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## Translating Borders, Performing Trans-nationalism

Paola Zaccaria

University of Bari, [mestiza@libero.it](mailto:mestiza@libero.it)

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## *Translating Borders, Performing Trans-nationalism*

Paola Zaccaria

*University of Bari, Italy*

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mestiza@libero.it

**Abstract:** A constitutive theme of semiotics, comparative literatures, applied linguistics and social theory, translation, is read here as a practice of transformation and crossing, trans-action and transit, composition and recomposition between texts and cultures. Inside and underneath the practices of translation lies the logics of encounter which is strictly linked to the *conocimiento* that global transformation can take place only if there is self transformation, and vice-versa. The translation border is a space of transformation, and la frontera a paradigm for transition and change: a body, a tongue, a culture opens to elsewhere, entering a contact zone, a transitional space of incessant gangways between cultures, between societal and individual histories, where words and worlds interact, and one's sense of identity transmutes and moves on. The interracial, intercultural self-intra-translation enacted by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (and Alfred Arteaga in *Cantos*) creates figurations of metamorphoses where mestizo thinking flourishes to become transnational, planetary and culturally dense—a *mestizaje* poetics, politics, thinking. The essay follows a *caminho* which opens on a critical perspective showing that Anzaldúa's theory is not binary or dialectic, but relational: the great divide between the dualistic thinking and Anzaldúa's project-process is the *conocimiento* that the counterstance "locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed," whereas confrontation, translation and comparativism introduce difference in monologism.

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### PRE-FACE

It is my intention to read the topic of this panel ("Borderlands of Language and Culture") through a constitutive theme of semiotics, comparative literatures and multicultural languages (as is the case of American culture): translation, read as a practice of transformation and crossing, composition and recomposition between texts and cul-

tures. Inside and underneath the practices of translation lies the logics of encounter which is strictly linked to the notion of the intertwining between linguistic and cultural borderlands and to the *conocimiento* that global transformation can take place only if there is self transformation and, vice versa, self transformation is possible in a world where categories such as national boundaries, protectionism and dualisms are de-

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Paola Zaccaria is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Bari, Italy. She teaches 20th-century American and English avant-gardes, Feminist Criticism, Latina and African American Literature, Border and Diaspora Studies, Literary and Film Theory, Visual Studies in Bari University. She has written numberless book chapters and journal articles. Her most recent books are: *A lettere scarlatte. Poesia come stregoneria* (*In Scarlet Letters, Poetry as Witchcraft*, Milano 1995); *Mappe senza frontiere. Cartografie letterarie dal modernismo al transnazionalismo* (*Maps without frontiers...*, Bari 1999); *La lingua che ospita. Poetica, politica, traduzione* (*The Hosting tongue. Poetics, politics, translation*, Roma, 2005); *Transcodificazioni*, Roma 2005. She is the Italian translator and editor of *Borderlands/La frontera*, and has widely written about Anzaldúa.

constructed.<sup>1</sup>

As we know, as Gloria Evelina Anzaldúa knew, the frontier is an ambiguous polysemic term: on the one hand, it refers to a great divide, an edge, a wall, a battlefield, a hudud<sup>2</sup>, a geographical limen which can be expanded by acts of aggression; on the other hand, it can also be a synonym for bridge, threshold, a tierra de medio, a land of incessant passages, an hijab, a space which is neither a center nor a margin. The same ambiguity coexists in the theory and practice of translation: it can be carried on as an act of aggression, as appropriation, even as cannibalism, but it can also be a space where the encounter of languages and cultures takes place and shape. As repeatedly said by writers and critics, inter-location generates inter-locutions.

The theme of our forum requires that I focus on a particular aspect of translation: the possibility of using translation as a political challenge, originating in a conception of the language as plural, multiple, opposed to the restricted view which affirms that nationalism, isolationism and monolingualism are unavoidable because the politics of cultural and individual identity unfolds the untranslatability of languages and cultures. Clearly, a vision of self and identity as multiple purports a conception of language—and therefore meaning—as multiple and affects each single self which will feel that in the in-between space of translation, the individual and global space for agency flourishes and opens to further *conocimiento*.

Being neither a sociologist nor strictly speaking a linguist, I—who am here because passionately engaging with Anzaldúa's lan-

guage, art, theory and practice since ten years ago—have chosen to focus on the translation of border texts in a Social Theory Forum focusing on “Human Rights, Borderlands, and the Poetics of Applied Social Theory” first of all because border texts have to do with a rewriting, or better, a reconfiguration of borders and so certainly they are a means of undercutting naïve notions of nationhood and of underlining the contested and liminal nature of national cultures. In the chicano-Anzaldúan concept of *la frontera* as bridge, the implications of the suffix “trans” are strictly co-existent and constitutive, and allow American Studies to be taught in a transnational perspective.

Moreover, translation speaks of a *transducere*, thus opening on the territories of movement, *transnationalism* and *comparativism*, i.e. translation enacts the contemporary move toward internationalizing and globalizing Studies. Translation is the prescribed way toward transnationalism and connection. Translation is the medium toward the “tout-monde” (Glissant 1996), the planetarity Spivak engages with in *Death of a Discipline* (2003).

