

**Legitimizing Existence – Gloria Anzaldúa Constructing
the Borderland Identity in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New
Mestiza***

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MÄKELÄ, HANNA: Legitimizing Existence – Gloria Anzaldúa Constructing the
Borderland Identity in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

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Käsittelen pro gradu –tutkielmassani kirjailija ja teoreetikko Gloria Anzaldúan esseekokoelmaa teoksessa *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Tutkin Anzaldúan muokkaamaa uutta identiteettiä, joka sisältää uudenlaisen tavan nähdä ja käsitellä henkilöllisyyttä syntyperän, seksuaalisuuden ja sosiaalisen aseman näkökulmista. Anzaldúa esittelee teoksessaan näkemyksensä, jonka mukaan amerikkalaisen yhteiskunnan rakenteet perustuvat vähemmistöjen, kuten naisten, etnisten ja seksuaalisten vähemmistöjen sekä henkiselle että fyysiselle sorrolle. Hänen pyrkimyksensä on vapautua yhtäältä ainutlaatuisen Meksikon ja Yhdysvaltain rajaseudun väkivaltaisesta historiasta, hakea oikeutusta olemassaolleen ja sitä kautta myös muille kaltaisilleen.

Teoreettisena kehyksenä tutkielmassani käytän lähinnä feminististä kirjallisuuskritisismiä, ja kirjailijan ollessa itsekin kirjallisuusteoreetikko pyrin käyttämään analyysissäni mahdollisimman paljon hänen omia ajattelumallejaan. Tässä tutkimuksessa käsitellään myös Anzaldúan käyttämiä erilaisia kerronnan keinoja, joilla kirjailija pyrkii eräällä lailla ”laillistamaan” Chicanojen olemassaolon Meksikon ja Yhdysvaltojen välisellä raja-alueella.

Graduni käsittelee kysymyksiä, kuten millaisin keinoin Anzaldúa rakentaa rajaseudun asukkaan identiteetin, kuinka hän muokkaa aiempaa käsitystä siitä, mitä on olla Chicano/a, ja etenkin sitä, mitä todella tarkoittaa hänen kehittämänsä identiteetti, ”kolmas olomuoto” eli ”uusi *mestiza*”. Samalla pyrin tutkimaan, onko Anzaldúan teoriassa tai tavassa luoda kirjallisuutta joitakin aukkoja vai onnistuuko hän rakentamaan ehjästi uudenlaisen olemismuodon teorian sekä kuinka tätä voidaan soveltaa muihin rajaseutujen asukkaisiin.

Avainsanat: Anzaldúa, Chicano/a, feminismi, identiteetti, mestitsi,
vähemmistökirjallisuus

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1. Introduction

Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) was a writer of fiction, poet, activist and literary and cultural critic living and working in the Southwest of the United States. Being of Mexican and Indian descent as well as a Texan, she was a representative of the Chicano minority living in the U.S. Moreover, her lesbian sexual orientation rendered her in the category of a “double minority”, being both gay and a woman of color. Anzaldúa has contributed to the Mexican American community by in not only presenting the Chicano/a¹ with a new way of constructing their borderlands identity, but also in struggling to reinstate the socio-political position and the cultural heritage of the Mexican American people. Her radical feminism and social critique has made her into an epitome of a woman of color fighting to break the social and sexual constraints imposed not on women alone, but on ethnic and sexual minorities as well. She has been said to have served, and still continue to do so, as a model for the community of Chicanas and for all minority groups alike. She set an example for people socially, politically or otherwise oppressed and marginalized from mainstream society.

Furthermore, Anzaldúa has been credited for using her own personal experiences growing up and living the life of the oppressed, being a Latina woman and a member of a racial and a sexual minority. Her own life was her material especially in her autobiographical book from 1987 called *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*², where in a compilation of essays Anzaldúa explores the mental constructs of

¹ Chicano = a Mexican American male, Chicana = a Mexican American woman, usually with reference to politically aware people of Mexican descent born/and raised in the U.S.A. See more in Martínez, Julio A. and Francisco A. Lomelí, *Chicano Literature – A Reference Guide*. (London: Greenwood Press, 1985)

² Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987/2nd ed. 1999)

the borderlands people by mediating and reconstructing the social formation of their identity. She does this through her own personal experiences as borderlands inhabitant. Born on a ranch in the Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas, Anzaldúa was raised among the Mexican American community and worked the fields with her family of migrant agricultural workers. When she turned eleven her family settled in Hargill, Texas. Anzaldúa was sent to school and was later to receive her B.A. in 1969 from Pan American University, and in 1972 her M.A. from the University of Texas at Austin. Acquiring a higher education was not common in her community; she was the first in six generations to leave home to go to school. Anzaldúa later taught high school English, worked as a lecturer in Californian universities and did graduate work at the University of California at Santa Cruz. She died a few weeks before finishing her dissertation.

When Anzaldúa was growing up, the traditional Chicano home life presented her with the community's strict and limiting gender roles. To escape the Chicano community's atmosphere of control, she turned to literature. The life experiences of Chicanas (Mexican American women), or more particularly those of *tejanas* (Mexican Texan women) inspired her writing, but the main focus in her work dealt with the experiences of *mestizas* (Mexican American women of mixed Native American and Spanish heritage). She struggled firstly to find her own identity and secondly to lend authority to others faced with similar struggles with race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Anzaldúa's own multi-faceted identity as a Chicana, a *mestiza*, and a lesbian can be seen to have motivated her work and defined her role as a social activist. Her major contributions were to gender studies, Chicano studies and queer theory, as well as creative writing. Her construction of the borderland identity can furthermore be seen to portray the mental constructs of borderland people anywhere, where there are two or

more cultures involved. Therefore her points of view can, in addition to the culture-specific context of the U.S. Southwest, be also used in a more global context.

Anzaldúa's work ranges from autobiographical texts to children's books through poetry and critical theory, and her writings have appeared in mainstream and alternative publications alike. She was awarded with several prizes during her life on account of her activism for minorities' rights as well as her achievements in the fields of literary and cultural studies. She has received awards such as the Lambda Lesbian Small Book Press Award, the NEA Fiction Award, the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award and the Sappho Award of Distinction throughout her literary career. Moreover, her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* was nominated as one of the 38 Best Books of 1987, selected by the Literary Journal³.

At her death in 2004 Anzaldúa was 61 years old. She died at her home due to complications from diabetes. As Nakao notes in her obituary: "Anzaldúa once vowed to construct a new culture – una cultura mestiza – with lumber, bricks and mortar, and her own 'feminist architecture.'" ⁴ Throughout her work the most central theme, as well as her foremost personal aspiration, was to create a new way of thinking and being, to reinvent herself and her race or *Raza*, as she and other Chicanos call it, and to claim ownership of her land, her sex and her identity as a person. An essential feature to the borderland identity is the absence of sense of self, which results in difficulties of identification among the minority group. The Chicano movement was founded on working toward the reconstruction of the identity of the U.S Mexican American descendants, and Anzaldúa takes the reconstruction a step further with her concept of

³ Voices from the Gaps, Artist entry on Anzaldúa.

<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/anzaldua_gloria.html> (April 11, 2008)

⁴ Annie Nakao's obituary for Anzaldúa: "Gloria Anzaldúa – writer" The San Francisco Chronicle, May 20, 2004. <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/05/20/BAGSC6OMV91.DTL>> (November 25, 2007)

mestiza consciousness. Herrera-Sobek (2006) says: “Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* evidences a will to reconfigure this loss of place, space, and history and reterritorialize the Chicano population in the American Southwest.”⁵ In other words, Anzaldúa set out to create a novel way of embracing instead of being ashamed of the *mestiza* heritage, something she named as the *new mestiza consciousness*; a specially constructed line of thought, which was to empower first of all those of mixed race (*mestizo/a*), and those who possess other kinds of minority characteristics.

Ashcroft et al. (1998) denote that the Spanish term *mestizo* and French *métisse* have surfaced from colonial discourse that attempted to taxonomically differentiate between various racially mixed groups of people, in order to justify the idea of racial purity and thereby excuse racial discrimination. What is more, they note that semantically both terms entail the same concept of a mixed racial background as the term *creole* does, and that they are today used in a positive sense whereas during the colonial period they had pejorative connotations. Furthermore, Ashcroft et al. state that the terms “have begun to reflect a perception in these cultures that miscegenation and interchange between the different cultural diasporas had produced new and powerful synergistic cultural forms” – especially in the Latin America *mestizo* has become a “positive ‘national’ cultural sign.”⁶ For most of the Chicano, this seems to be the case, especially after Mexico gained independence from Spain. According to Martinez and Lomelí (1985) *mestizaje* is a term favorably describing the “process of miscegenation or the mixture of different racial background [...] Although not exclusively alluding to a mixture between European and Indian, this tends to be the most common combination.” Moreover, they explain the word *mestizo* as “the person who embodies the *Mestizaje*

⁵ María Herrera-Sobek, “Gloria Anzaldúa: Place, Race, Language, and Sexuality in the Magic Valley”. *PMLA*, Volume 121, Number 1, Jan 2006 (6) <<http://search.ebscohost.com/>> (April 5, 2008) p. 267.

⁶ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. (Routledge: London, 1998) p. 136-137.

process; also used with pride to refer to Chicanos' mixed-blood heritage and a product of two cultures."⁷ For Anzaldúa the *mestiza* identity is exactly that – a heritage embodied in the Chicano – something that every member of the Mexican American community should be proud to be.

Anzaldúa felt the Chicano lacked voice and were therefore unable to defend their rights as legal citizens. For her the process of *mestizaje* involved to quit thinking along the lines of the white dominant Anglo culture that had *othered* the Chicano minority, not in the least during the colonization process. For Anzaldúa, a person going through *mestizaje* becomes aware of their distinctiveness as a member of the American society, and through self-recognition and identification a sense of “not belonging” will be terminated among the minority. Throughout Anzaldúa's work the idea of constructing one's identity is present, but especially *Borderlands/La Frontera* represents her idea of building a new identity on the distinctive, oftentimes negative characteristics of the identity formation process the borderlands habitants have to undergo. In fact, the book itself is structurally analogous to her idea of creating what some have called a *hybrid* way of being, and Anzaldúa's mixed genre resembles a great deal the *mestizaje* process. By shifting in between and combining different genres of literature, integrating history, native storytelling and using the languages of Spanish, English and Chicano Spanish, Anzaldúa recreates the essence of being Chicano in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. At the same time she engages in narrative innovations.

All in all, *Borderlands/La Frontera* is a complex combination of personal narrative and regional history, and structurally the book is divided in two halves: the first half is compiled of six essays and the second half of several Spanish English poems. The book begins with a part titled "*Atravesando Fronteras / Crossing Borders*",

⁷ Martínez, Julio A. and Francisco A. Lomelí. *Chicano Literature – A Reference Guide*. (London: Greenwood Press, 1985) p. 476

which is a powerful mixture of Anzaldúa's personal history blended with the collective history of the borderland people. In this section the reader is given a close-up to the oppression and racism through Anzaldúa's personal account. Moreover, it gives the reader a chance, or rather, forces the reader to identify with the individual "trapped" in the borderlands, where the dominant culture works mostly against, and rarely in cooperation with, the marginal cultures. Consequently, several cultural issues and problems are addressed in the first section of the book, stretching from religion to immigration to sexuality. The second part is called "*Un Agitado Viento / Ehécatl, The Wind*", a compilation of six sections of poems written both in Spanish and English. The end result of the manuscript is something the writer herself calls an *auto-historia*, an autobiographical, self-written historical narration.

The various literal measures Anzaldúa employs in *Borderlands/La Frontera* are intended to reflect the inclusive nature of the *mestiza* identity. Believing that language and identity are inextricably linked, Anzaldúa attempts to represent the *mestiza's* inclination of shifting out of ordinary formations or set patterns of the society. Used to serve the purposes of self-expression, the diffusion of different literary means into her narrative *literalizes* her idea of the *mestiza* identity. Similarly, it works to illustrate the idea of border-crossing throughout the book. What is more, the fusion of different languages portrays her idea of herself as a native borderlands writer even further – she inherently uses the words in any of the borderland languages. As a multilingual person the choice comes to her quite naturally: she is at the liberty to pick the words she finds best to serve the purposes of writing and self-expression. As a political person with an agenda her choice of words is oftentimes heavily explicit in order to force attention from the reader. Composed partially in Spanish and Chicano English and intentionally slipping between poetry and prose, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

consistently articulates Anzaldúa's commitment to channel personal liberation and political activism through writing. Moreover, as the world is moving toward a "transnational" or global era, where "transnationalism" according to Kearney (1998) entails "blurring and reordering of the binary cultural, social and epistemological distinctions of the modern period" and finally entering a state of "post-nationalism"⁸, the themes in *Borderlands/La Frontera* can be elaborated in a larger global scale – the book serves as a certain kind of handbook for reading texts with themes related to borderlands and Border Theory even though it mainly is, as Anzaldúa states, an *auto-historia*.

