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In-Between

*Latina Feminist Phenomenology,
Multiplicity, and the Self*

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SUNY
P R E S S

Somos la orquídea de acero,
florecimos en la trinchera como el moho sobre el filo de la
espada,
somos una vegetación de sangre,
somos flores de carne que chorrean sangre . . .
somos la selva que avanza.
Somos la tierra presente . . .

—Joaquín Pasos

Voy,
vengo,
y luego pienso.

Que lo mismo
aquí que allá,
no hay
un lugar
conseguido. Que aquí,
como allá,
soy lo que
las gentes llaman
un extranjero.

Y como un extranjero
iré y vendré.
Hasta que aquí
como allá,
ni yo
ni nadie lo sea.

—Clementina Suárez

I remain who I am, multiple and one of the herd, yet not of it. I
walk on the ground of my own being browned and hardened by the
ages . . .

—Gloria Anzaldúa

I can take on the cloak of the detached universal, but it is an uncom-
fortable garment. It is not me, and I do not do my best work wearing
it. I seek self-liberation when I write from my particular stance.

—Mary Matsuda

There is no other recourse but to destabilize and displace the subject of
modernity from its conceptual throne and to sponsor alternative ways
of relating and knowing that no longer shut out from "home" the reali-
ties of Latino, Asian, African, and other culturally marginalized peoples.

—Ofelia Schutte

The New *Mestiza* and *La Napantera*

*Borders—barbed-wire, wooden, sometimes invisible—separating, con-
straining, restricting. Seeing, sensing anew. Borderlands—where cultures,
ideas, norms, selves are remade, reconfigured, where pain mingles with
uncertainty, fear, anxiety, creativity, and new possibilities. The new mestiza
lives there. The shadow beast is her strong will, unfreezing her so she can
take a stance, so she can change. The new mestiza is the shadow that walks
hand in hand with the words on these pages, leading us away from tidy,
unified selves. It is good company.*

In this chapter, I discuss Gloria Anzaldúa's explorations of selfhood, in particular her account of the new *mestiza*,¹ one of Anzaldúa's most important contributions in her celebrated text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, a deeply intersectional text that has been influential in various disciplines, including border studies, literary studies, women's studies, queer studies, and many others (Anzaldúa 1987).² Given this text's tremendous appeal, the force of the ideas in it, and the fact that it has become canonical in some circles, it is important for me to approach it with caution as I wish to remain respectful of Anzaldúa's words but also to have a reflective, critical edge as I engage with them.³

My first reading of *Borderlands/La Frontera* was a powerful experience. Anzaldúa's words touched me deeply; they moved me in a way that few texts had done before. Her profound awareness of the intersecting, intermeshed nature of her multiple oppressions and her moving *autobiografía*, what I would call her lived-theory, pierced me.⁴ Reading about her struggles in the borderlands struck me intellectually and viscerally, given my own experience as a Latina who felt displaced and who often wondered about the question of home ever since revolution transformed my life, and many other Nicaraguans' daily lives in the summer of 1979. My family and I thus traveled to a new land, to new worlds, without economic means and

without the ability to speak English—not knowing that we would not step on the familiar streets of Managua for a long, long time.

Along with so many others who experience life at the borderlands, not just geographically but also culturally and metaphorically, I find myself in the words that Anzaldúa so vividly crafts. Reading *Borderlands/La Frontera* felt like reading my own story, my struggles as I felt myself caught between the Nicaraguan and US worlds, between a language that sounded sweet—yes, sweet like the wonderful tropical fruit such as *manices* and *jocotes* that I could no longer have—and a language that erased me because it was not mine. Anzaldúa's powerful writing, filled with pain but also with possibilities for personal, political, and spiritual transformation, has inspired so many inhabitants of the borderlands—it is no wonder that there are altars made in her honor.⁵ She transforms the border, what limits and constrains, to the borderlands, an in-between space of possibilities and creation. I read all those words—about edges of barbed wire, cultural clashes, homeland, movements of rebellion, blood sacrifices—and found them magnetic, pulling me toward deeper reflection and sensation about what it means to reside in a liminal space. Her work had and continues to have a tremendous impact on me emotionally and intellectually, both opening and healing wounds and also granting me new possibilities of theorizing.

