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Book Review: Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldua's Life and Work Transformed Our Own

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Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldua's Life and Work Transformed Our Own, by AnaLouise Keating and Gloria Gonzalez-López, 276 pages. University of Texas Press, Austin 2011. US \$36.85 hardcover, \$16.75 Paperback.

AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López have compiled a rich anthology to honor Gloria Anzaldua's life and work. *Bridging* is a demonstration of Anzaldua's invaluable legacy as handed down by two other "bridges" or volumes of essays: The iconic *This Bridge Called My Back* (1982), co-edited with Cherríe Moraga, celebrates the works of radical women of color. *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002), published twenty years later, commemorated that work. In *Bridging*, Keating and González-López compile thirty-one essays from women and men from a kaleidoscopic arena of ethnic, academic, and geographical locations, taking care to incorporate an assortment of genres that include the personal narrative, ethnographic research, poetry, empirical investigations, testimonio, and the scholarly essay. The contributors describe their first encounters with Anzaldua and her work, highlighting how Anzaldua's life and/or writings transformed them personally, artistically, politically, and/or ideologically. All reflect upon ways to bridge Anzaldua's intellectual inheritance into the future.

In keeping with the Anzalduan theme of shifting, overlapping identities, the book is comprised of five sections that defy easy categorization. Although Parts I through V highlight apparently distinct topics, virtually any of the essays could "shift" thematically into sections underlining "transitions and transformations;" (Part I) "Exposing the Wounds;" (Part

II) "Inner Struggles, Outer Change;" (Part III) and 'Toward a "politics of openness" (Part V). Part IV, "Bridging Theories," is distinctive in its emphasis on theory connected to activism.

Authors reference works from across a thirty-year spectrum of Anzaldúa's writings, from earlier works found in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) and *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), as well as Anzaldúa's more recent essays from *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002). Bridging recurs as a theme throughout the volume as authors blur boundaries and explode "fixed" identity or definitional categories, rebuilding hybrid, shifting, ever-contradictory, but ever-malleable constructs of sex, ethnicity, and personhood. The anthology shifts focus from a politics of oppositional consciousness underlined in Anzaldúa's earlier works to one that mirrors Anzaldúa's "radically inclusionary stance" in its emphasis on interconnectivity and a politics of affinity over identity (13). For example, Héctor Dominguez-Ruvalcaba can illustrate how being queer defines "a politics of difference that subverts segregation" while highlighting a utopian queer perspective in sync with Anzaldúa's vision of a new tribalism (84). In *A Bridge We Call Home*, Anzaldúa explains, "Our goal is not to use differences to separate us from others, but neither is it to gloss over those differences . . . Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include—by what I call the new tribalism" ("(Un)natural" 3).

Not only do the writers break down the binary divisions that keep "us" separated from "them," they also seek to blur the boundaries that separate the academy from community. In their essay discussing two borderland activist projects, one in health, the other in education, Elisa Facio and Denise A. Segura highlight how Anzaldúa's theories provided the theory and language for a methodological and linguistic "liberation," and how as a result, more Chicana activist sociologists have evolved from doing "research about Chicanas to [maintaining] a *Chicana feminist sociology* dedicated to social change" (175). AnaLouise Keating challenges academics to take a "connectionist perspective" that simultaneously locates the reader both inside and outside of the academy, and within the academy, she encourages scholars to break down the walls that "divide and conquer" (146).

Throughout the readings, pain represents an integral element in generating transformations. *La herida abierta*, the wound that scabs over only to rupture again, is symbolic of the transformational process of *conocimiento*, the painful cycle of evolutionary consciousness that entails shedding yesterday's outworn identities. However, and as various authors underscore, if one is willing to walk through the dismembering fear, discomfort, and even despair that *el arrebató*, *nepantla*, and *coatlique* often entails, she can emerge from the reconstructive process of shifting realities with her "senses of commonality and empathy . . . ignited" (Zaytoun 207).

In other transformative narratives, Jessica Heredia outlines the pain of her first-year as a graduate student, and Gloria González-López details the excruciating process of uncertainty on the path to gaining tenure. In describing their personal ordeals, each outlines her experience of the seven stages of *conocimiento*. Kavitha Koshy showcases her Anzaldúa-inspired theory and practice of *nepantlera-activism* that underscores the willingness to *live* in *nepantla* to foster inclusion. But Koshy warns that making the strategic decision to make "nepantla" "Home" is not without personal risks. In leaving herself open to alliance building with privileged "others," the woman-of-color *nepantlera* confronts the odds of "being hurt again and again" (203).

Bridging is instructive for noting how various contributors acknowledge their own positions and confront bias and privilege. Anahi Viladrich juxtaposes her white privileged standing in her native Argentina with her new ethnic, "exotic" "othered" status in the States. Uncovering her Latina identity, Viladrich is "committed . . . to exposing the politics of racism and white essentialism" (38). Michelle Kleisath and Betsy Eudey confront how their teachings "overvalued white ways of thinking and being" (Kleisath 103), "silenc[ing] the very voices [they] wanted to include" (Eudey 112). Glenn Jacobs notes that "for the privileged," seeing into the heart of our own darkness "entails awareness of how the boundaries of our selves remain insulated and unexamined, thereby buffering how we exclude others" (125).

Bridging is essentially about transformations: those that the authors have experienced in connection with Anzaldúa's work, and those yet to come, for the purpose of the anthology is to enact transformations in others to build upon Anzaldúa's legacy. But the reader is reminded that "transformations are neither automatic nor guaranteed" as they turn upon critical self-reflection and the willingness to "risk the personal." Contributors evidence the extent to which they have been personally transformed by Anzaldúa's work in that none are content to merely examine her writings, but also seek to apply Anzaldúa's theories as praxis and as a blueprint for living. In their various essays, all exemplify that from intensive inner works proceed public acts as the authors "take [their] transformations outward" into the world.