⁸ Kearney, Michael. "Transnationalism in California and Mexico at the End of an Empire" in Wilson, Thomas M. and Hastings Donnan (eds.) *Border Identities, Nation and State at International Frontiers*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 121.

2. Theoretical Frame

2.1 Feminist Theory

Feminism is essential for the theoretical frame of this thesis, for the reason that Gloria Anzaldúa herself proclaimed to be a radical feminist. It is one of the nominators in her list of characteristics with which she identified, and basically the essence of her social criticism matches with the main themes of feminism in general since she advocates equality and rights for women. In terms of feminist theory, her being a radical feminist would imply that she is critical of the capitalist, male-ruled sexist hierarchy, which is the cause of an unequal, oppressive society. Radical feminists consider that only a complete uprooting of the dominant oppressive hierarchy, and reconstruction of the society will lead to any type of social change. Anzaldúa's thoughts on feminism have contributed to the development of feminist theory. She expanded the definitions of feminism by including the aspects of race and sexual preference more immediately to the feminist discourse. Her work helped to develop a movement sometimes referred to as Third World Feminism. Third World Feminism can be seen to be more diverse than that which the (mainly white) women's movement advocates – it is explicitly the feminism of the women of color with a colonial background. In this study feminism is discussed mainly with reference to Anzaldúa's feminist theorization and her thoughts on the position of women of color in the (Mexican) American society.

Luke (1992) comprises feminist criticism as opposing and deconstructing patriarchal master narratives and the “old dichotomies and essentialist and foundationalist assumptions that underlie the subject-in-history implicated by the classic epistemological dualisms.”⁹ Here, Anzaldúa is certainly fundamentally attuned with

⁹ Luke, Carmen and Jennifer Gore (eds.) *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*. (London: Routledge, 1992) p.45.

“mainstream feminism”, but categorically the feminism Anzaldúa deals with, especially in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, can be referred to that of the Chicana, of the woman of the Third World. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* she explains how whiteness is seen as the norm while the black, yellow and brown alike, are marginalized and *othered*. What is more, in *Making Face, Making Soul – Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* states that her work

does not address itself *primarily* to whites, but invites them to ‘listen in’ to women-of-color talking to each other and, in some instances, to and ‘against’ white people... Mujeres-de-color¹⁰ speak and write not just against traditional white ways and texts but against a prevailing mode of being, against a white frame of reference”¹¹

Moreover, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa clearly states, that racialization took place *inside* the women’s movement. Women of color were treated as objects of research, studied by the white hegemony, and as such they were not taken into account by the academia for their research – they were examined and marginalized for their ethnicity. There existed therefore the need to establish a new variety of feminism. Third World Feminism stands against the tokenism of the women of color and its aim is to free women of color from the status of being objects of feminist studies and turning them into active participants and agents in any particular field of women’s studies.

Torrés (2003), among others, includes Anzaldúa as one of the first to voice the inequalities women in the position of a double minority were as participants in the academic, social and political environment. In terms of being heard in these contexts, she notes: “the fact remained that Chicanas – Lesbian or straight – were virtually invisible to the more publically acknowledged planners and scholars [...] this, among other things, made obvious the reality that race or ethnicity could not be separated from

¹⁰ *Mujeres-de-color* = women of color, my translation.

¹¹ Anzaldúa, Gloria (Ed.) *Making Face, Making Soul – Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990) pp. xviii, xxii.

gender and sexual identity as sources of oppression of women of color.”¹² Anzaldúa addresses the problems Chicana women face in the American society – in the academia, the work place, at home. Granted that Anzaldúa was one of the first to voice out the mistreatment of women of color, she was not the only one: Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith are Anzaldúa’s contemporaries, black feminist theorists writing about the experiences of black women in the American society. Principally the feminist themes connected with race, gender and sexuality that Lorde and Smith discuss, match the themes in Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Smith (1977) has defined the key concepts of Black feminist literary critique, saying that the politics of sex, race and class are unquestionably necessary and have to be acknowledged as linking factors in the works of Black women writers¹³. In this thesis the politics of Anzaldúa will be looked into.

Lorde (1984) defines the types of oppression and sources of violence in the society calling them “human blindness”. According to her, racism, sexism and heterosexism originate from the belief that there is an inherent superiority in one race, in one sex and in one pattern of loving, which justifies dominance over others. Moreover, she contends that homophobia is generated by the fear of having feelings of love for your own sex, which therefore leaves you hating others who possess those feelings. Like Anzaldúa, only three years prior to the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Lorde talked about people’s inability to identify the notion of *difference* as a dynamic human force.¹⁴ For Anzaldúa, *distinctiveness* was a cultural characteristic that facilitated change in the Chicano culture. Anzaldúa, too, talks about the sources of oppression and

¹² Torres, Edén E. *Chicana Without Apology/ Chicana sin vergüenza: The New Chicana Cultural Studies*. (New York /London: Routledge, 2003.) p. 168.

¹³ Smith, Barbara. “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism.” In *The New Feminist Criticism, Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. Showalter, Elaine (Ed.) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) p. 168.

¹⁴ Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider, Essays and Speeches*. (Freedom: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984) p. 45.

places the blame on the Western concepts of social and political hierarchy in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Still, according to her the Anglo is not to be regarded as the only source of discrimination against minorities in the Southwest. Anzaldúa notes how

the Chicano, *mexicano*, and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for deviance. Deviance is whatever is condemned by the community[...] The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human.¹⁵

In other words, the queer and the gay are on the lowest step of the Mexican American social hierarchy, women only one step above them.

Western thinking did not only create an atmosphere of oppression in the American society by imposing its ideology on the minorities, but it caused the loss of identity among them as well, especially in the case of the indigenous peoples. In fact, Anzaldúa contends that thinking in binary opposites causes the split identities of marginal groups in general. According to her, Western rationalization led to the creation of harmful duality in the society: "in trying to become "objective", Western culture has made "objects of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing "touch" with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence."¹⁶ Sonia Saldívar-Hull claims that the methodology Anzaldúa is offering employs the Chicana with strategies for "unearthing a razed indigenous history as a process of coming to consciousness as political agents of change."¹⁷ It is not before that women realize their power as active agents than they reach the state of being past the restrictions of their own subsumed ways of Westernized thinking. In Anzaldúa's theorization the violence against humanity is born in the split between male and female, white and black, modern and traditional.

¹⁵ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 40

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁷ Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. "Gloria Anzaldúa". *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. 5th edition, Paul Lauter (Ed.)

<http://college.hmco.com/english/lauter/heath/4e/students/author_pages/contemporary/anzaldua_g1.html> (April 4, 2008)

Moreover, *Borderlands/La Frontera* is permeated with the feminist idea that women everywhere are constricted by the ideas of patriarchy and through sexism the socially constructed models of being a woman limit them. Because of racialization and genderization women of color suffer from even doubly from the stereotypical categorization imposed on women. according to her, splitting and fragmenting the Self has had detrimental effects in the borderland identity:

Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes. Such is the case of the *india* and the *mestiza*.¹⁸

In order to circumvent violent consequences, these patriarchal dichotomies should be contested and resisted. Bucholtz (1999) maintains that women of color facing “both sexism and racism as well as other forms of power” are the subjects in Anzaldúa’s feminism and the multiple positions of identities present them with multiple voices, all underlining the “multifaceted nature of the self”. Furthermore, Bucholtz continues:

No aspect of identity has priority and no language linked to these identities is privileged over any other... by legitimating such “impure” linguistic varieties as “Tex-Mex”... on par with prestigious forms such as “academese,” Anzaldúa implicitly challenges the cultural hierarchy in which certain languages and the identities that they render are valued over others.¹⁹

To sum up, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa rewrites the identity of women of color, and in *Making Face, Making Soul – Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990)²⁰ she presents her radical feminist ideas even more manifest manner. Still, one would argue that Anzaldúa’s feminism has ontological characteristics, having to do with the idea and ways of existence. She is asking basic

¹⁸ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 59.

¹⁹ Bucholtz, Mary, ed. *Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. <<http://site.ebrary.com>> (April 11, 2008) p. 6.

²⁰ Anzaldúa, Gloria (Ed.) *Making Face, Making Soul – Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990)

ontological questions, such as what constitutes the identity of a person – that is, the identity of the woman of color, how is her identity constructed in relation to her environment and what are the properties of her existence?

Anzaldúa's work for editing writings of women of color contributed largely to the acknowledgement of minority literatures. It is common to many women writers of color to use their personal life stories and narratives as material in their work²¹. Native American writers such as Paula Gunn Allen and She collaborated with Cherríe Moraga in editing writings by several women writers of color, in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*²² in 1981. In her piece called "La Prieta", included in *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa concentrates on the social formation she herself has gone through, starting from when she was born to taking the reader through the events in her life which have formed her identity.²³ Similarly to "La Prieta", in *Borderlands/La Frontera* she employs mainly her own experience as a Chicana woman attempting to battle against the Westernized society's cultural assimilation processes and to maintain a self-image that is in accordance to her own lifeworld. Themes such as shame, family, race, poverty and racism, among others are repeatedly dealt with in *Borderlands/La Frontera* as causes of the fragmented identity of the Chicano. Schweitzer (2006) claims Anzaldúa's work as an anthologist of colored women's

²¹ See more on Native American writing in for instance Allen, Paula Gunn. *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) or *Off the Reservation: Reflections on Boundary-Busting Border-Crossing Loose Canons* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1998) and Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller*. (New York: Seaver, 1981)

²² Anzaldúa, Gloria and Cherríe Moraga (Eds). *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983)

²³ Anzaldúa, Gloria. "La Prieta." In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Anzaldúa, Gloria and Cherríe Moraga (Eds). (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983)

writings to have “broken new ground by creating unique forms of the genre that defy mainstream academic feminist and literary notions has been said to be.”²⁴

As Quintana (1996) notes, Anzaldúa and Moraga were among the first Latinas to compile texts that dealt with critical questions “concerning the relationship between linguistics, identity politics, cultural heterogeneity, and hybridity – categories of *difference* that surpass simplistic binary paradigms.”²⁵ In accordance to the resistance of binary thinking, Anzaldúa never claims to be either-or; she is in constant discourse with her identity that shifts according to place, situation, history and context.

2.1 Border Studies

While there is such an abundance of feminism and feminist social theory present in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, it is not sufficient to fully describe the complex nature of Anzaldúa’s theorizing of the *mestiza* identity. What is more, the compilation of essays is so much linked with the acculturation of the borderlands and the landscapes it includes that there is a need for another type of approach other than feminism. That is why the theoretical frame in this thesis falls also in the interdisciplinary field of Border Studies. In general Border Theory or Border Studies covers and discusses the issues of cultural politics, multiculturalism, ethno-centrism, and history as well as trans-boundary dilemmas: problems ranging from immigration to shared environmental problems, regional economics, ethnic conflicts in borderland areas of migration and the question of openness of borders versus security issues.

²⁴ Ivy Schweitzer. “For Gloria Anzaldúa: Collecting America, Performing Friendship”. *PMLA*, Volume 121, Number 1, Jan 2006, pp. 285–291 (7) <<http://search.ebscohost.com/>> (April 2, 2008) p. 287.

²⁵ Quintana, Alvina E. *Homegirls, Chicana Literary Voices*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) p. 115.

As Anzaldúa writes from the border and to the border, she deals with the specific geopolitical culture and in a larger scale of the borderlands in different contexts of culture, race, gender and history. According to Wilson and Donnan (1998) the anthropology of borders can be seen as one viewpoint of political anthropology, which examines nations and their institutions. They have a strongly humanist view in saying that the nation's institutions, such as media, are comprised of people, and those people should not be shrunk to images that are constructed by any group or institution wanting to represent them. Wilson and Donnan further add that ethnographers who do research on border peoples have the objective of narrating the experiences of the people, and that "an anthropology of borders simultaneously explores the permeability of borders, the adaptability of border peoples in their attempts ideologically to construct political divides, and the rigidity of some states in their efforts to control the cultural fields which transcend their borders."²⁶ With this definition, one could note that Anzaldúa becomes at once both the anthropologist as well as the object of her own study – she created an auto-ethnography (or "auto-*historia*") of herself.

Kearney (1998), drawing from sociology, anthropology and epistemology among other things, argues that since the U.S. impact on the borderline became full-scale, the distinction between the "anthropological Anglo Self" and the "ethnographic Mexican Other" has been evident and included the spatial, economical, categorical division resulting from military take-over. The modernism in the U.S. has, as Kearney contends, resulted in the forced unification of the nation state's identities in an attempt

²⁶ Wilson, Thomas M. and Hastings Donnan (Eds.) *Border Identities, Nation and State at International Frontiers*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 4.

to form a collective identity by melting together ethnicities “of its huddled immigrant masses and reconstruct it as ‘American’ and as, *inter alia*, race and racism.”²⁷

Johnson and Michaelsen(1997) note that because the concept of the border or the borderlands today includes practically “every psychic or geographic space about which one can thematize problems of boundary or limit.” In other words, it is a field of study employing various means of research in the specific context of borders, physical and others – thematization from a certain or many disciplinary viewpoints is then the essence of Border Studies. Accordingly, Johnson and Michaelsen mention the chief matters in the field of Border Studies recently dealt with as “‘race’ and ‘gender’ and then ‘nation’ and ‘sexuality’, the intellectual entry point of the ‘border’ is one of the grand themes of recent, politically liberal-to-left work across the humanities and social sciences” proceeding with a list of theories from anthropology, sociology, feminism, Marxism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, ethnohistory and poststructuralism.²⁸ To summarize, the essence in Border Studies is the concept of the border itself, and it is examined in terms of its defined and placement. Both appropriate starting points to search *Borderlands/La Frontera*: the book itself being largely credited as one of the founding works in the field of Border Studies.

