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Opening space at the border. On the emergence of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands. La Frontera. The New Mestiza* from the Mexican American periphery

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Abstract

The following article deals with the literary representation of the Mexican American border in the work of the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands. La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (1987). Anzaldúa's writing comes out of her lived experience. She uses the location of her origin, its historical and cultural background and personal memories as one of the sources of her theorizing where the Mexican American borderline becomes a metaphor for all types of crossings: geopolitical, social, ethnic, sexual. Her status of an "outsider within" endows her with a sense of a layered complexity that is masterly reflected in the hybrid structure of the text itself and its literary language. In this way, it is deeply inspirational to other bordering locations - Central Europe being one of them – and thus overcomes its local status. Divided into four parts, the analysis evolves around the topics of the writer's voice, body, space and language.

1 Voice

> *In the animal kingdom, the rule is, eat or be eaten; in the human kingdom, define or be defined.*
>
> *Thomas Szasz*[1]

"Soy la que escribe y se escribe / I am the one who writes and who is being written."[2] In her passionate refusal to be defined by others, Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa[3] dedicated her life and art to defining her existence on the Mexican American border. Her hybrid work *Borderlands. La Frontera. The New Mestiza*, which combines essay, poetry, autobiographical passages and political manifesto, turned out to be a deeply influential text.[4] Since its first publication in 1987, it has inspired countless readers who share the perplexing/painful/creative experience of bordering cultures. Its metaphorical power and the conceptualization of *la frontera* (border) and *mestizaje* (miscegenation) has also received great academic attention. María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba acknowledges the power of Anzaldúan thinking: "It is in part due to her influence that the idea of 'the border' turned out to be very prominent in a number of academic disciplines since the mid-1980s, especially in the United States, where this image has served as a popular locus of discussion on monolithic structures".[5] Alejandro Grimson considers Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* as one of the four main texts that gave an impulse to the development of border

[1] T. Szasz: *The Second Sin,* Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1973: 17.

[2] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands. La Frontera. The New Mestiza*, San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2015: 3.

[3] Terminological note. When referring to Anzaldúa, we use the terms *Chicana* author or *Chicana* writing because her literary and theoretical work appears after the Chicano Movement and Chicano cultural revival and thus it openly claims its strife for equal ethnic and gender rights. (The gender-nonspecific terms *ChicanX* or *LatinX* are more recent than Anzaldúa's text studied in this article.) We also use the politically neutral term *Mexican American* to refer to people with Mexican ancestry living in the US who do not consider themselves connected ideologically or emotionally to the Chicano Movement. For further information, see: K. Březinová: *El imaginario chicano. La iconografía civil y política de los mexicanos en Estados Unidos de América 1965–2000,* Praha: Karolinum, 2004: 35–43.

[4] From now on we will abbreviate the title of the book as *Borderlands*, whereas we will use the word "Borderlands" to refer to the geographical area of the U.S. Southwest.

[5] M. S. Tabuenca-Córdoba: 'Literature of the Borderlands', in S. Bost & F. R. Aparicio (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, New York: Routledge, 2013: 454–461, pp. 454–455.

theory at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, the other publications being those of Renato Rosaldo, D. Emily Hicks and Héctor Calderón & José David Saldívar.[6]

Border thinking is based on the idea that the theoretical and the epistemic must have a lived dimension. Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova understand the "lived dimension" in this context as the experiences of those who have been excluded from the production of knowledge by modernity. According to them, border thinking does not happen irrespective of modernity but in response to it, as part of real life struggles against the colonial distribution of power. Thus, "border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside".[7]

In her writing, Anzaldúa systematically draws on this dimension of being "an outsider within" as her personality and positionality force her to undergo bordering experience from every possible angle: "her very homosexuality is the sexual counterpart of her mixed blood, her language is neither English nor Spanish but a constant switching of several codes, while her locus of discourse lies in the interstice between the two countries, in what she calls the *no-man's-borderlands*".[8] Anzaldúa's will to surmount the centre/periphery binaries (be they of geographical, cultural, linguistic, racial, class or gender origin) drives her to open space for ambiguity. She speaks from the Texas/Mexican border, her message, however, is not particular only to the American Southwest. She proposes that the psychological, sexual, spiritual borderlands resonate wherever two or more cultures occupy the same space.[9] This possibility of border thinking projection to other areas is of key importance. One of the contexts where Anzaldúan ideas could resonate with renewed energy is Central and Eastern Europe with its cultural sutures and overlaps as well as its historical experience of being a territory constantly disputed among different imperial powers. Walter Mignolo supports this view: drawing on Anzaldúa and Aimé Césaire, he shows that the logic of coloniality of Western empires was also enacted in Central and Eastern Europe by what he calls "second-class empires":

