

Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ethical Turn in Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera

Hsinya Huang
National Sun Yat-Sen University

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Abstract: In her article "Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ethical Turn in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*" Hsinya Huang discusses indigeneity *vis-à-vis* diaspora, two concepts often used as if they were necessarily antagonistic and antithetical to one another. While in diaspora studies Native people are marginalized, Huang resituates the figure of the Native to the core of diasporic discussion by tracing the movement, migration, or scattering of Native people from their established or ancestral homeland. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's life narrative in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Huang advances the concept of the ethical turn in diaspora studies by questioning the master narrative regarding the diasporas. Huang argues that the othered Native should be redeemed to the center of diaspora studies not as alterity within the self, but as a subject that comes to meet us face-to-face.

Hsinya HUANG

Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ethical Turn in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*

When diaspora studies was established in the late twentieth century, diaspora discourses, as James Clifford relates, "are in constitutive tension" with Indigenous claim (252). This appears to be due to an unstated presumption on the part of diaspora scholars that because Indigenous people remain inside the borders of the nation-state, no population dispersal comparable to that experienced by African Americans, Asian Americans, or Jews is at issue. Upon minimal reflection, however, the fallacy imbedded in such a premise is revealed. Indeed, while the usage of the term "diapora" carries the connotation of forced resettlement owing to expulsion, slavery, racism, or war, especially nationalist conflict, the indigenous predicaments, in certain historical circumstances, are always and already diasporic. Natives, as removed from their ancestral home-base, are strangers in their own homeland and the colonial status of Native people is never a "post-." Inasmuch as diasporas are dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experience of displacement, dispossession, and dislocation, the Indigenous peoples, who should be understood as associated with a specific geographic setting — a locale they consider to be their ancestral homeland and by which they identify themselves as peoples, may claim diasporic identities as much as other ethnic groups do.

In the study at hand I connect two concepts often used as if they were necessarily antagonistic and antithetical to one another: the Indigenous and the diaspora. While diaspora scholarship marginalizes Native people, I resituate the figure of the Native to the core of diasporic discussion by tracing the movement, migration, or scattering of Native people away from their established or ancestral homeland. In "Where Have All the Natives Gone," Rey Chow asks how we can write about the native by not ignoring "the defied, degraded image" (30). I ask where all the Natives are in diaspora studies: the Native is turned into a "silent other" and as such, his/her silence becomes "the occasion of our speech" (Chow 34). To resituate the Native in diaspora studies is to meet the othered/alienated Native face-to-face. For Emmanuel Levinas, this face-to-face encounter with the other evokes the irreducible relation between the self and the other and the other cannot be made into an object of the self (see *Ethics*). As such, the encounter with the other reveals an urgency to install a responsibility for the other in the self. Levinas identifies ethics or responsibility as "first philosophy," that precedes any objective searching after truth (see *Totality*). The traditional pursuit of knowledge is secondary to a primary ethical duty to the other. This view bears resemblance to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's statement, "to be human is to be intended toward the other" (73). Ethics converge with culture on the notion of values to bring an ethical concern and an ethnic/Indigenous other to diaspora studies and literary production.

Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's life narrative in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I propose an ethical turn in diaspora studies by questioning the master narrative regarding diasporas. I argue that the othered Native should be redeemed to the center of diaspora scholarship not as alterity within the self, but as a subject that comes to meet us face-to-face. Anzaldúa advances the notion of the diasporic subject in indigeneity by chronicling Aztec/Native diasporic journeys of those on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, who are dispossessed and displaced by waves of militarism and nation building and confined into physical, racial, and economic spaces. How to explore ethics of the other, lurking in the dark recesses of native memory and language, by tracing the route / trail of Native American migration and displacement? How to refigure colonialism and diaspora within the context of political economy on the borderlands? How does indigeneity as an other matter in the formation of a diasporic subject? By definition, diaspora is associated with such ideas as "dispersed," "separated," "spread," "strange," "alien," "alienated," "disconnected," "outgoing," "other," "rootless," "uprooted," etc. whereas indigeneity denotes "native," "home," "local," "ordinary," "organic," "integrated," "engaged," "located," "belonging," "here," "intimate," "related," "rooted," and "natural," etc. (Harvey 1). Owing to Indigenous connection with the land, James Clifford contends that diaspora discourses are in "constitutive tension" with Indigenous claims (252). While community consciousness and solidarity remain crucial for diasporas to maintain identification and sustain self-knowledge, their sense of identity comes from outside the national boundary so as to "live inside, with a difference" (Clifford 251). Diaspora, therefore, exists "in practical, and at times principled, tension with nativist identity formations" (Clifford 232). The division between the inside and the outside appears to the hegemonic designation of the nation-state. The diasporic assumption as such affirms ironically a national border, which the diasporic subject with all its transcending capacity aims to challenge.

