

BORDER THINKING, MINORITIZED  
STUDIES, AND REALIST INTERPELLATIONS:  
THE COLONIALITY OF POWER FROM  
GLORIA ANZALDÚA TO ARUNDHATI ROY

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Literature follows great social changes—. . . it always 'comes after'. To come after, however, does not mean to repeat ('reflect') what already exists, but the exact opposite: to resolve the problems set by history.

Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic*

INTRODUCTION

This essay has a somewhat sweeping character. It is a preliminary attempt to link *pensamiento fronterizo* (border thinking) in Chicano/a Studies and realist interpellations of the subject and the politics of reclaiming identity of this volume. Border thinking emerges from the critical reflections of (undocumented) immigrants, migrants, *bracero/a* workers, refugees, *campesinos*, women, and children on the major structures of dominance and subordination of our times. Thus envisaged, border thinking is the name for a new geopolitically located thinking or epistemology from both the internal and external borders of the modern (colonial) world-system.<sup>1</sup> Border thinking is a necessary tool for thinking what the Peruvian historical social scientist Aníbal Quijano calls the "coloniality of power" and identity at the intersections (*los intersticios*) of our local histories and global designs.<sup>2</sup>

Quijano's coloniality of power, I argue, can help us begin to account for the entangled relations of power between the global division of labor, racial and ethnic hierarchy, identity formation, and Eurocentric epistemologies. Moreover, the coloniality of power can help us trace the continuous forms of hegemonic dominance produced by colonial cultures and structures. As I use it, the coloniality of power is fundamentally a structuring process of racial identity, experience, and racial knowledge production articulating geostrategic locations and subaltern (minor) inscriptions.

My emphasis will be on late-twentieth-century postcolonial theories (Chicano/a and South Asian) and early twenty-first century realist theories about identity, critical multiculturalism, and minoritized studies. So I'll begin by discussing three of the most important paradigms of minoritized study as forms of culture which have shared experiences by virtue of their antagonistic relationship to the hegemonic culture, which seeks to marginalize and interpellate them as minor. Then I will examine the issue of minoritized border thinking and languaging practices in Gloria Anzaldúa's celebrated *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.<sup>3</sup> Last, I will speculate on the issue of epistemic privilege and kinship trouble in Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things*.

Why propose a cross-genealogical (U.S. Latino/a and South Asian) treatment of differently structured histories of border and diaspora identity and minoritized writing? I hope this will emerge as I go along, and indeed throughout this book (designed as it is by Satya Mohanty, Paula Moya, Michael Hames-García, and Linda Martín Alcoff to encourage in-depth, cross-cultural comparisons within the general field of minority studies in the United States). But I'll begin by asserting some of the potential meanings and nuances of the minor as they have appeared on the scene of U.S. post-colonial studies in the past fifteen years.

THE POLITICS OF "BECOMING MINOR"

In a landmark 1987 conference at the University of California, Berkeley, the literary theorists Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd called for a radical examination of the "nature and context of minority discourse."<sup>4</sup> JanMohamed and Lloyd were specifically interested in rethinking the relationship between a "minor literature" and the canonical literatures of the majority. Schematically put, Lloyd and JanMohamed's theory and practice of minority discourse involves "drawing out solidarities in the forms of similarities between modes of repression and struggles that all minorities experience separately but precisely as minorities" (1990, 9). Their project of minority discourse fundamentally supplemented Deleuze and Guattari's Eurocentered theorizing of a minor literature—a literature so termed by its "opposition to those which define canonical writing." A minor literature entails for them "the questioning or destruction of the concept of identity and identification . . . and a profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification" (1990, 381). In other words, Lloyd and JanMohamed maintained that a "minority discourse should neither fall back on ethnicity or gender as an a priori essence nor rush into calculating some 'nonhumanist' celebration of diversity for its own sake" (1990, 9). While some realists might take issue with Lloyd and JanMohamed's partial dismissal of the cognitive work of our identities and their overreliance on the Eurocentric work of Deleuze and Guattari (their erasure of the cognitive aspects of U.S. and other globalized racialized minority experiences and identities), the political project of minority discourse remains on target: "Becoming 'minor,'" they write, "is not a question

of essence . . . but a question of position: a subject-position that in the final analysis can be defined only in political terms" (1990, 9).

My sense of the utopian future of minority studies owes much to the theoretical work of my colleagues at Berkeley but it does not quite reproduce the nuances of the way Lloyd and JanMohamed use the term minor (following Deleuze and Guattari's famous study of Kafka.)<sup>5</sup> In my own recent cross-genealogical work in Chicano/a and U.S. Latino/a subaltern studies, on José Martí as a subaltern modernist and revolutionary anti-colonialist, on the Cuban testimonio of Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet, and on the border modernisms of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and Américo Paredes for example, I have used the terms *subaltern* and *minor* to cast doubt not so much on our "narratives of identity" but on the narratives of the major, mainstream, and the hegemonic.<sup>6</sup> My emergent minority studies follows the collaborative scholarly and activist work of the Coloniality of Power Research Group (especially Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Quijano) and the South Asian Subaltern Group, particularly the work of historian Dipesh Chakrabarty. As Chakrabarty suggests in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, "[the minor] describes relationships to the past that the rationality of the [mainstream] historian's methods necessarily makes 'minor' or 'inferior' as something 'irrational' in the course of, and as a result of, its own operation."<sup>7</sup> The cultural and political work of the subaltern or minoritized historian, in Chakrabarty's words, is to "try to show how the capacity (of the modern person) to historicize actually depends on his or her ability to participate in nonmodern relationships to the past that are made subordinate in the moment of historicization. History writing assumes plural ways of being in the world" (2000, 101). In thus critiquing mainline historicism and monotypical Eurocentrism and using that critique to interrogate minoritized studies, in emphasizing the colonial difference in archival documents, and in considering representations between the elite and the minor, Chakrabarty has been moving away from mainline "history from below" studies and turning to minoritized studies mapped out by Lloyd and JanMohamed.

