



“TRAVELERS BY NECESSITY” – RUTH BEHAR ON THE WAY IN SEARCH OF ROOTS OR HOME

Ruth Behar begins her memoir *Traveling Heavy. A Memoir in between Journeys*, published in 2013, with the following citation: “I love to travel. But I’m also terrified of traveling” (3). Later she describes the “various good luck rituals” that she performs before starting a journey, such as checking if she has her “Turkish evil eye bracelet,” “a handmade necklace [...] to be protected from illness or sudden death” or “rubbing the turquoise glass beads to keep the plane from falling out of the sky” (3). She links all these habits to both her Jewish and Cuban ancestry. And although she calls herself a professional traveler, she also describes herself as “an anthropologist who specializes in homesickness” (*Traveling* 6), which aptly exposes the paradoxes related to the notion of traveling. As a person who likes visiting new places and meeting with new people, at the same time hating long flights and airports and desperately missing the family left behind, I share her perceptions and identify with some of the dilemmas depicted in her writings.

Behar is a Cuban-American anthropologist and writer, who was born in 1956 in Havana, Cuba in a family of Sephardic Turkish, and Ashkenazi Polish and Russian Jews. Following the Castro Revolution, her family emigrated to New York when Ruth was almost five. She studied cultural anthropology at Princeton University and obtained her doctorate in 1983. Her research mostly concerned feminism and the situation of women in “developing countries.” Currently, she is a professor at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. At the same time, she is a poet and the author of several books, also for children and young adults: *Lucky Broken Girl* (2017) and *Letters from Cuba* (2020), as well as a picture book, *Tía Fortuna’s*

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New Home (2022). Moreover, Behar is the co-editor of *Women Writing Culture* (1995) and editor of *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba* (2015). She was the first Latina to win a MacArthur “Genius” Award and was named a “Great Immigrant” by the Carnegie Corporation.

Her most acclaimed publications include *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story* (1993), which is an account of her friendship with a Mexican street peddler. The book received numerous awards and is widely used in courses in women’s studies, Latin American studies, anthropology, history, psychology, education, and literature. It was adapted for the stage by PREGONES Theater, a Latino theater company from New York. The stage adaptation, with live music and songs based on the book, has been performed at various universities and the commercial premiere took place in the Painted Bride Theater in Philadelphia¹.

Nonetheless, in this article I aim to initially focus on Behar’s second groundbreaking book, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, which was first published in 1996 and in which she presented a new theory and practice of humanistic anthropology based on her feminist conviction that personal involvement is a valuable contribution to the discipline of anthropology, or even more broadly to humanities and all social sciences. The book provides numerous examples of how scholars can weave their life experience into the research they conduct. Behar is one of the pioneers of what has become known as the vulnerable approach to science. In this article, I will first discuss her work in relation to other scholars who have attempted this methodology, and then identify her contribution to the transformation of the discipline.

The first essay in the afore-mentioned book, titled “The Vulnerable Observer,” begins with a story about the media coverage of the 1985 avalanche in Colombia in the small town of Armero that “buried an entire village in the mud” (1) and took the life of Omaira Sánchez, a thirteen-year-old girl, who was dying for three days trapped in the mud debris in front of the watching journalists and reporters, who could do nothing to help her. The French photographer Frank Fournier captured the image of the dying girl, which was published in *Paris Match* magazine a few days later. This picture won him the 1986 World Press Photo of the Year award, initiating a public debate about the failure of the Colombian rescue service and the “vulturistic nature of photojournalism.” This event was later depicted by Isabel Allende in her short story “Of Clay We Are Created,” from the 1989 collection

1 See <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/ruth-behar/translated-woman/>.

The Stories of Eva Luna, in which the photographer is a Holocaust survivor, Rolf Carlé, who could “no longer bear to watch silently from behind the camera” documenting the tragedy “as an innocent bystander,” so he threw off his camera and crouched down in the mud to hug the girl “as her heart and lungs collapse” (*Vulnerable Observer* 1). In turn, Ruth Behar used both the tragic incident and Allende’s story to discuss her concept of vulnerable anthropology, which, as she admits, is not the one “taught in our colleges and universities. It doesn’t sound like the stuff of which Ph.D.’s are made. And definitely it isn’t the anthropology that will win you a grant from the National Science Foundation” (*Vulnerable Observer* 3). She focuses on the contradictions of being an observer/witness and/or participant of the described events and further declares that “anthropology has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability.” She says:

