

Life Within and Beyond: The Legacy of Borderlands

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Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2017, and as a commemoration of the innovative text, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Center for Mexican American Studies prepared a yearlong celebration in honor of its legacy. Many mujeres across a multitude of disciplines came together to coordinate events that ranged from poetry readings, symposia showcasing student research rooted in Anzaldúan theory, bilingual story hours, and the annual El Retorno: El Valle Celebra [a] Nuestra Gloria. This edition of *Río Bravo*, like the year itself, is dedicated in honor of *Borderland's* legacy, which has provided all of us the space to examine our own borders for a deeper appreciation and critique, as well as the possibility for healing those heridas abiertas (Anzaldúa 3) that still exist and hemorrhage today.

Anzaldúa describes borders as physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual (Anzaldúa, "Preface"). She writes that borders exist wherever two or more cultures, races or classes collide with each other—a place where the "space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa, "Preface"). Anzaldúa's definition of borders eventually grew into nepantla, liminal spaces between worlds (Anzaldúa 243). The Río Grande Valley of the South Texas is nestled between the border of México and the Falfurrias and Sarita checkpoint, and although the Valley is in the United States, the checkpoint places it in between México and the greater U.S.—a physical nepantla.

As of late the Borderlands have been falsely categorized as a warzone occupied by rapists and "bad hombres" by Donald Trump, the current president of the United States, but those of us who live our day-to-day lives here experience a radically different reality. We love, create, share, discuss, live and breathe in this region in spite of the colonizing attempts of purging this place of our ancestors. Our Borderlands may be portrayed as a wasteland in mass media, but the nepantla I live in is beautiful. The overlapping that exists between the U.S. and México has provided and nourished all parts of my mestiza soul.

Like Anzaldúa, I too am a border woman who grew up between two cultures straddling the Tejas-Mexican border (Anzaldúa, "Preface"). In 1987 Anzaldúa wrote that "hatred, anger and exploitation" were the prominent features of the landscape due to the domination of people of Indigenous and Mexican origin (Anzaldúa, "Preface"). To some extent, this is no longer the case. As a community we are collectively learning to shed our self-hatred that stems from the legacies of domination and are becoming stronger by slowly overcoming those feelings (Anzaldúa, "Preface").

Situated in opposition to our communal strength, the current sociopolitical climate does exhibit sentiments of hatred and anger, and still practices exploitation against our communities. These sentiments and exploitative practices have made navigating life outside of the Borderlands painful and uncomfortable. I have also experienced the discomfort of home that Anzaldúa wrote about as well as the alienation that comes from the negative outside sentiments which creep into our lives through the media, but *Borderlands* has also taught me to embrace the uncomfortable and "alien" feelings. For Anzaldúa, alien feelings prompt the dormant aspects of our consciousness to be awakened. While the conditions that lead border residents to feel alien are vile and volatile, the "alien" feelings are accompanied by a skillset—something that we should be proud of. The alien feeling teaches us to navigate a world with bigoted race, class, and gender biases with our heads held high. Despite the harsh circumstances that must be endured, the skills we develop ensure our survival in a world that continually rejects us. And with the help of Anzaldúa, we learn to *thrive* in this world while building a new, better one.

1 Photographs by poet and photographer Arnulfo Segovia, videographer Frank Segovia, and myself from around the Río Grande Valley are included throughout this edition to showcase its beauty.

2 * "Alien" is in direct response to Gloria Anzaldúa's preface of *Borderlands*.

The legacy of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* has allowed us to live outside of the shadows imposed upon us by colonialism (Anzaldúa, "Preface"). Throughout history, colonizers have quite literally killed off our ancestors, cultures and mother tongues. They shamed us for our practices and imposed religion and language upon us, the result being a forced assimilation which is now so intricately woven into the world we live in today. Anzaldúa untangles the legacies of aggression and forced assimilation through her writings, inspiring us, making the painful empowering and inspiring courage to overcome the violence.

The authors in this edition are the new mestizxs Anzaldúa calls for when she writes "But we Chicanos no longer need to beg for entrance, that we need to always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurting out of our mouths with every step" (Anzaldúa, "Preface"). They utilize and embrace Anzaldúa's theories across wide-ranging fields, some of which may even be surprising, but they all show Anzaldúa's range and breadth of influence. The interdisciplinary contents of this journal encompass education, sociology, creative writing, law, biology, and speculative studies. The diverse range of contributions, and even more so, the contributors themselves, show Anzaldúa's legacy and impact in academia and beyond.

We have been conditioned throughout our lives to suppress our own stories, to believe that they are not of value. This edition represents triumph over that mental colonization. We have learned to overcome. As a graduate student trusted with editing this volume, I faced mental, physical and spiritual trials while helping bring this to completion. I learned to expand my understandings of myself and the work I reviewed, realizing how Anzaldúa's legacy forces us to re-write what is seen as valid in the academy and empowers us to lay claim to our own voices as contributors to this world. I am infinitely grateful for being entrusted with this responsibility to help share our stories, the beginnings and continuations of our own legacies. After all, if we are not telling our own stories intentionally, then no one else will. This journal would not have been possible without the Center for Mexican American Studies and its prioritization of supporting these urgent and important works. I would also like to thank the people who served as peer reviewers for this issue and everyone else who contributed their time.

For some time, we did hide beneath the shadows; still, parts of our past were practiced in our homes and continued to live on through our families. *Borderlands* has provided many of us with the tools necessary to reclaim our true histories and cultures and our rightful space within greater society to say that we are here, we have always been here and we are not going anywhere. Anzaldúa asks to be met halfway, but the true legacy of her text is the confidence she has planted within each nepantlera who no longer needs outside validation or affirmation from non-mestizxs. The heridas abiertas, though utterly painful, fuel us to keep going and to explore, dismantle and even embrace the borders we come across, and to curate new forms of knowing (Anzaldúa 4).

WORKS CITED

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3. Edited by Analouise Keating, Duke University Press, 2015.
4. Anzaldúa, Gloria. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. Edited by Analouise Keating, Duke University Press, 2009.