This brings me to the third (and for the purposes of this book the most recent) sense of minority studies: minority studies as a comparative "epistemic project" formulated by Mohanty, Moya, Hames-García, and Martín Alcoff. Against purely skeptical (postmodern and poststructuralist) attitudes toward identity, ethnic studies, and experience, they argue for a strong defense of critical cosmopolitanism and minority studies based on what they call "realist" views. (As a shorthand for this realist-inspired group of minority studies, I will focus in what follows on the collective project entitled *Reclaiming Identity*, edited by Paula Moya and Michael Hames-García.)

What Moya and Hames-García have done is to tease out (using Satya Mohanty's realist view of identity) a new way of doing literary, cultural, and comparative ethnic studies in the United States. *Reclaiming Identity* is at the very center of what the authors (after Mohanty) call a "postpositivist realism," an engaging method of philosophical, cultural, and literary interpretation that

situates "identity" in both a "radical universalist" and a "multiculturalist" world view (1997, xii). Briefly stated, *Reclaiming Identity* (like Mohanty's *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* [1997] and Moya's *Learning From Experience* [2002]) is a sustained, eloquent, and rich exemplification of this innovative method, practice, and pedagogy.<sup>8</sup> Moya puts their collective project this way: the realist view of identity can provide "a reconstructed universalist justification for the kind of work being done by . . . ethnic studies scholars," (2000, 2) by supporters of multicultural education, as well as for the salience of the identities around which such minoritized programs are organized.

Ranging across issues involving philosophy, literature, and social theory, the essayists explore realist accounts of identity and experience by making linkages among social location, experience, epistemic privilege, and cultural identity.<sup>9</sup> All contemplate a world where cultural identity is both socially constructed and substantively real. By attempting to transcend the limits of postmodernism/poststructuralism and essentialism, the authors in *Reclaiming Identity* take seriously (1) that identities are real and (2) that experiences are epistemically crucial. As philosopher Martín Alcoff emphasizes, *Reclaiming Identity* "is an act of taking back . . . the term realism in order to maintain the epistemic significance of identity" (2000, 312).

Because I'm working under some constraints of space, I will only focus in the remainder of this section on the essays by Mohanty, Moya, Hames-García, and Martín Alcoff. *Reclaiming Identity* blasts off with Mohanty's minoritized philosophical exegesis of Toni Morrison's celebrated novel *Beloved*. "The community sought" in the novel he argues, "involves as its essence a moral and imaginative expansion of oneself." Moreover, Morrison's "political vision of the oppressed . . . provides the context" in which her characters challenge each others' views "on the limits of mother-love" in specifically historical, gendered, and ethno-racial terms. Thus envisaged, Morrison's characters' perspectives, Mohanty suggests, are "not only affective but also epistemic." By reading Morrison's *Beloved*, many of us are therefore put in the position of characters in the novel, like Paul D, who have inadequate understandings of the social world they live in. Briefly, Morrison teaches us in *Beloved*, among other things, how to read infanticide and the social roles of slave mothers, thereby widening the scope of the moral debates about slavery and the gendered division of labor in the modern world system of capitalism.

Do slave mothers, like Morrison's Sethe, have a "special knowledge" (2000, 236)? Can a realist account of identity spell out the claim that members of a diaspora often have a privileged, albeit sharable knowledge about their social world? What are the valuable implications that the epistemic privilege of the politically oppressed and socially underprivileged people has? These are the major interpretive questions Mohanty grapples with in his essay. If diaspora implicitly refers to an identity, and Morrison elaborates it in narrative and descriptive terms, Mohanty argues persuasively that readers of *Beloved* have been slow to see how Morrison elaborates diasporic identity in unavoidably moral and theoretical terms. Thus, instead of seeing Morrison's characters as "empty signifiers" and therefore dismissing her take-on identities

on the grounds that they are after all rhetorically constructed and hence "spurious," Mohanty argues that identities in *Beloved* are not only descriptive and affective but also evaluative and epistemic. Hence, realists need to distinguish between different kinds of constructedness and at the same time see the politics of identities as enmeshed in competing social and ethical-theoretical worldviews. Last, Mohanty sets the *Reclaiming Identity* project in motion by arguing for a notion of "epistemic privilege"—that our experiences have real cognitive content and that deconstructive suspicions of experience (Joan Scott [1992] and Jonathan Culler [1982]) are unwarranted.

Building upon Mohanty's realist view of identity and his ideas about epistemic privilege, Moya and Hames-García complement and enlarge the realist view of the project by reading Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* and Michael Nava's *The Hidden Law* as contributing to understandings of how the minoritized "other" can change us, and how issues that challenge identity such as heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity do not have to be seen as separate entities but as "mutually constitutive." If Moraga, as Moya suggests, "understands identities as relational and grounded in the historically produced social categories that constitute social location" (2000, 69) and not as trapped in a cyborgian "signifying function" à la Donna Haraway (1991), Nava's work, Hames-García argues, "demands that we . . . take seriously the moral implications" of gay Chicano protagonist Henry Rios's experiences. For Hames-García, taking Henry's experiences seriously does not make him a "strategic essentialist" à la Chakravorty Spivak (1988); rather Henry bases his claim on the "moral sense of his right to participate in a Chicano community on the basis of his cultural upbringing and experience of racialization" (2000, 113).

In the book's conclusion, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?," philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff carefully defends the new postpositivist accounts of identity by discussing how approaches to the self developed by Hegel, Freud, Foucault, and Althusser have influenced the most important postcontemporary conceptions of identity and subjectification. The answer to the problems of essentialism and anti-essentialism, Martín Alcoff argues, is not political scientist Wendy Brown's theory of "wounded attachments" (where the cycle of blame is never transcended) but new, better alternative formulations of identity produced by the essayists in *Reclaiming Identity*.<sup>10</sup> Near her essay's ending, Martín Alcoff writes, "To say that we have an identity is just to say that we have a location in social space, a hermeneutic horizon that is both grounded in a location and an opening or site from which we attempt to know the world. Understood in this way, it is incoherent to view identities as something we would be better off without" (2000, 335).

