

CONVERSATIONS ON CONVERSION: APPLYING ANZALDÚAS THEORY  
OF NEPANTLA TO ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER'S  
CALL TO CONVERSION

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE  
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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DENTON, TEXAS

MAY 2012

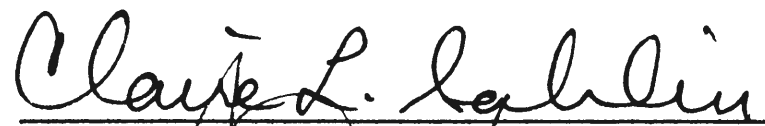
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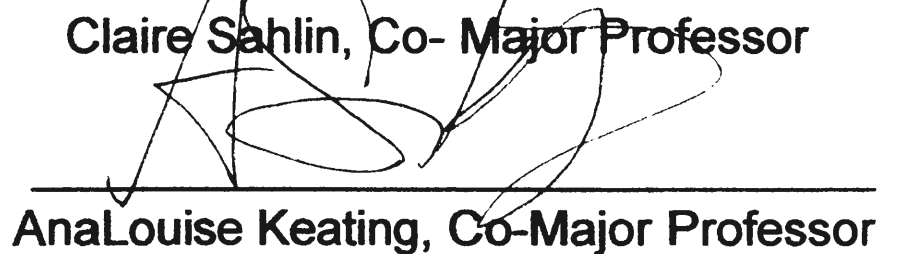
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To The Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting herewith a thesis written by Dana Gant Wilson entitled "Conversations on Conversion: Applying Anzaldúa's Theory of Nepantla to Rosemary Radford Ruether's Call to Conversion." We have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Women's Studies.



Claire Sahlin, Co- Major Professor



AnaLouise Keating, Co-Major Professor

I have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:



Department Chair

Accepted:



Dean of the Graduate School

## DEDICATION

To my husband of forty years,  
Gary Dan Wilson, whose unconditional love  
and support provide a secure foundation  
from which I can confidently pursue  
my dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the individuals who have guided and supported me through the process of writing this thesis. I am especially indebted to my committee co-chairs, Dr. Claire Sahlin and Dr. AnaLouise Keating. Dr. Sahlin, through her expertise in feminism and religion, has given me the invaluable gift of being able to pursue with confidence my research interests in an academic setting. Dr. Keating has encouraged and inspired me through her knowledge of the writings of Gloria E. Anzaldúa, and her commitment to transformation through attention to the spiritual component of human existence. Both Dr. Sahlin and Dr. Keating have taught me how to write, an incalculable gift I carry with me into the future.

I am grateful to Mary Jane Philpy Dollins who, in 2006, came to Midland, Texas and shared her excitement about Women's Studies at Texas Woman's University with a small group of older women including me. Because of Mary Jane, I found my way to TWU and the Women's Studies Department. I also wish to thank Michan Chowrimootoo and Barbara McGuirk for their important guidance with editing and formatting my thesis.

My friend and companion in life-long learning, Alison Ely, was an inspiration for me to pursue my academic aspirations. Alison's support was unwavering as I slowly moved through my courses and wrote my thesis. I am

thankful for her understanding and encouragement as I followed my passion for feminist theology.

I am grateful to my parents, George A. Gant and Neta Pierce Gant, both master's degree recipients and professional educators, for instilling in me the love of learning and the idea that education is important. I wish to thank my children and grandchildren for their patience as I pursued my dream. Throughout my academic endeavors, my husband, Gary Wilson has been a constant source of unconditional support. I am eternally grateful to him for his love and his fearless willingness to encourage me to be who I am and go where I am called while providing a safe place for me to come home.

Finally, I thank Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa and Rosemary Radford Ruether for their courage and commitment to the cause of making the world a more just and hospitable place for all of us to live. Through their writing I am moved to hear and respond to the call to conversion and the work of transformation.

## **ABSTRACT**

**DANA GANT WILSON**

### **CONVERSATIONS ON CONVERSION: APPLYING ANZALDÚA'S THEORY OF NEPANTLA TO ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER'S CALL TO CONVERSION**

**MAY 2012**

This thesis demonstrates how Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla may be used to enhance the conversion theology of Christian feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether. A critical analysis of these theoretical perspectives as they are portrayed in selected works of Ruether and Anzaldúa reveals that particular elements of Anzaldúan nepantla (context, "risking the personal," and use of metaphors) can be valuably applied to Ruether's theology of conversion. The application of elements of nepantla expands Ruether's ideas on conversion more toward a process. This thesis is significant because conversion experiences in an individual may foster the sense of interrelatedness with other people, animals, and the earth itself. Therefore, conversion brings with it the potential for social transformation. Anzaldúa and Ruether are concerned not only with personal conversion, but with the outward behavior that reflects that inner conversion. This thesis is relevant to those interested in social justice, activism, spiritual activism, and ecofeminism.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: CONVERSION, INTERRELATEDNESS, AND TRANSFORMATION

This thesis represents the coming together of the two areas of Women's Studies that have most captured my imagination and passion: Christian feminist theology and the theoretical work of Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Major Christian feminist theologians, including Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth A. Johnson, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, have generally disregarded the transformative cultural and spiritual perspectives of Anzaldúa. As a Christian feminist theologian, I will demonstrate how Anzaldúan theory can make a significant positive impact on Christian feminist theology. Rather than comparing and contrasting Anzaldúan theory with Christian feminist theology in general, my thesis will apply the Anzaldúan theory of *nepantla*, a transformative psychological and spiritual experience, to the conversion and *metanoia*<sup>1</sup> concepts of renowned Christian feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether.

According to AnaLouise Keating, Anzaldúa uses *nepantla* to represent several concepts such as "temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual points of crisis" (Appendix I 322). *Nepantla* can also be described as a transformative spiritual experience that may include a change in identity and/or perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> *Metanoia* is the Greek word for "conversion" and literally means "to turn around." Ruether uses the words "metanoia" and "conversion" synonymously.

Anzaldúa also defines *nepantla* as “a Nahuatl word for the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds. It is a limited space, a space where you are not this or that, but where you are changing” (qtd. in Ika 237). For Anzaldúa, then, the word “*nepantla*” is a term, rooted in metaphorical imagery, used to characterize a very complex interior state. Her depiction of *nepantla* is powerfully personal in terms of emotion and vulnerability. In other words, Anzaldúa is deeply open and honest about her own experience of *nepantla*, and *nepantla* is a key experience and theory in her life and writing.

Ruether uses the terms conversion and *metanoia* to talk about inner spiritual and psychological change. In contrast to Anzaldúa, she does not concentrate on the detailed process of conversion as much as she focuses on the outcome of conversion. According to Ruether, conversion or “transformative *metanoia*” is defined as “both sudden insight and also [a] slow maturation of a grounded self in relationship or community, able to be both self-affirming and other-affirming in life-enhancing mutuality” (“Feminist *Metanoia*” 39). Conversion, for Ruether, can be instantaneous or gradual and is capable of transforming a person’s sense of self-worth and their awareness of the value inherent in others. It is important to note here that in Western religious culture conversion is often associated with personal religious conversion. In other words, conversion can be perceived as an experience of moving from non-belief to belief in “God” and/or a particular set of religious creeds or doctrines. One might assume that Ruether, a

self-identified Christian and Roman Catholic, would also associate conversion as an acknowledgement of the existence of or belief in a divine entity (Gross and Ruether 57). Her writing does not confirm this assumption, however; Ruether does not refer to the experience of a personal conversion to “God” or religious dogma, and she maintains that conversion occurs in the context of relationship as indicated in the quotation. However, her description of conversion is detached from an extended account of her personal experience, unlike Anzaldúa who relies on her personal experience to create her theory of *nepantla*.

Although my decision to focus on these two theories of conversion was largely made, as stated above, based on my desires to bring Anzaldúan theory into conversation with Christian feminist theology, I also want to explore the role conversion plays in helping people turn to a life of activism. Both Ruether and Anzaldúa consistently address conversion as a means of changing the interior spirit of a person which, in turn, changes their actions in the outside world. While *nepantla* is a central feature in much of Anzaldúa’s later writing, conversion and *metanoia* are common threads woven throughout Ruether’s major writings on feminist theology and ecofeminism. In other words, for Anzaldúa, *nepantla* was a vital part of all the other theories she put forth while Ruether seemed to see conversion as important without ever actually developing an explicit theory of conversion with which her readers could deeply engage. Although there are commonalities in the concept of conversion as presented by both Anzaldúa and

Ruether, there are striking differences. Those differences provide space for productive conversation, and, as I will argue in my thesis, suggest some of the ways that feminist Christian theology can be enriched through dialogue with Anzaldúan theory.

The concept of conversion is particularly significant for me as an ordained deacon in the Episcopal Church, one of the historic “mainline” Christian denominations in the United States. My entire professional career has been spent serving those in need as a Church leader and encouraging the Church to engage in this service as well. In the liturgy of the ordination of a deacon, the *Book of Common Prayer* states that a deacon is “called to interpret the needs, hopes, and concerns of the world to the Church” and also to lead the Church into service to “the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely” (543). Those familiar with the Christian testament will not fail to recognize the theme of caring for those in need. Moreover, Christians generally agree that, as followers of Christ, they are to care for the poor and the disenfranchised. Sadly, I often find that the conviction that a Christian is called to care for those in need is not followed in praxis. Rather than compassion toward those outside the Church (i.e., the poor, the disenfranchised, and the outcast), Christians often ascribe to the idea that the Church is good and the world is evil. This binary stance severely impairs the possibility of compassion and the sense of interrelatedness that moves persons to acts of kindness and justice. When a person sees the Church as good and the

world as evil, Christianity may be experienced as privilege<sup>2</sup> rather than responsibility.