2.3 Research Questions

In this thesis I will attempt to look into Anzaldúa’s compilation of essays in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and explore the ways in which she deals with issues of origin,

²⁷ Kearney, Michael. “Transnationalism in California and Mexico at the End of an Empire” in Wilson, Thomas M. and Hastings Donnan (Eds.) *Border Identities, Nation and State at International Frontiers*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 117-121.

²⁸ Johnson, David E. and Scott Michaelsen. *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997. <<http://site.ebrary.com>> (April 15, 2008) pp. 1-2.

racism, sexuality, minority, social construction and identity formation in the specific context of the borderlands. The main research questions are how the author constructs the identity of the borderlands inhabitant and by which literary means she does this. The formation of the *new mestiza identity* is then the main focus of study here.

One of the main themes in this study is also the existence of different types of borders – those of the mental landscape and those of the physical, and the idea of border-crossing and transcending the visible and invisible boundaries. Most importantly, still, I will examine how and to what purposes the author shapes the Chicana identity. I will attempt to further elaborate on the process of *mestizaje* and the makings of the *new mestiza*. Chiefly the study will be conducted on the basis of *Borderlands/La Frontera* serving as a primary source, but as a secondary source I will look into *Making Face, Making Soul – Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, where the author also explains her theorization. Still, principally the different cultural aspects of the borderlands are under investigation, as it is obvious that there is a spectrum of cultures and marginalities interacting within the borderlands. I am interested in the way Anzaldúa portrays the several cultures and even semi-cultures of the borderlands. I look into the influences the various cultures have on the formation of the borderland identity. I carry out my study with reference to the first part of the book that comprises of a compilation of six essays, called *Atravesando Fronteras/Crossing Borders*. The second part, a compilation of poems entitled *Un Agitado Viento/Ehécatl, The Wind*, will not be touched upon in this thesis apart from a poem called “To live in the Borderlands Means You”²⁹.

²⁹ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, pp. 216-217.

3. Physical Borderlands

Throughout the history of mankind there have been nations that have claimed to manifest destinies and characteristics of (superior) exceptionalism, starting from the Roman Empire. The U.S. is at the moment one of the most powerful nations in the global world. The Puritan settlers to arrive in North America in the 1600's believed that God in his Divine Providence had made a covenant with them to lead the other nations of the world. Exceptionalism is a concept according to which Americans have a distinct and special (manifest) destiny that is categorically different from other nations' destinies. The concept of exceptionalism denotes that the United States and the American people have a special place in the world, offering freedom, humanity and equality. Looking at the state of global economy and American foreign policy (especially its war on terror) this seems to be the case in the U.S. attitudes still. The concept of exceptionalism is according to some scholars the most powerful concept in the forming of American identity, and a notion that has been present during every period of American history.

The theory of American exceptionalism has its roots in the Puritan and Revolutionary eras. The term American exceptionalism was first used by Alexis-Charles-Henri Clérel de Tocqueville in 1831. The core thoughts of Jacksonian Democrats' Manifest Destiny from 1840 coincides closely with Tocqueville's ideas. Already in 1630 John Winthrop metaphorically expressed the idea of exceptionalism in the American society with his idea of America being a "City upon a Hill" – including the notion that the Puritan community settled in New England was to serve as a model for all other nations. The land the founding fathers met was at first hard to survive in, but unprecedented rich in natural resources, and this led the Puritans to believe they

were there to “sow and reap” as American Adams. This was seen as an opportunity for prosperity that God had given them, and rightfully theirs, since the Puritans were Calvinist and believed everyone getting whatever prosperity they deserve in life.³⁰

The vast resources led to the fast growing economical independence from the British Empire, and American patriotism finally resulted in the American Revolutionary War of 1775 to 1783 (or, War of Independence). The results of the revolution had worldwide impacts – among other things it helped other colonial peoples reach the realization that they too could become self-governing nations. The “model nation” continued in its charters to promote the ideas of liberty, individuality, and equal rights for all. Still, at that time these ideals only concerned the white population, as many Native Americans refer to the killing of the Indians as genocide, and since slavery was not abolished in the United States until 1865. Against this background in the next chapter I shall discuss the borderlands in terms of geo-politics and socio-economics.

3.1 Geopolitics and Socio-Economics

Both the U.S. side and the Mexican side replicate the political, economic, social, and cultural systems of their respective nation-states. At the same time, borderlanders have blended the structures, institutions, and life expressions of the two societies to create something novel and entirely theirs—the *ambiente fronterizo*, or borderlands milieu. Today the area stands as a prime example of binational interdependence, providing striking evidence of the trend toward closer ties among the world's nations and societies.³¹

Oscar J. Martinez

³⁰ On manifest destiny and the Puritans see for example Lubragge, Michael T. “The Philosophy That Created A Nation” in *From Revolution to Reconstruction - an HTML project* <<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/E/manifest/manif1.htm#man>> (April 18, 2008) or Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975)

³¹ Oscar J. Martinez, “Human Interaction in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands”, <<http://www.humanities-interactive.org/borderstudies/text/essay.htm>> (April 11, 2008)

Born in 1942 Anzaldúa grew up in the Texan Southwest during the 1940s and 50s. The area and its culture(s) affected her strongly and formed her thinking to a great deal. In the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa places her writing in the physical borderland area the U.S. Southwest and Mexico, but on the other hand she states that in fact 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 under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.³²

Both Martinez and Anzaldúa refer to the borderlands mentality as something unique in one sense and yet universal in another. Nonetheless, it is essential to understand the physical U.S.-Mexico borderlands of today, in order to grasp the area's mental makings as well as Anzaldúa's points of view.



Picture 1. The Mexican-United States border and the borderland states.³³

³² *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 19.

³³ Picture 1 taken from the homepage of the XXIV United States-Mexico Border Governors Conference, held on August 24 and 25, 2006. <<http://www.4elemental.com/websites/bgc>>. March 9, 2008.

As can be seen in Picture 1, the borderlands physically consists of six Mexican states; Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas and of four U.S. states; California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Along both sides the more than 2 000 mile long border lives approximately nine million people today. The U.S. officials estimate that between 500 000-1 million U.S. citizens are currently living in Mexico, and that the rate for legal border crossings per day is on average 1 million. The U.S.-Mexico border affects people from both nations with issues having to do with trade, economy and employment as well as security: especially drug control and both legal and illegal migration. Moreover, Mexico is economically extremely dependent on producing exports to the U.S. market – U.S. exports provide more than 25% of the country's gross domestic product. Therefore the U.S. business demands control the cycle of the Mexican economy, but at the same time Mexicans provide the U.S. companies with cheap work force both abroad and home.³⁴ Lower than minimum wages and non-existent workers' rights in the Mexican sweatshops or *maquiladoras* and U.S. citizens suffering from unemployment due to factories moving south of the border are issues that have been much discussed in recent years, as have many other effects of the global economy. The U.S.-Mexico borderlands can aptly be seen to make out of the core problems of globalization in a smaller scale.

Similarly to problems with trade and industry, there are of course ecological issues also present on the borderlands. Neither U.S. nor Mexico has been able to build up the infrastructure of the borderlands as the population has increased and the area grown more urbanized and industrialized. Most of the borderland population of nine million is living in the fifteen sister cities on both sides of the border and there is a steady influx of more populace. The chief ecological issues have to do with poor

³⁴ U.S. Department of State fact-sheet on Mexico: <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm>> February 21, 2008.

drinking water supplies, lack of solid disposal facilities and treatment of wastewater. For the most part the sewage goes into the natural water reserves of Rio Grande or the Gulf of Mexico, flowing up north from the cities of Tijuana, Mexicali and Nogales.³⁵

The problems are widespread, and they affect both nations. There have been binational, joint attempts to battle the concrete problems of the physical borderlands: administrative attempts have been made and institutions and organizations have been founded to deal with the problems of drug smuggling and illegal border crossing as well as environmental and health concerns. In 1993 the Border Liaison Mechanism (BLM) was established to operate in the fifteen sister cities to locally alleviate or solve the problems. The local issues deal with things ranging from “accidental violation of sovereignty by law enforcement officials and charges of mistreatment of foreign nationals to coordination of port security and cooperation in public health matters such as tuberculosis.”³⁶ In other words, the concerns are numerous.

Some state-regulated projects, such as the ten-year development plan called Border 2012, and the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) dealing with water and sanitation issues, have been designed to protect the borderlands environment and develop the infrastructure. Other such improvement plans are the North American Development Bank (NADBank) established in 1993 and the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC), operating under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Since the forties health issues have been part of the borderlands improvement program, and in 2000 it was agreed upon to form a binational Border Health Commission. The commission is made up of federal secretaries of health, health officers of the 10 borderlands states and health professionals of the borderlands

³⁵ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency homepage: <<http://epa.gov/region6/6xa/border.htm>> February 21, 2008.

³⁶ U.S. Department of State fact-sheet on Mexico: <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm>> February 21, 2008.

communities.³⁷ As noted before, the problems listed above are problems that have to do with the concrete living conditions in the borderlands, and appropriately describe the “binational interdependence” mentioned by Martinez. In addition to environmental and economical projects there is a multitude of projects dealing with something that can be called the mental or the metaphysical aspects of the borderlands. Many associations and institutes, such as the Border Action Network, No More Deaths, the American Friend’s Service Committee’s Immigration Law Enforcement Monitoring Project and the Coalición de Derechos Humanos/Alianza Indígena sin fronteras (the Human Rights Coalition/Indigenous Alliance without Borders)³⁸, have been established to help transnational cooperation in order to increase cultural awareness and exchange on both sides of the border. The aim in most of them is to exonerate racism and xenophobia and to facilitate mobility across and interaction between the border cities.

Paradoxically, at the same time, there have been aggressive attempts by the U.S. government to better secure the border and to prevent illegal migration. Rosas (2006) discusses the state of what he calls the “thickening borderlands” and tags the U.S. policies in the borderlands as the “militarization of border law enforcement” paraphrasing Dunn and Palafox: the militarization of the police forces has happened through four major Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) boundary regulation operations, such as “Hold the Line” in El Paso, “Gatekeeper” in San Diego, “Lower Rio Grande” in South Texas, and “Safeguard” in Southern Arizona. The aforementioned policing operations placed multitudes of Border Patrol agents along the historical migrant corridors of the border. Rosas further contends that the borderlands policies executed by the North American government have ever since the colonization of the

³⁷ U.S. Department of State fact-sheet on Mexico: <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm>> February 21, 2008.

³⁸ Rosas, Gilberto. “The Thickening Borderlands: Diffused Exceptionality and ‘Immigrant’ Social Struggles during the ‘War on Terror’”. *Cultural Dynamics*, 18(3): 335–349. <<http://cdy.sagepub.com/>> (April 28, 2008) p. 341.

Southwest been oppressive in their “anti-“immigrant” exceptionalism” – meaning that “exceptionality captures the subtle permutation of the state of exception that occurs in the mundane, daily evaluations of racialized, normative citizenship, as well as being subject to militarized forms of governance [...]”, which affect everyone who resemble immigrants from Mexico – including the Mexican Americans who have been living in the borderlands for generations. According to Rosas the process of exceptionalization “originates with small-scale filibusters, imperialist endeavors by typically white adventurers, and the Texas Rangers, an organization with a legacy of violent campaigns in the southwest against native peoples, blacks, and Mexicans.” The consequences for the government’s aggressive militant border policies then result in “an incipient, semi-organized insurgency and broad cultural forms of resistance.”³⁹

To recapitulate, the interdependence of the two nations is far more diverse than the governmental or economical cooperation, but nonetheless it is necessary to know about the U.S. and Mexico’s transnational cooperation to understand the lives of the people habiting the border. It is crucial to know about the physical facts in order to form a geopolitical and socio-economical understanding on the nations’ relations – and comprehend the domestic and transnational attitudes present in the U.S-Mexico borderlands.