Given this précis of what I take to be one of the central aims of the *Reclaiming Identity* project, I would like to end this section by raising two issues for further interrogation. The first concerns the issue of identity in relationship to what the historical social scientists Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein call "Americanness" and what Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Agustín Lao, Ramón Grosfoguel, and others are calling "the coloniality of power."

In their essay, "Americanness as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system" (1992), Quijano and Wallerstein argue that the Americas were fundamental to the formation of the modern (colonial) world-system, and that Americanness is a fundamental element of modernity. For our purposes, Quijano and Wallerstein identify four new categories that originated in the so-called discovery of the Americas. They are: coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and the concept of newness itself. My first hesitation with the *Reclaiming Identity* project thus has to do with the way most of the contributors are generally silent about our identities in relationship to what Quijano and Wallerstein are grappling with in their work, namely, coloniality and power.

In other words, if Mohanty, Moya, Hames-García, and Martín Alcoff are right that to have an identity means that we have to understand that "we have a location in social space," wouldn't it be useful for us to ground these identities and locations in the history of the modern (colonial) world-system? Quijano and Wallerstein remind us that after all coloniality created a structure of hierarchy and drew new boundaries around and within the Americas. Moreover, coloniality was also essential to the formation of states, and Quijano in his more recent work such as "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" makes the additional claim that even in decolonization the stateness of decolonized states recentered the colonial structure of power. "What is termed globalization," Quijano writes, "is the cultural process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power. One of the fundamental axes of power is the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its rationality. The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than colonialism in whose matrix it was established. Therefore the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality" (2000, 533).

For Quijano and Wallerstein, ethnic identity fundamentally is "the set of communal boundaries into which in part we are put by others [through coloniality], in part which we impose upon ourselves, serving to locate our identity and our rank within the state . . . [Ethnic identities] are always contemporary constructs, and thus always changing. All the major categories, however, into which we ethnically divide today in the Americas and the world (Native Americans or Indians, Blacks or Negroes, Whites or Creoles/Europeans, *Mestizos* or other names given to a so-called mixed-category)—all these categories did not exist prior to the modern world-system. They are part of what makes up Americanness. They have become the cultural staple of the entire world-system" (my emphasis, 1992, 550).

If our identities are real and affective, they do come from somewhere. Any postcontemporary account of subjectification (Butler, Laclau, Žižek [2000]) and any postpositivist realist account of identity (Mohanty, Moya, and Hames-García), I believe, would have to grapple with the coloniality matrix

of power that Quijano and Wallerstein, among others, are outlining for us. Perhaps to get back to Martín Alcoff's concluding riffs on the realist view of identity that is why it might not be so dizzying for some to view identities as something we might be better off without. Michel Foucault, for instance, noted in "The Subject and Power" (1982, 212). But here, too, I'd stress that Foucault tends, especially in *The History of Sexuality*, to erase the crafty details of the colonial difference in his analysis of biopower. On the whole, however, I'm in strong agreement with Martín Alcoff's point about the political power of our identities. In our informational culture and society, our identities, sociologist Manuel Castells insists in *The Power of Identity*, are crucial and important because "they build interests, values, and projects, around experience, and refuse to dissolve by establishing a specific connection between nature, history, geography, and culture." Identities, Castells concludes (in Marxist realist fashion), "anchor power in some areas of the social structure, and build their resistance or their offensives in the informational struggle about the cultural codes constructing behavior and, thus, new institutions" (1997, 361). And it is this new subject or identity project of the informational mode of production, I believe, that many "straight" marxists have refused to grapple with in their engagement with the powers of identity politics.

This issue of "coloniality" then leads to another minor hesitation I have with the rich *Reclaiming Identity* project of Mohanty, Moya, and Hames-García. In his book, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000), Mignolo draws on the social scientific work of Quijano and Wallerstein to criticize various recent desires for universalist theories among both neoliberals and neo-marxists. Mignolo argues that parallel to the ethno-racialized classification of the Americas and the world (the embalming of identities) the colonial project in the Americas also classified languages and knowledges. The epistemology of the European Renaissance was, therefore, assumed to be the natural perspective from which knowledges could be described and suppressed. This same process, Mignolo suggests, was resituated after the Enlightenment, when the concept of reason opened up a new description and reason became associated with northern Europe and indirectly with whiteness (Hegel and Kant).

What are we to make of Mohanty and Moya's use of an apparently idealist Kantian "universalism" in their postpositivist realist project? Shouldn't a realist view of identity severely criticize the abstract hegemonic universalisms in Kant and the Enlightenment? Is it possible to imagine an "epistemic diversity or pluriversality," as Mignolo (drawing on the work of Glissant) suggests in his work on Zapatismo? For Mignolo, diversity is not "the rejection of universal claims, but the rejection of universality understood as an abstract universal grounded in a monologic." Further, he writes, a "universal principle grounded on the idea of the di-versal is not a contradiction in terms but rather a displacement of conceptual structures" ("Zapatistas' Theoretical Revolution," 2002).

As an alternative to the Kantian universalism in Mohanty and Moya's postpositivist realist project, I propose that Gloria Anzaldúa's and Arundhati

Roy's imaginative works belong to a "diversalist" cross-genealogical field that I term (after Quijano) the coloniality of border and diaspora power. Coloniality, because of the many structural and ethno-racial similarities about identity formations binding them to a colonizing past. But border and diaspora power because there are certainly many discontinuities—the outer-national dimension of represented space—to dictate the cognitive metaphor of the "world-system" text, which recalls as I have been suggesting the world political economy of Wallerstein and Quijano.

