasrad, sino de las posibles tensiones que ello va a conllevar con su marido y con la familia de éste, si no lo lleva, razón por la que acata las normas con respecto a un código de

vestimenta. El *burka*, pues, representa asimismo para María una conexión emocional con su marido, que adquiere connotaciones contradictorias al usarlo en contra de su voluntad en un principio y como forma de complacer a un esposo por el cual no solo se ha convertido, sino por el cual ha abandonado tierra y familia de origen. De ahí la visión negativa de María con respecto al *burka*, al decir que: “Joder, parece que estoy disfrazada. Menos mal que esto se me acaba en un tiempo y me vuelvo a Europa” (*Un burka* 112), aunque radical al principio, cambia a una visión de aceptación tal como concuerda con las palabras de la narradora: “Cada día que pasaba, sentía que estaba más integrada en aquel mundo. Le hacía gracia y se sentía cómoda sentándose como una más entre aquellas mujeres envueltas en velos, pañuelos y ropas amplias con caras redondas y pasos torpes” (*Un burka* 196).

La dificultad para entender la evolución que María experimenta sobre un cambio de visión sobre el uso de esta prenda es parte del mensaje implícito de Monforte sobre unos valores de tolerancia cultural y religiosa que su novela representa. Asimismo, este proceso evolutivo tanto intelectual como emocional por el que María está experimentando con relación al islam y al *burka*, debe entenderse mediante la integración de un contexto biográfico, tanto personal – su experiencia con esta prenda antes de su conversión–, como legal, –el contexto jurídico con relación a una normativa sobre el *burka* con la que ha coexistido antes de la conversión–. Este contexto biográfico personal y legal representa la base de una serie de argumentos intelectuales con los que María debe enfrentarse para resistir unos valores con los que se asocia el *burka* de opresión y subordinación a la mujer. Así, con el objetivo de presentar cuál es el centro neurálgico del conflicto con respecto al *burka* en occidente y de establecer un vínculo con la mujer conversa y con el trasfondo ideológico al que ésta tiene que enfrentarse, es necesario exponer primero cuáles son algunos aspectos político-culturales que han alimentado este debate.

En primer lugar, es necesario puntualizar que parte de la polémica del *burka* no responde a una necesidad de regular su uso/prohibición en términos cuantitativos, sino en términos cualitativos, al ser poquísimos los casos de mujeres que lo usan en Europa, pero mucha la controversia que ha creado. Es importante señalar que la contextualización del *burka* dentro de un modelo

europeo político de Nación-Estado que proclama unos derechos fundamentales y humanos hacia la mujer, adquiere diferentes interpretaciones. Por una parte, países como Alemania, por ejemplo, que profesan una neutralidad religiosa del Estado y un derecho de libre determinación, han recurrido a una base jurídica de abstención estatal con respecto al uso del *burka* en un espacio público, mediante el cual éste no es ni prohibido ni fomentado. Por otra parte, en el otro extremo del espectro, países como Francia que, asimismo promueven una misma base constitucional en cuanto a una igualdad de género entre hombre y mujer, así como la promoción de unos derechos humanos, han adoptado una jurisdicción que prohíbe el *burka* en base a un concepto de “equally membership” o de “national cohesion” (Fornerod 63;60-61) mediante los cuales la mujer *burkarizada* no acata ni unos principios recíprocos de ciudadanía ni unos principios ideológicos básicos de una república francesa de laicidad.

No obstante, desde un punto de vista, no tanto jurídico como ideológico, estos países y otros que han prohibido el *burka*, han asimismo basado sus marcos jurídicos bajo una perspectiva paternalista y han entendido el uso del *burka* como “un atentado a la Nación-Estado” (Moors 406) lo que puede implicar una serie de suposiciones que no son necesariamente verdaderas. Por ejemplo, que la mujer es forzada a llevar el *burka*; que éste refleja una falta de voluntad a integrarse en la sociedad en la que vive, y de que el *burka* no debe permitirse, por incitar potentes símbolos de opresión de género, miedo al *otro* y radicalización islámica. Como acabo de mencionar, este argumento no es necesariamente válido, pues muchas mujeres musulmanas, especialmente conversas, lo llevan como forma de fidelidad religiosa y de una obediencia al islam que requiere de la modestia física de la mujer y no como sometimiento y sumisión a un esposo. Por tanto, la conversa occidental, para combatir el estigma y condenación con los que se asocia el *burka* por parte de una sociedad y gobierno occidental, recurre a un mismo aparato ideológico legal y moral con los que aquéllos se identifican, y justifica su posición a usar el *burka* [y en ocasiones también el *hijab*] bajo unos mismos valores políticos que tal modelo de nación implica, reclamando su derecho a llevarlo según unos valores de unas sociedades liberales y de una ley de libertad religiosa en el país donde viven.

Estas mujeres portadoras de una indumentaria islámica que no se limita solo al *burka* sino también al *hijab*, se cuestionan algunas preguntas importantes. Por ejemplo, ¿qué derecho tiene el Estado a intervenir y prohibir el burka en una sociedad [y en un espacio público] que se define a sí misma como liberal y democrática y que apoya los derechos humanos y fundamentales de la mujer sea cual fuere su religión, clase y etnia? Asimismo, ¿qué derecho tiene el gobierno a dar por sentado que esta mujer es oprimida, recluida y obligada a llevar el burka, siempre justificando tal premisa bajo argumentos proteccionistas hacia la mujer pero no necesariamente fidedignos? Y finalmente ¿qué derecho tiene el gobierno a dar por sentado que el *burka* [y también el *hijab*] es un símbolo de subyugación femenina hacia el hombre cuando muchas de estas mujeres lo llevan no solo voluntariamente sino como muestra de una identidad religiosa y/o cultural? Todas estas preguntas y otras, que tienen como objetivo acercarse al contexto cultural e ideológico del que parte la conversa para combatir unas ideas con las que muy probablemente se ha identificado ideológicamente hasta el momento antes de la conversión, requiere asimismo de unas respuestas. Por ejemplo, que especialmente el *burka* constituye una amenaza a la identidad europea entendida como tal y a unos “valores europeos”; que no aceptar el *burka* pero tampoco el *hijab* como símbolo religioso o cultural implica una contradicción al modelo de sociedad pluricultural y de sociedad constitucional liberal que muchos países europeos proclaman; que la prohibición del *burka* no siempre constituye una protección a la seguridad ciudadana sino una excusa para prohibirlo y que en realidad, lo que se está haciendo es condenar una religión que es vista como contraria a la dignidad de la mujer, a la igualdad de géneros, a unos derechos humanos de la mujer (Ferrari 6) y últimamente a una identidad europea.

Como conclusión a este apartado sobre las intersecciones que se pueden establecer entre identidad y género con relación al uso del *burka* de la conversa, puede decirse, pues, que aquél para María es entendido, no bajo una prescripción religiosa, sino bajo una cultural/social con la que tiene que enfrentarse, pero primordialmente, emocional. Primero, cultural, social y geográfica [en Afganistán] al tener que coexistir con una sociedad

en la que sin el uso del *burka* no podrían existir unas relaciones sociales y familiares satisfactorias; y segundo, emocionales, al representar esta prenda una estrategia para complacer a su marido, y al representar su matrimonio con éste, el máximo exponente identitario de María. Asimismo, y desde una perspectiva literaria, la personalización que la autora hace del *burka* cuando la cuñada de María le dice a ésta: “Que solo te pertenezca a ti y tú a él” (*Un burka* 112), alude a la pertenencia simbólica de una nueva identidad que María adquiere al llevar el *burka*, lo que determina una nueva identidad como musulmana y como mujer.

Identidad y nación

El estudio de la nueva identidad que María adquiere en términos de nación, propiciada por un proyecto migratorio múltiple y un matrimonio con un musulmán constituye parte del espectro identitario que experimenta el nuevo converso y que es contingente a unos vínculos que se producen entre conversión y territorio(s), lo que determinará la visión del converso en términos políticos y de nación. De esta forma, el territorio de Londres donde ocurre la conversión de María deja de tener una connotación geográfica para adoptar una de política, sostenida por lo que algunos autores han llamado la dimensión política del islam (Jansen, introducción xi). En efecto, el territorio geográfico de Londres donde Nasrad y María conviven como inmigrantes en la primera parte de la novela, es símbolo de una construcción político-religiosa como una forma de oposición a una ciudadanía británica con la que no se identifican al no existir vínculos originales entre el islam y dicho espacio. Por consiguiente, los barrios donde la comunidad musulmana de Nasrad vive en esta ciudad, los hogares de éstos y la mezquita de Londres, constituyen todos ellos, marcadores *espaciales* importantes que ellos construyen, no solo al constituir éstos, espacios de práctica y sociabilidad de una religión que trasciende un espacio geográfico, sino al constituir aquéllos, espacios periféricos y símbolos de resistencia a unos valores de un territorio británico y a una supuesta ciudadanía británica con la que no se identifican. La ausencia del uso obligado del *burka* en este espacio por parte de María requiere de otras prácticas corporales mediante las cuales

se materializa su nueva identidad en términos de nación, y, la cual no puede desvincularse de su conversión. Por consiguiente, es mediante el uso de un código de vestimenta que pasa por el cubrimiento del cuerpo de la mujer y por unos valores de una sexualización no visible de aquélla que contrastan con unos valores británicos, que María no solo ejerce su nueva identidad como musulmana sino como esposa de Nasrad, motivo, al fin y al cabo, de la conversión. La nueva identidad de nación de María es contingente a una identidad religiosa islámica, la cual lo es a su vez, a un matrimonio con Nasrad.

Muy al contrario, en tierra afgana, donde el *burka* es impuesto a María, es mediante esta prenda, el medio por el cual la conversa ejerce una nueva identidad en términos de nación mediante la agencia que ésta prenda le permite dentro de un espacio en el que aquélla apenas tiene control. En un país como Afganistán en el que la identidad religiosa del individuo viene determinada no solo por un criterio religioso sino por otros de étnicos y raciales, es imprescindible que María encuentre estrategias mediante las cuales puede expresar una identidad satisfactoria en términos de nación en un país en el que vive. En efecto, el *burka* constituye un vehículo de camuflaje en el que la extranjería de María no es revelada [ni su color de piel o apariencia occidental], al mismo tiempo que una manera de encajar en una sociedad afgana y familiar de la que es parte mediante su matrimonio con Nasrad. Asimismo, la ausencia del conocimiento del farsi o lengua original de Afganistán por parte de María no supone un problema al no alentarse un discurso verbal a la mujer en el espacio público.

Adicionalmente, y aunque María muestre su inconformidad en el uso de esta prenda al principio, de la misma forma que su conversión al islam fue resultado de un pragmatismo con relación a su marido, lo es asimismo el uso del *burka*. Con éste, no solamente pasa desapercibida como extranjera en un lugar hostil en términos de género sino también en términos de nacionalidad, clase y religión. El uso del *burka* le permitirá una agencia que nunca hubiera podido tener mediante el uso de ropa occidental, al mismo tiempo que le permite mantener mejores relaciones intrafamiliares entre ella y su familia política, y entre ella y su marido. Por consiguiente, la obsesión de María por

aparentar ser afgana es no solo prueba de haber entendido unos beneficios que resultan de su uso, sino de la emergencia de una identidad como musulmana en este país, que es sostenida por un vínculo entre nación y religión, indisoluble en un estado teocrático como Afganistán [en la novela] lo cual las palabras de la narradora revelan: "...se obró el milagro: María, convertida en una mujer afgana...Solo vio a una mujer afgana. De eso se trataba. Y quedó satisfecha", a lo que María añade: "Si hay que ser una mujer afgana más, lo seré, y no habrá ningún problema" (*Un burka* 64-65). Estas palabras, que no solo implican tal vínculo entre religión y nación, al querer aparentar María una ciudadanía que en realidad no posee, son importantes a nivel literario por la incomodidad que son capaces de infundir en un lector no familiarizado con el islam, y mucho menos con el *burka*. De esta forma, Monforte está ofreciendo al lector, y en específico, al lector español, un reto a enfrentarse a una otredad religiosa y cultural, pero más específicamente, a una otredad que viene representada de la mano de un ciudadano español, María.

Desde el punto de vista literario, Monforte está de alguna manera expresando la idea de una "nueva religión española" mediante el simbolismo que un nombre tan común en España como María ofrece. María, madre de Jesús y madre simbólica del cristianismo, como María Galera, madre simbólica del islam en España. En este momento, puede afirmarse que el intento de María por aparentar una ciudadanía que en realidad no le pertenece mediante su conversión al islam, su matrimonio con un hombre afgano y el uso del *burka* como símbolo de ello, es parte del proceso de desterritorialización ideológica que ocurre a través de este personaje, al producirse una ruptura entre unos valores ideológicos que ya no se pueden vincular más al territorio del que procedieron, producto de nuevas exposiciones ideológicas, migraciones y obviamente, de nuevas relaciones sociales representadas por el matrimonio entre Nasrad y María y entre María y una nueva comunidad musulmana a la que accede. Por consiguiente, los valores individualistas, el énfasis en la estética y en una secularidad, –todo ello, vinculado a una sociedad occidental–, ya no conforman el sistema de valores con los cuales se identifica a un territorio español y al autóctono de éste, aunque

este ciudadano no pueda ser ubicado en su país de origen sino en una sociedad de acogida.

En efecto, el concepto de españolidad del país que María ha dejado atrás no viene determinado por aquéllos individuos españoles en un territorio exclusivamente español, sino por aquéllos que marchan o que van y vienen y contribuyen con ello a unas importaciones/exportaciones culturales. María, no es pues, un sujeto desarraigado por más que haya emigrado por voluntad propia, sino uno de desplazado que se encuentra expuesto a nuevas creencias y paradigmas culturales, religiosos, sociales y políticos. De ello se desprende, pues, que lo que se podría conocer como “identidad occidental”, si así se puede llamar, no se proyecta ya más como estática e invariable como antaño, sino que se asocia a otros sistemas de valores y creencias, cuya fuente es el islam en el caso que nos ocupa en este ensayo, y que está propiciada por unas relaciones sociales en el caso de María con individuos que representan una otredad ideológica. De esta manera, el abandono de una vestimenta y estética con los que María identificaba su feminidad previo a la conversión – “camisetas ajustadas y vaqueros apretados” –, así como un estilo de vida cotidiano que deja atrás, –“fiestas hasta altas horas de la madrugada” (*Un burka* 19) –, son todos, ejemplos de esta desterritorialización y adquisición de una nueva identidad para este converso, que requiere del cubrimiento del cuerpo, de la modestia en la apariencia física y de la servidumbre tanto a la familia nuclear como a la política, lo que queda patente en el nuevo rol reproductor y doméstico de María.

Esta nueva ideología concuerda con el retorno a una visión tradicional de la familia y a un rol social de ésta que contrasta con la de un mundo occidental en el cual la fragmentación de la familia es la norma. En efecto, la nueva identidad del converso constituye un anhelo al retorno de unos valores tradicionales familiares perdidos en el Occidente con los que aquél se siente arropado (Nieuwkerk 7) y que son símbolos no solo de un *nuevo individuo español* sino de un nuevo concepto de identidad nacional española. Las palabras de María adquieren relevancia en cuanto a la exploración de esta nueva visión nacionalista que tiene sobre el país que la ha visto nacer al afirmar que: “No. Será hoy. Será ahora mismo. No puedo comportarme

como una estúpida occidental. Ahora no. Soy extranjera y quiero llevar *burka* por mi propia seguridad” (*Un burka* 103). Independientemente del trasfondo en el que se produzcan estas palabras, –motivadas por la protección que esta prenda pueda ofrecer a la mujer extranjera en un país como Afganistán–, la afirmación de María es de importancia por dos razones. Primero, la auto-identificación por parte de María como a una “estúpida occidental”, pone de manifiesto el rechazo de este personaje a toda una ideología con la que se asocia el territorio del que ella procede; segundo, se pone de relieve la aparente contradicción que el uso del *burka* incita en términos identitarios por parte de una mujer “occidental”, mediante la cual ésta no lleva el *burka*, contradicción que ella rechaza totalmente al aceptar el uso de aquél.

Esta *desterritorialización* que María inicia al rechazar unos valores supuestamente occidentales implica una *reterritorialización*, al adoptar otros valores que contrastan con aquéllos que ha abandonado y que se asociaban al territorio que la vio nacer. Con ello, Monforte no solo está retando unos estereotipos que los individuos de una sociedad occidental sostienen sobre “lo islámico”, sino que de forma simbólica está derrocando la idea, –criticada previamente por Edward Said–, sobre la superioridad que Occidente sostiene de sí mismo. De esta forma, la conversión de María representa una transformación no solo en términos religiosos, sino también en términos ideológicos, sociales y políticos que se materializa con su matrimonio con Nasrad, la personificación de un nuevo sistema de valores. La reacción de una sociedad occidental espectadora ante los cambios identitarios y visibles de la nueva conversa son de importancia porque son vistos no solo como opresores hacia la mujer sino también como antinacionalistas de un país de origen con el que se vincula a este converso. Tal como afirma Nieuwkerk: “Female conversion to Islam summons up particularly fierce battles because gender issue has been pivotal in the construction of Otherness between “Islam” and the “West”. ... you are a traitor of the race” (1).

Así, Monforte usa la figura de la nueva conversa no solo para contrarrestar todo un aparato social que atribuye unos estereotipos tanto al inmigrante musulmán como al converso/a,

sino para darle voz propia a este sujeto [mujer] y constituir un recipiente ideológico a unos nuevos valores y creencias que representan la España del siglo XXI. De esta forma y bajo una óptica literaria, *Un burka por amor* representa una aproximación estética/literaria de aquellos nuevos valores ideológicos con respecto al islam en España, unos valores que, tal como afirma Wohlrab-Sahr, no constituyen un objeto de elección neutral, sino uno que implica una confrontación entre el mundo cristiano y el islámico, no solo ahora, sino por siglos (72). Esta nueva conversa española, capaz de levantar las ansiedades más íntimas del autóctono, representa una de las muchas caras de la España de hoy, pero, sobre todo, de una sociedad global. La identidad de esta conversa no es estática, sino que es contingente a una conversión que no es necesariamente una acción permanente, y que puede producirse en un vaivén de “idas” y “venidas”, contingente a un sistema de plausibilidad mediante el cual se reafirman unas creencias religiosas y culturales que se han adoptado, pero asimismo en contingencia a varios otros factores; uno, a unas experiencias personales fluctuantes con relación a la fuente de esa conversión, –el componente afectivo hacia su marido–, y por tanto, a una relación satisfactoria con éste; y dos, a un territorio que impone más o menos presión sobre el converso con relación a la implementación de unas prescripciones islámicas. En efecto, tal como afirma Susan Smith: “Geography matters” (136). El sistema de verosimilitud del converso mediante el cual éste se adhiere al islam se vislumbra, pues, como un sistema fluido y nunca estático. Tal como Anne Sofie Roald afirma en cuanto a tal estructura de credibilidad de la nueva religión, ésta está basada en una deconstrucción y reconstrucción de ideas culturales previas a la conversión y posteriores a ésta respectivamente (51).

Conclusiones

Como conclusiones, los objetivos delineados en este ensayo indican que el estudio de la identidad del nuevo converso es multifacético y responde a varias funciones. La experiencia religiosa identitaria por parte de María es interpretada como una negociación o *transacción* por parte del converso que se inicia por un vínculo afectivo con un individuo, pero que muy bien puede

desembocar en una involucración emocional, espiritual e intelectual total con la nueva religión. La identidad de este individuo, fruto de una conversión de la cual emerge, no constituye un intercambio de un sentido de pertenencia de una fe o sistema ideológico previos a la conversión por otro sistema ideológico, sino que debe ser interpretada como un crisol de valores y creencias entre dos ideologías y culturas que entran en negociación y cuyo resultado adquiere ramificaciones religiosas, pero también sociales y políticas. Esta nueva identidad, y, por tanto, nueva forma de sentir y ver la vida, representa una estrategia o forma de darle sentido a una decisión tomada de forma racional y totalmente libre de convertirse al islam, y muy posiblemente en contra de un contexto familiar y comunitario de origen.

Asimismo, la visión ideológica del nuevo converso en España o fuera de ella, contribuye al mapa ideológico de este país y del Occidente, y ya no es una que se ajusta a unos valores inamovibles, sino una que es producto de un itinerario existencial de este individuo, en constante proceso de formación, así como de unos paradigmas sociales, culturales y políticos.

Adicionalmente, esta nueva identidad, es una que implica una renegociación constante de un rol social, de una nueva visión de género, así como de nación, y que no deja de estar sujeta a unas relaciones de poder entre la mujer conversa y unas micro y macro sociedades que no acogen el islam de una forma positiva (Bourque 233).

Finalmente, y en referencia al uso del *burka*, –punto crucial en la novela–, puede decirse que éste constituye muy probablemente el símbolo identitario más poderoso no solo en la mujer nacida en el islam, sino también en la conversa occidental que elige su uso, y que, aunque está vinculado a un territorio geográfico originalmente, puede representar por parte de la conversa, un intento de disidencia a la visión que la sociedad occidental tiene de ella, pero también a la unión matrimonial de una mujer blanca, occidental y europea con un sujeto musulmán, eterno tabú social. La mujer conversa española, coexistente o no con una sociedad española que la estereotipa, inferioriza y relega a un espacio privado simbólico a causa de su conversión, constituye un nuevo sujeto híbrido y una deconstrucción de una idea de nacionalismo en España que trasciende las barreras

regionales y nacionales. Este sujeto europeo, mediante la conversión y el uso del *burka*, rehúsa la aceptación de un “learned judgement” (Said 67) al que Europa ha sucumbido frente al islam y frente al sujeto musulmán. Es decir, y en el caso del islam en Europa, el estigma que ser musulmán en Europa ha representado, es algo afirmado, reiterado, divulgado y reforzado no solamente por unos gobiernos mediante unas leyes específicas de la práctica del islam en un espacio público sino por unas sociedades que han impuesto unas exclusiones al sujeto musulmán, lo cual ha sido basado en un concepto de otredad religiosa, racial, étnica y cultural. Esta visión ha sido reforzada primeramente por un colonialismo, y hoy en día por unos medios de comunicación que han usado la tecnología para divulgar y legitimar ciertas ideas anti-musulmanas. Asimismo, el matrimonio con Nasrad, el sujeto sexualizado, exótico y/o repulsivo y peligroso, constituye una forma de trascender unas ideas fijas que Europa sostiene de este sujeto masculino musulmán y no blanco.

Es, por tanto, que se puede concluir que el uso del *burka* no es directamente producto de la conversión religiosa ni constituye en ninguna manera una práctica religiosa, sino es producto de unas “structures of feeling” (Raymond 134) o lo que podríamos llamar, unas estructuras afectivas para describir los procesos fluctuantes y oscilatorios que ocurren entre grupos sociales [María como española y Nasrad como afgano]. Asimismo, el uso del *burka* es producto de un compuesto de razones pragmáticas mediante las que se adquieren unos beneficios sociales, políticos y emocionales en un territorio geográfico al que se vincula. En términos identitarios, el *burka* da sentido a su nueva vida como musulmana y constituye una práctica tangible en su recorrido con el islam, al mismo tiempo que proyecta una idea de “ciudadanía musulmana” a una sociedad y familia de origen que no aceptan no solo el uso del *burka* sino su conversión al islam. En efecto y tal como afirma Stuart Hall: “...meaning and experience are constructed through signifying practices” (citado en James Procter 47). A modo más general, esta conversa española, la que lleva el *burka* como la que no, contribuye al crisol ideológico, religioso y social de una nueva España, de un nuevo individuo español y últimamente, de una nueva mujer española.

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**THE TRACE OF THE SILENCED VOICES OF LATIN
AMERICAN WOMEN POETS: A
POSTCOLONIAL AND FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF
ALAÍDE FOPPA'S POEMS IN *LAS PALABRAS***

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Abstract: Until very recently, women's literature that had expressed a feminist viewpoint had been excluded from the Latin American literary canon. The intellectual and political activism Foppa conducted in Mexico with the foundation of the first Latin American feminist magazine, *Fem*, showcased the most important feminist voices of the sixties and seventies. The poems in *Las palabras* are a sample of a subaltern subject choosing to speak about an uncomfortable topic in Latin American literature: the experience of being a Latin American woman and the censorship, pain and injustice it entails. From the viewpoint of feminism and postcolonial theory, the poetry of Foppa presents an analysis of the radical role women's writing can have for Latin America. It is possible to study these elements in the poems compiled and relate them to postcolonial categories such as subalternity, marginalized female voices and literatures, and the rewriting of women's stories and histories in Latin America.

Key words: Feminism, postcolonial theory, Latin American women authors, censorship

In December 1980, a poet was murdered because of the power of her words, the power words acquire when they speak uncomfortable truths in dictatorial regimes. She was called Alaíde Foppa Solórzano, a Spanish-Guatemalan poet who had returned to her country after thirty years of exile to visit her mother. She was executed in a similar way to Federico García Lorca, who was killed in Granada, Spain in 1936, after torture under Francisco Franco's military rule. Murdering Alaíde Foppa was the only way the Guatemalan government had to stop a powerful voice that reported state violence against Quiché indigenous women who were tortured, raped and murdered under the regime of general Romeo Lucas García from 1978 to 1981. (Rossi 107) This work intends to highlight the importance of reading Foppa's poems with a feminist lens. It is crucial to be able to analyze them as a

testimony of a reprisal for speaking out as part of the praxis of the pioneering feminist legacy the author left in Latin America. Nevertheless, the author did not report state violence directly in her poems. Instead, she went to the extent of broadcasting it in a radio program she launched in the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, Mexico City's premier university, where she worked as a full-time professor in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. Mexico was a country that became her second home after she and her family became exiles of the regime after the coup. The Women's Forum, *Foro de la mujer*, was a radio program Foppa started in 1972 in the UNAM's official radio station "Radio Universidad." It was a weekly emission that broadcasted over 400 programs and ended only with Alaíde Foppa's death in 1980. (Rossi 107). Its deep and philosophical analysis of women's condition drew strength from the writing of feminists like Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir. It consisted of an open forum -the first one of its kind in Mexico- for women to protest and accuse the exploitation and mistreatment to which they were being subjected in the Latin American context.

A feminist reading of her writings is crucial to valuing the work she did as a poet and as a militant spokeswoman for a group of subaltern subjects, the Latin American women and their marginalized condition in the twentieth century. It must also be explained that the cultural heritage left by Foppa was undervalued partly because her murder was seen as an exemplary punishment by the institution that most supported Alaíde and her activist and academic projects during her life, the UNAM. The renowned journalist and novelist Elena Poniatowska, who was very close to the author and interviewed her several times, writes:

El congreso de escritoras, celebrado en México en 1981, ni siquiera pudo llevar el nombre de Alaíde Foppa, a pesar de que las organizadoras hablaron de ella en el discurso inaugural, porque, según dijeron, peligraba la vida de las que tenían que regresar a su país de origen, nadie quiere nuevas desaparecidas, otras Alaídes Foppas en el continente. (Poniatowska 12) ¹

¹ The congress of writers, celebrated in Mexico in 1981 was not even named after Alaíde Foppa, even when the organizing committee mentioned her in the

Perhaps the main problem of censorship is that it does not silence only one person. Censorship is a mode of social control that affects all those who look up to the outspoken person as a model, especially if that individual is a writer whose texts or speeches serve public interests. The idealization of the intellectual by his/her public can be utterly destroyed by discredit or damage. It is symptomatic that no homage was paid to Foppa in the place where she had more influence: The University, the world of writers and intellectuals that she helped found in the UNAM, until eighteen years later after she was abducted in Guatemala; when a congress was organized in 1998 in Mexico City by the Mexican commission of human rights, a campaign for women's rights as well as by the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. As one of her former students, the writer Gonzalo Celorio read out during this act:

La desaparición de Alaíde nos impuso un silencio doloroso y expectante [...] Este silencio inicial amordazó la protesta inmediata, y si no la disuadió, al aplazarla, la fue convirtiendo en un “grito de hielo” [...] El silencio es la secuela más indignante y vergonzosa de la muerte de Alaíde porque quién ignora que la razón de ser de Alaíde -poeta, crítica, maestra, traductora, periodista en la prensa y en el aire- era, precisamente, la voz. (289)

As Celorio himself experienced, if barely any trace was left of her leadership in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters right after she was found missing, this was no coincidence. It was a planned outcome resulting from the fact that Foppa's assassination terrorized other intellectuals who had a critical approach to reality and who used their writing to fight for political causes.

Murder as an extreme form of censorship used to silence uncomfortable and dissident voices was a procedure widely used in Latin American dictatorial regimes throughout the 1970's and

inaugural speech because, according to them, the life of other women who had to return to her country was endangered. Nobody wants new missing women, new Alaíde Foppas in the Continent. (The translation is mine).

the 1980's, which first and foremost targeted scholars and intellectuals. The shock dissident voices caused to these repressive regimes during the cold war period was even greater when the one who spoke out loud was a woman and a writer. The critical disruption caused by Alaíde Foppa was so profound because she stepped outside her class privileges to speak for subaltern subjects who could not speak for themselves; and was also doubly shocking to the ruling class because of its solidarity with other marginalized voices, such as indigenous or destitute people. As researcher Debra Castillo indicates:

The women writers of Latin America are in some sense privileged in their access to the peripheries of culture, licensing them not only to speak of issues relating to private spaces but also to speak to and between and as an intermediary for other marginalized groups, implicitly, the disadvantaged social groups, the Indians, the blacks. (Castillo 58)

Alaíde Foppa's solidarity was not only with her fellow women, but with indigenous women who had never been defended in public by an intellectual, a fact that earned Foppa the label of indigenist. The well-known indigenous survivor of the Guatemalan guerrilla, Rigoberta Menchú, was first interviewed by Foppa for her radio program "Foro de la mujer" (Partnoy 174).

Through interviews with female victims, Alaíde Foppa created multiple spaces for resistance and for making the voice of the subalterns visible, especially the voice of women in Guatemala and Mexico. One of these forums for expression and freedom of speech was a seminar in the Faculty of Political Sciences (Facultad de Ciencias Políticas) in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Celorio, 289). The seminar was called: "Sociología de la mujer" (Sociology of women), and was the first one of its kind in Mexico. A pioneer in laying the foundations for a Latin American feminist criticism, Foppa also created and sponsored *Fem* magazine, the first feminist magazine in Mexico and in Latin America according to Annunziata Rossi (105), which was published in Mexico City in 1976, and contained foundational

critical texts from avant-garde feminists from all over the world.

Foppa's role as a director of cultural affairs, an activity that was crucial to the development of Latin America should not be overlooked, especially in the light of the cultural destruction exerted in the southern cone by the dictatorships and the militarization of Central American countries, which to this day have left behind a civil war whose sequels are not over. These historical processes created an enormous brain drain that displaced hundreds of intellectuals in Latin America, who from their exile revealed the genocide operated by their governments with risk to their own lives. Foppa was only one out of many displaced intellectuals in her continent whose scholarly activities were directly tied to the political situation that she fled from.

Although in her poems she appears to be willing to distance herself from her gender and her condition as a Latin American woman, and hence, to hide the fact that she is a subaltern subject, those conditions are present throughout the whole book of *Las palabras*. Despite the fact that Alaïde Foppa conceived her poetry writing as something separate from her more overtly activist writings in articles and essays, she did not succeed in extricating herself from her poetry in the anthology of poems *Las palabras*. The aestheticist trend that surfaces in her structured and tidy poems, which at first glance appear to speak only of language in its pure and abstract form, does not manage to conceal a certain anxiety present in the tone of her verses.

Alaïde Foppa was a female poet in Latin America close to the time of the literary *Boom*, which mainly recognized Latin American male authors as writers of international importance. The women's *Boom* did not come about until the 80s decade. Foppa did not live to see it. This struggle for recognition as a peer was also present in the struggle of the poetic voice to develop its own subjectivity in her poems. Attaining visibility as a poet was not easy for a woman writer in Mexico or Guatemala. This apparently obvious fact should be considered within the masculinist context of publishing, producing and editing in Mexico City in the 20th century. As Del Ángel confirms:

Esta poeta feminista, crítica de arte, traductora, académica y activista política es consecuencia del estado de inopia

que mantiene a miles de mujeres escritoras hispanoamericanas marginadas de un sistema literario preponderantemente masculino.² (22)

An intellectual as conscious as Foppa was of her own gender oppressions did not rise out of a vacuum but out was internalized as a result of a historical experience that systematically marginalized women from various fields of culture, including the literary one. Fortunately, Foppa came from a bourgeois and European background, from parents with a high cultural and social standing. She had also been educated in Italy and Switzerland, a fact that helped Foppa enormously to attain status as an intellectual and a female writer in Latin America; one that had assimilated and re-appropriated the European literary tradition to apply it to her own poetry and her own social context.

Perhaps Foppa's poems reflect less of a feminist commitment, at least in appearance, as compared to the highly politicized or militant poems produced after the Women's Liberation Movement in The United States by feminists like Adrienne Rich and Diane Wakowsky, which dealt overtly with the gender role strictures women were forced to accept in society at the time of the Cold War. Yet, when examined closely, the poems in *Las palabras* are quite telling of the female condition of a woman in Foppa's own region of the world.

Being a woman in the era of the Central and South American dictatorships meant to be marginalized in several ways. On the one hand, because women suffered more sexual and psychological abuse than in times of peace. Civil rights were practically abolished by the military juntas, the more the weaker members of the population were, the less possibilities they had of defending or protecting themselves. On the other hand, women had always been expected to be silent in traditional patriarchal societies, hence this abuse was not recorded or known of out of a domestic or local sphere. These authoritarian procedures were not exclusive to the period of state terrorism in Guatemala and other

² Such a feminist poet, art critic, translator, academic and political activist is a product of a relegated status that kept thousands of Hispanic women writers marginalized in a literary system that was chiefly masculine. (The translation is mine)

countries under military rule. Yet they were accentuated to such an extent during that time, that the highest degrees of violence were normalized by the whole society. Foppa, being part of an upper class educated elite, was able to escape and make a living in another country. But even that privilege did not make her a member of the happy few. The writer was forced to say farewell to her home, her parents, and even her sons, who died murdered by the guerrilla when they returned to Guatemala. It is not by chance that Foppa's first poem of *Las palabras* is an intimate depiction of her life of loss and censorship:

Una infancia
Nutrida de silencio
Una juventud
Sembrada de adioses
Una vida
Que engendra ausencias
Solo de las palabras
Espero la última presencia. (54)

In its own internal dialectic, the poem favors absence over presence, silence over speech even if the lyrical speaker paradoxically expects the last presence to come from words. Words are symbolizing the presence of something that remains unsaid, they are signs of emptiness. In this whole sequence of poems, there seems to be a contradictory attitude towards language. On the one hand, the lyrical voice confesses to be afraid of words:

Temo las palabras
porque lastiman con su roce
lo que es apenas nacimiento,
temo que destruyan
sentimientos intactos.
Dura corteza
para la poesía.
Pesada máscara
Bajo su rostro claro. (55)

The poetic voice seems to have lost confidence in the expressive power of words, as if words were not as precise as feelings, as if expressing what it feels would somehow alter the original sensation, even getting to destroy it. On the other hand, the poetic voice expects too much of words, as if it were dangerous for it to give them so much responsibility, as shown in poem IV:

Casi todo lo espero
De las palabras
Sin saber siquiera
Lo que prometen
Lo que me niegan
Lo que está más allá
Del eco que despiertan. (54)

The verbs used in this stanza: *negar*, *prometer* (to promise, to say no or to deny the possibility of something), are both verbs which have a negative connotation, and entail a negative relation with the poetic voice. This is so because they imply that whoever is subject to this promise is also exposed to the possibility that it will not be fulfilled, of the wish not being obeyed. Yet, the voice does not disclose what it is expecting from words. It does not say what it expects to find in that wordless great beyond, “*mas allá*”, that also represents the world beyond the text. Additionally, it is possible that words were nothing but echoes, as the tradition stemming all the way back to Plato would have it. In that case they would be nothing but mere representations, a mask underneath which reality lurks in an estranged and unrecognizable aspect. As in the metaphor present in poem IV, words are a hard crust for poetry, son “*dura corteza para la poesía*”, because they are only a sign, an arbitrary signifier.

However, if we go beyond the simple epistemological analysis of these relations, we should be able to explain why words are alienated from the subject that utters them. What is slowly being revealed in these poems is the alienation of the poetic voice from its own words, very much like the way a subaltern subject is alienated from the utterances he/she produces. In this respect, the speaker of the poetic voice has the qualities of a marginalized subject who has historically been excluded from

discourse and from the benefits of discourse, from the power that the platonic *logos* entails.

The subaltern poetic voice might also represent a female subaltern subject. If this assumption proved true, it would appear in the poems as well, not only in the female or masculine articles, but also in the social dynamics reproduced in the poem, the hierarchical relations and strict binaries that make up this collection. Throughout several poems in the compendium of *Las palabras*, the relation between the lyrical speaker and the addressee in the poem can be said to emulate a relation of masculine dominance. For example, in poem II, the lyrical speaker of the poem seems to be speaking from a place of passivity, a role that traditional societies typically assigned to women. This is so because the lyrical speaker, which we provisionally will call female speaker, expects *las palabras* to do everything for her: “Casi todo lo espero de las palabras”, as if she could not do it for herself. That is, the lyrical voice assumes that the entity it is addressing, in a similar way to the traditional masculine figure, has the power and capability of promising and denying something to her. This hierarchy is supported by the binary layering of the poem, which in fact consistently shows throughout most of the anthology. For this reason, it would be interesting to consider if there is something we would gain in reading the lyrical voice as a female lyrical voice in *Las palabras*, since the former interpretation is compatible with the gendered attitude of the lyrical speaker in this series of poems. The poetic voice seems to be feminine in the sense that the roles it performs as a speaker are closely related to traditional female gender roles. According to these societal expectations, a woman is supposed to dress up and mask her body with makeup and elaborate clothing, as shown in poem III:

Acaso me escondo
En las palabras
Y abrigo en ellas
Mi desnudez
O acaso
Me van quitando
Hasta el último velo
Que me disimula. (55)

The game of presence and absence is taking place again. On the one hand, the lyrical voice admits that it feels naked without words. In this behalf, words stand for presence. At the same time, words are indicative of the most intimate nature of the speaker, they uncover her. It would be informative for the reader to ask the speaker why she feels naked in the first place, where does that sense of nakedness – which seems to be related to a sense of shame – stem from. This vocabulary is suggesting that something is absent from the identity of the lyrical voice once words are lacking. The mask that was there at first is being removed and the real self is being revealed. From this perspective, the female voice is trying to hide something in the poem, perhaps her own female identity, desperately trying to erase the gendered experience in some sense betrayed by the poem.

