

Borderlands Theory: Producing Border Epistemologies with Gloria Anzaldúa

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Abstract

This study is dedicated to examine the concept of borders, geographical and otherwise, as instruments that are socially produced. It utilizes Gloria Anzaldúa's theoretical framework of Borderlands theory as a set of processes that seek to attain the de-colonization of the inner self. The historical and spatial dynamics of the geographical border between Mexico and United States, largely shaped by the U.S. expansionist agenda, resulted in the Mexican lost of more than half of its territory and the subsequent stigmatization of Mexican-Americans/Chicanos as "foreign others," since they did not share with predominant Anglo-Saxons the same values, culture, religion, traditions and skin color. I argue that the later exploitation, exclusion, marginalization, and racism against Mexican-Americans/Chicanos informed Anzaldúa's development of her Borderlands theory that seeks to attain liberation for any colonized identity. However, it is also my argument that the borderlands theory fails to account for meaningful political freedom since the processes that compose the theory are principally worked at the inner level, restricting the possibilities for a direct confrontation in the public sphere.

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Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Contents.....	iv
Chapter 1.	1
Introduction: The Social Production of Borders	1
Introduction.....	1
Seeking Change.....	4
Freedom and Social Life.....	6
Borders Birth.....	7
Border Thought.....	11
Chapter 2.	15
Geographical Borderlands	15
Introduction.....	15
Historical and Spatial Perspectives.....	17
People at the Spanish Borderlands.....	24
The Borderlands Conceptualization of Gloria Anzaldúa.....	25
Mexico-U.S. Borderlands.....	28
Economic Exploitation.....	29
Illegal immigration.....	30
Conclusion.....	35
Chapter 3.	37
Borderlands Theory: Mapping the Borderlands/Enacting Coyolxauhqui	37
Introduction.....	37
Imagining Borderlands.....	40
Borderlands theory.....	42
Borderland's Processes.....	45
Nepantla State, a Pathway to Change.....	46
Coatlicue State.....	48
<i>Coyolxauhqui</i> , Daughter of <i>Coatlicue</i>	51
Crossing the Border. <i>La Conciencia de La Mestiza</i>	53
Conclusion.....	55
Chapter 4.	56
Borderlands Theory: Change or Significant Freedom?	56
Becoming Political.....	56
Visions of Change.....	59
Political Identities.....	60
Change or Significant Freedom?.....	67
Borderlands Idealism.....	71
Conclusion.....	73
Chapter 5.	75
Closing Remarks	75
Future Research.....	75
Works Cited.....	81

Chapter 1.

Introduction: The Social Production of Borders

The US Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border culture.

Gloria Anzaldúa

Introduction

In the preface to the *Borderlands* Gloria Anzaldúa states: “I am a border woman” (Anzaldúa, 1987). Although such declaration may seem simple at first glance; to be sure, this standpoint entails a partaking in the social and cultural production of personal identity, since she is the one deciding what name she wants to be called. Defining herself as a border woman, implies that Anzaldúa has decided to reside in a place of ambiguity where to be either *with* us or *against* us is no longer her predicament, where the command to choose a side and to compromise her loyalty to a group is already rejected. However, this declaration is also political inasmuch as it refuses to assert a blind, unquestioned adherence to the figure of the state and its institutions. Furthermore, it implies that she has made a conscious decision not only on where to base her struggle but it also implies that she has already visualized what kind of struggle needs to be fought and against whom it is to be directed.

Being a border woman also implies seeing the borders as ever changing spaces that are not restricted to host power relations, but as also incorporating projects of resistance and liberation. This feature of border spaces makes their study appealing since borders as social, geographical and political constructions can be shaped and reshaped according to the multiple influences from those who are related to them. In this context, borders in the contemporary world, are better described by both their contrasts and contradictions, their permissiveness and restrictions, their control and disorder, their peace and violence, their justice and injustices and so on, but more than that, contemporary borders are characterized by the dynamism that contributes enormously

to the production of all kinds of knowledge. According to Georg Simmel, “the border is not a spatial fact with a sociological impact, but a sociological fact that shapes spatiality” (Georg Simmel 1992: 697, as quoted in Dittgen, 1999: 167).

In this study, I seek to contribute to a better understanding of Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of the borderlands in both its geographical and ideological dimensions. However, for the purpose of this study it must be understood that the geographical borderlands is to be associated with the US-Mexico borderlands (Anzaldúa writes geographical borders with small b), while the ideological dimension of the term is not associated with any particular cartographic space (ideological Borderlands is written with capital B)¹ but rather they can exist everywhere.² In addition to this clarification, another remark is necessary given that the work of Gloria Anzaldúa has influenced many important fields in the academy. In this regard, the name of Gloria Anzaldúa is mainly associated with academic disciplines such as feminism, Chicana/o studies, or queer theory as expressed by Ana Louise Keating who sees Anzaldúa as representative of “American studies, Chicano/a studies, composition studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, feminism, literary studies, critical pedagogy, women's studies, and queer theory” (Keating, 2005: 3). Similarly, Sonia Saldívar-Hull explains that *Borderlands* “continues to be studied and included on class syllabi in courses on feminist theory, contemporary American women writers, autobiography, Chicana/o and Latina/o literature, cultural studies, and even major American authors” (Saldívar-Hull, 2007). Since the work of Anzaldúa has been mainly approached from the feminist, queer, and nationalist (Chicano) prominent scholars,³ the present study is engaged

¹ For the purpose of this paper, I reproduce Anzaldúa’s style in using the word borderlands. In consequence, when I write borderlands with small b, I refer to its geographical dimension while Borderlands with capital B is meant to describe its ideological aspect. This move in my work is not meant to be simplistic for the term borderlands is more complex than what a binary construction reflects, however, I consider it reasonable to proceed in this way for practical reasons. Chapter 2 addresses this predicament in more depth.

² See chapter three for a discussion on the ideological dimension of the Borderlands.

³ See for instance Aigner-Varoz, *Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness* (2000), Cantu, *Living on the Border* (1993), Keating, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, (2000), Keating *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds* (2005), Perez, *Gloria Anzaldúa: La Gran Nueva Mestiza* (2005), Alarcon, Alvarez, Bachetta, Barcelo, Cantu, Castillo, Cisneros, Cuevas, Joysmith, (2007) *Borderlands* 3rd. edition . Other authors whom have exported Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* outside the feminist, queer or Chicano traditions are Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, (2007) *Theorizing from the Borders*, Saldívar (2007), *Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Caste* and Soja, (1996). *Thirdspace*.

from political and postcolonial standpoints given that it is in these disciplines where the work of Anzaldúa has little representation.⁴

This study thus addresses Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory⁵ as a project of resistance formulated as a set of processes aimed to guide the inner self of a colonized person in its struggle to achieve decolonization and liberation. Similarly, the study addresses the historical events that informed the social production of Borders both in its universal and local contexts as a way of establishing a background that allows us to identify the relations of domination that the Borderlands theory seeks to overcome. Furthermore, this study interrogates the scope of the Borderlands theory from a political perspective. In this logic, this thesis is structured in five chapters dedicated to assess the colonial, spatial, ideological, and political perspectives of the B/borderlands.

Accordingly, the first chapter contains a discussion of the colonial context that produced the concept of borders as boundaries of nation-states that served mainly as the mechanisms that created difference and exclusion. Here I situate the concept of borders within the context of the discovery of the new world and subsequent colonization of Mexico given that the framework guiding this study is postcolonial theory. The second chapter consists of a literature review regarding the geographical approach to the concrete borderlands between Mexico and the United States. A discussion of the geographical dimension of the borderlands is important insofar as it situates the present study in the specific historical and spatial context that informed the production of Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory. The third chapter depicts a map of the processes that shape Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory and explains it in more detail, examining what elements are integrated into the theory, and how they are related to one another. It should be specified that this chapter is more concerned in providing a general picture of the theory than in interpreting its possibilities. The fourth chapter addresses the political implications of the Borderlands theory and interrogates its scope from a political perspective. The discussion in this chapter juxtaposes Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory to Hannah Arendt's view of political freedom.

⁴ This is not to say that I do not consider Gloria Anzaldúa's contributions to feminism, queer theory, or Chicana/o studies relevant but rather that my interest is to explore the postcolonial and political possibilities out of Anzaldúa's Borderlands Theory by using it as a guiding framework.

⁵ For the purpose of this study, the term Borderlands theory is meant to refer to Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory. See chapter 3 in this thesis for a discussion on this topic.

Finally, in chapter five I conclude by giving a brief overview of this study and reflecting about the possibilities for future research.

Having introduced the thesis' organization let us reflect about one of the main goals that inform the Borderlands theory, namely, the notion of change.

Seeking Change

Change is, for the most part, a promising word. It represents alteration, variation, permutation, transformation, substitution, or conversion. Change is also understood antithetically, meaning that it promises us that things will not remain the same. We dream about change hoping that it will bring to our lives the beloved betterment that accompanies western ideals about the “good” life. Henceforth, in the modern context, saying that the world has changed means that the markets, in almost the entire world, have put at our disposition an infinite amount of new technology aimed to ease the work of humans. It also implies that we have access to faster ways of communication such as the Internet, mobile phones, or multimedia devices. Such technological developments render people closer by creating new ways of social contact, while simultaneously drawing people away from each other, since communication is increasingly mediated by the use of technology. Change has also been credited for providing us with “better” governments since it is considered that today democracies are replacing the totalitarian regimes, dictatorships, or tyrannical governments of the past, even while democracy is being sought by means of military force. Furthermore, change benefits from the fact that humans live in a world of reason, brought to humanity under the “lead” of the enlightenment, as opposed to the obscurantism of the past. In sum, change gives us, for the most part, the promise of a linear and historical progress that is commonly sought after.

However, change, as a promise of betterment, is never certain. Ideally, it can become a life project, the goal of a social movement, the platform of a political campaign, or the promise of a politician. At its worst, the quest for positive political change can result in catastrophe, chaos, war, military and economic intervention, exploitation, and so on. In this regard, change can be easily translated into a shell of power relations used to the detriment of the “weak” to advance the interest of elites. Nevertheless, we never give up on change since doing so would mean that

the worst Marxist nightmare might come true, that is, that individuals under the capitalist system act with a false consciousness that does not allow them to recognize the very source of their oppression, or that individuals passively accept domination and do not believe that agency and change are possible.

The idea of change is central to the present study, given that change is always a possibility for those who resist domination and power. Change is always sought whenever struggles for freedom, liberation, or recognition are organized. Yet, in many instances, change may not always bring the results one expects, meaning that struggles for change may turn into a never-ending endeavor. In this vein, this thesis critically addresses the possibilities for meaningful change in the context of epistemic, cultural, and political struggles that re-appropriate borders as sites where difference is problematized, resistance is organized and theorized, and freedom is sought. In pursuing this study, I am primarily concerned in addressing the standpoint of the people who are considered “foreign others”⁶ by means of their differences. In this context, the framework for this study is situated within postcolonial theory. Overall, this study is mainly informed by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and, more specifically, by her views regarding the concept of B/borderlands, physical and ideological.

In undertaking this study, my aim is to present a theoretical piece wherein I take the task of interrogating the notion of border as a producer of difference from the sixteenth century onward, and as a resistance project in a present-day context. Although I situate the analysis within the specific perspective of the Mexico-US borderlands, it should not be interpreted in a restrictive way, rather, I use this particular site as one of the many examples where ideological Borderlands can materialize and produce racism, discrimination, economic exploitation, exclusion, and the like. Today, the concept of borders has changed considerably, to the extent that the current environment of the border also provides many sorts of opportunities since according to Cadaval, “borders are artifacts of history and are subject to change over time. When borders shift, lands and peoples are subjected to different sets of rules; this creates opportunities for exploitation, conditions of hardship, and motivations for revolt” (Cadaval, 1996: n.p.). This work is thus mainly concerned with the concepts of borders, Borderlands, and its contributions to

⁶ See Boiler, (1995). *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives*, Chapter 2.

humankind's freedom. Equally relevant are the political outcomes that a project based on the borderlands might produce.

Freedom and Social Life

In the *Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt opens up her discussion about the conditions of political experience by referring to the first man-made satellite placed in orbit because of the human inventive. This event not only revolutionized the world, but was “the first step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to the Earth” (Arendt, 1998: 1). In Arendt’s terms, such an event would be considered an expression of freedom inasmuch as this satellite was an original device marking a breakthrough moment in the field of telecommunications and, as such, it was leading the world towards a new era. This example is constitutive of what, for Arendt, conceived the apex of the human condition, namely, true action or freedom understood as an “act, neither before nor after; for to *be* free and to act are the same” (Arendt, 1961: 152-53). From a political perspective, thus, change, even if positively assumed, is meaningless if it fails to account for the freedom of mankind regardless of their geographic location.

But before addressing the issue of freedom, it is important to determine the lenses through which that freedom is going to be addressed in this study, for freedom can take countless forms depending on the field or area of evaluation. In this regard, then, it must be specified that in seeking this study I am particularly concerned to approach my object of study as a product of social constructions. Particularly, I am interested in looking at the notion of borders and borderlands as spaces that are socially produced.⁷ For that reason, the present study must be understood in the context of postcolonialism as a critical theory of culture, where “culture is discerned not as the site of freedom, that which protects us from the tyranny of nature, but as the network of relations of power that produces values, beliefs and forms of knowledge” (Castro-Gomez and Johnson, 2000: 507). The decision to use postcolonialism as a framework for this study is derived not only from the many connections between the colonial order established since

⁷ Here the term is taken from Henri Lefebvre who conceived the border as both “*a field of action* (an area marked by particular political and social relations) and *a basis for action* (the produced space within which state power enables these relations)” (Lefebvre, 1991: 191 quoted in Sánchez 1998: 107).

the sixteenth-century and contemporary relations of control, but also because the construction of 'frontiers' or 'borders' is directly related to the colonial period, as we will see further on.

In pursuing this study, however, I remain aware of my own limitations as a student who attempts to enter in the field of the social sciences. In that regard, I realize that I still have many things to learn, nevertheless, I consider the present study worthwhile, since, as explained by O. Rose, "[mourning (in my case, learning)] is a question of risking to 'know, misknow, and yet grow;' that is, to re-cognize 'learning, growth and knowledge as fallible and precarious but risk-able'" (Rose 1998, quoted in Vazquez-Arroyo, 2004: 5). In this view, I consider my standpoint of a theorist similar to an apprentice who needs to gain not only more knowledge but also experience, criteria, and ability for analyzing social problems with a critical mind. However, in understanding this study as a critique of the social, economical, and political hierarchies in which the current world system is arranged, I am at pains in maintaining an equally critical stance for my own role as a researcher. Remaining critical also implies that in pursuing this work, I remain aware of the fact that "social life does not free men from the tyranny of nature, guiding him via culture to a gradual humanization, but subjects him instead to a new kind of heteronomy" (Castro-Gomez and Johnson, 2000: 508), where my role as a researcher is to establish the mechanisms through which that heteronomy is positioned. In this regard, my the goal in undertaking the task of developing a theoretical piece is, primarily, to cross boundaries as a student and risk winning or losing knowledge in the quest for answers to the questions of difference and exclusion that I find politically interesting. Because of this, I stay confident that regardless of the conclusions this work might reach, the knowledge gained from doing it will be worthwhile to the extent that it will teach me to approach social problems with a critical mind and an analytical perspective. Having clarified this point, let us return to the substance of this study.

Borders Birth

Coming back to the question of freedom, it is important to note that some of the most significant changes that humanity has experienced throughout history have contributed little toward this goal. An example can be found in one of the most significant events in the history of humankind,

namely, the discovering of the new world. Such an event, dated in the sixteenth-century, brought more enslavement than freedom to the world. Christopher Columbus's expeditions led to a European awareness of the hemisphere and the subsequent establishment of European colonies in America. Hence, an event that in principle could be regarded as a step forward in the field of science, in fact, accounted for the establishment of a system of exploitation of gigantic proportions.

One of the goals of modernity⁸ was to change the obscurantism of the world into reason. During this period, the European civilization expanded all over the world due to the fact that they managed to carry on the social production of frontiers; a concept that according to Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova was described as “[a] line indicating the last point in the relentless march of civilization. On the one side of the frontiers was civilization; on the other; nothing, just barbarism or emptiness” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 205).⁹ According to this classification, civilization was meant to be a synonym of Western Europe while barbarism was to be understood as the remainder, i.e. Africa, Asia, and America. From this context, then, frontiers became the spaces of influence that Europeans accommodated to exercise control over its periphery on the basis of racist values that led to the establishment of opposing categories such as *us* and *them*, or, *we* and *others*. With this classification, Europe “attempted to appoint itself *the center of the world* and tried to divide up the earth to organize the world's exploitation and to export the ‘border form’ to the periphery” (Balibar, 2004: 7). Thus, exporting the border form to the periphery not only implied organizing the world in units called nation-states, but it also meant developing a cultural or spiritual nationalism that required citizens to associate “the democratic universality of human rights with particular national *belonging*... leading inevitably to systems of exclusion: the divide between ...populations considered native and those considered foreign, heterogeneous, who are racially or culturally stigmatized” (Balibar, 2004: 8).

This mechanism was crucial to sustain colonization since colonized people were, obviously, not considered citizens of the imperial government; thereby they should not have access to rights

⁸ Modernity here follows the view of Anibal Quijano who considers modernity as a Western material arrangement of a new space/time form of subjectivity created to establish Europe as the center of the World and the rest of the continents as the periphery. For more on this subject see Quijano, (2000). *Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America*.

⁹ This quote is meant to describe the Western colonizer's perspective.

since they were not considered citizens in the first place. Castro-Gomez gives us a similar argument that is worth transcribing at length:

Citizenship was not only restricted to men who were married, literate, heterosexual, and proprietors, but also, and especially, to men who were white. In turn, the individuals that fell outside the space of citizenship were not only the homosexuals, prisoners, mental patients and political dissidents Foucault had in mind, but also blacks Indians, *mestizos*, gypsies, Jews, and now, in terms of globalization, “ethnic minorities,” immigrants and *Auslandern* (foreigners) (Castro-Gomez and Johnson, 2000: 513).

To be sure, Europeans not only denied colonized people a citizen status but they also classified native people as inhuman, devilish, or even animals, as inscribed in the philosophies predicated by Kant (1764), Hegel (1822), and others who considered that underdevelopment was a characteristic proper of non-Europeans (Natter, 2008). Thus, since colonized people could not be treated as “equals,” it was quite acceptable to use their labor and land to benefit the colonizers, a belief that has been extended to the present-day, as Mignolo and Tlostanova explain:

[T]he rhetoric of modernity (and globalization) of salvation continues to be implemented on the assumption of the inferiority or devilish intentions of the other and, therefore, continues to justify oppression and exploitation as well as the eradication of the difference (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 206).