The third reason for choosing border texts has to do with our common area studies: inter-language, inter-textuality, inter-translation is the reality of the USA; far from being national, solipsistic, American literature was and is dialogic, polysemantic, multicultural, innovative and complex:<sup>3</sup> the paradigm of transit inscribed in words prefixed by *trans* was and is constitutive of American culture. Once out of the dream of integrating the other's culture in the WASP design, the *trans(it)* paradigm physically present in the States will eventually be read

<sup>1</sup> On the simultaneity of self and global transformations, see Mohammad H. Tamdgidi's essay in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> The Arabic word “hudud,” explains the Moroccan writer Fatema Mernissi in *Islam and Democracy. Fear of the Modern World*, means norms, rules, frontiers, spiritual and ideological walls, whereas “hijab” is a curtain which can be crossed, the veil through which to see and be glimpsed at—something not so normative as the hududs.

<sup>3</sup> According to what Glissant wrote in *The Novels of America* (1989), the American continent is distinguished not by single states but by “cultural zones.” Glissant suggests it could be interesting to follow what happens in places where there is an abrupt rupture with the European past and tradition, where the contact with other cultures is more vibrant (for example in the South), although it can be asymmetrical (Bhabha 1994).

as trans-national.<sup>4</sup>

My hypothesis is that reading *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) by Anzaldúa, and reading *Cantos* (1991) by Alfred Arteaga in a transnational perspective in North America, for example, can be as stirring and alienating as reading *Lolita* in Teheran. It follows that translating *Borderlands/La Frontera* or *Textos vivos*, the second section of Arteaga's long poem, in Italian, gives the chance of teaching American Studies in a transnational perspective, just as reading *Reading Lolita in Teheran* in Rome or Austin, Texas, or Boston, Mass.

If travelling theories have contributed to the denationalization of American critical thought, besides introducing diasporic intellectuals in the transnational theory, then translation is nowadays not only the compulsory path to transnationalize languages and studies, to delocalize us and others, but also to globalize or better indigenize<sup>5</sup> visions and *weltanschauung*.

In times of globalization, contamination, and migration of texts and bodies, translation operates a passage from the materiality of one expression to another and implies a complex planetary redefinition: between West and East, North and South. Moreover, the analysis of translation practices requires a revision of the plurality of codes and languages inside discursive formations (Foucault 1973e 1977; Gee 1996 e 1999, Fairclough 1995), including gender formations. Translation is the lens through which we can view political and social, i.e. discursive, aspects of gender relations: it unveils how the meaning of "gender" is culturally mediated, that is how a gendered identity is achieved in interaction. Besides, translation helps to realize the complexity of the gender-society-language relationship.

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<sup>4</sup> The example of the Chicano culture here again helps us: Anzaldúa speaks of five races, of at least eight languages and three continents inscribed in the *raza*, which as we know is not a racialized concept, but on the contrary the prefiguration of a planetary overnational culture and community.

Finally, my practice of translation has taught me that we can extend the metaphor of contact<sup>6</sup> to the practices of translation. Contact is not meant here as the influence of one culture/language/discourse upon another, but as a space where cultures/languages/discourses are mutually co-constructive, so that translation is a practice of intertextuality and interdiscursivity—interculturality, besides producing transnational formations.

### TRANSLATION, MIGRATION, TRANSFORMATION

The translator's condition can be considered emblematic of the linguistic and cultural condition of the migrant subjects of our age, when even the common speaker, the resident citizen, lives "in-between languages" and is forced to translate quite a great number of signs (images which portray different cultures, slogans in foreign languages, foods with exotic names, music styles coming from different parts of the world or hybrid sounds and symbols, etc.). Because of this, even the common speaker is forced

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<sup>5</sup> I am borrowing the word and concept of indigenization from the paper, titled "Networking Women on a Transnational Landscape: Globalism, Modernism, and Gender," Susan Stanford Friedman delivered in Florence, for the International Conference *Networking Women: Trans-European and Circum-Atlantic Connections* (November 11-13, 2004). Friedman says that in reading modernist texts, she looks "for signs of what I call 'indigenization', the transplantation of traveling ideas and cultural forms into new soil where they become newly 'native', even 'traditional' in their new home. I see this form of cultural translation or transplantation as especially endemic to traveling modernities and thus a window into the way contact and traveling zones are constitutive of modernity and modernism." Later on, speaking of Picasso's indigenization of African masks in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Friedman expands the concept: "I use the term indigenization here to describe a process of cultural translation as a way of emphasizing that the heightened exchanges enabled by modernity often result in adaptations that nativize the cultural practices of others until they become definitive of a new tradition."

to see himself/herself with the eyes and through the language of the other. That's why the translation border is also a space of transformation: a body, a tongue, a culture opens to elsewhere, and addresses itself to different directions, entering a contact zone, a transitional space of incessant gangways between cultures, between societary and individual histories, where words and worlds interact, and one's sense of identity transmutes and moves on. The subject in the process of translating does not simply speak from a situated perspective, "a location of one's own," but his/her word, or better his/her chewing-tasting and outpouring of the other's word in another tongue comes from a linguistic and experiential (non)origin which is the space of the "in-between." The translator speaks in-between languages, cultures, codes, emotions, formations; s/he can find a word in her/his own language only if s/he uses eyes and ears to read, only if s/he is able to listen to the other's wor(l)ds, aware that the translated wor(l)d will always be the product of an in-between/trans space, an in-between hearing, an in-between perception, an in-between affection. Translation is made up by sign-meanings which are figures of contact.

