

CARVING NEW WORLDS IN THE BORDERLAND AND JUGGLING CULTURES IN SELECTIONS OF HAMMAD'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT: *The borderland is a space Gloria Anzaldua, the Chicana feminist, reconfigures and establishes outside the borders of the mainstream. It embraces a culture of tolerance, acceptance, and solidarity as it welcomes difference and people of all kinds from all walks of life. It does not reject any possibilities, new ways of thinking, or being. In fact, this space makes experimentation and self- discovery not only possible but a necessity crucial to the process of developing, recreating identities, and building connections with others. Writers inhabiting this space such as Anzaldua and Suheir Hammad work to resist oppression and silencing through solidarity and rewriting the stories of those whose histories have been erased. The purpose of this study is to explore the borderland within Hammad's poetry and the extent to which Hammad's poetry and the path she has taken on as a writer of the borderland contribute to the creation of a counter- narrative.*

KEYWORDS: Anzaldua, borderland, counter- narrative, in- between space, Suheir Hammad

Borders: arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those who they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others ... places where claims to ownership – claims to ‘mine’, ‘yours’ and ‘theirs’ – are staked out, contested, defended, fought over. (Brah, 2002, p.198)

INTRODUCTION

Gloria Anzaldua, the Chicana feminist, is a prolific writer and influential theorist of the borderlands. Anzaldua's theory focuses on the physical and ideological borderlands used to create divisions among people and maintain difference within society which eventually became sites of struggle and resistance. Through her theory, Anzaldua helps the marginalized think and see the world beyond Western Eurocentric standards they have been made to believe as *the* only way to see the world and acquire knowledge. She creates an opportunity for the subjugated to reconstruct their identities and practice foreign ways of thinking outside colonially constructed binaries that even restricted the way they perceive themselves and everything around them. Through this process of self-liberation from the shackles the West has placed on "the other's" psyche and mindset,

Anzaldua hopes they come out empowered and transformed agents of resistance who will never be silent or marginalized again by any force.

Anzaldua moves between multiple worlds and defies all the rigid categories used to define her as an individual and writer. In this study, Anzaldua's construction of the borderland and in-between space is used as the theoretical framework through which Suheir Hammad's poetry and work of resistance is examined. This study explores aspects of the borderland through the counter-narrative Hammad creates in her struggle of knowledge making and paradigm shifting. It discusses the parallels in the two writers' political visions that reveal themselves in their writing. Their connection to one another is often overlooked as Anzaldua's work has been mainly stressed in terms of its impact on the Chicano community, women in particular. Hammad is also usually placed and viewed within the Arab American context and representation. The two figures, however, find and situate themselves in a third space, apart from the mainstream and their cultural or ancestral roots, breaking social, political, cultural, and intellectual boundaries, and building bridges across transnational communities. They dedicate themselves to articulating the suffering of the oppressed and confronting the sources of their oppression. They both utilize their writing in general to educate, empower, and inspire new visions and conditions of existence.

Writers such as Anzaldua and Hammad write for a cause. As women of color, they do not enjoy white privilege or live in ivory towers and merely take pleasure in the practice of writing, but have taken on the mission of writing to record histories erased, fight misrepresentations, and bring back what has been distorted and ignored by the imperialist discourse. Anzaldua (1981) explains in her book *This Bridge Called my Back*, "I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you ... And I will write about the unmentionables" (169).

In the borderlands, Anzaldua contributes to an oppositional culture in which the oppressed groups, as Mitchell and Feagin (1995) state, are not powerless and wounded souls victimized by circumstances and corrupt systems. They refuse to play such a defeatist role and rather become active and reflective agents that construct a reality in which they are able to survive (69). Anzaldua (1981) herself, as a woman of color, rejects the role of a victim who surrenders to repression and continuous silencing and chooses to write as a form of resistance and empowerment. She asserts:

Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger... To discover myself. To preserve myself; to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. (*This Bridge Called my Back*, 1981, 169)

Writing to Anzaldua is a survival strategy she adopts to help her cope with the disorder and convulsion in the world. Anzaldua's dissatisfaction with the status quo and the world that exists with all its contradictions, chaos, and irrationality lead her to write so as to

make sense of everything and to remake herself. Through her writing, she is able to create order and an alternative reality she can comprehend and come to terms with.

