

Anzaldúa and ‘the new mestiza’: A Chicana dives into collective identity

María Henríquez-Betancor
mhenriquez@dfm.ulpgc.es

Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain

ABSTRACT

In this article I analyze how Gloria Anzaldúa’s seventh essay in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, titled “*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*”, condenses and portrays a development towards the *mestiza* consciousness presented in the first six essays in the book. This is a well-structured as well as fluid process in which each step guides us in a complex identity-building awareness. This process is an inner journey as well as an evolution in the public scene where the “new *mestiza*” has to revise and reinvent herself in several ways in order to acquire “the *mestiza* consciousness”. This essay is also a clear example in which Anzaldúa represents three voices: the “I”, the “we” and the “she”. These voices are one of Anzaldúa’s strategies for diving into what she understands as her collective identity as a Chicana and as a “new *mestiza*”. As will be shown in this article, the author moves among these voices for various purposes of identity-construction.

Keywords: identity, awareness, mestiza, voices, Anzaldúa, Chicana

“With terror as my companion, I dip
into my life and begin work on myself”
Gloria Anzaldúa

The image of diving into collective identity featured in the title of this essay comes from my perception that Gloria Anzaldúa does not stay on the surface of reality. She immerses herself in the sea of strengths, weaknesses, limitations and joys that experimenting with the construction of one’s own identity creates. The autobiographical experience is fundamental for Anzaldúa as she constantly refers to it in her work. But she does not forget the multiple connections she maintains with other women, queer or heterosexual, with the land, with her family, with her personal past and the deep past of her people (reaching far back to the time of the Aztecs). It is a process of holding her breath before her complex personal reality and the varied realities around her and then exhaling the reflections and the learned lessons gained throughout this metaphorical swimming. I only met her once and she was able to understand my cultural and personal

borderlands as a woman from the Canary Islands (Spain) who is frequently not identified as a Spaniard because of my Canarian accent and who identifies with many aspects of South American and Cuban culture. Anzaldúa could dive under and see through the basic information she had about me to connect with my own borderlands. I am no exception. Her masterpiece, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, is proof that her analysis goes beyond mere facts about the Chicano/a world to achieve powerful critical knowledge about its painful history, gender struggles, and mythical figures.

In this article I analyze how the seventh essay in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, titled “*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*”, condenses and portrays a development towards the *mestiza* consciousness presented in the first six essays in the book. This is a well-structured as well as fluid process in which each step guides us in a complex identity-building awareness. I see this process as an inner journey as well as an evolution in the public scene where the “new *mestiza*” has to revise and reinvent herself in several ways in order to acquire the *mestiza* consciousness. The seventh essay is also a clear example in which Anzaldúa represents three voices, the “I”, the “we” and the “she”. These voices are one of Anzaldúa’s strategies for diving into what she understands as her collective identity as a Chicana and as a “new *mestiza*”. As will be shown here, the author moves among these voices for various purposes of identity-construction.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa verbalizes several Chicana realities, including that of her Indigenous ancestors, her mother’s Mexican heritage, and the undocumented status of women in the U.S. In addition, she traces the linguistic frustrations experienced by Chicana academics. The Chicana/o realities she represents are the result both of various encounters in her own life as well as the experiences of others that she has gathered into herself. Anzaldúa voices a theoretical Chicana/o positionality in her paradigm of the “new *mestiza*” who “has a plural personality and who operates in a pluralistic mode” (1987: 79). Anzaldúa theorizes the Chicana identity conflict within a feminist, personal, collective, cultural and racial context. Because of multicultural and multiracial influences, the new *mestiza* expresses herself with behaviors, words, and attitudes that are sometimes contradictory. She learns to tolerate the fact that her racial and cultural identity is not clear to Anglo-Americans or Mexicans, and she adapts her behavior to

each situation. In other words, “she learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view” (1987: 79).

Anzaldúa herself identifies primarily with her Indigenous roots and she often questions her Hispanic as well as Anglo-Saxon heritage. She resists accommodating the identifying labels that patriarchal society, with its absolute terms, compels her to do. Likewise, she rejects choosing between her racial and historical influences or positioning herself as either a Mexican or North American. She rejects “the dual personality”¹ that catalogues her as a Mexican-American and welcomes the new “*mestiza*’s” plural personality that embraces all the different parts of which she is made. The cultural mixture and the personal evolution meet in the “new *mestiza*” who presents herself as subject of her own changes.

