

# NO-ZONE POETRY IN THE BORDER- LANDS

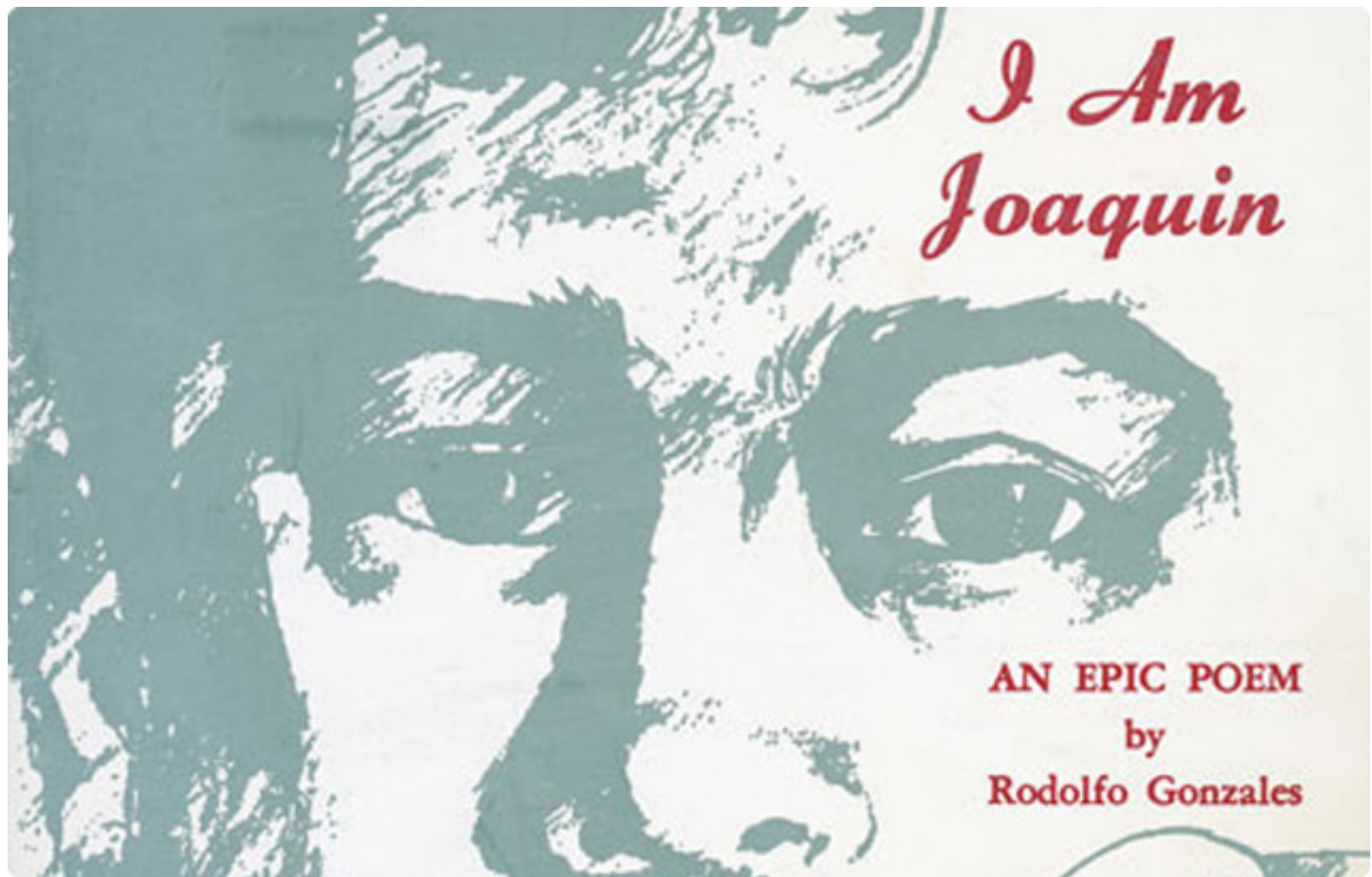
GRETA DE LÉON



MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

# I Am Joaquín

by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales



# I Am Joaquin

*by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales*

Yo soy Joaquín,  
perdido en un mundo de confusión:

I am Joaquín,  
lost in a world of confusion,  
caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,  
confused by the rules,  
scorned by attitudes,  
suppressed by manipulation,  
and destroyed by modern society.