This "border" is what Indigenous people resist and struggle to cancel. Taking the Americas as their ancestral homeland, Native Americans transcend the U.S. border to embrace the entire Western hemisphere as the locale of their cultures and traditions. And yet it is fallacy to say that a Cherokee remains "at home" since she/he resides within the continental or national territory claimed by the U.S. Vietnamese who are displaced to Taiwan or Korea would not be considered at home simply because they still remain in Asia. Native Americans, no less than any other ethnic groups, should be understood as identified with specific geography their ancestors and tribes have inhabited and therefore

historicized. To be transported from their ancestral home-base accounts for what is to be understood as diaspora. Aztecs used to be native to Aztlán, the now U.S. southwest. In the 1800s, however, Anglo migrants illegally to Texas, which was then part of Mexico. In 1846, the U.S. troops invaded Mexico and eventually took away half of the nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California. The border fence that divides the Aztec people was erected on 2 February 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Thus the Native nation was separated along with the conquest of the land. Return becomes transgression as the Indigenous people returning to their ancestral homelands are considered as illegal immigrants.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* reaches beyond this hegemonic border, a locality where death becomes "the principle character" (Holland 70). It spans the southwestern United States and moves beyond, from Mexico to Central America, representing Indigenous people living or, rather, dying on the border. The border is "the space of death," a world of fever and drought, where food is replaced by Demerol, codeine, cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol. Plagues ravage across the border: from the outbreak of smallpox in 1560, the great influenza of 1918, to the epidemic of AIDS in the contemporary era. Deaths number in millions. Anzaldúa narrates Native American disease on the border. She employs Indigenous bodies to bear witness to the colonial exploitation — living in this border place also means living in a place where ancestral roots are "truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated" (Anzaldúa 30). As she puts it explicitly, "1,950 mile-long open wound/divid[s] a pueblo, a culture" (24). *Borderlands/La Frontera* commences with destructive epidemics: "before the Conquest, there were twenty-five million Indian people in Mexico and the Yucatán. Immediately after the Conquest, the Indian population had been reduced to under seven million. By 1650, only one-and-a-half-million pure-blooded Indians remained" surviving the outbreaks of smallpox, measles, and typhus (27). This opening narrative about disease, as Anzaldúa progresses in her book, becomes metaphorical of an even more profound illness in spirit and the lands: physical sickness intertwines with spiritual unrest, while bodily wounds conflate with geographical rifts, echoing Michel de Certeau's idea of the political alliance between the body and the land, between the "tortured body" and the "altered earth" (227). Anzaldúa narrates a geographical "open wound," symbolic of the border dis-ease experience, before she refers to the diseased Native American bodies: "1,950 mile-long open wound/dividing a pueblo, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh, / splits me splits me/me raja me raja" (24). The body thus becomes the landscape on which the boundaries of the colonialists' nation are inscribed and upheld. By conflating the land with the body, Anzaldúa condemns the parallel exploitation of the land and the oppressions endured by the Native American diasporic body. In so doing, Anzaldúa also produces an expanded definition of the borderlands. As the (border)lands remain the common ground for all radical actions of Native Americans, lands are "more than the rocks and trees, the animal and plant life that make up the territory of Aztlán or Navajo Nation or Maya Mesoamerica" (Moraga 173). For Native Americans, especially for the borderland Indigenous, lands are also "the factories where [they] work, the water [their] children drink, and the housing project where [they] live," as Cherríe Moraga notes and she adds that lands are "that physical mass called our bodies" as well (173). Anzaldúa offers a different concept of spatiality, in which "land and bodies blend in both metaphysical and real senses, in which perception and living cannot be distinguished so easily," to borrow Mary Pat Brady's words in her study of the dynamics of space (139). The fractured land resonates with the wounded diasporic body.