The category of the coloniality of power is not, of course, without its defects. But it has fewer than others, as well as having some local and global advantages. So let the coloniality of power be taken in my essay for what it is: a hypothesis designed to grapple with hierarchy based on what Quijano terms the "social classification of the world's population around the idea of race." The racial axis of *mestizaje* in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and of caste in Roy's *The God of Small Things* have colonial origins in the Americas and South Asia, but Anzaldúa and Roy suggest that race and caste have proven to be more durable in our postcolonial world.

By cobbling together Quijano's subalternist concept of the coloniality of power and Wallerstein's modern world system, we can argue that the coloniality of power has survived in the Americas and South Asia (the Portuguese brought with them to India the idea of caste) for over 500 years and yet they have not come to be transformed into a world empire. The secret strength of the coloniality of power and the world system is the political side of the economic organization called capitalism. Capitalism, Wallerstein astutely argues, has flourished precisely because the world-economy "has had within its bounds not one but a multiplicity of political systems" (1974, 348).

#### CHICANO/A BORDER INTERPELLATIONS AND SUBALTERN STUDIES

Over the past decade an awareness has begun to develop of the affinities between the work of recent Chicano/a imaginative writers and the thought of U.S. migratory postcolonial thinkers. Indeed, what is remarkable is that it should have taken so long for the interlocking of concerns between Chicano/a writers and postcolonial thinkers to be properly appreciated. Among the most prominent of such common concerns are the following: the location of knowledge from the perspective of the U.S. empire's borderland contact zones; the critique of Occidental dominant perspectives in the current practices of U.S. social sciences, humanities, and area studies; and the grappling with localized geopolitics of knowledge and what Mignolo calls "border epistemologies." Furthermore, these affinities have not only been observed by scholars from the South (Latin America and South Asia), but also are becoming part of the self-consciousness in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has called the "emerging dominant" (1995, 179) in American Studies.

This section is a study of the interplay between the performative, border epistemologies of a Chicano/a imaginative writer and the changing

discourses of American vernacular literatures and cultures. Gloria Anzaldúa's writings about U.S. Latino/a life explore, among other things, the linguistic intermixture of ethnic and mainstream languages (English, Spanish, and Spanglish) to illustrate the changing languages of America. What vernacular varieties of English or Spanish will dominate in twenty-first century America? Which *lingua rustica* will the some thirty million U.S. Latinos/as (with over 10 million in California) hegemonize in their *testimonios*, novels, essays, and poetry? What new literary genres and bilanguaging regimes, produced by Chicanos/as, will emerge in American literature? If the "dialect novel" was all the rage in late nineteenth-century vernacular America<sup>11</sup> (Twain, Cable, Cahan, Du Bois), is there a borderlands English or Spanglish already underway in U.S. Latino/a dominant California, Arizona, Florida, Texas, Illinois, and New York? On another level, I want to investigate the enabling condition of some recent Chicano/a narrative and poetry and the various ways in which they seek to create an epistemological ground upon which versions of the world may be produced. As many U.S. Latino/a writers themselves suggest, to read is to question and to understand the (bilingual) texture and the rhetorical resources of language. Anzaldúa sees the aesthetic structure of knowledge as a form of *nepantilism*, a Mexica word signifying a violent cultural in-betweenness.<sup>12</sup>

To begin, I will juxtapose Gloria Anzaldúa's key concept of U.S.-Mexico border *nepantilism* (1987) against U.S. historian Frederick Jackson Turner's well-known nineteenth-century idea of the frontier. I do so to emphasize that while Turner and Anzaldúa may share some affinities of narrative and subaltern conventions and self-locations in the United States—both writers locate their stories in a tradition of border historiography—their contrasts, I think, run far deeper, for Turner's paradigms of the "frontier" and Anzaldúa's *frontera* are not equivalent.

One of the most imperial images of the American West, Turner's so-called frontier thesis helped shape the study of Americanization both domestically and, after the War of 1898, globally. U.S. historian William Cronin suggests that "few historical arguments [about the significance of the frontier in American history] have risen so high and fallen so far in [U.S.] scholarly reception" (1995, 692).

Turner famously opens his 1893 essay by quoting from the 1890s census report that described empirically the disappearance of the frontier. Moreover, in an idiographic vein, Turner theorized that U.S. modernity and modernization were caused by the frontier, for "free land and its continuous recession and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development" (1920, 1). By emphasizing the movement westward, Northeastern, Euro-Americans not only encountered peoples and cultures "less civilized" than they had experienced, but through this very contact, Turner argued, they had left behind their old world civilization and invented a new, North American one.

As Klein suggests, Turner's essay "narrates a dramatic struggle between past and present." Turner's compositional mode of emplotment rolls out

from East to West; from the Puritan's errand into the wilderness to the Gilded Age's San Francisco. If Turner starts off quoting social scientific data (census reports), he quickly moves his essay into the mythos of romance. His invocations of the colonial frontier heroes (Daniel Boone, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln) are, as U.S. historian Kerwin Klein notes, perfect "synecdoches for the American frontier spirit" (1997, 183).

All of the familiar themes of the U.S. cultures of imperialism are cobbled together in Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"—the advancing of the frontier, the free land, or the nineteenth century's equivalent of the twentieth-century U.S. food stamp program, and the conquering of and the errand into the wilderness. Throughout Turner is gracefully straightforward: "the frontier prompted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people" (1920, 40). And one of my favorite lines in the essay reveals Turner's poetic flair: "In the crucible of the frontier, the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into one mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics" (1920, 40).

