


Winter 2010

Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Decolonizing Ritual de Conocimiento

Sarah S. Ohmer
CUNY Lehman College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Follow this and additional works at: http://academicworks.cuny.edu/le_pubs

 Part of the [Chicana/o Studies Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Latina/o Studies Commons](#), [Other Anthropology Commons](#), [Other Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Theory and Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ohmer, Sarah S. "Gloria Anzaldúa's Decolonizing Ritual de Conocimiento." *Confluencia "Chicano/a Literature From the Foundational Period to the Current Global Era."* 26-1 (2010). 141-153. Print.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lehman College at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Decolonizing Ritual de Conocimiento

Sarah Ohmer

University of Pittsburgh

Gloria E. Anzaldúa's work makes up one of the many Chicana@ works that contribute another history, a history repressed by the national discourses on both sides of the border. Influenced by antecedents of U.S. Hispanic Literature who superposed "official" history with another history, Chicano activists had already enacted a retrieval of pre-conquest histories to revive their people's historical consciousness. As Saldívar-Hull states in "Mestiza Consciousness and Politics: Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La frontera*," the publication of *Borderlands/ La Frontera* distinguished itself from the Chicano movement's as it unveiled the curtain that hid the Aztec goddesses and kept aspects of pre-conquest history behind a cloud of blood sacrifices and military power (60). In the continuum of the foundational period to today's transnational era of the Chicana@ movement, Anzaldúa's reflections on sexuality and race stand in the latter part of the continuum. The transnational period opens a global dialogue, unfolding the Chicano Civil Right's movement's constricting walls of protest, and advocates another solidarity. In her borderland, Gloria questioned even the margins' borders.¹

Although Anzaldúa fervently rejected labels, her most recognized work *Borderlands/ La Frontera* provides pointers to define, but not limit, the lesbian activist's intellectual positions. She contests the Chicano historiography with a historical and political knowledge fed by pre-Conquest indigenous female deities' and ancestors' ways of knowing. She anchors herself in the woman of color or Third World Feminist movement as she revises patriarchal appropriations of indigenous icons (Coatlicue, la Virgen de Guadalupe), and puts subaltern women and mythical representations at the center of history. In my work on gender and women of color, her tracing the evolution of feminine deities' representation, the historical "taming"² of sensual feminine religious images, and the demonizing of other female deities has helped me analyze woman of color's repressed sexuality, as she noted that, in turn, this impacted the sexuality of Chicanas and women of color.³ She claims her objective as a *mestiza* intellectual: "[The mestiza] puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of." (Anzaldúa qtd. in Saldívar-Hull 63)⁴ With an important contribution to gender studies, her autohistoria-teoría infused with spirituality and corporeality at its core articulated

a woman-of-color consciousness shared by African American, Latin(a) American, and women of color at large.⁵

Gloria E. Anzaldúa led a life of/with crossing borders and adaptation to/with the borderlands that started before and expanded beyond her most referenced text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which is inscribed in all of her works. *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Making Faces*, *Making Soull/Haciendo Caras*, and *Interviews/Entrevistas* tackle the issues and define the concepts involved in such adaptations, transformations or crossings. In this article I will include an overview of such works, and focus on her later years' production, following AnaLouise Keating's goal to expand the Anzaldúan scholarship in *EntreMundos/ Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*: "Anzaldúa did not turn off her computer and stop writing after *Borderlands*' publication. Indeed, her ideas and theories deepened and became richer in her post-*Borderland* years." (4) Before looking closely at one of her last texts as a decolonizing ritual, I propose to revisit her works' with Walter Mignolo's postcolonial concepts and Chela Sandoval's study of Third World Feminism.

How can an intellectual activist movement last? This is one of the questions that the *nepantlera* asks herself throughout her theoretical contributions.⁶ Constant transformation is key. Gloria recognizes the colonial difference that surrounds us. Walter Mignolo defines the colonial difference as these classifications that allow the power of coloniality to perpetuate, or the energy, the machine that transforms our differences into values that separate ones in a global design from others who belong to a local history (13). Constant transformation allows for a consistent remembrance of these differences, and opens up an awareness to move between such labels to prevent the power of coloniality to overcome a resistance movement, to prevent a local history from becoming a global design. Looking at her consecutive works and her theoretical evolution, I propose to observe how Anzaldúa prevents a local history from becoming an imperialist global design.

This Bridge Called My Back was Anzaldúa's first anthology, co-edited with Cherríe Moraga in 1981. A radical transformation of the existing Feminist institution, this anthology insisted in including women of color from the United States' Third World. It stretched the "feminist" label's call for solidarity among women of different genders and backgrounds.

