

“I live in this liminal state between worlds, between realities, between systems of knowledge, between symbology systems.”

“Vivo en este estado liminal entre mundos, entre realidades, entre sistemas de conocimiento, entre sistemas de simbología.”

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews* (2000, 268)

## TRANSLATION AS “TRANS-INTERPRETATION”: Notes on Transforming the Book *Methodology of the Oppressed* into *Metodología de la emancipación*

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*Methodology of the Oppressed* is idea, method and book made, remade, translated and trans-interpreted; consequences of movement across histories, geographies, and peoples.<sup>1</sup> One of these makings shifted the title of the book *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) into *Metodología de la emancipación* (2016)—referred to in what follows as *MoTo* and *MoLe*. This particular shift points readers directly to the profound transformations in meaning that occur whenever language undergoes translation. One happy consequence of the transformation of *MoTo* into *MoLe* shift is that one of *MoTo*'s primary reasons for being rises to the surface. In this now visible re-configuration, the new *Metodología de la emancipación*/(*Methodology of the Oppressed*) emerges as an

undeniable b/order crosser, as “coyolteada,” or a being carrying revolutionary tricks—who enacts “de-colonizing perform-antics” (Aldama, Sandoval, Garcia, 2012). Ideas and books emerge as ruse-making “naguala.”

These terms, and others like them, are utilized and advanced by the militant intellectual group *Codex Nepantla*. Ours is a Chicana/Latinx/Indigenous group of activist-scholars who begin from the assumption that no linear translation (either between or within languages) is possible.<sup>2</sup> One result is *Codex Nepantla*'s development and deployment of a method and a technique for translation we term, respectively, “trans-interpretation” and “pocha poetics.” In *Codex Nepantla* group meetings, member Professor Alicia Gaspar de Alba explains that *Codex Nepantla* does “not translate any sentence code for code.” Rather, trans-interpreters act as meaning-activists, as *radical* bio-semiologists. She explains that trans-interpreters “translate/interpret in such a way as to (seek or to) retain the multi-leveled meaning(s) *and* the poetry of the original by using our own syntax and vocabulary.” Chicana-Indigenous trans-interpreters self-consciously produce revisions of language, aware that such revisions have an additional effect: They retroactively push against the very matrices of power within which an originating language is produced. Trans-interpretation is thus a meta-ideological method for revision. When Gaspar de Alba teaches us that Chicana-Indigenous trans-interpretation seeks to demonstrate “the poetry” of an original work through “using our own syntax and vocabulary,” she explains that trans-interpretation is a borderlands practice of re-Languaging that becomes operational through “pocha poetics.” She names this technique after a term, “pocha,” that is often used to denigrate and subordinate the productive language use created by bordered, migrating, and/or re-located peoples. In Gaspar de Alba's use, pocha poetics identifies a technique for trans-interpretation that honors and utilizes the language-makings of those who have developed and deployed code switching as a way

of life.<sup>3</sup> *Codex Nepantla* Chicana-Indigenous trans-interpretation teams have understood and deployed pocha poetics as technique since 2014.

Trans-interpretation through pocha poetics is time-consuming work. The first draft that moved the English version of *Methodology of the Oppressed* into a Spanish version, with my assistance, resulted in a (more or less) traditional translation by Julia Constantino. Our *Codex Nepantla* team intervened in this draft by creating a third, trans-interpreted version. This meant rereading the English version of *MoTo*, comparing its meanings to the traditionally translated Spanish version. Then, by utilizing pocha poetics, trans-interpreters create another version that repairs or returns lost, fragmented or invisible theoretical categories and/or poetic nuances.<sup>4</sup> Time, travel, and publication deadlines limited our work of trans-interpretation to four sections of the published *Metodología de la emancipación*. These include the introduction, chapters six and seven, and the conclusion (no footnotes were attempted). This remains an unfinished, experimental project. *Codex Nepantla* thus asks readers to activate their own “pocha poetics” when engaging the book, keeping in mind the following general framework. Chapters one and two of *Metodología de la emancipación* are linked as a study of global forms of neo-coloniality, effective forms of resistance, and coalition-making. Chapters three, four, and five are linked as studies of the way de-colonial thinkers and activists all over the world are utilizing radical bio-semiotics. *!Watcha!* Chapters six, seven and the conclusion identify the social physics of decolonial love.

The collective work of trans-interpretation often led *Codex Nepantla* teams into labyrinths of meaning. We entered lexical meaning circuits to become self-conscious players in a game of meaning production. In this game, players became re-linked to, or de-linked from their own (colonial, anti-, and de-colonial) histories, or cornered, with or against, their communities and/or communal

writing partners. Our movements through meaning both inured us from, and subjected us to, the rules of publication—in relation to previous language translations of the book, or to the book’s translation into Spanish by Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género (PUEG) and its publication by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Trans-interpretation cornered us, released us. Practitioners recognized how the game included pluriversal numbers of participants, all arbitrating creators of meaning, readers, actors, listeners, writers, witnesses, interpreters of emancipation, co-curators inside what we trans-interpreters understand as volatile and political inter-textual circuits. So *Codex Nepantla* invites all participants to join our self-aware game; play along with us inside the semiosis of pocha poetics; become coyolteada, language trans-interpreters, those who enact decolonizing perform-antics.

