A b s t r a c t. This text is devoted to Borderlands identity theory created by Gloria Anzaldúa, Mexican–American writer and activist, in the context of feminist criticism of women of color, or Third World feminism. The author discusses some of the most important concepts and theories created by Anzaldúa throughout her literary career such as: a vision of El Mundo Zurdo; the idea of bridging understood as a connection between women from different backgrounds; theory of inclusivity which encompasses various previously excluded categories of oppression (ethnicity, sexuality, class, origin, etc.); the idea called New Tribalism; the concept of Nepantla; theory of nos/otras; and finally the idea of conocimiento, which is an alternative method of knowledge acquisition resulting from the awakening of consciousness. The major goal of the paper is to show how certain ideas, which have been present in literature and the humanities for many years, can now be applied in the contemporary world as a solution to the problem of incomprehension of differences between “us” and “others.”

Key words: borderlands; gender; Gloria Anzaldúa; Other; Third World feminism.

To survive the Borderlands
you must live sin fronteras
be a crossroad.
(Gloria Anzaldúa)
cribes the Border as a “place of contradictions, [where] hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of [the] landscape” (*Borderlands* 18). She believed that “borders are set up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line […]. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squid-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25). This kind of the Border has recently appeared in present-day Europe and nobody really knows what to do about it. Politicians discussing the problem range from very conservative ones opting for a total closure of European borders, through more moderate ones who try to find a middle ground, to the very liberal ones, yet there are very few of them in the aftermath of numerous terrorist attacks that Europe has experienced in the last several months. The truth is that nobody offers reasonable solutions that would satisfy both European citizens concerned with the “invasion of the Others” and the incoming refugees kept for months in the refugee camps. I believe that this is a moment when political science and practice should look for the answers how to react to arising issues in other disciplines, mostly humanities that for years has been addressing the problem of the so called “clash of civilizations” and meeting the Other. In my opinion referring to theories such as Anzaldúa’s one, which deals with problems of displacement and assimilation of various groups of people who exist in a place suspended between different worlds and cultures, namely the Borderlands, 1 would allow people to better understand what is going on right now in Europe and come up with some practical solutions. Subsequently, this paper will focus on ideas deriving from Anzaldúa’s Borderland theory, namely New Mestiza and El Mundo Zurdo, Népatla and New Tribalism discussed in the context of the women of color feminism or Third World feminist theory.

WOMEN OF COLOR OR THIRD WORLD FEMINISM

In the late 1970s within women’s studies a need has appeared to relate interdependencies of race, class, ethnicity and gender to the feminist theory.

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1 When written with capital letter this term refers not only to the actual geographical territory of the US-Mexican border, but to a concept that Anzaldúa created and that goes beyond geographical location to include metaphorical meaning of cultural, psychological and sexual transformational spaces where the opposites meet.
It was a consequence of the insufficient attention paid to women of color and their problems within the second wave feminist movement. With the realization of the fact that there is no one category of a universal woman and that not all women face the same system of oppression, new trends and issues came to the forefront of the feminist discussion. Similarly to the postmodern theory, women of color feminism or Third World feminism\(^2\) rejected the essentialist concept of a woman\(^3\) and instead concentrated on the idea of the fragmentarization of the subject resulting from the fact that even within one country women can differ, are not equal to each other and suffer discrimination on various levels.

Subsequently, the major assumption of the Third World feminism is the conviction that categories of ethnicity, class and gender are interrelated systems of domination and oppression and therefore new terms such as culture, sexuality, religion, age, level of education or colonialism and nationalism should be included in the research within women’s studies. This approach was also a result of the rising since 1960s popularity of multiculturalism and the rejection of the so called “sameness theory” (Tong). When the civil rights movements stressed that ethnic minorities are the same human beings as the whites, they completely neglected the concept of difference. Critics of this stance have showed that paradoxically both concepts—the rejection of sameness of the people, and rejection of their diversity—are discriminatory to the same extend. First of all, not taking into consideration different histories of oppression of various groups we may assume that all people get started form the same position in life which is a huge oversimplification of their potential. Secondly supporting the idea of sameness of all humankind we set a standard to which all people should head to be the same. Unfortunately, in such a case the reference model always becomes white Western civilization, which is not only oppressive for minorities, but derives directly from the tradition of colonialism and European imperialism.

