

I'm on a plane returning to Denver, Colorado, after creating community at a highly emotional gathering of women and men at the University of Texas, San Antonio, to celebrate the twenty-year anniversary of Gloria E. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. I feel invigorated and inspired from the communal energies and exhausted by Anzaldúa's challenge of fleshing our realities. My carry-on bag holds three of Anzaldúa's books and seventeen pages of typed and handwritten notes. What a privilege to be living in the imaginary of Gloria E. Anzaldúa.

## WRITING AND WORKING IN THE BORDERLANDS: The Implications of Anzaldúan Thought for Chicana Feminist Sociology

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*In Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999), Anzaldúa theorizes border studies for the social sciences (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Najera-Ramirez, and Zavella 2003; González-López 2006; Levitt 2001; O'Brien 2009; Segura and Zavella 2006; Torres 2003). AnaLouise Keating adds, "*Borderlands*, which is frequently anthologized and often cited, has challenged and expanded previous views in American Studies, Chicana and Chicano Studies, composition studies, ethnic studies, feminism, literary studies, critical pedagogy, women's studies, and queer theory" (2005, 3). Particularly, Anzaldúa (1999) offers 'borderlands' and the 'new mestiza consciousness' as concepts, along with the methodological tool of autohistoria,

which pertain to this discussion as points of departure for theorizing the everyday life of Chicanas. It is important to note, however, that *Borderlands/La Frontera* is not necessarily considered her *trabajo destacable* as this would disregard or dismiss Anzaldúa's post-*Borderlands/La Frontera* contributions. As Anzaldúa explains, in *Interviews/Entrevistas* (2000), "*Borderlands* is just one project of this overall umbrella project that is my life's work, my life's writing. And this new book on composition, the writing process, [the construction of] identity [and] knowledge is like a sequel to *Borderlands*" (Keating 2000, 268). Through her work, Anzaldúa challenges us to engage with a more theoretically complicated feminist subject. The following essay discusses the implications of Anzaldúan theory and method in the development of Chicana feminist sociology.

### **Anzaldúa, Sociology, and Chicana Feminists:**

#### **From Marginalization to Intellectual Reciprocity**

Slightly more than twenty years after the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Anzaldúa's work is now influencing the social sciences (González-López 2006; Keating and González-López 2009; Levitt 2001; Martínez 2002; Segura and Zavella 2007). Her work is now part of the larger Chicana sociological discourse, but has yet to fully be accepted by the mainstream sociological canon as critical and legitimate scholarship. As a member of the American Sociological Association for the past fifteen years, I have seldom heard Anzaldúa referenced or cited in presentations or witnessed her work highlighted in a major forum at the annual conference. I do not recall ever seeing her texts sold at the book exhibits—where a badge is required for entry, restricting admittance only to those who are able to pay costly conference fees.

In Rebecca Aanerud's assessment regarding the impact of one of Anzaldúa's earlier works, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), she argues that this

anthology, co-edited with Cherríe Moraga, was marginalized within feminist theory. She notes,

Through the 1980s and into the 1990s *Bridge* was cited widely and often in journals as diverse as *Signs*, *The Black Scholar*, *Critical Inquiry*, and the *Yale Law Journal*. In fact, *Bridge* is one of the *most* cited books in feminist theorizing. However, authors do not discuss *Bridge's* content and specific arguments. (2002, 71)

Also, literary critic Norma Alarcón states that its use tends to be “cosmetic as Anglo feminist readers of *Bridge* tend to appropriate it, cite it as an instance of difference between women, and then proceed to negate that difference by subsuming women of color into the unitary category of woman/women” (Aanerud 2002, 71). This same argument can be made about Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where textual engagement has not been fully deployed.