Against this background, examining what the female voice wants to hide, and if that has anything to do with the place she is speaking from, might clarify this issue. As noticed before, the voice that is speaking is arguably a marginalized one, since the language it uses to communicate its feelings is strangely disconnected with the world. This might be a symptom of some sort of social alienation, where the individual speaker feels isolated from the collective whole because of her subaltern nature. Disconnection is a constant theme that runs all over *Las palabras* and is repeated in almost every poem. Poem V illustrates the isolation and the uncertainty in the language of the poetic voice: “¿Por qué escribo? /porque estoy sola y me asustaría/mi voz?”³ (56). Writing is a way of reconnecting to the society she is somehow cut off from, of modifying her state of utter solitude. Similarly, in poem X, the poetic voice knows that even if she speaks, she is not going to be heard, and if by any chance she happens to be heard, she will not be understood. It is, as the poem itself articulates, a language written in the shadows, a language made out of mute words:

³ “Why do I write? Is it because I am scared and my voice scares me when I speak?” (My translation).

Escribo en la sombra
Mudas palabras
Que nadie sabe
Signos confusos
Que nadie lee...
[...] palabras dormidas
en un largo silencio. (59)

The assumption that nobody reads these signs may strike the reader as somewhat bizarre, since every sign is supposed to have a collective nature. The oxymoron “mudas palabras”, silent words, emphasizes the role of silence in this hidden, timorous, confession. The contradiction consists in the stating of two simultaneous and contrary beliefs: that nobody reads her, while writing down this declaration. Consequently, it could be argued that it is only a paradox. The poetic speaker simply maintains this because she feels that she cannot speak/write outright. Hence, she goes on to codify her speech/writing, in case somebody tries to censor what she is saying. This explanation could account for the cryptic abstractions of the poems in this series, which saturates them with allusions to this imposed self-restriction.

The poetics of self-censorship is a recurring pattern in female poetry of the 20th century in Hispanic literature, perhaps because tradition had made it clear that women’s opinions on matters outside the domestic sphere did not count for the masculine authorities that regulated cultural artifacts like poetry or literature during that time. In that vein, the female subaltern author that was attempting to irrupt into the masculinist literary cannon in Latin America had to conceal its gender interests and specific modes of self-representation. Female poets that made it into the publishing world like Foppa, sensed that the language of the subaltern was forced to re-elaborate the contents and the form of what it was trying to express if it wanted to communicate its unorthodox verse: “Cuando callen las otras voces,/cuando yo sea sólo/una isla silenciosa,/tal vez escuche/la palabra esperada”⁴ (65). In these last verses of poem XX, the interference of other dominant voices does not let the subaltern voice communicate its

⁴ “When the other voices grow silent/when I am only/a silent island/I may then hear/the long-awaited word.” (The translation is mine).

whispering truths. Her isolation in this sea of voices is aptly conveyed by the metaphor of the island. The long-awaited word is like the promised land, a realm of utopia.

The condition of Latin American women in the last three decades of the XXth century was that of a subject tightly constricted by narrow gender roles. What's more, speaking of such limited social options or of the injustices suffered as a wife, daughter or woman was completely banned within the social milieu. In this sense, it is surprising that Foppa started a discussion on a topic that was such a great taboo in Mexican and Guatemalan culture: the marginalized condition of women in Latin America. The difficulty to broach such an uncomfortable topic can be seen in poem XVII, which struggles to find words with which to talk about such a complicated problem:

Hoy no me sirven
las palabras
solo sirven
para lo que ya se sabe.
Inútil servidumbre
Si falta la palabra
Para lo que no se dice. (63)

“Lo que ya se sabe”, What is already known, can be interpreted as the trite, comfortable and commonplace themes that are so common in Latin American female poetry in the XXth century, themes such as love, despair, nature, which were so popular in the *Modernista* strand because they were legitimated by the masculine ideology. On the other hand, “Lo que no se dice” might be something that can in reality be said, but that no one wants to hear because it is an uncomfortable truth. No one dares say it because there is a tacit censorship present in the context of that utterance. “Inútil servidumbre”, useless subservience, is a description of the truth-revealing function of the word. Words are useless when they cannot reveal the truth.

Furthermore, the gendered word “servidumbre” (la servidumbre) could be argued to be performing gender roles analogous to those traditionally ascribed to females who spent centuries in service deemed worthless by their patriarchal

societies, either because it generated no revenues or did not have a direct relation to production. The Guatemalan and Mexican societies where Foppa was raised are good examples of societies that had a scornful outlook upon the work of women, whether domestic or otherwise. This derision encompassed women's literary productions, which were always over-feminized or marked as specifically feminine in order to disparage or underrate their literary quality. The contempt the social body showed for women's poetry could be the cause of the shame that Foppa reproduced in many of her poems. The "forbidden word" in the former poem might refer to the contents or themes that are socially discouraged. What nobody talks about (the word which is not said) is like the bell on the cat in Aesop's fable; that is, very few people dare criticize this situation, since they do not want to be exposed as dissidents and thus marginalized from the hegemonic production of literary values.

If a feminist woman writer who bears the burden of segregation but is committed to speak for her kin does not bring herself to write about it, it is even more unlikely that anyone else will complain about it. Yet the effect of this contempt can be seen in the discomfort the lyrical speaker is voicing in Foppa's poems, which is also articulated as an explicit acknowledgement of pain in poem VI:

Toda la vida
Buscando palabras propias
Sinceras
Nuevas
Olvidadas
Limpias,
Para decir
Sin decirlo
Un secreto que lastima
Para dejar
Que sangre la herida. (56)

The sense of something forbidden is so compelling in this poem that the secret is hurting the poetic voice to the point of eliciting a comparison to a bleeding wound. The source of the wound is

keeping the secret inside, of not uttering the words it needs so that it is able to heal. The metaphor of the words as weapons is very apt in a context of global censorship as the Cold War era, where words were used as weapons, and gathering of information resulted in power. The poetic voice seems to be in a quandary where it is forced to choose between blurting out the secret and healing the wound, or letting the wound fester, self-censoring the things it is desperate to say. The way the poetic voice chooses to solve this dichotomy is shown in poem XIX:

Tendré que aprender otro lenguaje
Hasta encontrar
Desde el silencio
La palabra Perdida.
Tendré que esperar,
Arrepentida de mis palabras
Esa voz ignorada
Solo a un celoso silencio prometida. (65)

The feminine lyrical voice says it chooses not to speak, or to keep on speaking her impossible language, one that cancels itself out from the very outset. Silence is both a starting and an ending point, a goal and a premise. She feels that speaking is a transgression, since she regrets disturbing silence with her voice, as if this was analogous to breaking a marriage vow. Such is a surprising statement for one of the most outspoken intellectuals of the 20th century, who defied censorship during all her life and educated generations of women to break the historical vow of silence. Also, as a poet, she also knew that her task was to speak up, to challenge imposed or self-imposed silence. Again, the choice of the metaphor, a marriage (a un silencio prometida) is reminiscent of a masculinist power dynamic where the woman, the female voice (la voz) is the one who waits, who repents, who is a subject owing fealty to a lord, “el silencio”, a masculine word that also has the added quality of jealousy. Silence thus personified does not accept disloyalty, just like a monogamous sexual regime or a totalitarian dictatorship. Sexual politics are factoring out into the dialogue between the lyrical voice and the words. Yet this contradictory and painful compromise between being quiet and speaking out is

not the last attitude the poetic voice engages in. The poetic voice advocates for a form of speech that escapes the binarism of these categories, a type of language that can express what she wants to say without being socially penalized for it. This new instrument has not been fashioned yet. It is the new language that the author is in search for in her poems. An instance of this new tool which allows a different form of expression is poem XVIII, where we have the metaphor of language as a key:

Bastaría quizás
Una palabra
Para abrir de par en par
Una Ventana,
Una palabra clave,
Una llave
Que penetre el silencio
Y no la encuentro.
Seguiré viviendo encarcelada. (65)

The poet wants to find a possible pact between speech and silence, a mediation between presence and absence. She seems to be struggling between her desire to express topics previously censored in her work (self-censored in this case), such as pain, a sense of writing about forbidden topics like female discomfort and the desire to keep quiet, to give in to silence, to lose faith in language, speech, poetry. What is more remarkable is that a poet as recognized and prestigious as Foppa should question her own discourse in such a manner, her own legitimacy to use language, even when she is a recognized writer. Even for her, poetry was something forbidden, something that she wrote only whenever she had spare time:

Y yo
En mi oscuro nido
Llevo la poesía
Como un mal oculto
Como un secreto
Como un fruto prohibido. (59)

We are back in the biblical realms of Eve. Discourse, when used by a woman, is like a forbidden fruit, a tool that she was not always allowed to handle. Since the time of Plato, *Logos* used to be a man's property monopolized by the masculine gender, something that was supposed to be untouched by the female gender. The feminine transgression consists of reappropriating writing for her own purposes, to be able to go beyond the world of censorship and hermetism to which female writing and speech has historically been subjected over time. Censorship comes in many shapes and forms. It need not be explicit to be powerful or effective. Prescribing what a woman should write, how a woman is supposed to write or discouraging certain topics to be written about is a form of censorship that has proven itself powerful in Latin American countries. Editorial censorship has ruled the incipient female literary canon since its earliest beginnings.

In terms of Foppa's contribution to poetry, she is a foundational stone in the struggle toward a female voice, toward the search for an uncontaminated expression that is truly hers. Foppa heads toward the construction of a common language where she is allowed to express and communicate anything she wants, without fear of reprisal or marginalization resulting from an unconstrained and free act of speech. *Las palabras* is an attempt to broaden the spectrum of possible ways of writing poetry in Latin America.

The former is possible because talking about silence is still talking, it is writing out loud, writing for a public and a society that are going to react, daring to break a tradition of repression and censorship. In Foppa's case, writing about the silence that is present in words is a sort of metalanguage, which involves going beyond the sphere of mere speech and entering the realm of action and political militance, a realm that had been traditionally reserved for men. As Foppa mentions in poem XV, it is not only words which are in play in poetry. The realities that lie behind them are the ones that surprise us once they pass through the special filter we have devised for looking at reality, the one we call language:

No son las palabras
Las que hablan;

Dicen muy poco,
Engañan.
Detrás de ellas
Acaso
Una voz escondida
Susurra alguna vez
Y con las mismas palabras
Conocidas
Nos asombra. (62)

The poem above suggests that the power of words lies not in the free play of language but in the meaning that words are able to convey despite their shortcomings. Nevertheless, if the poet blames language for its failure in accuracy or meaning or laments the incapacity of language to utter certain truths, it is not solely, as the lyrical voice states, because words deceive. Rather, it is because the subject that utters them is not sincere in what he or she wants to communicate because he/she feels scared of being suppressed. Foppa herself possibly wanted to express how constricted she felt in the straight-jacket of masculine poetry, which did not have the instruments she needed in order to produce and reproduce her specific female experiences on the page. The effort she is doing to build a place in language for her own kind of poetry shows in practically every poem of *Las palabras*.

As indicated by the former poem here transcribed, poetry can reveal as much by what it says as by what it omits. What Foppa is not saying here explicitly, among other things, is that she does not feel that language as it is at that moment in her own Latin American Literary tradition is adequate to express what she feels. As a subaltern subject, she feels the need to deconstruct and reappropriate the hegemonic language in order to make it serve her own purposes. The masculine language of the canonical masters in Hispanic literature reveals that it is insufficient to convey the demands and needs of the subaltern subject, in this case, the need of the female poets to produce their own styles, themes and concerns in poetry. (Re)inventing a female poetry with its own categories and notions of value might be a way for language to free itself from reproducing the hierarchies of the dominant language.

These poems should be analyzed in the light of her life, as icons of what she died for: freedom of expression, freedom of speech. It is ironic that such an extraordinary intellectual and human rights activist should be little known in the country where she left most of her legacy, a legacy that reaches far beyond an individual nation. As Foppa's colleague, the Mexican Elena Poniatowska wrote in an article published one year after her death, in the aforementioned congress of writers in the UNAM who failed to pay her homage out of fear of suffering the same fate, even despite the fact that many were activists and politically committed intellectuals:

[...] ¿De qué sirven nuestros pensamientos, las manos, la pluma y el papel si con ellos no defendemos a los que desaparecen, a los oprimidos, a los que luchan, a los torturados? Si hace seis meses se encontraba entre nosotros una mujer compañera, amiga, escritora que compartía la vida que todos seguimos llevando tranquilamente, resulta que ahora no podemos levantarnos y exigir que se nos diga qué le pasó a Alaíde Foppa, dónde y cómo está, qué delito ha cometido, quién la juzgó y si se le condenó que se nos condene también a nosotras porque vivimos como ella, trabajamos como ella y deseamos para América Latina lo mismo que ella desea [...] Alaíde Foppa es un símbolo, el símbolo de las mujeres latinoamericanas por la libertad.⁵ (Poniatowska 14)

⁵[...] What's the use of thought or hand, of ink and paper if they are not used to defend those who are missing or oppressed, those who are fighting and those who are tortured? Six months ago, a woman who was a colleague, a friend, a writer that shared the life we are all living calmly was right here with us. Now it turns out that we can't get up and protest and demand an answer to what happened to Alaíde Foppa, where and how she is, who judged her and if they judge her they should judge us too because we live as she lived, we work as she worked and we our wish for Latin America is the same one she had. [...] Alaíde Foppa is a symbol, the symbol of freedom for Latin American women. (The translation is mine).

Poniatowska's words function as a reminder of the important role hegemonic voices in literature can play in repressive regimes, and the possibility they have to write about the issues the subalterns are facing when they are not able to defend their lives or to speak up because of the higher risks they run as a more vulnerable population. As a journalist, perhaps Poniatowska wants to suggest that Hegemonic voices that deny the responsibility they have in defending the subalterns are complicit with the same forces they do not dare critique even if they themselves are not directly at risk. Poniatowska is appealing in this paragraph, to the solidarity she thinks the Latin American writers should show to their kin, especially to the women writers who because of their gender are still part of the vulnerable and invisibilized groups in their region despite the privileges they have earned as writers, and even when they have a position of more power than their non-writing female counterparts. After all, they all have the same interest in defending freedom as a possibility, freedom as a project born out of a continuous struggle.

Foppa's poems, the magazine she started, her literary and academic work should help to reconsider the value of literature to speak unspoken and uncomfortable truths, for it is not only the mere beauty of words that interests literary scholars, it is the power of what they say to change reality simply by (re)presenting it. The subaltern is constantly striving to create a common language, a common ground where no censorship is allowed, a space where he/she has not only the possibility to speak for himself, but to make room for the words (*las palabras*) of all those who cannot speak. Alaïde Foppa as a Latin-American female poet strove to produce a more inclusive language where nobody's experience was suppressed, where no one's story was left out.

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SECCIÓN ESPECIAL

**Aproximaciones transdisciplinarias
al pensamiento de Gloria Anzaldúa**

SPECIAL SECTION

**Transdisciplinary Approaches
to Gloria Anzaldúa's Thought**

Edited by:

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**PRESENTACIÓN: EL PENSAMIENTO
TRANSDISCIPLINAR DE
GLORIA ANZALDÚA**

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Gloria Anzaldúa (n. Rio Grande Valley, Texas, 1942 – f. Santa Cruz, California, 2004) es la escritora y pensadora chicana y queer más influyente de las últimas cuatro décadas. Desde la publicación de la innovadora antología *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), coeditada por ella y Cherríe Moraga, en la cual incluyó sus primeros escritos sobre el feminismo postcolonial de mujeres queer y de color, su obra ha sido imprescindible para cualquier acercamiento interseccional al estudio de la identidad en relación con la justicia social y reparativa en ámbitos locales y globales. Su libro más conocido y citado, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), es ampliamente considerado una obra maestra entre otras cosas por ofrecer un método de sanación o reparación para los marginados a través de la escritura sobre la identidad, por su compleja crítica de la desigualdad que conlleva la formación geopolítica de zonas fronterizas en la posmodernidad y por su análisis interseccional de la identidad partiendo del cuerpo, la sexualidad, la espiritualidad y la imaginación.

En los últimos diez años, las publicaciones póstumas de una selección de sus escritos en *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009) y de su segundo libro de filosofía *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), ambos editados por AnaLouise Keating, así como innovadoras investigaciones de su impresionante legado inédito incluido en *The Gloria E Anzaldúa Papers* en la Biblioteca Benson de la Universidad de Texas en Austin, han confirmado el valor y la perdurabilidad de su obra, además de consolidar su posición como una de las pensadoras más importantes de nuestro tiempo. Su gran influencia en el desarrollo de numerosos campos del saber contemporáneo—estudios sobre etnicidad, espiritualidad, psicología, educación, lingüística, antropología, historia, género, sexualidad, etc.—ha inspirado no solo a académicos y pensadores sino también a activistas y a

comunidades históricamente marginadas en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos y en otras partes del mundo.

Quince años después del fallecimiento de Anzaldúa en 2004, esta Sección Especial de *Cuadernos de ALDEEU* incluye aproximaciones a su pensamiento desde distintas perspectivas y múltiples posicionamientos. Todos son consecuentes con la visión transdisciplinar que domina su obra; es decir, una visión que integra diferentes ramas del saber, tanto convencionales como alternativas, y que además incluye la identidad y la experiencia de las mismas autoras-investigadoras como parte constitutiva del propio ensayo. En nuestro proyecto original para esta sección especial, solicitamos contribuciones que fomentaran la capacidad de asombro y el acto de compartir, y que argumentaran aproximaciones conceptualmente innovadoras al conocimiento, partiendo de múltiples equilibrios entre cuerpos, intelectos, espiritualidades y la imaginación. Nuestro interés estaba en reunir un conjunto de artículos de investigadoras tanto consolidadas como emergentes que situaran de forma abarcadora la obra de Anzaldúa en el pensamiento contemporáneo. El resultado, como adelanto brevemente en los párrafos que siguen, ha superado con creces nuestras expectativas.

Abre esta sección especial el ensayo de Mariana Alessandri “Three Existentialist Readings of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands / La Frontera*”, el cual analiza las obras más conocidas y estudiadas de Anzaldúa bajo una nueva óptica, considerando a la tejana como la pensadora principal de lo que Alessandri describe como el Existencialismo de Mujeres Chicanas. Para ello, su ensayo ofrece un estudio del concepto de vergüenza en Anzaldúa en relación a las obras de Jean Paul Sartre, Samuel Ramos y Franz Fanon, centrándose especialmente en el concepto anzalduano de “terrorismo lingüístico”, el cual, para Alessandri, debe considerarse como una descripción y un rechazo de “la vergüenza lingüística” desde un punto de vista existencialista que engloba visiones canónicas y alternativas.

En el segundo ensayo, “Gloria Anzaldúa and Philosophy: The Concept / Image of The *Mestiza*”, Rolando Pérez reflexiona sobre dos nociones centrales en *Borderlands/La Frontera*—la figuración de la “Nueva Mestiza” y el concepto de “New Mestiza consciousness”—en relación con un gran número de autores de la

tradición filosófica contemporánea en occidente. El marco más general en que Pérez engloba su discusión—el rechazo de la distinción entre pensamiento y filosofía—es sorprendente y atractivo, y demuestra elocuentemente su aproximación a Anzaldúa como filósofa, frente a aquellos que, bajo la etiqueta de “pensamiento”, quieren aún hoy día defender la separación entre “alta filosofía” y “baja filosofía,” o entre “alta cultura” y “baja cultura”.

En “Writing Excess In *Light In The Dark / Luz En Lo Oscuro: Anzaldúa’s Phenomenology Of Writing As A Decolonizing Tool*”, Inmaculada Lara Bonilla nos propone otra original aproximación a la filosofía de Anzaldúa, esta vez en relación a la fenomenología, centrándose en el acercamiento de Anzaldúa a la escritura y la retórica, y en una temática recurrente en su obra: la convergencia de la experiencia corporal con los procesos de creación de significado. Este estudio además permite a Lara-Bonilla reflexionar sobre la recurrencia en los textos de Anzaldúa de elementos considerados “excesivos” en la escritura tradicional académica. Estas repeticiones, según Lara-Bonilla, hay que entenderlas dentro del compromiso de Anzaldúa con la escritura de teoría descolonizadora, buscando siempre el involucramiento y la transformación de los lectores.

En el siguiente ensayo, “*Ella Tiene Su Tono*”: Conocimiento and Mestiza Consciousness In Liliana Wilson’s Art”, Alicia Gaspar de Alba lleva a cabo una descripción y valoración de la filosofía de Anzaldúa en su conjunto como método de empoderamiento para los marginados o sujetos fronterizos—un método hacia la “conciencia fronteriza”, en palabras de Gaspar de Alba. Para ilustrar la conceptualización de los siete pasos hacia el Conocimiento—“the path to conocimiento”—que hace Anzaldúa en sus ensayos tardíos, Gaspar de Alba ofrece las pinturas de la artista latina de origen chileno Liliana Wilson, creando un fructífero diálogo entre arte, pensamiento y creación literaria que en realidad también incluye la visión personal de Gaspar de Alba como artista, académica y escritora fronteriza.

Este cuarto ensayo, de Gaspar de Alba, sirve como colofón a los tres anteriores, que buscan comprender mejor la obra de Anzaldúa en diálogo con corrientes filosóficas centrales del

siglo XX, y como transición hacia los tres siguientes, en los cuales se incorporan de forma más perceptible experiencias personales, reflexiones sobre posicionamiento y un afán de continuación incluso más allá de las ideas de la filósofa tejana. En “‘No Bridge Lasts Forever’: The Hybrid Nature Of Gloria Anzaldúa’s Thought”, Grażyna Zygađło explica detalladamente la aproximación holística al pensamiento de Anzaldúa que lleva a cabo en su libro, recientemente publicado en Polonia. Después de una reflexión sobre su posicionamiento como académica y educadora polaca estudiosa de Anzaldúa y sobre la necesidad de dar a conocer sus textos y las teorías a nivel global, el ensayo de Zygađło incluye una reflexión profunda sobre las posibilidades de aplicación de las ideas de la tejana en el campo de los estudios fronterizos comparativos.

Conjugando compromiso ético, investigación académica, reflexión histórica y creación literaria, Norma E. Cantú reflexiona forma original y creativa en el sexto ensayo, “Revisiting Mestizaje and Gloria Anzaldúa’s Border”, sobre los focos principales que Anzaldúa incluye en la conceptualización del mestizaje: lo espiritual, lo histórico y lo personal. Cantú sigue uno de los principales deseos de Anzaldúa, que siempre animó a sus lectores y a los estudiosos de su obra y pensamiento para que la continuaran, más allá de sus propias enseñanzas, llevando a cabo “work that matters”, obras que sean importantes para nosotros mismos, a nivel espiritual, comunitario e histórico. Su ensayo ofrece un contexto histórico, su propio testimonio como mestiza fronteriza, poemas originales y de gran fuerza emocional, y una reflexión final sobre la grave crisis humanitaria que nos afecta en 2018 y 2019 en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, donde se está maltratando y torturando a niños y sus familias, y violando gravemente los derechos humanos de migrantes que intentan cruzar la frontera, casi todos muy pobres, indígenas y centroamericanos.

Por último, en el ensayo “‘Almas Afines,’ ‘Kindred Spirits,’ Like-Minded Souls: An Anzaldúan Meditation on Identities and Transformation”, AnaLouise Keating también cumple el deseo de Anzaldúa de que continuáramos su obra aunque de distinta forma. En vez de seguir el formato de escritura “excesiva” o de incorporar la creación a la escritura académica,

Keating está más interesada en ir más allá filosóficamente; es decir, en repensar nociones elaboradas por Anzaldúa y en avanzar en la conceptualización de dichas nociones. Nuestra autora mantuvo sus ideas siempre en continuo desarrollo durante su vida y, en vez de imbricarlas en un sistema fijo y cerrado, las dejó intencionalmente abiertas y para que en el futuro, ella y otros continuaran la labor de adición, sustracción, rebarajamiento y reinención. Desde su posición como una de las mayores especialistas en la obra de Anzaldúa, gran amiga y colaboradora durante años con ella, Keating reflexiona aquí sobre su visión de la identidad, un aspecto central, y al mismo altamente elusivo o difícil de fijar dentro del pensamiento de la tejana.

Como nos enseña Keating en este último ensayo, no debe haber nunca conclusión definitiva en nuestro acercamiento a la filosofía de Anzaldúa. Fijar y cerrar su deseo de incesante producción y repensamiento iría en contra de la visión “excesiva” antiacadémica, antidicotómica, procesual y metódica, espiritual, corporal, imaginativa, creativa, transdisciplinar... que enciende su obra. No debemos olvidar que la misión central del pensamiento de Anzaldúa es curativa, y que los procesos de sanación nunca concluyen totalmente en nuestros cuerpos, en nos/otros. Bajo esta visión abierta del corpus del pensamiento anzalduano, visión abierta hacia el futuro—añadiendo reflexiones sustanciosas y al mismo tiempo esperando nuevas creatividades y nuevas formas de sanación personal y colectiva—queremos publicar esta sección especial. Doy las gracias especialmente a la Dra. Nuria Morgado, la editora de *Cuadernos de ALDEEU*, esta oportunidad de dar a conocer los últimos avances en el estudio del pensamiento de Gloria Anzaldúa. También agradezco a la Dra. Lisa Rabin y a todas las autoras y autores su ayuda y apoyo en la gestación de este proyecto.

THREE EXISTENTIALIST READINGS OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA*

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I will not be shamed again
Nor will I shame myself
–Gloria Anzaldúa¹

Abstract: This essay provides three new and related philosophical readings of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*: 1) in the lineage of canonical European Existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre, who provides an analysis of shame; 2) in the lineage of Mexican Existentialists like Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz, who attribute a relative of shame to Mexicans; and 3) in dialogue with Africana Existentialists like Franz Fanon, who describe the bodily shame of nonwhites in racist societies. Anzaldúa's concept of "linguistic terrorism," which existentially translates into *la vergüenza lingüística*, extends the scope of European, Africana, and Mexican Existentialisms while putting all three in dialogue for the first time, and serves as a first attempt at formulating a Chicana Existentialism.

Keywords: Gloria Anzaldúa, Phenomenology, Existentialism, Africana Existentialism.

María Lugones, Mariana Ortega, Linda Martín Alcoff, Andrea Pitts, Cynthia Paccacerqua, and Alexander Stehn are among the academic philosophers who read Gloria Anzaldúa as a philosopher. Ortega, along with Communications scholar Jacqueline M. Martinez reads Anzaldúa through the lens of Phenomenology, comparing her ideas and methods to those of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger (Ortega 2016; Martinez 2000, 2013). I suggest that we pivot, however, and put Anzaldúa in conversation with European Existential figures like Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre. She explicitly located herself in this lineage by recounting her early philosophical acquaintance with Nietzsche and Kierkegaard in elementary school, calling herself "that kind of kid" (Reuman

¹ Anzaldúa places this couplet in Chapter 7 of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in the section entitled "El Día de la Chicana."

31).² But we would miss something if we did not also see Anzaldúa's work as growing out of the Mexican Existentialist tradition. It is clear from her reference in *Borderlands* to *La raza cósmica* (1925) that Anzaldúa read Jose Vasconcelos, which means she likely read Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz, both of whom asked what it meant to be Mexican. Their answers likely informed her own view of what it means to be Mexican-American living along the US-Mexico border. The shame and perhaps inferiority she felt existing in-between cultures resonates with their account of Mexicans, who suffer from the history of conquest and colonization. Finally, there is much insight to be gained from reading Anzaldúa alongside Africana Existentialists like James Baldwin, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Franz Fanon, who write about the inescapability of blackness.³ Like these authors, Anzaldúa describes existing in a nonwhite body in a particular time in history within a given set of economic constraints and oppressive political circumstances.

This is not a historical essay but a philosophical one. It develops three readings of Anzaldúa as Existentialist philosopher and as intellectual bridgebuilder connecting European, Mexican, and Africana philosophies. Scholars know that Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Vasconcelos directly influenced Anzaldúa, but the degree to which other European, Africana, and Mexican

² Søren Kierkegaard was Anzaldúa's first philosophical love. She claims to have read him early, and he affected her profoundly. An explicit reference to Kierkegaard survived late drafts of *Borderlands/La Frontera* before she excised it. Anzaldúa claims to have been moved by his *Sickness unto Death*, from which she reworked the Kierkegaardian concepts of despair and sin. In Kierkegaard, Anzaldúa claims to have found someone whose despair "equaled [her] own" (*Reader* 235). On the basis of Kierkegaard alone, it would be appropriate to read Anzaldúa an Existentialist. Like him, she was invested in the project of describing how it is to exist, especially in a brown body and with a misfit tongue. See Alessandri, forthcoming in *El Mundo Zurdo* and in *Taking Kierkegaard Personally*.

³ Including the European tradition, designation of this branch of philosophy is complicated. Albert Camus famously did not want to be called an Existentialist, though Sartre did. Kierkegaard is sometimes called a "forerunner" or even "father" of Existentialism. Lewis Gordon uses the term "Black" more than "Africana," when referring to this field of study, which he alternately calls "existential philosophy" or "philosophy of existence." He makes clear that not all Africana philosophy is existentialist (Gordon 4).

Existentialists influenced her has not been adequately examined. Instead of locating these historical connections, I focus on one theme that spans all three Existentialisms: shame. I contend that Anzaldúa's description of shame challenges Sartre's, much like Franz Fanon did, but from a Chicana perspective. Her theory of "linguistic terrorism" and my formulation of its existential manifestation—*la vergüenza lingüística*—connects the three branches of Existentialism by highlighting a condition shared by many Hispanics raised in the United States. This essay is written in five parts. In part one, I offer initial reasons to read Anzaldúa as an Existentialist and not just a Phenomenologist. In the second section, I lay out Sartre's description of shame from *Being and Nothingness (L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique, 1943)*, which is considered the classic Existentialist account of shame. In part three, I review Fanon's critique of Sartre and highlight one striking affinity between Anzaldúa and Africana Existentialism. Part four shows how Anzaldúa's account of shame is continuous with the Mexican Existentialist fixation on inferiority. Finally, part five uses Anzaldúa's concept of "linguistic terrorism" to showcase one of the ways that Chicana Existentialism can make a unique contribution to philosophy by examining the connections between language, identity, and shame.

Part I: Anzaldúa as Existentialist

My reading of Anzaldúa as an Existentialist faces two related obstacles: 1) when read as a philosopher, Anzaldúa usually gets read as a Phenomenologist rather than as an Existentialist; 2) the field of Chicana Existentialism does not officially exist yet.

In *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience and Identity* (2000), Jacqueline Martinez argues that Anzaldúa and other Chicanas used a phenomenological method remarkably similar to Husserl's, to "focus our attention on the life world and the lived experience of persons [...] because it recognizes the inherent interrelatedness of human conscious experience and the fact of our locatedness in time, place, history, and culture" (ix). Martinez claims that Chicana phenomenologists first "stop the natural flow of our conscious awareness," then "look at it from different

angles,” and finally “understand the social structures that allowed that thing to show up as such to begin with” (x).⁴

Like Martinez, Mariana Ortega reads Anzaldúa through Phenomenology, specifically tying her to Martin Heidegger. In *In-Between* (2016), Ortega invokes Heidegger’s concepts of “*Dasein*” and “being-in-the-world” to support the thesis that Anzaldúa’s narrative and poetic “I” is more existential than ontological.⁵ Despite the conceptual resonances of my reading with Ortega’s, I believe there is just as much, if not more, to be gained from reading Anzaldúa alongside European, Mexican, and Africana Existentialists.

A book titled *Chicana Existentialisms* does not yet exist, but before 1997, *Existence in Black* did not either. Thanks to Lewis Gordon, Africana Existentialism is a recognizable and well-respected field of inquiry. Black philosophers in and out of the United States ask timely questions about what it means to occupy black bodies in White Supremacist societies. Gordon describes the field of Africana Existentialism as “a philosophical practice that is premised upon concerns of freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation” (3). Franz Fanon is an Africana Existentialist insofar as, Tendayi Sithole observes, “[his] concern is the existential condition of the black subject” (178). In a similar way, we can begin to develop a Chicana Existentialism with Anzaldúa at the helm.

Like Gordon, Carlos Sánchez recovered a piece of the Mexican Existentialist tradition, specifically as it thrived between 1948-1952. *Contingency and Commitment* (2016) tells the story of el *Grupo Hiperión*, which included Emilio Uranga, Jorge Portilla, Joaquín Sánchez MacGregor, Luis Villoro, and Ricardo Guerra. Sánchez reads these philosophers as beginning not with universal principles, but with local, embodied experiences of being Mexican within certain econo-political situations. He argues

⁴ In 2013, Martinez put Anzaldúa in conversation with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (who sometimes gets classified as an Existentialist, but not in this case) claiming that both authors focus on the importance of culture and communication. Martinez reads Anzaldúa’s concepts of “borderlands,” “consciencia de la mestiza,” and “la facultad” as primarily phenomenological interventions (226).

⁵ For a reading of Ortega’s “Existential I” in dialogue with Anzaldúa, see Newton and Sinclair.

that using their existential condition as a point of departure often landed these thinkers on as universal a theory as Existential philosophy can ever hope for (87-8). Like Gordon, Sánchez left behind a narrative thread of Mexican Existentialist thought for scholars to pick up and continue developing.

The idea of a Chicano Existentialism is not new, but it is anemic and phallogocentric. Three years before Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga published *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), San Jose State Professor of Mexican American Studies Elihu Carranza published *Chicanismo: Philosophical Fragments*. It is a description of being Chicano in the United States, of enduring the process of erosion and assimilation. Carranza describes a hyphenated existence similar to the one that Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. The hyphen between Mexican and American is a defining one for many Chicanxs, one that they fall into, feeling rejected by both cultures. In 1984, Jessie Contreras, Doctoral Student at Berkeley, wrote a dissertation under prominent Heidegger scholar Hubert Dreyfus, titled “Existential Phenomenology and its Influence on Mexican and Chicano Philosophy and Philosophy of Education.” Contreras tied the history of Chicano Studies programs in the US to Mexican Existentialist thought, specifically as it was formulated by the association of Mexican scholars and artists *Ateneo de Juventud* at the beginning of the 20th Century and the *Grupo Hiperión* in the 1940s and 50s. The dissertation is a genealogy of Chicano male thought read through the lens of Existentialism.⁶ It is in light of these (exclusively male) histories that we can develop a Chicana Existentialism as surely as Gordon and Sánchez did with *Africana* and Mexican Existentialisms.

Because of her subject position, in this essay I read Anzaldúa as having more in common with Fanon and Paz than Husserl or Heidegger. I will show that, like Fanon, Anzaldúa’s philosophical concern is the existential condition of the colonial subject, and her ideas provoke questions about freedom, anguish,

⁶ Contreras seems to have been woefully ignorant of women of color feminists. He makes no reference to *This Bridge Called my Back*, which was published by Persephone Press in 1981, presumably while he was researching his dissertation on Chicano Studies. He also fails to account for Chicana authors in his intellectual history, which ranges from 19th Century Mexico to 1983 in California.

responsibility, embodied agency, sociality and liberation. *Borderlands/La Frontera* draws attention to the concrete lived experience of the Chicana subject, and her descriptions reveal a concern for the liberation of embodied Chicanas. Anzaldúa scholars have shown that her account of “linguistic terrorism” teaches us something new about the existential reality of Mexican-Americans in Deep South Texas, but no one yet has read it as a critique of Sartrean shame.

Part II: Sartre on Shame

By the time Anzaldúa found Kierkegaard, Sartre had already written his famous phenomenology of shame in *Being and Nothingness*. It is no surprise that the man who wrote “hell is other people” also believed that “the other is the hidden death of my possibilities” (“No Exit”; *Being* 354). Sartre’s “other” limits me when he sees me. If I’m lucky, Sartre says, the other sees me as a “fascinating object,” but since I’m not in control, Sartre calls being seen a “danger” (484). I need the other to reflect me back to myself, but I do not know which me he will reflect (349). In seeing me, the other shows me to myself, and in so doing, he might shame me. Sartre writes: “I discover [myself] in shame and, in other instances, in pride. It is shame or pride which reveals to me the Other’s look and myself at the end of that look” (350). According to Sartre, shame happens when I do not like what I see in the mirror; pride happens when I do. Insofar as the other defines me, Sartre says that I am not my own. He explains: “Shame [...] is shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a given object [...] I am this self which another knows” (350).

Sartre uncritically takes for granted that the mirror is accurate. To illustrate this, he tells a story of a man standing in an empty hallway bent over a keyhole of an apartment. If no one sees what he is doing, Sartre says, the man gets lost in his spying and forgets himself. But as soon as he hears footsteps in the hallway, he has the sensation of being caught. When he becomes aware of someone watching him staring into the keyhole, he becomes a Peeping-Tom. For Sartre, the other’s testimony is always accurate: “I am this being. I do not for an instant think of denying

it; my shame is a confession” (351). Shame is admitting that I am what you see, for Sartre, it is admitting that I am guilty.

Like Sartre, Anzaldúa imagines shame like a mirror: “to be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we’ll see there” (*Borderlands* 80). For Anzaldúa and Sartre, shame comes from being looked at, and in all cases, it is not exactly the other’s eyes that shame me, but my seeing myself as the other sees me. Whether I am looking through a peephole, as Sartre imagines, or about to open my mouth in the presence of another Latina, as Anzaldúa describes, I become a thing, an object for the other, and potentially “the subject of your *burla*” (80).

In Chapter 1 of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa tells the story of how her cousin Pedro ran from the *migra* but got caught and was deported to Guadalajara despite being a fifth-generation US citizen. She notes that “he tried to smile when he looked back at us, to raise his fist. But I saw the *shame* pushing his head down, I saw the terrible weight of shame hunch his shoulders” (26, my italics). Anzaldúa admits to feeling this shame when Chicanas like her get rejected by the greater society: “Yes, all you people wound us when you reject us. Rejection strips us of self-worth; our vulnerability exposes us to shame. It is our innate identity you find wanting. We are ashamed that we need your good opinion, that we need your acceptance” (110). On Anzaldúa’s reading, Chicanas experience the shame of needing the other’s approval, of placing their self-worth in the hands of the other.

Although Anzaldúa’s use of shame thus far could be considered Sartrean, what makes her analysis of shame more descriptive of Chicana experience in particular is her emphasis on the role of language in Chicana shame. In 1952, African Existentialist Franz Fanon began the project of improving upon Sartre’s description of shame by incorporating the linguistic element, which Anzaldúa continued in 1986. I now turn to a discussion of Fanon’s linguistic contribution to the philosophy of shame followed by a discussion of Anzaldúa’s concept of “linguistic terrorism.”