Through her image of the “new *mestiza*”, Anzaldúa encourages Chicanas to break alienating dichotomies of thought. According to critic María C. González “for Anzaldúa dual thinking has split the individual into an unhealthy creature. This dualism has continued to reproduce itself to become the dominant system of thought” (1996: 29). To resist the dual thinking of Western culture, Anzaldúa suggests that we must first unlearn “the *puta/virgen* dichotomy” (1987: 84). Rejecting the Virgin/whore construct means annulling sexist prejudices that classify women according to their sexual and social behavior. To start dissolving this dichotomy the “new *mestiza*” has to break the patriarchal socially-established roles and behaviors believed to be correct for their gender. According to Anzaldúa then, “La *mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations” (1987: 79).

In addition, the “new *mestiza*” is a powerful image of the Chicana’s appropriation of her independence. Her potent self-definition begins after she has faced and tolerated the conflicts generated by her hybrid identity. According to Rebolledo, “Anzaldúa also clearly defined the historical oppression that made women feel they couldn’t cross the borders, and the empowerment that occurred when they realized that it was their choice” (1995: 103). Anzaldúa states it thusly: “My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian

¹ Maria Lugones’ term to define the personality, of Anglo-Saxon creation, where one dash separates the author’s cultural group from American nationality, as it is in Mexican-American. As Lugones says: “According to this concept, there is no hybrid cultural self. It is part of the Anglo imagination that we can keep our culture and assimilate, a position that would be contradictory if both cultures were understood as informing the ‘real’ fabric of everyday life” (1992: 35).

woman's history of resistance. [...] So *mama, Raza*, how wonderful, *no tener que rendir cuentas a nadie*. I feel perfectly free to rebel against my culture" (1987: 21). When addressing the "Raza", Anzaldúa refers to the historical, racial and cultural forces of her people that have oppressed her and which she has trespassed in her search for liberation as a Chicana lesbian. As Anzaldúa sees it, resistance begins individually but must also expand to the Chicana collectivity.

I. THE PATH TOWARDS A MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS: SPACES FOR CULTURAL AND PERSONAL EVOLUTION

I suggest that the seventh essay of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa rewrites her personal experiences and analyzes the evolution of her life trajectory towards "the *mestiza's* consciousness". She describes thusly: "Though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (1987: 80). The pain caused by this new consciousness is rooted in the rupture of paradigms from which her identity has been constructed and the rebellion against any ideology or behavior that would suppress "the new *mestiza*". As much as her destiny, "El camino de la *mestiza*" (the *mestiza's* way) includes places of change and spaces of transition towards a new way of thinking and feeling. A shared characteristic of what is referred to here is the permanent evolution of movement, its adaptability to external circumstances and personal conditions. The new *mestiza's* consciousness is not a static condition but a beingness that is constantly redefined. According to Chéla Sandoval: "*La conciencia de la mestiza* is born of life lived in the 'crossroads' between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures: It is a developed subjectivity capable of transformation and relocation [...]" (1998: 359). In Anzaldúa's words it is defined as an attempt "to work out a synthesis" in which "the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts" (1987: 79-80). This new consciousness emerges as a space of redefinition of what has been achieved as much as the creation of new ideas and images: "By creating a new mythos--that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave--la *mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (1987: 80).

The seventh essay brilliantly coalesces the six essays that precede it. In "El camino de la *mestiza*", which is one of the sections in the seventh essay, there is an echo of the issues

that Anzaldúa has tackled in the previous six essays. Initially she defends the construction of a new consciousness that implies a critical attitude toward her historical past. In order to understand the oppression suffered by the new *mestiza*, it is necessary to analyze it from its cultural and temporal origins. This is the task carried out by Anzaldúa, who, in her first essay, dedicated to "The Homeland, Aztlán/El Otro Mexico", re-writes the story of the Chicano people from her contemporary Chicana perspective. It is Anzaldúa's understanding that for the *mestiza* to initiate the road towards the constitution of the collective consciousness one has to look first at the individual and collective past in order to analyze the racial and cultural origins: "Her first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*. Just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back –which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, and which the baggage from the Anglo?" (1987: 82).