Anzaldúa’s own self-presentation and performance as a writer of absolute humility adds to the further marginalization of her work. More specifically, Anzaldúa was not regarded as an *academic icon*, nor did she ever aspire to be. For example, she states:

My role is that of teacher, healer, translator, and mediator. It’s all right for them to think of me as a model. But there’s a danger, the danger of the pedestal. They give me their power and in return I’m supposed to tell them what to do. So when I’m communicating my ideas I try to turn it back: “what does it mean for me to be on this pedestal up on stage, looking down at you? And what does that mean that you’re down there looking up at me?” (Keating 2000, 201)

Through her texts, Anzaldúa invites us to participate in a relationship of *intellectual reciprocity* where she challenges us to “take [her] ideas, think about and expand on them” (Anzaldúa 2000, 201). In my view, intellectual reciprocity involves a fundamental commitment to leading all living beings to liberation. Thus, the mentor/student, student/mentor become comrades who share the same goal and are bound in a relationship, traveling a shared path. It is my intent to honor Anzaldúa’s challenge in becoming human and being human, not only as a Chicana feminist sociologist but as a humyn being in working toward the liberation of all living energies.

Given that the social sciences have marginalized Anzaldúa’s writings, identifying them primarily as literary works, many Chicana sociologists hesitate to establish a relationship of intellectual reciprocity. Academic standards have confined Chicana sociologists to legitimize their scholarly work by citing those who are considered well published, namely white, heterosexual men and women scholars, and an occasional heterosexual woman of color whose sociological subjectivity is regarded as an afterthought. Thus, the challenge for Chicana sociologists has been to write for the academy, meaning to think and conceptualize within a white, heterosexual western framework. Whether Chicana sociologists meet the expectations of the colonial mantra of publish or perish is not even a consideration.

### **Reflections: Carving Selves, Creating Knowledge**

Gloria González-López’ reflective essay “Epistemologies of the Wound” (2006), for example, describes her early academic relationship with Anzaldúa as intellectually silent and marginalized. As a graduate student and young assistant professor educated in sociology, González-López was discouraged from incorporating Anzaldúan thought by not disrupting the works of canonic sociological theorists,

such as Durkheim, Weber, Habermas, and Lacan. However, González-López divulges that Anzaldúa's work has been a constant guide in challenging her academic journey, noting that initially she developed a relationship with Anzaldúan thought in silence. González-López states:

In my silent rebellion, however, I was always afraid of even thinking about incorporating Anzaldúa's theorizing in my papers and potential publications, I feared the endless questions I would have to decipher and try to answer: "Is Gloria Anzaldúa a sociologist, a theorist? Isn't that the Chicana lesbian who does poetry?" (2006, 18)

As many Chicana sociologists, González-López continues to engage sociological thought in the borderlands, which includes whether we desire to negotiate and engage critical knowledge in traditional sociological departments, ethnic studies, and/or women and gender studies. In addition, subsequent understandings of our various selves—our subjectivity—also come into question. Anzaldúa cautions us not to exert our energies "breaking down the male/white frame (the whole of Western culture)," thus implying that we focus on our decolonization as academics and (re)create our subjectivities as *thought-women* or indigenous scholars (1999, 2).

Finally, the politics of Anzaldúa's writing have also contributed to the marginalization of her work as she advocates creating new languages—lenguas—and ways of writing based on Chicana experiences in the United States. Employing counter hegemonic methodological tools such as autohistoria, "Anzaldúa presents history as a serpentine cycle rather than a linear narrative" (Saldívar-Hull in Anzaldúa 1999, 2). AnaLouise Keating (2000) expands on this definition claiming, "Autohistoria involves writing ourselves into the words we write" (2000, 1). More specifically, autohistoria incites Chicanas and women

of color to include their personal and community histories in addition to conceptualizing and writing abstract ideas. “I call it ‘auto’ for self-writing, and ‘historia’ for history—as in collective, personal, cultural, and racial history—as well as for fiction, a story you make-up” (Keating 2000, 242). Also, Chela Sandoval (2000, xiv) suggests that all social change begins with autohistoria, a methodological technique of spoken-word-art-performance-activism. Therefore, throughout her writings, Anzaldúa draws on her life providing stories of her childhood in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas—struggles with colorism where privileges are granted to light-skinned people of color, her labors as a migrant farm worker, her harsh educational experiences as a Spanish speaking child, and her sexual and spiritual desires, to name a few.