Change, in the European view, consisted of turning “savages” into “gentlemen” and of bringing them into civilization. However, until the moment when that change actually happened Europeans did not need to take into account the voice, contributions, and knowledge of the colonized. In that way, the epistemologies of indigenous peoples were shadowed in obscurantism, and reason was considered a characteristic exclusively associated with whiteness, where epistemologies of colored people were denied as such. Accounts of this have been recorded by researchers such as Dwight Conquergood who explains, “[s]ince the enlightenment project of modernity, the first way of knowing has been preeminent. Marching under the banner of science and reason, it has disqualified and repressed other ways of knowing that are rooted in

embodied experience, orality and local contingencies” (Conquergood, 2002: 146). On similar lines, we find Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006), who complain that the epistemologies of the colonized were erased from world history, since they held no value in the eyes of Europeans. Thus, the following step in colonization consisted of imposing assimilation into European settler cultures; that is how the Nahuatl and Maya languages were changed into Spanish, the Congolese, Kituba, or Lingala into French, or the Dahomeyan into English. This was also the reason why millions of people were forced to abandon their religion in order to be converted into Christianity. In sum, the culture, traditions, and religion of colonized people were used against them to justify oppression. For instance, the art and writing of the Maya civilization was destroyed under the justification that Maya texts were considered pagan. Similarly, the religious rites and human sacrifices of the Aztec culture were used as a justification for the destruction and subjugation of the Aztec people.

Although these events are highly problematic in themselves, there exist additional implications that are more disturbing; namely, the fact that the world inherited from modernity an international system that associates certain identities with specific geographical places, thereby implying the problematic assumption that “to say we have an identity is just to say that we have a location in social space, a hermeneutic horizon that is both grounded in a location and an opening or site from which we attempt to know the world” (Saldívar, 2007: 344). Saldívar criticizes this argument, since accepting it will be constitutive of geographical determinism,¹⁰ which attempts to establish a direct association between the degree of development in a nation, culture, or individual and his geographical location in the globe. So, for instance, it is believed that the reason why there is poverty in Colombia, Venezuela, or the Caribbean is because these countries are located in the south; a region where nature produces food easier than in the north, thus making people in the south lazier and more reluctant to work, create, and innovate. Of course, this version does not take any account of colonial history when attempting to explain the reasons why certain nations are economically more developed than others. In conclusion, modernity implies that “certain areas of the planet were [are] designated as the location of the barbarians and of the primitives” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 205).

¹⁰ For a discussion on this term, see Natter and Jones, (1997). *Identity, Space & Other Uncertainties*.

Border Thought

The concept of borders (or frontiers) is precisely the mechanism that Europeans employed to perpetuate and to reinforce difference. These sites were meant to mark a distinct division between those who could have access to the rights and benefits of the state and those who could not. Thus, who was to be included or excluded was/is to be determined by people's emplacement on one or the other side of the border. To put it in Hannah Arendt's terms, people's right to have rights is then determined by their status as nationals or foreigners of a state, since "national institutions rest upon the formulation of a rule of exclusion, of visible or invisible 'borders,' materialized in laws and practices" (Balibar, 2004: 23). Needless to say, the determination of who belongs *in*, and who belongs *out*, (or who does what in terms of labor) continues to be inscribed upon the same racist values employed during colonialism and modernity. According to Castro-Gomez, "the world-system is a *sui generis* set of social relations configured in the sixteenth century as a consequence of the European expansion over the Atlantic" (Castro-Gomez and Johnson, 2000: 509).

For a long time, it was expected that borders were capable of keeping strangers at distance; yet such a role turned out to be a fallacy insofar as the flow of transnational immigration, as has been observed, is a phenomenon as old as human history and, as such, has been proven to surpass the capacities of even the most powerful states. For instance, it has been stated that "ever since the emergence of modern territorial states, with their delineation of borders formally designating the extent of state's authority and the domain of citizenship, migration has posed governments the long-term challenge of managing cultural and political change" (Heisler and Layton-Henry, 1993). Despite such efforts, states historically fail in stopping people from migrating to places that they consider offer better opportunities. The best example available can be found in the case of Mexico and the United States, who have failed to prevent "illegal" immigration despite increasing militarization and technological advancements used to patrol the border. These circumstances have scholars re-evaluating the importance of state's borders in today's political context. According to recent analyses, borders are situated neither at the periphery nor at the margins of a state, but rather, at the core. This is evident especially when dealing with issues of security; not only because after the 9/11 attacks borders became

increasingly regarded as a line of defense that needs to be constantly monitored and secured, but because “as a structure, the nation-form produces and perpetuates a differentiation that must be defended” (Balibar, 2004: 23).

Assimilation is one of the problems most commonly associated with transnational migration. It is stated that migrant communities are not easy to assimilate into mainstream culture. For that reason, they represent a threat to the social security of the host country. Current trends of immigration show a tendency of people moving from areas of high political, social, or economic insecurity to what migrants tend to perceive as areas of lower insecurity (Heisler and Layton-Henry, 1993). Yet this process is considered turbulent due to the effects it causes in hosting countries. On a secondary level, it is believed by many that immigrants carry with them the underdevelopment characteristic of their place of origin. The perceived problem with immigrants is that they do not want to put their culture aside in order to adopt the dominant culture. For instance, in the case of Mexicans in the U.S., language, religion, traditions, and poverty are considered to be completely antithetical with the American way of “making good” (Nostrand, 1970: 642). In addition, Mexican heritage is closely associated with a tradition of failure (Poyo and Hinojosa, 1988). Thus, slow assimilation, in combination with stereotypes of failure and laziness, are the reasons for which Mexicans appear undesirable to white America.

Current debates about illegal immigration in the United States still contain, directly or indirectly, traces of colonial values since Mexicans are regarded as inferior. This supposed inferiority further complicates the problem of Mexican illegal immigration in a country that, ironically, has been largely influenced by immigrants from all over the world. However, I argue that Mexican presence in the United States is problematic since there is less likelihood that Mexicans are considered subject to rights. Instead, they are more likely regarded as agents ready to perform the hard work that the American economy needs at a cheap cost (Vargas, 2005). In this dynamic, assimilation plays a key role, since it is the basis of Mexican exclusion.¹¹ Mexican assimilation into the dominant culture, hence, is neither possible nor it is desirable from an Anglo point of view, since Mexicans are considered inferior because of their culture. As already stated, Mexican attachment to their native language, traditions, customs, and culture are hard to eradicate. Moreover, Mexicans are seen as inferior, since the racial mixture that took place

¹¹ For a similar argument, see González, (2000). *Harvest of Empire* and Oboler, (1995). *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives*.

during colonization produced a large population of *mestizos*. In short, Mexicans are regarded as the other. Ironically, the relationship between Mexicans and Americans is further complicated by the border that these two countries share.

This thesis is an attempt to understand better the relations of power and resistance between different groups, as mediated by their interaction through borders. Contrary to current notions of globalization that presuppose an increasingly homogenized economic system, I consider that the strong emphasis on notions of difference has its roots in the colonial period that produced the current international system.¹² If, as Hannah Arendt contends, the human condition should be about seeking humankind's political action, the extent to which this goal has been achieved is null if we consider that the contemporary international system continues to be based on the set of relations created by colonization. If we were to follow Etienne Balibar on the argument that "the notions of interiority and exteriority, which form the basis of the representation of the border, are undergoing a veritable earthquake," (Balibar, 2004: 5) then current conflicts over the border would not have the resonance within governments that they do. At the same time, borders "are undergoing a profound change in meaning," (Balibar, 2004) and their relevance for issues of security are increasingly significant. This thesis is mainly about how borders are drawn and re-drawn. Also important for this study is the basis on which borders are demarcated and by whom. In this vein, the significance of the present study lies within the fact that borders are political entities and, as such, they carry political agendas for different groups who seek to advance a variety of political issues. Thus, borders constitute a fertile ground for political analysis since they:

[A]re not only geographic but also political and subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic and contrary to frontiers the very concept of 'border' implies the existence of people, languages, religion and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the colonality of power... Borders in this sense are not natural outcome of a natural or divine historical process in human history, but were created in the very constitution of the modern/colonial world (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 208)

¹² For an expanded account on this argument see Castro-Gomez, S.-. and A. Johnson (2000). "Traditional and Critical Theories of Culture." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1(3): 503-518

Since the concept of ‘frontiers’ or borders was created as a political instrument aimed to physical but also ideological differences, in this study I am primarily concerned with the Borderlands as a theory that addresses the self as a space through which social processes and identities are constructed and contested; changed and resisted (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). This does not mean, however, that we will not pay attention to different notions of borderlands. In fact, as argued in the second chapter, we need to understand the social and political constitution of the geographical borderlands between Mexico and United States in order to understand why a Borderlands theory (the topic of the third chapter) had to be produced in the first place. A recurrent concern of this study is the use of borders re-appropriated by marginalized groups as spaces of resistance.

Because the dominant culture has created its convenient version of reality (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 229), one that aims not only to privilege the interests of certain groups, but also to override the rights of others, we cannot be content just to explore the possibilities of self emancipation that emotional Borderlands may offer. In addition, we need to go even further to see what instruments within society are used to produce systematically otherness with the aim to restrict and to exclude people from having access to resources. In this logic, Anzaldúa’s approach to the Borderlands will take us into a complex terrain where the self is constantly receiving the influence of multiple and contradictory actors, whose ongoing, sometimes autonomous, transformational influences set up a path to break free from traditional paradigms of class, race, gender, and sexuality.

Chapter 2.

Geographical Borderlands

Is dangerous to go in there [the land of the Anglo-American],
I've heard that they shoot trespassers. (*Anzaldúa and Gonzalez, 1995*)

Gloria Anzaldúa, Maya Christina Gonzalez,

Introduction

This chapter provides a selective overview of the borderlands scholarship. More specifically, this section is constructed as a literature review regarding the geographical approach to the concrete zone of borderlands between Mexico and the United States. Although I would like to treat this section as a general overview of the borderlands, the spatial constraints of this chapter force me to draw certain limits in terms of what needs to be presented. In this regard, I will focus on reviewing the borderlands literature that allows me to frame and produce criteria for my study. I decided to proceed in this way in the understanding that a full diagnosis of the concept of the borderlands¹³ is not what this chapter stands for. Rather, my interest is to build a context for the following chapters in which the Borderlands as a theory will have particular focus. However, having a discussion of the geographical dimension of the borderlands is important because it situates the present study in a specific historical and spatial context, which I argue informed the production of the Borderlands theory as an emancipatory and resistance project. Accordingly, the significance of this chapter rests in that it directly intersects the geographical borderlands with the ideology advanced by this term.

The concepts of border and borderlands may be defined in geographical terms but, increasingly, its significance has been growing to encompass additional ideas that contain

¹³ For an excellent compilation of the Borderlands Composition see Stoddard, E. R., R. L. Nostrand, et al. (1983). Borderlands sourcebook : a guide to the literature on northern Mexico and the American Southwest. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press : Published under the sponsorship of the Association of Borderlands Scholars.

symbolic meanings. In consequence, the terms border and borderlands have gained resonance in several disciplines and sub disciplines, as different authors have noticed. Among them, Paul Kutsche writes in his *Borders and Frontiers* piece, “The term *borderland* is ambiguous enough to encompass both boundaries and frontiers. This lack of precision is convenient, since borderland scholars are some times concerned with one and some times with other [and, I would add, some times with both as in the case of the present study]” (Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 16). Kutsche explains that the notion of boundaries is associated with the rise of ideas regarding the concept “of nation-state in modern Europe, pertaining to the political and administrative sovereignties juxtaposed along an arbitrary but formally demarked line.” In turn, frontier is an older term used to denote a zone of influence. According to this logic, “boundaries are precise while the width of frontiers is indefinite” (Kutsche quoted in Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 16). I want to call attention to this distinction, since the case that occupies us in this chapter is representative of both views. On the one hand, the Mexico-U.S. borderlands are constituted by the boundary that marks the limits of these two nations, and on the other, these borderlands explain in part the influence of United States.

Following this introduction, this chapter starts out with a discussion about the concept of borderlands in its historical and spatial context. My goal in this section is to trace the origin of the spatial composition of the borderlands through the work of a select number of historians who make significant contributions to the establishment of what is meant by this term. Next, I briefly explain some of the characteristics of the Mexican-Americans/Chicano¹⁴ groups associated with the *Spanish Borderlands*¹⁵ and discuss current social dynamics in this area, using Gloria Anzaldúa as a way of establishing a context for the following chapter. I conclude by addressing some of the political implications devised from the geographical borderlands. This section is guided by the argument that Anzaldúa’s Borderlands theory is a direct product of both historical and contemporary discriminatory practices affecting minority groups along the U.S.-Mexico border such as the Spanish origin population, Native-Americans, or blacks.

¹⁴ Since I am working under spatial constraints, in this study I do not address the Latin American population at the Borderlands. However if the reader is interested in a comprehensive analysis of the Latino population in the U.S. see Oboler, (1995) *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives*.

¹⁵ Here the term *Spanish Borderlands* conserves its original written form.

It is important to keep in mind that the concept of borderlands has been the object of considerable scholarly reflection since it first appeared in print, to the extent that its possibilities of explanation are numerous. For that reason, I wish to recall Ellwyn R. Stoddard words in the overview to the *Borderlands Sourcebook*. There, he cautions us about the fact that “the U.S.-Mexico border region is not a single borderland but rather a composite of many. What constitutes the entity varies among different academic disciplines, among the different ethnic groups occupying the territory, and according to the perceptions and the eras of the people defining it” (Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 4). Hence, with this premise as a point of departure, this chapter is mostly concerned with the geographical context of the borderlands viewed from a national perspective.

Historical and Spatial Perspectives

Borderland/s is a term that has been exported to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a wide variety of political and ideological constellations. Perhaps this is why some scholars have previously declared that the term borderlands is rarely site specific (Fox, 1994: 61). In our case, however, it is important to have a discussion about the historical and spatial aspects of the borderlands inasmuch as these perspectives have a direct relationship with its ideological connotation, as we will see further on. Moreover, it is likely that the Borderlands theory would not have the resonance it has today if the problems of discrimination, violence, marginalization, and exploitation that describe the current environment of the U.S.-Mexico border were not there.

In the case of the U.S.-Mexico border, placing the borderlands in an historical and spatial context is challenging since doing so implies reviving a past that is still difficult for the involved actors. In the strict sense, Richard L. Nostrand declared that a “borderland, narrowly defined, is the area adjacent to a political border” (Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 6). Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term borderland as a “border, bound, or limit of a country, territory or, the place near a boundary or frontier” (Oxford 1989). However, in the instance of Mexico and the United States, the term borderland/s has a connotation more complex, since any attempt to define this term forcibly takes us back to the colonial and neo-colonial experiences

imposed on the region first by the Spaniard occupation and later by the American expansionist practices. It also includes addressing the U.S.-Mexico war, the discriminatory practices targeting Mexican settlements in the new U.S. territories, the overwhelming U.S. domination over the Mexican economy, and the present-day discrimination against Mexican-Americans. Thus, as it can be inferred from recalling these events, the story of the borderlands is a story of continuous attempts at colonization which started with the arrival of Spanish colonizers to the New World then inhabited by diverse Indian tribes. According to Ralph H. Vigil:

The borderlands history properly begins with the spectacular movement commonly referred to as the expansion of Europe, which includes the sixteenth-century meeting of ethnically different Spaniards and heterogeneous Indians societies in that would become the northern fringe of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. (Ralph H Vigil quoted in Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 28).

Soon after the arrival of the Spaniard colonizers, the Indian population decreased considerably from “25 million who lived in and around the valley of Mexico” to “scarcely 2 million in the entire hemisphere by the late 1500s,” where “an average of more than 1 million people perished annually for most of the sixteenth century in what has been called ‘the greatest genocide of human history’” (González, 2000: 4, 10). Most of the deaths resulted, in very large part, from the numerous diseases introduced by the Spanish to the New World “but an astounding number of native deaths resulted from direct massacres or enslavement” (González, 2000: 11; Quijano and Ennis, 2000). The colonial experience in Mexico was different from that of United States in many senses¹⁶ but one of the most important distinctions was that the Spanish (males principally) mixed with Indigenous females and this mixture resulted in the production of a new race called mestizo, or *mexicano* “people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 5). The American land occupied by the Spanish crown came to be known as the New Spain and later it became part of the Mexican republic when this country obtained its independence from Spain in 1821. However, the land in northern Mexico would be disputed soon after.

The history of the Spanish settlements in what is today southern United States was of a main concern for historian Herbert Eugene Bolton. Numerous works point out at Bolton as the earliest

¹⁶ See the discussion on this topic in González (2000) *Harvest of Empire*, chapter 1.

scholar (1921) who was credited with the “effective discovery” of the *Spanish Borderlands*, “a name and a field of historical research” (Nostrand, 1970: 638; Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983; Poyo and Hinojosa, 1988). The important work that Bolton carried out in order to trace the history of the Spanish and Mexican activity in southern United States gained him national recognition. But according to Bolton’s critics, his delimitation of the *Spanish Borderlands* was restricted to what constituted the Spanish-Mexican northern outposts of New Spain, i.e. Florida, New Mexico, Primeria Alta (Southern Arizona), Texas, Louisiana and California (Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 6, 28; Poyo and Hinojosa, 1988). This perspective, though, suggests that the history of the borderlands ended with their inclusion within the United States. In *The Spanish Borderlands, Historiography Redux*, historian David Webber makes clear that in the view of Herbert Eugene Bolton, “the Spanish Borderlands were defined as those parts of the United States once claimed by Spain, from California to Florida (Bolton quoted in Weber, 2005). The problems derived from this delimitation are easily identified, since, for Bolton, the borderlands were directly attached to a condition of having “Hispanic” heritage and it was assumed that such condition would disappear by means of annexation. For Bolton, assimilation was taken for granted since, as defeated people, Mexicans could not be considered capable of avoiding the Anglo-Saxon cultural domination. I will come back to this point further on, but for now, suffice it to say that Bolton regarded the Spanish Borderlands as something terminated with annexation.

