

Pluralizing Identity and Identifying zir Plurality

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As Gloria Anzaldúa says in “To(o) Queer the Writer,” “Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes situated respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river—a process.”

The struggle today is, “which box do I check?” I am born of a Mexican woman, and I was raised in the United States. I am neither Mexican nor American, and yet I am both. So, which box do I check? Perhaps Michel Foucault was right when he wrote:

“I don’t feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?”

What is true for writing and for love relationships is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don’t know where it will end.” (Rux Martin, *One Truth Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault*, October 25, 1982)

Perhaps it is true that this river—this process—is an unknowing and an unknowable adventure, an adventure in including and embracing the unknown. I’d like to think that in the act of trying to fit oneself into an identity and the discovery that one cubbyhole doesn’t fit all of your identities, that the river metaphor becomes a much more helpful and productive way to imagine the plurality of identity.

The notion of a plural identity is in contrast to the subtle (or perhaps not so subtle!) ways in which hetero-patriarchal colonial history sublimated indigenous ways of knowing and identity production. I wish to move into not only advocating but privileging the plurality of identities as a way to *queer* the post/colonial space and place that today’s earth’s bodies inhabit.

I wish to start with a few questions which I hope expose the singularity of the colonial understanding and contours of identity.

Who am I today? If I am not conservative, then does that make me liberal? If I am not gay, does that make me straight? If I am not white, then am I black? The binary that these “boxes” reify is problematic insofar as one box necessitates the impulsive checking of another corollary box, and therefore singularizes one’s identity. Not only does it singularize the identity, but it also stabilizes the identity. What emerges is a fixed colonial identity whose referent is white and male.

What might a queer post/colonial theory of identity be? And how might a queer post/colonial identity *become*? First, I think that a queer post/colonial theory of identity is one that recognizes the multiple and ongoing intersections of the complicated pieces which materially construct our identities. Second, I think that a queer post/colonial theory of identity is an identity constructed from many access points: the intersections or borderlands, that help us all make sense of the materially rich web of human existence. I suggest that a queer post/colonial identity *becomes* by

pluralizing zir's identity and exposing the intersections that are necessarily embedded in zir's identity. To that end, I hope in this brief post to de-stable the notion of identity as a singular/monolithic category of socially constructed ideas. To do this, I suggest that it is its material reality that helps give shape to one's multiple or plural identity. I am many while I am one.

Colonized identities never had the chance to become a river of multiples, that process which Anzaldúa speaks about. Colonized identities are material, which have been and continue to be torn apart and mutilated by colonial destructiveness. As a result, colonized identities have been stabilized by their colonial referent: white and hetero-patriarchal. What is important now is to begin to make little moves against destructiveness and help unmask what a queer post/colonial theory of identity is, and how it becomes relative to its colonized history. This colonized history, in fact, continues to burgeon in light of the ongoing colonial efforts and imperial efforts of the First World. The fact that we all are socialized to "check" one box over another, to choose one colonized identity over the multiple, is problematic. We fight against this totalizing reality.

Checking the "one" box perpetuates the monolith of identities, eclipsing the multiple by reducing it into the singular. The act of checking one stable identity, while experiencing the multiple and unstable identities of, perhaps, being color-less in a world of binary colors, might compel us to explore the multitude of identities that are always in/between and becoming. What is of interest here is the recognition of the plurality of identities in the face of the stable, singular, and unified identity that the colonial regime concretized *for* us. The singular was given to us by the power structures. What percolates beneath our stratified experiences is the compulsion to relocate ourselves relative to the multiple and plural—to find the river that helps us become. This is the river, the process, that is percolating, but unknown to us. What is becoming are the pluralities of our identities; we cannot stop the river from becoming, and we cannot stop the process of identity from taking shape. As such, a queer post/colonial theory of identity is one which recognizes the multiple, in the face of the unified whole, the stable singular. It is also one which does not accept the colonizing tendency (or reality) of what results when one is forced to check one box for one's very complicated and multiple identity.

And so, if a queer post/colonial theory of identity is the recognition of the plural in the face of the singular and the colonizing reality of the unity of the monolith, and if we agree that this is not a myth, but a totalizing reality for so many who continue to be sublimated by this reality—the hetero-patriarchal colonial effort(s)—then we might ask how does a queer post/colonial theory of identity *become*? Here, the term 'become' is a technical term, borrowed from Rosi Braidotti and Gilles Deleuze (among others). To continue the metaphor of the river, we should look to the Guadalupe river, which functions as the border of Texas and Mexico, or the State of Texas/nation of the US and Mexico, however you wish to visualize these borders of nations and states.

Throughout history, this border has *become*. It was once a meager river which gave promise to those on both sides of the border: relationships became fruitful and productive across the waters. Now, however, this river is the static feature of the state of Texas and the country of Mexico that often times eliminates real relating and becoming. Because of the ways in which the United States situated its power relative to otherness, this river no longer embodies or enflashes its creative potential to become multiple or create space and place for the plural to flow between

these two countries, nations, and states. What this river does is act as a barrier to the process of becoming. It, at one time, enfolded potential, and the borderlanders of this space and place created ways to live into the river's gifts of allowing others to become both/and, or plural people. Yet it continues to be the hegemonic power structures that perpetually displace these peoples, and the borderlanders are bereft of the ability to embrace the plural, the multiple, themselves.

We must recognize the power of becoming. This river has the power to be the very process that helps others become multiple and plural. It is the State, the hetero-patriarch, who prohibits the river to become. The State keeps the river as a static bureaucratic feature of foreign policy adhering to the call for the border to be a unity of the monolith, instead of allowing it to live into the river's creative potential of the plural. Displacing hetero-patriarchal colonial powers reframes the heart of the river as a river offering the plurality of its waters. In this act of displacing, the river is able to become and offer both sides of the border opportunities to become.

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