In the second essay, "Movimientos de rebeldía y culturas que traicionan", Anzaldúa tries to differentiate among "lo heredado, lo adquirido y lo impuesto" (1987: 82) (what has been inherited, acquired and imposed), which is another step in the *mestiza*'s journey. In this essay, she analyzes and accepts her rebelliousness, criticizing the influence of the Anglo-Saxon patriarchal culture while claiming her indigenous identity because it is "a new political stance as a fully racialized feminist Chicana" (Saldívar-Hull 1999: 5). In "Entering the serpent", the third essay in *Borderlands*, the narrator explores "lo heredado" (what has been inherited) from the former indigenous cultures: here she revises the patriarchal articulation of the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Llorona within culture and history. As Sonia Saldívar-Hull affirms, "By rewriting the stories of Malinali, La Llorona and the Virgin of Guadalupe, Anzaldúa is strategically reclaiming a ground for female historical presence" (1999: 6).

Anzaldúa re-invents these two myths from the Chicana feminist perspective of the "new *mestiza*", and this lays the groundwork for the next essay in which she incorporates Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess. In "La herencia de Coatlicue / The Coatlicue State", Anzaldúa analyzes in depth the nature of this change embodied in the figure of Coatlicue. Once she accepts this figure as the image of transformative strength, Anzaldúa breaks down emotionally due to the contradictions of her identity: "I locked the door, kept the world out; I vegetated, hibernated, remained in stasis, idled. No

telephone, no television, no radio. Alone with the presence in the room. Who? Me, my psyche, the Shadow Beast?” (1987: 44). Part of the process and progression of acknowledging difference in this breakdown, Anzaldúa realizes that “there are many defense strategies that the self uses to escape the agony of inadequacy and I have used all of them. I have split from and disowned those parts of myself that others rejected” (1987: 45). She realizes this is a collective crisis, for many Chicanos have felt like her: “As a person, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. [...] we suspect that there is something ‘wrong’ with us, something fundamentally ‘wrong’” (1987: 45). According to Anzaldúa many people (not only Chicanos) who find themselves in this situation keep busy doing mundane things in order to avoid “seeing” this painful inner reality, and thus “awareness does not happen” (1987: 45). This is the moment to see “the face of fear in the mirror” so that “it registers in our consciousness” (1987: 45). Because of this risk of being paralyzed by the fear of not overcoming this feeling of being inferior, “the *Coatlicue* State can be a way station or it can be a way of life” as this goddess is “the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche” (1987: 46), those we would rather not recognize.

In the fifth essay, “How to tame a wild tongue”, Anzaldúa powerfully revises and interprets the multilingual Chicana identity; she describes her linguistic experience as a Chicana woman living in Texas, while she rejects the self-marginalization practiced by many Chicanas and resists the social contempt aroused by her use of both Spanish and English. Anzaldúa advocates for a variety of Chicana languages while she vindicates Chicano Spanish as a language that synthesizes both the Spanish and the Anglo-American influences, enabling the development of new terms in both. Yet this is not the only language that represents Chicanos, as “there is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience” (1987: 58). The linguistic aspect goes hand in hand with the individual and collective Chicana awareness, for as Anzaldúa says, “I am my language” (1987: 59) and “if a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me” (1987: 58). Hers is a language claim that invokes her sexual, gender, and writerly identities. Indeed, there are so many culturally-specific taboos that are collectively given no representational space in it, she must assert, “I will overcome the tradition of silence” (1987: 59). The numerous uses of

language and what these mean to the rich construction of culture become a political and personal issue where her rebellion as a Chicana woman writer is also manifest.

