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ETHICAL DISCOURSES ON FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURES*

ABSTRACT (***Ethical Discourses on Food and Environment in Contemporary American Literatures***) Also in the burgeoning field of environmental humanities, food has become an ideal site of critical debates, which are often intertwined with issues of race, class, ethnicity, gender, age, and species. Because of the growing awareness of our current ecological crisis, of the growing disparity in wealth, and of the abrogation of both human and nonhuman rights connected to food production, distribution, access, and consumption, many writers have published works with the intent to condemn unsustainable food practices and politics. Contemporary American literatures represent a rich and diversified reservoir of case studies. In this article I analyze the contributions of two women writers, Barbara Kingsolver and Gloria Anzaldúa, as examples of different discourses on food. Each case illustrates some ethical issues and their implications for diverse stakeholders in food systems.

KEYWORDS Food exile, Alternative food movements, Food justice and sovereignty, Environmental humanities, Ecocriticism

In these last decades, critical debates about food have proliferated all over the world. International scholarly works on food production, practices and consumerism, food security, human health, body politics, obesity, local food advocacy, and political engagement – just to name the most recurrent issues – are sprouting from practically any field of study. As a result, the dynamics regulating national and transnational foodways and food systems have been at the center of a process of re-politicization, often exhibiting their crossings with global capitalism and power. Food, with all its rituals, permeates most aspects of culture and "eating," asserts Michael Mikulak,

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"connects us to plant and animals, landscapes, histories, gendered politics, memories, pleasure, and pain," eventually concluding that "food is not only good for to eat, it is good to think with" (2013, 4). In other words, "food [...] is rarely only food" (Lavin 2009, 5).

This new surge of attention has promoted special consideration on the intersectionality of food and environment. While revealing the links between the production of food on the one hand and environmental damages on the other, the relations of agro-industrial systems, unhealthy practices, and their effects on human and nonhuman health and wellbeing have also contributed to spread some sort of disillusion towards the Green Revolution as several books, documentaries, and films testify. Just to name some significant examples: Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001), Marion Nestle's *Food Politics* (2002), Gary Paul Nebhan's *Coming Home to Eat* (2002), Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004), Deborah Koons Garcia's *The Future of Food* (2004), Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), Robert Kenner's *Food, Inc.* (2008), Paul Roberts's *The End of Food* (2009), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* (2009), Johnston and Baumann's *Foodies* (2010), all evoke a neoliberal imaginary of food and condemn the horrors of agribusiness and capitalist-centric systems often expressed in apocalyptic overtones.

In the United States one of the most vocal booster of alternative food culture and movement has been former U.S. first lady Michelle Obama (joined by internationally renowned celebrities), but sustainable-food activists around the world know that their major enemies are governmental administrations and lack of legislation. As a matter of fact, politics, economics, and environmental devastation have proved to be tightly interconnected, as the phenomenon of Italian "ecomafia" (Legambiente 1994) has amply demonstrated. Similarly, many other countries in the world (especially former colonies, such as India, Africa, and Latin America, or even European countries still suffering from dictatorship heritage) share the same socio-environmental crisis that translates into various forms of ethnic minority marginalization, political and social exclusion, and environmental risks. Within this frame, it is quite evident that when we come to talk about food, the term "food" acquires very different meanings according to the perspective adopted.

The warning is that it is now time to take food seriously as many scholars advocate. "Literature departments have been among the last academic disciplines to figure this out," states Marion Nestle (2014, xvi), while urging humanists to catch up with other fields of studies. This is the very objective of this article, which intends to contribute to the exploration of food and its interconnections with the environment within the contemporary American literary context. It is my contention, in fact, that literature and the arts are powerful media to map cultural continuity and memory, but they also function as ideal sites to foster responses to the dilemmas produced by globalization and capitalism. By focusing on two American women writers – Barbara Kingsolver and Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa – I also intend to demonstrate how women play a crucial

role in cosmopolitan activism, since their commitment operates not only by questioning and reimagining a "sense of place" (Heise 2008) but also through their efforts in shaping an awareness of global ecological developments, finally refiguring sustainable foodscapes.

