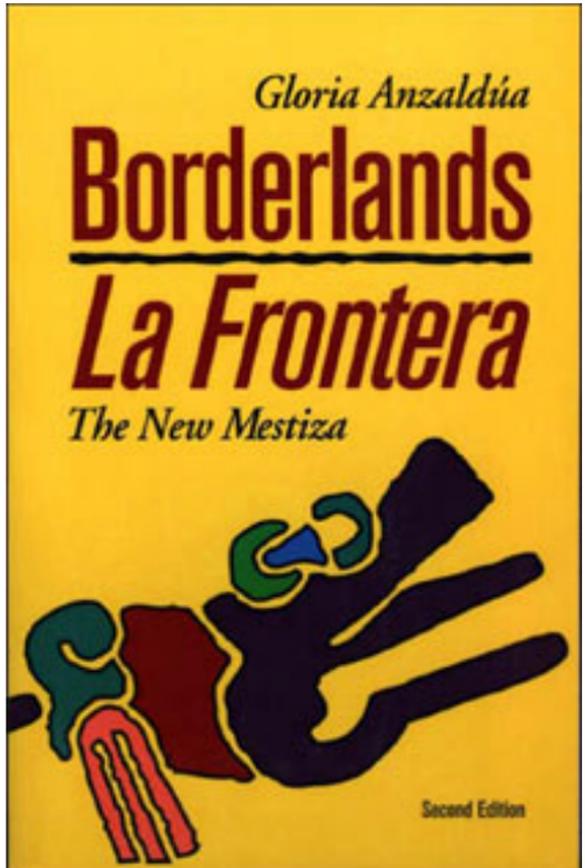


Excerpts from  
*Borderlands: La Frontera – The New Mestiza*  
by Gloria Anzaldúa.  
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# 1

## The Homeland, Aztlán

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### *El otro México*

*El otro México que acá bemos construído  
el espacio es lo que ha sido  
territorio nacional.*

*Este es el esfuerzo de todos nuestros hermanos  
y latinoamericanos que han sabido  
progressar.*

—Los Tigres del Norte<sup>1</sup>

“The *Aztecas del norte* . . . compose the largest single tribe or nation of Anishinabeg (Indians) found in the United States today . . . . Some call themselves Chicanos and see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlán [the U.S. Southwest].”<sup>2</sup>

Wind tugging at my sleeve  
feet sinking into the sand  
I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean  
where the two overlap  
a gentle coming together  
at other times and places a violent clash.

Across the border in Mexico  
stark silhouette of houses gutted by waves,  
cliffs crumbling into the sea,  
silver waves marbled with spume  
gashing a hole under the border fence.

*The other Mexico that we have created here  
is what always has been  
national territory.  
It is the [collective] effort of all of our brothers  
and Latin Americans who have known  
how to move forward.*

—The Tigers of the North\*

*Aztecs from the North*

\*Los Tigres del Norte (English: The Tigers of the North) is a norteño-band ensemble based out of San Jose, California, with origins in Rosa Morada, a sindicatura in Mocorito, Sinaloa, Mexico. They are still active recording and performing artists today.

*Norteño*, also *musica norteña*, is a genre of Mexican music. The accordion and the *bajo sexto* are norteño's most characteristic instruments. The genre is popular in both Mexico and the United States, especially among the Mexican and Mexican-American community, and it has become popular in many Latin American countries as far as Chile and Colombia. Though originating from rural areas, norteño is popular in urban as well as rural areas.

*Miro el mar atacar  
la cerca en Border Field Park  
con sus buchones de agua,*

an Easter Sunday resurrection  
of the brown blood in my veins.

*Oigo el llorido del mar, el respiro del aire,*  
my heart surges to the beat of the sea.  
In the gray haze of the sun  
the gulls' shrill cry of hunger,  
the tangy smell of the sea seeping into me.

I walk through the hole in the fence  
to the other side.  
Under my fingers I feel the gritty wire  
rusted by 139 years  
of the salty breath of the sea.

Beneath the iron sky  
Mexican children kick their soccer ball across,  
run after it, entering the U.S.

I press my hand to the steel curtain—  
chainlink fence crowned with rolled barbed wire—  
rippling from the sea where Tijuana touches San Diego  
unrolling over mountains  
and plains  
and deserts,  
this "Tortilla Curtain" turning into *el río Grande*  
flowing down to the flatlands  
of the Magic Valley of South Texas  
its mouth emptying into the Gulf.

1,950 mile-long open wound  
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,  
running down the length of my body,  
staking fence rods in my flesh,  
splits me splits me  
*me raja me raja*

*I watch the sea bombard  
the fence in Border Field State Park  
with its bursts of water*

*I hear the cry of the sea, the breath of the air*

*dividing a people*, a culture  
or, *dividing a town*, a culture

*It is breaking me, it is breaking me*  
(splitting) (splitting)  
(ripping) (ripping)  
(cutting) (cutting)

**Yemanjá (Yemayá)** is an orisha, originally of the Yoruba religion, who has become prominent in many Afro-American religions. Yoruba people, from what is now called Yorubaland, brought Yemaya/Yemoja and a host of other deities/energy forces in nature with them when they were brought to the shores of the Americas as captives. She is the ocean, the essence of motherhood, and a fierce protector of children.

