THE CODEX NEPANTLA PROJECT: Transinterpretation as Pocha Poetics, Politics, and Praxis

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Abstract: Although Chicana feminists have been publishing their scholarship since the 1970s, the greater part of their work is not available in Spanish translation; hence, non-English-speaking feminists in Mexico and Latin America, particularly at the grassroots level, have little access to Chicana feminist/lesbian theory and knowledge. The Codex Nepantla Project, a collective of self-appointed translators and transinterpreters of Chicana feminist theory, has been working for over five years on making Chicana feminist writings and concepts available in Spanish with the interpretive power of visual art via print and open-access platforms. This essay explores some of the ideological questions at the heart of this epistemological conundrum. Why are Anglo-American and French feminist publications as well as queer theory available in Spanish, but not the work of Chicana [lesbian] feminists? Why do Chicana academics write, publish, and present their work predominantly in English? How do Chicanas give agency to their forked, colonized tongues to tell their stories and communicate their theories of self-empowerment? How have Chicana feminists appropriated names, icons, and myths that originate in Mexico and Mexican history, such as Malinche, Coatlicue, Coyoxauhqhi, and resignified them to embody what it means to be a Mexican in a xenophobic country; to be a sexed, raced, classed, and gendered body in white patriarchy? How might art, and specifically Chicana/o iconography, function as a common language between Chicanas and Mexicanas? This essay takes the reader on an epistemological journey of liberation for pocha poetics and conocimiento, and invites readers to join the Codex Nepantla collective's mission of sneaking Chicana feminist/lesbian theory across the Spanish-speaking border

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The idea for the Codex Nepantla Project came to me in Mexico City in 2011 at the Tercera Semana de Cultura Lésbica Feminista LesVoz, a festival of Lesbian Feminist Culture sponsored by LesVoz,[1] the oldest

grassroots lesbian feminist organization of Mexico. As with other LesVoz events, programming for the festival featured the cultural production of Mexican and Chicana lesbians, including readings, performances and a group art exhibition. At the close of the event, Mariana Perez Ocaña, one of the founders of LesVoz, invited my partner Alma Lopez and me to attend the afternoon session of the "Mini Encuentro Nacional de Lesbianas Feministas." Because it was a closed-to-the-public retreat of lesbian feminist organizations in Mexico with whom LesVoz wanted to create a network, or *red de organizaciones lesbofeministas de México*,[2] there were representatives from ten or eleven groups from other parts of Mexico in attendance. After establishing the ground rules for the gathering—one of which was that we were there merely as listeners—we heard a riveting presentation on the history of Mexican feminism by activist Yan Maria Yaloltl Castro that ended with a strong critique of how "*lo cuir*" (or Eurocentric queer theory)[3] was cannibalizing the academic feminists at the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico), while the burgeoning trans movement, led in Mexico by transwomen who do not support the work of LesVoz, was colonizing lesbian feminism in the community.

A discussion ensued between those who wanted to open the network and their organizations to queers and trans folk and those who adamantly wanted to keep the integrity of a separatist lesbian network—a fundamental political and philosophical difference that Chicana lesbian/feminists had also been grappling with in our national associations—the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies and Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social—since the turn of the twenty-first century. Ultimately, this difference would prevent the development of a national network of lesbian feminist organizations in Mexico, but that afternoon, it was the first time all of these lesbian feminist groups had come together to discuss the possibility of forming a cohesive front united in the same struggle for lesbian survival and representation.

I found the raw discussion both fascinating and frustrating. I was fascinated because I witnessed a historic gathering of lesbian organizations in Mexico and frustrated that I could not join the conversation. So instead of speaking, I listened, and scribbled furiously what I wanted so badly to say. *Chicana feminists have gone through this. Chela Sandoval—National Women's Studies Association 1990.* Noticing that I had something to contribute, Mariana asked the group if anybody would mind if the Chicana compañeras addressed the gathering. Politely, they gave me the floor. I thanked them and talked about sexism within Chicanismo and racism within Anglo feminism and homophobia within both, and how Chicana lesbians wrote about those struggles from the margins of our mutually-exclusive communities, and how they had invented teorías like la nueva mestiza (Gloria Anzaldúa 1987), sitios y lenguas (Emma Pérez 1991), and conciencia diferencial/oposicional (Chela Sandoval 2000) to help us analyze our differences and name the sources of our (dis)empowerment. I related the way Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga had appropriated Mexican icons such as la Malinche, Coatlicue, and Coyolxauhqui to embody the psychic and physical violence we had all felt within Chicano patriarchy for our supposed betrayal of our familias, whether at home or among our carnales/brothers in the Chicano revolution. I concluded my remarks with an example. At the 2005 meeting of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies in Miami, Florida, a majority of the Lesbian Caucus, composed of a younger generation that preferred the queer label, sexual fluidity, and nonbinary gender identification, voted in favor of changing the name to the Lesbians, BiMujeres, and Trans Caucus, after more than 20 years of being a woman-only, lesbian-only safe space—a space and recognition in the association that the Chicana lesbians who had founded the Lesbian Caucus back in 1990 had fought bitterly to get.[4]