Anzaldua's writing is an essential reminder of the importance of literature for democracy, as one of the roles poetry, in particular, has played throughout history has been speaking to power and exposing cruelties committed by oppressors (De Medeiros, 2013, p. 82). U.S. feminists of color such as Anzaldua and Hammad have always recognized the value of writing in transforming a society, for it was their only outlet to speak up about the racism they faced and raise questions and awareness about social issues.

According to Patricia Arinto (1992), poets of the Third World play the role of the poet-warrior who takes on the responsibility of fighting for justice and liberation (65). Similarly, Anzaldua and Hammad, in this context, are warriors because they fight not necessarily with weapons but with words that leave an impact on the public and urge them to take action against oppression. Amiri Baraka, the African American poet articulates what poetry means to activists such as himself and the way he views it as an instrument through which change and justice are possible. In "Black Art," Baraka (1969) mentions he wants poetry that has a great influence on people, "poems that kill" and shoot guns (p. 116).

Clearly, Baraka, also as an in-betweeners does not write poetry as an elitist who writes for the sake of it. He supports the notion of transformation and activism that can be sought and achieved through the powerful impact of poetry. He challenges hegemonic voices and dares to question authorities and policy makers through his poetry and Anzaldua's and Hammad's work of resistance represent the same beliefs.

Emma Perez writes in her (2005) article Anzaldua "forged a new territory" where intellectual and spiritual freedom, and the development of new psyches can be found and even celebrated (3). In this space, she deals with real problems of sexism, racism, and classism which touch the lives of so many across the globe (Perez, 2005, 3). She asserts that she will write about "the unmentionables" in the borderland because there is room for "the other" and a right to speak in this new territory. She adopts new symbols and taxonomies in her representations of such serious issues as she dismantles old myths and paradigms of oppression through her writing and the same can be said about Hammad.

In a 1996 interview, Hammad is asked about her reasons for writing to which she replies, she writes because her voice has been silenced too long" (p. ix). She writes because it is her goal to tackle issues such as women's suffering, hunger, slavery, and displacement. Hammad is determined to unsettle fixed systems and dogmas and expose the ills of society and evil of governments. She feels, as a writer in the borderlands, she has a moral obligation to use her gift of writing to reach out to those whose voices have been silenced too often to remember their right of freedom of speech and right for a decent life. She undermines the decisions made by governments that allow for oppression, poverty, and discrimination to continue in numerous poems. She herself has experienced silencing but no longer tolerates submission or

voicelessness when she knows she has the power to be heard, make a difference through her writing, and contribute to the oppositional culture Anzaldua has created in the borderland. Reclaiming this intellectual, spiritual, and psychological space is important to Anzaldua and Hammad as they find it liberating and empowering. The borderland gives them the freedom to "construct new knowledge" as an act of opposition (Collins, 2000, pp. 284, 286).

Hammad's act of opposition manifests itself through her adoption of hip hop and the spoken word as a means to break away from traditional ways of thinking and communicating with the world. She also uses hip hop to express and expose the pain of those suffering around the world. She embraces "the other," African Americans, specifically, through the use and celebration of their music.

Hammad's contribution to the process of new knowledge construction takes the form of a counter- hegemonic narrative through which she rewrites stories about Palestinians, Mexicans, Blacks, or poor White kids who were erased from the history taught at school (Brown, 2006). So her decision to write came from her realization that she was only familiar with the dominant narrative that gave no voice to the marginalized and her sense of identification with the voiceless who are treated as invisible and sometimes non-existent, and that is when her role took shape as a writer who writes for justice and transformation. In the poem "September 4, 2002," Hammad stresses the importance of all the lives, of the marginalized, that have been lost to oppression, murder, and exile. She notes that when the USA is looking for idols, it ought to know they are born and not produced, but it has killed, silenced, and exiled many of its own idols. She states, in America's search for idols, it ought to look through the writings of Malcolm X and June Jordan.

Hammad asks America to consider those it has silenced in the past because there is value in what they said or did, and the history they have rewritten as they saw their own being erased by hegemonic narratives. She wants the United States to acknowledge the wrongs it has committed against "the other" represented through Malcolm X and native nations. She tells Americans, idols can be found among these societies they normally do not look up to and often oppress. She believes they ought to refer to narratives constructed by these groups in the search for truth and a reality hidden by dominant voices.