Part III: Fanon on Shame

Franz Fanon wrote about language shame, which connects him directly to Anzaldúa, but he also wrote about shame in general. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, 1952), he challenged Sartre's conclusion that shame is a confession, countering it with the idea that for a Black man in a White Supremacist society, the (White) other does not "discover" him as a criminal, for example, but rather turns him into one. For a Black man, says Fanon, shame is not a confession, not an admission of guilt. A Black man's shame is generated by the kind of seeing that happens in White supremacy. For a White man to feel shame, perhaps Sartre is right that he would have to be guilty. In contrast, Fanon says that a Black man just has to be *seen* to be shamed, which makes shame an admission of impotence, not guilt. The shamed party cowers in both cases, however, which only reinforces the judgment of guilt. Fanon recalls being called out as a "Negro" on a train, and, after having initially been amused by it, felt trapped by that image:

I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all historicity, which I had learned about from Jaspers. [...] In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. [...] I as responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho good eatin.'" (112)⁷

⁷ Before Fanon gave us a corrective to Sartre's phenomenology of shame, W.E.B. Du Bois gave us "double-consciousness." In *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, Du Bois described the "second-sight" that the Black man possesses, which lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is not altogether gift, for Du Bois, since he said that he has no true self-consciousness, which, in Sartrean language, might amount to "he is never his acts." Du Bois

Fanon was caught in shame, but Sartre was wrong about what his shame meant.

The first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, is titled “The Negro and Language.” Here, Fanon asks why a colonized Black man from the Antilles would strive to speak French and responds that to speak “means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (17-18). He draws out the racial dimension of linguistic difference: “the negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter,” or “more of a human being [...] in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.” He adds, “mastery of language affords remarkable power.” “Every colonized people... every people in whose soul an *inferiority complex* has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country” (18, my italics). A sure way to colonize a people and to make them feel inferior, for Fanon, is to take away their language. This is exactly what happened:

The middle class in the Antilles never speak Creole except to their servants. In school the children of Martinique are taught to scorn the dialect. One avoids Creolisms. Some families completely forbid the use of Creole, and mothers ridicule their children from speaking it. (20)

described “always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (45). Like Fanon, Du Bois would not have believed that shame is a confession but rather a reaction to being looked at. Comparing Du Bois’s “double-consciousness” and Anzaldúa’s “Mestiza consciousness,” Martinez points out that Du Bois and Anzaldúa both name a special “gift” that arises from the experience of systemic oppression. Du Bois says that black people who suffer from double-consciousness gain a kind of “second-sight,” while Anzaldúa called “la facultad” that power of seeing which comes out of a life of linguistic and racial oppression (Martinez, “The Double-Consciousness” 168-9).

Fanon shows how the possession of a language gives you access to a world and a certain degree of power.⁸ Naturally, this causes families to begin to break down. As Fanon puts it:

[The Negro] is incarnating a new type of man that he imposes on his associates and his family. And so his old mother can no longer understand him when he talks to her about his duds, the family's crummy joint, the dump...all of it, of course, tricked out with the appropriate accent. (36-7)

The Black man's response to what Fanon diagnoses as an "inferiority complex" is to blend, fit in, dump one's family, and claw toward linguistic acceptance. After all, he says, "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains mastery of the cultural tool that language is" (38).

Whether or not Anzaldúa read Fanon, her theory of "linguistic terrorism" sounds remarkably similar to Fanon's description. Both contest Sartre's notion that shame is a confession. Most importantly, Anzaldúa's analysis gives us a new way to talk about linguistic shame that is not at bottom, indicative of guilt. When Fanon wrote about the colonized peoples of the Antilles in *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952, he claimed to be speaking for all colonized peoples, which presumably would have included Mexican-Americans in deep South Texas, whom he would have judged to be living in a US colony. The story Fanon told about Blacks speaking French is remarkably close to Anzaldúa's observation that Mexican-Americans long to speak proper English. He understood well the external reasons why the Antillean man would want to learn French: "Yes, I must take great pains with my speech, because I shall be more or less judged by it. With great contempt they will say of me 'he doesn't even know how to speak French'" (20). But Anzaldúa also keyed in on how Mexican-Americans internalize that view: "Chicanas who grew

⁸ Fanon writes: "it is understandable that the first action of the black man is a reaction, and, since the Negro is appraised in terms of the extent of his assimilation, it is also understandable why the newcomer expresses himself only in French" (36).

up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish” (*Borderlands* 80). If Fanon rightly contended that “historically, it must be understood that the Negro wants to speak French because it is the key that can open doors which were still barred to him fifty years ago,” Anzaldúa also added a personal dimension, recounting that her own mother wanted her to erase her Mexican accent (*Black Skin* 38, *Borderlands* 76). For Anzaldúa and Fanon, language is identity, so the languages one chooses to develop as well as the ones one chooses to discard reveal the life one wants to lead. Fanon wrote about Antillean men who learned English but subversively held onto their local dialect; Anzaldúa herself majored in English to “spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty” (“Speaking” 165). In other words, Anzaldúa’s descriptions are like Fanon’s, but they are descriptive of an invisible people who routinely get called Mexicans.

Before expanding upon the concept of “linguistic terrorism” and *la vergüenza lingüística*, I turn to a reading of Anzaldúa in the lineage of Mexican Existentialists, for whom the Mexican suffers from similar feelings of inferiority and shame as Fanon’s colonized Black man.

Part IV: Mexican Existentialists on Shame

In his 1984 dissertation in Chicano Studies from Berkeley, Jessie Contreras traced Chicano thought of the 1960s back to Mexican ideas. He pointed out that students in the earliest Chicano Studies programs were taught Mexican Existentialist thinkers like José Vasconcelos, Antonio Caso, Octavio Paz, Samuel Ramos, and Leopoldo Zea.⁹ Although her field was not Chicano Studies, Anzaldúa’s timing makes it likely that she, too, would have studied these thinkers (188, 198). Anzaldúa was a meticulous writer who kept her references to other thinkers to a

⁹ Contreras writes: “Ramos and Paz are important to Chicanos in that they argued that the philosopher who molded culture to fit national circumstances, rather than the one immersed in European and Anglo-American ideas, ought to acquire national eminence. For these reasons, Ramos’ *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* and Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude* became important works in many course reading lists of Chicano Studies programs” (209-10).

minimum.¹⁰ In light of this, her quoting Vasconcelos in *Borderlands* is significant.¹¹

Vasconcelos was mentor to Samuel Ramos, student of Antonio Caso and reader of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. In *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (1934), Ramos diagnosed Mexicans with a close cousin of shame: inferiority (Contreras 94-105). If Contreras is right that Chicanos learned the history of Mexican intellectual thought, Anzaldúa would have read Ramos and Paz along with Vasconcelos, and so would have been familiar with Ramos' "*pelado*," the caricature of the poor and illiterate, yet rude Mexican, who seems to have morphed into Paz's "*pachuco*," the introverted and troubled Mexican who disguises himself in a coded language and dress.¹² Anzaldúa may even have been familiar with Emilio Uranga's concept of "*Zozobra*," which is the particularly Mexican condition of unsettledness—perhaps the Mexican correlate to Sartre's "nausea"—in which one swings from identification with the European Conquistador to identification with the Indigenous Mexican, leaving behind an emotional wake of what Carlos Sánchez names "insufficiency, groundlessness, and loss."¹³

These Mexican Existentialists focus on the negative traits of the Mexican as a product of violent colonialism and repeated degradation. Anzaldúa's "New Mestiza" shares some of these traits, like patience and humility, but she reverses course and focuses on the pride and stubbornness of the Chicana:

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us. We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we've kept ours [...] *Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet

¹⁰ This may have been why, at the eleventh hour, Anzaldúa pulled Kierkegaard from *Borderlands/La Frontera*. See Alessandri, "Leave out 'Kierkegaard.'"

¹¹ For more comparative scholarship between Anzaldúa and Mexican thinkers, see Sánchez Prado and García.

¹² We might add here Emilio Uranga, whose description of the Mexican as suffering from *zozobra*, or an uneasiness, is an advancement of Ramos's *Peludo* and Paz's *Pachuco*.

¹³ See Carlos Sánchez, "(M)Existentialism." In *Contingency and Commitment*, Sánchez reads the philosophy of Grupo Hiperión in precisely this way, as swinging from one extreme to the other, as itself infected with *zozobra*.

wild, *nosotros los mexicanos* will walk by the crumbling askes as we go about our business. Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain. (*Borderlands* 85-6)

Anzaldúa's language is more inclusive than Paz's and Ramos's, and her description of *nosotros los mexicanos* more hopeful. But she also notes that before recognizing and adopting the Mestiza consciousness, Mexican-Americans are subject to the kinds of shame and humiliation that Paz and Ramos may have had in mind. Anzaldúa did not diagnose Chicano/as in the US with *inferiority*, but she did talk about their *shame*. Nowhere does this shame cut so deeply, in Anzaldúa's writing, as in her discussion of linguistic terrorism.

Part V: Anzaldúa on Shame and Pride

"How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Chapter V in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, is among the most taught, studied, and cited sections of the book. Here, Anzaldúa offers a description of the experience of being language-shamed. The chapter begins with a dentist telling Anzaldúa that her tongue is getting in the way of his success (75). She interprets him literally and metaphorically, pointing out that unbridled tongues everywhere have stood in power's way, only to be terrorized by it. On Anzaldúa's account, her tongue's refusal to speak only English or Spanish presented a threat to people in power who believed in language purity. Her teachers hit her for speaking Spanish and her mother pleaded with her to lose her Spanish accent when speaking English (75-6). She writes about the speech class she was required to take at Pan-American College, mandatory for students with Mexican-sounding last names (*Borderlands* 54; Johnson and Cole 29). Researchers have confirmed not only that Speech 113x was mandatory for Mexicans, but also that it met five days a week over two semesters and was required for graduation (Johnson and Cole).

In addition to fulfilling the traditional course requirements, Anzaldúa claims that academic success for the Chicana involved learning to obey the "reglas de academia,"

which are implicit linguistic and behavioral rules. In a public lecture at Anzaldúa's undergraduate Alma Mater I have imagined these to include:

1. Arrive on time.
2. Spell correctly.
3. Address superiors in a professional way (Doctor, Professor are both ok; "Miss" is not).
4. Don't split your infinitives.
5. Don't just send an attachment as an email. You must write things in the body of the email too.
6. Learn how to use commas, semicolons, periods, and paragraphs.
7. If you want a recommendation, go see your professor during office hours to ask them; don't do it by email.
8. Turn assignments in on time.
9. Don't ask for extensions. Teachers will think you are lying.
10. Don't say "my car broke down," or "my Grandmother died." Teachers will call these "excuses," and say that they have heard them all. (Alessandri 2017)

Some of these rules are what academics think of as common-sense, but to a first-generation college student, or first-generation in the US, perhaps not. In this context, these rules reveal a culture of suspicion that borders on racism. Linguistic *reglas*, in particular, preoccupy Anzaldúa in *Borderlands*, and she spends the rest of the chapter defending Chicano Spanish.

In justifying her language, Anzaldúa was also justifying the existence of the Mexican-American of Deep South Texas, as Fanon did with the colonized Black man. "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity" is Anzaldúa's equivalent to Fanon's claim that to speak "means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (*Borderlands* 81; *Black Skin*

17-18).¹⁴ *La vergüenza lingüística* is the effect of linguistic terrorism on hundreds of thousands of people in the Rio Grande Valley and Latinx all over the country. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa writes:

Pena. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives. Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in their countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their native tongue; generations, centuries in which Spanish was a first language, taught in school, heard of radio and TV, and read in the newspaper. (80)

In this passage, Anzaldúa is referring to speaking Spanish among Chicanas and Latinas, who, in her experience, fight for top spot among minorities.¹⁵ The Chicana who speaks no Spanish would not want the Chicana who speaks Spanish fluently to see her, because it would provoke her shame.

Anzaldúa worked to convert her linguistic shame into pride, taking solace in poetry: “when I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people” (82). For Anzaldúa, as for Sartre, pride means being seen in the light that I choose. But unlike Sartre, Anzaldúa ties pride to legitimacy and freedom, both of which come from the legitimacy of her language. Pride, for Anzaldúa, consists of seeing herself represented in language, untranslated. To be a Chicana without shame means having the freedom to code-switch and to write bilingually: “until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (81). She adds: “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I

¹⁴ In “If Black English Ain’t a Language, Tell Me What Is,” James Baldwin likewise observed that “[language] reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger public, or communal identity” (Baldwin).

¹⁵ Anzaldúa writes: “If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me” (*Borderlands* 80).

will overcome the tradition of silence” (81). Like her description of shame, Anzaldúa’s description of pride is revelatory of the struggles of Chicanas in the US.

Conclusion

This essay is meant to have persuaded readers that in order to understand how shame works for Chicanas in the US, as well as how to convert it into pride, we need to read Anzaldúa in addition to Sartre, Fanon, and Ramos. Despite her resonances with Sartre, Anzaldúa is much closer to Fanon’s description of the Black man’s shame than she is to Sartre’s Peeping Tom. Her experience of shame results not from something she has done, but who she is. Anzaldúa *is* a Mexican-American like Fanon *is* a Black man. If Sartre’s character becomes a Peeping Tom by getting caught peeping, Fanon and Anzaldúa become Black and Brown just by being. Peeping Tom had a choice not to peep; Fanon and Anzaldúa did not have that choice.

Anzaldúa’s Existentialism connects at least three better-recognized branches: the European branch that includes Kierkegaard and Sartre, the Africana branch that includes Du Bois, Fanon and Baldwin, and the Mexican branch that includes Vasconcelos, Ramos and Paz. Many figures in this sub-discipline have been reluctant to accept the title “Existentialist,” and perhaps Anzaldúa would have challenged this definition too. But reading her as part of these lineages shows how Chicana Existentialism constitutes a distinct variety of Existentialism that converses with its European, Mexican, and Africana counterparts. So far, Mexican and Africana Existentialisms have added variety, complexity, and correction to the European canon. In time, Chicana Existentialism will also be recognized as adding unique perspectives on questions concerning the suffering and liberation of Hispanic women. These readings of Anzaldúa as an Existentialist philosopher have constituted one step in the process of developing Chicana Existentialism.

The research I have begun here can be continued in at least three ways: 1) Historical: Anzaldúa scholars might track down the historical connections between Anzaldúa and the major figures in European, Mexican, and Africana Existentialisms. This would involve scouring Anzaldúa’s archives at the Nettie Lee

Benson Library at UT Austin. 2) Philosophical: Anzaldúa scholars might develop the field of Chicana Existentialism. This would involve reading the work of Anzaldúa and other Chicana intellectuals to highlight and develop the Existentialist themes found therein. 3) Comparative: Anzaldúa scholars would benefit from a more extensive comparison of her ideas to those offered by the Africana Existentialist tradition, especially their analyses of lived experience as nonwhites living in the US.

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GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND PHILOSOPHY: THE CONCEPT/IMAGE OF THE *MESTIZA*

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*When an image and an idea forge an alliance,
we find the promise of a new ethical condition.*
Tristan Garcia, *The Life Intense*

Abstract: This paper treats Gloria Anzaldúa as a philosopher, while asking the question: why is it that Latin American philosophy is deemed “thought” but not philosophy proper, when we haven’t even answered the question “what is philosophy?” And further, what happens when one steps outside of the “Western” canon, as with Latin American philosophy? What lies beyond the solar system of “Western” philosophy, which in itself is a marvelous invention? Is it thought, is it philosophy proper? If it is thought, I would argue, it is philosophy, and if it is philosophy then it necessarily has to be thought. For what is philosophy if not thought taking account of itself? Hence, *epistemology*, *metaphysics*, and *ethics* are only the Western names we have given to the way we think about knowledge, the nature of reality, and the best way to live in a community. But this is also the matter of Latin American and Latino philosophy; and unmistakably what Gloria Anzaldúa *does*.

Keywords: Gloria Anzaldúa, philosophy, Latin American philosophy, Non-Western philosophy

Every two years or so, Professor Linda Martín Alcoff and I teach a course in the Thomas Hunter Honors Program at Hunter College on “Latin American Thought.” The reasons for calling it “thought” instead of philosophy are various; but institutionally it is clearly so as not to equate it with philosophy “proper.”¹ The course presents Latin American essays [José Martí’s “Our

¹ In *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* James Maffie relates how in *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, Benjamin Keen scathingly chastises Miguel León Portilla for comparing “‘the highest thought achieved by an Upper Stone Age people’ with the ‘climactic intellectual achievements of the Ancients Greeks’” (5). Fortunately, writes Maffie, León-Portilla’s *Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (1963) “remained steadfast in its commitment to the heterodoxy that Aztecs *did* philosophy” (5), rather than to the notion that they merely *had* a philosophy.

America” (“Nuestra América,” 1891) and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)], historical documents [the mid-sixteenth century Valladolid debates between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda], secondary sources [Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Conquest of America* (1982)], and literary texts [Pablo Neruda’s *Canto general* (1950), and César Vallejo’s novel *Tungsten* (*El tungsteno*, 1931)]. Obviously, such a list of texts would never be considered philosophy within the academy. One could imagine a small number of analytic and Continental philosophers who would be open-minded enough to consider them “philosophical;” but “philosophical” is not, by any means, the same as philosophy. Something similar occurred in the late 1970s with respect to Existentialism, or Existentialist literature—with Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, for example. No academic philosopher then—or even now—would have considered *The Myth of Sisyphus* (*Le Mythe de Sisiphe*, 1942) or a novel like *Nausea* (*La nausée*, 1938) philosophy. I remember an analytic philosopher in the mid-1980s telling me that though Nietzsche was a great poet, he was no philosopher. These prejudices exist and persist within the consecrated Western philosophical tradition. Yet what happens when one steps outside of the “Western” canon, as with Latin American philosophy? What lies beyond the solar system of “Western” philosophy, which in itself is a marvelous invention? Is it thought, is it philosophy proper? If it is thought, I would argue, it is philosophy, and if it is philosophy then it necessarily has to be thought. For what is philosophy if not thought taking account of itself? Hence, *epistemology*, *metaphysics*, and *ethics* are only the Western names we have given to the way we think about knowledge; the nature of reality; and the best way to live in a community. But this is also the matter of Latin American and Latino philosophy; and unmistakably what Gloria Anzaldúa *does*. Moreover, I use the word “does” intentionally here, for thought, as Fichte well pointed out after Kant, is an action. Never mind the medieval distinction between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. It was not the 18th century French philosophers who put this comfortable opposition to rest; but rather De las Casas, who—in saying “goodbye” to Aristotle—gave us a practical philosophy of human rights.

The Functioning of Philosophy

What is Philosophy? (1991), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's book on the functioning of philosophy reminds one of José Ortega y Gasset's *¿Qué es filosofía?* (1930). But if Ortega thought of philosophy in terms of the history and *situatedness* of truth, Deleuze and Guattari think of philosophy as a creative activity, and philosophers as concept creators:

Philosophers have not been sufficiently concerned with the nature of the concept as philosophical reality. They have preferred to think of it as a given knowledge or representation that can be explained by the faculties able to form it (abstraction and generalization) or employ it (judgment). But the concept is not given, it is created; it is to be created. It is not formed but posits itself in itself—it is a self-positing. (Deleuze and Guattari 11)

To put it another way, concepts are created; they do not come from the outside, or are in some way transcendental and anterior to a thinking subject that posits or creates them. They may function as explanatory tools that may be generalized through their abstraction, but even so, they always refer to concrete objects and situations in the world. Moreover, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, concepts are not unitary, self-enclosed mental entities, but rather multiple and gregarious. No sooner are they created than they are nested in a set. "There are no simple concepts," write Deleuze and Guattari. "Every concept has components and is defined by them. It therefore has a combination [*chiffre*]. It is a multiplicity, although not every multiplicity is conceptual. There is no concept with only one component" (15). Take Anzaldúa's concept of the *mestiza*, which derives from the concept of mixture, and particularly ethnic and racial mixture—as Inca Garcilaso de la Vega reminded his readers in *Comentarios reales* in 1609.²

² In a section of *Comentarios reales* where Inca Garcilaso de la Vega gives us a quick summary of the nomenclature invented by the Spaniards to define the *mestizaje* of the Americas (e.g. *criollas/os*, *mulatas/os*, *cholas/os*, etc.), he identifies himself as a *mestizo*: "A los hijos de español y de india, o de indio y española, nos llaman mestizos, por decir que somos mezclados de ambas naciones; fue impuesto por los primeros españoles que tuvieron hijos en

Such a concept of racial mixture is in itself derived from a colonial notion of race. As Aníbal Quijano points out, race was invented by the *coloniality of power* to enslave and exploit the indigenous peoples of the Americas and the African slaves transported in chains to the colonies. In short, *la mestiza* is a concept nested within other concepts that, through its very formation, functions as a questioning of “*pureza*.” Additionally, the concept of the *mestiza* is meaningfully gendered. It is not the “mestizo” but rather the *mestiza* that Anzaldúa creates.³ For concepts are by no means disconnected from the life-world; in fact, they are philosophical creations with which to negotiate the life-world: “All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution,” note Deleuze and Guattari, “We are dealing here with a problem concerning the plurality of subjects, their relationship, and reciprocal presentation” (Deleuze and Guattari 16). And Anzaldúa in her interview with Jeffner Allen fittingly says: “The problem is creating a new category with a new label other than one defined by gender, race, intellectual class, etc.” (Anzaldúa, “Lesbian Wit” 129). Just as the privileged, phallogocentric mestizo implies the Other, its antinomy, so does the notion of the *mestiza*; the difference being that the *mestiza* also implies in/difference and ambiguity, as it applies to LGBTQ, to women in general, and even to men, and their emancipation from machismo. “Obviously, every concept has as a history,” write Deleuze and Guattari, resounding Ortega y Gasset’s notion of philosophy as history. Unfortunately, they continue in Eurocentric mode, when they argue that the concept of “the other person goes back to Leibniz, to his possible worlds and to the monad as expression of the world” (Deleuze and Guattari 17). Needless to say, the notion of “possible worlds” already existed in many non-

Indias...y por su significación, me lo llamo yo a boca llena y me honro con él. Aunque en Indias si a uno de ellos le dicen sois un mestizo, lo toman por menosprecio” (Inca Garcilaso 253).

³ Interestingly, in the writing of this article I noticed that though the word “mestizo” has been added to Microsoft Word dictionary, its feminine noun form has not. Whenever I entered “mestiza” the auto-correct would change it to “mestizo.”

European metaphysical systems.⁴ Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro argues that it is through myth that Amazonian cultures, for example, express notions of the other person as a possible world. In *Cannibal Metaphysics*, Viveiros de Castro writes:

Myth is thus thinking that occurs against the backdrop of the other as a possible world, even as it translates the latter into and thus adheres to its point of view. In this crucial respect, they are quite different from concepts as Deleuze defined them. Where concepts maintain immanence by always in fact coming (even if unwittingly) in the plural, myths go a step further by having to actively contend with other myths (or concepts, or narratives, or discursive materials, and so on) and their divergent perspectives. Immanence becomes much more a matter of worlds and psyches that can at best be translated, and whose otherness need not be preserved because it is always stubbornly there. (29)

And afterwards he poses the question:

But is this indeed philosophy? Could myth *cum* concept, thought and critique as comparison, and being as differences of perspective really provide the main aspects of a metaphysics? In other words, does it do justice to actual philosophies to approach them from such a panpsychist perspective and as though we were comparing myths? (30)

Here, even Viveiros de Castro comes close to falling into the trap of suggesting a positivist notion of philosophy that would

⁴ In Aztec philosophy, the idea of “possible worlds” is already assumed in its own process metaphysics, as objects in the world are in a constant state of becoming: day becomes night as night becomes day. “The Nahuatl term for this relationship is *inamic*. Day and night for example are each other’s *inamic*,” writes James Maffie in *Aztec Philosophy* (138). Put another way, the *inamic* is a relation of possibility, or better still, a relation of virtuality: as day and night are each other’s virtual. In addition, the virtual, as Deleuze argues in *Difference and Repetition* “is not opposed to the real” (Deleuze 211).

have little to do with the metaphysical truths of myth. Can panpsychist perspectives be thought in terms of “actual philosophies?” he asks; to which one can easily answer: Why not? To be fair, Deleuze and Guattari qualify their assessment of Leibniz as the originator “of the concept of the other person,” by stating that “in Leibniz, possibles do not exist in the real world” (17), but are rather the abstract, possible worlds of modal logic. This has nothing to do with Gloria Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* and the possible worlds that derive from it. If the *mestiza* is a concept, it is a concept that gives rise to the *event* of the *new mestiza* consciousness. If Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* is not in the strict sense “panpsychist,” it certainly originates in a spiritual plane, and gives rise to a non-subjectivist, “cosmic” notion of consciousness. That perhaps explains why she begins her chapter “La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness” in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, with a quote from Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos’s *La raza cósmica*. “Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity,” writes Anzaldúa in reference to Vasconcelos (*Borderlands* 79). In this way, Vasconcelos’s “la quinta raza” or “the fifth race,” which only a culture of mixed races and ethnicities could achieve, becomes Anzaldúa’s *new mestiza*: a concept of ontological multiplicity and becoming.⁵

The Functioning of the *Mestiza*

As Deleuze and Guattari argue, all concepts are multiple. There are no simple concepts; and as we previously pointed out, Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* is no exception. Thought in machinic terms, the *mestiza* contains quite a number of components and moving parts. After all, concepts *do* things. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari break down René Descartes’ “cogito” into three components: “doubting, thinking, and being” (24). And analogously, the components of the *mestiza* may be expressed this

⁵ For an extended account of “multiplicity” see “Chapter 6: Purity, Impurity, and Separation” in María Lugones’s *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (121-150).

way: Being → Mixture → Body → Consciousness → Community; which, if put into a sentence, would read something like: *I am a being made up of mixtures that compose my body and my consciousness in a community of others like and unlike myself.* However, a community of others *unlike* me is only possible through an active affirmation of difference and becoming. But mixture, as opposed to the fiction of “purity,” requires tolerance; for mixture or “mestizaje” of whatever kind, as Michel Foucault argues in *Abnormal*, has, since the Middle Ages been conceived as “monstrous.” Foucault writes:

From the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century...the monster is essentially a mixture...It is the mixture of two sexes: the person who is both male and female is a monster. Finally, it is a mixture of forms: the person who has neither arms nor legs, like a snake, is a monster. Consequently, the monster is the transgression of natural limits, the transgression of classifications, of the table, and of the law as table: this is actually what is involved in monstrosity. However, I do not think that it is this alone that constitutes the monster. For medieval thought, and definitely for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought, the breach of natural law is not enough to constitute monstrosity. Monstrosity requires a transgression of the natural limit, of the law-table, to fall under, or at any rate challenge, an interdiction of civil and religious or divine law. There is monstrosity only when the confusion comes up against, overturns, or disturbs civil, canon, or religious law. (Foucault 63)

Is it any wonder, then, that the author of *Frankenstein* was a woman, who initially had to publish the novel anonymously because the world could not accept the “monstrous” notion of a female writer? Therefore, as Foucault above suggests and María Lugones points out, *purity* is all about the control of multiplicity (Lugones 130-31). And because this is the case, at the end of her introduction to the second edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Sonia Saldívar-Hull aptly announces:

With this second edition, *Borderlands/La Frontera* continues to offer a radical (re)construction of space in the Americas where political struggles and alliances are forged only after risking conflicts, appropriations, and contradictions in the face of power and domination. (*Borderlands* 13)

In this light the *mestiza* is an “(an)archical” concept that seeks to undermine all kinds of entrenched hierarchical ways of being in the world. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa writes:

The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (*Borderlands* 101)

Though I do not want to take the following analogy too far, Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* often serves the same critical function as Nietzsche’s *übermensch* (ironically its opposite). Neither a social type nor a subject, the *mestiza* is the name of a force, of a certain consciousness in the struggle for a re-evaluation of values.⁶ Hence Anzaldúa states:

⁶ The *mestiza* is neither subject nor object. As Anzaldúa says in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, *mestiza* consciousness breaks down the prison-house of “subject-object duality” (1999 102). Ana Louise Keating is right on target when she connects Anzaldúa’s prescient questioning of the subject-object binary to Meillassoux’s “non-correlationism,” to Jane Bennett’s vitalist philosophy (“thing power”), and to Levi Bryant and Graham Harman’s *object-oriented ontology* (Keating 2012).

That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestiza* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. This third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness. (101-2)

Interestingly, if Nietzsche's *übermensch* represented the new being that emerged with the death of (the male) God,⁷ so is *la mestiza*; but in the latter case, *la mestiza* represents the re/birth and re/membering of the goddesses—e.g. Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui.⁸ It is the *new mestiza*, argues Anzaldúa, who can

⁷ As a philosopher of the death of God, Nietzsche like Anzaldúa is a philosopher of the fragment. In opposition to the systematic philosophy of his day, he wrote aphorisms—philosophical fragments that could connect with each other or not, but never linearly nor necessarily. Nietzsche wrote essays, aphorisms, poetry, and even music. As Jason Wirth explains: “Nietzsche’s contribution to philosophy was not just a tool kit of new concepts...but rather an expansion of *the experience of what matters as philosophy*. Nietzsche did not just transform the stock of philosophical concepts. He transformed both what could count as a philosophical concept and the manner in which concepts matter. Nietzsche challenged the conventions that govern how issues come to have philosophical value as well the values by which we patrol the borders of philosophy” (Wirth xvi). Ironically, contained in Nietzsche’s conceptual “tool kit” are the very tools by which to take apart his philosophical misogyny.

⁸ “Aztec sculptures presented the *ambiguity* of inamic unified twoness using bicephalous figures such as the statue of a Coatlicue (‘Skirt of Serpents’). Coatlicue’s single face is formed by two facing snakes. When looking at the statue, one experiences a Gestalt figure-ground effect, the statue alternating between perceiving a forward-facing, two single-eyed, face to face snakes. The statue unites in dynamic reciprocal tension female-male, life-death, and so on. It not only symbolizes but also embodies agonistic inamic unity” (Maffie 162-3, my italics). And even more significantly, in an interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego, Anzaldúa elucidates her conceptualization of Coatlicue and the philosophical importance of her daughter, Coyolxauhqui: “Coyolxauhqui, the daughter of Coatlicue, who had four hundred brothers, was such a threat to Huitzilopochtli, one of the brothers, that he decapitated her, cut her into pieces, and buried the pieces of her body in different places. To me that’s a symbol not only of violence and hatred against women but also of how we’re split body and mind, spirit and soul. We are separated. I think the reason this image is so

best cope with a world full of social and existential ambiguities: “She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (101). The *new mestiza* is in a constant state of “nepantlism,” states Anzaldúa, even as far back as 1987 (100). Contrary to the opinion of some who see a conceptual change in emphasis from *borderlands* and the *mestiza* to that of *Nepantla*, they seem, to me at least, to be conceptually inseparable. And I believe her article “Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera” bears this out. There she writes:

Art and la frontera intersect in a liminal space where border people... live in a state of “nepantla.” Nepantla is the Náhuatl word for an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from the present identity into a new identity. The Mexican immigrant at the moment of crossing the barbed wired fence into a hostile “paradise” of el norte, the U.S., is caught in a state of nepantla. Others who find themselves in this bewildering transitional space may be the straight person coming out as lesbian, gay, bi, or transsexual, or a person from working class origins crossing into middle-classness and privilege. (“Border Arte” 180)

Further down, she explains:

I think of the borderlands as Jorge Luis Borges’s *Aleph*, the one spot on earth which contains all the other places within it. All people in it, whether natives or immigrants, colored or white, queers or heterosexuals, from this side of the border or del otro lado are *personas del lugar*, local people—all of whom relate to the border and to nepantla states in different ways. (“Border Arte” 180)

important to me is that when you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She’s no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in this anticolonial struggle, has been to put us back together again” (Anzaldúa, “Doing Gigs” 220).

And though she warns against “el romance del mestizaje” (181), she does not by any means abandon the concept of the *mestiza* or what she later calls “spiritual *mestizaje*.” In an interview with Karin Ikas, she says:

I think my philosophy is like a philosophical *mestizaje* where I take from all different cultures—for instance, from the cultures of Latin America, the people of color and also the Europeans... The philosophy that I am now trying to unravel also goes back to Mexican indigenous times where I use the words like *Nepantla*, like *conocimiento*, so things come from the indigenous, the Mexican or the Chicano. And then I try to philosophize about that. With spiritual *mestizaje* there is a component of folk Catholicism in it. (*Borderlands* 239)

So, what becomes of the *new mestiza*? Does the *mestiza* disappear in “the night when all the cows are black”? Not at all. The *mestiza* becomes in the later writings the *nepantlera*; same border-crossing force but with a different name. In “Speaking Across the Divide,” Anzaldúa explains:

Nepantleras are the supreme border crossers. They act as intermediaries between cultures and their various versions of reality... Las nepantleras, like the ancient chamanas, move between worlds. They can work from multiple locations, can circumvent polarizing binaries. (“Speaking” 293)

They achieve this because, as Anzaldúa said of the *mestiza*, she has developed “a tolerance for contradictions, for ambiguity” (*Borderlands* 101).⁹ The *mestiza/nepantlera* is beyond binaries.

⁹ Life for Anzaldúa, as it was for Simone de Beauvoir, is fluidity and movement; and as such, ethics and morals, like art, are not reducible to systems of thought. De Beauvoir’s *The Ethics of Ambiguity* was a response to the abstractions of ethical and political systems such as Kant’s and Marx’s. “[I]t is because man’s condition is ambiguous that he seeks, through failure and outrageousness, to save his existence,” wrote de Beauvoir. “Thus, to say that life has to be lived in its truth, that is, in the consciousness of the antinomies [contradictions] which it

And here the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil* may serve us, for in that book he questioned—albeit from a phallogocentric, Western European perspective—the metaphysics of opposites. He wrote:

...one may doubt, first, where there are any opposites at all, and secondly whether these popular valuations and opposite values on which the metaphysicians put their seal, are not perhaps merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives, perhaps even from some nook, perhaps from below... (Nietzsche 10)

In this case, Nietzsche (11) and Anzaldúa agree that the metaphysical binary of truth and fiction is highly questionable. Fiction, Anzaldúa argues, bears its own truth. In “Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness” Anzaldúa writes:

A person in the Santería tradition will say that stones talk to her. Somebody in the Western mode will disagree and insist that stones can't talk to her, but for the Santería both are equally real... People make up stories, entirely “fictitious” stories, according to the way they've been raised. To me, everything is real. Fiction is as true as whatever happened literally to people. (107-8)

Moreover, she states, the body, which is the locus of life, does not distinguish between “what happens in the imagination and what happens in the material world” (“Creativity” 108). This is a significant philosophical assertion as it reflects a non-traditional view of knowledge that emphasizes the body over the Cartesian “mind in a vat” image of thought. Consequently, when

involves, does not mean that one has to renounce it” (129). In fact, the ground of my freedom lies in life's sundry ambiguities, to which I can only respond at a particular moment with a particular act. “Ethics does not furnish recipes any more than do science and art” (134). Ethics also implies acting, not just out of my own freedom for me, but also for others. Human existence is often the freedom to act “by a negative movement which rejects oppression for oneself and others,” says de Beauvoir in the “Conclusion” to *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (156). Anzaldúa's *mestiza* embodies this existentialist manner of being in the world.

Anzaldúa uses the word *conocimiento*, she means a lot more than just reason and logic. She means intuition, imagination, and awareness, and rather than connected to scientific or instrumental reason, *conocimiento* is associated with artistic creation (“Speaking” 292), thereby eluding the Foucauldian power/knowledge construct.

In a dialogue with Inés Hernández-Ávila in *Interviews/Entrevistas*, Anzaldúa explained her theory of *conocimiento*: “Conocimiento is my term for an overarching theory of consciousness, of how the mind works. It’s an epistemology that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner-mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms-and outer-social, political, lived experiences” (“Quincentennial” 177). One could call this notion of *conocimiento*, *mestiza knowledge*, or the epistemology of *Nepantla/mestizaje*. Maffie writes:

The concept of nepantla...figures prominently in Aztec prescriptions concerning how humans ought to walk, speak, eat, drink, think, feel, bathe, dance, perform rituals, and sexually commingle, for example. Nepantla, in other words, defines Aztecs’ understanding of what Western philosophers call ethics, epistemology, aesthetics, social and political philosophy. (524)

One could add that it does so without splitting them up as separate *conocimientos*. Aztec philosophy describes “the way things *are* as well as prescribe the way things *ought* to be—that is, how humans *ought* to behave and what their way of life and path *ought* to be” (525). Without a doubt, one can clearly see the impact of Aztec philosophy on Anzaldúa’s thought when she writes that the *mestizas/nepantleras*:

...try to overturn the destructive perceptions of the world that we’ve been taught by our various cultures. They change the stories about who we are and about our behavior...They possess the gift of vision. Nepantleras think in terms of the planet, not just their own racial group, the U.S., or North America. They serve as agents

of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater *conocimiento*... (“Speaking” 293)

In short, the *mestiza consciousness* seeks to overturn “destructive perceptions of the world” through a form of “spiritual activism” (Anzaldúa, “Quincentennial” 178) that is the product of *conocimiento*: personal, political, and philosophical.