And yet, to talk about food supply is tantamount to talking about political and economic power, and the U.S. clearly stem out as hegemonic in their global scope and reach (Carruth 2013). In this sense, this article also wants to scrutinize possibilities to fill the gaps between ecocriticism and postcolonialism. As a matter of fact, the whole industry of food (transnational labor included) may provide a symbolic mirror to see race, class, gender, and environmental injustice. As Vandana Shiva writes in *Biopiracy,* "The seed and women's bodies as sites of regenerative power are, in the eyes of capitalist patriarchy, among the last colonies" (1997, 45). The charting of relationships between people, place/space and capital, women's bodies and the environment can be provided by the examination of the several extant foodscapes that current American literatures foreground.

The pathological exile from food

In his seminal essay "The Pleasures of Eating" (1989), Wendell Berry affirms that "eating is an agricultural act" (2009, 227). With this statement the American poet, novelist, farmer, and environmental activist upholds and reasserts the direct link between the food we eat and the agriculture that produces it. In the late 1980s, bewildered by the passivity and dependency of American consumers who bought "what they have been persuaded to want" while mostly ignoring "certain critical questions about the quality and the cost of what they are sold" (227), Berry was one of the most attentive beholders of that alienation from food that many Americans were experiencing together with other eating disorders. In his mind, what he called "the industrial eater" was a victim, somebody who was deprived of the skill to imagine the connections between eating and the land, in short somebody who suffered from "cultural amnesia" (229) as proved by his or her complete ignorance of food history. As Michael Pollan later stated, Berry's conviction that "eating is an agricultural act" can be considered an invitation to "connect the dots between two realms – the farm, and the plate – that can seem very far apart" (Fassler 2013). The dots that link these two realms are quite a few: land work, refrigerated transportation, processing, packaging, distribution, storage, retailing, cleaning, cooking, consumption, waste discharge, and their connection involves a great amount of energy use and carbon emissions. Yet, passive consumers are often unaware of the long food chain standing behind the "Supermarket Pastoral" (Pollan 2006), i.e. behind the idyllic story conveyed by the images or labels used to advertise food and eventually convince the consumer of their good quality. As a result, even alternative discourses on ethical choice, sustainability, citizenship, and responsible consumption get caught up in larger tales of capitalism.

Wendell Berry is resolute in his assertion that the politics of food involves narrative and freedom. The lack of democracy that he acknowledges "when our food and its sources are controlled by someone else" (Berry 2009, 229) gives reason of what I call a "food exile," a banishment or separation from the native land that, similarly to what happens with deported people, fosters a retrospective idealization of and nostalgia for what is lost, namely a "home." The space between food and its natural *oikos* is a space of transactions, negotiations, and transformations that involve the original place and its human and nonhuman inhabiting communities. In the process, the distant natural home often ends up becoming an "imaginary homeland" (Rushdie 1991) endowed with imaginary values. Eventually, Berry invokes a realignment with nature, whose ethical significance lies in the re-construction of local food networks as sites of resistance together with the re-establishment of the Christian values of the family life in America. And yet, despite their pedagogical intent aimed at making consumers aware of the issues that globalized food systems encompass, also local food movements and their well-intended literary counter-stories exhibit crucial conceptual deficiencies and posit more ethical questions. Written in the attempt to "renew our sense of place with our sense of taste" (Nelson 2008, 217), they often uncritically call upon a normative concept of "nature" and "the natural" (Portman 2014) that mostly involves the notions of purity, lack of contamination, integrity, and nostalgic pastoralism, which resuscitate the agrarian myth originated in the nineteenth century with Thomas Jefferson. His yeoman farmer, in fact, was "a citizen who embodied the civic and religious values of the nation by virtue of owning the farm on which he worked together with his family" (Brass 2005, 1.6); in the modern romanticized version, instead, a farmer is someone who escapes from the polluted city to reconnect with nature and eventually vindicates the dichotomous logic that perpetuates the false separation of nature and culture (Fargione 2016).

