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[un]framing the “bad woman”: Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and other rebels with a cause

Alicia Gaspar de Alba, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2014, 406 pp., ISBN: 978-0-292-75850-6, \$27.95 (Pbk)

Alicia Gaspar de Alba's book, *[Un]framing the “Bad Woman”: Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and Other Rebels with a Cause*, challenges dominant, patriarchal representations of Latina historical figures and rearticulates them through a Chicana/Latina feminist lens. As a compilation of the author's extensive body of work over the past twenty-five years, through a myriad of written and aesthetic forms, such as poetry, art, references to popular culture, and historical fiction, Gaspar de Alba's book seeks to retell the stories of Latina women who have been 'framed' as 'bad', while linking the common threads among them and with her own experiences. In this way, her book is in itself a political act that exposes the struggles and activism of both historical and contemporary Chicana/Latina feminists.

Situated in Chicana/o and American Studies, while crossing numerous interdisciplinary fields such as border, women's, queer, art, and postcolonial studies, Gaspar de Alba's writings are grounded in the works of Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1987), along with Moraga (1993), Pérez (1999), and other Chicana feminist scholars. The book begins with a letter to Anzaldúa, in which Gaspar de Alba shares how she has come to her passion and calling to engage in historical critique, at times serendipitously. Her writing draws the reader in with a vulnerable and honest introspection into her psyche, which radiates love, devotion, and appreciation for Anzaldúa and other Chicana/Latina feminists who have guided her instincts and intuition in framing her life's work.

After the letter, Gaspar de Alba clearly and meticulously lays out definitions of framing, all of which have inspired [un]framing as the title and major theme throughout her book. From a Chicana feminist perspective, the author theorises framing as the incrimination of 'bad women' or 'bodies framed within particular discourse and patriarchal imperatives, which are capitalist, racist, and imperialist' (p. 18). Through this interpretation of framing, the book's chapters are dedicated to rewriting the stories of Chicana's/Latina's positioned as bad 'within a revolutionary frame' (p. 19).

Gaspar de Alba begins by unframing Sor Juana, who has been historicised as a desexualised and apolitical 'holy' nun, when in fact she was one of the earliest Latina feminist revolutionaries. As a lesbian, activist, and poet, Sor Juana not only pushed back against patriarchy, heteronormativity, and homophobia, but she also fought for women to be recognised as intellectuals and writers. To problematise dominant accounts of Sor Juana's life, Gaspar de Alba

creates a fictionalised interview between herself and the herstorical figure, using archived letters written by Sor Juana to construct the narrative. This provides a creative and powerful method of sharing/having a living dialogue with Sor Juana that, at the same time, reframes patriarchal interpretations of her life.

Next, Gaspar de Alba unframes La Malinche, who has been labelled a traitor to the Aztec people because of her involvement as a translator for Cortés during the Spanish Conquest and because she later birthed their son. Gaspar de Alba uses a Chicana feminist lens to rewrite Malinche as someone who affirms 'a women's freedom to use her mind, her tongue, [and] her body in the way that she chooses and [...] for her own survival and empowerment' (p. 78). She then weaves popular culture into her analysis to problematise the patriarchy and homophobia in Chicano and feminist movements. The author continues to reframe his-stories by repositioning dominant accounts of Aztlán. Rather than adhering to understandings of identity as merely one's ties to a physical place of origin, Gaspar de Alba utilises notions of embodied aesthetics to re-envision Aztlán as spiritually, physically, and symbolically connected to Chicana feminists' visual art.

In subsequent chapters, the author connects past injustices, such as witch hunts, to present injustices through a retelling of the story of Coyolxauhqui, an Aztec warrior goddess who was framed as a bad daughter and consequently murdered by her brother. Gaspar de Alba juxtaposes Coyolxauhqui's gruesome killing with the El Paso–Ciudad Juárez femicides, illustrating how women historically have been humiliated, wrongfully portrayed, and dismembered. Providing a poignant account of the border femicides, the author shows how Chicanas in recent times have resisted the patriarchal, colonial, and neo-liberal underpinnings of US policies like NAFTA that have been key instigators of violence against girls and women on the border. She then retells these accounts through herstorical fiction. This is yet another example of Gaspar de Alba's desire to participate in scholarship that reaches beyond academic audiences and into mainstream forums. Engaging further in transformative scholarship, in the next chapter, Gaspar de Alba problematises protests against Chicana artist Alma Lopez's interpretation of the Virgin of Guadalupe, *Our Lady*. Importantly, Gaspar de Alba questions to whom such a prominent figure belongs and, in doing so, exposes the misogynistic underpinnings that have constructed the Virgin as 'pure' rather than as a 'sexed, gendered, raced, and classed body in patriarchy' (p. 230).

As a major figure in Chicana feminism, Gaspar de Alba has opened new spaces for Chicanas in Chicana/o and American Studies. This book in particular pushes feministas to continue re/claiming and rearticulating Latina herstorical figures. Furthermore, much like the women in her book who challenge the norms of sexuality, race, class, and gender, Gaspar de Alba challenges us to awaken and look at the frames in which we live and find value and strength in the process of unframing and reframing our own herstories. Her collection of essays is a Chicana feminist call to action, providing readers with vivid examples and necessary tools to begin the process of self-knowledge, or one's own spiritual activism. Because of these many imperative knowings and actions that Gaspar de Alba inspires, her book is a must-have for any scholar activist's collection.

references

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