


THE POETIC ESSAY OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND THE CHICANO DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

The following text was developed in parallel to the doctoral thesis research entitled The diaspora as identity and belonging in contemporary immigration. When I say that it is in a parallel way, it is because its development has been bearing witness to my reflections as a "foretaste of conclusions" so that I can now present it in full, at the end of the writing of the thesis, as my analysis of the importance of studying the complexity in the identity of women who belong to a diaspora. as is the case of the Chicanas or the Afro-Mexicans. At first, I desired to focus my research on the life trajectories of Afro-Mexican women; Time, material, and the pandemic invited me to narrow down my field.

However, my work has been cut but within the horizon in which I have been entering, which is to understand such identity from the hybridity or syncretism, which can be configured between two or more cultures.

This work of understanding, or of comprehensive analysis, seemed to me increasingly fundamental because it provides foundations to provide feminist and decolonial research with a transversal axis of a critical hermeneutical nature (criticism, deconstruction, and analysis) that moves between different disciplines.

My position has been shaped by the acceptance that when venturing into such a controversial issue, it has been necessary to see it from different areas of specialty and specificity.

That is why I have started from the premise that immigrant women are pariahs, who live their daily lives in an environment of harassment, violence, rejection and social discrimination, and that to stop being invisible, there is a conscience that motivates them to seek their place in the world, without renouncing their cultural identities. To be heard and recognized through art, political activism, or incorporation into groups of women forming collectives.

The importance of understanding this movement and the struggles it entails from the point of view of difference and social minorities lies in the fact that this understanding is necessary to deconstruct feminism and what it means to be a poor and immigrant woman – racialized and violated – within countries (both in national and regional universes) that sustain cultural hegemony and promote individuality among people. This generally breaks the social networks that many of them continue to weave and sustain internally through their families or with people close to them.

My experience in this research has highlighted the importance of the comprehensive practices that emerge in these networks, providing elements to recognize themselves from their cultural roots—from the mother tongue, ethnicity or being part of one or more cultures—and constitute a fundamental resource in the configuration of the critical thinking of these women. Since, the analysis they make of the patriarchal system (and of all the colonial and alienating variants that it implies), from their life experiences, creates in them a political-social consciousness, which incites them to fight for recognition, based on their difference; only that the manifestations of this understanding and its practices are not necessarily expressed in conventional languages and formats and challenge or summon,

as the case may be, a philosophical openness that, as I have assumed, involves certain risks.

Keywords: Diaspora. Pariah. World. Identity. Woman.

INTRODUCTION

TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE DIASPORA

Today, it is important to begin to broaden the horizons of philosophy and its studies at the postgraduate and research level, to return to critical thinking, which is necessary to continue questioning the reality that is often far from theory. Moral crises today are increasingly complex and worrying because they expose our ethical shortcomings as well as reflect the lack of a policy of dialogue that promotes putting on the table the discussion of differences and conflicts in beliefs to solve them in the best possible way within the societies we inhabit.

These crises often fall on the ideas of unity and homogenization of nation states, where nationality and exclusion of those groups that lack an immigration status defined either by passports or work visas and residencies continue to be sustained. This has determined that societies are divided between citizens and foreigners. That is, between people with basic rights who seek to keep their integrity intact from those who acquire them from birth or the naturalization of citizenship. On the one hand, foreigners who have a passport and visa are protected by the state, while those who do not have a passport or visa do not have any basic rights because their immigration status is irregular.

Border studies help to make visible these shortcomings that, day by day, are manifested in caravans of Central American migrants who try to reach the United States. Africans crossing the Mediterranean Sea in small boats to reach the European Union or hundreds of people fleeing war and violence from their places of origin. Through unity, many of them seek to have their Human Rights recognized, being seen as people in transit who only seek a better quality of life and that under this concept they take precedence over the jurisprudence of the countries in which they transit or live.

That is why these new displacements, which occur due to various situations around the world, are creating new diasporas. But the problem, which Avtar Brah (2011) points out in this regard, is that the diaspora is not theorized with the importance that it should represent today in the different academic fields of the social sciences and humanities.

