

**Re-membering Gloria in 2020 Nepantla Times: Images of Healing, Sensing a Planetary Situatedness, Ways to Make Work Matter, a Call to Action, nuestra lucha es por la vida**

**Nepantla Times 2020 Re-membering Gloria**

Norma Cantú<sup>1</sup>

How do I remember Gloria? I remember Gloria's laughter. I remember her laughing and having a great time in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, in Salisbury, Maryland, in Austin, at UC Berkeley, in the Washington DC Zoo... And in so many places where our paths crossed! I remember her smile and also her furrowed brow, concerned and in deep thought. Con la mirada profunda, with her bright shiny eyes, black as onyx and as deep. Speaking from the heart and with great curiosity for the world and for all that was happening at the time.

Has she had an impact in my work? Yes! Such a great impact. I credit her with giving me permission to write as I do en Spanglish, mezclando el inglés, mi lengua adoptiva, y el español del sur de Tejas, ese lenguaje sin igual, tan nuestro, con el que nació, en Nuevo Laredo, y con el cual crecí en Laredo. That lullaby's language—la canción de cuna que me arrullaba—that was my entry into the world of words, of language. I also know that without her work, many others would not have dared speak out. In my academic work as well, siento que su énfasis en la cultura, in the meaning of our cultural legacy—both celebrating the rich cultural production but also recognizing that the culture can be oppressive that emphasis and acknowledgement of culture and its definite mark on an individual's life impelled me to go into cultural studies and folklore studies. La cultura cura, sí, pero también aprieta y sujeta al ser que quiere ser libre. So yes, her work had a tremendous impact in my creative writing and in my academic work. As a cultural

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critic and also a poet and a novelist, I can say indubitably that her work impacted mine in profound ways.

How do you think Gloria's vision, philosophy and praxis is relevant for the times we are living right now in pandemic times? Her vision, her philosophy, and her praxis, give us a template, a model for our times. Con su visión, she taught us to look beyond the physical reality to the spiritual and to find meaning that may not be as obvious at first glance. I often fall back on Anzaldúa to explain the inexplicable.

I am not always rewarded, but especially when I despair and try to understand why things happen, I find solace in her words. I remember that the path through to *conocimiento* is layered and multifaceted. *Nepantla* is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas... The zone between two pretty entrenched views: Society's and your own living theory. The tensions, the in-between space that signify the changes... That is where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it.

"Though we tremble before uncertain futures may we meet illness, death and adversity with strength may we dance in the face of our fears." We will change. We will shift our perception. The question is how will we adapt or not. Her philosophy is profound and touches on key questions of existence. Why are we here on this earth? How can we get along? What shapes a human being? I hold dear both her intellectual curiosity and definitely her praxis of spiritual activism. The entities that I call for in meditation and that are in my realm, are those who will remind me to be aware. To be the new *mestiza*. *Conocimiento* and the music of the universe but with a firmly rooted practice in social justice and action. Finally, the quotation that I most use is from an essay right after 9/11. It is a brilliant essay full of hope and insight into the devastation wrought by that event in our history. "Let us do work that matters, *vale la pena*." Con eso me despido. Knowing that everyone gathered here is indeed doing work that matters and I send you love and more love as we move forward. Adelante! A diosita, as Gloria would say al despedirse when we chatted on the phone. A Diosita!



## Images of Healing

Romana Radlwimmer<sup>2</sup>

When I remember Gloria Anzaldúa, I see the curving, twisting serpent of the Rio Grande, I see multi-faceted spaces and the faces of the excluded and I know, we are the other and the other is us. I see the new mestiza as the priestess of crossroads and I see trees of life that link different worlds.

I never met Gloria Anzaldúa personally. I found *Borderlands/La Frontera* three years after she had passed away, as a graduate student in my University Library at another edge of the world. As a metaphoric and political landscape, her *Borderlands* were different than the ones I knew, but I recognized *los entremundos* of her words, and they deepened my understanding of my geopolitical reality.

Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts—spiritual activism, *Nepantla*, *la Facultad*, mosaic-like Aztec-patterned texts, *Coyolxauhqui*—have been guides when conceiving the world, her thought an important methodological eye. Instead of contradictions, Anzaldúa taught me to envision complexity. Instead of separations, connections. Instead of borders, crossings. Instead of blockings, surprises.

Gloria Anzaldúa inspires me because she is a brave and profound writer. By speaking her truth, she was capable of touching the minds, spirits, hearts of most diverse audiences. She reminds me of trying to connect with others on a meaningful level: in academic or political settings where rhetorics seem to have taken over, I dare to introduce interstitial meandering; with students who struggle in the hierarchical labyrinths of scientific jargon, I step back to marvel at both the simplicity and complexity of life together with them.

There is so much wisdom about suffering, pain, illness and healing in Anzaldúa's work. "Let us be the healing of the wound," Anzaldúa's text on 9/11, bears a secret subtext about Covid-19-times: "[L]os cuerpos trapped and suffocating became our bodies. As we watched, we too fell, todos caímos. [...] I couldn't detach from the victims and survivors and their pain. These woundings opened like a gash and widened until a deep chasm separated me from those around me." Anzaldúa's depiction of the individual and collective trauma—the reports and images of bodies lacking air—points towards other crisis, such as the current

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pandemic. She describes a similar distance we experience today; this Coyolxauhqui State of dissociation and fragmentation Covid-19 has had us all suspended in. Anzaldúa's mourning of the dead, her counting of the losses, and reflections on her country's and her own responsibility, could not be a more up-to-date cultural analysis. She urges us to reconnect to others, to seek and find healing images to guide us. With Anzaldúa's reflections, it is our choice to be in unaware desconocimiento, full of fear, ignorance and hatred, or to walk the more difficult path of conocimiento, of deep awareness, which leads to awakening, insights, understandings, courage, and the motivation to engage through concrete acts with the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions, to build bridges. How do we do this? The task is ours to find out. Anzaldúa shows us a way.



## Ofrenda: *Sensing with Gloria Anzaldúa*

Paola Bacchetta<sup>3</sup>

First, I want to recognize that I am writing this on unceded Native Ohlone land, in a place that colonizers call Berkeley, CA, in Turtle Island, a place that colonizers call the USA. The Ohlone peoples remain engaged in a struggle for their land and to re-establish their relation to the land that was disrupted through colonial genocide, theft, capitalist privatization and parceling.

I want to thank the organizers of this event for inviting me here to remember and honor our ancestor Gloria Anzaldúa by speaking about how her work has influenced my own. Thank you for bringing me into the community you are creating with this ofrenda.

Anzaldúa's work came into my life like a beautiful breeze, sweeping me up, moving me deeply, giving me breath, returning me to myself. Her life, writing, artwork, are intensely located geographically, politically, intellectually, artistically, culturally, spiritually. She is profoundly in-collectivity always. I am heartened to know that she wrote for her immediate communities and at the same time offered her work outward to everyone who can hear it, see it, sense it. She says in an interview that she writes "for different audiences" including "more of an international audience that came across from one world to the other and that has border people." Her way of living well with her locations, sense of home, otherness, multiplicity, borders, and many dimensions and registers of travels, opens a universe of reconsiderations for so many of us here and elsewhere.

Respecting the time limits and our mutual desires to hear everyone here, I will briefly speak of only one of Anzaldúa's many contributions to my life and work: the set of concept-terms comprised of *auto-historia* and *auto-historia teoría*.

