



Celia Herrera Rodríguez, *Omecibuatl*, 1979
Watercolor on fiberglass paper, 22" x 30"
Destroyed in fire in 1982

This Bridge Called My Back

**writings by
radical women of color**

Fourth Edition

**Edited by
Cherríe Moraga
and
Gloría Anzaldúa**

SUNY
PRESS

Cover art designed by Amane Kaneko

Published by State University of New York Press, Albany

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Printed in the United States of America

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For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

Production by Diane Ganeles
Marketing by Kate Seburyamo

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

This bridge called my back : writings by radical women of color / edited by
Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. — Fourth edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4384-5439-9 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-1-4384-5438-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Feminism—Literary collections. 2. Women—United States—Literary
collections. 3. American literature—Minority authors. 4. Minority women—
Literary collections. 5. American literature—Women authors. 6. Radicalism—
Literary collections. I. Moraga, Cherríe, editor. II. Anzaldúa, Gloria, editor.

PS509.F44T5 2015

810.8'09287—dc23

2014039109

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

para

*Elvira Moraga Lawrence y
Amalia García Anzaldúa
y para todas nuestras madres
por la obediencia y
la insurrección
que ellas nos enseñaron.*

for

*Elvira Moraga Lawrence and
Amalia García Anzaldúa
and for all our mothers
for the obedience and rebellion
they taught us.*

Catching Fire

Preface to the Fourth Edition

Cherríe Moraga

Egypt is burning
bonfires of celebration
ignited with the tinder
of that first
single
enflamed body
Tunisia.

!Sí! !Se puede!
The MeXicana¹ mantra rises to my lips.
We look across oceans
for hope.

When I first began to consider a preface to the 4th edition of *This Bridge Called My Back—Writings by Radical Women of Color*, these opening lines came to me. I wrote them at a moment in history when progressive revolution seemed possible. I remember that February nearly four years ago, watching the late night news, during the eighteen days of revolt in Tahrir Square, scanning the faces of protesters, searching for visual signs of *sisters* amid the fervent masses of men. I spy the hijab; swatches of dark fabric and multi-colored pastel blend among the hundreds of thousands. I press my ear to an Al Jazeera radio broadcast, “Hosni Mubarak steps

down!” And I hear a woman’s voice, “I have worked for this my whole life.” She is crying and I am crying because her victory is mine. To view the world today through a feminist of color lens shatters all barriers of state-imposed nationality. *The Egyptian revolution is my revolution!*

The first edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* was collectively penned nearly thirty-five years ago with a similar hope for revolutionary solidarity. For the first time in the United States, women of color, who had been historically denied a shared political voice, endeavored to create bridges of consciousness through the exploration, in print, of their diverse classes, cultures and sexualities. Thirty-five years ago was before Facebook, before Twitter, before cell phones, fax machines, before home computers and the internet. Thirty-five years ago, Egypt, Afghanistan, Nigeria seemed very far away. They are no longer so far.

Over those three and a half decades, the writers herein, have grown much older as the proximity of ‘foreign’ nations has grown much closer through technology and globalization, bringing millions of new immigrants to the United States, especially from Western and South Asia and the América just south of us. *Bridge’s* original political conception of “U.S. women of color” as primarily including Chinese, Japanese, and Filipina American, Chicana/Latina, Native and African American, has now evolved into a transnational and increasingly complex movement of women today, whose origins reside in Asia, throughout the global south and in Indigenous North America.

The prism of a U.S. Third World Feminist consciousness has shifted as we turned our gaze *away* from a feminism prescribed by white women of privilege (even in opposition to them) and turned *toward* the process of discerning the multilayered and intersecting sites of identity and struggle—distinct and shared—among women of color across the globe. In recent years, even our understanding of how gender and “womanhood” are defined has been challenged by young trans women and men of color. They’ve required us to look more deeply into some of our fiercest feminist convictions about queer desire and female identity. Thirty-five years later, *Bridge* contributor, Anita Valerio, is now Max Wolf Valerio. His very presence in this collection attests to the human truth of our evolving lives and the ‘two spirits’ of our consciousness.

Dated as it is, I am honored to re-introduce this collection of 1981 testimonies for the very reason that it is, in fact, *dated*; marked by the hour and place of these writers’ and artists’ births, our geographies of dislocation and homecoming, the ancestral memory that comes with us, and the politics of the period that shaped us.

El pueblo unido jamás será vencido. The people united will never be defeated.

I believed that once with a profound passion, remembering my youthful political optimism in the 1970s and into the eighties; the progressive political climate that gave birth to *Bridge*; that contagious solidarity among women and people of color movements in the United States and with our camaradas throughout Latin America and the rest of the Third World.² And then suddenly, and throughout the ensuing decades, we saw our dreams dashed over and over again:

- the United States’ three-decade history of invasion—Grenada, Panama, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq;
- the federal response to the AIDS pandemic and to the disproportionate loss of a whole generation of queer men of color, and of the women of color who died in the wake of that generation;
- the CIA’s role in dismantling the Sandinista People’s revolution in Nicaragua and the ouster of democratically-elected Aristide in Haiti;
- NAFTA’s binational betrayal of the Mexican worker and FEMA’s betrayal of Katrina-devastated Africa America;
- the endemic alienation of middle-class youth erupting in the tragedies of the Columbine shooting, the Virginia Tech Massacre; and Sandy Hook Elementary;
- the brown children left behind through the Bush Administration’s “No Child Left Behind;”
- the Supreme Court’s removal of the ban on political spending by corporations in 2010;
- the gutting of the Voting Rights Act in 2013;
- the rise in anti-abortion violence and the constant erosion of women’s right to choose;
- the Tea Party
- the USA Patriot Act;
- and the apartheid state of Arizona.

Assessing the conditions of our lives in the United States since the original publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*, it appears that today our identities are shaped less by an engaged democratic citizenship and

more by our role as consumers. The two major crises that the United States experienced within its shores in the previous decade—9/11 and the economic depression—were generated by the same corporate greed that legislates an oil-ravenous and dangerous foreign policy in the Middle East.

And . . . We. Keep. “Buying” it.

Nationally, grassroots feminists continue to be undermined by single-issue liberals who believe that by breaking a class-entitled glass ceiling—‘beating the boys at their own game’—there is some kind of “trickle down” effect on the actual lives of workingclass and poor women and children. This is the same “trickle down” of our share of corporate profit, secured by tax benefits for the wealthy, that has yet to land on our kitchen tables, our paychecks, or our children’s public school educations. Social change does not occur through tokenism or exceptions to the rule of discrimination, but through the systemic abolishment of the rule itself.

Is this the American Dream deferred?

What *does* happen to a “dream deferred?”

Does it explode, as Langston Hughes suggests?

Egypt exploded.

And, now what?



Entering the second decade of the 21st century, political currents begin to shift. We witness twitter-instigated town square rebellions and WikiLeaks assumes the role of an international free press. Progressive movements—those “rolling rebellions” of the Middle East and North Africa—roll across the ocean to break onto U.S. shores in a way that my 1981 twenty-something imagination could never have foreseen.³

In response to the federal government’s “bailout” betrayal of its citizens, the Occupy Movement and its slogan of “we are the 99%” spilled onto Wall Street and onto the Main Streets of this country, spreading the dirtiest five-letter word in “America”: C-L-A-S-S. The Emperor’s nakedness had been revealed: the United States is a class-based society, with an absolutely unconscionable unequal distribution of wealth and resources upheld by our government. For that revelation alone, in that it inspired a critical view of class inequity in this country, I am beholden to the Occupy movement, misnamed as it is.⁴ Although women of color and workingclass people were not represented there in large numbers, these activists, of some social privilege, publicly (and en masse) acknowledged that they were being bamboozled by their own government. *Just like us*. This is what the “Occupy” movement proffered, the possibility of a one day aligned oppositional movement.

What would it mean for progressive struggles like Occupy to truly integrate a feminist of color politic in everything from climate change to the dissolution of the World Bank? It is not always a matter of the actual bodies in the room, but of a life dedicated to a growing awareness of who and what is *missing* in that room; and responding to that absence. *What ideas never surface because we imagine we already have all the answers?* Patriarchy and white privilege can so seamlessly disguise ignorances that later become the Achilles heel of many progressive organizations, leading to their demise.