Borderlands/La Frontera features the diseased borderlands, as well as the diseased body both of which mirror a more profound psychological diaspora: Anzaldúa posits that living on the border is like "living in a state of psychic unrest" where "a cactus needle [is] embedded in the flesh" (97). This "psychic unrest" results from the structural intersection/interlocking among racial, gender/sexual, and class oppressions as historically related forms of the domination of not only bodies, but also nature and lands — oppressions erupt and converge in the environmental and social ills of the borderlands. As an Indigenous writer/activist living and working on the border, Anzaldúa takes up the ethical responsibility for many others — racial, gender, sexual, and class. She retrieves the history of her nation as she commences her narrative and uses it subsequently to both chronicle the border ills and enact cures making the borderlands a simultaneous space of wounding and healing. At the outset of her narrative, entitled "The Homeland, Aztlán / El otro México," she employs such words as "original," "the first," and "the oldest" to identify her nation, bearing witness that her people generated the ancestors of the Americas: "During the original peopling of the Americas, the first inhabitants migrated across the Bering Straits and walked south across the continent. The oldest evidence of humankind in the U.S. — the Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestors — was found in Texas and has been dated to 35000 B.C. In the Southwest United States archeologists have found 20,000-year-old campsites of the Indians who migrated through, or permanently occupied, the Southwest, Aztlán — land of the herons, land of whiteness, the Edenic place of origin of the Azteca" (26).

Anzaldúa reclaims the Americas by recounting the history of the migration of her people. If the geopolitical borderline between the U.S. and Mexico constructs a sense of absolute contradiction and conflict, she erases that borderline by rechristening this land as the "Americas." Relying on recounts of historical and archeological discoveries, she transforms the "place of contradictions" (19) into an

earthly Eden, a land of purity before the fall, before the split. As her history-making represents both the "route" of the migration and the "root" of the Americas, tribal history/memory embodied in the lands and travels with the spiritual presence of ancestors and becomes the pivotal center around which the rest of her narrative revolves. Although *Borderlands/La Frontera* is not a chronological narrative, Anzaldúa follows a chronological order to trace the origin of the American Indigenes. She locates not merely early Native American traces on the continent, but advanced forms of human communities as evidenced by the "campsites": in the American Southwest, archeologists found 20,000-year-old campsites of Native Americans who migrated through or even permanently occupied the Southwest, Aztlán. As she continues this history, Anzaldúa brings into focus her Aztec descent: in 1000 B.C. some descendants of the original Cochise people in Aztlán continued to migrate southward into what is now Mexico and Central America and became the direct ancestors of many of the Mexican people and this Cochise culture of the Southwest is the parent culture of the Aztecs (26-27). The Aztecs (the Nahuatl word for the people of Aztlán) left the Southwest, their homeland Aztlán, in 1168 A.D., moved further south, and established the Aztec empire, one of the greatest ancient civilizations of the Americas and the world until the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Spaniards and Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico and conquered it in 1521. It is at this particular historical juncture that Anzaldúa's diasporic narrative emerges. Before the Conquest, there were twenty-five million Indian people in Mexico and the Yucatán. Immediately after the Conquest, the Indian population was reduced to under seven million. By 1650, only one-and-a-half-million Native Americans remained, comprising the fortunate who survived the outbreak of smallpox, measles, and typhus epidemics (27). The remark Darwin made in 1836 when he visited Australia — "Wherever the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal" (Darwin qtd. in Arnold 88-89) — seems applicable to what happened in the Americas after the Conquest. The Spaniards and Cortés brought fatal diseases which were unknown to the inhabitants of the Americas. Having no immunity to this new pathogenic attack, the population of the New World dropped drastically. For the Aztecs, the colonial history is an everlasting nightmare. In fact, the history of Aztlán, the homeland nourishing Aztec native descent, is "a history of conquest upon conquest" (Phelan 65). In the 1800s, after the Spaniards, the Anglos migrated into Aztlán and then into the territory of Mexico in greater and greater numbers and gradually drove the *tejanos* (native Texans of Aztec descent) from their lands, committing all manners of atrocities against them. The U.S.-Mexican War began on 25 April 1846 and ended nearly two years later with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which not only fixed the Rio Grande as the boundary of Texas, but required Mexico to cede to the U.S. all the territory that today includes the states of California, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. As Anzaldúa pronounces, "*Tejanos* lost their land and, overnight, became the foreigners" (28) — a living condition and experience due to which border inhabitants become "strangers" at home. As Anzaldúa puts it, "you are at home, a stranger" (94).