Moving closer to a *mestiza* consciousness, in the seventh essay, in the section "El camino de la mestiza", the author does not establish a strict procedure for transformation. Each part of the process described is linked to what comes before and after but she also suggests that there are moments of change in which many elements of transformation occur simultaneously and non-linearly. During this journey, Anzaldúa revises and reinvents the past as a lesbian Chicana feminist through the different modes in which this past manifests itself. These modes include mythology, historical facts, language, and the Aztec cultural heritage. Anzaldúa articulates this cultural recapitulation, and as a result her identity as a changing subject becomes more evident. Likewise, the "new *mestiza*" also emerges as a feminine model of strength and openness to the progressive inner and fluid transformation required by this new consciousness.

The construction of the *mestiza's* new consciousness is in itself a journey that the Chicana has to make all by herself. In this process, Anzaldúa positions herself before her own conflicts and addresses certain social groups. From the section "Que no se nos olviden los hombres" both Anzaldúa and the new *mestiza's* attention are directed to the external world. She starts out quoting a poem in which she despises Chicana women: "Tú no sirves pa'nada- /you're good for nothing./Eres pura vieja" (1987: 83). Anzaldúa includes this type of colloquy frequently heard in the streets or any place where the Chicana's womanhood is not valued. While Anzaldúa's point of departure is the chauvinistic male complaint about the Chicana, she also questions where these men fit in her new consciousness. She confronts Chicano and Anglo-American men, asking them for their "individual we" to take a position and to acknowledge their role as oppressors: "we demand the admission/ acknowledgement/ disclosure/testimony that they wound us, violate us, are afraid of us and of our power" (1987: 84). Then Anzaldúa demands of the new masculine consciousness that men should discover their tenderness and not be afraid of it as "a sign of vulnerability" (1987: 84). As she recognizes, males and females are the victims of roles marked by the rigidity of the patriarchal system, which defines what it means to be a man. Hence, many heterosexual men are afraid of anything that could be considered feminine because "they are confused, and entangled

with sexist behaviors that they have not been able to eradicate” (1987: 84). Thus the transformation process Anzaldúa requires has a public and a private dimension.

In this same essay, in the section “Somos una gente” the “new *mestiza*” observes the Anglo-American white society from her cultural, racial, and gendered perspective. From the empowered position that the “new *mestiza*” has achieved, Anzaldúa addresses the *mestiza*’s collective needs, verbalizing their vindications. She asks nothing less than that white North Americans pay attention to such claims: “We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negotiation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect” (1987: 85). This is another step in the transformation towards a *mestiza* consciousness, the moment of collective self-acknowledgement before the Anglo-Saxon, North American society.

Anzaldúa asks for historical acknowledgement not only of the Chicanos’ presence in American history but also of the abuses they suffered due to social difference, racism, and linguistic and cultural contempt. Her stance is one of conciliation with white society, for as she says: “I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator” (1987: 85). Although Anzaldúa does not give up her fight, she believes in the possibility of finding common ground instead of separating one from the other. For example, she proclaims,

I think we need to allow whites to be our allies. Through our literature, art, *corridos*, and folk-tales we must share our history with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain Navajos or the Chicano farmworkers or los Nicaragüenses they won’t turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances (1987: 85)

Lack of knowledge of the Chicana culture increases cultural stereotypes that many people alien to the community believe. In contrast, Anzaldúa cherishes all those aspects which constitute Chicana culture, including *corridos*, art, history and she asserts that this culture should be better known and appreciated for its cultural richness. After asking for an acknowledgement of Chicana’s culture and history, Anzaldúa ends the section opening a door to dialogue with white society: “And finally tell us what you need from us” (1987: 86). Anzaldúa’s deeply considered emotional and psychic progression through a fluid experience of a range of issues to attain a *mestiza* consciousness is necessary. Confronting and naming the abuses perpetrated by white

society against Chicanos makes it possible for Anzaldúa to achieve an attitude in willing to find a way out to old and latent conflicts.

In the section titled "El día de la Chicana", Anzaldúa emphasizes her identity as a "new *mestiza*", considering herself part of that Chicana collectivity. She describes the ritual that takes place in her house every December the second, "when my sun goes into my first house" (1987: 88); this is a time when the influence of religion, astrology, and cultural beliefs converge. From her individual identity, she reaffirms the new *mestiza*'s collective identity to which she belongs: "On that day I affirm who we are" (1987: 88). She accepts all the parts of the group identity to which she belongs saying, "On that day I gather the splintered and disowned parts of *la gente mexicana* and hold them in my arms. *Todas las partes de nosotros valen*" (1987: 88). In this section there is a strong connection between the "I" and the "we" as differentiated identities that are linked by common needs and experiences. Thus this celebration day is a culmination of the process leading to *mestiza* consciousness.