In the early years of the twenty-first century, a long strand of writers embraced the back-to-the-land ethos championed by Wendell Berry to reclaim a more direct relationship with food. In most cases these literary nonfictions were written in the form of memoir, how-to manual, biography, family saga, or investigative journalism. Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle. A Year of Food Life* (2007) represents one of the most engaging examples of this literary crop.

Barbara Kingsolver's experiment in authenticity and locality

> This is the story of a year in which we made every attempt to feed ourselves animals and vegetables whose provenance we really knew. We tried to wring most of the petroleum out of our food chain, even if that meant giving up some things. (Kingsolver 2007, 10)

This is the programmatic statement that Barbara Kingsolver pledged in 2004, when after twenty-five years in Tucson, Arizona, she left the city with her family to start a new

life on a Virginia farm. A very cherished writer with a scientific background, Kingsolver blends in this chronicle her unique poetic skills with her ecological concerns and commitment. The book reads as a collaborative memoir, since it includes contributions from her husband – environmental historian Stephen L. Hopp, who provides numbers and statistics clustered in informative sidebars – and her teenage daughter Camille, who offers recipes and nutritional acumen, while adding a pinch of humor and naïve wonder to this savoring read.

The book interweaves a whole variety of themes: from genetically engineered foods to cruelty to animals, from fossil-fuel-based agriculture to veganism, and includes a homage to Italy and her traditional luxuriant food when the writer narrates her stay at a bucolic *agriturismo* in Tuscany (Kingsolver 2007, 253-258). What is particularly striking from the very first pages is the sense of mission that this family shares and the anticipation of gratifying rewards in their vowing to consume only what they grow on their own land. This determination is visible, for instance, when Kingsolver re-proposes H.D. Thoreau's postulate: "We had come to the farm to eat *deliberately*" (23, italics added), emphasizing her will to set a strategy and a holistic approach to her experiment. Her powerful commitment and political activism is very well represented by the full picture of her mundane tasks on the farm, which are wittingly narrated as challenges and adventures, while the reader is provided with an immense supply of information on canning, cooking, vegetables, turkey mating, harvest, egg-laying, and much more.

Like Berry, also Kingsolver laments how much people do not know about their food and the place it is grown, and celebrates authenticity as the preeminent feature of her new way of life: "We are increasingly weary of an industry that puts stuff in our dinner we can't identify as animal, vegetable, mineral, or what" (17), eventually expressing all her discontentment towards the Green Revolution of the 1970s for not keeping up with its promises: industrial agriculture, in fact, was supposed "to make food cheaper and available to more people. Instead, it has helped more of us become less healthy" (19). The direct response to processed, nutrient-poor, contaminated, and preservative- or hormone-filled food was the creation of the organic farm founded on "contemporary agrarian populism" (Guthman 2004, 10), which, on its turn, posits more ethical questions. As we will see, not only does the agrarian myth rely on the very notions of purity and authenticity promoted by Wendell Berry, but it also gets associated with forms of nationalism and ethnically homogeneous peasantry in a specific territory (Brass 2005).

