Feminist Border Thought

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In Latin America, one of the ways in which Amerindian and mestizo (mixed-race) peoples have come to experience themselves as marginalized, both in their concrete public dealings and in history, concerns the ways in which the interpretive traditions of their indigenous communities have been covered-over and forced into concealment by European colonialism. In this regard, one of the greatest impacts of colonization has been a sense of inarticulacy (or discursive limitation) due to the loss of prior social contexts and the interpretive alternatives they made possible, particularly with regard to conceptions of selfhood and cultural identity. This is especially important given that, as colonialism introduced new gendered, ethnic, and racial categories not native to Mesoamerica (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Quijano 2000; Lugones 2007), it simultaneously instituted exclusionary practices on the basis of those categories. The need to theorize identity based on new social, historical, and epistemic realities thus marks the starting point of Latin American social and cultural theory in general (Sarmiento 1946; Vasconcelos 1948; Zea 1953; Paz 1961; Mariátegui 1971; Kusch 1973; Retamar 1974).

In the 1980s, the emergence of neoliberal economic policies, hyperinflation, increased migration of Latin Americans into the U.S., along with the shifting paradigms of globalization, resulted in a need to develop cultural analyses that took these new circumstances into account. The discourse of ‘hybridity’ came into being as a way to theorize the complex constellation of these factors in Latin American culture (Canclini 1995 [1989]). More specifically, the term was originally used by Argentine-born cultural anthropologist Néstor García Canclini as an explanatory paradigm for social processes and identity formations in Latin American culture that reflected ‘more modern forms of cross-cultural contact’ than the racial mixture of European colonization (thereby absorbing the older paradigms of ‘mestizaje’ or cultural ‘syncretism’ within hybrid discourses) (Canclini 1995: xxxii).

More recently, however, the discourses of modernity that gave rise to models of hybridity in the social sciences — and the hyphenated, transnational identities they helped theorize — have once again undergone significant shifts. As Linda Martin Alcoff and Mariana Ortega argue in Constructing The Nation (2009), in the twenty-first century, the post-9/11 geopolitical realignment of ethnic territories and the rhetorical construction of national identity based on the concept of ‘homelands’ have brought new issues into the mix (1–12). Among these are the pressing concerns of racial prejudice, anti-immigrant sentiment, and the privileging of identities
based on cultural and linguistic assimilation into the dominant North American, U.S. culture. As a result of this shift, social and political life becomes characterized by the exclusion of difference in the name of abstract universals like freedom, steadfastness and unity, rather than the inclusion of plural, multicultural identities and social perspectives (Anzaldúa 2009b: 308). One place this tension is particularly visible, moreover, is at the borderland regions between the U.S. and Mexico (Gracia 2010).

Given these developments, it is not surprising that in recent years a new turn has also taken place in Latin American social theory, this time towards pensamiento fronterizo, or ‘border thought’. Border thinking can be very broadly understood as a socio-political perspective or organizing concept around which complex narratives of displacement associated with multi-ethnic identity, migratory life, and multicultural citizenship can be theorized. It not only emerges from academic discourses of formally trained social scientists but from the cultural and artistic production of multicultural women of color, as well as from ‘the critical reflections of (undocumented) immigrants, migrants, bracero/a workers, refugees, campesinos, women, and children on the major structures of dominance of our times’ (Saldivar 2006: 152). In this chapter I will introduce this emerging field of research by way of the borderland theories of ‘U.S. Third-World feminists’ (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; Sandoval 1991), or what I call ‘feminist border thought’ (pensamiento fronterizo feminista). I do so, both as a way to cast emphasis on the complex intersections of race, gender, and ethnicity that are so central to contemporary discourses of citizenship and rhetorical constructions of national identity, as well as to shed light on the remarkable reach of influence border feminisms are experiencing across a broad range of disciplines today. Although she is by no means the sole or even principal architect of this field, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004) stands out in particular for its widespread critical acclaim and interdisciplinary reception. For this reason, it will serve as the primary example in this chapter.