The Southwest, homeland of the Aztecs, was then permanently lost to a colonial power which was defended by guns and powder. Today thousands of Mexicans are crossing the border legally and illegally, while ten million people without documents have returned to the Southwest. The border patrols hide behind the local McDonald's on the outskirts of Brownsville, Texas, or other border towns. They set traps around the river beds beneath the bridges. Hunters in army-green uniforms stalk and track these economic refugees by the powerful night vision of electronic censoring devices planted in the ground. Cornered by flashlights and frisked with their arms stretched over their heads, the border crossers are handcuffed, locked in jeeps, and then transported back across the border. Anzaldúa depicts the conditions of being exiled in one's homeland in transparent detail and laments that for the first time since their departure in 1168, the Aztecs returned to their homeland, Aztlán, yet only to face a second exile: they become "strangers" / "aliens" at home (33-34).

The sorrows and sadness of being "diasporic" at home permeate Anzaldúa's texts. She identifies herself as a "border woman," growing up between two conflicting cultures, one indigenous and one alien: "I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life ... this place of contradictions" (19). She likens herself to a "turtle": as an exile in her homeland, she has been carrying "home" on her back (194). This indigenous vision of their homeland erases the U.S.-Mexico borderline and by identifying herself not only as a "border woman," but as a "turtle" Anzaldúa maps her native territory as she maps her own body. The body suffers because the land splits: the border running for 1,950 miles long is an "open wound," not only dividing a *pueblo*, a culture, but her body "staking fence rods in [her] flesh" (24). To challenge the fixed and rigid borders, Anzaldúa appropriates her own body and makes it a "crossroad" and a "bridge," which is nonetheless too fragile to "support the tons of cargo passing through it" (96). The lands suffer the split as does her body, where "before a scab forms it hemorrhages again" (25). Anzaldúa begins with the physical borderland, the experience of oppression in the geopolitical contact zone between the U.S. and Mexico. It is a "place of contradictions. Hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape" (19). Borderlands experience, as Susan Friedman puts it, means "splitting the land, the people, the body in two" (97). The U.S.-Mexican border "es una herida abierta" where different worlds grate against each other and "bleed" (Anzaldúa 25). And yet, the distinctive feature of the Southwest is also the survival of indige-

nous people as distinct peoples and as mixtures simultaneously, as living a history of rape and violence, and of escapes and resistances:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, 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 borderlands transgressors, aliens — whether they process documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. (Anzaldúa 25)

As diverse in origins and kinds as they could be, the borderland inhabitants are, by the normative definition "the diseased bodies": the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead — the alterity to the normative self. They are, in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." As they struggle to inhabit their ancestral lands, the borderland Indigenes simultaneously become the diseased bodies or "bare life" (*zoe*) which the colonial hegemony aims to eliminate.

