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Curando La Herida: Shamanic Healing and Language in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera

Estefany Lopez

New York University, estefanylopez923@gmail.com

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Abstract

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Keywords

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By Estefany Lopez, New York University
HSI Pathways to the Professoriate, Cohort 1

Abstract: This paper explores the influence of shamanic tropes and philosophy in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Shamanic philosophy holds that language can materially transform realities, and Anzaldúa applies this framework in her aesthetics. Anzaldúa uses metaphor to reimagine the border not as a partition but as a wound to be healed; this metaphor seeks to transform the U.S./Mexico relationship and undermine the oppressive discourse of US hegemony and white supremacy. Moreover, the intertextual and bilingual nature of the text performs the healing of the wound by generating a new language of mestizaje. These aesthetic tactics are likened to traditional shamanic practices such as the removal of harmful intrusions and glossolalia. Lastly, shamanic philosophy is evaluated relative to two dominant western philosophies of language, logocentrism, and poststructuralism. The value in revisiting shamanic philosophy lies in its radically affective understanding of language, and its potential to empower the marginalized to participate in the formation of mestiza consciousness and more equitable realities.

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Upon its release in 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* challenged the conventions of literary criticism; perhaps one of its most daring departures is its theorization of traditional cultural knowledge, particularly as it pertains to folk religion tropes and shamanic philosophy. Her writing practice is characterized by her desire to heal societal ills through language, much like a shaman might heal the sick with folk medicine. As a result, her work offers a framework that merges language and spirituality into a political tool of mestizaje that undermines the discursive damage of white supremacy and U.S. hegemony. This analysis will focus on two vital iterations of Anzaldúa's poet shaman aesthetics within

Borderlands: The New Mestiza: first, Anzaldúa uses novel, subversive metaphors to expand our conceptual schema of reality, thus enabling us to tap into non-representational modes of thinking. Additionally, the intertextual, interlingual structure of the text is performative of the borderlands itself and, similarly to glossolalia, accesses a nonlinear, polyglot modality that cannot be translated or appropriated.

Both these aesthetic tactics use language creatively to destabilize hegemonic systems of signification; in other words, Anzaldúa writes from the borderlands to heal the toxic binary thinking that privileges the U.S, white, and male over the Mexican, non-white, and female. The figurative and performative strategies in *Borderlands* orient the reader towards transgressing structural binaries and reintegrating the binaries' divorced halves into a whole¹. With this approach, Anzaldúa advances a monistic shamanic worldview and advocates for the dismantling of binary thinking. Shamanic tropes and conceptions of language are integral to Anzaldúa's approach, as shamanic philosophy holds that language can literally and materially transform realities. Anzaldúa's shamanic healing project throughout *Borderlands* uses language to transform and construct more equitable realities and operates within a radically effective understanding of language and discourse.

Gloria Anzaldúa alludes to her shamanic inspiration in "*Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink*", the chapter of *Borderlands* which is concerned with her writing process. Here, she directly invokes a parallel between the roles of the shaman and the writer, explaining that storytelling has the ability to transform writers and readers: "the writer, as shape-changer, is a *nahual*, a shaman" (*Borderlands* 88). Writing, thus, becomes a process of transmutation not only of words into images and narratives, but also of the storyteller and the listener. For Anzaldúa, this means that writing can be used to heal trauma both in herself and in her readers:

In reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make "sense" of them, and once they have "meaning" they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy (*Borderlands* 92).

Through creative expression, the writing shaman reshapes and reconceptualizes trauma, which in turn allows for healing. In engaging the author's theorization of trauma, the reader undergoes the same transformation. Thus, the text becomes a common space where writers and readers, through creative inversions, can reimagine a communal pain so that it becomes its own cure.

The healing potential of writing stems from a shamanic philosophy of language. AnaLouise Keating describes what she calls the "poet shaman aesthetic" in her article "Speculative Realism, Visionary Pragmatism, and Poet-Shaman Aesthetics in Gloria Anzaldúa — and Beyond." She writes that Anzaldúa's aesthetics lends words "causal force":

As in shamanic worldviews and indigenous theories and practices— in which words, images, and things are intimately interwoven and the intentional, ritualized

¹ While adamant about dismantling binaries, Anzaldúa's writings often suggest essentialist thinking; while she condemns the privileging of one "half" of the binary over the other, she seems to presuppose that the binary categories themselves (for example, man/woman) exist, while only their supposed fixed characteristics (women as lesser) are constructed. This is a tendency reflected in larger shamanic philosophies of language, and will be dealt with in the concluding section of this paper.

performance of specific, carefully selected words *shifts* reality— poet-shaman aesthetics enables us to enact and concretize transformation (52).