ANZALDUA & HAMMAD: THE IN- BETWEENERS

Gloria Anzaldua, the cultural theorist, experienced segregation when she was a child entering school in Texas. She was punished because she only spoke Spanish and this is a memory that stayed with her through adulthood. She was the only Chicana in advanced classes during high school and she wanted to become a writer at an early age. She also had to work at a young age to help the family and put herself through school and college (Keating, 2014). During her career, she was unhappy with the lack of publications by Chicanas and women of color that she can use in her classes and that is when she made the decision to edit a collection of feminist writings by women of color that address

White feminists' lack of awareness of the serious issues that concern women of color entitled *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), and published *Borderlands/La Frontera* in 1987, and another edited collection *Making Face, Making Soul* in 1990. Anzaldua became well known for her feminist writings that represent women of color and her radical vision for transformation. She received many awards for her work, such as the National Endowment for the Arts Fiction Award, Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, Lesbian Rights Award, and Sappho Award of Distinction among others (Keating, 2014).

Suheir Hammad is the daughter of immigrants from Palestine. She grew up in Brooklyn and developed an interest in writing at an early stage of her life. Once she started writing, she discovered she had a lot to say since her parents' story of exile and displacement was not the kind of narrative white teachers would expose students to at school and so she had to unveil some ignored truths in the mainstream. She published several books, *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1996), *Drops of This Story* (1996), *Zaatar Diva* (2005). She performed her poetry all over the USA and received numerous awards including an Emerging Artist Award from the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Institute at New York University, the Morris Center for Healing Poetry Award, and the Audre Lorde Writing Award (Knopf- Newman, 2006, 71).

Anzaldua's writings and Hammad's have appeared in numerous anthologies and have had a great impact on the wide audience they have reached whether it was feminists, women of color, college students, postcolonialists, poets, or activists. They have introduced to the world the thoughts and voices of many oppressed groups and have provided intellectual opportunities which help to expand the way we think and see the world, and challenge current and past epistemologies that undermine certain narratives while bringing other ones to the forefront. Anzaldua and Hammad are linked together as U.S. feminists of color although women in this group were once separated by class, gender, culture, or race identifications, they have become allies under the umbrella of U.S. Third World Feminism regardless of the their differences and have united mostly because of their shared responses and resistance to race oppression (Sandoval, 1991, 17). The two writers reflect their suffering and others' in their poetry, and so their writing can never be viewed as "high- brow and elitist" or get accused of being irrelevant and out of touch by those whose lives are fraught with pain and agony (Lister, 1996). Hammad's "First Writing Since," for instance, reveals her worries about those who will suffer due to the government's unfair policies and measures taken to protect itself post 9/11. Hammad emphasizes it will be colored and poor women for the most part who will have to bear the grief. She declares that statements such as 'you are with us or against us' made by officials has a catastrophic impact on freedom, civil liberties, and unity in America.

Hammad reminds the public of those who work on reform and social justice and calls for more solidarity with oppressed women of any race or class since they have a shared experience of discrimination and a need for a changed society. As a US Third World feminist, she calls for unity and activism to resist the imperialist rhetoric that divides people into supporters or non- supporters of terrorists. She rejects such irrational

divisions and polarized views which will only lead to the death of thousands of innocent people for no good reason.

Anzaldua discovers herself through writing as she occupies that space between the Mexican and the American border creating a third space, that of the Mexican American combined producing a hybrid identity. Hammad, similarly, is caught between two cultures: the Arab and the American to which she cannot completely belong separately but constructs a new space as an Arab American and an in- betweener where a new identity is formed. This identity is characterized by multiplicity, flexibility, and movement that allow her to cross borders and push through all kinds of boundaries.

Hammad refuses to be trapped within a single category or by a label imposed by society to identify her in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, or religion, for all of these elements constitute her new identity in the borderland. She cannot be one without the other as notions of identity are destabilized by the many cultures and races she is attached to and the multiple affiliations she finds herself connected to that the hyphenated identity is not inclusive or representative of.

Michelle Hartman (2006) explores the complexity of the process of identification of racial groups, especially, Arab Americans who were at times considered White and other times as "not white"(145). Such fluctuation in the way they were treated based on ethnicity and various racial hierarchies, some sought to align themselves with whites and others chose an "in- betweenness" that allows them to cross borders and inhabit more than one world simultaneously building bridges between disparate groups.

