



On the Shaping of a History of U.S. Latina Literature Anthologies

By Beatriz Rivera-Barnes

The Modern Language Association, included Chicanas in her anthology entitled *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States*. The term “Third World” was a quarter of a century old, having first been used in the 1955 Bandung Conference of African and Asian nations to replace the pejorative term “underdeveloped.”

The liberation movements of the sixties followed the Bandung Conference and, in an effort to keep up with the shifting times and mentalities, more and more universities opened Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Black Studies departments. Shortly thereafter, another nomenclature began to surface, that of minority, a term that, according to Barbara Christian, implicitly dissociated ethnic peoples of color from the majority of the world who were people of color. “The term minority undercut the connotation of that multiuniverse and of the possibility of that strength in numbers that

the phrase ‘Third World People’ had suggested” (Christian, 1995, 247).

The title of Fisher’s anthology contains both terms, minority and third. Its purpose was to demonstrate “not only that minority women have created and pursued a literary tradition of their own, but that their works represent some of the most exciting and creative innovations going on in contemporary literature” (xxvii). Fisher chose to include women from several different groups such as American Indian, Black, and Asian American. She did not, however, include Latinas other than Chicanas.

To the best of my knowledge, only two anthologies dedicated solely to U.S. Latina writers had been published prior to 1980. In 1978 Scorpion Press, a publisher in Tucson, Arizona, released a collection called *Siete Poetas*, which included authors such as Miriam Bornstein (who would appear later

in the anthology *Nosotras*), Maya Islas, Inés Hernández Tovar (who would be included in *The Third Woman*), Eliana Rivero (who would show up in *Nosotras* and *Woman of Her Word*), Margarita Cota-Cardenas, and Lucia Sol. *Siete Poetas* did not have an editor; its short introduction was written in the first person plural and signed by Scorpion Press.

One year later, Chicano Research Publications at the University of California, San Diego, published *Requisa 32—Colección de Cuentos*, edited by Rosaura Sánchez. Unfortunately, this anthology went out of print and can be found only in the library of the University of California at San Diego.

Never until 1980 had Latinas been included in any anthology of U.S. women's literature. Therefore, Latina scholars such as Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach considered Fisher's anthology to be the first example of their inclusion. The second example was *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, published a year later. According to Christian, *This Bridge Called My Back* "focused on similarities and differences among United States women of color" and "signaled growing alliances among writers in the different colored ethnic groups" (Christian, 1995, 249).

Although Ortega and Saporta Sternbach's essay "At the Threshold of the Unnamed: Latina Literary Discourse in the Eighties" was published in 1989, *This Bridge Called My Back* and *The Third Woman* are the only anthologies the two Latina scholars mention when they denounce what they consider to be the systematic exclusion of Latina voices.

A revision of the most progressive anthologies and criticism in the last five years reveals a failure to include a Latina perspective. This systematic exclusion of a Latina voice makes it impossible even to begin to catalogue these anthologies. (4)

While these scholars are right in criticizing the absence of Latinas in broader anthologies, they do not mention that some Latina anthologies had already been published by 1989. However, Ortega and Saporta Sternbach cite many journals that published the works of Latinas, such as *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, *Calyx*, *Third Woman*, and *Imagine: International Poetry Journal*.

The Third Woman anthologized a total of 19 Chicanas. At that time their ages ranged from 84 (Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, born in 1896) to 23 (Victoria Moreno, born in Texas in 1957). No biographical information was available for two of the authors, Soledad Perez and Rosalie Otero Peralta, and all were alive at the time of publication, except Judy Lucero, who died at age 28 (but Fisher does not mention when).

At the same time that Fisher published her anthology, two Latinas, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, were busy working on a project that was to become the landmark anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*. It presented a new paradigm—women of color—and this time Latinas themselves were anthologizing Latinas as well as women writers of color. The audience spanned the university, the general public, and other women

of color.

This Bridge Called My Back contains neither "minority" nor "third," replacing these terms with the word "radical." They are not just any women, but radical women. I suppose they are using the meaning of "extreme," but also taking into consideration its meaning as "roots and foundations." The first part of the title suggests hard labor, since the back is being used as a bridge, and very often the back is a symbol of hard work.