Diasporas are increasingly present in our daily lives, due to this time of mass migrations that we are experiencing, even so this category is vaguely used as a means of research and is used very little in philosophical theory, but little by little its use becomes more pertinent to locate that not all migrations are the same and that not all individuals in a society identify with the values of homogenization that sustains a particular State. Rather,

it should be understood as a "theoretical concept of diaspora 'experiences'" That is, it must be understood as a "historically contingent genealogy" (Brah, 2011, 203). Therefore, it must be critical of the discourses that sustain the ideas of the immovable origins of cultures, societies, and nation-states.

Diasporas make their way in the midst of a confrontation between what is identified as the established and unbreakable idea of citizenship, while the cultural values that are inherited from generation to generation that exist in certain minority groups that are part of any Nation enrich the ethical values of multicultural cities. Even so, the members of the diaspora suffer a moral and identity crisis that overwhelms them in the face of cultural hegemony. That is, they are in the decision to decide whether it is better to resignify their cultural roots or accept assimilation into the national identity to avoid social exclusion.

Minorities are sectors of society identified and concentrated in cities in such a way that their location is possible, often in peripheral areas where urbanization is difficult to access. These sectors of society are discriminated against because they belong to a cultural, religious, or ethnic group different from that of the majority. Some members of these groups are the product of migrations that led their fathers and mothers to migrate to reside in a different country. Once established, they seek the acceptance of society's neighborhood, neighborhood, or street. We can also talk about internal migrations. That is, of specific groups that move from one city to another or that come from the countryside.

They are part of a diaspora if they do not lose contact with the place of origin, either through memory or by having contact with their relatives and friends who reside in their places of origin or other countries or cities. It is important to recognize that they are from a place that they have lost and that, for them, means the origin of their ancestors, their roots, their culture, and their memory. It is the land, the roots, and the belonging that was lost but that in the collective or individual imagination is rescued to belong to a mythical place that is remembered and kept alive.

There are different diasporas, just as there are different cultural groups, but there are also historical diasporas, such as those that emerged from slavery. Nowadays, thinking about a Black diaspora is a resignification of Black groups in the U.S., Latin America, the Caribbean, Central America, and recently in Mexico – with the visibility of Afro-Mexican groups that are demanding recognition at the constitutional and social level – to find their identity from uprooting. It is a diaspora that emerged from a forced migration in which all ties with the place of origin were lost so that the mother tongue, clan, tribe, territory, beliefs,

and cosmogonies were cut short. So, the resignification of the black peoples of America in the face of slavery is essential for these groups to have a common past that resignifies them as people and human beings because they need to recover a past that was denied to them.

The diaspora, therefore, responds to a historical and self-becoming in the face of the world's growing deficiency in solving migratory problems or crises. This category should give the beginning to understand migrations from another angle. On the other hand, the border within the idea of diaspora is always present since they are crossed, delimited, concretized, and polarized mutually. For example, "the U.S.-Mexico border typifies the conditions of contemporary migration. It includes certain common themes that usually come into play when 'superdeveloped' countries implement measures to selectively control the entry of people from 'underdeveloped' parts of the world" (Brah, 2011, 203). To concentrate them as minorities and in suburban neighborhoods.

For this reason, these diasporas that emerge in small explosions throughout the world make diasporic subjects seek to make visible the need to resignify the roots of people and, with this, try to unveil the fragility of nationality, the fundamental basis of the nation state. This questioning responds to a world that can no longer withstand the "capitalist maelstrom". The excessive exploitation of the poorest countries – economically speaking – but richer in natural resources. The environmental and ecological crises of the depredation and exploitation of natural resources have thrown the planet off balance. The idea of a war that will end up destroying what is left – both humanly and ecologically speaking – continues to perpetuate the idea of fear or desolation between people and nations.

That is why the question we ask about being is about rethinking the idea of origin in each person, each people, and each ethnic group or culture. With this, I hope that the analysis of the diaspora will be understood, not as a solution to this problem, but rather to visualize that the current migratory problems lie in the lack of capacity to provide a policy of hospitality that works together with nationalism, not as exclusion, but as acceptance of differences.

On the other hand, diasporas provide the guideline to look back beyond the past or history. It is the elucidation and reunion of what we had forgotten and what we had lost. It is an opportunity to see ourselves at the origin of migrations, the memory of ancient lands, and the uprooting and journeys that have led us to what we are today.