In this chapter I pay particular attention to Anzaldúa's understanding of selfhood. In the first section I discuss her various characterizations of the self, including those in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and in later writings. While Anzaldúa offers various descriptions of selfhood, the new *mestiza* became representative of her view despite her and her critics' recognition of the problems associated with her choice of *mestizaje* as the leading metaphor for the self in *Borderlands/La Frontera*.⁶ This section points out some key characteristics of the new *mestiza*, including her embodiment and situatedness in an in-between space, what Anzaldúa described as borderlands and *nepantla*, and her tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction. It also notes some of the criticisms of this important notion of the self. In the chapter's second section I engage with Anzaldúa's texts so as to show the tremendous struggle that Anzaldúa goes through as she tries to explain both the multiplicity and oneness of the self.⁷ I conclude the chapter by pointing to the fact that Anzaldúa offers a *mestizaje* of both multiplicity and oneness, a paradoxical position that acknowledges that the self has a lived experience that encompasses multiplicity in terms of her various social identities and oneness in the sense of being an "I." Although perplexing, this position captures Anzaldúa's complex vision of the self in the borderlands. It also inspires my own view of multiplicitous selfhood that, as we will see, attempts

to capture the individual and existential sense of oneness of the self as well as the self's multiplicity given her social locations and her being-in-worlds.

She Seeks New Images of Identity

The path of Gloria Anzaldúa's explorations on selfhood and identity is difficult to grasp because her understanding of these notions goes through various reconfigurations and transformations.⁸ While she is most known for her view of the new *mestiza*, she also explains other visions of self, such as *la nepantlera*, new tribalism, *nos/otras*, geography of selves, and *la naguala*. Some months before Anzaldúa passed away from diabetes complications, she wrote,

I'd like to create a different sense of self (*la nepantlera*) that does not rest on external forms of identifications (of family, race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality), or attachments to power, privilege, and control, or romanticized self-images. But can we talk about ourselves in ways that do not rest on some notion of identity when identity is the means by which we (both individuals and groups) attempt to create a sense of security and belonging in the midst of a fast paced, ever-changing world? (Anzaldúa 2009, 302)

In this passage, Anzaldúa refers to one of her later visions of selfhood, *la nepantlera*. Anzaldúa defines *nepantleras* as "boundary-crossers, thresholders who initiate others in rites of passage, activists who, from a listening, receptive, spiritual stance, rise to their own visions and shift into acting them out, haciendo mundo Nuevo (introducing change)" (Anzaldúa & Keating 2002, 571). She describes a self that lives on the borders but that can cross them and facilitate passages across worlds, a self that does not form self-understandings based on race, sex, gender, or other forms of what Anzaldúa describes as external forms of identification, a self that acknowledges an unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other" (Anzaldúa & Keating 2002, 570).

An important aspect of this later description of self is Anzaldúa's rejection of what she calls an "oppositional form of identity politics." Anzaldúa regrets the manner in which identity politics becomes dependent on forging political alliances by virtue of a shared identity, be it race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and so forth. In her view, the oppositional aspect

of such identity politics stems from the fact that binaries are created in the process of forging identities—for example, us/them, gay/straight, able/disabled, and so on—and groups find themselves opposing the other side of the binary. Anzaldúa rejects this establishment of binaries and notes that identity politics sets itself up for failure. Rather than transforming institutions, it tries to reclaim power only from the very institutions that made it powerless in the first place. Given Anzaldúa's concern for a more inclusive understanding of identity, an "interconnectivity," especially in her later writings, she is wary of oppositional identity politics (Anzaldúa & Keating 2002, 569).