Actually, one can never say exactly from where one is translating, but can only declare one's own in-between space. The translator does not translate the *original* language into the *foreign* language, but s/he tries to dis-remember, dismember the language s/he has been introduced into the world with, in order to leave space for the sounds, the rhythms, the images, the meanings of the

language s/he has chosen to know, the language which s/he has selected as one of her/her personal keys to listen to and apprehend other languages—finally, s/he lets traces of the other (language) breathe, rise to the surface in the native language.

### TRANSLATION AS AN OPENING OF LA FRONTERA IN THE CHICANO EXPERIENCE

The question I tried to deal with while translating *Borderlands/La frontera* was: what happens when history thrusts human beings into another nation, into another narration, into another language, through another culture? When history is so violent that either it requires that the subject should move on, migrate, or that s/he should be named citizen of a country s/he has not even chosen to be her/his own—not even through the painful agency of the migration act. I have been questioning the case of chicanos, the Mexicans living *within* the American borders or *on* the borders between Mexico and USA, just because this kinds of subjects are compelled to ask themselves questions such as: "how to say 'I' / como se dise yo?", i.e. "como se traduce yo," or "what is translated in saying 'I'?"

Having selected for my approach to the issue of translation, gender, postcolonialism and transnationalism this peculiar form of residents/migrants' translation inside the States—the chicano self-infra-intra-translation—I have worked particularly on the interracial, intercultural transliterature/translation enacted by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La frontera* (1987) and Alfred Arteaga in his kaleidoscopic poem, *Cantos* (1991)—I would like to show how the intercrossings of languages, images, figurations and intertextualities enacted in their works manage to reveal that the chicano literature, far from being "ethnic" and "subcultural" within the "national" North-American culture, has flourished to become transnational, planetary and culturally dense or *mestizajed*. In

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<sup>6</sup> My use of the expression "contact zone" as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separate, come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 1992: 6) although embracing the stress on power imbalance present in Pratt's definition of "contact zone," adds to it the stress on the multiplication of interactions and transits offered by exchange, which often produces indigenizations and nativizations.



the classroom I work with the students towards discovering how Arteaga and Anzaldúa have worked towards a language, a text which more than cross-cultural I would define as intercultural or even better, transnational (although always maintaining characteristics of the culture in which this experiment has been generated—the chicano language and vision), in that the texture of their language is the result of co-constructed discourses. There is no antinomic, conflicting, schismatic tension in their language shifts from English to Spanish-Mexican to Nahuatl (and in Arteaga to French as well) and, in a spiral way, back to English again, in all the different combinations offered by the four tongues. There is no schism in their cultural vision and creation, on the contrary, the resulting text is moulded on the design of interrelation, indigenization and transformation of all the cultures involved.

In the case of chicano language and literature, the triple exile (exile from their original Aztec language; from the colonizer's language, Spanish, and later the excision from the Mexican country), makes chicanos experience the double bind Frederick Douglass talked of when considering the history of the Afro-American people (Gilroy 1993). It must be said that it is not the faithfulness to the original culture that makes of Chicanos a supranational people, a *raza*, but a sharing of feelings such as alienation and suffering because of exile and migration—because of oppression. The double bind has produced a language which is double (the Spanglish is a kind of double tongue, dancing between English and Spanish, and the two languages—Spanish and English—are made opaque by Mexican distortions of Spanish and *pochismos*, *calo*, *tex-mex*, etc.) or better, an interlanguage which is the “word made flesh,” that is a word which incarnates the state of being of those experiencing contact languages, in-between cultures, transpassing of national identity. The chicano speaker, and consequently the chicano writer, is the expression of the in-be-

tween condition, speaks from a transnational perspective—which implies that s/he speaks from an in-between relationship both to English-speaking subjects (which are not only the Anglos, but also all the different migrant subjects who have discarded their own native languages and moved to English) and to Spanish-speaking subjects (usually postcolonial subjects).

## **PRE-FACE 2**

Chicano resistance to anglo linguistic colonialism draws its force also from the consciousness that the land they live(d) on was theirs before the Spanish settlements and American expansionism to the South-West. The cultural geography of these border spaces was very uneven, multifaceted, as various as the native peoples of that area. The collision-meeting of languages and cultures which takes place in border areas, the incessant history of aggression and invasion of the natives' space and the resulting cultural contamination and *mezcla*, which implies an incessant need to adjust oneself to new fluxes, new settlements, new languages, are all exercises in translation as resistance to oppression. The borderlands can be seen as the place of an ongoing workshop on multicultural conflict where *fronterizos* struggle to move towards transnational communities.

The material and cultural condition of chicano *fronterizos* has produced prismatic points of view, interpretations-interpenetrations of self and other which question the binary categories of margin/center, identity/difference, insider/outsider, integration/alienation. Locating oneself in-between, in medio, in a mestizo positionality, on the borderlands, one can see oneself with the eyes of the other, becoming “the other” to one's self. When a subject develops a mestizaged consciousness, the racial problem starts to lose its foundation: the oppressor/oppressed duel is deconstructed and there is transformation—“a changing species is

born" (Anzaldúa 1987).