To better understand this study, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual axes on which this research is based. The main one, as we have seen, is the concept of diaspora. If analyzed from the etymological root, it is obtained that it comes from the ancient Greek διασποράς dispersion, which is composed of -δια (through) and -σπορα (seed, sowing). For this reason, διασποράς refers to the sowing of seeds and dispersion. For this reason, it evokes the movement of people on earth. Therefore, the use of this concept in critical studies of current migration phenomena and the link that exists between a person or a people is necessary to understand how societies, migrations, and minorities function today. That is why, to know whether or not we are talking about a diaspora, it is necessary to have the following elements: 1) Dispersion, 2) Belonging, 3) Experience, 4) Memory, 5) Home and, 6) Movement, and that they are reflected in the identity of a particular diasporic subject as well as in general in an ethnic group. Religious or cultural.

Diasporic thinking navigates between these points while also containing a shared history and experiences. They are identified as a hybrid identity that arises from a migration through a movement of a particular people and maintains the memory or longing for the place of origin – a mythical land – to which one has the desire to return even if a return is impossible. Based on this conception of diaspora, the following proposals are developed.

AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION OF HANNAH ARENDT: BEING A PARIAH

When we talk about a pariah, we are referring to a type of exclusion. A verbal exclusion with which it is intended to indicate a person who is not accepted. It arises from the Hindu conception of the untouchables, people who are born into the lowest castes, those who are in the dirt of the earth and who are not welcome, are not spoken to, and are not looked at. The evolution of the word has been extensive throughout history. It traveled in its diaspora and was used by the English to discredit certain sectors of society that did not fit into colonization. It was exported to Europe and with it a better way was found to refer to the others. To speak of pariahs, therefore, is to speak of people who are not accepted as human, who are reduced to characteristics that are easy to differentiate, point out, or corner to exclude them and expel them from the world.

Eleni Varikas in her book *The Scum of the World. Figures of the Pariah* (2017) makes a cartography of the word and with it refers to those figures who, from exclusion, found their humanity through art. It is a text that leads us to reflect on the pariah and the

importance of recognizing that exclusion is a reality that leads individuals to find themselves again in the reflection of discrimination to question reality and humanity.

That is why, in order to determine whether the condition of pariah today is identified with the situation of immigrant women, it is necessary to understand what Hannah Arendt understood by destiny and how it can condition the existence of a person who is marked by it. An existence that analyzes the Jewish people through women and their condition of exclusion.

In a letter in response to Jaspers, Arendt explains that "Jewish existence" is not an existence of the "properly Jewish", but an existence that is "conditioned by destiny", it is: "an authentic existential unity, conscious of its being marked by destiny (*Schicksalhaftigkeit*) that is only possible when one has already distanced oneself from traditional Judaism" (*Hannah Arendt. The Pride of Thinking*, Benhabib, 2000, 104). It is destiny that determines one's life fundamentally and continues through it.

Being Jewish is a destiny in which one must live one's life under the terms that have been granted to her from birth. At the same time, destiny means being exposed to the world, and therefore, life has a certain meaning that Arendt determines as the *Schicksalhaftigkeit* (fatality). That is, the definition of life as the "authentic existential attitude, aware of one's being marked by destiny". The fact of being Jewish is a fundamental role in Arendt, it is a conscious attitude that can only be seen if one takes a certain distance from that existence. Accepting himself as such opened up the possibility of understanding the workings of anti-Semitism, the origin of the Second World War or the Holocaust, to understand himself from the *Schicksalhaftigkeit* – destiny and the given – which allowed him to develop all his critical thinking.

What is given in this research is essential. It refers to the condition of the social construct that is given to each person at birth and that has not chosen to be born female-male, black-white, Muslim-Catholic. So, when we talk about the reduction to the given, we are referring to the process of dehumanization, which can occur to a given person at any time. For this to happen, such a person must contain within himself what he wishes to eradicate, discriminate against, or exclude from the world since they are reduced to characteristics that are easy to differentiate and point out. This dehumanization is carried out by reducing them to what has been granted to them at birth: the objectified body. With this action, the rights, identities, cultures, or different thoughts that he carries as a human being are denied. An example of this are the exclusions suffered by Jews, Chicanos,

Tutsis, gypsies, blacks, indigenous people, aborigines, women, homosexuals, transsexuals, etc.