In the feminist theory Elizabeth Spelman aptly describes this phenomenon in her book *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (1990). She investigates why women of color and problems they

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2 Other terms used to describe this kind of feminism are multicultural, global or postcolonial, however since Anzaldúa and other authors quoted in this text favored the name women of color or Third World feminism, I decided to follow this terminology.

3 Here I mean the works of such authors and literary critics as bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Andre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Maria Herrera-Sobek, Norma Cantu, or Maria Lugones.
were facing in their own communities were excluded from the mainstream white feminism. She writes:

The assertion of differences among women can operate oppressively if one marks the differences and then suggests that one of the groups so differentiated is more important or more human or in some sense better than the other. But on the other hand, to stress the unity of women is no guarantee against hierarchical ranking, if what one says is true or characteristic of some as a class is only true or characteristic of some women: for then women who cannot be so characterized are in effect not counted as women. When Stanton said that women should get the vote before Africans, Chinese, Germans, and Irish, she obviously was relying on a concept of “woman” that blinded her to the “womanness” of many women. (Tong 204–205)

Thus she warns feminists not to make the same mistake a historian Kenneth Stampp made when he asserted “that innately Negroes are, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing else.” Spelman further observes:

If, like Stampp, I believe that the woman in every woman is a woman just like me, and if I also assume that there is no difference between being white and being a woman, then seeing another woman “as a woman” will involve seeing her as fundamentally like the woman I am. In other words, the womanness underneath the Black woman’s skin is a white woman’s, and deep down inside the Latino woman is an Anglo woman waiting to burst through a cultural shroud. (Tong 205)

This was exactly what women of color protested against in the 1970s in the US. As a result of this protest they created their own movement—Third World feminism, the foundation of which was the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga’s anthology *This Bridge Called my Back. Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983).

In the Introduction to the anthology Anzaldúa says to Moraga “This book will change your life, Cherrie. It will change both our lives” (xv). In fact, it has changed not only their lives but the whole feminist movement in the US since *This Bridge Called my Back* became the most famous symbol of the women of color feminism. The book was awarded with Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award in 1986 and American Studies Association Bode-Pearson Prize for Outstanding Contributions to American Studies in 2001.

Accordingly, *This Bridge Called my Back* is a real counterpoint to white feminism with its concentration on political aspect of ethnic female writing
and conscious rising mission. It expresses the need of women of color to articu-
late their experiences of prejudice and discrimination in everyday life but also within the feminist movement. The major goal is to present and discuss differences between white and colored women, their origins and ways of coping with discrimination. The book is divided into 6 sections devoted respectively to:

1) how visibility/ invisibility of women of color forms their radicalism;
2) the ways in which Third World women derive a feminist political theory specifically from their racial/cultural background and experience;
3) the destructive and demoralizing effects of racism in the women’s movement;
4) the cultural, class, and sexuality differences that divide women of color;
5) Third World women’s writing as a tool for self-preservation and revolu-
tion;
6) the future of Third World feminism.

As far as racism within the white middle-class feminist movement is con-
cerned, Moraga describes this the following way:

We women of color are the veterans of a class and color war that is still esca-
lating in the feminist movement. This section attempts to describe in tangible ways how, under the name of feminism, white women of economic and educa-
tional privilege have used that privilege at the expense of Third World women. […] Things have gotten worse. In academic and cultural circles, Third World women have become the subject matter of many literary and artistic endeavors by white women, and yet we are refused access to the pen, the publishing house, the galleries, and the classroom. […] Racism is societal and institu-
tional. It implies the power to implement racist ideology. Women of color do not have such power, but white women are born with it and the greater their economic privilege, the greater their power. This is how white middle class women emerge among feminist ranks as the greatest propagators of racism in the movement. Rather than using the privilege they have to crumble the institu-
tions that house the source of their oppression—sexism, along with racism—
they oftentimes deny their privilege in the form of “downward mobility,” or keep it intact in the form of guilt. […] We are challenging white feminists to be accountable for their racism because at the base we still want to believe that they really want freedom for all of us. (Anzaldúa and Moraga 61–62)

In fact, in This Bridge Called my Back we can find several texts very critical towards white women such as the one by Chrystos, a Native Ameri-
can, and by Mitsuye Yamada, a Japanese American, or a text entitled “The
Pathology of Racism: a Conversation with Third World Wimmin” by Doris Davenport. In turn, Judit Moschkovich, half Latino, half Jewish notices that the basis for all oppressive behavior is the ignorance of Other’s cultures. Subsequently, many authors stress that “it is not the duty of the oppressed to educate the oppressor” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 79) and that white people should feel the need to learn something about the large number of peoples with whom they share a country and create a nation.