Acknowledging the culture's collective weaknesses and longings, Anzaldúa celebrates a culturally and spiritually compelling ritual for the Chicana/o collectivity. As she describes it, "On that day I say, Yes, all you people wound us when you reject us. Rejection strips us of self-worth; our vulnerability exposes us to shame". She continues by accepting the responsibility of overcoming pain as a means to a rebirth of the Chicana way, saying, "We can longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts. Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic. Let's try it our way, the *mestiza* way, the Chicana way, the woman way" (1987: 88). This individual celebration of the collective holds in it all the painful processes of past experience described in the previous six essays, the difficult understandings of her own contradictions, and the daring new beginnings of being a "new *mestiza*".

The "new *mestiza*" is a survivor; she has overcome the rupture with cultural patriarchal patterns and the limitations of gender. She has confronted her most obscure side, or her "Shadow Beast", her fears and shame. Thus declares the right to decide for herself who she wants to be. As Anzaldúa writes: "*se hace moldeadora de su alma*" (1987: 83). After having been away from her home in Texas, Anzaldúa returns to her origins and to

her geographical birthplace, a borderland of survivors of poverty. She returns to the first years of her life in “El retorno”, the last section in the seventh essay, where there is plenty of autobiographical information. Returning to the past through her memories, she recovers tastes and images of herself and her brothers and sisters working the land. Anzaldúa returns to her land with an irrecoverable image of the land she left.

Associated with her memories of the Valley, there are cultural elements which came to be part of her memories such as the Mexican cemeteries “blooming with artificial flowers” (1987: 89), the local TV programs which she missed “where hosts speak in half and half, and where awards are given in the category of Tex-Mex music” (1987: 89). She also missed meals “*el sabor de los tamales de rez y venado*” (1987: 89). She realizes that the Valley has changed; likewise, she is not the same woman who left. Instead, she returns as the “new *mestiza*”, convinced that there is no going back from her new consciousness, though aware that she will always be part of that landscape in her memories. Anzaldúa mixes images of old memories together with the new ones she finds when she returns and emphasizes what links her with some people of the mythic past: “Like the ancients I worship the rain god and the maize goddess” (1987: 90). Further, she points out what differentiates her when she comes back: “unlike my father I have recovered their names” (1987: 90). In doing so she reminds us that she has trespassed the cultural limits of the Valley in order to recover her Indigenous legacy.

In conclusion, the consciousness of the “new *mestiza*” proposed by Anzaldúa is a structural process of change in which the acceptance of cultural and personal problems, the meeting and intermixing of different groups with which Anzaldúa identifies, and the possibility of reconciliation with the white society conflate in a linear and non-linear fashion. It is a diving that arises from personal experience and expands to the external world, to the *mestiza*'s social environment that rejects the macho's role and questions the concept of masculinity in the Chicana community to finally return to the author's origins in Texas. By coming back to her homeland, Anzaldúa has carried out a transformation that has an influence in the new *mestiza*'s perspective. She is not the same woman who had left the Valley; while looking at her previous reality with new eyes, she has become more critical, knowing what it means to live there. Her memories link her with a space that only exists in her mind, though she also rescues her sense of the connection with the land, smells, and tastes of her historical past.

II. THE NEW MESTIZA'S INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Defining "the new *mestiza*" as at a racial, cultural, social and sexual crossroads, Anzaldúa does not refer to her as "*mestiza*" because she is the result of the mixing of two races but because she receives the cultures and races of various worlds, including the Mexican, the indigenous, the Spanish, and the Anglo-Saxon. The word "*mestiza*" is politically positioned at a multiracial, and multicultural meeting point. In an interview given in 1991, Anzaldúa defines the "new *mestiza*" as "kind of border woman who is able to negotiate between different cultures and cross over from one to the other and therefore has a perspective of all those different worlds that someone who is monocultural cannot have" (Blanco 1991: 4). This perspective of "the new *mestiza*" generates inner conflicts because she has difficulties positioning herself culturally, but it also allows her to discover her capacity to differentiate between what she wants and what she rejects in her identity. The *mestiza* perspective helps her to increase her tolerance and to amplify her vision of the world: "she is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking" (1987: 82). The use of the adjective "new" for the word "*mestiza*" and "conscience" announces an identity that is innovative and unknown previous to the publication of *Borderlands*.

