



# Why Learn from Chicanas? The Relevance of U.S. Third World Chicana Thinkers in Polish Feminist Research

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## SYNOPSIS

American feminist theories have long energised Polish scholarly work, and many Polish academics have drawn on the research of renowned American writers such as Judith Butler. Polish translations of numerous American authors may well have increased readership, which would otherwise be confined to English-speaking intellectuals. *Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej*, a left-leaning publishing house, offers a wide selection of crucial works by American feminists and sells those books at affordable prices, making certain texts by Butler, Carol Gilligan, and Katha Pollitt widely accessible. Most works published in Polish have been authored by white women with some attempts to be more racially inclusive (the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and bell hooks, for example, can also be found in translation). Chicana writers, on the other hand, are not part of *Krytyka Polityczna*'s canon. This paper aims to address this oversight, arguing for the benefits of drawing on Chicanas' research in the analysis of various social, political, and cultural phenomena in Poland. It also takes a close look at several relevant terms/concepts proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, and Chela Sandoval, as well as the ways in which these could be applied in the Polish context.

## KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEYWORDS

Gloria Anzaldúa; Ana Castillo; Chela Sandoval; feminismus třetího světa ve Spojených státech; *mestizaje*; vědomí *mestice*; *nepantlismo*; *conscientización*; Latinx; Chicana / Gloria Anzaldúa; Ana Castillo; Chela Sandoval; U.S. third-world feminism; *mestizaje*; *mestiza consciousness*; *nepantlismo*; *conscientización*; Latinx; Chicana.

## DOI

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The pursuit of feminist research and gender studies in a given country tends to be influenced by dominant global trends. In the case of 'peripheries', however, what seems to take place initially is a one-way transplantation of ideas (i.e. from dominant approaches in Western scholarly fields to their counterparts in peripheral contexts), rather than intellectual exchange proper. This phenomenon can be observed in Poland, where systemic transformation in the years following the 1989 dismantling of the Soviet Bloc led to a proliferation of peripheral thinking. Access to the body of work developed on the other side of the Iron Curtain resulted in the enthusiastic



embrace of feminist and gender studies approaches. Early on, this trend was downplayed in the Polish context, with some discrediting feminist approaches as a superficial imitation of what they saw as a Western fad (see e.g. Majbroda 2012, p. 455, or Kynčlová 2011, pp. 24–25), especially since these approaches had come to Poland not only through theory but also popular culture and literature. As Katarzyna Majbroda remarks in her comprehensive study *Feministyczna krytyka literatury w Polsce po 1989 roku* ('Post-1989 feminist literary criticism in Poland'), a glimpse at the translations of essential foreign feminist texts available in the 'Vistula Land' indicates that the majority come from the United States, France, and Great Britain. Majbroda maintains that the Polish literary field in the understanding of Bourdieu<sup>1</sup> has mainly been influenced by American thinkers, which may also be due to the exceedingly 'erudite' and 'obscure' language of French criticism<sup>2</sup> (Majbroda 2012, p. 137).

On the other hand, this Americanisation of Polish feminist research can also be seen as the result of such factors as political relations, in particular U.S. involvement in the Polish struggle against the communist regime in the pre-1989 era. During the post-Soviet era, the image of the United States as a paragon of liberty, alongside the promise of prosperity at the centre of the 'American dream' were readily accepted by many Poles. Furthermore, many Polish scholars, including Ewa Majewska (later quoted in this paper), have taken advantage of scholarship opportunities in the United States, which may help to explain the appeal of the works in question.

Majbroda's observation that French theory is less accessible to Polish scholars does not seem to fully account for the popularity of American research, since several works by Judith Butler — representing a form of theoretical discourse that is every bit as challenging, arguably, as her French counterparts —, have been published in Polish, making them accessible beyond the realm of English-speaking academics. For instance, a preface for the Polish translation of *Gender Trouble*, published two decades after the original text, was written by the acclaimed Olga Tokarczuk (Tokarczuk 2008, pp. 5–10). It may be that Tokarczuk was invited to write the preface, since her highly eco-feminist work is not immediately perceived as one. Majbroda quotes male literary critics from the 1990s who published their views on women's fiction of that time. Jerzy Sosnowski, who identified feminist tendencies in other texts, characterised Tokarczuk's novel *Podróż ludzi księgi* ('Journey of the people of the book') as ideologically neutral (Majbroda 2012, p. 111). However, while it does not present an explicit manifesto, Tokarczuk's novel is unarguably permeated by a feminist perspective and sensitivity. It strikes me as entirely fitting in this sense that Tokarczuk was chosen to write the preface for the Polish translation of *Gender Trouble*: even before she won the Nobel Prize, for over a decade in fact, she had made her mark in the field, and was clearly an engaged thinker on feminist issues, if not herself an obvious feminist.

Notwithstanding the fact that an ample body of work in the field of feminism and gender studies has been rendered accessible to Polish readers, theoretical works written by Latinas living in the United States are not widely known. One of the

1 Bourdieu understands the literary field as a 'market of symbolic goods' (Bourdieu 1996, p. 141).

2 All translations from Polish were made by the author.



central aims of this contribution is therefore to argue that such Latina authors as Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, and Chela Sandoval, to mention just a few, belong in the postcolonial studies canon every bit as much as Edward Said, who is regarded as one of the ‘founders’ of postcolonial studies even though he

*said nothing about postcolonialism in his original 1979 edition, the work [Orientalism] nevertheless provided scholars with many registers with which to address and interpret both Orientalist, self-serving, colonial discourses (within which are embedded a European compulsion to confine the other) and the highly adventurous, indeed agonistic, discourses of anticolonial struggles. (Mishra — Hodge 2003, p. 375)*

The main goal of the paper, however, is to argue for the benefit of deriving from the analyses of Chicana scholars and their conceptual framework, which would be relevant not solely for broadening scrutinising perspectives, but also because certain parallels might be drawn between Chicanas and Polish women identifying as feminists. Let me commence by explicating the terminology that is applied in this paper, so that I can later elaborate on these objectives.

## TERMINOLOGY

The term *Chicana*, which appears in the title of this paper, may require some elucidation. It is the female counterpart of *Chicano*, a term whose etymology is rather elusive. In their article ‘Chicano: Origin and Meaning’, Edward A. Simmen and Richard F. Bauerle identify several competing theories on the emergence of the word: while it may be a short form of *Mexicano* (based on indigenous pronunciation), it may also be related to the word *chico* (‘young boy’), or derived from *chicazo*, a young uneducated male vagabond (Simmen — Bauerle 1969, pp. 225–226). More recent explanations point to its beginnings as a pejorative term that subsequently underwent a process of linguistic reclamation (Gallardo 2021) — though Simmen and Bauerle make no mention of such negative connotations.

