

Ideology and Identity--A Brief Analysis of Anzaldua's Book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is to explore Anzaldua's autobiographical book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, to discuss how multicultural environment influenced Gloria, why she considers herself as a border person, a person with multiple identities, to analyze how she struggles in a land where there is uniformity between sexual oppression and racial oppression, refusing to be reduced to the "other". I will briefly introduce Anzaldua's early experience as well as her identity as a colored lesbian. Her life is a crossover where gender, racial, sexuality, class problem connect with each other. In the first part, I will discuss about Anzaldua's idea of taking Ideology as culture tyranny which creates visible and invisible pressure from outside that keeps shaping Chicano's sense of self, objectifying the colored people. In the second part, I will analyze the oppression that Chicano women suffer from the male dominated white society, and how the ideological oppression shapes their identity. In the third part, I will explore Anzaldua's radical theory --"new Mestiza consciousness".

1. Introduction

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldua published her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* which became an important event in Chicano Feminism Movement. It is regarded as an example of Chicana Post/colonial writing. Her book inspired lots of Chicano Feminist writers who shared the same experience as Gloria Anzaldua. When Anzaldua was three years old, she began menstruating. She was excluded by other people since early childhood because of her precocious sexual development. She describes how that unusual experience influenced her psychology as well as how she developed awareness of being treated as the "other", as "not normal". Her sense of self has been gradually shaped by the shame that imposed by "normal" people. Later, her colored lesbian identity makes

her even more exclusive. Long time oppression arouses her rebellious spirit. She takes writing as a method to resist, challenging the hegemonic belief that marginalizes the disadvantaged groups. Growing up in a farmer family on a ranch settlement in South Texas, Gloria spent most of her childhood working in the fields of her home valley. Since then, she started to know the hardship of being a migrant labor, and felt close to the land. South Texas is located at the border of U.S. and Mexico, where different cultures cross over. The multicultural environment has influenced Gloria a lot. She considers herself as a border person, a person with multiple identities. Take a historical look, border could always be a pronoun for War, conflict, contradiction or exploitation, as a border woman. Gloria compares her psychological territory of inner self to borderland where there is always struggling amidst hatred,

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anger, adversity and violation. She admits that being a multi-identity woman brings her unavoidable pain.

As a colored lesbian, her life is a crossover where gender, racial, sexuality, class problem connect with each other. In the first chapter, she adopts the genre “autobiographical writing” to narrate history, using personal experience to restructure history. Foucault argues power produced history; knowledge is the production of power. He opposes the view of “Grand History” which presupposes that history is continuous, lineal and progressive. In his opinion, history is occasional events that produced during the rivalry of powers. He denies any causality and purposefulness in history^[8]. Therefore, a new way of studying history is to explore how the casual events constructed by various powers and discourses, how some events are highlighted while some are eliminated. In Anzaldúa’s autobiographical writing, she provides readers with a new perspective of reading history through fragmented experience of minority groups, and “presents history as a serpentine cycle rather than a linear narrative. The history she tells is a story in which indigenous icons, traditions, and rituals replace Post-Cortesian Catholic customs”^[9]. In the last two decades, autobiographical writing became popular among Chicana feminist, for through deconstructing mainstream discourse, it “has proved to be an effective means for members of ethnic and/or sexual minorities to articulate, voice and legitimize their long-silenced and marginalized experiences.” as well as “a way of making sense of and coming to terms with experiences of pain and suffering that, once articulated and organized, comprise a system that serves as source of empowerment and knowledge that is instrumental in the creation of politically informed collective identities.”^[4]

2. Ideology as Culture Tyranny

Gramsci points out that Capitalist leadership consists of two forms of power, “rule” and “identify with”. “rule” is to make ruled class obedient by the strong force, while “identify with” is to approach to the predominant value. The colonial rulers and post-colonial rulers realized that it is extremely important to consolidate power by letting the colonized identify with their ideology, for the function of ideology is to legalize the governing. Therefore, all kinds of attempts are made to publicize their values, through media, schools, social organizations and so on^[13]. The all-pervasive Ideology is just like air, as the whole society breathes it without even noticing its existence. Gloria