I believe that to transform this version of Christianity that approaches the world as evil while seeing the Church as good, conversion is required. The conversion that is required is an interior change that makes a person aware of how they are connected to all people, creatures, and the earth itself and how they have a resulting moral obligation to work on behalf of social and environmental justice. This perception of interrelatedness is what motivates me to bring elements of Anzaldúa's *nepantla* to bear on Christian feminist ideas of conversion. Both Anzaldúa and Ruether write about the interrelatedness of all life. Anzaldúa describes interrelatedness in her groundbreaking essay, "now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts." She writes, "With awe and wonder you look around recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings – *somos todos un paiz* [we are all one]" (558). She also connected this recognition with the experience of *nepantla* – indicating that it was *nepantla* that brought her to this awareness.

Ruether offers her similar version of interrelatedness in her landmark book, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. Her view of interrelatedness is described in these words, "Our kinship with all earth creatures

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Christian privilege see Lewis Z. Schlosser's essay, "Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo."

is global linking us to the whole living Gaia<sup>3</sup> today. . . . Compassion for all living things fills our spirits, breaking down the illusion of otherness” (252). One cannot fail to see from these quotations that this recognition of interrelatedness was a very transformative, emotional, and spiritual experience for both authors. I would suggest that this powerful recognition of interrelatedness provides, at least for Anzaldúa and Ruether, the catalyst for transformative social action in the world. An exploration of conversion to interrelatedness in the writing of Anzaldúa and Ruether will enhance not only my work in the context of Christianity, but the work of all those who dedicate their lives to social justice and the alleviation of suffering.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Rosemary Radford Ruether offer particularly useful ideas for an analysis of conversion to interrelatedness. Moreover, Anzaldúa and Ruether have had the greatest impact on me as a scholar and human being. So, it is with awe and respect that I discuss their work and build on their ideas. I was first introduced to Gloria Anzaldúa in 2003 by a close friend who was pursuing a Master’s Degree in English from Texas Tech University. Assigned *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* for one of her courses, my friend was deeply moved by the book and often shared her thoughts about Anzaldúa and her writing. I was more than intrigued. Then, four years later, in the course of my own academic pursuit at Texas Woman’s University, I noticed a

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<sup>3</sup> Ruether defines Gaia as “the living and sacred earth” in the introduction to her book, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (1).

course offering entitled “Gloria Anzaldúa: Politics, Poetics and Prose.” I signed up for the course immediately and began to immerse myself in reading, reflecting on, and writing about the work of Gloria Anzaldúa.

Since that time, I have continued to be enthralled and inspired by Anzaldúa’s writing and thought. Why do Anzaldúan ideas resonate so strongly with me, a white, upper-middle class, heterosexual, Christian woman? Why am I so moved by the prospects of transformation when the status quo seems to favor me? What do I know of indigenous spirituality, racism, poverty, and oppression? Very little. However, I do know that I care. I care about those who are oppressed, and this caring is as much a part of my identity as any of the other categories listed above. I long for social justice, and I am willing to risk my own privilege to work toward those ends. Therefore, I also dare to identify myself as one who possesses what Anzaldúa calls “a women-of-color consciousness.” Anzaldúa asserts that not all white women necessarily embrace “whiteness” and claims instead that “whiteness [a perspective that upholds white supremacy] may not be applied to all whites, as some possess a women-of-color consciousness, just as some women of color bear white consciousness” (“(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces” 2).

When I say that I identify as one who possesses a “women-of-color consciousness,” I mean that I strive to recognize my own privilege and to see the world from perspectives other than my own. That recognition of privilege and

seeing the perspective of others calls me to respond compassionately in places of pain, need, and degradation. For these reasons I am moved by Anzaldúa's writing and dare to build on her ideas. She said herself, "it thrills me [and] . . . validates me as a writer that people can take my images or ideas and work them out in their own way and write their own theories" (qtd. in Sandoval xiv).

Anzaldúa's words indirectly bestow a blessing on my thesis. I gain further encouragement from the implied invitation by AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López who write, "We share with our readers our heartfelt desire to explore the many ways we can implement and expand on Anzaldúa's theories, from intellectual development and innovation within and across disciplines and fields to personal, institutional, and collective evolution and change – locally and globally" (16). These quotations and the sentiment expressed in them provide encouragement as I seek to analyze and build on Anzaldúa's work.

It is equally daunting for me to approach the writing of Rosemary Radford Ruether in order to scrutinize and expand on her ideas. In the second half of the twentieth century, Ruether emerged early as a pioneer in Christian feminist theology. Her numerous books and articles about sexism in the context of Christianity set the standard for a new perception of women in Christianity. It is with great esteem that I approach her writing to explore her ideas and make suggestions.



My first introduction to Ruether occurred in the spring of 2008 in a course at TWU called Ecofeminist Theorizing, Spirituality, and Activism. One of the required texts was Ruether's book, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. This book opened my eyes to ecofeminism's spiritual elements, indicating ecological implications for Christianity. The book also affected my political stance and my ideas about religion – particularly Christianity. Ruether also helps me understand my own location and identity and why I would even want to bring Christian theology into my academic endeavors. In her book, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, Ruether writes:

Why do I construct the cultural line of this discussion around the Western Christian tradition . . . ? I do this for two reasons. First, because this is my tradition and therefore it is the culture for which I must be accountable. Second, it is a culture that has shaped and continues to shape (particularly in its secularized, scientific form) the rest of the world, through imperialist colonialism and neocolonialism. It is the major culture and system of domination that has pressed humans and the earth into the crises of ecological unsustainability, poverty, and militarism we now experience. (10)

In other words, each person must begin their journey to activism from the place where they are. Because I am situated in Christianity and plan to stay there as a reformer, I must bring a new epistemology to bear on that place. I

must be responsible to the world for this tradition in which I live. As Ruether asserts, Christianity must be considered in any attempts to transform the world because Christianity is a major player in much of the world's systems of social domination. In this thesis Ruether's ideas will be brought into conversation with Anzaldúan theory not only for my own purposes, but hopefully to encourage other Christian feminists to consider Anzaldúa's theories in their own thinking and writing.

This thesis has four chapters, including this introduction. Chapter Two consists of an introduction to Gloria Anzaldúa, particularly identifying her as a "nepantlera,"<sup>4</sup> and a description of spiritual conversion as it is portrayed in her theory of nepantla. The meaning and derivation of the word nepantla as well as the origin and development of the theory of nepantla in Anzaldúa's writing are also included. Key elements of nepantla that I have identified to bring into conversation with Ruether's theory of conversion and *metanoia* are presented, and I discuss why nepantla is important for social justice work and transformation. Chapter Three includes a brief biographical sketch of Rosemary Radford Ruether and an overview of her work as an author and activist.

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<sup>4</sup> In the glossary of the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, AnaLouise Keating says that nepantlera is a "term coined by Anzaldúa to describe a unique type of mediator, . . . [who] live[s] within and among multiple worlds and, often through painful negotiations, develop what Anzaldúa describes as a 'perspective from the cracks'; they use these transformed perspectives to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics enabling them to reconceive or in other ways transform the various worlds in which they exist" (322).

Ruether's theory of conversion is described, tracing its development throughout selected pieces of her writing and noting areas where her theoretical work could be strengthened. Chapter Four includes an analysis of the conversion theories of both writers. I identify elements of Anzaldúa's *nepantla* that might be applied to Ruether's thought, particularly Anzaldúa's expansive context for the experience of *nepantla*, her rich use of metaphorical imagery, and her courageous inclusion of her own personal experience. Applying these elements of *nepantla* to Ruether's theory of conversion and *metanoia* supports my argument that Anzaldúan *nepantla* enriches Ruether's concept of conversion and *metanoia*. Relying on material from both Anzaldúa and Ruether, the conclusion connects conversion to its end result: a shift not only in the inner spiritual life of the individual, but in actions that have the potential for social and ecological transformation.

## CHAPTER II

### GLORIA ANZALDÚA: HER IDENTITY AND THE CRAFTING OF HER THEORY OF NEPANTLA

*And nepantla is the only space where change happens. Change  
Requires more than words on a page – it takes perseverance,  
Creative ingenuity, and acts of love.*

Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “now let us shift . . . now let us shift . . .  
the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts”

#### Anzaldúa in Her Own Words

As the epigraph above indicates, Gloria Anzaldúa believed that transformation calls for more than theorizing, and she lived that belief with determination, creativity and love (574). Her identity was beyond the labels she or others might attach to her. Indeed, as AnaLouise Keating states, “She [Anzaldúa] viewed herself in extremely expansive terms” (“Reading” 3). This particular “expansive” element of her identity can be transformative when approached as a theory. In her own words Anzaldúa reveals her identity and describes the ways that her broad sense of identity can serve to change the world. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* she writes, “At a very early age I had a strong sense of who I was and what I was about and what was fair. I had a stubborn will . . . Every bit of self-faith I’d painstakingly gathered took a beating daily. Nothing in my culture approved of me” (38). From this quotation we can gather that the boldness and clarity of Anzaldúa’s political voice was present almost from the

beginning of her life. She had developed a solid sense of herself and was able to differentiate between just and unjust behavior. Her characteristically courageous way of being vulnerable and open in order to communicate to her readers is evident as well. She clearly understood herself as “other”— as different from everyone else around her even as a child.