3.2 History of Oppression

Anzaldúa describes a borderland as a blurred place that has been created by the emotional remnants of an “unnatural boundary” constantly changing, and she notes how

³⁹ Rosas, Gilberto. “The Thickening Borderlands: Diffused Exceptionality and ‘Immigrant’ Social Struggles during the ‘War on Terror’”. *Cultural Dynamics*. 2006; 18; 335-349. <<http://cdy.sagepub.com>> (February 23, 2008) pp. 338-339.

the people living in the borderlands change along with it: “*Los atravesados*”⁴⁰ live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal”.”⁴¹ Looking back, the United States as a ‘Promised Land’ or as a melting pot of cultures seems now to have been the ‘Land of Empty Promises’ for many. Similarly, it has promoted the “American way” of living and the “American dream” most of the time at the expense of the immigrants and minorities cultural heritage. The country’s manifest destiny has mostly served only the ones holding the power: the members of the dominant white Anglo culture, or those who have become acculturated with it. Furthermore, the nation’s segregated and sectioned history has left diverse groups of minorities searching for an identity as American, as Americans with an ethnic background other than Anglo, struggling to be regarded and acknowledged as members of the American society. This has been the case for people who have been brought to the country against their will, as slaves have, but also for people in the borderlands, who stayed in their homes and birthplaces after the land was annexed to the U.S. Much of the land, which now is part of the Western United States, once belonged to Mexico. Parts of the present-day U.S. states of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Wyoming, as well as the whole of California, Nevada, and Utah were once Mexican land with Mexican people living on it. As Cadaval (1993) maintains:

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.”⁴²

⁴⁰ *Los atravesados* = those who cross over, my translation.

⁴¹ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 25.

⁴² Cadaval, Olivia. “United States-Mexico Borderlands/La Frontera.” *Borders and Identity. Borderlands Festival Program Booklet*, 1993. The Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies, the Borderlands Festival at the 1993 Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. <<http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/bord/intro.html>> March 3, 2008.

Exploitation, conditions of hardship and motivations for revolt are all themes very much present in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Most of them are also the causes for the fragmentation of the borderlands people's identities. The violence was already there in the harsh landscape of borderland deserts, but during and after wartime the violence and later on, the oppression of Mexican Americans heightened as the Anglo impact on the Mexican-American border area became full scale. After the annexation of Texas and the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848 some of the Mexicans left to settle on the Mexican side of the newly formed border, but others stayed. The treaty of Guadalupe contained the Mexican Cession, in which Mexico ceded 1.36 million km² to the United States in exchange for 15 million U.S. dollars. The remaining parts of what are today the states of Arizona and New Mexico were later ceded under the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. The Mexicans who remained in the annexed areas were given American citizenship, but in reality they were not treated as such – as a minority they were at the mercy of the Texas rangers, who terrorized people of Mexican descent. 100 000 Mexican citizens were annexed, along with the territory to the United States, and according to Anzaldúa, soon after their lands were taken from them: “The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it.”⁴³

While the treaty of Guadalupe de Hidalgo contained that Mexican Americans were to be granted citizenship and landowning rights, they had little or nonexistent means to protect themselves, their rights or their land. For the most part they became the poor agricultural minority migrating the borderlands and working for the white landowners. As if to add to the violent history of the border, Anzaldúa furthermore

⁴³ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 29.

writes the threat of death was imminently present in the Southwest: in 1915 Texas rangers lynched some hundred Chicanos in an attempt to silence the resistance movement formed by the Mexican-Americans. Here, describing the terror on the Chicano, Anzaldúa appropriately uses the word *Chicano*, not Mexican or Mexican American. Subsequently seven thousand inhabitants of the Southwest left their ranches and fled to Mexico. She also notes, that in order to prevent an up-rise of an independence movement in the Southwest, the army sent troops of 20 000 men to the region, which finally put an end to the Mexican American social protest movement and began the era of race hatred and segregation in the Southwest.⁴⁴

Socio-economically the specific area Anzaldúa writes from, the Rio Grande⁴⁵ Valley, is today according to Herrera-Sobek (2006) “one of the poorest areas in the United States, having the lowest per capita income, low levels of education, and high levels of unemployment” and was throughout the 1940s and 1950s strictly segregated in terms of racially divided parts of town: “Anglo Americans lived on one side of town, and Mexican Americans and African Americans lived on the other side, in separate sections. The races did not mix socially” and “for Chicano/as the sense of being a foreigner in one’s own land hung thick in the racially sensitive air” even though the Mexicans and Mexican Americans who worked the fields kept the economy going.⁴⁶

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa very much considers the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor in the Southwest. She notes the specific roles of the colonized and the colonizer, and the effects of colonization on the borderlands identity. Again Anzaldúa writes about the violence of the borderlands saying that the Mexican-American borderland is a place where the old Indian culture collides with the

⁴⁴ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Rio Grande is called Rio Bravo in Mexico

⁴⁶ María Herrera-Sobek, “Gloria Anzaldúa: Place, Race, Language, and Sexuality in the Magic Valley”. *PMLA*, Volume 121, Number 1, Jan 2006 (6) <<http://search.ebscohost.com/>> (April 5, 2008) pp. 267-267.

Anglo and through this a third culture, a border culture is formed: “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”⁴⁷ Before the land belonged to the U.S. or Mexico it was inhabited by Native Americans. Similarly to the migrating Mexican American workers, some of the Natives were nomads and some settled down to cultivate the land. In Central-America the Indian cultures of the Mayas and the Aztecs are the one mostly studied. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa strongly identifies with the Aztec and “writes home” to the Aztec mythical home Aztlan that has been traced to the Texan Southwest. Her message is that her people were there before the contact and contamination of the Spanish (Western) culture as well as that of the Anglo. Writing home she attempts to identify herself and others alike to the Indian, and draws from the Aztec images of culture that she finds to envision the Indian in the Chicano and the *mestiza*.

On the first pages of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in the opening chapter called “The Homeland, Aztlán / *El otro Mexico*” Anzaldúa states her Indian ancestry and dates the American Indian history all the way to the first settlers to arrive across the Bering Strait more than 35000 years B.C. She does this as if to say: “my people was here first”. She also notes that in 1000 B.C. the Chicanos’ ancient ancestors, “the direct descendants of the original Cochise people” migrated into Central-America through what is now Mexico and became the forefathers of the Mexican people. In the Southwest, she notes that the Cochise were the cultural parents of the Aztec Indians, and that the Aztecs migrated from Aztlán in 1168 A.D. leaving the Southwest and settling in what is Mexico City today.⁴⁸ She juxtaposes this narration of Indian history by first telling the story of her friend working on a farm and being deported to Guadalajara, Mexico for not speaking English and not carrying his identification with

⁴⁷ *una herida abierta* = an open wound, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 25.

⁴⁸ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 26.

him. He was deported from the U.S. even though he was fifth generation American – he was unable to tell this to the border patrol, which sent him further into Mexico than he had ever been in his life, but he walked back home to the Rio Grande valley.⁴⁹ With the background story of the deportation of her friend the message that the Indian heritage of the Chicano should justify their present-day existence in the Southwest becomes all the more obvious.

According to Meier and Rivera (1985) only few of the thousands of archeological sites have been thoroughly studied and therefore a great deal remains to be learned of the Native peoples of the Americas. They note that of all the ancient aboriginal Indian societies the Mayans reached the highest level of development around 700 A.D. having built their complex society in the Central-America and Yucatan peninsula. Still, as Meier and Rivera contend, already around 500 A.D. the Toltec Indians speaking Nahua (the language Anzaldúa on several occasions refers to in *Borderlands/La Frontera*) had built their own cultural centers north of where now stands Mexico City. The Toltec also worshipped the “benign plumed serpent god, Quetzalcoatl.”⁵⁰ The Indian culture was in other words flourishing.

Furthermore, Meier and Rivera note that the Aztecs, also known as Mexicas, overcame the Toltecs in mid-fourteenth century, and built their island settlement on the Lake Texcoco. Their settlement was to be known as the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán dominating Central-Mexico, and today it is known as Mexico City. Meier and Rivera explain that the Aztec society was violent and hierarchical: it had evolved into a military-oriented state operating a caste system and was lead by an emperor. What is more, the Aztecs had a well-functioning agricultural basis for their society and their culture was spread through both war and trade. The Aztec religious system can be seen

⁴⁹ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 26.

⁵⁰ Meier, Matt. S. and Feliciano Rivera. *The Chicanos, A History of Mexican Americans*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) p. 8.

as the source of the violence – it required sacrificing humans to the male sun god in order to prevent the sun from crashing into the ground and ending the world. The Aztecs succeeded in managing their empire of several large cities by utilizing their social, political and military system – according to Meier and Rivera they were “highly successful in synthesizing elements from the many peoples they conquered.”⁵¹

Anzaldúa proceeds further into the first chapter writing her interpretation of the Native American history, and at the same time describes the birth of the *mestiza* in the invasion of Mexico by the Spaniards. The Indian cultures were conquered early in the 16th century by the Spanish conquistadors, after the arrival of the Spanish Hernán Cortéz and his army in 1519. The rest of Mexico was taken over in the subsequent years, with weapons and diseases unknown to the Indians⁵². Meier and Rivera contend that the indigenous Mexicans still upheld their identity and culture for the most part, and the *mestizaje* process of blending the Spanish and Indian blood, as well as Catholic religion and cultural heritage, was commenced along with the colonization of Mexico. They also note that the mestizo held higher positions in society – the great-granddaughter of the Aztec emperor Montezuma married the first governor of the province of Nuevo México⁵³. The land was called New Spain and in the later period of colonization came to be composed of the colonies of Nueva California, Nueco México, Vieja California, Sonora, Durango and San Luis Potosí.⁵⁴ The period of Spanish colonization lasted almost 300 years, until year 1810 Father Miguel Hidalgo declared independence from Spain, beginning a struggle for self-government that lasted ten years. The subsequent Mexican war for independence placed in power General Antonio

⁵¹ Meier, Matt. S. and Feliciano Rivera. *The Chicanos, A History of Mexican Americans*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) p. 9.

⁵² *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 27.

⁵³ Meier, Matt. S. and Feliciano Rivera. *The Chicanos, A History of Mexican Americans*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) p. 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 18

Lopez de Santa Ana, who dominated Mexican politics from 1833 to 1855. A treaty was made between Mexico and Spain in 1821, stating that Mexico is an independent constitutional monarchy. Still, the land became a republic in 1824.⁵⁵

The land's history is quite turbulent. During Benito Juarez' two presidential terms between 1858 and 1871 both democratic and economic reforms were tried out in Mexico, but the invasion of the French in 1863 imposed a monarchy on the country, and placed an European archduke in power as emperor. In 1867 Juarez returned to power as president after the overthrowing of the emperor. More turbulence followed, as the country's socio-economic problems resulted in a revolution from 1910 to 1920 – the revolution's outcome was the 1917 constitution and people such as Venustiano Carranza, Pancho Villa, Alvaro Obregon, Victoriano Huerta and Emiliano Zapata competed for political power. According to the U.S. Department of State fact-sheet on the Mexican government's history: "the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was formed in 1929 under a different name, emerged from the chaos of revolution as a vehicle for keeping political competition among a coalition of interests in peaceful channels." Since then, the next 71 years Mexico's national government was controlled by the party, winning every presidential election held until July 2000 when Vicente Fox Quesada, a representative of the National Action Party (PAN), won presidency "in what were widely considered at the time the freest and fairest elections in Mexico's history." After President Fox finished his presidential term in 2006, Felipe Calderon assumed presidency.⁵⁶

To sum up, the Mexican history has its roots deep in the indigenous Indian heritage and the *mestizaje* process. The country has suffered from its violent and tumultuous past being the ground for competing powers and ideologies. The colonial

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State fact-sheet on Mexico: <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm>> April 22, 2008.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

clash of several cultures has certainly had negative impacts on Mexico, even though the corruption and violence has somewhat diminished during the 20th century. Still, there is a constant influx of people migrating from Mexico, legally or illegally, up north in the search of a better income and standard of living, resulting in more borderland people.

4. Spiritual Borderlands

4.1 Religion

The Spanish brought along them the doctrines of Christianity and the Catholic Church, which aptly blended with the indigenous religions of Mexico. According to Anzaldúa, in the Indian religious beliefs the feminine deities hold a strong foothold. The Toltec worship of *Tonantzin*, the Aztec worship of *Quetzalcoatl* and the Spanish worship of the *Virgin Mary* have all contributed to what is today known as the cult of *La Virgen Santa Maria of Guadalupe*, or the *Virgin of Guadalupe*⁵⁷, who in different contexts has been used to serve various purposes. For the Mexican, and the Chicano, she serves as a unifying figure of identification. As Andersson (2001) notes, Cornell's and Hartman's constructionist theory of identity formation can be applied to the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, where, in order to achieve a feeling of identity or identities, "people rely on historical events or redefine the past and social and ethnic boundaries."⁵⁸ This is what Anzaldúa is working on in *Borderlands/La Frontera* when she redefines the histories of the Indian, Mexican-American and the *mestiza*.

Furthermore, Andersson maintains that the Virgin of Guadalupe as a religious symbol has "relational dimensions", can be "fabricated to 'fit' certain circumstances" and is a "polytropic symbol, changing and transforming herself into different topical types in a given context."⁵⁹ Anzaldúa refers to *La Virgen* and her "predecessors", *Tonantzin* and *Coatlalopeuh* numerous times throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*. She notes a pre-Columbian form of oppression, when she maintains that the patriarchal

⁵⁷ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 47-61.

