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**DISERTAČNÍ PRÁCE  
TEZE**

**Chicana Literature:**

**A Feminist Perspective of Gloria Anzaldúa's Identity Politics**

**Chicanská ženská literatura:**

**Feministická analýza politiky identity v díle Glorie Anzaldúy**

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This doctoral thesis renders Chicana literature as a productive and effective instrument of communicating Chicana identity politics. In Benedict Anderson's terms regarding dissemination and circulation of narratives and texts as representative aspects of nation-formation (Anderson [1983] 2006), Chicana literary production contributes to the Chicana/o Renaissance, but critically engages the Chicana/o Movement of cultural nationalism that helped bring Chicana/o letters into existence. Unlike Chicano literature, Chicana writing subverts and deconstructs the Movement's androcentric tenets, and also avoids the conventional notions of nation as a category predicated on gender difference thereby reconceptualizing the very foundations of nationalism per se. The underlying paradigmatic and ideological points of departure for such a political project are informed by feminist epistemologies and methodologies. Chicanas tailor new theories and genres so as to address their positionality and cultural and social situatedness arising from the historical legacy of the arbitrarily constructed U.S.-Mexico border.

Chicana writing relies predominantly on relating Chicana lived experience. This situated and located subjective experience serves as a foundation of Chicana identity politics for "experiences are not unfathomable inner phenomena but rather disguised explanations of social relations" and can therefore be evaluated as such (Alcoff and Mohanty 2006: 4-5, cf. Rich 1985). In the gender-sensitive intersectional analyses executed in the present doctoral thesis, Chicana literary production emerges as a complex example of a strategic and reflexive instrumentalization of literature in the form of a political and activist tool contributing to Chicanas' gender and cultural emancipation on the one hand. On the other hand, within the Chicana/o context, literature is employed for perfecting the politics of recognition of the marginalized Chicana/o nation.

The doctoral thesis is based on critical appraisal of the writings by Gloria Anzaldúa with a special focus on *Borderlands/La Frontera – The New Mestiza* (Anzaldúa [1987] 1999) and

major concepts incorporated into Anzaldúa's construction of Chicana/o identity politics and Chicana/o cultural representations, such as the U.S.-Mexico border, Aztlán, *mestizaje*, Chicana/o nationalism and its criticism, mestiza consciousness as a new epistemology, and also major figures of Chicana femininity that genuinely embody postcolonial/decolonial notions of hybridity – La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona.

I propose that the author, highly reflective of Chicanas'/os' social circumstances, incorporates theory in all her writing, or rather that all her writing *is* theory. I establish my argument on gender-sensitive close reading of selected pieces of Anzaldúa's poetry, for poetic expression, in the context of androcentric society, supplies the author with the “vehicle to voice female concerns much in the way the dominant ideology of the United States provides the medium for male discourse” (Quintana 1996: 32).

The analytical stance I adopt in this doctoral thesis is informed by the constructivist paradigm, feminist epistemologies and theories, and it employs an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1991). Therefore, aspects of gender, race, class, and other socio-cultural categories are used as analytical tools with regards to the social reality of U.S.-Mexico borderlands. They are vital for elucidating how various social affinities of borderland subjects add up, thereby multiplying (and less frequently cancelling) Chicanas'/os' cultural and social marginalization, the constant theme of the authors' representational strategies.

Extending beyond literary studies, this doctoral thesis is interdisciplinary in its scope. It comprises literary analysis, i.e. an examination of cultural representations, with perspectives advanced generally by gender studies, cultural studies and, in part, by sociology and political science in regards to theories of nationalism. In this regard, I draw primarily on Anderson ([1983] 2003) and Yuval-Davis (2005). Also, methods and theories promoted by postcolonial studies – an interdisciplinary field *par excellence* – are instrumental in linking Anzaldúa's

thought and writing with struggles for both social change and symbolic valorization of difference as a concept.

The present doctoral thesis is divided into five thematic chapters. Chapter 1 “The Feminist Universe of Chicanas’ Literary Representations” explores the semantic meaning of the label Chicana. Chicanas’ self-naming has a political dimension, significance of which marks the development of both contemporary Chicana literature and Chicanas’ promotion of women of color feminism. The effect the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* coedited by Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga ([1981] 1983) has had on the shaping of Chicana feminism and literary production is further elucidated.