Except for the women of LesVoz and a few others, the rest had never heard of Chicana feminism. Some of them had heard of Chicanas, others had not. Of

course, they had all read or at least heard of Anglo and French feminists Judith Butler, Lillian Faderman, Adrienne Rich, Simone de Beauvoir, and Monique Wittig; but these radical grassroots gender and sexuality Mexican activists were not familiar with the names of our most radical Chicana lesbian scholar-activists, much less the early organizers of the Chicana feminist movement. Nor did they really get the concept of Chicana feminism as a separate theoretical discourse from mainstream American feminism. In fact, some of the attendees thought Alma and I were "gringa" feminists because a) I am light- skinned, b) we came from Los Angeles, c) we spoke to each other in English, and d) they could hear the pochismo, the hybrid language of the border, in our accents. Thus, they saw us at outsiders.

After the meeting ended, we invited everyone to come to a talk we were scheduled to give at la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Little did we realize that the political breach between academics and working-class activists is particularly wide in Mexico, and that, although the UNAM has a program on gender and feminist studies there is very little outreach to or integration of community organizations that serve the same interests. As community activists, organizers, and laborers, las compañeras of these lesbian organizations did not feel welcome at the university and could not see themselves occupying any space at the PUEG. "We won't feel comfortable," Mariana explained. "And besides, las compañeras don't understand English."

In a nutshell, that was the issue. Grassroots Mexican feminists and lesbofeministas did not read Chicana theory, not so much because our work was considered more gringa than Mexican, and more academic than activist, but more simply, because our work is not available in Spanish translation. While they could read Anglo-American and French feminist writing in Spanish, our Spanish-only grassroots compañeras had (and continue to have) little access to

Chicana feminist theory and Chicana lesbian feminist conocimiento because our work has not been translated. That was a huge discovery for me, a problem which (I naively imagined) had an easy solution.

On the flight back to Los Angeles, I wrote page after page of questions in my journal. How does the Chicana lesbian/feminist fight for equality, representation, and recognition in both the Chicano Movement and the white Feminist Movement mirror the exclusionary experiences of working-class lesbofeminist activistas in Mexico? Why are Anglo-American and French feminist publications translated into Spanish in Mexico, but not the work of Chicana lesbian/feminists with whom, ostensibly, our Mexican counterparts have more in common? Is it only a linguistic issue, or are there ideological and historical reasons that keep Chicana lesbian/feminist knowledge inaccessible to a Spanish-speaking audience? Do Chicanas write predominantly in English because we hate Spanish or because we are pochas? To what degree does Octavio Paz's judgement on Chicanos, or pachucos, as lost and lonely Mexicans, "sinister clown[s] whose purpose is to cause terror instead of laughter," (Paz, 16) continue to inform the Mexican imaginary of who or what the Chicana/o/x community actually is? Do Mexicans continue to see us as "traitors" to our Mexican culture for "forgetting" our Spanish? What do Chicana lesbian/feminist theorists and writers contribute intellectually and politically to the discourse of gender and sexuality in colonial patriarchy, as well as to national constructions of "Mexicanidad" or "Americanidad"?

As an artist, Alma added a visual component to my theoretical ruminations: how would seeing what Chicana artists have done with Mexican legends and iconography help to open up the borders of communication between us? Chicana artists have been creating a visual language of Chicana lesbian/ feminist empowerment using revised representations of Mexican iconography

since the 1970s. Malinche, Coatlicue, Sor Juana, la Soldadera, la Catrina, la Virgen de Guadalupe—all popular Mexican icons that have been carried across the border, recoded and trans-interpreted for a new audience of U.S.-born and -bred Mexicans and Latinx people to assert a cultural pride and specificity not tied to a linguistic identity.

At that time in the summer of 2011, the Latina/o/x studies library of scholarly and literary texts (in English, of course) was growing exponentially, and titles by queers and women of color were the most prolific. Individual Chicana/Latina feminist critical interventions virtually exploded in the fields of art, art history, cultural studies, education, gender studies, history, linguistics, literary criticism, media studies, public policy, queer studies, sociology, urban planning. Transformative Chicana lesbian/feminist anthologies started to populate the tables of university presses at academic conferences, and we also saw an increase in Chicana- and Chicano-authored novels, young adult books, and memoirs published by both mainstream and independent presses.[5] Indeed, mega-publishing houses started imprints that marketed directly to a Latina/o/x audience, and some published original works in Spanish as well as English. It was as if the book industry of the United States were suddenly discovering that Latinos/as/xs were not only quickly becoming the largest minority in the nation, but also, that they were a book-buying culture. The same cannot be said of the publishing industry in Mexico, which for the most part ignored the publishing prowess of its American diaspora.[6]

The great Mexicana writer, Elena Poniatowska herself had diagnosed why this disconnect existed twenty years earlier in a lecture she delivered at Hampshire College. Said Poniatowska:

> Chicanos are caught between two worlds that reject them: Mexicans who consider them traitors, and Americans who want them only as

> cheap labor … Even now, very few Mexican writers care for Chicano writers and poets, and even fewer women writers take Chicana writers into account…Chicanos with American passports are still considered aliens, and women especially are seen as continuing the tradition of la Malinche, the ultimate traitor …(37-39). To be a Chicano is not easy, but to be a Chicana is even harder. To be a writer in Mexico is not easy, but to be a woman writer sometimes makes no sense at all. A Chicana writer in the United States gets the worst of both conditions: being a woman and a Chicana aspiring to become a writer…In Mexico, the work of Chicano writers like Tomás Rivera, Tino Villanueva, Rudolfo Anaya, Miguel Méndez has been published, but no Chicana can make the same claim (1996, 43-44).