After Bolton, the next important figure in defining the borderlands is John Francis Bannon, a prominent historian who very slightly touched on the idea that the borderland was a geographical zone that could not only be conceptualized in terms of the U.S. context, but included Mexico as well. Gerald D. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa give an account of Bannon’s ideas regarding the Spanish Borderlands when they quote him declaring: “there are not a few historians who broaden the concept of the borderlands as to encompass the north Mexican provinces [from Nuevo Santander to Baja California]” (Bannon quoted in Poyo and Hinojosa, 1988: 402). However, Poyo and Hinojosa also emphasized the failure of U.S. historians in seeing the history of the borderlands as a part of a broader political and socioeconomic network that also integrated Mexican contributions to the social, cultural, political, and economical dynamics of the region. Such omission is similarly observed by Juan González who considers that “most Anglo-American historians have promoted the view that the early Spanish presence rapidly disappeared

and left a minor impact in U.S. culture when compared to our dominant Anglo Saxon heritage” (González, 2000: 8).

Although there has been an attempt to connect the borderlands to a wider historical context that also values the Mexican contributions to the development of the area, this attempt failed because the main purpose of most U.S.¹⁷ historians was to juxtapose a Hispanic tradition of “failure” vis-à-vis the successful domination of the Anglo communities (Poyo and Hinojosa, 1988: 397-403). These views were used as a way to justify the U.S. takeover of the region. This explains why most demarcations consider the borderlands as to be located exclusively in U.S. soil. Such is the instance of Richard L. Nostrand, who bases his delineation of the borderlands in terms of population criteria exclusively. But before addressing Nostrand’s version of borderlands, I will present some of the facts that created the context for his elaboration of the borderlands. These, of course, are rooted in the Spanish colonization of northern Mexico, but also in the U.S.-Mexico war.

The history of the borderlands relates to the Spanish occupation of the region, which controlled the area until Mexico gained its independence in 1821 and the land became under Mexican jurisdiction. Since Mexico had relatively few settlements on its northern limits by that time, the Mexican government opened the border to American trade and Anglo-American settlers. At the same time, the American colonies were experiencing a moment of growth and expansion that demanded additional land, accordingly, “Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, then a Mexican state, in greater and greater numbers and gradually drove the *tejanos* (native Texans of Mexican descent) from their lands, committing all kind of atrocities against them” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 6). The hostilities that Anglo-Americans committed against Mexicans found justification in the racist views of the latter who considered themselves racially superior to their colored neighbors. As a result of these disputes, Mexico and United States engaged in a series of conflicts related to the border early in 1830’s. But since Anglo settlers had considerably surpassed the number of Mexicans in the state of Texas, the Anglo immigrants decided to declare

¹⁷ I do not mean to state this argument as an absolute generalization but rather as a way of showing a well-documented tendency in treating the Borderlands history.

independence in 1836 and joined the U.S. republic nine years later precipitating the war between the two nations.¹⁸

Texas annexation to the United States was only the first step in the expansionist ambitions of this country that saw Americans' "domination of the region as ordained by nature" a view captured by doctrines such as "America for the Americans [Monroe doctrine] and Manifest Destiny" (González, 2000: 28). Texas constituted a good piece of land for Washington but it was not enough. Since the U.S. government had been requesting Mexico to sell its land and the latter refused in every occasion, the former needed a pretext to initiate a military move against its neighbor to appropriate more land; United States found it by arguing that "the [borderlands] area was underutilized, therefore implying that the U.S. takeover was legitimized" (Poyo and Hinojosa, 1988: 400) and also by pointing the supposed "cowardly and villainous character of the Mexicans after the events that took place during the battle of the Alamo (Anzaldúa, 1987: 6). In 1846, the U.S. incited Mexico to war. U.S. troops invaded and occupied Mexico forcing the nation to give up almost a half of its territory, what is now New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California (Anzaldúa, 1987). Mexico was forced to cede its northern lands as a result of the Guadalupe Hidalgo treaties signed in 1848. The outcome of the war represented a moment of glory, triumph, and success for United States while for Mexicans it signified shame, anger, humiliation, and defeat. At the end of the war, the border moved south in order to reflect the new acquisition of territory in favor of United States. This very moment in history had profound repercussions for the future of the two nations.

The war with Mexico had tremendous consequences for the United States. This war forged a new feeling of national identity. At the end of the war, the United States not only increased its size considerably; its military, economic, and political power grew accordingly. The result was what a writer identified as "the native germ of the American character" (Boardman, Martin et al., 1998). That is, many Americans consider this country to be the land of the future. They consider that this is a country with a divine design and great expectations. In this land, everything is possible, or at least, this is the ideology advanced by U.S. nationalist groups. In the view of former president James K. Polk, to enlarge the American territory was to extend peace and

¹⁸ For a discussion on the Spanish Borderlands and the U.S.-Mexico war, see González, (2000). *Harvest of Empire*, chapter 2.

anyone who opposed this ideal should be removed. Such ideology was mainly advanced by the Manifest Destiny written by John L. O'Sullivan. In this document, O'Sullivan promoted the idea that "God had intended North America to be under the control of Americans... [Thus], to extend the boundaries of the United States was to extend the area of freedom" (Boardman, Martin et al., 1998). People who favored the ideology displayed in the Manifest Destiny considered that expansionism was not only good but also evident and certain; it was something meant to be. It was under this discourse that the United States set up the task of "liberating" the world from tyranny, oppression, persecution and the like since the argument was that the American republic was favored by God. As we see it today, this type of political discourse is maintained to justify intervention in other countries. What in the Mexican case, back in 1848 was framed as extending "freedom" to the world, today in the case of Iraq is being framed as an extending "democracy," making intervention appear legitimate and, again, justified. Yet the practice is still the same, that is, imposing U.S./western values over those who are considered inferior.¹⁹

The conclusion of the Mexican-U.S. war cannot be read only in terms of geopolitics since a considerable number of people suddenly changed their nationality and citizenship status. Turning back to Nostrand's delimitation of the borderlands, he explains that "the cession by Mexico of this vast tract of land brought under American jurisdiction some 82,250 Mexicans in widely scattered settlements. The result was the creation of the borderlands" (Nostrand, 1970: 647). Thus, for Nostrand, the borderlands were constituted literally by the place of residence of the "foreign other,"²⁰ i.e., the Mexican population that remained in the territories annexed by the U.S. after the conclusion of the war and which since the twenty century was joined by immigrants of similar background causing their numbers to increase significantly along the north of the actual international boundary.²¹ In various accounts, Nostrand's demarcation of the borderlands in terms of population has political consequences, since it directly signals a population that Anglos considered "defective" by means of their differences and lack of

¹⁹ On a similar argument, González quotes Bolívar's declaration that "[Unites States seemed] destined by Providence to plague America with torments in the name of freedom" See the quote in *Harvest of Empire*, p. 39.

²⁰ For a discussion of the concept of "foreign other" see Oboler, (1995). *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives*, chapter 2.

²¹ Nostrand used a minimum criteria of 500 persons and 5% to consider a county as having a significant Hispanic population Nostrand, R. L. (1970). "The Hispanic-American Borderland: Delimitation of an American Culture Region." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 60(4): 638-661.

assimilation.²² In today's perspective, "the Mexican-American subculture would appear to be the borderlands" (Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 13). Namely, a culture that "became a foreign minority in the land of their birth... [and] were rapidly relegated to a lower cast status alongside Indians and blacks" (González, 2000: 30). Particularly if they were of color (Menchaca, 2001).

Other authors who endeavor defining the borderlands are Ralph H. Vigil and James T. Stensvaag; however, these scholars have similar tendencies of defining the borderlands outside its regional context. Ralph Vigil sees the borderlands as a space integrated by all the territories that Mexico was forced to cede after the U.S.-Mexico war. Along these lines, he states, "in this restrictive sense the borderlands embrace the States of California, Arizona, Texas and New Mexico and portions of Colorado" (Stoddard, Nostrand et al., 1983: 28). Stensvaag on his part writes in his *Traditional Historiography* piece: "for this essay, we shall assume that borderlands and the southwest are roughly synonymous" (Stensvaag quoted in Nostrand, 1970: 56). In sum, the authors discussed above have made numerous efforts to contribute to the broadest geographical delimitation of the borderlands. However, we find that these scholars approached the term from their particular field of interest and this is why there is no agreement on what is meant by the term, what its precise demarcation is, or where the significance of the borderlands lie. Moreover, Mexican contributions to the development, composition, and success of the area are usually erased from most historical and spatial analysis.²³

The previous approaches show that the borderlands have been mostly identified as a geographical space, which has been socially produced, to borrow the term from Lefebvre (1991), as the place of the U.S. where the "foreign other" resides, a zone that does not share with the rest of the nation the same values, character, and racial "supremacy" of white Anglos, since the area was impregnated with the culture of those considered having a lower culture, namely, Mexicans. Be it by assumption or because of the lack of it, the role of assimilation denotes that the borderland/s is a place marked by the pre-supposed inferiority of the people who inhabits it. That is, those with a Spanish heritage who have not ceased being associated to an old tradition of failure and laziness, as opposed to the assumed success and racial superiority of white Anglos. In reality, what is being implied here is that the borderlands inhabitants lack success not because of

²² See Oboler, (1995). *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives*, chapter 2.

²³ See González, (2000). *Harvest of Empire*, chapter 5, for a similar argument.

the historical oppression, exploitation, and violence that has targeted them for years, but because of their heritage and persistent designation as “uncivilized, underdeveloped, or inferior.”

People at the Spanish Borderlands

In the second half of the twentieth century, the United States witnessed a social transformation under the influence of the civil rights movement that looked to attain rights and to eradicate racism and discriminatory practices against the African-American community and other minority communities, including Mexican-Americans and Indigenous peoples – in response to pro-active empowerment movements among each of these peoples. The Chicano movement was composed of the Mexican-Americans/Chicanos whose major concentration was in the states that formerly belonged to Mexico: California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas. Although Mexican-Americans were granted full citizenship rights under the statutes of the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaties, they saw these rights undermined by the institutions that Anglos created. Additionally, the number of Mexicans was easily surpassed by the number of Anglo settlers in the region, something that worked to the detriment of Mexicans. In this context, “the land established by the treaty as belonging to Mexicans was soon swindled away from its owners. The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, has never been made” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 7; González, 2000).

Anglo domination over Mexicans soon left the latter in a position of second class citizens whose status could be easily perceived when looking at particular sectors where Mexicans had little or no participation, i.e. education, white color jobs, housing, health services, etc. However, after 1910 immigration would play a significant role in the days to come, enlarging the population of Mexican-Americans/Chicanos considerably. Mexican-Americans/Chicanos have profound links with the physical demarcation of the borderlands, meaning that Chicanos along with the rest of migrants from Latin America are the largest minority group in the borderlands. Mexican-American/Chicanos may be recent immigrants from Mexico, the sons and daughters of long-time immigrants, descendants of the Mexicans who acquired American citizenship when the border was relocated, be it independent Texas or the rest of the annexed territories. Because the borderlands people have a Spanish/Mexican heritage, they are related to the Spanish tongue

although new generations are losing the ability to speak Spanish. In its place English, Chicano Spanglish, or a combination between English, Spanish, Nahuatl and other indigenous dialects may be spoken. Also derived from the Spanish/Mexican heritage is a strong attachment to Roman Catholicism, although it is also considered that “the Catholicism of the Hispanic population, like that of Mexicans in Mexico is mainly a folk Catholicism permeated with unorthodox beliefs and superstitions” (Nostrand, 1970: 641).

Up to this point, we have discussed geographical borderlands through the lenses of Herbert Eugene Bolton, John Francis Bannon, Gerald D. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, Richard L. Nostrand, Ralph H Vigil, James T. Stensvaag. Now we will turn to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa.

The Borderlands Conceptualization of Gloria Anzaldúa

It was in the context of the Chicano and feminist movement that Gloria Anzaldúa addressed the concept of borderlands in a multi dimensional way. That is, similar to the previous authors, Anzaldúa situated her notion of a geographical borderland to be located in the Southwest, but she added ideological and epistemological dimensions to the previous concept. Accordingly, territoriality happens to be only one of the many elements in which the Borderlands²⁴ theory is founded. When referring to the geographical aspect, Anzaldúa stated: “the actual physical borderlands that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the southwest” (Anzaldúa, 1987: preface). Although Anzaldúa does not delimit the entire scope of the borderlands cartographically speaking, she shows awareness of the fact that, in the first place, the geographical borderlands is one that involves a territory previously under Mexican jurisdiction and second that this territory does not exclusively pertain to the U.S. but it includes parts of Mexico that are proximate to the border and share a common and unique culture that is neither Mexico or the U.S. In short, Anzaldúa’s dealing with geographical borderlands

²⁴ It is important to note that the Gloria Anzaldúa made a distinction between Borderlands with regular b and Borderlands with capital B. Borderlands with regular b refers to the southwest or Canada-U.S. border, while capitalized Borderlands refers to emotional Borderlands. K. Urch, M. D. a. J. A. (1995). "Working the Borderlands, Becoming Mestiza: an interview with Gloria Anzaldua." *disClosure*(4): pp.75-96.

forcibly includes Mexico where Mexican-Americans/Chicanos are treated as conquered people or as inferior from an Anglo point of view. We infer this from reading the next paragraph:

Gringos in the US Southwest consider the [Hispanic] inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens –whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians, or blacks. Do not enter; trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only legitimate inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites (Anzaldúa, 1987: 7).

Anglo-Americans coexistence with Mexicans, Indians, *mestizos*, or blacks in Texas, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado has been always conflictive. From the beginning, the Anglo-American society put a great deal of effort to force Mexicans to abandon not only their lands, but also their social, political, and cultural values in order to adopt the Anglo institutions. Overall, the Mexican culture was incompatible with that of Anglo-Americans, which is why the former should be abandoned. However, Nostrand (1970) considers that the process of assimilation among Mexican-Americans was slow given that Mexicans had their fatalism, a product of religion, their lack of emphasis on achieving or 'making good,' because of their language, and so on. If we follow Nostrand on this argument, we would have to state that in order for Mexican-Americans to acculturate, the loss of their culture, social life, and institutions was considered a pre-requisite in order to achieve full citizen status, something that has not happened. Indeed, for Mexican-Americans, their connection to the border and to the Mexican culture is something that cannot be easily erased, since as Anzaldúa expresses, "being a Mexican is a state of the soul —not one of mind, not of citizenship" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 62). In addition, for her, the borderland is also a place where contradictory membership in competing cultures and racial identities happen.

Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the Borderlands. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglo's incessant clamoring so that we forget our language... Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for physiological conflict, a kind of dual identity – we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican

cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. (Anzaldúa, 1987: 63)

Hence, the conflict of Mexican-Americans/Chicanos is that they live with one foot on each side of the border, their contributions to the economy and the culture of both nations are significant, since the cheap labor that they supply in the U.S. soil increases the profits of American corporations and the remittances that they send back to Mexico prevent the country from facing an economic collapse. Despite their contributions, however, mainstream groups still regard them as defective people in both sides of the border precisely because of the hybridity that they represent. As Mexican-Americans put it, being a Chicano means that the Anglos consider you a Mexican and the Mexicans call you gringo (Anzaldúa, 1987). This multiplicity of rejection is intimately related to the geographical space that Mexican-Americans occupy, to the history of that particular space, but also to the very notion of border (or frontiers) as a concept which was conceived by Western Europeans as a means to establish spatial hierarchies of civility and barbarism.²⁵ Similarly, Anzaldúa states:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A Borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residual of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants (Anzaldúa, 1987: 7).

The previous passage presents the borderlands as a tough place in which to live, since the intersection of interests, cultures, people and powers have made of this terrain a dangerous one. In the following section, we will proceed to evaluate the ways in which physical borderlands influenced Anzaldúa's thought as a foundation for the following chapter in which we will address the Borderlands theory.

²⁵ For a discussion on epistemic borders, see Mignolo and Tlostanova, (2006). Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge in European Journal of Social Theory 9(2): 205-221

Mexico-U.S. Borderlands

As we have seen, the geographical approach to the borderlands has a close relationship with both a historical perspective and contemporary discriminatory practices affecting minority groups at the U.S.-Mexico border. In this context, Anzaldúa's positioning is that of the so-called subaltern. Because her identification is among the Mexican-Americans she is aware of the fact that the U.S. southern border is a rationalized one where people of color, despite being U.S. citizens, are constantly reminded about the fact that their political institutions mistrust them, government officials question them and their society considers them the "foreign other."²⁶ People of color in the U.S. Southwest border are constantly exposed to a colonial discourse that has created hierarchies among citizens, since being an American of color is not the same as being a white American. Being labeled as a second-class citizen and a defective person is what led Anzaldúa to challenge the power relations inscribed at the borderlands.

Whether one feels safe or unsafe with respect to the border is determined by one's positioning in one or on the other side of the border, that is, the place that someone occupies in the social scale is determined by his or her status as a national or as a foreigner. However, one's allegiance to one or the other category has less to do with his migratory status and more with his physical appearance. In this regard, present and past forms of association with respect to those who hold power will enormously influence one's human or "inhuman" condition. My argument in this section is that the geographical border between Mexico and United States did, to be sure, have an influence in producing the ideological version of Anzaldúa's Borderlands. The border between Mexico and United States is a concern for people of Mexican origin in many important aspects. First, most Mexicans regard the current location of the border as a symbol of dispossession for having been forced to give in more than half of their territory back in 1848. Second, several governmental initiatives which have been originated, implemented or aimed at the border area have been proven to work to the detriment of Mexicans. Some of those are, for example, the initiative to create the border patrol in 1924, the implementation of the Border

²⁶ Also, see Oboler (1995). *Ethnic Labels, Latino lives: identity and the politics of (re) presentation in the United States*, chapter 2, for a similar argument.

Industrialization Program (BIP) that created the maquiladora industry²⁷ in 1965, the increasing militarization of the border, the installation of checkpoints, the building of the border fence, etc. Because I am working under some spatial constraints, I will limit my analysis to a couple of the major problems here mentioned, and not occupy myself with issues of drugs, organized crime, or environmental problems since such topics have been explored by other scholars.