**Border Thought vs Border Feminisms**

It is important to differentiate Anzaldúa’s feminist border thought from Walter Mignolo’s influential analysis of the ‘modern/colonial world system’ as producing new forms of knowledge that call for ‘border thinking’ or ‘border gnosis’ (2000: 9, 11). Although not mutually exclusive to each other (Mignolo, for example, often draws on Anzaldúa’s work to help dismantle Eurocentric knowledges or practices), the two branches of thought are informed by different intellectual traditions and by different methodological approaches to the problem of colonization. While both can be seen as pursuing a ‘decolonizing’ agenda, Mignolo’s program is primarily responsive to the problem of Eurocentrism in modern thought, as well as to lacunae left in Anglophone postcolonial theory (or occidential thought) with respect to Latin America (Said 1978). For this reason, Mignolo advances a form of, what he calls, ‘post-occidental reason’ (2000: 91) with the basic aim of ‘decentering theoretical practices’ through ‘the politics of geohistorical locations’, meaning by taking into account the specificities of regions (like Latin America and the Caribbean) that, due to European colonialism, are historically marked by a convergence of knowledge/power systems at all levels of culture (107; Foucault 1980).

Because modern capitalism has only intensified the relations set up by colonialism, the goal, for Mignolo, is to produce a more perspectival standpoint epistemology (or ‘pluritopical hermeneutics’) based on one’s position outside, or at the border of, what the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano calls ‘the modern/colonial world system’ (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Mignolo 2003 [1995]:11, 2000: 52). Although dynamic in its range and pluralized through its use of Quijano’s notion of ‘the colonial difference’, the primary model by which Mignolo
understands 'border thought' remains rooted in the conceptual framework of world-system analysis (2000: 18, 2006; Wallerstein 1974; Wallerstein and Hopkins 1982). Through groundbreaking empirical research programs on Mesoamerican literary practices and subaltern knowledges (Mignolo 2003 [1995]), Mignolo’s project can thus be seen as an applied effort towards epistemic decolonization, one that is methodologically grounded on the peripheral locations of marginalized social actors and world-views. In this respect, it is a scholarly effort to bring the anti-colonial theoretical successes of South Asian Subaltern Studies to Latin America (see Rodriguez 2001).

By contrast, feminist border thought originated in Mexican-American (or Chicano/a) involvement in the U.S. progressive social movements of the 1960s (Sandoval 1980; Segura and Pasquera 1992; Gracia 1997; Hurtado 1998), has strong roots in social activism, and is primarily concerned with articulating the complex workings of intersectional oppressions such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity on women of color.

Unlike their counterparts in the Anglophone feminist movement or the African-American civil rights movement, the difference lies in that Chicanas’ identities were inscribed with added layers of differences that further marginalized them within these movements, and in society at large. These included their legal or immigration status, indigenous heritage, spiritual practice, or language (whether it was heavily accented English, Spanish, Spanglish, Tex-Mex, or a hybrid of all these infused with indigenous dialects). Because of these layered differences, Chicanas not only faced class and raced-based discrimination, but also suffered a continual erasure or muting of their voices, regardless of which group identities and affiliations they attempted to organize around. Even in their own communities, where sexist, paternalist, and machistic attitudes prevailed, their status as women or lesbians threatened their ability to feel fully integrated or ‘at home’ in any one place.

For these reasons border feminism emerged out of a particular social context favorable to the development of what W.E.B. Du Bois called ‘double consciousness’ (1983 [1903]), only in their case it was a tripled, even quadrupled (or in Anzaldúa’s case, as Chicana lesbian woman of color with a disability, quintupled) consciousness.1 Chicana writers’ positionality in multiple cultural and social realities enabled them to shift perspectives more easily and to ground their methodologies on destabilizing practices, that is to say, by persistently ‘finding absences and exclusions and arguing from that standpoint’ (Hurtado 1998: 135).

But Chicanas’ multiple perspectives also meant that their lived-experiences were particularly difficult to theorize, as they often fell outside the dominant cultural constructions of selfhood or normative identity. In this regard, through their landmark anthology, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1981), Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga began taking steps towards a more robust articulation of the unique experiences that arise out of multicultural life, and to develop context-dependent tactics for successful coping in the absence of social, institutional, and cultural inclusion. In its wake, border feminists began not one, but a series of conversations and overlapping political, literary, scholarly, and artistic movements that together constitute Chicana literary, academic, and artistic production since the 1980s. (See Moraga 1983; Anzaldúa 1987; Alarcón 1990; Hurtado 1996; Gracia 1997; Sandoval 2000; Saldivar-Hull 2000; Cantú and Nájera-Ramírez 2002.) Arguably, the most significant publication to arise from this vibrant cultural production has been Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera (1987).