Clearly, the time was more than ripe for showing that Chicana lesbian/feminist knowledge was its own intellectual and political movement with a 40-plus-year history of textual discourse which not only deserved but needed to be read by its sisters south of the border. Because we share a common cultural root and a colonial experience based on race, class, gender, and sexual oppression in a world order ruled by the laws of the straight, white, rich, Father; because we fight a common struggle against decolonization, misogyny, and homophobia; and because we have developed a repertoire of radical theories and methods of self-empowerment and solidarity to help us navigate our bifurcated lives in the midst of a xenophobic patriarchy, we have authorized ourselves to write our own "autohistorias" and "autohistoria-teorías"[7] (Anzaldúa 2002) instead of waiting for somebody else to write or theorize our stories for us. And so, the seed for the Codex Nepantla Project found fertile soil.

Our Mission, Should We Decide to Accept It

We returned from that Mexico City trip in 2011 inspired by the idea of translating Chicana feminist and Chicana lesbian feminist theory into

Spanish and visual art, and of making these translations freely accessible to grassroots activists via the worldwide web. We saw it as a Chicana Lesbian/ Feminist Codex, and guided by our mission,[8] Alma created a blog called Codex Nepantla (see www.codexnepantla.blogspot.com). We invited 20 academic colleagues (many of whom are the very scholars and writers whose work we aimed to translate), students and ABD's, as well as Chicana/x or Latina/x and lesbian/queer visual artists to join us in forming a team of theoretical border crossers, or linguistic/artistic nepantleras,[9] who would translate Chicana lesbian/feminist theory into Spanish and visual art, facilitating access to this critical, oppositional, counter-hegemonic discourse for Spanish-speaking grassroots activists south of the border.

All of the Chicana academics I contacted expressed solidarity with the project. Some admitted to having issues with their own "bad Spanish." Others apologized for not speaking or even reading Spanish. I reassured them that pocha poetics was a legitimate form of writing, and that we would use whatever tools we had at our disposal to carry Chicana lesbian/feminist thought across the border on the bridges of our sitios y lenguas (Pérez 1991).

Alma invited other visual artists to help her with the artistic interpretations. Nearly everyone agreed to join the Codex Nepantla Collective, and I received enthusiastic commitments from several graduate students who wanted to participate in the workshop as well. We gave all participants access to the Codex Nepantla blog and waited for people to begin the dialogue. Unfortunately, the project stalled almost immediately, but not for lack of interest. Although the members of the collective were excited by the prospect of doing this scholar-activist work, we soon realized that the task at hand was not only challenging linguistically (as very few of us had any linguistic or grammatical training in Spanish or an academic background in translation), but actually daunting

ideologically because of all the layers of social anxiety and linguistic terrorism that had to be sorted out by each of us individually as well as by the Collective before any translation work was even possible.[10]

The Pocha Poetics Seminar

After two years of waiting for any activity on the Codex Nepantla blog, I realized the only way to make any progress on this project was to gather everyone together under the same roof for a translation retreat. I secured a University of California Humanities Research Institute Seminar Grant for a seminar that I called "Pocha Poetics in the Translation of Chicana Feminist Theory" that brought together eight faculty and nine graduate students from three University of California campuses,[11] other colleges in Los Angeles and beyond. During the two-day seminar in April of 2014, we discussed the feasibility of co-creating this resource, read essays about the ethics and politics of translation, and about translation as a postcolonial process, and shared/theorized/wrote about our very real apprehensions about translating our own or anybody else's work into Spanish.[12]

I compiled the essays on translations into a massive Pocha Poetics Reader. The highly theoretical discussion of the readings quickly narrowed down to practicalities of the process. How do we translate ourselves, especially if we don't speak or write in Spanish? What do we gain by making our work accessible in Spanish? What do we lose by keeping it inaccessible? How do we negotiate the binational shaming and harassment that Chicanas/os receive from both sides of the border for the way we speak: our Mexican-accented Spanish that underscores our "foreignness" in the United States; or, conversely, our English-accented and pocho (polluted/degenerate/embarrassing) Spanish that marks our supposed betrayal of our Mexican homeland? How do Chicanas give agency to our own colonized "pocha" tongues in the face of anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant rhetoric north of the border, and anti-vendida/a (sell-out), anti-pocha/a dogma

south of the Rio Grande? What, in fact, is "pocha poetics," and how can we diffuse this aesthetic on a grassroots scale in Mexico? How does art, and specifically popular and indigenous iconography, function as both a common and a foreign language between Chicanas and Mexicanas? What were we going to call this translation method, anyway?