Currently, at a grassroots level, the Climate Change Movement is forced to take note, as Native women in Canada wage local and international protests against the tar sands industry. Truly radical environmentalists are beginning to recognize that—without the counsel and active engagement of people of color, whose homes “neighbor” the majority of dumping sites in the United States; without the leadership models of traditional and innovative Indigenous practices of sustainability; and, without the *organized* outcry of mothers, who personally suffer the illness of their children due to environmental contamination—no mass movement to literally “save our planet” can occur.⁵



I was twenty-seven years old when Gloria Anzaldúa and I entered upon the project of *This Bridge Called My Back*. I am now sixty-two. As I age, I watch the divide between generations widen with time and technology. I watch how desperately we need political memory, so that we are not always imagining ourselves the ever-inventors of our revolution; so that we are humbled by the valiant efforts of our foremothers; and so, with humility and a firm foothold in history, we can enter upon an informed and re-envisioned strategy for social/political change in decades ahead.

Bridge is an account of U.S. women of color coming to late 20th century social consciousness through conflict—familial and institutional—and arriving at a politic, a “theory in the flesh” (19), that makes sense of the seeming paradoxes of our lives; that complex confluence of identities—race, class, gender, sexuality—systemic to women of color oppression *and* liberation. At home, amongst ourselves, women of color ask the political question: *what about us?* Which really means: *what about all of us?* Combahee River Collective writes: If Black [Indigenous]⁶ women were free . . . everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (217).

We are “third world” consciousness within the first world. We are women under capitalist patriarchy. We can impact United States foreign and domestic policy as union members, as organized domestic and service

workers, as community farmers, as sex worker advocates and Native water rights activists, as student protesters and street protesters, as mountain-top mining resisters, as migrant workers and migrant rights workers, as public health care providers, as single-mothers *really* raising our kids and as academics *really* decolonizing young minds. We do all this in concert with women across the globe pursuing the same goals: a shared and thriving existence in a world where our leaders have for the most part abandoned us and on a planet on the brink of utter abandonment.

Is not the United States' delayed and "party-politics" response to the Ebola virus plagued with "exceptionalism" and xenophobia? *Africa is not us*, America lies. But, as women of color, how are we to look away from mirror of the Monrovia mother sitting stunned and broken by the small heap of crumbled cloth that is her now dead daughter?⁷ It is not so far away.

Global warming. Campus rape. "Dead Man Walking while Black" on the Ferguson Streets of the USA. Somehow all these concerns reside within the politic of women of color feminism; for it is a political practice that is shaped first from the specific economic conditions and the cultural context of our own landbase—from the innercity barrio to the reservation; from the middleamerica suburb to the Purépeha village transplanted to the state of Oregon; and, fundamentally, to a dangerously-threatened Earth.

Daily, Indigenous relatives from the south are left splayed and bleeding across the barbed wire of a border, "defended" by United States amory, wielded by border patrol and drug cartels. Anti-immigrant racism fuels Congress's policies of violent discrimination against Raza, funding the 'round-up' of undocumented immigrants and sequestering them into "family detention centers." Our own *Bridge* contributor, Mitsuye Yamada (now, 91), could attest to the terrible familiarity of the times, remembering how—nearly seventy-five years ago—she and her family were among the 120,000 Japanese *Americans*, forcibly removed from their homes and sent to internment camps during World War II. "Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster" (32); and visibility, the most effective strategy to quell the rising tide of discrimination.

In 2010, Arizona's anti-immigrant legislation⁸ sparked a swelling and ongoing resistance movement, distinguished by the visible participation and leadership of mujeres and undocumented queers. Gay and lesbian guatemaltecas, salvadoreños, mexicanas y más helped force the Immigrant Rights Movement into the national public eye through courageous acts of civil disobedience, risking jail and deportation. And they also made publicly evident, that "coming out of the closet"/"salir de las sombras" is not a single-issue. The Undocuqueer Movement reflects the "simultaneity

of oppression,"⁹ foundational to women of color feminism: that the queer daughters and sons of domestic workers, farmworkers, and day-laborers can fight for their familias' rights, without compromise to the *whole* of their own identities. The political is profoundly personal.



This Bridge Called My Back is less about each one of us and much more about the pending promise inscribed by all of us who believe that revolution—physical and metaphysical at once—is possible. Many women of my generation came to that belief based on the empowering historical conditions of our early years. The African Independence Movements of the early 1960s, the Cuban Revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, the American Indian, Black Power and Chicano Movements, the anti-(Vietnam) war movement, Women's and Gay Liberation—all laid political ground and theoretical framework for a late 1970s feminism of color; as did so much of the concurrent radical literature of the period (*The Wretched of the Earth*, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, *The Red Stockings Manifesto*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, *The Dialectic of Sex*, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán . . .*).

Ten years before the publication of *Bridge*, the Third World Women's Alliance had already begun publishing its *Triple Jeopardy* newspaper, linking "Racism, Imperialism and Sexism" to domestic worker and welfare rights, the political prisoner movement, the sterilization of Black and Puerto Rican women, reproductive rights, and the liberation of Palestine. In 1981, we were the inheritors of that vision. And it is my hope that the young readers of this fourth edition of *Bridge* will be the inheritors of ours, informed by a twenty-first century perspective of mind *and* heart.

What brought me to feminism almost forty years ago was 'heart.' Feminism allowed 'heart' to matter. It acknowledged that the oppression we experienced as human beings was not always materially manifested, and that we also suffered spiritually and sexually. Women of color have traditionally served as the gateways—the knowledge-holders—to those profoundly silent areas of expression and oppression: domestic abuse aggravated by poverty, patriarchal strictures that distort the 'spirit' of religious practice; false familial hierarchies that deform our children's potential; erotic desire deadened by duty.

Such suffering is experienced by both males and females (not proportionately, but mutually). Women of color feminists see our movement as necessary for the liberation of men of color as well: liberation from war, from greed, from the theft of our neighborhoods, and from men's

destructive alienation from women and nature. This is no “stand by your man” liberal feminism, but one that requires intra-cultural conversation and confrontation in order to build an unyielding platform of equity amongst us. Without the yoke of sexism and queer-phobias, we might finally be able to build a united front against the myriad forms of racism we experience.



In the twenty years that *Bridge* stayed in, and went out of, publication over 100,000 copies were sold. It has also been read by thousands more. Early edition copies, dog-eared and coffee-stained, have been passed from hand to hand, borrowed then borrowed again, and “liberated” from library shelves. Often referred to by its believers as the “bible” of women of color feminism, it has been pirated on line for two hundred dollars a copy, reprinted in university course readers (with and without permission), pdf’d and copied, pressing its yellowing pages against the xerox machine glass to capture in print that Kate Rushin “Bridge” poem, that “essay about growing up on the rez,” (Barbara Cameron) or “that Asian American woman’s letter to her mom.” (Merle Woo). So, in many ways, *Bridge* has already fulfilled its original mission: to find its way into “every major city and hole in the wall in this country.”¹⁰

From a teaching perspective, *Bridge* documents the living experience of what academics now refer to as “intersectionality,” where multiple identities converge at the crossroads of a woman of color life. The woman of color life *is* the crossroad, where no aspect of our identity is wholly dismissed from our consciousness, even as we navigate a daily shifting political landscape. In many ways *Bridge* catalyzed the reconstitution of Women & Gender and Ethnic Studies programs throughout the country. After *Bridge*, ‘the race of gender and the gender of race’ could no longer be overlooked in any academic area or political organization that claimed to be about Women or Ethnicity. Still, the “holes in walls” of our thinking remain wide and many and there is an abundant amount of “bridging” left to be done.



As I write this, wars rage against women of color nationally and internationally: the epidemic of mass rapes of women in Congo; the brutal slaughter of thousands of women and girls (mostly unreported) in that transnational desert of despair, Juárez, Mexico; the abduction of hundreds of Nigeria school girls into a life of sexual enslavement, as ISIL barter

Yazidi females into forced marriages and religious conversions. Closer to home, the news of rising incidents of sexual assault on college campuses and inside the neocolony of United States reservation system begins to break through a wall of fierce censorship. Native women speak out. It is not always safe to do so.