In contrast to this idea of “otherness,” in “La Prieta” Anzaldúa also asks herself about community. “But who exactly are my people? *I identify as a woman. Whatever insults women insults me. I identify as gay. Whoever insults gays insults me. I identify as feminist. Whoever slurs feminism slurs me*” (229, her italics). As this assertion implies, Anzaldúa views all those who are oppressed and marginalized as her people. She goes on from there to articulate her ideas about a more extensive community in the profound rhetorical question, “What about what I do not identify as?” (229). In other words, if she identifies as feminist, she must ask herself if she is excluding those who do not identify as feminist. There is this realization that in identifying herself as a part of one group, she is, at the same time, excluding those with whom she does not identify. This realization of exclusion by identification was stunning in a time (c.1981) when identity politics was the accepted foundation for activism and transformation. Understanding that transformation requires going beyond socially-defined identity and difference, Anzaldúa sets herself apart from other feminist writers/theorists of her time.

Keating agrees when she states that at a time when,

many progressive social-justice activists and theorists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were banding together into identity-specific groups, Anzaldúa was not. She rejected the demands for monolithic identities and exclusive, single-issue alliances and invented new forms of relational, inclusionary identities based on affinity rather than social categories. (“Reading” 2)

Anzaldúan theory was groundbreaking in the 1970s and 1980s and it remains so today. Her theories reveal her worldviews and also speak volumes about who she was.

The refusal to limit herself (or others) through the use of social labels was, in itself, a remarkable element of her identity. Although there are various labels that Anzaldúa uses to describe herself, her identity cannot be constrained either by a single label or by a combination of labels. Keating elaborates on this idea in her introductory essay to the book *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*:

The oldest child of sixth-generation mexicanos from the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas and self-described “Chicana tejana feminist-dyke-patlache poet, fiction writer, and cultural theorist,” Anzaldúa

participated in a number of divergent worlds yet refused to be

contained within any single group or location. (“shifting worlds” 2)

As we see, Anzaldúa identified herself using ethnic and political terms as well as terms that describe her vocation. According to Keating, while Anzaldúa identified with multiple groups, she was much more than the sum of any labels attached to her. In the introduction to the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, Keating further expounds on this idea, opening her argument with Anzaldúa’s own words from her journal:

“Shortest bio GEA: Feminist visionary spiritual activist poet-  
philosopher fiction writer” – Gloria Anzaldúa. Journal (2002).

Although generally defined by others as a “Chicana lesbian-feminist” author, Anzaldúa described herself more broadly. As the . . . ultra-short biographical statement indicates, she viewed herself in extremely expansive terms. Rather than emphasize her racial/cultural identity, sexuality, gender, or class, she foregrounds her thinking and writing, her spirit-inflected politics and texts. (3)

This is one of my favorite descriptions of Anzaldúa. I support Keating’s idea that Anzaldúa stresses “her thinking and writing, her spirit-inflected politics and texts” rather than the typical identity categories such as “race/culture, sexual orientation, gender or class.” The magnificence of Anzaldúa’s “extremely expansive” self-identity is that it offers an invitation for others to self-identify in more “expansive” terms, thereby potentially transforming identity politics. I

suggest that expansive self-identity would foster greater inclusivity and a sense of interrelatedness among those who strive for social justice.

Through an exploration of Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla, we are able to gather more information about her sense of identity. When she writes about nepantla, she seems to see identity formation as a very dynamic process. For Anzaldúa, nepantla does not just happen once, but over and over. Since she uses her own experience to describe nepantla, we can conclude from those descriptions that she believed her own identity was in constant change.

According to Anzaldúa in her essay, "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts," nepantla is the stage of conocimiento<sup>5</sup> that occurs "most often—as its own space and as the transition between each of the others" (546). When describing "nepantla" she writes, "You are no longer who you used to be" (547). If "nepantla" occurs frequently for Anzaldúa and its advent made her realize every time that she was not the same person she was before entering nepantla, then we can say that, for Anzaldúa, identity was always evolving. Identity formation was not static, but dynamic.

Along with her self-identity revealed in her description of nepantla, Anzaldúa can be identified as a "nepantlera" extraordinaire. Indeed she was the prototype of nepantlera. For Anzaldúa a nepantlera is someone who has

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<sup>5</sup> As Keating points out, conocimiento is "a Spanish word for 'knowledge' or 'consciousness,' Anzaldúa uses this term to represent a key component in her post-*Borderlands* epistemology" (Appendix 1, 320). For more information on conocimiento see Anzaldúa's essay "now let us shift, the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts."



repeatedly navigated the state of nepantla, learned its lessons, and allowed herself to be transformed. Through this series of transformations, the nepantlera can assist others who experience nepantla. I see a nepantlera as someone who sees the world from many perspectives and is a go-between among persons who hold different perspectives. She (the nepantlera) is able to be in solidarity with those who suffer and are bereft of an advocate. Similarly, Keating uses the word “mediator, one who ‘facilitate[s] passages between worlds” to describe nepantlera (Appendix 1, 322). Anzaldúa’s explanation of nepantlera in her essay, “now let us shift,” provides the strongest argument for identifying Anzaldúa as a nepantlera. She writes:

“Nepantleras” must alter their mode of interaction – make it more inclusive, open. . . . Recognizing that the basic human hunger to be heard, understood, and accepted is not being met, las nepantleras listen to members of both camps. . . . Accepting doubts and ambiguities, they reframe the conflict and shift the point of view. By moving from a militarized zone to a roundtable, “nepantleras” acknowledge an unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other. (569-70)

Gloria Anzaldúa was describing herself in the quote, not as a claim to fame, but as a deep understanding of who she had become and her purpose in the world. She had evolved as one with an “expansive” identity who honored that reality in

others. Her many journeys through nepantla allowed her to serve as mediator—listening, accepting differences, revealing alternative perspectives, and always moving toward transformation. Hopefully, this brief description of Anzaldúa will give the reader enough of an idea of who Anzaldúa was in order to facilitate a better understanding of the Anzaldúan theory of “nepantla” to which we now turn.

### Origins of Nepantla in the Mind and Spirit of Anzaldúa

Anzaldúa’s spirituality provides a rich and fertile ground for her writing and theoretical work, and spirituality cannot be stressed enough when we attempt to understand “nepantla.” What does it mean to be a spiritual being? According to Anzaldúa, spirituality is “the ability to recognize and endow meaning to daily experience.” It “furthers the ability to shift and transform” (“now let us shift” 568). Through the engagement of the spiritual dimension of her existence, Anzaldúa was able to conscientiously reflect on the events of her life and then “shift and transform” to accommodate a new identity, knowledge, and/or actions. From spiritual practice and power comes the internal “shifting and transforming” which leads to external change in the world. Anzaldúa expounds on the process by which spirituality leads to transformation and action when she writes, “Spirituality is oppressed people’s only weapon and means of protection. Changes in society only come after the spiritual” (Weiland 72). The spiritual dimension of human life cannot be divorced from the experience of nepantla and transformation.

Anzaldúa's spirituality cannot be categorized by religious affiliation; rather, it is a confluence of many spiritual beliefs and practices. According to Keating, "Anzaldúa was especially influenced by Aztec and Toltec indigenous philosophies and by the writing of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, and Jane Roberts" ("I am a Citizen" 68).<sup>6</sup> I want to focus here on the influence of the indigenous (Mesoamerican) philosophies, particularly the Aztec. Anzaldúa explains that "Aztec is a Nahuatl word for the [ancient] people of Aztlan, the Southwest [United States], the land of the herons, land of whiteness, the Edenic place of origin of the Azteca" (*Borderlands* 26). As I mentioned in the introduction, *nepantla* is also a Nahuatl word. Why would Anzaldúa refer to the Nahuatl language? I think she considers herself a descendent of the Nahua in terms of her ancestry and her philosophy. She goes to great lengths in *Borderlands* to share the migratory history and mythical content of Nahua (Aztec) civilization. So it is not surprising that in shaping her own spirituality she would draw from her interpretation of the spirituality of the "indigenous Mexican" people or the Nahua.

Because understanding Anzaldúa's spirituality, drawn in part from the spiritual tradition of the Nahua, is essential to grasping the meaning of *nepantla*, I want to specifically point out three elements of Nahua thought that I believe nourish the development of *nepantla* in the mind/spirit of Anzaldúa. As Sylvia

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on Anzaldúa's spiritual journey, see chapters three and four of *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Alma Levine also discusses Anzaldúa's spirituality in her essay, "Champion of the Spirit: Anzaldúa's Critique of Rationalist Epistemology."