Consequently, her writings are not considered scholastically legitimate because they are not academic enough, not intellectual enough, and not abstract enough; as well, her stories create uneasiness for those who occupy spaces of academic power and privilege. However, Anzaldúa’s stories *are* her theory. It is the reader’s task to extract theory from these stories. Anzaldúa’s methodological tool of autohistoria renders legitimacy to Chicana feminist sociology and provides a foundation upon which to build our sociological imaginations. Additionally, invoking the methodological tool of autohistoria transforms sociological spaces currently theorized by white men and, to a lesser extent, white women.

**Subjectivities, Positionalities, and Social Locations:**

**Bridges to Conocimiento**

It is important to recognize that for Chicana feminist sociologists class, color, sexuality, and cultural ways of communicating—*platicando*—are influential in creating new languages and writing styles. For example, Chicana sociologists, who primarily may be working class, elicit patterns of communication embedded in working class experiences. Color or colorism also plays an influential factor. Ana

Castillo (1997) argues that dark-skinned Chicanas are less likely to be published in mainstream outlets. Additionally, sexuality is critical to these endeavors as Chicana lesbian sociological discourse is subsumed within the larger Chicana sociological narrative, and nearly dismissed in its entirety from the sociological canon. Cultural communication patterns, namely that of storytelling, are also important to consider. Thus, Anzaldúa's arguments on the decolonization of the Chicana feminist sociological subject is linked to the very language and writing style or performance deployed. Drawing on her work, I argue that continuing to write from a white male, heterosexual western framework disregards the authenticity of Chicana lives and dignity as activist scholars, which limits our relationship with the intellectual reciprocity in Anzaldúan thought and practice.

Encouraged by Anzaldúa's writing intentions, my aim is to privilege the art and act of Chicana feminist sociology as a legitimate academic form, simply because it is needed in decolonial projects and movements. Anzaldúan concepts of borderlands, new mestiza consciousness, and autohistoria disrupt the Chicano master narrative, thus advancing the sociological narrative of Chicana lives as the sociology of Chicanas. As suggested by Evelyn Alsultany, Chicana feminist sociologists, and women of color in general, "should decolonize essentialized frameworks, so that women of color can move through public space without strategizing a performance, selecting a mask for each scenario" (2002, 110).

Anzaldúa describes the borderlands "as a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in constant transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (1999, 25). Furthermore she states,

The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book *Borderlands* is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The

psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (Anzaldúa 1987 and 1999)

As noted by Edén Torres (2003), various scholars have tailored and adapted the concept, borderlands, within their own work. Borderlands, Torres argues, reflects a particular history of colonization for people of Mexican descent. The reality of the confluence of Mexico, the *motherland*, and the United States create specific social conditions for Chicana/os. Hence, I argue that Chicanas bestride gender, race, sexuality, and class in the context of borderlands as argued by Anzaldúa. By deploying the term borderlands, Chicana/os contextualize and substantiate their experiences and negotiations with gender, race, sexuality, and class.

Sonia Saldívar-Hull offers that the new mestiza consciousness transforms the Chicana life of action. “She ‘puts history through a sieve,’ she communicates ‘the rupture... with oppressive traditions’ and ‘documents the struggle.’... After undertaking that process...she [new mestiza] ‘reinterprets history and...shape[s] new myths’” (Anzaldúa 1999, 10). The new mestiza consciousness validates Chicana selfhood by (re)conceptualizing Mexican and Chicana historical figures and legacies, thus rewriting the Chicana’s place in the mythical home of Chicano cultural nationalists, Aztlán. Chicano nationalists are forced to recognize feminist rebellion as parallel to racialized class rebellion. Anzaldúa’s redefinition of cultural identity through critical analyses of essentialized categories of gender and sexuality transforms nationalism by incorporating

a feminist theory and a gendered Aztlán, which in turn validates Chicana selfhood. In this respect, the new mestiza consciousness collapses dualities that serve to enslave women, availing for those of us who write about Chicanas a dialectical language that allows for ambiguity.

**Working and Writing in the Borderlands:  
Decolonizing the Sociological Performance**

I situate my subjectivity within the field of sociology as a Chicana sociologist, a sociologist with a Chicana worldview committed to a decolonial project that liberates *all* living energies from systems of oppression, including spiritual colonization. I employ autohistoria by strategically interjecting my sociological journey beginning as an assistant professor in a sociology department and now as an associate professor in a Department of Ethnic Studies.