Even among the community of *Bridge*, the premature (and in some cases, violent) deaths of so many of the book’s contributors testify to the undisputable fact of the daily threat to women of color lives. It also speaks to the profound costs of just being us: visible women of color artists and activists suffering disabling illnesses; single mothers and grandmothers, queer women, raising our children’s children, while relegated to the margins of our own communities. “Stress” is too benign a term.



With the publication of this fourth edition, we call out the names of the dead. Co-editor, Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004), is the first to cross our lips, as it was she who held the first kernel of thought for this book in 1979. As the years pass, we will follow Gloria, as Rosario Morales (2011) followed her, and as Gloria followed Barbara Cameron (2002), Toni Cade Bambara (1995), Audre Lorde (1992), and Pat Parker (1989).

The artwork in this collection tells a parallel story. *Bridge*’s opening image “Omecihuatl,” by Celia Herrera Rodríguez, depicts the goddess-virgin’s face as that of Chicana union activist and lesbian, Victoria Mercado, murdered in 1982 in a politically-motivated assault. *Bridge* concludes with a similar refrain in the 1974 image from “Body Tracks,” by Cuban-born New York conceptual artist, Ana Mendieta, who ‘fell’ from a window to her death in 1985.¹¹

In the face of world-wide misogynist atrocities and intimate violences, we cannot escape recurring self-doubts about the actual power of our acts of resistance against global patriarchy. I admit I have long days of doubt. Perhaps it’s my age, the knowledge of the lengthening list of sisters/compañeras who’ve passed, and the sense of my own diminishing years. As so many others have said before me, *I don’t imagine I will live to see the revolution*. I smile at the arrogance of this; that we imagine that our work begins and ends with us.



Still, here, in the underbelly of the “first” world, women of color writing is one liberation tool at our disposal. History is always in the making; while women of color and Indigenous peoples remain wordless

in the official record. The very *act* of writing then, conjuring/coming to 'see', what has yet to be recorded in history is to bring into consciousness what only the body knows to be true. The body—that site which houses the intuitive, the unspoken, the viscera of our being.—this is the revolutionary promise of “theory in the flesh;” for it is both the *expression* of evolving political consciousness and the *creator* of consciousness, itself. Seldom recorded and hardly honored, our theory *incarnate* provides the most reliable roadmap to liberation.

So, let then this thirty-five-year-old document, *This Bridge Called My Back*, this living testimony of women of color epiphanies of political awakening, become part of the *unofficial* and truer record; an archive of accounts of those first ruptures of *consciencia* where we turned and looked at one another across culture, color and class difference to share an origin story of displacement in a nation never fully home to us.

Ultimately, as all people of progressive politic do, we wrote this book for you—the next generation, *and the next one*. Your lives are so vast before you—you whom the popular culture has impassively termed “Millennials.” But I think the women of *Bridge* would’ve simply called you, “familia”—our progeny, entrusting you with the legacy of our thoughts and activisms, in order to better grow them into a flourishing planet and a just world.

“Refugees of a world on Fire.” This is how I understood U.S. woman of color citizenship in the early 1980s. Perhaps the naming is now more apt than ever. Ours is a freedom movement that has yet to be fully realized, but it was promised among those women in the streets of an enflamed and now smoldering Cairo. It is also promised in the spirit of those young people who may first pick up this collection of poems, protests, and prayers and suddenly, without warning, feel their own consciousness catch fire.”

*In honor of the legacy of Mahsa Shekarloo.*¹²

5 noviembre 2014

Notes

1. “MeXicana” is feminine here in honor of Dolores Huerta, cofounder of the United Farm Workers. She first coined the phrase, “¡Sí! ¡Se puede!” (“Yes, we can!”) as a call to activism during El Movimiento of the 1960s.

2. As women (people) of color in the United States, we also used “Third World” to align ourselves with countries bearing colonial histories and still suffering their effects, much of today’s global south. We saw ourselves as “internally” colonized in the United States.
3. I also could not have imagined how the vision of those popular rebellions would become so sabotaged by the escalation of violent conflict now being visited upon the peoples of the region; the USA having had no small hand in its creation.
4. From a Third World perspective “occupy” is what the colonizer does; that is, he settles on land that does not belong to him. For that reason, we state that Xicanos and other Indigenous peoples live in “Occupied América” (Rodolfo Acuña).
5. The ongoing campaign led by the Mexican Mothers of Kettleman City against the toxic waste dump in their San Joaquin Valley town is a notable example. Also, for more information/reflection on Native-based environmental sustainability, see the writings of Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabekwe (Ojibwe)); visit: www.honorearth.org
6. Black women are Indigenous women, once forcibly removed from their ancestral homeland. If not in the specifics, the major ideological tenets of the 1977 Combahee River Collective statement can serve today as a treatise for Indigenous women’s rights movements globally.
7. Hawa Konneh was her name. The image appeared in *Time Magazine*, Vol. 184, No. 14. 2014.
8. S.B. 1070. One of the harshest and extensive anti-immigrant bills in the recent history, violated the constitutional and human rights of undocumented immigrants, while “racially profiling” any one who looked like them.
9. Combahee River Collective.
10. From the 1981 introduction to *Bridge*, reprinted in this volume.
11. There had been strong evidence in and out of court to convict Mendieta’s husband, a world-renown artist, of her murder, but he was exonerated. Of Mendieta’s “Body Tracks” Celia Herrera Rodríguez writes: “the bloodied hand and arm tracks descending to the ground [is] a reminder that this path is dangerous and many have fallen.” (*Bridge*, 3rd edition, 281).
12. My beloved friend, Mahsa Shekarloo, was an Iranian-American transnational feminist and a Tehran-based activist for the rights of women and children. She was also an editor, and the founder of the online feminist journal, *Bad Jens*. In Fall 2012, upon the news of her cancer, Mahsa returned from Tehran to her family’s home in Oakland. After a two-year struggle, she left this life on September 5, 2014. She was forty-four years old, and the mother of a six-year-old son. An emergent and eloquent writer, Mahsa, and what would have been her future works, will be deeply missed.

Editor's Note

In this fourth edition, we regrettably were not able to secure permission to republish Hattie Gossett's two essays, which had appeared in earlier editions: "Billie lives! Billie lives" and "Who told you anybody wants to hear from you? You ain't nothing but a Black woman." Gratefully, however, we were able to include additional poems by Kate Rushin, which pay tribute to women of color and their work—those "back-ups . . . my mama and your mama" (82) who have made our writings and art possible.



Agradecimientos. Thank you to our literary representative, Stuart Bernstein, who was critical to the successful recompilation of this material and its authors. His good faith and calm heart were foundational. Gracias to the all the production and marketing folks at SUNY Press, especially the ever-present patience of Diane Ganeles and her team, and the support of Beth Bouloukos and Kate Seburyamo. We also thank Larin McLaughlin, who made the initial efforts of acquiring *Bridge* for SUNY Press. A special thanks goes to AnaLouise Keating (of the Gloria E. Anzaldúa Literary Trust) for her copyediting help and her dedication to Gloria's vision. Finally, deep thanks a mi compañera por vida, Celia Herrera Rodríguez, as daily and righteous witness to this labor of love.

Acts of Healing

Gloria Anzaldúa

A lot of women are talking about all this radical stuff, but when it comes to be it will scare the shit out of them.

—Gloria Anzaldúa

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa believed that This Bridge should be published by a large, mainstream press in order to give it visibility, sustainability, and a wide audience. The Anzaldúa Trust is confident that Anzaldúa would be pleased with the additional possibilities this publication promises. As the following previously unpublished material, drawn from a 1983 Bridge preface draft titled "And not acts of killing but of healing" indicates, Anzaldúa viewed This Bridge as part of an ongoing, planetary transformational project.