[6] Cf. A. Grimson: 'Disputas sobre las fronteras', in: S. Michaelsen & D. E. Johnson (eds.): *Teoría de la frontera*, Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 2003: 13–23, p. 15.

[7] W. Mignolo & M. Tlostanova: 'Theorizing from the Borders', *European Journal of Social Theory* 9 (2), 2006: 205–221, p. 206).

[8] A. Savin: 'Course and Discourse in Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands - La Frontera*: The New Mestiza', in G. Fabre (ed.): *Parcoures identitaires,* Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1994. (https://books.openedition.org/psn/4699#ftn14)

[9] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands..., op.cit.*: 19.

> Aimé Césaire clearly saw, in the 1950s, that the colonial matrix of power set up and implemented through 450 years of colonization had been implemented by the Nazi regime in Germany and by the communist regime in the Soviet Union (Césaire, 1955). These are all different historical conditions from which border positions could be developed as active de-colonizing projects, both epistemic and political from the lived experiences (e.g. subjectivity) of diverse communities.[10]

Rereading Anzaldúan ideas from the Central/Eastern European perspective (be it an unusual one) proves how her thinking overcomes its concrete, local origin of the Mexican American frontier and becomes intelligible in other bordering locations. A concrete example could be the prologue to Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*. It opens with the author's return to the homeland of his maternal Jewish ancestors on the contemporary Polish-Lithuanian border. It is a story of the relation between landscape and people engaged in the centuries-long struggle between defining and being defined in: "a country where frontiers march back and forth to the abrupt commands of history. The same fields of wheat and rye moving in slow waves with the rhythm of the breeze had been Lithuanian, German, Russian, Polish."[11] A parallel that revives in the present day with extraordinary urgency some key parts of *Borderlands* not only because of the border theme but also because of the approach to it:

> Historians are supposed to reach the past always through texts, occasionally through images; things that are safely caught in the bell jar of academic convention; look but don't touch. But one of my best-loved teachers, an intellectual hell-raiser and a writer of eccentric courage, had always insisted on directly experiencing "a sense of place," of using "the archive of the feet."[12]

The lived experience thus donates the voice an extraordinary body.

[10] W. Mignolo & M. Tlostanova: 'Theorizing…', *op.cit.*: 213.

[11] *Ibid.*: 23.

[12] S. Schama: *Landscape and Memory*, Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1995: 24.

2 Body

> *1,950 mile-long open wound*
> *dividing a* pueblo, *a culture,*
> *running down the length of my body,*
> *staking fence rods in my flesh…*
>
> *Gloria Anzaldúa*[13]

Borderlands evidences the metaphorical transfer of the border onto the writer's body and Anzaldúa's identification of the divided land/people with the painful split she experienced physically and spiritually. The autobiographical grounding of the work is fundamental: intimate knowledge of the Borderlands conflicts and ambiguities and intense conscience of personal divisions is the source of authority that enables her to theorize about its complexity and about being "other". Panchiba Barrientos underlines that Anzaldúan *autohistoria-teoría* is based on personal biographies, history, memoir, storytelling, myth. It is important that "the stories never subordinate each other", be they "simple narrations inspired by everyday life or complex theoretical and epistemological proposals that defy normative and colonial imaginaries". This way Anzaldúa "resignifies the questions about what constitutes an experience that is worth telling".[14]

Gloria Anzaldúa was born in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas which positioned her right on the physical borderline between the U.S. and Mexico. She was born to a family of Spanish, German, Mexican and Native American roots. Her Basque ancestors belonged to the first European settlers of the region occupying the land as a result of the Spanish *conquista*. Two centuries later the Anzaldúas suffered the opposite lot as the 19th century borderline shifted, Texas left Mexico and soon became part of the United States. The resulting Anglo land grab and racism toward Mexican population eventually caused the gradual loss of social status and the impoverishment of the family.[15] Anzaldúa was born in 1942 and spent her childhood and adolescence in the midst of the segregated world of the Mexican American migrant agricultural workers. Her

[13] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…, op.cit.*: 24.