The Personal is the Political is the Philosophical

Regrettably, knowledge, as articulated above (*qua* *conocimiento*) would never be deemed philosophy, or even philosophical knowledge. Philosophy, reduced to an academic discourse—exclusively logical and analytical—is made to express its truths in a particular kind of way. Which way? Certainly not in the way in which Anzaldúa expresses her philosophy: visually, poetically, discursively, fragmentarily, and autobiographically. And that is rather remarkable, since that is exactly the way that Descartes, “the” founder of modern philosophy, presented his concept of the *cogito* and the *radical doubt*—taken from Francisco Sanches—in the *Meditations*. Now, if Descartes began with the outside world (*Not-I*) and then went inward; once inside he never left the solitary chamber of his own mind (*I*). This was not the case with eighteenth century French philosopher, Flora Tristan (1803-1844), who began her philosophical peregrinations from the experience of not being able to divorce her abusive husband to a radical skepticism that led her to question all kinds of unequal power relations in the society of her day. Remarkably, Flora Tristan’s travels, firstly, as a form of resistance and survival—as with her trip to Peru to claim an inheritance from her deceased father’s family, and be able to survive financially—and secondly, as an encounter with exploited working class women and men, in order to change unjust social, economic, and gender conditions around the world, anticipated contemporary philosophers María Lugones’ and Mariana Ortega’s shared concept of “world traveling.” And so, unsurprisingly, in *In-Between*, Mariana Ortega writes: “[W]orld traveling is a practice of both survival and resistance for multiplicitous selves in the margins. When practiced by members of dominant groups, it might also constitute an act of solidarity against oppression and injustice” (Ortega 88); which

again, was precisely what Flora Tristan set out to accomplish through her travels. In fact, Tristan's autobiography, *Peregrinations of a Pariah* (1833-4)¹⁰ may just be the perfect example of what Ortega calls in her book, a "phenomenology of world-travelling" (Ortega 87-116).¹¹ In contrast to Descartes, Tristan begins from the *I* and moves to the outside to become a "world-traveler" for oppressed women and workers everywhere. In the Foreword to *Peregrinations of a Pariah*, she states:

If self-knowledge is the necessary condition for the development of our intellectual faculties, and if the individual progress is proportionate to the development and application that these individual faculties receive, it is irrefutable that the writings most useful to men are those that help them study themselves, by showing them the individual in the various positions of social existence. Facts alone do not give us sufficient knowledge of man. (205)

The above is Tristan's initial epistemological premise: knowledge involves much more than facts, as facts are always disputable. It is through self-knowledge, or understanding that one can come to "see" (205) that one is not so different from others, and vice-versa—something similar to Anzaldúa's "path to *conocimiento*." We come to know the world by seeing, and her peregrinations are meant for that. An autobiography, she will argue, is an example—a particular that is irrevocably part of a universal. But that is only significant, if the particular sheds some light on present conditions that transcend the individual. Tristan goes on:

Most authors of revealing memoirs have not wanted to publish until the grave could shelter them from

¹⁰ For more on autobiography "as a philosophical endeavor" see J. Lenore Wright.

¹¹ Mariana Ortega's notion of "world-traveling" is "deeply influenced" by María Lugones' "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception" (Ortega 87). For Lugones' 1987 essay see *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (2003).

accountability for their acts and words, either because they were held back by egotistical sensitivity in speaking of themselves and the fear of making enemies in speaking of others, or else because they feared recriminations or denials. In doing so, they weakened their testimony, since we can trust it only when other authors of the period confirm it. (205)

Tristan's list of such luminaries who posthumously published their autobiographies includes Marquis de Lafayette, François-René de Chateaubriand, Talleyrand, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; but she immediately reminds us, "the value of an individual life lies not in the importance of the function assigned to him, the rank he holds or the wealth he possesses" (206). Instead, a person's value, she argues,

...is proportionate to the degree of utility in his relationship with the whole human race, and this is the scale on which morality will henceforth have to measure his praise or blame...He who sees in every human being his fellow, who suffers his pains and rejoices in his joys, must write his memoirs when he has found himself in a position to gather together observations... (206)

Given this to be such, her reason for writing about her trials and tribulations as a woman is to present herself as an example of everything that is wrong in society. Tristan declares:

Many women live in de facto separations from their husbands in countries from which Roman Catholicism has driven away divorce... It is thus not to myself personally that I wanted to attract attention, but rather to all women who are in the same situation and whose numbers are increasing daily. They suffer trials and tribulations the same as mine, are preoccupied by the same sorts of ideas, and feel the same emotions. Both sexes are equally concerned with the necessities of life, but they are not both affected to the same degree by love. (209)

Flora Tristan quite literally became a world-traveler: from Arequipa to London, uncovering and writing on social injustices, from unequal pay to worker exploitation and slavery. As the illegitimate child of a Peruvian father and a French mother, her own cultural status—reminiscent of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega’s—was that of a “*mestiza*.” And as a “*pariah*” she had to “cope” with the painful social ambiguities of being a single parent, separated but not divorced, and occasionally having to lie about her marital status. Her “*pariah*,” then, as an image of thought, is not too conceptually different from the traditional perception of the *mestiza*, as a being made of mixtures, and thereby monstrous.¹² Each in its own way, however, is an active force of critique that functions through the double articulation of negation and affirmation. In the case of the Chicana philosopher, it is the image—via the body—that structures her philosophy of liberation. Anzaldúa explains:

When I’m writing, I sketch images in order to gather and organize my thinking. For me, this sketching is better than making outlines. An image is worth a thousand words because there is a cluster of meanings associated with each image, with each thing I sketch...Images speak to us. They have their own meanings...Often when reading a poem or a story, before it even hits your mind, it’s already plucking at your flesh, tugging at your heart... You’ll feel and experience things, not just visually or kinesthetically, but with your whole body and mind. (“Creativity” 107)

¹² Pariah, a word of Indian origins, was originally associated with ceremonial drummers, laborers and servants, but “later increasingly as ‘untouchables’ in insanitary occupations,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary online. By the early 1800s it was associated with “impure tribes” in India. Coincidentally, according to Lugones, the *mestiza*, as a “curdled” and multiple being, invokes an ontology of impurity. The efficacy of her resistance resides in the impurity of *her mestizaje*. Lugones explains it as follows: “...I think of something in the middle of either/or, something impure, as both separated, and resisting in its curdled state. *Mestizaje* defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state, and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts” (123); which is what Tristan does when she calls herself a (world traveling) “pariah,” and Anzaldúa equally achieves when she refers to herself as a border-crossing “new mestiza.”

And in conversation with María Henríquez Betancor she affirms that she “originates concepts” from images. “The Borderlands metaphor and concept are up in the air,” she says; “anyone can work them” (Anzaldúa, “Writing” 241). Indeed, concepts function by being portable and applicable, often through personal associations. The same, obviously, could be said of the *new mestiza*. For Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* is what Deleuze and Guattari call a “conceptual personae;” or the conceptual/aesthetic image of a persona/figure that provokes one to reflect. One can think of it as an avatar. Deleuze and Guattari write:

The conceptual persona is not the philosopher’s representative but, rather, the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal conceptual persona and of all the other personae who are the intercessors [*intercesseurs*], the real subjects of his philosophy. Conceptual personae are the philosopher’s “heteronyms,” and the philosopher’s name is the simple pseudonym of his personae. (Deleuze and Guattari 64)

On occasion Anzaldúa talks about her work as a form of channeling concepts like the *mestiza* or the *nepantleras*, and so as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, she herself becomes the figure of her own concept. “The destiny of the philosopher is to become his conceptual persona or personae, at the same time these personae themselves become something other than what they are historically, mythologically, or commonly...” argue Deleuze and Guattari, and go on to give the examples of “the Socrates of Plato, the Dionysus of Nietzsche, the Idiot of Nicholas of Cusa” (Deleuze and Guattari 64). Clearly, to this list we may add Anzaldúa’s *new mestiza*. For her “mestiza” is *her mestiza* and no one else’s. It is not the “mestiza” of anthropology textbooks. It is an invention in the same way that she invented a new way of writing; or as she put it in a conversation with Andrea Lunsford:

Not only did I have to invent a new or mestizaje style of writing, a border aesthetics, but in speaking I also

use precolonial symbols and images which I modernize and precolonial myths which I rewrite. I also had to refashion my own reading practices and, through my texts, teach my readers to read differently... In inventing the text, the fiction, I invent the (my)self and the reader. ("Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric" 272)

It is not the case, therefore, that Anzaldúa's *mestiza* is the female version of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's "mestizo;" but rather that it is a new figure that had to be invented. Hence the significance "new" in the "new mestiza;" for the New Mestiza is not merely a concept, an image, a metaphor, but also, and perhaps even more significantly, an event. This event has multiple repercussions, and beyond the obvious ones, it has changed the way we conceive philosophy and the way philosophy is done. While I have throughout this article made numerous references to Deleuze's and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*, even such a text, despite its innovative ideas regarding philosophy, bears the traces of its gender and Eurocentric prejudices. Not to mention the fact that their understanding of philosophy is still too rigid and structural for our taste. For instance, in the chapter on Conceptual Personae, they write:

The difference between conceptual personae, and aesthetic figures consists first of all in this: the former are the powers of concepts and the latter are the powers of affects and percepts... The great aesthetic figures of thought and the novel but also of painting, sculpture, and music produce affects that surpass ordinary affections, just as concepts go beyond everyday opinions. (Deleuze and Guattari 65)

However, while the above may be an apt description of the divide between the conceptual and the aesthetic in Western thought, it is not a universal necessary divide, as Anzaldúa's *Nepantla, new mestiza* philosophy clearly demonstrates. Thus, to Deleuze and Guattari—but not just to them—we ask: Why so much purity, so much seriousness? Why not playfulness, *mestizaje*, and impurity? After all, even Deleuze famously

declared that philosophy—however we may define it—has always been done from the outside: by musicians, painters, writers (Deleuze and Parnet 74). Philosophers, he says “have always been something else.” Impure, “they were born from something else” (74).

Conclusion

In her essay “On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*,” Anzaldúa tells of how she was initially accused by white theorists of having stolen ideas from “Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, or the French feminists” (192), and explains that she was not familiar with their work when she wrote *Borderlands*. The racial, ethnic, and cultural injustice of such an accusation betrays the kind of colonialist attitude that has consistently deemed non-European philosophy to be anything but philosophy. However, as Maffie recognizes in *Aztec Philosophy*, even European philosophers themselves have not been able to agree on a working definition of philosophy:

Is philosophy even the sort of thing that even admits of definition? How do we decide? And more to the point, who gets to decide? Whose definitions and answers count, and why? Whose standards govern the discussion? Who is included and who is excluded from the discussion, and on what grounds? Equally crucially, who poses and entertains as worthwhile questions such as, Are non-Western people philosophical? And why do they pose them? In short, it is far from clear that this issue can be resolved in a non-ethnocentric and noncircular way. (6)

It truly cannot. The accusation leveled against Anzaldúa betrays both Euro- and phallogocentric prejudices. Firstly, at the cultural level, the accusation implicitly presumes that, for example, a concept like “deconstruction” could only have originated in a European thinker like Derrida. As such, it demonstrates the vast, unfortunate ignorance concerning non-Western philosophy. Secondly, in a phallogocentric and racist manner, it unabashedly states: How could a lesbian Latina, a woman of color, possibly

come up with critical theories all of her own? In this way, the contributions of Latin American philosophy, and even more so the work of non-European, women philosophers of color, has gone unappreciated and unacknowledged. One can only hope that things are changing. To that end, in the Spring of 2019 philosophers Charles W. Mills and Linda Martín Alcoff organized a two-day conference of Black Women Philosophers at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. This is clearly only a beginning, but an important one. No need to fear, I say to the conservatives. One does not need to kill Plato or even Nietzsche, to make way for someone like Anzaldúa; but certainly, one needs to rethink them, and leave the field open for new *mestiza* voices. As such, I hope this humble article has done something, despite its unwitting biases—some of it surfaced for me during the actual writing—to shed some light on the philosophy of Anzaldúa, and all the positive and creative ways of being in the world *mestiza* thought points towards.

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WRITING EXCESS IN *LIGHT IN THE DARK/LUZ EN LO OSCURO*: ANZALDÚA'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF WRITING AS A DECOLONIZING TOOL

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Abstract: While Gloria E. Anzaldúa's extensive and groundbreaking work has received much attention as that of a queer feminist and decolonial theorist, her philosophy of consciousness, as it relates to writing and theory-making remains understudied. This article proposes a generative turn towards phenomenology to bring us closer to a fuller understanding of her ever-evolving thought system. It examines how her compositional and rhetorical choices seek to subvert imposed models for doing theory; analyzes the thematic axis where recurrent explorations on bodily experience and meaning-making processes converge; and reads her work in conversation with that of classic phenomenologists. While centralizing Anzaldúa's posthumously published book/dissertation *Light in the Dark: luz en lo oscuro: rewriting identity, spirituality, reality* (2015), I note her consistent inclusion of elements deemed "excessive" in academia, such as bodily, traumatic and spiritual references, and how they are intimately connected to her commitment to decolonizing theory writing and to shifting readers' intentionality in emancipatory ways.

Keywords: decolonial thought, writing, phenomenology, intentionality, excess

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, and Others* (2006), Sara Ahmed states that her double strategy for understanding the orientation of (queer) bodies in space consists of a bidirectional move involving both "queering phenomenology and moving queer theory towards phenomenology" (5). This double-directional effort is necessary for her to show "how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space" (5). Similarly, attempts at simultaneously queering and decolonizing feminist theory have guided the theoretical efforts of Latina and Chicana thinkers such as María Lugones (2010, 2012), Cherríe Moraga (1993, 2000), Emma Pérez (1999), Norma Alarcón (1993), Carla M. Trujillo (1998), Chela Sandoval (2000), Mariana Ortega (2016, 2017), and Jackie Cuevas (2013, 2018),

among others.¹ And yet, it is the late Gloria E. Anzaldúa's groundbreaking work of the 1990s and early 21st centuries that still stands as the most radical, comprehensive, and far-reaching effort to conceptualize issues of writing and theory-making in ways that we may characterize as both queer(ing) and phenomenological.² As attention slowly begins to be drawn to phenomenology in the study of U.S. Latinx literature and thought, retrieving key philosophical texts of the Anzaldúan archive now seems timely and productive. This vast multimodal archive and especially its texts on writing, such as *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (2015), challenge our engagement with theory today and prompt us to reframe both queer feminism and decolonial theory from a phenomenological perspective.

Published and unpublished texts discussing theories of writing in complex, *phenomenological* ways are pervasive in the Gloria E. Anzaldúa archive. Over the course of decades she explored, among other concerns, how we relate to others and the world through art, and writing; how our consciousness may shift upon contact with words or creativity; how we orientate ourselves towards others as we experience reading and writing; and how we *make meaning* of, and relate to, difference.³ These issues are

¹ In addition to the work of these theorists and literary critics, the life writing by authors such as Aurora Levins Morales, Cherrie Moraga, Norma Cantú, Mirtha Quintanales, and others, published in the 1980s and early 1990s, also disregarded conventional forms of self-reference in their reflections on gendered and racialized, colonial dystopias or envisioned decolonial futures. Further work on these texts that offer radical critiques of accepted historical, cultural, social, and theoretical discourses would greatly contribute to this critical conversation.

² Anzaldúa does not deploy the term phenomenology or any other terminology of currency in philosophy or other academic fields, as consistent with the purposeful, decolonizing dis-alignment of her work with Western philosophical and theoretical genealogies.

³ We can say that, without using the term, Anzaldúa sustains her belief that we humans approach life phenomenologically throughout her life. In an interview with Lisa Smuckler as early as 1982, for instance, she states that "Human beings' whole struggle is to give meaning to their experience, to their condition" as she was as a young woman "giving meaning to my early bleeding. People shape their experience, that's how reality is created. There is no such thing as objective truth" (*Entrevistas* 18).

particularly salient in Anzaldúa's archival texts from the turn of the century, in which she elaborates concepts such as *nepantla* and *conocimiento / desconocimiento*, and builds on her earlier ideas on the writing process as a healing, politically transformative journey. In addition, and especially towards the end of her life, Anzaldúa consistently casts identities as constantly changing and in relational frameworks. These later concerns signal a move from her previous focus on ontology and issues of subjectivity towards a more careful theorization of consciousness, spirituality, and relationality.

The connections between consciousness, relationality, and writing are indeed central concerns in the texts that Anzaldúa extensively revised towards completing two variously titled dissertation/ book projects at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the 1990s and early 2000s, which she never defended before a university committee. Both the first project, the most consistent title of which is *Lloronas—Writing, Reading, Speaking, Dreaming*, and her second one, published posthumously as *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro*, reveal her growing understanding of herself and other authors as poet-thinkers offering philosophical contributions to decolonial, queer, and Chicana / women of color / feminist scholarship. Starting with an analysis of the Mexican and Chicana *llorona* myth as a collective consciousness, *Lloronas* addresses issues of reading, writing and consciousness, and draws insights into the relationship between writing and personal/political change. *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* is a treatise on the phenomenology of creative writing and of theory making in its refinement and expansion of Anzaldúa's earlier thought in these areas. In its editor's words, the volume "excavates [Anzaldúa's] creative process [...] and uses this excavation to develop an aesthetics of transformation" (Keating ix). *Light in the Dark* indeed "excavates" the writing process by paying particular attention to the crucial axis of embodied experience—including embodied spiritual experiences—and transformative meaning-making processes. On this axis, almost inevitably, a philosophy of writing and creativity—and not just an aesthetics—emerges as a descriptive decolonial phenomenology. As a dissertation project and Anzaldúa's last major attempt to propose a hybrid philosophical theory within academia, *Light in*

the Dark offers her clearest roadmap for how we may be able to transform and decolonize theoretical writing against the sanctioning of gatekeeping institutions. An assemblage of previously published and unpublished texts at the time of its composition, the volume's uniqueness lies in a) its attempt to organize her recent thinking into an organized and organic whole in within the framework of a dissertation; and b) in its result as Anzaldúa's fullest, last theory of writing and decolonial change which is at once phenomenological and practical.

This article focuses on this posthumously published work, the latest existing version of Anzaldúa's second and last dissertation/book manuscript. I seek to illustrate the phenomenological ways in which *Light in the Dark* makes a theoretical contribution on the conceptualization and practice of writing as a transformational decolonizing tool. Expanding substantially on earlier writings on the topic, as well as on Anzaldúa's notes and plans for writing workshops, talks, letters to women's writers, and on the practical deployment of *autohistoria-teorías* and other queer genres, the volume explores principally the phenomenology of writing. It posits writing as a key praxis for colonial and post-colonial, gendered, and racialized subjects to achieve new orientations, relations, and ultimately, new realities. As *Lloronas* proposed, *Light in the Dark* identifies this ultimate goal as a personal imperative and the collective endeavor of "poet philosophers" who commit to "producing knowledge; consciousness and identity, conocimiento [sic]," since "la mujer piensa, the poet is critic/the poet is theorist" (*Light* 168). The volume seeks to describe and enact the writing of theory as a decolonizing, transformative practice. Reading it through a phenomenological lens helps us better gage its key and multilayered philosophical contributions, of bearing in queer feminism and decolonial studies. These include reflections on bodily *experience*, orientation, the development of certain forms of consciousness, or the creation of new modes of intentionality (understood phenomenologically, as relational meaning-making). Phenomenology of course also opens an avenue to productively read Anzaldúa's work next to—or against—that of classic and contemporary philosophers who undertake similar explorations. These include theorists of perception, such as the also

interdisciplinary thinker Maurice Merleau-Ponty, queer feminist phenomenologists such as Ahmed, or feminist philosophers of race such as Amy S. Lee, who also discuss bodily experience and the methods and limits of phenomenology.

But perhaps most importantly, a phenomenological approach to *Light in the Dark* is productive in helping us to understand Anzaldúa's and our grappling with *theory writing*. Its decolonial approach to the dissertation and other theoretical genres is tied to a form of writing that seeks to intervene within and beyond the academy, a struggle in the terrain of intellectual and production common to both classic phenomenologists and feminist decolonial thinkers. These visible formal tensions must have contributed to the dearth of public recognition of Anzaldúa's theoretical work in the form of *academic* validation during her lifetime. It was only in 2004, the very year of her passing, that she was offered a doctoral degree by the University of California, Santa Cruz for work previously published; and the scholars writing extensively on her work at that time seldom speak of her as a philosopher. This scarcity of serious attention to her theoretical proposal—barring some exceptions⁴—may speak precisely not only to her differential relationship to the academy and academic genres, but also, as I propose here, to her 'excessive' understanding of the phenomenon of writing more broadly.⁵

I suggest, that, in fact, Anzaldúa's phenomenology of writing as delineated in *Light in the Dark* is a purposefully deviant deployment contra accepted, conventional academic genres; that her non-normative compositional process and the 'excess' of her theoretical writing are core, integral elements of her decolonial thought. The volume's focus on the phenomenology of writing questions the very fraught processes of producing and engaging theory through bodies that are gendered, sexualized, colonial or

⁴ See Alcoff (1999, 2006), Lugones (2012), Martinez (2014), and Ortega (2016), for instance.

⁵ The lack of attention to her phenomenology of writing in particular is surprising if we consider how extensively Anzaldúa theorized on these processes and her recurrent proposals for new modes of writing—and writing theory—that may decolonize the discourses and institutions that sanction theory and confer publication and other intellectual 'passports' to those deemed 'serious' philosophers.

colonized. It thus prompts us to question our own writing methods and interrogates our relationship to theoretical and critical writing, and our queer, feminist, or counter-cultural work. By noticing its moves towards phenomenological issues, I turn to examine *how* the presence of the somatic, compositional choices such as shifting, and other textual gestures deemed deviant or excessive in academic institutions are an enactment of Anzaldúa's own decolonial phenomenology of writing in *Light in the Dark*. In considering her aesthetic and methodological approach in this work, it becomes necessary to discuss issues of consciousness, intentionality, and orientation in an interrelated manner, as these concepts are inseparable in the volume.

“Blood and Pus and Sweat:” Writing Bodies and Trauma into Theory

Light in the Dark takes earlier Anzaldúan discussions on the intertwined development of writing and consciousness⁶—synthesized in concepts such as *la conciencia mestiza*, *la facultad*,⁷ or the *path of red and black ink*⁸—to a new, phenomenological level. The volume walks us through a creative process that seeks to subvert imposed models of thinking, theorizing, and relating to reality. Chapter 1 opens with the

⁶ Although Keating does not elaborate on this, she suggests briefly in her introduction to *Light in the Dark* that Anzaldúa extensively revised dissertation projects aimed at explaining the archeology and phenomenology of *la mestiza* (xv).

⁷ Anzaldúa offers different definitions of the terms *la facultad* throughout her oeuvre. From a reader's ability to read queer writing between the gaps (1991) to the most often deployed definition of an intuitive form of consciousness and knowledge that defies logic and is available to those inhabiting the borderlands, as defined in *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987). In *Light in the Dark*, *la facultad* is mostly associated with *nepantleras*, or those who create change while navigating productive spaces of in-betweenness. It is defined as the ability “to accommodate mutually exclusive, discontinuous, and inconsistent worlds” (79-81).

⁸ *Path of red and black ink* is deployed by Anzaldúa to signify the transformative, shamanistic power of writing in *Borderlands/ La Frontera*. The reference is the ancient Aztec codices: “tlilli, tlapalli, la tinta negra y roja de sus codices [...] were the colors symbolizing escritura y sabiduría (writing and wisdom)” (91).

writer—identified as *you*—walking along the Monterey Bay in California, reaching the edge of a cliff, staring down at the ocean waves, while reflecting on the *writing* of the very text that we (readers) *hold* in our hands. Both the author’s approach to writing and our own encounter with her text begin with images grounded in the body, connected through the author’s voice that merges us with a polysemic (self)-referential *you*. For the remaining seven chapters, writing is indeed cast not only as a mental, spiritual and physical activity, but also as a series of embodied phenomenological experiences involving spatiality and meaning-making movement.

This approach to the phenomenology of writing resembles what Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists discussed as “motor intentionality” or “motor signification.” In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes this concept as a meaning-making process, which involves movement, intentionality, and the awareness of one’s own body, as we understand each part to perform a function in relation to objects (112-4). For Anzaldúa, however, visual, tactile and inner-body sensations, as well as our synchronized movement, are accounted for not only in terms of their motor and orientation function. Our orientation, relation to space, and motility are the very elements that anchor writing and philosophical thinking in the body and they do so in a non-innocuous, strenuous manner. The *you* in the text inhabits a rocky space and moves through a place of arresting, breathtaking beauty, but also of imminent danger. As her/our bodies are oriented towards the wondrous natural landscape, we also feel proximity of a possible “jale bruto” (brutal yank) in the cliff before us. The moment of violent shock looms near and we soon learn that it has happened before and will happen again for Anzaldúa, propelling her towards the writing process (96).

In *Light in the Dark* the phenomenology of writing involves making meaning of trauma. It depicts the embodied act of writing as one of birthing and likens it to “pulling miles of entrails through your mouth” (102). The process begins “with a tension in the body,” concerns over the writer’s own precarious health, her “fluctuations of blood flow,” her fragile eyesight, the managing of diabetes—measuring glucose levels, shooting insulin, feeling exhausted,— the possibility of grave illness, and her well-known

cycles of stress, anxiety, and depression (97). Anzaldúa couples the notion that “writing is nothing if not a bodily act” (105) with the notion of writing as a struggle that may heal and transform. In fact, the path followed by the writing is the path of the queer, racialized, colonized body that writes—and writes *theory*—set in motion to heal, to understand, to bring reparation and harmony to her universe, however temporarily. Trauma and its healing are essential and necessary components of the decolonial embodied writing process.

Thus, we are introduced to the volume’s central allegory: the *path of conocimiento*, the spiritual and physical process that brings author and reader to an awareness—rooted in trauma lived in the body—leading to transformation. As Anzaldúa’s “Preface” announces, the possibility of discovery and healing—of *conocimiento*—relies on the impulse she terms the “Coyolxauhqui imperative”—“a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings [sic], traumas, racisms, and other acts of violation” (1). Those wounds—always embodied and always in relation—lead to valuable revelations, since “what accretes around an irritant... or wound may produce a pearl of insight, a theory” (2). It is at the moment of violent shock, in which truly relevant theoretical writing originates.

Light in the Dark proposes the recognition of the struggling body also as the basis for a writing that may touch others, as Anzaldúa had done in earlier writings. In “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers,” she addressed an epistolary *you* with similar advice:

Write of what most links us with life, the sensation of the body, the images seen by the eye, the expansion of the psyche in tranquility... Throw away abstraction and the academic learning... Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked, not – not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat. (*Bridge* 172-3)

The evocation of bodily fluids, the structural metaphor of *Bridge*—women of color’s mediating role, her backs serving as bridges, and their tongues as translators of silenced

epistemologies—and similar invocations of the struggling body constitute recurrent rhetorical and theoretical gestures in the Anzaldúan archive. In *Light in the Dark*, however, embodied experience is necessary to develop a methodology and elemental basis for understanding notions of re-orientation, new forms of relationality, and *making meaning* of a colonized, racialized world. It is indispensable in order to generate theory—a decolonial theory that may transform external reality. In the proposed perception-meaning-making-writing-transformation continuum, writing the type of theory that the volume enacts is not only a knowledge-producing act, but also one that leads to *conocimiento*, the form of insightful consciousness or wisdom, which involves perception, spiritual consciousness, and transformative action. *Light in the Dark* proposes the recognition of the struggling body as the grounding for a writing that may touch others.

Arguably, *Light in the Dark* explicitly encapsulates Anzaldúa's most comprehensive, methodical and mature theory of writing. The volume's final chapter "now let us shift... the path to *conocimiento*... inner works, public acts," a version of which she had published earlier in the edited volume *this bridge we call home*,⁹ discusses this notion of *conocimiento* as an expansion of her earlier articulation of *mestiza consciousness* as "enabling it to stretch" and transform. Although grounded in the body of the queer decolonial Chicana author, her proposal here moves well beyond ontology and notions of subjectivity to center the discussion on relationality and consciousness:

Being Chicana (indigenous, Mexican, Basque, Spanish, Berber Arab, Gypsy) is no longer enough; being female, woman of color, *patlache* (queer) no longer suffices. Your resistance to identity boxes leads you to a different tribe, a

⁹ After the inclusion of an earlier version of the chapter in Anzaldúa's co-edited collection *this bridge we call home: radical vision for transformation* (2002) she continued working on this essay, a version of which was last saved in June 2002, with annotations to it following as late as 2004 (*Light* 199). In one of these late annotations, Anzaldúa clarifies her far-reaching, overarching goals with this essay, which can be synthesized as follows: "to transform my personal life" and "to acquire knowledge and *conocimiento*, or lucid living" (*Light* 198).

different story (of *mestizaje*), enabling you to rethink yourself in more global- spiritual terms instead of conventional categories of color, class, career. (141)

And yet, the fact that the old identity categories do not suffice, as she explains in the preface framing the volume, does not mean that the body is not key in the process of retribalization. The path of *conocimiento* is an embodied one and it materializes through the phenomenon of writing—and the process of writing *theories*, in particular. Anzaldúa insists here: “writing is a gesture of the body;” “the body is the ground for thought;” “[t]he body is text;” if the body “responds physically, emotionally, and intellectually,” the “writing records, orders, and *theorizes* these responses” (5). In other words, if the decolonial writing process is embodied, the writing itself has a pulse, *is a body* at the service of new decolonial tribes.

Embodiment linked to the phenomenon of writing, thus, exceeds and transcends hermeneutics and epistemology in *Light in the Dark*. Embodied experience is certainly a reliable and necessary hermeneutic tool. Anzaldúa not only affirms the epistemic salience of experience but, as Linda Alcoff suggests, her belief that “the personal is unavoidable, ineliminable,” establishing the embodied and personal as a “deliberately nonobjective strategy [that] has major theoretical and political benefits” (“Unassimilated” 258). But Anzaldúa is intent on showing us how this may happen: if theory is to serve politically, she insists, it must connect bodily perception to movement to action to consciousness. The volume proposes that decolonial and other real-world benefits of theory can only be reaped if we pay close attention to writing’s relation to physical life, if we prioritize the life-writing—what she calls “*autohistorias*”—of racialized women and other oppressed subjects while listening carefully to their related bodily movements and meaning-making gestures.

Anzaldúa, thus, both parallels and goes beyond the centrality afforded to non-mediated physical experience as the basis of phenomenology granted by Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and other early phenomenologists, who also prioritized

living contact in the material world as a philosophical method.¹⁰ In her later work she coincides with these early phenomenologists in her interest in both immanent and transcendental experience, her insistence on the need for new, embodied methods of philosophizing, on the centrality of relationality and intersubjectivity.¹¹ More recently, women of color philosophers have explicitly exposed the limits of classic phenomenology in addressing racial interpretive horizons. For example, in “Madness and Judiciousness” Emily S. Lee evaluates the adequacy of Merleau-Ponty’s methodology in the canonical *The Phenomenology of Perception* and his subsequent phenomenological studies. Lee concludes that when it comes to accounting for making meaning of interpersonal racialized encounters, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology does not suffice. His emphasis on communication and language as central tools to navigate and successfully negotiate social interpretive horizons cannot explain the primacy of visibility and unspoken communication involved in making meaning of race and of racial encounters. Similarly, Anzaldúa prioritizes visible, palpable, material, bodily sensations as forms of communication in her writing. Her proposal of the path of *conocimiento*, while close to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘motor intentionality,’ which involves projection, evocation, and the conjuring up of certain forms of consciousness intimately related to the body, differs. Anzaldúa’s intentionality is clearly concerned with racialization, colonization, gender and sexual normativity, and with the policing of the act of writing. She is also more invested than Merleau-Ponty in the transformation of consciousness as we make meaning of lived experience in its pain and richness. She conceives bodily experience as part of a methodology that allows writing to heal

¹⁰ Perceptual experience is central to the foundational philosophical methods proposed by Husserl in the first book of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy (General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology)* and Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

¹¹ Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento* in *Light in the Dark* may remind us at times of Husserl’s “intersubjective natural surrounding world,” or “natural attitude” on conceiving knowing an act and generally the interconnectedness of knowledge and action, and in her focus on intentionality, which for Husserl was the “principal theme of phenomenology” (199).

and transform. The entire volume is persistent in its reference to the traumatic effects of the racialization and disenfranchisement of queer and gendered bodies. For these bodies, the role of imagining and writing are healing mechanisms bringing queer, decolonizing *light* to heteropatriarchal colonial darkness. By witnessing the product and the process of writing, much like contemplating the—also physical—act of walking, the *you*—author and reader—of *Light in the Dark* is not only in the physical world to observe or be observed, but also to move through and beyond habit and space, to follow a path of change, to watch her own meaning making and consciousness shift, to seek *conocimiento* through the moving body.

Anzaldúa, thus, transforms and expands the purview of established Western phenomenology not only by asserting the epistemic salience of experiences in racialized queer bodies for whom danger and lived trauma is always in the social horizon. She is also interested in a phenomenological *method* intended to aid us in engaging with, and transforming the world. *Light in the Dark* is predicated on the understanding that “[w]e re a nation in trauma” (10) and as a response, rejects normative, abstract ways of doing theory and offers a *path*. Along this path, she questions forms of theoretical communication, such as the dissertation genre, which is assumed to be transparent, or as Martinez has noted, she pushes “scholarship into a closer connection with the world we live in [...] in which interracial, interethnic, and intercultural communication is personally strained” (224). Thus, Anzaldúa’s phenomenology delves into the body and moves beyond prioritizing written communication as an embodied decolonizing meaning-making method, while proposing writing as a transformative process involving readerly imbrication, as the following section of this essay explains.

The Body of Writing: Method and Intentionality

As noted, Anzaldúa’s theoretical writings are cast in hybrid *mestiza* genres of excessive mixing or content for mainstream academic publishing and reading. Her practice of hybridization spans the personal essay, notes, poems, plays, writing guides and lessons, and the book/dissertation mode. Her unique forms of

writing, one of which she referred to as *autohistoriateoría* and defined “a personal essay that theorizes” (“Now” 578),¹² have been acknowledged as a key contribution to the creation of a new canon of US women of color feminist and queer Latina literature and theory. And her aesthetic revisionism and ongoing attempts at refashioning genres are understood as transformational in conventional autobiography and feminist and queer theory.¹³ Much less examined, however, is how Anzaldúa’s hybrid textuality throughout the archive offers a particularly apt corpus to examine a phenomenology of writing and composing that furthers her decolonial project.

Anzaldúa not only enacted *mestiza* genres, but also theorized extensively on the writing process and the psycho-social elements involved in compositional methods. Adding to her own practice of mixed genres, her texts often discuss writing as a product of a particularly revelatory journey and a differential mode of engagement with textuality. In early publications, such as “Speaking in Tongues” (1981), Anzaldúa already likens writing by women of color to a transformative alchemy able to reclaim a fragmented self, and describes her own writing as one that both articulates and enacts a theory (“Speaking” 169). The epistolary essay describes textual fragmentation and the compositional method of the multigenre self-referential text in its *materiality*, which includes revisions, fragmentation, and even physical repositioning of the pieces of writing.

Ideas on the materiality of textual composition are profuse in the archive, but further developed in Anzaldúa’s two dissertation projects, particularly in *Light in the Dark*. Always

¹² Anzaldúa also defined *autohistoriateoría* as “the genre of writing about one’s personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir” (“Now” 578). Her archive contains multiple other forms of hybrid self-referential writing at the intersection of autobiography and theoretical essay, notes, and poetry.

¹³ Critics analyzing the contours of Anzaldúa self-referential writing highlighting the uniqueness and intentionality of her formal innovations in both the writing of theory and the practice of an autobiography as a genre. Some focus on the hybridity of her language in *autohistoriateoría*, the often intimate, provocative a/b tone of her personal accounts and her experimentation with autobiography as a genre. See, for instance Saldívar (2007), Quintana (2003), Arteaga (1997), Headly 1996, Torres 1991, Vivancos Pérez (2013).

radically critical of dominant, scholarly forms of writing, but also interested in leaving a theoretical mark, Anzaldúa refuses conventional forms of composition in these academic texts. She turns to devising an experiential, queer aesthetics that aligns with her ideas of intentionality, spirituality, and transformational politics. The lengthy revision processes that in part lead to her to abandoning her earlier dissertation and choosing the composition, constant revision, and the content of a new one, attest to her struggle with genre and the incredible relevance she affords to the processes of revision and composition. The multiple archival versions of these projects speak of a persistent attempt to incorporate those elements that made her writing less palatable to academic and publishing gatekeepers for the sake of integrity and transformation.¹⁴ The near-final project of *Light in the Dark*, however, is coherent, quite harmonious, and perhaps the best example of her proposed “spiritual activism” for our new century, when writing must be “un proceso de crear puentes (bridges) to the next phase, next place, next culture, next reality” (156).

The text itself is an exploration of bodily perceptions and physical encounters within a colonial heteronormative, ableist world, an encounter that lies at the origin of the writing process in *Light in the Dark*. The description of the writing process here moves from earlier renditions of a more symbolic, shamanistic process—as in *Borderlands*¹⁵—to a volume-length careful description of a physical and psychic path, an intricately braided series of acts accompanied by a spiritual and consciousness-changing course. Chapter 5, titled “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together: A Creative Process,” takes the reader back to the Monterey Bay coastline to consider precisely “el cuento de tu proceso: a metastory [sic] tracking the phases of your creative process, touching on your writing habits, rituals, and emotional

¹⁴ These include folkloric, mythical, spectral and spiritual references, writing methodology, self-story, Jungian psychology, among other elements that challenge conventional writers’ and readers’ relationship to theoretical texts.

¹⁵ In Chapter 6 of *Borderlands*, “Tilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink,” Anzaldúa focuses also on the writing process. Here, her description of writing relies heavily on her understanding of indigenous shamanistic objects as live pieces of art, and of writing as one such offering. Some ideas on the physical grounding of writing seem to be sketched and are briefly discussed in the half-page section titled “Writing Is a Sensuous Act” (93).

upheavals” with the purpose of cultivating “an acute awareness of processes at work” (*Light* 95). After describing her own creative and compositional path, which is non-sequential and involves “constant destruction-reconstruction” of the text (108), the chapter ends with the self-referential *you* finally admiring “each page emerg[ing] from the printer crisp and clean and almost perfectly composed” and mailing away what still feels “unfinished” (115). After this brief moment of material production, of completion, the narrative takes the *you* of the author and reader right back to the coastal cliff to contemplate the waves once more and to be exposed to its danger and wonder, before walking back to begin the cycle of materializing new texts again (115-6).¹⁶

In spite of the unruliness and cyclical nature of her writing journey, Anzaldúa is invested in providing us with a descriptive, material method for the decolonial transformation of our intentionality in *Light in the Dark*. We, as the *you* of the text, ‘walk’ with the author not only through the course of the writing, but also on the accompanying seven stages of her path of *conocimiento*, which is fully explained in the following and final chapter. The process involves, 1) un *arrebato* or moment of fragmentation, 2) the moment of feeling torn between cultures or forms of consciousness (*nepantla*), 3) a moment of self-denial and depression (*the Coatlicue state*), 4) a decision to commit to writing and transformation (*el compromiso, the crossing*), 5) writing, composing or recomposing the self and its *stories* (or *putting Coyolxauhqui together*), 6) a clash of realities that takes place when those stories engage and negotiate the world, with its “imperialist tradition of dominance” (144), and 7) a moment when we connect and *shift* realities as a result of spiritual activism. At the onset, the author has been explicit in her intention to propose a method that may produce texts that “[do] not reinforce

¹⁶ These detailed physiological and psychological descriptions of the writing practice, while poetic, demystify the act of writing, bringing it closer to a felt reality for readers. Textuality and textual production are further brought to material reality because the different moments that produce the text “are not clearly demarcated, sequential, or linear, [but] overlap, shift back and forth, take place simultaneously” (102). The account of its final shape—its form and genre—is neither causal nor teleological in Anzaldúa’s description, but the result of a process of unruly and cyclical nature.

prevailing modes” of consciousness, texts that allow the writer to “know how to ‘read’ and ‘write,’ to show how to use “primary methods of presentation (*autohistoriateoria*) rather than secondary methods (interpreting other people’s conceptions)” (4). And that is precisely what Chapter 6 provides: a path for making meaning beyond logical understanding, the method to “come to knowledge and *conocimiento*” (4). Published separately an earlier version, the chapter is significantly placed immediately following its “sister essay,” “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together,” in *Light in the Dark*. Anzaldúa’s compositional choice here provides readers with an explicit connection between the material writing process (Chapter 5) and a holistic methodology for spiritual growth, activism through writing, and the transformation of reality (Chapter 6). As a theory-making and methodological text, then, *Light in the Dark* proposes the practice of writing not only as physical act composition, but also as key work in developing a decolonial *intentionality* when a differential and transformational form of composing is enacted. The new relationship with textuality leads reader and writing to making new meaning of our positions, relations, and oppressive realities and are to able to create new ones. Healing the wounded body, exploring motility in our surroundings, and the practice and concept of *shifting*—which I discuss in the next section—are central tools in this decolonizing path.