In “An Open Letter to Mary Daly” Audre Lorde writes to the author of *Gyn/Ecology* that when she wrote about the concept of the Goddess as an alternative to the male-god centered religions, she at the same time excluded a huge number of cultures that also worshiped female deities such as Afrekete, Yemanja, or Oyo, whose presence in native religions empowered women. Anzaldúa wrote in such a way about Tonantzin and Coatlicue in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where she revisited the story of La Virgen de Guadalupe and found indigenous elements in it. Meanwhile, Daly did not do sufficient research to include all the mentioned above goddesses, and therefore, as Lorde phrases it, “what you excluded from *Gyn/Ecology* dismissed my heritage and the heritage of all other non-European women, and denied the real connections that exist between all of us” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 95).

To fight with repression women have to respect each other and respect their stories, hence difference cannot be merely tolerated but must be perceived as a creative and necessary aspect of our interdependency.

In two last sections of the anthology we can find texts written by Gloria Anzaldúa, who develops here her ideas about female writing and explains her concept of El Mundo Zurdo (The Left Hand World), which is one of her earliest ideas symbolizing an imagined space where people from diverse places and with different needs can co-exist side by side working together on the change, and which is precisely described in her essay “La Prieta.”

**EL MUNDO ZURDO AND NEW TRIBALISM IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

El Mundo Zurdo is a place in-between two cultures, both of them either rejected or did not accept Anzaldúa entirely as a person. As a result, searching for a place of her own, suitable both for her and for other queer people she has created a concept of a universe sensitive to poverty, suffering and harsh living conditions that millions of people experience every day. Ac-
cording to Anzaldúa, it is a world open to all who do not fit anywhere else, but “these different affinities are not opposed to each other. In El Mundo Zurdo I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 209). In my opinion, this is exactly the kind of space we need to build in contemporary world, as otherwise we may face another global war or even annihilation of the whole humanity. We truly need to revise an idea of what modern society should be based on and how goods and privileges should be distributed among people, and Anzaldúa’s theory provides us with a ready-made model. Yet, to make this change possible we should begin with transforming ourselves, our conceptions and misconceptions as only “changing ourselves we change the world” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 208).

In her second anthology Making Face. Making Soul. Haciendo Caras. Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color (1990), of which Anzaldúa was a sole editor, she wrote an essay entitled “En Rapport, In Opposition: Cobrando cuentas a las nuestras,” in which she discusses revolution which took place among women of color after the publication of This Bridge Called my Back. She claims, “we no longer allow white women to efface us or suppress us. Now we do it to each other. We have taken over the missionary’s ‘let’s civilize the savage role,’ fixating on the ‘wrongness’ and moral and political inferiority of some of our sisters, insisting on the profound difference between oneself and the Other” (Anzaldúa, Making Face 142). Acting in such a way women of color have taken the white colonizer’s role, accepted his values and using his methods they oppress the Other. According to Anzaldúa, it is a legacy of colonization. White culture has imposed the categorization of Otherness and drawn borders of ethnicity deciding who qualifies and who does not and people of color internalized this system. As a result, everybody who does not confine to certain standards has to somehow legitimize their status by passing “ethnicity test.” For example, the knowledge of a group’s rituals or a language can be used as such a test. If a person fails it means that she “doesn’t measure up to our standards of ethnicity […] We throw shit in her face, we throw rocks, we kick her out […] We have turned our anger against ourselves. And our anger is immense” (Anzaldúa, Making Face 143). Anzaldúa calls such a behavior an “intimate terrorism” (Making Face 144). The only way to end with it, is to stop looking at the world “through white eyes” and reject the model based on binary oppositions. Instead, we have to “leave oneself and look through the eyes of the Other” and to appreciate “our colored background” (Anzaldúa, Making
Face 145) against which we can build our tribal identity. This notion brings about a new concept which originates from Anzaldúa’s theory namely New Tribalism, which is going to redefine older understanding of ethnic identity so as to accept the fluidity and flexibility of identity and mestizaje. It was in opposition with both assimilation and separatism pointing to the possibility of making alliances based on various affinities. This concept was further developed in Anzaldúa’s last anthology This Bridge We Call Home. Radical Visions for Transformation (2002), co-edited by Ana Louise Keating.