[14] Cf. P. Barrientos: 'Contar historias y dibujar sobre arena. Autohistoria, escritura e identidad en la obra de Gloria Anzaldúa', *Liminales. Escritos sobre psicología y sociedad* 7(13), 2018: 61–82, pp. 66, 76. (The original wording in Spanish, our translation.)

[15] Cf. G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…, op.cit.*: 30-31, 267.

gradual conscience of social inequality was paralleled in the private. As the first born daughter in a traditional Catholic family, she soon learned the burden of the uneven distribution of the masculine and feminine world, hierarchical and undisputed. Moreover, being endowed with an intense sensitivity to her body and sexuality – all this in a community where the corporal was repressed – thrust her into an arduous struggle for self-determination propelled by her strong character and an acute capacity of observation and questioning. Qualities that actually helped her to overcome the barriers of the educational system and later achieve university degrees in English, Art and Education.

The move to urban life, teaching and political and civic engagement in the seventies made Anzaldúa rethink her childhood and youth experience and deal with borders and divisions through theoretical and creative writing and lecturing, which was especially pronounced after she left Texas for California in 1977. The following decade saw Anzaldúa already as an independent scholar, a Chicana feminist theorist who strived to revalorize the role of Chicana activists in the Movement,[16] who offered critical reading of the traditional Mexican American society gender roles[17] and who pushed for the formation of an inclusive multicultural feminist theory that could underline the problems of race and class that non-white women had to tackle with. The most acclaimed results of her work are the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (co-edited with Cherríe Moraga, 1981) and the abovementioned *Borderlands.*[18]

Thus, from her particular location and due to her internal and external experience of the border, Anzaldúa theorizes on hybridity and all types of crossings: "Escribo para 'idear'—the Spanish word meaning 'to form or conceive an idea, to develop a theory, to invent and imagine'. My work is about questioning, affecting, and changing the paradigms that govern prevailing notions of reality".[19]

[16] Cf. E. Jacobs: *Mexican American Literature. The politics of identity,* New York: Routledge, 2006: 6–39.

[17] Cf. *Ibid.*: 98–117.

[18] Anzaldúa was also author or co-author of other works, such as *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), *Interviews/Entrevistas* (A. Keating (ed.), New York: Routledge, 2000), *This Bridge we Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (A. Keating (co-ed.), New York: Routledge, 2002), *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (A. Keating (ed.), Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), and a series of children's books.

[19] G. Anzaldúa & A. Keating (ed.): *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality.* Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2015: 2.

Tereza Kynčlová sees two objectives of Anzaldúa's work: a "therapeutic" aim directed to the writer's personal spiritual and physical struggles, and a goal that mediates "healing the historical wounds" in general. In other words, "a somewhat utopian forming of coalitions among people arbitrarily divided into categories of race, culture, gender".[20] This metaphorical union of an individual and collective need for a new understanding, the intertwining of the author's voice and body give way to envisioning third space.

3 Space

> *Landscapes are culture*
> *before they are nature;*
> *constructs of the imagination projected*
> *onto wood and water and rock…*
>
> *Simon Schama*[21]

Anzaldúa's attachment to the space she was born to permeates all *Borderlands*: she identifies with the dryland and dessert landscape. She draws energy and inspiration from Aztlán, or "the Land of white herons", that is considered to be the mythical place of origin of the Aztec/Mexica/Tenochca people and whose location is supposed to correspond with the her native Southwest. She is intensely aware of Rio Grande Valley's violent history. Her statement:

> This land was Mexican once
> was Indian always
> and is.
> And will be again.[22]

is present in the first and final chapter of the essayistic part of *Borderlands* called "Atravesando fronteras/Crossing borders" and creates a framework that supports the intertwining of the landscape and cultural history.

The spatial dimension and hybrid condition of *Borderlands* reverberate the geopolitical, cultural, linguistic, gender and other crossings. Anzaldúa introduces the reader into the multi-layered Southwest through a combination of

[20] Cf. T. Kynčlová: *Cesta…*, *op.cit.*: 133. (The original wording in Czech, our translation.)