The motion-mobility which marks la frontera figuration becomes the paradigm for transformation and change: to call oneself new mestiza/o implies a *caminho*, says Gloria Anzaldúa, a process which produces a redefinition of one's own subjectivity, of one's own culture. This practice and celebration of crossing, of miscegenation, of cross-pollination which is unveiled in narra(c)tions which bring together local and extra-local, national and extraregional, traditional and experimental, nearness and distance, personal and political discourses, makes border(lands) a figura(c)tion of modernity, a counter-narrative, and makes border crossing a new social practice, a new aesthetics, an *alter*-native culture (de Alba 2002)—a culture which is at the same time other, different, but also native of that geographical area, of that cultural space. This makes some chicano narratives the perfect material for teaching interculturality and transnationalism. Besides, chicano narratives endow us with perfect examples of the ethics of cohabitation, i.e. human society.

## FACING<sup>7</sup> BORDERS

When considering translating chicano texts, there is a further point to take into account: how can this complexity due to interculture and gender differences be translated both inside chicano culture/chicano texts and into another language, for example into Italian?

Chicano language, we have seen, is *per se* an interlanguage, a contact language spoken in a contact zone: a language in incessant metamorphosis, in constant translation, never "stable" or "still" or "given for ever." Beyond bilingualism, the lively celebration of multilingualism, mistilingualism, code switching and encounter gives birth to an interlanguage which is a refraction of the ex-

<sup>7</sup> In the double meaning of: looking at/giving a face, a shape, to borders.

traordinary chicano extra-location that gives birth to social, literary, linguistic and collective cartographies which are completely new in the frames of what we have been traditionally trained to know as national and gendered language and identity. The faces in front of us, the faces mirroring our faces are unusual, even disquieting.

According to Paul de Man, translation is a practice which "puts the original in motion to decanonize it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errancy" (in Bhabha 1994: 228). With no pretence of investigating categories such as hybridity and contamination, postmodernity and transformation processes, I want to see what happens when de Man's idea of translation is taken into account. Interlinguism, diglossia and mistilinguism are the face and the voice of la frontera: the *alter*-native culture (auto)figures itself, narrates itself through the languages of chicanismo (Anzaldúa 1990), and this bastard language becomes "this bridge we call home" (Anzaldúa-Keating 2002), and allows *fronterizos* to locate themselves in a "not-all" which nevertheless is more inclusive than the concept of homeland (2002). The "not-all" is one of the words to name transnationalism, the other face of the "all-whole."

Within this linguistic practice, the question is not only "who is speaking?" or "who is listening?," but: *with/to whom* am I speaking? *Between whom* am I taking my location/my perspective? Who is *beside* me? And *beside* here is meant both as next to me and beyond me and, as such, *beside* implies the meaning of that which opens my 'I' to the *more than only me*. Speech, and literature in being made of words, takes place because the speaker/ writer, is related to the/an other who is located *beside* him/her.

This makes us aware that the thinking behind Anzaldúa's theory is not binary or dialectic, but relational: the transformation of the self is possible only if the self is related to others, i.e., if the self learns how to work through the conflict, notwithstanding *el contradictorio* and the clash of voices within

la cabeza which makes her norteadá, insecure, restless, in “a constant state of nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways” (Anzaldúa 1987: 80), “in a state of perpetual transition.” To achieve “a new *mestiza* consciousness,” which she also calls the “consciousness of the Borderlands” (77), a “third element” which is “greater than the sum of its [the self] severed parts” (80), it is necessary una *lucha de fronteras*, which the mestiza writer also calls “a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war,” “a cultural collision” (78). The semiotics of conflict (in the same page it resonates in the reiteration of words such as: struggle, clash, strife, collision, attack, split, mortal combatants) is displayed to be soon after defaced through a stringent analysis showing that to counteract, to react is not to act. The subject in the process towards a mestiza consciousness, explains that divergent thinking does not mean to take a counterstance, but it is “a movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (79): it is necessary “a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity.” This tolerance for contradiction which in a previous essay<sup>8</sup> I proposed to read as con(*cum*)tra(*in-between*) diction (*speech*), that is a diction-speech which goes *cum* (together) the other’s diction, a diction which is in-between, close to other dictions, a diction which is not counter-diction, but the capacity of listening to other voices and answering to them having learned flexibility, tolerance, divergent thinking—having learned the third element beyond thesis and antithesis, having learned that

[T]he work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality...and to show in the flesh and through the images in her

<sup>8</sup> “Lo spazio della contraddizione” in *Guerre di segni. Semiotica delle situazioni conflittuali*, ed. by G. Manetti, P. Bertetti and A. Prato, Torino: Centro Scientifico ed., 2005: 114-133.

work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages and thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war (1987: 80).