Shifting: Text and Consciousness

Anzaldúa’s decolonizing project had centered on queering and destabilizing forms of composition since her earliest texts and overtime her interest in theorizing the rhetorical choice of *shifting* growingly acquires several conceptual layers. *Borderlands/ La Frontera* expanded the practice of writing hybrid personal essays proposed in the landmark anthology *This Bridge Called my Back* (1981) with a focus on hybridity and oppression in the context of the US-Mexico border. It deployed genre shifts from poetry to history to linguistic commentary, to myth, and other genres, radically breaking away from both conventional autobiography and scholarly writing throughout the volume. The book still stands as an iconic example of Anzaldúa’s proposal for a new mode of

theorizing, in which the connection between rhetoric, language, and political awareness are inextricably linked. The methodology of adding, subtracting—creating gaps—and shuffling is also extended to the composition of other multi-authored volumes that Anzaldúa co-edits, such as *Making Face Making Soul*. In her introduction to this volume she explains how the method of “montage and fragmented discourse” is used to both represent women of color lives and to require a certain textual experience on the part of readers, who are “forced into participating in the *making of meaning*” (*my emphasis*, “Introduction” to *Making Face* xvii). So, early on, the adoption of hybrid self-referential discourses, textual shifting, and fragmented compositional arrangements are salient and consistent with Anzaldúa’s theoretical concerns and her method of making theory.

In her book/dissertation projects of the 1990s and early 2000s, it becomes clear that Anzaldúa’s interest in *shifting* goes well beyond rhetoric to encompass notions of intentionality and is meant to advance new philosophical arguments. First, through the apparent shifting authorial positions the author can adopt multiple points of view, registers, tones, and orientations. In *Lloronas*, for instance, Anzaldúa explains the difficulties in trying to accommodate the voices of her various writing persona: the “[p]ersonal I who experiences the tales, the collector of other tales above the experience, the analytical ‘I’ [...] the interpretive ‘I’” (“Rampas de entrada” 5). And as the “Preface” to *Light in the Dark* further explains,

[w]hen I “speak” myself in creative and theoretical writings, I constantly *shift* potitions –which means taking into account ideological remolinos (whirlwinds), cultural dissonance, and the convergence of competing worlds. It means dealing with the fact that I, like most people, inhabit different cultures and, when crossing to other mundos, *shift* into and out of perspective corresponding to each; it means living in liminal spaces, in nepantlas. (3; *my emphasis*)

Thus, formally and ontologically, the shifting ‘I’ is appropriate to theorize experiences of living in liminal and in-between spaces, of being oriented diversely. The shifting of pronouns also subverts

orthodox forms of writing theory in *Light in the Dark* in other ways. When describing the writing process as one in which of *you*—“[t]hough you want deliverance, you cling to *your* misery” (129)—and I—“I was born and live in that in-between space, *nepantla*” (64)—are engaged, the pronoun shifts between chapters place the reader in the position of the writer while the writer observes herself in the mirror of self-reference. Both the narrating I and the reader experience being other and confronting a formerly estranged self while adopting a distance that facilitates theoretical writing and understanding.¹⁷

Significantly, the writing subject settles into the self-referential and readerly *you* in the two final, crucial chapters of *Light in the Dark*: Chapter 5, “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together,” and Chapter 6, “now let us shift *conocimiento*... inner work, public acts.” Here, Anzaldúa describes questions of consciousness in detail as they relate to the individual and collective act of shifting. Chapter 5 carefully describes writing as a *path to conocimiento*, which is a personal and collective process of queer feminist decolonizing knowledge and action, often guided by—and guiding—the writing process:

a major cultural shift in understanding what knowledge consists of... a shift away from knowledge contributing both to military and corporate technologies and to the colonization of our lives by television and the Internet, to the inner exploration and purpose of life... to the feminization of knowledge, one beyond the subject-object divide, a way of knowing and acting on *ese saber* you call “*conocimiento*.” (119)

And to the likely alarm of most theorists and academics, Anzaldúa goes on to affirm that those who attain *conocimiento* “refuse to accept spirituality as a devalued form of knowledge and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality” (119). Spirituality, as we know, has not fared well in the Western-dominated academy of late 20th and 21st centuries,

¹⁷ One of Anzaldúa’s criticisms of earlier versions of Chapter 5 before changing it from first- to second-person narration was, precisely: “I grandstand –the narrative mode I picked puts me and my ego in the text too much.”

especially after the writings of classic and existential phenomenologists such as the Husserl of *transcendental logic*, Edith Stein, or Emmanuel Levinas.¹⁸ Often from the margins, but within the academy, more recent scholarship by Latina/o theorists insists that the ‘excessive’ matter of spirituality and other forms of non-binary consciousness are essential to queer, decolonial and feminist projects, as they contribute experiential evidence and impacts philosophical thought in a number of areas, including logic, ethics, and epistemology. In her seminal essay “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” for instance, María Lugones notes how late 20th century and early 21st century Latina and other women of color’s feminist literature have challenged “the logic of colonial modernity” and “its use of hierarchical dichotomies and categorial logic” (742). They have claimed, as Anzaldúa does in her oeuvre, intersectionality, among other means, in particular, “the intersection of race, class, sexuality, and gender [that] exceeds [its] categories” (742-4).

In its connection to *conocimiento*, however, Anzaldúa’s phenomenological notion of shifting is not only a disruption of conventional, hierarchical literary and philosophical logic in tune with intersectional claims. It also poses a serious challenge to most academic readers, who are asked to re-fashion our relationship to textuality, to meaning-making, and to what we come to recognize as *theory*. In the final chapter of *Light in the Dark* the sixth stage of *conocimiento* is envisioned as “the blow up— a clash of realities” (143), which will happen before a final moment of “shifting realities— acting out the vision or spiritual activism” (seventh stage) (149). We are asked to engage the clash and the shifting and to consider spiritual awareness and thought as central elements in the decolonial transformation of writing within the academy. We are asked to understand how the embodied, psychic, and spiritual experience involved in the composition of the volume leads to a shift in consciousness and to acting upon such shift—“spiritual activism.” Writing can transform realities, Anzaldúa tells us, if we are able to confront these realities with

¹⁸ See for instance, Husserl’s *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), Edith Stein’s *On the Problem of Empathy* (1964), or Emmanuel Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being* (1974).

new writerly and philosophical tools—with new ways of making meaning, of making theory. We are asked, in short, to see the emancipatory potential of theory writing.¹⁹

Light in the Dark, thus, expands the challenge of (heteronormative, colonial) logic by explicitly discussing a theory of consciousness that incorporates trauma and spirituality. Centralizing these elements in the writing process is key in the transformation of writers' and readers' relationship to theoretical texts. Throughout the volume Anzaldúa enacts and explains both the *path to conocimiento* and the *methodology of shifting*, highlighting the materiality of a text that incorporates bodily and spiritual 'matter,' elements that are considered excessive in most academic realms. Further, as the classic phenomenologists Stein, Husserl, or Merleau-Ponty did in their own times, Anzaldúa's notions of embodied perception and intentionality challenge objective, consensual understandings of reality. Her reflections on the method—the phenomenology—are intrinsically linked to the shifting of her writing and our awareness, and this, in turn, to the transformation of our realities. By altering the ways in which we understand consciousness we can change *how we orient ourselves and relate* to writing and reality in the face of normative oppressive paradigms, she offers. Shifting, then, is more than just a compositional method. It is also a necessary skill in the process of collective decolonial transformation.

Concluding Thoughts

By revisiting *Light in the Dark* from a phenomenological perspective, I have observed both Anzaldúa's deployment of, and struggle with, theory as coexisting with a particular understanding of the writing process. Her posthumously published volume explicitly connects rhetorical composition with intentionality and with expansive modes of consciousness. She emphasizes the

¹⁹ As I explain elsewhere (a forthcoming essay in the journal *Chicana/Latina Studies*), this theory emerges more sharply in later writings as a purposeful proposal for change through writing, conceived as a form of "spiritual activism," consciousness and aesthetics being conceived as interconnected transformational meaning-making processes.

connection between the physical method and the psychological path of writing, between the material dimensions of the practice and spirituality, between forms of expression and transformative habits of meaning-making. This approach has also allowed me to take note of the intimate connections between writing, the making of meaning, consciousness, and social change in her late conceptualization of the creative/ theory making process. It is productive to see her own grappling with issues of academic writing in dissertation projects such as *Light in the Dark* as a complex phenomenological encounter with the page and the institutions that sanction the recognition of theory. Indeed, *Light in the Dark* posits itself as a phenomenological encounter with the page—one that simultaneously lays out a theory of writing and a shift in consciousness and intentionality. It constitutes a practical, embodied attempt to describe and enact a decolonizing theory through the study of several phenomena related to writing, which centers the body, its orientation, positionings, and trauma.

Further, by reexamining Anzaldúa's late work we can not only better appreciate how she conceptualized queer, Chicana and other women of color's bodies as gendered, sexualized, racialized, and always in relation to de/colonial contexts. We can also better understand how her proposal for the transformational potential of theory. As a decolonial thinker she is clearly invested in writing theory *differently*, as well as in providing liberatory meaning-making processes (writing) that may challenge oppressive forms of thinking, feeling, and consciousness. As her subtitle suggests, her last major theoretical project not only models, but also urges us to "re-write reality." If we, academic writers, are to heed her request, further phenomenological approaches to her work and the work of other Latina women and theorists of color will assist us in enunciating new understandings and account for our own contemporary feminist, or decolonial writing practices. *Light in the Dark* may guide us as we reflect on reading and knowledge production within and beyond gatekeeping institutions and environments that sanction what it is that, today, we *hold* as theory. I trust that a phenomenological engagement with Anzaldúa's texts will ultimately bring us closer to a fuller understanding of all the possible applications of her decolonial proposal as we shift our own writing practices. Her undefended

dissertation should help us to transform our reading and writing of theory in ways that do not shy away from her radical proposal.

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**ELLA TIENE SU TONO: CONOCIMIENTO AND
MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS IN
LILIANA WILSON'S ART¹**

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Ella tiene su tono: she has supernatural power
from her animal soul, the *tono*.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

“I come towards her in the starlight.
I look into her eyes
as one who loves can look,
entering the space behind her eyeballs,
leaving myself outside.

—Adrienne Rich, “The Lioness”

Abstract: This essay explores Liliana Wilson’s art in light of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *conocimiento* and mestiza consciousness. Looking at Liliana Wilson’s art gives me the same feeling as reading Anzaldúa, for the more I study Wilson’s art, the more I understand that her oeuvre is both a visual representation of the Anzaldúan program and an organic product of it. I see, in other words, the awakening of Liliana Wilson’s mestiza consciousness, and the artist’s process of *conocimiento*, an epistemology of the self as described by Gloria Anzaldúa in some of her *Interviews*, and in her essay, “Now let us shift ... the path of *conocimiento* ... inner work, public acts” (2002).

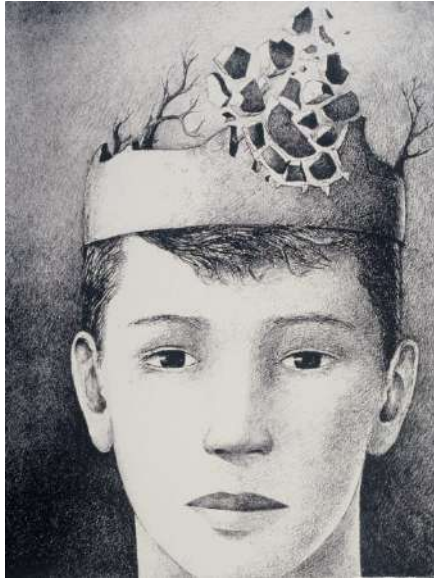
Keywords: Gloria Anzaldúa, Liliana Wilson, mestiza consciousness, visual arts.

I teach Gloria Anzaldúa’s auto-mytho-bio-graphical *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) as a manual of *concientización*, a 7-stage process by which to awaken the mestiza inside us, whether we’re male or female, queer or straight, Mexican or not. For many of my students, Anzaldúa’s concepts are too arcane and complex; for others, her writings seem simplistic, angry, and condescending. The ones who “get Gloria” approach her work from an intuitive place—they are border

¹ Originally published in *Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson’s Art of Dissidence and Dreams*, edited by Norma E. Cantú (Texas A&M UP, 2015), pp. 53-68.

crossers, themselves, or queers or open-hearted young people intent on learning something new rather than parroting their parents' ideologies—and they recognize in Anzaldúa's words something about themselves that they know to be true. Looking at Liliana Wilson's art gives me the same feeling as reading Anzaldúa. I become transfixed by the beauty and simplicity of the images, so immersed in her tender and tragic vision that I don't even realize something has punctured my perception, something familiar and yet alien to my awareness, as though I were looking at forgotten parts of myself. All I see are boys and girls and in-betweens occupying different terrains of grief and wonder, hope and despair, light and darkness, innocence and wisdom. I don't see the "tono," the animal soul that I am about to enter.





In fact, the more I study Wilson's art, the more I understand that her oeuvre is both a visual representation of the Anzaldúan program and an organic product of it. I see, in other words, the awakening of Liliana Wilson's mestiza consciousness, as described in *Borderlands/La Frontera* rendered in acrylics, colored pencils, and silkscreens. I also see the artist's process of *conocimiento*, an epistemology of the self as described by Gloria Anzaldúa in some of her *Interviews*, and in her essay, "Now let us shift ... the path of *conocimiento* ... inner work, public acts," published in *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002). In that essay, Anzaldúa outlines the 7 stages of the *conocimiento* process, which closely mirror the 7 stages of mestiza consciousness I will be discussing here: Stage 1: the rupture, being shocked out of the safe zone; stage 2: nepantla, the in-between space that is traversed when moving between states of consciousness; stage 3: the Coatlicue State, illness and plunging into "desconocimiento," the falling apart stage that leads to an identity crisis, or a moment of choice; stage 4: the call to action, breaking the silence, crossing the bridge from the personal to the political; stage 5: sharing Coyolxauhqui's story, putting the pieces back together; stage 6: exploding contradictions and the uses of "love" to mitigate "the

crack between worlds” (or what I call, practicing what you preach); stage 7: shifting realities and forming alliances, as in the work of spiritual activism. By juxtaposing Liliana Wilson’s artwork and Gloria Anzaldúa’s theories on *mestiza* consciousness, *conocimiento*, the Shadow Beast, the Nepantla State, and other border-crossing concepts, we will see how a Chilean immigrant artist and a native Chicana/tejana writer not only share “the dream of a common language,”² a language rooted in sexuality, political activism, creativity, and love that allows them to “enter the space behind [the] eyeballs” of their animal souls, as Adrienne Rich writes in the second epigraph, but also how they use this common language to guide them on their journeys toward an awakened self.

1. The Rupture, Or, Locating the Border Inside Ourselves

The first stage of awakening is the sudden awareness of the border inside us, where the border is any open wound, not just the “herida abierta where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds” that Anzaldúa writes about in the first chapter of *Borderlands* (25), but also the “rajadura” or crack that occurs when an outside force shatters your sense of wholeness and safety. An earthquake can cause that sudden awareness as much as a love affair or a work of art or a *coup d’état*. For Anzaldúa, it was seeing the Coyolxauhqui stone for the first time in Mexico City that showed her the different fragments of her own being, and later, the San Francisco earthquake that shattered her illusion of safety and revealed her deep-seated “fear of others breaching the walls” she had constructed around herself (Anzaldúa, “Now let us shift” 544).

² I am alluding to the title of Adrienne Rich’s book, which was the first book she published after she came out as a lesbian in 1976, and found the missing link (i.e., woman-centered desire) between her feminist politics and her quest for a new poetry, or common language, between women.



For Liliana Wilson the rupture was also two-fold, as depicted in her 1978 image “City of Blood”: first the military coup in Chile that killed President Salvador Allende and plunged her homeland into a war zone of torture and bloodshed, followed by her decision to immigrate to the United States and leave her family and friends behind and become a border crosser, a citizen of Nepantla.

For those of us who were raised in la frontera between the United States and Mexico, that crack, that open wound is our primary “sitio y lengua,” as Emma Pérez calls it, the place of origin for our being as well as our language (Pérez 162). That border is nepantla³—another Anzaldúan concept—the place in between two realities that creates a third reality, a third culture or “shock culture” inhabited by “atravesados” or border crossers—“the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 25). Anybody who is crossed in some way: racially, ethnically, linguistically, spiritually, sexually. Anybody who contains within them the contradictions of two worlds, immigrants

³ Anzaldúa described *nepantla* as “an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another.” Anzaldúa explains in her Preface to *This Bridge We call Home* (2002) that she uses the concept of nepantla to “theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds.” For Anzaldúa, nepantla is associated “with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (Anzaldúa and Keating 1).

and Chicanas/os among them, is an “atravesado/a.” This sudden awareness of the border inside us and the way it connects to the history of the actual geographical borderland is the first stage of consciousness.

It is also an awareness of pain, since that border is “an open wound,” which bleeds continually.

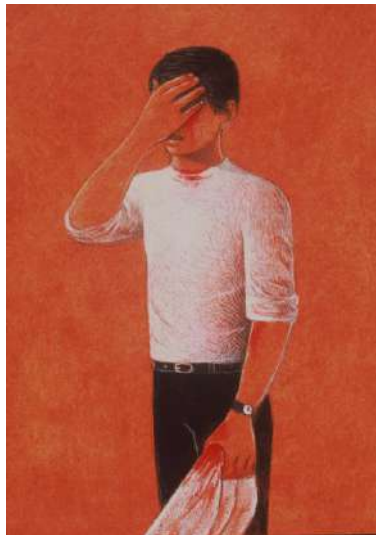


In “Mujer Dividida” (2002), Liliana Wilson depicts a woman divided from herself, caught in a dark borderland of isolation with no words coming out of her mouth. “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary,” says Anzaldúa (*Borderlands*, 25). The dark background in the image signifies this “vague and undetermined place” that could represent the “unnatural boundary” between two nations, two genders, two languages, or all of them at once. For as pained as she looks, however, the woman’s eyes are open, indicating that she is aware of her condition. The empty bubble in front of her face shows her that she is a non-speaking subject. She knows that she is divided, that she is wounded, but does not yet know how to speak about that

pain. As Liliana Wilson says of the political conflicts in her homeland:

Salvador Allende got elected in 1971, it was a very hopeful time for my country, but for the next three years he was attacked constantly by the military under the right wing parties, until they killed him in 1973 and took over the government. These were difficult years with all the death and torture. In 1977 I decided to leave Chile for the U.S. These were also difficult years because I had to leave my family and my friends, but I found myself in many other ways. For a long time I was drawing what I had seen in Chile, I was processing what had happened, while at the same time learning a new language and learning how to live here. (Liliana Wilson, email to the author, September 16, 2008)

The figures in “Memorias de Chile” (2001) and “War” (2002) do not want to face the diasporic pain of their memories, and yet the images of what they experienced and left behind continue to haunt them. They fall like dead leaves in the girl’s unconscious, larger than life, or they cling like bloodstains to the boy’s clothes, a skin he has shed but cannot yet release from his psyche. “I call this *desconocimiento*, being overwhelmed by reality and not wanting to confront it. *Desconocimiento* is the opposite of *conocimiento*; it’s the shadow side of ‘seeing,’” says Anzaldúa (“Bearing Witness” 34-35).



2. Nepantla, or, Facing the Shadow Beast

If Nepantla is the in-between space that is traversed when moving between states of consciousness, then Nepantla is the home of the Shadow Beast. Part of the agreement that we must make as we follow Anzaldúa's snake into the dark hole of our unconscious is the agreement to unmask our pain, which means

both to face it and to give it a face. This is the second stage of consciousness, facing the Shadow Beast that populates Nepantla and that acts as a gatekeeper to our own awareness. What is this shadowy figure that colludes with the destructive agents of self and society? Every form of internalized hatred is the Shadow Beast: racism, sexism, linguistic terrorism, homophobia. Every time we cringe when someone calls us a “pocha,” or a “faggot,” or a “dirty messcan,” we take that hatred into our gut.

Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you’ve programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades. (Anzaldúa, “Now let us shift” 541)

In “Denial” (1998) the girl purposely puts her arm in front of her face to avoid looking at what is on the other side of the window at which she stands, the window itself being symbolic of a portal into another world, one that the girl is afraid to cross. “To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage,” writes Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa and Keating 3). The boy in “El enmascarado” (2004) may have stepped into the dark reaches of Nepantla, but he can see only through the eyes of a false identity, the horned mask of the Shadow Beast.



o



Before we can enter into the Serpent and really begin this long dark journey into night, we must first face that Shadow Beast and all of the pain the Beast has caused us. We must be willing to look at the cage we have been living in, filled with false images of ourselves, like the three bird-headed figures in Wilson's ironically-titled "The Meaning of Life" (1995). These false

images are all reflections of the Monster we have fed too well with our secrets and fears, and the cage is our own home, our familia, our culture. As Anzaldúa reminds us, one way of defining homophobia is “the fear of going home” (*Borderlands* 42). Like all oppressions, homophobia begins at home. “As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves,” says Anzaldúa (*Borderlands* 67). The fear of rejection, of denial, of ridicule, of abandonment by the mother or the family or the culture, the “agony of inadequacy”—these are only a few of the fears that hide in the cage of that Shadow Beast and that feed the Monster of internalized hatred inside every border dweller.





But that’s not the only Beast that lives inside us (and this is a point too often missed by Anzaldúa scholars). There’s a twin face to the Shadow Beast, not just the one that feeds off of our fears and causes the pain, but the one who rebels against all that suffering, and who like the woman in “Bearing Witness” (2002), defies injustice with her third eye. This other Shadow Beast deals with the pain by developing a seventh sense, a defiant attitude, and a hard skin. Anzaldúa writes,

There is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. (*Borderlands* 38)

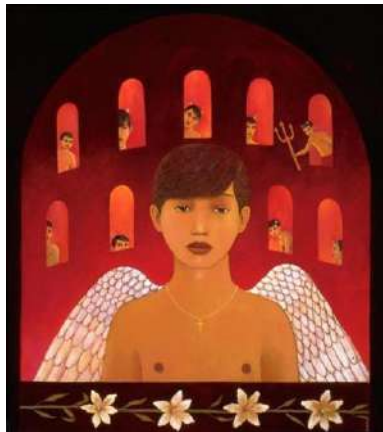
It is this Rebel face that goes “soy pocha, y que?” that doesn’t allow us to shut up and stay in our place, that gets punished for being an “hocicona,” for living out loud the contradictions that fly in the face of patriarchy and heterosexism and cultural tyranny. This face is the Hidden Other, the underfed, undernourished, but scrappy and resourceful Rebel face that strengthens rather than

diminishes us. Like the girl in “La entrada del cielo” (2004), the Rebel holds the key to her own bliss. The Rebel is the opposite of the Monster, and yet it is seen as monstrous by the people who love us, and whom we love despite the myriad ways in which they knowingly or unknowingly help us to feed the Monster of self-hate.



Like the boy in Wilson’s “El prisionero” (2004), some of us never get out of this cage, never get to see the other face of the Shadow Beast because facing the Monster is just too painful and we are either too afraid of the pain or too addicted to it to change anything. As Wilson said of this image, “the cage floating over his

head is something the boy can't let go of, something keeping him from moving forward." (Wilson, personal interview, March 22, 2008, Austin, Texas). Some of us never realize we carry the agent of our deliverance within ourselves, and so we stay trapped in the Monster's cage, using drugs or alcohol or sex or any other false form of solace to help us hide from our own fear. "Some of us take another route," says Anzaldúa. "We try to make ourselves conscious of the Shadow Beast ... Yet still others of us take it another step: we try to waken the Shadow Beast inside us" (*Borderlands* 42), which means listening to the voices that have told us over and over that we are evil, unworthy, and doomed. Despite his angel wings, the boy in Wilson's "Diablitos" (2004) is plagued by these voices, these lies about himself. He has not yet learned to trust that he has the power to rise above the din, to leave the nine circles of his own inner inferno and transcend his self-doubt.⁴



⁴ The nine demons in this image reminded me of the 9 circles of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*. Dante and his spiritual guide, Virgil descend into each circle so that Dante can see what awaits the soul of one who renounces the Christian God, each level taking him further down into the bowels of the earth, where Satan lives. Shaped like a spiraling funnel, Hell consists of the following levels: Limbo, place of the Virtuous Pagans who were born prior to Christianity; the Lustful, the Gluttonous; the Hoarders and Wasters, the Wrathful, the Heretics, the Violent, the Fraudulent, and the Treacherous.

3. The Coatlicue State, or, Entering Into the Serpent

Only when we have faced the Monster, seen through its lies, and given a face to the Rebel can we truly say we have become conscious of the Shadow Beast, and only then can we move on to the third stage of consciousness, entering into the Serpent. Entering into the Serpent means surrender. It means we know the path is covered in brambles and pitfalls, but it's the only way to get out of our own self-manufactured traps, as the boy finds in "Organic Barbed Wire" (1994). It means we trust there's a lesson on the other side.



And we trust we have some tools that will help us brave the hazards. One of those tools is what Anzaldúa calls "la facultad," a faculty of mind or mode of perception and survival that only those who live in the margins, those who are "other" from the white, male, rich, heterosexual, Protestant, English-only U.S. citizen "norm,"⁵ have unwittingly learned and continue to cultivate. Thus, people of color, women, the poor, queers, non-Protestants, non-English speakers, and the undocumented are all margin-dwellers, and all develop facultad. This tool, this mode of perception, comes

⁵ La facultad does not just occur in margin-dwellers in the United States. Any social, racial, sexual, linguistic, religious "minority" (despite actual demographics) that differs from the patriarchal ruling paradigm can be said to have facultad.

from deep within the arsenal of the Rebel, which is rooted in and connected to a part of the human self that for too many millennia of patriarchal dogma⁶ has been trod underfoot, like the snake: the feminine principle. La Facultad, in other words, is one of the ways of knowing attributed to women and ridiculed by men. Connected to the esoteric knowledge represented by the night and the moon, la facultad is akin to intuition, instinct, and the natural world. It is an irrational form of knowing, what Anzaldúa calls a “subversive knowledge” (“Now let us shift” 542) existing outside of the linear dimension known as logic, and for that reason useless to a mind socially-constructed to devalue women, nature, and the body.



⁶ Anzaldúa shows how the militaristic, male-dominated Aztecs/Mexica had already started this process of trampling the feminine even before the Christian conquistadores set foot on Mexican shores and completed the job. It was the cult of Huitzilopochtli, the God of War, that “drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place, thus splitting the female Self and the female deities. They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects” (*Borderlands* 49).

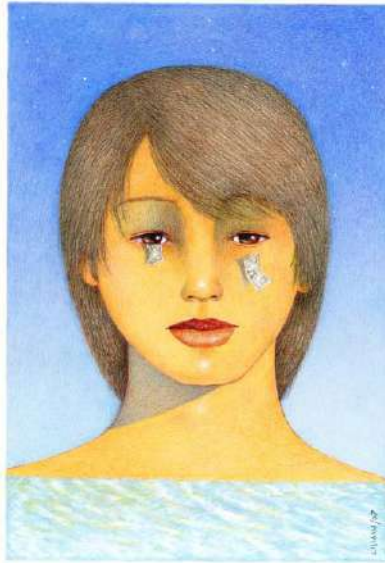
To resist *la facultad*, however, is to be tied up under a dunce cap like Liliana Wilson's "El ridículo" (2005). How often do we regret not heeding our intuition and finding ourselves caught up in a dangerous or ridiculous situation that we could have avoided had we "listened to our gut," that is, paid attention to our *facultad*?

Whatever it was that was the wrong thing to do—an obsession of some kind, probably—the boy trapped himself. The answer was in the universe but he couldn't see it. He made a fool of himself. He's still not looking at it, he's crying but his eyes are downcast. (Liliana Wilson, telephone interview, September 29, 2008)

Surrendering to the serpent means letting ourselves go fully into *Nepantla*, "the point of contact where the 'mundane' and the 'numinous' converge, where you're in full awareness of the present moment,"⁷ says Anzaldúa. From this in-between place, it is possible to see all of the contradictions that have been raging inside us, threatening to burn down the false structure in which we have housed our identity, as we see happening to Liliana Wilson's "Mujer desesperada" (2000).



⁷ Anzaldúa ("Now let us shift" 549).



“We can’t continue to believe the mental constructions that male society has built for women,” says Wilson (Telephone interview, 9/29/08). Anzaldúa argues that part of the process of *conocimiento* is learning to distinguish between “lo impuesto, lo adquirido, and lo heredado” (*Borderlands* 104)— or rather, learning to see through the social constructions we have inherited, acquired, or had imposed on us by our culture. It’s like looking in a mirror and seeing three reflections of the self: the self you think you have to be, the self that others construct, and the self that reflects your own fears and desires. A woman’s place is in the home, stand by your man, be a good mother—these mental constructions are images we have inherited from our culture, from generations of oppressed and repressed women before us, who were socialized to believe they had no agency but to serve patriarchal needs and interests. Wetback, welfare mom, cleaning lady, bad girl, whore—these are reflections imposed on women of color from the outside and duplicated in popular culture as we see in “Muerte en la frontera” (2007) where the young victims of vicious femicides are held responsible for their own deaths. As these imposed and inherited ideologies go up in smoke for “Mujer desesperada,” she sees yet another reflection, the one that shows her how terrified she really

is of being alone, like the woman in “The Wedding” (1996). In this reflection she sees how she has contributed to her own desperation and sense of failure by acquiring habits and addictions that do nothing more than enable the possessive fantasies of patriarchy and capitalism.



This, in turn, Anzaldúa explains, only blocks the natural process of molting.

Held in thrall by one's obsession, by the god or goddess symbolizing that addiction, one is not empty enough to become possessed by anything else. One's attention cannot be captured by something else, one does not "see" and awareness does not happen. One remains ignorant of the fact that one is afraid, and that it is fear that holds one petrified, frozen in stone. If we can't see the face of fear in the mirror, then fear must not be there. (*Borderlands* 67)

Here Anzaldúa shows us the problem as well as the solution: to divest ourselves of the distractions we've been using to cope with or hide from our reality, and to allow ourselves to become possessed by our fears and contradictions. To fully face the mirror and see that: I am a woman in a patriarchal, misogynistic society, a lesbian in a heterosexist culture, a Mexican in a country that despises Mexicans. I speak Spanish forked by the tongue of my

Anglo colonizer. I want to liberate my Raza and my body, which my own people seek to imprison and control. Like Alice stepping through the looking glass into a world of double-consciousness where objects and animals can speak and where her own politics of location are tested, we must step through the “rajadura” in the mirror to reach the other side of Nepantla, the place of transformation that we see depicted in “La Llegada” (1997).



To empty ourselves of our negative behaviors and distractions is to surrender to that voice that speaks to us from the darkness, a voice that leads us to the dangerous precipice of *conocimiento*. In the eternal now that is Nepantla, where the material world and the spirit world converge, it is possible to commune with ghosts and serpents, and it is also possible to meet the internal destructive and creative energy that is represented by Coatlicue, the mother of the Aztec gods, goddess of creation and death. It will be Coatlicue that pushes us to betray our deepest secret. Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands* “The secret I tried to conceal was that I was not normal, that I was not like the others. I felt alien. I knew I was alien. I was the mutant stoned out of the herd” (65). In “La caída del angel” (2005), Liliana Wilson shows

a fallen angel covering his face in shame or sorrow. Whether he is cast out from his community in the heavens and doomed to a solitary existence for all time, or whether he is burdened by loss, his heavy wings keep him immobilized. At this point, the crisis begins, the catatonic period of “desconocimiento” that is an essential, albeit terrifying and agonizing, aspect of the Coatlicue State. For some of us, this is the longest and most difficult stage in the process of awakening.



Cast adrift from all that's familiar, you huddle deep in the womb cave, a stone repelling light. In the void of your own nothingness, you lie in a fetal curl clutching the fragmented pieces and bits of yourself you've disowned. (Anzaldúa, "Now let us shift" 551)

What characterizes this phase of the Coatlicue State is immobility, brought on by physical or psychic illness that catalyzes those fears and contradictions into a crisis of identity. The Coatlicue State is a necessary moment in our process of “making soul,” a time of stasis and reflection in which we see both the horror and the beauty of our *Nepantla* existence. This clear

seeing from what Anzaldúa calls the “reptilian eye” in the middle of the forehead, also shows us that we have a choice, for indeed, choice, or rather the ability to decide, is the etymological root of the word “crisis.”⁸ By focusing on the destructive aspects of a crisis, the falling apart stage, we overlook the fact that a crisis is actually a moment of choice, when all of our options—the disowned pieces of the self—overwhelm us at once and we must exercise our power to choose what to do to bring the self back together, or to restructure the self. Wikipedia defines crisis as “a traumatic or stressful change in a person’s life, or an unstable and dangerous social situation, in political, social, economic, military affairs, or a large-scale environmental event, especially one involving an impending abrupt change.”⁹ Certainly, leaving one’s homeland produces a traumatic and stressful change in an immigrant’s life, even more a political overthrow.

Talking about “La caída del angel,” Liliana Wilson explains that the fallen angel has “come through something really horrible and doesn’t realize he’s survived; he thinks he’s still in that other place,” and connects it to her own Coatlicue State while still in Chile, when the military took over. “They wiped out the old Chile, they were demons, I was living in Hell. Our own Chilean people were doing that to us.” Not only did she *desconocer*, or fail to recognize, her homeland, but also she lost touch with her sense of herself as a Chilean. Another Coatlicue State happened when she first arrived in the United States. “I left everything and I just jumped into another world completely. It was pretty despedazante. It tore me up. All the pieces of me were left behind. I had to rebuild myself completely, like I was born again.” (Telephone interview, 9/29/2008).

⁸The online Wiktionary explains that “crisis” comes “from the ancient Greek κρίσις (krisis) ‘a separating, power of distinguishing, decision, choice, election, judgment, dispute’ < κρίνω (krino) ‘to pick out, to choose, to decide, to judge.’” Thus, a crisis is a turning point, a crucial and decisive situation. <http://xmlgadgets.com/home.pl?site=mwikt&query=crisis>.

⁹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis> Accessed 9/28/08.

4. Breaking the Silence/Call to Action

Overcoming silence is the fourth stage of *conocimiento*, whether the silence is the result of military repression, domestic abuse, homophobia, or what Anzaldúa calls “linguistic terrorism,” that despotic nationalism in both the United States and Mexico that insists you must speak only English or only Spanish, and that punishes and ridicules you for speaking both languages at once. Chicanas and Chicanos who are embarrassed that they don’t “speak Spanish correctly,” or that they speak Spanglish rather than English-only, who flinch at being called “pochos” and “pochas,”¹⁰ are suffering the effects of this linguistic terror campaign that is enforced by Mexican nationals on both sides of the border. Similarly, children who are punished at school for speaking Spanish, or who are tracked into “special education” classes or vocational classes because they don’t speak English or speak it with a heavy accent are also suffering from cultural and linguistic violence. Enforced at home and at school, this violence becomes internalized, and is another way of feeding the monstrous side of the Shadow Beast. A popular slogan in the gay community is “silence=death,” because to be silent is to collude with our oppressors, is to patently accept their violations as part of the status quo, and therefore, to condone them. “It’s dangerous,” says Liliana Wilson. “The war is happening, and it has not stopped happening. So I talk about it without talking about it. That’s how I paint” (Telephone interview, 9/29/2008). Art is Liliana Wilson’s tool for breaking the silence, for navigating the identity crises of her Coatlicue State, and for creating bridges between her past and her present, her politics and her spirituality.

In the Fall of 1995, Liliana Wilson and Gloria Anzaldúa came together for “El Taller Nepantla,” or the Nepantla Workshop,¹¹ a 5-week residency that brought five Latina artists, writers and painters from both sides of the border, to the Saratoga Hills near San Jose, California to explore Anzaldúa’s concept of Nepantla—“the idea of entering a place between the extremes of their

¹⁰ Pocho/pocha is a derogatory term that signifies someone who speaks a botched Spanish. It is used by cultural purists in Mexico who believe Chicanas/o are corrupting the Spanish language by mixing it with English, and who see this form of speaking as a sign of betrayal to the homeland, or mother culture.

cultures” —in their work (Reynolds). In Mexico, it was a time of civil unrest as the Zapatista Liberation Army was simultaneously protesting the neocolonial invasion of the North American Free Trade Agreement, demanding their rights as autonomous Mexican citizens, and being massacred by their own government.¹¹ In California, once the panacea of liberal thinkers and civil rights activists, voters had just passed Proposition 187 the year before, which denied basic human rights like health care and education to the undocumented, the first of a trifecta of civil rights backlashes in the state that would ban Affirmative Action in 1996 (Proposition 209) and Bilingual Education in 1998 (Proposition 227). “We’re here to make order out of this chaos, we’re here to make meaning,” Anzaldúa said in an interview. “This act of making meaning I call *nepantla* (Reynolds). It was here that Liliana Wilson crossed one of her own internal borders and added a new subject to her paintings: “We [were] walking in the woods every day and talking about our ideas. I’[d] been painting a lot of images of men up until [then], I think because I [could] be kind of distant from them. But [since then], I’ve started painting girls” (Reynolds).

