

## **La Mexicana en la Chicana: The Mexican Sources of Gloria Anzaldúa's Inter-American Philosophy**

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### **English Abstract**

This article examines Gloria Anzaldúa's critical appropriation of Mexican philosophical sources, especially in the writing of *Borderlands/La Frontera*. We argue that Anzaldúa effectively contributed to *la filosofía de lo mexicano* by developing an Inter-American Philosophy of Mexicanness. More specifically, we recover "La Mexicana en la Chicana" by paying careful attention to Anzaldúa's Mexican sources, both those she explicitly cites and those we have discovered while conducting archival research using the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. The eight Mexican philosophical sources we examine and discuss here are: José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), Miguel León-Portilla (1926-2019), Juana Armada Alegría (1938- ), Octavio Paz (1914-1998), Samuel Ramos (1897-1959), Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974), Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz (1648-1695), and Jorge Carrión (1913-2005).

### **Resumen en español**

Este artículo examina la apropiación crítica de Gloria Anzaldúa de las fuentes filosóficas mexicanas, especialmente en la escritura de *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Demostramos cómo Anzaldúa desarrolló una filosofía interamericana de la mexicanidad, contribuyendo efectivamente a *la filosofía de lo mexicano*. Recuperamos "La mexicana en la chicana" con atención a las fuentes mexicanas de Anzaldúa, tanto a las que ella cita explícitamente como a las que descubrimos al realizar una investigación de archivo en los Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers en el Benson Latin American Collection de la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Texas en Austin. Las ocho fuentes filosóficas mexicanas que investigamos y discutimos aquí son: José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), Miguel León-Portilla (1926-2019), Juana Armada Alegría (1938- ), Octavio Paz (1914-1998), Samuel Ramos (1897-1959), Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974), Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz (1648-1695), y Jorge Carrión (1913-2005).

### **Resumo em português**

Este artigo examina a apropriação crítica de Gloria Anzaldúa das fontes filosóficas mexicanas, especialmente nos escritos de *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Demonstramos como Anzaldúa desenvolveu uma filosofia interamericana do mexicanidade, contribuindo efetivamente para a *filosofia do mexicano*. Recuperamos "La mexicana en

la chicana" com atenção às fontes mexicanas de Anzaldúa, tanto as que ela cita explicitamente quanto as que descobrimos ao conduzir pesquisas de arquivo em Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, Biblioteca da Universidade do Texas em Austin. As oito fontes filosóficas mexicanas que investigamos e discutimos aqui são: José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), Miguel León-Portilla (1926-2019), Juana Armanda Alegría (1938-), Octavio Paz (1914-1998), Samuel Ramos (1897) -1959), Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974), Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz (1648-1695) e Jorge Carrión (1913-2005).

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Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) once envisioned participating in a plenary panel to be titled "La Mexicana en la Chicana" (Box 122, Folder 11)[1] for the 1991 annual meeting of the National Association of Chicano Studies (NACS), the first to be hosted in Mexico, in Hermosillo, Sonora. The theme of the conference was "Los Dos Méxicos," which resonated with Anzaldúa's dedication of *Borderlands/La Frontera* "a todos mexicanos on both sides of the border" (Anzaldúa 2012, front matter). Although Anzaldúa did not end up participating in this conference, she traveled to Mexico City the following year to co-teach a seven-day graduate seminar on "La Identidad Estadounidense" at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). The course was co-sponsored by La Facultad de Filosofía y Letras and El Centro de Investigaciones Sobre Estados Unidos de América, and the readings included Chapter 7 of *Borderlands/La Frontera: "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness"* (Box 171, Folder 9).[2] As Anzaldúa's invitation to teach this graduate course suggests, the importance of her scholarly contributions to the fields of both American Studies and Chicana Studies are fairly well-recognized. Indeed, she has been honored with Lifetime Achievement Awards from both the American Studies Association (2001) and NACCS (2005). Unfortunately, Anzaldúa's contributions to Philosophy are not as well recognized, although this is slowly changing with more recent scholarship treating Anzaldúa philosophically (Martinez 2014; Pitts 2016; Paccacerqua 2016; Ortega 2016; Newton 2017; Tirres 2019; Pitts, Ortega, and Medina 2019; Alessandri 2019; Alessandri and Stehn 2020; Stehn 2020). In any case, the fact that scholars have understandably focused on Anzaldúa's relevance for understanding a variety of U.S.-American identities—e.g., Chicana, women of color, queer, etc.—has obscured the fact that Anzaldúa also drew from and contributed to Mexican Philosophy, especially *la filosofía de lo mexicano* that flourished in mid-20th century Mexico.[3]

Our paper examines Anzaldúa's critical appropriation of Mexican philosophical sources, especially in the writing of *Borderlands/La Frontera*. We demonstrate how Anzaldúa developed an Inter-American Philosophy of Mexicanness, effectively contributing to what has been recently characterized as the "multi-generational project to pursue philosophy *from* and *about* Mexican circumstances" (Vargas 2018). More specifically, we recover "La Mexicana en la Chicana" by paying careful attention to Anzaldúa's Mexican sources, both those she explicitly cites and those we have

discovered while conducting archival research using the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers housed in the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin.[4] In the three sections that follow we: 1) define the terms *Mexican* and *philosophy* pragmatically for our purposes in conversation with Anzaldúa's work, 2) examine the Mexican philosophical sources that Anzaldúa cites in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and 3) present the other major Mexican philosophical influences on Anzaldúa that we have found in her archive. The eight Mexican philosophical sources we discuss are: José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), Miguel León-Portilla (1926-2019), Juana Armanda Alegría (1938- ), Octavio Paz (1914-1998), Samuel Ramos (1897-1959), Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974), Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz (1648-1695), and Jorge Carrión (1913-2005).