[21] S. Schama, *op.cit.*: 61.

[22] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 25, 113.

voices that speak from different positions and with different language. Quoting the lyrics of a popular song by the norteña music band Los Tigres del Norte she gives space to Mexican American Spanish ("El otro México que acá hemos construído"). The following citation in English of an academic work by Jack D. Forbes and Eric R. Wolf follows and links the Chicanos to their indigenous roots. Finally, a confession of the writer's affection to her homeland appears in a poem that switches between English and Spanish. The diversity of voices is combined with the contrasting images of Borderlands: unbound when it comes to the nature, the wind, the sand, the earth overlapping with the ocean, the waves, the spume. Divided when it comes to human arbitrariness that makes itself evident in the form of a fence with rusted barbed wire stretching from Tijuana/San Diego to the Rio Grande Valley and the Gulf. Anzaldúa portrays the fence as an open wound:

> The U.S.-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.
>
> *Yo soy un puente tendido*
> *del mundo gabacho al del mojado,*
> *lo pasado me estira pa' 'trás*
> *y lo presente pa' 'delante,*
> *Que la Virgen de Guadalupe me cuide*
> *Ay ay ay, soy mexicana de este lado.*[23]

A wound but also a bridge: the border culture in Anzaldúan thought is the locus of death as well as of transformation, creativity and new possibilities. She conceptualizes it as blood merging/*mestizaje*. Her "third country – a border culture"[24] is echoed a decade later in Edward Soja's study of Los Angeles called *Thirdspace*. Soja is inspired by Henri Lefebvre's criticism of the priviledged dyad of historicality and sociality, in other words, of the perceived and conceived space, and by his call for a third alternative understood as spatiality,

[23] *Ibid.*: 25.

[24] *Idem.*

or the third/lived space. Consequently, he stresses the importance of "thirding/othering" which lies in the constant openness of "both/and also" that replaces the duality of "either/or".[25] This is where Soja coincides with *Borderlands*, i.e. with the Anzaldúan way of introducing the trialectics of space in Chicano/a thinking.

Historicality emanates from Anzaldúa's descriptions of the Rio Grande Valley, its invincible arid nature, violent history and multiple cultural layers of indigenous, Spanish and Anglo heritage.[26] Sociality is reflected in the author's representation of the strikingly uneven power distribution in the U.S. Southwest in the matter of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and social status. Poems, essayistic passages, memories or intertextual quotes from the 19th century Anglo newspapers and political proclamations serve Anzaldúa to uncover the devastating results of what it meant when in 1845 "The wilderness of Texas [had] been redeemed by the Anglo-American blood & enterprise" as William H. Wharton would have it.[27] Once again Mignolo's concept of border thinking resonates here as "a response to the violence (frontiers) of imperial/territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity (and globalization) of salvation that 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 eradication of the difference."[28] Anzaldúa's depiction of the deterritorialization of the Mexican Americans prior to the Chicano Movement illustrates the point:

> The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it. *Con el destierro y el exilio fuimos desuñados, destroncados, destripados* – we were jerked out by the

[25] Cf. W. E. Soja: *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places,* Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 1996: 70–82.

[26] An eloquent illustration of the superior and exoticizing Anglo American perspective towards the Texas bordering area in the 19th century is offered in José David Saldívar's analysis of John Gregory Bourke's article "The American Congo" (J. D. Saldívar: *Border Matters,* Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997: 166–167). Also, for further analysis of the roles of Mexican and Anglo population in the evolution of Texas see David Montejano's study *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

[27] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 29.

[28] W. Mignolo & M. Tlostanova: 'Theorizing …', *op.cit.*: 206.

> roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossesed, and separated from our identity and our history.[29]

It is spatiality (or the third/lived space) that Anzaldúa resorts to when writing from the border, as it can insert "a discourse into a space where the discourse is not allowed" and help "transcend the desire for the comfortable and known".[30] Voicing the memories of the loss of land, exploitation on the fields, oppressive family hierarchies, language violence at school or silencing at home enables her to empower herself through writing and reread border social relationships and values from a different perspective.