This Bridge Called My Back broke the cultural national-ist paradigm by centering Latinas among women of color and by bringing lesbian identity to the fore in Latina writing. The spate of pan-Latina anthologies that followed *This Bridge*, namely *Cuentos*; *Bearing Witness/Sobreviviendo*; *In Other Words*; *Woman of Her Word*; *Nosotras: Latina Literature Today*; *Latina*; *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians*; *Infinite Divisions*; the special issue of *Third Woman* on the sexuality of Latinas; and *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, has charted new directions for Latina feminist scholarship and theory. (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, 5)

Eight Latinas were included in *This Bridge Called My Back*: Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Rosario Morales, Aurora Levins Morales, Mirtha Quintanales, Jo Carrillo, Judit Moschkovich, and Norma Alarcón, none of whom were included in Fisher's work.

These anthologies can be considered a step in the right direction, a promise that there would perhaps be an end to the systematic exclusion of Latina voices from even the progressive and feminist anthologies that Ortega and Saporta Sternbach allude to without mentioning any names.

Over ten years have elapsed since Ortega and Saporta Sternbach published the essay included in *Breaking Boundaries*. New voices have spoken, other voices have ceased to speak, and perhaps it is possible to begin to find or define a story or a history in these anthologies, or at least to look for one. For example, one of the many functions of anthologies devoted exclusively to women is, as Barbara Christian believes, to "confront us with the issue as to whether a community of women writers actually represent their community." Another function is to "help us to assess our institutional stances, so that our sites in the academy keep pace with our intellectual questionings, our political developments" (Christian, 1995, 257–258). The Latina Feminist group adds that, in collaboration with other Latinas, Chicanas "contributed to rethinking feminism, women's studies, Latino studies, and cultural studies in general" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, 5).

There are many anthologies now, and they are reminiscent of those images that trick the eye. At first glance they seem like a collection of multicolored dots or lines on a piece of paper, but if you focus, a distinct image slowly begins to appear. One can see a pattern emerge from *The Third Woman*, *This Bridge*, and *Keeping the Spirit* (published in 1982) to anthologies published closer to the end of the twentieth century, such as *Daughters of the Fifth Sun* and *¡Floricanto, Sil!*

and ones of the new century such as *Between the Heart and the Land* and *Telling to Live*.

My goal in shaping a history of Latina literature anthologies is not so much to make this literature known or to demarginalize it. I offer no shouts of protest and absolutely no indignant questioning. I make no call to upheaval or revolution. I leave those things to Anzaldúa and Moraga, who do them so well. Rather, this history is an effort to collect and analyze the anthologies we have in light of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature, taking race and class into consideration, then in light of feminist theory, taking gender and sexualities into consideration, and finally in light of canon exclusion or inclusion.

If the "testimonios" in the critical anthology *Breaking Boundaries* are used to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Horno-Delgado, Sabora Sternbach, Scott, and Rivero, 1989), in a history of anthologies it is the anthologies themselves that are charged with this mission.

But how do I proceed with this plethora of good goals and intentions?

When attempting to see 20 years' worth of anthologies from so many angles, my first problem was deciding on an entry point. I chose to retrace my steps all the way back and opt for a more modest beginning—the background—so as not to lose touch with the life-saving yarn, at least not from the very start. Also, some groups become so obvious for those of us who know them that we often forget to describe them, and we take way too much for granted. So I felt it necessary to rethink even the background.

From there I was able to connect to those other entrances and passageways, such as minor literature, race, class, feminist theory, women and writing, gender, sexuality, and the canon.

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In the beginning, indeed, there was a word. A name.

In their study of Hispanics in the United States, Moore and Pachón (1985) argue that we can get some idea of what Hispanics think of themselves by asking what they wish to be called. Do they want to be called Spanish? Mexican? Cuban? Chicano? "It is clear that these preferences change over time as the Hispanics themselves shift [...] each variant has a special historical root and special historical meaning" (Moore and Pachón, 1985, 12).