—The Gloria E. Anzaldúa Literary Trust

Before turning our eyes "forward" let's cast a look at the roads that led us here. The paths we've traveled on have been rocky and thorny, and no doubt they will continue to be so. But instead of the rocks and the thorns, we want to concentrate on the rain and the sunlight and the spider webs glistening on both. Some of you, like us, are up to here with the chorus of laments whose chief chant is "I'm more poor, more oppressed than you," who give suffering and pain more merit than laughter and health. And yes, we intimately know the origins of oppression; it brewed in our beds, tables, and streets; screaming out in anger is a necessary stage in our evolution into freedom, but do we have to dwell forever on that piece of terrain, forever stuck in the middle of that

**THIS
BRIDGE
CALLED MY
BACK**

**WRITINGS BY
RADICAL
WOMEN OF
COLOR**

EDITORS:

**CHERRIE MORAGA
GLORIA ANZALDÚA**

FOREWORD:

TONI CADE BAMBARA



KITCHEN TABLE: Women of Color Press

New York

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All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without permission in writing from the publisher. Published in the United States by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, Post Office Box 908, Latham, New York 12110-0908. Originally published by Peresphone Press, Inc. Watertown, Massachusetts, 1981.

Also by Cherríe Moraga

Cuentos: Stories by Latinas, ed. with Alma Gómez and Mariana Romo-Carmona. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983.

Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios. South End Press, 1983.

Cover and text illustrations by Johnetta Tinker.

Cover design by Maria von Brincken.

Text design by Pat McGloin.

Typeset in Garth Graphic by Serif & Sans, Inc., Boston, Mass.

Second Edition Typeset by Susan L. Yung

Second Edition, Sixth Printing.

ISBN 0-913175-03-X, paper.

ISBN 0-913175-18-8, cloth.

This bridge called my back : writings by radical women of color / editors, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa ; foreword, Toni Cade Bambara. — 1st ed. — Watertown, Mass. : Peresphone Press, c1981. [*]

xxvi, 261 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.

Bibliography: p. 251-261.

ISBN 0-930436-10-5 (pbk.) : \$9.95

1. Feminism—Literary collections. 2. Radicalism—Literary collections. 3. Minority women—United States—Literary collections. 4. American literature—Women authors. 5. American literature—Minority authors. 6. American literature—20th century. I. Moraga, Cherríe II. Anzaldúa, Gloria.

PS509.F44T5

81-168894

810 '8 '09287—dc19

AACR 2 MARC

Library of Congress

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[*]—2nd ed. — Latham, NY: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, c1983.

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para

Elvira Moraga Lawrence y
Amalia García Anzaldúa
y para todas nuestras madres
por la obediencia y
la insurrección
que ellas nos enseñaron.

for

Elvira Moraga Lawrence and
Amalia García Anzaldúa
and for all our mothers
for the obedience and rebellion
they taught us.

REFUGEES OF A WORLD ON FIRE

Foreword to the Second Edition

Three years later, I try to imagine the newcomer to *Bridge*. What do you need to know? I have heard from people that the book has helped change some minds (and hopefully hearts as well), but it has changed no one more than the women who contributed to its existence. It has changed my life so fundamentally that today I feel almost the worst person to introduce you to *Bridge*, to see it through fresh eyes. Rather your introduction or even reintroduction should come from the voices of the women of color who first discovered the book:

The woman writers seemed to be speaking to me, and they actually understood what I was going through. Many of you put into words feelings I have had that I had no way of expressing...The writings justified some of my thoughts telling me I had a right to feel as I did. It is remarkable to me that one book could have such an impact. So many feelings were brought alive inside me.*

For the new reader, as well as for the people who may be looking at *Bridge* for the second or third time, I feel the need to speak to what I think of the book some three years later. Today I leaf through the pages of *Bridge* and imagine all the things so many of us would say differently or better—watching my own life and the lives of these writers/activists grow in commitment to whatever it is we term "our work." We *are* getting older, as is our movement.

I think that were *Bridge* to have been conceived of in 1983, as opposed to 1979, it would speak much more directly now to the relations between women and men of color, both gay and heterosexual. In 1979, response to a number of earlier writings by women of color which in the name of feminism focused almost exclusively on relations between the sexes, *Bridge* intended to make a clean break from that phenomenon.* Instead, we created a book which concentrated on relationships *between women*.

*Alma Ayala, a nineteen-year-old Puerto Rican, from a letter to Gloria Anzaldúa.

When Persephone Press, Inc., a white women's press of Watertown, Massachusetts and the original publishers of *Bridge*, ceased operation in the Spring of 1983, this book had already gone out of print. After many months of negotiations, the co-editors were finally able to retrieve control of their book, whereupon Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press of New York agreed to republish it.

The following, then, is the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, conceived of and produced entirely by women of color.

Once this right has been established, however, once a movement has provided some basic consciousness so that heterosexism and sexism are not considered the normal course of events, we are in a much stronger position to analyze our relations with the men of our families and communities from a position of power rather than compromise. A *Bridge* of 1983 could do this. (I am particularly encouraged by the organizing potential between Third World lesbians and gay men in our communities of color.)

The second major difference a 1983 version of *Bridge* would provide is that it would be much more international in perspective. Although the heart of *Bridge* remains the same, the impetus to forge links with women of color from every region grows more and more urgent as the number of recently-immigrated people of color in the U.S. grows in enormous proportions, as we begin to see ourselves all as refugees of a world on fire:

The U.S. is training troops in Honduras to overthrow the Nicaraguan people's government.

Human rights violations are occurring on a massive scale in Guatemala and El Salvador (and as in this country those most hard-hit are often the indigenous peoples of those lands).

Pinochet escalates political repression in Chile.

The U.S. invades Grenada.

Apartheid continues to bleed South Africa.

Thousands of unarmed people are slaughtered in Beirut by Christian militiamen and Israeli soldiers.

Aquino is assassinated by the Philippine government.

And in the U.S.? The Reagan administration daily drains us of nearly every political gain made by the feminist, Third World, and anti-war work of the late 60's and early 70's.

The question and challenge for Third World feminism remains: what are the particular conditions of oppression suffered by women of color in each of these situations? How has the special circumstances of her pain been overlooked by Third World movements, solidarity groups, "international feminists?" How have the children suffered? How do we organize ourselves to survive this war? To keep our families, our bodies, our spirits intact?

**Conditions: Five. The Black Women's Issue* ed. by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith in 1979 was a major exception.

Sometimes in the face of my own/our own limitations, in the face of such world-wide suffering, I doubt even the significance of books. Surely this is the same predicament so many people who have tried to use words as weapons have found themselves in—¿*Cara a cara con el enemigo de qué valen mis palabras?** This is especially true for Third World women writers, who know full well our writings seldom *directly* reach the people we grew up with. Sometimes knowing this makes you feel like you're dumping your words into a very deep and very dark hole. But we continue to write. To the people of color we do reach and the people they touch. We even write to those classes of people for whom books have been as common to their lives as bread. For finally, we write to anyone who will listen with their ears open (even if only a crack) to the currents of change around them.

The political writer, then, is the ultimate optimist, believing people are capable of change and using words as one way to try and penetrate the privatism of our lives. A privatism which keeps us back and away from each other, which renders us politically useless.

At the time of this writing, however, I am feeling more discouraged than optimistic. The dream of a unified Third World feminist movement in this country as we conceived of it when we first embarked on the project of this book, seemed more possible somehow, because as of yet, less tried. It was still waiting in the ranks begging to take form and hold. In the last three years I have learned that Third World feminism does not provide the kind of easy political framework that women of color are running to in droves. We are not so much a "natural" affinity group, as women who have come together out of political necessity. The *idea* of Third World feminism has proved to be much easier between the covers of a book than between real live women. There *are* many issues that divide us; and, recognizing that fact can make that dream at times seem quite remote. Still, the need for a broad-based U.S. women of color movement capable of spanning borders of nation and ethnicity has never been so strong.

If we are interested in building a movement that will not constantly be subverted by internal differences, then we must build from the insideout, not the other way around. Coming to terms with the suffering of others has never meant looking away from our own.

And, we must look deeply. We must acknowledge that to change the world, we have to change ourselves—even sometimes our most cherished block-hard convictions. As *This Bridge Called My Back* is not written in stone, neither is our political vision. It is subject to change.

*Face to face with enemy. what good are my words?

I must confess I hate the thought of this. Change don't come easy. For anyone. But this state of war we live in, this world on fire provides us with no other choice.

If the image of the bridge can bind us together, I think it does so most powerfully in the words of Donna Kate Rushin, when she insists:

"stretch...or die."

Cherrie Moraga
October 1983

Foreword to the Second Edition

¿Qué hacer de aquí y cómo?
(What to do from here and how?)