The term *Chicana* (with the feminine ending *-a*, following the rule of agreement in the Spanish language) emerged with the Chicano Movement that coalesced around the figure of Cezar Chavez in the 1960s,<sup>3</sup> and with a number of women who believed

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<sup>3</sup> The Chicano Movement is a political movement that emerged in 1960s among Americans of Mexican descent broadly understood, who ceased to perceive themselves as white. As Ian F. Haney López explains, Mexican-Americans saw themselves as White in the 1920s (Haney López 2001, pp. 205–206); later, those disillusioned by anti-Mexican bias and influenced by Black Power began to claim another racial label. He briefly describes that ‘the remaking of Mexican group identity provided the basis for political mobilization in East Los Angeles’ (ibid., p. 212), which was initiated by a school walk-out to protest the terrible school conditions (ibid., p. 207). The walkout was preceded by a strike of agricultural workers led by César Chávez in 1965, which was ‘union activity carried out on a nonracial and nonviolent basis [which] developed into the largest, and arguably the only nationally-prominent, mobilization of Mexicans in this period’ (ibid., p. 219). Some organisers moved



in the Chicano struggle for civil rights but wished to distance themselves from the machismo that characterised the movement. Ana Castillo commences her book *Masacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* by introducing *Chicana* as an identification embraced by women in the United States who are ‘mestiza in terms of race, Latina or Hispanic in regard to their Spanish-speaking heritage’ (Castillo 2014, p. 1). Castillo offers the alternative spelling ‘*Xicana*’ with the aim of emphasising the role of indigenous peoples, the ‘x’ being associated with languages spoken in Mexico prior to the Columbian era. Here she explains the coinage of the term *Xicanisma*, which combines the two aspects of *Chicana* feminism in a single word:

*On a pragmatic level, the basic premise of Xicanisma is to reconsider behavior long seen as inherent in the Mexic Amerindian woman’s character, such as, patience, perseverance, industriousness, loyalty to one’s clan, and commitment to our children. Contrary to those who don’t understand feminism, we do not reject these virtues. These traits often seen as negative and oppressive to women may be considered strengths. Simultaneously, as we redefine (not categorically reject) our roles within our families, communities at large, and dominant society, our conscientización helps us to be self-confident and assertive regarding the pursuing of our needs and desires. (ibid., p. 37)*

*Chicanx* is a gender-inclusive and non-binary term adopted by many scholars, including Ed Morales and Elizabeth Martínez (in her *De Colores Means All of Us*), which replaces binary gender agreement (-o/-a) with a single -x. As Ártemis López clarifies, ‘activist x’ involves the use of Direct Non-Binary Language (DNL), which is preferable to ‘inclusive language’ or INL:

*Unlike INL, DNL unapologetically and explicitly affirms inclusion of non-binary people. Writing a document with INL delivers a different message from another written with DNL: the former could deliberately include us or could be just a matter of chance, while the latter is all about inclusion. For example, a queer clinic that uses singular they in their forms instead of he or she does so with the clear intention of stating that the organization prioritizes the comfort of all people above obliging language purists. (López 2020)*

This approach to language has grown in popularity in the recent years. However, many of the texts I draw on in this paper were published before the introduction of DNL, and thus feminine and masculine forms will be used if that is the way the authors have chosen.

*Chicanx* can be subsumed under the broader category *Latinx*. The latter term, as Ed Morales defines it ‘is the most recent iteration of a naming debate grounded in the politics of race and ethnicity’ (Morales 2018, p. 3). Describing the history of its development he adds that for several decades *Latino* was a progressive choice, since Hispanic was

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to Los Angeles, established *La Raza*, the movement newspaper, which also contributed to the aforementioned student walkout in 1968.



*pressed into service by the Nixon administration in the 1970s, an apolitical attempt at an antidote to the ‘unrest’ created by increasing activism in Latinx communities inspired by the African American civil rights movement. (ibid.)*

Morales also stresses that the term ‘Latino’ suggested that people identifying as such ‘were not merely hyphenated Europeans, but products of the mixed-race societies and cultures south of the border who freely acknowledged that they were not “white”’ (ibid., pp. 3-4). *Hispanic* as a label, even though embraced by many conservatives, might point to belonging to a different culture marked by Spanish ancestry and language. This could be one of the reasons why Hispanics or Latinx are still considered as an element external to American society.

## LATINX AS AMERICANS FROM THE UNITED STATES

The United States is home to a significant Latinx population: according to the 2020 Census, it represents 18.7% of the total population, counting only those of Latino/Hispanic origin. The number increases to 50% when the racial category is more broadly conceived as ‘white alone and in combination’ (Race and Ethnicity in the United States 2021). Yet many in the United States and elsewhere perceive Latinx as a foreign rather than integral part of American society and culture. The typical image of the American is a WASP, or possibly a Black person, while Latinx are viewed at best as immigrants and frequently as intruders on U.S. soil, usually associated with crime. Not only are such perceptions widespread in popular culture, but they have played a significant role in shaping political discourse and policies in the Trump era. Ed Morales opens his book *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture* with the following description of the growing issue:

*After several years of debate about America’s progress on its racial question, the election of Donald Trump has brought white supremacy into the mainstream. Replacing coded dog whistles with an authoritarian bullhorn, he has openly declared undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants to be violent threats to the American people and, indirectly, to the integrity of American identity. (Morales 2018, p. 1)*

Even though Trumpism targets ‘undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants’, in fact it leads to profiling Latinx as illegal aliens. Which is why pro-Latinx or Spanish language media have endorsed immigration reform by

*focusing on an issue affecting not only recent immigrants but also Latino citizens who had relatives subject to racial profiling or were simply disturbed by the increasingly anti-immigrant tone adopted by right-wing media like Fox News. (ibid., pp. 234-235)*

Yet this tone seems to have entered American political discourse much earlier than Trump’s pre-election campaign and eventual presidential administration. Samuel



P. Huntington, for instance, a renowned political scientist and adviser has argued that the Latino civilisation is substantially different from the one in the United States (*Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*). Underlying and shaping the American national identity, culture, and institutions are the values of seventeenth and eighteenth century Anglo Protestant settlers, who 'defined America in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and most importantly, religion' (Huntington 2004, p. 38). As his title proposes, Huntington goes on to enumerate the various challenges — or, more aptly, *threats* — to American identity. Yet 'Hispanic' is the only cultural identity singled out by Huntington in the table of contents, dedicating a chapter called 'Mexican Immigration and Hispanization' entirely to that issue, and referring to 'Hispanics' (or 'Latinos', using the terms as synonyms) throughout the work. The Mexican immigration America has witnessed in recent years, he argues, represents a unique case that differs substantially from other waves of immigration to the United States in the past. He observes 'a massive influx of poor people from the contiguous country' (*ibid.*, p. 222) into the only First World country globally that shares a two-thousand-mile frontier with the Third World. He quotes high immigration figures exceeding those of other ethnicities, and bemoans the longer assimilation process (*ibid.*, pp. 230–243), providing case studies in subsections of the chapter dealing with Hispanisation of Miami and the South-West. On the whole, the Mexican-American 'cultural bifurcation' is a negative phenomenon, he concludes, further arguing that core American identity is at odds with multiculturalism, and that no new identities should be admitted. On these grounds he rejects the notion, held by other commentators, that the American Dream should be regarded as an option for Latino populations: 'There is only the American Dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican-Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English' (*ibid.*, p. 256).

Latinx scholars both demonstrate and theorise the reality of dreaming in Spanish, including Chicano and/or a number of other regional linguistic varieties that have emerged as hybrids between indigenous languages (Spanish, English, and Black vernaculars). They claim a place in America on equal terms with WASPs and Blacks, not only as their constitutional right, but also with respect to their indigenous American ancestry, descending from the 'original' inhabitants of the American-Mexican borderland with its history of Spanish colonialism. The frequently repeated saying 'We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us'<sup>4</sup> aptly illustrates the sense of belonging in that space, and a demand to respect it.

It is not my intention in this paper to provide an overview of Latinx thinkers. Instead, I will focus on a specific section of what amounts to an immense body of research: namely, key concepts developed by selected Chicana writers that I find particularly relevant to the context of Polish Studies: '*nepantlismo*' and '*nepantlerismo*', 'mestiza consciousness' (all terms coined by Gloria Anzaldúa), Ana Castillo's poetics of *conscientización*, and Chela Sandoval's 'oppositional consciousness'. My aim is to highlight the way in which their voices constitute part of the American intellectual

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4 See e.g. Mary Pat Brady's *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (2002); but the quote is also used in many works of (pop)culture, including *Machete* (2010), a film by Robert Rodriguez.





canon, as well as indicating why Polish feminists share more with Chicanas than with white American women — which is why application of *Xicanisma* perspectives might energise research in the local Polish context.

## THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The local context, I believe, calls both for pursuing research of feminist methodologies specific to the region, one that continues to bear the burden of its Soviet Bloc past, as well as for energising our intellectual endeavours with external influences. Third-world scholarship might offer much more adequate analytical instruments than what is understood as Western feminist thought. After all, as Hana Havelková observed as early as 1997 (Havelková 1997), Western theories might have a limited application in the Eastern European world, as Lubica Kobová reminds us (Kobová 2020, p. 7). Since the 1990s, there has been a sharp increase in research projects embracing the notion that European countries of the former Eastern Bloc represent the periphery of — and therefore exist in tension with — Western culture. In 2009, for instance, the Post-Dependence Studies Center was established in Warsaw with a mission to

*investigate the condition of post-dependence underlying the contemporary Polish society and culture specifically, and, in a broader perspective, defining the difference of Central-Eastern Europe from its Western counterpart. We understand post-dependence discourse as a comprehensive term for a conglomerate of signifying practices organizing human experience, projects pertaining to identity, social relations, and forms of perceiving reality, all of which have been undertaken after the situation of dependence came to an end. (Gosk 2022)*

Drawing on Chicana scholarship might create an opportunity to enrich Polish feminist research and broaden perspectives throughout the Central-Eastern European context (this question, however, lies beyond the scope of the present paper). Yet the works of Latinas seem to apply more directly to the Polish than the Czech situation, for example, given the seminal role played by Catholicism in both Polish and Latin American culture.

Certain generalisations pertaining to historical changes in Central-Eastern Europe are perpetuated by Sovietological research within the ‘totalitarian school’, which, as Marta Fidelis suggests in ‘Gender, historia i komunizm’ still relies

*on Zbigniew Brzeziński and Carl Friedrich’s classical interpretation of Soviet totalitarianism formulated in the early ninety-fifties. It was founded on the premise that communism descended from autocracy. In this view, the state-party, in the person of the dictator and his closest associates, is all-powerful, capable of imposing any solution through political repression and an elaborate terror machine. As a result, society — enslaved and powerless — is incapable of independent action and has no influence on the course of events. (Fidelis 2020, p. 32)*



Fidelis expresses doubt about such interpretations, which tend to strip society of all agency. To this way of thinking she opposes the ‘revisionist school’ of social history, which, as she explains, approaches history from below and examines the ways in which Soviet ideology was both endorsed and opposed by various social actors. She traces the way gender equality manifested itself in post-war Poland: even though a law on equal rights for men and women initially appeared in the Polish People’s Republic’s Constitution of 1952, copied from the Soviet Constitution of 1936 (Perkowski 2020, p. 46),<sup>5</sup> the actual professional advancement of women and other related forms of social change came to a halt with the end of the Stalinist Era in 1956. Inasmuch as the general trend holds true for most countries in the Soviet Bloc, the degree of gender equality differed significantly due to local conditions:

*Historical accounts of gender issues in post-war Central-Eastern Europe hinge upon various concepts already used in the literature on the Soviet Union. At the same time, researchers emphasize the specificity of national and local conditions. Communism in the region, even in its most repressive and similar Stalinist model throughout the bloc, was not a carbon copy of the Soviet system. The approach to gender roles and equality policies also differed, despite essentially uniform ideological guidelines. (Fidelis 2020, p. 38)*

Whereas ‘Czechoslovakia was the most egalitarian of the socialist countries’, as Tereza Kynčlová suggests (Kynčlová 2011, p. 26), a more conservative attitude towards women’s political, social, and professional advancement was adopted in Poland and Hungary, where female leadership was not common and prestigious positions were predominantly held by men.

Tracing women’s political activism, Piotr Perkowski observes that any demonstration of disagreement was deemed simply anti-communist by ‘gender-blind’ historians (Perkowski 2020, pp. 46–47). He argues that women’s political efforts were situated in-between a clearly defined conflict between the communist apparatus and dissidents (*ibid.*, p. 46).

This in-betweenness and complexity of women’s position in society is aptly reflected by Chicanas’ theoretical framework and activism. As mentioned above, Chicanas faced a similar conundrum: in their struggle against the systemic racism of a WASP-dominated social order, Chicanas were torn between racial/class loyalty and rejection of the machismo that was widespread within the movement. Gloria Anzaldúa’s concepts of *nepantlismo* speaks directly to this sense of in-betweenness.

## GLORIA ANZALDÚA’S NEPANTILISMO AND MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS

Anzaldúa’s seminal work *Borderland/La Frontera: A New Mestiza* (1987) may have energised modern border theory — as Jonathan Handelman suggests (Handelman 2002, p. 25) —, but it has yet to be translated into Polish. In 2019, however, Grażyna Zygałło

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5 Perkowski emphasises that the pre-war Polish Constitution did not include a law on the equal rights of men and women.





published 'Zmieniając siebie — zmieniam świat.' Gloria E. Anzaldúa i jej pisarstwo zaangażowanego rozwoju w ujęciu społeczno-kulturowym, in which she presents the central concepts of Anzaldúa's work — a major step towards introducing the Chicana theorist's writing and its relevance to the Polish context. Zygadło also writes on Anzaldúa's concepts of 'nepantilism', describing it as 'unarguably, one of her most essential theories' (Zygadło 2019, p. 231).

The term originates in an Aztec word meaning 'torn between ways', alluding not only to a certain kind of homelessness, a sense of not belonging anywhere, but also to opportunities for liberation. In order to achieve that goal it is indispensable to embrace the contradictions and address the inner war resulting from belonging to three cultures (American, Mexican, and Indigenous), a task that requires speaking multiple languages and accepting one's own 'mixed breed'. Since this position hinges upon the inability to hold concepts in rigid borders, one is expected to learn tolerance for ambiguity (Anzaldúa 1987, pp. 78–79). As Zygadło writes:

*The idea of Nepantla combines pain (this is the in-between space, where we lose something; a realm full of chaos and doubt) and possibility (this is where we gain conocimiento and undergo transformation). It thus enriches Anzaldúa's epistemology with psychological, emotional and spiritual meanings. We are brought into the state of Nepantla by looking at theoretically familiar issues from a different angle. It is a point of contact — a bridge — between the real and spiritual worlds, which expresses Anzaldúa's 'spiritual activism'. (Zygadło 2019, p. 231)*

It is in this sense that *Nepantleras*, women who accept this state of liminality, always remain on the borderlands, not only in geographic but in cultural terms as well, so that they may see themselves as never fully fitting in. However, inhabiting the interstices between clearly defined territories lends itself to the possibility of an external view. It is a form of 'deterritorialization', in the sense suggested by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*: 'Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight to the point where it becomes an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency' (Deleuze — Guattari 1987, p. 11). That seems to be the *Nepantleras'* practice: permanent residence in the rugged terrain around the border, including social, political, epistemological, spiritual, linguistic, and cultural contexts, provides opportunities at the same time that it forces them to 'increase their territory by deterritorialization'. Embracing nepantilism in the way of the *Nepantlera* is a pre-requisite for a new Mestiza consciousness — a revised identity and subjectivity that emerges once the liminal state is recognised and embraced.