The great divide between the dualistic thinking and Anzaldúa’s project-process is the *conocimiento* that the counterstance “locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed” (78), and does not liberate the reacting subject from cultural dominium, does not create a new space and a new world: the counterstance imprisons the one who reacts to the action against which s/he reacts and to the thinking and practice of binarism. Anzaldúa is suggesting that all the actions linked to the space of opposition-reaction—counterculture, counternarration, counterinformation, etc.—are entrapped and frozen in the dead end of binarism.<sup>9</sup> This implies also the suggestion that each subject interested in the transformation of the global should educate one’s self to listen to and take into account the different formations and figurations which enter her/her consciousness through the *cum-tran(s)*-diction of the other than her/himself. Confrontation and comparativism introduce difference in monologism, in monolocalism and create an antinomic, interstitial space. And, in my reading of this crucial passage of Anzaldúa’s work, it is exactly in this interstice

<sup>9</sup> In her lecture for the forum, Lilia Bartolomé affirmed that Anzaldúa refuses deterministic, simplistic and binaristic positions, and in her conclusive remarks AnaLouise Keating saw in the writer’s non-dualistic, holistic thinking, the creation of a new epistemology.



area that it is possible to insinuate the wedge of the divergent thinking: from within this space alternative theories, visions, figurations will take shape and open a gangway which will transform contradiction as interdiction in inter-connection, interpe(ne)tration, flux, exchange. It is now clear that this interstitial space is a nepantla space—liminal ambiguous in-between places—and is one of the steps taken by the writer in the ever-ongoing process towards the theorization of nepantla states and spaces.

The cross-pollination practices enacted by mestizos and mestizas, by fronterizos, sans papiers and undocumented, teach intersection, point to the mid-ways, and envision transformational paths. By putting in contact the native and the non-native, the resident and the newly arrived, the native and the *alter*-native, interlinguism *takes face/shapes the face* and translates the other into one's language and one's language, as happens in love, is translated and partly lost for/into the other. Interlinguism and mistilinguism are @esistance and creation which are born within a relational communal co(n)text, generated in the networkings created by a positionality which is never violently intrusive and chooses the "in-between," the "beside" as a space of relationality, coexistence, proximity, closeness, neither too far and as such foreign, nor too near, and as such assimilated, the relational self moves beyond the boundaries of nationalism, disidentifies with both the Mexican and the American nation, and can (en)act a transformational identity and politics.

Taking into account Bassnett-Lefevre's theories, particularly their idea of translation as *rewriting*, and the post-structuralist methodology of translation as intercultural and interlinguistic *transducere*, I am also seeking to work on border texts (which are already transfer texts or transtexts), looking for a key to their translatability.

It being my intention, as already stated, to analyze the questions arising from the reading of Alfred Arteaga's *Cantos*, and referring particularly to the *Primer* (*Arrival*),

Segundo, (*Textos vivos*) and Quarto (*Xronotop Xicano*) of the long poem, first of all I want to think over "rewriting" as inter-writing, as a "*cum*-writing," especially as far as the female figure of Malintzin-Malinche-Marina-Molly (Bloom) evoked-invoked by Arteaga is concerned;<sup>10</sup> then I will proceed to take into account some parts of the second canto, already translated into Italian by Elena Urganani, to discover and show the poetical and iconic generativity of contact languages which bring "newness...into the world" (Bhabha 1994: 227).

I will in particular consider two points: Arteaga does not simply, in a postmodernist fashion, re-write Joyce, nor does he simply reinscribes Molly in the Malintzin-Malinche construction. He gives shape to a sophisticated, creolizing experiment: his is not a re-reading of the Mexican past neither a re-reading of the xx-century myth of Molly, but rather we are faced with a transreading, a *trans-latin(g)* (here I am playing both on *trans-Latin* (language), but also on *trans-latere*: through/across the border, the margin, *el lado*) which goes both ways temporarily and linguistically: from past to present, from present to past, but also from Ireland to Mexico and back to Ireland, so that the Irish traits can be seen on a chicano face:

Faces of Indians  
branded by Spaniards.  
Faces of Irishmen  
branded by Indians (Arteaga  
1991, *Quarto*).

It is sheer creolization, pure translation as palimpsestic re-writing. A name, a body of woman that has become a symbol of man's idea of femininity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

<sup>10</sup> "Marina .../an ocean contained/in one woman, .../...So feminine a shape. So female/a bay. .../.../ True name of woman, Vera Cruz./ body of woman./ "He named me/Xochitepec, yes so we are all flowers/of the mountain, all a woman's body,/ .../Contest Malintzin, "yes/I said yes I will yes." (Arteaga, "Arrival," Canto primero, in *Cantos*).

Molly, although body of Eire, retraces and rewrites her avatars, or rather the avatar of the conception of woman as land, as continent, as mother earth, but also as sea, ocean, bay, and it is the chicano design of creolization and syncretism that disrupts chronological time and continental maps, inaugurating a motherland which is beyond fatherlands and state-nations. The indigenization of Molly-Ireland-Europe (actually Molly is from Gibraltar, the gate between Europe and Africa) in a mestizaged culture and in a supranational country, as is the land of Aztlan, the dislocation of Molly the Hebrew, Molly the rose of mountain, Molly the creole<sup>11</sup> in the transnational *raza cosmica*, is an act of transformation, transfiguration, translation through 360 degrees of mythological and literary texts which nevertheless, as we will see, has its historical foundations.