We want to express to all women—especially to white middle-class women—the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement...to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions...to create a definition that expands what 'feminist' means to us.
(Anzaldúa *This Bridge* lii)

The goal was to point out the colonial difference that isolated women of color from Feminism, to eliminate divisions between women, and to change the epistemology of feminism. *TBCMB* was the first step in a long theoretical exploration and cross-cultural activist movement.

The colonial difference was noted from a subaltern point of view. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera*, published a few years after the anthology in 1986, presente a

model more than an example for Walter Dignolo's definition of border thinking (2000). According to Walter Dignolo's *Global Design/ Local Histories*, the subaltern point of view is the only perspective from which the colonial difference can be recognized. The subaltern eye sees what colonial translation has attempted to erase, and from there proposes decolonizing epistemologies: "[Border thinking] works toward the restitution of the colonial difference that colonial translation attempted to erase." (Dignolo 26) The new mestiza consciousness restitutes a multiplicity of languages, myths, popular songs and local histories to the U.S. Hispanic community.

The mestiza consciousness is painful, in constant motion, it's a break in the subject/object relationship, it's adopting two or more cultures, ambiguity, plurality, and an evolution to be free of cultural dominance. The mestiza consciousness is *not*: an establishment; a unity; a fixed category; a system of exclusion; a lifestyle manual; or an identification process with specific steps (Anzaldúa 100–102). From the margins of feminism, from Third World Feminism's center stage, Anzaldúa promotes crossing psychological, cultural, sexual and linguistic borders. She gives material for Dignolo to conceptualize "bilinguagem," the use of a language and form of thinking that questions and transforms the dimensions of text and nation that colonized thought. The orality, the multiplicitous languages and different genres (poetry, historiography, testimonio, corrido, proverbs, etc.) found in Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría present a subaltern epistemology that questions hegemonic culture, or the global design of text and contemporary theoretical production.

Feminism of color presently questions academic discourse as it recalls the importance of accessible, performative, corporal and malleable text, and the weight of the soul and spirit. *Making Faces Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras* and *this bridge we call home*, Anzaldúa's post-*Borderlands* anthologies, present this discourse with a theoretical objective closer to the new mestiza/nepantla consciousness than *TBCMB*.⁷ The focus on the soul that writes and complements the body in the creative process is more underlined, and she reiterates this framework in *Interviews/ Entrevistas*: "An integration. And the body is the bridge. That's what I haven't seen. People don't deal with the body, and yet they don't deal with the spirit. They deal with the head. The mind. [...] What I'd like to do is talk from the body *and also from these other realms*" (*Interviews/ Entrevistas* 64, emphasis mine). She underlines incorporating soul and "other [non-physical] realms" into writing. She rejects the cogito ergo sum epistemology. "*Je pense donc je suis*" becomes "siento almas y existo."⁸ Anzaldúa's body of work thus demonstrates a capacity of inclusion that allows a constant change of perception and identification.

She includes a wider variety of unpublished authors in *Making Faces/Making Soul, Haciendo Caras*. La nueva mestiza builds bridges with faces and crosses borders within feminism of color. She writes with her body and presents a theory always in motion, thus "doing theory" as Audre Lorde calls it, and suggests to write with spirituality. Changing concepts from *TBCMB*, the second edition of *TBCMB* notes that the world has come to a new phase of spirituality in 2001, and that *This Bridge* should further evolve to relate with all individuals. The activist intellectual movement's walls must shift. Anzaldúa's introduction underlines spiritual presences' role in changing Third World Feminism's doctrine to include the "*Mundo Zurdo, left handed world*: the colored, the queer, the poor, the females, the physically challenged. From our blood and spirit connections [otra vez, el

cuerpo y la espiritualidad] with these groups, we women on the bottom throughout the world can form an international feminism.” (218) The time came to create an international feminist movement based on a spiritual connection among the marginalized, yet it was not time to forget about nature.

The last element I find in Anzaldúa’s theory or activist framework is the presence of nature. She writes beyond the text, pushing her readers to read nature. Natural elements also allow her to formulate a self-critique that was absent in her early works, as we shall see with her allegory of the Natural Bridges in California.

