

Gloria Anzaldúa
is also the co-editor of
This Bridge Called My Back

Gloria Anzaldúa
Borderlands

La Frontera
The New Mestiza

aunt lute books
SAN FRANCISCO

Copyright ©1987 by Gloria Anzaldúa

All rights reserved

First Edition
16-15

Aunt Lute Book Company
P.O. Box 410687
San Francisco, CA 94141

"Holy Relics" first appeared in *Conditions Six*, 1980.
"Cervicide" first appeared in *Labyris, A Feminist Arts Journal*, Vol. 4, #11,
Winter 1983.
"En el nombre de todas las madres que han perdido sus hijos en la guerra" first
appeared in *IKON: Creativity and Change*, Second Series, #4, 1985.

Cover and Text Design: Pamela Wilson Design Studio

Cover Art: Pamela Wilson

Typesetting: Grace Harwood and Comp-Type, Fort Bragg, CA

Production: Cindy Cleary	Lorraine Grassano
Martha Davis	Ambrosia Marvin
Debra DeBondt	Papusa Molina
Rosana Francescato	Sukey Wilder
Amelia Gonzalez	Kathleen Wilkinson

Printed in the U.S.A.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Anzaldúa, Gloria.

Borderlands : the new mestiza = La frontera / Gloria
Anzaldúa — 1st ed. — San Francisco : Aunt Lute, c1987.

203 p. : port. : 22 cm.

English and Spanish.

Some poems translated from Spanish.

ISBN 1-879960-12-5 (pbk.) : \$9.95

1. Mexican-American Border Region — Poetry. 2. Mexican-American
women — Poetry. 3. Mexican-American Border Region — Civilization. I.
Title. II. Title: Frontera.

PS3551.N95B6 1987 811'.54—dc19 87-60780
AACR2 MARC

Acknowledgements

To you who walked with me upon my path and who held out
a hand when I stumbled;

to you who brushed past me at crossroads never to touch me
again;

to you whom I never chanced to meet but who inhabit
borderlands similar to mine;

to you for whom the borderlands is unknown territory;

to Kit Quan, for feeding me and listening to me rant and
rave;

to Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, for believing in me and being
there for me;

to Joan Pinkvoss, my editor and publisher, midwife extraor-
dinaire, whose understanding, caring, and balanced mixture of
gentle prodding and pressure not only helped me bring this
"baby" to term, but helped to create it; these images and words
are for you.

To the production staff at Spinsters/Aunt Lute who bore
the pressure of impossible deadlines well: Martha Davis whose
invaluable and excellent copy-editing has made the material
more readable and cohesive; Debra DeBondt who worked long
and hard to keep the book on schedule; Pam Wilson and Grace
Harwood;

to Frances Doughty, Juanita Ramos, Judith Waterman,
Irena Klepfisz, Randy Conner, Janet Aalphs, Mirtha N. Quinta-
nales, Mandy Covey and Elana Dykewomon for their support and
encouragement, as well as feedback, on various pieces; to my
friends, students and colleagues in the ADP program in Vermont
College, Women's Voices Writing Workshop, UCSC, and writers
who participated in my writing workshops in NYC, New Haven,
San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, and Austin, Texas, in particu-
lar: Pearl Olson, Paula Ross, Marcy Alanraig, Maya Valverde,
Ariban, Tirsia Quiñones, Beth Brant, Chrystos, Elva Pérez-
Treviño, Victoria Rosales, Christian McEwen, Roz Calvert, Nina
Newington, and Linda Smuckler;

El sonavabitché
(for Aishe Berger)

Car flowing down a lava of highway
just happened to glance out the window
in time to see brown faces bent backs
like prehistoric boulders in a field
so common a sight no one
notices
blood rushes to my face
twelve years I'd sat on the memory
the anger scorching me
my throat so tight I can
barely get the words out.