In fact, the territory of Gibraltar, in being the bridge between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, in-between Europe and Africa, but also between the European colonizers *en route* both to the Americas and to Africa to kidnap the slaves to be transported to the Americas, is the emblem-

atic space of colonization, contact, creolization, transit, translation. Gibraltar was chosen by Joyce as Molly's native place surely because of a series of possible allusions. I will list a few: in linking Spain (Algeciras) and Morocco, Molly—as the female body of Gibraltar—hinted also at the passage of Jewish people from Spain to North Africa because of the Inquisition in the 15th and 16th centuries; the Arab conquest of Spain in 711 took place through Gibraltar, and so Gibraltar and Molly as the flower of Gibraltar is the zone which allowed contact between East and West, North and South. Furthermore, since Gibraltar in a more distant past was also a land of conquest and passage for the Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Romans, there are layers and layers of cultures, colonizations, transits in that soil. The Spanish occupied Gibraltar in 1462, and this was instrumental to their colonization of Africa and the creation of contact between Western and Northern Africa and the Americas. In 1713 Gibraltar became a British colony, and Ireland is a British colony and North America was a British colony.

We can see now how it is precisely because of this history and of his having been touched by European modernism, that Arteaga thought of Molly as another namebody for Malintzin. Molly-Gibraltar, the woman and the city, are lands of conquest, crossings, creolization and, unavoidably, of betrayal. The Spanish, to reach Mexico, first conquered a female land, Gibraltar, passed through the bridge offered by her body and arrived in Mexico, and in order to conquer but also to speak to the natives, used the bridge formed by la Malinche's tonguebody-translation. Marina, the Spanish name for Malintzin, has a flavor of the Mediterranean, but also hints at the Atlantic passage, at the confluence between Europe-Africa-America: she speaks of the passage to colonization which, nevertheless, at the same time opened to creolization and transnationalization.

The other point I want to underline through Arteaga's poem is the powerful re-

<sup>11</sup> The daughter of Scottish Major Brian Cooper Tweed and Lunite Laredo, a Spanish-looking soprano, Molly was brought up in Gibraltar, whose atmosphere she describes in the final part of her monologue: "...and the auctions in the morning the Greek and the Jews and the Arabs and the devil knows who else from all the ends of Europe...and the rose gardens and the jessamine and the geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used...and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I...and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower. ...and yes I said yes I will Yes" (Joyce 1922: 732). In the Joycian scrapbook I saw in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin, there was a watercolours of Gibraltar by Jeanie Conan (1888). This painting can be one of the sources for the visualization of Gibraltar in the years Molly lived there and, moreover, it resembles the Howth promontory in Dublin. There is no space here for analysing these interesting transcodings (painting-writing) and superimpositions (Mediterranean landscape-Dublin river-sea landscape).

designing of sexual genders, male and female, which is not subsidiary to the attraction of the subject in the process of writing, i.e. the poet, for femininity as island, earth, sea, body of translation. And what is the male voice left with in *Cantos*? Not weapons, but words; not myths but everchanging reinscriptions which contain all the layers of time and space.

This poem creates a new breed and a new brand: all the *Cantos* are branded with creolization and indigenization. The title of the second song, *Textos vivos*, implies branded people, rewritten people and texts: *Cantos* gives shape to all the figures of translation.: “faces of Indians branded / by Spaniards. Faces of Irishmen/branded by Americans,” says *Xronotop Xicano* in the fourth song, which conjugates Bachtin’s idea of chronotope with the creole practice of syncretism. The fire branding, the overwriting, the colonization concerned natives and migrants, left its brand on the oppressed of the earth: that’s why Molly, in being woman, is, like la Malinche, oppressed. But, like la Malinche, although a colonized and oppressed woman, Molly can use her wits to translate, to create bridges between tongues, to sing, and makes her body become the bridge through which transmission of affectivity and sensuality is enacted—or at least this is what an empathic male poet envisions for her.

In Malintzin-Maliche-Marina-Molly, the patriarchal antithesis virgen/puta, Virgen de Guadalupe (mediator for all the mestizos, synthesis of the old and the new, of divine and human)/ la Chingada (Mexican name for Malintzin), or dona Marina (Spanish name), ikon of the female Indian betrayer is, with a gesture of border crossing, and a language and style neither local nor global, overturned, and a new figure is created, a figure of intersection, symbol of curiosity and intelligence, in which eros and spirituality, land of origin and land of conquest, meet and converge. Maliche-Molly are figures-places of translation, of confluence: we have already said that La Malinche has repeated-

ly been described by male authors as traitor (*traditora*), and Molly betrays Bloom in *Ulysses*. But Arteaga reads Maliche-Molly as translator (*traduttora*). The Spanish expression *tra(n)s-lada* recalls a common definition of the chicano subject (*del otro lado*), with which figures akin to la Malinche are designed both by Anglos and by Mexicans. The chicano subject, being always *del otro lado*, ends with electing as his/her *lado* la frontera, the trans-*lado*, the traslado.

