Moving Through the Borderlands:
The Racial Politics of Mestizaje in Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera*

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Arizona State University 2016

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Pittsburgh

2022

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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November 2, 2021

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2022

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Since its publication, Anzaldua's (1987) Borderlands has provided a multi-faceted and highly influential description of Chicanx ethnic experiences. Although sociological work on Latinx racial and ethnic experiences continues to grow, the impact of Anzaldua's (1987) work remains understudied despite its influence on the work of prominent Latinx feminists, activists, and scholars. Most foundational to Latinx thought are Anzaldua's (1987) theories of mestizaje-as-multiculturalism, and by extension as a pan-ethnicity. Because of this, Anzaldua's (1987) Borderlands/La Frontera serves as a prime, albeit unconventional, starting place for this sociological investigation of Latinx racial construction. I use close, contextualized reading of Anzaldua's work, particularly her calls for interracial solidarity vis a vis the "new mestiza consciousness" for this theoretical intervention. I argue that by framing interracial solidarity through mestizaje, or mixed-race identity, Anzaldua (1987) affirms biological deterministic understandings of race, and by extension, reifies a White supremacist status quo. I challenge Anzaldua's (1987) theories of "mestiza consciousness" as a primary path out of racial oppression, and chart similarities between Anzaldua's "new mestiza" and Mexican Secretary of Education Jose Vasconcelos' (1925) theories of mestizaje. Lastly, I assess the ways Anzaldua assumes an essentialist approach to race through biological language and rhetoric. From these explorations of race in Borderlands, I argue that fulfilling Anzaldua's still relevant goals for interracial solidarity against White supremacy requires a thorough analysis of the historical and current ways mestizaje operates as a tool of oppression, a departure from mestizaje in all its forms, and a turn towards the intellectual and activist work of Indigenous and Black scholars.

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1.0 Introduction

Why am I compelled to write? Because the writing saves me from this complacency I fear. Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. To show that I can and that 1 will write, never mind their admonitions to the contrary. And I will write about the unmentionables, never mind the outraged gasp of the censor and the audience. Finally, I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing. (Anzaldua 1983)

Writing to and for other women of color as a woman of color in the 1980s, much of Gloria Anzaldua's work reads like a breath of fresh air. Her validation of both the challenges and the exhilarations of being a woman of color writer will resonate with those of us still trying today in 2021 to "record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you" (Anzaldua 1983; p.168). While self-definition through writing and cultural praxis forms the core of Anzaldua's work, Anzaldua covers a vast array of themes deemed pertinent to understanding the Latinx racial experience, especially for Chicanx/Mexican people in the *borderlands* of the American Southwest. When I first encountered her texts as a 19-year-old, it seemed to me that Anzaldua was putting in print everything seldom seen in print. It was exhilarating for me, as a young Latina, to find in her work extensive discussion of experiences usually associated with being Latinx. Her work speaks to the trials of being bilingual, experiences of discrimination, poverty, and dispossession as a Chicanx person, accounts for the labor struggles of agricultural workers, details Latinx community's experiences with transnationalism, migration, and undocumented status, and breaks the silence on sexuality,

queerness, and homophobia in a highly conservative and religious culture (Anzaldua 1987; Moraga, Anzaldua, and Bambara 1983). For me, as for many other people, Anzaldua affirmed the realities I felt and saw on the daily. Beyond this, Anzaldua's work is a careful grappling with language. She articulates the structures and processes causing those (often painful) experiences, and attempts to transform such structures through language, through the very recognition of it, and through the re-articulation and transformation of associated symbols and meanings.

Thus, 17 years after her death, Anzaldua's contributions to Third World feminist scholarship remain indisputable, and her work continues to stand as a cornerstone of Latinx ethnic studies. Within the field of sociology, many scholars have attempted to reassess many of the same questions Anzaldua addresses: questions of race and belonging, Latinx identity, and questions of social structure and Latinx people's place in it (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Jimenez 2009; Mora 2014; Nakano Glenn 2015; Omi, and Winant 2015; Roth 2012; Telles 2014). This author's project is no different. In exploring the racial landscapes of Anzaldua's *Borderlands/The New Mestiza* (1987), I revisit current and old understandings of what it means to be Latinx, with an aim to shift the dominant conversations in sociology on Latinx identity beyond the often taken-for-granted assumptions of Latinx pan-ethnicity. Precisely because Anzaldua's (1987) work on Latinx pan-ethnicity vis a vis mestizaje is so foundational to the work of other prominent scholars (Femenías 2007; Jimenez 2009; Lugones 2010; Mora 2014; Omi and Winant 2015; Ortega 2016; Roth 2012), I utilize Anzaldua's (1987) *Borderlands/The New Mestiza* as a starting place for an investigation of Latinx racial construction. These racial landscapes, for the most part, remain unexplored in sociology, despite having resonance in sociological literature and in popular culture.

In this analysis, I use close, contextualized reading of Anzaldua's work for this theoretically intervention, or disruption, to the pan-ethnic path laid out by Anzaldua's (1987) *"new mestiza consciousness"* and *borderlands* ideology. Joining the critiques of Latinidad by scholars and activists who challenge the colonial and white-supremacist narratives at the center of Latinx identity (Beltran 2004; Brown 2021; Golash-Boza 2016; Harris and Wallace 2021; Kateri Hernandez 2013; Manrique 2016; Moreno Figueroa and Saldivar Tanaka 2016; Pelaez Lopez n.d.; Ramsay 2016; Ruiz 2001; Sexton 2008; Stern 2000; Treviño 2018; Treviño and Chen 2017), I, too, argue against the racial essentialism and eugenic foundation of Latinx racial identification vis a vis *mestizaje,* as embodied in Anzaldua's (1987) work.

Additionally, I push back against Anzaldua's (1987) predetermination of Black and Indigenous people in the racial landscapes of her borderlands. I argue that by centering mestizaje, Anzaldua creates a narrative of Latinidad which at best operates as a kind of multi-cultural "colorblindness," as detailed by Jimenez Roman (2005), and at worst through an oppressive racial and settler colonial logic casting Black and Indigenous people outside of the framework of the *borderlands.* Here, I center Black and Indigenous perspectives of race and identity in order to reject both mestizaje and Latinidad as useful tools of resistance against white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism.

2.0 The Borderlands

Anzaldua's (1987) work centers the psychic and physical place of the *borderlands,* a liminal space where states, race, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and other demarcating structures meld together. Although Anzaldua refers to the borderlands as the physical site of the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border, she writes that,

> The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (1987: preface)

It is a physical and psychic place wrought with the tension of opposing forces meeting. Anzaldua describes the tension of the borderlands as *"*una herida abierta," an open wound, "where the Third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (3). The borderlands*,* much like her theory of mestiza consciousness, works within Hegelian dialectics, attempting to bridge two (cultural and racial) binaries through a synthesis. As a "third place," the borderland's main characteristics are that it always in flux and full of ambiguity. Anzaldua claims that the inhabitants of the borderlands embody this ambiguity as social outcasts:

> The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.' Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors,

> aliens-whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. (1987: 3)

Replete with labor exploitation, gendered, racial, and sexual violence, "hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape" (3). As seen in the above text, oppressive power is seen as coming mostly from Whites/Anglos. Throughout the book, we see the landscape of the borderlands stretching out along a Du Boisian "color line," a racial binary of White vs People of Color. Whereas one side of the binary is formed by the White/Anglo (oppressor), the other side of the binary is envisioned as Mexican, Black, and Indigenous (oppressed).

The historical realities of the borderlands do not stray far from Anzaldua's descriptions. From Barrera's (1979) theories of Anglo exploitation of Chicanxs through an internal colonial system of labor and land appropriation, to Corky Gonzales' and the Chicanx movement's calls to embrace a Chicanx mestize nationalism against Anglo capitalist-colonial oppression (Gonzales and Esquibel 2001), to Montejano's (1987; 2010) work on the Chicanx movement's resistance to Jim Crow segregation and horrible working conditions and wages, the racialization of Mexican/Chicanx people is detailed through sociological, historical, and experiential analysis. More recently Omi and Winant (2015) explore Mexican racialization in their theory of racial formation, whereby race is a malleable construct in which state and structural processes (such as war and land acquisition) come to define certain groups as "others." Omi and Winant (2015), like Montejano (1987; 2010) and Gonzales and Esquibel (2001), point to the Mexican-American War and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as prompting this racialization. In a modern day

analysis of Latinx exploitation, Marquez (2012) discusses how racialization occurs through constant necropolitical and white supremacist state processes such as border policing, violence, and Latinx migrant death. Brown, Jones, and Becker (2018); Golash-Boza (2016) tie this racialization to the prison industrial system in the form of mass deportation, incarceration, and criminalization.