Those in attendance at the seminar confirmed that they wrote almost exclusively in English. They did not write or publish academic work in Spanish for at least three reasons: a) because they had gone to English-only schools in the U.S., b) because they were in academic departments in the United States that required publications in English, and c) because of a linguistic incapacity, meaning they never learned to read or write "correctly" in Spanish, even if they could still speak the language with their families. On a deeper level, they feared being thought of as stupid, assimilated, cultural defectors with nothing of value or importance to contribute to "real" Mexicans. In short, they were describing some of the side effects of linguistic terrorism and a deeply internalized colonized tongue. We explored these issues in a stenciling workshop held on the second day of the retreat. Alma guided us in stenciling a word or an image that represented the work of the seminar. Several of us decided to screen the word POCHA onto T-shirts. This choice was empowering, as it helped us to resignify a word that for too long had been used to demean us. Yes, I'm a pocha, not a Mexican, not an American, but both, and neither. ¿Y qué?

Thick Translation and the Nepantla Paradigm

The only way for Spanish-only grassroots activists to learn about Chicana lesbian/ feminist theory, knowledge, and scholarship is for the work to be translated. But translation is not just a matter of changing linguistic codes or substituting content from one language for another. In "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin reminds us that "no translation would

Figure 1. Pocha Poetics Seminar Stenciling Workshop at UCLA. Photo by Alma Lopez © 2014.

be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original" (Benjamin 1969, 73). Literal likeness or equivalency is just the surface of the translator's task; to fully render the many meanings of any translated text, the translator must have a "deeper interpretation" (79) and be able to communicate the text's intentions and connotations, so that the translation "produces in it the echo of the original" (76).

For Kwame Anthony Appiah, translation is not just "an attempt to find ways of saying in one language something that means the same as what has been said in another" (Appiah 1993, 808). The translator must also comprehend the historical, political, and cultural contexts of both the text and the author. "[A] translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further, to undertake the harder

project of a *genuinely informed respect for others*" (Appiah 1993, 817, emphasis added). Thus, to truly translate Chicana lesbian/feminist theory, the translator must have the capacity to effect this "deeper interpretation" that Benjamin expected of the words and sentences on the page. They must have knowledge of the intersectional identity politics that trouble our genders and relationships; awareness of how Chicana theorists appropriate and resignify Mexican and indigenous icons, legends, and cosmographies in the elaboration of that theory; must know that Chicano/a identity is situated in U.S.-Mexican territorial and ideological conflict since the end of the U.S.-Mexico War in 1848. The translator must understand that since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, U.S. Mexicans and their Chicana/o descendants have lived in a perpetual nepantla, in which we are neither "de aquí" (from here) nor "de allá" (from there), but from what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a third culture, which lives in-between el Rio Bravo and the Rio Grande—the same river with the same contested history but with different names. This third culture spawns from the wound that forms when the two worlds, countries, and cultures "rub against each other and bleed" (Anzaldua 1987, 3). Rather than a marginal location on the fringes of the developed world, as the word *frontier* in English suggests, our frontera is nepantla, the place in the middle, which is what Anzaldúa calls the borderlands, as she explains in one of her interviews:

> With the Nepantla paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities … I see the mestiza as a geography of selves—of different bordering countries—who stands at the threshold of two or more worlds and negotiates the cracks between worlds (Anzaldúa 2000, 268).

In discussing these issues at the Pocha Poetics seminar and the role that bilingualism and biculturality have played in our (post)/(neo)/(de) colonial subjectivities and discourses, we were, I now realize, not only thickly describing (a-la-Clifford Geertz) the intersectionalities and contradictions of Chicana lesbian/feminist ontology and epistemology, but also engaging in what Appiah calls "thick translation," or rather, a "translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context" (1973, 817).

For Clifford Geertz, effective ethnography or cultural analysis of the Other, must be a "thick description" that integrates layers of data, including social, political, historical, economic, linguistic, religious, and other contextual information of the group/people/culture under study. Thus, we could say that, like thick description, Appiah's "thick translation" involves knowing more layers of meaning and interpretation than just linguistic equivalencies. These layers of interpretation could explain why, in fact, some things are not translatable word for word, as the intentions, assumptions, and connotations of some utterances remain knowable only to those who share the cultural codes that would render something legible or intelligible in another code. For the culturally fraught process of bridging the differences between Chicanas and Mexicanas—the former a colonized identity with a history of second- and third-class citizenship within an English-speaking country located in the economic First World, the latter located in the economic Third World nation-state of a neocolonial Mexico, with a five-hundred-year history of mestizaje—the notion of "respect" is critical. But respect is predicated on understanding, the lack of which largely explains why Chicana lesbian/feminist theory (and literature) is not translated or read in Mexico outside of a few university courses. Without accounting for some, if not all, of these layers of interpretation, textual translations are

incomplete. To truly translate any text from one meaning system to another, translators must practice thick translation.

Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti (1995) argues in his chapter on "Invisibility," that a "good translation"—one that falls under what he calls "the regime of fluency"— renders the translator invisible: "The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator … The translator's invisibility is thus a weird self-annihilation" (1, 7). By rendering the text as close to the original as possible, the work of the translation recedes under the fluency of the translator in the other language. Can Chicanas be invisible translators of their own or one another's texts? Or, because we do not, in fact, operate under a "regime of fluency" in Spanish, thanks to a colonized tongue that was never considered fluent enough (read: articulate, eloquent, and free of accents) in either English or Spanish, do Chicanas consider ourselves capable of translating texts in our dual "mother-tongue"? Does our "pochismo," or code-switching tendencies, make us hyper-visible and therefore inimical to the translator's task? As Venuti asserts, "translation wields enormous power in the construction of identities for foreign cultures, and hence, it potentially figures in ethnic discrimination, geopolitical confrontations, colonialism, terrorism [and] war" (14).

By producing what I call "translations in the flesh," that is, translations of our own work or the work of other Chicanas with whom we share a knowledge of not only culture, history, and language, but also a knowledge of the body and the body's desire, could we not circumvent what Venuti calls the "violence of translation" (13), the erasure of the translator and/or the negative judgment of our Spanish-writing abilities? Perhaps in this way, Chicana lesbian/feminist writers and their translated texts could actually bridge the differences between Mexican academics and activists, as well as between the academy and the community? Perhaps, as Venuti claims, our translations could "be studied

and practiced as *a locus of difference*, instead of the homogeneity that widely characterizes [translation] today?" (34). Venuti's "locus of difference," like Appiah's "thick translation," is the translator's sign of profound respect for the original author's language, culture, identity, and history, and most of all, for the author's embodied knowledge and experience.

Why Chicanas Don't Write in Spanish

For many Chicana academics raised in the United States, Spanish may have been our native or mother tongue, the spoken language of home and family, or a foreign language that we were trained to forget while growing up and attending English-only schools in the monolingual United States, learning to read, write, and speak mainly in English. Some of us precede bilingual education, and those who received any formal training in Spanish got it in grade school, high school, or not until college. In any case, our Spanish vocabulary is limited, and many feel ill equipped to articulate complex intellectual discourse in Spanish. Although we continue to speak some form of Spanish or Spanglish with our families, we remain unfamiliar with and intimidated by formal, academic Spanish.

In Mexico, our lack of Spanish fluency is misunderstood (at best), sometimes ridiculed or even shamed. For my middle-class-adjacent, light-skinned Mexican grandparents and their immigrant offspring, the worst insult I could inflict on the family was to "lose my Spanish," which meant forget my Spanish entirely, or, worse, become a pocha and speak in both languages at once. This is what "educated" Mexicans call "polluting" or "corrupting" Spanish, which is the clearest manifestation of selling out (in their eyes) and disrespect (in our eyes). For Mexicans born and raised south of the border, Chicanas and Chicanos (or rather, the descendants of Mexicans who are born or raised north of the border) are considered traitors to their people and their culture because we are

perceived to have willingly turned our back on Mexico and willfully forgotten or abandoned our ancestral language.

In "The Pachuco and Other Extremes," Octavio Paz (1985) writes about living in Los Angeles in the early 1940s, and encountering what he perceived to be a different sort of Mexican, the kind "for whom the fact that they are Mexicans is a truly vital problem" (12). These Mexicans, he surmised from watching them in the streets, "feel ashamed of their origin; yet no one would mistake them for authentic North Americans" (13), assumptively because of their phenotypes. Paz found these shame-filled Mexicans "furtive" and "restless," as though they were "wearing disguises, [and were] afraid of a stranger's look because it could strip them and leave them stark naked" (13). This is an interesting choice of words, given this period of Los Angeles history is during the Zoot Suit Riots, when zoot-suit-wearing Pachucos were indeed targeted for their supposed un-Americanness, were beaten and stripped on the streets by American civilians and servicemen, and were then arrested for inciting the riots. Sadly, Paz's perceptions of Pachucos of the 1940s form the basis of the Mexican (mis) understanding of Chicana/o/x identity. For the Pazian mind, Pachucos are Mexican-origin gangs and intransigent rebels caught in an American world that rejects them even as they reject their own native culture and language. Rather than trying to assimilate, Pachucos flaunt their differences, which only enhances their untranslatability in the United States.

> The *pachuco* does not want to become a Mexican again; at the same time, he does not want to blend into the life of North America. His whole being is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma…Whether we like it or not, these persons are Mexicans, are one of the extremes at which the Mexican can arrive (Paz 13-14).