Perhaps like me you are tired of suffering and talking about suffering, estás hasta el pescuezo de sufrimiento, de contar las lluvias de sangre pero no has lluvias de flores (*up to your neck with suffering, of counting the rains of blood but not the rains of flowers*). Like me you may be tired of making a tragedy of our lives. A abandonar ese autocanibalismo: coraje, tristeza, miedo (*let's abandon this autocannibalism: rage, sadness, fear*). Basta de gritar contra el viento—toda palabra es ruido si no está acompañada de acción (*enough of shouting against the wind—all words are noise if not accompanied with action*). Dejemos de hablar hasta que hagamos la palabra luminosa y activa (*let's work not talk, let's say nothing until we've made the world luminous and active*). Basta de pasividad y de pasatiempo mientras esperamos al novio, a la novia, a la Diosa, o a la Revolución (*enough of passivity and passing time while waiting for the boy friend, the girl friend, the Goddess, or the Revolution*). No nos podemos quedar paradas con los brazos cruzados en medio del puente (*we can't afford to stop in the middle of the bridge with arms crossed*).

And yet to act is not enough. Many of us are learning to sit perfectly still, to sense the presence of the Soul and commune with Her. We are beginning to realize that we are not wholly at the mercy of circumstance, nor are our lives completely out of our hands. That if we posture as victims we *will* be victims, that hopelessness is suicide, that self-attacks stop us on our tracks. We are slowly moving past the resistance within, leaving behind the defeated images. We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we—white black straight queer female male—are connected and interdependent. We are each accountable for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea. And those of us who have more of anything: brains, physical strength, political power, spiritual energies, are learning to share them with those that don't have. We are learning to depend more and more on our own sources for survival, learning not to let the weight of this burden, the bridge, break our backs. Haven't we always borne jugs of water, children, poverty? Why not learn to bear baskets of hope, love, self-

nourishment and to step lightly?

With *This Bridge*... hemos comenzado a salir de las sombras; hemos comenzado a reventar rutina y costumbres opresivas y a aventar los tabues; hemos comenzado a acarrear con orgullo la tarea de deshelar corazones y cambiar conciencias (*we have begun to come out of the shadows; we have begun to break with routines and oppressive customs and to discard taboos; we have commensed to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness*). Mujeres, a no dejar que el peligro del viaje y la inmensidad del territorio nos asuste—a mirar hacia adelante y a abrir paso en el monte (*Women, let's not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us—let's look forward and open paths in these woods*). Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar (*Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks*).

Contigo,

Gloria Anzaldúa

Foreword

How I cherish this collection of cables, esoesses, conjurations and fusile missles. Its motive force. Its gathering-us-in-ness. Its midwifery of mutually wise understandings. Its promise of autonomy and community. And its pledge of an abundant life for us all. On time. That is to say – overdue, given the times. (“Arrogance rising, moon in oppression, sun in destruction” – *Cameron*.)

Blackfoot amiga Nisei hermana Down Home Up Souf Sistuh
sister El Barrio suburbia Korean The Bronx Lakota Menominee
Cubana Chinese Puertorriqueña reservation Chicana campaña
and letters testimonials poems interviews essays journal
entries sharing Sisters of the yam Sisters of the rice Sisters
of the corn Sisters of the plantain putting in telecalls to each other.
And we're all on the line.

Now that we've begun to break the silence and begun to break through the diabolically erected barriers and can hear each other and see each other, we can sit down with trust and break bread together. Rise up and break our chains as well. For though the initial motive of several siter/riters here may have been to protest, complain or explain to white feminist would-be allies that there are other ties and visions that bind, prior allegiances and priorities that supercede their invitations to coalesce on their terms (“Assimilation within a solely western-european herstory is not acceptable” – *Lorde*), the process of examining that would-be alliance awakens us to new tasks (“We have a lot more to concentrate on beside the pathology of white wimmin” – *davenport*)

and a new connection:	US
a new set of recognitions:	US
a new site of accountability:	US
a new source of power:	US

And the possibilities intuited here or alluded to there or called forth in various pieces in flat out talking in tongues – the possibility of several million women refuting the numbers game inherent in “minority,” the possibility of denouncing the insulated/orchestrated conflict game of divide and conquer – through the fashioning of potent networks of all the daughters of the ancient mother cultures is awesome, mighty, a glorious life work. This Bridge lays down the planks to cross over on to a new place where stooped labor cramped quartered down pressed

and caged up combatants can straighten the spine and expand the lungs and make the vision manifest (“The dream is real, my friends. The failure to realize it is the only unreality.” – Street Preacher in *The Salt Eaters*).

This Bridge documents particular rites of passage. Coming of age and coming to terms with community – race, group, class, gender, self – its expectations, supports, and lessons. And coming to grips with its perversions – racism, prejudice, elitism, misogyny, homophobia, and murder. And coming to terms with the incorporation of disease, struggling to overthrow the internal colonial/pro-racist loyalties – color/hue/hair caste within the household, power perversities engaged in under the guise of “personal relationships,” accommodation to and collaboration with self-ambush and amnesia and murder. And coming to grips with those false awakenings too that give use ease as we substitute a militant mouth for a radical politic, delaying our true coming of age as committed, competent, principled combatants.

There is more than a hint in these pages that too many of us still equate tone with substance, a hot eye with clear vision, and congratulate ourselves for our political maturity. For of course it takes more than pique to unite our wrath (“the capacity of heat to change the shape of things” – *Moraga*) and to wrest power from those who have it and abuse it, to reclaim our ancient powers lying dormant with neglect (“i wanna ask billie to teach us how to use our voices like she used hers on that old 78 record” – *gossett*), and create new powers in arenas where they never before existed. And of course it takes more than the self-disclosure and the bold glimpse of each others' life documents to make the grand resolve to fearlessly work toward potent meshings. Takes more than a rinsed lens to face unblinkingly the particular twists of the divide and conquer tactics of this moment: the practice of withdrawing small business loans from the Puerto Rican grocer in favor of the South Korean wig shop, of stripping from Black students the Martin Luther King scholarship fund fought for and delivering those funds up to South Vietnamese or white Cubans or any other group the government has made a commitment to in its greedy grab for empire. We have got to know each other better and teach each other our ways, our views, if we're to remove the scales (“seeing radical differences where they don't exist and not seeing them when they are critical” – *Quintanales*) and get the work done.

This Bridge can get us there. Can coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other's ways of seeing and being. Of hearing each other as we heard each other in Pat Lee's *Freshtones*, as we heard each other in Pat Jones and Faye Chiang, et. al.'s *Ordinary*

Women, as we heard each other in Fran Beale's *Third World Women's Alliance* newspaper. As we heard each other over the years in snatched time moments in hallways and conference corridors, caucusing between sets. As we heard each other in those split second interfacing of yours and mine and hers student union meetings. As we heard each other in that rainbow attempt under the auspices of IFCO years ago. And way before that when Chinese, Mexican, and African women in this country saluted each other's attempts to form protective leagues. And before that when New Orleans African women and Yamasse and Yamacrow women went into the swamps to meet with Filipino wives of "draftees" and "defectors" during the so called French and Indian War. And when members of the maroon communities and women of the long lodge held council together while the Seminole Wars raged. And way before that, before the breaking of the land mass when we mothers of the yam, of the rice, of the maize, of the plantain sat together in a circle, staring into the camp fire, the answers in our laps, knowing how to focus. . .

Quite frankly, This Bridge needs no Foreword. It is the Afterward that'll count. The coalitions of women determined to be a danger to our enemies, as June Jordan would put it. The will to be dangerous ("ask billie so we can learn how to have those bigtime bigdaddies jumping outta windows and otherwise offing theyselves in droves" - *gosssett*). And the contracts we creative combatants will make to mutually care and cure each other into wholesomeness. And the blueprints we will draw up of the new order we will make manifest. And the personal unction we will discover in the mirror, in the dreams, or on the path across This Bridge. The work: To make revolution irresistible.

Blessings,

Toni Cade Bambara

Novelist Bambara and interviewer Kalamu Ya Salaam were discussing a call she made in *The Salt Eaters* through The Seven Sisters, a multi-cultural, multi-media arts troupe, a call to unite our wrath, our vision, our powers.

Kalamu: Do you think that fiction is the most effective way to do this?

