

Nuestra Gloria: The Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Celebrates the 30th Anniversary of the Publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

By Stephanie Alvarez, Amanda Tovar, and Mariana Alessandri

2017 was a significant year in Chicana, queer, feminist, and American literary history, as it marked the 30th anniversary of the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. One of the most influential books of the twentieth century, *Borderlands* brings forth nuanced concepts of borders and the importance of the identities shaped by them—physical, cultural, or otherwise. The book has paved the way for exploration and healing for many Chicanas, people of color, individuals of all gender identities and sexual preferences, and everyone who has proximity to any type of border. Recognizing how *Borderlands* grounds a wide range of people, the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) saw it fitting to celebrate the life and work of Gloria Anzaldúa in a special way. Annually, CMAS holds a celebration of Anzaldúa, *El Retorno*, organized by Professor of Creative Writing and Associate Director of CMAS Emmy Pérez. However, CMAS dedicated the entire academic school year of 2017-2018 to Anzaldúa—specifically to *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, for the campus and larger Rio Grande Valley community—with a series we titled “Nuestra Gloria: CMAS Celebrates the 30th Anniversary of the Publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.”

Rather than a theory-laden essay, detailing the work around that series puts into practice what Anzaldúa asked us to do throughout her work. “Change requires more than words on a page—it takes perseverance, creative ingenuity, and acts of love.” In many ways, Anzaldúa left us with a monumental encargo as academics to move beyond theory to “do work that matters. Vale la pena.” So, in 2017 we would not only display Anzaldúa to the University, but we would also preserve the work of the mujeres involved in the archives, so that it will not disappear. We have chosen to detail several acts of love meant to celebrate and honor the work of Anzaldúa, documenting the efforts of a group of women faculty and students on the UTRGV campus. The praxis was driven by our love, respect and admiration of Gloria's work, and it is important to celebrate the often-challenging task of putting her words into action.

In the summer of 2017, a group of faculty and staff from UTRGV affiliated with the Mexican American Studies program, the newly formed B3 Institute (Bilingual, Bicultural and Biliterate), and the Center for Mexican American Studies traveled to Mexico City to engage in meaningful conversations about what being a B3 university meant and to prompt a deeper understanding of Mexican and specifically indigenous Mexican history. This was not unlike much of the processes Anzaldúa herself had undertaken to engage in her own writings, such as her 1992 visit to the opening of the museum exhibition “Aztec: The World of Moctezuma.” In fact, Anzaldúa's writings guided us and our discussions in Mexico City. Our process

1 Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds., *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 574.

2 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 22.