Confronting Contradictions: Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera

According to Anzaldúa, postcolonial life in general, and borderland life in particular, give rise to a unique set of contradictory cultural experiences that result from inhabiting multiple yet conflicting frames of reference. In her most celebrated work, Borderlands /La Frontera (1987) Anzaldúa gives a first-hand account of how being ‘a border woman’ can result in heavy costs,
both to one's sense of self and political agency, as the experience of being caught between multiple cultural norms and standards (or 'worlds') makes it very difficult to effectively address the numerous oppressions that affect one's life.

For Anzaldúa, borderlands exist 'whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory' (1987: preface). However, because she uses this term in two ways that often overlap, they are easily and often confused. On her account, borderlands are concrete, geospatial, cultural, and political formations that define territories, such as the physical border separating the United States and Mexico. But in a wider sense, they are also psychic spaces that develop out of an experience of exclusion or marginality, from being outside a cultural norm or dominant cultural formation. A borderland is, on this alternate use of the term, 'a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary' that is constantly changing due to challenges from both sides of the exclusion (25).

As a psychological state, the experience of borderlands is endemic to what she calls 'los atravesados,' as in those who continually 'cross-over' or transgress the boundaries of proscribed normative identities in culture, like gays and lesbians or the illegal alien. Because this category can apply to such a wide range of social groups and actors across cultures, including those unaffected by the markers of race or ethnicity, it should not be lost that Anzaldúa’s formulation of the borderlands arises out a specific need to theorize the complex experiences of women of color living in the wake of Spanish colonization. Thus, as Anzaldúa describes, 'to live in the Borderlands means you are neither hispana india negra española ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps/ while carrying all five races on your back' – an image of which she is painfully reminded by living at the edge of the U.S.-Mexico border (216). It is through this context-specific lens that she writes Borderlands.

Borderlands is a hybrid text, a 'mosaic' of genres (poetry, history, testimony, creative non-fiction) that, in its polyphonic structure, is also an allusion towards the assumptions of a unified, stable self that Anzaldúa tries to dismantle throughout her writings. Continually shifting in and out of English, Spanish, and Nahuatl (a native Amerindian language), she begins by tracing the history of the southwestern United States and the creation of the Chicano people as an artificial political category rooted in imperialism and social prejudice. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended U.S. occupation of Mexican territories, for example, resulted in more than the loss of over half of Mexico's lands (through the annexation of what is now Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and California); beyond the loss of physical terrains, it left Mexicans and indigenous peoples residing in these areas (now Mexican-Americans, or 'Chicanos') with a government, national language, and culture that was not their own (28-9). Because this is a general outcome whenever political borders are redrawn, Anzaldúa is careful to also chronicle the racial rhetoric and discursive strategies used in the justification of western expansion in the U.S. (28-35).

As Anzaldúa argues, the history of Chicano cultural identity is further complicated by the fact that this political remapping of homelands was not a first, but second conquest. It followed sixteenth-century Spanish colonization of Mesoamerican Aztlan, out of which the new racial mixture of Indian and Spanish blood, the mestizo, or mexicano, was created (27). Because, as earlier suggested, Spanish colonialism introduced new categories of racial purity and hierarchical social systems based on these categories, Chicanos faced the difficult experience of being multicultural in a social context where certain aspects of one's identity were seen as inferior, not only in relation to Spanish, but now also Anglo-American cultural norms and standards:

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like
others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision (100).

This multicultural 'struggle of borders' is especially pernicious for women given that colonization was also 'a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination' (Oyewumi 1997: 124), a type of double oppression that has, historically, been neglected in favor of national-populist constructions of the oppressed subject (as in the collectivity, el pueblo) in anti-colonial movements (Schutte 1993). Gender, in this regard, adds a unique layer of epistemic violence or oppression multicultural subjects such as Anzaldúa face, so that 'alienated from her mother culture, alien in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self' (1987: 42).