Get the “native point of view,” *pero por favor* without actually “going native.” Our methodology defined by the oxymoron “participant observation,” is split at the root: act as a participant, but don’t forget to keep your eyes open. Lay down in the mud in Colombia. Put your arms around Omaira Sánchez. But when the grant money runs out, or the summer vacation is over, please stand up, dust yourself off, go to your desk, and write down what you saw and heard. Relate it to something you’ve read by Marx, Weber, Gramsci, or Geertz and you’re on your way to doing anthropology. (*Vulnerable Observer* 5)

It appears that she is not merely questioning her academic discipline, but rather, she is critical of the prevailing approach to science and research, which is largely based on money, funding, and high theories, yet is detached from everyday life and people. Hence the academia, often referred to as the Ivory Tower, is not particularly receptive to the notion of being personally involved in the research that it conducts.

Moreover, Behar’s assertion that this aspect of the observer’s subjectivity influences the observed events is further supported by feminist standpoint theory and more generally by women’s writing. Elaine Showalter, in her renowned 1979 essay titled “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness,” proposed an innovative classification of women’s writing which aimed at creating a new model of critical analysis of female literature. This model avoided adapting male theories and paradigms to women’s literature in order to consciously affirm the specific characteristics of women’s writing, female literary tradition, conventions used by female authors, and their experiences. This approach has been called gynocriticism and it focused primarily on the examination of the characteristics of women’s literature that derive from corporeality and which are rooted in everyday life,

the history of women and their works, their themes, genres, and styles. Gynocriticism paved the way for researchers in various disciplines, enabling them to liberate from the patriarchal paradigms, including the linguistic ones (Zygadło). In my opinion, Ruth Behar is categorically using this “female framework” in her writings.

Furthermore, Behar frequently challenges the assumption that when an observer narrates something they have heard, there must be an acknowledgment that the account may differ if somebody else was listening to it or heard it at a different time. This is because human memory is flexible and the process of remembering is elusive, which means that all social knowledge is subjective. At the same time, traditional researchers still try to distance themselves from the stories they relate, striving for objectivity and abstraction, but they never completely get rid of that which Clifford Geertz calls “the burden of authorship” (in *Vulnerable Observer* 7). Therefore, there is a constant split among ethnographers into those who are willing to accept “vulnerability for the sake of science” and those who want their research to be “person-specific and yet somehow not ‘personal’” (*Vulnerable Observer* 8), following the tradition of depersonalizing one’s connection to the field. Contrary to that, Behar, who has worked as an ethnographer in Spain, Mexico, and Cuba, is known for her humanistic approach to understanding identity, immigration, and the search for home in the globalized world. Nonetheless, though she believes that “when you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably” (*Vulnerable Observer* 16), she also realizes that “vulnerability doesn’t mean that anything personal goes” (14) and that there exist various ways of witnessing.

Subsequently, Behar observes that “what bothers critics is the insertion of personal stories into what we have been taught to think of as the analysis of impersonal social facts” (*Vulnerable Observer* 12). Historically, storytelling and self-exposure have been a taboo in science, which was meant to “give voice” to the others. With time, life history and life story merged with *testimonios*, which were being practiced in Europe with Holocaust survivors and in Latin America with survivors of various dictators and regimes as a healing method for the psychological trauma. Although they focused on the individual’s traumatic experiences, they were meant to illustrate a broader story and finally brought the transformation of the discipline of anthropology, which led to the “retheorization of genres [...] and the creation of hybrid genres like self-ethnography and ethnobiography” (*Vulnerable Observer* 26). This growing popularity of autoethnography, in turn, resembles the theory of *autohistoria/teoria*, a term coined by Gloria Anzaldúa to describe the shift which women of color have

made from traditional Western forms of representing autobiography (Anzaldúa and Keating).

Autohistoria/teoria focuses on an individual's personal life, but at the same time tells the stories of others – a tribe, a class, an oppressed group – but the autobiographical element is emphasized through the frequent use of the subjective first-person narrative. Taking into account the author's socio-cultural background and thus representing the story of the entire community, the information is saved from oblivion and becomes part of a community's cultural heritage. Such an intergenerational dialogue is a crucial part of anyone's *autohistoria*, but also the fulfillment of the theory of reframing and restoration, which, as the name implies, focuses on finding, recovering, and restoring old narratives to their rightful position (Zygadło).

This textuality of reality (possibility of analyzing social phenomena through texts), which is the basis of postcolonial critical theory, opened the space for the committed epistemology often referred to as an “epistemology without innocence, whose ultimate goal is to create science as practice” (after: Domańska). In fact, this is what many ethnic researchers and authors do – they challenge the dominant models to recover the marginalized points of view of the colonized subjects and to offer a critique of the existing links between power and knowledge and the role they play in the formation of the diaspora's identity. The fundamental question is who has the authority to speak and for whom it has finally been asked.

In *The Vulnerable Observer*, Behar attributes this shift to the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga in 1981, a collection that discussed sexism, racism, and discrimination from the first-person perspective of various ethnic women writers. She says:

These first-person narratives, written by those who previously had been more likely to be the ethnographized rather than the ethnographer, challenged monolithic views of identity in the United States, asserted the multiplicity of American cultures, and deconstructed various orientalisms, challenging the assumption that the anthropologist was the sole purveyor of ethnographic truth. (27)

This was also accompanied by the renewed interest in the African-American autobiography, whose origins were in the personal narratives of ex-slaves, hence the debate on what it meant to be “an insider in the culture” gained momentum. Therefore, Behar observes:

As those who used to be “the natives” have become scholars in their own right, often studying their home communities and nations, the lines between par-

ticipant and observer, friend and stranger, aboriginal and alien are no longer so easily drawn. We now have a notable group of “minority” anthropologists with a range of ambivalent connections to the abandoned and reclaimed “homelands” in which they work. The importance of this “native anthropology” has helped to bring about a fundamental shift – the shift toward viewing identification, rather than difference, as the key defining image of anthropological theory and practice. (*Vulnerable Observer* 28)

At this point, we should examine Behar’s positionality in her ethnographic and fictional writing. In *The Vulnerable Observer*, she calls herself a “woman of the border,” enumerating all the symbolic borders she has crossed in her life and her ethnographic writing: “between places, between identities, between languages, between cultures, between longings and illusions, one foot in the academy and one foot out” (162). Furthermore, she admits that she “had been drawn to anthropology because [she] had grown up within three cultures – Jewish (both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic), Cuban, and American – and [she] needed to better connect [her] own profound sense of displacement with the professional rituals of displacement that are at the heart of anthropology” (21). Subsequently, although trained to write “cold-blooded logical essays” (*Vulnerable Observer* 33) during her “official” education, Behar “identifies strongly with personal and intellectual *mestizaje*” (Klein) of the Jewish, Cuban, and New Yorker parts of her identity and weaves the personal experiences into her research and writings thus opening the discipline of anthropology to the new perspectives and methods of research. As an anthropologist, she has argued for the open adoption of and recognition by the discipline of the subjective nature of research, which she calls “vulnerable positionality” (Klein). This approach can also be observed in *Traveling Heavy. A Memoir in between Journeys* (2013), the book that I am going to analyze next in the context of how adopting personal emotion-loaded experience while exploring and researching new communities can become not only an identity-formative attribute and a search for one’s roots but also a gateway to new academic theories and concepts.

Suffice it to say that the remote ancestors of all human beings were nomadic tribes, it is widely acknowledged that people have always moved from place to place for various reasons – an exploration of new territories and their economic exploitation, military conquests, and the following displacements; therefore, the journey is probably one of the best-illustrated concepts in various disciplines. Yet, the notion of traveling for pleasure as a leisure activity is a relatively new phenomenon in human history. Available and affordable to few, for this reason often a class indicator (sometimes also gender indicator – since

historically in Western societies and still in some parts of the world women cannot travel unaccompanied), traveling can be an exciting, desired, and adventurous experience that opens us up to new cultures and diversity. On the other hand, since it involves meeting with the Other, it can be a threatening and exhausting occurrence that causes fear and nostalgia. Sometimes the Other can also become our “alternate Self.” This is how Behar refers to it:

I go to other places for the same reasons most everyone does: to seek out a change of scenery and feel a sense of enchantment, to learn about the lives of strangers, and to give myself a chance to be someone **I can't be at home** [emphasis mine]. We leave behind the creature comforts and familiarity of home in order to explore alternate worlds, alternate selves. (*Traveling* 5)

Subsequently, for her, the journey turns into an existential experience involving transformation and philosophical exploration of oneself, while the whole memoir, which consists of short vignettes, becomes an account of the author's personal ambitions, failures, and successes. Behar depicts her life through her relationships with her grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as her husband and son. The stories are often humorous but always loaded with emotions, even nostalgia, and what joins them is the theme of packing and traveling.

She begins with her first field trip during her graduate studies when she went to a small village Santa Maria in Spain and when she describes the people she researched with a lot of compassion and sympathy, admitting that it was then that she decided to “refuse to surrender to the dry analytical language” (*Traveling* 89) she was being taught at school, even if she risked her program being terminated. Her professors considered that her work “lacked academic rigor,” she “didn't understand theoretical concepts” and hence she was “unteachable” (*Traveling* 88–89). Nonetheless, she has “never forgotten Santa Maria. It was a place of my youth. Where the kindness of strangers comforted me and gave me hope when I couldn't go home” (*Traveling* 101). Already in *The Vulnerable Observer*, she revealed that her work in Spain as an ethnographer was something more than just her search for roots: “It was about a desire for memory, ‘community memory’ in which I might locate my own story” (78). She further admits “the death of memory in Santa Maria provoked a resurgence of memory, for me, about my own Jewish heritage and how I become alienated from it” (82).

Afterwards in *Traveling Heavy*, she describes her travels to Miami to visit her family members, her subsequent field trips to Mexico with her students when she began teaching, and finally a bizarre

pilgrimage with total strangers for a reunion of people who share the same last name to the formerly Jewish town of Bejar in Spain. As she maintains they have done that in the hopes of finding a place to claim as their homeland. Nonetheless, when the reunion ends, she admits: “we’d found little in the city of Bejar that was directly related to us – there was the Jewish museum and the name of the city, but everything we’d seen was contemporary, nothing that tied us firmly to the past and to history.” However, she reflects: “we should keep this secret to ourselves and confidently return to all our homes in so many parts of the world and announce that we’d found our roots in Bejar” (*Traveling* 140).

This desperate search for roots accompanied by compulsive traveling is the leitmotif of Behar’s works, which is something that links her to all immigrants around the globe. In the opening to *Traveling Heavy*, she observes:

Travelers are those who go elsewhere because they want to, because they can afford to displace themselves. Immigrants are those who go elsewhere because they have to. If they don’t displace themselves they’ll suffer: their very existence is at risk. They pick up and leave, sometimes at a moment’s notice. The journey is wrenching, often dangerous, a loss of the known world, a change of scenery that creates estrangement, an uneasy dwelling among strangers, having to become a different person against one’s will. (5)

In this way, she introduces us to the immigrant experience of her family.

As it was mentioned earlier, her family left Cuba after the Castro Revolution when she was four and a half. They settled in the Ashkenazi section of Forest Hills, Queens, making ends meet by selling “fabric, envelopes and shoes.” Consequently, we explore her life as an immigrant child longing for acceptance, since the girl immediately started school although she knew no English, and hence had no friends. “English was the public language, the language of power, competition, and progress – also the language of solitude, the language in which I was totally on my own, without my parents to help me” (*Traveling* 7). Ever since she has been trying to regain the linguistic aspect of her cultural identity, either as an anthropologist able to use her Spanish in the fieldwork among farmers in Spain and Mexico, or later as a visiting academic to Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union when Fidel reopened the island for tourists. In *The Vulnerable Observer*, she recollects:

Like other children taken into exile in the United States after the Cuban revolution, I had grown up internalizing the cold war between the United States

and Cuba. I had absorbed both the Cuban immigrant paranoia about Cuba as a dangerous place, best left behind forever, and the United States ideology about Cuba as an enemy and a threat. There was also another issue for me, as a Cuban Jew. I kept asking myself what exactly I hoped to find in Cuba. After all, the members of my family were immigrants in Cuba, too. My grandparents, Jews from Byelorussia, Poland, and Turkey, had immigrated to Cuba in the 1920s, after the United States set sharp limits on Jewish immigration. All of my homelands, it seemed, were lost. (121)

That is why in her memoir she confesses: “To this day, no matter where I go, I carry the memory of the girl who felt utterly foreign, helpless, speechless, a misfit, the girl who wanted to dissolve into the cracks in the walls” (*Traveling* 6). Again, Behar’s feeling of in-betweenness, not completely fitting anywhere and being suspended in the void resembles Gloria Anzaldúa’s idea called *Nepantla*, which she describes as follows:

Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio*. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. *Nepantla es tierra desconocida*, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement – an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in *nepantla* so much of the time it’s become sort of “home”. (Anzaldúa and Keating 1)

Accordingly, *Nepantla* defines a state of mind in which we reject old beliefs and myths to gain new perspectives and change our worldview. Therefore, it is a phase of transformation and reconfiguration of our identity. It is where some ideas die and others are born. We have to bid farewell to the comfort and stability of our past, open ourselves to new ways of defining ourselves, and acknowledge the existence of other, alternative cognitive methods or knowledge schemes that Anzaldúa refers to as a search for *conocimiento* (Zygadło 88).

Therefore, suspended among various locations and emotions and with a life bound by the necessity to travel and the search for roots and the notion of an imaginary homeland, Behar’s memories meander among various decisive events of her life, yet they always circle back to the place where she began and longed to return: Cuba, “a forbidden territory” (*Vulnerable Observer* 148). Similarly to Salman Rushdie, who considered it impossible for migrants to reclaim the homes they left behind and the only possibility for them was to imagine the fictional locations, she declares:

I travel 50,000 miles a year. I'm Gold medallion. I scramble to get on the plane, together with the other privileged travelers. I go to Europe. I go to Latin America. I travel to California. To Miami whenever I can – now that I'm older I appreciate an ocean that's warm as a soup. I lost Cuba as a little girl. But I've gained an entire life up in the air, a life of going to other places, a life spent between places.

However much I long for the island I once called home, I'm not beholden to any one place. I'm not stuck anywhere. *But I'm also never sure whether I belong anywhere.* [emphasis mine] (*Traveling* 193)

Accordingly, at the end of her memoir, we find her as a woman with her heart split between her home in Michigan and her “home” in Cuba, trying to reclaim pieces of Cubanness for herself.

However, what seems more accurate is when she calls herself “a professional Cuban building a career out of my search for roots” (*Traveling* 201), since, as she explains, second-generation Cuban Americans “invent research projects for [themselves], but ultimately [they] go back to prove to [themselves] we're not afraid to go back” (*Vulnerable Observer* 140). In my opinion, these two fragments expose Behar's awareness of her privilege – as a middle-class American scholar firstly she can afford to travel whenever and wherever she wants, and secondly, as a recognized professor of anthropology she is conscious of using/abusing her professional training for her personal goals. She is neither an innocent observer nor a vulnerable participant, but both of them interchangeably, depending on the circumstances. Moreover, sometimes she becomes only a deliberate academic conducting her research.

Simultaneously, the issue of belonging constantly disturbs her, accompanied by the doubt about who has the right to remember. A little child she was when they left? Many times, she mentions that people keep telling her that when she left she was “too young to claim a bond to Cuba” (*Traveling* 6), and her Cuban nanny when they met when Behar was a grown-up woman told her that Ruth “didn't realize they were leaving” for good and only thought they “were going on a holiday” (*Traveling* 6). Who is then entitled to mourn the loss of a homeland, an identity? Behar – the scholar – aptly observes: “Aren't all of our childhoods imaginary homelands? [...] Homelands from which we have become exiled in the process of growing up and becoming adults? In becoming adults we are encouraged to put the child behind us, to disbelieve our own stories and our childhoods” (*Vulnerable Observer* 134).

On the other hand, her new Cuban friends convince her – the exiled woman – that “the island is [hers]” since she was “born in Cuba, [she'd] be Cuban forever” (*Traveling* 200) pointing out the hereditary notion of homeland. Moreover, Behar offers another explanation for her tear

when she says: “Having left as a child, I didn’t make the decision to leave” (*Traveling* 205), linking her feeling of uprootedness to the notion of agency. Subsequently, in the final essay in the memoir titled “An Old Little Girl,” she tries to wrap up her relationship with Cuba describing the way people say goodbye there. She writes: “This is an essay I can’t seem to conclude. It’s like a Cuban goodbye. You say goodbye, keep chatting, and say goodbye again, chat a little bit more, then offer yet another goodbye” (*Traveling* 223).

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, Behar’s insistence on and practice of an “anthropology that breaks your heart” are embedded in her conviction that ethnographic works should contain not only experiences but also human emotions. As scholars we are taught to detach ourselves from the objects of our study. Despite this, for several decades now in women’s studies, especially among women of colors researchers, we have been witnessing a different approach. To provide accurate and genuine representations of social worlds, ethnographers must reject “the artificial barriers between self and other, and between ‘truth’ and poetics.” As Misha Klein writes: “rather than engaging in the fiction of objectivity, Behar uses the subjectivity of fiction to convey deeper truths.”

Subsequently, Behar’s writings are both narratives representing fictitious fragments of imagined realities, such as her novel for young adults – *Letters from Cuba* (2020), loosely based on her grandmother’s immigrant experiences, and theoretically non-fictional memoirs or travel writings such as *Traveling Heavy* (2013) or its predecessor *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba* (2009). Still, what joins all these works is the issue of memory – how/what do we remember? How are our memories changing depending on the time and person we relate them to? Are they “true” descriptions of what “really” happened or are they just stories about the imaginary places – the greener pastures of America or the imaginary diasporas in which we search for ethnic roots, or the stories of our imaginary homeland, wherever and whatever it is? After all, as Behar concludes: “The pieces will form a story – and once a story is told it can never be lost” (*Traveling* 225).

Abstract: Ruth Behar, a Cuban-born immigrant to the US with Polish, Jewish, and Turkish background, begins her memoir *Traveling Heavy. A Memoir in between Journeys*, published in 2013, with the following citation “I love to travel. But I’m also terrified of traveling” (3). Later she describes the “various good luck rituals” that she performs before starting a journey, such as checking if she has her “Turkish evil eye bracelet,” “a handmade necklace

[...] to be protected from illness or sudden death” or “rubbing the turquoise glass beads to keep the plane from falling out of the sky” (3). She links all these habits to both her Jewish and Cuban ancestry. And although she calls herself a professional traveler, she also describes herself as “an anthropologist who specializes in homesickness,” which perfectly reveals the contradictions related to the notion of traveling. As a relatively new phenomenon, available and affordable to few, traveling can be an exciting, desired, and adventurous experience that opens us up to diversity and enriches us. At the same time, since it involves meeting with the Other, it can be a threatening and exhausting incident that causes nostalgia for home. Hence, the journey is an existential experience including the change, the philosophical exploration of oneself, the search for and dissemination of knowledge, and a sense of discovery (actual of places and communities and symbolical of cultural values and ideas). In this paper, I am going to analyze Behar’s writings as narratives representing fictitious fragments of experienced or/and imagined realities (*Letters from Cuba* 2020) vs. the non-fictional dimension of memoir or travel writing (*Traveling Heavy* 2013). Still, what joins the two types of narratives is the issue of memory – how/what do we remember? How are our memories changing depending on the time and person we relate them to?

Keywords: diaspora, home, travel, feminist memoir, memory, vulnerable anthropology

Bio: Grażyna Zygadło is an Associate Professor in the Department of American Studies and Mass Media and an affiliate in the Women’s Studies Center at the University of Lodz. Her major research areas include the marginalization of minorities in the US, specifically Latinx diaspora; women of colors feminism and literature; postcoloniality; the existence of borderland territories; and the relations between knowledge and power. She was a guest lecturer at the universities in Spain, Finland, Sweden, and Florida International University in Miami. She is a member of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa (SSGA) and HispaUSA Asociación de estudios sobre la población de origen hispano en EEUU. She is the author of two monographs (*Culture Matters: Chicanas’ Identity in Contemporary USA*. Frankfurt am Maine: Peter Lang: 2007; *Zmieniając siebie – zmieniam świat* – Gloria E. Anzaldúa i jej pisarstwo zaangażowanego rozwoju w ujęciu społeczno-kulturowym. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2019), two edited books and over 40 articles or chapters in edited volumes. Her most recent book – *Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Feminist Body Writing and Borderlands* – came out in autumn 2023 with Routledge.

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