

# (DE)COLONIZING COLONIZED IDENTITIES: THE CHICANA CASE\*

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## ABSTRACT

At a first level, this essay searches for the identity of Chicanos and Chicanas in front of the 'wasp' majority in the U.S. At a second, it analyses the differences in concepts and the representation of ideas and facts between Chicanos and Chicanas; at a third stage, it studies the gaps existing between the very Chicanas themselves, due to questions of class, gender and race, and the intersections produced by them. Several concrete instances are given of writers and militants of the activist movement that started in the decade of the sixties, and of the evolution of the Chicano resistance in North America, such as the cases of Ricardo Sánchez, Abelardo Delgado, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga. Also, terms like 'La Raza', el 'Barrio' are re-interpreted, and myths, like the one of 'La Malinche', are deciphered on the light of the new engaged postcolonial and ideological concepts.

KEY WORDS: Chicano/a studies, class, gender, race, colonization, decolonization, identity

## RESUMEN

En una primera vertiente, este artículo ahonda en la identidad de los hombres y mujeres chicanos frente a la mayoría 'wasp' americana, en una segunda, investiga las diferencias de concepción y representación de las ideas y las acciones entre chicanos y chicanas entre sí, y en tercer lugar, estudia las separaciones que hay entre las propias mujeres chicanas, todo ello debido a cuestiones de clase, género y raza, así como las intersecciones entre ellas. Se aportan varios ejemplos concretos de escritores y militantes activistas desde los años sesenta y de la evolución de los movimientos de resistencia chicanos en Norteamérica, como son los casos de Ricardo Sánchez, Abelardo Delgado, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, así como se interpretan términos como 'La Raza', el 'Barrio', y se descifran mitos como el de 'la malinche' a la luz de nuevas concepciones postcoloniales e ideológicas comprometidas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Estudios chicanos/as, clase, género, raza, colonización, descolonización, identidad.

It seems to me that in spite of the explosion of creative and critical activity on the part of both critics and writers, Chicana writers and critics are still within a framework of marginality among Chicano writing as well as in mainstream writing. Some of this may be attributed to time; that is, time for the maturing of our

literature as well as of our criticism. In addition to the creation of new insights and perspectives, we are also at a moment of rupture in which we are just beginning to look back to back—to unsay what had been said and frozen in time and place. We are at the moment of questioning everything, even ourselves. Only when it is accomplished can we, with clear conscience, proceed towards some understanding of critical difference (Tey Diana Rebolledo in Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul* 347).

The postmodern condition is by definition characterized by fragmentation. But this can be a good help to solve the problem of modern writers placing themselves at a crossroads, because of their origins, exiles and nationalities. In America, the literature of minorities is always being reinvented. We can speak about *transcultural* writers, the product of an international culture without limits, because of their own decisions and, or, social conditionings. Those writers live in that abstract space called *global village*, that is, a no-man's land without a specific identity, or else, with an identity of its own, characterized by polysemy, by creativeness, and non-canonical approaches to the literature of the world<sup>1</sup>.

It is well known that the recent history of the American continent has been produced by migrant forces which have been coming in different waves from all over the world. These waves of different people and races, coming to this promising *newfoundland* to find a new *El Dorado*, are a challenge to the people which came in it first (as it was and has always been in the history of the world since the very beginning), and consider themselves the owners of the land. But, without entering in these broader concepts of possession and inheritance of the territory, what can be stated clearly is that the situation of modern North America, specifically, is that of a mosaic, a microcosm of ideas, races, religions... which clash many times against a conscience of Unity, of the United States—as alluded in the very concept of this Nation.

The migrant condition is, therefore, a contradictory term in a land of possessors and victims, because the previous one establish the rules of government and the others adjust and try to imitate (in order not to be discredited), but keeping and progressively losing, in a series of generations, their own identities and differences.

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\* This work is an ample revision of a paper delivered at Helsinki/ESSE Conference in 2000. It is also based on an article published in the proceedings of the Swiss-Austrian Conference in American Studies in Salzburg, 1997, and read in the Women Conference in Thessaloniki, Greece that same year. The results are part of a project in minorities and margins granted by the Spanish DGES (PB95-0321-CO3-02).

<sup>1</sup> To analyze the intersections of *Chicano literature* with postcolonial and postmodernist studies and theories, see Pérez-Torres: *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*. The feeling of displacement and dispossession leads to the Chicano cultural identity as postcolonial; the Chicano contemporary multiculturalism and hybridity leads to the juxtaposition with postmodernism.

It is a situation, that of the emigrant, which is both frustrating and enriching, in a fascinating paradox that proves sometimes very creative, mainly in the hand of artists and intellectuals —let us forget about the social differences and restrict to migrant writers and intellectuals. On the one hand, the recent emigrant loses the power of roots and the knowledge of both the traditional and the imposed rules and language, that is, he/she lives in an unknown territory, with the fascination and vertigo of the discoverer of a new reality; on the other and after a while, both world begin to mix up, building slowly a new reality much richer than the one of a monochrom citizen but less safe and comfortable. It depends on the level of adjustment and the cultural power of the subject that it can result in a very rich and metaphoric literary force, leading to the creation of a hybrid. The possibility of watching and comparing the new with the old, after the first cultural shocks, transforms in the only privileged condition for the emigrant, and saves from schizophrenia. This is also a fascinating borderly condition because the eye watches from the ex-centric position (a terminology now in use for the study of differences in non-canonical literature), so that one can feel the reality from the outside, from the first non-implicate, innocent situation of the newcomer, mocked by the experts but mocking their certainty at the same time. Undoubtedly, the emigrant condition leads to a paradoxical status in which one temporarily loses the solid grounds and education, like a new-born child starts learning the new language and rules, a little bit looking like a decent fool to the eye of the established, but being able to judge from that seemingly inferior position, like an old-man who knows more than you but cannot express it.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of the Chicanos, the situation is radically different but leading to the same problem, for the Chicanos, despite being the former owners of the land, have been treated similarly to the other ethnic minorities that migrated or were taken to America during the nineteenth and the twentieth century, due to economic famines, religious riots or slavery.<sup>3</sup> Among the inhabitants of the immense territory of the United States, the Chicanos claim for the rights of a big region that

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<sup>2</sup> Many items concerning the situation of emigrants have been studied in the last years: questions like the experience of exile, the dislocation of space and place, the life in the new land, and, more recently, the gender specificities, the different experiences of female and male migrants, and the violence towards lonely women. Gina BUIJS' *Migrant Women: Crossing Borders and Changing Identities* is a good example of these anthropological series.

<sup>3</sup> In "A Note on Ethnic Labels," De la Torre Pesquera state "*Chicana* and *Chicano* typically refer, respectively, to women and men of Mexican descent residing in the United States. *Chicano* is also a broad term that includes both males and females who claim Mexican heritage (e.g., the Chicano community). These labels offer an alternative to the more common ethnic identifiers *Mexican* and *Mexican American*. The term *Mexican* may also be used to refer specifically to immigrants from Mexico. *Mexicana* and *Mexicano* typically refer to immigrant women and men. Regional and historical differences also affect the use of ethnic labels. For example, *Hispana* and *Hispano* are terms used by the Mexican-origin populations of New Mexico" (XIII).

spreads mainly through six southwestern States: California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, and parts of Oklahoma and Kansas, that is, a land formerly called Aztlán by the primitive owners: "Our nearest Indian relatives are the Aztecs and the Mayas, but their ancestors, in turn, were the people of Aztlán. Some of the most ancient Aztlán people were the Anasazi (the ancient ones), the Hohokan, and the Cochise..." (De León 13). Since then, Chicanos have been claiming for the possession of a territory that was originally theirs, and not the Spaniards', the Mexicans', or the Americans'. Their hybrid condition is another characteristic derived from the birth of a mixed-blood race, and it is precisely this condition that brings with it the Chicano identity vs. other populations of the nation; the *mestizo* quality has tainted the Chicanos' fight against dominance ever since.

Chicanos' activism starts from the very moment of their achieving a new situation as citizens of a new State, after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, in 1848, in which Mexico gave up its rights for the land to the United States. But it will not be until the twentieth century, in the decades of the sixties and seventies, that is, the moment of the big fight for equality of the main ethnic groups of America, when the Chicanos group together under the name of *La Raza*, in active resistance against oppression of the white Anglo-saxon majority. Other guerrilla-names that appeared at that time were *the people*, *the community*, *carnalismo*, *la gente*, or, more commonly, *el barrio*.<sup>4</sup> As Rose-Marie Roybal puts it, in favour of the first term,

*LA RAZA* is a convenient term, and it carries with it a great deal of charismatic power. Is it accurate to use it so freely, though? Is a Mexican American from San Diego, the same as a Mexican, or Chicano, from Salt Lake City, Chicago, San Antonio, or Racine, Wisconsin? How does one begin to discuss *LA RAZA* as a 'forgotten people' without the blanket generalizations about their social, political, or economic conditions? (...) Do these groups truly melt under a banner of *LA RAZA*? Perhaps, in issue-oriented situations. (9)

To create a unity in that diversity and be able to fight against dogma and canon, it is always necessary to use a certain epic language and the appearance of heroes, leaders and martyrs. They were soon and easily found in the old historical

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<sup>4</sup> De la Torre Pesquera (see previous note) explain the meaning and origin of these names: "The term *Chicano* was popularized in the late 1960s during the Chicano movement to affix a political orientation that affirmed the need to struggle against the historical oppression of people of Mexican descent in the United States. *La Raza* was also popularized during the same period and underscores a shared cultural experience and a sense of unity among peoples of Mexican, Central American, and South American heritage. *Latino*, commonly associated with peoples of Latin American origin, has a similar use. *Hispanic* is a term coined by the U.S. Census to identify all Spanish-speaking and/or Spanish-origin populations in the United States. While it is commonly used in data sets, it is considered an imposed identifier" (xiii).

