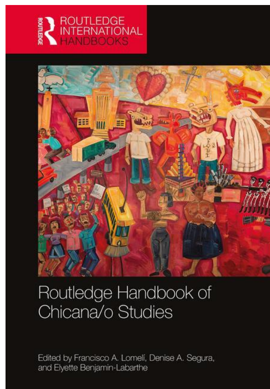
This article was downloaded by: *10.2.97.136*
On: 27 Sep 2023
Access details: *subscription number*
Publisher: *Routledge*
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Chicana/o Studies

Francisco A. Lomelí, Denise A. Segura, Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe

New tribalism and Chicana/o Indigeneity in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa

Publication details
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315726366-23
Domino Renee Pérez
Published online on: 03 Aug 2018

How to cite :- Domino Renee Pérez. 03 Aug 2018, *New tribalism and Chicana/o Indigeneity in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa from:* Routledge Handbook of Chicana/o Studies Routledge
Accessed on: 27 Sep 2023
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315726366-23

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

18

New tribalism and Chicana/o Indigeneity in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa[1]

Domino Renee Pérez

> Tengo miedo que [I'm afraid that], in pushing for mestizaje and a new tribalism, I will detribalize [Indians]. Yet I also feel it's imperative we participate in this dialogue no matter how risky.
>
> – Gloria Anzaldúa (1987)

This chapter begins with a quote from one of the most influential cultural theorists of the late twentieth century, Gloria E. Anzaldúa, that problematizes mestizaje and "new tribalism" and is integral to her theory of the borderlands. Born and raised in the Río Grande Valley of Texas on the border between Mexico and the United States, Anzaldúa explores the borderlands as a literal and metaphoric space that shaped her life and the lives of others like her who inhabited multiple positions in the physical, cultural, sexual, and political landscape. Rather than see this in-between space as disadvantageous, Anzaldúa envisioned it as a potential site of power, a place of seclusion, where border-dwellers could grow strong. In her multigeneric text, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), she claims and expresses the various facets of her identity as a Mexicana, Tejana, Chicana, and mestiza, which she defined as "mixed Indian and Spanish blood" (p. 5). Anzaldúa's work contributed significantly to women, gender, queer, Chicana/o, and transnational studies.

For many, *Borderlands* is revelatory for the way it affirms a self that is often erased or pushed, sometimes violently, into the margins of dominative or competing hetero-patriarchal cultures, whether Anglo or Chicano. Anzaldúa addresses these and other issues in her theory of the borderlands, a physical and intellectual locale where she is an agent of change for herself and others. Her cultural theory, especially her expression of mestizaje and the new mestiza, have resonated not only with feminists and women of color, but also with readers worldwide, one indicator of which is the large number of inquiries I have received as the Director of Mexican American Studies about her archives housed at the University of Texas at Austin. Her place in Indigenous studies, however, is more vexed. Indeed, Anzaldúa struggled to account for what she understood as the Indigenous part of Chicana/o identity. Whether she was theorizing mestizaje or "new tribalism" (an extension of the former theory) and in the process inspiring and empowering many people, this struggle remained incomplete and ultimately unsatisfying.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

Following Anzaldúa's death on 15 May 2004, from diabetes-related complications, the *PMLA*, the journal of the Modern Language Association of America, honored Anzaldúa's intellectual legacy in the "Theories and Methodologies" section of its 6 January 2006 issue. Contributors Tey Diana Rebolledo, Debra A. Castillo, María Herrera-Sobek, and Linda Martín Alcoff reflected on Anzaldúa's work, particularly her impact on border and transnational studies. Of specific relevance to my work here is Alcoff's article, "The Unassimilated Theorist," in which she reflects on the fact that Anzaldúa and her work, although "often cited" remains "undertheorized" (2006, p. 256).

The impact of Anzaldúa's work is indisputable. It serves as inspiration for scholars and activists around the world, including those in Russia, Taiwan, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, to name a few, who in personal correspondence convey the explicit connections between the state of marginalized people in their home countries and life in the borderlands. Edited collections, such as *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa's Life and Work Transformed Our Own* (Keating & González-López 2011), document her impact on the scholarly, spiritual, and pedagogical lives of her readers or plot new directions of critical inquiry across disciplines.

Immediately following Anzaldúa's death, Alcoff maintained that in the areas of Women's and Gender Studies, Latino Studies, and postcolonial theory, but particularly feminist theory, Anzaldúa "is rarely critiqued as a serious thinker should be" (2006, p. 256). Alcoff believed that Anzaldúa's work needed to be tried and applied to understand fully its lasting philosophical and theoretical impact. Numerous critical analyses of the type Alcoff calls for have since emerged, including those by Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, and Anzaldúa's former co-editor Cherríe Moraga. At the time, Alcoff offered her own critical reflection on how Anzaldúa's borderlands theory of mestizaje is brought into contemporary conversations about hybridity, a theory of identity rejected by many prominent American Indian scholars such as Craig Womack (1999).