## 1. Defining Mexican Philosophy Pragmatically

In presenting Anzaldúa as a Mexican Philosopher, we face the interrelated problems of defining *Mexican* and defining *philosopher*. The distinctions we make are pragmatic and stipulative rather than metaphysical. In other words, they are calibrated to our present aims of demonstrating Anzaldúa's study of and contributions to the Mexican philosophical tradition. We are not trying to pick out the unchanging essences in the world that are *Mexican* or making transhistorical claims about what counts as *philosophy*. Rather, by calling something "Mexican" or "philosophical" we want to draw scholarly attention to unrecognized, understudied, and/or dismissed features of Anzaldúa's work.

In both her life and her work, Anzaldúa wrestled with labels for herself and others, and as we know from both the testimonies of her friends and from spending time in her archive, she was a compulsive editor and rewriter. The archival materials associated with the writing of *Borderlands/La Frontera* from 1983 to 1987 fill seven boxes containing 112 folders. In an early draft, Anzaldúa considered dedicating the book to "all Chicanos and Mexicanos on both sides of the border" but also played with the split term "Chicano/Mexicano" (Box 31, Folder 13). For the final published version she deleted *Chicanos* and code-switched to "*a todos mexicanos* on both sides of the border," which suggests that for her own pragmatic purposes at the time, Anzaldúa was primarily interested in bridging the varieties of Mexican identity. In fact, another draft was "dedicated to all Mejicanos on both sides of the border no matter what they call themselves" (Box 32, Folder 7). This further suggests two things: 1) Anzaldúa recognized that what many people typically conceive as a clear border between Chicano vs. Mexicano or Mexican American vs. Mexican is in fact vague and indeterminate, just as she describes when theorizing the borderlands that defy the physical boundaries of Mexico and the United States; 2) Anzaldúa recognized that classifying someone as Mexican rather than Chicano or Chicano rather than Mexican American—to take just two examples—risks a certain amount of violence against their self-conception. To call someone Chicano is, at least typically, to suggest that they are *not* Mexican, at least, not in the way that a Mexican from the nation of Mexico who still

lives in the nation of Mexico is Mexican. To improve the way we deal with these sorts of “ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, or national classifications,” Anzaldúa painstakingly developed a pluralistic logic of inclusion, which she expressed near the end of her life as follows: “Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include—what I call the new tribalism” (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 3).

As philosophers, our own scholarly view of Mexico and Mexican identity has been deeply shaped by living and teaching for a decade at Anzaldúa's undergraduate alma mater in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, where roughly 90% of the population is Hispanic and Spanish is the dominant language spoken in the majority of homes. In other words, we live in what another groundbreaking scholar from the Rio Grande Valley, Américo Paredes, conceptualized as “Greater Mexico.” Like Anzaldúa, Paredes was drawn to philosophy and had to invent the scholarly concepts that would make sense of his experiences and those of his community. He coined the term “Greater Mexico” to refer to “all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican descent—not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well—in a cultural rather than a political sense” (Paredes 1976, xiv). Nevertheless, in order to avoid contention, the sources of Anzaldúa's philosophy that we identify and discuss below are Mexican in a much narrower sense. They were born in the nation of Mexico, lived there for most or all of their lives, and philosophized primarily or exclusively in Spanish or Nahuatl—all factors that contribute to why they have not received as much scholarly attention in the United States.

As difficult as it is to define and delimit who or what counts as Mexican, it is even more contentious to define and delimit who counts as a philosopher or what counts as philosophical. From Anzaldúa's published works and unpublished notes in the archive, we know that she wanted to be considered a philosopher but felt excluded from what she called the “most closed of male sanctums: philosophy” (Box 234, Folder 14). Anzaldúa reports that she was interested in philosophy beginning in elementary school where she carried around books by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Reuman and Anzaldúa 2000, 31), and she took a number of philosophy courses in college and grad school (scholars of classical U.S.-American Philosophy might be especially interested to read a final paper she wrote in 1973 on John Dewey's Aesthetics for PHIL 360: Art and Reality located in Box 224, Folder 10). Long before she died, Anzaldúa imagined her own obituary where she called herself “a great thinker, *philosopher*, writer and humanitarian” (Box 105, Folder 3; italics added), and toward the end of her life she labeled herself a “feministvisionaryspiritualactivistpoet-*philosopher* fiction writer” (Anzaldúa 2009, 3; italics added). In another note, she asked herself “what makes a philosopher?” and answered “scholarly self-study” (Box 102, Folder 5), hearkening back to Socrates and the Ancient Delphic commandment *gnothi seauton* or “know thyself.” In the sections that follow we show how Anzaldúa took up the philosophical project of scholarly self-study by critically appropriating Mexican sources who had been asking “*What does it mean to be Mexican?*” for generations.