Chicano authors’ opposition to Chicana (feminist) writing is debated using gender and the dominant discourse of androcentrism as major points of departure. Employing an analytical tool I term as the degree of dissent, the chapter explains the gendered differences between Chicana and Chicano literary production. As I show, these differences are not essentialist in their nature; rather they are a product of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2001) and unrecognized patriarchal interpellation on the side of Chicano men who fail to acknowledge their being gendered subjects (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 3).

It is argued that Chicana literature and Chicana feminism and theory coalesce; this argument is illustrated by an analysis of Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* and by a close reading of Alma Villanueva’s poem “Witches’ Blood” and Cisneros’ “Down There.” These works are also illustrative of Chicanas’ resistance to limited conceptions of women’s roles in the society, for they employ deliberate subversion and transgression in regards to traditionally policed topics of sexuality, corporeality, or national and/or familial loyalty.

Chapter 2 “Nationalism, Bronze Race and Gender: The Chicana/o Movement and Its Foundational Texts” is an interdisciplinary analysis of Chicana/o nationalist discourse under *El*

*Movimiento*. The objective of this chapter lies in a gender-sensitive close reading of two earliest, foundational texts of the Chicana/o Movement that date back to late 1960s, i.e. the outset of Chicana/o political activism within the context of the Civil Rights Movement. Also, the examinations of the famous political declaration of “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” (Alurista [1969] 1989) and the canonical *corrido* poem “Yo Soy Joaquín” (González 1967) are informed by feminist, postcolonial, and critical theories of nationalism (Bhabha 1994, McClintock 1993, Anderson [1983] 2003, Yuval-Davis 2005, Gellner 1964, Enloe [1989] 2014).

As “El Plan” invokes problematic racial superiority by drawing on Vasconcelos’ *la raza*, the chapter provides an intersectional analysis of the race/class/gender trinity pertinent to Chicana/o predicament. Because “El Plan” does not make a single reference to Chicanas, it is exposed as a “man-ifesto,” (Pardo in Orozco 1997: 266) a metonymic representation of the Movement’s pervading masculinist bias. *El Movimiento*’s privileging race and class as primary locations of oppression was the main cause of Chicana feminists’ dissent; emphasizing the Movement’s neglect of gender-related issues and its tacit expectation of heteronormativity, the political platform faced well-articulated criticism from women.

“Yo Soy Joaquín” demonstrates the androcentric leanings both in content and form, as the *corrido* is traditionally a gendered genre meant only for men to perform and represent. The socially constructed category of Chicano masculinity thus comes under scrutiny. Chicano masculine identity is always already marked as deficient or lacking, because it is racialized and classed, no less as it is situated in the coordinates of colonial legacy of uneven power relations. Therefore this form of masculinity cannot be labelled as hegemonic (Connel and Messerschmidt 2005).

Besides the gendered features, my close reading of the poem also details, how the mythical homeland of Aztlán comes to the fore in the text as well as in the nationalist discourse. Cognizant of the significance of Aztlán for the Movement as well as for Chicana/o letters as

advertised in both of the considered texts, the chapter also introduces Ashcroft's, Cooper Alarcón's, and Pérez-Torres' critical views of the nationalist concept of Chicanas'/os' mythical country of origin (Ashcroft 2009, Cooper Alarcón 1997, Pérez-Torres 2000). These analyses make an attempt to accentuate the internal heterogeneity of the Chicana/o nation and deeply problematize Aztlán as a notion of a unifying national(ist) potential, since it is rather an elitist and theoretical concept lacking connection with the everyday lives of working class Chicanas/os. The framework for the authors' discussions is set by Ashcroft's elaboration on the Chicana/o nation as a transnation whose uniqueness, indeed, lies in the community's recognized socio-historical and geographical specificity and its foregoing of charting a state of its own. Cooper Alarcón conveys Aztlán as a palimpsest, while Pérez-Torres discusses its hybridity.