I got to the farm
in time to hear the shots
ricochet off barn,
spit into the sand,
in time to see tall men in uniforms
thumping fists on doors
metallic voices yelling Halt!
their hawk eyes constantly shifting.

When I hear the words, "*Corran muchachos*"
I run back to the car, ducking,
see the glistening faces, arms outflung,
of the *mexicanos* running headlong
through the fields
kicking up clouds of dirt

see them reach the tree line
foliage opening, swishing closed behind them.
I hear the tussling of bodies, grunts, panting
squeak of leather squawk of walkie-talkies
sun reflecting off gunbarrels
the world a blinding light
a great buzzing in my ears
my knees like aspens in the wind.

I see that wide cavernous look of the hunted
the look of hares
thick limp blue-black hair
The bare heads humbly bent
of those who do not speak
the ember in their eyes extinguished.

I lean on the shanty wall of that migrant camp
north of Muncie, Indiana.
Wets, a voice says.
I turn to see a Chicano pushing
the head of his *muchachita*
back into the *naguas* of the mother
a tin plate face down on the floor
tortillas scattered around them.
His other hand signals me over.
He too is from *el valle de Tejas*
I had been his kid's teacher.
I'd come to get the grower
to fill up the sewage ditch near the huts
saying it wouldn't do for the children
to play in it.

Smoke from a cooking fire and
shirtless *niños* gather around us.

Mojados, he says again,
leaning on his chipped Chevy station wagon
Been here two weeks
about a dozen of them.
The *sonavabitché* works them
from sunup to dark—15 hours sometimes.
Como mulas los trabaja
no saben como hacer la perra.
Last Sunday they asked for a day off
wanted to pray and rest,
write letters to their *familias*.
¿Y sabes lo que hizo el sonavabitché?
He turns away and spits.
Says he has to hold back half their wages
that they'd eaten the other half:

sack of beans, sack of rice, sack of flour.
Frijoleros sí lo son but no way
 could they have eaten that many *frijoles*.
 I nod.

Como le dije, son doce—started out 13
 five days packed in the back of a pickup
 boarded up tight
 fast cross-country run no stops
 except to change drivers, to gas up
 no food they pissed into their shoes—
 those that had *guaraches*
 slept slumped against each other
sabe Dios where they shit.
 One smothered to death on the way here.

Miss, you should've seen them when they
 stumbled out.
 First thing the *sonavabitch* did was clamp
 a handkerchief over his nose
 then ordered them stripped
 hosed them down himself
 in front of everybody.
 They hobbled about
 learning to walk all over again.
Flacos con caras de viejos
aunque la mitad eran jóvenes.

Como le estaba diciendo,
 today was payday.
 You saw them, *la migra* came busting in
 waving their *pinche pistolas*.
 Said someone made a call,
 what you call it? Anonymous.
 Guess who? That *sonavabitch*, who else?
 Done this three times since we've been coming here
Sepa Dios how many times in between.
 Wets, free labor, *esclavos*.
Pobres hijos de la chingada.
 This the last time we work for him

no matter how *fregados* we are
 he said, shaking his head,
 spitting at the ground.
Vámonos, mujer, empaca el mugrero.

He hands me a cup of coffee,
 half of it sugar, half of it milk
 my throat so dry I even down the dregs.
 It has to be done.
 Steeling myself
 I take that walk to the big house.

Finally the big man lets me in.
 How about a drink? I shake my head.
 He looks me over, opens his eyes wide
 and smiles, says how sorry he is immigration
 is getting so tough
 a poor Mexican can't make a living
 and they sure do need the work.
 My throat so thick the words stick.
 He studies me, then says,
 Well, what can I do you for?
 I want two weeks wages
 including two Saturdays and Sundays,
 minimum wage, 15 hours a day.
 I'm more startled than he.
 Whoa there, *sinorita*,
 wets work for whatever you give them
 the season hasn't been good.
 Besides most are halfway to Mexico by now.
 Two weeks wages, I say,
 the words swelling in my throat.