Part of what motivated her to avoid portraying women and girls in her work, Wilson told me, is that she didn’t want to “victimize” them, but she also wanted to show male figures as “more vulnerable, to represent my own pain” (Personal Interview, 3/22/08). Rendering her pain onto male figures was a way of detaching herself from the memory of those feelings.

For Anzaldúa, it was story-telling that gave her the power to “battle the silence and the red. Daily I take my throat in my hands and squeeze until the cries pour out, my larynx and soul sore from the constant struggle” (*Borderlands*, 93-94).¹² For in telling

¹¹ After launching an insurgent uprising on January 1, 1994, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas was declared in a state of war against the Mexican state. The Mexican military was deployed into Chiapas to squelch the uprising, killing thousands of indigenous “insurgents” and civilians, and pushing the base of the EZLN forces into the Lacandon Jungle. There is a coincidental link between the date of the uprising and the date that NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, was implemented.

¹² In this chapter, “Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black Ink,” Anzaldúa talks about how using the actual [black] ink of her pen to write down the stories of the red [pain] she carries in her blood, sometimes makes her physically ill.

the story of “the red,” which signifies her pain, Anzaldúa both relives and releases the illness caused by the pain. Writing, then, simultaneously immerses her in the Coatlicue State, gives meaning to her experience, and restores her to health.

When I write it feels like I am carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. It is this learning to live with la Coatlicue that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare to a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else. (*Borderlands* 95)

That “something else” is the epistemology of the self that Anzaldúa calls *conocimiento*, and once tapped, the healing of the severed parts can begin.

5. Putting the Pieces Together, Or, Making Coyolxauhqui Whole Again

Coyolxauhqui is your symbol for both the process of emotional and psychic dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering. (Anzaldúa, “Now let us shift” 546)

For Liliana Wilson, it was art-making that allowed her to put the pieces back together. Art was her calling as well as her way of healing the psychic splits and open wounds that were the consequence of her exile. Making art allowed her to “revision and

“Because writing invokes images from my unconscious and because some of the images have residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I sometimes get sick when I do write. I can’t stomach it, become nauseous, or burn with fever, worsen. But in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make ‘sense’ of them, and once they have ‘meaning’ they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy” (92).

remember”: to expose the rapacious agendas and rabid dangers of living in a military dictatorship, as we see in “La junta de gobierno” (1995).



To reflect on what it felt like growing up in a family made dysfunctional by alcoholism and machismo, as we see in the ironic portrayal of “Successful Family” (1999).



To show the helplessness of an immigrant coming to a country that despises immigrants, as we see in “Proposition 187” (1998).



And to depict the despair caused by a culture based on corporate greed and violence, particularly against women and children, as we see in “Greed” (2001).



As the artist, Wilson sees through the experience, and this seeing “enrages” her, and fuels her desire for change, and yet her images are rarely brutal or political. “I transform rage into a real deep sorrow,” she says. “The military in Chile was so horrendous, that I got the point that rage or protest gets you nowhere, we can’t tell the truth because we’ll pay for it, we have to be smart enough to say the truth without being obvious and calling the attention of those who would hurt us” (Wilson 9/29/08).

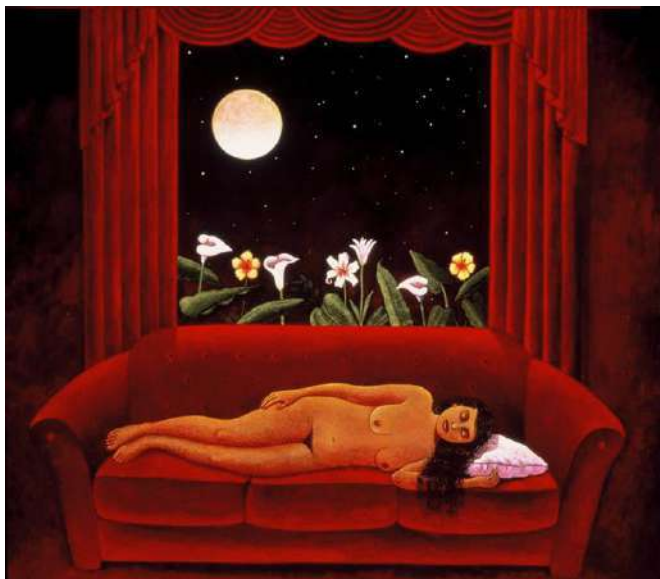
Although painful and isolating, loss, and the subsequent crisis that loss produces, is a necessary part of *conocimiento*—in Liliana’s case, loss of language, family, country, identity—for this is what Anzaldúa means by the process of molting, of shedding skins, which implies growth and transformation. Out of *desconocimiento*, comes consciousness, Anzaldúa reminds us. Out of the shattered self comes the whole. In “Sávila Sagrada” (2008) the girl sits serenely in a garden holding a potted aloe vera plant that signifies a healed self, centered in a life of beauty and connection to the natural world.



6. The Methodology of Love

It is through her painting that Liliana Wilson gives voice to the Rebel inside her who is not afraid to depict the horrors, the hypocrisies and the sorrows of a political refugee’s life. And yet, despite the painful situations that she paints, her human figures are always innocent and fragile. Even amidst the despair, there is some form of beauty, in the wise and gentle eyes of her androgynous boys and girls, in the lush plants and flowers of her landscapes, in the moon- and starlit skies of her universes. The

naked woman in “La Bella Durmiente” (2004), whose title evokes the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty, sleeps safely under an open window, unafraid of the night. Like Anzaldúa for whom darkness and the night represent “the mystery of the Origin,” (*Borderlands* 81). Liliana Wilson exercises her own subversive knowledge of this mystery by finding the nugget of gold in every painful experience.



“If I were to just depict the pain and not the beauty, nobody would want to look at my work, nobody would want to have it. What I want to give is love, only with love can we begin to heal,” says Wilson (Telephone interview, 9/29/08).

Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval calls love part of the “methodology of the oppressed,” both the means by which to change the world and the change itself. It is a revolutionary not a romantic love meant to instigate social change, an “oppositional social act.” “It is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political ‘movidas’” writes Sandoval, “—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (Sandoval 141). Sandoval believes that Third World revolutionary writers like Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez, Cherrie Moraga, and Che Guevara all “understand

love as a ‘breaking’ through whatever controls us in order to find ‘understanding and community’: it is described as ‘hope’ and ‘faith’ in the potential goodness of some promised land” (Sandoval 140).



Although the young immigrant in “El color de la esperanza” (1987) has survived countless travails to reach the border of the so-called promised land, where he/she will be poached on by “coyotes” and hunted down by the Border Patrol, he trusts that his faith will protect him and his dreams of a better life fill him with love and hope.

Twenty years later, Wilson continues to depict understanding and community in the hope of immigrant survival. She describes “La espera” (2007) as the story of a mother waiting for a son who will never come back. “Who knows where he’s gone, maybe the war, maybe the United States, but he’s not coming back to her,” says Wilson (Telephone interview, 9/29/08). Nothing can shake the woman’s conviction that she will see her son again, and like so many mothers of immigrants and soldiers, she waits for him to make his presence felt, undefeated by despair, her hope flowering abundantly all around her. Perhaps she feels him in the fluttering wings of the hummingbird, or “in a slither of serpents” whispering his name (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 73). Although she is resigned to the loss, she will never stop waiting for him.



7. Mestiza Consciousness/Spiritual Activism

For Anzaldúa and Wilson, love as a methodology by which to explode contradictions and mitigate “the crack between worlds” gives them the ability, the *poder* or power, to “shift realities and form alliances,” which leads to the seventh and final stage in the process of *conocimiento*, “mestiza consciousness.”

Although related to José Vasconcelos’s ideology of a fifth race forged by the biological blending of the four major races of humanity—Caucasians, Indians, Africans, and Asians—into a “bronze” hybrid that the Mexican secretary of education termed “*raza cósmica*” (Vasconcelos). Anzaldúa’s “mestiza” is more than a biological hybrid, more than a bridge between races whose purpose was to “redeem the dark races” and create as Vasconcelos writes “the definitive race, the synthetical race, the integral race” (Vasconcelos 20).¹³ Anzaldúa gives us a “new mestiza,” an “alien

¹³ For as seminal (I use the word on purpose) as the Vasconcelan notion of a cosmic race became with Raza activists in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, his thesis is fundamentally flawed. Rather than a theory of racial liberation, it is instead a treatise on New World eugenics riddled with racist stereotypes: the Chinese, he writes, “under the saintly guidance of Confucian

consciousness... a consciousness of the Borderlands... una conciencia de mujer" (*Borderlands* 99). Anzaldúa argues that a new consciousness can be created the way a new race is created, by joining opposites, by mixing the male with the female, the black with the white, the English with the Spanish, the Anglo with the Mexican, the body with the spirit, the subject with the object. In this way does the New Mestiza "sustain contradictions" and create "a tolerance for ambiguity" that never has to choose between two opposing sides, but rather stands "on both shores at once and, at once, see[s] through serpent and eagle eyes" (*Borderlands* 101, 100). Unlike Vasconcelos whose eugenic dream was to create a cosmic melting pot for the melding of One exclusive universal race, the New Mestiza is a consciousness of inclusivity in which "nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (*Borderlands* 101).

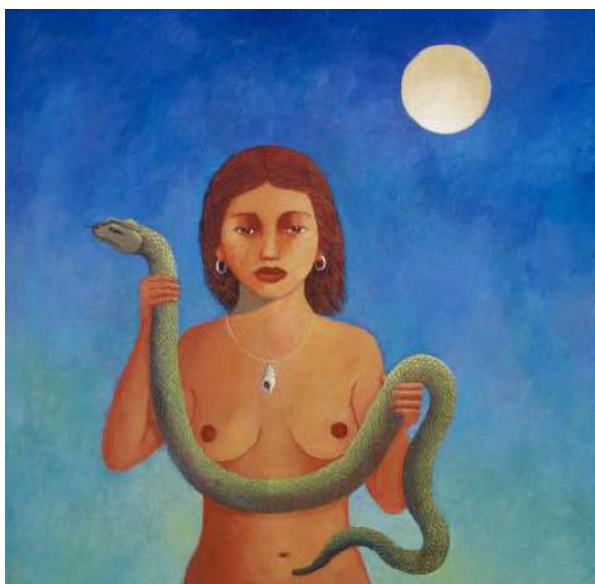
morality multiply like mice" (19); "the Black, eager for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust"; "the Mongol, with the mystery of his slanted eyes that see everything according to a strange angle"; or the Anglos, with their "clear vision of a great destiny ... the intuition of a definite historical mission" whose imperial cause is guided "by God himself" and whose blood is not tainted "by the contradictory instincts of a mixture of dissimilar races" (17). Indeed, that is the true message of Vasconcelos' "raza cósmica," not the celebration of mestizaje, per se, but the pursuit of a perfect race, a new race composed of a mixture of similar races, made more and more dissimilar, and yet with more of the strong traits of the white race, through the process of miscegenation. If Chicano/a activists had really read the full text of our illustrious Vasconcelos, they would have found his analysis of how Mexicans came to be, not by rape and conquest, but rather by "that abundance of love that allowed the Spaniard to create a new race with the Indian and the Black, profusely spreading white ancestry through the soldier who begat a native family" (17). Thus the purpose of mixing the races is to strengthen and purify, that is, whiten, the blood more and more until finally, "[w]hat is going to emerge out there is the definitive race, the synthetical race, the integral race, made up of the genius and the blood of all peoples and, for that reason, more capable of a true brotherhood and of a truly universal vision" (20). I think this was the only utopian sentence Chicano/a activists actually read.



Like Liliana Wilson's "El dividido" (2004), the New Mestiza is aware that she bridges opposites and contradictions. Wilson described this piece as the "universe being outside and within the boy, everything that is contained in the universe has always existed." (Telephone interview 9/29/08). The blue and red, as opposite qualities in the color spectrum—cold and hot, tranquility and passion—represent two separate worlds, or two shores, and the boy stands between both of them, not split and isolated, but cleaved to his own duality, standing on both shores at once, all of his contradictions contained. In *Nepantla* nothing is certain, but the boy's peaceful expression shows that he has learned "tolerance for ambiguity." Indeed, the boy appears to be drifting in this ambiguous universe, what Chela Sandoval would call the "no-place of the abyss," that utopian state of being in which "subjectivity can become freed from ideology as it binds and ties reality; here is where political weapons of consciousness are available in a constant tumult of possibility" (Sandoval 142).

Anzaldúa's predominant metaphor for this new consciousness is the serpent, as much the earthbound reptile that molts out of its old skin and grows a new one each year, as the metaphoric snake that, like our *conocimiento*, or inner knowledge,

spirals in and out of different stages of awareness, as the spiritual snake that connects her to the transformative power of Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue. “The snake is a symbol of awakening consciousness,” wrote Anzaldúa in the essay that culminates *This Bridge We Call Home*. “ —the potential of knowing within, an awareness and intelligence not grasped by logical thought” (“Now let us shift,” 540). That awakening, that intelligence, comes through the body, in particular through the sexuality of the body. For Anzaldúa, the serpent is a feminine energy. “She, the symbol of the dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life” (*Borderlands* 57). Although Anzaldúa suffered a near-fatal snakebite as young girl, and saw visions of serpents throughout her life, it took her years of consciousness work to connect with her animal soul. “Forty years it’s taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body, and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul” (*Borderlands* 48). *Ella tiene su tono*, then, means she has entered into the Serpent.



In “Eva” (2005) Liliana Wilson shows us a different version of the Biblical story of Eve, a “new Mestiza.” Rather than depicting the serpent as a symbol of evil, and Eve as a humiliated woman who gets cast out of Eden for her transgression of disobeying God’s orders not to eat of the sacred Tree of Knowledge, Wilson’s “Eva” is a woman at ease in her naked female body, a body that rather than demonizing the serpent, has entered into the serpent, that is, assimilated the animal body of the snake, and thus, the inner knowing of her creative root, her sexual desire that comes from the animal soul. There is no shame or penitence in “Eva.” Wearing the seashell that ties her to the mysteries of the ocean and standing under the full moon that guides her into the mysteries of the night, “Eva” holds the snake of her own *conocimiento* in her hands. As Anzaldúa would have described it, she “takes dominion over serpents—over [her] own body, [her] sexual activity, [her] soul, [her] mind, [her] weaknesses and strengths” (*Borderlands* 73). Liliana Wilson’s “Eva” is a New Mestiza who stands at the center of her own paradise.

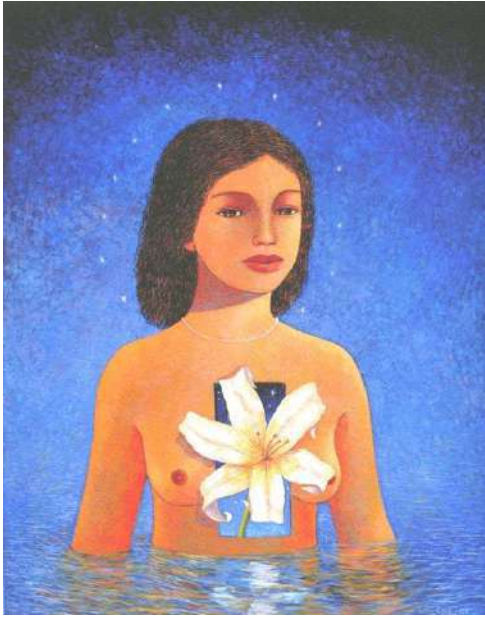


Like “Los ilusionistas” (2007), the New Mestiza “learns to juggle cultures,” and this juggling is a constant shifting of locations and languages, or “sitios y lenguas,” a “continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 102). The figures here could be boys, could be girls, could be hermaphrodites or

spirits. What they are doing is impossible in the world of gravity, but that is not their world. Theirs is a universe of possibility and playfulness, where nothing is impractical or unattainable, worthless or useless. It is here in the delicate balance of left brain and right brain, root chakra and crown chakra, positive and negative, day and night, yin and yang, male and female, straight and queer, here in this place of constantly shifting locations and languages that the New Mestiza finds the bridge she calls home.

The New Mestiza is both “Leonardo” (2007)—beloved of the wild creatures who radiates light from his left hand, a boy “so pure he floats on water,” as Wilson describes him, and the girl in “Transformation” (2004), whose rebirth happens in the liminal space between sea and sky where her fragmented selves blossom into a third element.





“In attempting to work out a synthesis,” Anzaldúa writes, “the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness” (*Borderlands* 102). The stargazer lily represents the element of earth, and signifies both the feminine principle that gives birth to her artistic creations and the spiritual power that connects us to the natural world, but it is also symbolic of the artist’s own name, Liliana, gazing at stars, growing stars. *Ella tiene su tono*.

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“NO BRIDGE LASTS FOREVER”: THE HYBRID NATURE OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA’S THOUGHT

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Abstract: Writing from Poland, I here focus on analyzing Anzaldúa’s work using three different methodologies: Postcolonial theory, from a Latin American perspective; gender studies, from the perspective of Third World women or women of color, and queer studies, underlying “her formative role in developing queer theory” (Anzaldúa, *Gloria* 5). This decision resulted from my deepest belief that, since Anzaldúa refused to be placed in one location or system and questioned traditional disciplinary thought, the only adequate approach to her oeuvre must be holistic. Operating within the system that has structured us to be followers and not leaders is a true challenge. Here I am speaking from my position as a woman raised in a very patriarchal culture and in a country with a legacy of a communist regime in which questioning was not encouraged but severely punished. So, Anzaldúa’s words in her essay “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” resonate well with my standpoint.

Keyword: Gloria Anzaldúa, Queer Theory, Disciplinary thought, Postcolonial theory.

My monograph dedicated to Gloria Anzaldúa, entitled „*Zmieniając siebie – zmieniam świat*” - *Gloria E. Anzaldúa i jej pisanstwo zaangażowanego rozwoju w ujęciu społeczno-kulturowym* (“*I Change Myself – I Change the World*” - *Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Her Writing of Committed Development in Its Socio-Cultural Context*), was published in January 2019. I focus on analyzing Anzaldúa’s work using three different methodologies: Postcolonial theory, from a Latin American perspective; gender studies, from the perspective of Third World women or women of color, and queer studies, underlying “her formative role in developing queer theory” (Anzaldúa, *Gloria* 5). This decision resulted from my deepest belief that, since Anzaldúa refused to be placed in one location or system and questioned traditional disciplinary thought, the only adequate approach to her oeuvre must be holistic. This is the approach that I use when I

teach her texts. It is also the approach that I have observed while participating in numerous conferences in which her work was discussed in relation to literary criticism, gender and border studies, sociology, cultural studies, ethnography, or disability studies. Consequently, when the invitation to participate in this Special Dossier came, I realized that its working title, “Transdisciplinary Approaches to Gloria Anzaldúa’s Thought,” perfectly synchronized with what I was trying to explain in my book, namely that Anzaldúa’s work can be used worldwide in several disciplines and with diverse groups of students, since it crosses ethnic, gender, class, national and internal borders. If one word was to describe her writing for me it would be hybridity.

Although transdisciplinarity is quite a fashionable word in academia at the moment, putting it in practice is not as easy as it would seem, especially in Poland. While writing my book, I have been asked on numerous occasions why I insisted on presenting Anzaldúa’s theory as a new holistic system of knowledge-formation instead of inscribing it into the existing theories—Derrida and his deconstruction were most commonly mentioned. When I tried to argue that, quoting Maria Lugones, I did not want “to follow the oppressor’s logic,” and that “not engaging in the mainstream discourse” was my tactic since I considered that Anzaldúa had created a totally novel feminist epistemology and theory of women’s writing, I encountered lack of understanding or disbelief, usually coming from the academics whom Anzaldúa described as “dependent scholars.” Despite different philosophical turns and all the technological advancements of the modern world, most people – also in academia, or maybe mostly in academia –still believe in the objectivity of knowledge and its rigid division into disciplines, and conceive progress and development in a Western linear sense. Of course, many scholars will object at this point. In several developing fields of study within the humanities and the social sciences, researchers are open-minded people whose work is critical of the existing body of knowledge and transdisciplinary approaches. I am fully aware of their work and deeply value and admire their criticism. Nonetheless, from my experience as an educator and researcher I still see this trend as a minor factor in the overall picture of the academic world, not only here in Poland.

I see this in the course syllabi, conference papers and discussions following them, as well as in the accepted proposals for publications or grants. I hear this in the informal conversations with my colleagues, yet very rarely on the public forum. On many occasions I was wondering why it is so. Then I realized that the key word here is trust. We have to trust ourselves to be able to question the authorities, to go beyond the existing concepts and to formulate ideas that nobody may like. Operating within the system that has structured us to be followers and not leaders is a true challenge. Here I am speaking from my position as a woman raised in a very patriarchal culture and in a country with a legacy of a communist regime in which questioning was not encouraged but severely punished. So, Anzaldúa's words in her essay "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers" resonate well with this standpoint:

Who gave us the permission to perform the act of writing? Why does writing seem so unnatural for me? I'll do anything to postpone it – empty the trash, answer the telephone. The voice recurs in me: *Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I could write?* How dare I even considered becoming a writer? [...] How hard it is for us to *think* we can choose to become writers, much less *feel* and *believe* we can. What have we to contribute, to give? (166)

Yet, what came after the transition into democracy in Poland and other Eastern European countries was the fascination with rough capitalism originating from neoliberal theory. At the same time, extreme individualism became a fundamental ideal for our changing societies. Why hasn't this worship for the individual venture followed in thinking and knowledge-formation? Why did we decide to accept and develop the existing epistemologies and systems? Where are the voices from the outside? Why do we decide to either diminish or ignore them? We were the Other for years, why don't we see the perspective of contemporary Otherness and instead cherish Western technology, thought and anthropocentrism? Looking for answers to all those questions I came to the conclusion that, even with a full awareness of the

atrocities of the Western world – colonialism, slavery, Holocaust, nuclear weapons, imperialism and patriarchy – we still want to join the club. We do not want to create a new community, to start a new association; we want to be given a pass to the old structures. We want to be the part of the “elite.” This realization came to me when I was reading Anzaldúa and working on my book on her.

Still, for me Anzaldúa is this “new Other” voice that I would like everyone to hear worldwide. She has created a number of concepts and theories that can be used in a number of disciplines. Her new feminist epistemology provides us with a possibility to create a new community of *almas afines* – first called El Mundo Zurdo, the left-handed world, and then Nepantla. Also, since positionality is extremely important to me, I need to answer a question “Who was/is Gloria Anzaldúa to me?” I never met her personally, which I deeply regret, yet she seems very familiar to me every time I open *Borderlands/La Frontera*, either to teach the book or just for pleasure. Furthermore, I felt especially close to her on the day I was standing by her grave with a group of her friends and acolytes on the fifth anniversary of her death in the Valle de la Paz Cemetery in 2009. That was during my first El Mundo Zurdo Conference. With its opening and closing spiritual ceremonies, the friendliness of all the participants and the good-hearted criticism, it was so different from any other conferences I had attended before. Nonetheless, I must admit, it took me some time before I fully recognized Anzaldúa’s greatness.

In the beginning, when a friend of mine recommended *Borderlands/La Frontera* to me when I was studying ethnic literatures as a part of my doctoral studies program at the University of Idaho in 2000, I bought the book, looked through it and found it weird, difficult and confusing with its mixture of languages and genres that none of the courses in my Literary Criticism M.A. program in Poland had prepared me for. Subsequently, I put it aside only to come back to it several years later when I had completed my Ph.D and was preparing to teach a course entitled “Introduction to Chicano/a Studies” at my alma mater, the University of Lodz in Poland. I felt that I had to include Anzaldúa in my syllabus. This time my reading of her oeuvre was so much different. By then I had a solid background in Mexican American history, the presence of Chicano/a culture in the USA—

my main focus of interest during my Ph.D—and had taught in the gender studies program. And I fell in love with Anzaldúa’s complexity, interdisciplinarity and wisdom. Yet, on top of that I felt *amor* and admiration for *la mujer* who managed to express all the pain related to being a poor Chicana lesbian woman in a hostile Anglo culture in such a wonderful poetic and mystic way. As a result, the following year I proposed a course for the M.A. students in the American and Gender Studies programs entitled “*La Frontera* and the New *Mestiza* Consciousness: Race, Ethnicity and Gender at the U.S. –Mexican Border,” mostly based on Anzaldúa’s book. A number of students enrolled in the seminar even though it was quite a challenge at that time, since we all shared one copy of the book—mine—and all other materials were the Xeroxed articles I had used for my Ph.D dissertation. Still, the course was successful and students enjoyed it a lot. Since then, I have been teaching it for years and every year together with my students, we discover something novel, thrilling, and inspiring about Anzaldúa’s work. Simultaneously, I started to attend El Mundo Zurdo conferences, made friends with Norma Cantú and other scholars and friends of Anzaldúa’s, and joined the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa, SSGA. Later, I decided to devote my tenure-track post-doctoral work to writing a book on Anzaldúa. Since her works have never been translated into Polish and not many Polish-speakers have heard about her, I resolved to write my book in Polish and include in it my own translations of Gloria’s poems and some fragments of her essays. In my book, I have tried to show how her work can be discussed and used in various disciplines by Polish scholars. In particular, I concentrated on gender studies, postcolonial theory, border studies, literary criticism, and queer theory. In this paper I will present the major theses and findings of my research on Anzaldúa’s writing in the light of the abovementioned theories. However, I need to emphasize that these approaches often overlap and intersect.

Feminist Theory

To approach Anzaldúa’s work from the perspective of feminist theory, I concentrated on the following thesis, formulated

by Chela Sandoval in her book *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000):

U.S. third world feminism developed an original form of historical consciousness... [and] provided access to a different way of conceptualizing not just feminist consciousness but oppositional activity in general: it comprised a formulation capable of aligning U.S. movements for social justice not only with each other, but with global movements toward decolonization. Both in spite of and because they represented varying internally colonized communities, U.S. third world feminists generated a common speech, a theoretical structure that remained just outside the purview of 1970s feminist theory, functioning within it – but only as the unimaginable. (Sandoval 41)

Obviously, we can read some of Anzaldúa's texts in the context of French feminist theory of *écriture féminine*, in relation to the works of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva or Hélène Cixous, since they all postulated writing from the body and rejected the phallogocentric order. However, I follow Anzaldúa's words in "Speaking in Tongues":

For the Third World woman, who has, at best, one foot in the feminist literary world, the temptation is great to adopt the current feeling-fads and theory fads, the latest half truths in political thought, the half-digested new age psychological axioms that are preached by the white feminist establishment. Its followers are notorious for 'adopting' women of color as their 'cause' while still expecting us to adapt to *their* expectations and *their* language. (167)

According to her, reading the works of feminist women of color in relation to French feminist thought is not fair, since it makes women's of color experience "invisible." For me, it first of all leads us only to a comparative perspective—to analyzing Anzaldúa's theories against somebody else's, in this case white

Western women who base their criticism on a dialogue with Western philosophers such as Freud, Lacan, Hegel, Descartes, Kant and Derrida. This does not give due appreciation to the knowledge formation process that takes place in Anzaldúa's texts, which, in my opinion, runs parallel to concepts and theories that were developing more or less at the same time.

When *This Bridge Called My Back* was first published in 1981, it not only offered a revisionist perspective, but was a real counterpoint to white feminism with its concentration on the political aspect of female writing and its consciousness-raising mission, which became the most well-known principles of the so-called US Third World feminism. Its major purpose was to give voice to those who had been silenced for too long, and to focus on differences between white women and women of color, on their origins, and on ways of coping with discrimination. Why, then, should Anzaldúa's theories be read against existing theories and not as coming from an original and much-needed voice of the excluded, who are capable of producing their own epistemology? The texts of women of color provide "another model for the self-conscious production of resistance" (Sandoval, 2000, 42). In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) this resisting self-conscious persona is the New Mestiza and, in the Introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul. Haciendo Caras. Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990) Anzaldúa writes:

A woman of color who writes poetry or paints or dances or makes movies knows there is no escape from race or gender when she is writing or painting. She can't take off her color and sex and leave them at the door of her study or studio. Nor can she leave behind her history. Art is about identity, among other things, and her creativity is political [...] Art is a struggle between the personal voice and language, with its apparatuses of culture and ideologies, and art mediums with their genre laws [...] Our survival depends on being creative. By sending our voices, visuals and visions outward into the world, we alter the walls and make them a framework for new windows and doors. (xxiv - xxv)

And in “Speaking in Tongues”: “Throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map and compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked – not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat” (173).

This is how Third World women can decolonize their experience and reject the existing binary opposition model in order to “leave [their] save Self, stop looking through white eyes and look through the eyes of the Other” (Anzaldúa, “En Rapport”142). Surely, Anzaldúa did this when she created *El Mundo Zurdo*, the left-handed world or when she wrote about the idea of New Tribalism: “Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include – what I call the new tribalism” (Anzaldúa and Keating 3). Thus, she has opened new spaces for feminist women coming from various parts of the world. This is where they can articulate their problems and discuss them vis-a-vis the dominating white voices. She wrote: “The knowledge that we are in symbiotic relationship to all that exists and co-creators of ideologies – attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values – motivates us to act collaboratively” (Anzaldúa and Keating 2). I have been able to observe this phenomenon for years since the moment I started teaching a course entitled “*La Frontera and the New Mestiza Consciousness: Race, Ethnicity and Gender at the US–Mexican Border*” now offered within the ERASMUS Mundus Master’s Degree in Women’s and Gender Studies Program (GEMMA), which is a unique program of excellence supported by the European Union and taught by a consortium of 6 European universities for international students from all over the world since 2006.

Students in this class—so far about fifty—were coming from twenty-three countries. At least twenty of them were other than white and some of them identified as bi- or homosexual. Some of them, because of their countries of origin in Latin America heard about Anzaldúa, but had never read her texts. For others this was the first encounter with Chicana literature. Teaching this course, I could observe how Anzaldúa’s thought resonated with my students’ experiences and expectations. They often commented on how they could not relate their own or their countries’ situations to white western theory written in English.

On the contrary, they could connect Anzaldúa's concepts with their own cultures and backgrounds. This is because El Mundo Zurdo created by Anzaldúa is an imagined space where people from various places and with different needs could co-exist side by side working together on change. She writes:

We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit *we are a threat*. Not all of us have the same oppressions, but we emphasize and identify with each other's oppressions. We do not have the same ideology, nor do we have similar solutions. Some of us are leftists, some of us practitioners of magic. Some of us are both. But these different affinities are not opposed to each other. In El Mundo Zurdo I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet. ("La Prieta" 209)

Therefore, these multicultural students who related Anzaldúa's ideas to the multiplicity and diversity of their own experiences were putting her theory of inclusivity "in the flesh" and building various bridges. For Anzaldúa:

To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. (Anzaldúa and Keating 3)

Postcolonial Theory

For several decades, postcolonial theory has become an influential intellectual current as it provided the tools to re-interpret global intercultural relations showing that older methods of studying history, literature and art were not sufficient to approach diasporas, hybrid transcultural and transnational identities and their representations. If we add to that assumption that postcolonial studies are interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, and that they cover a wide spectrum of problems focused on the relation between culture and power often contributing to the introduction of some social policies, it should not come as a surprise that they seem to be the ideal methodology to conduct research about minority groups, or about any area where the subordination/domination structure appears.

As Ania Loomba writes, postcolonial theory does not necessarily have to refer to a period directly after colonialism and spaces that were colonized. First of all, postcolonial theory stresses its “contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. Such a position would allow us to include [into the postcolonial discourse] people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African-Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as ‘postcolonial’ subjects although they live within metropolitan cultures” (Loomba 16). Moreover, according to Jorge Klor de Alva “postcoloniality should signify not so much subjectivity ‘after’ the colonial experience as a subjectivity of oppositionality to imperializing/colonizing (read: subordinating/ subjectivizing) discourses and practices. [...] postcoloniality must be understood when applied to United States Latinos or Latin American hybrids” (Cit. in Loomba 16). Klor de Alva offers a post-structuralist view at history in which “the lives of various oppressed people can only be uncovered by insisting that there is no single history but a ‘multiplicity of histories” (Cit. in Loomba 17). At the same time, we do not have to “know the entire historical and geographical diversity of colonialism in order to theorize, but rather, that we must build our theories with an awareness that such diversity exists” (Loomba 3). This is precisely the starting point for postcolonial studies from a Latin American perspective and precisely what Anzaldúa wrote in her essay “now

let us shift...the path of *conocimiento* ... inner work, public acts” from her last anthology *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002):

When creating a personal narrative, you also co-create the group/cultural story. You examine the description handed to you of the world, picking holes in the paradigms currently constructing reality. You doubt that traditional western science is the best knowledge system, the only true, impartial arbiter of reality. You question its definitions of progress, whose manifest destiny imperializes other peoples’ energies and snuffs out their realities and hopes of a better life. You now see the western story as one of patriarchal, hierarchical control; fear and hatred of women; dominion over nature; science/technology’s promise of expanding power; seduction of commerce, and, to be fair, a celebration of individual rights – freedom, creativity, and ingenuity. You turn the established narrative on its head, seeing through, resisting, and subverting its assumptions. Again, it’s not to denounce the culture’s old account – you must provide new narratives embodying alternative potentials. You’re sure of one thing: the consciousness that’s created our social ills (dualistic and misogynist) cannot solve them – we need a more expansive *conocimiento*. The new stories must partially come from outside the system of ruling powers. (560)

Accordingly, Enrique Dussel, one of the fathers of the philosophy of liberation, claimed that European philosophy based on eurocentrism defined modernity as a uniquely European concept which linked the Renaissance with the legacy of classical Greek ancient culture, and was later developed during the Enlightenment period and spread around the colonial world. This universal essential vision of modernity is rooted in the power structures under colonialism, and divides the world into the center—Europe—and the periphery—the colonies, the Third World, or the Global South—which is left behind in the economic and political sense. According to Dussel’s conceptualization of

what he calls “the myth of modernity,” this situation was possible since, “political and economic domination over the colonies was accompanied by the control of subjectivity and culture, and especially epistemology” (Kubiacyk 10). From this ontological stance, the “development of Europe” should be followed by all peoples of the world so that they could achieve social, technological, political and moral liberation. Instead, Dussel offers an alternative, which he calls “the planetary paradigm,” claiming that before 1492 (a crucial date for the beginning of modernity) other empires and cultures had already formulated their epistemologies. Although their development was often stopped by colonialism, it nonetheless cannot be denied. Therefore, the traditional Eurocentric idea of modernity should be deconstructed and replaced by “transmodernity,” which is “a global project of liberation, which allows the cultures that had been ignored to realize their epistemic projects in a constructive dialogue with Euro-North American modernity” (Kubiacyk 71).

This viewpoint was later on fostered by a group of Latin American thinkers—Walter Dignolo, Aníbal Quijano—creator of the concept of coloniality of power—and María Lugones (creator of the concept of colonial/modern gender system)—in the late-20th century, when they initiated a collective project called modernity / coloniality / decoloniality, which describes modernity as an epistemic frame and not a series of events or processes and in which modernity and coloniality are inseparable concepts. Decoloniality is an alternative non-Eurocentric way of thinking which goes against “great modern narrations—Christianity, liberalism and Marxism.” It is linked to the criticism of decolonization which involved only political liberation of the colonies and neglected epistemic sphere thus confirming the lower intellectual status of colonized peoples. Therefore, decolonization must be followed by decoloniality, which rejects the paradigm of modernity as a universal global model and instead invites us to discuss other subjects and cultural and epistemic localizations. This new critical approach should lead to a rejection of theories such as poststructuralism, postmodernism and those of the Frankfurt school of critical theory since they create, Ramon Grosfoguel’s words, an “Eurocentric criticism of Eurocentrism” (Kubiacyk 81). What is needed is a decolonial shift that may

contribute to the formation of a completely new paradigm “not the one that would be a continuation of the logic of all the others that already exist.” That is why the decolonization of thinking is a revolution ending with the “European patent for modernity,” which will cause the decolonization of knowledge (Kubiacyk 82-83). This turn is absolutely necessary since although traditional colonialism may have ended, global coloniality is still present at three levels: the structures of subjectivity, Eurocentric epistemology, and the Occidentalizing of lifestyle. Quijano calls this the “coloniality of power” frame, and points to the fact that it allowed Europe to conceive a homogeneous Humanities model. Meanwhile, from a Latin American perspective there existed “two complementary, but diverse paradigms” (Kubiacyk 88). Leopoldo Zea adds that European coloniality caused the “covering” of local native cultures by imposing on them this European paradigm as the universal one, and by empowering European languages as those in which true knowledge is formed. The effect is that knowledge created in other languages in the peripheries does not carry the same academic value and cannot aspire to the level of global universality. At the same time, decolonial theorists realize that the native past cannot be “restored,” and want its “reactivation” as “border thinking” (Kubiacyk 113). Therefore, Anzaldúa created her New Mestiza who:

cope 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 [...] she turns the ambivalence into something else. [...] The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in the healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of

dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (*Borderlands* 102)

In 2000, during a meeting at Duke University, the founders of the modernity / coloniality / decoloniality project created a journal called *Nepantla: Views from South*, which was “inspired mainly by but not limited to Latin American, Caribbean and US Latinidad perspectives,” and aimed at “fostering innovative reflection at the intersection of the humanities and the social sciences.” Interestingly enough, the journal’s title, as Walter Mignolo admitted, was taken from Anzaldúa’s philosophy and Pat Mora’s poetry. Both of them used the Nahuatl word *nepantla* to describe an in-between position such as the Aztecs’ was after the Conquest, in-between their traditions / system of knowledge and the progressing Spanish colonization. In a metaphorical sense Anzaldúa’s *Nepantla* conjoins ethnicity, sexuality, gender and nationality in a context of power-knowledge relations, challenging how these categories are inscribed in the theory of modernity/coloniality. *Nepantla* is not a utopian space. It symbolizes the South. In Bonaventura de Sousa Santos’s words, it becomes “a metaphor for the global suffering caused by the global capitalism” (Mignolo 2). Therefore, Anzaldúa’s epistemology should not be inscribed into the existing paradigm, although some of its concepts and elements can be interpreted as a continuation of the existing narrations. I believe that a much more adequate approach is to state that her vision of the world has originated in a different epistemic frame and it should be analyzed within it.