The new mestiza consciousness is *not* an establishment, a unity, a fixed category, an exclusion. Third World Feminism is *not* an unmovable state of security of confidence. *This Bridge We Call Home*, her 2002 anthology co-edited with AnaLouise Keating, seemingly dialogues with Mignolo’s then published *Local Histories/ Global Design* (2001). She recognizes that a movement born out of the margins must remain aware of the colonial difference, the home of border epistemology. Otherwise, it is *border thinking* or *nepantlerismo* that comes out; what arises is a colonial epistemology that is homogenous, denotative, and exclusive, rather than a decolonial epistemology with plurality, performativity, inclusion. Gloria becomes weary of a movement’s lack of transformation. She decides to include a plurality of ethnicities and genders in her last anthology, including anonymous authors, once again putting labels to the side.

The concept of constant transformation was never rejected by other Third World Feminists, nor does it make up a flawless movement. It serves as an example of the consciousness of a differential social movement, as defined by Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed*: “the differential mode of social movement and consciousness depends on the practitioner’s ability to read the current situation of power and self, its configurations, a survival skill well known to oppressed peoples.” (60) Their marginalized’s survival skill allowed women of color to distinguish Anglo feminists’ global design’s limits, its differences from their local histories, and it also allows them to notice differences among third world feminists. This constant awareness depends on changes in power structure, and Anzaldúa’s body of works shows a constant transformation and differentiation, characteristics of a social movement that could still last when crossing the borders within itself, and by building bridges between women of color and other minorities, with nature, other consciousnesses, and other realms.

With a consistent postcolonial framework, in *this bridge we call home*, Gloria Anzaldúa asks herself: how is it possible to maintain a “decolonial” stance within the emerging Third World Feminist movement? I will explore her answers as I demonstrate that her contribution is not solely a theoretical approach, and includes spiritual components that serve her transcultural contribution.⁹ Once I explain the ideological context of *this bridge we call home*, along with la nueva mestiza’s diagnoses on Third World Feminism, I shall explore Anzaldúa’s last piece, “now let us shift...the path of conocimiento... inner work, public acts.” My exploration observes four themes: el ejercicio shamánico, el conocimiento, and dream in conflict resolution. The four themes will allow me to trace the *bilanguaging love* of Anzaldúa’s text.

In a specific context...

From Anzaldúa's point of view, the development of Third World Feminism has constructed epistemological borders around itself instead of remaining within the borderlands of epistemology:

While *This Bridge Called my Back* displaced whiteness, *this bridge we call home* carries this displacement further. It questions the terms *white* and *women of color* by showing that whiteness may not be applied to all whites, as some possess women-of-color consciousness, just as some women of color bear white consciousness. (2)

Her first epistemological call to return to the borderlands expands the meaning of whiteness along with the meaning of color to erase the lines between racial categories. She erases lines beyond the separations of color to question gender labels, calling for a mission to recognize the malleable quality of categories, lines and labels. As border thinkers, the anthology's editors observe the limits of the past anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*, without rejecting it. They simply ask to "rethink the old ideas" and to allow new ideas to stem from them (2).

...of symptoms...

To call attention to the limits of *TBCMB*, Anzaldúa uses a metaphor of the Natural Bridges' fall in California: "Year after year [...] waves expanded the arches until the weight of the overlying rock collapsed the outermost bridge twenty-one years ago. In a few seconds the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake brought down the innermost bridge. Today only the middle one remains [...]" (1). The natural bridge made her realize the vulnerability of resistance movements; the forces of resistance may weigh the movement down to the point of destruction. With the modesty of a title that lacks capital letters, *this bridge we call home* proposes to break down a movement's barriers, its home and give room for growth: "Many women of color are possessive of *This Bridge Called My Back* and view it as a safe space, as 'home.' [...] Staying home and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth. To bridge means loosening our borders, [...] to attempt community, [...] to risk being wounded." (2-3)

Home has become symptomatic, and must be healed with shock. Viewing a safe space is but an illusion that has been created along with establishing the differential movement. Anzaldúa points to the perception of that illusion and reminds us that we know that reality is made up; that we simply pretend it is there. She proposes to step away from that, to attribute power to the representation of the movement *while keeping in mind that it is a representation*. There is no superiority of this movement since there is no original. A differential movement can perceive this and reject the idea of superiority, seeing itself as essentially not safe, nor stable, nor closed—like the new mestiza's "pluralistic mode": "[The new mestiza] operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned...she turns the ambivalence into something else" (*Boderlands* 101). As she alludes to a safe space, la nueva mestiza points to

the repression of the movement's essence—"our woundedness"—and to the mimicry that accompanies the repression of a postcolonial identity.