These (palimpsestuous) interpretations define the background for Gloria Anzaldúa's redefinition of Aztlán as related in the following chapter entitled "Queering and Gendering Aztlán: Anzaldúa's Feminist Reshaping of the Chicana/o Nation in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands." First, this chapter discusses Anzaldúa's rethinking of Aztlán in terms of land that gradually collapses into her conceptualization of borderlands, initially physical and geographical, and later metaphorical and culturally revisionist. This probe prepares the theoretical grounds for the following chapter on the rearticulation of the border/frontier concepts within the major U.S. national narratives of Western expansion, regeneration through violence, or the Puritan notion of Manifest Destiny. Second, still in chapter 3, I detail Anzaldúa's negotiation of the border separating the U.S. and Mexico in a minute analysis of two poems. While the first one engages the seeming banality in crossing the dividing line and therefore deals with the physical/material border, the second, "To Live in the Borderlands Means You" conveys the concept as one that causes new epistemologies to emerge and negotiate ambiguity.

Anzaldúa's reinventions of the Chicana/o nation as an inclusive and internally heterogeneous entity present another border-relevant theme discussed in this chapter. Drawing first on criticisms of the heavily gendered and (hetero)sexualized aspects of nationalism, I move on to discuss the home, i.e. the familial, domestic sphere that is situated at the core of nation-building processes targeting all members of the community based on gender difference. Queerness and defiance of homophobia become the strategic tools Anzaldúa employs to expose the arbitrary qualities of sexual and gender identity, thereby being able to envision a nation not predicated on gender difference or other hierarchical systems of social organization. Anzaldúa's notions of collectivity are explained by means of the concept she coins as new tribalism.

In Chapter 4 "Elastic, Yet Unyielding: The U.S.-Mexico Border and Anzaldúa's Oppositional Rearticulations of the Frontier," the border is viewed as a matrix for Anzaldúa's central epistemology of mestiza consciousness. It is an epistemology generated by the proximity of the U.S.-Mexico border. Mestiza consciousness represents an emancipatory and self-reflecting program with the opportunity to theoretically grasp the situation in the borderlands and to deconstruct the discriminatory binary oppositions implied by the Western conceptualization of the border concept.

As this chapter argues, the border does not operate exclusively on the level of its real, physical presence. In addition, it leaves an imprint in the borderland subjects' mental map thereby assuming a representational quality. Therefore, on the metaphorical level, the border in question is "infinitely elastic" (Aldama 1998: 46), allowing us to extend the expression "the American borderlands" to all regions, including internal ones, that show resistance to Euro-American cultural dominance. It is also elastic in the sense that the concept informs the said national myths borderland subjects are taught to subscribe to and identify with.

Also in chapter 4, the violent colonial legacy Chicanas/os faced as the U.S.-Mexico border emerged in 1848 is read against the backdrop of American supremacist and national myths, which are challenged by Anzaldúa's poem "We Call Them Greasers" that I propose to read as a representation of Chicana feminist theory. In the poem, intersecting categories of race, class, and gender provide a scaffolding upon which Anzaldúa builds a story that looks at the American foundational myth of westward expansion and colonial border proliferation from the perspective of a dominant protagonist. Moreover, Anzaldúa's portrayal of colonial and gender violence is a form of subverting canonical images of Western progress and its allegedly cultivating enterprise within which the structures of colonialism and patriarchy become thoroughly intertwined. What makes the poem remarkable is the fact that – despite the perspective being the colonizer's – the *effect* of the story is reserved for the Chicana/o historical experience of land dispossession and physical annihilation. In this respect, "We Call Them Greasers" can be perceived *as* theory, for Anzaldúa incorporates her awareness of structural inequalities in its narrative at the background of which the border functions as a fault line illuminating ideological, cultural, epistemological, racial, and gender(ed) differences.

The closing chapter 5 "A Trio Against Dualism: Postcolonial Re/Interpretations of Hybrid Representations of Chicana Femininity" analyzes La Malinche, La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Llorona as genuinely hybrid figures. Chicanas rewrite these women's representations in terms of their feminist identity politics as emancipatory, empowering prototypes of women's resistance to oppressive ideologies of androcentrism and racism while also subverting established master narratives of colonial enterprise and capitalist expansion. While these archetypes are disparate and so are their multiple representations, in Anzaldúa's and Chicanas' rewritings, the trio merges together and one figure permeates the other two as genuine hybrid embodiments.