## 2. Explicitly Cited Mexican Philosophical Sources in *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Anzaldúa quotes and footnotes many Mexican sources in *Borderlands/La Frontera*: the Norteño band Los Tigres del Norte (23); the musicologist Vicente T. Mendoza (28); Ismael Rodríguez, the director of *Nosotros los Pobres*, which Anzaldúa describes as “the first Mexican film that was truly Mexican” (32); the historian, anthropologist, and philosopher Miguel León-Portilla (91, 93); and the philosopher and politician Jose Vasconcelos (99). From this list, only Vasconcelos is consistently recognized as a Mexican philosopher, but Miguel León-Portilla's dissertation, “La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes” earned him a doctorate from the UNAM's Facultad de Filosofía y Letras in 1956. Published as a book by the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano in the same year, León-Portilla's groundbreaking work established the academic field of Nahuatl or Aztec Philosophy. His previous degree from Loyola University in Los Angeles, California, was an M.A. in Philosophy earned in 1951 with a thesis on the French philosopher Henri Bergson. These facts unequivocally place León-Portilla in the discipline of philosophy, but the fact that he dedicated his career to Nahuatl Philosophy led to being categorized most frequently as a historian or an anthropologist. Reflecting on the Eurocentric disciplinary labels applied to León-Portilla's work suggests that one of the many reasons that Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* is not well-recognized as philosophy may be that it works with Nahuatl names, symbols, and concepts, effectively obscuring the philosophical nature of her project given the prejudice against the very possibility of indigenous philosophy, or “philosophy without Europe” (Maffie 2019, 24).

In a similar way, Anzaldúa is most frequently categorized as a Chicana or Mexican American even though she could also very comfortably respond to the question “¿Qué eres?” with “soy mexicana” (Anzaldúa 2012, 84). The Mexicanness of her philosophical project is also harder for most North American scholars to recognize because they are less likely to know the work of the philosophers she cited like Vasconcelos and León-Portilla. One of Anzaldúa's most important philosophical innovations and contributions to *la filosofía de lo mexicano* was to bridge the histories and philosophies of three different types of Mexicans[5] in order to develop what the subtitle of *Borderlands/La Frontera* calls *The New Mestiza*: 1) the indigenous, Nahuatl-speaking Mexicans or Mexica whose philosophical contributions were recognized by León-Portilla's scholarship, 2) the mestizo, Spanish-speaking Mexicans whose philosophical contributions grew out of the educational system and philosophical milieu established largely by Jose Vasconcelos, and 3) the chicana, or those we might call Chicana Mexican, who often speak Spanish and English and Spanglish, and whose identities are explored and rewritten through Anzaldúa's philosophy.

Consider how the opening chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera* introduces and connects these Mexican identities and philosophies in a way that climaxes in the final chapter on mestiza consciousness. The chapter begins with two epigraphs. One establishes the existence of “El otro México” (23) by way of song lyrics about Mexicans

who inhabit the Southwestern portion of the United States that used to be (and in a very real sense still is) Mexico. These lyrics by Los Tigres del Norte suggest that the Mexicans who live in the United States continue being Mexican, or as Anzaldúa explains in Chapter 5: “We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul” (84). Just as the first epigraph establishes the Mexicanness of Mexicans on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, the second epigraph by Native American Studies scholar Jack Forbes establishes the indigeneity of Chicanos, calling them the *Aztecas del norte* who “compose the largest single tribe or nation of Anishinabeg (Indians) found in the United States today” (2). This also gets further explained in Chapter 5, where Anzaldúa writes that Mexican Americans tend to “forget our predominant Indian genes” (84) and “hardly ever own our Black ancestry” (85).

In a similar way, our research has led us to conclude that scholars have mostly missed Anzaldúa's Mexican philosophical ancestry. Chapter by chapter, Anzaldúa weaves together the histories, movements, and identities of Mexicans, Indians, and Americans of many cultures while adding her own mestiza voice to the Philosophy of Mexicanness. The process culminates in what Anzaldúa's calls her own “take off” on Vasconcelos' idea of *la raza cósmica*. Chapter 7 develops *La conciencia de la mestiza*, which in its productive Spanish ambiguity is always both a consciousness and a conscience. Modifying the grammatical gender of the new motto that Vasconcelos devised for the UNAM in 1920, Anzaldúa opens with the words, “*Por la mujer de mi raza hablará el espíritu*” (99). By interpreting the heart of Vasconcelos' vision as one of inclusivity and pivoting towards her own queer identity, the chapter effectively reinterprets the mission of *la raza cósmica* as follows: “We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods. Our role is to link people with each other” (106). It is therefore both ironic and tragic that Anzaldúa's work has not been consistently linked with the history of Mexican Philosophy. Our essay aims to provide a point of departure for organically connecting Anzaldúa's work to this larger philosophical tradition.