Because the dominant Western philosophic and humanist paradigms for understanding self-hood in the modern era have relied on a conception of the self that is unified, stable, coherent, and whose inner workings as a rational mind can be made transparent through introspective reflexivity, subjects whose lived-experience is structured by flux, change, and cultural discontinuity have a sense of selfhood that does not map on to, or 'feel safe' within these dominant frameworks. In fact, the multicultural subject herself feels muted by these frameworks because they do not account for her sense of ruptured subjectivity that comes as a result of being straddled in multiple, yet asymmetrically valued cultural contexts (such as the Anglo, the Mexican, and the Indigenous). It is this constant clash of differently-positioned cultural norms that make lived-experience painful for postcolonial subjects because one is never fully able to engage tacitly or pre-reflectively with one's own worldly context, having to stop frequently to negotiate the various social standards encountered though everyday activities (Ortega 2001).

Moreover, this loss of narrative continuity in the experience of selfhood means that, to maneuver in different cultural contexts (whether successfully or not) one often has to frequently shift states, thus suffering from a form of 'psychic restlessness' (78) or psychological exertion. In this regard, the experience of being multicultural in the sense described here is homologous to border-line states of consciousness, where one is neither neatly situated in one state nor the other, but rather finds oneself 'caught between lost intersticios, the spaces between the different worlds' one is forced to inhabit due to legacies of conquest and imperialism (42).

The problem, from a political perspective, is that this new hybrid, multicultural self has the added burden of reconciling different strands of one’s identity at the same time she is forced to address pressing issues of oppression and social violence, which generally require one to speak, make claims, or advocate for particular interests or on a group's behalf. To put it simply, in contexts of domination, 'we need to voice our needs' (Anzaldúa 1987: 107). This is particularly difficult, as Anzaldúa herself suggests, if one’s voice is constantly under erasure, or if the normative categories in which social and political demands are publicly articulated do not accommodate certain realities or experiences of oppression.

The task, then, is to produce bodies of work that can speak to the complex, multiplicious experiences that emerge from borderland life, forming what Cherrie Moraga aptly calls a 'theory in the flesh' (1981: 23). This theme of finding (or creating new) resources of expression for giving voice to lived-experience runs through all of Anzaldúa’s writings, whether it takes the form of phenomenological descriptions, fictional narratives, children's stories, poetry, drawings, or theoretical constructs:

We need teorías that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world ... Necesitamos teorías that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis,
theories that cross borders, blur boundaries ... And we need practical applications for those theories. We need to de-academize theory and to connect community to the academy.

(Anzaldúa 1990: xxv)

To this end, many of the concepts used to rethink difference and identity in Borderlands have had a profound impact on contemporary feminism and gender studies, as well as in applied contexts of coalition work and grassroots organizing (Saldivar-Hull 2000, 2006; Alarcón 2002; Castillo and Córdoba 2002; González 2003; Barcinski and Kalia 2005; Segura and Zavella 2008; Falcón 2008; Blackwell 2010).

The first of these is the notion of the ‘New Mestiza,’ which, simply put, formally posits a need for new conceptions of gender and race (mestizaje) that can accommodate the unique lived experience of multicultural, postcolonial subjects like Anzaldúa. Thus, in her view, ‘the new mestiza is a liminal subject who lives in the borderlands between cultures, races, languages, and genders’ but is not totally incapacitated or silenced by this complex positioning: ‘in this state of in-between-ness’ the new mestiza can also ‘mediate, translate, negotiate, and navigate these different locations’ (Anzaldúa 2009b: 209). Although the force of this concept seems to be merely descriptive, it rests on the insight that social and political liberation will require the preparatory act of visualizing that liberation, of concretely conceiving the possibilities for transforming ‘living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience’ (Anzaldúa 1987: 73).

This is important because the barriers that stand in the way of such liberation are often significant when considering the historical contexts in which borderland women of color theorize. Anzaldúa, for example, is very aware that in order to decolonize, the postcolonial subject is faced with the daunting task of mobilizing projects of liberation against Anglo-Eurocentric and colonial thinking using the very language which originally constrained one – a problem which has been powerfully articulated by Audre Lorde’s concern of whether ‘the master’s tools’ can ever ‘dismantle the master’s house’ (1981: 98).

