

**MARGINAL TOPOGRAPHIES AND THRESHOLDS TOWARDS  
TRANSFORMATION: NEW STORIES OF HEALING AND  
DECOLONIZATION STRATEGIES SET OUT IN GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S  
NEPANTLA.**

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**Abstract**

The present study focuses on Gloria Anzaldúa's interpretation of Nepantla, a fictional space to rewrite personal narratives, generate new realities and develop a narrative of healing. In short, Anzaldúan rebellious discourse against dominant ideologies will be addressed taking Foucault's conception of power to expose that, by generating this intermediate space, she articulates her decolonization strategy.

**Key words:** Threshold- transformation- creation- decolonization.

**Topografias marginais e limiars de transformação: novas histórias de cura e estratégias de decolonização na Nepantla de Gloria Anzaldúa.**

**Resumo:**

O presente estudo está focado na interpretação de Gloria Anzaldúa sobre Nepantla, um espaço ficcional para reescrever narrativas pessoais, gerar novas realidades e desenvolver uma narrativa de cura. Em síntese, o discurso rebelde de Anzaldúa contra as ideologias dominantes será abordado a partir da concepção de poder de Foucault para expor que, ao gerar esse espaço intermediário, ela articula sua estratégia de decolonização.

**Palavras-chave:** Limiar- transformação- criação- decolonização.

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## Introduction

The present study focuses on analyzing the construction of the political subjectivity present in Gloria Anzaldúa's auto-fictional voice in her two main works *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* 2015 and *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* 1999. Some autobiographical anecdotes that portray the explicit oppression she underwent are analyzed following Michel Foucault's description of how power relations work in modern society. These experiences are to be addressed to explore her multicultural background, which represents that of many other individuals who are forced to assimilate into a white dominant ideal. Considering she was never able to comply with the expectations, Anzaldúa bore the burden of being an outcast who could not fully develop a sense of belonging and ended up co-existing inside and outside the Mexican and North American culture. Hence, this article aims to contribute to research that views Anzaldúa's written work as a vehicle to disrupt dominant ideological binaries to support equity-building for marginalized groups.

This study bears in mind that the construction of *nepantla*, a fictional space, is the method used to articulate her decolonization strategies, it operates as the site of transformation she needed to detach from reality. This factual reality that conformed her socio-cultural background is to be analyzed following Foucault's analysis on power. This analysis will conclude that power is intrinsically connected to knowledge. Power relations are developed and transmitted through knowledge, which establishes what is normal and what is deviated from normalization. A hybrid identity such as Anzaldúa's fictional voice could never fit into any standard and because of that fact, it faced the ostracism. For this reason, the modes by which individuals become the subjects of power will be studied, to understand Anzaldúa's resistance to either assimilate or separate from the many cultures she inhabited. This reluctance to take a position is what turned her into a liminal individual, a wanderer walking in the margins of her cultures throughout her life. In consequence, she opts for creating new theoretical models since dwelling in the borders as a perpetual rambler is not an option anymore. Anzaldúa first declared herself a *mestiza* in *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*. By doing so, she opened a discussion around that concept first there by stating that her *mestiza* status would not allow her to fit in the norm.

She opts for the creation of subaltern knowledge when she decides to break free from the monoculture that is depicted through Foucault's analysis of power relations. Nevertheless, it is key to analyze the system from where peripheral subjects are formed to see that, as political subjects, it is precisely their reaction against the same system where they are created which enhances the generation of rebellious discourses. Anzaldúa as a subaltern subject is linked to a system based on normalization. For this reason, when she creates her hybrid narrative, she is conducting her decolonial strategy since she tries to disassemble power structures from the edges. Anzaldúa's fictional voice embraced her linguistic identity and that realization enabled her to see that the versions of reality of the authority figures that oppressed her clashed, she decided to break up with what she understood as consensual reality to create an alternative: *nepantla*. This shift thereby gave her the grounds to articulate this intermediate metaphorical space where she can express her longing desire for social justice.