Toni: No. The most effective way to do it, is *to do it!**

*"In Search of the Mother Tongue: An Interview with Toni Cade Bambara" (*First World Journal*, Fall, 1980).

Contents

Foreword	vi
<i>Toni Cade Bambara</i>	
Preface	xiii
<i>Cherrie Moraga</i>	
The Bridge Poem	xxi
<i>Donna Kate Rushin</i>	
Introduction	xxiii
<i>Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa</i>	
Children Passing in the Streets	
The Roots of Our Radicalism	
When I Was Growing Up	7
<i>Nellie Wong</i>	
on not bein	9
<i>mary hope lee</i>	
For the Color of My Mother	12
<i>Cherrie Moraga</i>	
I Am What I Am	14
<i>Rosario Morales</i>	
Dreams of Violence	16
<i>Naomi Littlebear</i>	
He Saw	18
<i>Chrystos</i>	
Entering the Lives of Others	
Theory in the Flesh	
Wonder Woman	25
<i>Genny Lim</i>	
La Güera	27
<i>Cherrie Moraga</i>	
Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster:	
Reflections of an Asian American Woman	35
<i>Mitsuye Yamada</i>	
It's In My Blood, My Face -	
My Mother's Voice, The Way I Sweat	41
<i>Anita Valerio</i>	

"Gee, You Don't Seem Like An Indian From the Reservation" <i>Barbara Cameron</i>	46
"... And Even Fidel Can't Change That!" <i>Aurora Levins Morales</i>	53
I Walk in the History of My People <i>Chrystos</i>	57

**And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You
Racism in the Women's Movement**

And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You <i>Jo Carrillo</i>	63
Beyond the Cliffs of Abiquiu <i>Jo Carrillo</i>	65
I Don't Understand Those Who Have Turned Away From Me <i>Chrystos</i>	68
Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism <i>Mitsuye Yamada</i>	71
Millicent Fredericks <i>Gabrielle Daniels</i>	76
"- But I Know You, American Woman" <i>Judit Moschkovich</i>	79
The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin <i>doris davenport</i>	85
We're All in the Same Boat <i>Rosario Morales</i>	91
An Open Letter to Mary Daly <i>Audre Lorde</i>	94
The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House <i>Audre Lorde</i>	98

Between the Lines

On Culture, Class, and Homophobia

The Other Heritage <i>Rosario Morales</i>	107
billie lives! billie lives! <i>hattie gossett</i>	109
Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue <i>Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith</i>	113

Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance <i>Cheryl Clarke</i>	128
Lowriding Through the Women's Movement <i>Barbara Noda</i>	138
Letter to Ma <i>Merle Woo</i>	140
I Come With No Illusions <i>Mirtha Quintanales</i>	148
I Paid Very Hard for My Immigrant Ignorance <i>Mirtha Quintanales</i>	150
Earth-Lover, Survivor, Musician <i>Naomi Littlebear</i>	157

Speaking in Tongues

The Third World Woman Writer

Speaking in Tongues: A Letter To Third World Women Writers <i>Gloria Anzaldúa</i>	165
who told you anybody wants to hear from you? you ain't nothing but a black woman! <i>hattie gossett</i>	175
In Search of the Self as Hero: Confetti of Voices on New Year's Night <i>Nellie Wong</i>	177
Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object <i>Norma Alarcón</i>	182
Ceremony for Completing a Poetry Reading <i>Chrystos</i>	191

El Mundo Zurdo

The Vision

Give Me Back <i>Chrystos</i>	197
La Prieta <i>Gloria Anzaldúa</i>	198
A Black Feminist Statement <i>Combahee River Collective</i>	210
The Welder <i>Cherrie Moraga</i>	219

O.K. Momma, Who the Hell Am I?: An Interview with Luisah Teish <i>Gloria Anzaldúa</i>	221
Brownness <i>Andrea Canaan</i>	232
Revolution: It's Not Neat or Pretty or Quick <i>Pat Parker</i>	238
No Rock Scorns Me as Whore <i>Chrystos</i>	243
Biographies of the Contributors	246
Third World Women in the United States – By and About Us: A Selected Bibliography <i>Cherrie Moraga</i>	251

Preface

Change does not occur in a vacuum. In this preface I have tried to re-create for you my own journey of struggle, growing consciousness, and subsequent politicization and vision as a woman of color. I want to reflect in actual terms how this anthology and the women in it and around it have personally transformed my life, sometimes rather painfully but always with richness and meaning.

I Transfer and Go Underground

(Boston, Massachusetts – July 20, 1980)

It is probably crucial to describe here the way this book is coming together, the journey it is taking me on. The book still not completed and I have traveled East to find it a publisher. Such an anthology is in high demands these days. A book by radical women of color. The Left needs it, with its shaky and shabby record of commitment to women, period. Oh, yes, it can claim its attention to "color" issues, embodied in the male. Sexism is acceptable to the white left publishing house, particularly if spouted through the mouth of a Black man.

The feminist movement needs the book, too. But for different reasons. Do I dare speak of the boredom setting in among the white sector of the feminist movement? What was once a cutting edge, growing dull in the too easy solution to our problems of hunger of soul and stomach. The lesbian separatist utopia? No thank you, sisters. I can't prepare myself a revolutionary packet that makes no sense when I leave the white suburbs of Watertown, Massachusetts and take the T-line to Black Roxbury.

Take Boston alone, I think to myself and the feminism my so-called sisters have constructed does nothing to help me make the trip from one end of town to another. Leaving Watertown, I board a bus and ride it quietly in my light flesh to Harvard Square, protected by the gold highlights my hair dares to take on, like an insult, in this miserable heat.

I transfer and go underground.

Julie told me the other day how they stopped her for walking through the suburbs. Can't tell if she's a man or a woman, only know that it's Black moving through that part of town. They wouldn't spot her here, moving underground.

The train is abruptly stopped. A white man in jeans and tee shirt breaks into the car I'm in, throws a Black kid up against the door, handcuffs him and carries him away. The train moves on. The day before, a 14-year-old Black boy was shot in the head by a white cop. And, the summer is getting hotter.

I hear there are some women in this town plotting a *lesbian* revolution. What does this mean about the boy shot in the head is what I want to know. I am a lesbian. I want a movement that helps me make some sense of the trip from Watertown to Roxbury, from white to Black. I love women the entire way, beyond a doubt.

Arriving in Roxbury, arriving at Barbara's* . . . By the end of the evening of our first visit together, Barbara comes into the front room where she has made a bed for me. She kisses me. Then grabbing my shoulders she says, very solid-like, "we're sisters." I nod, put myself into bed, and roll around with this word, *sisters*, for two hours before sleep takes on. I earned this with Barbara. It is not a given between us – Chicana and Black – to come to see each other as sisters. This is not a given. I keep wanting to repeat over and over and over again, the pain and shock of difference, the joy of commonness, the exhilaration of meeting through incredible odds against it.

But the passage is *through*, not over, not by, not around, but through. This book, as long as I see it for myself as a passage through, I hope will function for others, colored** or white, in the same way. How do we develop a movement that can live with the fact of the loves and lives of these women in this book?

I would grow despairing if I believed, as Rosario Morales refutes, we were unilaterally defined by color and class. Lesbianism is then a hoax, a fraud. I have no business with it. Lesbianism is supposed to be about connection.

What drew me to politics was my love of women, the agony I felt in observing the straight-jackets of poverty and repression I saw people in my own family in. But the deepest political tragedy I have experienced is how with such grace, such blind faith, this commitment to women in the feminist movement grew to be exclusive and reactionary. *I call my white sisters on this.*

I have had enough of this. And, I am involved in this book because more than anything else I need to feel enlivened again in a movement

* I want to acknowledge and thank Barbara Smith for her support as a sister, her insights as a political activist and visionary, and especially for her way with words in helping me pull this together.

**Throughout the text, the word "colored" will be used by the editors in referring to all Third World peoples and people of color unless otherwise specified.

that can, as my friend Amber Hollibaugh states, finally ask the right questions and admit to not having all the answers.