One possible remedy, as Anzaldúa sees it, is to try and decolonize the tools and categories by which one comes to understand and describe one’s lived-experience in the first place. Anzaldúa pursues this strategy but with a heavy emphasis on still being able to communicate with the dominant culture in order to voice one’s needs, as well as to build bridges and pathways for solidarity with other marginalized groups and social actors. In this sense, a powerful strategy for postcolonial ‘theorists-of-color’ is to formulate ‘marginal theories that are partially outside and partially inside the Western frame of reference’ (Anzaldúa 1990: xxvi). Anzaldúa contributes to this effort by creatively deploying pre-Colombian, indigenous thought and imagery at the same time that she pursues social and political projects rooted in the liberal, Western-democratic frameworks of inclusion, social justice, freedom, and emancipation.

It is in the service of this liberationary, inclusive, mestiza politics that Anzaldúa formulates several of her most important theories. Alongside the ‘New Mestiza’, these concepts include ‘autohistoria-teoría’, ‘El Mundo Zurdo’, ‘Nepantilism’ (or ‘Nepantla’), ‘mestiza consciousness’, the ‘Cuatlicue state’, ‘La Facultad’, the ‘Coyolxauhqui imperative’, ‘conocimiento’, and, in her later writings, ‘Nos/Otras’, ‘spiritual activism’, and ‘new tribalism’. Although many of these theories are interrelated, they have often been received in ways that do not reflect this linkage (Keating 2006). Thus, without severing them from one another, two of the most influential concepts to come out of Borderlands (along with the ‘New Mestiza’) are ‘nepantla’ and ‘mestiza consciousness’.

The word nepantla is a Nahuatl word signifying a type of process or activity that palaces things between categories, a type of ‘middling’ or ‘thirding’ quality that rests on native
Mesoamerican principles of ambiguity, reciprocity, and change (Maffie 2007). Anzaldúa uses the term ‘mental nepantlismo’ to describe the sense of being caught in between cultures rather than within them (1987: 100). Henceforth, she uses ‘nepantla’ to ‘theorize liminality’ in such a way that she is able ‘to shift from one world to another’ with a bit more ease (2009d: 248). Through ‘nepantla’, old epistemic frameworks are called into question, particularly those that depend on exclusionary dualisms for the construction of identity, and which make thinking about being ‘middled’ or simultaneously situated in multiple cultural realities very difficult.

This is related to what Anzaldúa calls ‘mestiza consciousness’ (1987: 102). In Anzaldúa’s view, ‘uprooting dualistic thinking’ (80) is one of the most important tasks of mestiza consciousness, especially for removing some of the harmful weight of Anglo-Eurocentric thought and social practices on the lives of postcolonial women.

Take the experience of gender, for example. In Ancient Maya Gender Identity and Relations, Karen Bassie-Sweet describes how, ‘in the male/female principle, a human being was considered to be both male and female, with the right side of the body male and the left side female’ – a concept which can be found throughout Mesoamerica and in Uto-Aztecan cultures such as the Hopi Indians (2002: 169; Williams 1986; Allen 1992). This is continuous with anthropological accounts of balanced oppositions and reciprocal dualisms in pre-Columbian thought (Maffie 2007). Now, consider Anzaldúa’s assertion that ‘what we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other,’ either male or female but not both (1987: 41).

As a lesbian woman, when growing up, Anzaldúa suffered deep prejudices and alienation form her own community on account of her sexuality. ‘The people of Hargill, in south Texas,’ she comments, ‘believed that if you were a lesbian, you were a woman for six months of the year and had periods, and for the other six months, you were a man and had a penis’ (Anzaldúa 2009c: 90). It would seem to be the case that, given the apparent continuation and resilience of (at least some aspects of) the male/female principle, so-called ‘half and halfs’ would not be normatively devalued to the extent that Anzaldúa recounts.

But when we recall that European colonialism imported a system of exclusionary logic (which would include the laws of identity and non-contradiction) that was reinforced through, among other things, gendered articles (in Spanish) and subject-predicate grammar, we see that for beings caught ‘between and betwixt’ these categories, the resources of expression necessary to describe and do justice to such experience are no longer at arm’s length.

Instead, due to the logical rules built into the language we use to describe experience, what falls outside these categories or cannot be assimilated through them becomes devalued as Other, as outside the norm. Thus, we see here a vivid example of the internal clashes, the ‘choque’ Anzaldúa talks about when referring to the multiple, but asymmetrical contexts of reference borderland subjects must inhabit, and which often lead to experiences of being ‘an outsider’ at multiple levels – of being ‘always the outside of the outside of the outside’ (Anzaldúa 2009c: 90).