Departing from structuralist views of Latinx racialization, Jimenez (2009) argues that geographical proximity to Mexico and easy access to cultural reinforcers, in addition to constant waves of immigration, leads to a strong reinforcement of group boundaries which prevents Mexican communities from assimilating into Whiteness. Telles and Sue (2019) echo these arguments but attribute a lack of assimilation and continued "ethnoracialization" of Mexican people in the U.S. across generations to low educational obtainment levels. Factoring in skin color and socioeconomic class to levels of educational obtainment, Flores and Telles (2012); Nakano Glenn (2009); Roth (2012); Telles (2014); Villarreal (2010) assess the combined effects of these on racial identification. While Villareal (2010) finds skin tone to be the main cause of socioeconomic stratification in Mexico, the statistical analyses of survey-based data conducted by Flores and Telles (2012) argues that both class and skin tone attribute to social stratification in Mexico. For Flores and Telles (2012), class origins most heavily impact Mexican people's occupation and wages, but a lighter skin tone is most correlated with higher educational level, which in turn affects occupational status. The work of Flores and Telles (2012) provides support for popular Latin American understandings of racialization as tied to both economic and educational status (money/education whitens).

Roth (2012) extends the study of skin tone and social stratification from Latin America to the United States and argues that individuals organize others using multiple racial schemas, some

which are invoked only under certain contexts. Roth (2012) ultimately sees Latinx racial definitions as being impacted by migration, skin tone, nationality, and culture, but her conclusions that skin pigmentation and experiences with discrimination affects Latinx's assimilation into the U.S. racial schema and Latinx self-identification is echoed by multiple scholars (Frank, Redstone Akresh, and Lu 2010; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Nakano Glenn 2009). While Frank, Redstone Akresh, and Lu (2010) and Golash-Boza and Darity (2008) both acknowledge that some Latinxs racially identify as White on census and survey data, Golash-Boza and Darity (2008) attribute this to a preference for Whiteness and evidence of a racial assimilation model. Lee and Bean (2004) find evidence of such distance from Blackness and proximity to Whiteness through Latinx racial interrmariage preferences in their study of racial boundaries. Frank, Redstone Akresh, and Lu (2010), on the otherhand, stand more in-line with Bonilla-Silva (2004) and Mora (2014), in their argument that many Latinxs push back against the binary racial hierarchy by refusing to identify with either Black or White.

Bonilla-Silva (2004) develops a structural interpretation of this phenomenon, which he calls the "tri-racial" system, and which encompasses the complexities of and heterogeneity Latinx racial identification. Within this emerging racial system, Bonilla-Silva (2004) predicts the addition of a third, middle group to the U.S. racial binary. This group consists of people who are "honorary Whites," typically lighter-toned Latinxs and non-white groups who identify as White and show a closer social proximity to Whites. Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues that darker-toned Latinxs including many Mexican people, Black people, Native Americans, and many immigrants will fall under a "collective Black" category. All those who are phenotypically White and fully assimilated culturally will be incorporated into Whiteness much like Irish, Scottish, and Jewish groups (Gans 1979; Hattam 2004; Steinberg 2001). Bonilla-Silva's (2004) theories of race are

similar to Portes' (2007) theories of segmented assimilation, although Bonilla-Silva (2004) sees racial structure as heavily dependent on skin tone, in addition to the social markers Portes uses to measure assimilation--like labor and economic class, educational obtainment, and experiences with being criminalized.

Incorporating structural, cultural, and pigmentocracy arguments of Latinx racialization, Nakano Glenn (2015; 2002) provides one of the most comprehensive, historically attuned analyses of Mexican American experiences of race in the United States. Nakano Glenn (2015; 2002) argues that White settler colonial projects, including expansionist projects into Texas and the Southwest created the gendered racial structures that define life for Indigenous, White, Black, Asian, and Mexican/Mexican American people in the United States. Alongside Anglo projects of land usurpation, the Mexican people of the Southwest were racialized as foreign "others," despite legal consideration as (White) citizens under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**.** Nakano Glenn describes how Anglos used skin tone and class, in addition to mestizo/mixed-race "non-White" categories, to mark Mexican people as socially undesirable. These markers justified the settler colonial racialization processes Nakano Glenn (2015) describes as the "four main technologies: (a) containment (separation and segregation), (b) erasure (cultural assimilation), (c) terrorism (violence, lynching), and (d) removal (expulsion, deportation)" (62). It is these processes of occupational and residential segregation, land dispossession, systematic language and cultural erasure and prohibition, racial and gendered violence, and deportation and policing which are detailed first-hand in Anzaldua's (1987) *Borderlands.*

It is also these very processes which Anzaldua utilizes to map trans-racial solidarities behind the color line and within the racial landscapes of the borderlands, with the addition of a key component that is often undertheorized in much of the Latinx racialization scholarship—

mestizaje. Although it is touched upon briefly in the works of nearly every scholar of Latinx racial identity as one of many historical and ideological influences on Latinx racial identity, Anzaldua (1987) posits mestizaje-ideology as *the* principal mold for Latinx racial self-perception in her theories of the "new mestiza" and the "new mestiza consciousness." Underlining Anzaldua's (1987) theories of mestizaje is another argument, which speaks to the research process in and of itself: despite all the confusing and often contradictory interpretations of Latinx racial identity by U.S. scholars, Latinxs *already* have a way of racially seeing themselves, and Anzaldua (1987) argues *it is mestizaje.* This is significant because it signifies a rupture with Latinx racial scholarship, which by the nature of the Western academic research process, reduces Latinxs to objects of study, subjected-others, racial others to be known, dissected and defined, measured to the (White Anglo-Saxon) standard.

When we take Anzaldua's (1987) work on its own terms, as a racial "talking back" (hooks 2015), we can begin to see mestizaje for what it is: one of the most influential and impactful, often omnipresent schemas of racial thought and action for many Latinxs. This begins to rift apart the "the stories others have miswritten about me, about you… to dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul" (1987: p.168), until we are finally able to glimpse underneath at a story of a people with a history, already in relation to multiple racial others—a story that is not narrated solely through the White, scientific gaze. This project thus attempts to grapple with the historical origins, function, and operational force of mestizaje; with what it meant and continues to mean for Indigenous and Black Latinxs, and for mestizes themselves. Without such an analysis, we cannot develop a thorough understanding of Mexican or Latinx racial identity in the United States nor can we begin to map trajectories of solidarity within the complex racial landscapes of the *borderlands*.

3.0 New Mestiza

On the surface, the premise of Anzaldua's book is an ethnic one, focusing particularly on the dynamics of belonging in Mexican-American communities, Chicana women's experiences, experiences of migration and deportation, agricultural labor, queerness, and language. Anzaldua's work describes an *ethnic* experience, indicated through the frequent use of the multi-layered "Mexican," which broadly denotes peoplehood, culture, regional and national origin, even race, and through her emphasis on culture and language. Yet, Anzaldua is also a self-identified mestiza, a mixed-race person, and her life experiences form the focus of her writing. She writes in the preface, "This book, then, speaks of my existence." In a later paragraph where she addresses the linguistic style of her work, Anzaldua (1987) identifies *Borderlands* as a kind of "halfway" point where others can come to meet and understand Chicanx language and experience. In this sense, the *Borderlands* is meant to define a non-apologetic place in the world for Chicanxs—a place that is culturally and linguistically *Chicanx*. Anzaldua (1987) calls this meeting place, her book, "an invitation to you—from the new mestizas."

Signed "from the new mestizas," Anzaldua's invitation for cultural and linguistic understanding reveals itself to also be a racial petition (on behalf of mestizaje). When we consider that under Latin American racial hierarchy, mestizo identity *is* a racial identity, we can see just how tightly interwoven race and ethnicity are. This is something stressed by Islam (1999) in her analysis of Southeast Asian immigrants' ethnic identification in Los Angeles. Islam (1999) argues that "while ethnicity constructs group identity, group boundary, and social relationships, an analysis limited to ethnicity masks how race operates in the United States" (p.37). Reading Anzaldua (1987) for race, instead of culture, we see that her exploration of

Chicana belonging vis a vis mestizaje operates as a kind of racial project, or what Omi and Winant (2015) describe as, "an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (105). Anzaldua advances this racial project primarily through the concept of multiplicity, which she sees as embodied in her positionality as mestiza woman.

Anzaldua (1987) details this cultural, linguistic, *and racial* multiplicity in the preface of *Borderlands:* "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)." Here we see Anzaldua identify herself as a member of a colonized people, and she acknowledges Anglo culture as having shaped her life experiences. She claims Anglo culture as her own but does not subsume her Mexican/Indigenous identity to it. In fact, Anzaldua sees moving between two distinct and "opposing" identities as a constant struggle which forms the basis of her mestiza identity, but which is ultimately validated through its end joys and rewards. In this interpretation of mestizaje, we see evolution beginning to play a central role. The struggles of mestizaje are seen as worthwhile because they evolve into an end-result of joy—presumed to be a knowledge of the unfamiliar and unknown, or what Anzaldua (1987) calls the 'dormant areas of consciousness.' Anzaldua illustrates this point:

> However, there have been compensations for this mestiza, and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of mankind, in being 'worked' on. I have the sense that certain 'faculties'—not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored—and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. Strange, huh?