In Keating's discussion of risking the personal, she notes how engaging in self-disclosure may result in being discarded as a scholar, considered "vain, egocentric, and selfish" (2000, 2). Autohistoria does not allow for self-censorship. It calls for Chicana sociologists to remove their academic masks and to "make face, to make soul" (Anzaldúa 1990). Academic masks impede our theoretical development, which inadvertently shapes our identities as Chicana feminist sociologists. As argued by Keating, "Academic masks subsume our desires for social justice, radical societal transformation, liberation, spiritual transformation, and cultural resistance in academic language" (2000, 3). Making face is a metaphor for constructing one's identity, a process of decolonization. Anzaldúa draws on Nahautl philosophy by suggesting that people were placed on earth to shape or make one's face (body) and heart (soul). Making face, making soul is a process by which Chicanas—women of color, in general—engage in constructing their identities and the subsequent healing processes involved.

In this essay, I attempt to discard my academic mask where theory can subsume personal thoughts and feelings or outlaw knowledge(s). I will no longer take part in my own censorship. And, I hope those who read this essay will agree to do the same. Hence, readers are encouraged to read beyond essentialized conceptualizations, read more than just a sociologist who happens to be a Chicana, but read me as a Chicana sociologist, a dark-skinned woman raised in a working class background now living as a middle-class global citizen and activist scholar/teacher. In removing the masks imposed on us by academia, we engage in making face. By making face, as Chicana feminist sociologists, we are constructing our identities and engaging in a healing process of transformation in the academy. Making face can help us to negotiate academic toxicity as Chicana feminist sociologists.

Chicana feminist sociologists, who work and write in the academic borderlands, straddle and negotiate the ambiguous space between the sites defined as Chicana sociology and the sociology of Chicanas—spaces that impose academic binaries or dualities resulting in an essentialized subjectivity. Those in power—namely white heterosexual men in sociology departments and those who hold influential administrative positions—create unnatural boundaries throughout academia. This practice of questioning the legitimacy of Chicana scholarship provides a convenient and privileged platform from which to other and sometimes appropriate our work.

The foundation of Chicana feminist sociology is largely based on our community work where we critically study the social conditions of individuals, families, social organizations, and networks and their interdependent relationship to the larger society. As such, we engage in critical theorizing by documenting/writing our observations and by providing suggestions for public policy in areas such as education and healthcare. However, this type of critical indigenous sociological

engagement is not considered traditional research; it is condescendingly reduced to service work. Hence, the unnatural boundaries established in academia by those in power are considered as such, unnatural, because Chicana feminist sociological studies inherently involves praxis or translating theory into practice, a task rarely carried out in academia.

Given the multiplicities of spaces—sitios—that Chicana feminist sociologists occupy, they can be considered potential nepantleras living and negotiating in the psychic and emotional borderlands. ‘Nepantleras’ is expanded upon in the discussion of the Anzaldúan concept, ‘nos/otras.’ Nepantla is regarded as an extension and elaboration of the borderlands concept where “Anzaldúa underscores and expands the ‘spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous’” (Keating 2000, 7). Nepantla is a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio—in the middle or in-between space. In the psychic and emotional borderlands, space(s) of mitigating and negotiating dualities with the goal of healing and transformation are practiced.

As Chicana feminist sociologists, we bring all our identities, the multiplicity of our subjectivities, experiences with the in-between spaces or living as nepantleras, into our writings. The process of making face, making soul in the academic borderlands is reflected in the politics of writing among Chicana feminist sociologists, which for some disrupt decolonization or become subversive acts (Anzaldúa 1990). Trinh T. Minh-ha argues that emphasizing racial and sexual attributes to the act of writing, a creative act, “discredits the achievements of non-mainstream women writers.” Consequently, Chicana feminist sociologists may feel compelled to choose from among conflicting identities, namely, “writer of color, woman writer, or woman of color” (1990, 245).