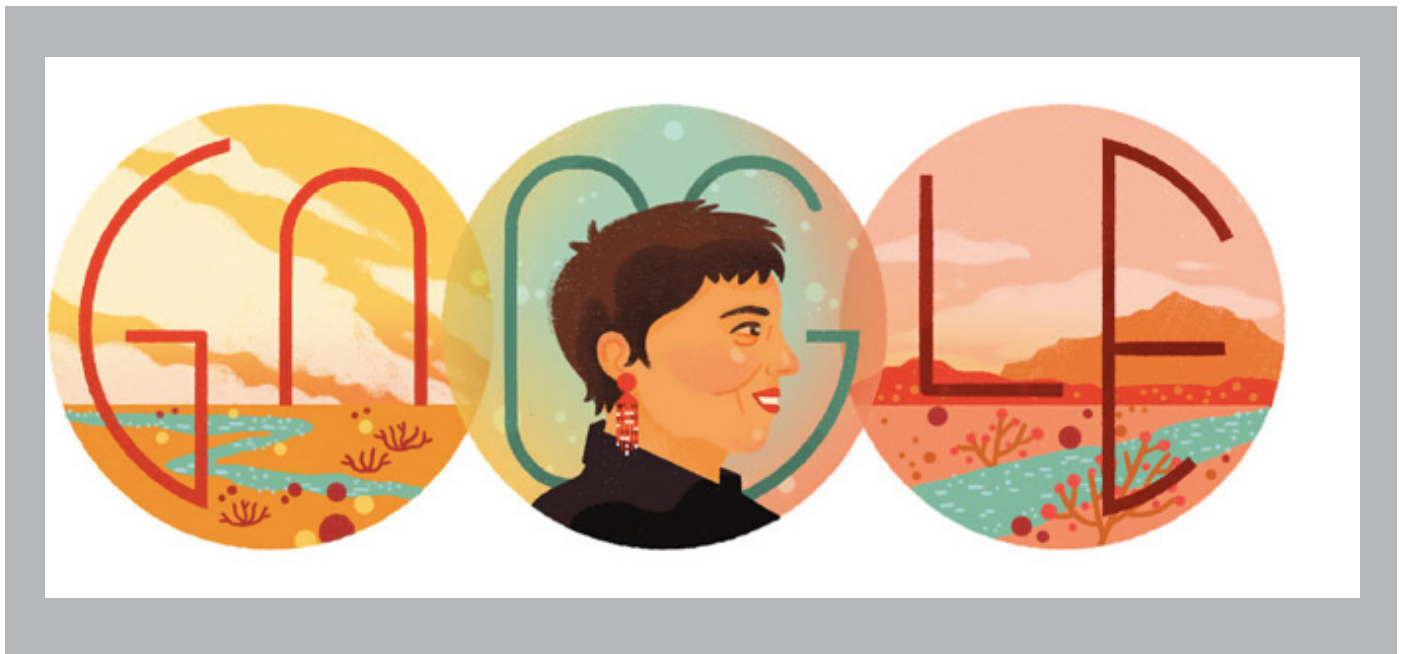
3 *Ibid.*, 22.

of collaboration and introspection led us to conceive of CMAS celebrating the 30th anniversary of Anzaldúa's groundbreaking *Borderlands/La Frontera The New Mestiza* at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley for the entire academic year. The consensus to celebrate Anzaldúa came at a time when many of us who were on the trip were experiencing extreme fatigue from dealing with the relentless and dehumanizing rhetoric and policy by the newly elected president of the United States, Donald Trump. We wanted to optimize the celebration to utilize Anzaldúa's theory *autohistoria-teoría* to tell our own stories and gain better control over the distorted Border narratives emerging from the White House. We hoped the events would rejuvenate our community as well as affirm community members in meaningful ways.

Additionally, we proposed that the year-long celebration not only be dedicated to Anzaldúa's first book, but that it take place at UTRGV, the legacy institution of Anzaldúa's alma mater. She graduated from Pan American College in 1968, writing about it in "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Moreover, we live in Anzaldúa's "Valle," the place she felt she had to leave, for which she felt a "fear of going home." We needed to showcase that the region that once rejected her is now home to individuals who appreciate her and her contributions, not just to academia, but to the community. We didn't owe the celebration just to her; we owed it to the students y la gente del Valle. We wanted to give them a notion of who Anzaldúa was, an inkling of her genius, and a sense of pride in knowing that one of the most important writers of the twentieth century was from here, from El Valle. Even today, not all literature professors teach Anzaldúa, and many students leave the university never having read a text by Anzaldúa.

¡Feliz Cumpleaños, Gloria!

September 26, 2017: ¡Feliz Cumpleaños, Gloria! was a celebration held during the university's activity hour. Our students wished to hold this party not just to honor Anzaldúa, but also to discuss the impact reading her work had on them. With birthday cake and all, la plática ensued, and to our surprise, some of Anzaldúa's relatives were also in attendance. They expressed gratitude that we were engaged with Anzaldúa's work, lauding in particular the efforts the youth were making to honor it. Anzaldúa's birthday would not just be



⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 137.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

marked with our own celebration, but Google's doodle for the day featured Anzaldúa to celebrate what would have been her 75th birthday. Anzaldúa's fans throughout the Valley, nation, and world shared their alegría through social media, email, and private messages. It was as if Anzaldúa's time had finally come, and that international platform so many knew she deserved had come to fruition. The atmosphere on campus among those involved in Mexican American Studies was one of pure joy. Students who had never heard of Anzaldúa were beginning to realize how far her fame spread.