#### **Foucauldian discourse analysis: disassembling power structures from the edge.**

Anzaldúa's creates some new theoretical models throughout *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* that represent her decolonization strategies. In these models, Anzaldúa takes the role of an auto fictional narrator that revisits some autobiographical narratives due to the fact that she perpetually wandered around the margins of her many cultures as a subject who was incapable to fit in her cultural and social reality, which will be regarded as the system from which these marginal identities are formed. This system will be studied approaching Michael Foucault's analysis of how power relations work in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 1977. The power structures that Anzaldúa's fictional subject reacts against will be explored following Foucault's conception of power to uncover the way it is exercised within the apparatus of the state.

Following his approach, power and knowledge are connected hermetically since power produces the knowledge that is necessary to sustain the norms that discipline and produce individuals. This bond, of crucial importance to consider Foucault's view on how modern society works, will be taken into consideration to approach the construction of Anzaldúa's rebellious reaction. Following Foucault's perspective, power relations depend on knowledge and vice versa. The conjunction of these two crosses individuals completely. In his view, knowledge generates identities in a process that is not natural,

but in a social construction based on social regulations, beliefs or customs. Therefore, he states that power and knowledge implicate each other:

*We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Discipline 27)*

In his view, power can only be exercised if it relies on knowledge, which works as the stage that supports power relations. As he discloses this relation, it may be noted that he refers to several fields of knowledge. Hence, it must be concluded that they are intrinsically bound up in a technology of power over the body, which Foucault describes as more than an illusion or an ideological effect, in his view the soul:

*On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished -and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at machine for the rest of their lives. (Discipline 29)*

The previous citation illustrates some instances of individuals who feel the exercise of power upon their souls. Anzaldúa's fictional voice shares that state of being constantly supervised because she was a *chicana*, which means that she descends from Mexico and lives in the United States. Her Mexican American identity left her in a very ambivalent position. She could never live in any of those two cultural dimensions since she was considered to be either to Mexican or not American enough. This state rendered her into an outsider who could not either blend in or distance from both cultures and therefore endured discrimination. This point is extremely relevant to bring awareness into a very relevant point in the Foucauldian analysis on power: it is not to be located just on one side that holds on to it but it considers the individuals who are supervised, trained and corrected as the mechanism that creates self-disciplined individuals. Power is not to be regarded simply as an instrument of coercion that creates yet as a consensual system that has two clear sides, it is not an isolated system that only has a side. No person or group alone holds or possesses power. Instead, power relations are built in a shared

construction held by two borders. According to this idea, power is a spectrum composed by two ends that agree on existing in this dichotomy:

*In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them, and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (Discipline 27)*

According to this idea, power shall not be interpreted as a one-sided factor but as an exercise that is carried out by two sides. As indicated before, madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized or those who are stuck at machine for the rest of their lives exemplify the controlled end of the equation. Anzaldúa's fictionalized memories were constantly on that ruled side, constantly rambling at the subjected end of the spectrum. Another instance that illustrates how power invests individuals that do not have it might be found when Anzaldúa recalls episodes of constraint on a daily basis in the family environment since she somewhat struggled with her mother's aspirations. Her mother was transmitting the same demands she came across at the public school system by telling her that she wanted her to speak English without an accent as a conditioning element for finding a good job:

*I want you to speak English. Pa' hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un 'accent', "my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican." ( Borderlands 75).*

The previous lines describe how she internalized her mother's pressure. Her mother projected her own wishes into aspirations for her daughter's future. Once these were not fulfilled, that turned into an internal frustration because even though Anzaldúa had access to an education she did not fully assimilated or blended in an euro centered standard. The same pressure was exerted on her when she is looking back to some of her memories from her time in Elementary and Secondary school. It could be stated that power was exercised on her because she was required to assimilate from childhood. That external demand placed on her was a bitter pill to swallow when oppression was regularly exerted on her to distance herself from her Mexican roots. It fostered a mocking and

skeptical attitude in her. She depicts how: “Back then, I, an unbeliever, scoffed at these Mexican superstitions as I was taught in Anglo school.” (Borderlands 58) Not adapting as she was expected was the first step towards living in the margins of her two cultures. This is why the formation of peripheral subjects needs to be analyzed taking into consideration Michael Foucault’s analysis on how power is articulated and regularly exercised in individuals, who states that:

*The reality of those born out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint: This soul: it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power. (Discipline 29)*