independentists, from Gregorio Cortéz to Reies Tijerina, and, more tragically, in the everyday victims of brutal repression and in the lack of understanding of two very different linguistic cultures, in the social injustices and the racist feelings that spread from ignorance of the other: Rubén Salazar or Ernesto Nerios —a young delinquent shot dead for stealing a car— became paradigms of these and aroused a conscience of united fight against the big *monster*. Obviously, the Chicano activism turns into a hidden anti-imperialist war against discrimination and gains strength progressively until the fulfillment of many goals and aims during the eighties.

Among Chicano activism of the nineties it stands out the work of some Chicano writers and poets that —in spite of the difficulty of being published and even read by the majority of their fellows— use their creative power as a tool, and wander through the States reading their poems and writings, and diffusing Chicano culture to other open-minded citizens. One of the most important Chicano poets, who even reached a university position, died recently, in 1995. Ricardo Sánchez exemplifies the fight for cultural challenges without forgetting one's roots and origins. In his several books of poetry published until his death, the creative force of the Chicano life is depicted and a political engagement with *La Raza* stands as the main streamline of his ideology. The title of the 1994 book, *Amerikan Journeys: Jornadas Americanas*, is a clear example of his militancy; the spelling of the word *Amerikan* is explained in the poet's fondness for puns and games of words: the letter *k* is the symbol of ku-klux-klan, the triple *k*, the main shame of American violent intolerance and racism.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the main importance of Sánchez' poetry lies in his easy manipulation of the language, to clarify the essence and value of the words. A whole new, invented, and *mestizo* vocabulary appears in his works, and his ideas in pro of the Chicano world do not collide with his love for life and humanity, his sense of universality, together with a taste for culture as the supreme wealth of the mind. In his 'dirge chicaneaux', written to the memory of Chicano activist César Chávez, Sánchez states these principles:

(...)  
 we knew you, carnal César,  
 within Texas turnrows  
 and Arizona cottonfields,  
 along valleys in California  
 and outposts in the Midwest,

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<sup>5</sup> In his preface to the book, Rob Lewis points out: "In labelling Ricardo Sánchez as a *Chicano* poet and his poetry as *Chicano poetry* we must be careful not to lose sight of the fact that Dr. Sánchez is a very accomplished *American* poet, writing in a specifically American idiom and out of a uniquely American experience."

knew you in the plenitude  
of Chicano Movement outcries,  
in the felicity of culture  
dancing/poeticizing the moment,  
felt the potent songs  
(...)

that justice might become  
the song of human realization,  
you taught a pueblo  
to demand their rights, to thrive  
within simplicity,  
(...) (Sánchez, *Amerikan* 51-52)

Another instance of Chicano poet within the active militant Chicano movement is 'Lalo' Delgado. I happened to meet Abelardo 'Lalo' Delgado in a conference about "Bodies, Boundaries and Borders in American Movement Cultures" that took place in Washington State University in June, 1996. I was personally impressed by the force and power of the strong voice of this aged Chicano that embodied the qualities of the chicano male cliché: courage, virility, physical resistance and, above all, a bitter sense of humour leading to irony but also, many times, to open laughter —something that could probably be defined as charisma. The language of that Chicano was even more impressive, because it was not a double-tongue capacity, but instead a tremendous powerful torrent of a creole language formed by the indiscriminate use of both the Spanish and the English. It had the right of being called a new language: it was Chicano language and it was theirs alone<sup>6</sup>. From the booklets by 'Lalo' Delgado sold there (a-200-numbered-issued editions, home-made and xeroxed), it could be noticed the peeping-eye of the poet exploring their neighbours from *el barrio*, his own experiences as activist, his taste for life and the family: the pillars of the Chicano conscience. Many Chicano myths were also included in the collective Chicano mind depicted by Delgado: *La Llorona*, *La Malinche*, a feminine symbol of ambivalent meanings: *la Virgen de*

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<sup>6</sup> As soon as 1972, there were activist speeches against the linguistic problem in Chicano environments. Nephtali de León, for instance, comments on language that "in the beginning we knew Spanish. Now we barely know our mother tongue and no one has taught us English. As such we have had to create our own language —la lengua del Chicano. Today's Mexican American speaks a mixture of Spanish and English. It is a beautiful language in its own right. (.../...) If you ever feel nervous or up tight, speak Spanish. If you ever must —speak Spanish. If your parents or your friends want to visit your school and they're not too hot in English —let them speak our beautiful language-Spanish! And let the system get an interpreter. It's cool to know Spanish. (/) One last word. It's super cool to be bilingual (57-8). Two decades later, Cherríe Moraga expresses (in her book *The Last Generation*) the paradoxical situation of the Chicano language, which —depending on the number of the generation of Chicano immigrant residing in U.S.— loses fluency and is disarticulated in favour of English.