> And yes, the 'alien' element has become familiar—never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable, but home. This book, then, speaks of my existence. (Borderlands: Preface. Italics her own)

The preface of Anzaldua's (1987) work sets the tone for the entire book, giving us a glance at the racial landscapes Anzaldua will walk us through. We see how her writing focuses on her lived experiences as a *mestiza* woman in the borderlands ("this *mestiza*," and "this book, then, speaks of my existence"). Even though she sees her identity as a bi-cultural one, she goes on to describe racial belonging, "I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican *(with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo* (as a member of colonized people in our own territory)." Anzaldua argues here, and later throughout her work, that her Mexican culture is also a predominantly Indigenous culture, and her experience with Anglo culture is one of being colonized. We are left wondering whether Anzaldua sees all Mexican culture as being predominantly Indigenously influenced, or if this is just the case for her experiences as a Mexican woman.

When Anzaldua (1987) writes that "living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element," we assume that the multiple identities kept integral are the identities she describes above—the mestiza, the Anglo, and the Mexican. Anzaldua describes this balance of identities as "exhilarating," a process of "being 'worked' on." Engaging with the "personal as political" thematic, she sees her own personal process of identity work as "being a participant in the further evolution of mankind." Even more intriguing, Anzaldua sees this process as an evolutionary process, imposing biology and political stageism ("further evolution of mankind") onto what she sees as the cultural processes of navigating multiple identities, but which can be read as a racial process.

Anzaldua goes on to describe an "awakening" of consciousness within the "colored and non-colored" people of the borderlands, alluding to political mobilization in the Southwest. In Anzaldua's historical context, this awakening goes hand in hand with Chicano nationalism and the mobilization of Latinx workers in the 1960 and 1970s. In fact, Anzaldua participated in this wave of mobilization during her time in graduate school at University of Texas at Austin. Her political activism ranged from participation in MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) and farmworker organizations, consciousness raising, and most notably, her inclusivity/representational efforts particularly around publishing women of color (Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, University of Texas Austin Benson Latin American Collection). These specificities help us understand the trajectory of Anzaldua's work, especially her emphasis on consciousness-awakening as political activism and her organizing of the borderlands along "colored and non-colored" lines.

Guided by this insight, we see that Anzaldua carefully cultivates her mestize racial identity from her perceived Mexican/Indigenous and Anglo cultural identities. Like her Chicano identity, Anzaldua embraces mestizaje as a political choice through which she seeks to politically awaken herself and others. We see the bulk of this work done in Chapter 7, "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," which translates to "Mestiza consciousness, Towards a *New* Consciousness." The title of this chapter harkens back to the title of her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza.* Her racial project is thus carried out through the entire work.

4.0 Paths Out of Oppression: the New Mestiza Consciousness

Anzaldua's "new mestiza consciousness" is best described as a queer, feminist, multicultural ideology designed to push back against both the racism of the Anglo-colonized Southwest and the patriarchy and homophobia of Mexican and White cultures. Anzaldua calls this consciousness a "women's consciousness," wrought from a "racial, ideological, cultural, and biological cross-pollination," and which brings a new culture of "inclusivity" that moves beyond the "duel of oppressor and oppressed (1987: p.77, 78). Anzaldua (1987) then, has high hopes for her "new mestiza," whose "first step is to take inventory" of the "baggage from the Indian mother" and the "baggage from the Spanish father" in addition to the "baggage from the Anglo." This work of "taking inventory," requires the new mestiza to analyze her past, her ideologies, and experiences, consciously deciding what parts of herself and her culture are oppressive and require parting with. Anzaldua (1987) writes of this process, "she puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of" (82). This critical, reflexive first-step of "putting history through a sieve" holds much potential for unpacking the historical and ongoing structures shaping the life of mestiza Chicanas and generating change. Anzaldua (1987) leads us to a crossroads of history where past and present actions and ideologies can be examined, with great potential for community accountability, and great possibility for new directions.

In this first step, Anzaldua (1987) entreats us to decipher the "bones" (structure, framework) of history and ideology. From this base, the new mestiza must only keep the "judgement/mindfulness, deep and rooted, of the ancient people" and toss out all other historical "lies" (82). The underlying assumption is that individuals can easily discern historical lies from

truths and remedy these social wrongs on an individual basis. The individual nature of this work is demonstrated through Anzaldua's emphasis on the singular pronoun *she* and *her:* "*Her* first step…*she* inherited...*She* puts history through a sieve…this weight on *her* back." Because "taking inventory" of the social and cultural is constructed by Anzaldua (1987) as a lonely task that happens within the individual, this critical work of social reflexivity is relegated to primarily *consciousness* work. This is demonstrated by Anzaldua's (1987) focus on retaining only the best *judgement*, the *judiciousness* of the "ancient people." When Anzaldua (1987) describes a social rupture with oppressive forces, we find it also occurs in the space of the individual mind, and it is through this personal rupture that future social transformation is envisioned:

> This step is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. She communicates that rupture, documents that struggle. She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. (82)

As Anzaldua leads us through this historical crossroad, the exhilarating potential of "taking inventory" becomes deflated. This critical step of "taking inventory" remains trapped in consciousness. Anzaldua (1987) encourages a "conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and all religions," which might imply the accountability and material change, the actions and practice, needed to dismantle systems of oppression, but Anzaldua then reveals that this rupture lives only in language since the new mestiza main concern is to *communicate* and *document* the rupture. For Anzaldua's new mestiza, breaking with the past does not require engaging in material struggle with others to enact social change. Instead, this rupture is a

theoretical one that seeks to alter the racist and sexist *discourse* and *perspective,* individual by individual. Anzaldua claims the Chicana new mestiza "reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward "the darkskinned, women and queers." (82). In this rather Bordieuan rendition of social change, the forces of mestiza history, which are created and shaped by colonialism, genocide, sexism, patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism, are subject to reinterpretation, battled only through symbolism and myth making, through "perspective" changes. In the following lines, Anzaldua (1987: 82) further solidifies this point. She argues that the new mestiza is "willing to share, to make herself vulnerable," and that "she surrenders all notions of safety of the familiar" (82). However, Anzaldua then proceeds to codify these sacrifices into consciousness: the new mestiza is only "vulnerable to foreign ways of *seeing and thinking*" and only has to surrender "notions" of safety.

Furthermore, although the consciousness work described for the "new mestiza" is purported to "create new perspectives towards the darkskinned, women and queers," Anzaldua's (1987) syntax demonstrates otherwise. Black and Indigenous "darkskinned" people are seen as separate from presumably White "women and queers," "othered" even within the realm of language by an imposed comma and objectified through the added definitive article "*the*" placed alongside the adjective "darskinned," without a noun. Anzaldua writes: "the darskinned, women and queers." This reduces the possibility of an intersectional racial justice perspective, one which acknowledges, respects, and centers the experiences and insights of Black queer women (Collins 2000; Combahee River Collective 1978; Crenshaw 1989). Even in the structure of language and symbols, the new mestiza's rupture with oppression is incomplete. This analysis does not conclude that taking conscious inventory of ourselves and our collective past *is not* critical

groundwork for social justice work aimed at building an egalitarian future. Instead, it seeks to demonstrate that leaving radical social change solely in the realm of consciousness—to be dealt with alone and separate from comrades in struggle—leaves the "new mestiza" (or any subject working towards liberation) unable to fully rupture with the oppressive past and present.

While these passages elucidate the trouble with a purely consciousness-based theory of social transformation, it also reveals a disconnect between the mestiza subject and her history. The past for the new mestiza is one which acts upon the mestiza her but is somehow not of her: "this weight on her back" is "baggage," marked as "inherited, acquired, imposed" (p. 82). Though this baggage clearly manifests itself in the present and is felt to be physically and emotionally weighing down the mestiza narrator, the baggage itself is seen as belonging to an Other. Anzaldua wonders, "which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, which the baggage from the Anglo?" Described as a kind of metaphorical backpack whose contents can be removed and "winnowed out" at will, this relation to historical and social forces disconnects the mestiza subject from the world in which she actively participates. If we assume this historical baggage is also the same social forces which "we as a race, as women, *have* been a part of" then we can see that the mestiza views colonialism and imperialism as something in the distant past, experienced like the aftershocks of an earthquake. The repercussions of these social forces are seen are seen as passed down ("the inherited, acquired, imposed,") and so are not seen as forces which are continuous and ongoing, constantly recreating themselves in their opposition. This view of history is a static one, where the implications of mestizaje are easily "reinterpreted" or done away with at will. It is not a view of history that sees mestizaje as an ongoing white supremacist process, whose essence makes up our settler colonial, patriarchic, capitalist social world—on all sides of the border.