U.S. historians such as Richard White locate Turner's essay as part of an emerging incantatory imperialism. By strategically using a frontier iconography in his essay—log cabins, covered wagons, canoes, and the like—Turner argued for a Jeffersonian "empire for liberty," surely one of our most interesting nationalist oxymorons for the cultures of U.S. imperialism (White, 1994). Like White, U.S. Latino historian George Sánchez chastises Turner for constructing "a myopic vision" in his frontier essay—"that of the East looking West, civilization looking toward chaos, Europe looking toward the rest of the world" (1993, 38). Conversely, against Turner's hegemonic vision, Sánchez suggests that the concept of the transnational *frontera* developed in postcolonial Chicano/a studies works against Turner's myopic imperialism. The transnational *frontera*, he argues, suggests "limitations, boundaries over which American power might have little or no control. It implies a dual vision, that of two nations looking at each other over a strip of land they hold in common" (1993, 38). U.S. Latino/a border thinking, therefore, enacts a powerful contrapuntal corrective for mainline American studies.

*Pensamiento fronterizo*—border thinking—for Anzaldúa, is a site of crisscrossed experience, language, and identity. Mignolo's pluritopical reading of Anzaldúa is especially helpful in this context. She draws, Mignolo insists, "a different map: that of reverse migration, the migration from colonial territories relabeled the Third World (after 1945), toward the First" (2000, 237). And this reverse U.S. Latino/a migratoriness, in Mignolo's view, helps explain Anzaldúa's powerful "linguaging practices" which "fracture the colonial language" (2000, 237).

If Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* thematizes not the hegemonic Hegelian–Emersonian universalism of Turner's frontier thesis, but the epistemic diversal reason of local U.S. *nepantilism*'s multiple broken tongues, "such fractures," Mignolo argues, "occur due to the linguaging practices of two displaced linguistic communities" in Anzaldúa's work: "Nahuatl, displaced by the Spanish expansion and Spanish displaced by the increasing

hegemony of the colonial languages of the modern period (English, German, and French)" (2000, 237).

This fracturing and braiding of colonial and postcolonial languages explains why Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* has the power to elicit such critical emphasis from Mignolo, one of the most innovative U.S. Latino critics of postcolonial literatures of the Americas. Reading Anzaldúa as a Chicana feminist philosopher of fractured and braided languages is precisely what I want to address below as both one of the major postcolonial issues in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and indeed for U.S. Latino/a studies in particular, and for the futures of minority studies in general.

Rather than a unified subject, representing a folk border culture in any holistic sense, we meet in Anzaldúa's *autobiografía*<sup>13</sup> a braided, mestiza consciousness, and a feminist writer fundamentally caught between various hegemonic colonial and postcolonial languages and subaltern dialects, and vernacular expressions. Her lament that "wild tongues" such as her own "can not be tamed" for "they can only be cut out" (1998, 76) might as well be addressed to Anzaldúa's complex postcolonial audience of radical women and (feminist) men of color. Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa expresses regret that even her bilingual mother in Hargill, has been partially complicit in valuing the English language of the hegemonic: "I want you to speak English. Pa' hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Que vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un 'accent,' my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents" (1998, 76).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa not only self-consciously speaks English with an "accent," she also writes in multiply accented, vernacular tongues. Read with its marked accentuation, Anzaldúa's work can be reinterpreted as expressing a late North American situation of multidialectism. Her negative dialectical answers to her earlier meditations that she will not "tame a wild tongue," or "train it to be quiet," or "make it lie down" (1998, 76) are her feminist philosophical dictums of border language and thinking. At the very heart of Anzaldúa's *autobiografía* is her claim that a braided "tongue" is centrally and dramatically at war with colonialism, U.S. Empire, patriarchy, and androcentrism's project to silence women: "Ser habladora was to be a gossip or a liar" (1998, 76).

Anzaldúa's response to being preoccupied with "the unique positioning consciousness takes at these confluent streams" (1987, i) is apprehended linguistically in the text in the juxtaposition of multiple dialects or tongues—Tex Mex, *caló*, *choteo*, Spanish and English—with their dominant and subaltern varieties. Moreover, this linguistic juxtaposition allows us to see Anzaldúa's attempts to reflect post-Jim Crow ethno-racial practices in South Texas as well as attempts at *nepantlism*—however incomplete—to merge, transculturate, and braid different ethno-racial formations and languages in a single text. As she puts it, she struggles with an "almost instinctive urge to communicate, to speak, to write about life on the borders, life in the

shadows" (1998 i). In this regard, Anzaldúa's *conciencia de la nueva mestiza* seems to be a respectful and gendered updating of W. E. B. Du Bois's famous early twentieth-century insights about the cross-linguistic foundations of double consciousness and the shadows of the color line:

One ever feels a two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the Negro is the history of this strife . . . , to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost . . . . He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of *white Americanism*, for he knows that Negro blood has a *message* for the world. (1986, 364–365, my emphasis)

My point is that Anzaldúa, like Du Bois, sees her braided Chicana consciousness as a fractured, cracked, and braided construction, an effort to merge new cultural formations and ethno-racial subjectivities. Like Du Bois, she highlights the inherent U.S. linguistic wars both inside the body of the nation and in the body of her soul, for like the U.S.-Mexico border itself, it is "an open wound, dividing a *pueblo*, a culture, /running down the length of my body, / [it] splits me, splits me/ me raja, me raja" (1998, 24). Both Du Bois and Anzaldúa call for new ethnic, linguistic, and cultural exchanges between the South and the North. If for Du Bois at the beginning of the twentieth century blackness and whiteness were inextricably woven together, then, for Anzaldúa at the century's end Chicana, Latina, African American, and Euro-American vernacular English and Spanish have been knitted together into what Du Bois called "the very warp and woof of this nation." This "colonial difference" is crucial to emphasize for those of us tracking Chicano/a studies' shifting and shifty cross-genealogy.