Miss uh what did you say your name was?
 I fumble for my card.
 You can't do this,
 I haven't broken no law,
 his lidded eyes darken, I step back.
 I'm leaving in two minutes and I want cash
 the whole amount right here in my purse

when I walk out.
No hoarseness, no trembling.
It startled both of us.

You want me telling every single one
of your neighbors what you've been doing
all these years? The mayor, too?
Maybe make a call to Washington?
Slitted eyes studied the card again.
They had no cards, no papers.
I'd seen it over and over.
Work them, then turn them in before paying them.

Well, now, he was saying,
I know we can work something out,
a sweet young thang like yourself.
Cash, I said. I didn't know anyone in D.C.
now I didn't have to.
You want to keep it for yourself?
That it? His eyes were pin pricks.
Sweat money, Mister, blood money,
not my sweat, but same blood.
Yeah, but who's to say you won't abscond with it?
If I ever hear that you got illegals on your land
even a single one, I'm going to come here
in broad daylight and have you
hung by your balls.
He walks slowly to his desk.
Knees shaking, I count every bill
taking my time.

Corran muchachos—Run boys.

muchachita—little girl

naguas—skirt

el valle de Tejas—Rio Grande Valley in Texas

mojados—wetbacks, undocumented workers, illegal immigrants from Mexico
and parts south

Como mulas los trabaja.—He works them like mules.

no saben como hacer la perra.—They don't know how to make the work easier
for themselves.

¿Y sabes lo que hizo?—And you know what he did.
Frijoleros sí lo son.—Bean eaters they are.
Como le dije, son doce.—Like I told you, they're 12.
guarache—sandal
sabe Dios—God knows
Flacos con caras de viejos—skinny with old faces
aunque la mitad eran jóvenes—though half were youths
Como le estaba diciendo—as I was telling you
la migra—slang for immigration officials
pistolas—guns
esclavos—slaves
Pobres hijos de la Chingada—poor sons of the fucked one
fregados—poor, beaten, downtrodden, in need
Vámonos, mujer, empaca el mugrero.—Let's go, woman, pack our junk.

En mi corazón se incuba
(para Sonia Alvarez)

*Todo comienza a partir de este día,
Una tristeza me invade y
Algo extraño se oculta en mi vientre—
Un golpe de soledad que me consume.
En mi corazón se incuba una espina.*

*La luz de las luciérnagas se retira y
De los árboles me llaman las lechuzas.
Inmersa en un abandono, tragando miedos,
Me siento muy lejos
De la huella del amor.*

*En tumbas huérfanas gasto largas noches,
Los minutos pasan como agujas por mi piel.
Soy una sombra pálida en una noche opaca.
Hondo escondo mi pena, hondo.
Hondo se enraíza un sueño noconfesado.*

*En este oscuro monte de nopal
Algo secretamente amado
Se oculta en mi vientre
Y en mi corazón se incuba
Un amor que no es de este mundo.*

Corner of 50th St. and Fifth Av.

Taking my usual walk
I run into sirens flashing red, turning
and a small crowd
watching the dark-haired man
with the thin mustache,
PR about 30,
maricón, a voice in the crowd shouts.

Two uniforms have his head
wedged down in the gap
between the bucket seats,
red sirens turning turning
just over his head.

Another pulls down his pants
holds him tight around the waist
the fourth pummels
the pale orbs over and over
till the PR's face is flushed
the cop's fist red
the sirens turning turning.
The first two look bored
eyes drifting slowly
over the crowd
not meeting our eyes.
He just thud got out thud of jail
I hear a Rican say
thud, the cop's arms like baseball bats.
Finally the thuds end.
They pull his head
out of the crack,
pull pants over livid cheeks,
manacled hands going down
to cover his buttocks

the sirens turning turning
I wade through the thick air thinking
that's as close as they let themselves get
to fucking a man, being men.