The most useful anthologies in this analysis of the background are *The Third Woman*, *This Bridge Called My Back* (both the English and the Spanish versions, which are somewhat different), and *Breaking Boundaries*. As a matter of fact, we only have to take the list of anthologies from 1980 to 2000 to notice that in the eighties they were Latinas or women of color (regardless of their race), that they became Hispanics in the mid-eighties and early nineties, and that they have been Latinas again since then. This certainly says something about the spirit of specific times.

Moreover, the term is so recent that we can easily go back to the not-so-distant past when the term Latina was first used,

or misused, either to sell a book, introduce an anthology, or offer a solution to some other word that critics or professors or politicians had outgrown and were eager to shed. At this point we can either agree or disagree with Rachel Phillips when she states that the very category "woman poet" implies inferiority. Were it to be so, where does this leave the ethnic woman poet? She is the one who even has to deal with all the imperfections that come with being bilingual. She has no choice but to write like "a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975, 18) and also to "make use of the polylingualism" of her own language:

...to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape, as an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975, 27)

Deleuze and Guattari's considerations take us to the question of minor literature. The first and inane obvious question is: Why pick a minor literature and dedicate so much time and thought to it, especially when there are so many "major" or mainstream literatures out there? It goes without saying that some of the Latina writers that were published and anthologized in the second half of the twentieth century were at times included not so much because of their talent as writers, but because of something else, something extraneous, such as sex and heritage, or even politics or sexual preference.

There are some aspects to this choice of literature—Latina literature—that make it quite approachable, a sort of microcosm, a paradigm for perhaps other more inaccessible studies and histories of so-called minor literatures. The texts are there, they are relatively easy to find, and the study seems to have a beginning and perhaps even the vague hinting of an end. Lastly, the anthologies mirror the three characteristics of a minor literature enumerated by Deleuze and Guattari.

In their work entitled *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*, Deleuze and Guattari ask themselves: "how to tear off from one's own language a minor literature, capable of hollowing out language, or propelling it along a clear revolutionary line?" (19). They then proceed to explain that the first characteristic of a minor literature is "the deterritorialization of language" (18). The other two characteristics are "political immediacy" and the "collective machine of expression" (18).

The anthologies do fit well into Deleuze and Guattari's characteristics. The anthologizing of Latina literature began as something political. Absolutely no one was publishing Latinas, not even the feminists. So one fine day Latinas such as Moraga and Anzaldúa decided to knock the doors down and throw the house out the window.

Contesting their marginalization, Chicana lesbian writers took greater risks and opened up the

exploration and celebration of women-centered sexuality, spirituality, and passion....(The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, 5)

The anthologies to analyze while keeping in mind the concept of minor literature are those of the first half of the 1980s, specifically *Keeping the Spirit*, a 22-page chapbook published in 1982 and edited by Aleida Rodríguez, which has been out of print for many years now; *Cuentos*, published in 1983 and edited by Alma Gómez, Cherríe Moraga, and Mariana Romo-Carmona, also out of print; *Woman of her Word: Hispanic Women Write*, originally published by *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* in 1983 and edited by Evangelina Vigil; and *Nosotras: Latina Literature Today*, a short anthology published in 1986 and edited by María del Carmen Boza, Beverly Silva, and Carmen Valle, who all forewent inclusion in order to ensure editorial objectivity.

Just as important is the question of literature by women and feminine writing, as well as all that comes with this literature, namely the body, gender, and sexuality. I also refer to the choice between *poetisa* (poetess) and *poeta* (poet). The 1978 Scorpion Press anthology *Siete Poetas* made a statement by opting for the latter. Such a choice brings up the debate as to whether the term “woman writer” implies inferiority.

What happens, indeed, when we add an ethnic layer to that already “inferior” category? In the conclusion to her book *Alfonsina Storni: From Poetess to Poet*, Rachel Phillips adds—after asserting that Storni is a minor poet—that there is a myth to be destroyed, and that myth is that of the woman poet:

...locked by complicity on the part of critics and readers into a false category of accomplishment. A few women stand among the world's great poets....None warrants attention because she is a woman, still less false evaluation according to some stunted canon of feminine achievement. (Phillips, 1975, 122)

Magdalena García Pinto is equally concerned with this issue. In her introduction to the complete poems of Delmira Agustini, she analyzes some arguments elaborated by Latin American critics regarding “feminine” works and then demonstrates how these critics succeeded in marginalizing women.