- Translation
- Translator/traduttora
- Traitor/traditora
- Tra(n)slada:del otro lado
- Traslado/a: transduction (again are we reminded of Anzaldúa’s figurations: “passageways, conduits, connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives” (Anzaldúa 2002: 1)

If for the mestizajed subject (and Malintzin-Malinche-Marina-Molly is the prototype of the mestizajed subject) there is no way back home, back to the origin (to call “home” the bridge is another way of underlining that there is no longer the possibility of getting back home for the fronterizos), back to monolinguisism, the only movement open to the poetic voice which, in being a poet, is anyway a player of words, is to become s/he her/himself mestizajed, and (con)fuse her/his voice both with the voices of other authors and with the (erotic and eroticized) body of matria and woman. In this way s/he makes her/his tongue become mestizajed, excessive, refractory to monolinguisism and homogeneity. In the mestizajed heterogeneous space of translation, of transduction and transculture induced by historical and literary colonization of the chicano space, Arteaga produces transnational language and vision, problematizing specificities of gender and culture.

The tactics of connecting fragments of tongues and narratives is akin to or de-

scends from the question “beside whom I am speaking?,” and enacts an intercultural, transnational dialogue beyond conflict or clash of cultures, paying attention to the questions: “how can I come close to the other’s eye/I? What is translated translating on the borders of the I-you?”

### TRANSLATION, TRANS-ACTION, TRANSFERS, TRANSFORMATION

When reading chicano literature, both the interpreter and the translator have to take into account the Chicano conception of verbal/written language as structured on images, as “picture language.” Anzaldúa has superbly described the image as the bridge between emotion and taking consciousness of emotion itself:

An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness (Anzaldúa 1987: 69).

This implies that speaking and writing are translation of mental and psychic images, another form of interlinguism. The author undergoes crossings, fluxes, departures which de-territorialize her language/vision and create new con-figurations,<sup>12</sup> which she also calls “traffic in images,” “film-like narratives,” “movies,” “animated story,” “shorts” “awakened dreams” (69-70). This process costs exhilaration and pain, needs sensory deprivation, requires from the artist to be at the same time director and spectator, screenwriter and actor, camera operator and landscape. Again, although she undergoes a psychic borderline state which requires from her to be inside and outside the frame, Anzaldúa narrates of a simultaneous experi-

ence of insidedness and outsidedness which, although close to schizophrenia, manages to overcome it by the very act of bringing together the outside and the inside, the self and the other—she manages again a bridging of roles usually thought of as opposite, dualistic. These film-like narratives, she adds, “are about shifts,” metamorphosis, transformations: in playing with her self, she opens a dialogue with *el espíritu del mundo*, and in changing her self, she changes the world (70).

So, when we consider chicano texts, not only have we to ask ourselves Lefevre’s question, that is, if it possible to re-write a text as autonomous with respect to the original, but then we have to consider the implications of the assertion that not everything is translatable in a translation. Are not, then, interlinguistic texts more subject to betrayal, mutilation, reduction than monolingual texts (if such texts existed) or texts born within a one-nation-oriented view of language?

To translate border texts the translator must “call the bridge his/her home” (Anzaldúa-Keating 2002). And yet I encourage my students to question issues such as: is it really possible to translate borders, edges? Is

<sup>12</sup> Figuration is a cartography of metamorphosis. In my last book, *La lingua che ospita*, in the chapter on “Poetry as Politics. Utopia?” I have tried to conjugate Eurocentric theories, especially Braidotti’s figure of “the nomad” (a gendered re-elaboration of Deleuzian theories of nomadism) with Anzaldúa’s figur(ation) of *mestiza* and *nepantlera* (Zaccaria 2004 a: 41-49). According to Braidotti, figuration is “a founding mythology” which pushes the “figure”—which is on the side of the categorial in that, in my opinion, it brings together conceptualization, idea, nomination and visualization—towards movement/action/process. Figuration is, I have come to believe, the injection of performativity in the figure. The figuration of the *nepantlera* adds to the Western concept of figuration the state of vision and becoming. In my approach to literary texts, I try to “translate,” i.e. to move/open (my) Western (con)figurations towards border-threshold (con)figurations—I try to inject in the figurations born out of translation, the seed and taste of visionarity, creativity, tra(n)sfiguration.



it possible to enter interstices, turn them upside down without re-opening the *herida*? Is it possible to translate chicano voices without risking re-inscribing their subjectivities within categories which could frame them as subjects living in a unitary, uniform, monological culture of their own within the larger “American” culture? And how to avoid, when presenting them as non-unitarian subjects, simplistically defining them as postmodern and postcolonial subjects since colonialism is not over in their lives, since colonialism and decolonizing, locating one’s self and delocalizing, has crossed several times their lives and tongues? Is it possible to envision translation acts as ethnography narrated by a subjectivity aware of being in the process of translating (an)other to whom the translator is a foreigner, a subjectivity aware s/he will never be able to translate/map from inside the chicano wor(l)d? And when I say chicano culture/*sentido*/images...am I not colonizing and stereotyping chicano community, de-facing chicanos of their singularity and describing them within pre-determined stereotyped paradigms? Do I take into account the different cultures/groups/subjects they interact with in the barrios, in the working places, in the streets, etc.?

To translate is to *acercar* the other; translating tells of the desire to meet the other without violence, without the will-wish to engulf the other in one’s own red-net.