### 3. Mexican Philosophical Sources Not Cited in *Borderlands/La Frontera*

The foregoing sketch should make plausible our reading of Anzaldúa as a Mexican Philosopher whose work contributes to *la filosofía de lo mexicano*, but our case is bolstered by archival research. We have examined: 1) many of Anzaldúa's notes and papers from as far back as her undergraduate education, 2) the scholarly sources that she taught, retaught, and tested her students on when she taught Ethnic Studies and American Studies courses like “ETS 318: La Mujer Chicana,” “AMS 371: The Chicana in America,” or “ETS 318: Chicanos and Their Culture” while enrolled as a doctoral student at UT Austin in the late 1970s; and 3) the books pertaining to Mexican Philosophy that Anzaldúa owned, underlined, highlighted, and wrote marginalia in. The remainder of our paper sketches the archival evidence of the philosophical influence of eight Mexicans on Anzaldúa: José Vasconcelos, Miguel León-Portilla, Juana Armanda Alegría, Octavio

Paz, Samuel Ramos, Rosario Castellanos, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Jorge Carrion. The order does not reflect any kind of a ranking but rather our attempt to weave them together in a brief but coherent narrative.

**i. José Vasconcelos (1882-1959)**

The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers contain five pages of handwritten notes Anzaldúa took (Box 165, Folder 25) while reading the 1961 edition of *La raza cósmica* that appears in a footnote in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (119). This means that unlike other leaders of *el movimiento chicano* who seem to have merely borrowed phrases from Vasconcelos because they were in the air (Stavans 2011, 43), Anzaldúa carefully read Vasconcelos' philosophy in order to critically re-work it. Anzaldúa also required students in her Summer 1977 "Chicanos and their Culture" course (Box 229, Folder 1) to read Vasconcelos' "The Race Problem in Latin America," which unlike *La raza cósmica* was available in English because Vasconcelos delivered it as a lecture at the University of Chicago (Vasconcelos 1926). Anzaldúa's bulleted recap of Vasconcelos' work indicates that the mission of *la raza cósmica* is "formar un nuevo tipo humano," the type that *Borderlands/La Frontera* would later present transfigured as *The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa's notes also suggest that she was particularly struck by the way that Vasconcelos "posited that a mixture of races does not create inferiority" and the fact that *mestizaje* happened much more quickly in Latin America (Box 165, Folder 25). One of her bullets simply records Vasconcelos' phrase "en pocas centurias," which she later echoed in *Borderlands/La Frontera*: "En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza" (102).

**ii. Miguel León-Portilla (1926-2019)**

Anzaldúa's personal library housed in the archive contains more than 5,000 books but none by Vasconcelos. In contrast, it contains eight different books by León-Portilla, at least three of which she almost certainly consulted to write *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which contains two footnotes on page 119 that reference *Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares* (Book Box 27).[6] While not cited in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa highlighted and wrote marginal notes throughout her copy of *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (Book Box 65) shortly before beginning work on *Borderlands/La Frontera*. The book is a translation of the work that earned León-Portilla his Ph.D. in Philosophy, *La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes*, but the English translation of the title denies León-Portilla's most fundamental thesis, namely, that there is such a thing as Nahuatl *philosophy* that can be reconstructed using *nahuatl* sources.[7] Despite the misleading translation of the title, the heart of León-Portilla's work was not lost on Anzaldúa, who highlighted almost every reference to "philosophy" or "philosopher" in the book. Like León-Portilla, she rejected any inseparable divide between poetry and philosophy, highlighting this question and answer from the introduction:

Had that restlessness of spirit, stemming from a sense of wonder and doubt, manifested itself in the rational inquiry into the nature of things which we call philosophy? ... The poet is a commentator on life and existence; in his immediate and imaginative way, he is a philosopher. Among the Nahuas, then, as among the Greeks, it was the lyric poets who first became aware of and enunciated the great problems of human existence. (León-Portilla 1963, xxi)

Anzaldúa's interest in this quote sheds new light on the genesis of *Borderlands/La Frontera* and adds depth to her later interview explanation that it was originally conceived as "a book of poetry, mostly written to Chicanos looking for some symbols of what it meant to be Mexican" (Hernandez and Anzaldúa 1995, 13). But since Anzaldúa felt like the poems would make the most sense if placed into a historical and cultural context she "added the introduction and it kept growing until it became seven chapters, half of the book" (Hernandez and Anzaldúa 1995, 13). In other words, Anzaldúa's chronological process of writing *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a poet-philosopher proceeded from poetry to philosophy, just like the Aztec *filósofos-poetas* according to León-Portilla. Recovering the influence of León-Portilla on Anzaldúa's work also helps us understand the way Anzaldúa conceived of its pedagogical function, which she further theorized in *Making Face, Making Soul: Hacienda Caras* (1990), whose title references León-Portilla's description of the work of the Nahua sage, *filósofo*, or *tlalmatini* ["one who knows things"] who teaches people "to have and develop in themselves a face" (León-Portilla 1963, 24).[8]

Here's another passage from *Aztec Thought and Culture* that Anzaldúa highlighted: "The wise man appears as a guide, a person who points out the path to others... To [him] belonged the black and red ink—writing and wisdom" (220). Chapter 6 of *Borderlands/La Frontera* is titled "*Tlilli, Tlapalli*: The Path of the Red and Black Ink" but in light of Anzaldúa's careful reading of León-Portilla, she could have also titled the chapter "Ethno-Poetics: The Path of Philosophy." Anzaldúa used "story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else" (*Borderlands* 88). She connected the stories of three different kinds of Mexicans—los antiguos, los mestizos, y las chicanas—while simultaneously "creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahautl concept" (95). Anzaldúa believed that she needed not just prose but poetry to succeed at these interrelated tasks, for as she highlighted in her copy of León-Portilla's book, "the only truth on earth' was poetry—'song and flowers'" (1963, 75).

