

MEXICA MONISM AND DAOIST ETHICS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA

SARALIZA ANZALDÚA

ABSTRACT: *Critical scholarship regarding the philosophy of Gloria Anzaldúa has proliferated in recent decades, especially in the fields of feminist theory, phenomenology, and epistemology. However, there is little analysis of the metaphysics which undergird their work and make possible their views on identity, experience, and community politics. First, this article will explore the significance of Anzaldúa's 'nos/otras' and its relation to Mexica (Aztec) monistic metaphysics. Such a concept resists an us/them construction of the world because it situates the other as us: the Spanish word for 'we' is 'nosotros' and holds the 'other/otros' as its root, which Anzaldúa feminizes to 'otras'. Second, we will compare Daoist and Mexica metaphysics, two monist systems, and unpack the moral implications for spirituality. Doing so, we will see that according to Anzaldúa's monistic view, we are affected by each other's spirit and have an obligation to be spiritually active in the world. This claim is found throughout Anzaldúa's philosophy and is the key to understanding the spiritual implications of her work. Lastly, we will apply such a view to sexual trauma and see that Anzaldúan metaphysics lays out a path of recovery. If sexual violence is the severing of trust with others, then Anzaldúa's understanding of how the world is constructed gives us a way to re-establish trust with ourselves, each other, and our communities.*

Keywords: *Aztec, Daoism, Gloria Anzaldúa, metaphysics, Mexica, recovery, sexual violence, trauma*

In a 1998 interview with AnaLouise Keating, Gloria Anzaldúa is asked whether *ya* feels connected.¹ *Ya* replies, "Yes. Sometimes I'll bump into a chair and I'll say 'excuse me'. I'll go for a walk and I'll stare at a tree, the way it's silhouetted, and I feel such a connection to it, as though its roots grow out of my feet and its branches are my arm

ANZALDÚA, SARALIZA: Ph.D. Candidate in Philosophy, University of California at Los Angeles, USA. Email: anzaldua@g.ucla.edu

¹ Instead of gendered English pronouns, this text uses the Nahuatl non-gendered pronoun '*ya*' and possessive pronoun '*i*'. For example, '*ya* said' instead of 'she said,' and '*i*-book' instead of 'her book'. This is a non-technical grammar choice and needs no philosophical explanation. Rather, given that one of the aims of Chicana philosophy (and in particular Gloria Anzaldúa who is the topic of this article) is bridging this paper adopts the practice of inclusive language.

rising to the sky” (Keating 2009, 74). This feeling of connection to the world underpins Anzaldúa’s metaphysics from which *i*-spiritual schematic grows. In particular, the ‘*nos/otras*’ embodies a monistic paradigm that gives us insight into how *ya* conceptualized healing. First, we will look at the *nos/otras* concept and then the Mexica metaphysics that informed Anzaldúa’s idea of unity. Then we will take a look at a similar Daoist world view in order to fill in some blanks and get a clearer picture for how Anzaldúa envisioned such a view to inform identity and spiritual action. Lastly, I will apply theory to practice and offer an Anzaldúan vision for healing ourselves/our communities from sexual violence.

Throughout *i*-works, Anzaldúa discusses a unified multiplicity. For example, as a child *ya* remembers reaching for an orange. *Ya* writes:

I remember reaching for the oranges, and suddenly there were three bodies, like I was three of me. (Like an ear of corn, which has all these coverings on it like sheaths: There was me and then from my center there were these three ears of corn and they were like my bodies, but they all came from one place.) I don’t remember if I really got the oranges or not. Right after that experience I began to feel apart, separate from others. Before this point, I couldn’t differentiate between myself and other things. I’d feel like I was part of the wall (Keating 2009, 76).

This sense of oneness that undergirds multiplicity, a kind of monism, repeats itself throughout Anzaldúa’s philosophy. Mostly notably in the concept of *nos/otras*. The plural first-person Spanish pronoun for ‘we’ is usually ‘*nosotros*’, but by altering the pronoun to a feminine ‘*nosotras*’ and creating an inclusive disjunction with a forward slash *ya* suggests that the excluded is included on two levels.