Economic Exploitation

One of Anzaldúa's preoccupations regarding the spatial borderlands has to do with the economic exploitation that Mexicans, particularly young and poor female populations, experience on the Mexican side of the borderlands. More directly, she is bothered by the way in which maquiladoras are allowed to operate in the Mexican side completely undermining the rights of workers. The maquiladora industry in Mexico was created because of the Border Industrialization Program or BIP. This program was supposedly designed to alleviate the growing rates of unemployment and poverty by setting up plants all along the Mexican side of the border (Portillo, Independent Television Service. et al., 2001). The BIP program was launched a year after the conclusion of the *Bracero* program in 1964, and it was expected to curtail the illegal immigration of Mexicans into the United States (Martínez, 1978). In reality, American and other transnational companies were putting neo-liberal practices into action and moved to the Mexican border in order to take advantage of the Mexican cheap labor (Marchand, 2004), in which, until recently, young, poor women constituted the majority of the workforce.²⁸ However, the boom of the maquiladoras in Mexico is related to the creation of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement between Mexico, United States, and Canada. Despite the widespread opposition to NAFTA, the program was implemented in January 1, 1994 increasing the number of maquiladoras operating not only along the border area but in all Mexico (Marchand, 2004). Although one cannot deny that the production of the maquiladoras has

²⁷ Maquiladoras are export assembly plants. They temporarily import materials for assembly by Mexican workers, without payment of tariffs, and then re-export the finished product. Calling the factories maquiladoras is a way of describing the extra value added to products manufactured in Mexico and then sold to foreign markets at inflated prices. Portillo, L., Independent Television Service, et al. (2001).

²⁸ According to a report announced by the Asociación Mexicana de Maquiladoras, in 2007, currently in Mexico the number of males workers has surpassed that of females at the maquiladoras. See figures in www.cfomaquiladoras.org

positively affected the Mexican economy, the negative effects for Mexican society surpass the positive ones. Maquiladoras at the border are in part responsible for the dehumanization and devaluation of Mexican labor. Since economic success in corporations is measured by their capacity to generate profits, and profits are greater when the costs of production are less, the value of the worker's labor needs to be constantly devalued by imposing racism and negative stereotypes among the population. Young and poor females are particularly affected in this chain since they occupy the lowest level in the social status (Saldivar-Hull, 1991).

Female workers are constantly regarded as disposable objects that can be easily removed from work whenever owners feel like it, without receiving any fair compensation. Companies are allowed to treat women in this way because the Mexican government needs the monetary resources that the maquiladoras provide and because the history of patriarchy in Mexico itself. Furthermore, female workers have to deal with the social stigmatization of being considered traitors because they are changing traditional Mexican family roles that challenge male privileges (Livingston, 2004; Schmidt Camacho, 2005). On the one hand, it is now generally accepted that, in order to sustain the household, females need to provide economic help but they also get blamed because work duties keep them from performing traditional roles such as rearing children, taking care of the household, and serving men. Working for a maquiladora is compared with selling the self to foreign investors and betraying the mother land (Schmidt Camacho, 2005).

Illegal immigration

Another major concern for Gloria Anzaldúa in relationship with the physical borderlands is the issue of illegal immigration. Due to space constraints, I will not address illegal immigration in a deep way, but rather, I will only focus in the aspects with which Gloria Anzaldúa felt preoccupied. Some of these are inferred by reading the next poem:

I walk through the hole in the fence
to the other side.
Under my fingers I feel the gritty wire

rusted by 139 years
of the salty breath of the sea.
[...]
1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a pueblo, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence roads in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja
[...]
This land was Mexican once,
was Indian always
And is.
And will be again.

These are pieces of a poem that Gloria Anzaldúa introduces in the chapter entitled *The Homeland, Aztlan*. This poem describes the journey of a Mexican immigrant who tries to enter into the U.S. territory through a border that increasingly resembles a military camp rather than a border between neighbors who claim to be friends.

Each passing year the measures that that U.S. government takes in order to reduce the illegal crossings to its side are more severe. This has forced immigrants to search for alternative ways to cross the border even if doing so represents greater risks for them. In order to achieve their goal, many immigrants choose to take the path of the desert that has become a tomb for many of them. Ironically, what used to be a common land now is separated by a “high tech” fence that uses the latest in technology along with the best agents trained to detect illegal immigrants. Ironically, while doing their job, the border patrol and government officials who create the laws aimed at the border do not stop to ask themselves why these people are so desperate to cross the border to an extent that they are willing to risk their lives to achieve their goal.

Back in 1848, Mexicans were separated by the drawing of a border that was reconfigured by means of the victory of U.S. troops over the Mexicans. However, the domination over Mexicans

did not end with the conclusion of the war, instead it has continued until today, since the Mexican economy is largely controlled by American corporations (González, 2000). The difficult economic conditions force Mexicans to migrate, since the country does not offer the necessary conditions for people to stay and try to live a life without poverty. The separation of Mexican families was one of the consequences of the U.S.-Mexico war, but that separation is also caused by the impoverishment that push many Mexicans, especially those in rural areas, to migrate to the north in a search for better opportunities, leaving their families behind. The U.S. is the obvious destination, not just because this nation is one of the richest in the world, but also because it is believed responsible, in a number of ways, for the bad conditions suffered at home.

For Anzaldúa the border is a 1,950 mile-long open wound given that she is a Chicana whose family happened to be on the American side of the border when Mexico was split in two. Her own family history is one that speaks about the theft that many Mexicans suffered at the hands of the Anglo-Americans who used their legal system to dispossess Mexicans from their land. Anglo-Americans took advantage of the fact that Mexicans did not speak English and lacked the economic resources to afford a legal defense. “139 years of the salty breath of the sea” accounted for the number of years that Mexicans were made “foreigners in the land of their birth” (González, 2000: 30) counting from the end of the U.S. Mexican war until 1987; the year in which Anzaldúa published *Borderlands*. It can be argued that Mexicans were a minority group in the borderlands. Yet, there are two important facts that we need to keep in mind. First, Anzaldúa is telling the history of her own people, that is, she is concerned with addressing Chicano history and the history of the U.S. colonization of Mexico. Second, even if Mexicans were a minority group in the *Spanish Borderlands*, the territory was under Mexican jurisdiction and belonged to that nation. Anglo-American’s feelings of superiority, combined with economic interest in the area which are the reasons why they justified their intervention using as an excuse the supposed backwardness of its inhabitants.

For Anzaldúa one of the main worries is that, “when you take a person, community, group, nation, etc., and divide her up, you are disempowering her” (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 220). She is no longer a threat because she lost half of her body, being or essence. Dominant groups have had success controlling others in part because they manage to divide a person, nation, or community. Separation may result in that at least one half will live afraid, insecure, and

debilitated until the moment of reunion, if that ever happens. Thus, attaining separation will make things easier to control; no wonder why this tactic still has so much popularity among politicians. As a divided nation, *Mexicanos* and Chicanos live afraid of the American domination that in many ways they try to resist. The irony manifested in the above poem is that today Mexicans literally search for holes along the border fence in order to make their way through the other side knowing that the land they try to reach was initially theirs. On a daily basis, we hear that Mexican illegal immigration is widely rejected, i.e. William Buckley and Ariana Huffington calling for “new enforcement measures against the "hordes" of illegal immigrants flooding across our nation's borders”(William Buckley and Ariana Huffington quoted in Saldívar and eScholarship (Online service), 1997), Mexicans are charged of wrongdoing for entering the United States illegally in search of jobs that allow them to keep families back in Mexico well fed. Furthermore, according to President Bush’s proposed amnesty bill, illegal immigrants who want to be considered for amnesty have, as a first step, to pay with jail time and money the price for being in this country illegally. Yet the United States does not want to recognize the fact that, for Mexicans, coming to this land without papers is not considered illegal crossing but rather re-appropriating the robbed land that Americans took by means of military force.

Today the Mexican-U.S. border constantly reminds Mexicans about the forced separation they suffered; total separation, however, was never fully achieved since we see that from that moment on, both Mexico and United States have been witnessing the increasing flows of legal and illegal immigration. The United States sees how despite its efforts in creating the border patrol, building a high-tech border fence, sending the military to the southern border, or creating countless checkpoints, Mexicans still make their way through to the U.S. territory. Nonetheless, those who avoid being captured by the border patrol face the hostilities of Anglo-Americans. Mexicans in the U.S. are currently the bottom of the social status since they are stigmatized as illiterate, lazy, dirty, criminals, etc. Unfortunately for Mexicans, these stereotypes are related to the color of their skin which provided the basis to sustain imperial domination and not so much to the Mexican character, so it does not matter how much Mexicans try to assimilate or adopt “American” values (for whatever that may mean); they continue to be oppressed since they are considered inferior for not being whites.²⁹

²⁹ See González, (2000). *Harvest of Empire*, chapter 5, for a similar argument.

These are the problems Anzaldúa describes as an open wound that cannot stop bleeding. However, something else is at stake and we can deduce it from reading the next paragraph on her poem *To Live in the Borderlands Means You*:

[...]
To live in the Borderlands means to
put *chile* in the borscht,
eat whole wheat tortillas,
speak tex-mex with a Brooklyn accent;
be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints

I want to concentrate in the final line of this passage: “To live in the Borderlands means to... be stopped by *la migra*³⁰ at the border checkpoints.” Here, the question is why one should consider that being stopped by *la migra* is something problematic, especially when the role of this agency is to detect illegal immigrants so they are deported back home. The issue here is that American citizens are equally restricted in their right to free mobility or at least those whose skin is dark and have the Mexican “looks.” An example of this is provided by Jose Saldivar in *Borders Matter*, where he recounts the journey of a native American novelist, Leslie Marmon Silko, who in a journey from Tucson to Albuquerque on several occasions was stopped by the border patrol who demanded her to provide them with an identification that certified her as a U.S. citizen, while white folks were never stopped (Saldivar and eScholarship (Online service), 1997). In a similar fashion, Gloria Anzaldúa uses her personal memories to account for a similar experience. In *Borderlands*, she states:

In the fields, *la migra*. My aunt saying, “*No corran*. Don’t run. They’ll think you’re *del otro lao*.” In the confusion, Pedro ran, terrified of being caught. He couldn’t speak English, couldn’t tell them he was fifth generation American. *Sin papeles*—he did not carry his birth certificate to work in the fields. *La migra* took him away while we watched him... They deported him to Guadalajara by plane (Anzaldúa, 1987: 4).

³⁰ *La migra* means the agents of the U.S. Border Patrol.

These two examples illustrate the argument that the southwest border is racialized. As long as your skin is white, you will not face the inconvenience of being questioned about the rightness of occupying certain spaces. By telling the story of Pedro, Anzaldúa not only guides us through the aspects of what it implies to be dark but also poor. Indeed, this narrative is exemplified by the agents of the border patrol thinking about Mexicans as if they are capable only of working in the fields. Hence, in the case of Pedro, his Mexicanness, therefore, his illegality was assumed. *La migra* did not have to bother checking his background since Pedro's appearance and job location were taken as an indicative of who he was, i.e., a poor illegal Mexican. This example also shows that poor people of color, despite being American citizens, are constantly required to prove not only who they are, but also who they are not, i.e., illegal immigrants from Mexico, drug dealers, terrorists, etc.

As we have seen, the physical, ethnic, racial and class borders between Mexico and United States has had an influence in producing the ideological Borderlands. The geographical border between Mexico and United States still reflects American domination over Mexicans, in particular people of color despite the migratory status of a person. Full of contradictions as it is, the Mexican-U.S. border is a dangerous place where mixed sentiments and feelings make their way through every day interactions. In this place of contradictions, colored people, poor people, weird people, deviant people, engage in daily battles for survival. Hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape (Anzaldúa, 1987, preface).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the geographical borderlands guard a close relation to the ideological notions of the Borderlands. Past and current dynamics of this site have created dual forms of colonialism that affect people of Spanish/Mexican origin as well as other non-white groups, since they are regarded as "foreign" both ethnically and racially to the identity of United States which has been described as white, protestant, and Anglo-Saxon (Oboler, 1995). Those who do not fit these characteristics are considered alien, "the racist label by which the U.S. government designates [the] exploited subculture it has created" (Saldivar-Hull, 1991: 217). Having a Mexican heritage

in the United States is commonly associated with failure, poverty, and inferiority. By contrast, being white and capitalist appears to be the only form of legitimization. However since the borderland/s is a place where multiple cultures coexist, a new form of ideology has been born, an ideology that speaks about overcoming physical and geographical boundaries. It also entails a new way of thinking that grows out of the multiple influences that it receives. Borderlands resistance ideology, thus, places itself at the core of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands to claim inclusivity, hybridity and the multiplicity of identities. It positions itself as a form of political engagement that aims to overcome the open wound that Mexicans have been suffering since 1848. In a way, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* is an attempt to ease the wound by recalling the ambitions and selfish actions of Anglo-Saxons to appropriate Mexican land by means of military force. It is also a way to call Anglo-Saxons to accountability for the destruction that their capitalist, expansionist interests caused in Mexico throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Aware that this recognition may never come, Anzaldúa's task is to put the pieces together in order to overcome the fear and insecurity that she feels is result of the separation, segregation, and racialization that Anglo-Americans have imposed on her. This is attempted by her developing the Borderlands theory, which I will address in the following chapter.

Chapter 3.

Borderlands Theory: Mapping the Borderlands/Enacting Coyolxauhqui

Nothing happens in the “real” world
unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

Gloria Anzaldúa

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to depict a map of the concept of Borderlands in the sense Gloria Anzaldúa intends. Although the body of literature that attempts to interpret Gloria Anzaldúa’s theories is vast and rich (see for instance Keating 1996, Alarcon 1997, Aigner-Varoz 2000, Keating 2005), most of her critics study Anzaldúa’s concepts independently from one another; namely, these scholars single out concepts such as *mestiza* consciousness, *la facultad*, *nepantla*, *conocimientos*, *des-conocimientos* or *coatlicue* state, just to mention some, to work on their analysis, study, interpretation, or elaboration. Although I point out this gap in the existing literature, this is not to say that one must discard such an important body of work, especially when these scholars have been dedicated to facilitating our understanding of Anzaldúa’s legacy. Moreover, approaching Anzaldúa’s concepts individually is perfectly understandable since the significance that she gave to her metaphors has ramifications applicable to almost any field, a fact that makes the study of her work a rather challenging task. My goal in laying this out, however, is to convey that the task that occupies me in this chapter is to treat Anzaldúa’s theory of the Borderlands in a comprehensive way, something that has not previously been attempted.

It is useful to clarify what I mean by treating Anzaldúa’s Borderlands theory in a comprehensive way, since I already stated that this is a new contribution to the existing

literature. Treating the Borderlands theory³¹ comprehensively does not mean that I will analyze each one of the terms, concepts and theories that Gloria Anzaldúa developed during all her life, rather, it means that I will explain what Borderlands theory is made of, what elements integrate it, how are they interrelated with one another, what are its goals and possible outcomes, and why is it relevant for us today. In other words, I will not limit my presentation to a select definition of the borderlands, but rather I will discuss at length the processes that go along with this theory. In this regard, it is important that we do not forget the historical, sociological, and spatial context that created the borderlands,³² since having these elements in mind will help us to see what the author is trying to attempt with this. In short, we can regard this section as a dialogue with the theory in order for us to know more about it.

The chapter starts out with a section addressing the different approaches that Anzaldúa herself gave to borderlands. But before proceeding, it is worth stating that this section requires that we be open to different interpretations of the Borderlands, since Anzaldúa exposes a rather unconventional version of the term, one that is not solely rooted in a spatial or geographical dimension, but that also uses a mental, spiritual, and emotional account. Here, my purpose is not to detach the borderlands from its spatiality, thereby implying that spatial or geographical borderlands are not relevant to political analyses, merely to concentrate in a specific version that will serve as the ground on which to build further political interpretations.

The second section consists in presenting the processes incorporated into the theory. I will describe how these processes work and what specific function they play. Although in my description I establish a specific sequence of these processes, it is important to note that this sequence is not meant to be linear or deterministic but may be accommodated in a different order. The core material for this section was taken from *Borderlands* and several interview sources where Anzaldúa explained in detail the elements of her theory. This is precisely the section that I regard as a reconstruction of the map that describes the ideological Borderlands, since the theory that occupies us was not elaborated hitherto as a three-step formula, but rather, it was explained in bits here and there. Finally, the third section contains a short discussion of the theory and opens up the door for the political interpretations of the following chapter.

³¹ It should be remembered that for the purpose of this paper the phrase Borderlands theory is meant to refer to Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory.

³² See second part of chapter 2 in this thesis.

Since I previously mentioned that my major concern in this chapter relates to the topic of ideological Borderlands, I believe it appropriate to explain my motives. When *Borderlands* was released in 1987, it constituted a groundbreaking publication in the sense that this book contained Anzaldúa's preoccupations with the historical processes by which dominant groups depict, produce, and represent the identity of the "other" as an inferior subject. In this book, the author combined diverse literary genres to make a critique against colonialism and how its promoters use culture and myths to create stereotypes about other people. Additionally, *Borderlands* influenced various literary fields in academia such as cultural studies, feminism, and queer theory,³³ among others; however, more often than not its political, as well as its postcolonial implications have been insufficiently explored. Furthermore, although many things have changed since 1987, in the current political context, the manipulation of identities is still a strategy widely utilized by political actors seeking specific ends. Let us take for instance the example of what in feminist circles is called "the process of re/colonization, which unfolds through the production of a homogenized Third World woman, depicted as a silent victim" (Fernandes, 1999). It is presupposed that, because Third World women cannot speak for themselves (for instance expressing sufferings, concerns, preoccupations, or engaging in mobilization), women in western countries must represent them and serve as channels for these women to have a public voice. Yet, the very fact that Third World women are depicted as voiceless demonstrates that the characterization of the Third World by the First is infused with political aims that seek to place one group in a position of privilege, power, or superiority vis-à-vis others. Although one can clearly see that the Third World women representation as voiceless is a myth, a question that must be addressed is why this myth was invented in the first place. I used the last point for the sake of exemplifying the kinds of problems that, I contend, Borderlands theory can help us to understand and perhaps resolve, yet, I will address this point in more detail later on, for now, suffice it to say I see political possibilities in Borderlands theory that can help us to critically analyze the interconnection between identity and politics.