⁵⁸ Cornell and Hartman, 1998, p. 101 quoted in Andersson, Daniel. *The Virgin and the Dead: The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Day of the Dead in the Construction of Mexican Identities*. (Göteborg: Göteborg University, 2001) p. 76.

⁵⁹ Andersson, Daniel. *The Virgin and the Dead: The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Day of the Dead in the Construction of Mexican Identities*. (Göteborg: Göteborg University, 2001) pp. 76-77.

Aztec-Mexica culture abolished the worship of the Mesoamerican Earth goddesses of fertility by naming them with monstrous attributes as the goddesses of destruction.⁶⁰

Moreover, by splitting into good and bad the female serpent deity called *Coatlalopeuh* (or She Who Has Dominion Over Serpents) the dominated Aztec society removed from her the authority as the creator of celestial deities, and by placing the female deities by male versions, the Aztec also split the female Self thereby leaving her, the female Indian disempowered in the Aztec society. Furthermore, the Spanish continued the procedure after conquering the Aztec-ruled Mexico in 1521. With them they brought the Catholic religion, which soon mixed with the pagan religions. Anzaldúa says that the Spanish continued the fragmentation of the female deities and de-sexed *Coatlalopeuh* by removing from her the serpent that symbolizes sexuality and assigning the virgin/whore –dichotomy into the goddesses. Therefore, in order to empower and restore the female aspect of the Chicanas, Anzaldúa symbolically writes about the “entering Into the Serpent” in chapter three of *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

Anzaldúa calls the Chicanos’ practice of Catholicism “folk Catholicism with many pagan elements” and, according to her, the religion many Chicanos practice today has absorbed characteristics from the ancient Indian religions and folklore as well as the Catholic beliefs even though the Spanish tried to make all the Native American deities and practices appear as heresy.⁶¹ Anzaldúa accounts for the spread of la Virgen de Guadalupe cult and the agreement the Roman Catholic church made in 1660 stating that la Virgen de Guadalupe equals Virgin Mary, and, furthermore, notes how the Mexicans assigned her as their patron, although most patron gods had been male, making her the defender of the Mexican people and the symbol used in events such as the Mexican Revolution. According to Anzaldúa la Virgen de Guadalupe is the most dominant

⁶⁰ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

symbol in today's political, religious and cultural imagery Chicanos share, because she fuses together the different aspects of the Chicano/*mexicano* identities – that of the Indian, the *mestizo*, the conquered but not yet totally defeated, serving as a “symbol of ethnic identity and of tolerance for ambiguity that Chicanos-*mexicanos*, people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures, by necessity possess.”⁶² As Andersson notes, another Chicana writer, Sandra Cisneros sees the Guadalupe cult firstly in terms of female sexuality: for her the Virgen of Guadalupe is “God, brown-skinned like a Chicana woman, a woman who acknowledged her own body, despite all the rules in the male society.”⁶³ Andersson continues that Cisneros aim is to eliminate differences between Latinas and white women by reading the Virgen cult in a new way.⁶⁴ Both Anzaldúa's and Cisneros writing calls for the empowerment of the (colored) woman and her triumph over the religious male rule in a strongly feminist manner, and yet they do not abandon religion altogether: they attempt to employ its feminine aspects to oppose the subjugation and shaming of the “guilt-laden” female image.

4.2 Tensions inside the Patriarchal Society

In accordance to feminist ideas of revealing and thus confronting the structures of the male-dominated society, Anzaldúa outlines the Mexican American society's patriarchal structure. Anzaldúa explains her feminist interpretation of both society and cultural identity as man-made constructs in *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as

⁶² *Borderlands/La Frontera*, pp. 51-52.

⁶³ Cisneros, Sandra, 1996, pp. 46-51, in Andersson, Daniel. *The Virgin and the Dead: The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Day of the Dead in the Construction of Mexican Identities*. (Göteborg: Göteborg University Press, 2001) p. 134-135.

⁶⁴ Andersson, Daniel. *The Virgin and the Dead: The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Day of the Dead in the Construction of Mexican Identities*. (Göteborg: Göteborg University Press, 2001) p. 135.

unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws, women transmit them. . . The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*⁶⁵.

The fate for women in the American society is thus to be subjugated into agents working to further the male regime. In this sense, the society *has* been built by both men and women, but at men's *terms*. Anzaldúa maintains that the construction of the Chicana female identity starts early on in the childhood, when mothers transfer the society's value system and sets of rules to their children. She notes how the women in her community offer confusing attributes on men – at times they claim that men are not to be trusted, at times they state that men have to be obeyed and sometimes the women even regard the men as selfish or child-like.⁶⁶

Indeed, the position of the woman in the Mexican American society, according to Anzaldúa, is strictly limited. Anzaldúa describes the society's patronage in the way the (man-made) culture keeps women in strictly predefined roles: in the past there used to be only three ways of being a woman in the Mexican-American society. The *mexicana* could stay home as the mother, walk the streets as a whore or dedicate her life to the church as a nun. The last of option of being a nun was the only way to avoid marriage and motherhood – it also entailed not having to explain your choices of not wanting to get married and/or have children. To summarize, the patriarchal system questions and disables women's existence as anything other than one of the three, leaving little space for self-rule for the female. According to Anzaldúa, at the time *Borderlands/La Frontera* was written the women's situation had improved somewhat, although all Chicanos were still not able to educate their children properly. There

⁶⁵ *Mujer mala* = a bad woman, my translation. *Borderlands/La Frontera*, pp. 38-39

⁶⁶ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 39

remained a fourth way of existence for women: becoming independent through education and career, but: “educated or not, the onus is still on woman to be wife/mother”⁶⁷ and if they do not fulfill the society’s expectations, the women are made to feel as if they have failed. Bates et al. (2005) confirm this attitude toward educated women, saying that they can be found to be elitist by the Latino men, and seen as competitive threat the work life and society⁶⁸. What is more, Anzaldúa argues that in addition to being made subservient to men, women invoke fear in the Chicano men. She relates the idea back to the Christian concepts of carnal sin and women as supernatural and superhuman – in the Latino world women are seen as undivine objects capable of reproduction, thereby they are in the need of protection from themselves. In the previous chapter I discussed her concepts on how religion has by maintaining a strict division of gender roles in the society, aided in the *othering* of the female subject and left the women in the position of a stranger in the society.⁶⁹

In addition to the patriarchal oppression of women, shame has pivotally contributed to the split personalities of the border people, who have endured the Anglo oppression for decades. According to Anzaldúa, shame is one of the key elements in the borderlands identity. Anzaldúa describes the deep sense of collective racial shame inside the Chicano community in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and quotes Gershen Kaufman to illustrate her point: “Shame is a wound felt from the inside, dividing us both from ourselves and from one another.”⁷⁰ Anzaldúa discusses the colonial origins of racial shame, and shifts from her usual female point of view to that of the male, when she depicts the Chicano men’s situation:

⁶⁷ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 39.

⁶⁸ Bates, Ülkü Ü. et al. *Women’s Realities, Women’s Choices, An Introduction to Women’s Studies*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 125.

⁶⁹ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

The Anglo, feeling inadequate and inferior and powerless, displaces or transfers these feelings to the Chicano by shaming him. In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from a sense of excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation. Around Latinos he suffers from a sense of language inadequacy and its accompanying discomfort; with Native Americans he suffers from a racial amnesia which ignores our common blood, and from guilt because the Spanish part of him took their land and oppressed them. He has an excessive compensatory hubris when around Mexicans from the other side. It overlays a deep sense of racial shame.⁷¹

Anzaldúa discusses the concept of *machismo* in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and claims that the Chicano men's feelings of inadequacy and loss of dignity are due to loss of respect in the *macho*. Thus false *machismo* as an adjustment to the environment's domination and poverty is created. According to Anzaldúa the Chicano men suffer from excessive feelings of shame and have a sense of hubris around the Anglo *and* around Mexicans from the other side of the border. She further explains that these feelings result in Chicano men's abusive and brutal behavior toward women, as well as abusing substances. Still, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* it is obvious that Anzaldúa considers men in general and Anglo men in particular to be blamed for the inequalities among the (Mexican) American society. Torres (2003) points out how the process of shaming evidently leads to "horizontal hostility" among the oppressed ethnic group, leaving the Mexican American calling each other the names with which the white have insulted them – the continuous process of shaming evidently leads to an inability to act at all.⁷² Anzaldúa describes the process in "La Prieta" and explains how the Chicano started to treat each other in the same way they were treated by the Anglo:

Guilt lay folded in the tortilla. The Anglo kids laughing – calling us "tortilleros", the Mexican kids taking up the word and using it as a club with which to hit each other. My brothers, sister and I started bringing

⁷¹ *Borderlands/La Frontera*. p. 105.

⁷² Torres, Edén E. *Chicana Without Apology/ Chicana sin vergüenza: The New Chicana Cultural Studies*. (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 31.

white bread sandwiches to school. After a while we stopped taking our lunches altogether.⁷³

The tensions inside the Chicano community can be seen to have resulted from issues due to colonialism. The American colonization or rather, the acculturation of the Mexican Texan minority did result in the minority's resistance against the colonizer. Still, Mexican Americans like many colonized minority cultures, subsumed some of the ideas and ways of thinking from the dominant culture. Similarly, she found that the colonization had to reach a new phase in which the colonized embraced the nominators they once were made to be ashamed of, otherwise the tensions would increase inside the community and the Chicano would continue to suffer:

We need to cultivate other ways of coping. I'd like to think that the in-fighting that we presently find ourselves doing is only a stage in the continuum of our growth, an offshoot of the conflict that the process of biculturalization spawns, a phase in the internal colonization process, one that will soon cease to hold sway over our lives. I'd like to see it as a skin we will shed as we are born into the 21st century.⁷⁴

To escape the oppressive thought-patterns of both the dominant and the dominated culture, as well as the stigmata of being a member of a minority of any sort, Anzaldúa felt she had to formulate a third way of being, a hybrid way of existence. Anzaldúa's recreation of the *mestiza* is meant to work against the hegemonic structures of the dominant culture that are limiting individuality and imposing stereotypes based on race, gender, nationality, or sexual orientation, but it is also intended to work against the patriarchal structures that are present inside the Chicano community. How do you survive the borderlands, then, when you are constantly struggling to locate and maintain your identity, in the whirlwind of different cultures?

⁷³ "La Prieta" in Anzaldúa, Gloria and Cherríe Moraga (Eds). *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) p. 201.

⁷⁴ Anzaldúa, Gloria (ed.) *Making Face, Making Soul – Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990) pp. 147-148.

5. How to Survive the Borderlands

5.1 Construction of an Identity and the Creative Process

In terms of surviving the borderlands spiritually and restoring the values of the Native Americans, Anzaldúa's reconstruction of the *mestiza* identity is quite similar in its structure to Native American cosmology. Cáliz-Montoro describes the fundamentals of Aboriginal cosmology present in the Native American ideas on spirituality in her book called *Writing from the Borderlands – A Study of Chicano, Afro-Caribbean and Native Literatures in North America* from 2000. Cáliz-Montoro covers the Aboriginal ideas on microcosm and macrocosm as she explains the concept of the spiritual path of life⁷⁵ as a combination of two circles. The inner circle of the cosmos constitutes for the “microcosm of bodymind, of self which is the source of all awareness and life”. The inner circle or microcosm is connected to an outer circle, the macrocosm, which is the “infinite bodymind of the universe and the fully expanded individual on the spiritual path.” There are four quadrants in-between the inner and outer circles, which represent the “natural movements, energies, qualities, and understanding that operate and affect both the microcosm and the macrocosm.”⁷⁶

Cáliz-Montoro goes on to describe the four quadrants as the four universal principles that form the circle of the Spirit: in the first universal principle is understanding that every being and thing in the universe is one, and with this realization comes along the sense of interconnectedness, responsibility and compassion for other people and nature. The world is seen as sacred and spiritual, rather than as material

⁷⁵ The definition of the spiritual path of life was according to Cáliz-Montoro first presented by Peter Gold in *Navajo & Tibetan Sacred Wisdom. The Circle of the Spirit*. (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1994)

⁷⁶ Cáliz-Montoro, Carmen. *Writing from the Borderlands – A Study of Chicano, Afro-Caribbean and Native Literatures in North America*. (Toronto, TSAR Publications, 2000) pp. 138-139.

place. Spiritual understanding is followed by a sense of belonging – a sense of place is achieved through identifying with other elements in the universe. Cáliz-Montoro uses the poems of Arthur Solomon, a half Canadian-French-half Ojibway Indian, to demonstrate the Native idea of healing and harmony. In his poem *Healing Ourselves* Solomon describes what makes up the division between the Indian and the Anglo:

What differentiates us from them is a difference in philosophy.
One is based on the false principle of materialism.
The other is based on the principle of the beauty,
the sacredness,
the harmony and the balance of the creation within which
we were to live.⁷⁷

Similarly to Solomon, Anzaldúa deals with the exact same division of cultures and worlds, constituting to the dichotomies of the Westernized society. Anzaldúa does not feel she fits in the Western, material world that is shaming her Indianness and neither in the half-Anglo-aculturated world of Chicanos, shaming her for being a radical lesbian of color. The *mestizaje* process equals her way of healing herself through writing. According to Anzaldúa the process of writing is something that is painful but yet a necessity: “You have to destroy, to tear down, in order to put together and rebuild. That’s why writing has saved our lives, because it makes sense out of this chaos.”⁷⁸

Ivanič (1998) contends that writing as a an activity is affected by our life-stories and experiences – she notes that there is nothing neutral about the act of writing, as each written word portrays an encounter or even a struggle, made in discourse with past experiences as well as new contexts. Even though writing is learned as a physical

⁷⁷ Solomon, Arthur, *Healing Ourselves* in Cáliz-Montoro, Carmen. *Writing from the Borderlands – A Study of Chicano, Afro-Caribbean and Native Literatures in North America*. (Toronto, TSAR Publications, 2000) p. 131.

