

REVIEW

A Nepantlera's Approach to Anzaldúa Archives

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Rhetorics of Nepantla, Memory, and the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers: Archival Impulses by Diana Isabel Martínez. Durham: Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. 206. \$95.00 (hardback) \$45.00 (e-book).

In Rhetorics of Nepantla, Memory, and the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers: Archival Impulses, Diana Isabel Martínez interlaces the formal and informal archives of Gloria E. Anzaldúa to recast notions of archives as singular and static sites of collected knowledge, archiving as a politically neutral endeavor, and archival research as a distilled and impersonal process. Intentionally situating herself in nepantla, Martínez engages various archives attributed to Anzaldúa. These include: the official archive of the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin; video or audio recordings and transcripts of Anzaldúa's public speeches that are housed at various academic and community sites at which she spoke; Anzaldúa's published and unpublished writings, notes, drawings and documents regarding her name, her illness, and an artist retreat visualizing her concept of nepantla; the informal archives of the Gloria Anzaldúa Altares Collection in the Special Collections and Archives at the University of California, Santa Cruz; and various digital and material altares dedicated to Anzaldúa since her death, such as the documentary *ALTAR: Cruzando Fronteras, Building Bridges* (Zaccaria and Basilio, 2009), the website "Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Home" maintained through

the McAllen Public Library, and the cliffside where Anzaldúa's favorite tree grew. Martínez argues that nepantla—an unsteady middle ground—functions as Anzaldúa's epistemic touchstone. Situating herself in this liminal space Martínez argues, allows her to notice and better appreciate the holism of Anzaldúa's thoughts, spirit, emotions, and body that manifest in her theorizations. Although the academy houses official records of Anzaldúa's intellectual work, Martínez reminds readers of Anzaldúa's fraught relationship with these institutions, encouraging them to challenge the gatekeeping and limitations they impose on knowledge production as Anzaldúa did during her lifetime.

From this methodological and theoretical positioning, Martínez offers several new concepts. One articulates how rhetoricians might engage archives and another describes a form of Anzaldúa's multidimensional writing style. To denote the interplay between the various objects that make up official and unofficial archival sites and the sensory and bodied experience of the rhetor when exploring material across various archival locations, Martínez leads off chapter one, "Archival Impulses: Nepantla as Method," by offering the notion of *archival impulses*. Her intent is to acknowledge the sensing, feeling, and thinking that occurs when engaging each object within an archive individually and the valency of the items contained within the different repositories collectively. This term, *archival impulses*, thus recognizes that the meaning-making by an archivist is personal, situational, and correlative, challenging understandings of archival research as a disembodied, apolitical, neutral endeavor. Relatedly, Martínez offers nepantla as a "flexible" and "generative" method for rhetoricians to use as better suited to account for the "visual, textual, performative, and embodied components" and contradictions found in the texts they analyze (chapter one, 22).

The second concept is found in chapter four, “Nepantla Autopathography and the Politics of Crisis.” Here, Martínez expands the concept of an autopathography—or an autobiographical narrative of illness and disability—by characterizing Anzaldúa’s writing about her diabetes—specifically an essay titled “S.I.C: Spiritual Identity Crisis: A Series of Vignettes” (1999) found in the Benson archives at UT Austin—as a nepantla autopathography. Martínez lays out how this essay mirrors at least three aspects of Anzaldúa’s process of *conocimiento*, namely shock/*arrebataimiento*, pain/*desconocimiento*, and awareness/resistance. For instance, she notes that when Anzaldúa documents her efforts to become informed about the causes of her newly diagnosed condition, both western medicine and Indigenous worldviews placed the onus on the individual, leaving her in a state of physical and spiritual shock. Reflecting on the physical manifestations of the disease that often wracked her body with pain, Martínez posits that Anzaldúa realized she often turned to other explanations that misled her from understanding the underlying source, denoting the pain/*desconocimiento* stage. Finally the awareness/resistance phase occurred when Anzaldúa realized that her health issue is not a battle to win, but rather a journey to secure agency over an unwieldy illness. While merging nepantla and autopathography is a powerful way to denote the recursive ways Anzaldúa’s sense-making surely informed her theorization of nepantla, Martínez might have provided further clarity about this writing style and how it differs from or is situated within Anzaldúa’s other signature self-reflexive writing style—her *autohistoria-teoría*.