In redeeming *zoe* into *bio*, life with his/her story, Anzaldúa performs ethical duty for the other in her writing. Like germs, these inhabitants spread disease and therefore are killable. Anzaldúa re-write/re-right them into *bio* life by retrieving their memory and history. She subverts the borderlines and remaps the borderlands by following the movement of the diasporic bodies, which functions as a kind of deterritorialization: in going from one point to another "in a constant state of transition" (25), those who "cross over, pass over, or go through confines" reset the borders as lines of dispersal. These borderland inhabitants never fail to escape human quarantine. As they trespass over the borders, they are also transgressors in the sense that they go past the confines to challenge the rigidity and normality of the border constraints. In effect, bound together by common history, memory, land, and ultimately spirit, these inhabitants on the border continue to exert their power of resistance, reminding us of those whom Michel Foucault considers "the plebs," although "the plebs" is not taken as a real sociological entity. According to Foucault, "there is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge ... There is 'plebs' in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities. This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as [it is] their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement" (138). Echoing Foucault's concept of the "plebs," Anzaldúa discloses an "inverse energy," a "discharge" residing in the borderland inhabitants. There is, indeed, "plebs" in their bodies and souls that escapes "relations of power." There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the site where relations of power are exercised: "resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real ... It exists all the more by being in the same place as power" (Foucault 142). The dividing lines of quarantine and punishment become simultaneously those of escape, dispersal, and resistance. Even murder fails as an attempt to take hold of this native otherness.

Anzaldúa conjures the stories of these inhabitants as the ethics of the other and deploys the borderlands as an othered space where the colonial self meets the Native face to face. She retrieves a memory which would otherwise have been consigned to oblivion: "My grandmother lost all her cattle, / they stole her land" (29). As she shifts her focus from the borderland community to her grandmother, the other/native woman, Anzaldúa bears witness to the wrongs done to her people and seeks redress for that which the whites regard as "legal" contracts and procedures but which she regards as acts of stealing: "My father's mother, Mama Locha, also lost her *terreno*. For a while we got \$12.50 a year for the 'mineral rights' of six acres of cemetery, all that was left of the ancestral lands. Mama Locha had asked that we bury her there beside her husband ... But there was a fence around the cemetery, chained and padlocked by the ranch owners of the surrounding land. We couldn't even get in to visit the graves, much less bury her there. Today, it is still padlocked. The sign reads: 'Keep out. Trespassers will be shot'" (29). The ancestral land of the family once belonged to many of them and has been used communally as their material base. The loss of the land thus signifies the loss of their material foundation. More to this, the fact that the grandmother's bones are left unburied after the Anglos steal their land indicates the greater loss of the ancestral spirit, which the tribe, as well as every individual, extols as essential to tribal livelihood. The once living environment and the cemetery is fenced off for mining. The transnational corporations hire local laborers to pull out the brush, chaparral, and cactus. Later the Anglos bring in "huge machines" and root plows and have them scrape their communal land clean of natural vegetation (31). The "machines," symbolic of colonial hegemony and capitalistic enterprise in complicity with each other, "uproot" the indigenous base, driving the land out of its holistic/natural rhythm (31). As she continues her narrative, Anzaldúa becomes the one who bears witness to the Native loss of not only more lands but tribal values: "in the 1950s I saw the land, cut up into

thousands of neat rectangles and squares, constantly being irrigated. In the 340-day growth season, the seeds of any kind of fruit or vegetable had only to be stuck in the ground in order to grow. More big land corporations came in and bought up the remaining land" (31).

The infusion of the values of White culture, coupled with the exploitation by that culture, was changing the Native way of life. In the name of progress and growth, colonial capitalists disrupted the natural rhythm, "the way of medicine" for tribal people (Allen 3) so as to overuse or abuse the lands. By drawing lines, dividing the land, and territorializing the borders into "neat rectangles and squares," the Whites only attended to the body of the earth in order to exploit it, never to succor it or to be nurtured by it (Anzaldúa 90). It is with this colonial exploitation that the image of the working-class Indigenous (other) woman provides "the most inclusive viewing of systemic power" (Mohanty 232) emerges in Anzaldúa's narrative. Anzaldúa does not theorize the interlocking matrix of domination, but deploys everyday practicality as the interpretive figure to uncover what Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls "relations of ruling" to address the conjuncture of contests over the meaning of racism, colonialism, and class, and to crystallize how racial, gender, and class consciousness converge in the indigenous experience. Anzaldúa attests to the realities of the borders. The Mexican government and wealthy landowners and growers are in partnership with such US-American conglomerates as American Motors, IT&T, and Du Pont, which own factories called *maquiladoras*. As Anzaldúa states, one-fourth of all Mexicans work at *maquiladoras* while most of them are young women. They work eight to twelve hours a day to wire in the backup lights of U.S. autos or solder minuscule wires in television sets, while their children roam the street and become part of *cholo* gangs (32). While the industrial production of automobiles and television sets has benefited the material life of White households, these luxuries are made possible by Indigenous mothers who could eventually lose their children to street gangsters not to mention the fact that they cannot even afford to enjoy the fruits of their own work.