The Obscurities of Cenote Writing: The Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa with Aída Hurtado

For our premier event of *Nuestra Gloria*, we called upon beloved Valley native, friend of Anzaldúa, renowned Anzaldúan scholar, and comadre of our CMAS familia, Aída Hurtado. Hurtado, who earned her Bachelor's degree at Pan American College during the Chicana Civil Rights movement, has always shown CMAS a tremendous amount of generosity. Knowing our limited funding, our student population, and the sacrifices made by our faculty, Hurtado eagerly accepted our invitation to join our celebration as the keynote speaker. Hurtado's talk "The Obscurities of Cenote Writing: The Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa" spoke to the ways in which the Valley influenced Anzaldúa and how she sees so much beauty in the Valley that so many take for granted. CMAS often is the recipient of the great generosity of community members, alumni and those associated with Mexican American Studies who appreciate that UTRGV is the legacy institution of Anzaldúa's alma mater, Pan American College, and that the Valley was her homeland. Moreover, they appreciate that many people, especially mujeres, have made sacrifices so that Mexican American Studies and CMAS could become realities at UTRGV.

Depiction and Dedication

Along with the kickoff event, it was critical to set the tone of our year-long celebration with a carefully chosen title and graphic design. Collectively, CMAS faculty, students and staff titled the celebration "Nuestra Gloria: CMAS Celebrates the 30th Anniversary of the Publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*." Along with the title of the event, we chose a graphic design that would accompany all of our event promotions. We felt compelled to reach out and ask CMAS faculty affiliate and renowned Chicana artist Celeste De Luna for her assistance in allowing us to use one of her Anzaldúa relief prints. Just as both De Luna and Hurtado demonstrated great generosity, Mexican American Studies alumnus Arnulfo Segovia also donated his time and talent as a graphic designer to create a poster for our year-long celebration incorporating De Luna's image that could be used throughout the year. In the end, the love and generosity of all for Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera* and el Valle came to fruition and was on display in both our design and kickoff event. Hurtado mentioned in her talk, "Sure, people are holding events to celebrate the 30th anniversary, but only you all are celebrating her all year! That's love. You all are the ones making her an icon."

Ballet Nepantla: Dancing Beyond Borders

CMAS had the honor and privilege of hosting New York City's Ballet Nepantla on November 29, 2017, at Edinburg

North High School. Ballet Nepantla was founded by Valley native Andrea Guajardo and co-founded by Martín Rodríguez with the intent of merging both of their backgrounds in dance—Andrea in classical ballet

6 "About Ballet Nepantla," *Ballet Nepantla*, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.balletnepantla.com/about>

and contemporary dance and Martín in traditional Mexican folklórico. This fusion of traditions embodies Anzaldúa's theory of *Nepantla*, an in-betweenness or overlap. They explore "the in-between-ness of cultures within the realm of dance, harmonizing contemporary ballet with traditional Mexican dance." Ballet *Nepantla* bears their name in honor of Anzaldúa.

Nuestra Gloria Graduate Research Symposium

During the Fall 2017 semester, Dr. Stephanie Alvarez taught *Chicanx Research Methodologies*, a required graduate course for the Master of Arts in Mexican American Studies. Alvarez set out to align the course with the yearlong celebration and assigned Anzaldúa's *Luz en lo Oscuro* and *Borderlands* as the fundamental texts for the class. Gloria Anzaldúa's writing and quest for healing the traumas she endured fueled the class discussions once students realized they had similar experiences to those of Anzaldúa, ultimately prompting the theme of research the students were to conduct in the course—healing and social justice in the Borderlands. Alvarez's work is always done with the intention of shifting conventional research methods, topics and narratives in hopes of positively impacting her students and their communities. This research methods course was no exception. Her students chose research topics such as "Comadriando: Reflecting on Patriarchy, Colonialism and Healing," for which students researched their relationships with each other and the effective ways they utilize the concept of *chisme* as a form of vulnerable and healing communication. Other topics included their relationships with their families, the correlation between sexual assault and colonialism, and "Educación, Voz, y Liberación" for which students researched the long-standing racism that exists in Texas public institutions and has informed their experiences while attending Texas public schools, and the difficulties of education while a migrant student. The students were so proud of their work, they collectively decided to present their research at a graduate symposium which was free and openly accessible to the public.