The Yorùbá religion comprises the traditional religious and spiritual concepts and practices of the Yorùbá people. Its homeland is in Southwestern Nigeria and the adjoining parts of Benin and Togo, a region that has come to be known as Yorùbáland.

An Orisha (also spelled Orisa or Orixá) is a spirit or deity that reflects one of the manifestations of God in the Yoruba spiritual or religious system.

*I am a stretched bridge  
from the Yankee world to that of the wetback,  
the past stretches me backwards  
and the present stretches me forward.  
May the Virgin Mary care for me  
Ay ay ay, I am a Mexican from this side.*

The U.S.-Mexican border **is an open wound** where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.

**\*\*los atravesados:** the ones who are caught in the in-between, [the border-dwellers]

This is my home  
this thin edge of  
barbwire.

But the skin of the earth is seamless.  
The sea cannot be fenced,  
*el mar* does not stop at borders.  
To show the white man what she thought of his  
arrogance,  
*Yemayá* blew that wire fence down.

This land was Mexican once,  
was Indian always  
and is.  
And will be again.

*Yo soy un puente tendido  
del mundo gabacho al del mojado,  
lo pasado me estira pa 'trás  
y lo presente pa' delante,  
Que la Virgen de Guadalupe me cuide  
Ay ay ay, soy mexicana de este lado.*

The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal.” Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they’re Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those

who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger.

In the fields, *la migra*. My aunt saying, "No corran, don't run. They'll think you're *del otro lao*." In the confusion, Pedro ran, terrified of being caught. He couldn't speak English, couldn't tell them he was fifth generation American. *Sin papeles*—he did not carry his birth certificate to work in the fields. *La migra* took him away while we watched. *Se lo llevaron*. He tried to smile when he looked back at us, to raise his fist. But I saw the shame pushing his head down, I saw the terrible weight of shame hunch his shoulders. They deported him to Guadalajara by plane he'd ever been to Mexico was Reynosa, a small border town opposite Hidalgo, Texas, not far from McAllen. Pedro walked all the way to the Valley. *Se lo llevaron sin un centavo al pobre. Se vino andando desde Guadalajara.*

During the original peopling of the Americas, the first inhabitants migrated across the Bering Straits and walked south across the continent. The oldest evidence of humankind in the U.S.—the Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestors—was found in Texas and has been dated to 35000 B.C.<sup>3</sup> In the Southwest United States archeologists have found 20,000-year-old campsites of the Indians who migrated through, or permanently occupied, the Southwest, Aztlán—land of the herons, land of whiteness, the Edenic place of origin of the Azteca.

In 1000 B.C., descendants of the original Cochise people migrated into what is now Mexico and Central America and became the direct ancestors of many of the Mexican people. (The Cochise culture of the Southwest is the parent culture of the Aztecs. The Uto-Aztecan languages stemmed from the language of the Cochise people.)<sup>4</sup> The Aztecs (the Nahuatl word for people of Aztlán) left the Southwest in 1168 A.D.

Now let us go.

*Tibueque, tibueque,*  
*Vámonos, vámonos.*  
*Un pájaro cantó.*

\*\*\**la migra*": slang—Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers.  
Often used to denote an Immigration raid.

*My aunt saying, "No corran, don't run. They'll think you're from the other side. In the confusion, Pedro ran, terrified of being caught. He couldn't speak English, couldn't tell them he was fifth generation American. Without papers—he did not carry his birth certificate to work in the fields. La migra took him away while we watched. They took him. He tried to smile when he looked back at us to raise his fist. But I saw the shame pushing his head down, I saw the terrible weight of shame hunch his shoulders. they deported him to Guadalajara by plane. The furthest he'd ever been to Mexico was Reynosa, a small border town opposite Hidalgo, Texas, not far from McAllen. Pedro walked all the way to the Valley. They took him—and he was without a penny. He arrived on foot from Guadalajara.*

**Nahuatl**, known informally as Aztec, is a language or group of languages of the Uto-Aztecan language family. Varieties of Nahuatl are spoken by an estimated 1.5 million Nahua people, most of whom live in Central Mexico. All Nahuan languages are indigenous to Mesoamerica.



\*\**Tihueque*: Nahuatl word—"let us go"  
\*\**Vámonos*": Spanish—"let us go"  
"Un pájaro cantó": Spanish—A bird sang.

*La encrucijada / The Crossroads*

A chicken is being sacrificed  
at a crossroads, a simple mound of earth  
a mud shrine for *Eshu*,  
*Yoruba* god of indeterminacy,  
who blesses her choice of path.  
She begins her journey.

*Su cuerpo es una bocacalle. La mestiza* has gone from being the sacrificial goat to becoming the officiating priestess at the crossroads.