My fathers  
have lost the economic battle  
and won the struggle of cultural survival.

And now! I must choose between the paradox of victory of the spirit,  
despite physical hunger,  
or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis,  
sterilization of the soul and a full stomach.

Yes, I have come a long way to nowhere,  
unwillingly dragged by that monstrous,  
technical, industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success....  
I look at myself.

I watch my brothers.  
I shed tears of sorrow.  
I sow seeds of hate.

I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life --  
MY OWN PEOPLE

I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble,  
leader of men, king of an empire civilized  
beyond the dreams  
of the gachupín Cortés,  
who also is the blood, the image of myself.

I am the Maya prince.  
I am Nezahualcóyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas.

I am the sword and flame of Cortes the despot  
And I am the eagle and serpent of the Aztec civilization.

I owned the land as far as the eye could see under the Crown of Spain,  
and I toiled on my Earth and gave my Indian sweat and blood  
for the Spanish master who ruled with tyranny over man  
and beast and all that he could trample But...

THE GROUND WAS MINE.

I was both tyrant and slave.

As the Christian church took its place in God's name,  
to take and use my virgin strength and trusting faith,  
the priests, both good and bad, took--  
but gave a lasting truth that Spaniard Indian Mestizo  
were all God's children.

And from these words grew men who prayed and fought  
for their own worth as human beings, for that  
GOLDEN MOMENT of FREEDOM.

I was part in blood and spirit of that courageous village priest  
Hidalgo who in the year eighteen hundred and ten  
rang the bell of independence and gave out that lasting cry--  
El Grito de Dolores  
"Que mueran los gachupines y que viva la Virgen de Guadalupe...."

I sentenced him who was me I excommunicated him, my blood.  
I drove him from the pulpit to lead a bloody revolution for him and me....

I killed him.

His head, which is mine and of all those  
who have come this way,  
I placed on that fortress wall  
to wait for independence. Morelos! Matamoros! Guerrero!  
all companeros in the act, STOOD AGAINST THAT WALL OF INFAMY  
to feel the hot gouge of lead which my hands made.

I died with them ... I lived with them .... I lived to see our country free.  
Free from Spanish rule in eighteen-hundred-twenty-one.  
Mexico was free??

The crown was gone but all its parasites remained,  
and ruled, and taught, with gun and flame and mystic power.

I worked, I sweated, I bled, I prayed,  
and waited silently for life to begin again.  
I fought and died for Don Benito Juarez, guardian of the Constitution.  
I was he on dusty roads on barren land as he protected his archives  
as Moses did his sacraments.

He held his Mexico in his hand on  
the most desolate and remote ground which was his country.  
And this giant little Zapotec gave not one palm's breadth  
of his country's land to kings or monarchs or presidents of foreign powers.

I am Joaquin.  
I rode with Pancho Villa,  
crude and warm, a tornado at full strength,  
nourished and inspired by the passion and the fire of all his earthy people.

I am Emiliano Zapata.  
"This land, this earth is OURS."

The villages, the mountains, the streams  
belong to Zapatistas.

Our life or yours is the only trade for soft brown earth and maize.

All of which is our reward,  
a creed that formed a constitution  
for all who dare live free!

"This land is ours . . .  
Father, I give it back to you.

Mexico must be free. . . ."

I ride with revolutionists  
against myself.  
I am the Rurales,  
coarse and brutal,  
I am the mountain Indian,  
superior over all.

The thundering hoof beats are my horses.  
The chattering machine guns are death to all of me:

Yaqui  
Tarahumara  
Chamala  
Zapotec  
Mestizo  
Español.