In arguing for the centrality of human language rights in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I mean to support Mignolo's critical, subaltern, U.S. Latino/a, postcolonial evaluations of Anzaldúa's *pensamiento fronterizo* without losing sight of the importance of the author's multiple renaming processes and her radical recodifications of womanhood. As Chicana feminist scholars such as Norma Alarcón, Chela Sandoval, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, and Paula Moya have all rigorously and gracefully argued, *Borderlands/La Frontera* is fundamentally a Chicana feminist text; a first-rate *historia* of post-Jim Crow South Texas; a jolting new positioning of the native woman in Chicana Studies; a terrific study in comparative whiteness and brownness; and postpositivist realist call for identity and social justice. Yet what is perhaps an equally powerful feature of Anzaldúa's text has also been one of its least analyzed—Anzaldúa's discussion of *nepantlism* as a braided, U.S. Latino/a linguistic consciousness. *La conciencia de la nueva mestiza*, for Anzaldúa, is "neither español ni inglés, but both." It is a consciousness of *nepantla*, signifying in betweenness and "capable of communicating the real values" of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to others (1998, 77).

In arguing for the centrality of her "forked," "wild," and active feminist tongues, Anzaldúa emphasizes that these tongues are informed with other, border-crossing tongues: "los recién llegados, Mexican immigrants, north from Mexico," and the older tongues of the "braceros" (78). And to these vernacular tongues, she merges her Tex-Mex dialects that she uses with her brothers and sisters and the "secret language of *pachuco*, a language of rebellion" (78) in order to create a foundational consciousness of the new mestiza.

Read against recent legal attempts in California and Florida (states with large U.S. Latino/a populations) to force an English-only linguistic absolutism, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* offers readers a dialect-centered anti-absolutism, for there "is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience" (1998, 80). In her own testimonial theorization of experience, when in high school she was "encouraged to take French classes because French [was] considered more 'cultured,'" she ends by noting that "Spanish speakers will comprise [by 2005] the biggest [minority] group in the USA" (1998, 81). However, she also argues that by the end of the twentieth century, a braided "Chicana/o" English "will be the mother tongue of most" Chicanas/os (1987, 81).

If I have focused on what may seem one of many issues, what Anzaldúa terms the practices and resistances of "tam[ing] a wild tongue," my goal has been to highlight various things at once: to agree with Anzaldúa's insistence on the centrality of *nepantilism* as a radicalized, minoritized and pluritopical linguistic project; and to explore *nepantilism* as the author's attempt to merge multiple subaltern and vernacular "serpent tongues—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice" (81).

The souls of the outernational new mestizas, Anzaldúa argues, have "nothing to do with which country one lives in." They are "neither eagle or serpent, but both" (85). It is precisely this going beyond the two-ness of national consciousness that Anzaldúa aspires to in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. If U.S. literary historian Gavin Jones is right that at the heart of nineteenth-century American literature was what he calls "the cult of the vernacular" with real "political and cultural functions," (1999) Anzaldúa's *autohistoriateoría* grounds her late-twentieth-century work in the differential vernacular serpent's tongue, a catachrestic subalternist tongue which is capable of cracking, fracturing, and braiding the very authority of the master's English-only tongue.

### POSTCOLONIAL/MINORITIZED IDENTITIES IN ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

In concluding this essay, I want to stay with the themes of minoritized identities and the coloniality matrix of power I outlined in a broad trans-American mapping, and examine briefly how recent Indian writings of the memories of violence and identity may also help us think through the colonial difference in a more global framework. I do not approach this question as a specialist in the history of the English novel in India. My relation to a globalized matrix of power is clearly at an early stage of thinking. However, what I have found in my preliminary readings of some of the English novels in India is this: at

the center of many English novels in India are the histories and memories of violence and coloniality: how humans create absolutist others out of others. In this sense, narratives of the violence of colonialism in the English novel in India—Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, for example—are also narratological studies of the politics of identity and the colonial difference. What animates many South Asian novels of the memories of the violence of British coloniality, of the Partition of 1947, and beyond is the question of how to live with the coloniality of power difference. It is with this larger question that I turn to a pluritopical reading of identities in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

The complexities of South Asian identities and kinship are at the heart of Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*. Central to the novel is a vision of the continuity between knowing the world through experience and struggle and changing the central relations of the coloniality of power that sustain and make the world what it is. Additionally, subalternized characters in the novel, especially children, divorced women, and peasants defy bloodlines of kinship and caste to condemn the bloodsheds of their everyday world in Kerala. In so doing, they defy both the gods of dominance and of kinship to remember what they experienced and shared with the god of small things.

The radicalized sense of kinship sought in *The God of Small Things* involves an expanded standpoint positionality of oneself, in particular the ability to enlarge and enrich one's ability to experience.<sup>14</sup> Thus envisaged, readers can better understand the political terms of the debate over the coloniality of power, caste, and the normative principles of kinship that inform and shape the narrative: the debate between Ammu, the twins, Rahel and Estha, on the one hand, and Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and the local police on the other, about the nature of so-called Untouchables in postcolonial Kerala. Did Velutha that "cheerful man without footprints . . . count?" (1997, 208), Ammu asks her children. Was it possible for Ammu, Rahel and Estha "bounded by the certain, separate knowledge" to have really "loved a man [Velutha] to death"? (307). "How could [Ammu] stand the smell? . . . They have a particular smell, these Paravans," (243) Baby Kochamma asks when she hears from the peasant Vallya Paapen what Ammu and Velutha had done. How we evaluate this debate over the coloniality of power, the love laws, and kinship depends upon how we interpret Rahel and Estha's remarkable transformation and defiance at the novel's end and how we see the relationship between their ability to experience and understand, their capacity to grieve for their mother Ammu and the peasant Velutha, and even perhaps how in their grieving they de-institute kinship.