Consequently, because Anzaldua's mestiza (1987) perceives herself to be a step removed from these social processes, she must parse herself into the ancestorial and archetypal categories of "Spanish father, Indian Mother, Anglo" to address them. Doing so shrouds the most important fact of all—the baggage the mestiza Chicana subject must take inventory of is—wholly— her own. It is her own layered and nuanced life experiences, *fused to her*. As such, it cannot be removed or "winnowed out," "sieved out." The mestiza *is* her history, and she must stand before history just as she is, in full recognition of who she is as a mestiza.

While Anzaldua's resort to the "the Spanish father, Indian mother, the Anglo" as archetypal Mexican mestize subjects' ancestors (Beltran 2004; Martinez Casas et al. 2014; Stern 2000) alludes to how gendered and racial colonial oppression interlock and intersect, the disassociation between the colonial past and present ultimately results in a shattered self-identity. This shattering presents a problem that can then only be solved in the realm of the ideological because to heal the material rifts of ongoing colonialism, the mestiza subject must first take accountability for the ways in which she herself is acting out history. This means going beyond an acknowledgement of the "inherited, imposed, acquired" emotional and ideological baggage, and taking responsibility for and action against White and mestize colonial social systems. Rivera Cusicanqui's (2012) Aymaran definition of history challenges linear understandings of time and colonialism, which might help Anzaldua's new mestiza redefine her role in history. Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) writes:

> There is no post or pre in this vision of history that is not linear or teleological but rather moves in cycles and spirals and sets out on a course without neglecting to return to the same point. The indigenous world does not conceive of history as linear; the past-future is contained in the present. The regression or progression, the repetition or overcoming of the

past is at play in each conjuncture and is dependent more on our acts than on our words. (p.96)

When we realize that we are spiraling through past, present, and future, living out the past decisions of history whilst simultaneously creating the future, it becomes easier for the mestize to understand herself as an agentic actor both inheriting a colonial past, but also acting in ways which uphold its presents and its futurity. Understanding history as a collective flow which "sets out on a course without neglecting to return to the same point," means letting the Indian mother, the Spanish father, and the Anglo fall away, and grappling with mestizaje for what it is: a *material*, social and economic, structural historical process, which is ongoing, and which must create ideological frames and act to continuously justify itself and ensure its futurity.

The brilliant works of Jimenez Roman (2005); Kateri Hernandez (2013); Loza (2016); Martinez Casas et al. (2014); Stern (2000); Torres-Saillant (2012); Undurraga (2011) analyze how mestizaje functions historically (and presently), not as an egalitarian mixture of cultures, but as an oppressive hegemonic process. Jimenez-Roman (2005) even likens mestizaje to a form of colorblindness since racial mixture is touted in Latin American (and in the United States) as evidence of racial harmony while hiding structural inequalities to the contrary. These oppressive social and economic structures formed through sexual violence against Indigenous women, enslavement of Black and Indigenous people, and continuous exploitation of people and land for the profit and benefit of White and mestizo social classes. Even after Latin American nation-states gained independence from European countries, these systems were continued, as demonstrated by Jimenez Roman (2005); Harris and Wallace (2020); Kateri Hernandez (2013); and Martinez Casas (2012), who analyze how state power transferred to the mestizo classes/castas, who maintained a white supremacist status quo for Black and Indigenous people.

Through mestizaje, the racial-identity and ideology of the Latin American nation-state (with the exception of Haiti) was constructed against Black and Indigenous people. In practice, this worked through physical, ideological, and cultural "whitening." This rejection and often flat-out erasure of Black and Indigenous people was an attempt by Latin American nation-states to enter modernity intellectually, technologically, and economically "on par" with Anglo and European nations (Jimenez Roman 2005; Martinez Casas 2012; Manrique 2016; Kateri Hernandez 2013; Vasconcelos 1925). As illustrated by King (2019); Mcclintock (2013); McKittrick (2006) sovereignty and autonomy for these nation-states meant reproducing and enacting European methods of thinking, governing, and being, which delineate Whiteness (or Mestizaje) against exploited and usurped racial Others.

The main ideology instrumental to this process was that of eugenics, which conflated racial-biological language with aspirations of social progress ("evolution"), as argued by Martinez Casas (2012); Kateri Hernandez (2013); Manrique (2016), and Undurraga (2011). Through eugenics, White and Mestize subjects determined themselves "inherently" superior, thereby justifying racist policies and actions—including genocide, enslavement, labor exploitation, and gendered violence against Black and Indigenous Latin Americans. Placing this superiority in the realm of the "inherent," predetermined sphere of genetics also served another purpose: it effectively meant that by the same logic, it was impossible to contest White/Mestize superiority since one's genes and bloodline cannot be altered. Eugenics ideology further secures White/mestize futurity since only by choosing Whiteness through cultural and sexual/marital practices can non-White/non-mestize people hope to escape (in some possible futurity) their oppression. Not just a state of being or a racial category or social class, mestizaje operates as a social process, whereby Whiteness or proximity to Whiteness entails certain benefits and

privileges. Drawing from Harris's (1993) detailed analyses of Whiteness as the marker of property rights and consequent social rights under United States legal history, and echoing Roediger's (1991) similar analysis of Whiteness as a "wage" paid to European immigrants who upheld White Supremacy and remained distant from Black and Indigenous people, Harris and Wallace (2021) argue mestizaje operates as a form of access to material and social privilege in Latin America. By virtue of skin color, social distance from Black and Indigenous people, and by continuing to uphold social systems which privilege White and Mestize people, Mestizes are afforded material and economic benefits, social status, social rights, social belonging, and futurity under the Latin American nation-state.

Like Harris (1993); Roediger (1991), Jimenez Roman (2005); Kateri-Hernandez (2013); and Harris and Wallace (2021), Loza (2016) takes a process approach to mestizaje to demonstrate how Indigenous people were assimilated into mestizaje and socially "Whitened" through laboring under the Mexican State's Bracero program. Loza (2016) describes how entering the capitalist economic workforce often meant Indigenous people had to "become" mestize and leave behind their Indigenous identities. This often occurred through displacement from homelands and migration to the United States in search of work, consequent difficulty practicing Indigenous languages and dress because of discrimination from mestize fellow-workers, and subjection to the patriarchal mestizo ideologies around work, masculinity, and nuclear family (many which were promoted and enforced by the Mexican state). Through labor processes driven by war-time demand from both the U.S. and Mexican state, many Indigenous people entering the Bracero program found themselves forced to assimilate into mestizaje to make a living under the Mexican economy.

Process-driven understandings of mestizaje, then, allow us to make sense of how and why racial inequalities persist in "multi-cultural" settings beyond purely ideological explanations. When we consider this, it becomes evident that to create the racially-just, egalitarian future Anzaldua (1987) desires requires a serious reckoning with the past and present of mestizaje, which may well result in mestizaje's very undoing. While transformation of consciousness is a formidable and critical task in and of itself, process-driven understandings of mestizaje remind us that consciousness changes need to occur alongside and through concrete action. Unless the material and relational structure of society also undergoes transformation, the consciousness changes advocated by Anzaldua (1987) cannot be effective or long-lasting especially given racism, sexism, and capitalism's pervasiveness and ability to appropriate the tactics and language of resistance. In the next section, I further analyze how Anzaldua's (1987) usage of the language and methodology of oppressive mestizo structure in attempts to "reinterpret mestizaje" results in this very appropriation of resistance. I specifically look at how Anzaldua creates the archetype of the "new mestiza" through biological and eugenic language and criteria, thus recreating the "old" mestizo's oppressive structures in her multi-cultural borderland world.

5.0 The Old and New Mestiza: From Eugenics to Multiculturalism

In the first few pages of her "new mestiza consciousness" chapter, Anzaldua reveals the source inspiring her concept: Jose Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, Secretary of Public Education during the post-revolutionary-era 1920s. Although Vasconcelos' work was instrumental in the making of the modern (mestize) Mexican nation state, he did so as a strong proponent of eugenics. For Vasconcelos, mestizaje was a social evolutionary project that would create a superior mestize nation. Vasconecelo's (1925) mestize ideologies summarize the essence of a long, racial formation project, what Omi and Winant (2015; p109) define as "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed or destroyed" especially by the nation-state itself. In the context of Mexico, this racial project sought to rearrange the Spanish-colonial castas system as mestize individuals took control of the state post-Independence into a racial system where significant rights, citizenship, and power were allotted to people of mixed ancestry with discernable White ancestors. However, just as Saucier and Woods (2016) point out in regards to theories of racial formation, this new arrangement of racial identity under the Mexican state's mestize racial project was constructed against a fixed pole of Black and Indigenous races which remained at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Vasconelo's (1925) theories of mestizaje favored eugenics as a racial project to build a thoroughly mestize Mexican nation, envisioned as intellectually, physically, and economically superior to all other races and nations (Manrique 2016; Stern 2000; Undurraga 2011; Vargas 2009).