With *auto-historia* and *auto-historia teoría* Anzaldúa considers the politics of women and queer of color cultural autobiography and their relation to social justice. She calls Borderlands/La Frontera *auto-historia-teoría*. The *auto* in the

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hyphenated and conjoined *auto-historia teoría* brings into play a notion of self that is far beyond the hegemonic Euro-centric and US-centric colonial, neoliberal notion of an individualized, bounded, internally homogenized self. The *auto*'s point of departure is Anzaldúa's specific multiple locations as a working class, prieta, Chicana feminist lesbian queer, a seventh generation Tejana, and the knowing of how this self is fusional in-collectivity with other selves. For Anzaldúa this self and self-awareness—the fullest possible self-sensing—have a central place in social justice for all humans, all other beings-becomings and the world. *Auto-historia teoría* can only be written and lived with a subalternative mode of perception, a new consciousness, a sensing of multiple simultaneous temporal-spatialities in the present, through a different subjectivity. *Auto-historia teoría* unfolds with symbolics, memoir, storytelling, myth, images, corporealities, presences, sensations. It defies what Derrida calls “the law of genre,” insofar as genre, like the hegemonic Euro-centric and US-centric self, is yet another constraining container that Anzaldúa breaks open.

In my work *auto-historia teoría* brings me back to the fullness of who I am as a living, speaking, writing subject. I am a different kind of mestiza: of Wayuu (Venezuelan side), Turkish, Italian and east African heritage. Anzaldúa speaks of spiritual exile as a seventh generation Tejana. *Parcequ'elle m'accompagne*, I work better to understand my own exiles. They are personal, geographical, political, spiritual, affective, corporeal. I am first-and-second-generation subject, a dyke, lesbian, guine, queer of color, surviving and often thankfully thriving. I am a subject born on Lenape land (New York) into a plurality of colonized but also colonizing conditions. Anzaldúa's *auto-historia teoría* helps me make sense of life including seven years of political exile, an effect of my 1970's political activities, and everything thereafter. With *auto-historia teoría* as theory and method, all my *terres d'exile* converge in my body, make peace in my flesh.

One concept I felt a need to create, to bring into my work, that bears the mark of Anzaldúa's reflections is *situated planetarity*. I write about it in a recent article in the journal *Interventions*. I think of *situated planetarity* as an approach to epistemologies, a point of departure for theorization, a way of being in and understanding the world and how all beings-becoming and all things are in-relationality. It helps me consider how everyone, everything is co-constituted in relations of power (colonialism, coloniality, capitalism, race, class, gender, sexuality...) that manifest and operate across local to planetary scales and what it may take to analyze, resist, transform these conditions, to invent other modes of life together.

*Situated planetarity* suggests the dimensions of *situated* sensing, perception and knowledge production that are for Anzaldúa life-long sites of reflection. *Situated planetarity* references *planetarity*, a notion that I specifically draw from the Sri Lankan philosopher Tissa Balasurya. He remarks that we are in a deeper relation with social justice when we think and create from our local point of situatedness with the whole world in mind. *Situated planetarity* also calls up the Foucauldian notion of epistemic violence, which it circumvents by putting into relief that the world is a universe of disparate subaltern epistemes through which everyone, everything, emerges as intelligible or not. With these genealogies and inspirations *situated planetarity* becomes a way to think with how one is always located in-collectivity in temporal-spatialities the sense of *auto-historia*, within relations of power that are operative across all so many scales, dimensions, registers. *Situated planetarity* incites us to make sense of the world on our own terms. It provokes us to re-imagine life itself across the planet while keeping presente all beings-becomings, relations and relationalities, including all our ghosts, ancestors, progeniture a-venir.

For this and so much more, my gratitude to Gloria Anzaldúa and the beautiful community of scholars, activists, practitioners that gather everywhere we speak your name.



## Ways to Make Work Matter and A Call to Action

Larissa M. Mercado-López<sup>4</sup>

When I received the email invitation to participate in this gathering, I read over the prompts and didn't know where to begin: How do I remember Gloria? The fact is, that I didn't know her personally. But I knew her through others. I knew her through the brilliant teaching and scholarship of Sonia Saldívar-Hull, through Norma Cantú's teaching and holistic mentorship the past 17 years, through the artists and poets of San Antonio whose renderings of her image and concepts deepened not only my understanding of her writings but put into practice her call to heal. Critique, and bridge through art, and I knew her through the K-12 teachers who used her work to resist the epistemological erasure and imperialism of the US education system. And through all these people, and her writings, I was transformed, found ways to make work matter, and found potential for liberation.

