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IN THE REALMS OF FEMINISM AND MIGRATION: GLORIA ANZALDUA'S BORDERLANDS' THEORY

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Abstract

In the present day, there have been many discussions and debates about the concept of borders and what they represent. Whether it is in literature or in governmental policymaking, borders are considered a major topic that shapes and represents the lives of thousands of people all around the world. The importance of such an issue stems from the fact that borders do not only stand for the physical ones but extend to include the mental borders as well. Many people, scholars, and authors have spent their lives conducting research or seeking spiritual guidance on how to cross such borders and transcend them. More importantly, the human mind has been on a long journey of self-discovery and finding one's true identity. In this paper, I am discussing the borderlands' theory as it has been passed to us by Gloria Anzaldua, and its relationship with migration and feminism, considering Josefina Lopez's *Detained in the Desert* (2010).

Keywords: Borderlands, Feminism, Migration, Psychology.

Introduction

There are various complex definitions of what an identity means, for instance, identity can be about the distinction between the social identity and the individual identity, as in the following statement: "Identity refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and

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collectivities" (Jenkins 1996, 4). In another example, an identity can be considered as a set of ethics, decisions, and actions. "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose" (Taylor 1989, 27). Eventually, there is no concrete definition of what an identity is. Each individual has their own perspective in constructing meaning to such an entity.

In Josefina Lopez's play *Detained in the Desert* (2010), one can examine the connection between Gloria Anzaldua's Borderland's and Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory. As it has the fertile ground of multi-cultural characters and interconnected events at the heart of the US-Mexico border when two completely different people get lost in the desert upon which their lives change.

According to Gloria Anzaldua, the actual borderland is when someone is of a mixed race, or when two cultures collide and merge. In her the preface to her book, *La frontera* (1978), she says: "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." (Anzaldua 1978). Linking her perspective with Henri Tajfel's of the social identity, one can analyze Josefina Lopez's female characters, examining their struggle as women of the border, and how their identities are either shattered between their American self and Mexican self, or shaped fully into a new self beyond the border.

1. Author's Background

Josefina Lopez is one of the most prominent Mexican American playwrights. She was 18 years old when she published her first play, *Simply Maria, or the American Dream* (1996), which is an autobiographical play reflecting her own experiences as an oppressed young Chicana. She has written her first play after attending a Luis Valdez play, which ignited her passion for the theater and writing. Later on, Valdez considered her play as a twin to his own *I Don't Have To Show You No Stinking Badges* (1992). He also described Lopez in his interview with the Los Angeles Times, as one of the greatest young playwrights in his days. In her own notes, Lopez stated that she writes in order to give a voice to all the women who cannot say anything. She says: "I write to empower myself because I grew up feeling very helpless". After reading Lopez's works, one can notice that empowering Chicanas is one of her most dedicated goals.

Josefina Lopez comes from Mexican parents who migrated to the US. She suffered from being an undocumented immigrant and that caused her to write excessively about illegal migration and how undocumented immigrants are treated whenever caught in the United States. In her play, *Real Women Have Curves* (1996), Lopez emphasized the fear of a group of women who became legal but still hide whenever they see "La migra van".

For more than 20 years, López has been an advocate of women's rights and a public speaker. She has spoken at over 200 colleges, including Yale, Dartmouth, and the University of Southern California, on themes such as Chicano theater, Women's studies, and Racial Diversity in Film. She has been the focus of several television and radio appearances in which she has fiercely highlighted immigration concerns as well as other critical problems affecting minorities and women. As well as being a playwright, Josefina Lopez is the founder and director of her own theater, CASA 0101 in Boyle Heights. In her theater, she gives lectures to young students on screenwriting, playwriting, and acting, and provides them opportunities to succeed and improve their acting careers. Lopez believes that everyone deserves a chance to achieve their goals and dreams, she says: "My job is to show people that everyone belongs in the theater, everyone belongs to making films, everybody has something important to teach someone else. And that's why stories are so important"

2. *Detained in the Desert* (2010)

Detained in the Desert was performed in 2010 at Casa 0101, directed by Hector Rodriguez. While López has established herself as a dramatist who watches life through a satirical frame, in *Detained in the Desert* she takes a serious look at one of today's most pressing topics. This is her confident reaction to Arizona's SB 1070, a disputed bill that would empower police officers to question the citizenship of anybody they suspect of being illegal. The main reaction was anxiety that racial discrimination would continue unimpeded, with dark-skinned individuals being the victims of this law procedure. Lopez has constructed a withering condemnation, not just of the Arizona legislation, but, by inference, of the country as a whole, based on a considerable personal and analytical investigation into the reaction to "those illegals" in Arizona.