In theorizing mestizaje, Anzaldúa foregrounded the idea that one's subject position, especially in the borderlands, is constantly in flux, but the goal of the border-dweller was to work towards coherence and not fragmentation. For this reason, as Alcoff points out, "Anzaldúa's description and analysis of mestiza consciousness is not at all in line with the postmodernist celebration of hybridity; the fact that she is used as support for this indicates that her work is not read carefully or critically enough" (p. 257). Alcoff highlights an important distinction between using Anzaldúa's work as a means of critical engagement with material and cultural production and political activism in the borderlands, for example, and critically engaging with her theories. Anzaldúa's philosophical and theoretical assertions, in Alcoff's view, needed to be thoroughly scrutinized and tested. Alcoff concludes her own critical assessment of mestizaje and hybridity by stating, "for Anzaldúa, the positive articulation of mestiza identity is a project to be undertaken, rather than something that already exists" (p. 257). Mestizaje is a dynamic process, constantly changing, constantly evolving, and it serves as a precursor to Anzaldúa's emerging theory of new tribalism.

The goal was not to tear down or launch attacks on Anzaldúa but to apply rigor and due diligence to her intellectual legacy as a theorist. Alcoff argued,

> Too few have read more than *Borderlands/La Frontera* or *This Bridge Called My Back*. Too few have done a sustained critical analysis. It remains for those of us who believe there is a wealth of potential in Anzaldúa's work to bring it into current debates.
>
> *(p. 256)*

My project represents a sustained critical analysis that posits new tribalism as an evolving theory and analyzes its potential application and impact, while paying particular attention to whether it entrenches further the imaginary Indian at the center of Chicana/o identity.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

Mixed-bloodedness, Spanish and Indigenous Mexican primarily, is pivotal to the identity of revolutionary subjects called Chicanos and is the central theme of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's epic poem *I Am Joaquín* (1972), named for the famous California "bandit" Joaquín Murrieta and the subject of the first American Indian novel *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit* (1854) by Cherokee author John Rollin Ridge. Chicana/o mestizaje, Rafael Pérez-Torres (2005) argues, exists as an ideological and cultural, rather than a biological, condition, one distinct from the national project of Mexico. While recounting and wending his way through cultural history, Gonzales (1972) invokes the Indigenous through "the eagle and serpent," a reference to the foundational mythology that led to the establishment of Tenochtitlan, the capital city of the Aztec empire (p. 16). Gonzales's vision of Joaquín is inclusive of diverse strata of Indigenous people, "the mountain Indians," "Yaqui/Tarahumara/Chamala," and "Zapotec" (p. 39). He places particular emphasis on Indigenous empire and male nobility through such figures as Moctezuma, Cuauhtémoc, "Nezahualcóyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas," and Mayan princes, creating a patriarchal legacy of male leadership and power (p. 16). Women are relegated to the roles of virgin (La Virgen de Guadalupe), goddess (Tonantzin), and "black shawled" mourners (p. 42). With only one of these as a realistic possibility, women had limited options in the project of nation-building.

As a foundational work in Chicano literature, *I Am Joaquín*[2] locates the rights and responsibilities of power squarely on the shoulders of men. At the same time, it extends Aztec hegemony into that particular historical moment, while also replacing it with what is best described as an "Aztext," a matrix of Aztec, Mayan, and Mesoamerican iconography, mythohistory, and symbology. The absence of a specific tribal history, oral and/or written, allows for the Aztext to serve as an ever-evolving, romantic, fictional placeholder for an Indigenous past, a palimpsest that writes over and further obscures the individual tribes subsumed by and outside of the Aztec empire.

In addition to its distribution at student rallies and conferences, *I Am Joaquín* was performed in the fields for migrant laborers by El Teatro Campesino and later adapted into a film by the troupe's co-founder Luis Valdez in 1969. Valdez called on pre-Columbian spiritual practices and philosophies to create a Chicano dramatic form that did not simply mirror or mimic *gabacho* ("gringo" or white) theater. Teatro Campesino began in 1965, beside the fields where workers were picketing Delano growers. The participants in the Delano Grape Strike, which lasted five years and helped to raise awareness across the country about the unfair treatment of farm workers, became some of the first actors in Chicano theater. Tony Curiel states in his introduction to the collection of Valdez's early works, "El Teatro was born to express the verisimilitude of the striking campesinos' reality" (Curiel 1994, p. 3). Rather than elaborate, scripted, or formalized plays, this early theater relied on what came to be known as *actos*, meaning acts, deeds, or even ceremonies.

For Valdez, these ceremonies harken back to the Aztecs: "In Mexico, before the coming of the white man, the greatest examples of total theater, were, of course, the human sacrifices" (Valdez 1994, p. 7). Sacrifice and suffering often characterized the lives of the campesinos, but Valdez draws attention to the staging of ceremonies or dramas that involved the entire community. Early Chicano theater empowered workers because they were the ones who "produced, acted, directed, designed and improvised" the parts (Valdez 1994, p. 3). Workers performing in the actos could not only act out their daily struggles, but also articulate their grievances and openly criticize their oppressors. Through the actos, a field worker could take on the role of a grower, or *patron*, and satirize his racist treatment of the campesinos. Alongside the actos, Valdez devised a complementary form known as *mito*, or myth, that sought out and cultivated connections between Chicanos and pre-Columbian art and thought. According to Jorge Huerta, "The Valdezian mito is a very personal inquiry into Aztec, Maya, and Native American philosophy that the

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

author has maintained to this day" (2000, p. 36). Together, actos and mitos represented Valdez's effort to create a distinctly Chicano theater, one rooted in Indigenous thought and practice.