Having been raised in Brooklyn, a diverse and multiethnic environment, Hammad develops a sense of belonging to people of color there. She explains in an interview how her father would tell her she was not Hispanic or black but neither was she a typical Palestinian. She actually thought she looked like the children she grew up with who were either Italian, Puerto Rican or light-skinned black people (Knopf-Newman, 2006, 85). Later on in her life, Hammad finds herself adopting their issues as her own, such as racism against African Americans evident in the handling of Hurricane Katrina victims, the suffering in Nicaragua, Haiti, Chechnya, and Iraq. She uses her position as an in-betweener to build bridges between these various ethnicities. Ironically, she starts reading and learning about the poetry of several Palestinian writers, such as Mahmoud Darwish and Fadwa Tuqan, from her interaction with black writers (Handal, 1997). This fact strengthens her ties to both communities.

THE BORDERLANDS

Anzaldua's theory of the borderlands proposes creating a space that does not limit anyone but actually undergoes continuous expansion and development because it is a site of experimentation and self- discovery. It includes everyone, the real and the imaginary, the positive and the negative, and nothing is rejected. In other words, it is inclusive of all the stages, successes, and failures one may experience as it is all part of the process of self-

reconstruction and liberation. It is also a site of new formations of identity and perceptions. In the borderland, Anzaldua embraces the contradictions pertaining to the process of blending of cultures that takes place on daily basis due to her racial identity and deals with the ambivalence positively. She explains, the new mestiza, meaning the in-between, develops "a tolerance for contradictions" and ambiguity as she juggles cultures and "operates in a pluralistic mode." In the borderland, everything is tested out and nothing is excluded or frowned upon whether good or bad (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79).

As a new mestiza, Anzaldua, learns to become an Indian in dealing with Mexican culture, however, becomes Mexican when dealing with Anglos. She copes with her multilayered identity and all that it involves in terms of politics and other various complexities. Hammad also learns to handle the mixture within her multiethnic identity and cultural affiliations. Hammad's plurality is reflected in her ability to shift back and forth in-between the American, Arab, and Black cultures, and the fact that she identifies with African Americans and becomes part of the Black community when she engages in issues that concern them like Hurricane Katrina and slavery and adopts hip hop to express her message to the public. She embraces her Arab origins when she fights for justice for Palestinians, Iraqis, and Muslims in America who face discrimination. On the other hand, she accentuates her Americaness and political affiliation with the US when she appeals to the American government to play its honorable and expected role in the world as an agent of peace and democracy. Her appeal comes from the statement the American president Barack Obama made after Haiti's earthquake in 2010. He reminded the American public that the country's leadership is partially founded on the fact that it does not use its super power to subjugate others but uses it to help them, and so it is their duty to aid people in Haiti and give them the support they need during difficult times (Obama, 2010).

The multiplicity within Hammad's identity as an Arab American forces her to deal with the clashes and contradictions her multiple affiliations entail. As an individual from Arab descent she is outraged by the human rights violations the USA has committed against Arab and Muslim cultures like Iraq and Afghanistan among others. She states in her poem "On the Brink of," it is rather difficult not to hold a grudge when she sees the way political leaders such as Blair, Bush, and Sharon allow for genocide and the dehumanization of the oppressed to take place under false banners. As an American, she cannot believe tax dollars are used to "crush dissent" among citizens when the nation was founded on principles of equality, democracy, and freedom of expression.

She is disappointed in the way political agendas have compromised the values American culture was built on and had attracted immigrants from all over the world such as her parents. She is devastated by her discovery that "White power, oil, the need to be God's/ only chosen" are top priorities over the lives of the innocent as the poem indicates. She feels confused juggling the multiple cultures and the baggage each come with, yet cannot reject anything: the good, bad, or ugly, or completely trust or distrust. As she functions in this "pluralistic mode," she realizes this is all part of who she is and the straddling of multiple cultures. She constantly engages with her multiple selves in the process of processing all the contradictions and the ambivalence she encounters daily. An instance can be seen in her statement about savage wars and

humanity, she wishes people could still remember how humans can be divine and merciful. She appeals to man's humanity when the country is on the verge of starting an inhumane war and hopes that the value of a human being is being considered.

Living in an "in- between space," individuals are able to see the world from multiple perspectives simultaneously. In "First Writing Since," Hammad presents the horrific attack on the World Trade Center and its impact on people from various points of view. As an American, she mourns the tragic death of citizens on September 11, 2001, and from the perspective of an Arab whose parents have been through displacement and occupation, she asserts that it is people in Gaza who feel America's suffering the most as they experience death and war on daily basis. She states, no one knows how New Yorkers feel more than those in the West Bank and Gaza. On the other hand, Hammad attempts to articulate the conflicted emotions Arab Americans experience when their fellow Americans are in great grief because of the tragedy blaming and demonizing her cultural origins. In the poem, two opposing views and images are juxtaposed next to one another as one American is represented as loving and kind enough to offer a hug to an Arab American who will suffer due to the attacks and the backlash it will cause against Arabs and Muslims. At the other end of the spectrum lies another American who is extremely unsympathetic and upset by the event and promises to take revenge on the enemies, Arabs and Muslims, supposedly, "we're gonna burn them so bad, i swear" ("First Writing Since"). Hammad is saddened by this harsh reality and worried about the outcome of such a tragedy and all those who will pay. This ambivalence is often found in her poetry.