According to Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, colonization works through mimicry. In other words, colonization must fail in order to be successful, in the sense that the colonized must stand as a poorer copy—the same, but not quite—of the colonizers in order for colonization to take place. Without calling it mimicry, Anzaldúa notices the brake that feminists of color have put on their movement in the attempt to decolonize: they have become a copy of that which they rejected (122). Thus Anzaldúa articulates an alternative epistemology that no longer questions the Anglo Feminism's superiority but rather, the superiority and consequent decline of Third World Feminism: "Like the trestle bridge, it will decline unless we attach it to new growth or append new growth to it." (2) I do not use the term "decline" in a sense of disappearance, rather, as a *loss of differential essence*.

In my opinion, Anzaldúa argues that in order to pursue the objectives from two decades ago, the members and readers of *This Bridge* must celebrate not the home of their movement but colonial difference, home of border epistemology (Mignolo 37). In any other case, they face the adoption of the very epistemology that colonizes thinking, a homogeneous epistemology devoid of a pluralistic mode.

...arises a healing ritual...

In her latest anthology, *this bridge we call home*, Anzaldúa proposes perceptual changes beyond what she has tackled in her previous work. In "now let us shift...the path of *conocimiento*...inner work, public acts," the spirituality occupies an omniscient presence in a narrative that ends with a prayer. The path of *conocimiento* is a walkway to change; it guides every one of us to start from within, and then to use our inner selves in spiritual activism.

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 (*des conocer*), to confront traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your *facultades*. (Anzaldúa 540–541)

At the end of the path lies the "mission": self respect, love, passion, and contributing to the community. Despite its spiritual connotation, *el conocimiento* is not synonym to a Divine Mission; it does not communicate an institutionalized religious message. In fact, one of the main steps along the path of *conocimiento* results in deconstructing religion and sciences: "you must first recognize their faulty pronouncements, scrutinize the fruit they've borne, and then ritually disengage from them." (Anzaldúa 559) The path creates a ritual of questioning and disengagement, *un ritual de conocimiento*.¹⁰

The ritual heals, too. Dismantling the inner programs may be compared to curing oneself of a spell. The collective mindset and sociocultural programmings plunge our minds into a "cultural trance" y el proceso del *conocimiento* purges and frees us from

this spell: “The upheaval jars you out of the cultural trance and spell of the collective mind-set [the Toltec disciple Don Miguel Ruiz calls it the collective dream].” (547) The magic present in “now let us shift...” uncovers the same perception of reality that intrigues Taussig in “The Golden Bough” (57–58). Anzaldúa makes us question the magical powers of cultural labels and social categories that manipulate our reality, as she finds ways to undo the sorcery of the “collective mind set.”

The ritualistic process thus begins with a *susto*, with the soul leaving the body, shifting away y el proceso consists of finding a way for the soul to return home to the body: “you must, like the shaman, find a way to call your spirit home.” (547) As it walks us through the path of *conocimiento*, the text earns a form of “ejercicio shamánico” as Hernán Vidal defines it in *Política cultural de la memoria histórica*. Vidal refers to the shamanic voice of a poet as a voice concerned by improving the balance of human needs and their relationship with nature (223).¹¹ The shaman journeys into darkness to find such a balance, and returns it to the community (Vidal 223–229). Anzaldúa describes some phases of the path of *conocimiento* as a voyage into the shadows, into hell, characterized by feelings of alienation and isolation.¹²

In the darkness, one discovers the commonalities of suffering. In the introduction to the anthology Anzaldúa suggests that this discovery is a necessary step at this point of Third World Feminism: “Twenty-one years ago we struggled with the recognition of difference within the context of commonality. Today we grapple with the recognition of commonality within the context of difference.” (2) In the shadows, la nueva mestiza finds relationships between depression and indigenous homicide, African slavery, and environmental destruction.¹³ The self reconnects with the cosmos.

Once out of the shadows, one is faced to build the bridge that unearthes links between self, espíritus y naturaleza, to let the soul find its way home, “attempt to give back to nature, espíritus and others a gift wrested from the events in your life, a bridge home to the self.” (540) Establishing a bridge between nature, espíritus and self restores a shamanic power into the community that dismantles and resists existing dogmas and ideologies related to continuing politics of violence (Vidal 238). The politics of violence, in Anzaldúa’s context, are none other than the ones that hold the home of *This Bridge* closed in and protective of outside elements. The *Bridge’s* walls stand for an incentive to control, to block out the other, the non-self. They demonstrate fear, a fear that feeds violence. Anzaldúa points to the walls’ destruction precisely to avoid the violence and to let go of control. To her, that is the only way to remain en la frontera and maintain a movement of decolonization—through bilanguaging love.