Indigeneity and the claiming of Aztlán as a mythic homeland were central to early Chicano nationalism and guiding principles of the Chicano civil rights movement, *el movimiento*. Chicano identity politics recognized and embraced an Indigenous past and cultural heritage while simultaneously asserting that conflict and contact with European invaders gave birth to the Chicano people. Ongoing social and political struggles represent the legacy of a colonial project that plays itself out on the body, mind, and spirit of Chicanos. *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, adopted in March 1969 at the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference held in Denver, Colorado and convened by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, was a declaration of self-determination for Chicanos and a claiming of the nation of Aztlán as a homeland. The assertion of Indianness in the language of *El Plan* is made through "bronze culture," habitation and civilization "of the northern land of Aztlán," the origin of their forebears, and through "reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun" (*El Plan*). The proclamation does not specifically identify the grievances of any one particular Indigenous group, choosing instead to declare "the independence of our mestizo nation" (*El Plan*). Inclusive of Native and native claims, the explicit definition of mestizo is not offered or outlined clearly in the plan.

Indigeneity, as an epistemology, has been fundamental to Chicano nationalism, and Chicana feminists, such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, in turn, used it to critique the masculinism and heterosexism at the heart of the Chicano nation. As Moraga asserts,

> What was right about Chicano Nationalism was its commitment to preserving the integrity of the Chicano people. A generation ago, there were cultural, economic, and political programs to develop Chicano consciousness, autonomy, and self-determination. What was wrong about Chicano Nationalism was its institutionalized heterosexism, its inbred machismo, and its lack of a cohesive national political strategy.
>
> *(Moraga 1993, pp. 148–149)*

Documented in collections like *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (García 1997), inclusive of personal essays, poetry, and speeches, among other forms, the Chicano civil rights movement saw the entrenchment of prescribed gender roles. Men positioned themselves as historical agents, as in Gonzales's poem, and relegated women to the margins of a movement by a marginalized people. Women were simultaneously in and outside of the project of nation-building except in their roles as mothers to the nation's future generations.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" attempts to account for the "in between-ness" of those outside of the nation(s), those who are "prohibited and forbidden" due to their sexuality, gender, race, or ethnicity (p. 3). Anzaldúa offered Indigenous figures and beliefs associated with the Aztec/Mexica as strategies of spiritual and psychic integration and transformation for the new mestiza and for male-centered conceptions of the nation. Josefina Saldaña-Portillo sees Anzaldúa's doing so as "a refreshing contradistinction to earlier Chicano deployments of mestizaje," adding that "Anzaldúa draws from the female deities in the Aztec pantheon," an approach that is not without its problems, "to explain a variety of Chicana-mestiza customs, to explain patriarchy in Chicano culture, to explain Chicana sexuality" (Saldaña-Portillo 2001, p. 415). Anzaldúa turns to Native thought and religion to address the problems with Chicano civil rights era tribalism and its complete devotion to the heterosexual family and kinship group at the expense of its distinct members: "Much of what the culture condemns focuses on kinship relationships. The welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe is more important than the welfare of the individual" (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 18). This turn

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

towards the individual creates avenues for exposing the Chicano tribe as a closed system in which domestic and social issues such as familial violence, sexual abuse, or homophobia exist openly in the nation. New tribalism, then, becomes her challenge to the old Chicano tribalism in the nation of Aztlán.

A mere five years after the publication of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa began speaking about a new tribalism. The term itself and how Anzaldúa began to conceive of it was the result of disparaging critical engagement with her work. Cultural theorist David Rieff published an article in *New Perspectives Quarterly* on the "Latination of America" entitled, "On Professional Aztecs and Popular Culture," in which he accuses Valdez and Anzaldúa of being "professional Aztecs" (Reiff 1991, p. 46). Rieff's primary criticism of the work of these artists and activists is that, in their total devotion to race and culture, they fail to consider the issue of class. He saw their efforts as a kind of "utopianism" that involved giving the world a "good rewrite" (p. 44). Rieff also observed: "What is remarkable about the new tribalism is the way in which it is so completely *self-absorbed*" (Reiff 1991, p. 44; emphasis added). The same year, in February at a UCLA conference, the article was passed on to Anzaldúa and from that point on, she then "borrowed the term from Rieff," although she admits to being uncertain as to whether or not he originated the idea (Anzaldúa 2002 a, p. 578, n17). So what Rieff saw as a point to critique, the emphasis on the individual, Anzaldúa saw as a strategy for remaking Chicano tribalism so that it could begin to address some of the problems within the nation, such as abuse and other exclusionary practices.