## NEW MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS

Mestizo and Mestizas and the phenomenon of *mestizaje* are connected with the history of colonisation of the 'New World'. The terms refer to the hybridity that ensued as a consequence of Columbus's venture overseas. Originally, the identity was deemed a biological category. Unlike their counterparts to the north — the Europeans who settled along the North-Eastern Coast of the modern day United States, hav-



ing left their homes together with their families to escape religious persecution —, the colonisers of today's Latin America were mostly single men who did not have other options for procreation than by engaging in various forced or consensual relationships with native women. These unions resulted in 'a murky class of mestizo who were marginalised from power, as well as pairings between indigenous people, African-descended slaves, and free working-class men' (Morales 2018, p. 52). Since the resulting offspring were considered the outcome of 'race-mixing', or *mestizos*, within the social hierarchy put in place by colonial powers, they were regarded as non-white, occupying a class below that of the colonisers. Due to their paler complexion, however, they enjoyed a position higher than that of the indigenous population.

According to Mexican and Chicano myth, the *Mestizos* and *Mestizas* descend from Hernán Cortés's indigenous mistress and interpreter Malintzin, or '*La Malinche*'. Rejected by both white and indigenous populations, their existence implied an act of violence, one that would be regarded as rape except that the blame was placed rather on the woman, who was seen as a 'race-traitor'. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz dedicates a whole chapter to the nuanced description of Malintzin's relationship with Cortés and its mythical, symbolic, and psychological consequences for what he calls the 'Mexican mentality'. Rather than focusing on Malintzin herself, he analyses the inner conflict experienced by Mexicans (by which he means Mexican men). The awareness that they are the sons of '*la Chingada*', a term Paz glosses as a woman who has been violated, ripped open, and deceived (evidently exceeding the sexual context), compels them to reject and repress their origin. Simultaneously, they bear resentment towards the mythical and symbolic mother, and by extension towards actual living women, since

*Dona Marina becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spaniards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal. She embodies the open, the chingado, to our closed, stoic, impassive Indians. (Paz 1961, p. 86)*

Paz does not appear to realise that he excludes women in his brief study of the 'Mexican' mentality, treating them solely as an accessory, reduced to their reproductive role, and judged on account of their sexuality. *La Chingada*, or 'violated woman', is further despised for her inability to protect herself from violence. This omission, which seems to escape Paz, strikes Chicana scholars as self-evident, if not clichéd. For instance, Ana Castillo bitterly observes that

*Malintzin (La Malinche and more vulgarly, 'la Chingada,' the fucked woman), [was] an actual historical figure who was stigmatized by the Eve theme. The insinuation here also is that female sexuality is at fault again, since it is woman who conceives and who therefore gave birth to the new race. (Castillo 2014, p. 118)*

Feminist scholars that deal with Chicanx culture and *Xicanisma* have critically evaluated various Malintzin legends while reclaiming the figure, highlighting the dominant macho discourse at its origins. Writing on this issue in 'Chicana's Feminist



Literature: A Re-vision through Malintzin/or Malintzin Putting Flesh Back on the Object', Norma Alarcon draws attention to the way negative perceptions of Malintzin's role in the conquest and idealisation of the pre-Columbian era 'heighten romantic nostalgia and as a consequence hatred for Malintzin and women becomes as vitriolic as the American Puritans' loathing of witches-women' (Alarcon 1983, pp. 183-184). She draws a parallel between Malintzin's perceived act of betrayal and the 'disobedience' of Chicanas who embrace feminism, in each case showing how the rise of women's agency comes to be regarded by Chicanos as an act of transgression, and then ventures that this experience is shared by third-world women in aggregate (ibid., p. 188). In conclusion, she speaks of the need to revise history and myths, since psychological dimensions do affect women's approach to all aspects of life, including their efforts to address gendered economic exploitation.

Alarcon's essay brings us back to Gloria Anzaldúa, whose *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* offers a new understanding on *mestizaje*, a concept which both acknowledges and cherishes hybridity. Anzaldúa refuses to be confined to the choice between two mutually exclusive identities — Mexican or American, male or female, black or white, to mention only a few —, a choice imposed by the external, largely male-dominated world. She aims at forging a new identity, which she spells out in a dramatic appeal:

*So don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures — white, Mexican, Indian. I want a freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture — una cultura mestiza — with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture.* (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 44)

Anzaldúa's border thinking may provide an effective approach to investigating Central-Eastern Europe — though (as previously mentioned) I will focus here on Poland. Geographically, it is a country where Occidental and Oriental overlap, and Polish exceptionalism envisages Poland precisely as lying at the intersection of these two worlds. In the post-WWII era, Central Eastern Europe saw the arrival of a number of displaced ethnic groups. Many found themselves in a situation similar to that faced by Indigenous and Mexican Americans, aptly described by the saying among Chicana activists that 'We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us' (Little 2018). Indigenous people who were first colonised by white settlers were later displaced as Mexicans vis-à-vis expansionist policies in the United States based on Manifest Destiny.<sup>6</sup> A detailed analysis of the territorial fluctuations over history lies beyond the

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6 As Julius W. Pratt explains in his article on the origin of the ideology, it was 'a convenient statement of the philosophy of territorial expansion' (Pratt 1927, p. 795) in the nineteenth century. The alleged goal to 'smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than the beasts of the field', served as a pretext for gaining new territory.



scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that a sense of uprooting or becoming an alien in one own's land is a factor that cannot be overlooked while examining contemporary narratives on individual and collective identities.

This sense of not belonging, or *nepantlismo*, can also be said to characterise the experience of people who found themselves within Poland's redrawn borders in the immediate post-war era. Efforts were made to forge a homogenous Polish identity to avoid social unrest, and gains in the west of Poland had to be justified by creating the myth of 'Recovered Territories', reimagining the area constituting a third of the new Poland (Iwasiów 2017, p. 181) as 'eternally' Polish. In her article 'Przesiedleni chłopi uruchamiają miasto' ('Resettled peasants bring movement to the city'), Inga Iwasiów scrutinises the role played by writers and reporters in the process of envisaging the 'repolonisation' of the area, with the focus on Szczecin/Stettin, the scholar's home town, and its residents. Szczecin is one of many examples of populations comprised of a plurality of ethnic groups, including Germans who stayed behind and peasants from *Kresy Wschodnie*, or 'Eastern Borderlands' (later part of the Soviet Union), as well as peasants from the Polish side of the border. The new subjectivity was founded by the PKWN<sup>7</sup> Manifesto of 1944, with the secondary aim, Iwasiów adds, of mobilising peasants to take up work in the industrial sector. The emphasis on building a new utopia in the 'Recovered Territories' (ibid., p. 185) was a way to forge a common Polish identity, but also to address post-war trauma, as well as crimes committed during the war and in the immediate post-war era. These crimes included the involvement of some Poles in the Holocaust, and organisation of pogroms against Jewish survivors, including the one in Kielce.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of *nepantlerismo*, especially in its role vis-à-vis the *mestiza* consciousness, provides a model for taking account of one's heterogeneous roots. Despite the common belief that Poland is an ethnically uniform country apart from the influx of immigrants in recent years, it is in fact a place where various cultures and ethnicities have coexisted for centuries. The post-war era may have erased this multicultural aspect to a certain extent, but the fact remains that a significant part of the population descends from complex and multiethnic origins. The nationalistic demand for homogeneity caused many to conceal their German, Jewish, Ukrainian, Russian, or Roma heritage, if possible, but a reversal of this trend is evidenced by the recent surge in efforts to learn about one's family history, and its thematisation in works of literature. This often involves re-establishing links with a religion, including Judaism. For some, it also involves an effort to come to terms with upsetting family histories, including the identification within one's own family history of pogrom participants, Stalinist apparatchiks, or alleged anti-communist heroes who turned out to have engaged in the murder of civilians. The search for lost heritage is often

7 PKWN was the communist provisional government: The Polish Committee of National Liberation.

8 Iwasiów mentions the 1946 pogrom, during which 'at least forty Jews were killed in the pogrom, along with two Poles who tried to defend them. Forty people were injured. The pogrom resulted in a widespread panic among the Jewish community in Poland and a wave of emigration in which about 100,000 people left the country' (The Pogrom of Jews in Kielce).



accompanied by rediscovering and learning the language of one's ancestors. The Polish-Kashubian poet Małgorzata Wątor, for instance, was inspired to learn Kashubian, a language spoken by a minority in Northern Poland, while exploring her ancestors' culture. She would come eventually to write poetry in both Polish and Kashubian (Wątor 2021). For years considered an inferior language of the illiterate, and thus eradicated through systematic state policies and education, Kashubian had to be her second language.