⁷⁸ Keating, AnaLouise, ed. *Interviews/Entrevistas / Gloria E. Anzaldúa*. New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 226.

skill, it “implicates every fibre of the writer’s multifaceted being.”⁷⁹ This is very much in-tune with Anzaldúa’s attitude towards writing. Growing up and reaching adulthood the creative process gave Anzaldúa the much needed clarity, self-recognition and order to the environment of disorder and confusion in which she lived all her life. Moreover, it gave her compensation for and provided a form of escapism from the inadequacies of the ordinary life. Books provided her an escape from the limiting everyday life on the ranch. She describes how she used to listen to the *cuentos* her grandmother told and how she herself made up stories for her little sister before they would go to sleep – then she also decided to become a writer: “It must have been then that I decided to put stories on paper. It must have been then that working with images and writing became connected to night.”⁸⁰ For Anzaldúa, reading and writing was also a way to access the world outside the working class Mexican American home.

Writing is above all a spiritual act, or a journey into the self to Anzaldúa, and it is a trip of continuous transforming and shape-shifting: “When I write it feels like I’m carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart – a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act [...] It is always a path/state to something else.”⁸¹ She further explains the feeling she gets from writing as something that is first taking her apart inside out, and it is only after this that she can put into order and express the experience that is being worked upon. Through the creative process, which in Anzaldúa’s case is first deconstructive and then reconstructive, she as a borderlands inhabitant finds the sense of self that has been lost in the course of centuries’ oppression. In the process she also finds the Indian qualities of spirituality in her:

Like many Indians and Mexicans, I did not deem my psychic experiences real. I denied their occurrences and let my inner senses

⁷⁹ Ivanič, Roz. *Writing and Identity, the Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1998) p. 181.

⁸⁰ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 87.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 95.

atrophy. I allowed white rationality to tell me that the existence of the “other world” was mere pagan superstition. I accepted their reality, the “official” reality of the rational, reasoning mode which is connected with external reality, the upper world, and is considered the most developed consciousness – the consciousness of duality.⁸²

The second universal principle of the Aboriginal cosmology discussed by Calíz-Montoro includes the universality of rebirth and regeneration, in other words the symbol of the Tree of Life, which necessitates respect, love and justice among people and nature. The second principle ensures growth, creation and expansion in the universe, and denies destruction and stagnation. Here is where Anzaldúa in her creation of the new consciousness in *Borderlands/La Frontera* tries to go, but perhaps due to the crippling effects of the oppression the author herself has gone through, her rage and anger for the oppressive male dominance does not leave room for all-embracing respect, love and justice. Even though these are things she clearly calls for, for the unification of the *india*, the Chicana and the *mestiza*, but from a vengeful point of view this is to happen at the expense of the Anglo – in *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa continuously excludes the white from the unity and at the same time, from the process of healing.

In the Aboriginal cosmology the third universal principle is finding the ways and trajectories in which the outer and inner cosmos interact. In other words trying to understand the immediate surroundings that connect with the vaster configuration of the universe. There is a constant variation in the way energy and insight shift and affect our relationship with the cosmos. The principle includes the dual nature of the “two-in-one unities’ such as real and ideal and ordinary and extraordinary”, which in other words does not consist of anything that is binary or exclusive, but something that possesses two or more nominators only seemingly opposite but which are in fact one. The unity

⁸² *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 58-59.

merely has different sides to it, rarely showing simultaneously. Should there be a gap in between the outer world of creation and the inner “ideal” world, the effect on a person would be ‘dis-ease’ – “centering” of the self is then needed in order to heal the ill. According to Cáliz-Montoro this is shown in the Native American communities when a person acts towards himself or the community in a destructive manner is being treated as someone in immediate need for help. The community offers help to the individual in the form of attention and integration⁸³: whereas the Native would send the person to a sweat-lodge to mentally center themselves and face the spirits that menace them, the Western society would exclude the person from the community and send them to prison.

Again, similarly in *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa describes the creative process as part of her artistic Indian identity as not being split from the functional or secular life. And yet again she contrasts the Western ideas against that of the Indians – of art as a higher aesthetic contrasted with art as everyday. For the Indian in her, art has shamanistic tendencies and as a writer she is a shaman, a shape-shifter and *nahual*. She calls the ethnocentrism performed by Western aesthetics that have robbed the Indian masks from their natural habitats – shrines and homes, and copied the methods and art of tribal cultures calling them by different names, such as cubism or symbolism. She calls for an end of this kind of spiritual rip-off as well as domination:

Let’s all stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent. White America has only attended to the body of the earth in order to exploit it, never to succor it or be nurtured by it. Instead of surreptitiously ripping off the vital energy of the people of color and putting it to commercial use, whites could allow themselves to share and exchange and learn from us in a respectful way.⁸⁴

⁸³ Cáliz-Montoro, Carmen. *Writing from the Borderlands – A Study of Chicano, Afro-Caribbean and Native Literatures in North America*. (Toronto, TSAR Publications, 2000) pp. 142.

⁸⁴ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 88.

The Aboriginal cosmology, as Cáliz-Montoro explains, includes a fourth universal principle that is the ultimate rite of transformation, which refers to the transformation of oneself, not the surroundings around us. Through the spiritual transformation the self can reach a higher level of psycho-physical being, through the spiritual path.⁸⁵ All in all, every one of the four principles of Aboriginal cosmology is interconnected and affect, as noted before, both the microcosm and the macrocosm. All the seemingly fragmented events in everyday life, the historical events and the interweaved poetry depicted in *Borderlands/La Frontera* can be seen to reflect the inner struggle towards the identification of the self, the birth of the *new mestiza*. It is through the creative process that Anzaldúa survives and surfaces victorious over all the hardship she has endured in the mental and physical borderlands. The creative process resembles to a great deal the Aboriginal *centering* and entering the spiritual. For Anzaldúa this happens through crossing the border of consciousness into a state of shamanic trance and in the state of trance the person is able to experience different shifts or stages:

Thought shifts, reality shifts, gender shifts: one person metamorphoses into another in a world where people fly through the air, heal from the mortal wounds. I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world's soul, I am the dialogue between myself and el espíritu del mundo. I change myself, I change the world.⁸⁶

Anzaldúa says she has survived the society's oppression and racism solely with the help of the creative process:

Writing is partly cathartic. In talking about certain experiences I have to go back into the wound, and it hurts! But every time I do it, it hurts less; the wound starts to heal because I have exposed it. So for me writing is a way of making sense of my realities. It's also a way of healing my wounds and helping other heal theirs.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Cáliz-Montoro, Carmen. *Writing from the Borderlands – A Study of Chicano, Afro-Caribbean and Native Literatures in North America*. (Toronto, TSAR Publications, 2000) p. 143.

⁸⁶ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 92.

⁸⁷ Keating, AnaLouise, ed. *Interviews/Entrevistas / Gloria E. Anzaldúa*. New York: Routledge, 2000) pp. 248-249.

When the Europeans colonized the land of the Indian, they simultaneously colonized their culture, religion, history and cultural traditions. An auto-historia, or testimonial (testimonio) can be regarded as political writing of resistance, particular to minority literatures in post-colonial societies, that reinstates the legitimacy of the minority. Moreover, *Borderlands/La Frontera* can be seen to possess the basic characteristics of a testimonial or *testimonio*. According to Sommer (1999) testimonials are typically first-person non-fiction narratives that are commonly used in Latin American literature. She states that by nature *testimonios* are “juridical and broadly political because the speaker “testifies” against abuses suffered by a class or a community”.⁸⁸ Anzaldúa certainly testifies for the colonized and against the predominant Anglo environment.

5.2 Language Tactics

The most fundamental function for which any language is used is that of self-expression and self-definition. Alongside basic communication language provides the means for artful self-expression, something that creates the notion of *literature* in a piece of written text. Literature, then, is inherently part of culture. The relationship between culture and language is reciprocal, meaning that a culture is shaped by a language it has formed, and a language is formed by a culture and its members, i.e. the speakers of the language. Hence, the nature of a language includes the idea of never reaching a point of stagnation. Deleuze and Guattari (1986) discuss Kafka’s mixing of Yiddish and Czech in his texts, which he wrote in German language in Czechoslovakia, and note that this

⁸⁸ Sommer, Doris. *Proceed With Caution When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 117.

new way of (borderlands) expression offers him a linguistic fluidity. That then provides him with the chance of invention.⁸⁹

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa blends together languages and uses several variations of English and Spanish. Linguistic resistance of the hegemony is dealt with especially in one of the essays *Borderlands/La Frontera* called “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”. She explains thoroughly, how the American society strips the Chicano from their own language and means of full self-expression by denying them their language. Speakers of Spanish are looked at scornfully: children cannot use their mother tongue in school and English is the preferred language of the work place. Generations do not understand each other anymore, as the children do not speak Spanish and the older generation does not speak English. A loss of the common cultural heritage takes place, when generations are unable to communicate between them. Still, Spanish has persisted among the Chicano community, although it has gone through variation and change categorical to borderland languages. As Anzaldúa maintains, the only way to tame a wild (indigenous) tongue is to cut it off. She lists “some” of the languages “we speak” as: Standard English, working class and slang English, Standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish Dialect, Chicano Spanish with regional variations in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, Tex-Mex and *Pachuco* (called *caló*).⁹⁰ Herrera-Sobek gives some examples of Chicano Spanish, stating that it is composed of Standard Spanish, Standard English, nonstandard Spanish, as well as nonstandard English, with words incorporated from the Indian language of Nahuatl, such as “*tomatl* (*tomate*; tomato), *metlatl* (*metate*; grinding stone), *coyotl* (*coyote*; coyote), *cacahuatl* (*cacahuate*; peanut), *zacatl* (*zacate*; grass), *xocolatl* (*chocolate*; chocolate), *chilli* (*chile*;

⁸⁹ Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) p. 20.

⁹⁰ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 77.

hot pepper), and numerous others, particularly names of fruits and vegetables not native to Europe and the other continents.”⁹¹

Mixing the minority language with the dominant language of the society has had the strongest effect of truly forcing a discourse between the cultures, as Leal and Barrón (1982) note, linking this type of literary means with poetry written by Chicano poets, such as José Montoya:

When I remember the campos /
Y las noches and the sounds /
Of those nights en carpas o /
Vagones I remember my jefita's /
Palote /
Clik-clok; clik-clak-clok /
Y su tosecita / (I swear, she never slept!)⁹²

The example clearly shows how the Spanish and English infuse into a valid and effective way to express the world as it is seen simultaneously through those languages. Furthermore, Leal and Barrón denote that a fair knowledge of Spanish is often needed in order to fully understand the poetry of Chicanos⁹³ – a statement reinforcing the idea of culture and language entailed as one symbiotic entity. The latter half of *Borderlands/La Frontera* is composed of several poems written in the similar manner of expression as Montoya's poem. "To live in the borderlands means you"⁹⁴ perhaps best serves to illustrate the *concentrated* essence of the borderlands identity:

⁹¹ Herrera-Sobek, Maria. "Gloria Anzaldúa: Place, Race, Language, and Sexuality in the Magic Valley". (267) PMLA, Volume 121, Number 1, Jan 2006, pp. 266–271
<<http://search.ebscohost.com/>> (April 22, 2008) p. 268

⁹² Poem by Montoya, José: *El Espejo*, in Luis Leal and Pepe Barron. "Chicano Literature: An Overview," in *Three American Literatures: Essays in Chicano, Native American, and Asian-American Literature for Teachers of American Literature*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1982) p. 188.

⁹³ Luis Leal and Pepe Barron. "Chicano Literature: An Overview," in *Three American Literatures: Essays in Chicano, Native American, and Asian-American Literature for Teachers of American Literature*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1982) p. 27.

⁹⁴ *Borderlands/La Frontera* pp. 216-217.