Yet, as Martín Alcoff notes, identity politics is a complex notion that has had multiple meanings. While a common understanding of it, especially by critics, sees identity politics as appealing to homogeneity within a group as well as to separatism, this is a mistaken understanding of the notion. Martín Alcoff takes the Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement" as the locus classicus of identity politics and points out that according to the writers of the statement identity politics is connected to the general relevance of identity in politics (Martín Alcoff 2006, 15; Combahee River Collective 1979). They do not assume that groups are homogenous, and they do not call for a separatist stance. Rather, they wish to underscore the importance of identity in their personal experiences of doing political work. Keating also points out the complexity of the collective's statement and the fact that it calls for a multipronged approach against racial, sexual, and class oppression, a complexity that, according to Keating, is missing in some of the more recent versions of identity politics (2013, 92–93). As understood by early proponents, identity politics is complex and not the narrow politics that appeals to homogeneity and calls for separatism.⁹ In her understanding of identity politics, Anzaldúa herself falls for this problematic understanding, and thus tries to forge an altogether different vision of identity not based on specific external forms of identification.

However, despite her appeal to a new understanding of selfhood that does not rely on external forms of identification, in the same passage Anzaldúa recognizes the need to appeal to identity so as to get a sense of security and belonging in this "fast-paced, ever-changing world." The passage illustrates Anzaldúa's struggle regarding selfhood and identification, a struggle that can be seen throughout her writings. Anzaldúa recognizes the importance that claiming her Chicana identity, her queerness, and her other social identities has had for her as she attempted to find some sense of comfort in the midst of the "intimate terrorism" caused by life at the borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987, 20). At the same time, she recognizes the

narrowness and confining nature of what she calls "identity boxes" and thus calls for a radical shift, what she calls "a different story (of *mestizaje*) enabling you to rethink yourself in more global-spiritual terms instead of conventional categories of color, class, career" (Anzaldúa & Keating 2002, 561) and appeals to a "new tribalism" and a "retribalizing of *mestizaje*" (2002, 560).¹⁰

Interestingly, a great deal of the power of the notion of the new *mestiza*, one of Anzaldúa's most important contributions and her most celebrated account of self as described in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, is that it is derived from Anzaldúa's lived experience in what she calls the *borderland abierta*, the open wound, of the US-Mexico border, an experience that is defined in terms of identity based on race, gender, class, and sexuality, as well as opposition to whites, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans and their norms. Anzaldúa's writing in the *Borderlands/La Frontera* period, what Keating calls Anzaldúa's "middle writings" (2009, 11), highlights oppositional identity in terms of the way in which Anzaldúa understands herself in opposition to the traditional norms held by these groups. Her work in the early and late periods contests such identifications and calls for more inclusive visions of self and identity, such as *la napanitena* as well as a "new tribalism,"¹¹ what she describes as an "expanded identity" (Anzaldúa 2009, 283).¹² When describing this new tribalism in her later piece, "(Un)natural bridges, (Un) safe spaces," Anzaldúa states,

Our goal is not to use differences to separate us from others, but neither is it to gloss over them. 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 and Keating 2002, 3)

In the later writings Anzaldúa also appeals to the wider notion of *nos/otras*, a play on the Spanish word *nosotras*, which means "us." Anzaldúa inserts a slash between *nos* and *otras*; while *nos*, Spanish for the feminine "we," underscores our coming together or "us," *otras* refers to otherness. Anzaldúa states in a 1996 interview,

We are mutually complicitous—us and them, white and colored, straight and queer, Christian and Jew, self and Other, oppressor and oppressed. We all find ourselves in the position of being

simultaneously insider/outsider. . . . Hopefully sometime in the future we may become nosotras without the slash. Perhaps geographically will no longer separate us. We're becoming a geography of selves—of different cities or countries who stand at the threshold of *numeros mundos*. (Anzaldúa 2000, 254–255)¹³

Nosotras, then, signifies an understanding of ourselves as insider/outsider. It appeals to the possibility of our being together while at the same time recognizing differences. As Keating notes, *nosotras* affirms collectivity, while at the same time it recognizes difference and divisiveness and also allows for the possibility of healing by understanding that “we contain the others, the others contain us” (Keating 2006, 10).¹⁴