Marcos explains in her essay, “Embodied Religious Thought: Gender Categories in Mesoamerica,”<sup>7</sup> the concepts of duality and fluidity, along with the use of metaphor, are significant elements in the Nahua worldview. I would argue that duality, fluidity and the use of metaphor are also significant to Anzaldúa’s theory of nepantla. Duality in the Nahua worldview is not to be compared with dichotomous/dualistic thought. Dualism frames existence in oppositional ways that suggest an either/or reality such as good/evil, black/white, and male/female. According to Eberhard Simons, “dualism . . . reduces reality to two equally primordial and mutually opposed principles” (“Dualism” 370). Duality, on the other hand, is a both/and kind of thinking that is not oppositional or exclusive. A person would not have to be labeled black or white, female or male, straight or gay. With duality as a foundational concept, one need not choose between fixed oppositional binary identities. According to Marcos, “In the Mesoamerican universe . . . the feminine-masculine dual unity was fundamental to the creation of the cosmos, its (re)generation, and sustenance. The fusion of [the] feminine and masculine in one bi-polar principle is a recurring feature of Mesoamerican thinking” (372). In other words, the masculine and feminine in Mesoamerican thought was not an instance of oppositional human poles, but a “dual unity” of humanity. This masculine-feminine duality may contribute to Anzaldúa’s

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<sup>7</sup> As Marcos explains, “by MesoAmerican thought, I am referring to the highly developed complex of ideas and beliefs that constituted the dominant epistemological framework among the Nahuas, Mayas, and other peoples of MesoAmerica” (“Embodied Religious Thought” 371).

expansive ideas of identity and her theory of “nepantla – a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing” (Ikas 237). Imagine the positive results from embracing the idea of duality: an end to racism, sexism, classism, etc. not to mention what human beings could do if there was that innate sense of unity.

Second, and closely related to duality, is the concept of “fluidity.” Fluidity basically says that life is full of change and we should never expect that things will stay the same. Human existence is, by nature, dynamic. Fluidity as a foundational concept says that we anticipate our identity to constantly change and shift. We welcome transformation of ourselves and others. Marcos explains Nahua fluidity as:

the unfolding of dualities. . . . The continuous unfolding is always in a state of flux, and is never rigidly stratified or fixed. . . . Within this fluidity of metaphorical dualities, divine and corporeal, the only essential configuration was the mutual necessity to interconnect and interrelate. (373)

In Mesoamerican (Nahua) thought, nothing stays the same; there is neither static reality, nor permanent identity. Life is “continuous unfolding.” I see this notion of fluidity reflected in Anzaldúa’s theory of nepantla. Nepantla is a place of transformation and change, and nepantla recurs over and over—it is fluid. Identity and perception are always in flux in nepantla. Fluidity also brings with it

the “mutual necessity to interconnect and interrelate” which I associate with conversion. In other words, conversion brings with it the possibility of interrelatedness and interconnection. As Keating suggests, “[Anzaldúa’s] writing invites us to recognize connections between body and text, between the intellectual, spiritual, and physical dimensions of life, between self and other” (Keating, “Risking” 12).<sup>8</sup> Fluidity assists us in making connections and interrelating which results, I believe, in transformation.

Third, the use of metaphor is another important facet of Mesoamerican thought and used extensively by Anzaldúa in her writing. Metaphors can be described as images from ordinary life that help us to understand abstract concepts. The use of metaphors can often bring clarity and meaning to the theoretical and/or the intangible. The *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* notebook, written by the School of Theology for the Education for Ministry program at the University of the South, states that “metaphors are verbal pictures. . . . (The literal meaning of the Greek *meta* + *phero* is ‘carry over’). The metaphor functions as a bridge” (2-11-3). In other words a metaphor helps us carry the meaning of an event over into language and reflection. Metaphor is much more than a literary device in Mesoamerican thinking. Marcos writes, “Metaphors make up the very fabric of Mesoamerican thought . . . [and] metaphor carries the imprint of the value system” (377). This quotation brings home the

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<sup>8</sup> AnaLouise Keating discusses the metaphysics of interconnectedness in “Risking the Personal: An Introduction,” in Anzaldúa’s *Interviews/Entrevistas*.

point again that Anzaldúa was influenced by Nahua (Mesoamerican) thought. She uses metaphors copiously and not just as an effective writing tool. She thinks in metaphors— almost as a language.

The word “nepantla” is itself a metaphor by used by Anzaldúa to describe a psychological and spiritual state. Remember that according to Anzaldúa nepantla is a Nahuatl word that means “the space between two bodies of water” (qtd. in Ikaas 237). We could infer from the metaphor that the psychological and spiritual state of “nepantla” would be an experience that occurs between other life events. Nepantla could also be described as being “torn between ways” as it is referred to in a subtitle of “now let us shift” (547). Note how the metaphor nepantla, which literally means “space between two bodies of water,” brings clarity to the abstract concept of being psychologically or spiritually “in-between” or “torn between ways.” The use of metaphors in theorizing about “nepantla” is one of the elements, I would argue, that would enhance Rosemary Radford Ruether’s ideas about conversion. Anzaldúa’s use of metaphor is very intentional, if not second nature. The use of metaphors is a powerful way of thinking and writing which brings a deeper, more concrete understanding of an abstract theory to the reader.

#### Tracing the Development of Nepantla in Anzaldúan Thought and Writing

Reading through Anzaldúa’s work chronologically, one can begin to sense her development of nepantla as she continues to live it, reflect on it, and

write about it. One of the earliest references to nepantla is found in a quote by Anzaldúa from a 1991 interview that Anzaldúa did with AnaLouise Keating entitled "Making Choices." Anzaldúa explains that "I find people using metaphors such as "Borderlands" in a more limited sense than I had meant it, so to expand on the psychic and emotional borderlands I'm now using 'nepantla'" (176). This statement seems to indicate that nepantla was a development in Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory. Anzaldúa again talks about nepantla in her interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abbrego in 1994 and, as I noted earlier in this thesis, nepantla is discussed as a worldview and a stage of growth in an interview Anzaldúa did with Karen Ika in 1999:

So Nepantla is a way of reading the world. You see behind the veil and you see these scraps. Also it is a way of creating knowledge and writing a philosophy, a system that explains the world.

Nepantla is a stage that women and men, and whoever is willing to change into a new person and further grow and develop, go through. (237)

Though this definition comes early in Anzaldúa's thinking and writing about nepantla, I suggest that it may most closely express the fullness of nepantla as Anzaldúa herself experienced it.

However, it is in the 2002 book, *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, that Anzaldúa begins to expand and develop her theory of



nepantla. This development commences in her preface to the book, “(un)natural bridges, (un)safe spaces” and in her landmark essay “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts,” where Anzaldúa presents the theory of nepantla in its fullness with stunning clarity and profound depth.

While the material on nepantla in “now let us shift” is comprehensive and authoritative, nepantla as a cultural and perhaps spiritual theory is multi-faceted and cannot be limited by Anzaldúa’s experience or writing. In other words, there may be components of nepantla of which Anzaldúa was unaware. Keating makes a similar point, noting that “for Anzaldúa, nepantla has multiple meanings that overlap and enrich each other” (“Risking the Personal” 5). This idea is born out again and again as Anzaldúa continues to develop her articulation of nepantla.

Elements of Nepantla: Context, “Risking the Personal,” and the Use of Metaphor

One of the key elements of nepantla is that nepantla always occurs in a particular context of human life. Identifying this context as Anzaldúa does in “now let us shift” helps her readers to better recognize nepantla when it occurs and then move through the experience more easily. This idea that nepantla occurs in particular contexts of life is one of the elements that I think would strengthen Rosemary Radford Ruether’s theory of conversion. In “now let us shift” Anzaldúa situates nepantla in a transformative process she calls *conocimiento*.<sup>9</sup> I would describe *conocimiento* as an experience and epistemology that begins with a

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote on page 16.

crisis. From the crisis one moves to the coatlicue state,<sup>10</sup> into nepantla and from there possibly toward conversion, a new knowledge, a different perspective, and/or a new identity. Along with identity, knowledge, and/or perspective, *conocimiento* may bring with it a greater sense of interrelatedness with others (human and nonhuman) and a new ethics. Interrelatedness calls one into action that transforms the world. Nepantla, as a stage of *conocimiento*, occurs, as I said, in a particular context. Human life is laden with significant experiences, and whether those experiences are positive or negative, they impact life as we understand it and call for reflection and change. According to Anzaldúa such an experience can be called an “arrebato.” She expands on this idea in the following quote:

Every arrebato – a violent attack, rift with a loved one, illness, [a] death in the family, betrayal, systematic racism and marginalization – rips you from your familiar “home,” casting you out of your personal Eden, showing that something is lacking in your queendom. Cada arreatada (snatching) turns your world upside down and cracks the walls of your reality, resulting in a great sense of loss, grief, and emptiness, leaving behind dreams, hopes, and goals. You are no longer who you used to be. (546).

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<sup>10</sup> The coatlicue state is “an important element in Anzaldúa’s epistemology; she coined this term to represent the resistance to new knowledge and other psychic states triggered by intense inner struggle which can entail the juxtaposition and the transmutation of contrary forces as well as paralysis and depression” (Keating, Appendix 1, 320).

From this vivid description the reader can connect with their own “arrebatos” – the contexts in which their own world had been “turned upside down.” Anzaldúa teaches us that traumatic events are part of every human life, and when they occur, we are cast into nepantla. As Keating says, “For Anzaldúa, nepantla represents temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of crisis. Nepantla occurs during the many transitional stages of life and describes both identity-related issues and epistemological concerns” (Appendix 1, *Reader* 322). So we see that “nepantla” occurs most often in the context of the experiences of human life that might be considered “crises or transitions,” and “nepantla” is a space where new knowledge can be born. No one is immune to the crises of human life, and therefore, no one is insusceptible to nepantla. Being aware of the context for nepantla enables a person to readily identify its presence and better navigate its pitfalls and possibilities.