### **iii. Juana Armanda Alegría (1938- )**

Anzaldúa assigned Juana Armanda Alegría's *Psicología de las Mexicanas* (1975) to her "La Mujer Chicana" class in 1977 (Box 227, Folder 7). There is no copy of the book in the archive, but we speculate that, as in the case of Vasconcelos' *La raza cósmica*, Anzaldúa may have used a library copy or a photocopy as the book would have been very difficult or impossible for her to purchase in the United States. The use



of Alegría's book for the course seems to have been Anzaldúa's own innovation because it is not mentioned on the Fall 1976 syllabus or the reading list of Inés Hernández Tovar from whom Anzaldúa took the course.[9] For the final exam, Anzaldúa asked questions about all three parts of Alegría's book, although the students who could not read Spanish were questioned on Shulasmith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). Before Anzaldúa taught the course, it already contained a unit on Chicana Psychology that drew upon the work of Chicana feminists like Anna Nieto-Gomez and Martha P. Cotera, so Anzaldúa must have believed that Alegría's book had something important to add. This supports our thesis about the scholarly importance of paying more attention to Anzaldúa's Mexican sources, but it also serves as a corrective for standard histories of Mexican Philosophy that tend to exclude the work of women by unfairly policing the boundaries of philosophy (del Río 2018). For example Samuel Ramos' *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*, a work in philosophical psychology, is widely considered to be the foundational text that officially launched *la filosofía de lo mexicano* (Schmidt 1978), whereas Alegría's philosophical psychology is ignored, forgotten, or considered at best to be *merely* feminism.

What Anzaldúa seems to have found most important in *Psicología de las Mexicanas* is the way that it bridged the more general problems of contemporary sexism (Part I) with a specific and revisionist history of *la mujer mexicana* going all the way back to the Aztecs and running through various Mexican feminine archetypes including Coatlicue, La Malinche, La Virgen de Guadalupe, Sor Juana, La Llorona, and La Adelita (Part II) in order to face the present situation (Part III). By identifying the "formas estereotipadas de la conducta femenina en nuestro país" Alegría sought to rebel against them and achieve a kind of liberation (144). Although *Borderlands/La Frontera* is more ambitious in terms of genre, language, scope, and subject matter, its synthetic historical structure and reworking of Mexican feminine archetypes resembles Alegría's book. Indeed, Anzaldúa could have written these words from Alegría's Introduction: "I try to somehow tie everything together from the things that I have experienced myself as a woman and through other women" (1975, 3; translation ours). They also had similar philosophical aims: what Alegría terms *concientización*, i.e., "becoming conscious of... our circumstances as human beings" (13), Anzaldúa further developed as the path that leads toward *la conciencia de la mestiza*.

#### **iv. Octavio Paz (1914-1998)**

Many of the long block quotes in *Psicología de las Mexicanas* establish further organic connections with other important sources of Mexican Philosophy that clearly influenced Anzaldúa. For example, Alegría quotes extensively from Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*, an English translation of which Anzaldúa acquired in May 1977 (Book Box 3), just as she was finishing teaching "La Mujer Chicana." Anzaldúa heavily underlined Paz's chapter "The Pachuco and Other Extremes." She was clearly fascinated by what Paz called the *pachuco's* "hybrid language and behavior" (1961, 18) as well as Paz's claim that "The pachuco does not want to become a Mexican again; at

the same time he does not want to blend into the life of North America" (14).[10] The year before, in June 1976, Anzaldúa had acquired Paz's *The Other Mexico: Critique of The Pyramid* (Book Box 69), a further development of the lecture he delivered at the University of Texas at Austin in 1969 where he reflected on the student demonstrations and revolutions that were happening throughout the world, including Mexico and the United States. Paz's existentialist claim that "The Mexican is not an essence but a history" (1972, vii) resonates with Anzaldúa's approach in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, as does his claim that his work on Mexican-ness was not "a search for our supposed being" but rather "a vision and, simultaneously, a revision" of what it means to be Mexican (vii). Anzaldúa's archive contains seventeen different books by Paz, and we cannot further examine their relation to her work here, but it is worth mentioning that Anzaldúa's subtitle for Chapter 1: "El otro México" not only quotes the Los Tigres del Norte lyric that serves as the first epigraph but also invokes the title of Paz's book, simultaneously situating her philosophical analysis of Mexican being in the borderlands North of the Rio Bravo and South of the Rio Grande.

