

## INTRODUCTION

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This collection of original articles represents the critical reflections and voices of Latinas engaged in theology in the United States of America. Other well-known feminist anthologies have brought together and identified the “experiences of women.” However, the experiences presented in those anthologies continue to be dominated almost exclusively by Euro-American or Afro-American women. This collection is an attempt to add the perspectives of U.S. Latinas to that feminist religious intellectual construction. This reader includes contributions from Latinas who live all around the United States of America, who are not only ethnically diverse but ecclesiologicaly diverse as well, and as such they are representative of the Latina mosaic that is a reality in our communities. We lift our voices to share the variety of issues that interest us, trouble us, challenge us, and motivate us. We are aware of how important it is for women to hear one another’s voices to enhance the work that needs to be done. The addition of our Latina voices, as expressed in our diverse methodologies and approaches, provides to the national tapestry of “women’s experiences” the missing textures, colors, shapes, and shades that are created by our Latina context. By adding the experiences of Latinas we seek to transform and enlarge that tapestry and create

a bridge that connects to the work of our feminist and womanist sisters. In this anthology we not only acknowledge the great diversity of approaches to the feminist religious language but also the unity of themes found among U.S. Latina feminists.

This is a feminist Latina reader. This collection articulates the theological reflection of Latinas in the United States of America on the realities, struggles, and spirituality of women. We understand theology as a dynamic and critical language with which we express our religious vision of a new paradigm of civilization that is free of systemic injustice and violence due to kyriarchal domination.<sup>1</sup> Empowered by this language, we seek to affirm new models of social relationships that are capable of fully sustaining human dignity and the integrity of creation. Beginning with the religious practices and imagination of our Latina communities, the feminist religious language allows us to say who we are and how we seek to affect the present and future direction of society, culture, churches, and the academy. As women engaged in theology, whether in the church or in the academy, we acknowledge the importance of claiming a space for our voices to be heard and for collaboration among women to be achieved. With the emergence and growth of the feminist theologies of liberation, we no longer wait for others to define or validate our experience of life and faith. Women, and in fact all who are in a constant struggle against oppression, have decided to interpret and to name themselves. We want to express in our own words our plural ways of experiencing God and our plural ways of living our faith. And these ways have a liberative tone. In the midst of a reality in which “women of color” continue to be excluded, as noted by M. P. Aquino, doing theology “is not a luxury, but a necessity and a right to be claimed.”<sup>2</sup>

The task of theological reflection is never done in a vacuum, and it builds on the reflections and learnings of other women who journey with us. That is why we acknowledge the important work and contributions of Ada María Isasi-Díaz in developing what she has defined as *mujerista* theology.<sup>3</sup> However, we have opted to name ourselves Latina feminists. Since the power of self-naming is so crucial to the experience of women, particularly non-white women of grassroots provenance, this decision represents our effort at self-identity in the public sphere.<sup>4</sup> It also represents our effort at establishing conversation with the rich tradition of Latina/Chicana feminism in the United States of America. As Latina feminists, what we offer in this

reader is what Cherríe Moraga has called “a theory in the flesh,” which because of the “physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.”<sup>5</sup> This theory in the flesh is also plural and multivocal. Because the Latina community in the United States of America is a *culturally plural* and a *mestizo/a* community present in all colors of the human rainbow,<sup>6</sup> the articles in this reader also represent the variety of voices and realities of *Chicanas* (or *Xicanismas*), *Puertorriqueñas*, *Cubanas*, *Mexicanas*, and *Sur Americanas*. Our common bond is that we live in the United States of America (our physical reality), where we have all experienced racism, sexism, devaluation, and exclusion by a culture and a society that cannot seem to move beyond the white/black focus of its national discourse on race and national identity.

As Latina feminists, we are presenting a critical framework from which we analyze the realities of Latinas in the United States of America. In doing this, we examine inequalities along lines of race, class, poverty, citizenship, gender, and religion as they affect us and our communities. With these articles we hope to challenge Euro-American feminists and womanists to rethink the issues that directly relate to the ongoing and developing discourse of women in both the secular world and the theological academy. We understand that the dominant feminism, Euro-American and womanist, in the United States of America represents only one type of what Chéla Sandoval calls “oppositional consciousness,”<sup>7</sup> also found in other liberation movements and ideologies. Therefore what we bring to the feminist and womanist discourse is a pluralism that goes beyond the white/black agenda. The articles in this reader focus on issues that are relevant and pertinent to Latinas yet are also of concern to our national agenda. The articles in this collection reflect on the themes of the Latina reality, whether it be the issue of identity or the importance of popular religion in Latina communities or the situation of undocumented women who live within U.S. borders. We find in this collection of writings evidence that what Ivone Gebara has said is true for Latinas in the United States of America: “Feminist theological expression always starts from what has been lived, from what is experienced in the present.”<sup>8</sup>