Another chapter similarly offers insight into how Anzaldúa’s writing process and theorizing were mutually constitutive. In chapter two, “Voices from the Archive: Family Names, Official Documents, and Unofficial Ideologies in the Gloria Anzaldúa Papers,” Martínez examines the intertextuality of documents Anzaldúa kept or wrote regarding her name, which was incorrectly noted

and/or subsequently changed on multiple official documents like her birth certificate, driver's license, passport, voter registration cards, student and faculty ID cards, and library over her lifetime. The impact of this imprecision, Martínez notes, informed how Anzaldúa recounted these formative moments via her children's book character Prieta (her own nickname). Likewise, chapter three, "Making Experience Public: Contextualizing Anzaldúa's Public Engagements and Redrawing the Boundaries of Speech" examines how Anzaldúa's public speeches often modeled her attempt to reconstitute the bodymindspirit and illustrated the state of nepantla, both important elements of her cosmology. Martínez uses this chapter to encourage her fellow rhetoricians to heed the transgressive particulars of Anzaldúa's speech-making, such as the various modalities of discourse that functioned to engage the audiences in a deeper form of listening that included the whole body. Importantly, she also addresses the ways Anzaldúa was often minimized or exploited by academic institutions, even when being invited to speak on her campuses, to better contextualize her rhetorical choices. Both of these elements help to advance a study of Chicana rhetoric in the discipline. Chapter five, "Visuality, Community and Theories of the Flesh," illustrate how Anzaldúa built theory using imagery. By examining archives related to an artist retreat Anzaldúa facilitated that was intended to visualize "theory of the flesh," Martínez contends these documents illustrate how Anzaldúa engaged in intellectual production via visuality and collaboration and argues for more attention to such sites and approaches as valid sites of knowledge production.

In both chapter six, "Remembering Gloria Anzaldúa Globally through a Documentary Altar," and chapter seven, "Finding Anzaldúa: Memorials, Altares, and Her Many Homes," Martínez shifts attention to the various products that have been produced after Anzaldúa's death as significant components of Anzaldúan archives deserving of scholarly attention. She

posits that in addition to the altares Anzaldúa herself created in her home, various physical and digital altares dedicated to her offer great insight into her theoretical legacy. Specifically, in chapter six, Martínez broadens the notion of “altares” to include digital ones, such as the documentary, *ALTAR: Cruzando Fronteras, Building Bridges* (2009), which she analyzes as a form of an altar. She characterizes the film as a visual representation of Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands, centering the multiple modes of knowledge production Anzaldúa advanced.

In her conclusion, Martínez reminds readers that much of Anzaldúa’s intellectualizing occurred as a public scholar, as she was often devalorized by the academy during her lifetime, and that her legacy extends beyond what is recognized by official institutions, like the UT Austin collection. For scholars, she encourages them to embrace Anzaldúa’s call for reflexive and generative knowledge production, noting that engagement with the range of archived material Martínez explores in this book can evoke novel or singular insight depending on how intentionally a scholar centers their positionality, lived experiences, mind, body, and spirit, when immersed in these repositories. Ultimately, Martínez circles back to the need to situate oneself in nepantla when working in an archive, as it fittingly problematizes the idea that the knowledge is static and stored there; rather, the nepantla state helps illuminate that knowledge is in constant flux and relative.

Both the personal narrative style and its accompanying theoretical insight make Martínez’s text an important book for Anzaldúa scholars, rhetoricians, and Chicana/x or Latina/x feminist researchers and archivists. Its accessibility and breadth would serve gender and women’s studies courses, research courses, queer studies courses, and Chicana/o/x or Latina/o/x studies courses.