This play, like most of her works, has a dramatic form, heading back and forth between location to location. This necessitates quick, effective transitions designed to keep the pace continuing and the suspense mounting. The shifts succeeded in the opening night performance, transporting us from one place to another with few set pieces and artifacts, as well as music and sound effects. The play is divided into two parts, with the first concentrating on Sandi, a young lady who has lost her sense of her Mexican origin, and the second on a radio talk show presenter who incites anti-immigrant outrage among his listeners near the Arizona/Mexico borderline. Sandi is traveling with her Canadian lover when they are stopped by a police officer because she "looks like an alien," despite the fact that her Canadian partner is illegal. Sandi is detained after refusing to "present her documents." The irony that she is a citizen and Matt does not contribute to the perception that this legislation can encourage systemic racism.

The play's antagonist is Lou Becker, a small-town talk radio presenter. Through his radio program, this nasty individual spreads anti-immigrant prejudice. When he is abducted and left to suffer in the desert, his encounter of Sandi, who has fled the ICE vehicle and is roaming in the desert, leads to some unexpected disclosures. Even though this is a drama about real people in real scenarios, López conjures the otherworldly by introducing two spirits who are essential to the storyline. "Whatever you name it, whether you call it "magical realism" or not, it worked for me. Our people believe in ghosts," (Huerta 2011) she stated during the post-show discussion. Most significantly, this play pushes us to contemplate the repercussions of legislation such as SB 1070, as well as the steps used to abduct the character of Lou Becker. Josefina Lopez stated that this play is dedicated to Enrique Morones who was the founder of Border Angels.

Review of Literature

Psychologically speaking, classifying the self as a component of numerous social categories that are either in-groups or out-groups amplifies one's resemblance or distinction from others, social identity theory is especially beneficial in comprehending the immigrant experience. Since it first appeared mostly in scholarly papers, the concept of personal and group identity has been discussed extensively and laced with ambiguity. According to social psychologists, identities are interpretations one assigns to oneself and sociological outcomes that are generated and perpetuated by the human societies of identifying or situating oneself in identifiable classifications (Foote 1). Identification entails continual engagement with people and the interchange of ideas on a regular basis (McCall and Simmons 1966). Second, identities are self-meanings that emerge in response to certain circumstances as well as situations (Stryker 1968). Third, identities are built on preserving and identifying the similarities and contrasts between an individual's views, beliefs, and duties as opposed to those of others who have similar or counter-roles (Lindesmith and Strauss 1956). Lastly, because identities are subjective and expressive, meanings emerge most clearly through performativity during contact with others. At its most fundamental level, identity is how we make logical sense of ourselves, together with all the subjective constructed as transnational

blends of values and identities from their homeland together with the ethnic character of their new country of residence as in the case of various immigrant groups.

The self is seen as a set of identities, like in identity theory; but, in this context, identities are social identities, each connected with membership in a social group:

The basic idea is that a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category – a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept (Hogg et al. 1995:259).

Each of these social identities offers self-enhancement, aids in self-conceptualization, and produces self-esteem and rank. These social identities have a significant impact on a range of other behavioral phenomena, including intergroup conduct (Hogg et al.1995; Hornsey and Hogg 2002; Ellemers et al. 2002)

The literature of women of color is critical in the concept of ethnic category diversification, which stigmatizes certain women while elevating others, resulting in what Cherrie Moraga refers to as the "theory of flesh" (Moraga and Anzaldua, Bridge 23). This integrated theory originates from the tangible reality of many systems of oppression, which it then characterizes. The integrated conceptual frameworks developed by women of color's writings provide for a better comprehension of "gendered racial identities" or "racialized gender identities" (Gordon 105).

Anzaldua's *Frontiers* represents the modern recognition that 'all' identity is produced throughout diversity and advocates for the development of a new politics of difference to accompany this sense of self-identity. *Borderlands* depicts a concept of "plurality of self" (Alarcon, 366), which Anzaldua refers to as *mestiza* or border awareness. This awareness comes from a perspective shaped by numerous determinants—gender, class, and sexual identity opposing ethnicities and racial identities.

These flexible border ideologies not only impact the social system, but also play a vital role in shaping individual and national identities. As a result, social borders, and the identities they contribute to are best regarded as dynamic and cultural. As identities form, belonging to an in-group and not an out-group grows increasingly important in articulating and preserving a new identity, notably at state borders (Kaplan and Herb 1999, 1).

Identifying with a certain place is the most essential sort of social identity and supersedes claims of other attachments and allegiances (Emerson 1960). Indeed, identifying with a nation or state clarifies the blend of other identities based on other characteristics like as gender, ethnicity, language, and religion, which help link the common cultures and social relations among its citizens.