The theology in this reader is one that takes seriously the relative autonomy as well as the integration of theory and practice while reflecting on life. As a result, it is a theology that is in the process of

redefining reason itself. Our task as Latina scholars is not to give up reason or neglect skill development in favor of social justice, but to demonstrate that *how* we think counts as reason. How we think arises from our plural practices and lived experiences. We want to be able to tell our own history and speak about our condition and our expectations. That is why the Latina feminist language we are presenting cannot overlook or dismiss the issues of nationalism and the geopolitical configurations of the nation-state as analytical categories. The history of Latinas is interconnected with the history of conquest and domination of the southwestern reaches of this country, as well as of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, by an ever-evolving United States of America. This is a national story as well as an international one in which the United States of America would seek to dominate an entire hemisphere—militarily, economically, and racially.

Latinas share a common history of *conquista* and *reconquista*, of colonization and domination. We know what it means to be seen as intruder and alien on our own land; we know what life is like as a daily cultural, social, and racial “border crosser.” It is this national/international reality that is unique and important to the Latina feminist, while it also serves to focus our writings on relations of power. In these relations of power the Latina uses her social position as well as her gender and cultural location (language and skin color) as the place to begin her analysis. The result is a process that empowers and decolonizes. That is why the issue of justice remains central to our analysis. As a result of our shared history of conquest and colonization, Latina feminists use their theological reflection to move in new and liberating directions in which justice is also interpreted as a Christian vision of a new humanity in a new social order. The quest for justice, for social transformation, gives Latinas the power to challenge the dominant culture’s devaluation of our own culture, language, and indigenous intellectual legacy while affirming our self-worth.

As Latina feminists we are also trying to formulate what can be called “marginal” theories because they are partially outside and partially inside the Western frame of reference. We are articulating new positions that examine the “in-betweenness” of Latinas who live in this country. As Gloria Anzaldúa says, the Latina lives in a “borderland world of ethnic communities and academies, feminist and job worlds.”<sup>9</sup> In this in-between existence we move across racial, cultural, economic, and idiomatic boundaries. We may be citizens, but

we continue to have outsider status. We may be a part of the academy, but our research interests continue to be labeled “special topics.” We may be members of a parish, but our styles of worship continue to be considered nontraditional and ethnic. The ministries to our communities continue to be underfunded and overlooked in denominational planning. We are daily border-crossers who must learn early on to interpret life on both sides—life in the dominant culture and life in the Latina community—in order to survive. The pages of this book give the reader a glimpse into the experiences and patterns of life we have uncovered, and we offer our own theories to help understand and interpret a reality that touches the lives of the more than thirty-five million Latina/os living in this country. In our reflection/writing there is also an obligation and a sense that our primary responsibility, accountability, is to our people, our communities, our children. Therefore, we challenge the prevailing view of scholarship as a fundamentally individual activity undertaken in isolation from community. We further question the mind-set that too readily pits the individual against society, affect against intellect, subjectivity against objectivity, science against theology, and faith against religion. Our faith is at the root of our struggle *and* our reflection.

This collection is divided into two sections. The first contains six articles that focus on the source or locus of Latina thought and insight: religious practice. Beginning with historical contextualization, Michelle González writes about Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and her legacy of writings, which provide a clear example of how the religious practice of Latinas does have a feminist intellectual history. The article by Teresa Delgado examines the writings of Puerto Rican women as they struggle with their national reality as *colonia* and how those writers offer a new source for feminist liberation theology. Gail Pérez examines the *cuentos* of Chicana writer Ana Castillo, arguing that she uses the popular religion/folklore of Chicanas as a tool to interpret the reality of class, race, and oppression. Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz explores the concept of identity and the ways it is used as a hermeneutical lens for a liberating reading strategy. Anna Adams focuses on Latina Pentecostals, a rapidly growing group, by examining the context of one geographic setting, Allentown, Pennsylvania. In the final article of this section, Jeanette Rodríguez looks at the context in which Latinas live out their faith and how that faith fuels their commitment to justice.

The second section has as its focus the methods and insights of

Latina feminists on two levels. The six articles in this section not only establish a deliberate yet critical conversation with the existent U.S. Latina feminism, but they also examine the reality of Latina life. María Pilar Aquino's article explores the central features of our theological activity, including its understandings and orientations, context of reality, preconditions and characteristics, key principles, and its major tasks. Daisy L. Machado writes about the undocumented women who live in this country, using the biblical image of the Levite's concubine to examine relations of power and nationhood. Carmen Nanko examines how the Latina/o theologian must rethink the concept of a "preferential option for the poor" that is central to Latin American liberation theology, so that such an option can give voice to the reality of the U.S. Latina community. Nora Lozano-Díaz writes about the Virgin of Guadalupe from a Protestant perspective; she examines whether *la virgencita* has been ignored by Protestant Latinas. Gloria Loya explores the many contributions of Latinas to what she calls "an ever-evolving *mestiza* feminist theology." And finally, Nancy Pineda-Madrid develops a "ChicanaFeminist epistemology," describing the major themes of this epistemology and their importance for the intellectual work being produced by Latina theologians.