Ammu's defiant response to her family's insistence in maintaining caste rules coherent in Keralite culture and society is to make the twins Rahel and Estha "promise" her that they will "always love each other"—especially in the face of what Roy refers to as the local "love laws" which pin down "who should be loved. And how. And how much" (168). With this straightforward speech act of promise, Ammu tampers throughout the novel with the stable heteronormative issues of family, bloodlines, and the bourgeois nation. The political vision of the subaltern which Roy's *The God of Small Things* seeks

primarily through the standpoint positionality of women, children, and peasants provides the context in which family members such as Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and the state police's support of caste and the coloniality of power can be challenged, made specific, and given meaning. These are the many idioms of dominance and subordination that Roy thematizes in the novel.

Ammu's capacity to know herself is directly related to her ability to feel with others and to tussle with the normative rules of kinship in Kerala: "It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day" (44). While Ammu disgraces her bourgeois family by divorcing from an alcoholic and abusive husband and returns home with her young twins to her parents' home in Ayemenem, she intensely feels "that there would be no more chances. There was only . . . a front verandah and a back verandah. A hot river and a pickle factory . . . And in the background, the constant, high, whining mewl of local disapproval" (42). It is Ammu's braided "unmixable mix[ed]" subaltern consciousness of "tenderness" and "rage" that drives her feelings toward her children, toward the Untouchable Velutha, and her disapproving mewling family and local culture and society. The urgent assurances that the peasant and card-carrying communist Velutha provides Ammu with profoundly change her and her children. Velutha, I sustain, makes possible a qualitative cognitive reorientation through his "beauty" and his labor and gifts for her, the children, and the family's business. "As she watched him she understood the quality of his beauty. How his labor had shaped him . . . Had left its stamp on him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace" (316). Interestingly, Velutha is important not only because he is the god of small things in Kerala but also because of the qualitative joy he produces in others with his magician-like "facility with his hands." Velutha (since the age of eleven), Roy emphasizes, "could make intricate toys—tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts. He would bring them for Ammu, holding them on his palm (as he had been taught) so she wouldn't have to touch him to take them (71–72).

Apart from his graceful carpentry and toy-making skills, Velutha "mended radios, clocks, water pumps. He looked after the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house" (72). Years later, Velutha's creative engineering skills are used at Ammu's family's business where he reassembled "bottle-sealing machines, maintained 'new cannery machines' and automatic fruit and vegetable slicers" (72). Indeed, one of the main reasons for seeing Velutha as a pivotal character in the political debate about "who counts" in Kerala and the world that *The God of Small Things* stages is that he reveals an enormous ability to create culture and society for everyone around him. He has an enormous imaginative and cognitive life of experiences that the coloniality of power in Kerala has denied him as a Paravan.

While there are several tragic deaths in *The God of Small Things*—the novel opens with the memories of the Mol family grieving around the

drowned Anglo-Indian Sophie Mol's coffin, and Ammu dies alone in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey at the viable and die-able age of thirty-one, the novel revolves around the brutal death of Velutha and the postcolonial nation's inability to count him as one of its own.<sup>15</sup> After the forbidden sexual encounter between Ammu and Velutha is uncovered by the family, Baby Kochamma makes a complaint to the local police on false charges, and with the approval of the local Marxist party hegemony, Velutha is hunted down, beaten, and tortured to death at the police station: "his skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth. . . . Four of his ribs were splintered. . . . The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy" (294).

*The God of Small Things* circles around Velutha's, Sophie Mol's, and Ammu's deaths and the subsequent "social deaths"<sup>16</sup> of Rahel and Estha. After the twins are forced by Baby Kochamma to "save" Ammu's sexual and caste reputation by condemning Velutha to false charges of kidnapping and child abuse, Roy shows how dominance (without hegemony) intrudes into the smallest spaces in Kerala. What Rahel and Estha experience, Roy writes, was "a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions . . . of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly. . . . If [the police] hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature—had been severed long ago. [T]he posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria" (293, my emphasis).

While Rahel and Estha almost never recover from these deaths, Velutha's life and brutal death force them to tamper with the incoherencies of "kinship" and biology. Kinship is therefore not just a situation Rahel and Estha, Ammu and Velutha find themselves in, but a set of practices in postcolonial Kerala that are, as Roy suggests, controlled, performed, ritualized, and monopolized by those in power. Kinship trouble, we might say, is what Roy seeks to deinstitution in *The God of Small Things*.

In political and psychoanalytic terms, *The God of Small Things* traces Estha and Rahel's struggles to "work through"<sup>17</sup> the implications of their complex cathetic relations with postcolonial Kerala and the Ayemenem House. Estha never fully recovers. He stops talking altogether. Occupying as little space as possible in Kerala, he walks "along the banks of the river that smelled like shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans" (14). Rahel, too, returns from a self-imposed diaspora of sorts in the United States, where she suffers a bad marriage in Boston, divorces, and labors in a New York City ethnic restaurant. When she learns that Estha has returned to Ayemenem (they have been apart for twenty-five years, since December 1969), she comes home.

If for Rahel surviving the brutal Kerala past is partly predicated on her identity of diaspora, her attempt to form a coherent present also involves

a transgressive "acting out" with her twin brother Estha. The adult twins do so by making the love laws and its rules incoherent. Interestingly, Roy cannot directly represent Rahel and Estha's sexual transgression. There was, after all, Roy explains "very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened" to Rahel and Estha. "Nothing that . . . would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings" (310). What is only narratable is that Estha and Rahel had held each other closely, long after making love, and that "that night was not happiness, but hideous grief" (311).

Hideous grieving, intimate loving, working through—all these idioms are woven together in *The God of Small Things* through Rahel and Estha, suggesting the complexity involved of coming to know oneself and expanding one's capacity to experience with others. The figures of Rahel and Estha may well compel a reading that tampers with the normative spheres of kinship and bloodlines that sustain and monopolize the society and the nation by exposing the socially contingent character of kinship.<sup>18</sup>

Roy ends her postcolonial novel by suggesting how much theoretical and historical knowledge is involved in Ammu, Estha, and Rahel's learning to experience in Kerala. Their changing relationship with Velutha is based on an understanding of the brutality of caste, the love laws, and of the necessity and urgency to deinstitutionalize them. *The God of Small Things* is one of the most intriguing of postcolonial texts precisely because of the ways it indicates the extent to which subaltern identity and experience depends upon a minor (or small) historiography. We cannot claim a political identification, Roy suggests, until we have reconstituted our small collective identities and reexamine who counts in our cultures and societies.