These Indigenous women are also part of the large population of illegal refugees on the border. Living on the borderlands, they are some of the poorest and the most exploited of any people in the U.S. Anzaldúa writes about these othered stories as ethics of the other: it is illegal for Mexicans to work without green cards, but big farming combines, farm bosses, and smugglers who bring them in make money off "wetback" labor, they do not have to pay minimum federal wages or ensure adequate housing or sanitary conditions (Anzaldúa 34). The Indigenous woman is especially at risk and often, "the *coyote* [smuggler]" does not give her food for days. Often he rapes her or sells her into prostitution. Anzaldúa recounts the unfortunate life story of a Chicana worker: "She cannot call on county or state health or economic resources ... She can't go home ... Isolated and worried about her family back home, afraid of getting caught and deported, living with as many as fifteen people in one room, the *mexicana* suffers serious health problems" (34). Anzaldúa relates the story of how this woman sells her house and her furniture and borrows from friends in order to pay the *coyote* who charges her four or five thousand dollars to smuggle her to Chicago. She "may work as a live-in maid for white households for as little as \$15 a week. Or work in the garment industry, do hotel work," but "she can't go home. She's sold her house, her furniture" (34). All these accounts of the Indigenous woman worker's life are reenacted dramatically in the second half of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, invoking oral tradition in poetic art. In an oral tale, titled "White-wing Season," the bitter South Texas lives serve as the backdrop for the testimony of a farm woman who accepts money from "whitemen," allowing them to shoot white wing doves on her land. Slaughtered white wing doves, a sport for these hunters before they return to the Midwest, are juxtaposed against exploited Indigenous women, who needs to pick up the birds the hunters drop on her washboard to feed her family (124-25).

In the section titled "*La Pérdida*" Anzaldúa continues to chronicle the life story of Indigenous workers. In particular, in "Susplumas el viento" she narrates the everyday labor of Indigenous women as the theme of her storytelling. A disturbing rape plot initiates her narrative, which tells the story of Pepita, a farm woman who is raped by her boss in the field. The imagery employed in this telling again conflates the woman's body with the land, while "the Anglo ... land[s] on her, dig[s] in, suck[s]" (138). The story as a reverie of a childhood spent in the border fields becomes a testimony for Indigenous farm workers like Pepita surrendering to their White boss's sexual violence in order to keep their jobs. Projecting herself onto the figure of the hummingbird, Pepita remembers the bird in her grandmother's garden for solace. Of all the creatures, birds alone can fly all the way to heaven yet this hummingbird now appears to her in the context of the fields and caged as an object of violence: "the obsidian wind / cut tassels of blood / from the hummingbird's throat" (139). She longs to escape her race-, gender-, and class-mandated fate as an Indigenous laborer. She reads, imagining the hummingbird's feathers to be the quill that helps liberate her from *las labores*: "If the wind would give her feathers for fingers / she would string words and images together" (140). But even the wind humiliates her in her day-dreaming, for, "el viento sur le tirósu saliva/ pa' 'trásen la cara" (140). She has no choice, but to continue with her manual labor "shifting 150 pounds of cotton onto her back ... [she] cut[s], wash[es], weigh[s], package[s] broccoli spears, carrots, cabbages in 12 hours," while "the men [are] staring at her ass" (139-40).