In the writer's eyes, this "thirding/othering"[31] is made possible in the Borderlands as they are forced – and thus capable – to mix categories and open up space with alternative ways: "To survive the Borderlands/ you must live *sin fronteras*/ be a crossroads."[32] This liminal space/state of in-betweenness is understood by Anzaldúa as "Nepantla": "Nepantlas are places of constant tension, where the missing or absent pieces can be summoned back, where transformation and healing may be possible, where wholeness is just out of reach but seems attainable."[33] The writer takes up the term/concept from náhuatl:[34] she compares the Chicano/a experience to the state of disarticulation and disorientation of the Mesoamerican culture after the conquest which brought about the cataclysmic breakdown of the Aztec empire and immediate miscegenation of the indigenous and white/Spanish worlds.[35] "Nepantla" stands for a space where two seemingly opposing views must be negotiated and synthesized, it is thus a space of change and transition which leads to new perspectives,

[29] *Ibid.*: 30.

[30] R. Cándida Smith: 'Where Am I at Home?', in M. Dear & G. Leclerc (eds.): *Postborder City*. New York: Routledge, 2003: 236.

[31] Cf. E. W. Soja: *Thirdspace, op.cit.*: 81.

[32] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 217.

[33] G. Anzaldúa & A. Keating (ed.): *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality,* Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2015: 2.

[34] The náhuatl term derives from *panotla* (bridge) and can be translated as "the land in-between" or "space in-between" as Miguel León-Portilla claims (cf. C. Joysmith: *Nepantla: liminalidad y transición,* México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015: 12).

[35] Cf. C. Joysmith: *Nepantla…*, *op.cit.*: 12.

knowledge and skills.[36] According to Anzaldúa, what is gained in such a space is the *facultad*: "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities [...] a kind of survival tactic of people caught between the worlds".[37]

Anzaldúa connects this "transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" especially with Borderlands women.[38] The refusal to accept the dualisms of fixed and opposing genders, national identities, geopolitical formations or social structures leads her to the concept of "new *mestiza* consciousness" emblematized in the figure of La Malinche, the indigenous interpreter of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés.[39] As Elizabeth Jacobs underlines: "The subversive image of female identity that recurs throughout the text is developed with references to Anzaldúa's own lesbian sexuality and a genealogy of indigenous female figures beginning with Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess of life and death."[40] The spiritual renewal found in the pre-Columbian mythology together with the art of mixing cultures are mirrored in an ancient metaphor where Anzaldúa identifies herself with corn, "tenacious" and able to "survive the crossroads",[41] and then with tortilla making: "*Soy un amasamiento,* I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings."[42]

Anzaldúa's reliance on the empowering energy drawn from the Mesoamerican goddesses (Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui or Tonantzin) or the women symbols of mestizaje (La Malinche, La Llorona) is applauded by and inspiring to many Chicana/ChicanX feminists and readers in general. However, it also represents a debatable point of her theory. Critical voices find her dependence on mythology excessively optimistic and nostalgic. The Chicano writer Benjamín Alire Sáenz does not see any sense in returning to the "traditional" spiritual values

[36] Cf. N. E. Cantú: 'Sitio y lengua: Chicana Third Space Feminist Theory', in: I. Martín-Junquera (ed.): *Landscapes of Writing in Chicano Literature,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013: 173-188, p. 182.

[37] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands...*, *op.cit.*: 60-61.

[38] *Ibid.*: 100.

[39] In his study "Untranslatable Multiculturality", Néstor García Canlini develops an interesting chapter on the absence of a positive term for miscegenation in English, in contrast to French, Spanish, and Portuguese. (*Imagined Globalization.* Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2014: 79–97).

[40] E. Jacobs: *Mexican...*, *op.cit.*: 29.

[41] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands...*, *op.cit.*: 103.