This articulation between power and knowledge is central to understand why the subjects that look for another representation away from the norms (knowledge) accepted socially end up becoming liminal subjects. The previous example portrayed that Anzaldúa’s felt the compulsion to assimilate at the Anglodominated public school system and that she endured the same conditioning at home. In both anecdotes, she was being subjected to the knowledge: she was trying to deal with expectation placed on her, presuppositions based on prejudices already established in racist discourses that conformed her reality. This stage in her life has been brought to attention to exemplify a key point in Foucault’s analysis of how power is inscribed in society: through social institutions. It could be said that they represent vessels of power, a major source of social discipline and conformity. Social institutions are indispensable in the formation of individuals since they produce docile bodies that self-govern themselves beneath the perpetual gaze of the institutions. This constant monitoring generates a fear of being seen or judged in individuals.

This idea is conveyed in Foucault’s analysis using the model of the panopticon. It was developed for prisons by Jeremy Bentham towards the end of the eighteenth century. Therefore, it is precisely the mechanism to inscribe individuals in the power relations so that both roles plays are performed simultaneously: individuals beneath the eye of systematic monitoring become the principle of their own subjection. Thus, the panopticon is analyzed as a universal strategy of power. It is vital in his analysis of power because its use, which emerges from its architectural system because it represents the way power may be executed by surveillance, in his own words: “The Panopticon is a marvelous

machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power.” (Discipline 202) It is vital to highlight that in Foucault’s view, this architectural form could describe how power is integrated in social structures, he observes it as “as a kind of laboratory of power” (Discipline 204) that is articulated in an invisible form thanks to its direct observation. Foucault believes it an efficient device that is infiltrated into men’s behavior:

*A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. So it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behaviour, the madman to calm, the worker to work, the schoolboy to application, the patient to the observation of the regulations. (Discipline 202)*

As stated in the previous quote, individuals are subjected in an imperceptible manner and there is no need to use a visible brute force to make this power machine work. This can be appreciated in an example following the analysis introduced above about what happened to Anzaldua in the North American Public School system. Following Foucault’s perspective: “The school tends to constitute minute social observatories that penetrate even to the adults and exercise regular supervision over them . . .” (Discipline 211) In line with this fact, she was subjected to the discipline mechanisms that discouraged her to alternate between English and Spanish. At the controlled end of the spectrum, she bore that outcast position from an early childhood just for being Mexican-American. All these anecdotes draw some light on what panopticism may encompass just by analyzing that she was required to only speak in English and to guarantee so, she was placed under observation in her school years. Anzaldua relates that she was the constant target to an overwhelming pressure at school from one of her teachers: “If you want to be American, speak `American`. If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong.” (Borderlands 75) This instance shows how surveillance works in the model of the Panopticon, which is just the device or machinery that might discipline individuals into fitting to a standard or norm:

*At the other extreme, with panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come. (Discipline 209)*

Anzaldua was subject to that invisible oppression when forced to only communicate in English because not only the school posed a space where she could not

be herself switching language but also felt racial discrimination as a stigma that haunted her. There was more than just language alternation, she came across many barriers to fit. She wanted to blend but was not capable of doing so:

*My body is raced; I can't escape that reality, can't control how other people perceive me, can't derace, e-race my body, or the reality of its raced-ness. U.S. society is gendered and racialized; it expects certain behavior from women, certain bearings from men, certain comportment from queer mujeres, certain demeanor from queer hombres, certain conduct from disabled, and so on. If you're a person of color, those expectations take on more pronounced nuances due to the traumas of racism and colonization. (Light 65)*