To live in the Borderlands means you
are neither *hispana india negra española*
*ni gabacha*⁹⁵, *eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;

To live in the Borderlands means knowing
that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,
is no longer speaking to you,
that *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*⁹⁶,
that denying the Anglo inside you
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

Cuando vives en la frontera
people walk through you, wind steals your voice,
you're a *burra*⁹⁷, *buey*⁹⁸, scapegoat,
forerunner of a new race,
half and half – both woman and man, neither –
a new gender;

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;

Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to
resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle,
the pull of the gun barrel,
the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;

In the Borderlands
you are the battleground
where enemies are kin to each other;
you are at home, a stranger,
the border disputes have been settled
the volley of shots have shattered the truce
you are wounded, lost in action
dead, fighting back;

To live in the Borderlands means
the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off
your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart

⁹⁵ *gabacha* = a Chicano term for a white woman

⁹⁶ *rajetas* = literally, "split," that is, having betrayed your word

⁹⁷ *burra* = donkey

⁹⁸ *buey* = oxen

pound you pinch you roll you out
smelling like white bread but dead;

To survive in the Borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*⁹⁹
be a crossroads.

In fact, the poem's structure is similar to the montage-type of writing Anzaldúa uses throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, not to mention its testimonial character. In addition, the poem is thematically concurrent to the themes in Anzaldúa's essays, as can be seen in the "writing home" to the Indian in the Chicano in the second verse. The use of Spanish and English portray her idea of the bi- or multilingual borderland identity that has the ethnic background of many nominators (line 1). The struggle and the battle and the "volley of shots", in other words the violent oppression of the borderland, have left "you", the Chicano, wounded and in need of reconstruction. The healing comes in the form of a new, cross-roads-like manner of existence – of course, the *new mestiza*. Anzaldúa's style in "To live in the borderlands means you" is so straightforward that it does not leave much room for a "close" analysis, making the poem an almost self-explanatory testimony of life in the borderlands.

5.3 Identifying the Self and Transcending Duality

By clearly stating that the listed languages are the languages and language barriers of the borderlands, and by resisting the domination of English in her self-expression, Anzaldúa not only points out the depreciatory attitudes towards Chicano English and towards its speakers, but she also creates an analogous situation for the reader, with which she herself and other Chicanos have had to deal all their lives. She transfers the

⁹⁹ *sin fronteras* = without borders (all translations in the poem by Anzaldúa)

frustration and irritation of the language barrier and of the sense of not being able to understand fully what is being communicated. A reader who does not understand Spanish or Chicano English is thus not able to understand the full meaning of the messages *Borderlands/La Frontera* sends out. Similarly, this is another means of contrasting the Anglo impact and the “indigenous” culture of the Mexican American – implying the difficulties in communication in the United States where non-English speakers are shunned and punished, in schools, in workplaces, in the academia. Language, then, is an essential means for Anzaldúa to further mediate the barriers and discrimination the border people face.

Deleuze and Guattari (1986) list three characteristics of a minor literature; in it everything about it is political, everything assumes a collective value and “in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization.” To elaborate, Deleuze and Guattari contrast the minor and major literatures, where in the major literature the environment serves as a mere background setting when the attention is on the individual protagonist’s needs and opinions, whereas in a minor literature the space is overcrowded with political connotations that gather up political agenda. What is collective about a minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is that in it “what each author says individually already constitutes a common action”, thereby contributing to a collective, national consciousness with its politicality. Thirdly, a minor literature is a literature built inside a major language by a minority, and therefore it is *constructed* by nature.¹⁰⁰ To put it simply, a minor literature has a politically charged agenda with which it is trying to saturate the minority with resistance. Quintessential is the deterritorialization of the “master” language and literature.

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) pp.16-17.

In the fifth essay of *Borderlands/La Frontera* called “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” Anzaldúa describes the meaning of language as a means of identity formation. In this essay she also uses to some extent the idea of self-definition through exclusion: saying what you are by stating what you are not. In this kind of naming oneself the basic binary oppositions can be used as a starting point, but they soon will prove to be inadequate; in a multicultural and multi-layered society it does not suffice to define the self merely on the basis of gender or race or religion or sexual orientation. First it needs to be stated, what exactly is being defined, that is, the appropriate vocabulary for self-definition needs to be sought. *What* do you call yourself, *who* do you allow to define yourself and most importantly, *why* do you define yourself and to what ends? In the case of being aware of one’s heritage and culture, it is just as important, what language is used in the definition of the *self*.

Anzaldúa calls Chicano Spanish a border tongue that has developed naturally in the borderlands, and argues at the same time, that it is called a deficient and mutilated form of Spanish by the linguistic purists and by most Latinos. Herrera-Sobek (2006) agrees and notes how Chicano Spanish has “creatively transformed” English into Spanish by, among other things, adding verbs to the (nonstandard) Spanish lexicon. Herrera-Sobek also condemns as ignorant people, who call the Chicano language with derogatory terms such as “gutter” or “pig” Spanish, and maintains that “there is nothing mysterious about Chicano Spanish. Any linguist knows the process of language change when two languages are in contact.”¹⁰¹

When deprived of a legitimate language the Chicano have to sort to other means of expressing themselves by verbal communication – they have to choose a variant of Spanish that is considered appropriate by the society. Anzaldúa calls the

¹⁰¹ María Herrera-Sobek, “Gloria Anzaldúa: Place, Race, Language, and Sexuality in the Magic Valley”. *PMLA*, Volume 121, Number 1, Jan 2006 <<http://search.ebscohost.com/>> (April 5, 2008) pp. 268-269.

hegemonious society's attack on the language of the Chicano a violation the First Amendment of the American Constitution.¹⁰² For Anzaldúa language is something basically human and intrinsically linked with the concept of identity and self-expression of people of color: "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language"¹⁰³ Nevertheless, because the position of the Chicano between the Anglo-American cultural values and those of Mexican is still obscure and so is the case with their language, "the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of orders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place". This "integration" would imply the restoration of the Chicano identity into the identity of the *new mestiza*, since they are a "synergy of two cultures", who possess degrees of identification and acculturation with both cultural spheres.¹⁰⁴ As a *mestiza* Anzaldúa is neither male nor female, heterosexual or gay, Indian or Spanish, but everything and everywhere – left without recognition for her gender or race, as well as with no validation for her sexual orientation, she creates an identity unprecedented for herself and others alike:

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am everywoman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; yet I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture [...]¹⁰⁵

Scholl (2001) discusses hybrid narratives and intersections in identities especially in terms of queer people of color and argues that their identities cannot be enclosed under any particular category and therefore they cannot be separately analyzed first in terms of their race, then their ethnicity, then their sexual identities but through understanding the

¹⁰² *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 77.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

“particular ways all these identities *intersect* and are negotiated.” After this understanding we start to realize the evident complexity of identities in general.¹⁰⁶ Anzaldúa is negotiating the *mestiza* identity, but she does it inside her Self, and inside *Borderlands/La Frontera* – no one from outside is called to take part as an opposite party in the negotiation but as mere listeners as she is in discourse with her Self and her text.

Throughout her work Anzaldúa calls for the cooperation of different oppressed groups: the gay, the subjugated women of color and ethnic minorities in general. Her social criticism is mostly based on empowering the margin through the *mestiza* identity and especially in terms of race and gender, but also in terms of queerness. Anzaldúa strongly relies on the power her writing as a force capable of reforming the structures of the society, and defines her task as a feminist writer in “La Prieta”: “I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover: “The rational, the patriarchal and the heterosexual have held sway and legal tender for too long. Third world women, lesbians, feminists and feminist-oriented men of all colors are banding and bonding together to right that balance. Only together can we be a force.”¹⁰⁸

The language as well as the identity of the border people presents itself to Anzaldúa as a synergetic combination of different variations of languages and influences of cultures, which work with particular degrees of identification with different contexts: *La Raza* is to her the common nominator for all Mexican Americans of Indian and Hispanic or Spanish descent. *La Raza* is something Anzaldúa identifies with before she calls herself *mexicana* or Chicana, so the latter can be seen as

¹⁰⁶ Scholl, Linda. “Narratives of Hybridity and the Challenge to Multicultural Education” in Kumashiro, Kevin (ed.) *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education*. (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2001) p.144.

¹⁰⁷ “La Prieta.” In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. p. 205.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

subcategories of the first. Still, the words are laden with the weight of the meanings. The choice of words varies greatly in terms of connotations linked with the specific nominators for the borderlands inhabitants and their identification with certain cultural or linguistic identities, as she explains:

As a culture we call ourselves Spanish when referring ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70 to 80% Indian. We call ourselves Hispanic or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun “American” than the adjective “Mexican” (and when copping out).¹⁰⁹

Here, “copping out” means that the Chicano denies their “true” heritage of Indian blood, and try to appear as something other than they (to Anzaldúa) really are – they have internalized the racism of their environment. Or rather, the borderlanders can be seen as denying some entities of the minority’s identities by putting forward others.

Fragmentation and attempting to manage in different social situations and contexts is the main cause for this type of fluidity of identity as well as linguistic code-switching.

Deprivation of a legitimate language leaves the person without an identity and a sense of self, and therefore other means are essential in surviving the borderlands. For Anzaldúa it is more important to assert in self-definition rather than subjugating to the naming from outside. Here, the definition of self includes claiming to be a representative of something other than the dominant culture. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa hardly ever calls the Chicano or herself *American*, but since it is essential to the expansion of the *mestiza consciousness*, she on several occasions states the things she considers herself to be. Showalter (1994) calls these the acts “un-naming and self-naming” – making a statement of what you are and what you by no means

¹⁰⁹ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 84.

consider yourself being. According to her these acts “have long been fundamental to cultural identity and self-assertion”¹¹⁰ and in the case of the *mestiza*, they certainly are. Lorde (1984) argues that for black men and women it is self-evident that if the black do not define themselves, others will, “for their use and to our detriment.”¹¹¹ Moreover, Smith (1977) contends that the almost non-existing literature of Black lesbian women has “everything to do with the politics of our lives, the total suppression of identity that all Black women, lesbian or not, must face.”¹¹² In the American society the situation of the black is parallel to that of the Chicano – they too are trying to find ways of resistance and ways of empowerment.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa talks about the sense of being nothing or of not existing, when the Anglo and the Chicano cultures cancel each other’s influences out: “we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.*” The Spanish would translate to “at times I am nothing and no one. But until I am nothing, I am something.”¹¹³ Anzaldúa goes on to describing what she does identify with:

When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas.¹¹⁴

From the passage one could conclude that voicing your multiple heritage is a way of becoming to terms and empowering your culture’s legacy and thus, by simultaneously

¹¹⁰ Showalter, Elaine. *Sister’s Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women’s Writing*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 7.

¹¹¹ Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider, Essays and Speeches*. (Freedom: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984) p. 45.

¹¹² Smith, Barbara. “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism.” In *The New Feminist Criticism, Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. Showalter, Elaine, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) p. 181.

¹¹³ My translation, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 85.

¹¹⁴ *Borderlands/La Frontera*. p. 85.

voicing your marginality you own it. When the declaration is performed by the person him/herself, it brings authority to the Self.

Anzaldúa does not fail to point out the suppressive nature of Chicano Spanish towards women, and that “language is a male discourse”, using as an example the word “*nosotras*” spoken by Puerto Ricans and Cubans, stating her shock of realizing there exists a female form of *us* in Spanish, when Chicanas had always referred to themselves as “*nosotros*” and “were robbed of our female being by the masculine plural.”¹¹⁵ As she points out how the Chicano society labels girls and women as gossips or liars for talking too much, or how the Latino society named speakers of Chicano Spanish as cultural traitors ruining the Spanish language, she draws attention to both linguistic sexism as well as linguistic terrorism inside the language users, inside her own culture.¹¹⁶ Anzaldúa is trying to make the Chicanos and especially the Chicana women aware of the linguistic terrorism and to resist it by not being ashamed or afraid of using their language.

A way to cope in the pressure of the borderlands is to transcend and break down everyday dualities in the society through resistance. The aim is to break free from mental and other conformation to outer influences, and to change the way one thinks. The change has to come from inside the oppressed body, otherwise it will not be effective. Changing the common thought-patterns and questioning the society’s dichotomies is the first step to transcending the limits imposed by the various cultures in the borderlands:

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show how in the flesh and through the images of her work how duality is transcended. 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. A massive

¹¹⁵ *Borderlands/La Frontera*. p. 76.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 76-77.

uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective thinking 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.¹¹⁷

In other words, the crucial change in the society will only be achieved through empowering the margin and altering the ways of thinking among the Chicano/a, starting from the individual and ending in the collective mind of the minority. The expansive, border-crossing *new mestiza consciousness* is intricately characterized by hybridity, flexibility, and plurality, and this is clearly shown in the way Anzaldúa identifies herself as a “Chicana dyke-feminist, *tejana patlache*¹¹⁸ poet, writer, and cultural theorist”¹¹⁹. For the social change to happen, the *mestizaje* process was needed to resist thinking along the lines of conventional binary opposites. Division between concepts such as male and female, white and of color, hetero-and homosexual, etc. had to be disposed of conclusively. In other words, Anzaldúa wanted to show the Chicano that if she can name herself all the things once thought to be pejorative, and still be proud of her mixed background, others could follow her example. Thus liberation from the racialised, sexualized and genderized society’s dichotomies could be reached.

¹¹⁷ *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 102.