Por lo general, se puede afirmar que la posición de la crítica con respecto a la producción literaria femenina es segregacionista, según lo atestiguan las antologías e historiografías del Modernismo en Hispanoamérica. Dos criterios son los que suelen aplicarse con más frecuencia: el de compartimientos estancos o el de exclusion. (Generally, if we take a look at the anthologies and histories of Modernism in Latin America, we can easily affirm that the critical position with regard to feminine literary production is segregationist. Two criteria are applied most frequently: compartmentalization and exclusion.) (García Pinto, 1993, 25–26; transla-

tion mine)

García Pinto then uses José Olivio Jiménez's 1985 *Antología crítica de la poesía modernista hispanoamericana* as an example. In spite of having put forward an intelligent selection, Jiménez (García Pinto believes) nevertheless succumbs to what she calls the *criterio marginalizante* (a segregationist tendency of sorts) precisely in the way that he introduces Agustini as a poet in his anthology. When García Pinto quotes Jiménez in her introduction to the complete works of Agustini she underlines the word *aparte*. It is precisely with that word, meaning “besides, on the other hand,” that Jiménez introduces Agustini. According to García Pinto, this means that it is the works of men that shape the canon, and that the few works by women are simply mentioned (García Pinto, 1993, 27).

This marginalization, this *aparte*, remains an issue throughout the history.

Since Latinas were part of the second wave of the feminist movement and stood in opposition against the first wave, I chose to read the anthologies of the second half of the decade of the eighties and of the early nineties when it came to analyzing literature by women and the question of, or debate over, feminine writing. Even then, when it seemed as if women's problems were over, Latinas were feeling García Pinto's underlined *aparte*.

Anthologies that address those themes are *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990), edited by Gloria Anzaldúa; *Poetas Cubanas en Nueva York* (1991), edited by Felipe Lázaro; *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991), edited by Carla Trujillo; *Shattering the Myth: Plays by Hispanic Women* (1992), edited by Linda Feyder; *The Sexuality of Latinas* (1993), edited by Norma Alarcón, Cherríe Moraga, and Ana Castillo; *Infinite Divisions* (1993), edited by Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana Rivero; *In Other Words: Literature by Latinas of the U.S.* (1994), edited by Roberta Fernández; and *Hispanic, Female, and Young* (1994), edited by Phyllis Tashlik.

When considering the period from the early nineties to the year 2000, I analyze the anthologies in light of the canon. This reading can be done from several different angles. We can see these anthologies as challenges or demands for inclusion in the canon, or as forms of acceptance of Latina voices. This canonical acceptance may come through the inclusion in the anthology itself, through the use of these anthologies as tools in the classroom, or through the publication of the anthologies by mainstream publishers. This shows that there are different levels and different types of canon inclusion.

The canon and anthologies always seem to ride in tandem, and little does it matter if the shape and the make of the vehicle remain mysterious and vague. Actually one could even fall into that spiral of a question as to which came first. Are the Latinas included in an anthology because they belong to some sort of canon already, or are they canonized if they appear often enough in anthologies?

The anthologies most useful when taking into consideration canon inclusion or exclusion are *Latina: Women's Voices from the Borderlands* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), edited

by Lillian Castillo-Speed; *Daughters of the Fifth Sun: A Collection of Latina Fiction and Poetry* (Riverhead Books [a division of Putnam], 1996), edited by Bryce Milligan; *Máscara*, published in 1997 by the alternative press Third Woman Press and edited by Lucha Corpi; *¡Floricanto, Si!* (Penguin, 1998), edited by Bryce Milligan, Mary Milligan, and Angela de Hoyos; and *Puro Teatro: A Latina Anthology* (University of Arizona Press, 2000), edited by Alberto Sandoval Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternbach.

I decided to approach this history of anthologies in a linear fashion; in other words, reading and analyzing the anthologies I found in chronological order.

A word about finding these works: It has required months of constant searching, and the search is ongoing still. For many months I was discovering new anthologies every day. Now these discoveries have become rare, but nothing assures me that I have found them all. What I wish to make clear is that I did not pick and choose a handful of anthologies; on the contrary, my goal was to find them all. Did I succeed? That is another question. Perhaps one or two eluded me. *Mea culpa*.