The Chicana attention to linguistic peripheries is part of a larger tradition of celebrating one's own way of speaking and writing. Such languages may be idiosyncratic or unique, crossing linguistic borders as rigid demands for purism emerge through top-down nationalistic attempts to control the means of expression.

### BORDERLAND LANGUAGE

Language accounts for a crucial part of Anzaldúa's work, both as a subject of critical theory and aspect of her writing style. She points to the polyglotism that characterises the spoken language, enumerating its various forms: 1) Standard English, 2) Working class and slang English, 3) Standard Spanish, 4) Standard Mexican Spanish, 5) North Mexican Spanish Dialect, 6) Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California all have regional variations), 7) Tex Mex, and 8) *Pachuco* (called *calo*), which is the language of rebellion against Standard Spanish and Standard English used by zoot-suiters (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 77). Acknowledging this linguistic diversity serves as a means of self-empowerment. Chicanos and Chicanas are often led to feel inferior for the lack of 'purity' that characterises the choice between Spanish and English, and their way of speaking is considered as a contaminated form of language on both sides of the border. In spite of this, Anzaldúa considers polyglotism to be an asset, blurring what is normatively considered as distinct and mutually-exclusive categories, and representing a more efficient medium of communication, one that also involves translating from culture to culture, flexibility, and instantaneous adaptation to a linguistic environment.

Linguistic diversity in the Polish context has a number of key differences. Karolina Hansen, a psychology scholar who investigates prejudice, maintains that

*[i]n Polish psychology, as well as in linguistics, there has been little interest in attitudes towards Polish dialects and non-standard ways of pronunciation in general. At the same time, language was and still remains a subtle indicator of social status and origin in Poland, [locating a person in] a specific geographical area or generally of rural descent, connected with small towns rather than larger cities. (Hansen 2015, p. 157)*

She briefly summarises the reasons for those subtle regional differences: as a result of the relocation of various ethnic groups after 1945, the original heterogeneity of languages and dialects gradually melted into a speech that was quite uniform, a process of standardisation that was accelerated by such factors as compulsory education and mass media (*ibid.*, p. 158). Despite changes in approaches to minority languages





and dialects, as well as the current attitudes and policies of the European Union to treat them as cultural heritage and to foster plurilingualism and linguistic equality (Koutny 2018, p. 154), both Ilona Koutny and Karolina Hansen voice scepticism about the practical applications of those values. Whereas the former scholar identifies a discrimination rooted in the linguistic imperialism of English at both the national and international level, the latter analyses the data derived from the population census in 2011. Hansen has found that even though the majority of respondents recognise the significance of preserving dialects, they do not approve of their use at work and in the public sphere in general (Hansen 2015, p. 173).

By drawing on Chicanas' attitudes towards language, Polish scholars might gain important insight on the biases against non-standard forms of speech. Whereas fiction writers increasingly resort to linguistic variation, this does not seem to be the case in formal and academic contexts. The writing style adopted by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* exemplifies how theories of language democratisation translate to writing, a style that escapes classification as various genres — poetry, essay, myth and manifesto — merge into what Ana Castillo calls a *tapiz*. Referring literally to a traditional colourful carpet or tapestry woven by women, the term works in this context by suggesting a similar approach to the Chicana work of art or literature, in which the threads symbolise both the tasks traditionally performed by women and influences of non-white writing (Castillo 2014, pp. 173–190). Anzaldúa weaves her *tapiz* of various genres and languages in order to illustrate what she identifies as the 'Coatlícué state'.

*As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. (Anzaldúa 1987, pp. 80–81)*

Anzaldúa either deliberately defies the exigencies of scholarly writing, is trained in a different tradition, or does not aim to produce a theoretical work in the first place. Yet the text reverberates with vibrant ideas that would eventually be included in the canon, perhaps to the surprise of the writer herself, exceeding its status as a work of fiction and going on to inspire others, including writers in the theoretical context.

Polish academics have also seen changes in scholarly style. For Stanisław Gajda, the contemporary 'intellectual aura' is a *Zeitgeist* that shapes cognition and ontology, as well as style, as he shows with such keywords as 'postmodernity', 'crisis', 'chaos', and 'turn' (Gajda 2013, p. 61):

*Since linguistic reality is characterized by great variability, blurring of boundaries, multiplicity of phenomena and development processes, etc., research approaches*





*have become more flexible and cautious. Researchers view linguistic reality not only within the framework of accepted paradigms (research programs), but they refer to their own experience (empirical, ideological, theoretical). A sense of dispersion collides with a longing for unifying syntheses. (ibid., p. 65)*

On the other hand, he claims that the matter has hardly been explored.

Following experiments in academic discourse of some Chicana theorists, including Anzaldúa's work, provides an opportunity to reflect on academic styles in Poland and Central-Eastern Europe, which should not only be constricted to emulation of the Western writing. Perhaps certain innovative forms could be developed in the humanities that allow for conjugation of academic rigor with idiosyncratic languages.

### **SANDOVAL'S OPPOSITIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS EXEMPLIFIED BY U.S. THIRD WORLD FEMINISM**

Chela Sandoval, unlike Gloria Anzaldúa, has written her *Methodology of the Oppressed* in accordance with 'Western' scholarly standards. The audience she appears to have in mind is comprised of academics, which explains her use of nuanced and precise terminology, and she aims to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework. Either she aspires to gain international recognition and thus does not intend to distance herself from 'white-writing', or simply lacks the skills to avail herself of more creative, poetic language — the domain of Ana Castillo and Gloria Anzaldúa. This difference notwithstanding, Sandoval's work is firmly embedded within the field of post-colonial studies, and the very title evokes Paulo Freire's already canonical *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first released in 1964. It is in this work that the Brazilian pedagogue seems to universalise what Paz treats as an inner conflict specific to the Mexican colonial situation, and to those who have internalised the perspective of the oppressor. He formulates the central question as follows:

*How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating. (Freire 2005, p. 48)*

Even though Sandoval does not refer to Freire's work directly, she seems to employ his theories as a springboard for her own analyses, and she offers further instruments that can be essential in dismantling the dominant symbolic structures that underlie the internalisation of oppression. The process of dismantling the colonial perspective in Sandoval's case does not entail a complete renunciation of Western scholarship. On the contrary, in her highly erudite book, well-anchored in continental philosophy and the Anglo-American postmodernist tradition, in combination with third-world scholarship, she calls for the integration of theories from diverse backgrounds. These can be modified and applied to the local context with disregard for the prevailing orthodoxy in order to develop what she defines as 'oppositional consciousness'. This would result in the emergence of a political subjectivity that



*resides in a state of contingency, of possibility, readying for any event. Dependent on the chances provided by power, the differential mode of oppositional consciousness movement is conditional: subject to the terms of dominant power, yet capable of challenging and changing those very same terms. It is a mode of consciousness and activity that is not necessarily true or false — only possible, active, and present. It promotes social movement with purpose, both subject to the terms of power and capable of transforming them. This social movement generates a different kind of negotiation as it barter meaning systems, using skills accomplished by a new kind of collectivity that attaches strings, makes demands, imposes conditions, negotiates terms. (Sandoval 2000, p. 180)*

She explains this oppositional consciousness with the example of ‘U.S. third world feminism’, which functions as ‘a model for oppositional political activity and consciousness in the postmodern world’ (ibid., p. 43). It is a term that might cause some confusion, and warrants further discussion.