This symposium was held on December 8, 2017 and was titled "Healing & Social Justice in the Borderlands Research Symposium." This was also part of "Nuestra Gloria: CMAS Celebrates the 30th Anniversary of the Publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera*." Students invited their friends, families, and

**I CHANGE MYSELF
I CHANGE THE
WORLD**

NUESTRA GLORIA

CMAS CELEBRATES THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF
BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 11

AIDA HURTADO

**5:30 RECEPTION THEN TALK AT 6. @
BORDERLANDS ROOM EDUC 3.204**

LIVE STREAM IN BROWNSVILLE AT THE CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE – MAIN 1.212B

CMAS KICKS OFF OUR YEARLONG CELEBRATION OF NUESTRA GLORIA: A CELEBRATION OF THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA* WITH RIO GRANDE VALLEY NATIVE AND GRADUATE OF PAN AMERICAN COLLEGE AIDA HURTADO. HURTADO RETURNS TO THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY ON OCTOBER 11, 2017. THE CENTER FOR MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDIES, ALONG WITH THE SUPPORT OF CENTER FOR BILINGUAL STUDIES, WILL HOST A RECEPTION AT 5:30 IN THE BORDERLANDS ROOM (EDUC 3.204) FOLLOWED BY HER PLÁTICA THE OBSCURITIES OF CENOTE WRITING: THE LIFE AND WORK OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA AT 6:00PM. THE EVENT WILL BE LIVESTREAMED TO UTRGV-BROWNSVILLE AS WELL.

AIDA HURTADO IS A PROFESSOR AND LUIS LEAL ENDOWED CHAIR IN THE CHICANO AND CHICANA STUDIES DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA- SANTA BARBARA. SHE IS A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST WHOSE RESEARCH FOCUSES ON CHICANA/LATINA FEMINISMS AND ON THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF LATINXS AND THEIR VIEWS ON GENDER IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. HER GROUND-BREAKING PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE *THE COLOR OF PRIVILEGE: THREE BLASPHEMIES ON RACE AND FEMINISMS*, *VOICING CHICANA FEMINISMS*, AND *BEYOND MACHISMO*. HER MOST RECENT WORK IS ON THE CRIMINALIZATION OF LATINX YOUTH AND HOW IT IMPACTS THEIR EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES.

partners to watch and engage with the presented research. Each student brought a food dish or drink to share and listened intently to one another's presentations. The room was overflowing with community members y familia. Alvarez's intentions of shifting customary research methods were actualized when the majority of her students decided to take their research a step forward and transition it to self and community-based healing simultaneously – this is parallel with Anzaldúa's work and is often seen the antithesis of traditional academic work. Several students turned their research papers into their master's theses, others submitted their work for publications, and some presented their work at conferences across the country.

Poetry as Conocimiento: What We Learn from the Poetics of Anzaldúan Theory with Lauren Espinoza

Poet Lauren Espinoza, the first student at UTPA/UTRGV to receive a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Mexican American Studies, also came to campus to deliver a talk on Anzaldúa titled "Poetry as Conocimiento: What We Learn from the Poetics of Anzaldúan Theory" on January 25, 2018. The presentation was profound, not just because it meant Lauren's own "retorno," but also because she spoke of Anzaldúa's poetry and its influence on her own. This moment was particularly impactful as Espinoza herself, an award-winning poet and recent recipient of an MFA from Arizona State University (ASU) & current PhD Candidate at ASU, embodied a full circle moment as she was standing in the classroom talking to students demonstrating that success in the academy can be achieved for those from el Valle. Lauren's mother recorded the entire event as Lauren spoke of Anzaldúa, Anzaldúa's lessons and what Anzaldúa had to teach poets. After the formal presentation, Lauren joined us at CMAS for lunch and a plática with a handful of graduate students to discuss what it was like to get a PhD, to review the application process, and to offer advice.