When *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* was released just a few months apart from Smith and McKinnon's *The 100-Mile Diet*, it soon became a bestseller and contributed to spread and reinforce the philosophy of life of the "locavore," a term that the Oxford University Press promoted as the "Word of the year 2007."[1] Coined by a group of

[1] https://blog.oup.com/2007/11/locavore/. Nov. 12, 2007. Accessed January 5, 2017.

women based in San Francisco, it refers to a local resident who eats only food grown or produced within a 100-mile radius. It is quite evident, then, that the main concern of both Kingsolver's experiment and the locavore movement is the "food miles," i.e. the geographic distance travelled by food from the field to the table and, as a consequence, energy and fossil fuel squandering. The admonition to avoid "oily food"[2] is predicated upon the fact that fewer transport miles necessarily mean fewer emissions of greenhouses gases into the atmosphere, but also upon the morbid intimacies of the human-oil relationship that in our modern petroculture raises questions of complicity (Fargione 2016b). A good example in Kingsolver's book is offered by the "banana incident," narrated by Camille in a section titled "Getting Over the Bananas." During a visit to their farm in Virginia, her friend's suggestion to buy some bananas is soon rejected, provoking justifiable bafflement. Kingsolver soon provides an explanation, stating that "it seemed wasteful to buy produce grown hundreds of miles away when we had so much fresh fruit right now, literally in our backyard" (2007, 310). Camille states that her friend considered that conversation as a "life-changing moment" and that she "developed a sincere interest in agricultural methods that preserve biodiversity" (310). But despite Kingsolver's good intentions and active participation, her anecdote invites further pondering.

Kingsolver's first unmistakable message is that imported food is a primary cause of environmental damage. If it is undeniable that gas emissions are highly dangerous in their contribution to climate change, at the same time even some scholars in the environmental humanities believe that "food miles are a poor proxy for environmental harm" (Lewis and Mitchell 2014) since some popular farming methods used to grow products locally can generate even more emissions than long-distance imported foods. What seems completely discarded in Kingsolver's normative plan is the urgency to address the implications of justice in relation to the developing countries where that food is grown. The banana industry, for example, provides employment for thousands of people in tropical regions whose plantations need to face a plethora of challenges: from severe climate change impacts to workers' low wages, from competition with large farms to inadequate health protection plans, to name a few. It is true that such concerns affect both the U.S. and developing countries; ironically, many disadvantaged individuals in the U.S. are immigrants from those very developing countries whose overall environmental impact is "comparable to, or lesser than, local producers" (Lewis and Mitchell 2014, 580).

In addition to the self-congratulatory tone that pervades her whole narration, Kingsolver adopts here the same rhetoric that she uses in the opening of the book:

[2] Steven L. Hopp's first contribution to the book is titled "Oily Food" and is a condensed and effective description of how "Americans put almost as much fossil fuel into our refrigerators as our cars." Hopp reminds that each average food item has travelled at least 1,500 miles (Kingsolver 2007, 5).

"We'd sure do better, if only we *knew* any better" (2007, 8, italics in the text). This phrase points to people's lack of knowledge as one major obstacle to the transformation of the current agrifood system into a more environmentally and socially just alternative. Yet, the food movement discourse and its narrative resonate particularly with white and wealthy individuals (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, 3), thus undergirding exclusionary practice in terms of race and class. In her critique to the "messianic approach to food politics"[3] that alternative movements seem to share, food theorist Julie Guthman offers a compelling picture of the shortcomings of local advocacy and of the cultural politics of "if they only knew." By reminding one of the most quoted sentences in Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food*, a very influential and critical book on the American ways of eating, Guntham illustrates the inequality between those who can afford a more healthy food, which in fact is supposed to be more costly, and those who cannot: "Not everyone can afford to eat high-quality food in America, and that is shameful: however, those of us who can, should" (Pollan 2008, 166). Not only does Pollan neglect how class issues affect the food discourse, but he also keeps the same normative approach that he shows in the "guide to consumers" that he wrote in 2007 for *The New York Times Magazine*, and where he offers a series of "rules of thumb" such as: "Don't eat anything your great-great grandmother wouldn't recognize as food" (Pollan 2007). And yet, Alkon and Agyeman argue that Pollan fails to consider that "our great-great-grandmothers" have come from very different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds and that food for them might have meant many different things (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, 3). He thus seems to be unaware of the necessary *cultural* biodiversity that should precede agri-cultural biodiversity: by heralding the local as a preeminently white-coded space, local food advocates exclude non-white people from the food discourse and from its "authenticity." In this sense, Michelle Obama's campaign can be considered revolutionary in its double intent: to make people aware of the benefits of healthy food, and, as a pledge of a non-white representative, to foster a more racially inclusive food discourse.