#### v. **Samuel Ramos (1897-1959)**

Another work that Alegría quotes frequently is Samuel Ramos' *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934), which is widely recognized as a foundational text for *la filosofía de lo mexicano* (Schmidt 1978). Anzaldúa owned the English translation, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (1972), dating her acquisition "mayo 77, tejas Aztlán" (Book Box 67). This book was required reading for Anzaldúa's Ph.D. coursework, and when she taught "Chicanos and Their Culture" during Summer 1977 she included exam questions about Ramos' chapter "Psychoanalysis of the Mexican," Paz's "The Sons of La Malinche," and Vasconcelos' "The Race Problem in Latin America," alongside questions on Armando Rendón's *Chicano Manifesto* (Box 228, Folder 7). These juxtapositions in Anzaldúa's course construction clearly demonstrate that she was thinking about contemporary questions of Chicano/a identity in relation to the longer tradition of *la filosofía de lo mexicano*. Anzaldúa may have also revisited Ramos' book while writing *Borderlands/La Frontera* since a list she wrote in June 1985 titled "Mexican Pensadores" contains, in order: Antonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz, Edmundo O'Gorman, Leopoldo Zea, and José Gaos (Box 32, Folder 10). Below this list, she wrote: "Psychology of the Mexicano/Chicano" and under that: "El Perfil del Hombre y la cultura en Mexico / 1934 - Samuel Ramos." She also wrote a few bulleted themes, including "fear of inferiority," "self-denigration, self-disparagement," "supposed inferiority of native culture," and "Attitude of a nation which has its origins in a highly developed autochthonous civilization that was later reduced to colonial status which the Chicano experienced twice" (Box 32, Folder 10).

Anzaldúa's highlighting in the English translation of Ramos' book stops in the second chapter, which suggests that it was not the first copy she read from since the final exam she gave for "Chicanos and Their Culture" in 1977 focused on the third chapter. The highlights are thus most likely from the time period when she was writing

*Borderlands/La Frontera*, as the June 1985 “Mexican Pensadores” note suggests. Ramos’ basic hypothesis, which Anzaldúa highlighted, was that “some expressions of Mexican character are ways of compensating for an unconscious sense of inferiority” with the result that “the Mexican undervalues himself, committing in this way an injustice to his person” (1972, 9). Like Ramos, Anzaldúa sought to “eliminate the false premises of [Mexicans’] inferiority complex” (Ramos 1972, viii). Indeed, the passage where Anzaldúa discusses the inferiority complex of the Chicana reflects the basic structure of Ramos’ diagnosis:

No, it isn’t enough that she is female—a second-class member of a conquered people who are taught to believe that they are **inferior** because they have indigenous blood, believe in the supernatural, and speak a deficient language. Now she beats herself over the head for her ‘inactivity,’ a stage that is as necessary as breathing. But that means being Mexican. All her life she’s been told that Mexicans are lazy. She has had to work twice as hard as others to meet the standards of the dominant culture which have, in part, become her standards. (Anzaldúa 2012, 70-71; bold added)

According to Ramos, the way beyond the inferiority complex that Anzaldúa represents here is the development of new standards that humanize what the dominant culture has rendered subhuman, which is precisely what Anzaldúa does by developing la *conciencia de la mestiza* by paying far more critical attention to the roles of gender, language, sexuality, and spirituality.[11]

#### vi. **Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974)**

The centrality of gender, sexuality, and language in Anzaldúa’s work bring us to Rosario Castellanos and Sor Juana. Anzaldúa almost certainly saw both poet-philosophers as kindred spirits, but it is unlikely that she would have read Castellanos’ M.A. thesis in Philosophy at the UNAM, *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950), since it was largely unknown even by specialists until it was re-published after Anzaldúa’s death (Castellanos 2005). Castellanos’ thesis directly confronted the trilemma described by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* that had not changed much since Sor Juana confronted it three centuries earlier: “For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother” (Anzaldúa 2012, 39). Just as Castellanos’ *Sobre cultura femenina* defied the stereotype that women are intellectually inferior, her subsequent work as a poet, literary critic, novelist, neoindigenist, and philosopher confronted the difficult historical fact that the dominant culture has made it almost impossible for women to be both mothers and creative beings.

Although Anzaldúa read at least some of Castellanos’ poetry before publishing *Borderlands/La Frontera*,[12] the bulk of Castellanos’ influence seems to have come later. In a work plan titled “Mexican Feminist Theory and Autobiography” that Anzaldúa dated November 9, 1989, she wrote: “Read Rosario Castellanos—novels, theory-

criticism, poetry, short stories and critical texts on her work” (Box 91, Folder 6). Anzaldúa purchased *The Selected Poems of Rosario Castellanos* (Castellanos 1988) in January 1989 (Book Box 81), followed by a Spanish collection of her poems (Castellanos 1985) in December of 1989 (Book Box 103). At page 208 of this collection, *Poesía no eres tú*, we found a bookmark where Anzaldúa had written “Intro to Caras 1st stanza autohistoria 2nd stage self-writing.”[13] This note clearly demonstrates that Anzaldúa was drawn to Castellanos’ poetic practices of self-writing and philosophical reflections on self-making, which inspired Anzaldúa’s *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras* (1990). Anzaldúa also worked on an essay titled “Self-representation and Identity” in 1990 that references Castellanos on page 14 (Box 95, Folder 14). We have not had the opportunity to trace out Castellanos’ influence on Anzaldúa’s later work more carefully, but the archive contains twelve books by Castellanos.