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-

Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.

We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward. *Nuestra alma el trabajo*, the opus, the great alchemical work; spiritual *mestizaje*, a "morphogenesis,"<sup>5</sup> an inevitable unfolding. We have become the quickening serpent movement.

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.

*Lavando y remojando el maíz en agua de cal, despojando el pellejo. Moliendo, mixteando, amasando, haciendo tortillas de masa.*<sup>6</sup> She steeps the corn in lime, it swells, softens. With stone roller on *metate*, she grinds the corn, then grinds again. She kneads and moulds the dough, pats the round balls into *tortillas*.

We are the porous rock in the stone *metate*  
squatting on the ground.  
We are the rolling pin, *el maíz y agua*,  
*la masa harina. Somos el amasijo.*  
*Somos lo molido en el metate.*  
We are the *comal* sizzling hot,  
the hot *tortilla*, the hungry mouth.  
We are the coarse rock.  
We are the grinding motion,  
the mixed potion, *somos el molcajete.*  
We are the pestle, the *comino, ajo, pimienta,*

We are the *chile colorado*,  
 the green shoot that cracks the rock.  
 We will abide.

### *El camino de la mestiza / The Mestiza Way*

Caught between the sudden contraction, the breath sucked in and the endless space, the brown woman stands still, looks at the sky. She decides to go down, digging her way along the roots of trees. Sifting through the bones, she shakes them to see if there is any marrow in them. Then, touching the dirt to her forehead, to her tongue, she takes a few bones, leaves the rest in their burial place.

She goes through her backpack, keeps her journal and address book, throws away the muni-bart metromaps. The coins are heavy and they go next, then the greenbacks flutter through the air. She keeps her knife, can opener and eyebrow pencil. She puts bones, pieces of bark, *hierbas*, eagle feather, snakeskin, tape recorder, the rattle and drum in her pack and she sets out to become the complete *tolteca*.

Her first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*. Just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back—which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, which the baggage from the Anglo?

*Pero es difícil* differentiating between *lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto*. She puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of. *Luego bota lo que no vale, los desmintos, los desencuentos, el embrutecimiento. Aguarda el juicio, bondo y enraizado, de la gente antigua*. This step is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a *nabual*, able to transform herself into

a tree, a coyote, into another person. She learns to transform the small "I" into the total Self. *Se hace moldeadora de su alma. Según la concepción que tiene de sí misma, así será.*

## Notes

### The Homeland, Aztlán / *El otro México*

1. Los Tigres del Norte is a *conjunto* band.
2. Jack D. Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán*. (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, Premier Books, 1973), 13, 183; Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of Shaking Earth* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1959), 32.
3. John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Images of the Southwest* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 9.
4. Chávez, 9. Besides the Aztecs, the Ute, Gabriellino of California, Pima of Arizona, some Pueblo of New Mexico, Comanche of Texas, Opata of Sonora, Tarahumara of Sinaloa and Durango, and the Huichol of Jalisco speak Uto-Aztecan languages and are descended from the Cochise people.

*Somos una gente*

*Hay tantísimas fronteras  
que dividen a la gente,  
pero por cada frontera  
existe también un puente.*

—Gina Valdés<sup>7</sup>

Divided Loyalties. Many women and men of color do not want to have any dealings with white people. It takes too much time and energy to explain to the downwardly mobile, white middle-class women that it's okay for us to want to own "possessions," never having had any nice furniture on our dirt floors or "luxuries" like washing machines. Many feel that whites should help their own people rid themselves of race hatred and fear first. I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator. I think we need to allow whites to be our allies. Through our literature, art, *corridos*, and folktales we must share our history with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain Navajos or the Chicano farmworkers or *los Nicaragüenses* they won't turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances. They will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead.

Individually, but also as a racial entity, we need to voice our needs. We need to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our

personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty—you'd rather forget your brutish acts. To say you've split yourself from minority groups, that you disown us, that your dual consciousness splits off parts of yourself, transferring the "negative" parts onto us. (Where there is persecution of minorities, there is shadow projection. Where there is violence and war, there is repression of shadow.) To say that you are afraid of us, that to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intracultural split will heal. And finally, tell us what you need from us.

5. To borrow chemist Ilya Prigogine's theory of "dissipative structures." Prigogine discovered that substances interact not in predictable ways as it was taught in science, but in different and fluctuating ways to produce new and more complex structures, a kind of birth he called "morphogenesis," which created unpredictable innovations. Harold Gilliam, "Searching for a New World View," This World (January, 1981), 23.

6. *Tortillas de masa harina*: corn tortillas are of two types, the smooth uniform ones made in a tortilla press and usually bought at a tortilla factory or supermarket, and *gorditas*, made by mixing *masa* with lard or shortening or butter (my mother sometimes puts in bits of bacon or *chicharrones*).

7. Gina Valdés, *Puentes y Fronteras: Coplas Chicanas* (Los Angeles, CA: Castle Lithograph, 1982), 2.