Anzaldúa's individual identity, which recognizes itself as a "new *mestiza*", builds bridges with the collectivity, these being other *mestizas*, the homosexual Chicano or Anglo community and the Chicano world as a whole. As as a *mestiza*, Anzaldúa belongs to all of these group identities because as a "new *mestiza*" she accepts her multiple alliances. When uniting with these different groups from her spoken position as "we", she puts into words the collective claims of each of the different groups. From the first person voice, she claims her right to transcend dualities, she clarifies that her identity is not the sum of the Chicana/Mexicana and the Anglo-American self and that these are mixed with a "third element" or the "*mestiza* consciousness". From her stance as an "I" she accepts and welcomes all the identities that form her "plural personality". The "new *mestiza*" learns to tolerate living with her different cultural and racial elements to turn them into something new and complex. Anzaldúa adopts these three voices or cases, making the most of each perspective to identify with different groups of people and aspects of herself.

Being a Chicana, Anzaldúa recognizes herself in the experience of “the new *mestiza*” and includes herself in the collective identity of “the new *mestizas*”. To talk about “the new *mestiza*”, Anzaldúa makes use of the third person singular as well as the first person singular and plural, moving among them as equivalents. Each grammatical case is an “ideological I” which “face[s] the ideologies of the gendered subordination of women and heteronormativity” (Smith and Watson 2001: 63). I suggest that Anzaldúa makes use of these multiple selected subject positions in order to contest and revise inherited gender and cultural roles and behaviors.

When she speaks from the first person singular, she connects herself with her most intimate and personal identity. For example, as a lesbian *mestiza* she acknowledges her nationality and race as universal: “As a *mestiza* I have no country [...] yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)” (1987: 80).

Using the “I” she also defines her feminism and her new culture as a “new *mestiza*”: “I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanic and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture” (1987: 80-81). In this definition, she positions herself at the crossroads of the dualities in any of her attitudes, and she decides to be simultaneously both. In this way, she puts into practice her proposal that “the new *mestiza*” must show “in her work how duality is transcended” (1987: 80) and be “on both shores at once” (1987: 78), the “shores” representing the poles or extremes (of behavior, values, etc) among which the Chicana has traditionally had to choose. Even when Anzaldúa’s statements are contradictory, the “new *mestiza*” transcends them as she lives with both. Accepting her new hybrid identity, she writes, “Soy un amasamiento, I am act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (1987: 81). Anzaldúa uses the image of the dough or “el amasamiento”, in which various ingredients mix to give something new as a result, something that has a direct relationship with its components as it comes from them but which has its own texture and weight. In the same manner, the “new *mestiza*’s” own identity is marked by her origins but she transcends them to

become a critical being who rejects any cultural or gender assimilation that could overshadow her.

In contrast, when Anzaldúa refers to "the new *mestiza*", she chooses to use "she", the third person singular. When using this case, Anzaldúa gains a certain distance from her own personal "I", but she appropriates objectivity by observing the "she" as a complex constructed reality. The female third person singular adopted by Anzaldúa for "the new *mestiza*" is the chosen subject to carry out change. In other words, this is a change that cannot happen if it does not begin from a personal starting point, though it must move as well to the "she" position where activism occurs. The "new *mestiza*" learns to adapt to the worlds she belongs to and develops open strategies for this purpose, "She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. [...] Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche" (1987: 79). She also carries out this process "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (1987: 79). This is a "she" voice that decides to position herself as an active subject of her own changes, "La *mestiza* has gone from being the sacrificial goat to becoming the officiating priestess at the crossroads" (1987: 80).