I picture translation as trans-action and transit, as “transfiguration and difference” (Ponzo 1999: 94), as interpenetration and interpretation, as transformation of the “bridge” in “home,” knowing that the translator and the translated inhabit a heterogeneous place, a space of incessant transmutations, transpassings and betrayals. To be on the translation borderlands means to live on a gangway whose door, whose hinge opens in both directions; it means to have incessant confrontation with the passage of the other, to be constantly under the call which urges the border(wo)man in the process of translating, to cross onto the other side, to betray,

to leave something there for ever. To translate means feel attraction towards the other (tongue) and risk betrayal, appropriation, even sexual appropriation of the other(’s word).<sup>13</sup> It is just the hinge which invites the borderman/borderwoman/the translator to relocate him/herself and the other in the other’s culture.

I have come to look upon s/he who translates border texts and border thinking both as a refugee and as a resident, at the same time a nomadic and a mestizaje subject: his/her incessant linguistic dislocation, his/her going and coming between different languages/worlds, his/her deterritorialization of his/her own native language are movements which imply the use of nomadic but also *nepantlera* transformational practices and theories. To translate is, above all, to perform the decolonization of one’s own native language, the language into which one translates the (other) text; to translate is to inject other visions into the translator’s culture/literature/gaze.

Translations are cartographies of contact, of touch: the translator transfers texts/visions from one language/culture into another language/culture. The translator of mestizaje texts introduces cartographies of transition that transform the maps of national languages which can no longer shape themselves as monolingualistic or sedentary. Pilar Godayol in the “Preface” to *Veux xicanes* says that translation brings together suffering and desire. It makes me think that the wish to translate the other suggests tension, attention to, intention of touching the other, or at least of coming near—*acercar* the other’s voice and vision.

We are learning nowadays what the pre-Columbus culture knew about the indivisibility between body and sign, what Cortes knew when he named the interpreter-translator “la lengua” and when, to say “translate,” he used the expression “cortar len-

<sup>13</sup> I am referring here to studies on gender and translation, such as Godayol 2002; Taronna 2004.



gua,” open the tongue. Nowadays we are finally realizing that we have always been living in a multicultural polylinguistic world. This means that basically we are re-discovering what oppressed natives and oppressing colonizers have been experiencing all the time: there is metamorphosis between *tlilli tlapalli*, *la tinta nera y rojo*, the ink and the blood, writing and body; there is, as there has always been a transfusion, a transitioning not only between ink and blood, black and red, but also a transflooding of the black’s blood in the red’s blood, an outpouring of Africa in the Americas.

There is no space here to compare two wonderful experiments in writing-translating: the sixth chapter of *Borderlands/La frontera* by Anzaldúa, entitled “Tlilli tlapalla,” and the Canto Segundo, titled *Textos vivos*, by Arteaga, where he plays on *negro*, *pluma negro and rojo (flor)*: the colours *rojo* and *negro* are allusive to the writing process: red is the matter of words, red is, for Anzaldúa, *sabiduría*, wisdom (Anzaldúa 1987: 69), black is the written word, which comes from the body, from “*la tinta de mi sangre*,” from the red ink (71).

In Arteaga’s lines there is also a play on *red* (Spanish) as net, cage, cultural net-red, the texture of the poem which he names “*la red negra*,” the networking which goes from one hand to another, from the writer’s hand to the reader’s hands and then to other readers’ hands. In Arteaga’s vision, the net, in being made of written words, is both red as *rojo* (comes from the body-matter) and black-*negro*. The red-black of writing stands both for the body and the sign, for the blood and the ink. It hints at the conjugation of the red(skin) or indio and the black(skin), i.e., the slave, the most violated among the American subjects. Arteaga describes both the writing process (when the poet is *mestizo*) and the reading transformative ever-going process; he inscribes the experience of interlinguistic reading, urging the reader to interpret and to interpenetrate signs/meanings, to move from the voice-throat-physicality to the face-image-figuration, from the

verbal-acoustic to visualization.

Anzaldúa had given face to this process, to this clash-fusion from body to word which can be at the same time exhilarating and devouring in her *Borderlands*:

To be a mouth—the cost is too high—her whole life enslaved to that devouring mouth. Todo pasaba por esa boca, el viento, el fuego, los mares y la Tierra. Her body, a crossroads, a fragile bridge, cannot support the tons of cargo padding through it. (1987: 74)

A bit earlier she had been explicit about creation and transformation:

When I write I feel like I am carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart—a nahuatl concept. My soul...is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. ...[T]his...transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into an ominous experience. It is always a path/state to something else. (73)

I think that the *nepantla* thought and vision that Arteaga, Anzaldúa, and all the border writers re-indigenize and re-nativize to name the transition and transfiguration from the voice to the face, or better from the image to the word, are appropriate strategies to describe the designs and winding paths of translation, the transformations of the self when the self is related to community and globality—the *raza cosmica*. Overall, Anzaldúa’s practices and theories educate to the politics of denationalizing the narrative cartographies, without, nevertheless, each single voice/face melting in the pot: “I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. ...But I exist, we exist. They’d like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven’t, we haven’t” (86).

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