Educated Mexicans like Paz have no knowledge of the contentious racial and cultural history and politics that Mexican-descended Americans have had to endure since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. They know el Gringo invaded Mexico and stole half of Mexico's territory after winning the U.S-Mexico War, but they have not experienced what it means to grow up in a country that preaches assimilation, but practices alienation of anyone whose color, culture, and language does not conform to the dominating culture or who fits the description of an "illegal," whether U.S.-born or not. Chicanas/os/xs cannot help but feel a split in their subjectivity, for "[s]ubjectivity is composed of two opposing processes, identification and perception—the many ways we see or identify ourselves, and the ways we are perceived by others" (Gaspar de Alba 2014, 21). And this discrepancy is not limited to life in el norte. During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s-70s, Chicano/a activists learned that for all their folkloric danzas and political reclaiming of Mexican indigeneity, educated Mexicans like Octavio Paz saw them only as foreigners, vendidos, and cultural clowns, and so rejected their claim to a Mexican identity. I argue that it is because of this deep-seated contempt of U.S. Mexicans that the corpus of Chicana/o/x literature and scholarship is not respected, translated, read, studied, or taught in Mexico. Hence, it is up to us to us to translate, transinterpret, and teach about ourselves to Mexicans.

Coyoteando Coyolteadas, or Transinterpretation as the New Bridge

The scarcity of Chicana lesbian/feminist publications in Spanish, the lack of Spanish linguistic translations, and the perceived deficit of Spanish fluency among Chicana lesbian/feminist authors raises an intertextual opportunity that makes the interpretive power of art critical to the praxis of transinterpretation. In other words, the imagery and iconography used by Chicana artists, writers, and poets can functions as a common language

that helps to bridge linguistic and cultural divides between Chicanas and Mexicanas. The Codex Nepantla Collective proposes art as the conceptual "coyote" by which to smuggle Chicana lesbian/feminist thought south of the border, a type of "coyoteada" (single crossing) or "coyotaje" (tradition of crossing). Indeed, at the Pocha Poetics seminar, our conversation about this notion produced another neologism-- the word "Coyolteada"—a theoretical diphthong that combines the notion of an unauthorized migration, or coyoteada, and the Aztec moon goddess Coyolxauhqui, the mutilated, dismembered, and beheaded "bad" sister of the sun god Huitzilopochtli who tried to prevent his reign of bloodshed by killing him at the moment of his birth. Indeed, Coyolxauhqui's myth and iconography have been appropriated by Chicana lesbian feminists as a symbolic representation of the way the early feministas were treated and discredited by both their Chicano brothers and Chicana sisters, who judged them as lesbians (then considered an insult) and therefore as wannabe-white-women more concerned with promoting their own interests than with supporting la Raza's revolution. The combination of these two ideas yields Coyolteada—the unauthorized action of the "bad" sisters and daughters of the Greater Mexican nation sneaking our militant lesbian feminist discourse south of the border. "Transinterpreting" this idea of Coyolteadas with her visual vocabulary, Alma created an image of a coyota (Chicana lesbian/feminist and product of Mexican and American biculturality) engaging in the covert movida of howling her story to her sisters south of the border with the full moon rising to the north, signifying her location in the genealogy of Coyolxauhqui.

Rather than sneaking migrants from south to north of the border, Coyolteadas would smuggle the militant ideas of Chicana pocha activists from north to south, a border crossing al revés, the thick language of theory translated and interpreted by the very authors and users of these ideas. Rather than a literal

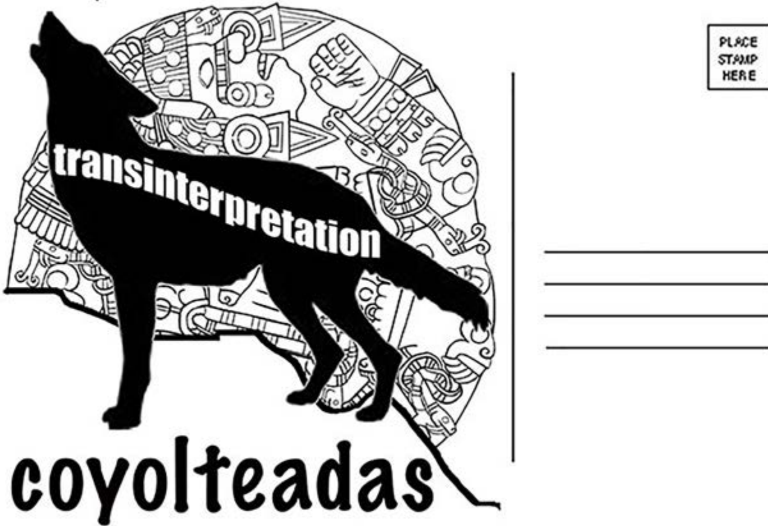

Figure 2. Sample Transinterpretation Postcard designed by Alma Lopez, © 2014.

translation of texts, in other words, "transinterpretation" explores the process of Chicanas interpreting our own work and that of other Chicana lesbian/feminist "sisters," and colleagues, and carrying the multiple meanings of specific concepts and theories on the bridges of our lenguas.