Through the unraveling and reweaving of the many layers of her identity, Anzaldúa embraced her complexity while at the same time remaining completely aware of the complications that can and did arise in making claims on one's cultural inheritance. It is important to note that she did not identify as *india*. She did, however, claim Indian ancestry through mestizaje, a distinction that was important to her, and many of her personal and philosophical principles were cultivated from an Aztec/Mexica worldview. Anzaldúa did not ignore "the biological mixtures of Basque, Spanish, Berber Arab and the cultural mix of various cultures of color and various white cultures" that were a part of her ethnic and racial history (Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003/2004, p. 9). Her reliance on female figures from the Aztec pantheon, most notably the goddess at the center of what Anzaldúa called the "Coatlicue State," demonstrates a privileging of Indigenous thought over other cultural forms (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 42). The modeling of beliefs based on any cultural or racial group requires a critical examination of the social underpinning of the culture and its people, along with the motivation and reasoning behind such "borrowing." She, unfortunately, does not engage with the fact that the Aztec empire was an oppressive entity that forced other tribes to pay tribute and/or submit to its power. Saldaña-Portillo sees Anzaldúa's particular emphasis on Aztec female figures as replicating initiatives in Mexico, namely the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) state-sponsored, twentieth-century promotions of "mestizaje and indigenismo" at the expense of living tribal communities (Saldaña-Portillo 2001, p. 416). The advocating of an Indigenous thought and history also replicates a narrative of a unified Indigenous nation under the name "Aztec," one that eradicates smaller existing tribes in the United States and Mexico from cultural and political memory. Nicole Guidotti-Hernández shares a similar assessment:

> The common reading of Anzaldúa as taking up the mantle of mestizaje as a theory of Chicana/o liberation in some ways denies the violence, both physical and epistemic, that occurs when the essentialized Indian – who cannot pass for mestizo or cannot celebrate a mestiza/o cultural heritage and is in fact Indian in the eyes of the U.S. and Mexican nations – is eliminated from the conversation.
>
> *(Guidotti-Hernández 2011, p. 19)*

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

Anzaldúa's conception of mestizaje is meant to be a category of inclusion that accounts for Indigenous ancestry; its connection to Aztec/Mexica antiquity, namely female figures in its pantheon, confines the source of Chicano Indigeneity to the past rather than rooting it in living tribal traditions. This confinement in history commits the kind of violence through elimination that concerns Guidotti-Hernández.

Despite acknowledging how Anzaldúa, through her specific use of Aztec goddesses, breaks with previous deployments of mestizaje, Saldaña-Portillo finds problems with this alternate configuration, one that also contributes to erasure. She warns:

> When [Anzaldúa] resuscitates this particular representation of indigenous subjectivity to be incorporated into contemporary mestiza consciousness, she does so to the exclusion and, indeed, erasure of contemporary indigenous subjectivity and practices on both sides of the border.
>
> *(Saldaña-Portillo 2001, p. 416)*

The criticism is a familiar one lodged against Anzaldúa, who expressed the same concern about how her work might be read:

> I'm afraid that what I say may unwittingly contribute to the misappropriation of Native cultures, that I (and other Chicanas) will inadvertently contribute to the cultural erasure, silencing, invisibility, racial stereotyping, and disenfranchisement of people who live in real Indian bodies.
>
> *(Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003/2004, p. 12)*

When she became aware of Saldaña-Portillo's criticisms, Anzaldúa responded by saying, "I appreciate her critique but my sense is that she's misread or has not read enough of my work" (Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003/2004, p. 14). Yet Saldaña-Portillo is not the only critic to see appropriation in Anzaldúa's work.

A careful reading of Anzaldúa's new tribalism reveals that it is not tied explicitly to antiquity; however, there are other equally problematic aspects. Her emerging ideas on the principle represent the theorist's efforts to open up the category of mestizaje to account for "what happens when our sense of tribe and identity changes, when it expands" (Hernández-Ávila & Anzaldúa 1991, p. 185). Native kinship formations are at the heart of this new tribalism, as is the place of the individual within the group. Anzaldúa explained to Irene Lara in an interview:

> New tribalism is a kind of mestizaje. Instead of somebody making you a hybrid without your control, you can choose. You can choose a little Buddhism, a little assertiveness, individuality, some Mexican views of the spirit world, something from blacks, something from Asians . . . you graft them together.
>
> *(Lara 2008, p. 42)*

The message here is mixed. Although Anzaldúa indicates that she uses new tribalism "to formulate a more inclusive identity, one that's based on many features and not solely on race," what those features are remain unclear (Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003/2004, p. 9). She further states: "In order to maintain its privileges the dominant culture has imposed identities through racial and ethnic classification. The new tribalism disrupts this imposition by challenging these categories" (Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003–2004, p. 9). Yet in naming racial groups, she ostensibly replicates the same classifications as the dominant culture she critiques.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