According to Keating, in her later work Anzaldúa proposes this more “expansive” theory of subjectivity by appealing to the notions of new tribalism and *nosotras* that move beyond oppositional identity categories, thus problematizing her appeals to identity in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In a 1983 interview Anzaldúa states,

I use labels because we haven't gotten beyond race or class or other differences yet. When I don't assert certain aspects of my identity like the spiritual part of my queerness, they get overlooked and I'm diminished. When we come to a time when I don't have to say, “Look, I'm a dyke,” or “I'm spiritual,” or “I'm intellectual,” I'll stop using labels. That's what I want to work towards. But until we come to that time, if you lay your body down and don't declare certain facets of yourself, they get stepped on. (Anzaldúa 2000, 77)

In 2002 she writes,

Today categories of race and gender are more permeable and flexible than they were for those of us growing up prior to the 1980s. *This bridge we call home* invites us to move beyond separate and easy identifications, creating bridges that cross race and other classifications among different groups via intergenerational dialogue. Rather than legislating and restricting racial identities, it tries to make them more pliant. (Anzaldúa & Keating 2002, 2)

We can see that Anzaldúa is constantly struggling with the idea of social identities as it is clear that she recognizes their importance in our politi-

cal struggles, but she also considers them as labels that lead to exclusion. In addition, Anzaldúa wavers from appeals to a radical transformation in which there will be no room for identity categories at all to appeals for a reconfiguration of previous labels, what she calls “separate and easy identifications” and oppositional identities, to a more “pliant” sense of identity—in other words, there are different ways in which *nosotras* becomes *nosotras*.¹⁵

While I understand Anzaldúa's concern regarding the narrowing, essentializing, and homogenizing aspect of identity categories, I wonder about her desire for a time when we do not have to appeal to our racial identities or other types of identities.¹⁶ Will this vision promote a belief in race neutrality when such neutrality is not really in effect? After the US election of President Obama, much has been said about race neutrality and a post-racial time. However, pervasive racial oppression remains, and this oppression needs to be acknowledged rather than covered over by rhetoric about race neutrality. When discussing what she considers a dangerous post-racialism, Crenshaw states,

It is a trick room whose welcoming spaciousness belies the gradual closing of the four walls, a closing that represents a synthesis between colorblindness that simply denied the structural reproduction of racial power and post-racialism that seeks to minimize its effects. Escape seems impossible until an off switch can be found. (2011, 1347)

Where do we find an off switch? Is the notion of new tribalism or *nosotras* that will lead to a new “geography of selves” part of this switch?

It is interesting to note that even in one of her earlier writings, “La Prieta,” Anzaldúa had an inclusive vision that she called *El Mundo Zardo*, or the Left-Handed World, an inclusive community in which members of different groups are able to form coalitions regardless of their different ideologies and affinities (Keating & González López 2011, 14). This world is, according to Anzaldúa, “a network of kindred spirits, a kind of family” that works for change (Moraga & Anzaldúa 1983, 209). What allows them to form alliances is their condition of not fitting in society or being the “queer groups” that don't belong anywhere.¹⁷ As she notes,

We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we

do not fit, and because we do not fit we are a threat. Not all of us have the same oppressions, but we empathize and identify with each other's oppressions. . . . In *El Mundo Zurdo* I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet. (Moraga & Anzaldúa 1983, 209)

Anzaldúa's account of self and identity is complex and in process—it progresses, evolves, circles, and encompasses various related visions of selfhood such as the new *mestiza*, *la nepantlera*, new tribalism, and *nos/otras*. Her recognition of the importance of identity categories for political purposes and her desire to have an altogether different kind of self and identity that does not rely on external forms of identifications (e.g., race, sexuality, etc.) create a productive tension in her discussions of selfhood.¹⁸ The trajectory of Anzaldúa's understanding of self is not simply linear, as if it were possible to neatly arrange the trajectory from new *mestiza* to *la nepantlera* to new tribalism. A more inclusionary account of self was already at work in the early writings (Anzaldúa 2009, 11). As pointed out previously, Anzaldúa's recognition of the importance of identity categories is also a concern even in the later writings.