Love is the necessary corrective to the violence of systems of control and oppression; bilanguaging love [from and in the peripheries of national languages] is the final utopic horizon for the liberation of human beings involved in structures of domination and subordination beyond their control.
(Mignolo 273)

El ejercicio shamánico de Anzaldúa teaches us to reform politics of domination. She shares her bilanguaging love teachings with a personalized testimonial style. This time, her

personal crisis is intricately linked to the earth's transformations. And her crisis is related to you; it becomes *your* crisis. The testimonial that relates an earthquake episode is written in the second person singular "you," but is really about an "I" (or is it?). This blurs the line of personal identity and makes the 'theory' not only personal but interpersonal as well. She is not sharing a theory; she shares a lifestyle through poetry. She's a poet practicing el ejercicio shamánico:

Se ha retornado a las implicaciones de la primera cultura global... En ella se ha buscado los elementos para redefinir lo sagrado como base para la creación de una nueva ética que promueva la plenitud de la vida en general y de la persona, así como también para observar diversas soluciones prácticas para la supervivencia humana que puedan adaptarse a formas de economía avanzada. (Vidal 232)

And the lema for Anzaldúa's proposed lifestyle is as such: "if you don't work through your fear, playing it safe could bury you." (544) How may this lema strive towards decolonizing thinking? Mignolo points to the intellectual's dilemma whose mind is stuck in coloniality (263). He warns us of how an individual may reproduce the colonial difference in their thinking instead of articulating their thinking *from* the colonial difference. For Anzaldúa, if the participants of *This Bridge* refrain from tearing down their barriers to protect their movement's identity, that could bury it. She pushes the walls of her address. The "you" addresses not just Third World Feminism, not just women of color, but also any movement, any individual.

...un ritual de conocimiento...

The first stage of conocimiento begins with un darse cuenta, a call to adventure. I have discussed the main outline of the ritual. Delving into each step of the path of conocimiento allows to appreciate the intricacies of a decolonizing process, and Anzaldúa's rewriting Carl G. Jung's journey of individuation. The second stage deals with the liminal transitional space, "la nepantla:"

Nepantla is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas ... the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it. (548-549)

The epigraph to the second stage's section compares la nepantla to the spiritual isolation in which remain Mexicans who have not recovered from la Conquista, thus relating her ideas to the first colonial encounters. If I understand Anzaldúa correctly, the recovery from colonization implies, first and foremost, a clash of opposites, un enfrentamiento with oppositional movements of identities and ideologies in which the self sways, but is not fixed, and remains ambivalent. One remains in this spiritual isolation until a new identity emerges.

The third stage recalls la Coatlicue from *Borderlands*, a stage of complete darkness. Among the concepts to be tackled, the third stage strongly advocates a critique against 'scientific medicine' and praises herbal medicines (553). Such a perception of medicinal ways supports a return to shamanistic beliefs, also part of the *ejercicio shamánico*: "De aquí han resultado conceptos como...la preocupación de la etnobotánica por conservar el conocimiento shamánico de plantas medicinales." (Vidal 232) Within the shadows, one moves away from colonial practices to tribal practices.

The fourth stage is reconnection. While she describes this stage, Anzaldúa discusses the problem of the Cartesian mind/body split and the difficulty to reinvent it. This dichotomy can be broken with the inclusion of the spirit into the paradigm. El conocimiento involves reconnecting mind, body and spirit in the fourth stage.

Consequently, the fifth stage involves a desire for order and meaning, a new script that realigns the inner self with discoveries from the shadows and the reconnections. The sixth stage consists of presenting this new script to others, unsuccessfully, and dealing with a clash of realities. The strategy acquired in the seventh stage solves the clash of realities to establish a common ground. A blend of ethics and compassion, along with a shift of realities, engages spiritual activism. Spiritual activism depends on integrating the knowledge/experience acquired from the shamanic exercise into our lifestyle.

The definition should be clear by now, but further clarifications are always welcome. Successive stages of personal experiences make up el conocimiento. They permit new perceptions to articulate and integrate a "new paradigm" within us and among our communities. Conocimiento and being/self are interrelated, and espíritus lend conocimiento to an individual, hence the shamanic exercise. The path/ journey of conocimiento comprises a confrontation of avoided elements, which in turn leads to the full use of la facultad, a perception that transcends the programming that censures/blinds/represses/distorts. El conocimiento is "skeptical of reasoning and rationality"; it involves spirituality and intuition, with intuitive knowledge coming from "unmediated constructs" and not from the filter of identity. Though skeptically, el conocimiento also includes science and rationality.

Anzaldúa's piece in *this bridge we call home* illustrates, in my opinion, a manual of bilanguaging and this way of life at a cultural/ linguistic/ spiritual/ sexual/ intellectual/ activist/... crossroads. I interpret her text as a fight to integrate the fear of spirituality present in the articulation of activism/intellectualism, and an advocacy to allow the cohabitation of spirituality and logical reasoning in the formation of intellectual/ personal/ experiential/ spiritual/ lifestyle premises. "Anzaldúa looks at borders as the places where the distinction between the inside and the foreign collapse; the borders themselves become the location of thinking and releasing the fears constructed by national intellectuals toward what may come from the outside." (Mignolo 260) What Mignolo notes as Anzaldúa's bilanguaging, I also underline in this paper. However, the "national intellectuals" in his quote are replaced by, or rather, comprised by women of color. It is no longer a question of thinking and releasing the fears constructed solely by national intellectuals, but also those constructed by Third World Feminists. Two anthologies and two decades after *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa's bilanguaging speaks from the inscription of language within her body to the emerging international Third World Feminist community.

She rethinks “the complicities among texts, nations, empires, and cultures of scholarship” (Mignolo 261), only she takes it to an intercultural level as she incorporates Nahuatl myth with I-Ching symbolism, for instance. In *this bridge we call home*, la nepantlera underlines both spiritual text and corporal language from *Borderlands* and *This Bridge Called My Back*.

...bilinguaging love...

Bilinguaging is an act of love (Mignolo 272). Anzaldúa practices this act in *this bridge we call home* as she means to transcend the system of values that dominates and colonizes. She realizes what Mignolo points out—“a new abstract universal won’t do” (273)—and that’s exactly the reason why she offers to put down the movement’s walls. This is what she proposes in the introduction to the anthology. She illustrates how that begins with the falling of one’s inner walls in her narrative. The absence of walls welcomes diversity within self-identity and within a movement’s identity. Such is the future that Anzaldúa welcomes, and that Mignolo promotes (“Diversity as a universal project is the future road, and the ‘diversality’ requires a new epistemology, border epistemology” 273).

We noted in a previous comment that the seven paths of *el conocimiento* resemble a religious and a ritualistic pattern. They also represent a multicultural mosaic of ritualistic symbols: the shakras, the alchemical process, the four elements... Anzaldúa’s text enacts the integration of different cultural versions of an archetypal structure/symbol, finds the commonalities among the differences without essentializing them, and brings them to the reader’s consciousness.

Subalternization of knowledge became possible due to the homogenization of a given concept of reason *and* due to the Christianization, the civilizing mission and the spread of its corresponding global designs. The latter transformed local histories, giving birth to the other side of globalization: *mundialización*. The border space is between globalization and *mundialización*, and between modernity and coloniality. This very space has lived years of recognizing the Western epistemology as superior to the local subaltern knowledges and languages; then the colonial difference comes to inhabit this border space, where new forms of knowledge emerge to denote the limits of Western epistemology. Thus bilanguaging, the cohabiting of two or more languages, knowledges or epistemologies, becomes possible. Rather, where languaging and knowledging becomes possible. (Mignolo 250–252)

“Now let us shift...the path of *conocimiento*...inner work, public acts” seams together a number of concepts stemming from the Nahuatl, Spanish and English languages, and epistemologies from Occidental and Oriental ways of thinking. For instance, the symbols originate from the Tarot, the dowsing, astrology, numerology, and Jungian psychology. Instead of referring to a specific primary source, Anzaldúa plays with the guiding energies of numerous religions, cultures, superstitions, juggling to allow them to cohabit with her text and within her/your life.

...dreaming conflict resolutions...

The central concept, *conocimiento*, is defined through a metaphysical concept, an animal, and a shamanic capacity: “Third eye, reptilian eye [and] *naguala* . . . results in *conocimiento*.” (542) *Naguala* is a technique of shape shifting practiced by Mexican shamans that allows them to shift “into the perspective of their animal companion” (577). Anzaldúa integrates this capacity into her text by preserving its meaning and molding it to her lifestyle theory: “I call the maker of spirit signs ‘*la naguala*’, a creative, dreamlike consciousness able to make broader associations and connections than waking consciousness.” (577) Here the *naguala* re-introduces the importance of dreamlike consciousness, a state that has been denied importance especially in critical cultural encounters. Anzaldúa’s contribution thus re-instates the importance of the imaginary in conflict resolution. Reverie, dreaming, artistic creativity help us find similarities instead of divisions (568). This stems both from the shamanistic *naguala* practice and the scientific connectionist nets: “I borrow this term from the ‘connectionist nets,’ the neural net consisting of billions of neurons in the human cortex. Connections are made in all states of consciousness, the most broad in artistic reverie and in dreaming, not in focused logical waking thought.” (578)