After having decided that I would read the anthologies in chronological order, I divided this chunk of time into four unequal parts: the background, minor literature, feminist theory, and lastly, the canon.

I am by no means pretending that this is how it happened and that the earliest anthologies explored the background and the identity, that the concept of minor literature and of feminist theory can be applied to the middle ones, and that the latest ones challenged the canon. Every single one of them explores identity and background, every one is an example of a minor literature and of writing by women, and every one challenges the canon in its own way.

I simply chose to privilege each one of those topics at a specific moment in time. The order is mine, but I do find logic to it. The background should come first, that is obvious. But why consider it a minor literature before seeing it as literature by women? The reason for this is that I believe Latinas were part of the second wave of American feminism and not of the first. In other words, they positioned themselves as a militant “ethnic” or “minority” group before they became militant women. As a matter of fact, an anthology such as *This Bridge* was a form of protest against what they considered to be the reigning white feminism.

As to the canon coming last, it is because we can see a clearer picture this way. The anthologies went from being published only by kitchen table presses to being published by mainstream publishers. This is a form of inclusion or of acceptance. I thought it best to wait for last to examine its implications. “How many styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones, have only one single dream,” Deleuze and Guattari write. The dream is “to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language.” So here we come full circle, for Deleuze and Guattari conclude with an imperative phrase, “Create the opposite dream: know how to create a becoming-minor”

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1975, 27).

Lastly, if one is to shape a history, then this history has to start and to stop somewhere. The problem with a modern history such as this one is, obviously, premature aging. But it cannot be helped. The best I can do is to conclude that the anthologies of the new century point to new directions and also show that the fluidity of the present always has an impact on history. In other words, as time passes, so the past changes.

Chronological Bibliography of the Anthologies of Latina Literature

1978: *Siete Poetas*. Tucson, Ariz.: Scorpion Press.

1979: *Requisa 32—Colección de Cuentos*. Rosaura Sánchez, ed. La Jolla, Calif.: Chicano Research Publications, University of California, San Diego.

1980: *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States*. Dexter Fisher, ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

1981: *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press.

1982: *Manteniendo el espíritu—Keeping the Spirit*. Aleida Rodríguez, ed. Los Angeles: Latinas Unidas.

1983: *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*. Alma Gomez, ed. New York: Kitchen Table.

_____. *Woman of Her Word: Hispanic Women Write*. (special issue of *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*). Evangelina Vigil, ed. Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press.

1986: *Nosotras: Latina Literature Today*. Maria del Carmen Boza, ed. Tempe, Ariz.: Bilingual Review Press.

1987: *Compañeras, Latina Lesbians: An Anthology*. Juanita Ramos, ed. New York: Latina Lesbian History Project.

1988: *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda: Voces de Mujeres Tercermundistas en los Estados Unidos*. Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo, eds. San Francisco: Ism Press.

1989: *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writings and Critical Readings*. Asunción Horno Delgado, ed. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

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1990: *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

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1997: *Máscara*. Lucha Corpi, ed. Berkeley, Calif.: Third Woman Press.

1998: *¡Floricanto, Si! A Collection of Latina Poetry*. Bryce Milligan, Mary Milligan, and Angela de Hoyos, eds. New York: Penguin Books.

2000: *Puro teatro: A Latina Anthology*. Alberto Sandoval Sanchez and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Journals

(NOTE: This list is not all-inclusive but features a few journals that have dedicated entire issues to Latina writings and Latina literary theory)

El Grito. This journal was launched by Quinto Sol, the first Chicano press. In 1973 *El Grito* devoted an entire issue to the creative expression of Chicanas, "Chicanas en la literatura y el arte."

The Americas Review (formerly *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*). University of Houston, Houston, Texas. In 1983 *The Americas Review* devoted an entire issue to Latina literature, "Woman of Her Word."

Calyx. An Oregon-based feminist journal that published in 1984 an issue called "Bearing Witness/Sobreviviendo: An Anthology of Writing and Art by Native American Latina Women."

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