The New *Mestiza* in *Nepantla*

Anzaldúa is acutely aware of the difficulty of the task of providing an account of self that captures the complexities of her lived experience in the borderlands. While cognizant that in her later work she emphasizes a much more expansive vision of selfhood, here I would like to highlight some main characteristics of the new *mestiza*, because I consider these features to be of great importance when attempting to provide an account of selfhood that goes beyond traditional accounts that emphasize unity and undermine the multiplicity of the self. Anzaldúa's discussion of the new *mestiza* includes an appeal to identity, but not an identity that is easily categorized as oppositional. As noted earlier, *Borderlands/La Frontera* includes an oppositional sense of identity as Anzaldúa situates herself against the norms of Chicanos, whites, and Mexicans. She also wishes to find the "true" Chicana faces, a desire that places her dangerously close to an essentialist view of identity (1987, 87). However, as Elena Ruiz-Aho notes, Anzaldúa writes about her own concrete lived-experience, and other *mestizas* may or may not relate to it (Ruiz-Aho 2011, 357). Moreover, in the very same account of the new *mestiza*, Anzaldúa already provides a more expansive, inclusive view since she highlights the new *mestiza's* ability to be on "both shores at once" or

to "cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory" (Anzaldúa 1987, 78–79). As she says, "I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question" (1987, 87). Despite her seemingly essentialist remarks about the new *mestiza*, Anzaldúa is already working with elements for a more expansive identity.¹⁹ It is thus important to keep in mind the tensions regarding identity that run through Anzaldúa's work.

In this section, I first explain some of the main features of the new *mestiza*, such as her situatedness, her state of in-betweenness or being in the borderlands and *nepantla*, and her tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction. These tensions are helpful in understanding alternatives to traditional understandings of selfhood and subjectivity that miss the importance of the multiplicity of the self. I also discuss the way in which these three characteristics of the new *mestiza*, characteristics that are also part of Anzaldúa's later visions of selfhood such as *la nepantlera*, are key for transformation and resistance to oppression.

As a lover of the written word as well as images, Anzaldúa appeals to myths and metaphors that might perhaps disclose what overly theoretical accounts of self that rely on traditional ways of thinking about self, identity, and subjectivity cannot even begin to capture—thus Anzaldúa forms a vision of a new self, the new *mestiza*, that is to reveal the agonizing but also rewarding struggle of life in the borderlands. *Mestizaje*, or race-mixing, particularly between Europeans and Amerindians, has a long history, from its early uses when the Spanish arrived in the New World to José Vasconcelos's understanding of it as he developed the idea of a *raza cósmica* to Chicano contemporary understandings of a "critical *mestizaje*," a *mestizaje* that understands itself as "embedded in a legacy of colonial struggle and moving through new configurations of resistant identities" (Pérez-Torres 2006, 45).

Even though *mestizaje* is generally understood in terms of racial mixing, Anzaldúa's use of the concept is not one that prioritizes this racial dimension. For Anzaldúa, the "new *mestiza*" is a notion that is more inclusive than racial *mestizaje* (Anzaldúa 2009, 205; 2013, 104). Interpreting the term as primarily signifying a racial identity is problematic because that would suggest that Anzaldúa's notion captures only the *mestiza* identity of Chicanas. While her account of the new *mestiza* is anchored in her lived experience as a Chicana living on the US-Mexico border and prioritizes this experience—one must not overlook the material, economic (Saldívar 1991, 83), and geographic conditions of the new *mestiza*—Anzaldúa's account captures both material as well as metaphorical aspects of a life in the borderlands. The metaphorical and theoretical aspects of Anzaldúa's account,

however, cannot be considered as the most important ones, either, as they might lead to theories that lack specificity and materiality, thus allowing for the erasure of the importance of the actual conditions of those who inhabit the borderlands.