### **vii. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695)**

Alegría discusses Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz at length in *Psicología de las Mexicanas*, as does Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, which Anzaldúa acquired in 1977 (Book Box 3). In fact, page 111 is dog-eared with “Sor Juana” written on the dog-ear. Anzaldúa highlighted much of Paz’s discussion of Sor Juana, and the reference in a footnote to Sor Juana’s most famous philosophical letter, “Reply to Sor Filotea” is circled. This passage is underlined: “We can sense the melancholy of a spirit who never succeeded in forgiving herself for her boldness and her condition as a woman” (Paz 1961, 115). In Anzaldúa’s copy of Paz’s *One Earth, Four or Five Worlds: Reflections on Contemporary History*, which she acquired in 1987 (Book Box 3), she highlighted Paz’s claim that Sor Juana was “not only a great poet but also the intellectual conscience of her society” (Paz 1986, 139). Anzaldúa’s friend Randy Connor gave her a copy of Octavio Paz’s book *Sor Juana: Or, the Traps of Faith* (1988) in 1988 (Book Box 2). Anzaldúa also acquired Margaret Sayers Peden’s *A Woman of Genius: The Intellectual Autobiography of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz* (1987) on October 12, 1988 (Book Box 108). Her copy of *A Sor Juana Anthology* (1988) is dated “24 agosto ‘90 Santa Cruz” (Book Box 65). We have not had the time to examine these books for notes or highlighting, nor could we establish the date of a note card by Anzaldúa that names Sor Juana as a philosopher and intellectual ancestor, but it reads: “Review: Intellectual Forerunners. What imploded in my consciousness: the fact that this woman (and other lesbian thinkers) are an actuality, that they dared enter the most closet closed [sic?] of male sanctums—philosophy. In my own racial background Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, the first feminist of this hemisphere...” (Box 234, Folder 14).

### **viii. Jorge Carrion (1913-2005)**

Alegría quoted frequently from Jorge Carrion’s *Mito y magia del mexicano* (1952), and Anzaldúa owned a photocopy of the book (Box 187, Folder 6). Although this photocopy contains no underlines, Anzaldúa wrote twelve handwritten pages of notes

about the book in August 1983 (Box 165, Folder 35) just before she began work on *Borderlands/La Frontera*. These notes add depth to our understanding of the creative process by which Anzaldúa bridged the classic *filosofía de lo mexicano* written by figures like Vasconcelos and Ramos—who tended to at most hollowly affirm the contributions of Mexico's indigenous people in the making of the Mexican—with León-Portilla's innovative scholarly work establishing Nahuatl Philosophy. Published as part of a series called "Ensayos sobre el Mexicano," Carrion's book opens with reflections on the *choque* between the Spanish and Indian that created what the first chapter of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* later described as "*una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood)" (Anzaldúa 2012, 27). Carrion's work brings these two people groups and cultures closer together by examining the way that Mexicans have relied on a kind of mythical and magical thinking and practice alongside a primitive science in their attempts to interpret and influence reality, from the time of the first *choque* up to the present day *choque* when the souls of Mexicans are colliding with the technical culture of the United States.

Just as Carrion presented the effects of these *choques* on the Mexican psyche and identity in Mexico, Anzaldúa's work explores their effects on the Mexican psyche and identity in the United States. In fact, Anzaldúa uses the exact same word in Spanish, *choque*, and references the same split between the spiritual world and technical world in describing the cultural collision leading towards the creation of *La consciencia de la mestiza*: "*El choque de un alma atrapado entre el mundo de espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada*. 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" (Anzaldúa 2012, 100). And while Anzaldúa takes up the Aztec tradition in a very different way from Carrion by engaging in acts of feminist revision and a careful reading of León-Portilla's work, she still develops something akin to what Carrion's Chapter 3 names the "Psychological Route of Quetzalcoatl" in *Borderlands/La Frontera* Chapter 4: "*La Herencia de Coatlicue / The Coatlicue State*." In response to another tremendous *choque*—the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—Anzaldúa wrote what would become the final essay published during her lifetime: "Let us be the healing of the wound: The Coyolxauhqui imperative—*la sombra y el sueño*" (Anzaldúa 2009). Anzaldúa's life and work manifest a pervasive dedication to healing deep *heridas* and achieving psychological integration by confronting the *choques* of modernity, from colonization to terrorism.

#### 4. Conclusion, Limitations, and Further Research

On Anzaldúa's first page of notes on Carrión written in Spanish and titled "Mexican Psychology," we once again see evidence of her belief that poetry could play a special role in healing the Mexican's wounds: "The poets have a powerful candle for exploring in themselves what is not an impediment but rather a [productive] ambivalence in their magical and logical character. The best works grow out of these

antitheses" (Box 165, Folder 125; translation ours). Our research has grown out of our conviction that Anzaldúa created many such works—at once magical and logical, philosophical and poetic—and we hope that our article has succeeded in further illuminating them as contributions to Inter-American Philosophy that drew substantially upon Mexican sources to further develop *la filosofía de lo mexicano* or the Philosophy of Mexicanness. Anzaldúa's conception of her calling as a poet-philosopher has far more connection and resonance with the long history of Mexican philosophy than scholars have recognized, from the way the Nahua *filósofo-poetas* are portrayed in León-Portilla's study, to Sor Juana's love of science *and* poetry, to Vasconcelos' belief that the coming society of *la raza cósmica* should be organized around aesthetic principals.