### **U.S. THIRD WORLD FEMINISM — A PARADOX?**

It is Sandoval who seems to have coined the term ‘U.S. third world feminism’. In her understanding, which draws on race, ethnicity, and culture, the fact that non-white women are subjected to discrimination along multiple lines accounts for a significant difference between their experience and that of white women, even those who belong to lower social classes. In other words, class alone is not an adequate indicator for the experience of discrimination.

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa also distinguish third world feminism from white feminism, and, like Sandoval, use the term to refer to non-white women living in the United States. The origins of the term can be found in the 1960s when

*U.S. third world feminism provided access to a different way of conceptualizing not just feminist consciousness but oppositional activity in general: it comprised a formulation capable of aligning U.S. movements for social justice not only with each other, but with global movements toward decolonization. (ibid., p. 42)*

She goes on to describe their writing style and theoretical structure in distinction from U.S. feminist research of the 1970s, a body of work that Gayatri Spivak describes as ‘hegemonic feminist theory’ (see e.g. Spivak 1990, p. 57–58, or Spivak 2003, p. 50–53). The notion involves certain subcategories, including Womanism — a term coined by Alice Walker that refers to the feminism of black women —, and the aforementioned Ana Castillo’s *Xicanisma*. Another Chicana scholar, Cherie Moraga, in her *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness* (2011) explains how the feminism of women of colour of the 1970s was influenced by the recognition of their ‘internally colonised status as the children of Native and African People’ (Moraga 2011, p. 19). She goes on to discuss the ways in which people of colour are excluded from the notion of Americanness at the axiological level: notwithstanding the notion that American society should be a melting pot, a metaphor later replaced by that of the ‘tossed salad’, WASP



values appear to have established a hegemony that remains unchallenged in the face of significant ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity. It therefore seems rational to forge alliances with people who share similar experiences and standing, whether or not they live in the United States. *Xicanas* (Latinas and brown<sup>9</sup> women), as Moraga, Castillo, Anzaldúa, Sandoval and others argue, do not share the same interests as middle-class white feminists, but rather those of ‘sisters of the corn’, a term that Moraga derives from Toni Cade Bambara (*ibid.*, p. 31).

However true it may be that ‘brown’ women do not share the experience of white women, that they face racial discrimination and are often considered culturally ‘alien’, and thus inferior — generalised as Catholics if they are Latinas/Chicanas, or Muslim if they are of Middle-Eastern descent —, we may still ask: to what extent can we describe the feminism of women of colour as ‘third world’? After all, the United States is believed to constitute part of the Global North, the most developed region in the world. Sandoval appears to apply the term to feminism of women of colour, those who are marginalised and belong to or are profiled as belonging to lower classes. She does not seem to provide a clear definition, however, in her *Methodology of the Oppressed*, but she does point to Anzaldúa’s powerful description of the American-Mexican border as an open wound, where the third world meets the first. Since brown women — understood as Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous — often inhabit those spaces, or else originate in the Third World, to claim it as an identity and subjectivity might serve the purpose of both transnational solidarity and a coming to terms with one’s roots. Moreover, ‘third-world’ much more aptly describes the economic conditions of many Latinx/Chicanx/Indigenous people. Essentialising the United States as a prosperous country conceals the striking social inequalities between various groups of people, and the vast differences in access to essential services like health-care, education, etc. that one might expect to be universal in a (nominally) first-world country of the Global North.<sup>10</sup>

With her meticulous descriptions of social movements founded by women of colour, and with her frequent references to the works of third-world scholars, Sandoval does much to increase the visibility of theories that are often absent from the works that make up the canon, which tend to focus on the Western and white experience. She defines oppositional consciousness as a strategy for acquiring the intellectual tools necessary for resisting co-optation by the dominant ideology:

*The idea here, that the citizen-subject can learn to identify, develop, and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to ‘break with ideology’*

9 Brown as a racial identity is used here to refer to those who are beyond the white-black-Asian divide. Some Chicane scholars tend to use the term to refer to brownness associated with Mexicans/Latinx/Indigenous people from the Americas, see e.g. (Aldama — Sandoval 2012, p. 194). By contrast, Swati Rana sees ‘brownness’ as a wider category not only restricted to Hispanic/Latinx/Indigenous people (Rana 2015).

10 In his *Numbers Don’t Lie: 71 Things You Need to Know About the World*, Vaclav Smil argues that the best single index that reflects a country’s living standard is infant mortality. He quotes the figure for the United States: 6 deaths out of 1000 live births, which is twice the rate of Iceland, Finland, Norway, Japan, or South Korea (Smil 2022, pp. 31–32).

*while at the same time also speaking in, and from within, ideology, is an idea that lays the philosophical foundations enabling us to make the vital connections between the seemingly disparate social and political aims that drive, yet ultimately divide, social movements from within.* (Sandoval 2000, p. 44)



Sandoval distinguishes five different categories of oppositional consciousness: 'equal rights', 'revolutionary', 'supremacist', 'separatist', and 'differential'. In her point of view 'feminist forms of resistance [...] are homologous to five fundamental forms of oppositional consciousness that were expressed within all U.S. liberation movements' (ibid., p. 45) in the second half of the twentieth century. Whereas other thinkers identify four stages of oppositional consciousness, Sandoval supplements these with 'differential', which involves embracing the other four and analyzing the relationships among them. Applied to the feminist movement in the United States, the stages correspond respectively to liberal feminism, Marxist/socialist feminism, sexual difference — envisaged as grounds for a moral superiority of sorts due to oppression —, and finally separatist, involving differentiation within the feminist movement. Sandoval proposes differential consciousness as a form of theory and activist practice, a notion that entails movement between ideological positions, following Anzaldúa's claims. She thus opposes to the white liberal feminists view of separatism, namely as a position of disloyalty or betrayal, the notion that it serves as a foundation for building a tactical subjectivity, echoing Spivak's strategic essentialism. To arrive at such a consciousness, which Sandoval envisages in process-oriented terms as moving beyond binaries, requires flexibility and establishing links between the various types, which are no longer deemed mutually exclusive. Sandoval underscores the contribution of third world feminists to creating and/or adopting this theoretical framework, and implementing it while working on the grassroots level, and she repeatedly draws our attention to the need for consistency between ideas and practice:

*[T]his is the activity of the trickster who practices subjectivity as masquerade, the oppositional agent identity, ideological, aesthetic, and political positions. This nomadic "morphing" is not performed only for survival's sake, as in earlier, modernist times. It is a set of principled conversions that requires (guided) movement, a directed but also a diasporic migration in both consciousness and politics, performed to ensure that ethical commitment to egalitarian social relations be enacted in the everyday, political sphere of culture.* (ibid., p. 62)

Readers in the Polish context may find it surprising that Sandoval considers the five categories of oppositional consciousness as a topography, rather than a typology (ibid., pp. 54–56), and that she associates the fifth 'differential mode' with the figure of the trickster who freely surveys the other modes — a figure marked by the Chicana context in which she is working. On the one hand, this may be due to the fact that Sandoval's work is relatively unknown in Poland, not least because there are not as yet Polish translations of her work. Sandoval herself blames the racialisation of academia, which she describes as outright 'intellectual apartheid'. However, rather than rejecting Western scholarship, and so conceding to a sense of self-victimisation, she endeavours to overcome these limitations in the exchange of ideas. To this



end, she draws on post-structuralism, feminism, queer studies, and numerous other scholarly approaches in order to arrive at a 'coalitional consciousness', culminating in a 'Differential Manifesto' that advances the differential as a 'subjunctive' strategy:

*[I]t is that which joins together the possible with what is, the place where indirect style or discourse occurs until it finds purposeful, guided, political reason to be through the reconfiguration of units-of-power in the interests of their egalitarian distribution. This form of political subjectivity resides in a state of contingency, of possibility, readying for any event. Dependent on the chances provided by power, the differential mode of oppositional consciousness movement is conditional: subject to the terms of dominant power, yet capable of challenging and changing those very same terms. It is a mode of consciousness and activity that is not necessarily true or false — only possible, active, and present. It promotes social movement with purpose, both subject to the terms of power and capable of transforming them. This social movement generates a different kind of negotiation as it barter[s] meaning systems, using skills accomplished by a new kind of collectivity that attaches strings, makes demands, imposes conditions, negotiates terms. (ibid., pp. 180–181)*

Sandoval's strength lies in her fusion of theory and practice: she explicitly subordinates the consciousness in question to another purpose, namely political activism. Even if utopian, the 'Manifesto' serves its purpose, conveying a sense of hope that may serve as an antidote to the tone of left-wing melancholia.<sup>11</sup> Another accomplishment of Sandoval's work is to place third-world feminist scholars side by side with such broadly acclaimed mainstream thinkers as Fredric Jameson, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes, suggesting that the contributions of women of colour are as worthy as the works of world-famous philosophers. To those familiar only with Western 'white' writing, it highlights the contributions made by feminists of colour to the discussion of diversity within the field of women's studies. These contributions, moreover, are based on their situated knowledge, resulting from the lived experience of discrimination along multiple lines, rather than the product of abstract academic ruminations that are typical of a milieu marked by social and/or economic privilege.

Inspired by the notion of a *mestiza* or oppositional consciousness, Polish scholars might be compelled to embrace their own situation: not a 'third worldism', perhaps, since this would imply a certain cultural appropriation and self-victimisation, but a 'second-worldism' based on greater commitment to post-colonial/post-dependence/de-colonial studies. By this, I do not mean to encourage rejection of white feminism from the Global North, but instead the realisation that our condition varies, so that application of post-colonial or other 'second-world' scholars might enrich the Polish scholarly context. Furthermore, forming coalitions with feminist activists from

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11 Left-wing melancholia is understood here as the expression is used by Walter Benjamin, and as the topic of Enzo Traverso's *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (2016) as discussed by Mark Steven (2017, p. 182). As Steven also points out, the phenomenon is already spelled out on the first page of the preface: 'The memory of the left is a huge, prismatic continent made of conquests and defeats, while melancholy is a feeling, a state of the soul and a field of emotions' (Steven 2017, p. xiii).

the peripheries might spark much more energising collaborations than those that rely simply on 'Western' allies. In regards to this last case, Ana Castillo's 'poetics of *conscientización*' might be instrumental. The term, again derived from Paolo Freire's concept of *conscientização* in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, refers to 'the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence' (Freire 2005, p. 109). It seems to be the process that leads from the state of *nepantla* towards gaining a new *mestiza* consciousness.



## ANA CASTILLO'S POETICS OF CONSCIENTIZACIÓN

Ana Castillo's theoretical work seems to function as a bridge between Anzaldúa's fragmented multi-genre, multi-lingual work and Sandoval's well-organised erudition well adapted to Western academic standards. Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers* is a collection of essays from her dissertation work, but she primarily writes poetry and fiction, a preference which also manifests itself in her academic work. Predilection for *belles lettres* determines the subject matter, and thus she emphasises the role of literature created by Indigenous women, *Mestizas*, and *Xicanistas*:

*Choosing to be conscious transmitters of literary expressions, we have become the excavators of our common culture, mining legends, folklore, myths for our own metaphors. Ours is not Homer but Netzahualcoyotl, not Sappho but Sor Juana, not Athena but Coatlicue. (Castillo 2014, p. 177)*

The last name refers to the pre-Columbian goddess of both creation and destruction, thus symbolising the giving but also the taking of life. She explains the obstacles inherent to her project due to the systematic eradication of pre-conquest culture, as well as the lack of education in the field. The poetics of *conscientización* outlined in the chapter 'Tapiz' involves the rediscovery, preservation, reinterpretation, and perpetuation of a culture that has long been marginalised. In order to achieve this, Castillo proposes a poetics that would distance itself from hegemonic white writing. She adds, however, that

*what is most provocative and significant in contemporary Chicana literature is that while we claim and explore these cultural metaphors as symbols of rebellion against the dominant culture, we have also taken on the revisioning of our own culture's metaphors, informed as they are by male perceptions. (ibid., p. 177)*

This is to say that emancipation from patriarchy, including the one sustained by Chicanos and Latinos, must occur in an array of spheres: a mere political liberation is neither sufficient nor possible, should such efforts not also be undertaken on an intellectual and cultural level. Apart from engaging in political struggle, *Xicanistas* therefore commit to research the cultural history of Amerindian women. Castillo further urges fellow Chicanas to overcome their fear of speaking — many a non-WASP will have experienced linguistic discrimination in the United States — and to regain their own voice, as well as putting it in writing. She ensures that the need for writing does





not stem from the Western and individualistic concern with ‘immortality’. Against the highly competitive spirit of the American culture, Castillo advises cooperation, the collective creation of a cultural and literary tapestry (*tapiz*), in order to challenge the othering of the dark-skinned woman, who, as she aptly notices, has been discovered in the course of archeological research to be an object of worship. The act of writing therefore gains a social and political dimension, since it might have a transformative potential. Castillo conveys this potential by asking (and answering): ‘What may happen when we refuse learned associations, dualisms, metaphors? We may begin to introduce unimaginable images and concepts into our poetics’ (ibid., p. 181). It is clear how skilfully she carries this off in her novels, which deal with the experience of *nepantla* described earlier in this article, as well as human relationships, and political-emancipatory issues seen from an individual perspective. Even when dealing with traumatic and sensitive subjects, such as border violence, Castillo approaches them with empathy, irony, and humour.

### WHY LEARN FROM U.S. THIRD WORLD FEMINISTS?

In this paper I have tried to draw certain parallels between the situation of Latinas and Chicanas, who experience *nepantlismo*, and Polish women, who are also situated between two forces conceptualised as contradictory: the East and the West. Rejecting the Polish sense of exceptionalism, which not only persists in popular mythology but persists even in certain academic circles, it strikes me that the position I speak of involves far more ethnic groups. Poles tend to use the expression ‘bulwark of Christianity’ to describe their position, an expression that places ‘us’ in the borderland between East and West — that is to say, the last bastion of the West in Europe to the east of which the ‘Orient’ begins. However, it should come as no surprise that a number of other countries/areas draw on a similar narrative to describe their ‘unique’ geographic situation. The Polish philosopher Ewa Majewska, for instance, writing in her article ‘La Mestiza from Ukraine? Border Crossing with Gloria Anzaldúa’, draws the line of demarcation along the territory that formerly constituted part of Poland and exists as *Kresy*, or ‘Eastern Borderlands’, in the collective memory and current discourse. Majewska uses the term ‘Mestizas’ in reference not to Ukrainian women, but to Belarussians, Ukrainians, and possibly Lithuanians who inhabit the *Kresy* today (Majewska 2011, pp. 34–41). It seems, however, that despite her awareness of Anzaldúa-inspired border-crossings in the spatial as well as figurative sense, Majewska fails to challenge the Polish nationalistic view that they are firmly anchored in Europe, which is to say the West, on the basis of Poland’s pre-WWII borders that extended further eastwards towards the ‘clash of civilizations’, to use Huntington’s term once again.

It is not my goal to determine the ‘actual’ location where East meets West. I would, however, by way of conclusion, like to reiterate certain advantages in applying theories developed by Chicana scholars to the intellectual landscape of Poland. A first priority would be to undertake work towards an acknowledgement of our ‘colonial’ status. It is not colonialism in its classical sense, as defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. Yet there are certain similarities connected with Poland’s peripheral ex-



istence, as well as a degree of orientalisation that manifests itself in a social reality that differs from the one in the imaginary Occident.<sup>12</sup> It would be best therefore to embrace Poland's specificity in this context.

Which is not to say that a post-colonial approach to Polish relations and cultural production has never been attempted. On the contrary, a number of researchers have been working with this approach, in large part because of the efforts of the prominent Polish literary studies professor and feminist Maria Janion. However, this approach still raises skepticism, by virtue of the prevalence of what Janion calls Poland's 'romantic paradigm'. This could be the reason why, as she purports, the majority of Polish intellectuals, aware of what Sławomir Mrożek dubbed 'an Eastern-Western position' have long endeavoured to join the West and amputate the Eastern component (Janion 2006, p. 11). As she informs us:

*The processes subjecting Poland to colonization by the states that seized its territory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as Sienkiewicz's dream of colonizing others, contradictory to the reality, created a paradoxical Polish **postcolonial mentality**. It manifests itself in a sense of powerlessness and defeat, inferiority and peripherality of the country and the stories it tells. This fairly common feeling of inferiority to the 'West' is countered within the same paradigm by a messianic pride in the form of narratives about our exceptional suffering and merits, our greatness and superiority over the 'immoral' West, and our mission to the East. (ibid., p. 12)*

Realising we have inherited a 'post-colonial mentality' and recognising our nepantilism could prove advantageous, not because of the opportunity it lends to cherish our own victimisation, but as a way of facing our complex history. This might come as a relief, since it would mean giving up 'chasing' the West as well as giving up on our 'mission' in the East. The latter can be found in the nostalgia that reverberates, mainly in conservative circles in Poland, over the lost territories and former grandeur, as well as a sense of cultural superiority over the countries to the east of Poland. The sentiment evokes what the prominent Polish sociologist Jan Sowa considers the 'Polish colonial empire' (Sowa 2015, p. 61). Instead of seeking opportunities for conquest overseas, however, Poland expanded by absorbing territories in what is today Ukraine. Sowa is aware of the critical reception of this argument among historians,

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12 'In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly, and in some of its aspects unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behavior of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. But like any set of durable ideas, Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those called Occidental, European, or Western; in short, Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine. If the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, then we must be prepared to note how in its development and subsequent history Orientalism deepened and even hardened the distinction' (Said 1979, pp. 41–42).



but justifies his position by quoting primary sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries whose authors overtly attached a colonial status to the land in the East. He also draws a parallel between the theoretical discourse developed in Poland of that era to the terminology of French and British colonialism, perpetuating the myth of *terra nullius* and *mission civilisatrice* to remedy the situation on territories supposed to be culturally inferior (ibid., p. 63). Perhaps, however, the process calls for a kind of collective therapy,<sup>13</sup> one that could encompass our own poetics of *conscientización*.

In Poland we could also learn to reappropriate religion, to draw on spirituality and forge an eclecticism, even from areligious and atheistic positions. Following Chicana re-conceptualisations of religion and spirituality with the powerful figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Goddess of Americas as her role is characterised in the book by this title and in the aforementioned *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*, does not lose relevance among Poles, who have acquired a reputation of devout Catholics. St. Mary should be reclaimed — not only as a religious icon, but as a valid cultural symbol with transformative potential — from the sole domain of partisan, far right-wingers eager to capitalise on its political value.<sup>14</sup> Certain steps have been taken to revise the figure of the Madonna, yet many who distance themselves from Catholicism view all religious connotations with suspicion by virtue of the hegemonic status of the Vatican Church in Poland. This merger of religion and feminism, moreover, is often condemned, especially in the public sphere, despite the actual coexistence of the two. Dominika Kozłowska, a philosopher and editor-in-chief of the Polish catholic journal *Znak*, argues that many women are estranged from the Catholic Church due to its rigid attitudes towards gender roles, which culminate in the exclusion of women from the priesthood. She urges women to stay and to strive to implement change from the inside, and she highlights steps that have already been taken along these lines, including the creation of a Feminist Catholic Manifesto published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the signatories of which include a Polish feminist fiction writer and professor of literary studies (Kozłowska 2015). However, it seems that such appeals for the merger of religion and feminism are few and far between, disproportionate to the high percentage of the people who identify as Catholics. Moreover, Kozłowska and others who make them — including Elżbieta Adamiak, the ‘first Polish feminist theologian’ (Radzik 2014) — represent intellectual circles, and rarely seem to attract those outside academia and the intelligentsia. Following the example of Xicanas, Polish scholars could forge new ways to promote Catholic feminism on a wider scale.

13 Certain Polish scholars, including the sociologist Jan Sowa (2011, pp. 128–130) and philosopher Andrzej Leder (2012, p. 21), analyse Polish history and mentality through the Lacanian lens.

14 On a limited scale, those attempts have already been made in activist circles with the infamous case of the image of the Madonna with a rainbow halo, and the political persecution of those suspected of spreading the picture around the city. Another ‘Madonna scandal’ involved a Gay Pride in Gdansk and a festive performance of a colourful procession with a heart-shaped vagina used as a prop. The organisers of the happening, Prof. Ewa Graczyk, a feminist literary critic and activist as one of them, faced charges for insulting Christian values.

Finally, paradoxical as it may sound, we could learn to accept our own heritage and create feminist scholarship ‘as if’ it were more similar to third-world feminism, including U.S. *Xicanisma*. In this case we could simply rely on local feminisms that directly address specific issues in the trend of ‘situated knowledges’, as promulgated by Sandoval and other Chicanas, even if they do not use the term explicitly. Two major arguments can be advanced. One is practical-epistemological: it is always enriching to learn from those who are more experienced. The other is moral: following Chela Sandoval’s (perhaps overly deontological) proposal, we should commit to express solidarity with other post-colonial movements, rather than conceptualise the Central/Eastern European feminist scholarship and movement as part of the Western tradition. In this way local feminisms could cease to connote elitism, becoming instead the aspiring ‘poor relative’ of the confident and seductive Western feminist. Instead of a highly educated urban phenomenon, city feminists would become ‘sisters of the wheat’ in our region, possibly ‘potato sisters’ or ‘beetroot sisters’. In Polish, these expressions are used as derogatory epithets for uncouth people from rural areas, which is all the more reason to appropriate them — to enjoy the sweet corn from the South, the sweet and sour beetroot, and the nourishing potato in a form of research and activism that unites inhabitants of the city with those of the country. Such a metaphor would mirror or complement the ‘sisters of the corn’ that stems from ‘people of the corn’, the latter alluding to indigenous people and Mexican peasants, since ‘corn was domesticated from a grass called teocintle by the peoples of Meso-America approximately 10,000 years ago’ (Santini 2006). It would eventually become their primary food source, inspiring festivities as a symbol and guarantee of food security and peace. We should likewise hail our own local grain, wheat, our own vegetable, beetroot; we should seek to find our uniqueness in them. This analogy might also have the potential of inspiring respect for farmers and peasants, who cultivate what ends up as our daily bread.

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