In *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Barbara Kingsolver is even radical when she states that "local food is edible patriotism" (2007, 338). I tried to imagine how this sentence could be applied to her clichéd – *Mama mia!* (252) – romanticized recall of the Italian *agriturismo* that she visited with her family. If it is true that most of these accommodations are "charmingly furnished, in a picturesque setting" with a family-based organization, she universalizes this type of structure and mistakes it for the Italian farming *tout court*. What Kingsolver probably ignores is the dark side of Italian land working, especially in the south. In regions such as Campania, Basilicata, Apulia,

[3] Julie Guthman's article – aptly titled "'If They Only Knew.' The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Food" – is included in a collection on food justice whose editors, Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, have highly contributed to expose the relationship between food politics and environmental justice, while questioning the embedded meanings attached to food systems and foodscapes.

Calabria, and Sicily, for example, the seasonal work of fruit and tomato harvesting is often accomplished by Italian women or immigrants, mostly undocumented black Africans, living in real ghettoes on the margins of urban centers, working for long hours and with low wages, with no contracts, nor health insurance despite they are exposed to occupational hazards, and are obliged to adhere to an illegal hiring system called *caporalato*, a sort of gang-master recruitment (Perrotta and Sacchetto 2014) that evokes plantations and slavery. So, when in the conclusion of a chapter titled "Growing Trust" Barbara Kingsolver writes: "'locally grown' is a denomination whose meaning is incorruptible" (123), we should at least question not only the semantic corruptibility of the phrase, but especially the implied pristine nature of the economic and political configuration of some forms of localism, together with their veiled protectionism.

Nepantla diet and food sovereignty in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Feminist lesbian Chicana writer, poet, activist, and cultural theorist Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa preferred to be identified, first and foremost, as a border dweller. When in the introduction to her acclaimed "autohistoria-teoría" *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) she affirms "I am a border woman," she immediately locates herself as the resident of an ambivalent space. The ambivalence, of course, involves a precise regional location, the southwest border between Texas and Mexico, but it also refers to the ideological separation line that she decides to inhabit in order to de-colonize her inner self.

The geographical border was built at the end of the Mexican War in 1848. The American domination, however, did not end with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which stripped Mexico of half of her lands and forced her dispossessed population to migrate to the north, crossing the border illegally and running several risks. Suzanne Bost analyzes this ambiguous relationship between the two countries and gives evidence of the ongoing American attitude towards Mexico, a country that she does not hesitate to describe as "a commodity to incorporate" (Bost 2003, 493). This "(neo)colonial ingestion" is very well represented in manifestations of U.S. popular culture not only through literature and cinema (she offers the example of John Wayne films), but also in food as it refracts a national "desire to consume 'the other'" (93) as best epitomized by the popular fast-food corporate franchise Taco Bell, whose advertisements often exhibit an intersection of heterosexual normativity and cultural depredation.

When the dividing line between the two countries was drawn, Gloria Anzaldúa happened to be on the American side of the territory whose 1,350 mile-long border became for her "*una herida abierta*, an open wound" (Anzaldúa 1987, 3). Anzaldúa's border, however, should not be considered as a mere cartographical divide, neither as a metaphorical confine that elicits rigid binary logics and oppositional ontology. *La*

frontera, instead, should be seen as a site of transformations, contradictions, and contestations that politically resists crystallized ethnocentric and androcentric ideas of normality and purity. "A borderland is," in short, "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (3).