I have been the bloody revolution,  
The victor,  
The vanquished.

I have killed  
And been killed.  
I am the despots  
Díaz  
And Huerta  
And the apostle of democracy,  
Francisco Madero.

I am  
The black-shawled  
Faithful women  
Who die with me  
Or live  
Depending on the time and place.

I am faithful, humble Juan Diego,  
The Virgin of Guadalupe,  
Tonantzín, Aztec goddess, too.

I rode the mountains of San Joaquín.  
I rode east and north  
As far as the Rocky Mountains,  
And  
All men feared the guns of  
Joaquín Murrieta.

I killed those men who dared  
To steal my mine,  
Who raped and killed my love  
My wife.

Then I killed to stay alive.

I was Elfego Baca,  
living my nine lives fully.

I was the Espinoza brothers  
of the Valle de San Luis.

All were added to the number of heads that in the name of civilization  
were placed on the wall of independence, heads of brave men  
who died for cause or principle, good or bad.

Hidalgo! Zapata!  
Murrieta! Espinozas!  
Are but a few.  
They dared to face  
The force of tyranny  
Of men who rule by deception and hypocrisy.

I stand here looking back,  
And now I see the present,  
And still I am a campesino,  
I am the fat political coyote—

I,  
Of the same name,  
Joaquín,  
In a country that has wiped out  
All my history,  
Stifled all my pride,  
In a country that has placed a  
Different weight of indignity upon my age-old burdened back.

Inferiority is the new load . . . .

The Indian has endured and still  
Emerges the winner,  
The Mestizo must yet overcome,  
And the gachupín will just ignore.

I look at myself  
And see part of me  
Who rejects my father and my mother  
And dissolves into the melting pot  
To disappear in shame.

I sometimes  
Sell my brother out  
And reclaim him  
For my own when society gives me  
Token leadership  
In society's own name.

I am Joaquín,  
Who bleeds in many ways.

The altars of Moctezuma  
I stained a bloody red.

My back of Indian slavery  
Was stripped crimson  
From the whips of masters  
Who would lose their blood so pure  
When revolution made them pay,  
Standing against the walls of retribution.  
Blood has flowed from me on every battlefield between  
campesino, hacendado,  
slave and master and revolution.

I jumped from the tower of Chapultepec  
into the sea of fame—  
my country's flag  
my burial shroud—  
with Los Niños,  
whose pride and courage  
could not surrender  
with indignity  
their country's flag  
to strangers . . . in their land.

Now I bleed in some smelly cell from club or gun or tyranny.

I bleed as the vicious gloves of hunger  
Cut my face and eyes,  
As  
I fight my way from stinking barrios  
To the glamour of the ring  
And lights of fame  
Or mutilated sorrow.

My blood runs pure on the ice-caked  
Hills of the Alaskan isles,  
On the corpse-strewn beach of Normandy,  
The foreign land of Korea  
And now Vietnam.

Here I stand  
Before the court of justice,  
Guilty  
For all the glory of my Raza  
To be sentenced to despair.

Here I stand,  
Poor in money,  
Arrogant with pride,  
Bold with machismo,  
Rich in courage  
And  
Wealthy in spirit and faith.

My knees are caked with mud.  
My hands calloused from the hoe. I have made the Anglo rich,  
Yet  
Equality is but a word—

The Treaty of Hidalgo has been broken  
And is but another treacherous promise.

My land is lost  
And stolen,  
My culture has been raped.



I lengthen the line at the welfare door  
And fill the jails with crime.

These then are the rewards  
This society has  
For sons of chiefs  
And kings  
And bloody revolutionists,  
Who gave a foreign people  
All their skills and ingenuity  
To pave the way with brains and blood  
For those hordes of gold-starved strangers,  
Who  
Changed our language  
And plagiarized our deeds  
As feats of valor  
Of their own.

They frowned upon our way of life  
and took what they could use.

Our art, our literature, our music, they ignored—  
so they left the real things of value  
and grabbed at their own destruction  
by their greed and avarice.