A Bridge Gets Walked Over

(Boston, Massachusetts – July 25, 1980)

I am ready to go home now. I am ready. Very tired. Couldn't sleep all night. Missing home. There is a deep fatigue in my body this morning. I feel used up. Adrienne asks me if I can write of what has happened with me while here in Boston. She asks me if I *can*, not *would*. I say, yes, I think so. And now I doubt it. The pain of racism, classism. Such overused and trivialized words. The pain of it all. I do not feel people of color are the only ones hurt by racism.

Another meeting. Again walking into a room filled with white women, a splattering of women of color around the room. The issue on the table, Racism. The dread and terror in the room lay like a thick immovable paste above all our shoulders, white and colored, alike. We, Third World women in the room, thinking back to square one, again.

How can we – this time – not use our bodies to be thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap? Barbara says last night: "A bridge gets walked over." Yes, over and over and over again.

I watch the white women shrink before my eyes, losing their fluidity of argument, of confidence, pause awkwardly at the word, "race", the word, "color." The pauses keeping the voices breathless, the bodies taut, erect – unable to breathe deeply, to laugh, to moan in despair, to cry in regret. I cannot continue to use my body to be walked over to make a connection. Feeling every joint in my body tense this morning, used.

What the hell am I getting myself into? Gloria's voice has recurred to me throughout this trip. A year and a half ago, she warned and encouraged: "This book will change your life, Cherríe. It will change both our lives." And it has. Gloria, I wish you were here.

A few days ago, an old friend said to me how when she first met me, I seemed so white to her. I said in honesty, I used to feel more white. You know, I really did. But at the meeting last night, dealing with white women here on this trip, I have felt so very dark: dark with anger, with silence, with the feeling of being walked over.

I wrote in my journal: "My growing consciousness as a woman of color is surely seeming to transform my experience. How could it be that the more I feel with other women of color, the more I feel myself Chicana, the more susceptible I am to racist attack!"

A Place of Breakthrough: Coming Home (San Francisco, California – September 20, 1980)

When Audre Lorde, speaking of racism, states: "I urge each one of us to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there."* I am driven to do so because of the passion for women that lives in my body. I know now that the major obstacle for me, personally, in completing this book has occurred when I stopped writing it for myself, when I looked away from my own source of knowledge.

Audre is right. It is also the source of terror – how deeply separation between women hurts me. How discovering difference, profound differences between myself and women I love has sometimes rendered me helpless and immobilized.

I think of my sister here. How I still haven't gotten over the shock that she would marry this white man, rather than enter onto the journey I knew I was taking. (This is the model we have from my mother, nurturing/waiting on my father and brother all the days of her life. Always how if a man walked into the room, he was paid attention to [indulged] in a particular Latin-woman-to-man way.) For years, and to this day, I am still recovering from the disappointment that this girl/this sister who had been with me everyday of my life growing up – who slept, ate, talked, cried, worked, fought with me – was suddenly lost to me through this man and marriage. I still struggle with believing I have a right to my feelings, that it is not "immature" or "queer" to refuse such separations, to still mourn over this early abandonment, "this homesickness for a woman."** So few people really understand how deep the bond between sisters can run. I was raised to rely on my sister, to believe sisters could be counted on "to go the long hard way with you."

Sometimes for me "that deep place of knowledge" Audre refers to seems like an endless reservoir of pain, where I must continually unravel the damage done to me. It is a calculated system of damage, intended to ensure our separation from other women, but particularly those we learned to see as most different from ourselves and therefore, most fearful. The women whose pain we do not want to see as our own. Call it racism, class oppression, men, or dyke-baiting, the system thrives.

*From "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House" (from the text).

**Adrienne Rich "Trancendental Etude," *The Dream of a Common Language* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 75.

I mourn the friends and lovers I have lost to this damage. I mourn the women whom I have betrayed with my own ignorance, my own fear.

The year has been one of such deep damage. I have felt between my hands the failure to bring a love I believed in back to life. Yes, the failure between lovers, sisters, mother and daughter – the betrayal. How have we turned our backs on each other – the bridge collapsing – whether it be for public power, personal gain, private validation, or more closely, to save face, to save our children, to save our skins.

"See whose face it wears,"* Audre says. And I know I must open my eyes and mouth and hands to name the color and texture of my fear.

I had nearly forgotten why I was so driven to work on this anthology. I had nearly forgotten that I wanted/needed to deal with racism because I couldn't stand being separated from other women. Because I took my lesbianism that seriously. I first felt this the most acutely with Black women – Black dykes – who I felt ignored me, wrote me off because I looked white. And yet, the truth was that I didn't know Black women intimately (Barbara says "it's about who you can sit down to a meal with, who you can cry with, whose face you can touch"). I had such strong "colored hunches" about our potential connection, but was basically removed from the lives of most Black women. The ignorance. The painful, painful ignorance.

I had even ignored my own bloodline connection with Chicanas and other Latinas. Maybe it was too close to look at, too close to home. Months ago in a journal entry I wrote: "I am afraid to get near to how deeply I want the love of other Latin women in my life." In a real visceral way I hadn't felt the absence (only assumed the fibers of alienation I so often felt with anglo women as normative). Then for the first time, speaking on a panel about racism here in San Francisco, I could physically touch what I had been missing. There in the front row, nodding encouragement and identification, sat five Latina sisters. Count them! Five avowed Latina Feminists: Gloria, Jo, Aurora, Chabela y Mirtha. For once in my life every part of me was allowed to be visible and spoken for in one room at one time.

After the forum, the six of us walk down Valencia Street singing songs in Spanish. We buy burritos y cerveza from "La Cumbre" and talk our heads off into the night, crying from the impact of such a reunion.

Si, son mis comadres. Something my mother had with her women friends and sisters. Coming home. For once, I didn't have to choose

*From "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House" (from the text).

between being a lesbian and being Chicana; between being a feminist and having family.

I Have Dreamed of a Bridge

(San Francisco, California – September 25, 1980)

Literally, for two years now, I have dreamed of a bridge. In writing this conclusion, I fight the myriad voices that live inside me. The voices that stop my pen at every turn of the page. They are the voices that tell me here I should be talking more "materialistically" about the oppression of women of color, that I should be plotting out a "strategy" for Third World Revolution. But what I really want to write about is faith. That without faith, I'd dare not expose myself to the potential betrayal, rejection, and failure that lives throughout the first and last gesture of connection.

And yet, so often I have lost touch with the simple faith I know in my blood. My mother. On some very basic level, the woman cannot be shaken from the ground on which she walks. Once at a very critical point in my work on this book, where everything I loved – the people, the writing, the city – all began to cave in on me, feeling such utter despair and self-doubt, I received in the mail a card from my mother. A holy card of St. Anthony de Padua, her patron saint, her "special" saint, wrapped in a plastic cover. She wrote in it: "Dear Cherrie, I am sending you this prayer of St. Anthony. Pray to God to help you with this book." And a cry came up from inside me that I had been sitting on for months, cleaning me out – a faith healer. Her faith in this saint did actually once save her life. That day, it helped me continue the labor of this book.

I am not talking here about some lazy faith, where we resign ourselves to the tragic splittings in our lives with an upward turn of the hands or a vicious beating of our breasts. I am talking about believing that we have the power to actually transform our experience, change our lives, save our lives. Otherwise, why this book? It is the faith of activists I am talking about.

The materialism in this book lives in the flesh of these women's lives: the exhaustion we feel in our bones at the end of the day, the fire we feel in our hearts when we are insulted, the knife we feel in our backs when we are betrayed, the nausea we feel in our bellies when we are afraid, even the hunger we feel between our hips when we long to be touched.

Our strategy is how we cope – how we measure and weigh what is to be said and when, what is to be done and how, and to whom and to

whom and to whom, daily deciding/risking who it is we can call an ally, call a friend (whatever that person's skin, sex, or sexuality). We are women without a line. We are women who contradict each other.

This book is written for all the women in it and all whose lives our lives will touch. We are a family who first only knew each other in our dreams, who have come together on these pages to make faith a reality and to bring all of our selves to bear down hard on that reality.

It is about physical and psychic struggle. It is about intimacy, a desire for life between all of us, not settling for less than freedom even in the most private aspects of our lives. A total vision.

For the women in this book, I will lay my body down for that vision.
This Bridge Called My Back.

In the dream, I am always met at the river.

Cherrie Moraga

The Bridge Poem

Donna Kate Rushin

I've had enough
I'm sick of seeing and touching
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody

Nobody
Can talk to anybody
Without me
Right?