This "in-between space" that she also calls "nepantla,"[4] is a fluid liminal condition. In this sense, both mental and physical borderlands become spaces of a constant struggle for identity, which encourage people to be something new and original. As a consequence, the *new mestizos*, a term that implies an expansion of the previous biological definitions of *mestizaje*, are people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their bodies, gender, sexuality, economic status, ethnic group, personality, language, spiritual or religious beliefs. Yet, at the same time, this border also advocates respect for history and traditions: "Identity is not just what happens to me in my present lifetime but also involves my family history, my racial history, my collective history" (Anzaldúa 2000, 240). Basically, to be a *new mestiza* means to recognize a synergetic combination of apparently contradictory American and indigenous traditions while moving "entre mundos" (Keating 2005, 3) to defy binary logics and redefine subjectivities in post-national cultures through a practice "of crossing, of miscegenation, of crosspollination which is unveiled in narra(c)tions [...]" (Zaccaria 2006, 62). When Anzaldúa writes in Spanglish "*Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading" (1987, 103), she refers to a process of cultural, historical, and material *caminho,* which implies an awareness achieved through "*el trabajo,* the opus, the great alchemical work" (103). In many passages of *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa assumes corn, a staple food of her people, as the symbol of her "morphogenesis":

> Indigenous like corn, like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn – a female seed-bearing organ – the *mestiza* is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth – she will survive the crossroads [...] *moliendo, mixteando, amasando, hasiendo tortillas de masa.* (Anzaldúa 1987, 103)

In the process of theorizing about Chicana identity re-configuration, food plays a pivotal role and illustrates the fragmentation that characterizes the native North American experience, which on its turn represents a form of exclusion from nationhood as illustrated in Anzaldúa's poem "To Live in the Borderland Means You ... ":

[4] "Nepantla" literally means "place in the middle" and is a term that Anzaldúa takes from the Nahuatl vocabulary. Historically known as Aztec, Nahuatl is a native American language and is still spoken in Central Mexico.

are neither hispana india negra espanola
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;
[...]
To live in the Borderlands means to
put *chile* in the borscht,
eat whole wheat tortillas,
speak tex-mex with a Brooklyn accent;
be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints.

By acting as an index of cultural belonging and identity claim, food in this poem seems to indicate a resistance towards assimilation, a striving attempt to safeguard a sort of national and culinary authenticity (Bost 2013). And yet, as Meredith Abarca sharply argues:

> What does it mean to speak of the authenticity of culinary practice when traditions within all cultures are constantly changing? [...] Those who award themselves the privilege to define authenticity in any ethnic food, whether they are cultural outsiders or insiders, can inflict wounds that either appropriate cultural and personal knowledge or essentialize it causing a stifling of creative growth. (Abarca 2004, 2)

The process of hybridization – both cultural and gastronomic – that Anzaldúa suggests bans the concepts of purity and stability, allowing us to define her nurturing style as "nepantla diet." The phrase might even sound like an oxymoron: while "nepantla," as we have seen, evokes non-rigid spaces and a fluid condition of in-betweenness, the word "diet" is often incorrectly and exclusively associated to a regimented food style based on a regulated selection of foods for either medical reasons or aesthetic weight loss. The nepantla diet particularly affected Anzaldúa's life and writings in the early 1990s when she was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, which caused her premature death in 2004. Both obesity and diabetes are a real plague among American Indian communities and are the most evident costs that they had to pay, together with the trauma caused by their forced movement onto reservations and their restricted access to land and food resources.