I argue that Chicana feminist sociologists, in general, have deployed various

forms of autohistoria in their writings, as is the case with González-López (2006). In this historical moment, the impact of storytelling is evident in the ways in which we establish our relationship to the writing process. Many of us have parents and grandparents who were born in the early twentieth century, primarily of working class backgrounds, with limited or no formal education. Thus, we were educated, disciplined, loved, and cared for through storytelling. “The New Mestiza consciousness—while it refuses static notions of the self—profoundly validates Chicana selfhood” through confronting traditions of male domination within our own communities, challenging notions of men and men-identified women, and rupturing the dualities of sexuality—moves which promote heterosexism (Saldívar-Hull in Anzaldúa 1999, 5). Also, as described by bell hooks, “the world of women talk energized us” (1990, 207). Talking circles are places of negotiating the borderlands, in particular, living in a world of heterosexism and patriarchy. Honoring and taking these lessons of *platicando* to the cosmos of the academy is a conscious, counter-hegemonic decolonial process for liberation.

Writing in the flesh of a new mestiza consciousness engenders a process of survival, healing, and transformation for the individual, their community, and the larger society. In this respect, the act of writing is not merely a technical skill, but one that entails a sense of creativity. However, the sociological canon does not consider creativity as scholarly, thus derailing Chicana feminist sociologists from uncovering untapped resources of transformative and revolutionary thought. We all feel these sources as energies of creativity. We feel the pull of these energies, and many times dismiss them as we have forgotten how to unveil them, how to reach-out to them. We have been indoctrinated to think and write abstractly or creatively from the rational world, not the imaginary reality as suggested by Anzaldúa (2005). Thus, we employ and perpetuate the oppressive story that continues to define and

dictate the master sociological narrative. The native tongue, our ways of communicating, sharing ideas and values, must be honored to dignify not only our lives as Chicanas, but also the lives we speak about in our works. This is our task, our commitment, as Chicana feminist sociologists who engage a new *mestiza* consciousness.

In the field of sociology, González-López's (2006) work on incest in Mexico displays the utility of *nepantla*, *conocimiento*, spiritual activism, *la facultad*, and *Coyolxauhqui*. These inform the early stages of her work toward understanding adults' histories of intra-familial sexual experiences during childhood and adolescence (2006, 17). For example, while conducting fieldwork, González-López conceptualized epistemologies of the wound—multidimensional states of consciousness—to generate sociological knowledge about sexual violence in Mexican society. Also, she discovered and explored the core of the mutually interconnected intellectual, emotional, and spiritual processes experienced by participants, through her in-depth individual interviews (2006, 17).

Jodi O'Brien's 2009 essay, "Sociology as an Epistemology of Contradiction," suggests that we interrogate the tensions and contradictions we experience personally in our work as sociologists. O'Brien uses *autohistoria* to examine her own academic experiences, which further enhances her sociological imagination and subsequently generates critical sociological knowledge. In a series of academic vignettes, O'Brien references her own lived experiences as an example of grappling with complexity, contradiction, and conflict engendered by the very subject matter under study. She argues that sociologists who interrogate complexity, including the accompanying pain and conflict, situate themselves in spaces conducive to more clearly articulate standpoints

from which most significant contributions are created. More specifically, O'Brien states, "A well-articulated comprehension of this *contradiction-forged standpoint* is one foundation from which we can generate a sociology that has the potential to chart resonant courses through the terrain of complexity and to span significant chasms of difference" (2009, 8).

**The New Mestiza Consciousness:**

**Chicana Feminist Sociologists as Indigenous Scholars**

Chicana feminist sociologists situate themselves in *nepantla* where political and spiritual relationships to the land are negotiated. Consequently, in that space, one's identity is considered to be in a state of progression. Thus, indigenous scholarship involves a political and spiritual relationship to the land on which we all live, not an ethnic-racial identity. Reclaiming our relationship to the land as *indigenous scholars* may have important implications for our Chicana identities and subjectivities. In a 1991 interview conducted by Inés Hernández Ávila with Anzaldúa, they engaged the concept of originality or the sense of place as land base. Hernández Ávila cautions us not to romanticize the Indian past, but to comprehensively and wholeheartedly understand and (re)connect to "the Indian past"—to understand intellectually and spiritually "what it means to have raices in this continent, in this hemisphere" (2000, 184). Hernández Ávila further states,