The new *mestiza* is a self inhabiting the borderlands, a self in-between the United States and Mexico, who experiences a lived struggle because she is split between cultures, races, languages, and genders, all tugging at her, pulling her to one side or the other, demanding alliances or setting down rules, continually pushing her to choose one or the other, to suffer from “an absolute despot duality” (Anzaldúa 1987, 19). Anzaldúa rejects such dualities and binaries and, instead, finds that in the borderlands the new *mestiza* occupies another space, a liminal space of *nepantla* or in-betweenness.²⁰ According to Keating, *nepantla* is an extension or elaboration of her theory of the borderlands and the *Coahuila* state, the state in which the new *mestiza* becomes paralyzed but that is also necessary for transformation and change (Keating 2006, 8). She quotes Anzaldúa’s discussion as to why she chooses to use *nepantla* instead of “borderlands”:

I found that people were using “Borderlands” in a more limited sense than I had meant it. So to elaborate on the psychic and emotional borderlands I’m now using “nepantla.” . . . With the nepantla paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of the mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined. (Ord. in Keating 2006, 8)

Nepantla is an unstable, precarious, and unpredictable space, “*tierra desconocida*” (unknown land) and a “bewildering transitional state” that is disorienting and displacing and leads to dissociation of identity (Anzaldúa 2009, 243, 180). It is a space of constant displacement that leads to an uncomfortable and alarming feeling but that is also the “home” of the new *mestiza* (Anzaldúa 2009, 243). As such, it is also a space of healing and meaning-making that encompasses spirituality and political activism (Román-Odio 2013, 54). While being in this space, the new *mestiza* develops a *mestiza* consciousness that, according to Anzaldúa, can reflect critically and see from different perspectives. Consequently, it is a space rich with possibilities not only of critique but also of transformation. It is a space in which new identities can be forged:

Nepantla is the Náhuatl word for an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity. (Anzaldúa 2009, 180)

In *nepantla*, the new *mestiza* experiences “Coahuila states,” what Anzaldúa describes as ruptures in the everyday world that include a double movement, including moments of fear and inability to move but also moments of creativity and transformation, of crossing and acquiring a new identity. In these crossings, the new *mestiza* acquires a *mestiza* consciousness, or a “consciousness of the Borderlands” (Anzaldúa 1987, 77). *Mestiza* consciousness is a “plural consciousness,” as it requires the negotiation of multiple ideas and knowledges (Mohanry 2003, 80). Thus for Anzaldúa such consciousness implies a “multiplicity that is transformational” (Anzaldúa 2009, 246). *Nepantla* is both the space that makes possible the new *mestiza* consciousness as well as the space that becomes “home” to the new *mestiza*, in which she can further develop her critical abilities and continue to transform herself. *Nepantla* represents actual borderlands, a theoretical space, but also “states of mind.” As Anzaldúa says, “I associate *nepantla* with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (Anzaldúa 2009, 248).

As a liminal subject that lives in *nepantla* between cultures, races, languages, and genders—as a subject with various in-betweens—the new *mestiza* can question, mediate, translate, negotiate, and navigate these different locations and thus be able to form a critical stance. Such a critical stance allows for the possibility that the new *mestiza* will become resistant. Commentators such as Lugones rightly point out that *nepantla* constitutes a theoretical space for resistance (Lugones 1992, 31). Key to her ability to be critical and thus resistant and to her ability to transform herself is the new *mestiza* consciousness’s tolerance for both contradiction and ambiguity:

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

The *new mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. . . . Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa 1987, 77, 79)

The tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions is for Anzaldúa absolutely necessary for the new *mestiza's* possibility for transformation and resistance. The interesting question is how the experience of contradiction and ambiguity leads to transformation and even resistance rather than keeping the new *mestiza* in a state of intimate terrorism, without the possibility of change. Different interpreters provide different explanations for the formation of the new *mestiza's* critical stance. Edwina Barvosa, for example, finds that the critical abilities of the new *mestiza* are generated by the intersections of her multiple identities and worlds. Such overlaps are, according to Barvosa, the basis for inner tensions and critical vantage points in the sense that the new *mestiza* can analyze her knowledge and identities vis-à-vis each other as she goes back and forth between her social spheres (2008, 89–96).²¹

Lugones sees the possibility for resistance arising out of the new *mestiza's* tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction but also from her transgression of rigid conceptual boundaries and her breaking of the unitary aspect of new and old paradigms that lead her to create a new value system through the uprooting of dualistic thinking (1992, 34). As opposed to other commentators who see the new *mestiza's* resistance as social, Lugones points out that, for Anzaldúa, crossing-over is a solitary act, “an act of solitary rebellion,” that emphasizes the inner life of the self and the psychology of oppression and liberation rather than a “sociality of resistance” (Lugones 1992, 36). Such a sociality of resistance, which, in Lugones’s view can be developed from Anzaldúa’s text, is of the utmost importance since “unless resistance is a social activity, the resister is doomed to failure in the creation of a new universe of meaning, a new identity, a *raza mestiza*” (Lugones 1992, 36). While I agree with Lugones that there is an emphasis on the individual character of Anzaldúa’s voyage of resistance and transformation, I also see the social as playing an important role in Anzaldúa’s account. Both the individual and the social are linked in her development of resistant practices.

Lugones and Barvosa rightly capture the connection between the possibility of acquiring a critical stance derived from a life in *nepantla* and the possibility of transformation and resistance. It is in the cracks between worlds in which meanings and ideas overlap that the new *mestiza* can inter-

pret these meanings vis-à-vis each other and find points of commonality and divergence that might help her provide a more critical interpretation than if she just had access to knowledge and meanings in separate spheres. As Anzaldúa states in a 1996 interview, “Navigating the cracks between the worlds is difficult and painful, like going through the process of reconstructing a new life, a new identity. Both are necessary for survival and growth” (Anzaldúa 2000, 255).

Situatedness, in-betweenness, and tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction remain crucial in Anzaldúa’s account of the new *mestiza* and in her later characterizations of self. They attest to the deeply phenomenological aspect of her account as they capture her lived experience in the borderlands or *nepantla*. Through a passionate engagement with her own experience of inhabiting the US-Mexico border, her deep sense of being liminal, and her recognition of the ambiguous and contradictory aspects of her life that produce intimate terrorism as well as transformation, Anzaldúa offers a moving Latina feminist phenomenological account. This account serves as an inspiration for those who wish to move beyond traditional understandings of the subject or of selfhood that do not take into consideration the importance of situatedness, liminality, ambiguity, and plurality. Even philosophical phenomenological views of self that take into consideration situatedness and ambiguity can benefit from Anzaldúa’s vision so as to do justice to the lived experience of those who inhabit the borderlands.

The Perils of *Mestizaje*

While Anzaldúa’s account of the new *mestiza* is extremely helpful in providing possibilities for accounts of selfhood that are more attuned to situatedness and multiplicity, it is important to remember that the term, as well as Anzaldúa’s use of it, might be problematic. For example, Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuena Córdoba criticize Anzaldúa for providing an account of the borderlands that is overly metaphorical and is defined and narrated from a “first world” perspective (Castillo & Tabuena Córdoba 2002). While Castillo and Tabuena Córdoba’s critique picks up on possible pitfalls of Anzaldúa’s account given the importance of the metaphorical there, the new *mestiza* needs to be understood as anchored in specific material conditions, as a situated, embodied being. Anzaldúa’s Latina feminist phenomenology is at its best when describing her embodied experience in situated contexts in the precarious life of the borderlands. Anzaldúa’s descriptions emphasize the new *mestiza's* struggle in the US-Mexican borderlands as it is felt in the flesh rather than as an intellectual exercise: