

# Making Face, Making Soul

*H A C I E N D O   C A R A S*

*Creative and Critical Perspectives  
by Feminists of Color*

edited by Gloria Anzaldúa

*aunt lute books*  
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## Notes on Oppression and Violence

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“Because I am Brown, I am oppressed.” When I speak this, I know it is not enough. The knowledge of racism is not enough. Because if I am still bound by my own self-hatred, *I am the oppressor onto myself.*

I ask myself, “How does a Brown sister, a Black sister, free herself?”

Knowing I am oppressed, I must also know that I participate in this oppression. I must realize that I and all my darker sisters take the instruments of oppression and use them on ourselves. Our tools come in many forms.

We take from the oppressor the instrument of hatred and sharpen it on our bodies and souls. The internalization of “spic” and “nigger” begins at birth. Only consciousness must follow—or death.

*Migrant Farm Labor Camp No. 109, Ohio, August 17, 1956:*

*The poor home of a migrant farm worker’s family was invaded today by police to rip the children from the groins of the Mexican mother. The Native American father had attempted to kill his three-year-old daughter. The incident was caused by severe economical distress and obvious hunger. The daughter was placed in an orphanage.*

The very roots of my radicalism

began in the city streets.

*Where was the point of departure from myself                      what time was  
it                      what did the feeling look like                      how did it taste                      why did  
I swallow it?*

Street culture and behavior is a way of surviving in industrial North America. It creates a passionate and violent language.

When I would whisper to a compadre, “I love you,” or yell “I hate you” to an enemy, the passion of the language which exploded inside me sprang from the same source. I had learned that both love and hate are potentially violent. When I dared to love someone, he or she shared with me a basic understanding that through our hating we might survive. If we could hate enough and fight back enough we might be jailed less or knifed less or raped less often. As I grew older, I built upon the notion that hatred must seek revenge. I began responding to the harsh reality that I was worthless in society by broadening my violent actions. And in an odd way, I sought justice.

My responses were mixed with a pre-consciousness. A form of resistance.

I was incarcerated when I was sixteen on four felony charges and three misdemeanors. A plea bargain sent me to an experimental maximum security institution in Ohio instead of the Women's prison. When I stole the jail transfer papers on me and others off the prison psychologist's desk, I learned many of us had been sent here because we had high IQs. And, about me, the papers read "She is considered dangerous to society and herself." Dangerous to society...

*Dangerous to tell the violence I am. Dangerous to release the anger I am. Dangerous to write the truth of the source of oppression. Dangerous to name it—name the person, the myth and the props. Dangerous to be who I am. Dangerous to the social make-up of this country. Dangerous to write it. Dangerous to myself.*

A poem I wrote in 1970 reads:

i stepped out  
to meet the Cold  
only the Cold warmed me  
feeling winter's naked intent  
the last Cold needle piercing my arm  
feeling white man's consent  
the lasting supply of bitter Crystals  
thru the dead of Snow.  
i stepped out  
to meet the Cold  
only the Cold warmed  
my bleeding to escape

I was a junkie. Anglos have been consenting to us darkies shootin' hard drugs since the beginning of their colonization. But the white man didn't actually push the spike into my veins. I did. This act is clearly the embodiment of self-hatred. Hatred which goes back a long time. Goes back to the three-year-old girl terrorized by the knife of her father—to the white welfare woman whispering in my ears, "Your momma is a whore, you will grow up to be a no-good whore...." Individual incidents in our lives—in our collective history—we North Americans—colonized and exploiter alike. Yet, it is our collective wills which have created the need for killer drugs. *Violent responses in any form they take are accomplices to the wills which have created the need.* The availability of drugs is not the problem or the dealer down on 122nd Street. They are only players in a far more complex value system of worth which nurtures self-hatred. Self-hatred which is directing and encouraging people to

believe suicide is an option—as is alcohol or drug addiction or the reckless homicide on the highways.

*We take from the oppressor the instruments of hatred and sharpen them on our bodies and our souls.*

For us, because we were misfits—because we were dangerous, the authorities in control of our lives decided to use us as experimental guinea pigs—to monitor our brain waves—test out new drugs—experiment on how to control us, the very dangerous in society—how to mess with our minds.

We were all imprisoned for various crimes against the State: impersonating men; escaping abusive homes; setting fires; taking drugs; robbery 'cause we were hungry; plotting to overthrow the government. Most of our so-called “crimes” against the State were acts of resistance or rebellion against an oppressive family, school, society; for many of us, our cultural identity had been battered and abused since birth.

I was ward of the State from the ages of ten to twenty-one. My adopted mother had given up legal custody of me because of her mental breakdowns.

It was after reading the *Communist Manifesto*,<sup>1</sup> when I was thirteen, that I began to reason that the State had become the parent in my life. And it had been the State which had denied me my real mother, because she was brown and poor and undocumented. I understood too, that the hatred I possessed against the State had been nurtured in this denial. My hatred was more intense than the heat of soldering steel. My reign of revenge followed—robbery—assault on a policeman—possession of narcotics—crossing state lines with narcotics—documents indicating the plot to overthrow the government. The plot to overthrow my parents.

At the maximum security institution all of us darker sisters with curly, kinky, or otherwise offensive hair, had to straighten it to make it more acceptable to our white jailers. In rebellion to this forced cultural exploitation, I purposely jumped another inmate in the straightening room hair shop—breaking her nose and she laying a hot iron across my cheek. I was thrown into solitary confinement for two weeks. Yet, my purpose had been accomplished. Never again did the wardens lead me down the hallway to the hair shop, for fear I would start trouble again.

A radical is born with the will to survive and the strength to make trouble.

Yet, my hatred was consuming me. For all the talk of hatred against the oppressor, true liberation must begin with the liberation of one's self from oneself.

In the basement of the prison was a roller skating rink that a couple of cell groups would use once a week. I liked going there, to watch the other girls round the rink, maybe seeing a good-looking one and making eye contact.

Racial tension in the prison was very high, even more so than on the streets. For there, we could not choose our peers, or escape our enemies.

Descending into the cement basement of the prison, I accidentally bumped into a blue-eyed, brown haired white girl. It took only one half second for me to explode into hatred against her skin. I wanted to strike out at her, but the crowd pushed her forward and out of reach too fast. I hated her like fear loves weakness. Seating myself on the bench, I waited for her to round the floor. Suddenly, everything in the room faded. The music stopped, the sounds of skates weakened then stopped, people disappeared. I was facing a large emptiness alone. I blacked out, yet, while in this void, I heard a voice inside of me say, "See, when you hate so much you are blind to beauty and love can't find you." After hearing these words, the room reappeared, the music began again. I did not move for a long time. I didn't move until I had vowed to myself to cease my hating and let love find me.

I had chosen to cross over, to allow the transcendence of hatred into the opposite, love. A meeting point inside of me let me see clearly there are two roads: one of hatred and one of love. It was still for me to act upon this knowledge to perform human acts which would build upon this vision of love.

When Martin Luther King Jr. said he had a dream—a vision of human love—he knew in the deep well of hatred is love. Love which knows the flesh of every human being is alive with feelings. Still, human love is a vision of love for all of us. Each moment we recall the vision of love *we commit an act of resistance against the oppressor.*

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From *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians*

*Notes*

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972), 331–362.