

## Unity or Diversity

Two of the poems which I found myself fascinated with are *Child of the Americas* by Aurora Levins Morales and *To live in the Borderlands means you* by Gloria Anzaldúa. These two poems talk about the pride of each of the author's cultures and races. The authors do not want to make excuses for being the way they are but want to tell about the pride they feel for being the way they are, and they found no way to change themselves but show that history has made them the way they are. Both of them show a part of their cultures and the differences in identities as *Latinas* and as immigrants' descendants; Aurora Levins Morales is a Puerto Rican, and Gloria Anzaldúa is a Chicana from Texas.

I am interested in these poems because I am from a South American country, Venezuela. I never cared about my race before coming to the United States. The first day I came to college, I was asked to fill out a form which asked about my name, age and all my other personal information. But there was a question which shocked me; they asked me about my race. I was very confused, nobody had asked about my race before. I wrote down Hispanic-American, but I really was not sure about what I should put down. I knew that my mother's ancestors were from Spain, and my father's ancestors were mulattos (the children of blacks and whites) and mestizos (the children of Amerindians and Europeans). So, I do not feel that I am white, black or Indian. I am not any of them in my own nation either. I like Morales's and Anzaldúa's poems because they both talk about pride in their heritage, and at the same time, these poems are about the anger towards a culture that does not seem to be understood in the fact that that culture is different by nature. The authors want people to learn how to live with them and with each other in spite of the differences of race and culture. I found many similarities in their poems.

First, they both talk about mixing races, and they do not know exactly which one they fit in or which one they belong to. In Anzaldúa's poem, she says that to live in the Borderlands means you are neither *hispana india negra española ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed*. (Neither Spanish Indian black Spanish woman, nor white, you are mixed, a mixed breed.)

She describes herself, and those that live in the borderland, as a unique blend of all five races, always feeling out of place in their homeland. Anzaldúa compares life as a *mestiza* as one who transcends borders. She says those that live in this new culture transcend the races, the genders, and the cultures.

Judith Pookie Flores says the following in her essay *Cuatro Mujeres Living in the Borderlands*: The poem by Gloria Anzaldúa 'To live in the Borderlands means you' is describing what [it] is like, 'To survive the Borderlands, be crossroads.' This poem is powerful because it exposes us to a new paradigm, a new perspective of self, many *culturas* (cultures) in one's self. It walks us through our histories and cultures.

It is the same with Aurora Levins Morales when she says I am not African. Africa is in me, but I cannot return. I am not Taíno. Taíno is in me, but there is no way back. I am not European. Europe lives in me, but I have no home there. I am new. History made me. My first language was spanglish. I was born at the crossroad and I am whole. Like Anzaldúa, Morales cannot find her place in her race. She has not only one ancient identity, she has them all. That is why she finished her poem I am whole. And through her poem, she wants to express her identity with her past, and at the same time, she wants to place herself in her present.

Ron Coscorrosa, in his essay *Reaction: Child of the Americas* says, She is herself, not defined by what made her and where she came from, but by her current state of being and where she is going. Even though she has different parts in her, she is still one. She has no conflict about having mixed heritage; to her it makes no difference. It shouldn't. She does not have a Jewish part of her brain and an African part of her brain, she has one brain. She is human, just as someone with full African origins.

Secondly, both poems not only talk about mixing of races but about mixing of cultures. It is like many cultures living together in a common region creating a new culture. Anzaldúa says in her poem that to live in the borderlands means to put *chile* in the borscht, eat whole wheat *tortillas*, speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent: be stopped by *la migra* (immigration officials) at the border checkpoints; Anzaldúa uses food as a symbol of the mixing of cultures. Borscht, whole wheat tortillas, and chile, are all foods that come from different places and cultures, but in the borderlands, they are consumed together, just as the cultures that have lived on the borderlands for generations have merged into another culture separate from the individual groups of people who have settled there.

The article Women Writers says that Thematically, 'Borderlands' is a narrative of the convergence of two cultures, and a search for an identity. Anzaldúa was raised between two distinct cultures – Chicano, in which she was born and raised, and Anglo where she was educated. In her culture, she was expected to conform to society. She found herself not being able to do that.

Aurora Levins Morales also used symbols to describe mixing of cultures. In her poem Child of the Americas, she says, I am Caribeña (Caribbean woman), island grown, Spanish is in my flesh, ripples from my tongue, lodges in my hips: the languages of garlic and mangoes, the singing in my poetry, the flying gestures of my hands. Garlic and mangoes— both could be thought of as very Caribbean, which is partly what Aurora identifies with.

Adam Hough, in his essay Takaki/Morales Response, says that Ms. Morales, displays the pride in the United States of America that is lacking in modern day society. This isn't written verbatim; it instead is Ms. Morales' pride in her diverse background that is American culture. This is shown in the first line of each stanza. 'I am a U.S. Puerto Rican Jew, Caribeña. Not an African but with African in me; [n] ot Taína but with Taíno in me.' This shows that she is proud of who she is and her background.

Dr. Miner also says that I realized that Morales captured the essence of what the nation's [or United States'] 'composition' can aspire to. Morales combines a strong love for her nation, her 'Americanness,' while simultaneous[ly] appreciating the diversity her heritage has blossomed within her. Morales closes 'Child of the Americas' with 'and I am whole,' a symbolic and appropriate match to the [nation's] motto 'Out of many, one.'

Third, both authors use languages in their poems to refer to the mixture of Spanish and English. Gloria Anzaldúa, for example, says, Cuando vives en la frontera (when you live in the borderlands), people walk through you, the wind steals your voice, you're burra, buey (donkey, ox). The use of Spanish in her poem represents the pride she feels for her Spanish ancestors.

Aurora Levins Morales says, I speak English with passion: it's the tongue of my consciousness, a flashing knife blade of crystal, my tool, my craft. ... I was new. History made me. My first language was spanglish.

The Article Women Writers says that her recollections of the insults she received in the American society makes one empathize with her shame. She was put down due to her heritage, languages, and dialect. 'I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler.' Tormented by fitting into American society, she was ridiculed by peers of her culture.

In the Article Critical Essay #2 – Part 2 of Analysis, it says that in 'Child of the Americas', her message is one of passion for her culture, language, food and Spanish in her whole being. Her poem is strong in the message of having many cultures and staying connected to them through history, memory and just being who you are. She talks of being at the crossroads of culture.

In conclusion, Gloria Anzaldúa in To live in the Borderlands means you and Aurora Levins Morales in Child of the Americas, have a common theme— the many cultures, races and languages living together in a

common place create a new culture. And, they want to be accepted as they are. Their messages may not be a complaining but rather a strong affirmation of all their identities, and all the parts that make them who they are.

They are Americans, and like these two writers, I feel America is my second home. Just like Gloria Anzaldúa says in her poem, To live in the Borderlands means you must live *sin fronteras*. The authors make it clear that it is alright to be multicultural and encourage bonding with each other identity. The problem here is that we as people are always trying to classify ourselves into races, cultures, social positions. Gloria Anzaldúa and Aurora Levins Morales, through their poems, try to say that instead of classifying ourselves, we should try to understand each other and try to live in harmony, accepting the differences among us. Differences make each one of us special and unique.

It is my prayer that one day we would accept each other as we are and not let races and culture divide us but bring us together. It is not a secret to the world that the mestizaje is a Latin-American cultural identity. Simon Bolivar said in his speech in the Congress of Angostura (held in 1819, while the wars of Venezuelan independence were still in progress), The blood of our citizens is diverse; let us mix it to unify it.

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