They overlooked that cleansing fountain of  
nature and brotherhood  
which is Joaquín.

The art of our great señores,  
Diego Rivera,  
Siqueiros

Orozco, is but another act of revolution for  
the salvation of mankind.

Mariachi music, the heart and soul  
of the people of the earth,  
the life of the child,  
and the happiness of love.

The corridos tell the tales  
of life and death,  
of tradition,  
legends old and new, of joy  
of passion and sorrow  
of the people—who I am.

I am in the eyes of woman,  
sheltered beneath  
her shawl of black,  
deep and sorrowful eyes  
that bear the pain of sons long buried or dying,  
dead on the battlefield or on the barbed wire of social strife.

Her rosary she prays and fingers endlessly  
like the family working down a row of beets  
to turn around and work and work.

There is no end.

Her eyes a mirror of all the warmth  
and all the love for me,  
and I am her  
and she is me.

We face life together in sorrow,  
anger, joy, faith and wishful  
thoughts.

I shed the tears of anguish  
as I see my children disappear  
behind the shroud of mediocrity,  
never to look back to remember me.

I am Joaquín.

I must fight  
and win this struggle  
for my sons, and they  
must know from me  
who I am.

Part of the blood that runs deep in me  
could not be vanquished by the Moors.

I defeated them after five hundred years,  
and I have endured.

Part of the blood that is mine  
has labored endlessly four hundred  
years under the heel of lustful  
Europeans.

I am still here!

I have endured in the rugged mountains  
Of our country  
I have survived the toils and slavery of the fields.

I have existed  
In the barrios of the city  
In the suburbs of bigotry  
In the mines of social snobbery  
In the prisons of dejection  
In the muck of exploitation  
And  
In the fierce heat of racial hatred.

And now the trumpet sounds,  
The music of the people stirs the  
Revolution.

Like a sleeping giant it slowly  
Rears its head  
To the sound of  
Tramping feet  
Clamoring voices  
Mariachi strains  
Fiery tequila explosions  
The smell of chile verde and  
Soft brown eyes of expectation for a  
Better life.

And in all the fertile farmlands,  
the barren plains,  
the mountain villages,  
smoke-smeared cities,  
we start to MOVE.

La raza!  
Méjicano!  
Español!  
Latino!  
Chicano!  
Or whatever I call myself,  
I look the same  
I feel the same  
I cry  
And  
Sing the same.

I am the masses of my people and  
I refuse to be absorbed.

I am Joaquín.

The odds are great  
But my spirit is strong,  
My faith unbreakable,  
My blood is pure.

I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.

I SHALL ENDURE!

I WILL ENDURE!

ALURISTA  
seven poems

*tremble*  
purple



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# about the poet

**Alurista** is one of the most significant and widely acclaimed Chicano poets. He has published six collections of poetry: *floricanto en aztlan* (1971, reprinted in 1976), *nationchild plumaroja* (1971, reprinted in 1982), *timespace huracan* (1976), *aunque* (1979), *spik in glyph?* (1981), and *return* (1982). He has recited his poetry throughout the United States, Mexico, Germany, Holland and France.

Alurista has also edited 24 books to date, as well as the journal *MAIZE*. He is presently West Coast Editor for three literary and academic journals: *Confluencia*, *Imagine*, and *ViAztlan*. The most recent videotape about Alurista, "Torn in Two," was aired nationally on PBS television and received an Emmy Award. His work is being collected in the "Mexican-American Archives at the Benson Collection: A Guide for Users," University of Texas, Austin.

Alurista is a professor and scholar, having obtained his Ph.D. in Spanish and Latin American literature, and he was awarded the Jr. MacArthur Chair in Spanish by Colorado College in 1984 for his teaching excellence. He is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at Cal Poly U. in San Luis Obispo, California.

Alurista also has a long history in the Chicano Movement going back to the 1960s. He helped organize the first national Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War, was a founding member of MEChA in San Diego, and founded the first Chicano Studies program in the country at San Diego State University. He helped initiate *La Verdad*, the first Chicano newspaper in San Diego, and was an author of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*.