Anzaldúa Plática Marathon

On January 26, 2018, CMAS held an Anzaldúa Plática Marathon during the university's annual FESTIBA; Festival of Books and Art. This event was initiated in 2017 by then Interim CMAS Director Professor Emmy Pérez. Faculty and students were invited to come in and out all day long to share their research, creative work, testimonies or stories of 10 minutes about Anzaldúa. In scheduled talks from 9am-4pm, presenters and participants would enjoy breakfast tacos and beverages as 11 presentations were made on topics ranging from "Gloria Anzaldúa's Interest in Philosophy," as discussed by Dr. Mariana Alessandri, to "The Shadow Beast Inside Me," shared by Angelica González. Professors and students participated from the colleges of Education and Liberal Arts, from five departments consisting of Philosophy, Mexican American Studies, Bilingual and Literacy Studies, and University Studies.

Unfolding UTRGV Students with Dr. Mariana Alessandri

Raheleh Filsoofi of UTRGV's art department curated and directed a multi-location, multi-week international art exhibit spanning from the end of January through March of 2018. The exhibit was called "Fold: Art, Metaphor, and Practice." It included art from thirteen diverse female artists and seven scholars from different colleges across the university. The concept of "Fold" was inspired by philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and the artists and scholars were asked to interpret it for themselves. On February 27, Dr. Mariana Alessandri presented a lecture interpreting the concept "Fold" in the context of UTRGV itself. The title of her lecture was

7 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), chapter 5.

8 *Ibid.*, 75.

“Unfolding UTRGV Students.” It was a presentation on Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of “linguistic terrorism”; since Alessandri is an affiliate faculty with Mexican American Studies, she wanted to celebrate Anzaldúa’s life and work especially during this year, the 30th anniversary of the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

In Alessandri’s lecture, she divided the history of linguistic terrorism into three time periods: the first was in the 1960’s and 70’s, when Anzaldúa was attending English-only schools in South Texas; the second spanned the 1980s and 90s, when *Ebonics* was coming under criticism in California, and then the 2000s-2018, UTRGV having been established as a bilingual University in 2015. Alessandri traced the history of students like Anzaldúa who were made to “fold” their language deep inside themselves to avoid corporal and verbal punishment. Grandparents of current UTRGV students often have had an experience with linguistic terrorism like Anzaldúa’s. Most learned quickly that success meant forgetting Spanish. Anzaldúa recounts that in her career at Pan American University, she was forced to take two speech-correction classes five days a week for two semesters for no credit with the intention of getting rid of her accent. Anzaldúa refused to fold—she kept her language and her accent, but she is one of few. In *Borderlands/la frontera*, Anzaldúa quotes Ray Gwyn Smith who asked: “who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?”

Next came the experience of the students of that linguistically robbed generation. Most of their parents did not teach them in Spanish, having learned that lesson the hard way. This resulted in the parents of current RGV students, some of whom also work as teachers in RGV public schools, not feeling very comfortable with Spanish. Their children who now sit in the classrooms at UTRGV often feel very ashamed of their level of Spanish and think this lack of fluency is their fault. Some blame their parents for not teaching them, but in reality, neither is to blame. Anzaldúa articulated this clearly in *Borderlands/la frontera*:

By the end of this century Spanish speakers will comprise the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French classes, because French is considered more “cultured.” By the end of this century, English and not Spanish will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinos.

Anzaldúa added that the pain of the rejection of Spanish in favor of English and French is directly related to the identity of those students. She wrote: “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity.” Alessandri suggested that helping UTRGV students linguistically unfold is a difficult and often painful process, since their initial folding was an attempt to find relief from linguistic shame.

Now that UTRGV explicitly aims to be bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate, it creates a difficult situation for the grandchildren on those in Anzaldúa’s generation who folded Spanish away so deeply that their grandchildren have no access to it. Many UTRGV students either don’t know Spanish or have been told that their Spanish is bad. Recent arrivals to the U.S. from Mexico will fare better in bilingual classes because they have not had to fold their language away. Alessandri ended her talk by suggesting to all faculty present that they have a responsibility to reckon with the linguistic terrorism of the University in which they teach.