In line with shamanic conceptions, Anzaldúa's language is not merely representational, nor merely metaphorical or poetic; it is material, "causal. Language can have material(izing) force" (Keating 52). In other words, Anzaldúa wills realities into being through language. The shamanic view that language not only constitutes but materializes reality is further developed by Christopher Bracken in *Magical Criticism: The Recourse to Savage² Philosophy*. Bracken explains that shamans "regard signs as vehicles for the transmission of forces as if the elaboration of discourse were enough to effect changes in the nondiscursive world" (1). As a result, shamanic philosophy of language posits a material connection between signifier and signified, in which a word employed affects material entities.

Power Intrusions

Reading Anzaldúa's essay "Metaphors in the Tradition of a Shaman" alongside James Geary's work *I is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor* offers an explanation to how metaphors fit into Anzaldúa's aesthetic ideals. Anzaldúa writes that her negative mental representations of reality caused her to become sick: "imagination acted upon [her] own body" and her mental images "communicated with tissues, organ, and cell to effect change" (Metaphors 121). As a result, she sensed the power of words and images, and recognized the need to "control the metaphors" she used to conceptualize her reality (Metaphors 121). Anzaldúa characterizes these words and images— and the material conditions they underpin— as illnesses, "lo que daña" (Metaphors 121). Here, "illness" refers to anything that "unbalances" individuals or communities; in this case, Anzaldúa extends it to racism, sexism, bigotry, and inequality (Metaphors 121).

In describing the physiological effect of words and images on her health, Anzaldúa erodes Cartesian dualist views of the body and mind as separate, as well as the larger Western distinction between abstraction and materiality. In Anzaldúa's words, metaphors and symbols "concretize the spirit and etherealize the body"; by transforming spirit into material and body into abstract, Anzaldúa shows how language can make apparent the fluidity and interconnectedness of supposedly antithetical categories (*Borderlands* 97). Metaphor introduces ambiguity and overlap between those binaries which are reputed to be diametrically opposed to one another; thus, the binary dissolves. Her views hearken back to animistic, shamanic beliefs which contend that all is unified and interconnected, that physical ailments can have a nonphysical source, and that words and images are just as material as sticks and stones.

Given this framework of language, words can be deployed either as weapons or cures; connotations, context, and usage determine which of those roles the word assumes. To put

² Bracken does not use the term "savage" uncritically; instead, he emphasizes that "we scholars invent our savages" (6). What is considered savage was constructed by western thinkers to 'racialize' non-western ideas as being culturally and racially deficient. He uses the term savage not to positively identify a category of people, but to illustrate how certain bodies of knowledge have been devalued by hegemony based on prejudiced "production of the categories of thought" (6). In Anzaldúa's case, knowledge based on indigenous religion is deemed 'savage' and 'primitive' in a discourse which privileges US Anglo-American intellectual traditions; her persistence in reclaiming shamanic tropes seeks to undo the devaluation of indigenous belief systems.

plainly, it is not the word itself that determines whether it heals or hurts, because signifiers themselves do not 'mean' anything; because all meaning is contextual, it is the discourse surrounding a word that lends it its powers. This discourse is calcified by metaphors, which link words and concepts within our cognitive schema. Geary describes how metaphors form connections between words, and how these connections transform realities. Metaphors are figurative devices that describe a thing in terms of something else, thus drawing parallels between them that elicit associations and meaning. Geary represents metaphor with the equation "X = Y", suggesting that words do not 'equate' themselves but always interrelate to other words through metaphorical thinking (8).

When metaphorical associations are repeated enough in speech, they become encoded into constructed meaning. For example, the word blue has been associated with sadness for so long that the expression "I'm feeling blue"—literally nonsensical—makes perfect sense. Blue = sad as metaphor has pervaded speech to the point of synonymy; thus, the metaphor has a fixed quality which Geary argues makes it an "extinct metaphor", or a metaphor so deeply embedded in language it even ceases to be considered metaphorical and becomes commonplace, obvious, and even "literally true" (25).

Geary's extinct metaphors parallel Anzaldúa's discussion of "dead metaphors" (Metaphors 122). Anzaldúa writes that the aforementioned illnesses of society are the result of old, dead, metaphors. If bigoted discourse is an illness, then metaphors are the pathogen carriers.[CSA4] Dead metaphors are so deeply codified into language itself that they resist change, thus simultaneously cementing and disseminating the power structure that created them. Anzaldúa argues that the only way to cure this illness is to replace the dead metaphors with new ones (Metaphors 122). In other words, counteracting old discourse with new metaphors can heal societal malaise, especially when dead metaphors fortify the oppressive dominant discourse of the ruling class.