In addition to the injection of insulin and other chemicals into her body through a very disciplined and repetitive observance that juxtaposed meals rituals, Anzaldúa also turned to a wide variety of alternative healing treatments that belonged to many different cultures. Suzanne Bost's study of her archive mentions

> [...] herbs, gemstones, dreams, energy healing, astrology, Chakras, the Tattvas, music, charm pillows, candles and their color symbolism, something called "Self Realization Fellowship," and "Rainbow Medicine" (herbal remedies from native women in the Ozark Mountains). (Bost 2013)

For Anzaldúa even a form of disability such as diabetes eventually becomes a practice to incorporate transnational human and nonhuman "others" in a healing and artistic act:

> Creativity sets off an alchemical process that transforms adversity and difficulties into works of art. All of life's adventures go into the cauldron, *la oya,* where all fragments, inconsistencies, contradictions are stirred and cooked to a new integration. They undergo transformation. For me *esta oya* is the body. (Anzaldúa 2003, 18)

The creativity of art and literature proves to be a powerful resource to eschew consolidated dichotomy of self and nature, since not only does Anzaldúa posit that the human body is not separate from the environment in which it exists, but she also achieves the awareness that her body is an environment itself, connected in multiple ways to the larger ecosystem. Moreover, the poet's body is also the first site of an act of mirroring and acknowledgment. In a revealing interview, in fact, she claims that she recognized herself "in the faces of the braceros that worked for my father. Los braceros were mostly indios from central Mexico who came to work in the fields of South Texas. I recognized the indian aspect of mexicanos by the stories my grandmother told and by the foods we ate" and even her own "demeanor" was to be perceived as indio, since she "used to lie down on the bare earth." These powerful images of her childhood allow her "an awareness of something greater, an awareness of the interconnectedness of people and nature and all things" (Hernández-Avila and Perez 2003, 8). Anzaldúa's body is directly connected to the body of the earth, and when she writes about her personal sickness, she simultaneously narrates the toxicity of her land as embedded in the violent history of her people: her wounds and her land's wounds bleed in the same way.

In *Borderlands,* in the section titled "The Homeland, Aztlán / *El otro México,*" we read how in the 1930s Anglo agribusiness corporations "cheated the small Chicano landowners of their land" (Anzaldúa 1987, 30) and in the name of progress displaced indigenous people to implement their most technologically advanced farming methods. Anzaldúa's father, for example, after losing his land in southern Texas, was forced to work as a sharecropper for Rio Farms Inc., a large-scale corporate company. The harsh conditions of field labor and the exploitation of Chicano migrant workers is well depicted in a series of poems that Gloria Anzaldúa wrote after she joined activist and union leader Cesar Chàvez's National Farm Workers Association. In "A Sea of Cabbages," for instance, a farmer working "on his knees, hands swollen / sweat flowering on his face" (132) is compared to "a worm in a green sea," enduring physical toiling, repetitive labor, and pesticide contaminations. At noon, "he takes out his chile wrapped in tortillas drinks water made hot soup by the sun" (133) and through these detailed visual descriptions, the reader realizes the significance of indigenous people's access to "culturally meaningful food as a human right" (Adamson 2011, 216) and the connections to other indigenous people's rights, mainly to lands, territories, and natural resources, finally emphasizing a call for ecological praxis. Radical movements such as

Via Campesina have responded to this call, proving how collective agency can be effective in the building of new strategies of resistance and alternatives to the global gastropolitics in contemporary food systems.

What is generally called "food sovereignty" is thus the right of peoples to sound and culturally appropriate foods produced with sustainable methods and it is rooted in grassroots movements that advocate a more democratic food system. The insistence on the value of food as a nurturing, spiritual, and cultural need rather than just a commodity is the first step of a process of resilience that stems from the urgency to reject the dehumanization of food growing and production, first of all by recognizing the work of all food providers and by giving them the right to control the whole food chain. These rights have been confirmed by some international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), but in much of her persuasive work Joni Adamson[5] has demonstrated how literature has highly contributed to the international debate surrounding environmental justice and food sovereignty. Novels, poetry, and nonfictional works have offered remarkable insights into the ethical issues pertaining food access, production, distribution, and consumption. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* is possibly one of the most vocal and complex examples of this political-discursive resistance.

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[5] The complex history of the relations between indigenous peoples in the Americas and their social and environmental justice struggles has been detailed in many of her articles (Cfr. Adamson 2001; 2011; 2012, 2012b).

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