*Guadalupe* vs. *la vendida*. The “malinche” is precisely one of the most popular myths in the Chicano tradition and similarly to the “Eve” myth in the Jewish-Christian religion it brings the burden of sin nearer to women than to men. According to the legend “La Malinche was a young Aztec woman who served as Hernán Cortés’s translator and concubine during the conquest”, after having a child with Cortés, the Malinche becomes “a whore, the mother of a bastard race of *mestizos*, and a traitress to her country” (Mirandé 24).

In “La Llorona,” a poem in two parts, Delgado takes advantage of the myth to explore the historical and legendary aspect in the first part, and an extrapolation for activist purposes in the second. *La Llorona* transforms from a virgin *dolorosa* with a dead Chicano Christ in her hands, to a priestess of a pagan religion that kills her own *mestizo* son in order not to lose him, and thirdly, to the Chicana mother who cries for her children because of the racist repression of American society:

(...)

La Malinche

and [Cortez] had a son,  
one of the first Mestizos,  
one of the first Chicanos.  
When the child grew up  
Cortez wanted to send him to Europe  
to be educated as a white man.  
La Malinche rather than giving her son  
to such a fate

sacrificed him to the sun.

La llorona, the wailing one,  
keeps crying for her lost son.  
T e n o c h t i t l a n  
is now Mexico city  
and many are those who swear  
that in the dead of night  
when the wind blows cold,  
La Malinche, symbol of all mothers  
who have lost a son,  
gives out her deafening wails.  
ay, ay, ay, her crying is a warning  
to the descendants of the Aztecs  
to stay away from technological monsters  
from dangers that materialism fosters.

(Part II)

(...)

a loud cry.  
la llorona’s deafening wail  
send those students  
running home.  
They shiver just talking about it.

Can it be she suffers  
 the bad education Chicanos  
 receive in many U.S. schools.  
 (...)
 —She cries in las barracas  
 of industry, her children  
 devoured by computers.—  
 Ay, ay, ay, I want mi hijo.  
 A silence louder than her cry  
 makes goose pimples multiply. (Delgado, *la llorona* 3-4)

The myth of *La Malinche* is a powerful subversive *motif* in the Chicano literature. Here, in this poem, Delgado uses it in a positive way: *la llorona* is a woman of courage who fights with her own blood, killing her son, against the white's oppression represented by the conquerer Cortez, the invader of the land. But this story has many different interpretations and has become the main example of the fight between Chicanos and Chicanas as another fight for the defence of human rights.<sup>7</sup> It will not be until the birth of the first feminist Chicana movement in the seventies, that the male-centered Chicano society starts to balance its main pillars. Chicana feminists will go against the myth of *La Malinche* and question the submissiveness and tamed heroic spirit of the Chicana mother and wife. For example, Cherríe Moraga, a Chicana activist and poet, interprets this myth in a more negative and dystopian way. In her rather confessional essay "A Long Line of Vendidas", specifically in the chapter titled "Traitor begets Traitor", she copes with the consequences of the Malinche act. There, she states that "The sexual legacy [that] passed down to the Mexicana/Chicana is the legacy of betrayal, pivoting around the historical/mythical female figure of Malintzin Tenepal. As translator and strategic advisor and mistress to the Spanish conqueror of México, Hernán Cortés, Malintzin is considered the mother of the mestizo people. But unlike La Virgen de Guadalupe, she is not revered as the Virgin Mother, but rather slandered as La Chingada, meaning the "fucked one", or La Vendida, sell-out to the white race" (*Loving in the War Years*, 99). Moraga's own biography, as the daughter of an Anglo and a Mexican makes her one of the mixed-blood creatures derived from Malinche's own vital decision, according to the legend<sup>8</sup>:

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<sup>7</sup> M. BORREGO analyzes the deconstruction of *La Malinche* in Cherríe Moraga's work: *Loving in the War Years* (Borrego 43-46). This legendary woman is seen as a victim of Chicano macho attitudes against Chicanas. *La Malinche* betrays the Chicano coloured-men with her love to the white Hernán Cortez; thus, the first *mestizos* are born. Also, she embodies the sin of Eve, and stands as a prostitute, a *Vendida*, against the greatest myth for the Chicano race, that is, the Virgin of Guadalupe "who embodies the most virtuous feminine attributes: piety, virginity, forgiveness, succor and saintly submissiveness" (Mirandé 28)

<sup>8</sup> In an interview with Moraga, Borrego Ruano asks for the meaning of being an outcast in every land; this is her answer: "Pues es difícil decir porque es una combinación de cosas: por ser

Malintzin, also called Malinche, fucked the white man who conquered the Indian peoples of Mexico and destroyed their culture. Ever since, brown men have been accusing her of betraying her race, and over centuries continue to blame her entire sex for this “transgression. (*Loving* 100)

In that sense, Moraga re-interprets the myth to vindicate her condition as Chicana, feminist and lesbian in “La Güera”:

It wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression —due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana— was realized. My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings. (*Loving* 52)

It is precisely this triple level of marginalization that creates Moraga's social fight, and the last one, that is her sexual option, her lesbianism, integrates her personality as a woman and a Chicana to form an integral being in a specific society.