Eleni Varikas makes a genealogy of the word pariah, as we have mentioned above, and locates as such the people who are excluded from the world because of their social condition, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and one could also add migratory status. He talks about those people who, through their differences, manage to have a place in the world through art. His book develops in questioning the idea of homogenization that exists in societies. Artistic expression, Vrikas points out, is used to find a place in the world once lost. An idea that she adopted from Arendt, since the same philosopher refers in several of her texts to the importance of art to be seen and accepted in the world, and once the above is achieved, the place in humanity that was lost with exclusion is recovered. The figure of the pariah is used by Arendt to make visible the exclusion suffered by Jews throughout history and how certain people managed to be heard through art (cinema, poetry, literature, etc.). Therefore, the present work also uses the division between upstart, pariah, and conscious pariah, from the term used by Arendt.

1. An upstart is the person who does everything possible to belong to the hegemonic society, renouncing his identity, his culture, religion, or ethnicity.
2. A pariah is the person who lives in a society but does not seek assimilation or acceptance by the majority.
3. A conscious pariah is the person who recognizes himself as different and who knows that he will never be fully accepted in society. So, she decides to get a place in the world to be seen and recognized.

It is also important to recognize that the concept of pariah is a category of contempt and exclusion in itself, which is why we have resorted to recovering Arendt's research together with that of Varikas to create a new category that resignifies the members of a diaspora. From now on it will be our duty to recognize them as conscious diasporic subjects.

With all this, what is sought is to contribute to border and feminist studies to locate women who inhabit a diaspora, migrants and those who live within a minority. But he makes them visible through art. Since artistic expressions can be understood as another type of "life narratives" (*Penelope's Odysseys*, 2017, 284.), where women express experiences, knowledge and criticisms to be aware of their place in the world—whether they are excluded or not—. We also start from this conception, existence and birth to

make the analysis of Gloria Anzaldúa and her resignification as a Chicana, portraying her exclusion from the world through her poetry and her reencounter with her grandmother's cultural roots, reinventing her identity. Therefore, a diasporic analysis will be made based on the analysis of the literary text *Borderlands/ The New Mestizo* by Gloria Anzaldúa, which represents her diaspora through a poetic essay.

THE POETIC ESSAY OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND THE CHICANO DIASPORA

The book *Borderlands/ La nueva mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa must be understood as the testimony of a woman who, on the one hand, has been aware that the reality she is living is not accepted in Anglo-Saxon society because she physically represents a wild language. That is, it represents a culture and a woman who has been conquered, raped, denied, betrayed and sold. Anzaldúa has experienced years of history in her body in which violence, betrayal and rejection of a culture that has been born from two worlds¹ (the Anglo and the mestizo) are reflected. It is a hybrid culture that is also based on the indigenous and the Spanish.

On the one hand, it tells us that the mestizo culture is the result of the encounter between these worlds. The clash between them can be understood as a collision that continues to be suspended in time, provoking reactions, feelings and contradictions simultaneously. On the other, he explains that the mestizo continues to reject the indigenous tradition that it has inside. The Indian who has been a victim of the Spanish conquest and who, out of shame or fear, is locked up deep within each of us who share the same historical context. When we speak of "the Indian" we are referring to a spirit that walks in silence, that speaks of the supernatural and understands it. He knows how dark and bad there is in us: the height, the skin, the color, the eyes, the visions and the beliefs of other ways of existing. This is the first thing we reject in ourselves. Thus, Anzaldúa frames how the mestizo identity is constructed and how she, being Chicano, her identity navigates and moves between various thoughts, beliefs, knowledge and experiences. An identity that is born from three worlds.

Anzaldúa says that, "Something happened to the Chicano soul—we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and a language, Chicano Spanish, which reflected that reality. Having a name, some of the fragments began to fit together—who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to glimpse what we might ever become."

¹ The two worlds are the mestizo world and the Anglo world. While the indigenous world is invisible.

(Anzaldúa, 2016, 117.) In this glimpse of the future, they were already formed as a new identity that disrupted the reality of the conquest, the colony and above all the expropriation and sale of the territory. From the land and geopolitical movements, the Chicano identity regained strength. Since seeing themselves in an uncertain future they were created from the present.