Anzaldua felt a deep wounding throughout her life because of race prejudice, as mentioned in the previous quote, traumas of racism and colonization translated life into an ordeal. Thus, it could be considered that her fictional voice is trying to find a reconciliation with the processes of class and racial hierarchy she found in her socio-cultural context. In Foucault's terminology, it could be said that she could not fit into a normalization process. He states that the norm encompasses any standardized rule in society so in her case, the pressure to assimilate resulted into a norm she struggled to comply with. This standardization renders any individual out of the norm as a displaced being that tries to fit but virtually can not manage to do so and ends up co-existing, inside and outside the system. Foucault asserts that normalization is the process that regulates and reduces individuals into a standard: "The normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education and the establishment of the ecoles normales ..." (Discipline 184) This circumstance did not change much when Anzaldua enrolled in college. She narrates how at University it was a requirement for her and all Chicano students to take English classes to hide their accent. This created a differentiation that might have conditioned her time in college. This choice even created discomfort in her immediate environment as: "Yet, at the same time, we're afraid the other will think we're *agringadas* because we don't speak Chicano Spanish." (Borderlands 80) The coercion to fit and adhere to the norm made her have mixed feelings even about her likes and hobbies due to the fear of being discriminated because of racial differences. She risked social ostracism if she embraced her Mexican cultural referents and practices:

*I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and agringado Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn't stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it. (Borderlands 83)*

This created a psychological conflict in her because she found hard to deny what she felt. It could be asserted that incapable to follow to the norm and leave her Mexican roots behind in order to blend in, she grew with a fear of social exclusion. That created in her a sense of self-censorship as she was terrified to be called a: “*Pocho*, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish Language” I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas.” (Borderlands 77) She narrates how:

*Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or pochismos. The pocho is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English. (Borderlands 78)*

Anzaldúa mentions that although *pochos* disguise their Spanish to homogenize, it is a strategy that distances the individual who uses it from his or her community. This fear or struggle may represent how language may have been used against the Chicano community by the dominant culture. This embarrass sometimes ends up in a confrontation: “And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.” (Borderlands 80)

She undergoes tension when switching languages and it took her some time to overcome this fear which she later used as a feature of her multicultural identity. In line with the analysis followed in this paper, Foucault regards language as something that has the capacity to control because it can rule out individuals who do not have it. From his angle, the end of the spectrum that is in control of the language creates a barrier that displaces the ones that do not conform to it. Anzaldúa is aware of this power structure: “*El anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua*. Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.” (Borderlands 76) Following this premise, language use is to be

contemplated as an indication sign mark of power in the United States. The use of Spanish may be regarded as an identity mark that works as a performative act that creates identification in the Latin community in North America. When approaching Anzaldua's fictionalized memories, language alternation between English and Spanish shall be regarded as a key element in identity formation. It provided her with a linguistic identity since she could not do as instructed from her education years. Her autofictional voice took a personal implication in the matter: "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language." (Borderlands 81)

Anzaldua points out the struggle related her sexual identity as well. Language discrimination or systematic racism were not the only open fronts she lived through. According to Foucault, homosexual desire draws away from the normative heterosexuality, it is seen as peripheral deviation of the apparatuses of sexuality. Bearing in mind the Foucauldian analysis conducted in this study, it shall be mentioned some sexual orientations that move away from the heterosexual norm can be interpreted as political rebellions because sexual desire operates as political device which controls our behavior to orient it to heterosexual sexuality. Her sexual orientation, which clearly diverted from the norm too was another trigger to feel hopelessly alien or strange. Anzaldua described how she grew up in that uncertain position, with her feet in many worlds.

Although racial distinction was hard to cope with, it could be declared that embracing her linguistic identity was a marking point to start negotiating with the pressure experienced throughout a lifetime. Adding up, it might be said that Anzaldua's socio political protest is precisely born from growing up under that uncomfortable psychological unrest when deciding what language to use and by doing so, with the ambivalence that embracing her Mexican roots meant in her early years. As has been stated throughout this section, racial discrimination was a heavy burden to handle as well.

### **Anzaldua's interrogation of consensual reality: The path to unlearning.**

Anzaldua is encouraged by her access to academic formation which has enabled her generation to question the established order which has been analyzed through Foucault's interpretation of power relations. She states that academic formation enables

her and her cohorts to question the system with the tools needed to question reality in order to find a representation that circumscribes their many cultures:

*Unlike previous generations of Raza, our academic knowledge and language give us both the vocabulary to look at our own cultures and dominant cultures in new ways and the tools to interrogate them. We notice the breaches in feminism, the rifts in Raza studies, the breaks in our disciplines, the splits in this country. These cracks show the flaws in our cultures, the faults in our pictures of reality. (Light 84)*

In her view, education opened a gate that could trigger a route towards creativity, which might ultimately smudge the boundaries that the power-knowledge paradigm poses. By adopting this posture, it could be said that she meets Foucault's critique of social mechanisms that have the ability to force individuals into self-regulation since she no longer puts up with the limitations of what is understood as reality to stop suffering for not being accepted. This reality has proved to be unsatisfactory for her since its main pillar of construction is the norm as has been depicted before. In consequence, Anzaldúa opens a site to dialogue with concerns related to identity, aesthetics, epistemology, or ontology: *Nepantla*. It represents a fictional site that is the necessary emplacement for subjects in the margin who are subjected under multiple forms of constraint.

This imaginary place, which is to be visited through an imaginary journey is a transversal element in her work and represents the ground for all her theories that compose her decolonization technique. So as to achieve an alternative towards a satisfactory representation she builds this space of resistance. In order to contribute to the existing debate and to develop her decolonization strategies, she offers this space as a new source of knowledge and transformation, a path outside the binary thinking that can hinder the anguish that assimilation or separatism enhance where only blending or conforming to fit in a built society are the only options available:

*I hope to contribute to the debate among activist academics trying to intervene, disrupt, challenge, and transform the existing power structures that limit and constrain women... In questioning systems of knowledge, I attempt to add to or alter their norms and make changes in these fields by presenting new theoretical models. With the new tribalism I challenge the Chicano (and other) nationalist narratives. My dilemma, and that of other Chicana and women-of-color writers, is twofold: how to write (produce) without being inscribed (reproduced) in the dominant white structure and how to write without reinscribing and reproducing what we rebel against. (Light 7)*

From these lines it can be seen that she is aware of the changes that need to be made and of the limitations the Chicano collective lives with. This is why Anzaldua uses the Nahuatl word *nepantla* to build the foundations of an imaginary space that is in the middle. In her own words: “I call entering this realm “*nepantla*” —the Nahuatl word for an in-between space, *el lugar entre medio*. *Nepantla*, palabra indígena: un concepto que se refiere a un lugar no-lugar.” (Light 28) This idea is supported by its meaning in Nahuatl, which is intermediate space:

*Nepantla is the space in-between. The locus and sign of transition. In nepantla we realize that realities clash, authority figure of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and others have failed living up to idealized goals. (Light 9)*

*Nepantla* is a threshold of transformation that allows life in other coordinates because she can no longer put up with the expectations placed on her. Taking this journey which is guided by metaphorical coordinates, she develops the potential to build a transitional stage that might result in the formation of new spaces in which a sense of belonging can be developed and achieved, not feeling indefinitely and hopelessly alien or stranger.

As brought up in the previous section, the lack of representation is first motivated by her internal positioning: Chicana lesbian feminist. From this location, running away from the norm and drowning in the edges, Anzaldúa builds with her nails a fictional space to leave behind the misfit position that haunts her: “Being assimilated into white culture, being part indigenous, being artists yet having to survive in the “real” world puts us in a precarious position, with our feet in different worlds.” (53) The previous lines portray that she inhabits various positions that are not satisfactory anymore. It shows how her feet stand on different worlds and her narrative voice can no longer stay still making displacement to other realities is necessary. Anzaldua carries out this in an exercise of autofiction: “I was born and live in that in-between space, *nepantla*, the borderlands.” (Light 64)

In spite of the fact that the creation of this middle space answers to some fictional autobiographical facts, *nepantla* is not just the land for mestizas but the metaphorical space for any individual who feels alienated because of living in the margins or on the edge of society.

The eternal movement among borders that encompasses the many aspects of identity can be everlasting. Identity formation as an ongoing process can portray an ordeal for individuals who live in the confines of many cultures. Borders can turn out to be a conflictive spaces that might lead to isolation, as Anzaldua states it: “There are other borders besides the actual Mexico-U.S frontera and other border artists occupying other nepantlas.” (Light 63)