‘Mestiza consciousness’ can, in this respect, be a powerful tool of analysis for thinking through the ‘subject-object dualisms’ that keep the mestiza woman of color ‘a prisoner’ with regard to possibilities for understanding and conceptualizing identity (Anzaldúa 1987: 102).

Finally, the criticisms that have arisen in response to Borderlands center on possible essentializing tendencies of border women’s experiences and Anzaldúa’s idealized renditions of pre-Colombian, indigenous deities (Yarbrough-Bejarano 1994). With regard to the latter, in the absence of a thick background of pre-conquest Amerindian cultural norms and practices to situate native NahuaL concepts in more appropriate, context-dependent ways, Anzaldúa makes strategic use of indigenous images and metaphors; in this way she combats what she sees as marginalizing and oppressive Anglo-European cultural practices, and can be read as an example of what Spivak calls ‘strategic
essentialism’ (Anzaldúa 1987: 205). The resources of expression available to postcolonial women of color like Anzaldúa must therefore be considered in the context of the ‘extraordinary possibilities wiped out by’ colonialism (Césaire 2000: 43).

With regard to the charge of essentializing experience, although Anzaldúa, by her own account, attempts to theorize ‘the unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures’ (2000: 176), she insists that her methodology is grounded in the phenomenological insights of her own concrete, bodily lived-experience (Anzaldúa 2002). In this sense, she limits her discourse by producing vivid descriptions of everyday life and complex experience which other mestizas may (or may not) relate to; in either case, what she offers the mestiza is a new vision for understanding her identity as plural and multiplicitious, while also postulating concrete strategies for building her own pathways for change.

**Future Directions: Conclusion**

At the moment, Anzaldúa’s cultural theory is experiencing a surge in interest across a wide array of fields. These range from well-known areas of influence such as Chicano, feminist, LGBT, and ethnic studies, where her works have been included in over 100 anthologies (Keating 2006), to now (more general) areas such as political science (Burke 1999), anthropology (Behar 1993), social psychology (Ayala and Torre 2009), sociology (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Martinez 2005), philosophy (Ortega 2001, 2008), and theology (Grant 2010), to name only a few. One particular developing topic that is of interest for social scientists in general is the use of Anzaldúa’s theories of multiplicituous subjectivity and multiethnic cultural identity to recast notions of cosmopolitanism and (Will Kymlicka’s notion of) multicultural citizenship (Burke1999, 2004).

As a leading figure in what I have here called **pensamiento fronterizo feminista**, or feminist border thought, Anzaldúa’s influence on contemporary discourses of cultural diversity, citizenship studies, identity politics, and minority studies should grow even further in the coming years, particularly on account of the post-9/11 historical realities facing ethnic groups and immigrants in the U.S. and abroad. As it does, one should keep in mind both the specific context in which her theories emerged as well as the latticed network of Chicana and Latina feminisms that helped initiate, sustain, and disseminate the discourse of ‘borderlands’ that her work (along with Mignolo’s) is now beginning to make mainstream. The danger, it should be noted, is in abstracting the border-crossing experience of the mestiza the point of covering over the differences marked by its specificity and original context of use (Yarbro-Bejarano 1994). If one keeps this in mind, it is possible to see how ‘Anzaldúa’s theories have much to offer social scientists – especially those scholars interested in combining cutting-edge theory with social justice’ (Keating 2006: 7).

As a socio-political theory that articulates the barriers towards inclusiveness and recognition of cultural differences in multiethnic societies, feminist border thought can be seen as an emerging paradigm for understanding and revising disciplinary discussions that center on identity-based issues such as class, race, gender, and ethnicity, as well as for formulating new methods of cultural analysis that can respond to the complex needs of cultural and ethnic minorities in multicultural democracies.

**Notes**

1 Along with suffering from diabetes and life-long chronic pain, Anzaldúa was also born with a rare hormonal imbalance that resulted in ‘precocious menses,’ or the onset of puberty at the age of six. Her first period was at only 3 months of age (Anzaldúa 2000: 34).

2 One way to spot the difference is by noting the case used in the word, whether it is a capital ‘B’ or lower case ‘b’. With very few exceptions, the lower-case use corresponds to the physical state of a geographic borderland, while the other corresponds to the psychic domain.
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