Hammad enjoys the ambivalence within the borderland that provides her with an alternative reality that does not subscribe to the values of neither of the two worlds she comes from. In this space, a new set of principles and values inform the lives of the in-betweeners. Citizens in the borderland are no longer inclined to follow manufactured ideologies within American culture that dictate Mexicans are aliens, Blacks inferior, or Arabs terrorists. In this space, new definitions are created and new perceptions are formulated, and so seeing other races from a different lens and representing them in "uncommon" ways is made possible. Through the poem "First Writing Since," Hammad creates a counter- narrative through which she presents her brothers who are originally Arab as successful and productive citizens in society. She replaces negative media images of Arabs and Muslims as violent and barbaric with positive images drawn from a reality she lives that is separate from the media's thirst for action and propaganda. She explains, her brothers, a "rock god" and a sergeant, are both Arab practicing Muslims from Brooklyn.

Anzaldua creates a different and unique world in the borderland. She constructs new knowledge as part of her counter- narrative. She subverts the symbols and metaphors used to represent the Chicano woman as she feels discontent and "disempowered by these representations" (Aigner- Varoz, 52). Her references to the beast and serpent images in *Borderlands/ La Frontera* are made to reappropriate them and create new meanings that

improve the female's image in society to be seen in a more positive light (Aigner- Varoz, 52). Anzaldua states:

The dominant culture has created its version of reality and my work counters that version with another version. The version of coming from this place of in-betweenness... the Borderlands. There is another way of looking at reality. There are other ways of writing. There are other ways of thinking. (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000, 229).

Anzaldua is tired of the reality shaped by dominant ideologies in which she is forced to live on the margins because she is basically different as a Chicano, female, and queer. She does not believe there is one single way of thinking or writing as she has been exposed to alternative ways when she opened up to many other possibilities and ways of being, and finally, came up with a reality of her own. Hammad, like Anzaldua, searches for new worlds, words, symbols, and metaphors to use in her poetry. Hammad writes, "I am the poet in search of new words/ And a new world Not Mars" ("Beyond Words"). She needs a new world to experience which she hopes to carve in the borderland. Mars is not the answer though. She seeks a new space where she can perhaps experience a different reality, unlearn previous dichotomous systems of thought, and learn from a new epistemic world other modes of thinking.

Hammad is troubled by the existing world in which oppression and racism have become the norm. She is eager to experience a positive democratic world even if it is of her own creation on a page. Her frustration with the current situation appears in her poem "On the Brink of ...," when she wonders how we could face the young and tell them their voices do not matter to those in power and thinking for themselves does not come without risks. Hammad is constantly seeking alternative spaces to occupy where she can actually think for herself and explore the places her mind and imagination take her. She longs for the freedom that enables her to break boundaries of thought placed by government policies, political rhetoric, hegemonic forces, colonial agendas, and social norms. She wants ideologies which value power and greed over humanity eradicated and replaced with those which empower and inspire to uplift and radically change nations and relieve human suffering. Hammad rejects the symbols and ideologies through which citizens are brainwashed. She asserts that events such as the New York attacks do not happen randomly and people will be played by policies, conspiracies, and misinformation. This is verbalized in her poem "First Writing Since," "there is no poetry in this. there are causes and effects... symbols and ideologies... and information we will/ never know."

In "What I Will," Hammad exercises her right to take on the stance that reflects her own convictions and not the one she is told is appropriate or "politically correct" unlike the individual portrayed in W. H. Auden's poem "The Unknown Citizen" who "held the proper opinions for the time of year." Hammad refuses to conform, because "Everyone can be wrong." That maybe the convenient path to take, but she is not willing to be manipulated by rhetoric and distorted histories made to serve the interests of those in power. Hammad often takes the risk of holding on to unpopular views as she knows there

are other "version(s) of reality" not revealed to the public because they unsettle the hegemonic narrative, and so other perspectives and ways of thinking are usually kept in the dark. In the poem "What I Will," Hammad is unwilling to join the herds in their celebration of wars and bombs because she is convinced that they may be wrong and their decision to start a new war is misguided. She does not want to be deceived by the public or hidden agendas (60). Hammad is determined to create a world on her own terms. One which is not dictated by oppressors who choose war over peace and never make room for any opposing views. She refuses to side with supporters of violence and bombs even if they are the majority because, in the borderland, she has regained her right to think, judge for herself, and see the world beyond set ideologies. She asserts, "I will craft my own drum" because she is aware that, in this new space, different possibilities always exist beyond the limited expectations crafted for the masses.