Our sexuality has been hidden, subverted, distorted within the “sacred” walls of the “familia” —be it myth or reality— and within the even more privatized walls of our bedrooms. Like many women, our understanding of our sexual desire too often comes through the reality of sexual violence. In the journey to the love of female self and each other we are ultimately forced to confront father, brother and god (and mother as his agent). (*Alarcón* 9)

Some years later, in the book called *The Last Generation*, Moraga makes a real statement of principles concerning militancy, feminism and sexual inferiority. In this case, she makes use again of the Malinche symbol as a way of showing how cultural formation stigmatizes the figure of the woman and the homosexual, and in so doing they prove the impossibility to fight in the same front than the orthodox ones. Because they also privilege the male heterosexual condition as superior and “official”. It is a long quote that we reproduce here for the sake of the argument:

The male-dominated Chicano movement embraced the most patriarchal aspects of its Mexican heritage. For a generation, nationalist leaders used a kind of “selective memory”, drawing exclusively from those aspects of Mexican and Native cul-

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mujer, por ser lesbiana, etc. Una siente marginación, pero también ese es mi trabajo. Yo siempre he “radicado” en ese espacio, eso es de donde sale mi trabajo como escritora, como artista, como una persona que quiere expresarse. Como radico en ese espacio, entonces por eso siempre estoy enfrentando estos obstáculos y experiencias de violencia, de ignorancia, de racismo, de todas estas cosas; pero también siento que he tenido mucho privilegio. Cuando estoy hablando de mi posición frente a la mayoría, y también respecto a mi familia, sobre las raíces de mi familia, me doy cuenta de que nadie de mi familia tiene la educación que tengo yo” (*Entrevista* 276).



tures that served the interests of male heterosexuals. At times, they took the worst of Mexican machismo and Aztec warrior bravado, combined it with some of the most oppressive male-conceived idealizations of “traditional” Mexican womanhood and called that cultural integrity. They subscribed to a machista view of woman, based on the centuries-old virgin-whore paradigm of La Virgen de Guadalupe and Malintzin Tenepal. Guadalupe represented the Mexican ideal of “la madre sufrida”, “the long-suffering desexualized Indian mother, and Malinche was “la chingada”, sexually stigmatized by her transgression of “sleeping with the enemy”, Hernán Cortés. Deemed traitor by Mexican tradition, the figure of Malinche was invoked to keep Movimiento women silent, sexually passive, and “Indian” in the colonial sense of the word. (I) The preservation of the Chicano familia became the Movimiento’s mandate and within this constricted “familia” structure, Chicano políticos ensured that the patriarchal father figure remained in charge both in their private and political lives. Women were, at most, allowed to serve as modern-day “Adelitas”, performing the “three fs” as a Chicana colleague calls them: “feeding, fighting, fucking.” In the name of this “culturally correct” familia, certain topics were censored both in cultural and political spheres as not “socially relevant” to Chicanos and typically not sanctioned in the Mexican household. These issues included female sexuality generally and male homosexuality and lesbianism specifically, as well as incest and violence against women—all of which are still relevant between the sheets and within the walls of many Chicano families. In the process, the Chicano Movement forfeited the participation and vision of some very significant female and gay leaders and never achieved the kind of harmonious Chicano “familia” they ostensibly sought (Moraga, *The Last Generation* 156-8).

So, at the same time that Chicanos were calling for the rekindling of ethnic pride and identity, Chicanas who pointed to the rich legacy of feminism and female participation in *raza* revolutionary movements were discounted as *vendidas* or as women’s libbers. Feminism was seen not as something organic to the culture but as an Anglo trick to divide the Chicano movement (Mirandé 235).<sup>9</sup> Little by little, the Chicana begins acquiring a conscience of her own margins, more powerful than the Chicano’s, because of her own inferior condition as woman in a male-centered society. And a big clash within Chicano society leads to the division of *La Raza* into the *Barrio* concerns with primary needs, and the Chicana feminists (*las compañeras*) concerns with their own civil rights. Tey Diana Rebolledo in “Walking the Thin Line: Humor in Chicana Literature” consequently argues that “a criticism of the Mexican-American system or of sexism itself by women is, in effect, a breaking of the ranks of ethnic solidarity and an abandonment of “the culture”. Thus, the

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<sup>9</sup> “She is made to feel guilty if she voices her opinion in areas considered ‘men’s work,’ and she’s called a ‘metiche.’ She is called unloyal to ‘la causa’ and ‘el movimiento’ when she refuses to bed down with someone ‘putting the make’ on her. She is told she should stand behind her man when she can be just as supportive in standing *beside* him” (Roybal).

system creates tremendous pressure and feelings of ambivalence for the writer, (...) For example, movement women felt relegated to the kitchen to fix the beans while the men talked revolution (Herrera-Sobek 95)."<sup>10</sup> She continues giving two poetic examples of this female awareness of the separation from the machismo, written by Lorna Dee Cervantes and Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, respectively:

you speak of the new way,  
a new life...