³³ Keating, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, (2000), Keating *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds*,(2005),

Imagining Borderlands

Gloria Anzaldúa added her voice to the scholarship regarding the borderlands, geographical and otherwise, in 1987 when she published *Borderlands*. In this piece, the author approaches the topic from a variety of perspectives that allows her to express her concerns as a person with multiple and at times competing, identities. Interestingly, Anzaldúa did not present her Borderlands theory in a linear form, rather and perhaps purposely, she constructed meaning in a “hybrid way,” namely, the narrative employed there fuses theory, memoir, fiction, history, myth, poetry, storytelling, and music to speak about in-between spaces, symbols, possibilities, contradictions, simultaneity, etc. This hybrid style is also present in the way she introduces the topic since *Borderlands* does not present a straightforward definition of the theory, nor does she give us a defined sequence of the different levels put together into the theory; rather, one learns that Borderlands is a theory which is composed of many different processes by looking at several different sources. It is extremely likely that the author pursued this type of style deliberately since she believed that “writing is envisioning and conceptualizing the work. Writing is also dreaming the story into a virtual reality. The different stages in embodying the story are neither clearly demarcated nor sequential nor linear—they overlap, shift back and forth, take place simultaneously”(Anzaldúa, 1999: 247). In a wider context, Anzaldúa created a project that extended the limits of a single book, essay, or poem, however, this does not mean that one cannot map her ideas for the sake of gaining insights about the path she constructed in Borderlands, especially when doing so will allow us to have a better sense of her contributions as a scholar.³⁴

As is imprinted in the back cover of the book, in *Borderlands*, the author “remaps our understanding of what a ‘border’ is, presenting it not as a simple divide between here and there, us and them, but as psychic, social and cultural terrain that we inhabit, and that inhabits all of us” (Aunt Lute books, Anzaldúa, 2007). From this passage, we gain a glimpse of what Anzaldúa conceived of as being the Borderlands. In the first place, we are told that Anzaldúa does not

³⁴ For additional arguments regarding Anzaldúa’s contributions see Keating, *Women Reading Women Writing*, (1996), Keating *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds*_(2005), Mignolo and Tlostanova, (2007) *Theorizing from the Borders*, Perez, (2005) *Gloria Anzaldúa: La Gran Nueva Mestiza*, Saldivar (2007), *Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Caste* and Soja, (1996). *Thirdspace*.

necessarily see the border as a specific geographical or territorial space. Indeed, territoriality is only one of the many features in which borders can materialize, there are other possibilities too, for instance, borders can take many different forms: ideological, epistemic, geographical, emotional, spiritual, and so on. In this regard, we can say that geographical borders are a human production but, in turn, humans are border's products given that these spaces are used to establish people's allegiance in or out certain groups, communities, nations, etc. Since the goal of the second chapter was to address the geographical borderlands, now let us shift the discussion to its ideological aspect. While addressing the ideological Borderlands, Anzaldúa states:

The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the 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 the lower, middle and upper classes touch (Anzaldúa, 1987: preface).

In the above paragraph, we are confronted with a notion of Borderlands that does not exist physically but which are, nonetheless, influential and powerful. These Borderlands have been created with the intention of establishing differentially, that is, they are socially produced to create hierarchies seeking to seize control over the fate of certain groups or, trying to keep others at distance. As previously explained, the very notion of a border implies people construct binary categories such as *us* and *them*, which, most of the time, are incompatible since the *us* gets privileged over *them*. These Borders are the consequence of the incapability of certain groups to deal with difference and to incorporate it as something that is immanent, not a detriment, to the human condition. The theorization of these ideological Borderlands is more complicated given their immateriality. In other words, people who create them may declare that they do not exist, since they do not occupy a physical space. However, these Borderlands are felt on a daily basis and as social products, they are the carriers of power relations and political agendas as we will further see.

Borderlands theory

In this section, we confront the most difficult aspects of the Borderlands theory since we are dealing with Borderlands that are socially constructed. This characteristic makes their awareness problematic because pointing them out is not as simple as in the case of physical borders. In order to depict emotional and ideological Borderlands one has to look at fixed structures of power, i.e., state officials, dominant culture, economic and political elites. Borderlands are experienced when people are confronted with the fact that they are constantly rejected by means of their color, sexual preference, class, or gender. Ideological Borderlands may be present when the social hierarchies presuppose that the world is composed by rigid and definite categories of superiority and inferiority, where superiority is commonly associated with folks who are white, Christian, middle or upper classes while inferiority is related to those who fall outside of the previous category and are considered different or defective. Anzaldúa's definition of Borderlands states that "a Borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary where the prohibited, the forbidden and *los atravesados* reside in a place of discomfort as they negotiate between the conflicting forces in such margins" (Aigner-Varoz, 2000: 49). The Borderland is produced by feelings of alienation and discomfort with the dominant culture that denies "others" as equals and rejects them for all that they represent. However the Borderlands is not only a space created by people's discomfort, it is something else.

At its most basic, Anzaldúa declared in an interview with AnaLouise Keating, "Borderlands is a *metaphor for processes of many things, psychological, physical, and mental*. A metaphor that does not apply specifically to one thing but can be applied to many things" (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000:176, emphasis added). Although this declaration is not entirely clear, since we can infer from it countless interpretations, the first thing we learn is that Borderlands is a theory of processes, that is, it involves a series of actions or operations conducive to an end; a continuous operation aimed at a particular goal (Encyclopedia Britannica, Online Edition). This goal, as Anzaldúa sees it, is to reverse the colonization that has been passed on to her, and many others, through cultural practices and the construction of myths that operate in everyday discourse. This is why she states: "The dominant culture has created its version of reality and my work counters that version with another version—the version of coming from this place of in-betweenness,

nepantla, the Borderlands. There is another way of looking at reality. There are other ways of writing. There are other ways of thinking. There are other sexualities, other philosophies” (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 229). Anzaldúa uses myths as a counterargument to the practice of stereotyping the Mexican culture as something immanently negative. By re-writing the content of myths, she contends against Anglos that the epistemic world is exclusively based on Eurocentric notions of enlightenment; rather, she argues that the world is composed of many ways of knowing, one of them being that of the Indian cultures (Mayas, Incas, Aztecs, etc.). Anzaldúa uses myths to explain the theory, since the construction of myths is a powerful tool in the process of creating social hierarchies and writing is equally, if not more, powerful in doing the same. My argument must not be misunderstood as implying that the Borderlands theory is to be regarded as Anzaldúa’s myth, instead, it is a well thought project of resistance, also considered as *conocimiento fornterizo* or ‘border thinking’ (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006), that I aim to map. Gloria Anzaldúa conceived the theory of Borderlands from the point of view of the disempowered, the undesirable, the transgressor; the one that because of the colonial discourse imposed on her/him feels alien to the place and culture where she/he lives.

Anzaldúa uses her writing skills to create the Borderlands in order to re-appropriate her mind, body, soul, voice and more importantly, her own epistemologies. In this sense, we can infer that part of what is at stake in *Borderlands* is the right that any person has of self-representation, or “*autohistoria*,” to put it in Anzaldúa’s own terms. For Anzaldúa, *autohistoria* “depicts both, the soul of the artist and the soul of the pueblo. It deals with who tells the story and what stories and histories are told” (Saldívar, 2007: 364, footnote 14). One needs to defend *autohistoria* since the dominant narratives that depict “foreign others” are not specifically based in racism for the sake of racism; they pursue specific goals such as capitalist expansion, resource exploitation, land appropriation, political control, transferring of wealth, etc. Thus, in addition to Anzaldúa’s remark that the stories about us must be told by ourselves, one must also pay critical attention to the content of the stories and histories that dominant groups tell. Moreover, one should also question the purposes behind dominant narratives, that is, one must be critical about who says what, and why. This also applies to the individual level where one must always ask what the purpose of myths is, such as the following:

*“Tu no sirves pa’ nada—
You’re good for nothing.
Eres pura vieja.”* (Anzaldúa, 1987: 83)

In this case being considered worthless just because one was born a woman is an attempt to deprive that person not only of her basic rights but also of her capacity to exercise any social influence, or having a part in the making of decisions that affect her. By telling women that they are worthless, the dominant culture (males in this case) seek to cage women as dependent, useless, weak, subjects who cannot accomplish anything unless they have men’s support. Moreover, the myth embedded in these lines is that women are “naturally” inferior to men, condition that according to the myth cannot be changed, reverse or contested. But again, for Anzaldúa the supposed inferiority of women is just a myth that women can certainly change and overcome to liberate themselves. In this light, one way of resisting domination is by entering into the process of Borderlands and daring to transgress these social boundaries by gaining self-awareness and self re-cognition. The Borderlands as a theory of identity is fascinating since self-awareness makes people interrogate the ordering of things, to challenge authority, and to ask questions regarding traditional structures of power imposed on those who are constantly marginalized. In this sense, “Borderlands can also be considered as a state of mind which can be interrogated through language” (K. Urch, and et al., 1995: 76-77). This is not to imply that we are speaking about a mental or imaginary space where difference is suddenly accepted but rather, Borderlands is a conscious state which can be used to re-appropriate the right to define self-identities since for Anzaldúa identity is enacted and performed. In sum, Borderlands theory speaks about overlapping border spaces and the cultural representations that people in these spaces have to negotiate in order to exercise agency. It is not just a matter of accepting one’s differences and learning to live with them, but rather, it is a moment when self-awareness is attained and pushes people to transgress the boundaries that dominant groups have imposed on them by daring to enact multiple identities all together.

Borderland's Processes

Although Borderlands is a theory for several processes, we still have not resolved what these processes are, how they are integrated into the theory, and what role each one of them plays. Anzaldúa explains that “emotional Borderlands can be found anywhere where there are different kinds of people coming together and occupying the same space or where there are spaces that are hemmed in by these larger groups of people”(Anzaldúa quoted in K. Urch, and et al., 1995: 77). From this statement, we learn that emotional Borderlands are not characterized by rigid or definite categories, that they are constituted by ambiguities, by diverse people who happen to be searching for a place to fit outside dominant categories, and that these Borderlands can be found anywhere. Yet, anywhere means literally any place and we still do not know in what moment we are stepping into an emotional Borderland. To resolve this problem, once again, we turn to Anzaldúa who explains that “people who are in the process of crossing from one class to another or one country to another or one identity to another go through a transition, a *nepantla* state which is part of the Borderlands” (Anzaldúa quoted in K. Urch, and et al., 1995: 78). Hence, the first of these Borderlands processes is *nepantla*. *Nepantla* and Borderlands are closely related to the extent that some times the author uses the two terms interchangeably, however, in this paper, Borderlands is considered as a whole theory, where *nepantla* happens to be one of its processes. The following process in the theory is *Coatlicue* state. Just as the *nepantla* state is central to the Borderlands, the *Coatlicue* state is central to *nepantla*. In repeated interviews, Anzaldúa explains that the *nepantla* state has different stages, of which *Coatlicue* is one (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000, Reuman 2000). The *Coatlicue* state, in turn, has a daughter metaphor and this is *Coyolxauhqui* (Reuman, 2000). This process is one that speaks about reconciliation and auto validation, characteristics that make it equally fascinating as we will see further on. Finally, the last process in this theory is *la conciencia de la mestiza*, a powerful concept that integrates the work of all the previous stages and gives the Borderlands theory a specific purpose. In order to elaborate a map of all the processes that intervene in the Borderlands it was necessary to look into several sources, since the theory was originally developed in *Borderlands* but the author worked it out throughout all her writings. Her particular style of writing is very much like her

idea of transforming her self back into a bridge; namely, she writes about the Borderlands in a non-linear style, but building bridges throughout all her work while doing so.

Nepantla State, a Pathway to Change

Gloria Anzaldúa is not the sole writer who has elaborated upon the concept of *nepantla*, indeed, the term has found strong resonance among contemporary scholars, writers, poets, and artists. One of the first recordings of this term is associated with an episode documented by Diego Durán, who heard the term from an Indian who explained to him “*todavía estamos nepantla*”, *es decir, “aún nos encontramos a la mitad del camino”* (Durán and Garibay K, 1984: 237). *Nepantla* was included in the Borderlands theory as a metaphor. In describing this metaphoric process, the author incorporates some elements that existed in the etymological meaning and adds her own. In *nahuatl* (the language of the Aztecs or Mexicas), the meaning of this term is “*a la mitad de*, or, *en medio de*.” Anzaldúa also uses this concept, but she also states that *nepantla* “*es el lugar en medio de todos los lugares*, the space in-between, the liminal stage or transitional periods in identity formation (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 5, 238). Since Borderlands is a theory composed of several processes and *nepantla* is central to the Borderlands, from this logic, we infer that *nepantla* is a Borderlands process, more typically called *nepantla* state, where the self is going through the process of transiting inside the mind, the psyche and the spirit simultaneously.

We travel through *nepantla* to challenge, confront, or reaffirm our own identity before getting to a point of stasis (Anzaldúa quoted in K. Urch, and et al., 1995: 78). We need to go through the *nepantla* state in order to be confronted with the fact that there are many ways of knowing, that epistemologies also exist outside the western ideology, and that we have many possibilities of learning, being and expressing outside the rigid categories that aim to construct people’s identity in one particular way. In the words of Michel Foucault “the point is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are” (Foucault 1982: 212 quoted in Saldívar, 2007: 345). In this regard, what needs to be refused is the assumption that people in the Third World “do not think or theorize” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 205), that white is superior to black, brown or yellow, that defectiveness and deviancy are synonyms with colored, homosexuality or

poverty and that “people [also] refuse to be geographically caged, subjectively humiliated and denigrated and epistemically disregarded” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 208). *Nepantla* defends the thesis that one needs to be aware of the diversity of knowledges that exist in the world in order to embrace, reject, or select what is best for us (since the capitalist world allows for multiplicity of commercial brands for commodities, why we should not be allowed multiple epistemologies, even the ones that reject capitalism).

Nepantla constitutes the channel where the journey towards self-awareness, self-proclamation, and, perhaps, liberation begins. In *nepantla* we are exposed to many different worlds, many stations of knowledge that help us to position our mind in the particular context in which our identity was constructed. *Nepantlas* expose several identities to the self in terms of the past, present and future, and juxtapose them with others without implying that one needs to take any particular stance. For Anzaldúa “identity is relational, it exists in relation to some other. Therefore, it happens always in this in-between zone, the *nepantla* or the Borderlands. And that in being in this in-between zone it’s saying that your fixed categories are permeable and one can jump from one locale to the other, or one particular identity to the other” (Anzaldúa quoted in Reuman, 2000:12). Hence, *nepantla* contributes to the Borderlands in the sense that it allows transcending rigid identities. It begins the process of de-colonization by substituting monolithic views with multiple knowledges.

The Chicano Art Organization builds on the definition of *nepantla* by explaining that this term is usually referencing endangered peoples, cultures, and/or genders, who due to invasion/conquest/marginalization or forced acculturation, engage in resistance strategies of survival (Chicanoart.org, 2007). Throughout the *nepantla* state, endangered peoples, cultures, or genders gain self-consciousness about the threats that mainstream cultures superimpose upon them. Hence, they learn to re-invent social, political, and cultural spaces in which they not only survive, but also counterattack their oppressors by enhancing cultural difference as a place of power. For instance, the production of art can serve as one of the many battleground sites where cultural difference is valued, i.e. *A day without Mexicans (film)*, *Borderlands/La Frontera (book)*, *El regreso a Aztlan*³⁵, etc. To explain the meaning of *nepantla*, we will use Anzaldúa’s own words:

³⁵ See <http://www.chicanoart.org/mirando00.html> for an example.

In *nepantla*, you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to 'see through' them with a mindful, holistic awareness. Seeing through human acts both individual and collective allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, identity, and reality, and explore how some of your/others' constructions violate other people's ways of knowing and living" (Anzaldúa quoted in Keating, 2005: 10)

Coatlicue State

Indeed, a *Coatlicue* state is both the most painful and elucidating process in the Borderlands. Knowing that Gloria Anzaldúa has a profound admiration for female indigenous goddesses, we come to understand why she chose to name her next stage in Borderlands the *Coatlicue* state. She was concerned about the fact that ancient myths and fictions were and are used to produce realities that work to the detriment of women, i.e., the previous example where women are depicted as worthless because of their womanhood. In this sense, her work was dedicated to reposition the myths of female goddesses at the center of her theories in order to return to women the power that patriarchal cultures took away from them. This move in Anzaldúa's work is important, since giving female characters a central role in her theories means pulling females out of the shadows given that women, in the Mexican and Chicano mythology play negative roles. Just as Eve is held responsible for human's limited longevity in the Holy Bible, Tonaltzing, better known as La Malinche, is considered the female traitor of the Mexican nation, since not only was she Hernán Cortés'³⁶ mistress but it is believed that she helped him to defeat the Aztecs. What the history does not say, however, is that La Malinche was given to Cortes as a slave by the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma, this is why Anzaldúa writes: "not me sold out my people, but they me" (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 220). Additionally, putting females at the center of her theories can have the result that people who know about Anzaldúa's work may be equally interested in learning more about these female figures and their stories which might lead to further research on them in order to know more about their roles, contributions, collaboration

³⁶ Hernán Cortés was the Mexican conqueror

and so on (a field that is not being sufficiently explored). That is the reason why figures such as *Coatlicue*, *Tonaltzing*, *Coatlalopeuh*, *La llorona*, *La chingada*, or *La Virgen de Guadalupe* play a prominent role in her writings.

Coatlicue's role in the Borderlands is to "balance dualities and fuse opposites" (Anzaldúa, quoted in Reuman, 2000: 10). It is in *Coatlicue* state where one stops to digest all the knowledge gained in *nepantla*. In this zone "one begins to confront past identities against those awaiting in the future, but the path of *Coatlicue* is the dark night of the soul, [is] hiding oneself in the dark cave, reaching the bottom" (Anzaldúa, quoted in Reuman, 2000: 13). *Coatlicue* is a symbol of life and death, the process whose work is to take all of what we have ever been in order to destroy it and re-build it. However, why would one ever want to go through the *Coatlicue* state? The answer to this question forces us to start making connections. In order to reach Borderlands, we need to go through a process of awareness or re-cognition. Our channel to this process is the *nepantla* state, an in-between space where we are in transition through different worlds, meanings, concepts, categories that allow us to gain the necessary *conocimientos* to re-configure the self. However, because the task of *nepantla* is only to serve as a transition channel, we cannot expect to achieve transformation just by going through it, for this stage can be very confusing. For that to happen we need a *Coatlicue* state, and what this process does Anzaldúa explains:

When you are in the midst of the *Coatlicue* state—the cave, the dark—you're hibernating or hiding, you're gestating and giving birth to yourself. You're in a womb state. When you come out of that womb state, you pass through the birth canal, the passage that I call *nepantla* (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 225).

Through this passage, we learn that *Coatlicue* is crucial to the Borderlands because it is in this stage where one has to kill the colonized self and everything one has learned in order to recognize that self, namely, that one's identity goes through a stage where it has to confront all the identities, acquired, imposed, desired, and so on, in order to identify where the discomfort/oppression comes from. *Coatlicue* forces us to see the social constructions that have been used to represent us and she forces us to confront them since "to not see is to be in *desconocimiento*" (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 177).