First, Anzaldúa suggests that the we is fundamentally characterized by its inclusive relationship to the other on the macro level and can’t be understood separately. For example, when we think in terms of national identity it is to the exclusion of other nationalities. Yet, those boundaries between one nation and another are not as mutually exclusive as one first assumes. Communities straddle borders, people migrate, and families hold multiple nationalities. Thus, not only are borders permeable, but so are these identities. Given that Anzaldúa is from the Rio Grande Valley, where communities straddle borders and undermine supposedly exclusive boundaries, it’s not surprising that *i*-configuration of group identity is constituted as such.

Second, by using the feminine pronoun Anzaldúa highlights the presence of marginalized identity on the micro level which would otherwise be erased by the normative male pronoun. Continuing with the border example, the identities of American and Mexican have normative connotations that arise from those societies which police the discourse surrounding those identities. When we think ‘American’, one might think of an American flag with a bald eagle flying overhead, perhaps some jets and fireworks in the background, similar to what is portrayed in dominant media. One senses the undertones of a masculine military power, not a sense of the feminine or queer. Yet, just as the *otras* group identity is present in *nosotras*, so too is the marginalized individual included. It is not just how seemingly opposing groups are

positioned against one another, it is also how the individual is recognized within those groups and the tension therein. Scholars such as Andrea Pitts (2021) and Mariana Ortega (2016) note how our sense of self, especially those marginalized selves, occupy a multiplicity that can at times be very uncomfortable. For example, a racialized self might be in tension with a gendered, classed, or even career self. In one sense, these are not separate selves but multiple facets of one self. In another sense, they are distinct selves that can either inform or reject each other; perhaps even something in between. Regarding the American example, within the masculine military identity that seeks to destroy is the feminine that seeks to love and the queer that escapes such false binaries. Such liminality blurs the supposed rigid boundaries between what it is to be masculine, feminine, and queer. Masculinity is surely capable of love just as surely as the feminine is capable of violence, and the queering of these identities undermines assumed dichotomies.

This idea that seemingly opposed identities not only inform, but constitute one another is a particular kind of monism motivated by Mexica philosophy. Readers of Anzaldúa will know the influence Mexica and Mexican philosophy had on *i*-work, given *i*-repeated use of ‘*nepantla*’ and that *ya* read Miguel León-Portilla.² We can thereby assume that Anzaldúa was familiar with ‘*teotl*’.³

For the Mexica, *teotl* was both the matter and movement that constituted the fabric of existence. While trees and tacos may seem different, they are merely *teotl* moving differently. The example I like to use is steam and ice. Both are made of the same matter, water, and it’s the movement of their molecules that make them take different shapes. Those shapes, ‘*nahualles*’, are in constant motion transitioning from one form to another as *teotl* moves.

‘*Inámic* pairs’ motivate this motion. These pairs are “interdependent, interrelated, mutually engendering, and mutually complementary while at the same time mutually competitive and antagonistic” (Maffie 2014, 137). Facets of *teotl* form dynamic forces that interact with one another. Importantly, while these forces are in tension with each other and can’t be co-extensive, they feed one another cyclically and are mutually reliant. Neither are they static entities but rather forces that move relationally in a process. For example, in our steam and ice case we have the pair heat and lack of heat interacting with water to constitute those *nahualles*. The forces of heat and lack of heat interact in tension over the seasonal cycle and reshape water in a dynamic process throughout the year.⁴

These ideas, monism characterized by interdependent pairs, occur throughout Anzaldúan philosophy. For example, when discussing the self and other, *ya* describes that space as *nepantla*: a point of contact between different worlds that are simultaneously one (Keating 2015, 28-29). It is a split in our awareness that perceives two different objects, and when we move into the ambiguous state of *nepantla* we

² ‘*Nepantla*’ is one of three kinds of movement that the fundamental Mexica matter *teotl* can perform. It is a weaving motion like cells knitting together or molecules coming together to form larger objects.

³ Also called ‘*ometeotl*’.

⁴ Force should not be understood as merely a positive. Forces can also be negative, such as the force death which is characterized by a lack of life.

uncover the unified reality. However, though Anzaldúa emphasizes a unified view in spiritual action, the reader is given little direction as to how this kind of world view functions, or how it may be used to heal some of the trauma *ya* discusses.⁵

I suggest that Anzaldúa's metaphysical framework has spiritual implications which are key to understanding the power of *i*-spiritual model to heal.⁶ How one views the world constructed will inevitably influence how one operates in it, and the possibilities therein. In particular, the spirituality of the world takes on a different flavor depending on how the pieces of the world fit together.

In order for us to understand Anzaldúa's full spiritual view, we need to fill in some places. After centuries of colonization that has destroyed, misinterpreted, and erased the Indigenous philosophy of Mexico, valuable work is being done to restore what was taken. However, much of the scholarship is still nascent and not readily available in English. So I suggest that we look to a similar philosophy that has more resources currently available: Daoism.⁷

I'm not suggesting that Mexica philosophy can be replaced with Daoism. There are significant differences between the two traditions. However, where similar Daoist thought can help us expand and map out areas of Mexica philosophy that are obscured for grave, historical reasons. In particular, Daoism with its similar monism of interacting pairs can suggest a possible spiritual framework for Anzaldúa's vision.

Like *teotl*, 'Dao' (道) forms the basis of existence as both matter and movement.⁸ The principle text of Daoism, the *Dao-De-Jing* (道德經), refers to the *Dao* as "the Great Mother" that "gives birth to infinite worlds" (Mitchell 1988, Ch. 6).⁹ Similarly, it too has interacting complementary pairs called 'yin-yang' (陰陽).¹⁰ Robin Wang (2012) writes that reality is constituted by a wholeness (*Dao*) "mediated through the interaction of *yin* and *yang*" (41). Like *inámic* pairs, these forces are in tension with one another and yet interdependent. This relationship once again forms the things we

⁵ In one passage, Anzaldúa discusses the rape of two migrant children by a patrón (farm manager, usually white) (Keating 2009, 84).

⁶ In lieu of the more common philosophical terms moral and ethical, I use Anzaldúa's term 'spirituality' to describe an epistemology and ethics based in a monistic metaphysics (Keating 2009, 323).

⁷ By Daoism, I'm referring to the school of Daoist philosophy (*Dao-Jia* 道家) and not the spiritual institutions (*Da-Jiao* 道教). Though I recognize that Chinese philosophy and religion is not thought of separately in the same terms as Euro-American counterparts, I follow Steve Coutinho's (2014) distinction in *An Introduction to Daoist Philosophies* that the former is comprised of particular thinkers and texts, while the latter involves belief in specific ritualized practices.

⁸ Importantly, we must understand matter as movement and movement as matter which constitutes a force that manifests the world. Both *teotl* and *Dao* are process metaphysical concepts that view the objects of the world in transition and it is their movement that constitutes their existence. For example, the burning of carbon is a process that constitutes fire. To think of matter, movement, and force in terms of essentialist metaphysics (possessing a unique feature that excludes them from other objects in the world) would be to misunderstand the very natures of *teotl* and *Dao*.

⁹ Another translation reads "the mysterious female" called "the root of heaven and earth" (Mair 1990, 65).

¹⁰ Others such as James Maffie (2014) have also noted the similarities between Mexica *inámic* pairs and Daoist *yin-yang* (172n3).

take to be reality, called ‘the ten thousand things’ or ‘myriad things’ in this tradition. For example, water is principally formed of *yin* and the introduction of *yang* in the form of heat will produce steam.

Using Daoism, we can now push *teotl* further and get a fuller picture of Anzaldúa’s spiritual vision. If the world is fundamentally monistic, then *i*-concept of *nos/otras* makes metaphysically sense. Materially, the *nos* is both complimentary to and constructed with the *otras*. As such, each individual *nahual* is relationally interdependent to each other by virtue of the monistic system in which it resides. Thereby, each *nahual* has the power to affect the movement of other *nahualles*. In Anzaldúan terms, the *nos* affects the *otras* and the *otras* affects the *nos* by being both relational and identical.

This has a profound impact on spirituality. Whereas a more individualistic spirituality based in essentialism might direct one’s intention inward or need justification for spiritual action, Anzaldúa’s spirituality is constructed towards *otras* because that is where the *nos* lies. Sole attention to the *nos* simply creates a false boundary. As such, if one is to be spiritual well/whole then we are compelled to be active in the world beyond the isolated *nos*. We have a responsibility to ourselves/each other as *nos/otras* because we are bound by the fabric of our universe. The we is found out in the world.

Returning to Daoism, we can make use of ‘*Dao-de*’ (道德) which translates as ‘the way and its power’. A monistic metaphysical system with interdependent pairs does not view spirituality, i.e. morality, ethics, and epistemology, as a task of aligning oneself with the good and avoiding the bad, but rather “aligning one’s activities with the forces and propensity of the natural world” (Wang 2012, 129). Given that all the world is fundamentally one at the material level, one should aim to be harmonious with that world. ‘*Dao-de*’ is a term that references this alignment because by being “in flow” with the *Dao* one taps into its power. Such power maximizes one’s potential within the whole *Dao* as a part of the *Dao*, and is illustrated in Zhuang Zi’s story about a swimmer.

The story goes that Kong Zi (Confucius) was visiting Lu-Liang and saw a man in a pool at the foot of a powerful waterfall. Thinking the swimmer in trouble, Kong Zi rallied *i*-students for a rescue but as they approached they realized that the swimmer had no trouble navigating the turbulent waters. When questioned how the swimmer was able to swim without drowning, *ya* replied “I have no way. I began with what I was used to, grew up with my nature, and let things come to completion with fate. I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies, following along the way the water goes and never thinking about myself. That’s how I can stay afloat” (Watson 1968, 205). The swimmer illustrates that by harmonizing oneself with the *Dao* (the *Dao* is often symbolized by water in Daoist texts), a person can not only be at ease with the world but also manifest a quiet power that helps navigate that sometimes turbulent world.

It’s telling about the relationship between the self and the *Dao* that the swimmer explicitly states that they refrain from thinking about themselves, and speaks to a particular kind of relationship between virtue, nature, and the self. The swimmer is likened to a moral agent, and by acting in the world develops a kind of intuition and

awareness that allows an actor to be spontaneous. That spontaneity is not random or without intention, rather it is guided by a nature that has aligned itself with *Dao*. As A.C. Graham writes:

People who really know what they are doing, such as cooks, carpenters, swimmers, boatmen, cicada-catchers...do not go in much for analyzing, posing alternatives, and reasoning from first principles. They no longer even bear in mind any rules they were taught as apprentices. They attend to the total situation and respond, trusting to a knack which they cannot explain in words (1983, 7).

That natural, spontaneous action is what it is to be “in the flow”. Such action stems from a nature tapped into the *Dao* and its power, and is in harmony with the forces that govern/construct the world.

Though the journey towards alignment with the *Dao* begins with a self conditioned by language and the principles we’ve assimilated via our culture (learning the rules of how to behave in our particular society), such a journey ends with letting go of that conditioning.¹¹ Lao Zi writes, “Evince the plainness of undyed silk, Embrace the simplicity of the unhewn log; Lessen selfishness, Diminish desires; Abolish learning and you will be without worries” (Mair 1990, 81). Letting go is characterized by cultivating an awareness that what you think and the actions you take from those thoughts are conditioned. Zhuang Zi reiterates this point in the story *Knowledge Wandered North*. When Knowledge asked how to be in flow with the *Dao*, the Yellow Emperor replied “Only when there is no pondering and no cogitation will you get to know the Way. Only when you have no surroundings and follow no practices will you find rest in the Way. Only when there is no path and no procedure can you get to the Way” (Watson 1968, 234-235). Both Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi characterize alignment with the *Dao* not as something to be worked towards with reasoning and principled action, but rather something that occurs naturally when one lets go of such attempts and becomes aware of the depth with which our nature has been conditioned throughout our lives.

Importantly, this letting go is not a rejection of society and desires in favor of the natural. This would lead us into the natural fallacy. What is natural is not necessarily good either in the categorical sense or the functional sense. Rather, this letting go is characterized by an awareness of our conditioning so that we can act spontaneously in the way that Zhuang Zi’s swimmer does. The swimmer does not forsake *i*-village or reject language, *ya* spoke in the story and there was no evidence that *ya* lived in the waterfall pool. Instead, the swimmer had aligned themselves with the way of the water so as to navigate the turbulent pool and its undertow. While swimming, there was no need to speak nor was there a need to thrash against the water. Each movement of the swimmer was in harmony with the way of the water because they were guided by an

¹¹ Lee Yearley (1983) in “The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-Tzu” discusses the connection between language and action more in depth: “Because we think in language, the language we learn causes us to feel, desire, respond, and act in certain ways. Human beings are controlled by the language they use; they depend on what their language allows them to do” (126).

intuition and awareness harmonized with the water/*Dao*. In Mexica terms, such alignment would be tapping into *teotl* and maximizing one's potential as a *nahual*. In both cases, spiritual maturation is the process by which we become aware that our conditioned self is a manufactured self. Once we are aware, we can become intentional and choose to align ourselves with the *Dao/teotl* and thereby include the totality of the world in our sense of self.

So if we are to make use of Daoism in order to get a clear picture of what Anzaldúa imagined, spirituality in the world would be identification with the *otras* as self and to seek harmony with it. Since both the *nos* and *otras* are *nahualles* of a monistic world, by identifying with the *otras* one identifies with the *nos* as *teotl* (or *Dao*) and such identification is harmonious with the world. Resisting identification with the *otras* resists being in harmony with *teotl*. Such resistance can generate conflict and lead to suffering, in the way that karmic consequences generate suffering in Buddhism by refusing to acknowledge reality.¹² On Anzaldúa's view our actions pertain not just to our own spirituality, but that of the world as well. Importantly, this means that by virtue of metaphysics our spirituality is likewise influenced by the world. As such, we are compelled to act towards spiritual wellness by being committed to working in the world towards the spiritual wellness of the *otras* and not merely of the *nos*.

Before we continue to how Anzaldúa's spiritual model can be used as medicine for trauma, I'd like to deal with a few of objections. First, I have yet to demonstrate that there is an equivalency between Mexica *teotl* and Chinese *Dao*. How can we know that Anzaldúa would have agreed with my expansion of *i*-philosophy or that Daoist ethics is applicable? Second, how does alignment with the nature of *teotl/Dao* lead to spiritual wellness? This seems to fall into a natural fallacy in which nature is the source of good and by following nature we are therefore good without proving first that nature is in fact good. Third, even if we are charitable to the monistic model, why would this motivate us to be aligned with monistic metaphysics for the sake of spiritual wellness? Finally, given that Anzaldúa's philosophy was complex via multiplicity and *nepantla*, wouldn't this monistic reading flatten those concepts?

As I've stated, I don't claim an equivalency between Mexica and Daoist philosophy. Rather, we know that Anzaldúa read both philosophies and I claim possible influence through which we can expand upon *i*-work. *Ya* used Mexica philosophical concepts and terms repeatedly over almost thirty years of scholarship, and given the tone of that work we can see similarities to Daoist philosophy. Though *ya* is not explicit about such influence, Anzaldúa admits to studying "Eastern philosophy" and Daoism. How closely these philosophies fit together in a technical sense is a separate concern beyond the scope of this paper.

The second concern misunderstands Daoist ethics as a kind of action that seeks a good and then actively works to achieve that good. Rather, Daoism advocates '*Pu*' (樸) which denotes 'natural simplicity'. Those who achieve *Dao* and spiritual wellness do

¹² We know that Anzaldúa studied Buddhism, and it's not hard to imagine the influence this had on *i*-work (Keating 2009, 193). Buddhism, in particular the Mahayana tradition, influenced Chinese Daoism and vice versa such that these two branches of philosophy often share similar concepts and practices.

so through *Pu* which aims to live a simple life by letting go of the conditioned ego which includes socially constructed desires. Again, this is not a denial of self or desires. Instead, it is an expansion of the self aligned with the *Dao*. Kenneth Dorter (2014) in “Indeterminacy and Moral Action in Laozi” clarifies this point:

When Laozi says, “The sage desires to have no desire” (64.16), the unwished-for desires are those of our individual body, those which give us pleasure independently of and even at the expense of others; and the desire to be rid of them is the desire of our inclusive body, our identification with the world as a whole, the self as what is common to all rather than what is distinctive to each. “Being all-embracing, he is impartial” (16.13) (75).

With this expanded sense of self achieved through *Pu* and letting go of conditioned desires, one naturally aligns with the *Dao*. There is no action needed to imitate nature or align oneself with the natural world. This is important to understand, because Daoists don’t view the natural world as inherently good. Rather, it is the least conditioned aspect of the *Dao* in comparison to society with its rules of behavior and language. As conditioned, society is full of arbitrary distinctions that create false boundaries and further restrict the self. As Lee Yearley (1996) notes in an essay on Zhuang Zi:

[D]ifferences are likely to appear because these learned discourses [philosophical and ethical languages], Zhuangzi emphasizes, build on dichotomies: they rest on oppositions, such as that between the beautiful and the ugly. This web of oppositions forms thought, attitude, and action and gives groups of people a distinctive identity. For example, one group’s language declares tattoos beautiful and their lack ugly, and its members think, feel, and act accordingly. Those without tattoos are considered imperfect specimens of the human race and treated as such. Another group, however, employs the same general opposition — the beautiful and the ugly — but thinks tattoos ugly and behaves accordingly (157).

By letting go of conditioned self, including conditioned beliefs, desires, and actions, one becomes closer to the *Dao* naturally but one doesn’t imitate the natural world as a way to the *Dao*. This would be another form of conditioned self built via the dichotomy of people vs. nature, the former being less good than the latter. Thus, there is no aiming or maintaining towards a more natural self as a being in nature, but rather a letting go so that one can uncover a more expansive nature in harmony with the *Dao*. This resembles Anzaldúa’s paradigm of deconstruction, in particular the letting go of false boundaries and conditioned notions of self as separate from others.¹³

Third, I have two thoughts on the third objection. First, the term ‘spiritual wellness’ in contemporary pop culture has the connotation of a spiritual practice that develops supposed good qualities for the sake of peace or happiness. For example, regular meditation, eating particular foods, or other adjustments to one’s lifestyle in order to become a better person. Again, this misunderstands Daoist ethics. Spiritual wellness in

¹³ For example, in a prize acceptance speech Anzaldúa says: “Let’s challenge each other to examine...our own inherited or acquired privileges, our social positions, and to take responsibility for our assumptions about people who are different from us” (Keating 2009, 241).

Daoist philosophy is not the adoption of particular practices in order to live better. Rather, Daoists strive to return to their metaphysical nature (*Dao*) through *Pu* because it maximizes one's potential as *Dao*. Karyn Lai (2007) discusses this point when *ya* writes that *de* (德) should be thought of in terms of its potency and the power of a thing in relation to its context/environment, rather than a kind of moral goodness (326-327). This kind of wellness can be thought of in terms of becoming one's true potent self, an expansive sense of self without conditioned desires arising from socially constructed dichotomous boundaries, and not a transcendent wellness in which one becomes happier, more peaceful, or a healthier person by behaving a certain way or adopting specific principles. Daoist wellness is a kind of potency that happens in relation to the *Dao*. Thus, Daoist metaphysics and spirituality are one and the same. Spirituality is not a second feature that arises from metaphysics. So if one accepts Daoist metaphysics, one also accepts the Daoist spiritual model without need for further justification.

Second, I can only imagine the need to justify spiritual wellbeing arising from privilege. The privilege of safety and security, having never experienced the deep kind of suffering that comes with trauma. For those lucky few, there is nothing that will convince them that spirituality arises as a basic need in order to deal with such suffering. For the rest of us, our experience of trauma necessitates spirituality in order to deal with the suffering such events leave in their wake. Not only as individuals, but as communities who are still experiencing the trauma of colonization for which spirituality is a wellspring of resilience, solidarity, and solace.

Finally, the dynamism of Anzaldúa's monism does not exclude a complex worldview of multiplicity and *nepantla*.¹⁴ In fact, it is the nature of Anzaldúa's metaphysics that gives rise to *i*-complex view of the world. Multiplicity arises from *teotl*, because it is the base matter/movement that gives rise to the many objects of the world. Those manifestations come to be because *teotl* moves in complex ways. For example, *teotl* may move in *ollin* (an oscillating pattern) such as the oceanic tides. It may also move in *malinalli* (a spiraling pattern) such as when a caterpillar spins a cocoon; or it may be in *nepantla* (a weaving/unweaving pattern) such as when cells knits themselves together to heal a wound. The fact that all these examples stem from the same matter/movement of *teotl/Dao* does not flatten the complexity of their movements/force. Rather, such complexity is grounded in the monistic nature of the base material of reality. So Anzaldúa's use of *nepantla* to describe the multiplicitous nature of Chicane people in the occupied Southwestern United States, being both Indigenous and Spanish, American and Mexican, and yet neither of those things, can only be understood in the context of Mexica monism.

So, how can we use Anzaldúa's spiritual monism for trauma recovery? Anzaldúa was no stranger to trauma, and it is not surprising that *i*-system of metaphysics and spirituality would be conducive towards a healing model. Given that system, healing work would be characterized by its outward focus. If trauma is broken trust with the world/the *otras*, a closing off, then healing is working towards reestablishing that trust

¹⁴ Anzaldúa's view is one of multiplicity, not plurality. The former is constituted by one thing that presents itself in multiple ways, while the latter has many distinct objects presenting themselves.

by opening up. Anzaldúa compares losing one's boundaries during sex with spiritual activities such as meditation that open oneself to "a connection with the source" (Keating 2009, 85). This connection involves facing a fear of the *otras* that can be threatening to the self (Keating 2009, 87). By fearing and hating the *otras*, one fears and hates oneself. Only by accepting "all the pieces" can one heal and connect with the world (Keating 2009, 88). That connection is the source of healing. On Anzaldúa's view, the spiritual activist:

[A]dopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a *nahual*, able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person. She learns to transform the small "I" into the total Self (Anzaldúa 2012, 104-105).

What would this model look like for the purposes of healing from sexual trauma? There is an epidemic of sexual violence in the United States, and survivors have the odds stacked against them in terms of seeking acknowledgement, justice, and treatment. Often survivors are met with resistance and forced into silence. Sometimes that resistance comes from one's family and loved ones. This kind of fracturing, what Anzaldúa terms '*Coatlicue* state', undermines a person's trust with the self and the world; leading to anxiety, depression, and crisis because one's perception of the world has shifted. There are new knowledges and experiences that are un-welcomed. The world now seems confusing and threatening.

I offer some suggestions for how to reconnect according to Anzaldúa's model:¹⁵

Connection with the *nos*:

- Through one's body (movement and food)
- Through one's mind (meditation, spiritual practice, and therapy)
- Through one's spirit (art, culture, fun)
- Through one's immediate community (supportive loved ones, other survivors, and healing practitioners)

Connection with the *otras*:

- Through nature (walking, planting, protecting)
- Through exploration (seeking out new experiences and places)
- Through larger community (connecting with people beyond your immediate community)

¹⁵ For the purposes of article structure, I divide the *nos* and *otras* though as I've illustrated these concepts can't be separated in the metaphysical sense.

- Through harmony (helping others to heal, being mindful and active in the world—especially with those of the *otras* who are oppressed)
- Through learning (reading, listening, education)

These practices are based in a dynamic that seeks to reconnect that which has been cordoned off by trauma. Through these practices, one reestablishes trust with the *otras* and comes to the view the world in terms of *nos/otras*, or in metaphysical terms to let go of false boundaries instilled through violence and uncover the nature of reality: *teotl/Dao*. Each practice may use a single movement, such as *nepantla* in reestablishing community ties, or all three movements such as reestablishing a connection to the natural world. It is through these practices that one is able to let go through *Pu* (樸), and be in harmony with *teotl/Dao*. Anger, sadness, and mistrust, along with the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress like nightmares, anxiety, loss of appetite, etc., are processed, eased, and eventually diminished so that one can lead a more connected life to the whole of existence.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, what I offer is a vision of Anzaldúa's *remedio* (remedy) as a survivor myself. *Ya* emphasized practicality in practice and theory rooted in practice, and I've aimed to do so by expanding on the practice of Anzaldúan metaphysical spirituality. My *ofrenda* (offering) is a mere starting point for survivors, supporters, and our communities.

Anzaldúa's model for metaphysics and spirituality is richer, more detailed, and more resourceful than what casual observers might first presume. *I*-philosophy grew out of *la frontera* (the border) and trauma, in which boundaries and distinctions destroy our connection to ourselves, each other, and the world. Communities become divided and families separated. Thereby, given *i*-methodology of *autohistoria-teoría* (biographical theory), we should not be surprised that Anzaldúa viewed the world as one thing and developed a spiritual model from this perspective.¹⁶ If such wounds are caused by splitting, then by reconnecting we heal.¹⁷

Gloria walked to the river. In the distance, *ya* could hear the noise of the highway. People going to places in fast little bubbles, barely away of each other. *La herida* (the wound) still throbbed, sometimes subtle like the pulse of a moth's wings and sometimes painful like the pounding of a hammer on bone. *Ya* reached the river and sat on the bank. Gloria dipped *i*-feet into the cool water of *el Río* (the Rio Grande) and felt the blades of grass underneath *i*-hands. *Ya* listened to the traffic pass behind, and stared ahead at the other bank as the river moved gently by. "We're all related, even to grass," *ya* whispered (Keating 2009, 94).

¹⁶ Anzaldúa viewed theory as fundamentally grounded in personal experience, and that one's history is a resource for scholarship. This methodology is often characterized by inserting poetry, biography, prose, art, and other forms of expression into scholarly work, which made theory richer and more accessible.

¹⁷ What *ya* called the '*Coyolxauhqui* imperative'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express a deep appreciation to those scholars and teachers whose work I've built on, and hope that my work has contributed to the thriving of our tradition so that future (and current) generations may benefit. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* for their critical evaluation and valuable feedback on this article.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, Gloria (1987; 4th edition 2012), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (CA: Aunt Lute Books).
- A.C. Graham (1983), "Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of 'Is' and 'Ought'", in Victor H. Mair (ed.), *Experimental Essays on Chuang-Tzu* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press), 1-23.
- Dorter, Kenneth (2014), "Indeterminacy and Moral Action in Laozi", *Dao* 13: 63-81. <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11712-013-9358-6>>
- Keating, AnaLouise (ed) (2009), *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press).
- Keating, AnaLouise (2015), *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality, Gloria E. Anzaldúa* (Durham: Duke University Press).
- Lai, Karyn (2007), "Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing: An Ethical Assessment", *Dao* 6: 325-337. <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11712-007-9019-8>>
- Maffie, James (2014), *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*, (Colorado: University Press of Colorado).
- Mair, Victor H. (trans) (1990), *Tao Te Ching: The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way* (New York: Bantam Books).
- Mitchell, Stephen (trans) (1988), *Tao Te Ching* (New York: Harper Collins).
- Ortega, Mariana (2016), *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (New York: State University of New York Press).
- Pitts, Andrea (2021), *Nos/Otras: Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Multiplicitous Agency, and Resistance* (New York: State University of New York Press).
- Wang, Robin R (2012), *YinYang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Watson, Burton (trans) (1968), *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Yearley, Lee (1983), "The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-Tzu", in Victor H. Mair (ed.), *Experimental Essays on Chuang-Tzu* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press), 125-139.
- Yearley, Lee (1996), "Zhuangzi's Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State", in Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds), *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (New York: State University of New York Press), 152-182.