In 2003 the group modernity/coloniality/decoloniality met at the University of California Berkeley and one of the organizers of the meeting was Jose David Saldívar, one of the key researchers of the US-Mexican border. Both his presence and the use of Anzaldúa’s terminology prove close relations between the intellectuals from Latin America and Latino/a studies scholars in the United States. It results from the fact that still for many US Latinas/as, Latin American culture is a defining element of their identities. Moreover, Walter Mignolo in many of his texts refers

to Anzaldúa and the influence she had on his own research. In a conversation with Catherine Walsh included in their co-edited book *On Decoloniality* (2018), Mignolo says:

I read Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* shortly after it was published in 1987. At that point I did not know about Quijano, and Quijano's concept of *coloniality* was not yet born. It was a shock for many reasons, but the most important is that it brought me from the semiotic abstraction I was doing, down to earth: I realized that I was made "Hispanic" and I realize that in Argentina I was Italo/Argentinian. I understood, with the corresponding scale differences, what Fanon meant by *sociogenesis*. When you feel that you have been classified, that you are not what you think you are, you become part of the gaze of the classifier. The awareness of dwelling in the border brought immigrant consciousness and that affected my body. [...] Borderland and borderlines brought the concept of *pluritopic hermeneutic* in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, which I finished writing in 1993. Anzaldúa is in the introduction, next to Raimon Panikkar. The second shock was Anzaldúa's revamping the concept of *Nepantla* [...] So in *The Darker Side* I traced the line between *feeling nepantla* as a Nahuatl speaker was reported to say around 1550 and *nepantlism* in the twentieth-century borderland. It was a third shock how she brings the bleeding of the Third World grating with the First World, the bleeding of borderlands. But borderlands are not geopolitical; they are much more than that: they are racial and sexual [...] All that is what I took from Anzaldúa and carry with me, in my senses, since then. (Mignolo and Walsh 251)

Border Studies

Unquestionably, Gloria Anzaldúa is the author of the most famous quotes about the US-Mexican border, which according to her is "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against

the first and bleeds (*Borderlands* 25). Therefore, Border studies is the most obvious choice of a discipline within which we can approach her work.

The emergence and development of Border studies as a discipline is one of the most significant theoretical breakthroughs in American studies in the last decades. The Association for Borderlands Studies was founded in 1976. In the initial phase, it focused only on researching the US-Mexican border region, but later the scope of research was widened, and the border itself became a paradigm for studying the borderland regions globally. In the United States, the tradition of research on the meaning of the borderlands in the territorial, political and cultural sense goes back to the nineteenth century (the famous study by Frederick Jackson Turner entitled *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* comes from 1893), but contemporary Border studies have been enriched with new research areas. This was due to the ongoing processes of globalization, the merging of markets and cultures through trade, regional economic integration between neighboring countries, and the appearance of new forms of media coverage. It should also be noted that these processes take place on an unprecedented scale. However, despite this rapidly growing cultural unification, or maybe because of it, the problem of the existence of boundaries is still very up-to-date. Instead of disappearing, in many places around the world we are currently observing tendencies to strengthen borders, and these are not only political boundaries separating different countries, but also internal boundaries within particular nations: ethnic, religious, cultural, and so on. Therefore, I believe that the existence of borderland territories and the issues related to their functioning or the creation of tensions and conflicts is a significant challenge for the global leaders, and also an extremely interesting research area for scholars working on various academic fields.

In my view, the most general task of Border studies is to provide a holistic understanding of the territories currently referred to as borderlands. Border studies is a multidisciplinary research area that provides a theoretical and methodological model within contemporary cultural studies. Their scope includes the most current global socio-economic, cultural and even ecological problems. New issues discussed in Border studies are:

the emergence of new state entities and the related problems of population migration, economic and cultural integration and intensification of ethnic conflicts, connections between nation and state, and national security issues resulting from the opening or erasing of borders (Truett and Young, Calderón and Saldívar, Saldívar). While the ever-present myth of the American Dream still influences immigration to the US, especially from Mexico and Latin American and Asian countries, a similar myth is now prevalent in the European Union due to the huge influx of refugees from Africa and the Middle East (Chacón, Andreas). In this context, global discussions on immigration are much needed, and the institutionalized management of borderlands worldwide is a central concern. Since the US-Mexican border is probably the best researched and scientifically documented borderland region in the world, it provides a model to approach the topic and a set of the most characteristic and significant social and cultural processes to take into account, in order to challenge the long-established binary opposition categories (Ganster and Lorey).

Obviously, Gloria Anzaldúa is a crucial figure in the modern Border studies theory. When in 1987 she published her groundbreaking book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, she became one of the most representative and most often quoted researcher of the US-Mexican border, and soon an icon of the entire Border studies. Anyway, as she repeatedly emphasized, the task of her life was to create a new discourse about the borderlands and border subjects, which would include the voices of socially and culturally excluded people—women of color, homosexuals, and the poor from the so-called Third World. She writes:

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/ religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a

new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (*Borderlands* 103)

Demonstrating visionary sensitivity, Anzaldúa has long drawn attention to the problems and issues that are currently being discussed about borderlands in various academic disciplines. The geopolitical borderlands she depicts is an area where various systems of power, exploitation and oppression intersect—capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and the domination of the white man. Therefore, the New Mestiza identity created by her, the figure of a strong and self-conscious woman, breaking all barriers and limitations through the use of a feminist consciousness rising method, has become a model for many women around the world.

She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a *nahual*, able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person. She learns to transform the small “I” into the total Self. (*Borderlands* 104-5)

Anzaldúa’s concept of Borderlands is more than just a revisionist feminine vision of the geopolitical borderlands, in contrast with other canonical male depictions, and it has become a constant inspiration in my academic career.

Literary Criticism

Anzaldúa’s work is also very innovative and interesting in terms of its literary value. Generally, women of color writings enrich American literature with new voices and topics. In the case of Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* not only incorporates various genres (essay, poetry, autobiography) and languages

(code switching) into one work, but also introduces a novel form at that time—"autohistoria," which later on was developed in numerous works of other female authors, for example by Norma Cantú in her *Canícula: Imágenes de una niñez fronteriza* (1999). However, since a lot has been written on *Borderlands/La Frontera* and its artistic/literary merit, in this section I would like to focus on the less known part of Anzaldúa's writing, namely her stories for children.

Anzaldúa is the author of two books for children *Friends from the Other Side - Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993), and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman - Prietita y La Llorona* (1996). Both share the same protagonist—a young girl named Prietita. Anzaldúa considered writing these stories as a form of her activism and indeed they can be classified as a socially involved literature. Inspired by her own experience, this is how she remembers what pushed her to write for children of color:

When I started writing children's stories, I noticed that 99% of all children's stories were written by whites and that most stories about ethnic kids were written by whites. They write about the desert, Native Americans, hawks. Some of those stories are beautifully written, but their authors are appropriating the lives and spirits of a people that they tried to exterminate. They take the religion, the land – incarcerating Indians in reservations which are really concentration camps. Today whites are stealing the last things Indians have clung to – their art, their spirituality, and their religious traditions. Every white person who had written a children's book about Indian peoples displaced a Native person who could have written it. White publishers, the ones in power, publish the white people. Some of these whites may not even know they are excluding because of race – it may not be a consciously racist act, it may be just ignorance. Nonetheless, the writer of color gets rejected and the white rip-off writer gets published and gets rich off of marginalized people. (*The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 194)

For me, this quote proves her enormous sensibility to any type of exclusion and her constant need to react. The lack of children's literature in which the protagonists are other than white can be inscribed in the colonial discourse of power and domination over the conquered peoples whose lands and wealth have been taken away along with their cultures and traditions. Today this is often discussed as a phenomenon of cultural appropriation. Children need to grow with stories that have characters they can identify with, and that take place in familiar environments so that they can have appropriate role models and an appreciation for their culture. Therefore, what I especially value about Anzaldúa's stories is their bilingualism, their representation of Chicano/a myths and traditions (La Llorona, *curanderas*, and so on), and the fact that the illustrations for both books were created by renowned Latina artists—Consuelo Méndez, a painter from Venezuela, and Maya Christina González, a famous illustrator. Moreover, the topics addressed in the books—poverty, migration, fear of *la migra*, the friendship of children of diverse backgrounds—show that a society consists of various groups of people and all of them have their dreams and want to live peacefully. Differences should not divide us but teach us about the diversity that surrounds us.

Although both stories follow a well-known traditional pattern in children's literature—a struggle between good and evil during which a series of obstacles must be overcome—the problems that Prietita has to deal with are still very different from the ones known from the Disney movies. She fights with poverty and malnutrition, the fear of the Border Patrol agents and is concerned by her mother's serious disease. These are not the most common topics in children's literature—they are part of the everyday existence of children living in the borderlands. Thus, though in the fairy-tale scenery of nature, Anzaldúa's heroine does not overcome the typical obstacles of fairy tales, but faces the painful reality of many Latinx in the United States. Furthermore, to be successful, Prietita must break the law—help undocumented immigrants to escape, and enter private territory without permission. The girl then faces very difficult moral choices that are not always accepted by society and crosses different borders, thus becoming like Anzaldúa's adult heroines, a bridge

connecting different cultures and realities. Additionally, the existence of such literature is extremely significant for teachers of bilingual and bicultural children. At the same time, writing books for children is not highly valued by literary critics. This is not something that makes one a great acclaimed writer, thus, for me, the fact that Anzaldúa undertook this task proves that she really believed that theory must be put in the flesh.

Conclusions

In today's world, the fluidity of categories, disciplines, and borders is the everyday feature of our reality, and without realizing these interrelations, it is impossible to understand many problems. I think that the work of Gloria Anzaldúa is a perfect example of border crossing and of creating new conceptual territories such as *Borderlands* or *Nepantla*. Therefore, in my opinion, her work deserved a comprehensive study. Despite the fact that Anzaldúa's theory has recently gained significant popularity in the international academic environment, there is no monograph devoted to her life and activities, though she was one of the mother of women of color feminism and the creator of the alternative *Borderland* theory. Of course, there have been numerous biographical notes, collective studies and innumerable articles in edited volumes, mainly in English and Spanish, referring to her impact on various academic disciplines. Since she is not a very well-known writer in Poland, I decided to write my book in Polish to familiarize Polish scholars and students of various disciplines—not only from American studies or English philology—with her life, philosophy and oeuvre. Moreover, none of her works had been translated into Polish. My translations of several of her poems and large fragments of the prose section of *Borderlands/ La Frontera* are a significant contribution to Polish humanities, especially taking into consideration that most of her works are written combining English and Spanish. Translating *Borderlands* into a language in which codeswitching is not popular was a highly demanding task.

At this point I should also explain why both in my monograph and in this essay, I have not included in my analysis the previously unpublished texts that appear in *The Gloria*

Anzaldúa Reader (2009) and *Light in the Dark. Luz en lo oscuro. Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (2015). This was my deliberate and conscious choice because of the following:

- Both books were published posthumously
- Published texts were selected by AnaLouise Keating, but they represent just a fraction of her unpublished materials, held at the Benson Latin American Library at the University of Texas in Austin
- *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* has more literary content, while *Light in the Dark* is more theoretical, and was unfinished—some chapters had several versions, different introductions, were written in different periods of Anzaldúa's life, and AnaLouise Keating made all the editorial decisions

In sum, these new and posthumous publications deserve the attention of every researcher of Anzaldúa's work, but, in my opinion, they do not fit into my monograph. They deserve separate studies and one should very critically consider what publishing texts many years after her death means for the heritage of Anzaldúa's theory. Finally, since I devoted this essay mostly to describe my book on Anzaldúa, I use here the same arguments, texts and quotes that I used there.

To conclude, Gloria Anzaldúa saw potential in contradictions and in rejecting duality. She decided to give voice to women crossing all boundaries—the New Mestiza, and later the Nepantleras, those who live on the edge of society and their communities, and learn to juggle with meanings and to smuggle their ideas in-between borders. Through the reinterpretation of La Malinche, La Llorona and La Virgen de Guadalupe myths, Anzaldúa makes them strong figures, the role models for contemporary Chicanas, whose transgression allows for a rebirth and survival of indigenous femininities. From the concepts of Borderlands and the New Mestiza consciousness, Anzaldúa fluently moves to the concept of Nepantla, which, for me, is undoubtedly one of her most important theories. It was first formulated in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, but Anzaldúa constantly returned to it and was constantly developing it.

The idea of Nepantla combines pain—this is the area in-between where we lose something; a space full of chaos and

doubt—and possibilities—this is where we get *conocimiento* and undergo transformation. Crossing disciplinary boundaries, Napanla enriches Anzaldúa's epistemology with psychological, emotional and spiritual significance. Entering Napanla we begin to learn a new language and discover a new view of the world. With her emphasis on multiperspectivism and the many sides of her theoretical approaches, Anzaldúa proves how deeply she was convinced of the fluidity of our identity and all categories and definitions. She wrote:

In the new stories, postmodern science shifts its orientation, no longer holding itself to what can be validated empirically by the five senses. It acknowledges non-physical reality, inner subjective experiences, and spirit. The world from the depth of the sea to the highest mountain, is alive, intelligent, ensouled. In the fourth stage del camino de conocimiento you caught glimmers of this holistic story – a paradigm that's always served indigenous cultures. Beliefs and values from the wisdom of past spiritual traditions of diverse cultures coupled with current scientific knowledge is the basis of the new synthesis. The emerging narratives are multicultural. (“now let us shift” 561)

These symbiotic relations that Anzaldúa proposed between mind and body, between various groups of people, and between academic theory and spirituality are the major reason why I call her approach holistic.

Through life and her writing, Anzaldúa intended to create a coalition of people beyond any divisions. AnaLouise Keating highlights her search for the interconnectedness of all beings and underlines that this approach is already present in Anzaldúa's early work. In the Introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa wrote: “we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we—white black straight queer female male—are connected and interdependent” (iv). Keating adds that when we define ourselves as indispensable parts of a larger whole, then we feel compelled to act, and we feel that our actions, even if they seem small and insignificant in the face of the whole

world's problems, have a positive impact to strengthen the potential of the Other.

However, we must always remember that commonality is not the same as sameness, since it goes beyond and does not ignore difference. Anzaldúa was a thinker who refused to look only from one perspective and to adopt one-sided positions. Her concept of *conocimiento* is a way of connecting people over colors, ethnicity, sexuality and other differences, and an attempt to negotiate contradictions within race, gender and sexuality. According to her, the future belongs to those who will be able to cultivate sensitivity to difference, thus creating a hybrid consciousness that transcends the mentality of “us” versus against “Other.” *Nos/otras* do not polarize. There are no *otras*—we are all *nosotras*, and the task of Napatleras is to show ourselves the way to achieve this goal. Once we realize that all categories (race, class, gender) are usually overlapping systems of domination and oppression of neoliberal capitalism and patriarchy, we can start to create our own stories and, by treating each other's wounds with the help of native *curanderas* we contribute to our common vision—we work together to change the world.

This idea—changing ourselves as a way to contribute to changing the world—is especially close to me. Since, as Anzaldúa claimed, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the world faced a huge global crisis due to the dominance of economic globalization, technological consumerism, and neoliberal ideologies, we must question dominant systems of oppression and turn to subversive methods that may offer alternative values. We must take action to challenge the current status quo, and we have to do it individually, each of us every day. Challenging the official and conventional ways of looking at the world, we draw attention to elements and events previously overlooked and excluded. This allows us to better understand some of the activities and political and socio-cultural decisions. At the same time, we must accept the fact that everything that we have been taught so far and what was presented as objective knowledge may only be subjective creations of a given time, place and culture. Acknowledging this should be our task and this is where I stand following Anzaldúa's words: “Tu autohistoria is not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to shifting winds” (“now let us shift” 562).

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REVISITING MESTIZAJE AND ANZALDÚA'S BORDER

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This land was Mexican once was Indian always
and is. And will be again.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*

Abstract: This creative braided essay explores a key concept of Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa's work by focusing on spiritual, historical, and personal mestizaje. Written through a personal lens that includes a brief overview of the historical context, a testimonio, original poetry, and an update on the violence along the US Mexico borderlands, specifically along the Texas-Tamaulipas border, the essay seeks to reflect on the original work while weaving in current concerns such as the migrant crises and the violence instigated by the drug cartels. The three main threads—history, including key figures, poetry, and personal narrative—mirror those used in *Borderlands*. Ultimately, the essay asks that we do “work that matters” as Anzaldúa urged us to do.

Keywords: *Borderlands/La Frontera*, mestizaje, US-Mexico Borderlands, migrant crisis, border violence, spirituality, testimony

A key concept for Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, mestizaje, becomes the starting point for this paper; it is not a static mestizaje she is envisioning—it is ever changing and fluid. Anzaldúa's insistence that the we, as border dwellers, possess knowledge, embodied and acquired, that our ways of being in the world, our culture, indeed, our very essence is firmly rooted in the indigenous allow me to then extrapolate the key concepts for developing a 21st century response to both the literal borderlands and for the translation of our worlds, of our borderlands. Using this structuring idea, I have constructed this braided essay around a central focus using a hybrid genre that weaves together poetry, narrative, and testimonio. Moreover, I weave the thematic strands: historical and geographical context, Anzaldúan thought (border, queer theory), create a kind of update on the current border realities theorizing border translation, and finally, I pose a challenge to continue doing our work, continue Anzaldúa's legacy

doing work that matters, for indeed, as she wisely stated, “vale la pena, it is worth the pain” (Anzaldúa, “Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound” 102).

In recent years as I contextualize and locate any discussions of Anzaldúa, I begin in 1325. The founding of Tenochtitlan, after all, is part of her book with a historical context and often in my pláticas with her, we would talk about that vague indigenous that as mestizas we inherit in our blood and in our history. Often taking up opposite positions in terms of which indigenous group would be more relevant for tejanas to invoke, we talked about the history but also the affinity, cultural and physical, we perceived in our own lives. During these discussions with Anzaldúa I questioned her insistence on using Aztec mythology to anchor her ideas. Why would you go to the Aztec deities when we in South Texas were far removed and had our own indigenous lineage through the Coahuiltecan groups—the Karankawa, the Comecrudo, and the various Taumaulipéc bands? She was insistent and argued that the Aztec cosmology not only served her purposes best, but that indeed the bands in Texas were part of the larger indigenous migrations that had happened for centuries. It was after attending the unparalleled exhibit of códices at the Museo de Antropología where I saw folio 2 of the *Códex Mendoza* that shows the Aztec arrival in what is now Mexico City from Aztlán that I understood her choices.



Image 1. From the Codex Mendoza

It was a humbling experience to see the work of scribes, the tlamantinime, from over 500 years ago. As a quick recap, the codex shows the Aztec's trek south as they sought, honoring Huitzilopochtli's command. The deity urged them to leave Aztlán and establish their kingdom where they found an eagle perched atop a nopal with a serpent on its beak—planting the seeds of our layered mestizaje as the bands of Nahuatl-speaking ancestors traveled south; it is the mestizaje that Anzaldúa complicates even more. No, our Coahuiltecan groups left no such record, at least none that survives. So, I have come around, although I still honor and acknowledge the first people of the land that is now Texas, that according to further study did indeed predate the founding of Tenochtitlan.

As Chicanas, we are deterritorialized and detribalized and we are the inheritors of that violence, a violence that is present with the Spanish conquest and continues to this day with the drug cartels. I am not going to delve into the roots of the violence, suffice it to say that the severe vestiges of the violence remain. Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's book, *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (2016), lays out the historical and cultural shifts that result in the claims to and denials of indigeneity. But we must remember that Anzaldúa although grounded in the ideas of Indigenous/European mestizaje includes more than such concepts; she calls for a widespread notion of the "new mestiza." The idea of "mestizaje" undergirds her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*; a mestizaje that is multivalent and includes among others the spiritual, linguistic and cultural mestizajes scholars have analyzed. Perhaps one of the prime examples of spiritual mestizaje is la Virgen de Guadalupe (Delgado 24-25, 201-3).

In Anzaldúa's text, La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche take center stage to define the spiritual and linguistic mestizajes. The apparitions in 1531 of the Virgen de Guadalupe sowed seeds of a folk Catholicism, a religious and spiritual shift that remains until today in so many forms—the matachines danza performed in December in her honor, for instance. She is also ubiquitous in home altars (ofrendas) and traditions many in our communities practice. The indigenous roots for many birth and funeral rituals exist along with other quotidian cultural practices

that persist, such as the morning ritual of sweeping and watering the front yard—a practice my grandmother and later my mother held onto until they were physically unable to perform the task. The dark-skinned Madonna that is Guadalupe, marked with indigenous symbols along with sexual and cultural marks on her dress reveals a conundrum. Is she really an Aztec goddess? Tonantzin? Coatloapeuh? Or is she a Christian icon that is being used to convert the indigenous to Catholicism? For Anzaldúa, Guadalupe is a symbol of Mexicanness but also of the feminist spirituality that is at the core of her thinking, rooted in indigenous thought. Anzaldúa similarly treats the story of La Malinche in her discussion of the language of the border, a language that mixes registers and codes from formal to informal English and Spanish and the mix of both, Tex-Mex. The idea that Malinche, functioning as interpreter for the conquerors, betrays her people serves Anzaldúa as a springboard for a parallel discussion of how her culture betrays her. In Anzaldúa's worldview, culture is both nurturing and cruel. The patriarchal closed nature of the Rio Grande Valley impels her to leave seeking escape from “las culturas que traicionan” (15). In Chapter 2 of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa lays out the various ways she feels the home culture is inhospitable for her as a woman, a feminist, a lesbian, and twice claims: “Not me sold my people but they me” (21, 22). Such a claim resonates with the idea that, upon her father's death, Malinche's family sold her to another indigenous group.

The Spanish legacy of violence against the indigenous remains. My poem, “She Was a Bobolo Grandmother” arose from the desire to document that history:

SHE WAS A BOBOLO GRANDMOTHER

She was a Bobolo grandmother
en el Nuevo Santander
who in her grief self-immolated,
like the Vietnamese monks and nuns.
But in the 1700s, no TV camera recorded
her death at her own hands,
protesting the invasion.
The Spanish took it as proof of
the savagery, the inhumanity.

The others, her own people,
wanted her to succumb,
to give in. Pretend to believe
in the foreign god.
But her grandchild laid dead.
The tall foreign soldier had taken the infant
from her daughter,
smashed the tiny piece of her heart
against a tree, then raped her daughter.
How could she
live in a world where
such things happened?
So she set herself afire
calmly sitting at the very spot that would become
the center plaza of that river
town in Nuevo Santander,
the flames burning away her pain, her hate.
No marker honors her death
and no one knows her name,
but the historian chronicled her death,
and thereby she lives.¹

In Anzaldúa's worldview, the Spanish wrought such pain that we are still subject to its vicissitudes over 500 years later. We have a chronicle of the devastation and of the characters in the story—La Malinche, the Aztec kings, Hernán Cortés and the warriors and soldiers. The anonymous authors of The Lienzo de Tlaxcala left a crónica that documented the violence and the roles of the key players like Malintzin, later Doña Marina, now known as La Malinche.

¹ First published in the journal Kweli, May 23, 2018. <http://www.kwelijournal.org/poetry-1/2018/5/21/she-was-a-bobolo-grandmother-by-norma-elia-cantu>.

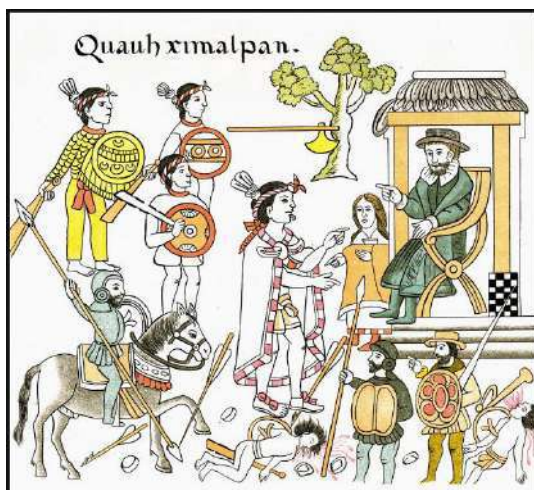


Image 2. From the Lienzo de Tlaxcala: Moctezuma, Malinche and Cortés

Malinche’s presence in our history is emblematic of the hybridity but also of a genealogy that goes back further to other women in the Pre-Conquest era that Anzaldúa does not mention. Malinche is not the only indigenous woman to have had agency and whose story survives. Anzaldúa most probably did not know of the poet, Macuilxochitzin; hence, she did not include her. I consider her the first feminist of the Americas; and she merits inclusion in the genealogy. She was born in 1435, daughter of the warrior Tlacaelel. Her poems chronicle the battles in a pre-contact life where war was a constant and battles determined the Aztec empire’s dominion. The reason I consider her a feminist is that she inserts women into the narrative poems, gives the women agency and a central role in the narrative. Here is an excerpt of the end of the poem known as “Song of Macuilxochitl” translated by León-Portilla from the original into Spanish and later into English and published in his book *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World*:

That one [Axayácatl] went in search of his
 women
 he said to them:
 “Prepare a breechcloth and a cape,
 give this to your man.”

And Axayácatl called out:
“Bring the Otomí
who wounded me in the leg.”
The Otomí was afraid,
he said:
“Now truly they will kill me!”
Then he brought a large piece of wood
and a deerskin,
with this he bowed before Axayácatl.
He was full of fear, the Otomí,
but then his women made supplication for him to
Axayácatl. (Leon-Portilla 185)

Drawing from the indigenous to the colonial period, in *Borderlands* Anzaldúa lays a framework for a mestizaje that emerges as a defining positionality vis a vis the relationship between conqueror and conquered, between man and woman, between the wealthy and the destitute, between the haves and have nots. I am not surprised then, that Anzaldúa wrestled with the relationships to these iconic figures, Guadalupe and Malinche, legacies that Chicanas embraced when they found them in books or in stories in the oral tradition.

Anzaldúa refers to other religious figures such as Santa Teresa de Ávila and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. I focus on the latter as she most directly impacts Chicanas. Anzaldúa discusses the colonial period and cites Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the 10th muse. Due to the Eurocentric English-only pedagogy of Texas public schools, I was unaware of her work; she was one of the first if not the first Latin American or Mexican writers I read—and not for a class—*La Décima Musa*. A gift for my 21st birthday, the collected works opened up a world to me. I faced a difficult Spanish with odd lexical and syntactical structures that took a while to discern, to get used to, but still I persisted and grew to love the style and tone of her work. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the second feminist poet of Abya Yala as the Guna call this continent.² As mentioned

² In recent years, I have heard this term used widely in reference to the southern hemisphere of the Americas by global south scholars. As far as I can tell, it is the equivalent of North American indigenous people referring to North America as Turtle Island.

earlier, the first was Macuilxochitzin who was writing about women being out on the battlefield in the mid fifteenth century before the Europeans set foot on the Americas. Sor Juana planted feminist seeds in her writings where she questioned the societal structures of her time and insisted on respect for women's value due to their intellectual pursuit. These seeds are still bearing fruit as we engage in spiritual activism.

Anzaldúa's portrayal of these women in *Borderlands* recovered their roles in our historical narrative that had all but erased them. It was an attempt to re-inscribe them back into our cultural history. Recovering their legacy was a way to "clear up" the path, making it difficult for many in the Chicano movement to deny our place at the table, as it were. Anzaldúa had been making waves since the 1970s; I recall a National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) meeting in Ypsilanti where she presented but under awful conditions—her presentation was moved and the new room not posted so many of us missed it. The homophobia of some members and leaders of the organization at the time, I suspect, had something to do with it. Anzaldúa took it all in stride; Just keep doing the work, she advised. The changes in NACCS have shown that she was right as more and more LGBTQ+ panels and presentations have appeared on the annual meeting programs, and the Lesbian and Joto caucuses have been added. Furthermore, NACCS provided a springboard for other organizations such as the Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) and the Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS).

The Chicano Movement of the 1960s had multiple aims and manifestations. Inheritors of a legacy fomented by the vestiges of a militarized border and continuous and egregious discriminatory practices, Chicanx and Latinx scholars and students followed the activism of earlier generations. As a student at the University of Texas in Austin in the 1970s, Anzaldúa was well aware of the Movement. She was well aware that Tejanxs on the infamous date—February 2, 1848—became a doubly colonized people in what is now the United states. She recognized the significance of this date and of the war in the formation of our

identity as Mexicanxs in the United States. The land was borderless at the time; the borders between the 16th and 19th centuries were fluid and non-monitored. The indigenous nomadic groups roamed freely. In 1821, when the Mexican state is established, the border, as it were, did not exist—all the territory claimed by Spain at the time becomes Mexican at the end of the War for Independence. A look at the US military incursions during the US-Mexican War that culminate in the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848 indicate that the US had one goal and one goal only—to take over the land claimed by Mexico. It is this colonizing project that Anzaldúa chronicles in *Borderlands* and that informs her view of war, of land, of colonizing empires. Also, it is this history that impels her vision of a land without borders.

The border is not just one sided; we must also consider the impact of US policies on Mexican residents along the “franja fronteriza” the swath of land on both sides of the river, or the línea. Anzaldúa’s historical overview of the takeover, becomes personal as she recalls the loss of land. She points to the violations, the way the Anglo incursions take over with impunity. The land is at the center of the conflict and even after the war, the egregious violations including lynchings, murders, and rapes continued well into the 20th century. Her poems in *Borderlands*, especially “We Called them Greasers” are a good example of how aware she was and how she felt about it, so much so that she presents a graphic and disturbing narrative from the point of view of the violator.

In fact, the situation in the early 20th century iba de mal en peor as thousands of refugees fled into the US fleeing the violence and poverty that was the result of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. On September, 1911 my hometown of Laredo, Texas was the site of a gathering of over 400 delegates who met to protest the situation. El Primer Congreso Mexicanista, met in Laredo from September 14 to 22. The call for the gathering came from Clemente Idar, whose family owned and published *La Crónica de Laredo*. The motto for the delegates was “Por la Raza y para la Raza.” This story too is absent from *Borderlands*. I don’t know why Anzaldúa did not include it in *Borderlands*, but can surmise that she either didn’t know about Jovita and the Idar family or chose to not include it in her analysis of the border historical record for other reasons. Jovita Idar, Clemente’s

daughter, a school teacher who left the classroom to work with her family newspaper quickly emerged as a leader of feminist groups, such as the Liga Femenil. The 400 delegates planted seeds for the *escuelitas*, the little schools, as well as for what would become the struggle for civil rights with the Chicano Movement. Anzaldúa in the 1970s in Austin, nurtured and cared for that seed that had been there since the early part of the twentieth century; subsequently, through her writing, she continued to nurture that struggle, for that movement that signified hope for a better life, a revolution, perhaps. In Austin in the 1970s, the dream of merging our knowledge was forged in the midst of the complex politics of the homophobic patriarchal *Movimiento*. The gay and lesbian supporters often stayed quiet or out of the nitty gritty organizing, yet they were right there in the midst of it all. There when the massacre happened in 1972 at the moratorium in Los Angeles, there at the fight for justice in Colorado, there for the establishment of LGBTQ organizations, including Stonewall. Silent but present.

From all this life experience, embodied knowledge, *conocimiento* born en sangre propia, Anzaldúa forged and honed the ideas that would first appear in *This Bridge Called My Back* and later in *Borderlands* and in essays like “now let us shift... the path to *conocimiento*... inner work, public acts.” However, it was the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1981 that finally gave voice to the Chicana—and other radical women of color—so that they could be heard.

In *Bridge*, Cherrie Moraga and Anzaldúa, as coeditors, gathered the writings of lesbians of color, radical women; we owe them a debt of gratitude. *This Bridge* focuses on “women of color,” radical women of color for a reason—to resist and speak back to the erasure of our indigenous, our Chicana, and black histories, the denial of our ancestors’ worth, their lives. We remember the closing words of Macuilxochitzin’s canto cited earlier: “But then his women appealed to Axayácatl.”

So the women of *This Bridge* spoke up, they appealed and were heard. They were witnesses, and their words, their ideas were taking shape within the very institutions they sought to dismantle. The educational system, the publishing industry, the spaces where

women of color, Black women, Chicanas, and other Latinas had been absent, erased and silenced.

The ideas and concepts in *Borderlands* did not spring up like magic overnight and to believe they did is naïve and uninformed. Going through the archives of the manuscript we can see a clear progression from the poems, to the essays, and in a recursive dance the edits flow both ways. From poems, to essay and from essay to poems...the arduous and painful project of writing and editing and defining key concepts evolves over weeks, months, and sometimes, years. Joan Pinkvoss tells of the intense writing time that produced *Borderlands* and Anzaldúa's grueling process of creation, a process she herself explains in interviews, letters, and essays (Personal communication). She points out that writing is not a luxury, it is a need. Basing her ideas on indigenous epistemologies, she notes that writing is difficult but necessary.

Undoubtedly one of the most unrecognized aspects of *Borderlands* is its power to heal and call out the need for healing by going to the dark, the unsavory and unpleasant history. "She's so angry," some students say when first encountering Anzaldúa; they find it hard to accept that it is our reality as denizens of the border, an often violent and inhospitable land. After teaching one of the most disturbing poems in the collection this poem came to me. I was devastated for days, feeling that I had tapped what Anzaldúa calls the Shadow Beast.³ I was not sure I had surfaced unscathed from the cenote of my feelings of anger and frustration at the helplessness. The border these days is a ship in a tumultuous sea ravaged by winds and rains and lightening ever threatening. The violence against women continues to rise although the attention generated by the femicides at the El Paso/Juarez border has subsided. Living in Laredo and now in San Antonio, I know the reality of the current violent climate. My niece's friend who worked with her at Victoria's Secret disappeared when she and her boyfriend went across for dinner. Many blame the victim: "Andaba mal," they whisper, insinuating that she was into drugs or dealing or both. But those who knew her attest to her innocence.

³ Anzaldúa writes about the concept of the Shadow Beast in *Borderlands* as she explains the idea of the self as a complex entity that includes a dark or negative aspect that can spur action.

Maybe her mistake was agreeing to go with her boyfriend across, something all of us used to do without thought or fear. But, what about the hundreds others disappeared, attacked? The young boys who are never seen again. My mother's neighbor tells of her 14-year-old who didn't come home from school one day. Just like that. Her cousin who has friends who have friends advised her to let things be. To mourn her son and don't ask any more questions. The veiled threat is obvious and the criminal justice agencies in town—the local police, the sheriff's department, the state patrol, and so on—do not act or do so minimally. These are facts. And there is a shroud of silence covering it all. No one dares denounce, no one really knows whom to denounce.

So when this, my dark story, emerged, I didn't want to write it. Reminiscent of Anzaldúa's "We call them Greasers," as I said, the poem came from somewhere dark, and I resisted. In March 2019, during the Question and Answer period after a reading from my creative work at Hostos Community College, a student gently but honestly asked me why I did not write about the ugly things that go on along the border. Sheepishly I answered that I just did not want to go there. Shortly after that, however, this poem, entitled "The Dark Story", emerged. The point of view of the narco is harsh and reveals the evil that such violence clothes:

THE DARK STORY

I knew she'd come
Willingly when I saw the fear in her eyes
The glint of my knife
She cried then screamed
A shrill cry an animal.
But I couldn't hear.
I went first, then the boys. Boys? Men really.
Some older than my father, others younger than
my son.
She's to blame. Hanging out with that wimp over
there
Such a mamón
Se cagó de miedo
When he realized who we were, who I was.
Knew what was coming. He Knew.

Didn't kill him right away. No.
Made him suffer. Made sure he watched
It all. The small cuts to her body. How her nipples
Were sliced like cutting cheese. JuanJo claimed
them
He'll make earrings and wear them some day.
The boys, well not really boys, some men had at
her
We made sure he watched it all. The physical pain
Ain't all, you know. Not good enuf for him. El
dedo!
We cut off his fingers too. One by one. El dedo
Then his tongue. His penis. Some of the boys—
not boys really, some are men
Enjoyed that most of all. The so-called fortune of
the traitor
Who talked too much
Who talked to those he shouldn't have
We know everything.
No se nos pasa nada.
Nadie no not no one None
Said a word. After that pretty little girl was gone
Her light gone. Her whimpering finally gone
She's gone. So is he, they said.
Al tanque, I commanded. They obeyed
And looked away as I walked
Past them got in my black Escalade
Drove away. (Previously unpublished)

Unlike the 1970s and early 1980s, the detention centers run by the US government that house thousands of people—men, women, and children from all over the world, today's centers are even more egregious in their violation of human rights. The migrants whose trip “al norte” ends when thwarted by the US Border Patrol has layers and layers of policy and humanitarian violations. These days, many migrants plead asylum at the border. They have traveled hundreds or thousands of miles to present themselves at the border seeking asylum only to find that they have entered into a twilight zone of legality and confusion, an

already dysfunctional system made more so by policies imposed by the current administration in Washington DC. Two such detention centers are located in my hometown of Laredo, Texas: The Rio Grande Detention Center and the Laredo Detention Center, run by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), a privately-owned, for-profit organization that has been there for at least 30 years. The Rio Bravo facility was not yet operational when I moved away from Laredo in 2000. Located south of the city in the municipality of Rio Bravo so I know very little about it other than it is more isolated. But the other one, commonly known as CCA facility has been there since the early 1980s.

Back then, in the early 80s, the situation was already bleak as hundreds of migrants from Central America and elsewhere were processed or held there indefinitely. They sought refuge from the violence and the economic hardship, made the long trek north. Those unlucky enough to be caught were housed at the CCA facility. I and other community activists took it upon ourselves to hold the authorities accountable for their actions. I remember a few cases and the violations of human rights. We formed a chapter of Amnesty International to try to protect ourselves and to connect to a larger network. Some of the cases we dealt with have stayed with me. The young newlyweds who were fleeing Sri Lanka arrived one winter; they were utterly desperate, cold, hungry, certainly not dressed for the trip. They had been traveling for a week—it was their honeymoon. The women were my particular concern. Many a time we would take socks and other clothing to them and for their children—yes, children were housed in the facility together with the women. One spring, the women put on a play they had written based on a song. The Central American women who had worked in political actions in their home countries were especially good at organizing themselves. We did little more than document their presence and work with Amnesty International through a group we organized called the Refugee Assistance Center where we sometimes got local attorneys to do pro bono work. I recall a lesbian couple who had been threatened in their town; they traveled two months from Guatemala by foot and had suffered humiliation and even at the center were shunned by the other women. I remembered all of this work in the summer of 2014 as the rise in unaccompanied minors

grew to unprecedented numbers. Back in the 80s few cases of unaccompanied minors came up. But now, thousands were coming to our nation's southern border and exposed the severity of immigration policies that criminalize children.