Fuerza del Valle: Women Workers at the Frontline

As part of our Nuestra Gloria celebration, CMAS hosted the mujeres from Fuerza del Valle (Fuerza) on March 29, 2018, to share their role as women at the frontline of the development of the Fuerza del Valle Workers' Center. It was important for us not only to recognize their efforts, struggles, and the resiliency of these women, but also to uplift and support them. Fuerza exists to protect workers from workplace theft and mistreatment in the Rio Grande Valley and beyond. Fuerza was birthed as a project by the Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network’s Jobs Working Group and later developed into Fuerza. The community effort is supported by and housed in the offices of the Texas Civil Rights Project. Fuerza reaches communities across

⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Mission & History,” *Fuerza Del Valle*, accessed January 5, 2019, <http://fuerzadelvalle.org/about/missionhistory/>

the entire Rio Grande Valley and has recovered approximately \$350,000 dollars in unpaid wages for workers. Las mujeres shared information from their leadership as part of the research team that produced the groundbreaking study “Vivir el las sombras: Las trabajadoras del hogar latinas en la región fronteriza Texas-México.”

The Gloria Anzaldúa Speaker Series with AnaLouise Keating

Each year, the Department of Philosophy invites speakers to present as part of “The Gloria Anzaldúa Speaker Series,” initiated in 2008 and named for Anzaldúa to bring more recognition to the Valley native as a philosopher. CMAS has been collaborating with the Philosophy Department for the last 8 years to co-sponsor the event. The speakers connected to the series do not always speak about Anzaldúa, her theories, or work, but connect in some way to her philosophy to their work. However, for the purpose of this year, coordinator of the series and associate professor of Philosophy, Cynthia Paccacerqua agreed to focus on Anzaldúa specifically.

Together with Associate Professor of Mexican American Studies and Director of the Mexican American Studies Cinthya Saavedra, the series invited AnaLouise Keating to deliver the annual address on April 8, 2018. Keating’s presentation was titled “Radical Contributions to 21st-Century Thought,” in which she highlighted several of Anzaldúa’s theories. In addition, Keating visited the classes of Paccacerqua and Saavedra. Paccacerqua was teaching a course on Chicana/Latina feminism, and Saavedra was teaching a course specifically on Gloria Anzaldúa. Both courses were mixed undergraduate/graduate courses and taught on the same day and time to allow the classes to interact with one another on occasion. These courses were designed to coincide with CMAS’ year-long celebration.

Unleashing the Wild Tongue

“Unleashing the Wild Tongue” began as a means of completing an assignment by MAS students Amanda Lee Tovar, Angie González, and Yajaira Rivera in a graduate course on Decolonial Theory taught by associate professor of Mexican American Studies and Director of CMAS, Stephanie Alvarez. Students were asked to develop decolonial pathways that would allow a community to engage in a deconstruction of cultural norms and that would be sustainable. The three mujeres decided to create lesson plans around Anzaldúa’s children’s book “Prietita y La Llorona” that they would also put online in order to make accessible for teachers anywhere. The lesson plans include reading the book aloud bilingually, not fully in English or Spanish, but rather one page in English and the next page in Spanish, to honor the Tex-Mex background. With the help of David Bowles, assistant professor of Literature and Culture, the mujeres identified words of Nahuatl origin in the text for teachers to point out to the children. The purpose of these linguistic exercises is to demonstrate to the students just how many valuable linguistic assets they have at their disposal even if they have not been aware of it. After the reading, the mujeres suggest a discussion about Anzaldúa’s interpretation of La Llorona which differs from the villainous one they have learned throughout their lives. Next, tapping into creative interpretation, the children are tasked to imagine their own Llorona collectively in groups visually and are given large sticky notes, markers and crayons. The second component of the lesson was the development of a trilingual coloring book. This trilingual coloring book of various images has the titles of the objects in English, Spanish, and Nahuatl. The coloring book allows students to take home and share with their families the recovered language and cultural knowledge that otherwise may remain solely in the classroom.