In Hammad's counter- narrative, she exposes and challenges various structures of oppression and, at the same time, suggests alternatives to existing political and social conditions. In "Beyond Words," Hammad rejects the binary of "us" and "them" that divides people demonizing one party and creating an enemy of the other where it is unnecessary and often life threatening for humanity. She articulates the danger that lies within such binaries:

There is still enough resistance in us
To create a world where *there is no*
Your people or my people
But our people
Our people who kill Our people who are killed
I somehow know love will save us. ("Beyond Words")

Hammad envisions a world where love will save people and help create solidarity and a much better world where such divisions do not have to exist among humanity. She urges people to resist the divisions that keep them separate and hostile to one another. She does not give up hope on the possibility of recreating the world where there is no "your people" or "my people."

Anzaldua addresses the issue of binaries and ways of (b)ordering "the other" by eliminating and banning such concepts from the safe space she creates in the borderland because it is these binaries that add to the hatred and hostility between the "othered" and "non- othered," thereby diminishing any chance for reconciliation and solidarity. Anzaldua's borderland emerged as the outcome of the many psychological borders built, resulting from the creation of binaries for instance, to keep "the other" at a distance and impede the potential for assimilation or integration in order for the current dynamics that structure power and subservience to continue to materialize and former divisions perpetuated. Anzaldua finds herself within the metaphorical or psychological borderland which is "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (*Borderlands*, 3). It is this space which she struggles with as people who cross "the confines of the normal," the outcasts, or "transgressors" are de-

legitimized by whites and those in power (3-4). Anzaldua's text *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, however, validates the experiences of many coming from various races, cultures, religions, classes, and sexual orientation, writes Erika Aigner- Varoz (2000, 47). Anzaldua works to dismantle oppressive constructions of gender, race, and class hoping to uplift and empower the outcasts who are continuously being rejected by the mainstream. In this territory, such delegitimization is discarded and deemed insulting and offensive because the borders restricting "the transgressors" are designed by certain forces only to keep them under control and to manage their difference until they are made weak and submissive.

Anzaldua, in this in- between space, challenges the way knowledge is constructed and disseminated by dominant groups and fragments of history are pieced together to form a strategically and socio-politically appropriate history produced for the masses' consumption. She objects to the minimization of people's lives through racism and discrimination leaving them feel insignificant and trivial. Anzaldua believes everyone's history and stories are worthy of recognition and a struggle because there should be no hold over what constitutes authentic knowledge, and certainly not if classifications are made based on bias and binaries of us/ them created by Western imperialism. People in the borderland reclaim agency through documenting their stories and feel proud of their role in this process of knowledge making. In this space, terms such as "legitimate" knowledge and resistance are contested here through a process Teresa Cordova (1998) would describe as regaining control over definitions (41).

Hammad, like Anzaldua, recognizes that the history of many can be erased through the history fabricated by those in power who even have control over meaning, definitions, and the legitimacy of knowledge and information produced by certain people. Thus, Hammad insists on being involved in the decolonial project of reconstructing meanings and unsettling the hegemonic narrative, thereby undermining the authority of imperialists. She contributes to the process of knowledge production by producing a counter-hegemonic narrative in the borderland through which she resists rigid labels given to people as they are "othered" such as refugees, slaves, poor, or displaced. In her poem "Of Refuge and Language," she refers to the way the poor are always "tagged and boxed with labels" they have not chosen for themselves and goes on to point out that no one ever chooses to be called slaves just like no one chooses for themselves the status of dispossessed either but these are conditions imposed on certain races in the world.