Because we were interrupted in our relationship with the land, many people don't know what it feels like to be connected to a land base. Native people who've been relocated and urbanized still have that connection to the land, to this hemisphere. What is it that happened with Chicanos? (2000, 184)

She notes that despite the disruptions in the relationship with the land experienced by northern Native people, indigenous people continue to claim their relationship with the land. Considering explanations of internalized racism, Hernández Ávila questions historical memory among Chicana/os and their relationship with the land, or on being indigenous to the western hemisphere, as naming themselves Native peoples has become nearly obsolete.

The new mestiza consciousness is grounded in Anzaldúa's use of indigenous imagery, terminology, and beliefs. Some have termed her practice as a form of escapism. However, Keating argues that, "Indigenous Mexican philosophies and worldviews offer Anzaldúa's epistemological tools for individual/collective self-definition, resistance, intervention, and creation" (2000, 5). As previously mentioned, the new mestiza consciousness involves recovering indigenous memory and history. Chicana feminist sociologists, who enact the new mestiza consciousness, employ an indigeneity where "the indigena in the New Mestiza, represents a new political subjectivity as a fully racialized feminist Chicana" (Saldívar-Hull in Anzaldúa 1987, 5).

### **Nos/Otras: Selves Intersecting Others—Building Alliances**

Anzaldúa's concept of nos/otras advocates:

An unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other. We are the other, the other is us... Honoring people's otherness, las nepantleras advocate a "nos/otras" position—an alliance between "us" and "others." In nos/otras, the "us" is divided in two, the slash in the middle representing the bridge—the best mutuality we can hope for at the moment. Las nepantleras envision a time when the bridge will no longer be needed—we'll have shifted to a seamless nosotras. (Keating 2005, 7)

Nosotras, the Spanish word for the feminine *us*, indicates a collectivity, a type of group identity or consciousness. Joining together *nos* and *otras* holds the promise of healing; we contain others, others contain us. However, *nos/otras* does not represent sameness, as the differences among us still exist. These two concepts function dialogically, generating previously unrecognized commonalities and connections (2002, 570).

The black/white dichotomy continues to define race relations in sociological research, publications, informal conversations and gatherings, and the overall sociological performance, as evidenced by my latest observations of American Sociological Association (San Francisco, California, 2009) annual meetings. For example, there were panel discussions focusing on building alliances between and among white women and women of color. For the most part, however, Chicanas and Latinas were absent from the dialogues. As I shared my observations with a Chicana colleague, she responded, “We’re excluded because black women consider us white and white women only consider black women as colored!” Thus, the exclusionary practices of the black/white dichotomy perpetuate an academic borderland, which undermines Chicana and Latina sociological contributions, marginalizes our scholarship, silences our voices, and impedes activist alliances among us all, including men. Fortunately, the American Sociological Association’s Latina/Latino section provides a space for the development of Chicana feminist thought, the building of cross-ethnic and interdisciplinary alliances among its members, and a site in which to engage academic decolonial processes.

Even so, how do I as a heterosexual woman build transformative alliances with Chicana queer sociologists? How do we envision Chicana feminist sociologists doing anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist work? Chicana feminist sociologists must build alliances with lesbian sociologists. According to

Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, “We do not read Anzaldúa’s (and other Chicana and Latina feminist lesbian works) work in the larger context of Chicana lesbian writing” (2006, 3), or for purposes of this discussion, in the larger context of Chicana lesbian sociological writing. First, we must remove ourselves from sexualizing Chicana lesbian scholarship. Second, we need to read beyond heterosexual frameworks and parameters, which involves deconstructing heterosexism and heteronormativity. Anzaldúa’s Chicana queer imaginary challenges us to educate ourselves about heterosexism and its associated privileges rather than exhaust the energies of our queer sisters in having them teach us, the oppressor, as we have had to teach white men and women about our racialized ethnic selves. As self-identified heterosexual Chicanas, we must learn about lesbian history, movements of resistance and survival, the denial and violation of queer civil rights and citizenry in relationship to our own lives as heterosexuals, so that we may build bridges to radical social transformation. We need to understand how heterosexism and heteronormativity influence bridging alliances among all of us; we need to respectively learn from one another. We need to collaboratively construct our subjectivities and identities.