Like Vasconcelos (1925), Anzaldua (1987) also hinges her world-making endeavors on mestizaje. Unlike Vasconcelos, Anzaldua aims for an egalitarian and non-oppressive world.

Whereas Vasconcelos' ideas represent the "old" mestizo, designed to Whiten the population of Mexico through both racial and cultural mixture whilst mimicking European modernity, Anzaldua's "new" mestiza is meant to "darken" Chicanos through acknowledgement of Black and Indigenous ancestors and identification with non-Whiteness. Analyzed closely, however, the "new mestiza" invoked is not too different from the "old" mestiza. Anzaldua (1987) reads Vasconcelos generously:

> "Jose Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color--la primera raza sintesis del globo. He called it a cosmic race, la raza cosmica, a fifth race embracing the four major races or the world. Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly 'crossing over,' this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross pollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making-a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands. (p. 77)

Anzaldua reinterprets Vasconcelos' mestizo ideology into a multi-cultural framework for a post-modern world. Like Vasconcelos, Anzaldua claims that mestizes, the mixed-race descendants of Indigenous, Black, and White people, are "la primera raza sintesis del globo"—the first synthesis race of the globe. Each individual race is assumed in an essentialist way, pure and unmixed, untouched by history and multiple cultures. Instead of seeing mixed-race individuals as impure, as Anglo historical perspectives dictate, Anzaldua follows Vasconcelos' trajectory and attempts to invert the racial schema by proposing mestizes as somehow unique, and thus superior, *because*

of supposed racial heterogeneity. Anzaldua (1987) does not dispute Vasconcelos' designation of mestizes as a "cosmic," and thereby heavenly or divine, race. She even goes so far as to argue that Vasconcelos' mestizo theory "is one of inclusivity," but does not specify that it is only inclusive for white and light skinned Mestizes and those willing to maintain European domination and White supremacy.

Although Vasconcelos' work did contest Anglo/Aryan racial purity and segregation notions through "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination," his perspective on racial mixture was ultimately an assimilationist one. Far from "embracing the four major races of the world," Vasconcelos' written and public work show a clear belief in a racial hierarchy and a preference for Whiteness. During his career, Vasconcelos perpetuated ideology and legislation that policed Black and Asian migration into Mexico while also campaigning for Indigenous assimilation into White and Mestize society, especially through migration to cities, entrance into the state's labor force, re-education, and sterilization initiatives (Manrique 2016; Martinez Casas et al. 2014; Stern 2000; Vargas 2009). These acts are backed up by Vasconcelos' ideological work, where he identifies Black, Indigenous, and Asian people as "inferior," and mestizos as evolutionarily superior beings who embody the best of all races. For Vasconcelos, the process of mestizaje simultaneously necessitates the extinction of "inferior races," which he deems "ugly" and "unmodern" (Vasconcelos 1925; Manrique 2016; Kateri Hernandez 2013).

Anzaldua leaves out Vasconcelos' racist and assimilationist affinities to focus on what she thinks is at stake—the racial segregation and oppression experienced by Mexican people in the Southwest Borderlands because of Anglo-Saxon ideologies of racial purity. In doing so, she relegates her argument to the auspices of eugenics, thus invalidating her end goal of egalitarianism and multi-culturalism. On par with her previous theories of liberation based in

interpretation and symbolism, Anzaldua believes that by reinterpreting Vasconcelos' ideology of mestizaje into one of "inclusivity," social transformation can occur for mestizes. While the "old" mestize may have been assimilationist, the living and breathing symbol of an evolutionary road towards Whiteness, Anzaldua's "new mestiza" aims to be a walking symbol of cosmopolitanism, resistance, and a heterogenous modernity. However, a reinterpretation of mestizaje to only emphasize its "positive" traits, leaving intact the oppressive power structures which give rise to these, results in a mimicry of resistance. One cannot do justice to the wrongs of the past or change the present through purely intellectual reinterpretation. The mestiza does not live in a Cartesian vacuum, and a consciousness change without sustained actions to create and enforce it, will not turn a white supremacist, sexist world upside down.

This is clear when we examine Anzaldua's (1987) first reinterpretation of Vasconcelos (1925) mestizaje as theory of heterogeneity. Both Vasconcelos and Anzaldua focus on mestizaje as the advent of a heterogeneous society, although Anzaldua sees mestize heterogeneity as competing with White supremacy by prioritizing people of color, women, and queer communities. As described above, Vasconcelos' (1925) sees mestizaje as replacing or standing in for Whiteness (at least in Latin America). While these worlds may seem different, both Vasconcelos and Anzaldua take an essentialist perspective of race, and center mestizaje as the vehicle towards an ideal society based on the mestize's "unique" physical and cultural mixture.

Although the process and end goal of Anzaldua's new mestiza appears different than that of Vasconcelos' fifth-race mestizo, the new mestiza parallels the old. Both mestizes act as bridges, racial and cultural mediators or ambassadors of sorts, the vanguard, meant to bring all other groups into the fold of a mestize modernity. Both see a mestize modernity as good thing. It is heterogeneous (on the surface) in comparison to a White-supremacist modernity, which favors

a politic of the same. While all other racial groups are meant to fit into a heterogeneous mestize modernity, both Vasconcelos and Anzaldua dictate exactly what belonging looks like under a mestize hegemony.

For Vasconcelos, mestizes continue the "mission of whites, begun with the colonization of the Americas," which is to "'serve as the bridge' that brings together and unifies all other races into one, into 'a fifth universal race' that is to be totalizing and superior to all earlier races (Manrique 2016: 49). In contrast, Anzaldua's new mestiza brings others into the "new mestiza consciousness" by acknowledging Black and Indigenous past and attempting to change consciousness to be more favorable towards people of color, queer people, and women. However, only the mestiza and her consciousness are seen as heterogeneous and offering a multi-cultural future. While all other racial groups are welcome in this mestize modernity, they must first pass through the portal of mestizaje. Black and Indigenous people are seen as flat, homogenous, not diverse, not heterogenous, and certainly not capable of bringing about a multi-cultural, egalitarian modernity. Anzaldua is explicit about the future she desires:

> "En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness" (80).

Although Anzaldua mentions behavior, briefly, her new mestiza consciousness does not include a plan for action or a call for material changes to structure and social relations. She emphasizes her politics of symbolism: "Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads."

This is troubling not just because an ideological change of the magnitude Anzaldua desires requires a massive transformation of material and social relations, but because those in power favoring White supremacy and patriarchy back up their ideological goals with direct structural and political interventions. For instance, even though both Anzaldua and Vasconcelos see mestizes as carrying out their respective goals through education and consciousness transformation, Vasconcelos implemented his nefarious consciousness goals through a political plan of action. Vasconcelos, and other mestizes in power before and after him, pushed his oppressive racial project onto the Mexican populace through his public political role (as national Secretary of Education), through publishing racist and eugenicist literature, through the funding of classical-European emphasizing art and educational curriculum, and by influencing racist policy (Manrique 2016; Stern 2000). Anzaldua's new mestiza pushes back by doing the critical work of retelling and reinterpreting history to be more inclusive of "the darkskinned, women and queers," but then does not concretely detail a course of action by which changes of consciousness might be realized on the material and relational plane. Thus, Anzaldua leaves the road wide open for the long and oppressive history of mestize *action* to make its course full steam ahead. The rupture with the old mestiza is thus rendered incomplete. We see the new mestiza complicit with the old mestiza through this essentialist approach to race, the invocation of eugenics, and the failure to be accountable to the past and present ways mestizes have benefited from white supremacy or acted to perpetuate it.

Only in one realm does Anzaldua veer sharply from her previous trajectory: Anzaldua's "new mestiza" puts forth an ambitious feminist proposition distinct from the parallels between the old and new mestizes we have discussed previously. Beyond just consciousness awareness regarding racial histories, Anzaldua emphasizes the new mestiza as critical to fighting sexism

and prejudice against LGBT people. For her, sexism and racism are fought simultaneously—a laudable project. Her new mestiza ideology is, after all, a "conciencia de mujer," a women's consciousness. She entreats her fellow Chicanas, "But more than words, we demand act…As long as woman is put down, the Indian and the Black in all of us is put down. The struggle of the mestiza is above all a feminist one" (84). This is the core task of the mestiza: to stand up against sexism and change the culture around women and queerness through the development of a new mestiza consciousness.

Previously, Anzaldua's solution to racism is primarily through recognition and education, consciousness raising. However, her solution to sexism and homophobia makes a call to action: "we demand acts." Racial justice is here seen as, not just going hand in hand with sexual and gendered justice, but as occurring *through or after* these. Anzaldua's line "As long as *woman* is put down, the Indian and the Black in all of us is put down" speaks to Anzaldua's positionality and political process (84). *All* mestizas are seen as being Black and Indigenous, or having some stake in these communities: "the Indian and the Black in all of us," and this stands regardless of skin tone, actual (not just perceived) community ties, or experiences with power structures.

On one hand, Anzaldua attempts to connect gendered oppression to racial oppression, and to entreat readers that sexism must be overcome by also overcoming racism. On the other hand, she qualifies this, and ties it back to her notions of community belonging through genetics/ancestry: the "Indian and the Black" are *in* "all of us." In other words, when racially ambiguous ("mixed race") women are put down, Indigenous and Black people also suffer—but this is implied to be only because of descendancy/ancestry. Again, the possibility of solidarity between mestize people and between Black and Indigenous people is reduced to a politics of literal belonging; solidarity here occurs "because you belong to me, as my ancestor," which is

not too different from the White supremacist and assimilationist perspective of the old mestize. Black and Indigenous oppression *as also* women's struggles/concerns, as interlocking struggles separate from a perceived unity (through ancestry) would be detailed here in a turn of phrase: "When Black and Indigenous women are put down, all women are also put down." Far from a new debate, feminist women of color have continuously cautioned against subsuming racial issues to gender issues, pointing instead to the ways gender and race interact for women of color in ways not usually addressed by White feminist approaches (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Davis 1983; hooks 2015; Lorde 2007).

To substitute or conflate one oppression for the other homogenizes distinct experiences of power. This, unfortunately, also occurs as Anzaldua addresses sexuality. In addition to the use of colorblind and homogenizing language, Anzaldua also resorts to biological language:

> "As a mestiza, I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races). I am culture-less because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of Light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings" (80-81).

"I am an amasamiento," an amassing, Anzaldua writes, but amassing is not too different from assimilation. In one paragraph, Anzaldua states that "as a lesbian, I have no race," yet she is "all

races" because queer people belong to all races. By simultaneously claiming no race and all races, Anzaldua invokes the amassing, or homogenizing, quality of mestizaje. Some scholars, like Jimenez Roman (2005), liken this tendency of mestizaje to a kind of colorblindness and false "racial panacea " where Latinxs are seen as "racially compromised subjects while simultaneously exempt from racial discourse" (67). However, in not "seeing color" or claiming *all colors,* mestizes go beyond colorblindness. Instead, amassing become an oppressive assimilatory process with the terms of belonging historically preconditioned. Because it attempts to appeal to *all and no* cultures, protests of mestizaje are seen as illegitimate. This amassing/homogenizing tendency also creeps into Anzaldua's affirmation of her sexuality. She writes that "As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover" (80). At best, Anzaldua's anti-nationalism and solidarity with other women is possible only as lover or a sister, but never as a friend or comrade.

Dhamoon (2013) pushes against such interpretations of solidarity which invoke unity and homogenization within a politics of "sisterhood." She entreats feminists to take an intersectional approach to feminism that critiques power both amongst and outside the category of women, allowing for a politics "based on solidary amongst differences" (2013:78). Beltran (2003) also applies this warning to the texts of prominent Chicano nationalist in her analysis of mestizaje as a gatekeeping/border patrolling function. By analyzing Corky Gonzales's famous "I am Joaquin" poem and Anzaldua's (1987) feminist spin on Chicano nationalism, Beltran (2003) argues that mestize subjectivity as hybrid, multi-cultural, "conqueror and conquered," can only occur through racial essentialism, which demarcates the border of belonging between the mestiza and all other groups. Beltran asserts that the mestize subject of Chicano nationalism claims to assimilate (within her) multiple cultures (Indigenous and European), but then bars other groups

from this process. Beltran argues that to assimilate fully into Whiteness (or Blackness or Indigeneity, in my interpretation), would mean "the Chicano subject would no longer be able to invoke a radical and politicized racial identity" (2003; 599). Beltran (2003) sees this occurring in Anzaldua's (1987) work through the positing of mestiza subjectivity as one whose mixed-race, heterogeneous "experiences gives her privileged insight and knowledge." Beltran emphasizes that this insight requires the *stability* of others to authorize the author's own radical location as a 'bridge' to the various communities she inhabits…*Mestizas* are in flux, Others are not; *mestizas* represent the next step forward, while Other subjectivities are less capable of evolution" (603).

Beltran's (2003) excellent critique of Anzaldua reveals the way the violence of the Mexican-U.S. border is recreated through "hybrid" or mestize identity's required stabilization and essentialism of other groups in relation to mestizes. However, while Beltran sees this as "a dominant narrative of subjectivity in which some subjects represent multiplicity and insight while others signify unenlightened singularity," I push Beltran (2003) analysis further to argue that this process is not just one of creating singularity and flattening of Others' subjectivities. Instead, it is a process that is intimately linked to homogeneity vis a vis White supremacy and the structural oppressions epitomized in Vasconcelos' (1925) eugenicist "ideal mestizo subject."

In the next section, I further problematize the eugenicist way in which Anzaldua (1987) claims racial hybridity and multiculturalism. Lastly, I take seriously Beltran's (2003) critique of and challenge to the mestize subject: "rather than risking a radical preconception of subjecting that calls existing categories into question, theorists of mestizaje too often reproduce already existing narratives of romantic identification and exclusion" (2003:596). Through the course of this work, in dialogue with Anzaldua, and with Black and Indigenous queer, feminist scholars, I risk calling all taken-for-granted racial categories (and all systems of oppression) into question.

6.0 The Language of Eugenics: Race as Biology

Anzaldua's (1987) usage of hybridity, multi-culturalism, and multiplicity invokes mestizaje's distinct homogenizing and oppressive process. Anzaldua (1987), as Beltran points out, posit mestize subjectivity as hybrid, thus making all other subjectivities as "fixed," but also utilizes racial essentialism *vis a vis eugenicist, pseudo-biological language*, to theorize this paradoxical homogenized multiplicity. In the paragraphs proceeding her generous reading of Vasconcelos, she writes:

"Because I, a *mestiza,*
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio,
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente" (77).

In a petition towards solidarity, Anzaldua's (1987) new mestiza claims all cultures at once and is seen as moving seemingly seamlessly between cultures (read: races). Little is said about *how* the mestiza narrator moves through all these cultures at once or how exactly she inhabits each of these. With this passage proceeding Anzaldua's (1987) statements on Vasconcelos' (1925) cosmic race, we are left to assume that this claim to multiple cultures is based in biology. Later, this multiplicity of cultural knowledge vis a vis biology is emphasized as Anzaldua (1987) discusses queer experience. Anzaldua (1987) writes, "the mestizo and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all

blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls" (83). Unity between people of different cultures, races, genders, and sexualities is based in blood and bloodlines in a biologically essentialist way that reifies the sexist, racist, and patriarchic structures that created these categories. Instead of generating possibilities of belonging and community that cut across lived *experiences*, Anzaldua's (1987) use of "blending that proves that all *blood* is intricately woven together" and "evolutionary continuum for a purpose" recalls the assimilationist and White supremacist nature of eugenics—despite its appeal to queer and mestize identities. Manrique's (2016) excellent work provides a cautionary tale of the power of the eugenics movement in Latin America. Eugenics, biological-racial essentialism, as much then as now, is described by Manrique (2016: p.3) as a "heterogenous movement that involved well-respected scientists, anthropologists, social activists, feminists, scholars, politicians, and many others." Extensively throughout her work, Anzaldua (1987) abundantly uses genetic and biological language to invoke race, preserving the racist and eugenicist framework she inherits from Vasconcelos (1925). Mestizaje, racial mixture, is located for Anzaldua (1987; p.77) "at the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly 'crossing over;" it is about a "malleable species with a rich gene pool." It is a thoroughly essentialist and eugenics matter in which power, history, and social and economic structure are merely a backdrop on which mestizaje plays out.

Biology, invoked through blood and genetic ancestry, are turned into a tenuous vehicle for racial belonging as Anzaldua (1987) discusses the competing messages of belonging Chicanos face:

> "In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement. Around Latinos he suffers from a sense of language inadequacy and its accompanying

> discomfort, with Native Americans, he suffers from a racial amnesia which ignores our common blood, and from guilt because the Spanish part of him took their land and oppressed them. He has an excessive compensatory hubris when around Mexicans from the other side. It overlays a deep sense of racial shame." (83)

Anzaldua calls Chicanos' distance from Native Americans "racial amnesia." Although she describes the historical processes that alienated Chicanos from Native Americans, "because the Spanish part of him *took their land and oppressed them,"* Anzaldua ultimately attributes this "racial amnesia" to blood, not colonialism. She emphasizes, "the Spanish part" of the mestizo subject did the oppressing. Like the fragmentation of the mestize self in the section on "taking inventory," the solution to social distance from Native Americans is attributed to an inattentive consciousness. Anzaldua writes, it is an issue of "[ignoring] our common blood." The actions leading to the wrongdoing, (the social processes of colonialism and mestizaje), and the consequent guilt felt, is externalized much in the way we see with the baggage of the "Indian mother, Spanish father, and Anglo" externalized.

It wasn't the mestize Chicano or his recent ancestors who took land from Native Americans, but the alienated, disconnected "Spanish part of him." There is only one solution when the problem is contrived in this way—to shift consciousness and refuse to ignore "common blood." The solution is pluralistic: acknowledge and include diversity but leave the structure intact. When belonging is based in blood, the social processes leading to disconnection from Indigenous kin are relegated to the distant past: colonialism and mestizaje are reduced to one-time events which happened to our ancestors, and we can't change the past or our blood. The neoliberal assumption behind this is that oppression and colonialism exist only in the past, and so the present can only be remedied through ideas and reinterpretation. When social historical

processes are compartmentalized and stored in a (mythologized) past, the Chicano, in his wholeness, is ultimately left confused, still guilty and ashamed, and still alienated from others. Anzaldua does not allow us to examine this racial trauma more closely, let alone attempt to make peace or heal from it. Thus, the gaping wound of the violence of the borderlands, which bleeds upon all others, remains unhealed. We see these wounds with more detail in another chapter, where Anzaldua discusses her and her family's racial identity in genetic terms, again resorting to eugenics as she hashes out her notions of interracial solidarity:

> "Si le preguntas a mi mama, 'Que eres?' te dira, "soy mexicana. My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer 'Soy Mexicana" and at others will say, 'soy chicana' o 'soy tejana.' But I identify as 'raza' before I ever identified as 'mexicana' or 'Chicana.' As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70-80% Indian" (1987:62).

In this paragraph, Anzaldua poses the question of "What are you?" to her mother, siblings, and herself, without skipping a beat. Because she sees race as a fixed, essential, and biological property, Anzaldua (1987) does not see the question itself as part of the racism of the race-structure. Building off of Bonilla-Silva's (2014) work on racism as the ideology of racialized social structure, Jung's (2015) emphasizes, "Rather than restricting racism to the ideological level, I propose that racism denominate structures of inequality and domination based primarily or partly on race" (31). Much like for Omi and Winant (2014), for Jung (2015: p.31), race is "a modern mode of differentiating humans and forming identities," whereby people are categorized by states or through structures like colonialism and imperialism in historically contigent ways. Despite having "minimal coherence across different historical moments," Jung (2015) argues

that because race is derived from notions of ancestry and biology (Smedley 2012) it is "almost always experienced as primordial, as natural" (31). This assumed "natural" aspect of race, which hides the social, political, and economic structures behind racial formation, is what we see most clearly in Anzaldua's (1987) description and affirmation of her racial identity.

Although the above paragraph on racial identity from Anzaldua (1987) is also a perfect example of Roth's (2012) argument that Latinx individuals balance multiple racial schemas, which shift in particular contexts, Anzaldua (1987) states that primary racial schema as a genetic and biological one. She is "raza," which translates to "race" and refers to either a problematic and fraught pan-Indigenous race or to Vasconcelos cosmic race (Forbes 1974; Vasconcelos 1925) before she is "mexicana" (Mexican, or mestiza), "Chicana" (a political identity), "tejana," (Texan), or "Spanish" (a linguistic identity or a White identity). Although "raza" might invoke pan-ethnicity, Anzaldua makes clear that blood, ancestry, and biology act as a stand-in for race. Her notions of "raza" are melded to the biological: when one does not identify as raza, "It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70-80% Indian."

As seen previously when Anzaldua is faced with the problem of fellow Chicanos "copping out," she gives an ideological, consciousness-based cause and solution. She writes, "As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70-80% Indian." When fellow Chicanos demonstrate a preference for Whiteness and assume a Whitened "Spanish" identity, Anzaldua again uses the language of "forgetting." Anzaldua (1987) does not frame this a conscious decision or a self-serving one tied to basic material and social benefits, but rather, she frames it as a slip of the mind. It is not that racially ambiguous Chicanos benefit materially or symbolically from Whiteness or that racist settler colonial systems are perpetuated

through choosing a White identity by creating distance from Black or Indigenous people: it is a deficiency in consciousness. Above all forms of identity (national, state, linguistic, political affiliation), however, Anzaldua is clear that Chicano belonging rests at the feet of "our predominant Indian genes." Anzaldua (1987) naturalizes race and belonging by collapsing it into the biological and reifies the racist social structures in turn.

Even if we were to give Anzaldua the benefit of the doubt and assume that her understandings of genetics were based in historical processes, it would be difficult to contest her usage of exact genetic percentages ("70-80% Indian") and to minimize her praise of Vasconcelos as not eugenicist and biologically essentialists in nature. Anzaldua again and again chooses genetics as markers of community belonging even where other forms of belonging would greatly suffice. She, for instance, fails here to mention forms of belonging that supersede the national, state, racial, or genetic references she makes—markers like relationship to land, relationship to others, shared rituals, histories and understandings, or shared cosmologies.

Persistent since its inception, genetic assumptions of race transpose essentialist and fixed understandings onto a constructed, often flexible and malleable, sociopolitical category in a way that is, frankly, racist and contrary to Anzaldua's claimed inclusive, anti-racist argument (Kendi 2016; Morning 2014; Nakano Glenn 2002; Omi and Winant 2015; Roediger 1991; Smedley 2012). Morning (2014) stresses the importance of not conflating the two, "Races originate instead as sociopolitical categories that lead to the search for and construction of hackneyed biological classifications. Racial groupings are rooted in political and social rumination—they are not the product of laboratory discoveries that only later get caught up in power relations" (1679). Indeed, Anzaldua's usage of genetic and biological language creates an unsettling dissonance given her emphasis on the ambiguous and shifting nature of her own racial identity,

and the strength of narrated experiences with discrimination as a Mexican woman in the Southwest. While some may argue Anzaldua's intent is not racist, the end-product is unfortunately so.

If anything, Anzaldua's usage of genetic and eugenicist language reveals a disparity between the multiple identities she as a mestiza claims in her work and the actual reality of mestizaje. Through her mestiza, mixed race identity, Anzaldua claims inclusivity of all races and cultures. Yet, her claim as a person belonging to multiple cultures at once is based on genetic belonging to these communities, specifically in her relation to Indigeneity. By resorting to genetics (the invisible, otherwise illegible) as the primary foundation of Chicano Indigeneity and Indigenous belonging, Anzaldua reveals a lack of substantial belonging to Indigenous culture. Far from an attempt to police who is Indigenous and who is not, this project seeks to problematize the way Anzaldua uses Vasconcelos, social-evolutionary metaphors, and genetic language to arrive at biological constructions of race and belonging. Anzaldua's assertions at critical moments that point to an absence of belonging (the "racial amnesia" and "forgetting") become even more sticky when we consider the fraught relationship between blood quantum, Indigenous tribal recognition, and the colonial State.

Although scholars recognize how classification of Indigeneity by blood and descent may initially have marked First Nation sovereignty and autonomy from the state, these policies of blood quantum ultimately serve to benefit the State by *limiting* tribal autonomy and "reducing" the Indigenous population the State chooses to recognize (Coulthard 2014; Lawrence and Dua 2005; Wolfe 2006, 2013). Coulthard (2014) additionally emphasizes the gendered implications when First Nation belonging is constrained by the State to patriarchal lineages or considered lost upon a woman's marriage external to the Nation but cautions about separating issues of gender

and Indigenous sovereignty from the larger "axes of oppression that have converged to sustain it over time," such as settler colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and State oppression (96). While some scholars specifically point to blood quantum arguments of belonging as reifying the settler colonial logic of elimination (Tuck and Yang 2012; Wolfe 2013), Doerfler (2015); Garroutte (2003); and Gonzales, Kertesz, and Tayac (2007) all demonstrate how eugenics shaped blood quantum formulations of Indigenous nationhood. Likewise, Wolfe (2013) notes how pan-ethnic notions of Indigeneity, often construed as an "Indigenous race" through notions of blood, are antithetical to notions of belonging, autonomy, nationhood, and self-identity utilized by Native Americans. Important to note here are the disastrous consequences of blood quantum formulations of Indigenous nationhood: the usurpation and exploitation of land by settler-colonial States, the division of Indigenous families, and ultimately the undermining of Indigenous definitions of citizenship, kinship understandings, and autonomy. Additionally, Wolfe (2013), Gonzales, Kertesz, and Tayac (2007), Tuck and Yang (2012), and King (2019) draw critical attention to the way blood quantum and one-drop-rule definitions of race are compound constructions which work together, albeit inversely, to simultaneously and systematically oppress Black and Indigenous people. By using the language and methodology of eugenics to advance her arguments for multiculturalism, Anzaldua (1987) uses the "master's tools to dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1983), and yet another master is created—one who wears the mask of mestizaje.