In April 2018, Amanda Lee Tovar took the assignment out of the classroom and made it a part of the year-long celebration. Tovar led two different Center for Mexican American Studies Presents Bilingual Story Hour sessions at Reed-Mock Elementary in Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD and used the lesson plans she

1. *Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 81.*

2. *UTRGV El Retorno (UTRGV), accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.utrgv.edu/emas/nuestragloria/retorno/index.htm>*

created. During Tovar's lesson, she emphasized to the children how intelligent they were for knowing not just English and Spanish, but also Tex-Mex and Nahuatl as they knew most of the Nahuatl words in the "Prietita y La Llorona." In speaking about the experience of delivering the lessons, Tovar revealed that "it was one of the best experiences of my life. Watching their faces light up as we told them see how smart you are, you know three languages! Seeing them freely talk about remedies used at home like barridas, el huevo, hierbas and consulting curanderas with huge smiles on their face felt amazing." The second graders worked together and developed their own Lloronas which included traditionally frightening Lloronas but also other interpretations such as a Pizza Llorona who delivers pizza to hungry children.

Anzaldúa wrote that the way to truly hurt her was to speak badly of her language. So much of her identity was wrapped up in her language, and she wrote that until she could fully accept her language and be accepted for it, she could not take pride in herself. Anzaldúa's sensitivity to language rings true today for children living in the Borderlands whose language and culture are often hurt or disregarded; their self-image becomes distorted, and they internalize self-hatred. These lessons were essential for the young students, as they illuminated their abundant knowledge and affirmed their cultural-linguistic identities.



11th Annual El Retorno: El Valle Celebra Nuestra Gloria with Dr. María Herrera-Sobek

The 11th El Retorno: El Valle Celebra Nuestra Gloria closed out our yearlong celebration of Gloria Anzaldúa. Founded by Emmy Perez, El Retorno started in 2008 in response to Río Grande Valley grassroots community organizations such as the Gloria Anzaldúa Legacy Project as well as the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa based in San Antonio. The annual event includes a pilgrimage to Anzaldúa's burial site in Hargill, TX. Because this event was in the same academic school year as our year-long celebration, we decided to dedicate this El Retorno to the anniversary of Borderlands, and it had one of the biggest attendances to date. Dr. María Herrera-Sobek, professor of Chican@ Studies and Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity Equity and Academic Policy at UC Santa Barbara was the keynote speaker who gave a talk titled "Gloria Anzaldúa and the Rio Grande Valley: Our Parallel Lives, Convergent Scholarship, and Divergent Life Experiences." That morning of May 16th, we met community members from the Valley and El Mundo Zurdo conference attendees at Valle de la Paz Cemetery in Hargill for an opening ceremony conducted by local poets. Participants were invited to speak about why they were in attendance, and very moving testimonios followed. The symposium included short presentations by students, community members, activists and artists who are engaged in work which is in some way directly inspired by Anzaldúa's writing, teachings, and legacy. We were fortunate to have some of Anzaldúa's family members in attendance, along with performances by Conjunto Los Cardenales de Roma High School, an incredible conjunto band from Roma, TX.

Conclusion

Finally, this journal creates another extension of Anzaldúa's legacy. Throughout the course of the year-long celebration, it became overwhelmingly clear that another effort was needed to round out the historical moment of the 30th anniversary of Borderlands. That effort required documentation of the work and participation in this journal. The Río Bravo journal has gone through several changes throughout its history and now goes through yet another. It provides not only a dedication to Anzaldúa but a reassociation with the community it is meant to serve and represent.

The influence of Anzaldúa across our lives is deep and intricate, manifesting in ways that are not always obvious. The narrative that often surrounds the life and work of Gloria Anzaldúa is that El Valle does not know or care about Gloria Anzaldúa, but we hosted these events to publicly celebrate and honor Anzaldúa's legacy. The totality of these events represents a direct result of more than a decade of individual and collective efforts to preserve and uplift Anzaldúa's significance not just in the Valley, but in our community. These moments are historical and a long time coming. It was an honor to see so many people come together for the year-long celebration of the life and work of Anzaldúa. Our hope is that the intensity and capacity for holding events like these continues to grow and be celebrated. El Valle has been facilitating events that surround Gloria Anzaldúa and her legacy for years and will continue to do so for many years to come.

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