In conclusion, I suggested that pluritopical border thinking is linked to a realist view of minoritized studies. I suggested further that the recent directions in critical minoritized studies—subaltern studies, the coloniality of power studies of the Americas, and postpositivist realist studies—could be taken as the most significant movements in U.S. postcolonial studies rather than as blueprints or master discourses to be imposed worldwide. Thus, border thinking in minoritized studies demands a different conceptualization of the self, of power, and of cultural citizenship.

I have also assumed a framework in which the minoritized designs in Anzaldúa's and Roy's narratives are linked to different stages of the modern world-system: the coloniality of power from the Renaissance to the present in Anzaldúa's narrative, and the love laws and the British imperial difference in Roy's novel. Both minoritized designs in these Chicano/a and South Asian works argue for a border and diasporic thinking as a necessary epistemology upon which a diversalist knowledge can be articulated in a trans-modernist world governed by global capitalism and new forms of coloniality. Finally, my essay is an argument for a critical cosmopolitanism from below; at the same time I see in Anzaldúa's and Roy's imaginative writings a plea for a new politics of diversity—one that conceives border and diasporic thinking as a critical project.

## NOTES

1. On the world system of capitalism, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974) and Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1994).
2. Quijano argues that modern regimes of power are characterized by "coloniality," which, as distinct from colonialism, is not simply defined by a formal redomination between empire and colony but primarily defined by global and national/cultural hierarchies (gendered, racialized, and sexualized) that are articulated differentially in time and space. See Quijano's "Modernity, Identity, and Utopia in Latin America," *Boundary 2* (1992): 140–155, and "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1/3 (2000): 533–580. See also Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Augustín Lao-Montes' superb "Introduction" in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City*, ed. Augustín Lao-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), and Ramón Grosfoguel's *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
3. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Second Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).
4. See *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, ed. Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "What is a Minor Literature?" *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
6. See my "Foreword" entitled "Migratory Locations: Subaltern Modernity and Inter-American Cultural Criticism" in Julio Ramos' *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), "Looking Awry at 1898: Roosevelt, Montejo, Paredes, and Mariscal," *American Literary History* 12/3 (Fall 2000): 386–406; "The Location of América Paredes's Border Thinking," *Nepantla* 1/1 (2000): 191–195; and "Las fronteras de Nuestra América: para volver a trazar el mapa de los Estudios Culturales Norteamericanos," *Casa de las Américas* 204 (Julio-Septiembre, 1996): 3–19.
7. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).
8. See the following: Satya Mohanty's *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula Moya and Michael R. Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) and Paula Moya's *Learning from Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
9. Mohanty hypothesizes in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*: "instead of conceiving identities as self-evidently based on the authentic experiences of members of a cultural or social group . . . , or as all equally unreal to the extent that they lay any claim to the real experiences of real people because experience is a radically mystifying term . . . , we need to explore the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location. To do so, we need a cognitivist conception of experience . . . (1997, 216).
10. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Freedom and Power in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

11. For an understanding of how nineteenth-century America was obsessed about vernacular varieties of English, see Gavin Jones's *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
12. *Nepantla* is a word used by the Nahuatl-speaking people in the sixteenth-century to define their own sociocultural situation in the face of the Spanish conquest. According to Mignolo, the word *nepantla* was recorded by Diego Durán, a Dominican missionary who was writing an ethnographic history of the Nahuatl speakers from the Valley of Mexico. When Durán asked one of his informants what he thought about the difficult situation that had been created for them by the Spanish invasion, the informant is reported to have responded, "estamos nepantla," ("we are Nepantla"), that is, "we are in-between" (personal correspondence with the author, January 15, 1998). My emphasis on *nepantla* throughout the essay is meant to function as a reminder of the "colonial difference" implicit in U.S. Latino/a Studies, a translational and transnational memory that all cultural difference has to be seen in the context of power and of the relations of subalterity and domination.
13. Gloria Anzaldúa writes in "Border Arte: Nepantla, El lugar de la Frontera," that border art "depicts both the soul of the artist and the soul of the pueblo. It deals with who tells the stories and what stories and histories are told. I call this form of visual narrative *autobistorias*. This form goes beyond the traditional self-portrait or autobiography, in telling the writer/artist's personal story, it also includes the artist's cultural history" (113). In a conversation with me at the University of California, Santa Cruz, on October 17, 1990, Anzaldúa described the form of *Borderlands/La Frontera* with the neologism, *autobistoriateoría*.
14. Here, in this last section, it should become clear that I am in substantial agreement with Mohanty that our identities are not mere social constructions and hence "spurious," nor fixed unchanging essences in a brutalizing world. I agree, further, with Mohanty that "we have the capacity to examine our social identities, considering them in light of our best understanding of other social facts and our other social relationships" (1997, 201). My reading of Roy's *The God of Small Things* is indebted to what I take to be Mohanty's significant reformulation of experience and identity.
15. I read Roy's critique of the bourgeois nation in *The God of Small Things* as echoing Ranajit Guha's description of the South Asian Subaltern Group's project. In his essay, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" (1988), Guha defines the problematic of their project as "the study of [the] historical failure of the nation to come into its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it to a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of either the classic nineteenth-century type under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or a more modern type under the hegemony of workers and peasants, that is a 'new democracy'" (43).
16. I refer, of course, to the term Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death* gives to the status of being a living being radically deprived of all rights.
17. See Dominick LaCapra's "Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historians' Debate" (1992).
18. My reading of kinship and positionality has profited from Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).