Re-cognizing also implies that we face those things that make us afraid. This is not to imply that one is better or worse after entering into *Coatlicue*, rather, one is different. As Anzaldúa states, this stage is so agonizing because it reveals the impositions that metaphors inserted in “the collective unconscious, powerfully influencing the individual construction of her/himself” (Aigner-Varoz, 2000: 49) but it also reveals the “truths” about ourselves that we made the choice to believe. This true self reveals before us a person that is afraid, perhaps ashamed, and troubled, since she has been constantly told that she is inferior. This is an inferiority she has learned by not being allowed to have a fair or dignifying job, by not being recognized in her accomplishments, by being denied medical care, education, or political participation, etc.

In a *Coatlicue* state we are hiding because we are afraid of the demons that exist in there, we are afraid of the monsters and the beasts, yet we are aware that those demons and monsters are an extension of our own flesh. They came into existence because the negative stereotypes in society made us believe in many forms of inferiority. In a *Coatlicue* state, it would be safer to avoid self-awareness; not knowing will be less painful since *Coatlicue* requires the strength that is needed to murder acquired identities, which were implanted in us through colonial discourse. And yes, one should be terrified since coming out from the *Coatlicue* state does not mean that one succeeded in achieving transformation, nor empowerment. In fact, one can get lost in a *Coatlicue* state forever, meaning that she will live colonized for the rest of her life. Perhaps that is the reason why the *Coatlicue* state is so agonizing, because one needs to face the painful stage of killing one by one the demons that obscure the soul, because one needs to confront the power of others against our own to recognize the in-between spaces, which can be used to reverse domination. It is only by feeling discomfort that one will dare to risk conformity to seek change, evolution, and transformation; otherwise, alienation will be the easy choice. As Anzaldúa explains:

When we are not living up to our potentialities and thereby impeding the evolution of the soul—or worse, *Coatlicue*, the Earth, opens and plunges us into its maw, devours us. By keeping the conscious mind occupied, or immobile, the germination work takes place in the deep, dark earth of the unconscious." (Anzaldúa, 1987: 47).

Coyolxauhqui, Daughter of Coatlicue

In *Coyolxauhqui* state, we begin to put all the pieces together. In fact, this is what the *Coyolxauhqui* metaphor stands for. Anzaldúa addressed *Coyolxauhqui* in an essay entitled *Putting Coyolxauhqui together: A Creative Process*, published in 1999. As its name indicates, this essay illustrates Anzaldúa's struggle with her own writing, with the obsession of an artist to make a piece of art out of her work. Anzaldúa introduces *Coyolxauhqui* as the daughter of *Coatlicue*, the moon goddesses, a warrior woman and the sister of the Aztec war god Huitzilopochtli. She explains that her brother "decapitated her, dismembered the body and scattered her limbs and buried the pieces of her body in different places because he was afraid of her power" (Anzaldúa, 1999: 251; Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 220). The aim of this process is to produce meaning, coherence, ordering, and shape to the previous work. *Coyolxauhqui* is in many senses reconciliation with the self, a phase of self-acceptance and self-appreciation. Although *Coyolxauhqui* was written with the aim of expressing the struggles of the self in the process of writing, this does not mean that its application is limited to this activity. Instead as Anzaldúa herself explains:

Writing about writing is more about life than it is about writing, that writing mirrors the struggle in your own life, from denial to recognition and change; that writing illumines your fears and dreams. All these insights are precious because you wrestled them out of the granite walls of your creative block (Anzaldúa, 1999: 258).

This passage emphasizes that a *Coyolxauhqui* state is a process of putting the self together not only at the individual level, but also in relationship to the social, political, economical, or emotional context in which we live. Namely, *Coyolxauhqui* allow us to realize that in order not to be considered a foreigner, we spend most of our time trying to assimilate, to be less like *us* (the other) and more like them (we) in order to fit, be accepted, recognized, and allowed access to rights, resources, or opportunities. However, the previous stages allowed us to see all the possibilities beyond a single one and this is the moment when we re-cognize the self as actually being multiple, that is, we acknowledge that our identity has been influenced by various different cultures and for that reason we cannot claim a single self. We recognize the multiple influences

to which we have been exposed and accept that multiplicity as part of our own identity. This allows our allegiance to a certain group or category not to be compromised but open to different associations, memberships and the like.

This moment of re-cognition allows reconciliation with the external world. Perhaps we may stop seeing the world as one that oppresses us and start to see it as one that we can change, influence, and accommodate according to our needs. In other words, we no longer see ourselves as depoliticized agents, but as people who can actually resist and exercise power instead of merely being its subject. This reconciliation also requires that this re-built identity does not fall in the trap of wanting to meet the social, emotional, or political expectations that others put upon us, meaning, for instance, that one stops trying to meet deadlines, certain standards of beauty, or that one stops acting according to what is socially approved. Hence, it is necessary that we empower ourselves through *Coyolxauhqui* because “when you take a person and divide her up, you dis-empower her, [and] she is no longer a threat” (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 11). If we are not complete, the feeling that something is missing will make us afraid, it will make us dubious about our own capabilities. These feelings are dangerous since others can use them to perpetrate colonization. Therefore, Anzaldúa reminds us, “you have to accept the imperfections of your work, accept its partial incoherence, accept the fact that it will never attain the surface of a water-smoothed stone. Like a person’s life, all art is a work in progress” (Anzaldúa, 1999: 259).

Hence, what Anzaldúa is trying to express here is that it is okay to be us; it is okay to be different, brown, black, or whatever. It is okay having different values, religions, or traditions than those of the white man. Putting the pieces together and accepting our work as something in progress also means that there is always a possibility for a change, for difference, and that nothing is universal, divine, or perfect. And yet, this imperfection makes one’s work perfect, since it is our creation, our struggle, our voice and soul. Our identity, just as our work, is constantly arranged and re-arranged; however, after *Coyolxauhqui*, we are aware of all the forces trying to influence us, and now we decide to what to pay attention and what to ignore, what to incorporate and what to discard.

Crossing the Border. La Conciencia de La *Mestiza*

The final process in the Borderlands theory is *La conciencia de la mestiza* or the Borderlands consciousness as Anzaldúa calls it. A long way had to be walked in order to arrive at this stage, yet the confusion that she experienced in *nepantla*, the agony that she suffered in *Coatlicue*, and the crushing burden of picking up the pieces in *Coyolxauhqui* have all produced important outcomes which are materialized in the new *mestiza*, a consciousness that speaks of resistance. The new *mestiza* is a space of hybridity, of multiplicity, which means that it is not exclusive of Mexican-Americans/Chicanos, Latin Americans, Indigenous, or Indians. Even white males can have a *mestiza* consciousness since this is a state of mind. Having a *mestiza* consciousness means that all the previous processes have prepared the self to engage, to abandon previous feelings of victimization, and to replace them with reason and political action, where reason is to be regarded as the capacity to understand our own position vis-à-vis those institutions that represent us and demands that we question them constantly. Thus, the person who previously lived as a colonized being, as someone devaluated and stigmatized by the logic of domination no longer accepts to play that role, no longer accepts impositions and marginalization. She instead uses her voice to define herself, to speak for herself and to open new spaces for herself. The *mestiza* consciousness is now her new identity and she enacts it and performs it on a daily basis. The new *mestiza* hence is capable of transformation and evolution and her new identity makes her unique. The attributions of this new identity Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands*:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be a Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode —nothing is trusted out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only she sustains contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else (Anzaldúa, 1987: 79).

In the new *mestiza*, feelings of fear and shame together with the wound caused by the separation and subsequent distinction of white/colored, male/female, civilized/barbarians, etc., are healed with “a new value system” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3) in which metaphors are used to reverse the negative stereotypes socially imposed on people by inserting new meanings onto them. Going

through the Borderlands helps her to redefine her position not only in her own eyes, but also in the society. Now, she is no longer the voiceless, tamed woman that would not dare to challenge others; to be sure, she is ready to do so, and in turn, she is feared and no longer the one who fears. Yet having a better notion of our own identity is not enough, since the transformation one has suffered does not come without compromises.

One of these compromises is to seek the transformation of the overall social structure. Hence, the new *mestiza* becomes necessarily a political actor as a product of the newly gained identity, who needs to work in favor of creating emancipatory spaces, building communities of solidarity, teaching resistance, transforming institutions, and so on and so forth. Anzaldúa shows this political consciousness in the new *mestiza* when she states, “it is not enough to stand in the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 78). Later in that same paragraph, she declares that one’s role as a new *mestiza* is to act and not to react from what stance, positioning, profession, etc., one may have. However, action must be politically engaged. This struggle is mapped in this way:

The first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja...* this step is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets history, and using the new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the dark-skinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance 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... She is able to transform herself (Anzaldúa, 1987: 82-83).

Thus, a new consciousness implies a political activism, which for Anzaldúa was manifested through her writing. Her broader project is to attain political change since this type of change is the kind that can really make the difference in a person’s life. Yet, she saw the Borderlands as a theory of processes that needed to be put in practice repeatedly, since people are subject to many kinds of oppressions and being aware of one form does not do the job for all. However, once an identity of *la conciencia de la mestiza* is assumed, the space of marginalization to which one was relegated becomes the space of resistance from where one follows the task to redefine everything

around. Along these lines, Jose David Saldívar explains, “*la conciencia de la nueva mestiza*, for Anzaldúa, is ‘neither *español*, *ni inglés*, but both” (Saldívar, 2007: 352).

Conclusion

Understood as a process that allows the possibility of resisting control, domination, and manipulation, Borderlands theory connects a series of emotional, psychological and spiritual processes that inform the reconfiguration of the self in order to put all the pieces together so we understand identity as being multiple, reflexive, and open to ambiguities and difference. It is necessary to take a journey through the Borderlands in order to be able to appreciate our personal history, our memoir, our value outside the influence of colonial discourses. In this sense, Borderlands theory is an attempt to demonstrate that de-colonization is feasible and positive. It establishes the premise that thinking outside the box, where the box is western Eurocentric based epistemologies, is possible. Anzaldúa does not defend, however, a rejection of western knowledge, instead her argument defends incorporation, mixture, and also debate since we cannot discard the knowledge that we do not even know. Ultimately, the theory tries to tell us that one must defend the right to find out who one is and who one wants to be without having others telling us the roles we are left to play. Although one may not always agree with Anzaldúa, I believe that her theory of Borderlands is worth a try given that the Eurocentric enlightenment failed to provide the answer for human freedom, not to mention topics such as wealth distribution, inclusion, justice, etc.

Borderlands theory prepares us to engage in political action in order to seek the overall transformation of society. Anzaldúa approached this task in her writing; she dedicated her entire work to this transformation by re-writing the story behind myths, thereby transforming the story of the oppressed. More of these possibilities are addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4.

Borderlands Theory: Change or Significant Freedom?

“Where there is no freedom, there is death and destruction.”

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Becoming Political

The problem of the twentieth century, W.E.B. DuBois stated in 1903, is the problem of the color line — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of people in Asia and Africa, in America and the Islands of the sea (Du Bois, 1996: 15). The problem of the twenty-first century, Mignolo and Tlostanova state, is the problem of the ‘epistemic line’ (Borges 2003, quoted in Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 214). However, towards the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, we still do not resolve the problem of the “capital line,” that is, the control, exploitation, and domination of the poor classes by the richer ones. During the second part of the decade of the 1990’s, the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, made everybody believe that “another world is possible” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 219), yet the building of that new world, it seems to me, has been postponed. In the international arena, the west is still the dominant actor in the economical, political, and military spheres, although current debates suggest that China’s economic and political power will soon take over as the next hegemon, meaning that western epistemologies would no longer be dominant. However, even if these predictions materialize during the course of the present century a different world leader does not necessarily imply a better one. Moreover, having a different world leader does not signify that the neo-liberal system currently in place would necessarily be replaced.

I started this section by opening the discussion regarding the possibilities for a meaningful change in this newly born twentieth-first century, where change is to be understood as the establishment of rules different from those inherited from the colonial period, today recognized

as globalization. In this sense, the question I would like to address in this section considers the extent to which the Borderlands theory is an instrument that can contribute to a greater level of freedom for marginalized groups and minorities. Here, freedom is to be understood as theorized by Hannah Arendt who conceived freedom in terms of action. According to Arendt, “action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other. This is not to say that motives and aims are not important factors in every single act, but they are its determining factors, and action is free to the extent that it is able to transcend them.”(Arendt, 1961: 151). Thus, freedom for Arendt is an act that is not motivated in response or reaction to external forces, but it constitutes the beginning of something. I will return to Arendt later on; for now suffice to say that I juxtapose Arendt’s notion of freedom to ask what the Borderlands theory contributes to this end. Moreover, I am curious to see if the Borderlands theory goes beyond its own boundaries as a project of resistance and offers concrete political possibilities for those who follow the theory. In posing these questions, I seek to discuss the benefits of the Borderlands theory as an emancipatory project but, at the same time, I am at pains at analyzing the limitations, if any, of the theory since I believe that agency, in resistance projects, must not be assumed but demonstrated. In asking these questions, hence, I am reminded that the role of the theorist is to remain critical with respect to the work one seeks to analyze.

In this study, my main concern has been directed at physical borders, ideological Borderlands, and their treatment as mechanisms directed at the creation, management, and maintenance of difference, but also as sites where contestation occurs and takes the form of social, cultural, or epistemic resistance. At this point, it should be clear that the Borderlands theory is a set of processes that aim to achieve de-colonization by re-writing the history of the colonized people and by inserting new meaning in the content of myths and narratives that speak for the “other.” This theory is also aimed at all those who have been historically marginalized by dominant groups to enter in a mental, psychological and spiritual process that allows them to question the structures that sustain acquired identities and allows them to transform that identity into something else, namely, a more autonomous, self constructed identity that seeks the healing of the self. One of the outcomes that might result from the Borderlands process, I argue, is the inducement of people to *become political*, since meaningful change is only attained when action

is taken at the political level and it manages to influence the political system. According to Engin F. Isin, becoming political is:

[T]hat moment when one constitutes oneself as being capable of judgment about just and unjust, takes responsibility for that judgment, and associates oneself with or against others in fulfilling that responsibility. (Isin 2002: 276, quoted in Secor, 2004: 352).

The Borderlands theory that I addressed in the previous chapter falls in this definition inasmuch as the theory clearly judges the European colonialism and the American geographical and economical expansionism in Mexico as something unfair to the indigenous and the Mexican populations respectively. During colonization, the indigenous populations were massacred or worked to death (González, 2000; Quijano and Ennis, 2000), indigenous culture and science were destroyed or distorted, the human and natural resources were overexploited, and wealth was extracted from the new world to the imperial government, while American expansionism divided Mexico geographically and penetrated the national markets in order to extract its resources. In pointing these events out, Anzaldúa places herself as a practitioner of postcolonial theory and joins the list of authors who condemn colonialism and its contemporary operational forms. Since western culture has distorted much of the historical events in an attempt to justify its past actions and atrocities, it is important that history and stories are recuperated and told by those who suffered the consequences of domination since their view needs to be incorporated as part of history itself. Thus, Anzaldúa assumed responsibility to join others in the task of bringing back to light the stories of the dominated in order to incorporate their voices into the world history.

Such a task is important, since, for Anzaldúa, “myths and fiction create reality and these myths and fictions are used against women and against certain races to control, regulate, and manipulate us. [Thus], I’m re-writing the myths, using the myths back against the oppressors” (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 219). Anzaldúa considers that the myths that dominant groups create against “foreign others” are unjust, since these are disseminated through cultural practices with the aim of producing subordinated identities who are used to advance the interests of those who oppress them. Anzaldúa’s moment of becoming political comes when she decides to act against the oppressor by re-inscribing the narrative of myths to confront domination with new knowledge. Her political act materializes when her own stories do not allow dominant groups to

describe her as inferior, defective, ugly, or lazy. Instead, she decides to embrace a new identity that allows her to transform the negative stereotypes into empowering personalities. In addition, the Borderlands theory, as resistance project, demands action and compromises from those who decide to ascribe to the theory since it is considered that once one realizes the sources of oppression, action must follow. In what follows I will take a moment to address the political moments of the Borderlands theory.

Visions of Change

According to Engin Isin, the act of becoming political “is embodied in the moments when ‘strangers’ and ‘outsiders’ overturn the “various strategies and technologies of citizenship [or identity] in which they [are] implicated and thereby [constitute] themselves differently from the dominant images given to them” (Isin 2002: 33, as quoted in Secor, 2004: 353). The whole project that Anzaldúa advances through the Borderlands theory is to be found along these lines insofar as this theory is conceived as a process through which colonized people must travel in order to refuse given identities. In this vein, the Borderlands theory contends that Mexican-Americans/Chicanos are not the dark side of United States of America, that not all Mexicans are intruders, illegal, or delinquents and that being a descendant of a white European and an Indian should not be taken as a symbol of failure, backwardness, or fatalism. Furthermore, what Anzaldúa most refuses is the idea that she is cast as a “foreign other” among her own, that no matter how hard she worked in school to have a name and respect on her own, people still considered her success something merely accidental since the stereotypes against people of color do not consider them capable of such merits. At the same time, Borderlands theory is also a bridging project, since, as Norma Cantu states, “one must also see border life in the context of its joys, its continuous healing, and its celebration of a life and culture that survives against all odds. For to do otherwise condemns us to falling into the vortex of pessimism and anomie where so many already dwell” (Cantu, 1993: n.p.). Hence, instead of continuing to see the border as an instrument of oppression, Borderlands theory re-appropriates the symbolism of the border as a sign of restitution, reconfiguration, and re-vitalization.

Anzaldúa sees it possible to cast herself different from the labels she has been given in her social interaction with dominant groups because in her view “identity is a process-in-the-making. You are not born Chicana; you become a Chicana because of the culture that’s caught in you” (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 239). In other words, one is not born superior or inferior, which is similar to say that one is not born male or female, white, black, brown, yellow, or rich or poor, either. Those categories are imposed on people by society inasmuch as one is expected to engage in certain roles, behavior, or attitudes according to what is socially accepted. Thus, if one’s identity is constructed in a certain way it is because one learned, throughout our association with others, to adopt a particular form of being and to construct meaning through certain types of values, norms, religion, traditions, etc. In the Borderlands, then, the goal is to unlearn (*desconocer*) what one was taught to be and to create an identity that is more aware of itself and its coming into being. It is in this moment when a whole world of new possibilities emerges since one stops being caged in other’s people boxes. After the Borderlands process, one stops meeting other people’s expectations, meaning that not only does one refuse what is given by the colonizers but one constantly reinvents who one is.³⁷ In the words of Maria Lugones, “the border dweller comes to understand, through a jarring, vivid awareness of being made into more than one person, that the encasing by particular systems of meaning is a process one can consciously and critically resist or accept” (Lugones, 2005: 88).

