

# Introduction, 1981

*Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa*

## How It All Began

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

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

In April, 1979, we wrote:

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

(From the original soliciting letter)

## The Living Entity

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

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

We named this anthology “radical” for we were interested in the writings of women of color who want nothing short of a revolution in the hands of women—who agree that that is the goal, no matter how we might disagree about the getting there or the possibility of seeing it in our own lifetimes. We use the term in its original form—stemming from the word “root”—for our feminist politic emerges from the roots of both of our cultural oppression and heritage.

## The Parts of the Whole

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

## The Writers and Their Work

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

The selections in this anthology range from extemporaneous stream of consciousness journal entries to well thought-out theoretical state-

ments; from intimate letters to friends to full-scale public addresses. In addition, the book includes poems and transcripts, personal conversations and interviews. The works combined reflect a diversity of perspectives, linguistic styles, and cultural tongues.

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

In compiling the anthology, Cherríe was primarily responsible for the thematic structure and organization of the book as a whole. She also wrote the introductions to the first four sections of the book which cover 1) The Roots of Our Radicalism; 2) Theory in the Flesh; 3) Racism in the Women's Movement; and 4) On Culture, Class, and Homophobia. Gloria wrote the introductions to the final two sections of the book which explore The Third World Woman Writer and The Vision of the Third World feminist. Together as editors, we both bore the burden of the book (even more than we had anticipated—this being our first attempt at such a project), not only doing the proofreading and making editorial decisions, but also acting as a telephone answering and courier service, PR persons and advertisers, interviewers and transcribers, and even occasionally, muses for some of the contributors during their sometimes rather painful "writing blocks." Most important, we saw our major role as editors being to encourage writers to delve even more deeply into their lives, to make some meaning out of it for themselves and their readers.

## Time and Money

Many people have commented on the relative speed in which this book was produced. In barely two years, the anthology grew from a seed of an idea to a published work. True, everyone has worked fast, including the publishers. The anthology was created with a sense of urgency. From the moment of its conception, it was already long overdue. Two years ago when we started, we knew it was a book that should already have been in our hands.

How do you concentrate on a project when you're worried about paying the rent? We have sorely learned why so few women of color attempt this kind of project: no money to fall back on. In compiling this book we both maintained two or more jobs just to keep the book and ourselves alive. No time to write while waiting tables. No time for class preparation, to read students' papers, argue with your boss, have a love

life or eat a decent meal when the deadline must be met. No money to buy stamps, to hire a lawyer “to go over the contract,” to engage an agent. Both of us became expert jugglers of our energy and the few pennies in our piggybanks: Gloria’s “little chicken” and Cherríe’s “tecate bucket.”

### Agradecimientos

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

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

### Putting our Words into Practice

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

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

working alone on the issues of racism. And, we want to see our colored sisters using this book as an educator and agitator around issues specific to our oppression as women.

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

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

The revolution begins at home.