Meant as a continuation of the first anthology This Bridge We Call Home was to examine what had changed over those 20 years in women’s of color situation. Here, both editors decided that this new book must be even more open to diversity so they invited these minority groups which had been excluded from the first anthology (Arabs, Jews). Moreover, they opened up for people from outside the US making this project truly multicultural and international. This attitude was an expression of the theory of inclusivity which is another concept formulated by Anzaldúa, described by Chela Sandoval in the Foreword to the book as “a methodology of love” (Anzaldúa and Keating 25), as well as putting the concept of New Global Tribalism into life. The number of coming proposals in response to the call for papers proved the existence of a strong need for such a publication.

As for Anzaldúa in This Bridge We Call Home she mostly concentrates on the metaphor of the bridge and develops the idea of Nepantla, which she has already mentioned in Borderlands/ La Frontera. In the Introduction, she writes:

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call Nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious always-in-transition space lacking boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida, and having this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in Nepantla so much of the time it’s become a sort of home [...]. Change is inevitable; no bridge lasts forever. (Anzaldúa and Keating 1)

Thus, Nepantla becomes an idea describing a state of mind when we reject our old beliefs and myths to gain new perspectives and change our point of view, but we have not reached that point yet, and so far we are suspended in a world in-between. It is a process of reconfiguration of our identity; time
when certain ideas are dying to give space for the new ones; time when we transgress borders and leave the comfort and stability of the past to open up for the new possibilities of defining ourselves. Again, I believe this is the state we are facing nowadays in Europe since we are suspended in-between the dream about safe past that was built after World War II and the challenges of post 9/11 world. Still, to feel comfortably in Nepantla we should accept not only the Other, but first of all an existence of the alternative ways of cognition that for centuries have been rejected by the Western civilization. People who inhabit Nepantla Anzaldúa calls Nepantleras and describes them the following way: “Where others saw borders, these Nepantleras saw links; where others saw abysses, they saw bridges spanning those abysses. For Nepantleras, to bridge is an act of will, an act of love, an attempt toward compassion and reconciliation, and a promise to be present with the pain of others without losing themselves to it” (Anzaldúa and Keating 4). When we cross the bridge and reach out to the Other we may feel in danger but we may also discover in the Other a fellow human being whose experience can enrich our own.

As far as the metaphor of the bridge is concerned Anzaldúa warns that since change is inevitable and necessary, no bridge lasts forever and we have to build them anew, based on new ideas and in new circumstances. In the theory that This Bridge Called my Back helped to formulate many oppressed people found a refuge, a home. However, Anzaldúa claims that it is not a good and lasting solution since it leads to closing ourselves within a space that seems safe for us, which in turn leads to stagnation and stumps further personal growth. Instead, we should concentrate on creating new links, building new bridges since, in her words:

To bridge means loosing our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. (Anzaldúa and Keating 3)

NEW MESTIZA IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The meeting of two cultures and traditions is always accompanied by fear, initial lack of trust resulting from pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices and the effects of it are in most cases unpredictable. Also, there is a
tendency to interpret all differences as a disadvantage of the Other. Thus, as Ryszard Kapuściński once said the most important issue is to arrive prepared at this meeting. While conservatives opt for reaction against the potential threat, which in most cases leads to conflicts, Anzaldúa offers another solution. She sees this meeting as a potential to create something new, therefore she encourages people to act, and not react. In *Borderlands/ La Frontera* Anzaldúa writes:

> The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision. Within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance. But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture’s views and beliefs, and for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependant on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it’s a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once, and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react. (100–101)

Anzaldúa’s figure of New Mestiza plays a significant role in this process. Since she is the inhabitant of various in-between spaces because of her ethnic, sexual, class, spiritual beliefs and other affiliations, New Mestiza becomes a mediator, an interpreter and initiator of a new feminist consciousness—New Mestiza Consciousness. One of the tasks related to this process of formation is breaking with the binary paradigms and creating new archetypes crossing beyond the dual reality as only then we can avoid conflicts and violence. Subsequently, Anzaldúa claims:

> The work of Mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her
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 language, our 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 the end of rape, of violence, of war. (Borderlands 102)

Therefore, Anzaldúa believed that the future of humanity belongs to New Mestiza who uniting old with the new would participate in creating a new culture, new system of symbols and values and who would tell a new version of history to the world, the one that would include histories of various previously excluded and invisible people and their contribution to the formation of human civilization.