One of the most powerful elements of Anzaldúa’s theory of nepantla is its intensely personal nature. Anzaldúa has gone through nepantla repeatedly and is not only able, but willing, to give a candid and vulnerable account of all that it means to experience spiritual conversion. This open and honest way of communicating is what Keating calls “risking the personal.” Keating very astutely elaborates on this element of Anzaldúan writing in her introduction to *Interviews/Entrevistas*:

Throughout her writings, Anzaldúa draws extensively on her own life – her early menstruation; her campesino background; her childhood in the Rio Grande valley of South Texas; her experiences as a brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking girl in a dominant culture that values light-skinned, English-speaking boys; and her sexual and spiritual desires, to mention only a few of the many private issues woven into her words. . . . Although it often makes readers uncomfortable, this use of the personal is central to Anzaldúa's power as a writer. (2)

I would argue that this element of “risking the personal” is one of the reasons that the theory of “nepantla” is so compelling. One way that Anzaldúa “risks the personal” is in her vivid description of the myriad emotions she experiences while in nepantla. For example, in “now let us shift” Anzaldúa writes, “Vulnerable to spiritual anxiety and isolation, suspended on the bridge between rewind and fast-forward, swinging between elation and despair, anger and forgiveness, you think, feel, and react in extremes. Now you flounder in the chaos, now feel cradled in la calma” (548). This quote gives an almost chilling sense of what it might feel like to be in nepantla, a very tenuous, even dangerous emotional, psychological, and spiritual space. In nepantla a person is exposed and may feel completely helpless. Sharing such emotion is an act of courage and love. Through “risking the personal” Anzaldúa invites us all to open ourselves to nepantla, conversion,

and transformation. “now let us shift” is the revelation of the path Anzaldúa walked as she continually moved from oppression and pain to nepantla, to conversion, to healing and spiritual activism.<sup>11</sup>

The third element of nepantla explored in this chapter is Anzaldúa’s rich and prolific use of metaphors in her writing. The metaphors she uses provide a deeper understanding of her theory. Metaphors transfer meaning from experience to language and assist in a fuller grasp of theoretical and abstract concepts such as nepantla. I suggest that for Anzaldúa, the use of metaphor is second-nature, indeed another language she spoke much like she spoke English and Spanish. What Sylvia Marcos says about the Mesoamerican people – that “Metaphors make up the very fabric of Mesoamerican thought . . . [and] metaphor carries the imprint of the value system” can be attributed to Anzaldúa. Metaphors are an inherent part of language and meaning for her. We see the use of metaphor in Anzaldúa’s interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego. She connects her theory of “nepantla” with the metaphor of birth:

When you come out of the Coatlicue state you come out of nepantla, this birthing stage where you feel like you’re reconfiguring your identity and don’t know where you are. You used to be this

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<sup>11</sup> “Although Anzaldúa did not coin this term, she used it to describe her visionary, experientially based epistemology and ethics. At the epistemological level, spiritual activism posits a metaphysics of interrelatedness and employs non-binary modes of thinking. At the ethical level, spiritual activism requires concrete actions designed to intervene in and transform existing social change. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (Keating, Appendix 1, Glossary, Reader 323).

person but now maybe you're different in some way. You're changing worlds and cultures and maybe classes, sexual preferences. So you go through this birthing of nepantla. When you're in the midst of the Coatlicue state – the cave, the dark – you're hibernating or hiding, you're gestating and giving birth to yourself. You're in a womb state. When you come out of that womb state you pass through the birth canal, the passageway I call nepantla. (225-26)

This birthing metaphor is very helpful because it highlights the idea of “nepantla” as an “in-between space” (“(Un)natural bridges” 1). It is not the womb or even the actual birth itself but the space in-between. Nepantla could be seen from the perspective of this metaphor as a limited space, a tight, dark, uncomfortable, maybe even dangerous space.

The “bridge” is another powerful image (metaphor) that Anzaldúa uses extensively in her later writing about nepantla, and it also helps to underscore the role of the nepantlera<sup>12</sup> mentioned earlier in the chapter. I think it may be the most effective metaphor Anzaldúa employs to illuminate her theory. She writes:

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and

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<sup>12</sup> See pages 16-17.

changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio [middle ground]. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. (“(un)natural bridges” 1)

Visualizing the bridge as the way over spaces of nepantla, the reader can more clearly understand that traversing through/over nepantla can be a frightening experience. Indeed, transformation can be terrifying. But where would we be without bridges? The bridge does not eliminate the journey through nepantla; the bridge makes it bearable. In this sense we may see the nepantlera as a bridge. Because of the precarious nature of nepantla, the bridging work of the nepantlera is essential. We often see Anzaldúa in this role in her writing. For example, she writes, “For nepantleras, to bridge is an act of the will, an act of love, an attempt toward compassion and reconciliation, and a promise to be present with the pain of others without losing themselves to it” (“(Un)natural” 4). Nepantleras figuratively lay themselves across the abyss in an arduous and self-less task to help to facilitate the journey for others from one world to another. Applying the bridge metaphor to the nepantlera, nepantla will be perceived not only as spiritual or psychological state, but also as a worldview. It becomes a way of life. This perspective is most evident in the seasoned nepantlera. Living on a bridge between worlds, the nepantlera is at “home,” as Anzaldúa points out, “You

realize that 'home' is that bridge, the in-between place of 'nepantla' and constant transition, the most unsafe of all spaces" ("now let us shift" 574). The bridge is a powerful metaphor in comprehending the state of nepantla and the bridge image also assists in us understanding the life of a nepantlera. Those who choose the life of a nepantlera begin to view nepantla as the lens through which they view the world. These examples of Anzaldúa's use of metaphor reveal how she develops the connection between the theory (nepantla) and the metaphors of birth and the bridge. Both paint a vivid picture of nepantla and nepantlera.

The three elements of nepantla presented in this chapter: context for recognizing nepantla, "risking the personal," and the use of metaphor can be applied to the conversion/*metanoia* theory of Christian feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether. I argue in the next chapter that application of these elements will strengthen and expand Ruether's ideas of conversion. Applying these elements of nepantla to Ruether's concept of conversion also represents an expansion of Anzaldúa's work in that her writing is brought into another sphere of thought, i.e. Christian.



## CHAPTER III

### ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER: A CALL TO CONVERSION

*Conversion means relinquishing unjust power and privilege and reconstructing one's relation to others so that the means of life can be more justly shared. Conversion always happens in a social context, not as isolated individuals without any relation to society. Personal conversion and social change are dynamically interconnected.*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Religious Identity and Openness to a Pluralistic World: A Christian View"

#### The Shaping of an Activist, Author, and Feminist Theologian

As the above epigraph indicates, Rosemary Radford Ruether sees personal conversion as having enormous effect on the social transformation of the world. She understands conversion as occurring in community and always vitally related to "social change." A closer look at Ruether's background and sense of self illuminates the process by which she came to have the belief that conversion is linked to social transformation. Like Gloria Anzaldúa, Ruether views herself in extremely expansive terms. In explanation of expansive identity, I refer to AnaLouise Keating's words on the expansive self-identity of Gloria Anzaldúa: "Rather than emphasize her (Anzaldúa's) racial/cultural identity, sexuality, gender, or class, she foregrounds her thinking and writing, her spirit inflected politics and texts" ("Reading" 3). I would argue that Ruether also "foregrounds" her thinking and writing rather than her race, religion, class, or gender, thereby identifying herself expansively. As I suggested in Chapter Two,

an expansive self-identity may foster greater inclusivity and a sense of interrelatedness among those who strive for social justice. Therefore Ruether's expansive sense of self contributes to her ideas of conversion and social transformation.

This chapter will explore the life of Ruether and her references to conversion or metanoia found in her theological writing on sexism and ecofeminism. I will examine some of Ruether's personal experiences as contexts for conversion, and I will argue that Ruether's concept of conversion can be strengthened by the application of various elements of Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla.

Born in 1936 in St. Paul, Minnesota, Ruether became one of the most renowned Christian feminist theologians of the twentieth century. Her writing and teaching envision a transformed world free from oppression, degradation, and abuse. The ability to imagine such a vision originates, in part, in her childhood. Although Ruether was raised Roman Catholic, she was also taught to be receptive to different, even new, ways of thinking. In an autobiographical essay in the book she co-wrote with Rita Gross, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation*, Ruether states:

Openness to interreligious dialogue has particular biographical roots for each person. For both Rita and me, very different family patterns disposed each of us to be open to dialogue and to come to

repudiate a Christian exclusivism that assumed that there is only one true religion and that all other religions are inferior or even false. My own family, the Radfords on my father's side and the Ords on my mother's side, were religiously plural and had an international and an inter-cultural perspective that disposed me to be open to such experiences of other religions. (48)

Note the use of the phrases, "religiously plural" and "inter-cultural" as they define Ruether's inclusive way of approaching people and material that differ from her own life and thinking. The very existence of her book on Buddhist-Christian dialog is clear evidence that Ruether is willing to listen to the experiences of others and be open to differences that others may present. She is also willing to be changed by such dialogue and willing to help others change should they desire it.