[42] *Idem.*

of the Mesoamerican people as the material conditions that originated the Aztec religion are long gone and the Anzaldúan yearning for the return to the *Tierra Madre* is unfeasible: "the conquest was cruel, violent, irrevocable. Whatever is the image of our future, it will not be similar to our past." [43] He also points to the contradiction of her famous words ("This land was Mexican once/ was Indian always/ and is. / And will be again.") when he disqualifies the concept itself of "land belonging to someone".[44] Similarly, David Johnson and Scott Michaelsen object to the recurrent "link of the Mesoamerican to magic, transformation and healing" in which they see examples of stereotyping of the pre-modern people.[45]

As for miscegenation understood as healing, Anzaldúa finds support in the iconic "La raza cósmica" by José Vasconcelos but her reading of the Mexican philosopher is quite unilateral.[46] She finds in its celebratory passages on mestizaje (that professes miscegenation to bring about a future "fifth race" in the Americas) an inclusive counterpoint to racial purity. On the other hand, she completely omits the discussion of the controversial side of Vasconcelos's text (which works with concepts of racial superiority/inferiority, sees miscegenation as synthesis instead of diversity inclusion and relies on the spiritual/aesthetic/civilizing factor in miscegenation, idea that actually comes from the classical Greco-Latin tradition, not the indigenous one). According to Ada Savin or Benjamin Sáenz, Anzaldúa's high stakes on mestizaje as the ultimate solution reveal that *Borderlands* suffer from binary thinking after all:

> Unfortunately, Anzaldúa falls into binary thinking that she criticizes with such eloquence. To categorize the world in "European" and "indigenous" and try to unite both worlds through miscegenation actually equals to relapsing into the "dual" thinking that does not express the complexity of the society we are living in.[47]

[43] Cf. B. A. Sáenz: 'En las zonas fronterizas de la identidad chicana sólo hay fragmentos', in S. Michaelsen & D. E. Johnson (eds.): *Teoría de la frontera,* Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 2003, 87–113, pp. 103–105. (Original wording in Spanish, the translation is ours.)

[44] *Idem.*

[45] Cf. D. E. Johnson & S. Michaelsen: 'Los secretos de la frontera: una introducción', in: S. Michaelsen & D. E. Johnson (eds.): *Teoría de la frontera,* Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 2003, 25–59, p. 34. (Original wording in Spanish, the translation is ours).

[46] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…, op.cit.*: 99.

[47] B. A. Sáenz: 'En las zonas…', *op.cit.*: 104. (Original wording in Spanish, the translation is ours).

> Thus, reaching the last pages of the book the reader stumbles over the very same oppositions the author had set out to abolish: white vs. black/mestizo, material vs. spiritual, sterile vs. fertile [...].[48]

Rather than the utopian proposal to resolve the clash of cultures through *mestizaje* or ancient myths,[49] *Borderlands* could be held valuable for its capacity to convey the complexity of the border that makes people negotiate and gain the *facultad* to survive and thrive (the complexity captured in the Anzaldúan term of "Nepantla"). The writer's stress on hybridity and on being open to "a constant changing of forms"[50] is a basic characteristic of third space and offers the foundation of her textual-theoretical border as a metaphor.

4 Language

> *The tremendous world that I have in my head. But how free myself and free it without being torn to pieces? And a thousand times rather be torn to pieces than retain it in me or bury it. That, indeed, is why I am here, that is quite clear to me.*
>
> *Franz Kafka*[51]

Writing as a form of "freeing oneself" from an overpressure of what one needs to express. Writing as conscious risk to be "torn to pieces". We can hear a distant echo of Kafka in Anzaldúa's confession of being "in all cultures at the same time/*alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro/me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio/ Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan/ simultáneamente*".[52] The literary language and structure of *Borderlands* masterly illustrate

[48] A. Savin: *op.cit.*

[49] Simon Schama's claim is of special interest in this context: "Of one thing at least I am certain: that no to take myth seriously in the life of an ostensibly 'disenchanted culture' like our own is actually to impoverish our understanding of our shared world. And it is also to concede the subject by default to those who have no critical distance from it at all, who apprehend myth not as a historical phenomenon but as an unchallengeable perennial mystery" (S. Schama: *Landscape...*, *op.cit.*: 134).

[50] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands...*, *op.cit.*: 112.

[51] F. Kafka: *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910–1913,* New York: Schocken, 1948: 288.

[52] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands...*, *op.cit.*: 99.

the writer's urgency to capture her "being torn between ways", the disorientation caused by her writing from the liminal state of "Nepantla", through different modes of perceiving the world, a task that invites creativity but can also be self-consuming.