The healing engendered by new metaphors functions as shamanic healing by inducing "altered states of consciousness conducive to self-healing" (Metaphors 122). In other words, because new metaphors force us to restructure our perceptions of the world, they allow us to build new realities that circumvent the societal illness caused by dead metaphors and establish healthier discourse.

One of Anzaldúa's most radical new metaphors is her reimagining of the border. Throughout the work, Anzaldúa re-conceptualizes the border not as a partition but as a wound. This new metaphor of the border undermines white supremacist discourse surrounding the border and posits a new ontological relationship between the U.S and Mexico. Before examining how Anzaldúa reimagines the border, we must first look at how it is traditionally conceptualized. The U.S./Mexican Border is a dead/extinct metaphor that perpetuates U.S hegemony's subjugation of Mexicans and Chicanos. A border is defined as a separation between two distinct entities. It is an arbitrary line drawn on a map that signifies where one thing ends and another begins. This line on the map does not represent itself; rather, it metaphorizes an unbreachable limitation, an outline of bodies which necessarily do not overlap or interact. Because it is arbitrarily designated, the border superficially imposes the rigid categories of "Us" and "Them" onto a landscape that is fluid and continuous. Lastly, in a context of disproportionately held power, the border is framed from the dominant view as "that which keeps others out."

The border manifests the illnesses of tribalism and binary thinking, establishing a Manichean allegory that serves white supremacy. The border metaphor is arbitrarily constructed; yet, its economy as a metaphor is ever-present in the experience of the people it affects.³ This is clear in the history of the borderlands, the interstitial space between the U.S and Mexico. Despite the legal decisiveness of the border, the cultural distinction between its two sides is not clear-cut, and is steeped in political conflict. Communities along the border are caught between these two different entities, alienated and doubly disowned. This is seen in “The Homeland, Aztlán,” the opening chapter of *Borderlands*, which chronicles the historical developments of the region.

In dominant U.S. discourse, Mexico is perceived as the Other, and Mexicans as ‘aliens’; thus, even if the people of the borderlands have resided there for centuries, they are rendered strangers in their own ancestral home. Land disputes left Chicanos as “*atravesados*”, people “jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from identity and history” (*Borderlands* 25, 30). This is evoked when Anzaldúa’s mother is barred from entering her ancestral cemetery:

Mama Locha had asked that we bury her there beside her husband, *El cementerio estaba cercado...* We couldn’t even visit the grave, let alone bury her there. Today, it is still padlocked. The sign reads: Keep out. Trespassers will be shot (*Borderlands* 30).

Displacement within one’s homeland creates neurosis caused by un-belonging and dispossession. The border as “that which keeps others out,” precipitates this illness.

As Anzaldúa identifies the problems of the border, she re-metaphorizes the border as a wound; this new metaphor paves the way towards healing. The new border metaphor emerges not as a split between two, but a wound on one collective body:

The U.S-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds... A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary (*Borderlands* 25).

In this passage, the border is described as a wound essentially slashing a body in two, suggesting an ontological shift in assessing the U.S-Mexico divide. Rather than describing an essential binary opposition, the new metaphor figures the border as pathology. The imagery of the border as injury suggests that U.S and Mexico are fragmented parts of a once unified whole, and that the injury inflicted is unnatural and undesirable. This new metaphor brings urgent awareness to the border, forcing us to reconceptualize the relationship between these two nations and cultures.

³ The material ramifications of the border as partition metaphor are painfully apparent in contemporary politics; the Trump Administration’s “zero tolerance” (intolerance) border policy in 2018 prioritizes the preservation of the oppressive U.S/Mexico binary over the psychological and physical health of children, separating families in the name of ‘law and order’ (Burkitt).