Ruether's education, along with her life experiences, provided fertile ground for her developing intellect. She hoped to become an artist, but was drawn to religion, particularly Christianity, early in her academic career. Her master's and doctoral degrees in Roman History, Classics, and Patristics were both related to Christianity. This extensive education in Christian theology and the cultural/historical context in which Christianity was formed prepared Ruether for her later transformative work on sexism in Christianity. While pursuing graduate studies, Ruether also married and had three children. Caring for

children while working and studying outside the home often creates tension which Ruether experienced. In her essay “My Life Journey,” she states,

This experience [having children while finishing graduate school] brought me face to face with the contradictions between my aspiration to be both a mother and a scholar and the Catholic teachings forbidding birth control. Problems of Catholic teachings on sexuality and gender became urgent. (“My Life” 281)

The quotation and particularly the use of the word “urgent” seems to indicate that Ruether experienced a crisis that could possibly have given birth to her feminist stance toward theology and Catholic practice. I suggest that during this period in her life, she experienced *metanoia*. In Anzaldúan terminology, Ruether was in *nepantla* brought about by a personal “crisis” (Keating, Appendix 1 Reader 322), and she was “torn between ways” (Anzaldúa, “now,” 547-48). Ruether was moving toward a feminist epistemology that provided an experiential basis for her feminist theology.

The 1960’s also provided fertile ground for the activist in Ruether to emerge. She worked with “Delta Ministry” in Mississippi in the summer of 1965. As Ruether puts it,

That summer in Mississippi was a crucial turning point in my social consciousness. For the first time I glimpsed America from the underside, from the perspective of poor Black people in America,

and the face of white people I saw was frightening and dangerous.

(“My Life” 282)

In Ruether’s account of her experience in Mississippi, we can again see elements of *nepantla* such as the idea of being between worlds. She was intellectually and spiritually straddling her white, educated, middle-class world and the world of “poor Black people in America.” She also expresses the sense that she might have been experiencing conversion (i.e., her use of the words/phrases such as “crucial,” “turning point,” and the notion that her consciousness was changing). The above quotation also highlights the uniqueness of Ruether’s understanding of racism as an oppressive reality in America. According to many women of color, most white feminists of the 1960s and 1970s failed to adequately address racism (Combahee River Collective 243). For Ruether sexism and racism were both issues of concern.

Intellectually Ruether possesses an expansive understanding of how dominant systems of power work to marginalize all those perceived as a threat. In other words, even while those who create and sustain dominant systems of power view women, other races, cultures, and nationalities as objects to be used in the preservation of systems of power, they also perceive them as threatening to that power. Ruether sees Christianity as one such dominant system of power and according to her, “[Christianity] is the major culture and system of domination that has pressed humans and the earth into the crises of ecological

unsustainability, poverty, and militarism we now experience” (*Gaia* 10). This is quite an indictment from a renowned Christian theologian and her words call all Christians to at least entertain the idea that Christianity has been a major contributor to the problems we, as global citizens, face today.

Ruether was also one of the early voices to warn of the impending “ecological crisis.” For Ruether this crisis included the idea that the degradation and abuse of our natural resources might make life unsustainable on the earth for humans, animals, and plants. She emphatically declares that

there was no way that one could bring the rest of the world into the consumer lifestyle enjoyed by affluent Americans without destroying the bio-systems of the planet. Social justice demanded, not an endless expansion of the American economic system, but a conversion to a new paradigm. (“My Life” 282)

Note particularly the call for conversion in this quotation. Ruether is calling for a “conversion to relationality. This transformation means *metanoia* or ‘change of mind’ in which the dialectics of human existence are converted from opposites into mutual interdependence” (*Sexism* 163). “Mutual interdependence” is another way of talking about interrelatedness discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

For Ruether, this ecological crisis was connected to sexism, and though she did not coin the phrase, the combination of ecology and opposition to sexism

came to be known as ecofeminism.<sup>13</sup> One of the first texts on ecofeminism, published in 1975, was Ruether's book, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. Mary Mellor, who elaborates on *New Woman, New Earth* in the abstract of her essay, "New Woman, New Earth – Setting the Agenda," writes that "Rosemary Radford Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth* . . . was one of the first ecofeminist texts. This collection of essays identified many of the key issues for future ecofeminists and asserted the core of ecofeminist thinking." Ruether also wrote one of the most definitive books on ecofeminism entitled *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* published in 1992. Her ecofeminist writings are extensive, and clearly her fearless naming of the oppression of the earth and its peoples and her call to conversion are compelling.

This brief biographical sketch of Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that her experiences provided moments of crises which, in turn, offered the opportunity for epistemological changes needed to begin to create theories and theologies that promote social and environmental justice. It is from those shifts or "conversions" within her intellect and spirit that Ruether was able to do her transformative work of writing and teaching. This pattern of crisis, reflection, and change not only situates Ruether's ideas of conversion firmly in her own life

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<sup>13</sup> In her 2005 book, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, Ruether describes ecofeminism "as a major school of philosophical and theological thought and social analysis" (91). She goes on to say that "Ecofeminism sees an interconnection between the domination of women and the domination of nature" (91).

experiences, but also provides opportunities to apply elements of Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantla* to Ruether's experiences of and references to conversion. This is important because I believe that there are elements of *nepantla* that strengthen Ruether's ideas on conversion. We turn now to Ruether's writing on conversion and *metanoia*, which are somewhat obscured in the body of her extensive writing on Christian feminist theology.

### Conversion and *Metanoia*

While Ruether consistently refers to the experience of conversion throughout her writing, she neither systematically constructs a theory of conversion nor outlines a process by which conversion occurs. Instead, she presents conversion as a consistent element of her theoretical and theological work on sexism and ecofeminism. This is very different from Anzaldúa's overt focus on the theory of *nepantla*. The terms "conversion" (in the context of ecofeminism) and feminist *metanoia* may be inseparable for Ruether. It is noticeable that she most often uses "conversion" to connote change or paradigm shifts within the context of her writings on ecofeminism, and she uses "feminist *metanoia*" in the context of her writings on sexism.

Although Ruether's expanded concept of conversion is deeply spiritual<sup>14</sup> in nature, it transcends religious dogma. Though she views Christianity as a "spiritual tradition," she does not limit her ideas of spirituality to religion (*Gaia*

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<sup>14</sup> For an understanding of Ruether's concept of spirituality, see *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (4, 207).



207). According to Ruether, “Rather we must see the work of eco-justice and the work of spirituality as interrelated, the inner and outer aspects of one process of conversion and transformation” (*Gaia* 4). So we could say that Ruether views spirituality as an internal process that brings transformation. For me, her ideas on conversion and metanoia are spiritual because, in Anzaldúa’s words, they concern “recognizing and endowing meaning to daily experience” (“now” 568). In other words, an idea or concept is spiritual when it helps us to reflect on life and find value in the events of life. Though practices of spirituality may vary from person to person, it is spiritual practice that helps persons assign meaning to life. Spirituality is also a practice by which human beings learn relationality and compassion. The spiritual aspects of Ruether’s theology are evident in the following quote from her pioneering book, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, published in 1983. According to Ruether:

Converting our minds to the earth means understanding the more diffuse and relational logic of natural harmony. We learn to fit human ecology into its relation to nonhuman ecology in a way that maximizes the welfare of the whole rather than undermining and subverting (polluting) the life system. (91)

Ruether advocates a “conversion of our intelligence to the earth,” which is an early reference to her ecofeminist ideas (89). Note that there is no reference to “God” or religion in this quotation, although I maintain that Ruether’s thoughts are

of a spiritual nature because they involve reflection on the meaning of life.

However, the absence of any reference to God or religion is indicative of Ruether's expansion of the concept of conversion.

In addition, in *Sexism and God-Talk*, in Chapter Seven, entitled "The Consciousness of Evil: The Journeys of Conversion," Ruether introduces her use of the term "*metanoia*." While she does not include the adjective "feminist" in this particular quotation, she truly describes a feminist *metanoia* when she writes, "The recognition that the social structures of marginalization of women are unjust creates a fundamental *metanoia*, or turning around, from the perception of woman as other to the recognition of woman as equivalent human person" (173). For her feminist *metanoia* is the act of realizing that women have been undervalued and changing one's perspective to the idea that women are of equal value to men. *Metanoia*, resulting from the recognition of sexism, can be associated with the contexts in which Anzaldúa believes that nepantla occurs, namely arrebatos/crises (Anzaldúa, "now" 546). However, the recognition of sexism is the only personal context in which Ruether addresses either conversion or *metanoia*. With this exception of the recognition of sexism, Ruether's discussions of conversion and *metanoia* in her writings seem to occur randomly without a connection to specific life experiences. Ruether's life, on the other hand, is rich with experiences where conversion might occur, but she does not directly connect her theorizing and theologizing to those life experiences.

Ruether could strengthen her ideas on conversion had she presented certain critical events of human life such as loss, illness, and experiences of social injustice as opportunities when the potential for conversion is present.

In her 1995 essay, "Feminist Metanoia and Soul-Making," Ruether expounds further on the experiences of individual women (and sometimes men) when they realize the evil of sexism and decide that they want to live in a different way. She describes *metanoia* as "soul-making, . . . the process of enhancing our capacities, both personally and socially, for sustaining just and loving relationality, of curbing and curing fear of and contempt of others and for ourselves" (39). Ruether believes that "soul-making happens through transformative *metanoia*" (39). This quotation reflects a more subjective notion of conversion by Ruether with its references to emotions such as contempt, fear, and love. I view this emotive language as a positive development in Ruether's writing. This subjective component of *metanoia* corresponds closely with *nepantla* as Anzaldúa fully embraces intense emotion in her experience of *nepantla* and in the articulation of the theory of *nepantla*. Unlike Anzaldúa, however, Ruether does not ground her writings on conversion or *metanoia* within her reflections on her personal experience and does not fully address the spiritual, emotional, and psychological elements of conversion. Consequently, her idea of conversion remains a rather abstract and impersonal concept. I wonder if this lack of connection between her writing and her personal life is due

to her academic training. I also wish to reiterate that it was never her intention to present a systematic theory of conversion.