As co-editor of several volumes of *El Mundo Zurdo* conference proceedings, I've had the privileged experience of being a scholarly steward of her work, shepherding new approaches, recovery efforts, and creative renderings of her work into publications. Together with my co-editors and the publishers and editors at Aunt Lute, we have worked to document the field of Anzaldúa studies. And now, as we find ourselves embattled with a global pandemic and the ongoing processes of colonization, more than ever it's critical that her work be accessible and widely read.

When COVID -19 began growing rapidly and much of the world started to shelter in place, we were forced to turn inward to make sense of the changes as we negotiated our old and new ways of living. Our close, physical proximity to the communities and social systems that we had previously relied on for support and sustenance were now ironically a threat to our survival. And for those of us who are people of color in countries with unstable leadership gripped by the talons of white supremacy, we found ourselves even more engaged in the struggle to insist on our personhood.

When my family began sheltering in place, we spent hours a day watching the news, we were forced to confront, more than ever before, the resurgence of a white supremacist movement in response to black and other people of color community's demands for justice. I couldn't help but draw parallels to Anzaldúa's description of the physical and psychic unrest of the borderlands, where she wrote: "We shiver in separate cells in enclosed cities, shoulders hunched, barely keeping

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the panic below the surface of the skin, daily drinking shock along with our morning coffee, fearing the torches being set to our buildings, the attacks in the streets. Shutting down.”

We feel this too as we wake up to news every morning—the shock with our morning coffee, the *arrebato*—that flings us into a state of unrest. But Anzaldúa gave us the tools that we needed to live in this space of seemingly never ending choque: to navigate the in-between, to reimagine home and community, to work toward new ways of relating, new ways of knowing, and new ways of healing. Nепantla, conocimiento, El mundo zurdo, spiritual activism, facultad: these are the tools we need to persist and survive. These are the tools through which we can map a path toward hope, justice, and healing from historical trauma. And we see some of these in action already—especially within the Black Lives Matter movement and other global movements for justice and self-determination.

“So what would Gloria say right now?”, some have asked. I can’t say for sure. But I do think that she might show us how this moment has issued what she referred to in her writing on 9/11 as a psycho-spiritual-political call to action. She’d likely call this a moment for the Coyolxauhqui imperative—an imperative to heal, achieve integration, and to use creativity to repair the wounding from the relentless ruptures. And knowing that the Coyolxauhqui imperative necessitates a process of making and unmaking, and continuous healing, is, right now, the hope that we need to persist.

Thank you, again.



## **Imperativo Coyolxauhqui: nuestra lucha es por la vida**

Coco Gutiérrez Magallanes<sup>5</sup> y Cora Jiménez Narcia<sup>6</sup>

“¡Ya empezó la fiesta de muertos!”, se escuchan l@s gritos de las crías en nuestras casas, mientras se acercan a ver una y otra vez la ofrenda.

No es una fiesta—pensamos en silencio, mientras repasamos las fotos. ¡Tantos rostros que no debieran estar! Les arrebató la vida el privilegio de pocos, sus odios, sus violencias.

De nuevo miramos las fotos y sentimos cómo nos estalla la realidad en pedazos. ¿Cuál fiesta? Si hay miles de quienes no tenemos la certeza siquiera de dónde se encuentran. ¿Cuál fiesta? Si nos está matando. ¿Cuál fiesta en un país abierto, en sus entrañas, con fosas, donde las familias buscan entre huesos a lxs suyxs?

“¡Mami, la fiesta! ¿ya empezó?”, pregunta Matilde. Los ojos le brillan; quiere pintar su cara de catrina y hacer de “La Llorona”. Emiliano, su hermano, dice que también él quiere un bigote como el de Zapata. Mientras tanto Victoria afina su voz para cantar “Llorona”, Audre enuncia su deseo de que nuestr@s ancestr@s regresen a visitarnos y nos den aliento, y Kari solo grita que quiere que “¡cambie todo!”.

No nos atrevemos a decirles lo que sentimos y nuestra respuesta es:

–Sí, ya empezó la fiesta.