We do this, not because we think we are "saving" anybody, or because we see Mexican lesbofeministas and other Latina sisters as incapable of theorizing their own lives, but because we were saved by these ideas, which, after forty years have become a legacy of conocimiento, a democratic body of knowledge produced by, for, and about Chicanas. To enact this surreptitious border-crossing al revés, not only must we wrestle with linguistic terrorism, colonized mentalities, and/or pocha oppression (that is,

discrimination enforced by our communities, our political and educational systems, our families, and sometimes even ourselves), but we must also create a new Chicana lesbian/feminist vocabulary in Spanish and visual art embedded with all the layers of meaning that go into the decolonizing praxis of a thick translation.

Methodology of the Oppressed (2000) by Chela Sandoval was the first Chicana lesbian/feminist book translated and published by the Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género (PUEG) in 2015. In "Translation as 'Trans-Interpretation': Notes on Transforming the Book *Methodology of the Oppressed* Into *Metodología de la emancipación*," Chela Sandoval[13] calls the Codex Nepantla Collective a "militant intellectual group … [of] activist-scholars" who are engaged in the "development and deployment of a method and a technique for translation we term, respectively, 'trans-interpretation' and 'pocha poetics.'" (Sandoval 2018, 27). Pocha poetics involves code-switching as a "legal" language of our thirdspace lives and encourages the use of our own poetic systems of syntax and vocabulary over the traditional, formal, or "correct" processes of translation. "Thus, by utilizing pocha poetics, trans-interpreters create another version that repairs or returns lost, fragmented or invisible theoretical categories and/or poetic nuances" (28). For Sandoval, transinterpretation constitutes a new kind of language game. "In this game, players became re-linked to, or de-linked from their own (colonial, anti-, and de-colonial) histories … [and] communities" (28). Despite all the subjectivities participating in the process, all the players in the game, and all the "labyrinths of meaning" that the process of transinterpretation requires us to traverse, Sandoval acknowledges that it results in "a certain harmony comprised of a rising progression of feminist fourth-world, third-word and many-world kinships." (29) And it is this kinship that those of us engaged in the Codex Nepantla Collective want to

extend to our Mexican and Latina colleagues.

Anzaldúa believed that it was possible for Chicanas to build alliances not only with white feminists but also with our Mexican and Latina academic and activist colleagues. "By highlighting the similarities, downplaying divergences, that is, by *rapprochement* between self and *Other* it is possible to build a syncretic relationship. At the basis of such a relationship lies an understanding of the effects of colonization and its resultant pathologies" (Anzaldúa 2009, 114). In other words, the internalized -isms and phobias that infect our minds and bodies, no matter which side of the border we're standing on, must be semiotically analyzed, theorized, deconstructed, and resignified in the thick layers of our translations in the flesh. Borrowing the Nahuatl word for book, the Codex Nepantla Project creates an open- access, web-based interactive "codex" that will help to bridge the two worlds of Chicana and Mexicana lesbian/feminists, and to mediate the breach that exists between academic and grassroots feminists in Mexico. Bridging implies working together, coalition-building between worlds of difference and historically situated misconceptions of the Other. Thus, this virtual codex of Chicana lesbian/feminist theory in Spanish and visual art can become a pedagogical nepantla, that "space in between" where Chicana and Mexicana feminists, lesbians, and lesbofeministas situated along all points in the class- and color-spectrum can initiate dialogue, compare stories, exchange ideas, raise questions, share confianzas, and develop what Adrienne Rich called "the dream of a common language" (1978), a grammar of solidarity and love between women that breaks down patriarchy, redefines power, and speaks in a constantly shifting floricanto of poetry, art, and theory.

For Anzaldúa, "[b]ridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without…To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political and spiritual intimacy, risk being wounded"

(Anzaldúa 2002, 3). The work of the Codex Nepantla Project is simply another kind of bridge, a way of crossing over the huge chasm that separates what Anzaldúa calls nos/otras, us and them, ourselves and others, who must navigate the contradictions of our world citizenships and the wounds of our linguistic/cultural differences and find the resonances with each other's lives.

Notes

[1] LesVoz, cofounded by Mariana Perez Ocaña and Juana Guzmán, is best known as the publisher of the first lesbian literary magazine in Mexico and producer of six mammoth lesbian marches in Mexico City (Marcha Lésbica) that brings thousands of lesbians from all over the Americas to march in Mexico City. Semana Cultural is one of its more recent cultural interventions that introduces lesbian cultural production in the visual arts, poetry, performance, and music from throughout Mexico and the U.S. into community spaces.

[2] To respect the privacy of the participants, many of whom were fighting in their own communities and families against physical violence for their lesbianism and harassment for their radical feminist politics, they are not named here.