Political Identities

Gloria Anzaldúa positions the Borderlands project at the border not only as a way to “exploit the network of in-between spaces and ambiguous identities that emerge with the break down of patriarchal nation-state boundaries” (K. Urch, and et al., 1995: 75) but because basing her resistance project at the border has political aims inasmuch as it re-appropriates the same space that dominant cultures use to produce difference. The separation of the “other” by means of the creation of both geographical and ideological border proved to have an immense effect in the world, given that it accentuated the differences between north and south, center and periphery

³⁷ For Anzaldúa one example would be to change one socially acquired heterosexuality for a political homosexuality, which means that one trains oneself to like people of the same sex until the attraction towards people of the same sex becomes natural.

and between “civilized” and “barbarians.” Mexico and the United States fought a war in the nineteenth century driven by their conflicts over the border; in addition, many of the subsequent problems between the two nations resulted from the imposition of a new border that added a new dichotomy to the previous ones, namely, winners and defeated. These differences seemed to render people on the two sides of the border increasingly apart. However, transgressing the border cannot be avoided given that another role of the border “is the spatial movement of people and goods in the direction of specific goals with the purpose of adjusting the endowments of the earth and humans given by nature” (Ratzel, 1897: 447, quoted in Natter, 2008: 20). Thus, the role of borders as instruments of control and separation fails because movement and circulation are natural activities of humanness. Moreover, although the notion of borders presupposes control, inspection, and regulation, the logics of capitalism suggest the elimination of state’s borders at least for the circulation of goods.

However, the economy, the state, and civil society are not the same entity and while for capitalists borders are a burden, for the state and its dominant society borders are indispensable inasmuch as these mechanisms allow them to determine when one’s presence is acceptable and when it is undesirable. However, today the permeability of geographical borders is for the most part unavoidable. Thus, borders in the twentieth first century are characterized by their contradictions, fragility permeability, and contrary to their significance during the nineteenth century, in the present-day, borders are symbolically used to embrace difference, something that is extended to core areas since borders are the doors through which cultures, people, goods, governments are influenced by their interaction with others. Hence, borders in the contemporary world are better described as both their contrasts and contradictions, their permissiveness and restrictions, their control and disorder, their peace and violence, their justice and injustices and so on, but more than that, contemporary borders are characterized by the dynamism that contributes enormously to the production of all kinds of knowledge.

Coming back to Anzaldúa, the political project that she seeks with her Borderlands theory is to question the undemocratic character of the borders and to interrogate the legitimacy of every existing border, geographical and otherwise. These goals are pursued by forcing the world, and especially the dominant culture, to remember how the history of that “foreign other” has been distorted, changed, or destroyed over and over again through the multiple discourses that

attempted to delegitimize her/him as a rational being. So, for Anzaldúa, current debates about justice, legality, rights, and freedom ought not forget the multiple oppression that colonized beings, people of color, and those who are different have been suffering for centuries since history has obscured, in complicity, the hundreds of years of oppression, economic exploitation and marginalization practiced against minority groups. In this context, therefore, it does not make any sense to create mechanisms of aid directed at the “Third World” since these mechanisms, in reality, are limited to regulate exploitation. Instead, governments, civil society, and grassroots organizations should be worried about stopping the exploitation of the third world. Anzaldúa’s Borderlands theory, hence, is relevant today, and will remain relevant, as long as marginalized people continue to be forced into a position of inferiority within the contemporary model of *The World System*³⁸ that inherited the structure, organization, and form of operation from the colonial period. According to Castro-Gómez:

The differences between groups and societies that constitute the world-system do not depend on their level of industrial development or degree of “cultural evolution,” but on the *functional* position, they occupy within the system. The differences are thus not temporal but structural. Some of the system’s “social zones” occupy the function of “centers,” meaning that they monopolize the hegemony, while others occupy a “peripheral” function because they are relegated on the margins of the structures of power (Castro-Gomez and Johnson, 2000: 509).

The analysis, which Castro-Gómez provides, is helpful for the argument that I am trying to articulate inasmuch as he points out what is the root of the problem. That is, in his analysis, he establishes that the current world-system, designed into center and periphery units,³⁹ is sustained by the continuous subordination of certain groups and societies, namely, the periphery. It is not new that core units, more specifically, its corporations count on geographical expansion to extract resources, create new markets to allocate its goods and cheap labor to produce commodities for the capitalist (Harvey, 2000). The terminology of center and periphery has its roots in the “coloniality of power” as theorized by Aníbal Quijano. According to Quijano, “modern regimes of power are characterized by ‘coloniality,’ which, as distinct from

³⁸ This term was coined by Immanuel Wallerstein (1994).

³⁹ By units, I mean nation-states.

colonialism, is not simply defined by a formal re-domination between empire and colony but primarily defined by global and national/cultural hierarchies (gendered, racialized, and sexualized) that are articulated differentially in time and space" (Quijano quoted in Saldívar, 2007: 363). The term "coloniality of power," hence, articulates the idea that the forms of surplus appropriation that took place during the colonial period, shape present relations of domination where those who were colonized continue to occupy the lowest rank in the social structure, which automatically devaluates them vis-à-vis the classes traditionally in power.

In this last point, the Borderlands theory, as a project of resistance is fundamental, since Gloria Anzaldúa is developing a map for those who have suffered colonization, domination, or marginalization towards an entire different way of thinking in which one not only realizes the logic of coloniality, but also has the opportunity to work in the transformation of the self. As we saw in the previous chapter, Anzaldúa begins the path towards the Borderlands by making sure that one's feelings of discomfort as a result of marginalization, domination, dispossession, etc., are stressed by her narrative. Accordingly, she opens *Borderlands* by telling the story of how Indians in the New World were murdered, robbed and displaced by the Spaniards and English colonizers and later on the Mexicans were disposed from half of their nation, from their lands and made subject to persecutions for economic aims but also because for White-Anglos, Mexicans carried out a racial transgression that marked them as inferior. Here, the intention of the author is to convey her feelings of discomfort with these events to create a consensus for change. Later, through the *nepantla* state, Anzaldúa tell us that one needs to remain open to the exposition of different forms of knowledge, since knowledge comes from multiple sources, including western and non-western traditions. For Anzaldúa, the *nepantla* state is agonizing because people "are in a state of confusion and the process might be slow or might be fast. Is not knowing who you are; it's almost like being identity-less for that space of time (Anzaldúa quoted in K. Urch, and et al., 1995: 78). In the *nepantla* state, one is confused because this stage requires that people dare to act but at the same time, one is insecure about what path to follow. In other words, the *nepantla* state is the stage in which one must take the decision to build a new identity for the self, yet one is unsure about which identity to choose. For Anzaldúa, "*nepantla* is the state or stage between the identity that is in place and the identity in progress but not yet formed" (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 177-178).

The following stage, the *coatlicue* state, is painful since here one confronts, face to face, the colonial narrative. One is in a state of stasis, being confronted with the fear, shame, and desperation provoked by being cast as inferior, inhuman, and irrational. However, part of this fear comes because “In *coatlicue* state, the fear is provoked by the very prospect of liberation” (Lugones, 2005: 95). At the same time, the serpent of life that inhabits this stage is working to destroy the bones of the colonized self in order to grow new ones (Lugones, 2005). In sum, one faces the agony of thinking that one is not able to survive outside the logics of coloniality, yet *coatlicue* helps one to see that the fear is coming from the colonized mentality that *coatlicue* is trying to destroy in order to help one to think outside the system. Next, *coyolxauhqui* is the process that helps one to heal the pain experienced during the previous stage and it allows for reconciliation between the self and whatever that self fears. This stage helps one to accept the fact that humans are fallible beings therefore one is fallible too. *Coyolxauhqui* helps one to recognize the self as one who is working to create her own history, role, and participation in society. Although the *coyolxauhqui* state stands for the process of putting the pieces together, in the larger picture, *coyolxauhqui* stands for self-appreciation too, something that was denied by the colonial narrative.

Finally, *la conciencia de la mestiza* is the stage in which one is persuaded into action, political action,⁴⁰ because one was changed through all the previous stages. When you arrive to *la conciencia de la mestiza*, “the person you are now may have achieved political sensitivity and awareness and a feminist consciousness, and may have achieved all sorts of knowledges. You look back at the past and reinterpret those events from the new perspective, the new awareness” (Anzaldúa quoted in K. Urch, and et al., 1995: 78). In this last stage, change is assumed. The identity of the new *mestiza* can now take any form, any position, any color or any stand, or whatever. However, this identity has to be different for the process forcibly changed one’s identity. Even if one decides to continue under the influence of the oppressor system, there is change since subordination will be conscious. Anzadua’s political agenda is at her best in *la conciencia de la mestiza* when she confronts the basis of colonialism, imperialism, modernity,

⁴⁰ Although I will address concrete “political moments” in *Borderlands*, it must be understood that, to me, Anzaldúa was “acting politically” by the sole fact that she wrote *Borderlands* since the narrative that she uses is aimed to influence and change the way Mexican-Americans/Chicanos think about themselves but also the way in which dominant groups treat marginalized groups.

and globalization periods, namely, she denies that the white race is a superior one; instead, she takes the task of theorizing for *mestizaje* or the in-betweens characteristic of the Borderlands.

“[C]rossing over,” this mixture of races, rather in resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollinization, an “alien” consciousness is presently in the making —a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987: 77).

Since colonization has been sustained in the supposed inferiority of those who are non-whites, in the above paragraph Anzaldúa, indeed, states that the alleged inferiority is not such because hybridity offers more possibilities to the performativity of the self without saying that hybridity is superior. With this action, Anzaldúa is not only denying that she is inferior but she implies that the combination of races, cultures, and ideologies that exist in her give her more possibilities for being and acting. Yet, Anzaldúa herself considers that one needs to go a step further since challenging, questioning and counteracting are not enough, for counterstance is cast as reactionary and “All reaction is limited by and dependent on, what is reacting against” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 78). Thus, Anzaldúa suggests that one take the standpoint of both the colonizer and the colonized to disengage totally from the struggle if that is what one wants as long as we decide to act. The strength of the new *mestiza* is precisely the *mestizaje* that she allowed for her new identity by breaking down the borders initially fabricated to keep the “undesirable ideas out” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 79). However, this new *mestiza* needs to propose things, to take the initiative to construct a better world; she needs to put her ideas on the table so she can stop being the subject of other’s intentions.

In many senses, we can see Anzaldúa’s political agenda as that of a negotiator between two opposite sides since her take on the postcolonial turn does not favor assimilation, nor does she advocate revolt as Memmi Albert (1967) would suggest; rather she proposes a third way, namely, a path of intermediation. In the path towards de-colonization, she sees the healing of past wounds as something imperative, this healing is possible if two conditions are fulfilled. The first is to becoming knowledgeable about the self and about each other’s histories and struggles (epistemological interchange) and second, to build cross-cultural alliances. In this regards, she

states: “the answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 80). However, to heal the open wound something else needs to happen, and this is part of the epistemological interchange. That is, dominant cultures need to recognize publicly their responsibility in causing all the harm and atrocities that they committed in their process of expansion. They need to acknowledge their irresponsibility for creating difference and categorizing the “foreign other” as someone inhuman, inferior and the like. They need to recognize that their rejection excluded the “other” from participating in the repartition of the wealth that belong to them and which dominant cultures stole. This action must be prior to any attempt of healing since:

We need to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty... To say that you are afraid of us, that to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists on the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her (Anzaldúa, 1987: 85-86).

The passage above is one of the strongest political moments for Anzaldúa to the extent that her words speak to the U.S. domination over Mexican-American/Chicanos but to the whole colonial and globalization projects. It demands accountability from oppressors in order to reconcile the split of the world caused by the establishment of physical borders (frontiers). At the same time, this passage also implies that the West needs to make a compromise in acknowledging the past and present exploitation of the Third World, and stop masking exploitation through projects of international aid and economic cooperation. From this perspective, Anzaldúa’s Borderlands theory prepares the self to become political in the quest for change. However, to what extent is this step possible if we consider that dominant groups have an interest in keeping the system as it is? How to appeal to reason, or even democracy, when the only reason that capital follows is that

of profits and everything else comes in second place. Moreover, how to reverse a system that has been in place for so long and today finds no rivals.

Change or Significant Freedom?

The development of Borderlands theory, no doubt, has been one of the most provocative projects of resistance and political initiatives that are based in the border. Anzaldúa influenced enormously many people from many different disciplines who decided to take her ideas in all kinds of directions to defend a common project; namely, achieve social, cultural economical and political recognition. This vast production of knowledge, to a great extent, was made possible in response to Anzaldúa's call to recuperate and express one's *autohistorias*. In the Chicano context that demanded recognition of the Chicanos as a distinctive group, Anzaldúa allows herself to theorize about the possibilities of the Borderlands for minority groups influencing, in so doing, the American academy. Anzaldúa's work remains one of the most influential and persuasive until these days, yet it is important to know in what direction the theory is taking us, outside the idealism that Borderlands theory certainly has. In what follows, I am interested in establishing the limitations of the Borderlands theory as part of a broader political context that resists change. Because power is not easily, and perhaps willingly, ceded, I remain cautious about the emancipatory character of the Borderlands.

Anzaldúa theorized self-liberation by developing a set of cognitive processes oriented to produce a resisting identity in the oppressed. With this process, Anzaldúa appealed to the recognition, transformation, exposition, and exchange of self-epistemologies that work towards a self-metamorphosis that allows the self to resist domination and eventually to bear liberation. Although as a resistance project, the Borderlands theory is not only healing but also empowering, Anzaldúa's formulation is restricted by the subject it speaks. Anzaldúa is addressing the colonized and the people whose identity has been bordered by the dominant power. In *Borderlands*, she is trying to tear those borders down in order to join the loose ends in one's identity to be able to function as a whole being again. However, Anzaldúa is addressing the self as an individual, as a single being that needs to cure him/herself before becoming political. This is precisely the message she gives us when she states: The struggle is inner... The struggle has

always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn comes before changes in society” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 87). From this explanation, we learn that Anzaldúa does not conceive social change unless the essence of a person changes, unless one has been exposed to the fears of the soul and has learned how to block them.

While criticizing Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* consciousness, Maria Lugones argues that Anzaldúa fails to link the psychology of oppression and resistance to collective resistance, therefore, weakening the sociality that Anzaldúa herself documents in resistance. For Lugones, “Unless resistance is a social activity, the resistor is doomed to failure in the creation of a new universe of meaning, a new identity, a *rata mestiza*. Meaning that is not in response to and looking for response fails as meaning” (Lugones, 2005: 97). While I agree with Lugones’ critique of Anzaldúa’s failure to see resistance as a collective activity, I do it for different reasons since, in my view, resistance at the individual level is still resistance. As it is well known, both Michel de Certeau and James C. Scott theorized about the practice of everyday life and resistance in everyday life respectively. Michel de Certeau for instance considered that the “weak” employs “innumerable practices through which users re-appropriate the space organized by techniques of socio cultural production” (de Certeau, 1984: xiv). de Certeau contends that common people have at hand numerous tactics, which are used to accommodate the oppressor system according to one’s convenience. Similarly, Scott states that “weak” individuals do not passively submit themselves to the commands of dominant groups but rather they engage in ordinary, individual practices to mitigate or dissent impositions from those who hold power (Scott, 1985). But contrary to Lugones, both de Certeau and Scott do not consider that individual means practiced by a single individual, but rather, “that the decision to resist is engaged self-motivated, self-interested, and seeking primarily personal gains. It is manifested through acts of insubordination, evasion, offensive defiance, and defensive disobedience (Scott, 1985; Dunaway, 2003). At the same time, “this is a unique species of *collective action* because none of this resistance could achieve its purposes unless it is acted as a generalized, unspoken complicity” (Scott, 1985: 447, emphasis added). My own interpretation is that by making the struggle inner, Anzaldúa is trying to force the colonized to believe that the de-colonial shift is possible and change can actually

happen since in her view, “nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 87).

The logic that Anzaldúa follows in the above quote, is that in order for people to seek freedom, they need to believe that freedom exists in the first place and have a notion of what that freedom looks like, otherwise, they can lose the point of the struggle not knowing why they are fighting. In this logic, if freedom is first experienced at the inner level, then it is possible to have an idea of what freedom in society is, yet, as Lugones argues:

As I understand the liberatory project, the inner and the collective struggles are not separable; they are “moments” or “sides” of the liberatory process a dismissal of the “inner struggle” dismisses liberatory subjectivity. A dismissal of the collective “moment” robs the struggle of the self-in-between of any liberatory meaning (Lugones, 2005: 97)

Lugones considers that the inner and the collectivity are forcibly linked since the lack of one of the two moments would tear apart the whole project of liberation. In this regard, if the inner transformation does not occur, meaningful change would be misleading, and if this inner transformation is not linked to a collectivity, the struggle will also fail because it lacks the support of a bigger entity and, besides that, if liberation does not reach all it is not liberation at all. Here, Lugones still considers that the “number” makes the difference and that liberation is more likely to occur if liberation is sought, for instance, by a social movement. While I do not follow Lugones on her argument, I do consider that theorizing the Borderlands as an inner struggle is problematic since, as Hannah Arendt states, it is a mistake to take freedom to be primarily an inner, contemplative or private phenomenon, for it is in fact active, worldly and public (Arendt, 1998). In Arendt’s terms, freedom is experienced in our interaction with others, by seeing ourselves being directed towards a specific end or by being able to make up choices free from any constraint or imposition. In consequence, while we may feel “free” or liberated when dealing with the self, in our social interactions this freedom may not be there at all since many human actions are guided by any type of necessity.