¹¹⁸ The Nahuatl word *patlache* means “one who is extended” according to Celia F. Klein. *None of the Above: Gender Ambiguity in Nahua Ideology*, 2001, p. 191. <www.doaks.org/etexts.html>

¹¹⁹ Keating, AnaLouise, ed. *Interviews/Entrevistas / Gloria E. Anzaldúa*. (New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 203.

6. Critical Conclusions

To conclude, my aim in this thesis was to study Anzaldúa's compilation of six essays in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and to explore how the author deals with concepts such as origin, racism, sexuality, minority, social construction and identity formation. The study was conducted with the specific borderlands context in mind, and in the theoretical framework of Border Studies and Feminism. The main research questions took into account the author's construction of the borderlands identity and the literary means that she employs in the process. The *new mestiza identity* and its propensities were therefore focused on. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* being my primary source, I also looked into other works on which Anzaldúa has collaborated, mainly *Making Face, Making Soul – Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, and to some extent "La Prieta" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.

Starting out, I outlined the profile of the author and her culturally specific origins. In the introduction I also attempted to explain the meanings of some of the key words in Chicano Spanish used by Anzaldúa. Then I continued into mapping of the theoretical framework in which I set the study questions of my thesis. I drew out the foundations of Third World Feminism and differentiated it categorically from "mainstream" Feminism. I touched upon Anzaldúa's contributions to Third World Feminism in terms of her fictive and theoretical writings as well as her editorial work. Similarly, as *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of the main works in the interdisciplinary field of Border Studies, I further outlined the theoretical basis of Border Theory. Then I introduced the physical landscape of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, to highlight the area's main geographical, political and socio-economical features. Similarly, I indicated some of the main ecological and sociological issues present in the borderlands. After all,

my approach fitted into the theoretical frame of Border Studies, and furthermore aided understanding some of Anzaldúa's points of view.

Discussing the general constructs of the Chicana identity I looked into the foundations of the Chicano community in terms of gender, race and religion. Outlining the borderland area's different types of oppression, some of which still prevail, I attempted to locate a source for Anzaldúa's social radicalism and motives for writing. Analyzing Anzaldúa's blending of languages and several genres of literature, such as historical narration and personal life story, I examined how she reconstructed the Chicana identity. Moreover, I further elaborated on the identity formation called *mestizaje* and the makings (as well as the purposes) of the *new mestiza*. I pointed out the synergetic features between language and identity formation, and explained some of Anzaldúa's language tactics in closer detail.

Focusing on Anzaldúa's compilation of essays in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, I found that there are several tactics she uses to resist the constraints of the patriarchal Chicano society and the white hegemony of the Anglo American society. She reconstructs and legitimates the Chicana identity through validating her language, history and socio-cultural heritage. In my thesis it becomes obvious that throughout her work the source of Anzaldúa's writing is her own life as a woman. The reasons and motives behind her texts are to articulate her own experiences as a woman, as a lesbian, as a Chicana to her readers, so that they could maybe see that they are not alone with their experiences as representatives of minorities. As she maintains: "Yes I have to understand racism because I have to survive it. But I also have to look at my own psychology as an oppressed woman, take that psychology of oppression and add

the liberation and the empowerment to it.”¹²⁰ Indeed, Anzaldúa’s has for her part transformed the way in which we look at borders and border identities, and she has accordingly been credited for her work in the field of cultural studies. Her work has provided new approaches and viewpoints also to identity formation and feminist studies, but nevertheless there seem to be some weaknesses in her theorization. She certainly fills the role she has assumed as a radical feminist writer, but at what cost?

Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa claims to bring forth the idea of the *new mestiza* and her healing entities that can provide a better future for mankind, but does she in reality do so? Does she succeed in breaking down dichotomies or does she in fact create them in her division between *us* and *them*? As Lorde (1984) maintains, the only way to fight the old power is not to do it on its own terms, but “by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence, at the same time as we are resisting.”¹²¹ I argue that Anzaldúa is in Lordean terms trying to dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools.¹²² One could argue that Anzaldúa’s exclusion of the Anglo and the male sex from the healing process are *colonial* of her, or even *racist* and *sexist*. Similarly, I argue that her “writing to the indigenous” and at times obscure references to spirituality that fill *Borderlands/La Frontera*, may seem too New Agist and not serve as a solid point of identification for the younger generation of Chicanas. Furthermore, the term *mestizaje* has too strong connotations to colonialist rape to some Latinas for it to be considered a positive process.

To conclude, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* it is obvious that through her essays Anzaldúa is trying to mediate the collective experiences of the Chicanas, of gays, of

¹²⁰ Keating, AnaLouise, ed. *Interviews/Entrevistas / Gloria E. Anzaldúa*. (New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 218.

¹²¹ Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider, Essays and Speeches*. (Freedom: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984) p. 103.

¹²² *Ibid.* p. 110.

women of color. The essays can be seen as testimonials giving evidence on the abuse the minorities have gone through, and the reasons and motives behind her text are to articulate her ideas of what life should be like for women, for lesbians, and for Chicanas. Consequently, for speaking on behalf of the oppressed groups inside the Chicano community, the women and the queer, Anzaldúa states that she too is considered to have betrayed her culture for testifying against some of its members.

Despite all the contemporary praise that Anzaldúa has received for writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*, there are some critical points in her theorization that need to be addressed. Not only is the reader at times left baffled at the accusations and “in-your-face” techniques Anzaldúa employs in *Borderlands/La Frontera* to appear radical and enraged. When writing her essays she probably was enraged, as she felt racially betrayed by some of the Chicano, firstly for not accepting her queerness and secondly for acculturating into the Anglo society and going along its lines of thought. Not to resist or question the hierarchies of the patriarchy is according to her a contribution to the split among the minority. Still, as Anzaldúa herself explains the destitution with which the borderlands presents its inhabitants, she should not be surprised that some of the Mexican Americans are in fact “copping out”. They do so simply to survive in their daily lives and to live in the contemporary American society. After all, they are simply constructing their lives with the blueprints the society has offered them. One could argue, that Anzaldúa is at lost when she is trying to make the younger Chicana women identify with their great-great-great-grandmothers, when actually the task every generation has is to start their forefathers’ work anew and rebuild their society to fit their own perspectives.

Firstly, Anzaldúa places the blame for inequalities in borderlands on the Western society and its ideologies, secondly she hangs it over men of all races, then she

puts it on the White Anglo women and lastly it on the Chicana themselves, namely for “copping out” and being silently invisible. Could it be that Anzaldúa had really grown so bitter at the Anglo, at the Mexican American, and even at the Chicana, that they all need to be slashed out in her autobiography? For the most part, the Mexican American and the Chicana have tried to survive in the American society, living in the way, shape and form of a minority. The same applies with the matters of ethnicity and class. Machado (1978) contends that both the Anglo and the militant Chicano work under the hypothesis that Mexican Americans are a monolithic ethnically and socially, when in fact there is a lot of variation among Mexican Americans in terms of social status, ethnic heritage and level of acculturation. The false assumption of ethnic cohesiveness derives from the fact that the complex history of evolution of the Mexican Americans is not taken into account. According to Machado Mexican Americans are “represented in all levels of society, and their socio-economic positions condition their responses more than any sort of amorphous appeal to ethnicity.”¹²³ Moreover, given the circumstances and hardships Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands/La Frontera* the socially lower classes have gone through it was a major sacrifice on their part to stay in the U.S. and to adhere to what little power or rights given to them. The Mexican Americans stayed, knowing how they might be ostracized – at least in theory they had the choice of going over the border to Mexico. Still, I would not go as far as claiming that they chose to live in the diaspora – they were put there by the dominant Anglo environment promising freedom and equality through democracy but delivering nothing.

Furthermore, Johnson and Michaelson (1997) discuss the theoretical problems that are present in *Borderlands/La Frontera* – according to them there are three flaws of theorization, one being that “tensions between tendencies toward universalism and

¹²³ Machado, Manuel A., Jr. *Listen Chicano! An Informal History of the Mexican-American*. (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1978) pp.xiii-xiv.

localism are not sufficiently marked [...] Spanish American writing is both unique *and* serves as a kind of final destination for *all* world writing” meaning that the author work in the same manner of imposing their own culture just as the Western culture – Anzaldúa is doing something of which she is accusing the society. Johnson and Michaelsen even note, that she is taking part in a new but a very worn-out form of colonialism.¹²⁴ Similarly, as Anzaldúa tried to acculturate the Chicana into the *new mestiza* culture she seemed not to be able to accept that somebody could actually, for instance, be a content housewife. She is, in fact, thereby patronizing her fellow Chicana – you could even argue that she is depriving the Chicana the freedom of choice in her manifest of oppression on women.

The second aspect in the problematic of Anzaldúa’s theorizing that Johnson and Michaelsen contend, has to do with the way the author deals with indigenusness, for instance when she is writing back to the *india* – Anzaldúa could be seen to treat indigenusness almost in terms of binary opposites: it is at the same time “othered” as something completely antirational and at the same time seen to be thoroughly humanist – Johnson and Michaelsen say that Anzaldúa seems to be splitting the humanist and the rationalist ideas while simultaneously engaging in “some of the most obvious of stereotypes of premodern peoples (that their cultures are dominated by magic, shape-shifting, healing).”¹²⁵ Reading Anzaldúa’s essays they at times seem too fragmented in their line of thought to comprehend. Besides, the buildup of Aztec spirituality does occasionally leave the reader asking if the ancient Indian culture can really serve as a valid place for modern-day identification, although granted that it can provide the means of rooting your heritage in the land where you have been made to feel like a

¹²⁴ Johnson, David E. and Scott Michaelsen. *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) <<http://site.ebrary.com>> (April 30, 2008) pp. 12-13.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

stranger of no legitimate right of existence. As for the resistance and disassembly of the oppressive patriarchal thought-patterns that Anzaldúa advocates, Mohanty (1991) notes that if the tasks of internally criticizing and dismantling the hegemonic “Western” feminisms and reconstructing the geographically, historically and culturally grounded feminist strategies are not done simultaneously, there is a risk that “third world” feminisms become marginalized and ghettoized.¹²⁶ Anzaldúa does succeed in simultaneously performing the tasks of deconstruction and reconstruction to which Mohanty refers, but her theory at the same time suffers greatly from the marginalization of gender and race. And again, the fragmented structure of her essays somewhat obscures the objectives of social change she promotes.

Thirdly, Johnson and Michaelsen note that there is another unanswered tension in Anzaldúa’s theorization that comes up when she claims that there can be an inclusive future available to everyone that enables transcendence of all the borders in the world and yet, at the same time, Anzaldúa is excluding the Anglo and the white culture from it.¹²⁷ Indeed, similarly you could argue that if the aim of *Borderlands/La Frontera* is to produce a new way of being and thinking that is unifying and all-inclusive to all (borderland) people, why does Anzaldúa still address mainly the female audience? She places the shame and the blame almost solely on the male gender, for the atrocities homophobes and chauvinists have performed in the society. Again, you could argue that Anzaldúa is now performing counter-sexist acts on the men she herself has watched the Chicana struggle with. Will one reach unity through first accusing and then revenging? To sum up, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa refers to the eagle soaring in the sky,

¹²⁶ Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Under Western Eyes” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) p. 51.

¹²⁷ Johnson, David E. and Scott Michaelsen. *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) <<http://site.ebrary.com>> (April 30, 2008) p. 13.

when she describes the potential of the mestiza – in order to maintain unity one has to reach inner balance and peace of mind. However, the anger and the fury come bursting out in *Borderlands/La Frontera* seeming almost uncontrollable. The reader may start to wonder, if the society has fragmented into too many shreds of cultures to become whole and unified, as Anzaldúa herself seems to be unable of redeeming herself of the violent past of the borderlands. The blame is placed on so many groups, that is no longer very clear, who it is that Anzaldúa is fundamentally trying to reach and for what reason. Similarly, her “writing to the indigenous” and at times obscure references to spirituality that permeate her text may seem too New Ageist and not serve as a solid point of identification for the younger generation of Chicanas.

Understanding Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* proved quite troublesome to me when writing this thesis. First of all I have only studied the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the minority literatures of U.S. – I have never actually visited the area. Secondly, living in Finland I have not had to feel oppressed by the Finnish society in terms of my gender, my sexuality or my ethnic background and can thereby only sympathize but not wholly relate to the hardships that take place in the borderlands. Moreover, troublesome was also to locate a starting point for my analysis in Anzaldúa’s text, for its divergence and deviation. Getting a hold of *what* is actually being mediated and *how* it is executed in her compilation of six essays, proved equally challenging. It is clear to me that this thesis is lacking in its scientific propensity, but I have, nevertheless, offered my reading and interpretation of Anzaldúa’s work quite meticulously, by first giving some essential background information on the writer as well as the locale, and then moving on with the applicable theory. Finally I have presented some critical conclusions on *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Anzaldúa’s theorization in general. Notwithstanding the gaps in her theorization, Anzaldúa’s work has largely been credited for benefitting the

fields of feminist studies as well as Border Studies by aiding the development of Third World Feminism and for writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*, one of the quintessential works in Border Theory. Indeed, her voice was one of the loudest among the representatives of minority literatures.

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