It might be said that this location with a great prospective is built with great potential to face certain moments of crisis found during certain stages of life that allows to not accept factual reality as it is presented but to see through her many cultures to see their impositions. Consequently, by questioning the systems of knowledge, Anzaldua is challenging the reader to gaze with new eyes the modern power relations described by Foucault, first to decompose how these create what is commonly accepted by reality by mutual agreement to then shake those grounds offering brand new epistemological paths in her narrative. Anzaldua openly questions the systems of knowledge and places herself as an agent prone to first question and transform existing norms when se ratified from her experience that it was not possible to either put up with assimilation or separation from the norm. Accordingly, it could be affirmed that Anzaldua is completely aware about this norm-power-knowledge coalition and openly opposes to it. From her point of view, a task of unlearning must be undertaken:

*Formal education enhances some aspects of awareness and gives access to certain kinds of knowledges. Decolonizing reality consists of unlearning consensual “reality”, of seeing through reality’s roles and descriptions by what Don Juan calls acts of not-doing.*  
(Light 43)

Seeing through the cracks between worlds enables ger to question her factual reality. The commuter that dares to cross Nepantla has to challenge consensual or collective reality as a departure point. This need to retreat and to question what is established is mainly fueled by a struggle for representation. Travelling wears off labels so they no longer affect self-conception: “Dismantling identity entails unlearning stereotypical labels and questioning consensual reality. It means seeing through identity roles and descriptions of reality.” (Light 84) The exercise of questioning and unlearning stated in the previous citation opens a path of empowerment which Anzaldua describes as a quest that can solely be triggered by imagination:

*We are all on a path of empowerment. We must empower the imagination to blur and transcend customary frameworks and conceptual categories reinforced by language and consensual reality. (45)*

What is most significant about the journey is that going through this transformational threshold has the potential of achieving the capability to succeed in the process of reconfiguration of identities. As maintained by Anzaldúa, embracing the emotional traumas to dialogue with them is in the end a trip worth taking: “By connecting with our wounding, the imaginal journey makes it worthwhile.” (Light 29) Although, nepantla shall be seen as a transitional stage, it is key to embrace that it is risky to be stuck there: “If you stay too long in nepantla, you are in danger of being blocked, resulting in a breech birth or being stillborn.” (Light 62) Anzaldúa stands in the middle of nowhere: she can inhabit many positions at the same time and at the same time stands in none. This is precisely what being in Nepantla is like but she warns the reader of the risk to be taken if the traveller gets lost there.

Considering that the dominant western worldview does not suffice, she articulates nepantla, a threshold where any line that sews any label can be transformed and blurred, creating new narratives. Deconstructing reality, she constantly regards the fact that: “The dominant western worldview holds that an “objective” external reality exists independently of the knower, a reality that science can accurately describe.” (Light 43) This is precisely why, according to her, a change in perception is undergone when this intermediate imaginary space is visited. This transitory voyage in her writing enables a shift from daily immediate perception to a magic emplacement. Everchanging, nepantla has its origin in imagination, fantasies, dreams, intuitions, and symbolic events. This placement allows the visualization of broader symbolic processes that bring repressed perceptions to consciousness but to do so, a displacement is required:

*My task is to guide readers and give them the space to co-create, often against the grain of culture, family, and ego injunctions, against external and internal censorship, against the dictates of genes. From infancy our cultures induct us into the semitrance state of ordinary consciousness, into being in agreement with the people around us, into believing that this is the way things are. It is extremely difficult to shift out of this trance. (Light 7)*

These lines illustrate the difficulty that leaving a state of conformation may be. Due to this, the voyage is sometimes initiated by a life situation or an event that shakes the foundations of an established point of view. In accordance with this quotation, shifting out of this ordinary consciousness might be the first step towards lifechanging experiences in nepantla. This transition as a stage in her life could be taken as an emplacement where chaos was to reign necessarily to establish some order. Anzaldúa's interpretation of this fictional area to has the potential to deal with several mental states: "Literal encounters, traumatic happening—arreatamientos such as illness, loss, depression, dislocations, accidents, and the like—can function as initiatory ordeals...". (Light 35) All these hard moments of being that might catapult an individual to Nepantla are the trigger to make realities interact. These imaginative shifts are triggered by a wound or psychological conflict. Once the narrative voice has embraced the fact finding a satisfactory that encompasses her *mestizaje* is not an option anymore, the realization tears her up:

*After a racial or gender wounding, something breaks down; you fall to pieces (you're dismembered). You can't swallow your anger and grief. You struggle to redeem yourself, but you can never live up to the white dominant ideal you've been forced to internalize. (87)*

Nepantla has approved to be a key concept to develop her Post- Borderlands theory. It constitutes a transitional space represents a world in-between to dialogue with old beliefs and unlearn everything that had been taken for granted. This process allows to acquire the capacity to open new views and change perspectives related to several forms of oppression as racism, sexism, heterosexism or classism which may be overt or covert. Either way, individuals under oppression or lack of belonging are perpetually in the borders of acquiring a satisfactory representation. In Nepantla, Anzaldúa converses with her liminal state to enable that possibility for anyone living circumstances like hers.