Pero your voice is lost to me carnal,  
in the wail of tus hijos,  
in the clatter of dishes,  
and the pucker of beans upon the stove.  
Your conversation come to me  
de la sala where you sit,  
spreading your dream to brothers  
where you spread that dream like damp clover  
for them to trod upon,  
when I stand here reaching  
*para ti con manos bronce* that spring  
from *mi espíritu*  
(for I too am Raza) (Horno-Delgado 50).

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he's very much aware now  
and makes fervent Revolution  
so his children  
and the masses  
Will be free  
but his woman  
in every language  
has only begun to ask

—y yo querido viejo  
and ME?— (Herrera-Sobek 96)

That is the reason why the feminist Chicanas group themselves into other *tribes*, other issue-oriented unities, that are not properly placed inside the Chicanas' movement alone. Another important fact is that the Chicanas oblige themselves to

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<sup>10</sup> Notice the irony in the name of some small independent presses which allude precisely to this situation of women, like Kitchen Table Press, for example, set in important places like New York in this case.

the task of finding and creating a new and more equal language to express a different world, so they become postmodern *womanist* writers acting against many other war fronts: now, the enemies will not only be the whites, the machos, the social injustices, but also the white women, and the white feminists, because they show themselves far from the Chicana goals as *coloured* people, and a whole chain of intersections of class, race and gender provoke a very interesting postmodern intellectual debate.<sup>11</sup> The key-point in the gap radicates in the foucaultian situation of power that differentiates among the groups:

As Third World women we clearly have a different relationship to racism than white women, but all of us are born into an environment where racism exists. Racism affects all of our lives, but it is only white women who can “afford” to remain oblivious to these effects. The rest of us have had it breathing or bleeding down our necks. (*I*) But you work with what you have, whatever your skin color. Racism is societal and institutional. It implies the power to implement racist ideology. Women of color do not have such power, but white women are born with it and the greater their economic privilege, the greater their power. This is how white middle class women emerge among feminist ranks as the greatest propagators of racism in the movement. Rather than using the privilege they have to crumble the institutions that house the source of their own oppression —sexism, along with racism— they oftentimes deny their privilege in the form of “downward mobility”, or keep it intact in the form of guilt. Guilt is *not* a feeling. It is an intellectual mask to a feeling. Fear is a feeling —fear of losing one’s power, fear of being accused, fear of a loss of status, control, knowledge. Fear is real. Possibly this is the emotional, non-theoretical place from which serious anti-racist work among white feminists can begin. (Moraga & Anzaldúa 62)

In this sense, Doris Davenport puts the finger in it when exploring the core differences between white feminists and black feminists, which are based precisely in the racial items: “We experience white feminists and their organization as elitist, crudely insensitive, and condescending. Most of the feminist groups in this country are examples of this elitism. It is also apparent that white feminists still perceive us as the “Other,” based on a menial or sexual image: as more sensual, but less cerebral; more interesting, perhaps, but less intellectual; and more oppressed, but less political than they are (Moraga & Anzaldúa 86). The deconstruction of the breaches that separate them affect the position of every militancy as well as mathematical intersections affect the components of every member of a group, or in other words, there is the need of decolonizing the mind —as critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o would put it— to

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<sup>11</sup> A very important book about these is *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender*. Also, see *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings*, and *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature*.

find a new status of equality, after recognizing one's position in the pyramidal structure of power. Davenport, in this sense, goes further in her exploration: "Although black and white feminists can sometimes work together for a common goal with warmth and support, and even love and respect each other occasionally, underneath there is still another message. That is that white feminists, like white boys and black boys, are threatened by us" (86). The simile that is used clarifies the situation of marginalization suffered by colored feminists when coping with affinities in both groups and strike the importance of gaps in power-systems. As the critic affirms, acutely:

Such a "superiority complex" is obviously a result of compensation. I mean, if whites really knew themselves to be superior, racism could not exist. They couldn't be threatened, concerned, or bothered. I am saying that the "white supremacist" syndrome, especially in white feminists, is the result of a real inferiority complex, or lack of self-identity. Just as macho male uses wimmin to define himself or to be sure he exists, white feminists use wimmin of color to prove their (dubious) existence in the world. (88)