He is the conscious pariah that Hannah Arendt spoke of and reformulated and that we see represented in this fragment of Anzaldúa. His voice puts into practice the pariah in the Chicano identity and of having the conscience that seeks its right to difference. It seeks integration from a "struggle of identities" and tries to reconcile three conflicting worlds² through 1) recognition as an indigenous people in the U.S., and 2) acceptance of their autonomy from Mexican society.

To understand this process you can see it as a birth. A birth in which the woman is placed from reality and in the function she has to exercise in society. Birth emerges as a necessary process in which women analyze, deconstruct and reconceptualize their knowledge, experiences and lives to have the possibility of changing it. What Anzaldúa achieved in poetry and essays is a beginning that manages to place her in the process of the conscious pariah. The Chicana that does not fit into *Angla society* because it is different. She moves away from her family, fleeing from the macho tradition to recognize herself for her different and rebellious sexual preference. The analysis he makes of its cultural tradition, the role of women, mothers, Mexica goddesses and the wild language, is a panorama in which the diaspora expands and transgresses the borders of what is intended to be established as an unbreakable and immovable limit.

Here we have to speak irremediably of Arendt once again, remembering that in the face of the question "who am I?" Arendt always answered: "a Jewess", we find that Anzaldúa not only asked the same question, but also delves deeper into the question of knowing oneself to be different. Because the question is not asked to itself, but it is the question that the majority asks to the other and to the minorities. "*If you ask my mom, 'Who are you?', she will tell you: 'I am Mexican'.*" My brothers and sisters will say the same thing. Sometimes I answer "*I'm Mexican,*" and sometimes I say "*I'm Chicana*" or "*I'm Texan.*" But I identified with '*Raza*' long before I identified as '*Mexican*' or '*Chicano.*'" (Anzaldúa, 2016, 115.) The struggle of mestizo women lies in the awareness of identifying, first of all, with a

² These three worlds are the following: the indigenous world, the mestizo world and the Anglo world. The mestizo world is composed of the mulatto, black, Indian, Spanish, Creole, etc.

race and not with a people or person. For when faced with the question where do I come from? We strip ourselves before ourselves, discovering everything that we carry "on our backs", denying or accepting our roots. While, on the other hand, it wonders about the formation of the given, of the fatality that fate has prepared for them at birth with the difference in their skin, as analyzed by Seyla Benhabib and Fina Virulés.

Therefore, deconstructing the past is necessary to know that the creation of women as mestizos, immigrants, Chicanas, Indians, Latinas, blacks or others, comes from a history of colonization that has tried to exterminate individual histories and identities (which are different throughout the continent and within the same societies). They want to re-conquer and re-educate them from good customs, good language, to use the right language and not only the right one, but to have the right accent. It is about assimilating as much as possible to what is unattainable for them. It is a power struggle where the game of assimilation gives more weight to that identity that has more privileges than any other:

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when we refer to ourselves as a linguistic group and when we slip through the cracks. At that moment when we forget about our predominant indigenous genes. We are 70 or 80% Indians. We call ourselves Hispanics or Spanish-Americans or Latin Americans or Latinos when we link up with other Spanish-speaking peoples in the Western Hemisphere and when we slip through the cracks. We call ourselves Mexican-American to express that we are neither Mexican nor American, but that we are more the name of American than the adjective Mexican (and when we squeeze the bag). (Anzaldúa, 2016, 116.)

This awareness is given through answering the question: Who am I? This reveals a shared history of pain between women, cultures and identities. Therefore, Anzaldúa manages to position the mestizo woman and the Chicana woman as a conscious pariah. She clarifies that being a woman is about "Deconstructing, building. He becomes a *nahual*, capable of transforming himself into a tree, a coyote, into another person. Learn to transform the small "I" into the Total Being. *She becomes the shaper of her soul. According to the conception he has of himself, so it will be.*" (Anzaldúa, 2016, 140.) It is to decolonize the reality of being a woman, mestiza, Chicana, and immigrant within a racist, individualistic, and patriarchal society that is encouraged by the capitalist system.

From that break it will be different by conviction and not only by decree. That is why Anzaldúa manages to go beyond the "incontrovertible datum" (the given), since being marked by "the destiny of difference", the Chicana woman mocks the given and appropriates it, to play with the language by refuting the feminine and transgressing the

being in the face of other possibilities of belonging to the world to rediscover her humanity again.

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