7.0 A Guide Through the Borderlands

As we wander the dusty and parched deserts of the borderlands, Anzaldua wants us to believe that blood is thicker than water, but we know blood won't quench our thirst. We can see her genetic claims of Indigeneity through mestizaje for what they are: a move meant politicize Mexican people into solidarity with other people of color. While this is precisely the kind of endeavor that is needed, the road paved by the new mestiza consciousness is an unstable one that leads us back into the violence of the borderlands. In many ways, Anzaldua's (1987) new mestiza consciousness attempts to contest these very processes of mestizaje—especially through the recognition of Indigenous and Black ancestors, through resistance to toxic masculinity, patriarchy, and homophobia. However, by turning towards genetics and blood quantum as an indicator of community, by using the language of eugenics and its ideologies, by centering mestizaje as an exemplary mode of being, and by failing interrogate and remedy the ways proximity to Whiteness and alienation from Black and Indigenous communities has benefitted and continues to benefit mestizes, Anzaldua keeps the racial hierarchy intact. Mestizaje is not reinterpreted, but rather reaffirmed for what it is—a longstanding hegemonic racial project, one that reinforces Whiteness through systematic assimilation and oppression of all other non-white racial groups. As Jimenez Roman (2005) cautions:

> "But however elastic and fluid whiteness and blackness may appear, the 'middle ground' that miscegenation seems to offer can never be neutral since it still depends on acceptance of a racial hierarchy predicated on presumed epistemological, aesthetic, and social values, themselves based on biological criteria…It should be emphasized that the refusal to take race into account is not born of a humanitarian inclination to treat all peoples as equal;

> rather, it is a refusal to acknowledge the existence of racially constructed systems that produce and rationalize material inequality, and to then assume responsibility for correcting it." (72)

Like Anzaldua (1987), many other decolonial Latin American feminists (prominently, Femenías 2007; Lugones 2010; Ortega 2016) have attempted to reinterpret mestizaje as a "middle ground," sometimes as neutral, sometimes as a place of contestation, discourse, and possibility precisely because of its ambiguity. Here, Beltran's (2004) arguments that mestizaje can only be a place of possibility when all other racial groups are constructed as unable to hold multi-cultural possibility are backed up by Saucier and Woods' (2016) meticulous and much needed critique of racial formation theory and racial fluidity/ambiguity. Only by leaving the structure of racism intact, by perpetuating it through eugenic ideology and a blatant refusal to look at mestizaje's bloody and oppressive construction against Black and Indigenous people, by accepting this racial system as valid, can mestizaje be read as a multicultural and heterogeneous place of possibility.

When Anzaldua (1987: p.78) asks readers, "…*the mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?" as if the answer wasn't clear, as if the playing field was level, as if structure didn't exist, *as if there could be any other answer,* I, too, offer the words of Audre Lorde, which have given nuance and power to many a decolonial text (see Tuck and Yang 2012, for a powerful contrast between Lorde and Western notions of consciousness-based decolonization):

> "For each of us as women, there is a dark place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises, 'beautiful/and tough as chestnut/stanchions against (y)our nightmare of weakness/' and impotence. These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness.

Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep. When we view living in the european mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious…The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free" (Lorde 2007: 37-38).

Lorde's words challenge mestize conceptions of Blackness as stagnant and flat, as incapable of subjectivity, multiplicity, or radical possibility and creativity. Beyond symbols and language, beyond the mirage of mestizaje, Lorde's words force us to make poetry out of our own lives, to *feel* and to *live* in a world with others, in a way that is radical and free. In contrast to Anzaldua's new mestiza consciousness, which invokes the Western assumption that experience is primarily in the realm of thought, Lorde's poetry requires tangible and material action. Furthermore, Lorde differs from Anzaldua in her approach to violence of colonial, racist, sexist structure. Whereas Anzaldua (1987) sees the solution as one of reinterpretation, Lorde (2007: p.38) cautions:

"Sometimes we will drug ourselves with dreams of new ideas. The head will save us. The brain alone will set us free. But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves—along with the renewed courage to try them out."

In midst/in the mist of the colonial world that begat the borderlands are the old and forgotten ideas—the words of action, of women, *Black and Indigenous women*. Lorde's words require

material action to fight the “lies of the white fathers,” which deceive us into thinking we can *think* our way out of oppression or that decolonization requires no action from us but to look back and to remember. It is for this reason that Tuck and Yang (2012) turn to Lorde as a model for praxis as they critique metaphorical interpretations of decolonization.

Lorde’s (2007) work exemplifies praxis because she defines poetry (language, words) as arising from experience. There is a constant interdependency in her work between lived experience, which “births” thought and understanding, and the way we name and act upon it—poetry. What is most salient in the work of Lorde (2007), however, is her call for courage and bravery to live out our visions and dreams Lorde (2007) states, “However, experience has taught us that action in the now is also necessary, always. Our children cannot dream unless they live, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours?” (38). These are words of survival, but also words of thriving. There is no separation between what was, what is, and what will be, but a constant flow of feeling between these—the present, the now, must be remedied to ensure a future and realize the past. Action may seem daunting, but Lorde’s (2007) work entreats us to “attempt the heretical actions that our dreams imply” despite the fear they might invoke in ourselves (or in others). In fact, there cannot be a situated poetry without these actions deemed “heretical” by White and Mestize society.

Lorde’s words open a path through the racial landscapes of the borderlands into a future that is decidedly *not* mestiza, but staunchly (defiantly) Indigenous and Black. This path rests upon “heretical” visions that call into question all aspects of (White and Mestize) modernity—the very dissolution of racist and colonial systems of oppression, towards abolition, land back, and the reality of Black and Indigenous liberation. These futurities invoke new and old ways of

relating to one another, but their fates rest upon a process of decolonization that is, as Tuck and Yang (2012) describe, *not a metaphor*, but a “breaking [of] the settler colonial triad, [which] in direct terms, means repatriating land to sovereign Native tribes and nations, abolition of slavery in its contemporary forms, and the dismantling of the imperial metropole” (2012: p. 31). It is this futurity created by Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation, based in a concrete politics of decolonization/abolition, that will guide us through and out of the borderlands.

Although this analysis and this author does not pretend to find itself outside of the colonial frameworks that birthed Anzaldua’s (1987) *Borderlands* or even hope to escape their reification, like Brown (2021); King (2019); Lorde (2007); Rivera Cusicanqui (2012); Tuck and Yang (2012); and many others, I do dare to dream beyond, or rather, *move through*, these racial landscapes into a world that is *borderless*. This is a world where we know the stories of the land and call each formation by its original name; or perhaps we’ve come up with new names together in the first tongues, in which we act to affirm each other instead of to oppress one another. It’s a world of land-back, abolition, decolonization, feminism, an unimaginable world of the “dark,” “deep,” and “ancient” (Lorde 2007, p.37), *where we are all free*. I’m convinced that in this Other world we will know one another by our whole being, and not just by our names. We will dare to love and to live with our whole selves. It’s in this world where we will stand accountable to each other, as much in death and its afters, as in life.

There’s a part of me, reading Anzaldua (1987), that believes (and hopes) that she, too, believed in this world, but perhaps did not know how to get us through to it. *Borderlands*, in many ways, attempts to articulate a path out of the chaos and violence of this world, but the journey mapped does not lead mestizes towards a true freedom. Perhaps Anzaldua was not ready to let go of the borderlands, confusing the myth for its jagged cerros, its stark deserts so full of

life and so full of bones. This is the travesty of mestizaje, of Latinidad, of nations, and borders. They mirror what we know, that which is familiar; they cut us on the reflection of our pain but deprive us of a healing balm, and this illusion is the worst kind of seduction. Or perhaps Anzaldua did not believe at all, and she was one more lost amongst us to these myths. She made strategic choices in her work in the hopes of bringing people together, praying that the ends would justify the means. At the end of this analysis, it can be said that there is something reassuring in seeing Anzaldua as she is—not as a prophet or idol, but as a woman who lived as we do, making choices each and every day. We know that some of those choices would uphold empire, while other choices give us the tools to ensure its demise.

Even though the demise of this empire is perhaps not likely to come in our lifetimes, nor will it be a one-time event, it is comforting to know, as we embark on projects of liberation, that we can set our visions alongside those of other feminist, decolonial, women of color and let them be but one more pavestone to be lived out each day, in every relationship, and every motion, as best as we can. To "act as if were possible to radically transform the world," as Angela Davis (2014) entreats us, is to hasten the coming of these visions, letting them breath, transform, and change right where we are. We've come around so many times now that time itself has ceased to exist as we know it; the watch of capital-colonialism is stopped. We've learned to tell time another way. We race away from its ticking, until the sound itself is swallowed up by our footsteps, crunching along a cool, peaceful desert trail. It's fall. The sun is in its meridian, and we grow stronger each day under its glow. This is certainly not a new way out, but all I ask is that we walk through it together.

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