Methodology

Literary textual theoretical analysis is the chosen method for this paper, relying on Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands* framework and her perspective of a third identity emerging from the result of two clashing identities. As well as, Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, which emphasizes the division of the in-groups and out-groups. Mixing the two frameworks together, one can analyze the female characters in Josefina Lopez's *Detained in the Desert* (2010), where it is easy to find women being in the center of a borderlands clash.

Discussion

In her interpretation of frontiers and borderlands, Anzaldua focuses on cultural and collective knowledge gained via her role as a Chicana female. As a result of her experiences as an impartial observer in radical groups and in various social dynamics, she comes to

understand the enraging repercussions of the turbulent interconnection of different oppressed groups and feeling connected, as well as the threats and opportunities for her professional and social equality.

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. [...] 'Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement,' say the members of my race. 'Your allegiance is to the Third World,' say my Black and Asian friends. 'Your allegiance is to your gender, to women,' say the feminists. [...] What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label. (Anzaldua 205)

This characterization corresponds to the state of the frontiers that she outlines in her best-known book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The State of the Borderlands*. Since borders appear "where two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, and where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy," the *New Mestiza* has been coined.

That is, the dialectic between those "invisible" societal borders and the historical materiality of the United States-Mexico border, which has been described as a "thin edge of barbwire," a "1,950 mile-long open wound," and a "thin edge of barbwire" controlled by border patrols, has given rise to this definition (*la migra*). Because of the allusion to an open wound, Anzaldua is able to tell a diverse and conflictual past while also addressing the current trend of militarization of the United States-Mexican border.

Through her portrayal of Mexican migrants as a people who have a rightful claim to their ancestral homeland, which she describes as "a land that was Mexican once, was Indian always, is, and will be again," she recovers an obscure history and reveals the contradictions of neoliberal globalization that have been hidden by the political discourse on 'illegal' immigration. More importantly, whereas the free movement of individuals is sanctioned and rejected by policies of mass deportation, the movement of goods, capital, and cheap, controlled labor is encouraged as a critical component of development and national growth, resulting in experiences of exploitation on both sides of the Southern border.

According to Anzaldua, her transformational theory is defined by a game of mirrors that takes place between the tangible experience of border crossers at the Southern border and the reality of boundaries inside the United States culture. While she makes an attempt to speak to all Chicanas, women of color, and white women in the United States, she articulates the possibility of resistance from the specific position of "*la mojada, la mujer indocumentada*," whose situation is associated with that of the woman of color in the United States. Just as an 'undocumented' migrant woman is doubly endangered and lives in a hazardous environment, a woman of color does not feel comfortable and is estranged from her own culture as well as from the dominant society, and this is true for both women. This estrangement, which has resulted from repeated rejections, characterizes the borders where migrants and women of color reside. For Anzaldua, borders are sites of crisis, where "two or more forces collide and are held teetering on the brink of disaster, a condition of *entreguerras*," as she puts it (*La Frontera* 1987).

Due to their origins in tyranny, Anzaldua's borders are not pleasant places to be in since they replicate "a shock culture, a border culture, a third nation, a closed country." To be in the borderlands is to be in a constant state of reiteration of non-belonging, of difference, and of alienation; to be in a place of contradiction, violence, and exploitation; and to be in a location of contradiction, violence, and exploitation. Anzaldua refers to this area of the borderlands as *nepantla*, which is a Nahuatl term that translates as "territory between two

worlds," or "a perpetual state of transition." Several academics, like Gabriela Arredondo and Ada Hurtado, have examined borders as the location where a hybrid identity, the *mestiza*, is generated on the basis of this description of chaos, difference, and transition. As Suzanne Bost points out, the chaotic and critical nature of the borderlands should not lead us to view Anzaldua's theoretical goal of the *mestiza* consciousness since a celebration of hybridity and post-modern subjectivity, as this would be misconstrued. Rather from being a location of clearly defined limits, borderlands are a site of hazards and misunderstandings, a hazardous environment where paradigmatic divides, such as the one between friend and enemy, do not hold, and where the queer and the outcast find a place to call home.