Though its root lies in the intuitive awareness, with the snake as a symbol of an awakening consciousness, “an awareness and intelligence not grasped by logical thought” (540), Anzaldúa’s new paradigm, the path of *conocimiento*, comes from outside and from within in different ways. From outside and within the self, monolingual systems, intellectual reasoning, cultural hegemonies, scientific data, but the new stories that emerge from her new paradigm are stories ignored by traditional science. They build a decolonizing bridge between nature, *espíritus* and self that restores a shamanic power into the community, that dismantles and resists existing dogmas and ideologies related to continuing politics of violence, and that triggers inner / spiritual / personal / social / collective / material changes.

The nepantlera’s text embodies a shamanic exercise and bilanguaging love. According to Mignolo, bilanguaging “could contribute in the struggle to reconvert subaltern memories from places of nostalgia to places of celebration.” (266) As Anzaldúa describes the walls that delineate the Third World Feminist epistemological home, I perceive it as a house full of nostalgia, an emotional will to preserve and secure the essence of feminism of color. Anzaldúa walks out of this home, without turning her back to it (since she has eyes in the back of her head), and proposes to break the walls of nostalgia and celebrate insecurity. She places herself at the crossroads of Anglo feminism and Third World feminism to produce a double critique and pursue decolonization. With shapeshifting and magic, the path of *conocimiento* shall allow us to adopt a dreamlike creativity to tackle conflict, and transcend the illusionary images of the manipulative collective dream. Let us keep in mind, however, that the path of *conocimiento* never ends. Like Jungian individuation, it is a constant journey, a constant inner and outer battle, and a consistent mode of transformation.

Her last words in the text are “now let us shift. Contigo, Gloria.” They come at the end of a prayer that brings self, nature, and spirits together and reminds us of the anthology’s objectives as well as our freshly taught skills: “May the roaring force of our collective creativity/ heal the wounds of hate, ignorance, indifference/ dissolve the divisions creating chasms between us/ . . .sabemos que podemos transformar este mundo/ filled with hunger, pain, and war/ into a sanctuary of beauty, redemption and possibility...” (576)

The prayer, a meditation, shows Anzaldúa thinking with a wide array of elements, and literally thinking with, as she embodies each word into her mind, body and soul in a ritualistic celebration. Within the locus of Third World Feminism, Anzaldúa teaches us a way of life, a skill enabling us to use creativity to re-shape values and principles beyond the colonial difference, a ritual of *conocimiento*, of knowledge-ing that enables bilanguaging love. This is only the beginning, for her teachings have inspired me to establish a new paradigm of analysis, one that searches the healing function of narratives with indigenous, Africanist, and psychoanalytical references. How will you shift? How will we all shift? We shall soon find out...and as we wait, let us embrace our fears and have faith, as Gloria reassures that “the healing images and narratives we imagine will soon materialize.” (5)

Notes

“My harshest critics have been Chicanas, and Chicanos; [...] The older Chicanos I think are in the same place as the Chicanos who don't support my work as much, in that they're the old guard, and here comes this Chicana dyke, feminist dyke, and they don't quite know how to react.” (Reuman & Anzaldúa 7)

² Taussig finds another example of the “taming” or changing the name of an “Indian-manifested Saint” in Colombia, from the “Wild Women of the Forest” to “Our Lady of Remedies.”

³ Community massacres are brought up both in the theoretical part and the poetry section of *Borderlands*, with images of the Tejano's lynchings which establish a connection between African slaves and Mestizos/Chicanos (Saldívar-Hull 75). An Anglo-Texan poetic voice explores this image in “They Called Them Greasers,” a poem's title that pays tribute to Historian Arnolde de León's book on lynching as an institutionalized threat against Tejanos in 19th century Texas, by bringing both lynchings and rape episodes to the forefront (*Borderlands* 135–36). In another poem that rewrites the Llorona legend from an indigenous woman's point of view, the trauma of losing her sons to war builds a bridge between Chicana's and indigenous women in the Americas' trauma. Yet in another instance, she shares the awareness of a hemispheric sense of trauma when she quotes Violeta Parra's poem on the Chilean indigenous suffering; she exposes losing land ownership as a collective trauma shared by populations throughout the Americas (and the world), with Parra's lines as the epigraph to her section on the Treaty of Guadalupe.