Before closing this introduction, we would like to say a little about the journey of Latinas in theology. The reality is that Latina/o theology is just beginning to take hold within the academy and the Church as a result of the books and articles that the Latina/os in the theological community have produced in the past decade. We are an emerging community that has only recently begun to give voice to our theological reflection and experience. This anthology has Roman Catholic and Protestant contributors, and while we may struggle together, each denominational community also has had its own particular journey and realities. The Roman Catholic U.S. Latinas trace their first steps as a group to the creation of ACHTUS (Academy of Catholic Hispanics in the United States), which officially began in 1988. Five years later, María Pilar Aquino became the first female president of ACHTUS, giving evidence that Latinas have been integral to the burgeoning Roman Catholic Latino/a theology right from the beginning. Protestant Latinas, while still fewer in number than their Catholic sisters, are also making great strides and creating a much-needed space for their theological voices. As a minority within a minority, Protestant Latinas have forged friendships and crossed boundaries with their Roman Catholic Latina sisters, which has created an

awareness of the value of both perspectives as well as the importance of all our contributions to theological activity.

And now some words of gratitude. The editors want to say a heartfelt “thank you” to our colleagues who also contributed to the realization of this project. They offered their work with a sense of selfless giving, knowing that we did not have any kind of funding to compensate them for their work. Their goal was to make their voices heard by a larger and more diverse audience. These writers also represent a newly emerging community of younger Latina scholars, many of whom have only recently entered the academy. *A cada una de ustedes, ¡Muchas gracias, hermanas!* This book is the realization of a dream, of OUR dream. María Pilar Aquino’s work in the editorial process and her chapter in this book were possible thanks to the Louisville Institute, which, through its Christian Faith and Life Sabbatical Grants Program, allowed her the time to participate in this project. We thank the Louisville Institute for its support. We are especially grateful to Theresa J. May, assistant director and editor-in-chief of the University of Texas Press, for making the publication of this book possible, and to the readers involved in this project for their helpful suggestions. We are also grateful to our colleagues at the University of San Diego, Brite Divinity School, and Seattle University for their support.

Our hope with this anthology is to offer a collection of articles written by Latinas in our search for innovative intercultural explorations for feminist theological methods. We came together driven by our desire to actualize our “anthological imagination.” It has taken more than three years for this project to come to fruition, but we celebrate the journey, and we hope that this book will be a bridge to a more open and diverse feminist/womanist dialogue. As Cherríe Moraga has said, “We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words.”<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

1. On the meaning of *kyriarchy* as analytical category, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic. The Politics of Biblical Studies*, 5–6, and *Jesus Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet. Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*, 14.

2. María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America*, 68.

3. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha. In the Struggle: Elaborating a*

*Mujerista Theology and Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century.*

4. As editors of this book we acknowledge that the term *mujerista* was coined in Peru as the name for a sectarian gynocentric group that, inspired by an essentialist ideology about women, turned away from the powerful Peruvian feminist movement in the late 1970s and gradually disappeared in the late 1980s. See Documento Final, "Del amor a la necesidad. A Julieta Kirkwood. IV Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe. Taller: La política feminista en América Latina hoy," in *Caminando: Luchas y Estrategias de las Mujeres. Tercer Mundo*, María Antonieta Saa, Isis Internacional, Ediciones de las Mujeres, vol. 11 (1989): 9–13.

5. Cherríe Moraga, "Entering the Lives of Others. Theory in the Flesh," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 23.

6. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*; Daisy L. Machado, "Latino Church History: A Haunting Memory," *Perspectivas*, Hispanic Theological Initiative, no. 1 (fall 1998): 22–34; Jeanette Rodríguez, "U.S. Hispanic/Latino Theology: Context and Challenge," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 5:3 (1998): 6–15; María Pilar Aquino, "Directions and Foundations of Hispanic/Latino Theology: Toward a Mestiza Theology of Liberation," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 1:1 (1993): 5–21.

7. Chéla Sandoval, "Mestizaje as Method: Feminists-of-Color Challenge the Canon," in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo, 355, 359; and "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders*, no. 10 (spring 1991): 1–36.

8. See Ivone Gebara, "Women Doing Theology in Latin America," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King, 55.

9. Gloria Anzaldúa's introduction ("Haciendo caras, una entrada") in *Making Face, Making Soul. Haciendo Caras. Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa, xxvi.

10. Moraga, "Entering the Lives of Others," 23.