I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister
My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists
The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the
Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends' parents . . .

Then
I've got to explain myself
To everybody

I do more translating
Than the Gawdamn U.N.

Forget it
I'm sick of it

I'm sick of filling in your gaps
Sick of being your insurance against
The isolation of your self-imposed limitations
Sick of being the crazy at your holiday dinners
Sick of being the odd one at your Sunday Brunches
Sick of being the sole Black friend to 34 individual white people

Find another connection to the rest of the world
Find something else to make you legitimate
Find some other way to be political and hip

I will not be the bridge to your womanhood
 Your manhood
 Your human-ness

 I'm sick of reminding you not to
 Close off too tight for too long

 I'm sick of mediating with your worst self
 On behalf of your better selves

 I am sick
 Of having to remind you
 To breathe
 Before you suffocate
 Your own fool self

 Forget it
 Stretch or drown
 Evolve or die

 The bridge I must be
 Is the bridge to my own power
 I must translate
 My own fears
 Mediate
 My own weaknesses

 I must be the bridge to nowhere
 But my true self
 And then
 I will be useful

Introduction

How It All Began

In February of 1979, Gloria attended a women's retreat in the country just north of San Francisco. At Merlin Stone's insistence, three Third World women were to receive scholarships to her workshop on goddesses and heroines taking place during the retreat. Only one made it – Gloria. The management and some of the staff made her feel an outsider, the poor relative, the token woman of color. And all because she was not white nor had she paid the \$150 fee the retreat organizers had set for the workshop. The seed that germinated into this anthology began there in Gloria's talks with Merlin.

What had happened at the women's retreat was not new to our experience. Both of us had first met each other working as the only two Chicanas in a national feminist writers organization. After two years of involvement with the group which repeatedly refused to address itself to its elitist and racist practices, we left the organization and began work on this book.

In April, 1979, we wrote:

We want to express to all women – especially to white middle-class women – the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definition that expands what "feminist" means to us.

(From the original soliciting letter)

The Living Entity

What began as a reaction to the racism of white feminists soon became a positive affirmation of the commitment of women of color to our *own* feminism. Mere words on a page began to transform themselves into a living entity in our guts. Now, over a year later, feeling greater solidarity with other feminists of color across the country through the making of this book, we assert:

This Bridge Called My Back intends to reflect an uncompromised definition of feminism by women of color in the U.S.

We named this anthology "radical" for we were interested in the writings of women of color who want nothing short of a revolution in

the hands of women – who agree that that is the goal, no matter how we might disagree about the getting there or the possibility of seeing it in our own lifetimes. We use the term in its original form – stemming from the word “root” – for our feminist politic emerges from the roots of both of our cultural oppression and heritage.

The Parts of the Whole

The six sections of *This Bridge Called My Back* intend to reflect what we feel to be the major areas of concern for Third World women in the U.S. in forming a broad-based political movement: 1) how visibility/invisibility as women of color forms our radicalism; 2) the ways in which Third World women derive a feminist political theory specifically from our racial/cultural background and experience; 3) the destructive and demoralizing effects of racism in the women's movement; 4) the cultural, class, and sexuality differences that divide women of color; 5) Third World women's writing as a tool for self-preservation and revolution; and 6) the ways and means of a Third World feminist future.

The Writers and Their Work

The women in whose hands *This Bridge Called My Back* was wrought identify as Third World women and/or women of color. Each woman considers herself a feminist, but draws her feminism from the culture in which she grew. Most of the women appearing in this book are first-generation writers. Some of us do not see ourselves as writers, but pull the pen across the page anyway or speak with the power of poets.

The selections in this anthology range from extemporaneous stream of consciousness journal entries to well thought-out theoretical statements; from intimate letters to friends to full-scale public addresses. In addition, the book includes poems and transcripts, personal conversations and interviews. The works combined reflect a diversity of perspectives, linguistic styles, and cultural tongues.

In editing the anthology, our primary commitment was to retaining this diversity, as well as each writer's especial voice and style. The book is intended to reflect our color loud and clear, not tone it down. As editors we sought out and believe we found, non-rhetorical, highly personal chronicles that present a political analysis in everyday terms.

In compiling the anthology, Cherrie was primarily responsible for the thematic structure and organization of the book as a whole. She also wrote the introductions to the first four sections of the book which cover 1) *The Roots of Our Radicalism*; 2) *Theory in the Flesh*; 3) *Racism in the Women's Movement*; and 4) *On Culture, Class, and Homophobia*.

Gloria wrote the introductions to the final two sections of the book which explore *The Third World Woman Writer* and *The Vision* of the Third World feminist. Together as editors, we both bore the burden of the book (even more than we had anticipated – this being our first attempt at such a project), not only doing the proof-reading and making editorial decisions, but also acting as a telephone answering and courier service, PR persons and advertisers, interviewers and transcribers, and even occasionally, muses for some of the contributors during their, sometimes rather painful, “writing blocks”. Most importantly, we saw our major role as editors being to encourage writers to delve even more deeply into their lives, to make some meaning out of it for themselves and their readers.

Time and Money

Many people have commented on the relative speed in which this book was produced. In barely two years, the anthology grew from a seed of an idea to a published work. True, everyone has worked fast, including the publishers.

The anthology was created with a sense of urgency. From the moment of its conception, it was already long overdue. Two years ago when we started, we knew it was a book that should already have been in our hands.

How do you concentrate on a project when you're worried about paying the rent? We have sorely learned why so few women of color attempt this kind of project – no money to fall back on. In compiling this book we both maintained two or more jobs just to keep the book and ourselves alive. No time to write while waiting tables. No time for class preparation, to read students' papers, argue with your boss, have a love life or eat a decent meal when the deadline must be met. No money to buy stamps, to hire a lawyer “to go over the contract,” to engage an agent. Both of us became expert jugglers of our energy and the few pennies in our piggybanks: Gloria's “little chicken” and Cherrie's “tecate bucket.”

Agradecimientos

But oh there were the people who helped: Leslie, Abigail, Leigh and her IBM selectric, Randy, David, Mirtha's arroz con picadillo and loving encouragement, Merlin and Adrienne's faith in the book, Jane and Sally's letting Cherrie change her mind, our women's studies students at San Francisco State University who put up with their two over-tired grumpy teachers, Debbie's backrubs, Jo who typed the whole damn manuscript, Barbara C. and her camera and crew, Barbara S.'s work in spreading the word in Boston, the friends who lent us money, and all

the other folks who supported our readings, our benefit parties, our efforts to get this book to press.

Most especially, of course, we wish to thank all the contributors whose commitment and insight made the nightly marathons we spent pulling out our hair worth it. They inspired the labor.

Putting Our Words into Practice

With the completion of this anthology, a hundred other books and projects are waiting to be developed. Already, we hear tell in the wind from other contributors the possibility of a film about Third World Feminists, an anthology by Latina lesbians, a Third World feminist publishing house. We, women of color, are *not* without plans. This is exactly the kind of service we wish for the anthology to provide. It is a catalyst, not a definitive statement on "Third World Feminism in the U.S."

We see the book as a revolutionary tool falling into the hands of people of all colors. Just as we have been radicalized in the process of compiling this book, we hope it will radicalize others into action. We envision the book being used as a *required* text in most women's studies courses. And we don't mean just "special" courses on Third World Women or Racism, but also courses dealing with sexual politics, feminist thought, women's spirituality, etc. Similarly, we want to see this book on the shelf of, and used in the classroom by, every ethnic studies teacher in this country, male and female alike. Off campus, we expect the book to function as a consciousness-raiser for white women meeting together or working alone on the issues of racism. And, we want to see our colored sisters using the book as an educator and agitator around issues specific to our oppression as women.

We want the book in libraries, bookstores, at conferences, and union meetings in every major city and hole-in-the-wall in this country. And, of course, we hope to eventually see this book translated and leave this country, making tangible the link between Third World women in the U.S. and throughout the world.

Finally *tenemos la esperanza que This Bridge Called My Back* will find its way back into our families' lives.

The revolution begins at home.

Cherríe Moraga
Gloria Anzaldúa

THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK

WRITINGS BY RADICAL WOMEN OF COLOR