Interestingly both Anzaldúa and Arendt consider action as one of the most empowering tools at the hands of humans since both consider that the moment of empowerment comes with action. For Anzaldúa, action means taking the initiative, to propose, which is also the opposite of to

react, while for Arendt action means to begin or not being constrained and bounded by others. But despite differences, the authors resemblance in the relevance of action for human freedom, in what is of concern in the treatment of the public and private spheres, Arendt has no tolerance for the private realm (the inner) when it comes to political aims, since for Arendt, action is a public category, a worldly practice that is experienced in our daily interaction with one another and as such it is a practice exercised in public spaces or the city (Arendt, 1998). The key point here is that people do not live isolated from one another, but rather we live in society. We live our experiences and give them meaning in society; in relation to those with whom we share plans and that is the reason why freedom does not work so well at the inner level. In addition, as Henri Lefebvre argues, an critical assessment the social life “ought ‘by a process of rational integration... to pass from the individual to the social’ –and, ultimately materialize itself in collective action toward social justice” (Lefebvre 1992: 148, as quoted in Bartolovich and Lazarus, 2002: 6). While we would like to think of our souls as being free from any influence, we cannot escape the fact that we live in society and it is there where freedom is relevant.

By making the struggle inner, Anzaldúa puts an excessive responsibility on the individual herself in finding her liberation. Yet, since people experience freedom, or its absence, in the public sphere, in the quest for liberation, the inner self has to realize that the struggle is not only against the inner demons, fears, or traumas, but also against society and its social and political institutions, i.e. the state and the economic sector. In this realm, it is important to remember that identity construction is not an exclusive personal matter, but rather it involves an individual’s perception of herself and her interaction vis-à-vis those against she defines herself. In other words, since Borderlands theory attempts to liberate the self from imposed identities, one needs to be clear that such liberation would not be possible if one does not directly confront the structure of power that participate directly in shaping one’s identity in one way or another. Thus, although Anzaldúa states that the struggle is to be directed against the dominant culture (white males), Anzaldúa misses the opportunity to challenge the institutions that the white culture created to institutionalize domination. In doing so, Anzaldúa also misses the opportunity to challenge one of the most important entities that creates, regulates, and promotes those institutions, namely, the state. The state apparatus widely advanced the ideologies of the Monroe

Doctrine, the Manifest Destiny, the Proposition 187, etc. While commenting on Patchen Markell's *Bound by Recognition*, Vazquez-Arroyo argues that:

The state is frequently a constitutive actor in the politicization of identity, either by its own logics of legitimation or by means of its role in the political economy. It is not innocent to the managing and racialization of identities in capitalist societies either. In fact, the recognition of its legitimacy often relies on the production and management of differences (Vazquez-Arroyo, 2004: 9).

Thus, if the state plays a prominent role in politicizing identities, any theory or projects of resistance directed to change or create a new identity needs not only to call accountable the figure state, but also to confront it and seek to influence it in a direct form. It is through the state that domination is legitimized and worked out even in the so-called democratic states. State's apparatuses through their institutions, policies, rules, laws, etc., have an important participation in determining what is legal and what is not, what is just and what is not and also whose rights get to be protected and whose not. Consequently, in seeking significant freedom, it is important to pay close attention to those political institutions that represent us and critically evaluate their complicity in promoting the privilege or oppression of certain groups. Thus, although I do consider the freedom of the self important, it is hard to argue against Arendt on this point since the freedom of the colonized has been erased in the public sphere, meaning that it is in the public space where freedom must be sought, fought, and recuperated. In this vein, colonized people must not only resist domination, imposition and the like. They must insert themselves in the city, in schools, in hospitals, in congresses, in government offices, in bars, in galleries. In short, the colonized must exist in every single place that claims to be public since it is there where freedom matters. However, in favor of Anzaldúa I will say that she did not fail to see the relevance of having freedom in public spaces for stating that would be untrue. Yet, her concern was first in liberating the self in order for that self to determine what kind of freedom was more important.

Borderlands Idealism

From another perspective, it assumed that Anzaldúa's theory would automatically take us to a safe land, namely, that the Borderlands now transformed into a place that has become familiar,

agreeable, and even safe. Since the aim is to heal the self, to put it together, to make it knowledgeable, it is implied that this reconciliation at the inner level will follow the processes in Borderlands with the desired outcomes. In this regard, awareness in the sense Anzaldúa intended, should not be taken for granted, since it is probable that the exposition to the Borderlands may lead us to reject the epistemologies of the “other” and to identify largely with western knowledge. One may decide that the west is better, white is better, capitalism is better than everything else that exists around. In sum, the colonized may wish to remain colonized, no matter how “irrational” or nonsensical that decision would be. Lugones also sees this risk when she states, “we feel the temptation to stay within the "confines of the normal" since reality and we in it are familiar to ourselves. We always may feel the temptation to engage in political activity without this preparation [Borderlands processes], as if oppression did not touch our selves” (Lugones, 2005: 92). Perhaps the colonized decides that despite all the things that have been imposed on her, colonization is better. It is possible that she decides that she is too angry, that she wants to take revenge and revolts against the system instead of negotiating or mediating, or she can decide that the theory does not make a big difference to her life so she puts the theory aside. The possibilities that identity suffers a transformation are there, yes, but it does not mean that these will be positive for the self for this can be a false agency.

As a theory that addresses the inner self, the Borderlands theory can possibly, although not forcibly, work towards the empowerment and liberation from different forms of oppression, and towards the undermining of western epistemologies that claim for them the right to explain the world rightly. However, although Borderlands theory directly confronts those who hold power, we cannot assume that the system that one tries to confront is a democratic one. That is, Anzaldúa calls white-Anglos to assume historical responsibility for forcing Mexico to cede half of its territory, for vandalizing Mexicans after the war forcing them to leave behind their lands, for taking their corporations to Mexico and Latin-America to use Latin Americans as a source of cheap labor, for having Mexican-Americans/Chicanos and illegal immigrants in the United States doing the hard work in exchange for few dollars, for extracting Mexico’s wealth out of Mexico leaving the country impoverished, for doing all these things based on the argument that their neighbors were inferior. In *Borderlands* Anzaldúa calls America accountable for being an oppressor in almost the entire world, and, in doing so she assumed that the democratic values of

this country would respond to her call, yet neither United States nor Western Europe have ever shown any intention to heal the open wound by publicly recognizing that colonialism and economic exploitation are something negative. On the contrary, colonialism, imperialism, and now globalization are for the most part justified in the name of freedom, democracy, God, reason, etc. As Mignolo and Tlostanova state, “[Border resisting projects] have yet to find a way in which ‘either-or’ is a deadlock, which seems to be maintained by the success of capitalism in wearing different masks (liberal, Islamic, etc)” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 217).

Conclusion

Although one might accept the idea that some governments are democratic, capital is not, and that is the main obstacle that stays in the path towards liberation. Peruvian philosopher, Annibal Quijano (2000), argues that the capitalist form of exploitation relies on the racialization of beings to maximize its benefits. According to him, since the discovery of the new world, the capitalist system, thus capitalists, have been accumulating wealth at the expenses of the labor provided by those who have been placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy by means of their color. Quijano argues that the contemporary system of capitalism continues to apply the same principles of exploitation. However, when it comes to capital accumulation David Harvey argues that: “capitalists [have the ability] to adapt to new conditions: indeed one of the more outstanding things about capitalist historical geography is precisely its flexibility and adaptability” (Harvey and Harvey, 2006: 81). Additionally, Matthew S. Weinert affirms that “global political life does not seem to lend itself to democracy, [since] major democracies like the United States and Great Britain have intervened in democracies abroad to advance their own particular interests” (Weinert, 2005). In this context, one can argue that as long as the capitalist system continues to hold its current hegemony, it is very probable that it will remain undemocratic, meaning that accountability to the Third World and all the people who have been dispossessed, exploited, and wounded by it may never come, unless of course democracy becomes a precondition for wealth accumulation. In this sense, as a theory of resistance, the Borderlands is at its best when focusing at the inner level in order to achieve the liberation of the self, however, when transporting this project to the political realm, at its best, this theory

achieves self liberation and self-decolonization since the theory is bounded by the powers it seeks to confront. To achieve significant freedom, the theory would need to be recognized and validated by those who are confronted by the theory, however, as Anzaldúa stated about the *coyolxahuqui* state. The life and the writing are a work in process, which means that this Borderlands theory is also a work in progress and as such, it needs to be improved and worked out constantly since absolute freedom, just as democracy, “is something that can never be made absolutely present once and for all” (Michaelsen and Shershow, 2007: 58). In this sense, Borderlands theory gives us the formula to fix one of the areas that needs to be fixed, i.e. the inner self; yet, there are many other channels for domination that cannot be disregarded as part of the struggle since these channels are used to legitimize domination.

Chapter 5.

Closing Remarks

Because I, a *mestiza*
Continually walk out of one culture and into another
Because I am all cultures at the same time

Gloria Anzaldúa

Future Research

Any final account of the contributions of Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory will always be incomplete, inasmuch as the history of this theory exists in an ever-changing space that is rewritten every day. In many senses, transitioning through Anzaldúa's theory is an on-going process since it is extremely likely that we will always encounter attempts at domination and resisting that domination will always be a possibility. In this sense, writing a conclusion seems almost like a contradiction to the aims and goals that the Borderlands advance. It can be regarded as trying to impose an end to a project that advocates self re-invention and rejects any boundaries. However, despite my interest in the subject, and my sense that this study is somewhat incomplete, I shall argue that having reached the closing section of this thesis, convinces me, that the topic of the Borderlands has many different lines of inquiry that need further exploration. This fact leads me to the only certain conclusion I can possibly reach at this moment, that is, that the study of the Borderlands is a lifetime project that requires additional research in order to deal with all its complexities, contradictions, and possibilities.

I started to write this thesis motivated by the idea that I could contribute to the scholarship dedicated to the study, analysis, and elaboration of the work of Gloria Anzaldúa by exploring the applicability of her Borderlands theory to the field of political science. Soon after I started to engage this project, the study of her work led in various directions that I approached only partially. In this regard, I must say, that the study of the Borderlands raises for me more

questions than I am able to answer. In first place, it is important to convey that since the framework that I used in this study is postcolonial theory, the analysis here engaged is limited in its temporality since the concept of borders was not traced to the pre-Columbian period in ancient Mexico. Future researchers of this topic might find interesting to trace the origin of the concept borders among the Olmeca, Maya, Teotihuacan, Tolteca, or Aztec (Mexico) civilizations. Additional unanswered questions relate to the concept of freedom and the attributions that describe this concept. Similarly, I am interested in knowing to what extent social, cultural or political theorists are able to produce a comprehensive emancipatory theory of freedom and if such a task is possible, to what extent are those theories applicable? Moreover, can any theory of freedom in itself become a vehicle for oppression? What hope does humanity have for real equality, justice, democracy and the like? In relationship to the topic of borders, is it possible to democratize the institution borders? What are the specific implications of getting rid of borders, and how would such a thing will affect human rights? Is it possible to avoid human hierarchies? Is such a thing desirable? Do we have any viable alternative to the capitalist system? Although I do not have the necessary tools to answer these questions, I would like to think of them as lines of inquiry that I plan to address in my future research.

In the understanding that a definite conclusion in the study of the Borderlands cannot be reached, this section is dedicated to addressing some additional remarks that I did not have time to examine properly in the previous chapters. Having a political standpoint required me to remain particularly critical about the set of power relations that influenced the creation of the geographical and ideological Borderlands and about the theory itself. This position led me to investigate the extent to which the Borderlands theory provided more chances to achieve freedom between the covers of a book than in the everyday life. However, even if the theory finds its major resonance in the academic community, the problem it describes needs to be addressed in order to include the perspective of others in debates about democracy, freedom, rights, and the like. For that reason, I have considered it important to revise the spatial and ideological dimensions of the borderlands in order to call attention to the political relations that exist in this particular site, since any attempt to democratize the border forcibly implies that the involved parts assume political responsibility by discussing and sanctioning the ideologies behind institutions that promote oppression, marginalization and exclusion of minorities. It is

precisely for this reason that I chose to inform my study through the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, since her Borderlands theory, and more specifically her concept of *la conciencia de la mestiza*, argue for the building of alliances among the different inhabitants of the Borderlands. The legacy of Anzaldúa, according to Emma Pérez is that:

Gloria Anzaldúa forged a new territory, a new intellectual locale, a new spiritual space, a new psychic and psychological terrain. She created fresh symbols, metaphors, and taxonomies to describe a material world where poverty, racism, homophobia are real problems and where a psychic, sacred inner world is as real as the material, tangible world (Perez, 2005: 3).

Without attempting to claim the universality of a life in the Borderlands, I would dare to say that many people in the world understand what this metaphor means, despite their location. This is why any attempt to heal the open wound of the Borderlands needs to be sustained in the concept of responsibility, where responsibility (moral, social, and political) is a pre-requisite to achieve meaningful freedom.

The fact that there is a shared understanding of what it means to live in the Borderlands, tells us that difference is still a big concern in the twentieth-first century. This difference is precisely the reason for which theories, such as the Borderlands, need to be created in order to interrogate the existence of every socially produced Border. Since colonialism, the emphasis on difference, thus *otherness*, has proved difficult to overcome. The power relations that were established in the colonial period led to the establishment of hierarchies of human attributes between Europeans, indigenous and slaves. These hierarchies have been perpetuated through the different stages of enlightenment, modernity, and now globalization. In this study, I have argued that Borderlands theory was informed by the author's exposition on continued racial prejudices, rejection, violence, and discrimination targeted against Mexican-Americans/Chicanos at the Borderlands. Despite the fact that the Mexican presence in the United States has a long history, the national narrative produced by American historiography rendered their contributions invisible. This omission not only contributed to the exclusion, marginalization, and/or persistent segregation of Mexican-Americans as some of the consequences of "the political, psychological, and social effects of unacknowledged citizen rights" (Oboler, 1995: 49), but also it played a key role in

perpetuating the stigmatization of Mexican-Americans as “foreign others.”⁴¹ According to Oboler, racial categories are tools for exploitation, domination and exclusion, since “the names by which groups and individuals become known acquire political, social and personal significance in the context of the debates on ethnicity and race...” (Oboler, 1995: xiii).

It is in this context that Gloria Anzaldúa argues for the adoption of a *mestiza* consciousness that allows those who have been put in the category of the inferior to transcend their personal suffering, since “people who are not trusted in their thinking, are doubted in their rationality and wounded in their dignity” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 207). A long time ago, Gloria Anzaldúa understood that colonization attempted to destroy indigenous knowledge, art, and culture in order to impose its own institutions, norms, and values, claiming that these alone were legitimate. However, that attempt had only partial success given that the clash of civilizations, to use Huntington terms,⁴² which results from constant border-crossings, provide evidence that the interaction between different cultures is almost inevitable. For this reason, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* was as relevant two decades ago, as it is today, given that:

The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts . . . 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 (Anzaldúa, 1987: 80).

In the moment that humans allow space for a collective consciousness that incorporates the memories of all (the dominant culture as well as minorities), there will be greater possibilities of having more democratic border spaces. But in order to democratize the institution of the border, state governments and society need to re-think its function as closed spaces that are needed to keep others at a distance. Similarly, borders “can no longer function as simple edges, external limits of democracy that the mass of citizens can see as a *barrier protecting* their lives and rights without ever really interfering with them” (Balibar, 2004: 109). The problem, I would like to suggest, is not so much that borders exist but rather that in many cases, borders remain

⁴¹ See Oboler *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives*.

⁴² This is a term coined by Samuel P. Huntington *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

undemocratic, closed to the circulation of the “other,” even when threat or danger are not perceived. In what constitutes an important contribution to the ongoing debate on the democratization of the border, Michaelsen and Shershow argue that “...democracy must question and interrogate every border, remaining infinitely incomplete and open: to the unforeseeable, to the future, and to the unexpected arrival of the other” (Michaelsen and Shershow, 2007: 58). It is precisely because borders remain closed to the circulation of people that their “socially discriminatory function” (Balibar, 2004) and controlling purposes are intensified. Thus democratizing the border implies re-thinking and re-writing the laws that regulate the movement of people.

If the undemocratic character of the border is doubted, I would like to ask those who remain skeptical of my argument to look at the border fence that is currently under construction where the physical limits between Mexico and the United States meet. Ironically, in September of 2006 Luis Rubio and Jeffrey Davidow⁴³ suggested that Mexican economic problems were due, in great part, to the country’s reluctance to fully open the border for greater international investment, especially in the energy sector that involves the state-owned companies of PEMEX and CFE.⁴⁴ Hence, to recall once again Anzaldúa’s metaphor of the open wound, this time addressed by Norma Cantu who explains, “The wound has continuously bled, as politics, economics, and most recently environmental pollution exacerbate the laceration. If some healing occurs and a scab barely forms, a new blow strikes” (Cantu, 1993: n.p.). The pain of the wound is intensified when “the most recent wave of brown immigrants who come to the United States in search of political freedom... realize that for the brown, the black, and Asian races, the suppressed history of the United States is the history of exploitation as well as racism” (Saldivar-Hull, 1991: 217). Here, it would be fair to remember Marx’s argument that “labor in a white skin cannot be free where in the black it is branded” (Marx 1990: 414, as quoted in Weinert, 2005: 25).

In writing these final lines of my thesis, however, I realize that a larger problem is at stake, and this has to do with the fact that exploitation is not exclusively portrayed at people of color.

⁴³ Is a career foreign service officer from the U.S. state of Virginia. Davidow has served as a member of the Senior Foreign Service, as well as having been the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico.

⁴⁴ PEMEX (*Petróleos Mexicanos*) is Mexico's state-owned, nationalized petroleum company while CFE (*Comisión Nacional de Electricidad*) is Mexico's state-owned company that provides services of generation, transmission, and distribution of electrical power services to Mexicans. Here I do not mean to say that state-controlled companies are better than private ones, rather, my point is that states demand the opening of border for the capitalist penetration while the circulation of people is highly restricted.

The main problem is that, up to today, the capitalist system remains undemocratic, but its support and promotion by liberal democracies suggest otherwise. According to Weinert,

Globalization undermines democracy by widening the gap between the rich and the poor; inducing a disproportionate relationship between finance and production, whereby the “symbolic economy” of money outstrips the “real economy” of production and distribution; and forcing underdeveloped countries to refinance old debt with new. Globalization restructures production which undermines the “power of labor in relation to capital;” stimulates migrations of people in search of better working conditions and higher wages; creates an “internal South” in the North, and “a thick layer of society [in the South] that is fully integrated into the economic North;” (Cox 1996: 528, as quoted in Weinert, 2005).

Thus, any account of freedom must address the democratization of capitalism and the search for alternatives to globalization. Such debates have already started⁴⁵ and are increasingly gaining resonance; however, more analysis on these lines is necessary.

⁴⁵ See for instance Cavanagh, J., J. Mander, et al. (2004). Alternatives to economic globalization: a better world is possible. San Francisco, CA, Berrett-Koehler.

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