Nancy Saporita, in "A Deep Racial Memory of Love," explains accordingly how this process of splitting began, for "during the seventies, a new genre of Chicana poetry emerged that began to address some of those issues; in them, the Chicana speaker rails against the Anglo-American women's liberationist for her condescension, her lack of sensitivity, and her choosing of the agenda for all women (Horno-Delgado 49). She puts the clear example of Marcela Lucero's poem, "No More Cookies, Please":

W A S P liberationist  
you invited me  
token minority  
but your abortion ideology  
failed to integrate me.  
Over cookies and tea  
you sidled up to me and said  
"sisterhood is powerful." (Horno-Delgado 48)

Also, in the re-invention of the world, Chicana writers see themselves forced to speak against their own cultural breed and formation, and in doing so they become nearer most of the other marginal women of the American landscape. This ideal, unreal, world is by definition decentralized and peripheral, that is, its borders are imaginary or self-invented and imposed. It creates a magic world of memories and subjectively chosen frontiers, which are the product of the power of physical and mental dislocation. And something even more attractive to the modern critics is that these notions of *unity in diversity* bring about other intersections and coincidences which are stronger than the national ones. They form a shocking movement, grouping together different races and ethnic origins under different names. One of the best examples can be seen in the activist group of *radical women of colour*, that

appeared some years ago in the western coast of the American Pacific<sup>12</sup>. They find the quality of being *marginal* women of different racial and gender origins as the only point of contact: a new and risky classification that is working very well with the Chicana movement and the Afro-American in the U.S. border and with the Asian-Indian immigrants in Canada, for example<sup>13</sup>. Virginia Harris and Trinity Ordoña in their essay “Developing Unity Among Women of Color: Crossing the Barriers of Internalized Racism and Cross-Racial Hostility,” explain the origin of this “bizarre” union,

Racism treats women of different racial backgrounds differently, but racism is still a common oppression of women of color. Our experiences may be different, but we all internalize racism (“struggle to become something we’re not while denying who we are”) and feel the powerlessness which results from that internalization. The racial hierarchy is calculated and has definite purpose. One purpose is to produce the antagonisms we experience in groups of supposedly similar women. We are unable to talk to each other. We are unable to accept differences. We are unable to see and admit the stereotypes and predispositions we have about ourselves and other women. We are unable to get situations resolved. (Anzaldúa 307)

The proof of the strength of these women is shown by the existence of publishing houses both in Canada and the United States, like Aunt Lute in California, or Little Sisters in British Columbia, to embody the power of the word to end with long-time silence. In this sense, a book which became the epitome of the metaphor of borders and breaking boundaries is Gloria Anzaldúa’s famous *Borderlands: La Frontera*. The title is in itself a metaphor of the marginal quality of their poetry as outcast and coloured people in this society. They live in at least three borders or *nations* (inner-scapes) that marginalize them: that is the racial, the gendered, and for some of them the sexual option (their lesbian condition). All this is proved to be stronger than their ethnicity, however powerful as this may be. They find themselves nearer a same tribe than being Chicana, American, Canadian, Mexican or Indian. And indeed they produce together a corpus of what can be called and

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<sup>12</sup> Globally, women are becoming conscious of their positions inside of the sexual-caste system within which they live. Their responses to this realization are multi-form. “Feminist’s responses to this realization are as varied as the women who create them. U.S. Third World feminists are positing new form of political response. Their visions depend upon the alternatives inherent in the recognition of difference —these visions generate new theoretical models which have the potential to reshape the discipline known as “Women’s Studies”” (Chela Sandoval in Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul* 68).

<sup>13</sup> See for example the integration of books like *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings from Radical Women Of Color*, or *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras. Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, which put “Radical Women of Color,” of Asian, Indian, Mexican and other origins, together.

can be included in the canon of postcolonial literature, because it shares the same attributes as the *colonized* literature of orthodox origins brought to the comparison with the colonizer body of thought. Pérez-Torres, for example, quotes a definition of a multiple borderland identity, in the figure of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, that can be applied to most of these multifaceted Chicano authors:

My “identity” now possesses multiple repertoires: I am Mexican but I am also Chicano and Latin American. At the border they call me *chilango* or *mexiquillo*; in Mexico City it’s *pocho* or *norteño*; and in Europe it’s *sudaca*. The Anglos call me “Hispanic” or “Latino”, and the Germans have, on more than one occasion, confused me with Turks or Italians. My wife Emilia is Anglo-Italian, but speaks Spanish with an Argentine accent, and together we walk amid the rubble of the Tower of Babel of our American postmodernity. (95)

Compare now with the poetic self-definition that appear in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *borderlands*, in which gender aspects are also included in the melting-pot:

To live in the Borderlands means you  
are neither hispana *india negra española*  
*ni gabacha*, 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*,  
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, the wind steals your voice,  
you’re a *burra*, *buey*, 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;

(.../...)

To survive the Borderlands  
you must live *sin fronteras*  
be a crossroads (194-5).