Furthermore, in an essay “now let us shift...the path of conocimiento” Anzaldúa writes that such a re-interpretation of the stories, accompanied by looking not from our culture but “seeing through [our] culture separates [us] from the herd, exiles [us] from the tribe, wounds [us] psychologically and spiritually,” but also makes us a part of “collective mind-set and of collective dream” (Anzaldúa and Keating 547). Replacing old stories with the new ones we have to open up to the stories from outside the dominant system of power/knowledge to construct bridges over racial, ethnic, class, gender, sexual and cultural differences. This contributes to building of an inclusive coalition of almas afínes, community based on true equality and following the concept of sustainable development. This decolonizing aspect of telling stories anew challenges not only the Western cultural discourse, but the whole modern global capitalism with its racism, sexism and exploitation of the Third World.

New Mestiza and Nepantleras may make this passage easier for us since they lead and interpret. They promote what Anzaldúa defines as theory of nos/otras, which is an alliance between us/nosotras and the other/otras. Symbolically presented as nos/otras this concept reveals artificiality of the division between “us” and “them” since depending on a place, time, or a situation once we become “us” and another time “them.” The slash between these two pronouns serves as a bridge between two identities. Still, Anzaldúa, and all Nepantleras with her, hope that the day will come when the slash/bridge will no longer be necessary because people will understand that although we differ in details we are all the same on the big scale since we are all part of one tribe. Then we reach the state of New Tribalism through
conocimiento,⁴ which represents a non-binary way of thinking and allows for the use of alternative methods of cognition and spirituality to deepen our perception. This intuitive form of knowledge goes beyond logical reasoning and empirical research.

Yet, arriving at the stage of conocimiento, we must realize that on the way we will experience “the pain of personal growth” (Anzaldúa and Keating 553), and once there, we have to be prepared that our life will change irrevocably. Leaving behind myths and stories we have known throughout our whole life we give up part of who we are, instead we gain knowledge that not always makes us feel comfortable. “By crossing you invite a turning point, initiate a change. And change is never comfortable, easy, or neat.” Therefore, Anzaldúa asks “maybe this bridge shouldn’t be crossed,” but then she answers, “conocimiento hurts, but not as much as desconocimiento” (Anzaldúa and Keating 557).

The major asset of this new epistemology is its multicultural, multidimensional aspect and inclusive character thanks to which “the whole world may become un pueblo”⁵ (Anzaldúa and Keating 568). Yet, this can only be possible when we leave our safe “home” and open up for other people’s stories and problems. As a result, we will be able to redefine our position towards the Other, and when that happens, together we will change the world.

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⁴ In Spanish, knowledge or consciousness.

⁵ In Spanish, a town, village.


*NOS/OTRAS MIESZKAJĄCY W NEPANTLI — GLORII ANZALDÚI KONCEPCJA TOŻSAMOŚCI POGRANICZA WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM ŚWIECIE*

Streszczenie

Tekst poświęcony jest teorii tożsamości Pogranicza wykreowanej przez Glorię Anzaldúa, amerykańską pisarkę i aktywistkę meksykańskiego pochodzenia, w kontekście krytyki feministycznej kobietolorowych, czyli feminizmu Trzeciego Świata. Autorka przedstawia w nim niektóre koncepcje i teorie wykreowane przez Anzaldúa, takie jak: wizja El Mundo Zurdo; idea bridging, czyli łączenia kobiet z różnych środowisk; teoria włączania (theory of inclusivity) w dyskurs akademicki i ruch feministyczny różnych pomijanych wcześniej kategorii wykluczenia (etniczność, seksualność, klasa, pochodzenie, itp.); idea nowej, globalnej plemienności, zwana New Tribalism; koncept Nepantli; teoria nos/otras, czyli przymierza między nami/swoimi (nos) a innymi/obcymi (otras); idea conocimiento, czyli wykorzystania alternatywnych metod poznań, będąca rezultatem budzącej się świadomości. Zaprezentowanie teorii tożsamości Pogranicza ma na celu ukazanie, jak pewne idee, od lat funkcjonujące w literaturze i humanistyce, mogą mieć obecnie zastosowanie we współczesnym świecie, targinym problemami wynikającymi z nierozumienia różnic między „nami” a „innymi”.

*Sreścila Grażyna Zygałdo*

Słowa kluczowe: gender; Gloria Anzaldúa; Pogranicze; Inny; feminism kobiet kolorowych.