Without further guidance, new tribalism is at once superficial, a la carte spiritualism (either inclusive or independent of organized religious practices), culture, and personality; it is also biological, like the creation of a hearty orange tree, its strength and quality of its yield attained by crossbreeding. Anzaldúa was searching for a way to transcend race and biology, but new tribalism's central metaphor is the orange tree made strong through grafting. The emphasis on genetic inheritance is reminiscent of José Vasconcelos's theoretical imagining of a *raza cósmica*. Mexican philosopher and minister of education under Eulalio Gutiérrez, Vasconcelos imagined a cosmic race, one made strong through genetic selection of desired racial characteristics with the loss of the Indigenous and the emergence of the mestizo as the end result. Although this new tribalism is "a social identity that could motivate subordinated communities to work together in coalition," there is a biological determinism embedded in its definition (Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003/2004, p. 9). The metaphor of the tree is ultimately lacking because the kind of transformation Anzaldúa is talking about is being imposed on a living entity: the tree did not choose to have its strength or productivity altered.

Regarding her evolving theoretical considerations, 1991 proved to be a watershed: In that year, Anzaldúa also sat down for a conversation with Inés Hernández-Ávila and began to theorize through mestizaje towards new tribalism, stating "Nos/otras and the New Tribalism describe the formation of personal and collective identity" (Hernández-Ávila & Anzaldúa 2000, p. 178). At this time, she expressed specific interest in finding out "what happens when our sense of tribe and identity changes, when it expands to include a new kind of tribalism" (Hernández-Ávila & Anzaldúa 2000, p. 185). Without fully understanding Anzaldúa's definition of "old tribalism," it is difficult to ascertain what aspects are being "remade" or discarded. Still in the early phase of her thinking, Anzaldúa defines new tribalism as "a kind of mestizaje that allows for connecting with other ethnic groups and interacting with other cultures and ideas" (Hernández-Ávila & Anzaldúa 2000, p. 185). Although Rieff may have served as the inspiration for the term, like an alchemist, Anzaldúa transmutes his *ad hominem* attack into her theoretical basis for bringing people together.

New tribalism allowed Anzaldúa to account for the world outside of the borderlands, a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary," but one she theorized from the U.S. side of the frontera (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 3). New tribalism emerges from the original theoretical concept of mestizaje and, although remaining very much a part of it, attempts to address the effects of globalization on individuals and communities. In 1991, Anzaldúa explained to Hernández-Ávila:

> Now we live in a global village; we live in each other's pockets and not in isolated ethnic plots. We depend on exchange of goods, ideas, and information. Modern life goes on and we can never go back, we can never completely isolate each group from other groups.
>
> *(Hernández-Ávila & Anzaldúa 2000, p. 186)*

Dynamic and evolving theories, mestizaje, and new tribalism reflected Anzaldúa's desire to be even more inclusive, building bridges across borders, oceans, and continents. And it is this point that Alcoff does not take into account when she states: "Whether Anzaldúa's analysis of the particularities of Chicana hybridity is applicable to hybrid identities generally or to hybrid identities specifically now, in the current climate of globalization, needs reflective analysis" (Alcoff 2006, p. 257). On some level, Anzaldúa must have sensed this about her own work and began to theorize in a way that accounts for and accommodates a global perspective.

An interview with Debra Blake and Carmen Abrego in 1994 demonstrates that Anzaldúa had begun the process of refining her thoughts on new tribalism, revealing that it emerges in

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

part as a response to the rigidity of Chicano nationalism: "My tribe has always been the Chicano Nation, but for me, unlike the majority of Mexican Americans, the indigenous lineage is a major part of being Chicana" (Blake & Abrego 2000, p. 214). "Tribe," therefore, is synonymous with the Chicano nation, and Anzaldúa takes this opportunity to make a distinction between Chicano and Mexican American, with the former centralizing Indigenous heritage, although it is unclear how exactly. Anzaldúa continues,

> Nationalism was a good thing to seek in the '60s, but in the '70s it was problematic and in the '80s and '90s it doesn't work. I had to, for myself, figure out some other term that would describe a more porous nationalism, opened up to other categories of identity.
>
> *(Blake & Abrego 2000, p. 215)*

Therefore, new tribalism, along with "nos/otras," served as a means of "disrupting categories," a move necessary in Anzaldúa's view because "[c]ategories contain, imprison, limit, and keep us from growing. We have to disrupt those categories and invent new ones" (Blake & Abrego 2000, p. 215). But what effect does this disruption and invention have on ideological, historical, and political conceptions of tribes and tribal people? And if Indigenous lineage plays "a major part" in being Chicana, how does it manifest or get enacted?

Both interviews appear in AnaLouise Keating's edited collection, *Interviews/Entrevistas/Gloria Anzaldúa* (2000), where, in the introduction, Keating restates Anzaldúa's own definition of new tribalism but adds that it represents "a disruptive category that redefines previous ethnocentric forms of nationalism" (Keating 2000, p. 5). So then new tribalism is a turn away from nationalism, in which kinship is no longer defined exclusively by blood, geography, or any other bureaucratic entity. Anzaldúa reflects on this point in the preface to *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002a):

> Many of us identify with groups and social positions not limited to our ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, or national classifications. Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include – what I call the new tribalism.
>
> *(Anzaldúa 2002a, p. 3)*

Yet, by this time, although never simply a rhetoric of inclusion, new tribalism had become intertwined with a larger and equally dynamic spiritual belief system involving *nepantleras* (women of the border) and *naguales* (spiritual and literal shape shifters) that together have the capacity to transform people and the way we think about global culture. Anzaldúa remained insistent that we needed to revisit regularly categories and groupings of people. New tribalism was her concerted effort to do so:

> We need a new tribalism. We need a different way of shuffling the categories. As long as we rely on language, we'll have categories even though they're very limiting and imprisoning. Every few years we should blur the boundaries, make them porous. If we reshuffle all the categories, can we come up with new identity markers, new ways of composing members of different groups, into new groups? I've come up with "new tribalism" y allí estoy. I'm stuck. [laughter] Every so many years I add a little bit, extend the categories, pero I don't think the problem will ever be solved because life transforms all the time, so of course categories only work for so long.
>
> *(Lara 2008, p. 42)*

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

For historical, social, cultural, and political reasons, among others, it is unlikely that sovereign Indigenous nations would share her point of view. Indigenous scholars might be wary of blurring the boundaries or of constantly making and remaking Indigenous definitions of identity. The desire to think of terminology and theory as dynamic is important but does not address why people need or choose to turn to Other cultures when the shelf-life of intellectual and ideological projects constantly expires. It does not promote the interrogation of the inherent subject position assumed by members of dominative groups, nor does it problematize the idea of Other cultures serving as cultural, social, or spiritual resources. On the surface, it ostensibly sanctions cultural tourism and the fetishizing of difference and does not address the power relationship in this kind of taking, a situation dramatized in Sherman Alexie's novel *Reservation Blues* (1995).

In Alexie's book, two New Age white women, Betty and Veronica, who initially appear as groupies for the Indian band Coyote Springs at the center of the novel, long to be Indian, admiring their harmony with nature and other stereotypical characteristics. Betty and Veronica, whose names call to mind the classic comic book duo from the U.S. *Archie Comics* series, achieve their dream when Cavalry Records signs the girls to record for their label as "Indian" artists. The lyrics to one of their songs describes eagles crying, connecting with the land, Mother Earth, and Father Sky. The artists affirm feeling "Indian" despite their white skin and blonde hair. They also encourage others who share a similar racialized longing to do the same.

For the Anglo duo in red face, Indianness is at once biological, buried in the spongy marrow of the bones, and a choice, something accessible to anyone who makes a claim, even a sincere one, for sincerity often provides the most privileged root of entitlement. It answers to no one and does not reside in contemporary lived experience or historical relationships with land, language, or community. Rather, it is something always present and realized through skin bronzer, feathers, and beads. It is divorced of tribal histories, people, and legacies. It is transformative without having to consider how the parent culture is being transformed in the taking. As Coco Fusco points out in *English Is Broken Here* (1995), "Absorption and mimicry of Native American, Mexican, and African American cultural forms and philosophies have been absolutely central to the formation and transformation of white Americanness" (Fusco 1995, p. 68). This kind of appropriation, nevertheless, rarely takes into account "the conditions of colonized societies and other contexts where national autonomy, national culture, and/or subaltern identity are fragile, imperiled, or symbolically effaced by external forces" (Fusco 1995, p. 70).

After hearing the recording by Betty and Veronica, the book's Spokane protagonist, Thomas Builds-the-Fire (Spokane), destroys the tape and then quickly runs around his house, gathering those things precious to him in fear that "somebody was going to steal them next" (Alexie 1995, p. 296). Thomas's fear is born from the threat of further theft, thus illustrating that "playing Indian" is not a benign act of appropriation. Rather, it is a theft of history, culture, and identity. It also displaces Indians symbolically and sometimes quite literally from the position of speaking about their own communities. Despite claims to Indigenous ancestry, Chicanas/os are not immune from this kind of taking. Anzaldúa herself stated, "Chicanas/os are not critical enough about how we borrow from lo indio. Some Indian Americans think all Chicanas/os plunder native culture as mercilessly as whites" (Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003/2004, pp. 14–15). This plundering or theft is detrimental to Indian peoples and no less violent than other previous and ongoing colonial projects.

Although the issue of cultural appropriation, especially in terms of Native artifacts, rituals, and kinship formations, is a serious concern in the face of detribalization, how does one acknowledge or even begin to claim or account for Indigenous heritage without erasing or

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

disenfranchising living tribal communities? Anzaldúa's untimely death left these and other central and ongoing questions unanswered. "Now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts" (Anzaldúa 2002b, p. 5).

The final selection in *This Bridge We Call Home* offers Anzaldúa's definitive thinking on new tribalism as an alternative to assimilation and separatism. It is a means of healing, a means of imagining a unified whole. New tribalism allows not simply for the transgression of borders, but also for the internalization of those conflicts as a means of healing:

> Imagination, a function of the soul, has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to reimagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our times.
>
> *(Anzaldúa 2002b, p. 5)*

Ultimately, new tribalism juxtaposes novelty with history, while at the same time focusing on an individualistic process rather than a relational one. It also proposes to remake tribalism or make tribalism anew while failing to recognize that many tribal communities are happy with their current and ongoing guiding myths. Other than issues of inclusion and difference, what is it about tribalism that is being "remade," and what impact does it have on other tribal communities?

To be tribal or tribalized is to partake in the civic and communal life of a group that is made up of families and clans or that shares a common ancestry and often kinship or ceremonial relations. In the United States, "tribe" is most often associated in the popular imagination with the more than 500 nations of American Indians, federal recognition, issues of sovereignty, casinos, or reservations. To be tribal can mean maintaining one's ancestral lands, language, and community; access to resources and the continuation or termination of a people's lifeways; crushing economic adversity for some and profound prosperity for others. In other words, there is no singular way of being tribal.

For Anzaldúa, new tribalism was a metaphor for a lived experience, a way for groups to work together in coalition and an organizational structure for bridging humanity. But Chicanas/os must live outside of metaphors and mythology. To be Chicana/o or even Xicana/o[3] is to make language compromises; it is the longing for a homeland; it is the exaltation of imagined origins; it is the expression and feeling of loss; or it is none or some of these and other complexities. What we have lost is not singular nor is necessarily shared. We need to define with specificity who we are and where we come from. We need to acknowledge the effects of internalized colonialism that simultaneous classed and racialized a nation of detribalized mixed-bloods and mestizos. We need to examine the ways that Chicano ideology historically has privileged particular kinds of Indigenous bodies and Indigeneity over others. Finally, we need to trouble narratives of poverty and the compulsory working-class status of Chicanas/os to account for who we are in the present.

Anzaldúa's new tribalism is as flawed as it is beautiful, an incomplete strategy for connecting people socially and globally, independently of race or nation. In its imagining of a nation, Chicanas/os have not always confronted their deeply conflicted history with Native peoples in Mexico and the United States. We may see ourselves as indigenous, but are we Indigenous? A 2010 brief by the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that of the individuals who identified as Mexican (Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana or Chicano), 175,494 also self-identified racially as American Indian (U.S. Census Bureau 2012, p. 17). The number makes Mexican American Indians the fourth largest tribal group in the United States after Cherokees, Navajos, and Choctaws. But what are the tribes within the larger category of Mexican American Indians? Where

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

are the Indigenous nations inside this category and outside of the Chicana/o imaginary? How do we participate in the civic and/or cultural life of those nations? What is our investment in Indigeneity? Is our solidarity with Native people merely a symbolic one? As Chicanas and Chicanos, we want the right to claim our history as ethnic Indigenous Mexicans, but we must take care in how we assert that claim.

Regardless of Anzaldúa's assertions that mestizaje and new tribalism are reflections of her desire not to "inadvertently contribute to the cultural erasure, silencing, invisibility, racial stereotyping, and disenfranchisement of people who live in real Indian bodies," the possibility of their doing so is high (Hernández-Ávila & Pérez 2003/2004, p. 12). Moraga echoes this and other concerns about appropriation, stating

> From the perspective of living tribal communities the idea of a new, ethnically inclusive tribalism may resonate as yet another neocolonial attempt to dehistoricize and weaken the cultural integrity of aboriginal nations. This, of course, was not Anzaldúa's intention, but the danger of such appropriations is not to be minimized.
>
> *("The Salt," 2011, pp. 124–125)*

Anzaldúa's advocating for a boutique and special tribalism comprised of "a little bit of this and a little bit of that" should give us pause, for on its surface, it seems to invite cultural tourism and appropriation at the expense of actual tribal nations. Rather than maintain an imagined mythology that participates in the entrenching of an Aztec hegemony, nay Aztext, and the perseverance of a narrative of empire, Chicanas/os can make claims to Native experience through their participation in a centuries-old and still enduring Indigenous labor diaspora that is not confined to any one geographic place, region, people, or particular nation. The time has passed for royalty and robes. We need "documented" histories and a substantive means of talking about the relationships between Indians and Chicanas/os. However, the relationship among Mexicans, Indians, and labor has always been clear. One need only look at the construction of the California missions – built by Indian laborers overseen by Spanish monks – to evidence this history.

Mexican, Central, and South American Indians and mestizos moved, historically and presently, north and south along the Mesoamerican migrant corridor, stretching from Central America through Mexico and into the United States and Canada, to settle or search for work or an improved quality of life but not always with documentation. Records for these individuals exist, if at all, in oral rather than in written records. Similarly, family altars, prayer cards, rosaries, recipes, blankets, and other handicrafts or material objects can embody a history that is not immediately identifiable as recorded or even translatable. These and other means provide potential avenues for familial or individual documentation of Indigenous ancestry for Chicanas/os. By placing ephemera alongside accounts and documents that convey how the state sees Mexicans and Indians, for example, those found in U.S. newspapers, Spanish-language newspapers/periodicals, or nontraditional archives such as deportation records, intelligence and scouting reports, police records, and census data, Chicanas/os can move away from romantic fictions to historical and present accountings that bridge Indigenous with Indigenous on both sides of the border.

Notes

1 'New Tribalism and Chicana/o Indigeneity in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa' by Domino Renee Pérez originally appeared in the *Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature* (2014), edited by

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23

James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. Reprinted with permission. It has been slightly updated and edited consistent with Routledge guidelines. Http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199914036.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199914036

2 The reader is referred to respective chapters by R. Gutiérrez and R. Pérez-Torres in this *Handbook*, which provide additional text from "Yo Soy Joaquín/I am Joaquín" and contextualize its significance within the Chicano movement and mestizaje.

3 Xicana/o spelled with an "X" differs from Chicana/o (which begins with "Ch") and is used by some authors, notably Ana Castillo (1994), to embrace the Indigenous roots of the Chicana identity.

References

Alcoff, L. Martín 2006, 'The unassimilated theorist', *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 1, pp. 255–259.

Alexie, S. 1995, *Reservation Blues*, Atlantic Monthly Press, New York.

Anzaldúa, G.E. 1987, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*, Aunt Lute, San Francisco.

Anzaldúa, G.E. 2002a, 'now let us shift . . . the path of conicimiento . . . inner work, public acts', in G.E. Anzaldúa & A.L. Keating (eds.) *This bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, Routledge, New York, pp. 540–578.

Anzaldúa, G.E. 2002b, '(Un)natural bridges, (un)safe spaces,' Preface', in G.E. Anzaldúa & A.L. Keating (eds.) *This bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, Routledge, New York, pp. 1–5.

Blake, D. & Abrego, C. 2000, 'Doing gigs: speaking, writing, and change', in A.L. Keating (ed.) *Interviews/Entrevistas/Gloria Anzaldúa*, Routledge, New York, pp. 211–234.

Castillo, A. 1994, *Massacre of the dreamers: essays on Xicanisma*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Curiel, T. 1994, 'Introduction', in *Luis Valdez – early works: actos, Bernabé, and Pensamiento serpentino*. Arte Público, Houston, pp. 3–5.

El plan espiritual de Aztlán. 1969, Denver: national Chicano Youth Liberation Conference. "Papeles," M.E.Ch.A. University of Arizona. Accessed April 12, 2013. www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=el+plan+espiritual+de+aztlan+pdf.

Fusco, C. 1995, *English is broken here: notes on cultural fusion in the Americas*, New Press, New York.

García, A.M. (ed.) 1997, *Chicana feminist thought: the basic historical writings*, Routledge, New York.

Gonzales, R. 1972, *I am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín; an epic poem. With a chronology of people and events in Mexican and Mexican American* history, Bantam Books, Toronto/New York.

Guidotti-Hernández, N. 2011, *Unspeakable violence: remapping U.S. and Mexican national imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Hernández-Ávila, I. & Anzaldúa, G.E. 2000, 'Quincentennial: from victimhood to active resistance' (1991), in A.L. Keating (ed.) *Interviews/Entrevistas/Gloria Anzaldúa*, Routledge, New York, pp. 177–194.

Hernández-Ávila, I. & Pérez, D.R. 2003/2004, 'Email Interview: Gloria E. Anzaldúa', *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 15, no. 3–4, pp. 9–20.

Huerta, J. 2000, *Chicano drama: performance, society, and myth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Keating, A.L. & González-López, G. (eds.) 2011, *Bridging: how Gloria Anzaldúa's life and work transformed our own,* University of Texas Press, Austin.

Keating, A.L. (ed.) 2000, 'Risking the personal', Introduction, in *Interviews/Entrevistas/Gloria Anzaldúa*, Routledge, New York, pp. 1–15.

Lara, I. 2008, 'Daughter of Coatlicue: an interview with Gloria Anzaldúa', in A.L. Keating (ed.) *Entre mundos/among worlds: new perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*, Palgrave, New York, pp. 41–56.

Moraga, C. 1993, *Last generation: prose & poetry*, South End Press, Boston.

Moraga, C. 2011, 'The salt that cures: remembering Gloria Anzaldúa', in *A Xicana codex of changing consciousness*: *writings, 2000–2010*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, pp. 116–130.

Pérez-Torres, R. 2005, *Mestizaje: critical uses of race in Chicano culture*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Reiff, D. 1991, 'Professional Aztecs and popular culture', *New Perspectives Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 42–46.

Saldaña-Portillo, J. 2001, 'Who's the Indian in Aztlán? rewriting mestizaje, indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón', in I. Rodríguez (ed.) *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, Duke University Press, Durham, pp. 402–423.

United States Census Bureau. 2012, 'The American Indian and Alaska Native Populations: 2010', Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

Valdez, L. 1994, *Luis Valdez – early works: actos, Bernabé, and Pensamiento serpentino*, Arte Público, Houston.

Womack, C.S. 1999, *Red on red: native American literary separatism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:24 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315726366, chapter18, 10.4324/9781315726366-23