takes Ideology as culture tyranny. “We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture.”^[1] She revisited the history of how U.S. invaded Mexico and forced her to give up Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California, of how the original inhabitants being invaded by the Anglo language, values and their white supremacy, and the borderland between the two countries was not simply physical one, but psychological borderland, sexual borderland and spiritual borderland. Chicanos often have low estimation of self, since their native tongue, Chicano Spanish is viewed as inferior language. She remembered that her teacher arrogantly asked her to talk like an “American” when she tried to tell her how to pronounce her name. In the university, she and other Chicano students were required to take speech class in order to get rid of their accents. When she taught Chicano students English in High School, she was forbidden to supplement the required texts with Chicano works. She was told that she was supposed to teach English and American literature. “Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self”^[1]. She describes the complicated feeling when Chicanos sit together and speak with each other. Neither Spanish nor English they speak with each other would make them feel comfortable. “To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we’ll see there –Shame, low estimation of self”^[1]. That’s the power of the dominant culture. The codes and principal it represents exist as natural, unchallengeable. Most people follow those principal in order to be accepted by the society. A few people try to resist it, but the visible and invisible pressure from outside keeps shaping their sense of self.

Anzaldúa also criticizes the binary structure in western thinking is another form of violence. It keeps people away from embracing ambiguity. The world is split into true/false; progress/backward; rational/irrational; Subject/object, female/male, white/colored. The rigid categorization of people leads to stereotype and prejudice, because during the process of categorizing, the individuality is more or less being ignored. Female, colored people become the “other”. In the colonized society, color is most visible borderland that divides people into different groups. White people, as a privileged group who own the discourse power is the subject of narrative. Colored people, as a silenced, inferior group, are inevitably being objectified. In

the white narrative context, they are merely the reference of white people; they are the empty shell whose blood and flesh are being constructed out of the Whites' imagination. Edward W. Said says in the Culture and Imperialism that the imagination of geography and history (in the story told by Colonial explorer and novelist for instance) actually helps to strengthen colonists' sense of self. Their feeling of existence is enhanced through dramatizing the difference between the near and distant area. As for the Colonized, their subjectivity is deeply influenced in the Colonists' gaze ^[11]. In Said's famous book *Orientalism*, he cites Karl Marx's sentence "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." East exists as exotic fantasy in the West's imagination. It is produced and reproduced in the Western discourse, and orientalism is that kind of colonial discourse that reduces the Colonized into "the other", which is powerful enough to confuse the colonized "the other" with "the self", like a broken mirror distorting their image. They have to identify themselves with that image since they are told repeatedly it is who they are. Anzaldua also associates woman with the Colonized because of their "otherness". There is uniformity between sexual oppression and racial oppression.

In *Entering into the Serpent*, Anzaldua explains how the female deities are split in the patriarchal society by the western value of duality. Those female deities once owned both light and dark side. They had more depth in their nature just like human beings until western churches split their wholeness, and they become uni-dimensional. The light ones possess all the traditional moral parts (defined by the male): pure, motherhood, sacrifice...so that women could follow them as example without any confusion. And the dark powerful goddesses are given the monstrous attributes so that they could be dis-empowered and substituted by the male deities. According to Derrida, "a binary structure constructs an "other" as a privileged term, against which the latter can distinguish itself. One term is taken out of a system of terms and is given a positive value, which thus constructs an "other" or negative of itself which signifies everything that it does not accept... The second term is thus denied an existence of its own; it is merely a negation of the first term." ^[7]

3. New Mestiza Consciousness

In the final part, Anzaldua raises a radical theory --"new Mestiza consciousness" to build multiple identities. It is necessary to transcend the predefined self and recon-

struct the identity with new consciousness. The purpose of establishing New Mestiza consciousness is to break up dualism ingrained in the western thinking. Dualism split things into opposite categories: good/bad; female/male; white/black; Dualism emphasizes difference rather than sameness, which results in exclusion rather than inclusion. There is no respect room for something in between, for ambiguity and contradiction. Mestiza Consciousness aims to create a sense of plurality of self--the self is not confined in one Category, rather, it is the unity of differences.

4. Conclusions

Gloria Anzaldua's trans-disciplinary book redefines the traditional meaning of identity. Identity is not essential, since there exists no fixed "Essence". Identity is not invariable, stable and universal, rather, it is fragmented, constructive and it experiences continuously changing. Identity is being constructed both within and outside. It is influenced by a system of representation such as language, culture... And those representations react to people as ideology. So the process of identity construction is to some extent very political. As a "border" group whose history, living space, language and culture are being invaded by the dominant Anglo, Chicana's identity are split up by the western dualism, and their inner selves are fragmented. Therefore, Anzaldua's Mestiza Consciousness is valuable methodology to free them from dominant ideology, to form new identities which embrace the ambiguity and difference.

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