

BOOK REVIEW

Decolonizing Spirit: New Directions for Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Politicized Spiritualities

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Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives. Ed. Elisa Facio and Irena Lara. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014. Pp. 272. \$27.90 (paper).

Continuously describing the anthology as a “labor of love,” Elisa Facio and Irene Lara, the editors of *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*, birthed a cosmic collection that builds on notions of s/Spirit and spirituality, with the aim of addressing the gendered, sexualized, classed, and racialized spiritualities of Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women. While there is a growing number of spirituality-related articles and single-authored texts within the fields of Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women's studies, *Fleshing the Spirit* is one of the first book-length works to broaden the scope of Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous politicized spiritualities albeit distinct from institutionalized religions. *Fleshing the Spirit* offers multifaceted embodied expressions of s/Spirit, spirituality, hybrid spiritualities, and spiritual activism, as “conscious, self-reflective way[s] of life” (4) that recognize what it means to be “related to all that lives” (532). Notably, *Fleshing the Spirit* equally attends to material and spiritual conditions dando luz to “fleshed spirit” (11) epistemologies, which build on Cherrie Moragas's iconic “theory in the flesh” from *This Bridge Called My Back* (23).

Honoring the sacred Four Directions—East, West, North, and South—found within many Indigenous worldviews, the anthology is organized in four sections

of autohistoria-teoría essays, poetry, short stories, personal narrative/testimonios, and artwork. Speaking in their own voices, the nepantlera authors, as Indigenous Chicana scholar Inés Hernández-Avila describes them in her forward, reflect on the importance of fleshed spirit to social, environmental, and global justice. Within each, common experiences emerge: for example, negotiating understandings of the concept of spirituality, the impulse to weave the self to the whole, the decolonial healing of the “mind-body-spirit-heart-will” split (xviii), and land-based traditions. The anthology argues that through the process of decolonizing spirit—healing the bodymindspirit colonial and (neo) colonial split—one can enact personal and social change.

The anthology opens with the section “The East: New Beginnings,” to highlight new critical engagements and the energy of fire. Laura Pérez’s “Writing with Crooked Lines” poignantly forges a path toward cross-cultural spiritual knowledges that challenge the traditionally materialist, hierarchical, individualistic, profit-driven aspects of academia and general society. Then, readers are guided to the direction of “The West: Feminine Energies.” Here, Brenda Sendejo, guided by the feminine energy of Guadalupe, introduces “methodologies of the spirit” to describe the various ways one comes to spiritual consciousness through oftentimes painful negotiations in nepantla—liminal spaces.

In the third section of the anthology, “The North: The Direction of the Elders,” the authors turn readers to the energy of maturity and the fluidity of the wind. Lara Medina’s “Nepantla Spirituality: My Path to The Sources of Healing” introduces nepantla spirituality to describe her experiences negotiating her working-class Catholic upbringing with indigenous elder *conocimientos*. The last section, “The South: The Direction of Youth,” offers testimonies associated with children and the place of the earth, including childhood wounds in

need of healing. In “Coming Full Circle,” community elder Beatriz Villegas/Illuicatlahuili-Bea takes readers to her earliest childhood memories as she turns to spirit to fend off predatory uncles. She comes full circle as she ends her piece reflecting on her collective spiritual experiences that led her camino/journey as grandmother of traditional Native ways.

While *Fleshing the Spirit* speaks to a much-needed conversation on (inter)connections between spiritual and activist work for Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women, there were few contributors who directly address sexuality as part of their engagement with spirituality, especially as it pertains to queer sexualities. The editors attribute this gap to the difficulty of these conversations because of “oppressive attempts to control sexuality go[ing] hand in hand with control over spirituality” (10). Nonetheless, Berenice Dimas’s “Queeranderismo” bravely reflects through poetry on and personal narrative of her transformational process of healing from intergenerational trauma and present-day traumas through a profound metaphysic of the erotic. Similarly, Irene Lara’s “Sending the Serpent in the Mother” boldly speaks about her “erotic-spiritual” journey of reclaiming and healing her body and its erotic power from dominant western narratives that perceive the body and its hungers with mistrust. *Fleshing the Spirit* courageously paves the path for future conversations about the interconnections between (queer) sexualities and spirituality.

Fleshing the Spirit should be required reading for all women, but especially for Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women aspiring to locate spirituality in present-day ancestral forms and/or beyond organized religions. Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women in all levels of academia would particularly benefit from this collection, as many of the contributors speak to negotiations

between personal/spiritual and academic work. This anthology heeds the collective call of Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and the editors/contributors to walk the road that is both material and spiritual towards enacting personal/social transformation.

References

- Moraga, Cherríe. 1981. "Theory in the Flesh." In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. New York: Kitchen Table Press.