On a daily basis, hour-to-hour, moment-to-moment, we must be conscientious about our social location in the U.S. heterosexist state. More importantly, how do our ideas, words, language, gestures, and actions perpetuate heterosexist oppression and subjugation? As *nepantleras*—honoring differences that exist in this historical moment—we cannot fall back on the heterosexual privilege of guilt. Heterosexism also grants us the privilege of convenience in choosing when and how, if at all, to engage in the dismantling of patriarchal heterosexism. Thus, this public statement now holds me indefinitely accountable for building alliances with *all* queer sociologists.

**Conclusion: Living in the Imaginary of Gloria E. Anzaldúa**

I have always been a sociologist, a dark-skinned Chicana raised in a working class family on the west side of Sacramento. Injustices toward women were played out in my abusive, alcoholic home, and injustices toward Mexican students were standard practices in the schools I attended. Teenage pregnancy and drug and alcohol consumption/abuse plagued the neighborhood at what seemed to be epidemic levels. And the number of relatives and friends taken to and killed in Vietnam generated curiosity, confusion, and anger.

During an exchange of childhood memories with a friend, now also a sociologist, she suggested I see *Once Were Warriors*, a film produced in 1994, about an indigenous New Zealand family confronted with alcoholism and abuse. I immediately identified with Grace, a young woman who committed suicide after being raped by a friend of the family, whom her father commanded she respectfully address as uncle. I was thrust into a space enveloped with suicidal memories. I remember calling a hotline one night with a razor to my wrist. I then decided to kill myself slowly with drugs and cheap alcohol. I looked at the world around me and felt myself slipping into a borderland without any recourse. Going to college seemed to be my salvation. I had no idea why I applied to college, and, even less so, what to do when I arrived. I just knew going to college was the best thing to do. All the suffering, all the pain took me to college to escape, to free myself, or so I thought.

Like many scholars of color, I have always desired for my life conditions to guide my writing, but it was much too painful of a task. During my time in college, I did not want to visit or repeatedly relive my pre-university life, as I feared the unpredictability of what I may disclose. Drawing from Anzaldúa and Minh-ha, I believe this is why so many of us *chose*, under duress, to master the technical tool of writing like white heterosexual men and women—for

self-protection. Now, years later, as an associate professor, I have finally faced, as they say, my demons, my internal struggles—my shadow beast, as Anzaldúa defines the internalized oppression we carry.

Today, my writing is challenged in revisiting and critically engaging my past. But now I fear exposure, and the risk of hurting my family, particularly my parents who sacrificed three years of their lives, by moving to Colorado and tending daily to a bedridden daughter stricken with cancer, so that I would live. My unwillingness is not due to a lack of courage, but possibly the fear of being regarded as selfish and ungrateful for being so bold for wanting to heal my wounds.

One of Anzaldúa's greatest offerings is that she provides us with the courage to flesh our voices—lenguas, the courage to write and claim our spaces—sitios con orgullo—with pride, and, in my case, as a dark-skinned woman, raised on the west side of Sacramento, to audaciously name myself a Chicana feminist sociologist. Anzaldúan theory and practices for liberation incites our growth as readers and writers, which ultimately speak to the power of her writings.

One of my students, Zach Serrano, who was enrolled in my Anzaldúa Critical Theory seminar, eloquently drew a parallel between flesh offerings—an indigenous ceremony where an individual offers a small piece of their flesh, usually from the arm to strengthen prayer and commitment to walk the red road—and Anzaldúan writings. Serrano expressed that in the moment of offering one's flesh, we only give a physical offering because we only have control over our physical bodies. Anzaldúa, however, lived her spirituality or the synergies of mind, body, and spirit. Her writings are a flesh offering, as she offers herself to those willing to read her works in the context of intellectual reciprocity. The works of Chicana feminist sociologists need to

be documented and remembered as we, too, are compelled to write for the next seven generations.

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