The scholarly downside to the fact that Anzaldúa was such a wide-ranging thinker is that we simply cannot achieve an exhaustive understanding of her influences or ideas. Describing her creative process, Anzaldúa perspicaciously wrote: "After all, writing is not only the physical act of drafting and revising. It also involves feeding the muse books on mythology and Aztec nagualismo (shamanism), reading voraciously in all disciplines, and taking notes" (Anzaldúa 2015b, 102). Only scholars who have spent time in Anzaldúa's archive can fully appreciate just how voraciously she read across disciplines and just how meticulous she was as a writer. We have attempted to achieve a reasonably comprehensive understanding of the Mexican sources of Anzaldúa's philosophy, but we do know at least two specific ways in which our paper is inadequate and thus calls for further research and commentary. First, Anzaldúa was more heavily influenced by Mexican women writers—typically classified as poets and novelists and feminists rather than as philosophers (del Río 2018)—than we have had time to investigate. For example, the archive contains many hours of audio recordings of Anzaldúa talking to students and faculty about "Contemporary Mexican Women Writers" (Box 155, Folders 32-35; Box 156, Folders 1-9), but we only had time to listen to snippets and there are still far more written materials to examine. Second, although we live and work in "Greater Mexico" (Paredes 1976) and our understanding of Mexican Philosophy is conversant with much of the excellent scholarship from Mexico, our vantage point is nevertheless from the United States, and this not only shapes but also limits what we have been able to see. We hope that Latin American readers of the *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*, especially Mexican philosophers, will be able to fill in some of our blind spots and make more connections, aided in part by the recent publication of two Spanish translations of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, one by Norma Cantú (Anzaldúa 2015a) and another by Carmen Valle (Anzaldúa 2016).

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## Notes

[1] Handwritten note in the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin. Copyright © Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Reprinted by permission of The Gloria E. Anzaldúa Trust. All rights reserved. Parenthetical references to box and folder numbers throughout this paper refer to materials available in this archive. A guide to its contents is available on the web at <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utlac/00189/lac-00189.html> Parenthetical references to book box numbers refer to the archival location of one of the more than 5,000 books from Anzaldúa's personal library, maintained in the same archive.

[2] For more on Anzaldúa's visit to Mexico City, see Claire Joysmith, "Anzaldúa's Bordercrossing into Mexico," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 1 (2011) and "Gloria Anzaldúa: Bridges and Wounds," *Voices of Mexico*, no. 74 (January-March 2006). Also Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Learning to Live Together: Bridging Communities, Bridging Worlds," in *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa's Life and Work Transformed Our Own*, eds. AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López (University of Texas Press, 2011). Spanish readers can consult Claire Joysmith and Gloria Anzaldúa, "Ya se me quitó la vergüenza y la cobardía. Una plática con Gloria Anzaldúa," *Debate Feminista* 8 (1993).

[3] The best overview of *la filosofía de lo mexicano* available in English is the introduction to Carlos Alberto Sánchez and Robert Eli Sanchez, eds., *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century: Essential Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[4] The authors would like to thank the staff at the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers in the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas Libraries. They were extremely helpful with our requests to examine all the archival materials referenced in this paper.

[5] It is worth repeating that our reference here to “different types of Mexicans” presents a heuristic typology that should not be confused with essentialist claims about Mexican identities.

[6] Anzaldúa's personal library at the archive technically contains eleven books by León-Portilla, but three are subsequent editions of the same book. From the fact that Anzaldúa inscribed many of her books with the date and place of purchase, we know that she purchased León-Portilla's *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* on February, 22 1982, and *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* on August 15, 1983. We can therefore say with considerable confidence that she read at least three books by León-Portilla before the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera* in 1987, even though she only directly quoted from one.

[7] While most mainstream professional philosophers in the United States would likely consider León-Portilla a historian and/or anthropologist, the fact that he was fundamentally interested in philosophy was obvious to at least one Professor of Anthropology at Tulane University who reviewed *Los Antiguos Mexicanos* (the work cited by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera*) for the journal *American Anthropologist* in 1961, two years before the translation *Aztec Thought and Culture* appeared: “The result of this new approach to old material is that [León-Portilla's] style of writing suggests the 20th century philosopher rather than either the historian or anthropologist” (Robertson 1961, 1375).

[8] Anzaldúa highlighted the quoted phrase in her copy of León-Portilla's *Aztec Thought and Culture* (Book Box 65). She highlighted a similar passage on page 13 and wrote “face” in the margin.

[9] For more history of the “La Mujer Chicana” class at UT Austin, see Brenda Sendejo, “The Space in Between: Exploring the Development of Chicana Feminist Thought in Central Texas” in *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era*, eds. Dionne Espinoza, María Eugenia Coterá, and Maylei Blackwell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

[10] We have provided a more substantial analysis of the relation between Paz's *pachuco* and Anzaldúa's *nueva mestiza* in “Gloria Anzaldúa's Mexican Genealogy: From *Pelados* and *Pachucos* to New Mestizas.” *Genealogy* 4, no. 1 (1).

[11] For a more detailed analysis of Anzaldúa's critical appropriation and transformation of Ramos' philosophy, see our article “Gloria Anzaldúa's Mexican Genealogy: From *Pelados* and *Pachucos* to New Mestizas.”

[12] Anzaldúa's handwritten list of readings for ETS 374 La Mujer Chicana included Rosario Castellanos' poem “Silence Concerning an Ancient Stone,” which Anzaldúa's notes further describe as follows: “poem about identity, heritage, & creative process—Mexican Poet” (Box 227, Folder 7).

[13] We cannot be certain that we found this bookmark where Anzaldúa originally placed it, so we do not indicate the poem.