Sadly, the current crisis is not new. The depth and intensity, however, have escalated into the nightmarish separation of families so that children have been "lost" and may never be returned to their parents because many of them have been deported to their country of origin or because the government has no idea of where the children are. As of June 24, 2019, between 2018 and 2019 at least seven children have died in temporary detention centers away from their families (Pompa) The damage is irrevocable. In thinking of the current border situation my own writing practice has nudged me to write a few aphorisms.

When immigrants travel, the world shifts.
The moon remains the same whether one sees a
rabbit or a man.
So, the migrant is the same whether at home,
traveling, or in a new place.

¿De dónde vienes? ¿A dónde vas? Questions one
must not ask an immigrant lest one cause pain.
Like a turtle the immigrant carries home on her
back. We are all immigrants.
Immigrants know the sorrow of leaving behind,
leaving behind all that is loved, all that is
cherished.
Immigrants know the joy of coming home when
they return. If they return.
Dead bodies under a Texas Arizona California
New Mexican sun attest to the desperation of the
immigrant fleeing violence.

And so in the 90s....and even in the 21st century...we
continue the struggle; we march, we insist that injustice has no
place in our country. We must not allow despair to set in in the
face of calumny. We deserve better...those children ripped from
their mother's arms deserve better. Those who have died in

detention centers deserve better. The thousands fleeing violence and poverty deserve better. And while the current administration's policies may make me sad and angry I know we must carry on; we must remain ever vigilant.

Repeatedly in her work, Anzaldúa invokes the power of art to heal, to transmit knowledge. In early May 2019, I was at a Matachines gathering in Laredo; the following week I was at the American Indians of Texas's Flor de Nopal/Cactus Blossom Gathering in San Antonio. In both I was reminded of the healing of our traditional arts, of the dance traditions and the drumming traditions that heal, we call on our indigenous selves to bring healing, to bring hope. I thought back to Anzaldúa's insistence on the knowledge we carry because of our indigenous roots in the Americas.

Matachines Dance
The drum beats incessantly
Calling forth the matachin dancers
They gather and prepare to dance.
To heal.

Among the many topics that surfaces for the 21st century border reality is immigration, especially the immigration debacle under the current U.S. administration whose policies result in egregious violations of human rights.

Border Horror
El viento sopla y las urracas caw in the afternoon
Foreboding omens of children snatched from
their parents' arms.
On the TV screen, a child yells out a phone
number
While in the background
Children crying only like children can
A cacophony of calling,
Calling out for their mother.
Mama. Mama. Mama.

But the mother's arms remain empty
Her eyes full of tears. A father's guilt:

His daughter gone.
Finally a phone call and tears and recriminations
Por qué?
Solo quiero ir a casa.
Estar contigo.

In these difficult times, I often ask myself what would Anzaldúa say? What would she write? I then go to her piece in the book on 9/11 co-edited by Clara Lomas and Claire Joysmith (92-103). In that last essay published before her transitioning exactly 15 years ago this year, I find solace as I perceive a steady hand at the helm navigating the tumultuous and wild time at the aftermath of our collective hell. Her words ring out potently and aptly address the need for equanimity. It is the *mestizaje* that will save us, the union of all our disparate selves, the recognition that we are indeed all connected. In her writings as well as in her practice, Anzaldúa was all about inclusion, noting the interconnectedness among all people. In my view, this interconnectedness is best exemplified in her thought by the way she held *mestizaje* as the key metaphor for the self but not just the individual, not just the queer, not just the Chicanas, not just the feminists, but the entire human family. She calls us to recognize our essence as one. In her articulation of the concept of *mestizaje*, especially in her ideas of the “new *mestiza*” I see a theorizing that comes from a deep connection to the universal truths found in her philosophy, a philosophy that transcends the site specificity of her work on the US-Mexico borderlands to a more universal call to unite and work for social justice, a call to create what she called, *El Mundo Zurdo*, the space where everyone could live in harmony and peace. But how to achieve it?

Ultimately, the message is clear and strong: We must resist forces that work against such a vision. We must find the light in the dark, the good in the evil. We must vanquish the collective shadow beast, confront it and rise above it, knowing that it too can trap us and lead us to actions that are divisive, that separate us, that impel individual self-centric work. We must resist and return to Anzaldúa’s ideas of collaboration by “doing work that matters, *vale la pena*.”

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**“ALMAS AFINES,” “KINDRED SPIRITS,”
LIKE-MINDED SOULS:
AN ANZALDÚAN MEDITATION ON IDENTITIES AND
TRANSFORMATION**

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Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river—a process. Contained within the river is its identity, and it needs to flow, to change to stay a river—if it stopped it would be a contained body of water such as a lake or a pond. The changes in the river are external (changes in environment—river bed, weather, animal life) and internal (within the waters). . . . Changes in identity likewise are external (how others perceive one and how one perceives others and the world) and internal (how one perceives oneself, self-image). People in different regions name the parts of the river/person which they see.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer the Writer”

It’s crucial that we choose attributes to define ourselves beyond racial, gender, sexual, and class stereotypes. For me, being Chicana is not enough—nor is being queer, a writer, or any other identity label I choose or others impose on me. Conventional, traditional identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in jaulas (cages) that limit the growth of the tree of our individual and collective lives. We want fresh terms and open-ended tags that portray us in all our complexities and potentialities. When I think of “moving” from a sexed, racialized body to a more expansive identity interconnected with its surroundings, I see in my mind’s eye trees . . . with interconnected roots (subterranean webs).

—Gloria Anzaldúa, manuscript draft

Abstract: Unlike those readers who passionately describe Anzaldúa according to such categories, as, say, Chicana lesbian, tejana queer, or feminist, I’m sometimes tempted to swing to the other extreme: to entirely reject all labels and describe her in unmarked terms—as “author,” “philosopher,” “theorist,” or “creative writer.” Yet to exclusively describe her in unmarked ways is really no better than locking her into very specific identity categories, for to do so ignores those times and texts where Anzaldúa embraces the labels and self-defines very specifically, as Chicana and/or feminist and/or lesbian, and so on. Welcome to my dilemma. The labels generally used to describe Anzaldúa are too limited, but they are not entirely incorrect. I can neither reject nor embrace them. And so I wonder: how can I describe Anzaldúa in ways that acknowledge her groundbreaking work in identity-related fields without freezing her into these identities which she herself

questioned and (*at least sometimes*) outgrew? This is my unresolved dilemma and what this paper is about.

Keywords: Gloria Anzaldúa, Gender, Identity, Self-identity, Queer Identity.

For over twenty years, Gloria Anzaldúa's work has been one of my key research topics and fields of expertise; Anzaldúa herself was my collaborator, close friend, and "writing comadre" during her life (*and now, after her passing, she salutes me from the other side, visits me when the borders thin, inspires me always*).¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, given my research, I'm regularly asked to write encyclopedia articles about Anzaldúa's life, achievements, and/or contributions to various fields (literary studies, LGBTQ theory, American studies, Chicana/o studies, and so on). These requests contain specific, identity-based assumptions about Anzaldúa, generally describing her with words like these: Chicana or "Mexican American lesbian feminist writer, poet, scholar and activist."² Because encyclopedias and other reference books play an important role in ensuring an author's continuance into the future, I'm happy to provide the requested entries whenever my schedule allows. However, I stumble over the descriptions of Anzaldúa herself: How can I describe her in ways that honor her complexity? Regardless of the terms used, the labels seem too narrow. As my opening epigraphs indicate, Anzaldúa viewed individual and collective identities as fluid, changing, and resistant to fixed labels and descriptions. While she did not entirely reject the social identity categories used to describe her, she didn't fully accept them.

1. Throughout this essay, I use italicized parenthetical statements to push the boundaries of my ideas, to make tentative, speculative statements—statements which sometimes (*like this time*) might strike some readers as odd, provocative, and/or overly bold; other times these italicized parenthetical comments might seem to contradict what I've said elsewhere in the essay. By thus interweaving my own multiple perspectives, I aspire to enact frictional knowledge production.

2. This description was given to me by an Oxford University Press editor, who invited me to write an entry on Anzaldúa for a project.

There's a certain irony in Anzaldúa's unwillingness to embrace these categories. After all, she attained her stature as an author and theorist through her identity-related work (especially her challenges to the erasure of US women of colors, Chicanas, lesbians, and other marginalized groups), and her publications often centralize very specific identity-related issues. Her first co-edited, multigenre collection, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), broke new ground in its attention to US women of colors' erasure in and potential contributions to contemporary feminist movement; this book has become iconic in its emphasis on women-of-color feminisms and self-definition, and is still taught in many college classrooms. Her poetic autohistoria-teoría, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), offered a fresh perspective on Chicana/o borderland existence; Anzaldúa's definition of the "new mestiza" and her bold self-definition as a Chicana lesbian was groundbreaking. Her edited collection, *Making Face/Making Soul, Haciendo Caras: Theoretical and Creative Writings by Women of Color* (1990), and her co-edited *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* underscored the innovative intellectual and artistic work produced by self-identified US women of colors. And her bilingual children's books, *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993) and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/ Prietita y La Llorona* (1995), were specifically designed to fill a gap in children's literature, which generally ignored the experiences of young Chicana@s and Spanish-speaking children. As these texts and others demonstrate, Anzaldúa did, at various points in her life, self-define in very specific identity-related ways: as "Mexican American," "Chicana," "lesbian," "queer," "feminist," "writer," and so on; she embraced the social identity labels and passionately argued for their value.

But at other points, she did not. Thus, for example, in my second epigraph, she questions and partially rejects labels which previously she embraced, viewing them as insufficient and inadequate: "Conventional, traditional identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in jaulas (cages) that limit the growth of the tree of our individual and collective lives." Shaped by binary thinking,

conventional identity labels inhibit individual and collective growth.

The problem, however, is that we (*Anzaldúa's readers, scholars, students, fans*) sometimes focus too closely (*and too exclusively*) on a single text (*usually Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*), expanding the Gloria Anzaldúa we there discover into the entirety of Anzaldúa's life and work. We read her context-specific self-definition as permanent, entirely accurate, and complete: **The Authentic Gloria Anzaldúa**, as it were. (*This temptation can be almost overwhelming when Anzaldúa's self-naming resonates strongly with our own. In such instances, Anzaldúa functions like a mirror: We look at her but see ourselves and thus we cling, sometimes desperately, to the Anzaldúan label because it affirms us, offering us much-needed grounding and acceptance.*) But to do so limits Anzaldúa herself, contradicting and ignoring both her ambivalence about the social categories and the many variations in her self-descriptions. (*To borrow from my first epigraph, where Anzaldúa likens individual and collective identity to a river that flows and is constantly changed by internal and external factors, it's like people standing at a specific point on the river bank who name a single segment of the river—the little slice they can see—but then insist that this small segment is the entire river—always and forever.*)

Unlike those readers who passionately describe Anzaldúa according to these categories—as, say, a Chicana lesbian, or a tejana queer, or a feminist—I'm sometimes tempted to swing to the other extreme: to entirely reject all labels and describe her in unmarked terms—as “author,” “philosopher,” “theorist,” or “creative writer.” (*After all, as Anzaldúa herself notes in “To(o) Queer the Writer,” “Marking is always ‘marking down’” [164]*) Yet to exclusively describe her in unmarked ways is really no better than locking her into very specific identity categories, for to do so ignores those times and texts where Anzaldúa embraces the labels and self-defines very specifically, as Chicana and/or feminist and/or lesbian, and so on.

Welcome to my dilemma. The labels generally used to describe Anzaldúa are too limited, but they are not entirely incorrect. I can neither reject nor embrace them. Given my knowledge of Anzaldúa's theoretical and personal work with

identity-related issues, I can't simply ignore this dilemma by somehow pretending that it doesn't exist. And so I wonder: how can I describe Anzaldúa in ways that acknowledge her groundbreaking work in identity-related fields without freezing her into these identities which she herself questioned and (*at least sometimes*) outgrew?

Although I have not yet arrived at entirely satisfying solutions to this dilemma, Anzaldúa's slippery relationship to the social identity categories has confirmed my own suspicions about social labels. Like Anzaldúa, I want to see myself and others in broader terms, shifting identity from "a sexed, racialized body to a more expansive identity interconnected with its surroundings." And I, too, believe that we need "fresh" approaches to identity formation and self-labeling. But in order to discover or create these alternatives, we need new terms to describe ourselves and others, terms that don't lock us into already-existing definitions—definitions that inhibit our growth and thus prevent us from creating new forms of radically inclusive community. Individual and collective identities are related; how we define ourselves greatly impacts the types of communities we can develop. If we define ourselves in restrictive, exclusive terms, we build narrowly-defined communities with others who meet our restrictive self-definitions, communities that reject all those whose social categories are not identical to our own. We need identity labels that can function synergistically, enabling (*perhaps at times compelling*) us to reconfigure our lives. As Anzaldúa asserts, we need "fresh terms and open-ended tags that portray us in all our complexities and potentialities," open-ended identity concepts that invite us to change.

To address these needs, I suggest (and try to develop) new forms of identity politics—transformational models that facilitate our inter-relatedness with all existence, enabling us to create new communities, new allies, new modes of being. Positing our radical interconnectedness (*what I've elsewhere described as a metaphysics and ontology of inter-relatedness*)³ is the key. By

3. See my books *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues* (especially chapter one) and *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Operational Politics of Change* (especially the introduction and chapters one

positing some type of universal commonality intra-connecting (*or infusing/shaping*) us all, we can insist that, despite the many differences among us, we have some type of shared identity. (*And by “we,” I mean all forms of life, not just human beings.*) Anzaldúa makes a similar point in a 1991 interview, explaining that we are “almas afines,” or “kindred spirits,” and share an interconnectedness which could serve as “an unvoiced category of identity, a common factor in all life forms” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 164).

And so, in what follows I offer a theory and practice of transformational identity politics. As I define the term, transformational identity politics represents a post-oppositional approach that redefines identity in much broader terms—terms that exceed (*without dismissing*) the human and all of those social identity categories used to define us. Based on a metaphysics and ontology of interconnectedness, transformational identity politics takes multiple, open-ended forms; questions monolithic identity categories and static concepts of selfhood; reconfigures self/other dichotomies; enables us to forge commonalities; and works to create inclusionary identities and communities. To be sure, we can’t know with 100% certainty whether Anzaldúa would have agreed with this theory (*although I believe that she would*). My goal, though, is to build on and go beyond Anzaldúa herself—a bold goal but one that Anzaldúa would encourage.

From Conventional to Transformational Identity Politics

Not surprisingly, given the context in which they arose, conventional identity politics are oppositional. The identities on which they are based emerge from and react to the status quo—the unjust political and socio-economic landscape in which we find ourselves. When we enact conventional identity politics, we base our social critiques, political theories, and activist strategies on our sense of personal ethnic, gender, and/or sexual identity. For example, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* we could say that Anzaldúa enacts conventional identity politics in using her experiences as a Chicana tejana lesbian to critically analyze the existing

and five) for discussions of this metaphysics of interconnectedness. [any particular chapter/pages?]

sociocultural, epistemological, and spiritual conditions. My point here is not to condemn these politics of identity; they have done vital work in the world, and they're still necessary some of the time. However, they're too limited to effect the radical transformation we need in the twenty-first century, for several reasons.⁴ First, because they rely on identity categories and definitions based on hierarchical concepts of gender, sexuality, race, and so on, they can reinforce the social structure they are trying to transform. (*Think about it: who's really doing the naming, if we claim the racial/ethnic/sexual/gender/etc. identities that were used to separate, segregate, diminish, and in other ways oppress us?*) Second, when these identity categories are used in ways that over-emphasize narrowly-defined, "boundaried" differences, they can prevent us from recognizing and/or creating commonalities among differently-situated peoples and groups. Third, all too often conventional identity politics impose unity on and demand "mono-thinking" from members, constraining those who embrace the specific identity to follow the party line, as it were.⁵ Fourth, when used to focus on *personal* identity, they subtly reinforce the hyper-individualism so prevalent in western culture, inhibit the creation of inclusionary groups and unlikely coalitions, and thus prevent us from developing complex

4. See *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Operational Politics of Change* (especially chapters one and three) for an extensive discussion of the limitations in oppositional politics (including conventional identity politics). Part of my discussion in this section is drawn from these chapters.

5. I borrow the term "mono-thinking" from M. Jacqui Alexander, who associates it with a type of group-thinking in which a single politics or agenda is imposed on an entire group, leading to "the mistaken notion that only one kind of justice work leads to freedom." As she notes, "Such thinking is always premised in negation, often translated into singular explanations for oppression" (98-99). For an example of this mono-thinking, see Kathy Rudy's reflections on her experiences as a member of the Durham, North Carolina lesbian community in the late twentieth century: "For me, it wasn't only the fact that our politics were based solely on essentialized womanhood that was troubling. It was also the related fact that by the mid-1980s my community had become dangerous in its narrowness and policing. The role of a radical feminist was scripted in such a way that many of my own pleasures were denied. Watching detective shows on TV, going to church, eating meat, wearing polyester or high heels, shopping, feeling feminine—these and many other activities had to be hidden from the larger group in order to maintain membership in good standing in the lesbian community" (209-10).

collective identities and alliances across difference. In short, restricted by the binary-oppositional frameworks and energies which define and direct them, conventional identity politics cannot effect radical transformation.

Unlike these conventional identity politics—where social actors base their activism on their sense of personal ethnic, gender, and/or sexual identity—transformational identity politics defines identity more broadly, anchoring it in a metaphysics of interconnectedness and positing an “unvoiced category of identity”—a shared aspect that cannot be entirely labeled or pinned down. By so doing, transformational identity politics enables us to slip through or in other ways move partially beyond socio-historically created and imposed, unified, stable identities. I underscore the partiality of these movements. We do not entirely reject all social identity categories but instead hold them more loosely, recognizing their limitations. Anzaldúa illustrates this transformational approach in *Light in the Dark*, when she claims:

Being Chicana (indigenous, Mexican, Basque, Spanish, Berber-Arab, Gypsy) is no longer enough, being female, woman of color, patlache (queer) no longer suffices. Your resistance to identity boxes leads you to a different tribe, a different story (of mestizaje) enabling you to rethink yourself in more global-spiritual terms instead of conventional categories of color, class, career. It calls you to retribalize your identity to a more inclusive one, redefining what it means to be una mexicana de este lado, an American in the U.S., a citizen of the world, classifications reflecting an emerging planetary culture. In this narrative national boundaries dividing us from the “others” (nos/otras) are porous and the cracks between worlds serve as gateways. (141)

Significantly, Anzaldúa does not *reject* the old identities (“*Chicana*,” “*female*,” “*woman of color*” or “*patlache/queer*”) which previously she embraced; she acknowledges her connections to them while, simultaneously, moving beyond them. Holding them less tightly, she defines herself more expansively, in “global-spiritual terms.” These more expansive terms facilitate

the development of radically inclusive communities—a planetary citizenship, as it were.

Similarly, in her early pre-*Borderlands* work we see other versions of this expansive permeable identity—an identity so permeable and in some aspects shared that it can, at times, encompass the nonhuman. Thus for example in her 1977 poem “The coming of el mundo surdo,” Anzaldúa creates a self-definition that includes but also exceeds the human:

I am the temple

I am the unmoving center
Within my skin all races
sexes all trees grasses
cows and snails implode. (36)

Affirming her sacredness (and, indeed, the sacredness of all existence), Anzaldúa self-defines in ways that include but go beyond raced and sexed identities to include nonhuman animal and vegetal life. She creates an alchemical-assemblage self-definition and posits a vitalist understanding of individual and collective identity that underscores the inter-relatedness of all living beings. And in *Borderlands/La frontera* Anzaldúa again defines herself in terms that go beyond (*or precede?*) the human: “the animal, the alien, the sub- or suprahuman, the me that has something in common with the wind and the trees and the rocks, that possesses a demon determination and ruthlessness beyond the human” (72-73).

Transformational identity politics adopts a relational approach to difference. Rather than simply enabling alliances *across* differences, transformational identity politics employs these complex differences to transform identity itself and, through this transformation, build new communities of *almas afines*, like-minded souls. Anzaldúa’s theory and practice of *El Mundo Zurdo* offers a particularly useful example.

El Mundo Zurdo

Anzaldúa's theory of El Mundo Zurdo (which she sometimes refers to as "The Left-handed World") spans her entire writing career, from the late 1970s until her death in 2004. One of her earliest theories, Anzaldúa returned to it in her post-*Borderlands* work, folding it into her theory of *conocimiento*. I find it to be one of Anzaldúa's richest theories and most effective illustrations of her visionary, radically inclusive approach to alliance work and identity-related issues (*among other things*).⁶ This activist theory originated in her daily life when, in the late 1970s, she organized a series of poetry readings called El Mundo Surdo Reading Series⁷ in San Francisco. This series was extremely diverse and included people of various colors, genders, sexualities, and so on. Unlike many other progressive social-justice activists and theorists of this time period who were uniting into identity-specific groups (*groups motivated by conventional identity politics and thus premised on some specific type of foundational sameness*), Anzaldúa refused to self-segregate and insisted on creating alliances among people from a variety of different social locations. Despite the many differences among them, her El Mundo Surdo participants (*and audience*) shared several commonalities, including their visionary beliefs in the transformational power of imagination and the spoken word (*the*

6. In the early 1980s, Anzaldúa was working on an essay and a short story collection titled "El Mundo Zurdo;" she titled the last section of *This Bridge Called My Back* "El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision," and she defines, explores, and enacts El Mundo Zurdo in her autohistoria, "La Prieta;" at various points throughout her career she returned to and expanded on this theory and practice. For examples of Anzaldúa's later versions of El Mundo Zurdo, see *Interviews/Entrevistas*, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* and "Counsels from the Firing." For a more extensive discussion of Anzaldúa's theory, see my *Transformation Now!*, from which this discussion is drawn.

7. Note the change in spelling from "El Mundo Surdo" to "El Mundo Zurdo." The shift from "s" to "z" in the word "Zurdo" occurred when *This Bridge Called My Back* was in press. Although Anzaldúa was not pleased with this alteration, eventually she accepted and adopted it. For more on this issue see her archives, located at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, Austin. See for example Box 26, folders 1 through 3; Box 63, folder 3; Box 154, folder 2; Box 159, folders 21-22.

“*Left-handed World*”); their work as creative writers and artists; their personal experiences of alienation, discrimination, and/or oppression; their interest in social justice; and their shared rejection of the status quo.

As Anzaldúa’s *El Mundo Surdo* Reading Series suggests, in her transformational identity politics, social identity differences among human beings are not automatically or necessarily divisive. It is, in fact, sometimes almost the reverse: differences can function like gateways, facilitating opportunities for alliance-building and new forms of community. According to her theory of *El Mundo Zurdo*, it’s possible (and indeed necessary) for very different people—from diverse racial, sexual, gender, religious, class, career, etc. backgrounds with a wide variety of needs, politics, experiences, and concerns—to co-exist and work together to enact revolutionary change. As Anzaldúa explains in “*El Mundo Zurdo (the Left-handed World)*,” the final section of “*La Prieta*,”:

We are the queer groups, the people that don’t belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit, *we are a threat*. (50, her emphasis)

She calls our attention to a commonality that includes (and, indeed, thrives on) difference—defined in potentially transformational ways. More specifically, Anzaldúa replaces conventional definitions of difference-as-opposition with a relational definition. She frankly acknowledges that the inhabitant-practitioners of her visionary Left-Handed World are not all alike; their specific oppressions, solutions, and beliefs diverge and at times even conflict, contradict, and in other ways disagree. She accepts these differences and uses them in nonoppositional ways, to generate new forms of commonalities: “these different affinities are not opposed to each other. In *El Mundo Zurdo* I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet” (50). Joined by their rejection of the status quo and their so-called deviation from the

dominant culture, Anzaldúa's surdistx⁸ enact a planetary citizenship; they create new alliances and use these alliances to transform their worlds. I coined the term "surdistx" to represent the radically diverse communities we build when we, like Anzaldúa, posit "unvoiced" categories of identity and enact nonoppositional approaches to difference. I name these volitional, radically inclusive planetary citizens "surdistx," rather than the more common-sense "surdists" or "surdos" because adding the "x" seems very Anzaldúan in its challenge to conventional gender categories and gendered "a" and "o" endings of words. As early as the mid 1970s, Anzaldúa intentionally includes nonbinary gendered people in her fiction and prose; although she passed on before the contemporary usage of "x" to signal gender inclusivity beyond masculine and feminine, I believe that she would have appreciated it and adopted it for her own work.

Like other forms of transformational identity politics, Anzaldúa's theory of *El Mundo Zurdo* invites us to use differences as invitation to alliance-building and community formation. By defining differences relationally, we can seek commonalities that acknowledge (and, indeed, value) the differences (whether in cultures, experiences, beliefs, politics, and/or desires) among us. As Anzaldúa asserts in her preface to *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, "Our goal is not to use differences to separate us from others, but neither is it to gloss over them" ("(Un)natural bridges" 3). Rather than deny, ignore, defy, or reject the distinctions among us, we acknowledge and explore them, trusting that our efforts will lead to generative commonalities.

Anzaldúa grounds this nuanced approach in her metaphysics and ontology of interconnectedness: her spirit-infused worldview which enables broader, more inclusive contexts for difference. Defining each individual as part of a larger whole, she insists on a commonality spanning "everyone/everything;" she acknowledges our many differences while also insisting that we "share a category of identity wider

8. "Surdistx" is my term; I use it to represent the radically diverse communities we build when we, like Anzaldúa, posit "unvoiced" categories of identity and enact nonoppositional approaches to difference.

than any social position or racial label” (*Light in the Dark* 138).⁹ As implied earlier in this essay, for Anzaldúa, this shared identity category is foundational: It enables her to destabilize and, at strategically useful times, dissolve the rigid boundaries inscribing conventional social identities.

No Final Conclusion

I have no final conclusions or ultimate solutions to my dilemma: I remain uncertain about how best to describe Anzaldúa in ways that simultaneously honor her fluid identity transitions and her identity-based affirmations. And so, I have relinquished my attempts to arrive at the “perfect” solution; I acknowledge her shifting complexity and, whenever possible, frame her concepts of identity in dialogue my own transformational identity politics—a theory that she inspired me to invent. I emphasize her “unvoiced category of identity,” and I seek new ways to use it as I build new communities of *almas afines* through my own written work.

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RESEÑAS

Juan Carlos Elijas, *Desorden de Espíritu*. Prólogo de Edouard Forêt, Madrid, Reino de Cordelia, 2018, 126 pp.

Ni siquiera en la solapa interna de este libro ha podido resistirse su autor ante el irrefrenable vértigo de su creatividad, porque en ese breve currículum, tantas veces anodino por convencionalizado, al referirse a las entregas poéticas que ha publicado hasta *Desorden de Espíritu*, construye un juego intertextual irónico con el más conocido título de Pablo Neruda, y dice de sí mismo que “Ha escrito veinte poemas no de amor y una obra de teatro inédita y desesperada.” Luego menciona sus últimas obras, entre las que figura una en lengua catalana, *Triptics dels déus absents*.

Conozco buena parte de la producción poética de Juan Carlos Elijas (Tarragona, 1966), y en sus versos he apreciado siempre su gran versatilidad formal, temática y perspectivística. Y sin olvidar en absoluto sus frecuentes tentaciones lúdicas, ironistas, alternativas y contraculturales. Por esa razón veo en *Desorden de Espíritu* un libro bien distinto de los anteriores, porque lo permea una sostenida vertiente elegíaca, y un tipo de lengua literaria que se distingue de cualesquiera obras precedentes de este escritor tarraconense.

La vena elegíaca brota de la pérdida de cinco amistades fallecidas que dejaron sensible huella en el hablante lírico, y puedo asegurar que de los libros de Elijas que he leído es éste el que más plácemes me concita. Una de las explicaciones para tal beneplácito se fundamenta en lo que el propio poeta señala en la antecitada solapa de autopresentación. Y es que en esas líneas se nos participa, y cito, que “Concibe el instante como una constante despedida...” Y después añade, en relación con *Desorden de Espíritu*, que “Le fastidia que la vacía muerte, hiena, le arrebatase a las amistades. De ahí este libro. Al doblar la esquina de la respiración, la elegía: única razón sentimental de la supervivencia en el poema.”

En esta cita afloran tres ideas conjugables entre sí: la de concebir el paso instantáneo del tiempo como un adiós; la de considerar a la muerte como algo vacío que, más que rabia, da

fastidio; y en tercer lugar la de ofrecer al desaparecido una suerte de re-aparición merced al poema en él inspirado.

A estas percepciones habría que agregar otras todavía, como por ejemplo la derivada de asumir una cita de Octavio Paz que figura en “El prelude” del libro. Es ésta: “Homenaje a la muerte del muerto que seré”. Podría interpretarse este aserto del escritor mexicano como un tener conciencia de que, como la condición mortal es compartida con aquellos a quienes la muerte se cobró su vida antes que la del poeta, éste dialoga con los que se le adelantaron en el morir, a ese “muerto que seré.”

En *Desorden de Espíritu*, el hablante recuerda a los traspasados, los evoca, y mantiene un diálogo interior con todos ellos a partir de la condición perecedera común, y del trato anecdótico que compartieron. Ligado emocionalmente a las cinco personas idas, a cada una se dedica una elegía, situándose esos poemas sucesiva y ordenadamente conforme al año de las muertes respectivas, la cual consigno al lado de su nombre. La secuencia elegíaca nominal se dispone, por tanto, de este modo: José Luis Giménez Frontín (2008), Francisco Javier Urruela Vallejo (2010), Tony Urbano (2014), Ramón Oteo Sans (2015), y Pilar Gómez Bedate (2017).

El libro culmina con una “Coda” comprendiendo siete poemas en prosa, encontrándose en el primero, “Obertura”, esta aserción: “...la poesía es indagar en el ataúd con hambre de vida.”, tesis que casa bien con la capacidad de generar sobrevivencia que antes había adjudicado al poema elegíaco. El entrelazamiento de la muerte con el vivir se asienta en la poesía, propone el poeta, en convergencia con la perdurabilidad del fallecido en el poema y por el poema.

De otro carácter, pues ya no se trata de composiciones elegíacas personalizadas, es la elegía simbólica comprendida en el texto último, titulado “Final”, con el que termina *Desorden de Espíritu*. Según el autor, este poema en prosa “condensa esa elegía implícita a la Europa herida de muerte en que uno habita.” Serían, en suma, media docena las elegías, conteniendo “Coda” diversas “correspondencias con los textos que forman las elegías”. “Coda” va imbricando, uno por uno, los cinco textos precedentes, armonizándose los cinco en su tejido textual.

En la “Nota del autor” adjuntada al cabo del libro, Juan Carlos Elijas señala que, en las elegías que originaron las cinco personas nombradas, se ha plasmado una “repetitiva superposición de planos: una muestra cinematográfica sumada a una muestra pictórica y a una pieza musical.” Y a continuación aclara que los ligámenes establecidos entre estos tres planos responden, en cada supuesto, a dialécticas diversas que tuvieron lugar entre él mismo y José Luis, Tony, Javier, Ramón y Pilar.

Explicita estas referencias culturales en dicha nota informativa, y a ella remito a quien desee conocer esos detalles intertextuales, porque no me detendré en tales pormenores, por suculentos que sean para el comentario. Tampoco voy a demorarme en aducir y enumerar las técnicas versales empleadas en el quinteto elegíaco. Las ha referido con pertinencia el prologuista del libro, Edouard Forêt, y a sus preliminares remito a los lectores de estos apuntes míos tan a vuelapluma.

Sí diré que esa gavilla elegíaca transmite una atmósfera de irrealidad que el propio lenguaje va creando. En esa atmósfera cabe asimismo un tono coloquial de afecto y de familiaridad compatible con una poética de la mitificación que alcanza su grado máximo en la elegía a Pilar Gómez Bedate, idealizada en un entorno zamorado vislumbrado con un habla poética de gran belleza y plasticidad. Diré también, por último, que en esas variaciones elegíacas se atestigua en la obra de Juan Carlos Elijas un crecimiento poético extraordinario, consiguiendo que ese grupo de poemas no solo resulte conmovedor, sino impresionante.

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Fernando Pessoa, *El poeta es un fingidor. Antología poética*, edición bilingüe de Ángel Crespo, Madrid, Cátedra, 2018, 583 pp.

Difícilmente encontraremos en la poesía universal un escritor tan singular como el portugués Fernando Pessoa. En su caso, el concepto de singularidad no solo ha de aplicarse al carácter de su obra literaria, sino a su propia vida. Ateniéndonos a su biografía, recordaré que nació en Lisboa en 1888, pero a los ocho años, a causa de un segundo matrimonio de su madre, hubo de trasladarse con ella y su padrastro a Sudáfrica, en concreto a Durban, lo que supuso que su educación fuese inglesa, en un High School de dicha localidad africana. Fue un corte contextual abrupto, aunque enriquecedor.

Será en 1905 cuando retorne Fernando Pessoa a su país, y nunca más va a hacer una salida fuera de las fronteras lusitanas. Tres años más tarde, se ocupa en la labor de corresponsalía, en francés e inglés, para distintas firmas comerciales lisboetas. Se mantuvo siempre en este tipo de empleo, y sin tener aspiraciones de mejora económica, lo que le permitió vivir de manera modesta, pero a cambio le dio amplio margen para dedicarse a la escritura.

Por lo que hace a su labor literaria, Pessoa iba a dar sus primeros pasos creativos componiendo versos y prosas en lengua inglesa, y bajo el seudónimo de Alexander Search. Fue entre los años 1908 y 1910 cuando se convirtió en un escritor en portugués, primero elaborando poemas, y a continuación artículos, decantados hacia lo esotérico. Lo más distintivo y definidor de su poesía es haber concebido un *drama em gente*, en virtud de que en ella se conjugan voces diversificadas y con nombre propio, los heterónimos. Junto a esas voces figura también la más genuina de ellas, la suya propia, la considerada voz ortónima.

Tres voces heteronímicas las adjudicó a Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis y Álvaro de Campos, llegando a inventar una biografía para cada uno de estos autores fictivos. La poesía ortónima es, claro está, la firmada como Fernando Pessoa. A vueltas de la referida diversificación interior, el estudioso pesoano Ángel Crespo escribía, en el prólogo al volumen que comentamos, que el poeta “se reparte para reconstruirse...para que traten de

reconstruirlo sus más avisados lectores mediante la escenificación crítica de su drama” (41).

No vamos a detenernos en todas las vertientes implicadas en las heteronimias del escritor luso, porque nos ocasionaría un larguísimo discurso, impropio de una reseña común y corriente como ésta. Pero no puede dejar de señalarse, de la mano del antecitado Ángel Crespo, que estos heterónimos se fundamentan en la tesis pesoana acerca del neo-paganismo europeo, el cual admitiría todas las corrientes filosóficas por creerlas verdaderas. A cada sentimiento neo-pagano de la naturaleza le correspondería un heterónimo. En consecuencia, y cito una anotación del autor aducida por Crespo, “El neopagano debe convencerse de que, al escribir, realiza un sentimiento de la naturaleza. Según la intensidad de este sentimiento, una u otra debe ser la metafísica en que se asiente. Determinadas horas de la naturaleza exigen una metafísica distinta de la que exigen otras” (48).

Interesantísimo resulta también cómo enfocaba Fernando Pessoa el Cristianismo a la luz de la neopaganía que concibió. Y es que, para él, no es el Cristianismo sino una corrupción del paganismo trascendental, el paganismo basado en los misterios, a diferencia del paganismo popular, centrado en los dioses y en los mitos. Estas reflexiones las puso en boca de su heterónimo filosófico Antonio Mora. Jesucristo es enfocado como un dios más, el dios que faltaba en el panteón divinal, un dios de la tristeza. En otro momento discursivo, Mora afirmó que los dioses no habían muerto en absoluto, sino que somos nosotros quienes hemos dejado de verlos, sea porque cerramos los ojos, sea porque nos ha obnubilado “alguna niebla” (53).

Comprende *El poeta es un fingidor* seis órdenes de textos. El primer par lo constituyen los relativos al Pessoa ortónimo bajo los títulos de *Cancionero* y *Mensaje*. Los dos siguientes se atribuyen a Alberto Caeiro. Se trata de *El guardador de rebaños* y *Poemas inconjuntos*. El quinto grupo habría sido fruto del numen de Ricardo Reis y el sexto de Álvaro de Campos.

La edición motivo de nuestro comentario comporta la novedad de ofrecerse al público en forma bilingüe portugués-español. Y entre otras particularidades presenta la de haber prescindido de un poema que se atribuyó en tiempos a un supuesto heterónimo pesoano, C. Pacheco, cuando su autor fue un discípulo

de Pessoa llamado Jesus Coelho Pacheco. Otro aporte del libro lo constituye el haberse ampliado, actualizándolo, el elenco de referencias bibliográficas generadas por el poeta luso en las décadas más recientes. Estas tareas las ha llevado a cabo, con pericia encomiable, Ignacio García Crespo, sobrino del poeta y filólogo Ángel Crespo, y atento vigilante, como gran conocedor del mismo, del legado literario de su tío, en cuyo haber contarán de manera permanente sus contribuciones al mejor conocimiento de la vida y de la obra de Fernando Pessoa.

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COLABORAN EN ESTE NÚMERO

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José María Balcells, Catedrático de la Universidad de León, es autor de diversos estudios, ediciones y monografías sobre escritores del Siglo de Oro español, entre ellos Fray Luis de Granada y Francisco de Quevedo. Acerca de poesía española del siglo XX ha publicado, entre otros libros, *Voces del margen. Mujer y poesía en España. Siglo XX* (2009), *Miguel Hernández: espejos americanos y poéticas taurinas* (2012), *Las palabras de*

la bahía. Estudios sobre Rafael Alberti (2013) y *Los desvelos de Isis. Sobre poetas, poemas y poesía* (2014). En 2016 publicó una serie de estudios acerca de la epopeya burlesca española reunidos bajo el título de *La epopeya burlada. Del 'Libro de Buen Amor' a Juan Goytisolo*.

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áureos, The Evolution of the Pastoral Novel in Early Modern Spain, Cervantes: Social and Literary Polemics, Pastoral Themes and Forms in Cervantes's Fiction, An Analytical and Bibliographical Guide to Criticism on Don Quijote (1790-1893), A Celebration of Brooklyn Hispanism (ed.), *La cornada* (Alfonso Sastre, ed.) y cien artículos, conferencias y reseñas sobre diversos temas: el género pastoral, la teoría clásica española, la época de los Reyes Católicos, la égloga primitiva, la literatura académica, Cervantes y Lope de Vega. Ha dictado conferencias, seminarios y cursillos en universidades europeas desde Londres a Kiev.

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