Anzaldúa's poetic dramatization resonates in autobiographical prose with the accounts in the first half of *Borderlands/La Frontera* where Anzaldúa draws on sociological and historical research to narrate the life conditions of Indigenous workers: not only does an Indigenous laborer have to contend with sexual violence, but she is prey to a sense of physical and psychological vulnerability. As a refugee, she ventures into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain, which was, ironically, once her ancestral land. All these plights are then signaled in a three-line utterance: "This is her home / this thin edge of / barbwire" (35). Trembling with fear yet filled with courage, a courage born of desperation, barefoot and uneducated, the Indigenous woman with hands like boot-soles rests at night by the border river [Rio Grande] "where two worlds merge creating what Reagan calls a frontline, a war zone" (33). Anzaldúa converges this female worker's body with her own, for, earlier in her narrative she announces that "this is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire" (24). The two refrains, varying only in their possessive pronouns, identify the irreducible relation of the author with the Indigenous worker. This face-to-face encounter engenders a collective, racialized, and class-specific woman's experience for the textual space, as well as the geo-political space of the borderlands. Since Pepita in "Susplumas el viento" fails to write of her experience to "string words and images together," Anzaldúa does it for her, performing her ethical responsibility for the other woman. In writing, then, Anzaldúa goes through a process of healing her own wound, a wound identical with the "1,950 mile-long open wound / dividing a *pueblo*, a culture" (24): "When I don't write the images down for several days or weeks or months, I get physically ill. Because writing invokes images from my unconscious, and because some of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I sometimes get sick when I do write. I can't stomach it, become nauseous, or burnt with fever, worsen. But, in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make "sense" of them, and once they have 'meaning' they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, bring[ing] me great joy" (92). A border divides the indigenous Aztecs and turns them into diasporas. It then resides in the abolishment of the border that Native Americans reclaim their home-base. Their identity and community consciousness rely not on a connection to an imaginary elsewhere but rather on a claim to *aquí*. The "route" and the "root" reside simultaneously in the Americas and oppression enforce this split making the borderlands into "a site for wounding," a space for hurt, for "the exercise of power over others," and yet also for "resistance against others" (Friedman 97).

In conclusion, oppression evokes resistance, pain carries a potential for salvation as the pain of being "a stranger" at home instills the urge to speak and to re-appropriate history through remembrance. The borderlands, thus, become a simultaneous wounding and healing space. It is important to look outside of the history of the U.S. to see how a colonial power and the changes it brought along affected Indigenous people throughout the hemisphere. To study diaspora is to refigure colonialism within the context of political economy on the border. Anzaldúa seizes hold of an Indigenous diasporic memory essential for her to fulfill a basic ethic duty for the other. The revelation of the other/Indigenous face makes such a demand for her to write/right her people's survival, to appropriate a memory as it "flashes up in a moment of danger" (Benjamin 255). She works to recover her subjectivity in relation to the other/Indigenous woman on the borderlands. Native American historical trauma becomes her personal text mediated through the Indigenous (other) woman's story, or in Cathy Caruth's words, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24). Eventually, as Anzaldúa celebrates transnational mobility by living on the borderlands, border experience "is about survival, *survivre*, to live on — living on a borderline, as well as living on, just the act of living on" (Bhabha 37).

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Author's profile: Hsinya Huang teaches US-American and comparative literature at National Sun Yat-Sen University. Her interests in scholarship include Native American and Indigenous literatures, ecocriticism, and postcolonial and ethnic studies. In addition numerous articles in Chinese and English, Huang's book publications include *(De)Colonizing the Body: Disease, Empire, and (Alter)Native Medicine in Contemporary Native American Women's Writings* (2004) and the edited volumes *應勘北美原住民文學：多元文化的省思* (Native North American Literatures: Reflections on Multiculturalism) (2009), *Aspects of Transnational and Indigenous Cultures* (with Clara Shu-chun Chang, 2014), *Ecological Literature: Ecology, Subjectivity, and Technology* (2015), and *Ocean and Ecology in the Trans-Pacific Context* (forthcoming). E-mail: <hsinya@mail.nsysu.edu.tw>