Sólo después de decirlo en voz alta volvemos atrás y pensamos: aquí estamos, todavía sobrevivimos, aunque no lo esperaban, como dijeron Gloria Anzaldúa y Audre Lorde.

Gloria Anzaldúa, maestra ancestral, nos legaste la potencia del imperativo Coyolxauhqui, el imperativo de defender y cuidar la vida. Un imperativo que se

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transforma en acuerdo de lucha, como dijeron las zapatistas: el acuerdo de seguir vivas.

Para vivir se prepararon las comunidades zapatistas y tomaron la decisión de la guerra; suspendieron el uso (no la entrega) de las armas, y apostaron por la flor de la palabra. Para vivir, han aprendido a no caer en las trampas y provocaciones del mal gobierno, a pesar del constante asedio militar y paramilitar en las comunidades.

Las primeras insurgentas zapatistas: Ramona, Esther, Ana María lo dijeron: decidimos alzarnos porque los niños y las niñas se morían en nuestros brazos de enfermedades curables. Decidimos seguir vivas, ¡vivas materialmente, vivas de pensamiento y vivas desde el disfrute pleno de la existencia colectiva!

El acuerdo de seguir vivas, es el imperativo Coyolxauhqui que nos legó Gloria Anzaldúa y nos arroja con un huipil de fuerza para sobreponernos al dolor, la rabia y respondernos a nosotras mismas y a Matilde, Emiliano, Victoria, Audre, Kari, Gibran, Anayansi, Domi y Prietita que el día de muertos es también una fiesta.

### **Imperativo Coyolxauhqui, nuestra lucha es por la vida**

Hace tiempo,  
mucho antes de que nuestros hijxs nacieran y nosotras también,  
hubieron nuestras ancestras,  
que parieron historias  
Y las sembraron profundo para que otras las contáramos.  
Siempre distinto, como de por sí es la vida.

Las guardaron en recetas y poesía,  
en danzas y batallas.  
Y sobrevivieron,  
lo hicieron,  
para hablar de cosas hermosas  
como la libertad  
Y aquí estamos,  
en ofrenda haciendo  
memoria por ellas.

Para contarles de cómo amamos con locura y rebeldía la vida  
y que aunque muchas veces nos cansamos,  
no nos rendimos,

que procuramos lo posible para seguir vivas  
para que ellas también lo estén.

Porque habemos miles  
que no dejemos de luchar para caminar sin miedo de que alguien nos lastime  
por ser mujeres de colores.  
Para volver a la tierra de la que fuimos arrebatad@s,  
Y correr entre la milpa que sembramos,  
Recorrer los bosques, selvas, ríos y desiertos que amamos,  
Para hacer frente a la sensación de perder todo.

Ante esta ofrenda a la vida nos decimos  
que es tiempo para el autocuidado comunitario  
porque queremos viva a la gente organizada de nuestras comunidades,  
queremos seguirlo estando mañana,  
pasado mañana

Ante esta ofrenda reiteramos el acuerdo de preservar la respiración,  
a pesar de la ambición de quienes arrebatan oxígeno y tierra,  
a pesar de las violencias.

Somos profesoras en una universidad pública y también activistas sociales y ambientales; trabajamos en aulas (presenciales y virtuales), sindicatos, cooperativas, bibliotecas y ludotecas populares y comunitarias, espacios refugio con comunidades, mujeres e infancias que habitan territorios que tienen en sus cuerpos el sonido de las balas, la frustración por no tener con qué comprar lo necesario para la comida, escuela, para enfrentar la enfermedad y la rabia de ver que alguna mujer o niña es desaparecida y la busca solo su gente querida.

Desde la ciudad que habitamos cada semana hacemos resonar con altavoces el imperativo Coyolxauhqui. Nuestro compromiso presente, pasado y futuro: ¡expandir el imperativo de la vida!

Gloria Anzaldúa, sean estas palabras una ofrenda a tu vida. Gracias maestra poeta y campesina nepantlera de la rebeldía y desobediencia creativa por la vida.