⁴ *Borderlands* presents us with another history of Texas as well, apparently overlooked by Anglo-Texan historians J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb. She unveils the lynchings that took place when Mexicans resisted Texas Rangers' conquest, and the unspeakable sexual abuse which established Chicano writers like Américo Paredes still silence (Saldívar-Hull 68).

⁵ While autohistoria focuses on and at times fictionalizes the life story (seen, for example, in Anzaldúa's *Prieta* series), autohistoria-teoría includes openly theoretical dimensions as well (see, for example, in *Borderlands*). As Anzaldúa explains, “*Autohistoria* is a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria-teoría is a personal essay that theorizes” (“now let us shift” 578). (Keating 6)

⁶ In Anzaldúa's writings, ‘nepantla’ represents both an extension of and an elaboration on her theories of the Borderlands and the Coatlicue state (as described in *Borderlands/La Frontera*)... But with nepantla, Anzaldúa underscores and expands the ‘spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous’ dimensions.’ Nepantla—as process, liminality, and change—occurs during the many transitional stages of life and describes both identity-related issues and epistemological concerns.” (Keating 7) Nepantla is identity-related, but also an epistemology, as well as a creative faculty, all of which Anzaldúa practices in her theoretical framework.

⁷ “With the nepantla paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined.” (Anzaldúa *Entrevistas* 176)

⁸ English translation: “I think therefore I am” becomes “I feel spirits and I exist.”

⁹ Spirituality was always present in Anzaldúa's texts, and she regretted that academics would overlook this aspect of her writing which made its transculturality: “For the most part what was missed in their reviews and interpretations was the spiritual/mystical/poetic aspects of my writing. I think that, in particular anything that's ahistorical or that's transcultural or that seems to be transcultura—makes them

uncomfortable. So very few people will lecture on the spiritual aspects. Very few people.” (Reuman and Anzaldúa 7)

¹⁰ “With *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa fleshes out the potentially transformative elements of her well-known theories of *mestiza consciousness* and *la facultad*. Like the former, *conocimiento* represents a nonbinary, connectionist mode of thinking; like the latter, *conocimiento* often develops within oppressive contexts and entails a deepening of perceptions. But with *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa underscores and develops the imaginal, spiritual-activist, and political dimensions implicit in her previous theories. An intensely personal, fully embodied epistemological process that gathers information from context, *conocimiento* is profoundly relational, and enables those who enact it to make connections among apparently disparate events, persons, experiences, and realities. These connections, in turn, lead to action. . . . Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento* offers a holistic, activist-inflected epistemology designed to effect change on multiple levels.” (Keating 8)

¹¹ “un mejor equilibrio entre necesidades humanas y las relaciones con la naturaleza.”

¹² This also resembles the archetypal “journey of individuation” as outlined by Carl G. Jung, and Joseph Campbell’s “hero’s journey.”

¹³ It is important that the shamanic voice be preoccupied by the dignities of humanity according to Vidal, 238)

Bibliography

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990.
- . *Borderlands/ La Frontera, The New Mestiza*. San Francisco : Aunt Lute Books, 1999. Print.
- . *Interviews/ Entrevistas*. Keating, Ana Louise, ed. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- . “Foreword, 2001.” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Moraga, Cherríe L. & Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002. xxxiv-xl. Print.
- . “La Prieta.” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Moraga, Cherríe L. & Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002. 220–234. Print.
- . “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter To Third World Women Writers.” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Moraga, Cherríe L. & Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002. 183–194. Print.
- . “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe Spaces.” *This Bridge We Call Home*. Keating, Ana Louise & Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2002. 1–6. Print.
- . “now let us shift...the path of *conocimiento*...inner work, public acts.” *This Bridge We Call Home*. Keating, Ana Louise & Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2002. 540–579. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. “Of Mimicry and Man.” *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 121–130. Print.
- Keating, AnaLouise. *EntreMundos/ Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2005. Print.
- Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/ Global Designs*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.
- Reuman, Ann E. and Gloria Anzaldúa. “Coming Into Play: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa.” *Latino/a Identities*. Spec. issue of *MELUS*. 25.2. (Summer 2000). 3–45 Web. 12 August 2010.
- Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity*. New York: Routledge, 1993. 44–58. Print.
- . *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987. Print.
- Vidal, Hernán. *Política cultural de la memoria histórica*. “Ejercicio shamánico: Raul Zurita, *Canto a su amor desaparecido* (1987).” México, D.F.: Mosquito editores, 1997. 221–239. Print.