In essence, the border—the othering of Mexicans and Chicanos— changes from a marker of difference into an injustice towards a shared body. Once this trauma is recognized, there is an ethical imperative to heal the body by repairing its wound. Removing the old toxic metaphors by the addition of new healing metaphors echoes the shamanic practice of extracting harmful intrusions. In *The Way of the Shaman*, Michael Harner describes a practice in which shamans heal by “sucking” out harmful intrusions from the body. An intrusion is, like a “communicable disease”, transmitted between people, and is described as a psychic/physiological injury which is inflicted on others by “eruptions” of negativity such as anger and hostility (Harner 116). For example, a jealous glare is often said to transmit a curse; however, the concept of harmful intrusion can also encompass something like the psychological harm of racist speech on a person of color. Interestingly, Harner uses the word “communicable”, which may not only refer to diseases passed by direct contact, but also implies “that which can be communicated”; this secondary interpretation resonates with our discussion of words as material, and more specifically, as pathogen carrier. In this case, the dead and damaging metaphors act as an intrusion on the body and must be removed and replaced.

Anzaldúa performs the shamanic practice of removing intrusions on a macro scale, in which the affected body is the U.S and Mexico and the harmful intrusion is the hostility, fear, and tribalism materialized in the border. Ridding ourselves of this wound requires resituating the border within a new conceptual schema that isn't oppositional, Manichean, and unjust. The border as wound metaphor is Anzaldúa's poet-shaman aesthetics in practice: the shared trauma of a violently imposed border is synthesized through metaphor, and from the acknowledgment of the trauma emerges an urgent need to dismantle the toxic, white supremacist discourse surrounding the border.

Speaking in Tongues

Anzaldúa's use of metaphor is deeply steeped in shamanic philosophies of language and healing praxis. Similar inspirations from shamanic philosophy also permeate the form of *Borderlands* itself. The polyglot, intertextual structure of *Borderlands* is performative of Anzaldúa's reconciliatory thematic. By using multiple languages in the text, and often in the same sentence, Anzaldúa gives voice to the ethos of the borderlands and expresses its languages, English, and Spanish, as they interact in one liminal space. If metaphors reconfigure entities by merging them with their supposed opposites, then the simultaneous presence of many languages destabilizes fixed meaning and linearity, performing the productive interplay of cultures which is characteristic of the borderlands. To borrow from Doris Sommer's *Bilingual Aesthetics*, multilingualism challenges a dominant language's monopoly on meaning. Anzaldúa's combination of languages in the text gives voice to the particular trauma of the *mestiza*, and performs the reintegration of the U.S and Mexico from binary into the monad of shamanic cosmology.

The introduction to Doris Sommer's *Bilingual Aesthetics*, “Invitation,” examines the aesthetic value of bilingualism; when applied to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, it becomes apparent how Anzaldúa's multilingual approach is productive to her goal of shifting realities through language. Sommer writes:

More than one language is a supplement, not a deficiency. It is a dangerous supplement to monolingualism, whether the addition amounts to two languages or many. Bilingualism overloads mono systems... the underlying goal of thinking about these overloads as intellectual, artistic, and ethical enhancements will be to open public debate beyond this failing standard of monolingual assimilation (xi-xii).

Monolingual systems of signification establish an uncontested grasp on how we conceptualize reality; supplementing this system another language (indeed, a new system) jolts us out of complacency and invites us to reevaluate the discourse we have come to accept as given. Bilingualism, then, challenges fixed meaning by providing a different linguistic framework through which meaning is conceptualized. Every language, owed to its singular development, context, and structure, contains its own world sense. To craft a bilingual text, then, is to weave between world senses; any multilingual text is always already an intertextual text, as it cannot be read without cross-referencing world senses.⁴ This cross-referencing makes linear reading impossible, and deviates from the centralizing, homogenizing epistemology of white supremacy.

Polyglossia is one of the pinnacles of *mestiza* consciousness and hinges on an understanding that the Borderlands is a hybridized place whose ethos is not fully expressible by either English or Spanish alone. The simultaneous presence of many languages challenges hegemonic accounts of U.S culture as supreme and authoritative. Thus, the presence of multiple languages in the text performs the meeting of cultures, the ambiguity, and inclusivity that will heal the wound of the *Borderlands*.

The supplement of a second language paves the way for language play and creative, divergent thinking in what Doris Sommer calls “bilingual games” (Sommer xi-xii). This divergent thinking enables deviation from binarism and allows for connections to be made across languages. Cross-lingual play accesses *mestiza* consciousness by generating new meanings and accessing nonlinear means of representation. Anzaldúa utilizes this approach in “La consciencia de la Mestiza” when she makes a cross-linguistic metaphor:

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 (*Borderlands* 103).