The "she" for the "new *mestiza*" is also a potential "we" as it invites the Chicana collectivity (as well as other identities) to join in the transformative process of creating a new and powerful identity. Anzaldúa uses a very significant image, that of corn to define the shared qualities of the *mestiza* with many Chicanas when she says, "Indigenous like corn, like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions" (1987: 81). Anzaldúa continues, "she holds tight to the earth-she will survive the crossroads" (1987: 81).

Yet this "she" voice also includes Anzaldúa's "I", for the author's personal decisions and her life experience push her to envision and write the "new *mestiza*". As she states, "As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover" (1987: 80).

When the narrator speaks from the "we" position, it is normally to include herself in the collectivity of Chicana women, to represent, together with other *mestizas*, those values that unite them and identify them as a group. The image of the stone captures this identity: "We are the coarse rock" (1987: 81). Even when the rock can stand as an

image of impenetrability, the permeability or openness to other external influences is clear: “We are the porous rock in the stone metate” (1987: 81). It is this combination of the resistance of the rock and its porous nature that describes the common characteristic of Chicanas who often protect themselves as well as open up to a multicultural experience. Although it may appear to be a contradiction because the rock is both porous and resistant, at the same time Anzaldúa is creating a culturally-specific image of amplified female power. Anzaldúa also expresses the “mestizaje” in the widest sense of the word when she says “Somos el amasijo” (1987: 81) (we are the dough). Anzaldúa uses the image of the elaboration of tortillas as a cultural metaphor for the formation of the cultural and gender identity of “the new *mestiza*”. Anzaldúa describes the process of making “tortillas de masa” as a synonym of how “new *mestizas*” go through different parts of themselves. Anzaldúa creates what I call a collective and cultural self-definition as she mixes the personal with meaningful shared cultural elements. She identifies with the tortillas and with the specific utensils which are necessary to make them: *el metate*, *el comal*, and *el molcajete*. She includes the strong-flavored ingredients such as cumin, garlic, pepper, and red chile. The elements to make these tortillas are varied and culturally-specific, a metaphor for the complexity of her Chicana/Mexicana lesbian identity. The identification happens with the ingredients, the process, and the result.

The communal “we” sometimes turns into an individual “we” as in “Que no se nos olviden los hombres”. Although the reality she tackles in this section may be shared by many Chicanas, she makes a direct reference to her experience with her father as a man, and her sense of how his masculinity was perceived in her family. It is the individual “we” that includes her as well as her siblings, a smaller unique community experience of the father figure. Analyzing the meaning of “macho” for her father, Anzaldúa writes that it has connotations of “being strong enough to protect and support [us], yet being able to show love”. The more well-known negative use of macho, she insists, “is actually an Anglo invention” (1987: 83). She then makes the more individual “we” stand for the whole male Chicano culture as she also tries to understand why men abuse women saying: “Though we understand the root of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it” (1987: 83). In this use of “we”, Anzaldúa assumes the collective dignity and the self-respect that are necessary to face abuse. Through this “we”

Anzaldúa represents the “new *mestizas*” as strong and resistant to violence so typical of their history.

Later on in the same section, “we” includes homosexual men of all races and nationalities together with lesbians: “We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods” (1987: 84). This form of “we” indicates solidarity with transnational homosexual identities. Anzaldúa claims the importance of the contributions made by minorities in the homosexual community. “Colored homosexuals”, she writes, “have always been at the forefront [...] of all liberation struggles in this country; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds” (1987: 85). As somebody who is affected by the marginality suffered by this group, the author claims collective acknowledgement in Chicano society for the creative work, asserting that “Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer. People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying” (1987: 85).

In “By your true faces we will know you”, in the seventh part of the seventh essay, the “we” includes all Chicanos (men and women) in a situation of disadvantage and discrimination because of white oppression: “The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance [...] we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves” (1987: 86). Anzaldúa’s “narrating I” mixes with the “narrated I”² through the use of the “we”. She is her people as she has also suffered discrimination in various forms and is conscious of the struggle that the Chicana/o collectivity has and is still going through to gain recognition. She is able to look at the situation from outside as a writer and critic and also as a long-marginalized subject. Anzaldúa includes herself within the Chicano collectivity as the subject who writes and the object (as part of the group) of her writing. The plural subject unifies Anzaldúa’s many hurt selves with the discriminated people she writes about.

