

TELARAÑAS: UNTANGLING MY PAIN

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ABSTRACT

This is an exorcism, a purging exercise that presents me with the opportunity to make sense of a thirty-year-old lingering pain. It started with mother sharing the news that we were in the United States, to stay. That decision affected my relationship with both my parents and my sisters. We don't share our feelings, memories, or experiences. Now, we are not on amicable terms, which is collateral damage caused by the move.

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Conocimiento hurts but not as much as *desconocimiento*.
(Anzaldúa 2015, 137)

(DES)(RE)CONOCIMIENTO

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Based on Anzaldúa's work, in combination with infinite works produced by Chicana feminist epistemologies and ontologies, I have "taken inventory" (Anzaldúa 1987, 104) to explore my immigration process. *Nepantla* (Anzaldúa) has become my place of permanent residence. It provides me with both a contrasting isolation, a connection to myself and the world needed to evaluate the constant *sustos* (Anzaldúa) that have me returning to this space.

I have embraced *sustos* as they are reminders that the work of being and becoming is constant. Therefore, I accept the hurt and the confusion, but I recognize how to carefully welcome them and accept the process they set off. I have chosen to write unspoken words to expose the contrasting feelings and thoughts I have about an encounter with my father. Anzaldúa's Coatlicue stage that is fueled by contradiction, along with my transnational academic knowledge drenched in a daughter's love, empowers me to respond to the question my father asked that morning, "*Was moving to the United States a good decision?*"

Susto

I have been ripped wide open
by a word, a look, a gesture-
from self, kin, and stranger...
never realizing that to heal
there must be wounds
to repair there must be damage
for light there must be darkness.
Healing Wounds (Anzaldúa 2009, 249).

It is mid-morning, my father is his usual self: distant, quiet, judging, and inquisitive. He likes to grill me, to trap me with questions that highlight my shortcomings so then he skillfully could proceed to belittle me. I am managing the road when he suddenly utters a question in a soft smooth tone, "*Was moving to the United States a good decision?*"

His words, like waves of rabid thunder, resonate in my head. A bile taste fills my mouth. I grip the steering wheel with sweaty hands. I keep my eyes on the road, desperately trying not to lose

control. An overwhelming pain grips the center of my heart, and I can feel it moving through my body. It slowly rips through my every muscle, and I concentrate acutely on its path of destruction. I feel the birth of tears, so I bring the back of my hand to my mouth and bite it down, hard. My father scolds me and reminds me of my lack of proper hygiene; one sentence took me back to feeling five years old again. A classic *modus operandi*. His demeaning tone, his sarcastic words drive all my feelings away. Automatically and with urgent speed, I proceed with the short drive home... I just want him out of my car!

However, his question is important. I turn to watch him and capture a glimpse of the person that keeps hurting me. The image surprises me. The person sitting next to me is a fragile, tired, and very ill man. My heart shrinks with a strange, still unpleasant feeling. I clear my throat, and over my better judgment and self-preservation, I ask him to repeat his question. I slow down the car, take my eyes off the road, and concentrate on his face. Something overwhelming washes over him, his body has sunk into the seat. He repeats the question.

“Was moving to the United States a good decision?”

This time, I’m able to hear worry, melancholy, regret, pain, denial, and fear as the most palpable. I can see the words in my mind reminding me “learning to sit perfectly still, to sense the presence of the Soul” (Anzaldúa 2002, 351). I take a deep breath and ask about the source for his inquiry. His voice is an unrecognizable whisper that causes me an abrupt shift of emotions. I recalled “This disorientation compels you to rethink the situation and the people involved” (Anzaldúa 2015, 87).

I want to respond as clearly and sincerely as possible, but I am incapacitated. The patriarchal internalized superiority I was so deeply and proudly inculcated paralyzes me. It pushes me deeper into the deafening silence that is the foundation of our relationship. Therefore, I wish to share my *testimonio* guided by a deep “desire of solidarity” (Beverly 2008, 571), and construct a web of *reconcilio* that aids the treacherous path in and out of *Nepantlan* (Anzaldúa 2009) that hopefully, will keep me afloat from the waves created by the *remolinos* (Anzaldúa 2015) of my experiences and memories. I want my *testimonio* to become an act of sharing encircled by healing, and communal transformation. However, I cannot reach this *reconcilio* with him. Here is a new trying, sharing my *testimonio* in the form of an *epistola*, a letter. I will plunge into the *cenote* of my pain (Anzaldúa, 2015) to provoke *un cambio de mentalidad* to produce gifts and new ways of knowing and being in the world.

Learning once more that the path of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa 2002) is a tough road to travel. That we cannot do it alone. That we need extra support to deal with the *desconocimiento* it produces. I am lucky, as I am not alone in the continuous understanding of self within the migration stories and their re-learning of being in the world. Next, it is my reply to his query, a letter I will never send, and he will never read.

PADRE

In shadow work, the problem is part of the cure—you don't heal the wound; the wound heals you. First you must recognize and acknowledge *la herida*. Second, you must “intend” to heal. Then you must fall headlong into that wounding—attend to what the body is feeling, be its dismemberment and disintegration. Rupture and psychic fragmentation lead to dialogue with the wound. (Anzaldúa 2015, 89)

You must be kidding, dad. Now, is thirty years later. Why do you think, now, would be a good time to have this conversation? It is completely self-indulging on your part. Are you seeking reassurance because you feel vulnerable and weak? Do you want me to thank and praise you for your decision to move us here? Do you want me to recognize your decisive direction as the catalyst for our accomplishments? That we basically owe everything to you? Sure. We may have accomplished a great deal and are quite successful. So, yes. We have been privileged. However, you are forgetting something critical. At what price? You may see the external riches and accolades, yet you have failed to see who we have become. We will not use the word family to describe us. The few times when we interact, we don't know how to reach out or to connect to each other, and this is because of the awfulness (prejudice, racism, violence, pain, fear) that each one of us has experienced and has created deep divisions among us.

Añorar lo que hubiera podido ser y no saber cómo hubieran sido nuestras vidas en el mundo que destruiste al decidir venir, es una desgarradora ilusión.

One that haunts me.

We were drastically uprooted.

Transplanted somewhere foreign with no decision nor resources.

You chose it for me.

I was blindsided.

All my life I've felt unworthy, used.

Today, as a parent, I reflect on your decision, and I'm puzzled as why there was not even a conversation. A few words to explain the situation and share the reason for the move. *Hubiera sido suficiente decirnos que sería mejor para nosotros, que tenías miedo de no poder proveer por nosotras allá. Solamente un par de palabras hubieran hecho una gran diferencia. No soy y nunca he sido tonta, ciega, egoísta. ¿Por qué no dejarme ver, sentir, tus razones? No es pedir permiso. Si hubiera querido venir o no, eso no importa. Una niña apenas adolescente no te hubiera entendido completamente. Con una sincera conversación tuya, yo hubiera podido crecer y poco a poco reflexionar sobre tu decisión.* But it never happened. Which made me an afterthought of your master plan, showing me that my feelings, thoughts, and opinions had no value, no importance. So, why after thirty years? What do you want to hear from me now? Why are you willing to listen? *La sospecha impregna cada una de tus preguntas y no confío en tus intenciones. Esta sospecha es lo que nos destruye, lo que nos separa. La que no nos deja vivir y gozar lo que hemos podido lograr en este país. Esta sospecha que me jala al vacío de la desconfianza y me ata a una horrible tristeza.* Dad, neither you nor I have been able to process what has been gained or lost due to the move.

Anzaldúa wrote, “Because we operate in forward mode, we’re forced to absorb, in ten years or less, changes that usually take more than two generations to assimilate” (Anzaldua 2015, 86). Then, how does one tally it all? Do the benefits outweigh the disadvantages? Do the positives erase the negatives? No. Impossible. Your illness and the changes your life has undergone, compounded by my new role as one of your caregivers, provokes you to question who we are to each other, and this has taken you back to ask this basic question. A question that cannot be answered because migrating to the United States was not good nor bad; it is just what happened. You may think of it as a decision because that is what it was to you, but it will never be to me. My vacillation to respond fills you with uncertainty because your positivist view of the world will not let you accept the complexity of our existence. Anzaldúa writes, “Each of us lives in a fiction of our own construction, one supported by consensual reality” (2015, 185). I am an accomplice to your antiquated view of the world since I have never engaged you with the other possibilities that I know exist. I shared this knowledge with people that are willing to hear, and I know that you will not; your actions have proven this. So, silence, and consequently ignorance, defines our relationship. I have given up on trying to know you, and I protect myself from you knowing me. Again, suspicion prevents me from being myself with you. There are too many issues, too many years, and too much reticence for us to now converse. Still, I do feel a sense of responsibility to answer your questions because I learned from you that every question is valid, and each one deserves to be addressed. Here, I share what I said to you that day:

Estuvo bien Papá. Tenemos muchos beneficios.

That was it. Silence returned. The framework of our relationship remains untouched. I do not want to change it because I am afraid of the pain needed to make sense of its boundaries. I think you know this too. Still, I am glad you asked. As I write about it now, my heart runs fast with the possibility of starting a new conversation with you regarding your inquiry, but hesitation grips me. Maybe I will be able to do it one day and hope that time does not run out on us.

Tu hija

(IM)POSSIBILITY

Largo camino te queda.
(Anzaldúa, 2015, 116)

We arrived home and my father exited the car. I sat stunned and took a few deep breaths. I repeated the latter after I finished writing the words above. I feel sorrow in the center of my chest. My mind is flooded with questions: Should I talk to him more? How bad is it going to hurt? Could we have a better relationship? Will he hear me? Should I try? I do not know.

I greatly appreciate the *sustos* (Anzaldúa) that come along with the *arrebato* (Anzaldúa) because as a *Nepantlera*, it provides me the opportunity for growth. I must now again “take inventory” (Anzaldúa 1987, 104), and start the process once more.

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Karla O'Donald is a Senior instructor in the Department of Spanish and Hispanic Studies at Texas Christian University. Her research interests include Chicana Feminist Epistemologies and its connection to critical pedagogy, decoloniality, foreign language teacher education, and the use of Spanish for specific fields and purposes.

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