### **The travellers: drowned voices longing for portrayal in the struggle for representation.**

Nepantleras are described as unique type of mediators, those who have survived and been transformed by their encounters in Nepantla. The trigger that boosts the journey comes from the need to create new narratives away from euro centered positions. Anzaldúa's portray the multiculturalism that U.S Latin communities undergo, co-existing

in a society where they might be regarded as alien members. She articulates a duality creating all these contrasts:

*Living in a multicultural society, we cross into each other's worlds all the time. We live in each other's pockets . . . We are mutually complicitous – us and them, nosotras y los otros, white and colored, straight and queer, Christian and Jew, self and Other, oppressor and oppressed. We all of us find ourselves in the position of being simultaneously both insider and outsider. (79)*

Despite the fact that she uses so many contradistinctions to make visible this dual composition of labels used in society, the fact remains that she breaks the twofold perspective by stating that she is both inside and outside that polarity. This shows a displacement since she is destabilizing the two ends of the spectrum paradigm that has been described in the first section.

Anzaldúa's narrative autofictional voice stands as a transformative agent who reflects on her autobiography to create a new place to heal, self-grow to enhance individual and collective transformation. *Nepantleras* are threshold people that have the ability to reconceive or transform their perspective of life from the cracks and at the same time revisit their artistic creation on this threshold.

According to the previous quote, the chance to include individuals who virtually do not fit and long for representation can only come from a change inside the system to leave behind an ostracized position. No longer standing in the misfit or outcast position precisely to overthrow it from within the social structures. Because of this, Anzaldúa's creation of *nepantla* is a technique used to rewrite real spaces in order to generate satisfactory fictional spaces.

*Nepantla*, as a key emplacement in Anzaldúan cartography, is the land for any group who does not fit within the norm and longs for a third space to find a new representation apart from binary thinking: "Mestizas don't fit with the norm. Depending on the degree of cultural hybridization, we are caught between cultures and can simultaneously be insiders, outsiders, and other-siders." (71) Being simultaneously insiders and outsiders seems the way that has been opted to move within oppressive contexts. Anzaldúa believes that hybrid beings are like chameleons that need to change their colors to merge, always in the margins, constantly within and without making identity something that may change according to the habitat:

*Identity is relational. Who and what we are depends on those surrounding us, a mix of our interactions with our alrededores/environments, with new and old narratives. Identity is multilayered, stretching in all directions, from past to present, vertically and horizontally, chronologically and spatially. (Light 69)*

Anzaldúa establishes the fictional grounds of a fictional space of transition for marginal identities who do not adhere to the norm. Because of this, they are inevitably subject to several forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, heterosexism or classism. This operates as the engine of the production of her rebellious message; therefore, this artistic manifestation will be approached as an element of insurrection to generate a process of resistance and reconstruction of discourses to make her voice visible/heard. Her multiple voices will not indulge into self-regulation any longer since they have undertaken the path to unlearning consensual reality. Anzaldúa opts for a third way since she can no longer stay where she is. Considering this, the need to create of a third way to fight systematic oppression, Anzaldúa's *Nepantla* enacts a decolonization process capable of going beyond rage and trauma. The opening of a threshold to recreate reality by dialoguing with colonialism, nationalism, racism and sexism to write new stories and by doing so, it gives birth to a narrative of healing.

*Una alianza entre los humanos y los "Dioses". A system of healing based on spiritual practices, chamanería has survived for more than forty thousand years. It is the oldest known religious practice, one in which the shaman or nagual undertakes a "journey" (or trance journey) to the underworld, upper world or other worlds, moving from one zone to another to encounter "spirits" from whom she or he obtains healing insights and brings them back to help their community. (Light 32)*

As can be regarded, she openly acknowledges Carlos Castaneda's influence, she states that: "To "see", says Don Juan, one has to sneak between the worlds of ordinary reality and the world of the sorcerers." (Light 32) Since only in her imagining she is capable of opening a new reality for the reader, she builds *Nepantla* to enable a spot for a healing process, which simultaneously represents for her the ultimate goal of her artistic activism, placing herself in the scope of a shaman who has to be torn apart in basic elements just to be reconstructed to acquire the faculty of healing to help her community. In Anzaldúa's words: "In these imagining I process feelings, traumas, negativities

resulting from gender, racial, or other oppressions, and I mourn my losses.” (35). This venture, is not an easy one and the reader could feel so as Anzaldua utters that “Judging stories of nonliteral realities, such as chamanas’ flights to other worlds, as “made up”, our western society invalidates the meanings and healing they offer.” (37)

To conclude this section, it is worth bringing up that the creation of this transformation area might be approached as an element of insurrection that poses an answer to reality after it has been proved to not be sufficient. When real spaces are written again from a different perspective, a process of resistance and reconstruction of discourses is enacted to generate satisfactory fictional spaces.

### **Conclusions: Nepantla is a potential site of transformation in between spaces.**

Nepantla, liminal space that can mark a changing point between the way things had been to open the gates towards the future. The journey across Nepantla represents a transgression of borders to leave comfort and stable zones in the past to open windows to more satisfactory ways of representation. As has been covered in this study, Anzaldua herself revisited some traumas derived from racial prejudice. The reluctance she found at home to express her sexual orientation just because it was away from the heterosexual normative that standardizes the phallogocentric society was brought into light also. Not just her but any individual in denial of a projected or assumed heterosexual identity have the potential to be safe there. These and other oppressions enhanced her need to create this transitional space to address some cognitive dissonances.

Michel Foucault’s conception of power was set into the equation of this analysis to first, give visibility to the lack of representation that “mestizas” undergo in an everlasting anguish. Sexual orientation or desire was posed as an example to render how any behavior that distances from “the norm” longs for representation in Nepantla. It was used to display an example of what happens and can be achieved in there. Generating this intermediate space, Anzaldua articulates her ultimate decolonization strategy to heal old narratives and open new transformational gates. The creation of this hybrid text, without delimited borders, lives outside the established approaches in the colonial and postcolonial world to open a space to question established identities so its later influence of this concept in Chicano studies is undeniable. Nepantla is the place where Anzaldua shifts to deal with her liminal position and escapes the observation of Foucault’s idea of the panopticon to be capable of: “Negotiating with borders results in mestizaje, the new

hybrid, the new mestiza, a new category of identity. Mestizas live in between different worlds, in nepantla.” (Light 71)

Anzaldua’s creation of this fictional world is brought on by her inability to put up with traditional labelling that marks individuals. Since being paralyzed, stranded in the middle is not the only option anymore, she traces a new path that offers an alternative to reshape reality by exposing her inner self through her fictional voice. Not complying with the ideals, she was forced to grow up with, she stands in the middle of nowhere: she can inhabit many positions at the same time and at the same time stands in none. It could be claimed without hesitation that this feeling is precisely what being in nepantla is like. Therefore, she warns the reader of the risk to be taken if the traveler gets lost there.

The perspective of this analysis considers that this narrative technique responds to the established order due to its hybridism. With these multiple maneuvers, she creates the ground for all her theories. This is to be considered her last resource to face the transitional state in which she inhabits. When entering Nepantla, the generation of multiple identities that are not to be constrained by race, class, or gender is a possibility. This is why it must be concluded that Anzaldua openly inquires about the speechless identities, which long for representation not necessarily framed by the norm. To add up, Anzaldua uses this fictional space to dialogue with several forms of oppressions and by doing so, she generates a subversive literary element. By building the pillars of this space of transition, she enables a voyage where a shift from the ordinary to the magical or spiritual can be experimented in order to access other realities that are more satisfactory. Consequently, nepantla is a third way, an alternative that breaks the duality that poses the need to adapt to labels or to take an outcast position.

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