Feminist *metanoia* is also addressed in Ruether's classic book on ecofeminism, *Gaia and God: A Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, published in 1992. In the introduction to the book, Ruether defines *metanoia* as a "change in consciousness" which refers to persons being able to recognize the need for eco-justice and the struggle(s) against systems of domination" (9). Chapter Nine of *Gaia and God* then expands on her idea of *metanoia* as a "change in consciousness." In this expansion she presents a lengthy discussion of "reflective consciousness" which has to do with the idea that, as Ruether explains it, "we [humans] are, the 'mind' of the universe, the place where the universe becomes conscious of itself. Reflective consciousness is both our privilege and our danger" (249). In other words, human beings alone, according to Ruether, have been given the ability to think about life, to choose to change (*metanoia*), and to behave differently. It is an enormous responsibility and not without exciting possibilities.

The capacity of human beings to transform the world belongs solely to human beings. That is why conversion is so important, according to Ruether. If we cannot change our consciousness, we cannot behave in different ways. Ruether asserts that first we have to recognize where change is needed; then we must concede that in many instances we are the problem (Gaia 249-50). From

acknowledgement of the necessity for conversion, we can move to conversion itself, which is a spiritual and intellectual process. Conversion brings the willingness and the opportunity to amend our own behavior in cases where it is harming others, including non-human others.

However, as Ruether points out, recognizing the need for conversion is often close to impossible because many of our daily lives are so dependent upon both economic and cultural systems that are, at their core, systems of domination. In order to preserve our lifestyles, we must be complicit in sustaining those systems. Conversion and change frequently require that we risk our own comfort and privilege. In the book she co-wrote with Rita Gross, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, Ruether comments on the difficulty of recognizing and responding to our call to conversion:

Structures of privilege and oppression and our socialization into them can dim our awareness of our larger potential. "Conversion experiences" are breakthroughs to this larger potential that enable us to question and free ourselves from the grip of the systems of dominating power and to name these as wrong. Conversion experiences are facilitated by critical epistemic communities that validate such questioning and nurture liberating transformation. To be converted all alone is humanly impossible, even though it may

sometimes seem to those with dissenting views that they *are* all alone. (136)

Ruether suggests that the way forward is found through engagement in communities of critical thinkers who are first, seeking new forms of knowledge; second, supporting the struggle toward conversion; and third, encouraging “transformation.” She is insistent that “transformation” does not happen when one isolated person tries to change the world, but when groups of people come together to create new knowledge and forge change for themselves and the world.

Building on the idea that conversion takes place in community, Ruether adds a rather ambiguous emotional dimension to her concept of conversion in her 2005 essay, “Religious Identity and Openness to a Pluralistic World: A Christian View.” She states that “conversion takes place in the hearts of people in community” (38). The fact that Ruther locates conversion in the “heart” may be another attempt to either characterize conversion as a spiritual experience or to allude to the fact that it may involve emotion. More importantly, in this article, and as stated in the epigraph to this chapter, Ruether affirms the relatedness of conversion and social transformation. According to Ruether, “personal conversion and social change are dynamically interconnected” (39). This is a very profound concept, and Anzaldúa seems to hold the same position when she writes, “change requires more than words on a page—it takes

perseverance, creative ingenuity, and acts of love” (“now” 574). The relationship between conversion and social justice is an integral element in the exploration of conversion. In other words, conversion without changed behavior and a commitment to social justice would not be conversion. True conversion brings with it action that works toward the transformation of the world.

In summary, Ruether’s body of work consistently includes references to the idea of conversion or *metanoia*, but not as a fully developed or systematic theory. Criticisms of her lack of theoretical work on conversion may seem unfair in light of the fact that Ruether never intended her words about conversion to be interpreted as a full-fledged theory. However, conversion and *metanoia* are mentioned so frequently in Ruether’s writing that exploration and analysis of conversion and *metanoia* are certainly indicated. In Chapter Two I discussed three key elements of Anzaldúa’s portrayal of her theory of *nepantla*: recognizing a life context where *nepantla* is possible, “risking the personal” as a method of writing, and the use of metaphor. When I bring these elements of *nepantla* to bear on Ruether’s reflections on conversion, I find Ruether’s ideas about the process of conversion to be underdeveloped. With the exception of the recognition of sexism, she does not present conversion as occurring within a particular life context. There is scarcely any subjective content, other than those passages that I noted, connected with Ruether’s portrayal of conversion or *metanoia*. Moreover, Ruether does not use metaphor or imagery to illustrate

her thoughts on conversion and metanoia. Granted, subjective content and metaphor are not prominent in Ruether's works in general, but I argue that applying a contextual element for conversion, developing the idea of conversion as a personal experience, and including metaphorical imagery would enhance her ideas on conversion. The following chapter will address these applications.



## CHAPTER IV

### APPLYING ELEMENTS OF ANZALDÚA'S THEORY OF NEPANTLA TO RUETHER'S CALL TO CONVERSION

#### Analysis of the Conversation Between Nepantla and Conversion

An analysis of both Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla and the concepts of conversion and *metanoia* as they are synonymously portrayed by Rosemary Radford Ruether provides some thought-provoking outcomes. The key outcome of placing the ideas of these writers in relation to one another is the recognition that the theory of nepantla is much more fully developed as a process than the the concepts of conversion and *metanoia* as they are discussed by Ruether. As AnaLouise Keating tells us, "Anzaldúa used this term [nepantla] to develop her post-Borderlands theory of process, liminality, and potential change that builds on her theories of the Borderlands and the Coatlicue state" (Appendix 1, 322). Keating's words reflect the development of the concept of nepantla in Anzaldúa's thinking and writing over an extended period of time. For Anzaldúa, nepantla was a focal point in her later writing. While there are numerous fundamental aspects of nepantla that could be explored in relation to Ruether's texts, I identify three key elements from Anzaldúa's writings on nepantla to apply to and enhance Ruether's concept of conversion: 1) attention to context, 2) "risking the personal" as a method of writing, and 3) the use of metaphor in formulating the theory of

nepantla.<sup>15</sup> Context refers to a particular life experience during which there is potential for nepantla to occur and therefore, also the possibility for conversion. Anzaldúa calls these life experiences “arrebatos.” “Risking the personal” concerns the writing method Anzaldúa uses in which she includes very personal experiences to describe and enhance her theoretical work. As was noted in Chapter Two, “risking the personal” is undeniably powerful.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Anzaldúa employs numerous metaphors in her pursuit of illuminating the theory of nepantla. When applied to Ruether’s work, these elements, (context, “risking the personal,” and the use of metaphor) would be effective for strengthening the development of her concept of conversion.

I stress again that it does not appear that Ruether intended to develop a full-blown theory of conversion in her written work on sexism and ecofeminism in the contexts of Christian theology and history. However, she consistently calls for and refers to conversion or *metanoia* in her written work. Perhaps it would be helpful to think of Ruether’s writing on conversion in terms other than theory. Helen Wolf agrees and in her dissertation, “Ecofeminism and the Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether,” maintains that “Ruether develops a theology of conversion” (30). Like Wolf, I believe that Ruether’s concepts of conversion and *metanoia* are significant enough to warrant research and exploration since Ruether presents some undeniably well-formed ideas concerning conversion.

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<sup>15</sup> See pages 24-30.

<sup>16</sup> See Keating’s introduction to *Interviews/Entrevistas*, “Risking the Personal.”

Wolf helpfully asserts that Ruether's model of conversion is grounded in what she calls, "Ruether's biblical prophetic-messianic tradition of liberation, justice, and relationality" (30). In other words, Ruether's ideas about conversion are based on her progressive interpretation of the Judeo-Christian tradition formed by her commitment to social justice. Although Ruether's concepts of *metanoia* and conversion can be considered theological, they still have not been fully developed into a theory or comprehensively described as a process. I argue that an application of three key elements of nepantla (recognizing life context for conversion, "risking the personal" as a method of writing, and the use of metaphor) will strengthen Ruether's ideas about conversion.

### The Applications

Ruether's writing about her personal experiences provides an ideal place to apply elements of Anzaldúa's writing about nepantla in order to enhance her concept of conversion. In her theological autobiography, "My Life Journey," she describes a life experience that could be considered to be a context for her own conversion to feminism. According to Ruether,

Between 1958 and 1963 [she and her husband] would have three children even as [she] finished [her] graduate education. This experience brought [her] face to face with the contradictions between [her] aspiration to be both a mother and a scholar and the Catholic teachings forbidding birth control. (281)

The stress surrounding the demands made on her is evident. While Ruether would not call this experience *nepantla*, I would suggest that during this time of being torn between family and work, along with the added pressure of the Church's doctrine prohibiting birth control, she was indeed in a time of *nepantla*. In the tension surrounding these demands, feminist epistemology was being born in Ruether as is evidenced by her words: " [I was] brought face to face with the contradictions between my aspiration to be both a mother and a scholar and the Catholic teachings forbidding birth control." Ruether was learning how difficult it was to have children and pursue an academic career, when in the early 1960's a woman often had to choose between family and career and there were no daycare centers and many men considered child care "woman's work." Arguably, Ruether's experience (the crisis of recognizing the "contradictions" in her life) was ideal for transformative *metanoia* and therefore an excellent illustration of a personal crisis in which elements of *nepantla* could be identified ("My Life" 281). I believe that to strengthen her theology of conversion, Ruether could have more clearly identified her situation as a life context where she experienced a feminist *metanoia*. She could have elaborated about the way in which the tension between career and mothering could be an experience that brings about a shift or change in a woman's perspectives.