Hammad questions the legitimacy of definitions predetermined by forces of power and asserts that such narrow- minded views and constructions of psychological and physical borders do not have control over her or her perceptions of the world. The poet states, "We need to own our definitions and live by them. We need not be afraid to adapt or change them when necessary. Borders are manmade, and I refuse to respect them unless I have a say in their formation" (Hammad, 2010). Hammad's poem destabilizes meanings and definitions, and shows that such labels are not fixed categories in which thousands of people are placed. They can and should be changed when needed because they are unnatural and manmade. In "Of Refuge and Language," she recalls her grandparents who

were at times called refugees, and other times "non – existent," and they perceived themselves as landless.

She is outraged by the definitions and titles these people are given because they are associated with negative connotations which they are not guilty of. They are stigmatized through these labels and will have to struggle because of them. The injustice lies in the fact that these titles do not define them, their history, or culture, but society sees them only through these unfair definitions imposed on them preventing them from leading a normal life they choose for themselves. This is, particularly, why the marginalized need a third space, free of labels, to inhabit such as the borderland. Accordingly, Anzaldua's theory of the borderlands where difference is not denied, but rather recognized and celebrated is important to many writers. People of all kinds are welcome in the borderland where they build connections and solidarity as they share their experiences of suffering and oppression. Being on the border of cultures, they become the center which is free from marginalization by the mainstream. Here they are able to share their concerns for humanity and work toward justice without making enormous efforts in seeking acceptance by the dominant group that determines which difference is acceptable and which is not.

Many acts of solidarity have appeared during the twentieth century among several oppressed and struggling communities that felt a deep connection with other fellow humans. For instance, refugees in the West Bank made donations to Haiti after the earthquake and also raised money to aid Hurricane Katrina exiles. These refugees made it a point to extend their kindness to the victims across oceans although they are poor and exiled themselves but are familiar with the agony that comes with the status of refugee (Alex Lubin, 2013, 244). These connections may have gone unnoticed by many, but writers such as Anzaldua and Hammad, being activists, caught between cultures and living in multiple worlds are able to establish these links, see beyond difference, and locate human suffering and injustice across borders.

Hammad and many other writers of color like Anzaldua, Amiri Baraka, Etel Adnan, June Jordan, Naomi Shihab Nye, Alice Walker do not only pay attention to issues relevant to their own ethnicity or race but concern themselves with larger issues than those of a single community and transcend the differences that separate communities from each other. Through their writing, they touch the lives of many people and build bridges linking various communities to each other such as African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, Palestinians, Asians, and Middle Easterners. It is this heterogeneity within this global community fighting for justice that ties these people together giving them strength and a high sense of tolerance and appreciation of difference which lies at the core of Anzaldua's theory of the borderlands. In "Of Refuge and Language," the writer makes certain connections after Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans and points out that in history we have seen tents arranged for people in Rwanda, Haiti, and Bosnia but none were prepared for those fleeing the hurricane since "Americans do not live in tents." In this poem, Hammad makes a link between seemingly disparate communities which have formed bonds as they struggle to overcome the crises

they face whether it is displacement, massacres, indoctrination, or discrimination. Surely, communities in Palestine, Rwanda, New Orleans, Bosnia, and Haiti have experienced one form or another of these tragedies.

Hammad complains in her poem "Beyond Words" that she is constantly told not to confuse issues, build connections, or find parallels among people as "Haiti is not Chechnya/ Chiapas is not East L. A." and neither is Iraq Palestine. She is told:

No connections here
No illuminated parallels
Two different histories and two different peoples
Make no links
Do not confuse the issues
Only confuse the people (27).

Nevertheless, Hammad cannot but see and make those links regardless of what others think. She cannot pretend they are mere coincidence and believe there is no pattern in these continuous histories of oppression even if they involve different peoples. She realizes geographies may be different, but the suffering and pain of subaltern subjects is identical no matter how far across the globe they may be. Hammad never submits to the intellectual oppression politicians and government officials inflict on the public as they want to control perceptions and meanings in their attempt of self- preservation and perpetuation of principles they continue to defend to serve their self interests. They want people to live in blind obedience and have no insight into systemic oppression and the crimes committed against humanity worldwide.

Sirene Harb (2014) agrees with Hamad that drawing parallels and establishing connections between histories and oppressed nations unsettles the hegemonic narrative, therefore, ensuring a lack of awareness of others' histories is fundamental for the protection of existing paradigms and power structures. Harb believes that "the refusal to articulate links and common concerns" among oppressed groups keeps them separate feeling isolated and their struggles insignificant (80). It seems crucial to forces of power that subordinated subjects are prevented from articulating any similarity in "patterns and mechanisms of oppression" as Harb puts it (80). For Hammad, making these links is necessary if any kind of resistance is to be formed. In her poem, "Some of my Best Friends," Hammad describes attempts to silence any voices that speak up in solidarity, "We look for each other in crowds of flags/ Loud speakers who silence us our solidarity/ Angers others who would always/ rather war (89)."

The previous lines show how imperialists and hegemonic forces try to prevent "the other" from acts of solidarity or any type of activism to keep them helpless and vulnerable as much as possible under the "divide and rule" policy. Authorities do not approve of the mobility of in- betweeners because such movement in and out of cultures and societies provide them with access to varied conditions of life, an awareness of various government practices that may be determined by racial or class differences which help

them draw connections and conclusions they are able to use in their criticism of the nation's politics and leadership. We certainly have seen this happen when Hammad wrote a critique of the negligence Hurricane Katrina victims faced as they were not given enough attention or care when they needed it the most because they do not represent the mainstream or the high class in White society. This access to multiple cultures and their histories, however, is crucial to activists and writers such as Anzaldua and Hammad to build solidarities, raise awareness, and to push for radical social and political transformation.

While the in- betweeners' movement among worlds may be admired, the pain this condition entails ought to be acknowledged as well, writes Ana Louise Keating (2006). That is, they actually risk being ostracized or rejected as they refuse to belong to a single community and support its worldviews (9). The complexity of living as an in- betweener is highlighted in "Beyond Words" as Hammad asserts she is, simultaneously, the American the authority does not represent, and the Arab Arab presidents and rulers do not represent either.

Hammad disconnects herself from government representatives, both American and Arab, since they should but do not represent the views of the public. She finds herself an outsider to the two communities to which she belongs, mostly, in terms of her political affiliations and views. She cannot defend Arabs completely as their dictators do not represent her and neither can she claim to be really proud as an American when her government has failed her. But this conflict about her worldview and political stances have complicated her life as she is harshly judged by multiple communities as opposed to those who belong to a single culture and can easily choose one side to support and one way of seeing the world. She reflects the ambivalence she experiences living on the edge of multiple cultures that are often in opposition to one another when she writes in her poem "Beyond Words," "I am taking ... Too much in/ I find nowhere to rest this responsibility/ If I say nothing I am complicit/If I say something I am isolated as extreme." Her position in the middle between the two cultures which shaped her character and experiences yet constantly clash with each other is problematic. That is, she is unable to take sides. Nevertheless, her silence can be taken as complicity, while expressing her views, could make her isolated or seem extreme. Perhaps, her position on the borders of cultures give her the chance to see the faults of both sides and reflect on the ways she can explore to bring the two sides closer and help them get to a better understanding of their commonalities and differences. Her situation, also, represents that of many individuals with hyphenated identities living on the borders who are expected to take sides. Hammad's renegotiation of her multi- layered identity, however, is manifested in her use of hip hop which has, probably, been one way to bring communities together and establish a relationship in which respect, tolerance, and communication are core values. Writers, such as Anzaldua and Hammad, are not afraid of taking risks or getting rejected for their views since what really matters to them is the work they do to achieve autonomy and liberation, and make change possible.

CONCLUSION

The anti- imperialist project Anzaldua and Hammad have taken on of decolonial thinking and resisting intellectual oppression, which held people captive to the prisons built within them through many decades of a dark history, has remapped the world beyond physical geographies and borders. They have established a non- homogenous community extended from opposite sides of the earth linked through a sense of collective fate and a common struggle for freedom and justice, thereby, creating heterogeneity in the newly formulated narrative that defies a previously respected and trusted single narrative manufactured by hegemonic forces for public consumption and redistribution around the world. This project Anzaldua and Hammad have contributed to through writing has been critical and essential to the empowerment of the oppressed and the creation of new alternatives for limited thinking, experiencing the world, and most importantly, existing.

Connecting with others and building solidarity between people across the globe to fight for justice only strengthens members of this community inhabiting the third space, validates their experiences and histories, making their lives more meaningful and inspiring, and increases the magnitude of their influence in causing a paradigm shift, social, and political transformation. In this fact lies the significance and importance of the work Anzaldua and Hammad do through their counter- hegemonic narratives and call for unity and activism beyond gender, culture, class, or race differences. This study has contributed to the literature that examines US border crossers building bridges with people of other ethnicities which has been under- theorized relatively speaking. Perhaps, further research is needed about connections with other ethnic American literary traditions, such as, the Asian American as this area of focus has been overlooked even more than the links made between Arab Americans, African Americans, and Chicanos.

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