The “new *mestiza*” analyzes, culls, and reconstitutes her identity within an individual and group frame, but there is not a border between her “I” and her “we” as subject. When analyzing her personal experience, Anzaldúa creates a space of identification and representation for other Chicanas. When speaking from the plural subject position, she has previously had to identify with a reality shared with others, either Chicanas/os in

² The “narrated I” and “the narrating I” are terms coined by critics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001) to refer to the writing subject and the narrated object of narration.

general or the homosexual community. The process of recreating identity that Anzaldúa proposes, whether that identity is individual or collective, is non-linear and progressive, fluid and concrete. We learn the complexity of her identity as she positions herself in the different voices. Recognizing the historical and cultural information, analysis, and different positioning as well as the claims of each one of them, it is clear that this text “provide[s] witness for other, create[s] a community of affirmation, and encourage[s] social transformation” (Hall 2001: 104). In other words, *Borderlands* itself through its stages of transformation and the many identities it re-presents and becomes (I, she, we) is a real representation of the collectivity.

Borderlands has marked a before and an after within the construction of the Chicana identity. Verbalizing the concept of “borderland” was a point of departure for Anzaldúa. Like many other Chicanas, she felt the pressure to choose among the different cultures and ideologies from which she came. In *Borderlands* Anzaldúa dares to reveal silenced and repressed feelings within the Chicanas’ literary panorama. She exposes rage and frustration and takes a stance through her vindication of a multicultural social and sexual identity. Resisting the Anglo-American dominant system’s literary and political assimilation, she creates a body of work which represents lesbian Chicanas, and Chicanas/os in general, who as a community share a cultural and historical memory of social discrimination.

Gloria Anzaldúa enjoys the privilege of being different. Through her work she vindicates her right to be Chicana, *mestiza*, Indian, lesbian, feminist, writer, and critic. *Borderlands* represents Anzaldúa’s multicultural, racial, multilingual, and historical experience; likewise, it presents diverse realities that constitute Chicana’s complex collective memory. Anzaldúa considers Chicanas’ strength as a collectivity necessary to make social transformation possible. Her text aims to generate changes in the individual and collective thought. As I have shown, she establishes a bridge between herself and her reader, using various voices as a strategy. These multiple identities connect her with many different groups of women: Chicanas, Texans, lesbians, writers, and women of Mexican descent who in one way or another may see themselves reflected in her words. Anzaldúa speaks as a lesbian Chicana in the Mexican-American frontier, but she certainly does not exclude other cultural groups who could see themselves represented in her journey across personal and collective experience.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, G.** 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Books.
- Anzaldúa, G.** 1999. 2nd ed. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Books.
- Blanco, P.** 1991. "Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa". *University of Arizona Poetry Center Newsletter* 16: 4-5.
- González, M.C.** 1996. *Contemporary Mexican-American Women Novelists: Toward a Feminist Identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Hall, L.** 2001. "Lorde, Anzaldúa, and Tropicana performatively embody the written self". *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 15 (1), 96-122.
- Lugones, M.** 1992. "On *Borderlands/La Frontera*: An interpretive essay". *Hypatia* 7 (4), 31-37.
- Rebolledo, T.D.** 1995. *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Saldívar-Hull, S.** 1999. "Introduction. Anzaldúa". *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1-15.
- Sandoval, C.** 1998. "Mestizaje as method: Feminists-of-color challenge the canon". In Trujillo, C. (Ed.) *Living Chicana Theory*. Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 352-370.
- Smith, S. and J. Watson** 2001. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Trujillo, C.** (Ed.) 1998. *Living Chicana Theory*. Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press.

Received: 23 November 2011

Accepted: 23 February 2012

Cite this article as:

Henríquez-Betancor, M. 2012. “Anzaldúa and ‘the new mestiza’: A Chicana dives into collective identity”. *Language Value* 4 (2), 38-55. Jaume I University ePress: Castelló, Spain. <http://www.e-revistas.uji.es/languagevalue>. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/LanguageV.2012.4.2.4>

ISSN 1989-7103

Articles are copyrighted by their respective authors