Furthermore, we can see the context for conversion in Ruether's experiences working with the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi in 1965. She

writes, “For the first time I glimpsed America from the underside, from the perspective of poor Black people in America, and the face of white people I saw was frightening and dangerous” (“My Life” 282). Seeing people living in poverty and oppression created a spiritual and psychological crisis for Ruether as she confronted the realities of racism and classism. The crisis precipitated transformation. According to Ruether, “That summer in Mississippi was a crucial turning point in my social consciousness” (282). Here, Ruether acknowledges that her experience in Mississippi was a context for conversion, but she does not expound on the connection between conversion and the context in which conversion may occur.

The second element of *nepantla* that I suggest applying to Ruether’s writing on conversion is “risking the personal” which refers to Anzaldúa’s method of integrating very personal content throughout her theoretical writings. Again, we turn to Ruether’s life and look at her conflicting experiences of raising a family and being a scholar simultaneously. Did Ruether feel alone in her situation? Were there other women with whom she could commiserate? How did the experience change her view of her scholarly life, her role as a mother and wife, and her adherence to Catholic dogma? Did she ever experience a shift where she viewed herself differently or knew something she had never known? Did she resolve to change the world when she realized a shift in her identity and epistemology? Was she angry or frustrated then? Did the pull between family

and career strain her marriage? Did she ever feel like giving up her academic endeavors? More detailed answers to some of these questions in her writings might assist the reader in connecting personally to Ruether's ideas concerning *metanoia*. What is lacking in her writing are descriptions of the more personal and vulnerable aspects of the experience, including her emotions. Surely she felt anger, fear, and frustration while she was experiencing being torn between family, career, and religion. I do not suggest that disclosure of emotions by an author is the only way to impact readers concerning conversion. I do suggest that in Anzaldúa's case, the personal and emotional language is very powerful in helping readers to comprehend the dynamics of *nepantla*.

Another example where Ruether could have benefitted from the use of "risking the personal" is in her writing concerning her work with the civil rights and peace movements. In "My Life Journey," she writes, "That summer in Mississippi was a crucial turning point in my social consciousness. For the first time I glimpsed America from the underside, from the perspective of poor Black people in America, and the face of white people I saw was frightening and dangerous" (282). Ruether uses the words "frightening and dangerous" which interject an emotive, even personal, quality to her words. She even writes, "That summer in Mississippi was a crucial turning point in [her] social consciousness," but she does not connect the fear and danger with the idea of experiencing a "turning point in her social consciousness." Ruether also neglects to directly relate either

the fear and danger or the “turning point” to *metanoia* or conversion. I do not criticize Ruether for not making the connection between her experiences and conversion. However, I merely suggest that writing about her experiences in Mississippi provides the perfect opportunity to bring a more personal element to her writing and thus make an even more powerful impact on her readers.

The third element from *nepantla*, which could fruitfully be applied to Ruether’s writing, is the use of metaphor. Ruether uses metaphors only sparingly throughout her body of writings, and she does not use them to enhance her concept of conversion. Looking again at her written depictions about her experiences while working in the civil rights movement, we see the opportunity for incorporating metaphors. She writes:

We had to be on the lookout for local whites as vehemently hostile to our presence. One night hooded Klu Klux Klansmen rode through the campus shooting at random at the windows of the buildings. Thereafter we stationed a nightly guard to watch for such incursions. The plan was to ring a bell warning people to get under their beds if such an event occurred again. These experiences gave me a graphic sense of living in an American war zone, one in which we had to assume the local police were the enemy. (“My Life” 282)

As we see, Ruether uses the metaphor “war zone,” which is very effective in helping the reader to understand the gravity of the experience and to receive a vivid picture of what was happening. Being literally or figuratively in a “war zone” is an ideal place to reflect on the need for transformation. I would suggest that a person would never be the same after a “war zone” experience, and I suspect that Ruether must have somehow been changed by her “war zone” experience. How does it feel to have to make a plan to avoid a bullet coming through your bedroom window? I would imagine it makes a person feel very vulnerable and perhaps the notion that we are safe in our own country would be questioned. How does it feel to mistrust the very authorities whom you thought were there to protect you? Responding to these questions concerning the “war zone” metaphor would have illuminated Ruether’s ideas about *metanoia*. Had Ruether included even more descriptive imagery to portray her experience and then directly connected the experience to *metanoia*, her writing may have been even more compelling to her readers for provoking a deeper understanding of conversion. For instance, what metaphor aptly describes her experience of being a young mother and a graduate student who is in conflict with religious teaching concerning birth control? A woman might think of the situation as being trapped or being torn between being a mother and having a career. A discussion of what it is like to be trapped or torn between family and work might ensue, thereby illuminating the original experience.



## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have constructed an argument based on textual interpretations and analyses of specific writings by Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Rosemary Radford Ruether. My central argument is that Ruether's depiction of the act of conversion can fruitfully be expanded and strengthened in compelling ways by the application of certain elements of Anzaldúan nepantla. I have shown how the application of three elements of Anzaldúa's writing on nepantla, (1) recognizing the context for nepantla, (2) the use of what AnaLouise Keating calls "risking the personal," and (3) the use of metaphorical language to describe transformative experiences, may enhance Ruether's description of the process of conversion. My thesis also provides a beginning process by which a theory of conversion using Ruether's written work could be constructed. This thesis is important because I believe that the transformation of the world on behalf of environmental and social justice hinges on inner change or conversion. Specifically, transformation of the world will require a conversion to interrelatedness, as I discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Interrelatedness is the recognition that all people, animals, plants, and the earth itself are dynamically connected. As Anzaldúa describes it, "We are one" ("now" 558).

Leela Fernandes, in her book, *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social Justice, and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*, similarly suggests that conversion is required for transformation:

If our politics and movements are to be able to fully challenge existing structures of power and inequality they must also rest on a form of spiritual transformation [that] requires a complete dissociation from the ego-based investments in control, recognition and superiority which are mistakenly identified as self-interest. It requires a brutally honest, inward process of self-examination to dispel the idealized self-images we carry around with us and provide the radical humility required to really manifest social justice in this world. . . . It requires a firm understanding that there can be no separation between this internal process of confrontation and what we view as external processes of change and transformation.

(44)

In essence, Fernandes asserts that transformation of this world requires internal conversion as well as outward change. As we are transformed inwardly, our actions in the world will be transformed as well. Conversion calls us from self-centeredness to other-centeredness or interrelatedness. As we have seen, Ruether agrees when she writes, “Personal conversion and social change are dynamically interconnected” (“Religious Identity” 39). In the conclusion of her essay, “now let us shift,” Anzaldúa echoes the same sentiment: “nepantla is the only place where change happens. Change requires more than words on a page – it takes perseverance, creative ingenuity, and acts of love” (574). So, we can

then say that conversion serves as a catalyst for change not only in one's inner life, but also in one's behavior in the world. Conversion is essential for those who work to transform the world because, as Helen Wolf tells us, "Conversion can . . . lead to action" (33). With this statement, Wolf is in the company of renowned feminist and eco-feminist authors who believe that conversion and acts of social justice are integrally related.

While this thesis has explored the Anzaldúan theory of *nepantla* and its application to the concepts of conversion and *metanoia* as put forth by Ruether, there are still many questions concerning *nepantla* and conversion. According to Wolf, "more direction is needed for *metanoia* to occur. There is need for more concrete guidance on how to foster the conversion of human consciousness called for by Ruether and other eco-feminists" (33). I agree with Wolf and would add that Anzaldúa, through her writing about the theory of *nepantla*, has made an enormous contribution by providing guidance to us about how and when there is potential for conversion. We learn from Anzaldúa that life presents us all with opportunities that bring us to question the status quo. These opportunities are most often quite difficult and painful, but in knowing that we are experiencing the process of *nepantla* in these instances, we can more ably navigate the waters of conversion, thereby becoming agents of transformation in the world.

In her master's thesis, "Radical Rhetoric: Excavating Gloria Anzaldúa's 'La Prieta,'" Jessica Camp writes that "Anzaldúa grapples with difficult questions that

require individuals to undergo intense self-reflection and, through this reflection, develop a greater understanding of those around us. Ideally, this increased comprehension will lead to compassionate action in the service of social justice”

(2). According to Camp, it may be naive to think that increased comprehension, a precursor to conversion, will necessarily lead to behavior that reflects that conversion. Even though conversion may seem idealistic or impossible, I believe that we must begin somewhere if we are to transform the world. Conversion is part of our responsibility as we seek to live lives that make a difference. In the words of Rosemary Radford Ruether, “We must start by recognizing that *metanoia*, or change of consciousness, begins with us” (*Gaia and God* 269).

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