When compared to the celebration of hybridity as a liberated identity, which numerous post-modern writers extol, this is a different form of the disorder. While Anzaldua's borders show a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty, de Genova depicts the position of Mexican migrants in the United States as being defined by a continual state of "deportability." In reality, according to Anzaldua, border people are defined by their being in a state of transition, by their "abnormality," which is continually emphasized and penalized for failing to adapt to both the mainstream culture and their own culture:

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 borderland's 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. (Anzaldua 3-4)

Experiencing life on the borders and on the edges, according to Anzaldua, forces women of color to acquire a *mestiza* awareness based on *la facultad*, the capacity to "view from two or more perspectives simultaneously." Initially arising from the refusal to identify with either "side" of the border or with a single set of cultural norms, this awareness grows and evolves via the assertion of a plurality of belonging, like in Anzaldua's case, as "*hispana india negra espaola, eres mestiza, mulata, half-bred.*"

The capacity to be an "outsider inside" and the "ability to retain numerous social views while simultaneously keeping a core that revolves around specific tangible forms of oppression" are two aspects of the *mestiza* consciousness, as Hurtado points out. However, in emphasizing parallels between the *mestiza* consciousness and W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness, Hurtado and Martinez fail to confront the contradictory feature of Anzaldua's theory, as they did in their earlier work. In reality, although Anzaldua's inner "battle of identities" is among numerous identities, he carries a comparable wounded memory of oppression and shares "the predicament of the mixed breed" with the other characters in the novel. Having a "pacified" identity combination of being Chicana and American does not bring the dispute to a close.

In other words, it produces consciousness that is not a product of two "unreconciled strivings," since the process of creating a "*mestiza* consciousness" is not a process that results in a successful reconstruction. Anzaldua believes that the divide generated by this inner fight has the potential to result in the emergence of a new consciousness rather than a new identity, i.e., a point of view rather than a new identity. In the midst of this conflict, the paradoxical dynamic acting inside Anzaldua's theory of *mestiza*, boundaries, and identity becomes obvious. Anzaldua is attempting to piece together the parts of the identity puzzle that stems from the borders, and as a result, she is continuously under pressure to reject the construction of a definite identity in order to preserve a more global viewpoint.

Moreover, if we take seriously Anzaldua's claim that nepantla is a state of constant transition, her understanding of identity as relational, and her encouragement to break down boundaries, there can be no possibility of identity stabilization in the borderlands; furthermore, it can only be temporary and collective. Rather than just refusing to "choose" a single identity or one side, the reluctance to do so in borders is a rejection of the fundamental concept of identity as a concept. This rejection, in fact, serves as a means for establishing a distinct and oppositional perspective from which Anzaldua calls into question the fundamental notions of modernity and its history.

The symbolism of borders and bridges call into question the limits that exist between the categories of knowing and belonging, as well as the barriers that exist within the very same idea of identity. Anzaldua confronts the conditions she encountered while participating in the women's and Chicano movements by underlining the continual dialectic between equality and diversity, which is inherent in crossing between various sides as an act of resistance that allows for resistance.

From her criticism of the exclusion of women and lesbians of color, who "spoke in tongues like the pariah and the lunatic" in the (white) feminist movement, she criticizes the position of women of color as "tokens" or "purveyors of resource lists" in the (white) feminist movement. The author avoids the danger of eliminating diversity in the name of "global sisterhood" and critiques static definitions for identity produced in exclusionary and monolithic identity politics by putting women of color as the major political topic. In the 1980s, the concept of "bridging" was not a new concept.

Apart from the previously mentioned anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*, which received a lot of attention, other publications were also expanding on the concept of linking persons from different identity groups. In one case, the publication *Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*, published by Adrienne Rich and in which Anzaldua served on the editorial board, was named after Anzaldua's mother.

However, when considered in the context of the tension between Anzaldua's theory of mestiza consciousness, which emphasizes the breaking down of boundaries and categories, and the formation of political and collective subjects, her theory challenges a strategy of bridging based on shared identities, as in breaking down barriers and categories. When examining the growth of multiracial feminism in the 1990s and subsequent years, her notion of the bridge as well as her work to "challenge the terms white and women of color" are both valuable resources.

Multiracial feminism is an essential theoretical framework for understanding Anzaldua's role in the formation of coalitions of women of color. Multiracial feminism derives from a fundamental criticism of both identity politics and the white feminist movement, which is at the heart of its political position. To be sure, the initial articulation of multiracial feminism is predicated on the necessity to place the issue of race as a structural power structure at the heart of the feminist movement in order to defeat political rhetoric that is couched in "color-evasive language." In that it theorizes social positions as frames for a "matrix of dominance" and emphasizes "the intersecting character of hierarchies at all levels of social life," multiracial feminism occupies a theoretical space between viewpoint approaches and intersectional theories of power. Similarly, to how multiracial feminism recognizes how the interaction of forms of domination not only defines oppressions but also opportunities, it considers the position of groups and individuals at the intersection of social hierarchies at the top of the intersection of social hierarchies as important.

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