Malinche's story, historical significance, and palimpsestuous reinterpretations within Mexican, U.S. and Chicana/o cultures expose femininity and La Malinche's persona as constructs that are fashioned to serve political interests; in case of La Malinche in particular these are very contradictory interests of androcentric nationalism and racist colonialism as opposed to feminist emancipation and women's empowerment. Patriarchal representations of Malinche convey her figure as a passive victim of the historical events of male domination, but Chicanas resist such portrayals. They celebrate her language skills, her autonomy and her role as the *de facto* mother of the emergent mestiza/o race. Her talent for interpreting is conceptualized by Chicana writers as an image of their own hybridity. Malinche thus symbolizes the possibility of establishing new groupings and collective identities so emphasized by Chicana literature and criticism. This non-hierarchical, bridging symbolism is present both in Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza consciousness and in the purpose of Chicana feminism.

Another archetype of Chicana femininity the final chapter relates is the Virgin of Guadalupe. Besides the spiritual aspect, she personifies the normative model of valued womanhood, which is care-giving, motherly, self-sacrificing and passive. Given the fact that La Virgen is said to have appeared near the site of the temple of the pre-Columbian goddess Tonantzin and that her skin color references indigenous roots as well as the birth of the mestiza/o race, her character has gone through many literary and artistic metamorphoses that have made use of her ambivalence. It is precisely the unclear origin of La Virgen and the pliability of her archetype and spiritual embodiment that provides Chicanas with the material for transforming this symbol itself, along with their femininity, spirituality, sexuality, and independence.

The surprisingly seldom-mentioned fact that La Virgen is always portrayed as being pregnant (Gonzalez-Crussi 1996:11), opens up new possibilities of interpretation. If Our Lady

of Guadalupe is associated with historical narratives of colonization and religious narratives of redemption and motherly suffering, her pregnancy draws attention to another narrative that precedes both these narratives. It is the narrative that has not been told yet: Jesus had not yet been born (and he had not died yet), therefore salvation has not yet been achieved and the story of Mary and Jesus – mother and son – still has an open ending. La Virgen's pregnancy is thus potent within the context of postcolonial reinterpretations in the sense that it does not impede imagination and allows us, for example, to recreate the story of colonization and Latin American migration as a historical era that is not conquering but solidary or free of violence, while also permitting us to consider the relationship between mother and child to be a bond that is not subject to patriarchal control.

The legend of La Llorona, a widely known figure of Chicana/o folklore, demonstrates unusual dynamics. The Weeping Woman is typically depicted as a wife whose husband abandoned her for another woman and leaves her by herself with the children. Llorona then kills her offspring either because she is desperate or as an expression of revenge. There are, however, versions of the legend that explicitly address the issue of class inequality where Llorona is a poor woman whereas her husband is a member of higher social circles (Perez 2008). The class and gender intersection is supplemented by a version with a racial and colonial subtext in which La Llorona is explicitly described as an indigenous mistress of a white and powerful Spanish man. Thus the abandoned Indian is led to the murder of her children by their illegitimate status. That is just a short remove from combining Llorona and Cortés' interpreter and partner Malinche. The hybrid permeability of these three archetypes is finally accomplished, I argue, in the image of the pieta once these figures' problematic motherhood unites them as women who lost their children to violence, cultural assimilation, or predetermined self-sacrifice and they are left only with their lament. Yet, this does not diminish the impact their representations may have on women.

To conclude, the employment of gender as the primary analytical tool in the present intersectional analysis of Chicana literary representations has proven instrumental. Chicana writing, feminism (precisely women of color feminism), and identity politics come to be seen as mutually constitutive phenomena for which the Chicana/o Movement functioned as a catalyst. They form a paradigmatically consistent and cohesive representational universe while maintaining genre and content heterogeneity and thematic diversity that allow for numerous interpretations and palimpsestuous rewritings. Also, Chicana literature shows the U.S.-Mexico border region as an extraordinarily productive space.

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## **GRANTY**

2009 – 2011 řešitelka grantu Grantové agentury Univerzity Karlovy, č. 259210; *Antologie povídek amerických regionálních spisovatelek: jižanská a chicanská ženská literatura*, společně s Dagmar Pegues.

2/2008-5/2008 Sasakawa Foundation, Visiting Researcher, University of Texas, Austin, USA

1/2002-6/2002 semestrální studijní pobyt, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, USA

## **RECENZNÍ POSUDKY PRO ODBORNÉ ČASOPISY**

Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum  
Slovo a Smysl / Word and Sense  
Modern Africa

## **ČLENSTVÍ**

2016+ MESEA - The Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and the Americas

2014+ Genderová expertní komora ČR

2009+ Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa

