Chapter Three

Nepantla

A Borderland Epistemology

Soy un amoramiento. I am an act of kneeling, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.

We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward. Nuestra alma al trabajo, the opus, the great alchemical work; spiritual mestizaje, a "morphogenesis," an inevitable unfolding. We have become the quickening serpent movement.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 103

In this chapter, I advance some ideas on decolonization by discussing my understanding of key concepts in Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, consistent with thinking of Latin@ within the colonial history of Abya Yala. In addition, I integrate Maria Lugones’s critique of and contributions to the modernity/coloniality project paradigm (1992, 2010) and Ramón Grosfoguel’s distinct views on transnational feminisms (2006, 2012).

My working thesis is as follows: There are two interrelated aspects of the coloniality of being: the systemic suppression of local knowledges and the emergence of alternative knowledges resulting from this oppressive experience. Nepantla offers the possibility for these alternative knowledges to emerge and develop (Migonolo, 2011). This framework has much to contribute to the models, language, and practices that we call mental health, and to family and other therapies. I explore nepantla as a concept to anchor a discus-
sion accompanied by (a) differentiating identity politics from epistemic and ethical projects that are grounded in subaltern identities and (b) understanding and articulating the ways in which gender identities, class, race, sexual orientation, and ability intersect and make visible not only multiple and complex oppressions within and between groups but also borderland spaces.

My personal, primary frame of reference is that of someone who inhabits the borderlands of bilinguality, binationality, and interculturality. This frame of reference involves an understanding of how knowledge and subjectivity are intertwined with modernity/coloniality, and what the constructing of knowledges and family therapy and other mental health practices in the borderlands can offer us in opening other paths of healing. I invite family therapists and others in the mental health fields to look into what other disciplines can offer and to consider the cross-fertilization of our practices.

ABOUT GLORIA ANZALDÚA

Gloria Anzaldúa was a Chicana, lesbian, feminist, Tejana patlache poet, writer, and cultural theorist born to field-worker parents. She began laboring with her parents and siblings at age eleven, and when her father died three years later, she had to continue working at the fields throughout high school and college. She won numerous awards for her writings, such as the Lambda Lesbian Small Book Press Award for Haciendo Cara (1990) and the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award for This Bridge Called My Back (1997). Her book Borderlands/La Frontera (1987) was selected by the Library Journal as one of the thirty-eight Best Books of 1987. In her writing she used a unique blend of languages, including Spanish, English, and Nahual. Anzaldúa wrote in “Spanglish,” inviting the reader to experience what she experienced throughout her life in a land where non-English speakers were shunned and punished (University of Minnesota, 2012).

In addition, her work is grounded in her body and is connected physically and metaphorically to gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and class, and dialectic relationships between these and the self. She conceptualized pain as recursive vulnerability, necessary for personal and social transformation, and used her body as a means to embody geographical, cultural, and psychological borders as well as spiritual animal symbols. She did what the scholars from the modernity/coloniality collective project have not dared to do yet, that is, to make visible her own personal experience and use it to articulate her thinking. Her teoría insisted upon locating it in the body; hers was an embodied voice.

I believe that a decolonizing framework must be anchored in the reality inherent in multiple subjectivities and an embodied voice. Some male authors in the modernity/coloniality collective project (e.g., Escobar, 2003)
identified a need for female and queer voices to emerge and be heard. However, this is no excuse for their not addressing the material and multiple other consequences of their male—and other kinds of—privilege in the nation states of Abya Yala. While Mignolo and Tostianova (2006) have written about Anzaldúa’s unique perspective and contribution to a decolonizing paradigm, they have not written about their views in ways that make visible their own social locations.

NEPANTLA: A BORDERLAND EPISTEMOLOGY

In her provocative preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) introduced a discourse of people who live between different worlds and whose social conditions involve hybrid identities:

The actual physical borderland that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19)

First, she referred to a geographic borderland that is a site and a symbol of great violence from the U.S. government and groups of U.S. citizens toward peoples coming from the South of Abya Yala, especially those who are dark-skinned. It also evokes asymmetries in labor division, and in concrete historical and material social conditions. Then she referred to other borderlands involving sexual orientation, class, gender, and race, which are as material as the geographical borderland, but encompass experiences that inform and transform each other. However, the idea is not to essentialize the cultures that meet at the borders or to homogenize borders as if there were only one border culture, identity, or even process of hybridization.

According to Anzaldúa (1987), the borderlands are the places in between, the spaces in which border knowledge and border identities are constructed; the gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives (Rosaldo, 2008); and the overlapping border spaces and cultural representations that those who inhabit these spaces negotiate in order to exercise personal and collective agency (Lugones, 2005, 2007). The borderland concept is transnational and can be applied to the multiplicity of borders present in Abya Yala and is consistent with Lionnet and Shih’s (2005) view of the transnational “as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation from the center” (p. 5).
In my view, we can incorporate the notion of borderlands as real and symbolic spaces that confine marginalized peoples in a metropolis, and the formal and informal economy. It is also helpful to integrate Esteva and Madhu’s (1998) concept of the “One-Third World” and “Two-Thirds World” to address issues of geographical location and power and privilege. They proposed the categories of One-Third World and Two-Thirds World to refer to the social majorities and social minorities can be geographically located in the Global South or the Global North, and their quality of life. These categories help us understand the distribution of wealth within a history of colonization embedded in the North-South relationships. Let us look at some examples of people’s lives and borderlands.

Catalina’s family was partly from Puerto Rico and partly from the mainland, and her family moved back and forth from one to the other. They settled in a Latino neighborhood of a large Midwestern city where she recounted feeling not Latina enough because she was not born in Puerto Rico. Her skin tone wasn’t dark enough, and she did not attend the neighborhood school that her Puerto Rican peers attended. In the gay community she was not gay enough because she considered herself bisexual. Her parents and extended family were Christian and, although she described them as somewhat religious, they did not approve of her sexual orientation. When there were conflicts with her mother, she would call Catalina “pata,” a derogatory word for lesbian. Catalina knew this meant something dirty, weird, and unacceptable. She felt like there was a hole in her heart and, from a very young age, could not let go of feeling that being gay was wrong in God’s eyes.

Catalina struggled with lack of acceptance outside and inside her home. She was lucky to have her aunt Martha around. Aunt Martha was the oldest of her mother’s sisters and a kind of matriarch. Although she never affirmed Catalina’s identity, she would chastise her sister and other family members for criticizing Catalina and remind them that family was first regardless of anybody’s ways and deeds. Catalina’s father kept his distance from her and her siblings. She felt his silence as disapproval but he never argued or became vindictive with her. The most intimate conversation they had occurred when Catalina was nineteen years old and already attending a local college. There was a family reunion and he had drunk too much. He told her, “I don’t know what to say, mi’ja. I think God put a man and woman on earth to be together but I love you no matter what.”

Catalina grew up witnessing and experiencing occasional racial discrimination and hearing her family’s anger resulting from police harassment, store personnel racist behavior, and job managers’ harshness at work. At the same time, she was told to quiet down in restaurants if she became too excited “because people here (America) do not talk in this way,” and that it would be best for her children if she married a White male.
Outside her family, Catalina struggled to connect with other Latinos and everyone else, as her school was a reflection of a larger community segregated by race. African Americans, Latinos, and Whites lived in the spaces mapped by their race membership. She made friends here and there with people from each group. However, she and her sister were called “little immigrants,” and both Whites and African Americans told them that they sailed to the mainland in a “cheerio.” Catalina remained silent or laughed along with her classmates, as trying to fit in was less painful than fighting back. When she told her parents about these comments, they told her not to take them seriously. Catalina had to learn to develop bridges between her family and the world outside, as well as between racial groups, genders, and sexual orientations, to piece together spaces where she could be connected to all these different people and experiences that were meaningful to her.1

Pepe, a heterosexual, lower-middle-class and Mestizo-looking Peruvian chemist who migrated to Argentina in the wave of the 1990s, found himself working as a street peddler before he got a job as a technician in the chemical sector. He left his country in search of a better job and found himself being harshly discriminated against by Peruvian immigrants who had migrated earlier and by Argentinians. Apparently, he did not have the “right” color and did not belong to the “right” social class.

He met Rosalinda in Buenos Aires and felt they were a good match because of their similar backgrounds. Like many Peruvian women, Rosalinda worked as a maid. After three years in his job, Pepe was laid off when the company was sold, and he had to take a job with lesser pay in the textile industry. Pepe and Rosalinda lived in an immigrant-populated neighborhood and had to negotiate their survival with immigrants from Bolivia and Paraguay. This involved connecting with them around experiences of immigration and common cultural legacies while resisting racial prejudice from them and the larger Argentinian population.

Catalina, Pepe, and Rosalinda lived in a social context that forced them to negotiate boundaries and create bridges to connect and develop well-being rather than mere survival. Though I have described their contemporary circumstances, they also stand on a foundation embedded in a history of colonization and legacies of oppression from their own homelands. It is as if they carry the legacy of colonization on their backs and as if they unknowingly resist the legacy of the coloniality of being and find those in-between spaces in which to be and to create a living.

From the vantage point of the scholars in the modernity/coloniality group, border thinking arises from the colonial difference: that is, the wound of coloniality generates the formation of this kind of subjectivity. It emerges from the conflictive dialogue that decolonial thinking develops between Eurocentric thought and other languages, logics, and ways of being. For Mignolo (2000c, 2011), border thinking allows us—once having recognized
equality and accepted the wound inflicted by the colonial difference—to draw different paths and to enunciate other knowledges.

While teaching at San Diego State University, I supervised students in practica, and usually my classes were a magnet for Spanish speakers from Latin America, Chicanos, Latin@s, and anyone connected to the border. While working with them on examining dimensions of privilege around ethnicity and class in their countries of origin, I included discussions about the history of the unearned privileges we held as a result of the genocide of Indigenous populations since the arrival of Columbus in Abya Yala. I asked them to examine alternatives for taking responsibility for these unearned privileges and to explore implications in their clinical work and in their development of the self of the therapist.

One of these clinicians was a recent upper-middle-class immigrant who came from the interior of México. Her rich ethnic background involved Asian and Spanish ancestry, and she experienced great difficulty relating to the history of oppression toward Indigenous and Mestizo people in her country, or facing her position of structural privilege. Another supervisee lived in Tijuana, the city that borders San Diego. Like her peer, she was also ethnically privileged but middle rather than upper class.

The woman who cleaned and cooked for her family was an Indigenous person from the south of México. This supervisee spoke of how, after struggling with the English language and way of life, as well as discrimination, in the United States, she realized that this Indigenous woman, whose ethnicity, class, and migration struggles had been invisible to her, had possibly experienced the same, perhaps even more intense, challenges. From that point on, the supervision relationship changed. The supervisee, who initially refused to even consider the structural power that benefited her in her own society, became more willing to open up—to be humble and vulnerable in training. We were able to identify and examine the layers of power and privilege embedded in different geographical locations and we used it as a basis for working on the development of the self of the therapist (Hernández & McDowell, 2010).

COATLICUE, NEPANTLA, AND MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS

In the borderlands, oppressed subjectivity comprises two states: intimate terrorism or internalized oppression, and Coatlicue. The latter is a state of creation. Anzaldúa (2000) called Coatlicue the process that forces us to see and confront the social constructions that have been used to represent us, usually in a pejorative manner. Coatlicue requires the strength to challenge and liberate oneself from the identities that were implanted in us through colonial discourse. This is no easy task. It is as if we are caught in between
two seemingly harmful worlds. We fashion the self as the self-in-between, recognizing that the possibility of resistance lies in the creation of a new identity in the borders. This journey is characterized by the development of a critical consciousness, which Anzaldúa called Mestiza consciousness, and is akin to Freire’s concept of concientización (Freire, 1971).

In *Interviews/Entrevistas* (2000), Anzaldúa explained that she began to use the term *nepantla* to expand the meaning of her original concept of borderlands:

> With the Nepantla paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of Mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined. (p. 176)

Keating (2006) explained that nepantla is a Nahuatl word meaning “in-between space,” and involves transformation and “dis-identification” from existing beliefs, social structures, and models of identity; by so doing, we are able to transform these existing conditions (p. 9). Nepantla is a liminal space where transformation can occur.

In the 1990s, Indian scholar Homi Bhabha (1994) contributed to the development of border thinking with his theory of the “third space.” He explained:

> The possibilities of being somehow, *in between*, of occupying an interstitial space, that was not fully governed by the recognizable traditions . . . often produces a *third space* . . . It opens up a space that is skeptical of cultural totalization, of notions of identity which depend for their authority on being “ordinary” . . . a cultural identification which subverted authority. (p. 190)

It is in the interstices or spaces of articulation of cultural difference (where different cultures overlap/displace) where identities are produced, displaced, and negotiated. The concepts of nepantla and third space seem to refer to similar conditions, processes, and possibilities. Bhabha (1994) asserted an in-between third space of enunciation that is characterized by ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradictions. He described it as a space “teeming with potential” (p. 54), challenging myths of purity that define colonizing ideologies. Hybridity becomes a productive space of enunciation that opens up sites of resistance. Let’s look at some concrete illustrations.

Two African American females, Nicole (age 17) and Debbie (age 18), met through the Internet. Debbie identified as lesbian and was always open about it with Nicole. Nicole thought of herself as heterosexual but was attracted to Debbie. They met and began dating. Nicole’s mother opposed this relationship based on her own homophobia and accused Debbie of luring her
daughter into homosexuality. Unbeknownst to Nicole, her mother involved the police by accusing Debbie of sexual involvement with a minor. Debbie was picked up by surprise and treated harshly by the local White policemen. Michelle, a Mestiza-conscious and queer activist, got involved and organized legal and community help for Debbie.

After months of dealing with the legal system, Nicole turned 18 and Debbie was able to survive the ordeal with minimal legal consequences. Michelle, Nicole, and Debbie decided to further organize to open spaces and give voice to queer youth of Color even though Nicole did not claim a specific identity based on her sexual orientation. In one of the spaces they created, other youth of Color were able to connect, and heterosexuals of Color became both learners and allies. They received affirmation from communities of people who cared about them personally and about the impact of their experience in society. They asserted their existence and challenged homophobic familial relationships as well as a racist and homophobic police and judicial system that, fortunately, failed to vilify Debbie (Maher, 2011).

In a different kind of space, my friend, colleague, and former student Pressley Ranking and I (Hernández & Rankin, 2008) examined how we created a liberatory training and therapy space addressing intersections of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and class. At the time, I was supervising his work as a therapist in training with a same-sex affectional female couple from nationalities different than ours. Pressley and I are about the same age, but at the time I was his professor in a practicum class in a marriage and family therapy master's program. Our social locations were very different, and yet we had a lot in common. He is a male of European descent, and I am Latina, heterosexual, and an immigrant. We are both a part of a struggling middle class and fully able-bodied.

The couple was initially seen by another student in another practicum class, and their issues were framed as a "roommate situation." When Pressley expressed his opinion, initially he was subtly shut down by his supervisor and peers until they could not tolerate his insistence that this was an intimate and lesbian relationship issue. One of his peers told him that he was gay, and therefore thought everyone else was, and that he saw the world through a gay lens only.

In our supervision and training space, we explored Pressley’s clinical hypotheses and supported his work. It turned out that the couple had a long and complicated intimate history, but they did not want to identify themselves as lesbian or use any kind of label. This did not deter us from assisting them to accomplish their goals for enhancing their relationship. We created a context in which our clients were validated and helped while we learned and further articulated key issues in training in the family therapy field. What did Pressley and I share? Once our intersectionalities were explored, our areas of privilege and marginalization became visible. We located ourselves in a hy-

http://site.ebrary.com/id/10672865?ppg=59
Copyright © Jason Aronson, Inc. All rights reserved.
May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.
brid space, nepantla, to develop a way of working that blended our knowledges and experiences and resisted silencing the voices of clients and therapist. Nepantla was a place of curiosity, risk, negotiation of meaning, and consensus on how to work with this couple.

What kind of language and human activities would constitute healing from the standpoint of nepantla? Let us look to Anzaldúa’s Mestiza consciousness concept for guidance. According to Anzaldúa (1987), the process by which Mestiza consciousness, or consciousness about hybridity, is developed involves a journey whereby the person who is developing this kind of consciousness experiences a confrontation with multiple ways of knowing, which may challenge or coexist with the ones with which she is familiar (nepantla); a dismantling of identities acquired within a colonial mindset (Coatllicue); and a reconstructing of a different sense of who this person is (Coyolxauhqui). In this journey, the person realizes what she/he has to do to fit in, to be accepted, recognized, and allowed access to opportunities, rights, and resources. She/he spends time trying to be less like those considered different (lacking), and more like those who define the rules for the rest. I add that she/he also recognizes power differentials that shed light on how theories and practices that deal with cultural differences are more about colonial differences, which are named and articulated within a Eurocentric framework.

The Mestiza recognizes the struggles involved in acknowledging the various legacies that she/he embodies; she/he cannot claim a single self and so embraces multiplicity as part of her/his own identity. The Mestiza consciousness is based on the cross-pollination of experience and knowledge. There are steps for the Mestiza as she/he begins her/his life of action. These involve “taking inventory,” or examining who she/he is and differentiating what she/he has learned, where, when, and from whom. After scrutinizing history and identifying lies, she/he “communicates the rupture” with oppressive traditions, “documents the struggle,” “reinterprets history,” and finally, “using new symbols, shapes new myths” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 104). This new consciousness involves expansion and inclusion of similar hybrid figures. Just as in W. E. B. DuBois’s concept of “double consciousness” (1982), any refiguring of the Mestiza needs to flexibly accommodate blends of hybridities to create communities of resistance.

Anzaldúa offered many insights into the development of Mestiza consciousness in her children’s book, Prietita and the Ghost Woman (1996), in which she explained the journey of healing the open wounds created by capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, sexism, homophobia, and racism. Prietita, a dark young girl apprenticed to a curandera (traditional healer), learns that her mother is suffering from a recurring illness. The girl, who knows that curandera Doña Lola can cure almost any illness and knows almost every healing plant, asks her for a remedio, or remedy. Doña Lola says that she has
run out of ruda, a crucial ingredient in the medicine she will prepare for the mother.

Prieta then embarks on a journey to get ruda. This journey involves going to a dangerous ranch whose occupants are famous for shooting trespassers (sound familiar?). Prieta does not know that, throughout the story, the figure in need of reclamation and transfiguration is La Llorona, an infamous weeping woman whose stories are known in Mexican and other Latin American cultures. In this journey, Prieta learns to listen and to trust her intuition through her experiences with various animals such as a dove, a jaguar, and a salamander. These animals can be seen as náguals, or manifestations of La Llorona, through shape shifting.

Prieta meets La Llorona above the waters of a lagoon where she is shown where to find the ruda. La Llorona leads her back to the barbed wire boundary of the ranch. Thus, La Llorona leads Prieta into a path of becoming a curandera. According to Hartley (2010), this story is symbolic of two forms of healing: the healing of the self and of the cultural status of women represented by La Llorona. He further explained that the story is a symbol for the need to develop fearless confrontation with colonialist violence, and to highlight the transmission of sacred knowledge from one generation to the next to ensure health and cultural survival.

MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS JOURNEYS

One of my most important life journeys to develop critical consciousness has involved addressing my own heterosexism and misuse of heterosexual privilege. Having been raised in a conservative middle-class environment where sexual orientation was as invisible as it could be, I had no idea about virtually anything related to the development, lives, dreams, and challenges of sexual minorities. My head was also filled with all sorts of garbage about sexual orientation and gender identities, but I never had to examine it. All I had before I came to the United States was one very formative experience, which, looking back, I see was the guiding force in my quest.

My maternal uncle, whom I adored and who was the most important male figure in my life, was gay. It was a family secret. I intuitively knew he was gay. No one ever told me anything about his sexual orientation, but I knew well enough to protest and argue on the few occasions when subtle derogatory comments emerged in the family. At the time, I could not and would not examine my own heterosexism. I was afraid, and all I cared about was how much I loved him. I did not quite see how my not interrogating my own homophobicia was intrinsically linked to his survival.

When I came to the United States for graduate school, I was blessed to have landed in a very liberal and queer-affirming part of the country. This
part of my migration experience is one of many that I am very grateful for. While living in Amherst and Northampton, Massachusetts, I had the opportunity to learn and connect with many gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and faculty. I welcomed the possibilities with open arms, knowing that I owed this to my uncle. I had to confront my own prejudices and ignorance; I had to face an ugly side of my family and, after many arguments with them, this is not a topic of conversation they engage in with me. I also lost friends, but I was not interested in making excuses or turning a blind eye to issues concerning sexual minorities. Over time I learned about how to move beyond my interpersonal life to advocate and resist heteronormative systems and homophobic institutions.

I embarked on a journey to examine my own gender identity development and sexual orientation, thanks to my uncle and the Amherst/Northampton community that embraced me in spite of my ignorance. This journey has not ended, for even if I think that I am not personally heterosexist, I am marked by the privilege of my social location as a heterosexual, and this connects me and impacts my relations with heterosexuals and gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and others alike.

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

Identities constructed on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class, ability, and sexual orientation are socially significant, and context-specific ideological constructs are useful as markers for historical and social location (Martin-Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Mohanty, & Moya, 2006). These identities are especially relevant when considering how they intersect in a particular social context, thereby making visible the structural privileges (i.e., access, opportunity, and opinion), or lack thereof, that people have simply by virtue of their location (e.g., lesbian, lower-class, fully able-bodied women of Color, or heterosexual, upper-middle-class, visually impaired women of Color). Collins (1998) explained that looking at intersecting identities "highlights how social groups are positioned within unjust power relations, but it does so in a way that introduces added complexity to formerly race-, class-, and gender-only approaches to social phenomena" (p. 205).

The concept of intersecting identities offers an interpretive framework to analyze the ways in which a group’s privileges and marginalization affect each other. The concept can potentially become a resource for social change. For example, if we look at differences in sexual orientation, ability, and class among Latin@, we see that increased potentials for safety, life, business partnerships, and employment accrue to those who happen to be heterosexual, able-bodied, and upper-middle-class. Their experiences in the United States and in their own countries of origin must be understood within the
context of these intersections to address issues of privilege and accountability in a manner that does justice to their complex intersectional identities. Let us look at some examples.

Liliana and Marcela are both family therapists. Liliana’s family migrated from Guatemala to the United States and worked as day laborers until they saved enough to open their own small business. She is lesbian, dark, abled-bodied, and college-educated and has kept herself in the middle class in spite of the amount she owes in educational loans. While she was the first one in her family to attend college, and has accomplished much due to her pioneer spirit and tenacity, she never learned how to relate to people from higher social classes or to middle-class people of European descent. She is shy and apprehensive because of the many experiences of discrimination that she and her family have had.

Contrast the opportunities and access that Marcela, a heterosexual, abled-bodied daughter of immigrants from Venezuela, has had. She was born into a family with college-educated wealthy parents. Her family migrated from a town in Cataluña, Spain, to Venezuela, and her last name is not overly common. She speaks three languages and has traveled extensively in Europe and Asia. Her social graces are outstanding, and her ability to generate professional connections has helped her gain visibility in desirable professional spaces. Marcela’s social location affords her access and opportunity that Liliana does not have. This does not mean that Liliana is completely disadvantaged or that she may not get a job for which both apply, but it helps us understand how putting these two women under the category of Latina or Hispanic obscures crucial differences between them. Let’s look at another example.

One fateful December 31st night, my husband and I decided to take both of our cars to Annapolis, Maryland, to celebrate New Year’s at a restaurant. All of our friends were Latin@. He traveled with Juan, an old friend of mine, who we did not know was undocumented at the time. I traveled with a friend who was finishing up her doctorate, and her children. I was stopped by the police for driving 35 mph in a 25 mph zone. I failed to notice the sign, which was my fault, and I wouldn’t have challenged getting a ticket.

However, before I had a chance to hear about a ticket, the policemen asked me to get out of the car, searched me, and handcuffed me without an explanation. Three heavily armed men surrounded me in spite of my obeying their orders and posing no threat. They took me into the back of their car, and when I kept asking what the reason for their actions was and requested that they check my social security number, they told me that I had the right to a call once I was booked in jail. In the meantime, my friend protested their actions and quickly called my husband, a White heterosexual college-educated male, and told him what was happening. The police witnessed the conver-
ation and, after his initial refusal, one of the policemen finally told her the address of the police station where I was detained.

Although I had made risky decisions in the past while doing human rights work in Colombia and had felt fear for my life, these circumstances could not compare to experiencing the impact of White supremacy in my own body. Next, they put me in a jail cell and locked the door while I was still in handcuffs. I still did not know the reason for these actions. I knew to stay calm and continue to be respectful to try to avoid further abuse, but inside I was praying for help. After one of the officers came to ask me if I knew any English (keep in mind that they had my wallet with my driver’s license and university ID, and I had been talking to them all this time in English), we continued to converse in English as he asked me where I was from, what I did for a living, etc. Then they took me out of the cell, took the handcuffs off, and sat me in a chair where I heard their opinions about immigrants and especially “Hispanics.” They went on to tell me that I had not explained to them who I was.

In the meantime, my husband arrived and demanded an explanation while arguing with them. I was taken out, my wallet was returned, and my husband had another argument with the officer who led this process. We got no apologies. He explained that there was a woman in the system with my first name and one of my last names, Maria Hernández, and that she was sought for dealing drugs. I wondered if these men had the most minimal clue. Did they know how many women with the name “Maria Hernández” have migrated to or were born in this country?

In spite of the humiliation and horror of this experience, being fully fluent, having documents, a university ID, a bilingual friend who advocated for me, and a White husband who raised hell in the station, are concrete expressions of the social capital that I have by virtue of my education, class, and marriage. This was an experience of victimization, yet the justice system never even considered it an issue worth pursuing. There was no justice. However, my social location still made it possible for me to survive the ordeal with less harm than that experienced by others. Do you know how powerful White privilege is? Well, our friend Juan drove with my husband to the station and even walked inside with him. He was the most at risk because he had no documents at the time, but no one ever asked him a question.

Others may be familiar with a common scenario in the United States, exemplified by a mental health professional and scholar that I will call Martin. Martin identifies as Latino but makes sure who everyone knows that he is European by way of family ancestry, travel and customs, and education and professional and family networks. Typically, such individuals move up in the career ladder by empathizing with the Latino cause when it is convenient for them (e.g., affirmative action), but their most intimate circles are other Latinos like them and those of European descent. It is as if they have a
code by which they signal that they are not really one of “them,” and that they are willing to use this group of people for their own benefit and that of the system.

Consider an immigrant, college-educated psychologist (or mental health professional) from the Southern Cone who built his career based on working with Latinos. Let’s say that a central aspect of his research agenda and past clinical practice was working with Mexican immigrants, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and second- and third-generation Latinos from disempowered communities. However, he grew up in an upper-middle-class home and had all the privileges that a White male has in his country of origin. He suffers the pain of racialization in the United States where he, like all of us, discovers that “he has a race,” and becomes part of an ethnic minority group; he experiences discrimination due to his accent and olive skin color.

He cries about the loss of privilege he suffered in the United States, but discovers that he is really not like “them.” He is educated, well-mannered, charming, and has more in common with any middle-class American of European descent than with a Latino from the ghetto. He finds a way to navigate the system to get the most benefit, in this case by using the people-of-Color agenda when he stands to benefit and by making sure that he differentiates himself from “them,” showing his European credentials and those of his country. In the meantime he reveals a ferocious competition against any other Latin American and/or Latino immigrants or colleagues of Color who might question his location and tactics. Sound familiar? In the meantime he uses his popularity among mostly heterosexual women of European descent to be recommended as a consultant, speaker, and expert in immigration matters.

Another familiar scenario from my own country involves an assessment of class credentials by which people easily locate where you belong in the social hierarchy by asking what neighborhood you were raised in or what neighborhood your family lives in and where you went to school. With this minimal information people from upper-middle- and upper-class backgrounds can quickly decide to move forward with a conversation and, if doing so, what kind of relationship they will establish and what information they will share about themselves.

Let’s take a similar scenario in another geographical space. In Colombia, few families inherited the wealth of stolen lands and slavery throughout the country. Many of the Criollo families who pride themselves on their European ancestry show their credentials via their last names and/or family trees in addition to property, education, connections, etc. Many of these families have had a very close connection with the Catholic Church through sons who have occupied high positions in the church and can influence the country’s local and national governments.
Consider the case of Alfonso, a gay man born to a family of Spanish lineage who was raised within one of the most traditional of Catholic priest organizations from elementary to graduate school. He lives a double life and can do so comfortably as a college professor and a philosopher because there are many powerful men in the same situation with families who simply choose to look the other way. He has a myriad of connections at hand due to his family’s extensive social capital and his own connections through elite Catholic organizations. He competes for a department chair position with Claudia, a heterosexual female who has no connections to the church and a family who struggled to put her through college. She advanced due to merit and studied abroad. She is divorced and has a child, and her husband does not pay child support. Like most in this social context, she has little or no awareness about her own heterosexism. The nuances of social locations, the differences that social capital makes, and the complexities of systems of power must all be examined.

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (p. 248) and as a capital made up of connections that affirm bonds of friendships, status, recognition and have the potential to become economic capital. Let’s unpack Alfonso’s situation in the previous example in light of this definition. He creates social situations (e.g., dinners, going to movies) that he knows are key to the development of professional relationships. He also shares his tastes, desires, and knowledge of food, travels, people, clothing, etc., with colleagues and potential partners in project ventures. Thus, when it comes to “representing” Latinos in venues that are worth competing for (e.g., grants, conference presentations, and leadership positions), he is thought of highly and considered before anyone who may seem a “troublemaker” or simply someone who does not fit as well. At this point he does not have to work so hard to get what he needs. He is in.

If we look at Alfonso and Claudia’s situations, we can hypothesize that, by virtue of his inherited status, social networks, and wealth, no matter how bright she is, it is likely that in the patriarchal context of a religious university system embedded in the traditional and very patriarchal values of a city such as Bogotá, Claudia has little chance of getting the chair position. However, Alfonso lives with the pain of marginalization and internalized oppression in a larger social context that rejects his sexual orientation. He also had to learn to be cautious and careful to protect his personal safety in highly heterosexist environments.
Mohanty (2003) affirmed that the concept of intersectionality helps us unveil power relationships not reducible to binary oppositions between oppressor and oppressed by attending to fluid and multiple "structures of domination that intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures, while insisting on the dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and collectives and their engagement in ‘daily life’" (p. 55). She clarified that systems of racial, class, and gender domination do not have identical effects on everyone everywhere. Privilege and marginalization affect access and opportunity of entire groups, families, and individuals. Individual experience and interpretation of privilege and marginalization will vary with each person, but individual frames of reference are not the yardstick to measure larger social issues that affect us all in one way or another at various times.

In the mental health fields, Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006), Hernández, Almeida, and Dolan Del-Vecchio (2005), and, in cultural studies, Escobar (2008) have concurred that cultural differences are not the source of power differentials and they should not be the framework on which mental health services are designed. Instead, differences in power associated with particular cultural meanings and practices generate norms and meaning-making practices that define what is dominant and marginal, accepted or not, in the worlds of everyday social life and mental health training and practice. An intersectionality framework should be used along with nepantla because it allows us to see how dimensions of privilege and marginalization vary in context, and how one has to look at all dimensions and their impact on the self and others in a fluid manner.

"WE DON'T HAVE THESE PROBLEMS HERE; THESE PROBLEMS OCCUR IN THE UNITED STATES, NOT HERE."

How often have you heard in Latin American countries that racism does not exist there? How often have you heard that there is 100 percent gender equality? Isn't it all about class differences? The Latin American left and the legacies of leftist European thinking linger in the social consciousness, the social disciplines, and important niches of innovation and concern for social justice in Latin American circles. Here is an example of a somewhat common argument about why colonization and decolonization are not parameters fitting all contexts in Latin America.

In a presentation where I discussed some ideas about decolonization and psychology training along the lines of what I had discussed so far at the Interamerican Psychology Congress, an Argentinian psychology student stated that, although these ideas were interesting, they did not really apply to

http://site.ebrary.com/id/10672885?ppg=67
Copyright © Jason Aronson, Inc.. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.
Argentina because, in contrast with the U.S. colonization process, colonization was not essential to how capitalism was implemented in his country, and in fact, the social sciences did not go through a process of systematization like in the United States. In his view, this fact allowed psychoanalysts to monopolize the production of knowledge and the practice of mental health for a long time, and this deterred the mental health field from developing strong liaisons between psychology and the market as had happened in the United States. In addition, Soviet psychology also had a strong legacy there and this psychology is not capitalist. And finally, he affirmed that his country had no legacy of colonization because there are no ethnic minorities there, no people of African descent, only peoples with different nationalities.

I was thankful for his comment as it allowed me to discuss with more depth how psychoanalysis and Soviet psychology are other forms of Eurocentered thinking, and how if we keep thinking that there are only two options that must live in opposition, that is, capitalism and socialism, we will continue Cold-War-era dualistic thinking with limited horizons for change. Let’s highlight some common prevailing ideas that his comment reflected: (a) the frame of reference is between the United States and Europe; (b) psychoanalysis and Soviet psychology are seen as the alternatives—but these systems of knowledge were produced using European languages and reproduced by European immigrants in Abya Yala; in other words, what is framed as an alternative is more of the same; (c) Indigenous peoples, sexual minorities, and other marginalized populations are invisible (would they have visibility as objects of study?); (d) there is no memory of the history of genocide that African and Indigenous peoples experienced in the Southern Cone and the legacies of privilege that the psychology student embodies; and (e) differences are categorized by nationality because Argentina is a country with a long history of European and Latin American migration. But guess who tends to be dark and who tends to be light? And guess what nationalities have more status? Furthermore, the speaker did not explicitly address his own social and epistemic location, which in this case, makes various dimensions of privilege invisible.

Grosfoguel (2006), in line with Fannon (1967), affirmed that the success of colonization has been to produce people who think like oppressors even though their social location and life conditions are those of marginalization. In his view the Latin American elites who live in Latin America live and think like colonizers, and many ethnic minority populations in the United States are colonized subjects who think from a decolonial perspective. This view helps us reaffirm the importance of using the concepts of nepantla, intersectionality, Global South and Global North, and One-Third/Two-Thirds Worlds together.
SOCIAL LOCATION AND EPISTEMIC LOCATION

An intersectionality analysis must also include a distinction between social location and epistemic location. Grosfoguel (2007, 2008a, 2008b), Lugones (2007), and Mignolo (2011) have explained that a person or group can be located on dominant sides of the intersectionality matrix (e.g., gender, class, race, sexual orientation, ability) and take an epistemic position consistent with the marginalized position in a power relationship. Likewise, people whose social locations are that of marginalization may take oppressive epistemic positions.

For example, in a study exploring how marriage, couple, and family therapist-educators with privileged social locations position themselves to make a difference in larger social systems, McDowell and I (2012) found that participants recognized that the relationship between privilege and lack of privilege has to do with class and ethnicity and that those who have social privileges stand on and benefit from those who do not have those privileges. An illustration of this idea follows:

If I can afford to live in a nice house in the suburbs . . . in a society where there’s differential pay, the only way I can afford it is if someone else can’t. And if the person who comes to clean earned as much as I do then we couldn’t pay her to clean which means we’re maintaining that difference. . . . Even though my parents didn’t have much money, I strongly believe because I had access to state universities and I’m White, I could over time earn more. . . . So those disparities start early and get bigger and bigger. (p. 169)

One response to becoming aware of the relationship between privilege and lack of privilege is to shift from focusing on the oppression and lack of privilege of others to dismantling the privilege from which one benefits. We continued our analysis by pointing out that, over time, participants started to try to change the very structures that benefited them and not others, for example:

Initially . . . my belief system was more liberal . . . I didn’t make the connection [that because] I have education . . . [and] access to power, then it’s any, I would have never of said obligation, it’s my desire to work on behalf of people who don’t have what I have, so in that sense, I think I had that kind of liberal belief that with privilege comes responsibility. I think what changed was getting increasingly aware that the very things that protected and advanced my privilege were things that were withheld or barriers to other people. And so it was like this shift to instead of using my privilege to work for them . . . how do I use my privilege to dismantle the [systems of] privilege that I’m a part of? . . . It took some time to learn that just being caring and wanting things to be different for people who are the target of oppression is not the same as tackling the systems and individuals responsible for the oppression. (p. 169)
Persons or groups whose social locations may be that of marginalization and who take oppressive epistemic positions include conservative Christian, African American, and Latino churches that condemn any form of marital arrangement other than a heterosexual, religiously sanctioned partnership; ethnic minority groups or persons who support the persecution of undocumented Latin@xs in the United States; and women of Color who compete with other women of Color and use the same oppressive strategies that are typically used against them. Let’s look at the following example in more detail.

Carlos, a Latino, gay, fully able-bodied faculty member at a university with no tenure system, came to therapy searching for a safe place to talk about his difficulties at work. He had been working at a university for four years, and although his publication record was competitive, his student evaluations ranged between good and excellent, and his administrative duties were fulfilled, he kept having trouble after trouble with the program’s administrative assistant, a White heterosexual woman in her forties, and the African American heterosexual program director after he opposed hiring a conservative religious African American woman into the program. In fact, in the past, when he complained about a guest male faculty in the closet pressuring him to date, his colleagues cast doubt on his complaints and dismissed them. The program director, his administrative assistant, and the cleaning crew, who also happened to be African American, kept complaining about his facial expressions, tone of voice, and general communication so that he almost stopped talking to anyone in the office for fear of being misinterpreted. The program director complained to Human Resources by stating that he “was intimidating,” “intense,” and “angry.” This man used the same old tactics that have been used against his people to force his colleague out. Carlos had developed a stomach ulcer by the time he began therapy. Therapy helped him process his thinking and face his sadness and anger, but ultimately he had to find another job.

In sum, social location and epistemic location differ depending on the kind of choices we make relative to how we use our own privilege and marginalization and how we position ourselves in our family, organizational, and community systems. Sometimes social and epistemic locations coincide, and sometimes they do not. However, thinking of oneself as someone who questions and challenges privilege at any level is not an excuse to make invisible one’s privilege.

In addition to differentiating social location from epistemic location, it is necessary to distinguish between identity politics and identity in politics. A critique has been made about the risks of intolerance and fundamentalism involved in assuming that identities are essential aspects of individuals (Martín-Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Mohanty, & Moya, 2006). Unfortunately, some of the writings in multicultural psychology, multicultural counseling,
and multicultural family therapy (Lum, 2007) have contributed to the essentialization of ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation by generating counseling models for specific ethnic groups as if all Latinos share the same foundational characteristics. This has led, for example, to ideas about how all Latinos value family, have a present-centered time orientation, and other assumptions that cannot apply to all Latinos in the United States. Thus, the practice of essentializing difference in multicultural scholarship results in otherizing (Almeida, Hernández-Wolfe, and Tubbs, 2011).

Freire (1971), Anzaldúa (1987, 2000), and hooks (1992) used the concept of other to describe the acts of naming, categorizing, and classifying as acts of power used to demarcate the center from the periphery, the normal from the abnormal, the same from the different, and self from other. An alternative path to addressing identity and politics involves looking at identity in politics. Mignolo (2007) argued for the relevance of identity in politics because the control of identity politics lies precisely in the construction of an identity that doesn’t look as such but as the “natural” appearance of the world. That is, Whiteness, heterosexuality, and manhood are the main features of an identity politics that denounces similar but opposing identities as something that is considered essential and fundamental. However, the dominant identity politics doesn’t manifest itself as such, but through abstract universals such as science, philosophy, Christianity, liberalism, Marxism, and the like (pp. 43-72).

Therefore, resistance that highlights marginalized identities has a place in our lives, not because we are all Latin@, women, or sexual minorities, but because we resist within a way of understanding the world and living as a community. From a nепантла perspective, resistance accompanies all forms of domination and lives in the fissures and silences of hegemonic narratives, in the practices of remembering involving our oral and written traditions, and in our very bodies and ways of relating.

LOS ENCUENTROS DE VOCES (GATHERING OF VOICES):
A NЕРАНТЛА SPACE

The emergence and development of this nепантла space illustrates the challenges that Western psychology and mental health in general encounter in the Global South and in working with people located in the Two-Thirds. It shows the tensions between compartmentalized areas of practice in psychology (e.g., clinical vs. community) and the power differentials that set the stage for colonizing practices that intend to help but perhaps don’t.

In her work with displaced populations and people living in poverty around the outskirts of southern Bogotá, Carolina Nensthiel (2012) described some of the challenges that she faced in trying to provide therapeutic services
to women experiencing domestic violence in this needy community. She was hired by the local government to implement a plan that sought to respond to domestic violence by offering individual therapy. A space was opened to provide services in the headquarters shared with many other community development projects. However, these services had a peculiar characteristic: women in the community did not request them. Therefore, some women from the community were hired to reach out to other women, acting as peer educators based on their training in issues of domestic violence.

Nensthiel led the implementation of this service. She and her team found themselves listening, in the privacy of individual therapy sessions, to stories that were all very similar in that they encompassed the effects of multiple needs and oppressions related to poverty, isolation, and disconnection. After reflecting on the commonality of issues and the challenges of getting women to come to therapy on a regular basis, Nensthiel began to hold group therapy sessions in which she opened the conversational space to the peer educators and invited them to share their perspectives with everyone else. Through this process, everyone began to learn to compassionately listen to each other, and, with time, the women in the community sought their peer educators to talk about their problems.

Nensthiel observed how these webs of understanding and trust developed, and she worked with the peer educators to develop a witnessing and listening stance as they continued their involvement with women in the community. At the time she thought that their role was more appropriately described as that of someone who listens, and she called them "women listeners," or "mujeres escucha." As the groups continued, women in the community were more interested in attending group gatherings with the mujeres escucha than individual therapy. This led to a change in the position and role of the therapists. Therapists shared the facilitation of gatherings with the mujeres escucha, and the therapists’ stance of expertise, distance, and lack of self-disclosure became more permeable. The therapists, the "mujeres escucha," and the women shared their reflections in open conversational spaces. Therapists were asked to be careful to avoid making their comments the center of conversations, but they were free to reflect on the impact that the women’s experiences had on them. The groups became an outlet for women to connect around the shared experiences of domestic violence, but they also became a place to share their joys and to find support and kinship.

Nensthiel was later involved in an elective course for psychology students completing their last year of practical training at a private university in Bogotá. This course was part of the social and community psychology track and involved a participatory action research component. Nensthiel initiated a collaboration between this psychology program and the local government in southern Bogotá, where she worked. The project was designed to develop therapeutic services that fit the community’s needs and idiosyncrasies. Using
her training in family therapy and community psychology, Nensthiel began to integrate ideas from narrative approaches (e.g., definition ceremonies), collaborative approaches (e.g., reflecting teams), Alcoholics Anonymous, community psychology, and participatory action research to design a space that would change the balance of power between therapists and clients, and breach boundaries between the private and public spheres of life. She called this space for dialogue and community building “Encuentros de Voces” (gathering of voices).

The Encuentros de Voces are collective improvisational conversation spaces in which participants dialogue together and witness each other’s stories. They are framed by the idea that the stories shared are gifts worthy of honor. Facilitators invite participants to move along the continuum of private and public conversation by sharing their own internal dialogues with the group. The facilitators also offer questions and reflections and prevent participants from using conversational styles or commenting in ways that may be hurtful and inappropriate. As they resonate with the stories shared, participants and therapists contribute to the dialogue by anchoring their reflections in their own personal history. This collective experience intends to challenge isolation, create webs of solidarity, and create critical awareness about gender identity, class, and race issues (Nensthiel, 2012).

Descriptive data and a qualitative analysis of data from samples of these Encuentros de Voces, as well as focus groups with community members and students in training, and murals created in the neighborhoods, showed that these gatherings contributed to the reconstruction of the social fabric in the seven locales in which they were regularly implemented. Data from participants indicate that women developed networks of friends and became involved in taking care of each other. They also developed solidarity initiatives for supporting participants when they were ill or experiencing a crisis, and became more aware of gender inequities and class prejudice as well as personal agency around relationships, family, and jobs.

Data from students in training show the positive impact of parallel processes between the Encuentros and their class relative to fostering democratic participation; learning from the context and practice of these gatherings; questioning disciplinary dichotomies (e.g., social/community vs. clinical psychology); developing critical consciousness about class, gender, race, and sexual orientation privilege; and learning to move between the private and public nature of the Encuentros.

The Encuentros de Voces were first implemented in 2008, and by mid-2011 students were holding approximately 150 gatherings per term in seven locales in the southern outskirts of Bogotá. Ironically, the gatherings were mostly attended by women because the project mandate and the politics at decision-making levels in the government restricted them to women, although a small group of men and gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons attended
some of the gatherings. In spite of these and other political challenges, the
Encuentros de Voces exemplify how Neusthier, her students, and the com-
community members who cocreated these spaces of dialogue forged a practice in
between private and public, community and clinical, by transforming a man-
date for services—that not only proved unsuccessful but imposed a way of
healing based on Eurocentric standards that has the potential to be a practice
of colonization—into a nepantla space.

SUMMARY

The coloniality of being involves the systemic suppression of local knowl-
edges and the emergence of alternative knowledges resulting from this expe-
rience of pervasive marginalization. Nepantla is a liminal space where trans-
formation can occur and is situated within unarticulated dimensions of expe-
rience where people live in between overlapping and layered psychological,
sociological, political, spiritual, and historical spaces. These spaces are a
potential fertile ground for the emergence and articulation of alternative
knowledges. Developing these knowledges involves a journey of change in
consciousness that can be metaphorically described as intimate terrorism,
Coatllicue, Coyolxauhqui, and Mestiza consciousness. This journey must also
involve an examination of intersecting identities, social location, and episte-
mic location to understand and articulate the ways in which gender iden-
tities, class, race, sexual orientation, and ability intersect and make visible
both privilege and marginalization as well as nepantla spaces. If the reader is
interested in using this material for further reflection, I provide a set of open-
ended questions for dialogue in the Appendix.

NOTES

1. For a history of the colonization of Puerto Rico, see Decolonization Models for Ameri-
ca’s Lost Colony by Angel Collado Schwartz, and Constructing a Colonial People: 1898–1932, by Pedro Cabán. For a discourse analysis of social work representations of im-
grants, see Park and Kemp (2006) in the journal Social Service Review.

2. Coatllicue, “The Mother of Gods,” is the Aztec goddess who gave birth to the moon,
stars, and Huitzilopochtli, the god of the sun and war. She is also known as Toci, or “our
grandmother,” and “the lady of the serpent,” the patron of women who die in childbirth.

3. President Obama’s record on immigration is dismal. During his administration, depor-
tions have risen to a record 400,000 individuals a year, through the unparalleled expansion of
immigration enforcement measures. The administration also has a record of making grand
announcements about providing relief based on discretionary process. So far, these have
amounted to no more than recycled memos and broken promises. See the website deportation-
nation.org as well as reports from the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times. The
president’s partial implementation of the DREAM Act, in which he uses executive privilege
just months before the November 2012 election, is a sad reflection of his government’s ap-
proach to immigration and Latinos.