Across every diverse population, multileveled reading, translation, and trans-interpretation of the books *Methodology of the Oppressed* and *Metodología de la emancipación*, however, emerged a certain harmony comprised of a rising progression of feminist fourth-world, third-world and many-world kinships. Their ascending sound challenges the mono-graph: the “objective,” “authoritative,” academic monologue, the mono-voice of power used by “those-in-the-know.” The tone, structure, and aims of the *Methodology of the Oppressed* and of *Metodología de la emancipación* broadcast this US third -wor(l)d-space harmonic of affinity where it is identified as “the differential politics of US third world feminism.”<sup>5</sup> Wanderers multiply inside this communal composition, their voices move with, between, through, and beyond the clefs audible in these books, their intonations sustain pocha poetics, trans-interpretation, and radically creative bio-semiotics.

This author's original writing in English belongs now to history. *Metodología de la emancipación*, and its predecessors, are artifact-processes ripe for the trans-interpretation/trans-valuation that are required for times to come. Last year, I entered *MoTo* and *MoLe* as one player in a game shared with allies, readers, listeners, witnesses, actors, translators and trans-interpreters. Our play was improvisational, each member a meaning-trickster, a b/order crosser, we acted as edgy, self-aware gamblers with pocha poetics, as ruse-making naguala. Our work belongs to los lenguajes de la frontera. *Methodology of the Oppressed* and *Metodológica de la emancipación* are languages playfully mobilized (Lugones, 1987) for and by differentially-acting, Third-World/many-world/decolonial feminist liberation activists.

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(I wonder: how many differing/differential versions will emerge from this written, read, heard, storytelling-wor(l)d art performance (SWAPA); from this version of our *Metodología de la emancipación*, and our games of trans-interpretation?)

### **Witnessing/Acknowledging**

Dedico con cariño a Hayden White, mi maestro; a Alicia Gaspar de Alba, mi colega y compañera; a Tewa Elder Cathy Sanchez, Tia Georgia Serrano y Tia Agueda Martinez, mis maestras; y a Peter J. Garcia, mi hermano Genízaro, en honor de los nuevos pasados y futuros que estamos tejiendo.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> US academics often understand the English version of *Methodology of the Oppressed* as one great communal sentence written to interject in and (over) colonial modes of meaning. For such scholars, the entire book is treated as if it were 1) a Saussurian *sign* (S) of guerilla radical activity; 2) a signified-conceptual example (SD) of such; or 3) the book is cited and used only as a signifier (SR), that is, as an empty *form* used to advance a scholar's own intellectual and moral cause. The language translation of a book, however, immediately forces understanding (and meaning-production) onto different grounds.

One of the translation groups to which I belong, *Codex Nēpan̄tla*, exploits and uses this necessary movement onto new grounds. We turn it into a *method* we call “trans-interpretation.” The new book *Metodología de la emancipación* is not only the product of language translation, but also a product of something else we call “trans-interpretation.”

<sup>2</sup> This is especially true for US Chicana/Indigenous/Xicanx and Latinx cultures. These are colonial/ decolonial cultures that use elements of speech, language, thought, culture, and resistance from across Turtle Island, i.e. the American hemisphere. Chicana differential cultural politics are increasingly recognized as an approach to thought and material expression that crosses every border, for example, and not only those borders that range from the furthest south of this continent to its furthest northern reaches. In all territories and places, says Gloria Anzaldúa, where human borders “scrape against another border and bleed,” (Anzaldúa 1987, 25) differential politics and consciousness create perform-antics of survival. Within the United States, Xicanx cultures-in-between-cultures have developed their own “languages,” both at colloquial and theoretical levels (generally recognized as “border languages,” and these are sometimes denigrated, sometimes celebrated, as “Spanglish,” “pochismo,” “calo,” or “pachuco,” or as the similarly treated “languages” of emotion, spirituality, or revolution. Trans-interpreters are radical bio-semiologists who challenge the judgment that such “border-populations” are expressing “bad” or “good” relationships to Spanish, English, to the Indigenous languages of this continent, or to any literacy of thought, body, emotion, or spirit. Instead, radical bio-semiologists and trans-interpreters celebrate the creative re-codings of language and being continually born out of pre-, present- and post-national experiences within which “humans” have organized experience. The “subaltern” keep speaking (Spivak 1988).

<sup>3</sup> The term “pocha-poetics” was devised for this use by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. The first meeting of our *Codex Nēpan̄tla* team took place at UCLA in April 2014. See the originating documents at *Codex Nēpan̄tla* website [www.codexnepantla.blogspot.com](http://www.codexnepantla.blogspot.com). I am also a member of the International Decolonial Translation Group, *Groupe Décolonial de Traduction*, *Grupo Decolonial de Traducción*, *Grupo Descolonial de Tradução*, and the *Decolonial Institute*.

<sup>4</sup> In this case, it required comparing the “first draft” translation with the English version, sentence by sentence. Such work is best accomplished either with the author, or with people who have studied the author’s work in depth. Trans-interpreters discuss the problematics of the shifts in meaning created through a traditionally accomplished translation. They then devise their own, pocha poetic, trans-interpreted version, which is what is found in four chapters of *Metodología de la emancipación*. (See the video clip referenced here for an example of the discussions and outcome of a single two-word English sequence: “TransInterpretation of Norma Alarcon’s Chicana Feminism. Traductoras: Professors Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Elena Avilés, María Cristina Pons and Sandra Ruiz.” Published on Aug 19, 2016 <https://youtu.be/HLQr5CAJeqM?t=6m10s>).

<sup>5</sup> Refers to a particular approach to politics and consciousness. In *MoTō* and *MoLe*, the key term “US Third World Feminism” refers to a particular mode of “Third World”-“Global South” political and subjective positionality that is generated inside “First World-Global North” nation-state territories.

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