According to Savin, "one of [Anzaldúa's] most noteworthy achievements is that of having convincingly incorporated the linguistic hybridity of the borderlands into the very substance of her literary work".[53] The formal innovations, linguistic code-switching and genre crossing appear all along the text but Anzaldúa accumulates her reflections on Borderlands language and voice especially into the fifth chapter called "How to tame a wild tongue". It begins with the following anecdote:

> "We're going to have to control your tongue," the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. … My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. "I've never seen anything as strong or as stubborn," he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?[54]

Anzaldúa's memory of her "stubborn" tongue interfering with the dentist's work brings about the pondering of the twin quality of a tongue/language: an organ that preserves a physical body and simultaneously allows spiritual communication through speech. In her introduction to the book *Langues choisies, langues sauvées: poétiques de la résistance*, Christine Meyer also highlights this double-sidedness when alluding to the autobiography of Elias Canetti whose first volume is called *Die gerettete Zunge*.[55] Meyer infers that for Canetti (born into the Judaeo-Spanish community in Bulgaria and exiled in England during Nazism) writing in German meant saving his own "tongue" understood as part of his body, not only an organ of speech. "Saving his tongue" meant overcoming a death threat.[56] It is the same urge of physical preservation that

[53] A. Savin: 'Course…', *op.cit.*

[54] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 75.

[55] "The tongue set free": the twosome "Zunge/Sprache" in German equals "tongue/language" in English.

[56] Cf. Ch. Meyer & P. Prescod (eds.): *Langues choisies, langues sauvées: poétiques de la résistance,* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2018, 19–20.

moves Anzaldúa to metaphorically link the "stubbornness" of her tongue to the perseverance of the languages spoken in the Mexican American Borderlands.[57]

> For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages.[58]

What is more, the impossibility to "bridle a wild tongue" connects to the message that Anzaldúa transmits as a feminist Chicana writer who fights against the silencing of women in her own community: "*hablar pa' 'trás, repelar. Hocicona, repelona, chismosa,* having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all sings of being *mal criada.* In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women – I've never heard them applied to men."[59] For the women of colour, this silencing is double, not only due to their inferior position in the mainstream white society, but also, as Anzaldúa points out, due to the "orphan condition" that many Chicanas feel when not accepted by the Latin Americans in the countries where Spanish is the official language:

> *Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente.* We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla.* Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos* – we speak an orphan tongue.[60]

The peripheral position, Anzaldúa's elevated sensitivity to a context of rich multilingualism complicated by complex hierarchies, the "forked tongue", the "orphan tongue": all these conditions push the writer into providing her text

[57] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 77.

[58] *Idem.*

[59] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 76.

[60] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 80.

with tension and emotion based on hybridity. She writes in English but at the same time resists the majority language from within through introducing Mexican Spanish words or directly changing over to English/Spanish code-switching. Besides, she uses the innovative power of *pocho* (Mexican Spanish grammatically and phonetically modified by the English-speaking environment). Although scorned by the standard Mexican Spanish and English speakers as a degenerated linguistic form, *pocho* (as well as the urban slang of Mexican Spanish called *pachuco/caló*) managed to transform its negative energy into the empowerment of its speakers during the Chicano Movement and their expressivity has been used by Chicano/a writers.[61] Anzaldúa herself, especially in the fifth chapter, lets her language "bark", as one of the subtitles conveys: "Oyé como ladra: el lenguaje de la frontera".[62] Contradiction, ambiguity, adaptation and creativity go hand in hand with physical survival, they are the vantage points of cultural/linguistic hybridity. *Borderlands* shows this eloquently on the example of La Malinche interpreting for Cortés: her tongue saved her life.

Similarly, speaking up from the border, obtaining a voice, a *facultad*, enabled Anzaldúa to create metaphors of the border that have grown powerful. They have become "part of the scenery" being "more real than their referents" as Schama would say.[63] They can inspire other voices to emerge from silence.

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[61] As Carlos Monsiváis aptly showed, *pocho* and *pachuco* had an imprint on standard Mexican Spanish spoken in Mexico as well (cf. C. Monsiváis> 'Tin Tan. Es el pachuco un sujeto singular', *Intermedios* 4, 1992: 6–13, pp. 8–10).

[62] G. Anzaldúa: *Borderlands…*, *op.cit.*: 77.

[63] S. Schama: *Landscape…*, *op.cit.*: 91.

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