Here, there is a crosslinguistic punning of the word *amasamiento*, which is Spanish for “kneading” but also suggestive of the English word “amass.” The description which follows folds in both kneading and amassing imagery, in which Anzaldúa is an amalgamation of different cultures— and their corresponding languages, who then creates her own new *mestizaje* culture from those components. Here, it is clear that the polyglossia of the text unlocks a spontaneous logic that explores concepts that are difficult to pinpoint within either language alone. As such, the text unites the cultures which underpin the different languages, allowing the free play of the languages to give rise naturally to *mestiza* culture.

⁴ Contained in a world sense is the untranslatability of meaning; Jacques Derrida suggests “what is most idiomatic... to a language, cannot be appropriated... when you look for what is most idiomatic in a language... you approach that which, throbbing within a language, does not let itself be grasped (101).”

This intersects interestingly with Anzaldúa's reference to glossolalia in one of her most passionate essays, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women", in which she describes the challenges women of color face writing in an intellectual climate that privileges white male cultural production. Because the voices of women of color do not conform to white male discursive and aesthetic practices, and do not serve hegemonic metanarratives of patriarchy and white supremacy, they are delegitimized and taboo. From the white male frame of reference, the woman of color is unintelligible:

Our [women of color] speech, too, is inaudible. We speak in tongues like the outcast and the insane... The white man speaks: *Perhaps if you scrape the dark off your face. Maybe if you bleach your bones [you could write]. Stop speaking in tongues, stop writing left-handed. Don't cultivate your colored skins nor tongues of fire if you want to make it in a right-handed world* ("Speaking" 165-166).

In a monolingual system of signification based on white, male, Anglo-American values, validation for women writers of color is conditional upon their intellectual conformity to hegemony. Speaking in tongues, then, is a refusal to abide by those terms and a reclamation by the woman of color of a subversive discourse that is devalued in the mainstream.

In "Shamanic Urgency and Two-Way Movement as Writing Style in the Works of Gloria Anzaldúa", Betsy Dahm explores Anzaldúa's usage of the term:

Referencing religious application, speaking in tongues can be interpreted as babbling incoherent nonsense... depending on one's perspective. Speaking in tongues can also refer to an unknown and/or sacred language⁵ (16).

Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, is an ecstatic religious experience in which a participant begins to speak in indiscernible speech. From a monolingual perspective, Anzaldúa's speech is garbled and nonsensical; therefore, from the vantage point of dominant discourse, Anzaldúa is speaking in tongues. Yet, from a bilingual aesthetic perspective, we understand that not all words have translations in other languages and that cross-lingual play can yield interesting and novel insights.

Thus, from Anzaldúa's position within the Borderlands, her speaking in tongues is not nonsense, but rather accessing a different nonlinear self-expression that arises between languages. In the same sense that glossolalia occurs in liminal states of consciousness, Anzaldúa's bilingual speech speaks to the trauma and the ingenuity and generativity of a liminal identity. As she slips across world senses, Anzaldúa speaks in tongues that institutionalized power cannot understand or accept. As such, the glossolalia generates the new language of the *mestizaje*, a language that is incoherent to those who do not wish to understand hybridity, but is spiritually and materially transformative to those who embrace *mestiza* consciousness. If shaman philosophy holds that language can transform realities, Anzaldúa's intertextual form

⁵ Glossolalia is usually regarded as channeling a divine language; however, Anzaldúa's speaking in tongues is not transcendent, but deeply entrenched in the sociopolitical realities of the *Borderlands*: "the danger is in being too universal and humanitarian and invoking the eternal to the sacrifice of the particular and the feminine and the specific historical moment" ("Speaking" 170).

shows us what healing the border wound might look like as it performs an emerging mestiza consciousness.

Conclusion

Shamanic influences are apparent in Anzaldúa's work, regarding both her use of metaphor and the performativity of her multilingual text. Interestingly, shamanic philosophy of language does not fit neatly into a western paradigm. In a western context, two main philosophies of language are prevalent: the logocentric or western metaphysical model and the poststructuralist model. When examined alongside these philosophies of language, shamanic philosophy is simultaneously more conservative and more radical than either logocentrism or poststructuralism. Amidst this tension, it becomes apparent that, as Bracken argues, we still have a lot to learn from our so-called "savage" philosophers, and that Anzaldúa's framework holds value and immense potential.

As Bracken explains, in shamanic philosophy, "signs have a "real" and "physical" connection with things" and as such, "physical forces can be deployed by discursive means" (2-3). In other words, when a word is spoken, the latent "mana", or force, of the word is activated and a change in the physical world manifests (Bracke 1). A helpful analogy would be a voodoo doll: the voodoo doll represents a person in the physical world, and changes done to the doll affect the real person; similarly, shamanic belief holds that language is materially connected to and affects physical realities. Thus, in shamanic philosophy, the relationship between a signifier and the signified is neither purely abstract nor purely arbitrary.

On the other hand, logocentrism holds language to be an abstract tool of communication that conveys transparent meaning about a transcendent and objective reality outside of language. Like logocentrism, shamanic language attributes to words an essence, mana, that links words to the things they represent in a transparent, 1:1 relationship. This essentializing tendency of shamanic philosophy is reflected in some of Anzaldúa's writings. For instance, Anzaldúa writes that she "questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings", but she doesn't question the existence of the categories light and dark themselves as essentially existing (Borderlands, 103). In the shamanic view, words and physical realities are parallel; thus, if the linguistic categories exist, the material categories exist also. While it is possible to change linguistic categories and thus change reality under the shamanic view, the essential connection between signifier and signified remains intact even if the categories change. However, shaman philosophy differs from logocentrism in that its signifiers are transformative rather than merely descriptive of an external reality, and are not abstract but material. Language is not necessarily bound to reproduce the hegemonic discourse, but is always capable of generating new systems of signification, and thus new realities.

In this last regard, shamanic philosophy echoes the poststructuralist claim that language constitutes reality. Poststructuralism holds that signs are arbitrary and interrelated to other signs in an endless chain of *différance*; rather than the positive identification of logocentrism, poststructuralism posits that things are negatively defined by what they are not. As a result, there is no understanding of the world as separate from language. The shaman goes further and says language not only constitutes, but always reconfigures reality not just perceptually, but also materially. Keating writes:

in poet-shaman aesthetics, words do not simply point to this externalized material reality in some correspondence-type mode. Words neither serve merely as a veil between ourselves and a more real (that is, more tangibly material) world nor create our reality in some poststructuralist approach (i.e., the "linguistic turn"...). My claim is far more extreme: in poet-shaman aesthetics, words have causal force; words embody the world; words are matter; words become matter (52).

If logocentrism holds that language is abstract, and poststructuralism holds it is constitutive of a world, yet arbitrary, then shamanic philosophy holds it to be material and intentional. Anzaldúa's philosophy of language, in typical *Borderlands* fashion, is irreducible to the either/or binary that characterizes the western debate. Within the western context, shamanic philosophy remains ambiguous; however, shamanic language is worth revisiting due to its radically affective implications, and its potential to actualize the goals of mestiza consciousness.

The poet-shaman challenges us to consider that a discourse being constructed doesn't mean that it isn't, in a meaningful and physical sense, still very "real". More so than logocentrism and poststructuralism, shamanic conceptions of language emphasize the lived experience of discourse. Under this view, words have material consequences and are intimately interwoven into daily life; if language is material, and can change a subject's emotional, psychological, and physical well-being, the shaman manipulates the materializing properties of language to envision a new reality that is free of illness, that does not harm but rather empowers.

This reimagining is central to the mestiza consciousness Anzaldúa describes in the closing chapter of *Borderlands*. The mestiza consciousness is a new culture based on tolerance of ambiguity, hybridity, and plurality; this culture is realized by "by creating a new mythos— that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave— *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (102). In other words, generating new subversive metaphors, new systems of signification, and new realities offers a new paradigm which undermines US hegemony.

Finally, the poet-shaman delivers the tools for transformation to the mestiza herself. The poet-shaman is an optimist, maintaining that rebel voices can change the world. Anzaldúa writes "people in possession of the vehicles of communication are, indeed, in partial possession of their lives (Metaphors 123)". While language can never be fully possessed, Anzaldúa's aesthetics invite the disenfranchised to grapple with their oppressor's definitions and create their own. Shamanic philosophy empowers those who have been marginalized and excluded from dominant discourse to participate in the formation of a more just society and an emerging *mestiza* consciousness.

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About the author:

Estefany Lopez is a Ph.D. student studying English at New York University's Graduate School of Arts and Science. She received her B.A. in English from Florida International University (FIU). Her research encompasses critical theory, particularly Marxist and Critical Race criticisms, as well as philosophies of language and minority literature. Her areas of interest are 20th-21st century U.S. Literature, and the intersections of literary discourse with contemporary cultural and political formations. She is also interested in postmodern aesthetics and its application to questions of identity, community, and meaning. After attending the Salzburg Global Citizenship Seminar in 2016, she has been interested in cosmopolitanism and the dynamics of cultural exchange. In Fall 2017, she was awarded the Butler Waugh Scholarship from the English Department at FIU.