The “borderland” concept is also a question of non-integration, non-belonging, due to hybridity and *métissage*, and viewed both negative and dissociated to the eye of the “other”, as Pat Mora’s poem, “Legal Alien” superbly explains,

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,  
able to slip from “How’s life?”  
to “Me’stan *volviendo loca*,”  
able to sit in a paneled office  
drafting memos in smooth English,  
able to order in fluent Spanish  
at a Mexican restaurant,  
American but hyphenated,  
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,  
perhaps inferior, definitely different,  
viewed by Mexicans as alien,  
(their eyes say, “You may speak  
Spanish but you’re not like me”)  
an American to Mexicans  
a Mexican to Americans  
a handy token  
sliding back and forth  
between the fringes of both worlds  
by smiling  
by masking the discomfort  
of being pre-judged  
Bi-laterally (Anzaldúa 376).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This piece can be compared to a poem titled “Me,” written by Asian-Indian Canadian writer Lakshmi Gill, in that it also presents an intimist, confessional line, written in an autobiographical first person, with postcolonial connotations, seeking to self-affirm an identity:

My black hair is a dark beast’s mane  
framing a face etched in rain  
(I defy your expectation  
No, not pain,  
yes, rain)  
it washes away the expression:  
Aha! She’s Asian!

The sleek straight hair  
that forms in a top bun  
or cascades down to a round brown bum  
Ha, ha, the Oriental!  
and the mind clicks in all  
the notions of orientalesse  
(like some disease)  
so very pleased  
to be comfortable (McGifford & Kearns 30).



That is the reason why the spatial factor stresses the feelings of exile. We live in a world in which colonial exploitation, cultural imperialism, ideological domination and racism are still present, although hidden by a mask, a subtle mask of hypocrisy. So, after picking up and elaborating the collective history of their own countries and their colonial past, they notice they are part of the third world and understand they are capable of defending their roots and affirming themselves. In the case of the *radical women of colour*, they also call themselves *third world women*, inside the first world culture, to stress the feeling of isolation from the highway, and their outcast condition. In this way, they lose their anonymity, their vulnerability, and can try to give solutions not only to the colonial knowledge of the past, but also to the new colonialism of the present. Therefore, acting against another kind of imperialism, the colonization of the mind, new generations of radical women writers appear nowadays, with enormous success, passing over the hermetic borderlines of literary canons. One must applaud their courage of being marginal, because only a peripheral perspective can offer a new discourse. These diversities and paradoxes build a picture, vivid and multicoloured at the same time, of the American movement cultures. The complexity of these writers is caused by the coexistence of different cultures without a supremacy of one to the other, and ethnicity does not lead to isolation, but on the contrary, to a fertile plurality, to a rich hybridity. As Anzaldúa states in the prologue to *Making Faces, Making Soul*,

Theorists of color are in the process of trying to formulate “marginal” theories that are partially outside and partially inside the Western frame of reference (if that is possible), theories that overlap many “worlds.” We are articulating new positions in these “in-between,” Borderland world of ethnic communities and academics, feminist and job worlds. In our literature, social issues such as race, class and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. In our *mestizaje* theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of the existing ones. We recover and examine non-Western aesthetics while critiquing Western aesthetics; recover and examine non-rational modes and “blanked-out” realities while critiquing rational, consensual reality; recover and examine indigenous language while critiquing the “languages” of the dominant culture. And we simultaneously combat the tokenization and appropriation of our literatures and our writers/artists (xxvi).

To summarize, in the brief study made about the (de)colonization of the Chicano/a colonized identity, the new Chicana fight proves much richer and more

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The poem pays a special tribute to the theories of Edward Said that can apply to Mora's piece, when referring to western prejudices. There lies an unuttered wish to be individualized, to be given a personality, unhyphenated and singular, deprived of the anonymity of the “orientalism”. The need for finding one's own identity in a definite and intimate cultural space: a room of one's own, in woolfian terms, so to say.

politically radical than the previous *carnalismo* taken by the Chicanos. Nevertheless, the success of both, although still in the middle of the process, has permitted the spread and the coming into light of a very rich American minority culture that has, undoubtedly, the inalienable right to shine by itself.

Last week  
I had been white  
...we were friends.

Yesterday,  
I was Spanish  
...we talked...  
once in a while.

Today  
I am a Chicano  
...you do not know me.

Tomorrow,  
I rise to fight  
...and we are enemies.  
[Margarita Virginia Sánchez, "Escape"] (De la Torre & Pesquera 35).<sup>15</sup>



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<sup>15</sup> "Written by a thirteen-year-old from California, self-identification is achieved through the link made between ethnic self-consciousness and the enunciation of the term *Chicano*. Within this context, "Chicano" incorporates a rejection of external definitions, such as "white" or "Spanish," that would identify the Chicano as the "other." Identity is thus described as a space of self-creation and active struggle against preconceived ethnic modalities that are more acceptable to the dominant culture" (Angie Chabram Dernerseian in De la Torre & Pesquera 37).

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