[3] Macarena Gómez-Baris (2018) defines "lo cuir" not as an embracement of queer theory or identity as these are constructed in the Anglophone world, but instead as an interpretation of the untranslatable resemanticization, or pride of sexual difference, embedded in the word "queer," whose literal translation in Spanish would be "raro," which means not rare, as in highly valuable, but strange as in colonizing. To differentiate between the decolonial and the colonial interpretations of the term, the English word "queer" becomes Hispanicized to the phonetic "cuir," which Gómez-Baris reminds us, is "located within deeper histories of colonial exchange" (57) in the Americas that "account for sexual difference in their specific geopolitical context" from the northern borders of Mexico to the southern tip of Argentina. Gómez-Baris rejects the notion of one overarching notion of "lo cuir" in Latin America, but acknowledges that "[l]o cuir, then, becomes a powerful mode of embodied political activity that is not merely the result of U.S. imperialism, but names relational viewpoints from throughout the Southern Hemisphere" (57-58). For the lesbofeministas of LesVoz, however, lo cuir is simply a linguistic substitute for the colonizing Anglo term "queer," a theory and practice that feels entitled to taking up space and demanding accommodation in all gender-based movements. In general, a strong contingent of the group viewed queer theory as white, socially privileged, and male-dominant. That queer theory had become so popular in the Mexican academy clearly spoke to the colonizing tendency of white male discourse, which they felt was erasing the history of Mexican feminism and particularly the lesbofeminista movement. Alma and I explained the difference between this totalizing kind of queer theory, which was also becoming a dominating discourse in the U.S. academy, and the particular ways in which queers of color have appropriated the term to signify their intersectional

oppressions within that dominant white male discourse, but the animosity against all things "cuir" did not permit another reading.

[4] The Joto Caucus also saw the need to expand their membership to include bisexual and trans folks, but for some reason, they did not alter the name of the caucus to reflect the new membership and were able to retain their "joto," or gay male nomenclature. Perhaps they were not pressured from within to make this change, or a vote was taken and those voting for the Joto Caucus prevailed.

[5] Luminaries of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x belles lettres include John Rechy, Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Junot Diaz, Helena María Viramontes, Reyna Grande, Luis Alberto Urrea, and Benjamin Saenz.

[6] This is not to say that there are no Chicanas writing in Spanish or translating their own work. Author and editor, Norma Cantú, currently Murchison Professor in the Humanities at Trinity University in San Antonio, professor emeritus of the University of Texas, San Antonio and founder of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa, has been at the forefront of translating Chicana feminist thought, particularly the work of Gloria Anzaldúa; indeed, her translation of *Borderlands/ La frontera* was one of the two Chicana lesbian/feminist titles published by the Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género in 2015. On a more personal note, I have transinterpreted my own work, both poetry and prose, since my graduate school days in the early 1980s, and several of my self-translations have been published in Mexico.

[7] Since "historia" in Spanish means both history and fiction, a literal translation of the terms would be "self-story/self-history" and "self-story/self-history-theory." Although she expounded this method of self-writing, and practiced it throughout her oeuvre, including her poetry, Anzaldúa did not actually define these terms until 2002, in a footnote to her "now let us shift" essay in *This Bridge We Call Home*. "Autohistoria is a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria-teoría is a personal essay that theorizes" (578).

[8] Codex Nepantla has a three-fold mission: 1) to render Chicana lesbian/ feminist theory from English to Spanish, 2) to create a Chicana lesbian/feminist vocabulary in Spanish for foundational terminology, and 3) to use visual art to interpret Chicana lesbian/feminist theories and concepts with the aid of cultural iconography—all of which constitute the nepantla process that we call transinterpretation, which is at once a decolonial pedagogy, a praxis in genuine respect for the Other, and a tool for social change.

[9] A nepantlera is the new mestiza who fully inhabits the ambivalent, contradictory in-between third space or third culture between two or more critical realities, be they national identities, languages, genders, sexualities, world views, and/or spiritualities.

[10] The lack of research funding has also been a roadblock to the project. Since 2012, I have applied broadly for grants to support this project (including the University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States), but my proposal has not been read as a research-based endeavor, but as "just translation." To date, the only funding the project has received is the University of

California Humanities Research Institute seminar grant ($4000) for the "Pocha Poetics" seminar at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

[11] Names and affiliations of the faculty participants: University of California, Santa Barbara: Chela Sandoval and Ellie Hernández; University of California, Riverside: Alicia Arrizón and Tiffany López; Loyola Marymount University: Deena González; UCLA: Alma Lopez and Alicia Gaspar de Alba; and Italian professor Paola Zaccaria who has published extensively on translating Gloria Anzaldúa, and who happened to be visiting Profesora Sandoval at Santa Barbara. The rest of the participant/attendees were graduate students from the same UC campuses attending with their mentors.

[12] Go to https://lgbtqstudies.ucla.edu/photos/pocha-poetics-2014/ to see pictures of the event.

[13] As a member of the Codex Nepantla Collective who was also an active participant at the Pocha Poetics Seminar at UCLA in the Spring of 2014, Chela Sandoval helped construct and deconstruct the terminology we generated to name and describe our method of translation. Sandoval's experience with transinterpretation is more than theoretical, for she got to practice and see the results of the method in the collective's interventions with some of the rewritings and resignifications of the "official" translation produced by the Mexican translator contracted by the Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género (PUEG). I still find it bewildering that without the knowledge or permission of the author, the PUEG decided to translate Chela's book into Spanish, a text that is already difficult to understand even by native English-speakers, as if it were just a question of changing English to Spanish without any idea of the thick layers of context and meaning embedded in the original.

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