# yes



yes, four nipple rocking  
to the songdance whisper  
the sea, the sand,  
the wind whooshing  
flute fountain whistle  
yes, it is raining  
and the morning mist  
beckons the sun  
dawn's veil hovers  
columns of hunger  
columns of drought  
long for quiet death  
peacefully, dusk  
vultures sit  
trading guns  
it continues to  
not let be, yes  
to be naught  
no tender touch  
no kiss, this here  
bombing, no, no  
not playing nipples  
be uprooting wombs  
it is not powdered death  
that people seek  
the glory of "progress"  
be nightmare  
peace remains  
a dream, a child  
yes, a smile  
a rainbow  
a flower and a song

# on the beach



CELIA CALDERÓN

on the beach chair i  
 he, thinking across the peaks  
 slushing, joshing i  
 but, not really, the snow  
 b as much his as the sun mine  
 borge, said i  
 and he thought, jorgeluís  
 of course, the hummingbird  
 sucks on  
 and the willow weeps  
 and dylan is bob  
 even though thomas was  
 and is  
 a good poet, he lived off  
 his agenda, while tomás  
 has his hawk eye  
 on the line  
 the borderline, yes  
 the grand littleman  
 el comandante  
 poeta de la sierra  
 sandina tierra  
 i listen  
 "hablando se entiende  
 la gente", true,  
 so true. premise however  
 lawned on talking which  
 implies a two-way arrow  
 shot  
 put well, witty  
 did anybody listen. well

english is now the "official"  
 language in california  
 mister, had to legislate it pal  
 a'nque the flow brook  
 cannot be adobed (from **adobe**  
 building blocks that  
 construct houses, applesheds  
 and ovens).  
 in the southern west  
 or the western south  
 as thee may play thy spool  
 weave cotton so  
 hermano, compadre  
 uniformed parodies politik  
 the world is at hand  
 like a harpsichord  
 only the melody waits  
 tom rhythms blues and crimsons  
 the light out the cave  
 b weaponless  
 i must tell this story  
 now. least the house of lead  
 and computers, pencil  
 ink this sunset well  
 bring the water up  
 worry not  
 suicide is no longer a personal  
 choice  
 transnational bargaining chips  
 chumps chump change  
 ... ¿y nosotros qué?, ¿nos otros qué?  
 pos nada, nadan adán  
 papier mache, papel, paper  
 pauper smashed

has only bridges to sleep  
 under  
 stated wealth and property  
 rights  
 white maidens writ  
 título  
 árbol que vuela vela  
 hamaca que conoce  
 el rock más antiguo  
 ¡mécese!  
 la democracia can only b  
 in a kellogs cereal  
 box prize  
 lotería  
 malcolm x was the first  
 víctima  
 kennedy and king got it  
 as well, ni modo  
 el facismo may have had  
 more tentacles than  
 any one ever imagined  
 in germany  
 in the u.s.a. it matured  
 since the hiroshima bomb  
 and its banking  
 pockets  
 this is not a critique  
 in glyph  
 or in spinach  
 of olive oil  
 or whaLE mEAT  
 future shock chooses  
 pesticides, agent orange  
 and, well



weALTH county  
 here i sit on pismo  
     hills, libélulas  
 frolic and he writes memos  
     funding cowards, no ...  
     misguided, hungry  
 lost militaristic egos, he goes  
     seeding death  
 and they, unemployed  
     unschooled  
     contras follow powder  
     the smell sweet  
     the bullet swift  
 rooster burning there b no dawn  
     fall choppin lettuce. let us  
 col, cabbage, garbage haul out  
     winter nears and the  
     chinese masses will not starve  
     he, duck sits, plucking  
 bleak  
     pimple heads, tinkerbell  
     b starwars  
 yet i ...  
     ... high noon?  
 pistoled high plains  
     drift, draft?  
 ... wish pop eye was here  
     in the harbor full  
 moths hover  
     deceit and deception  
 prevail as presidential prerogatives  
     ronny is really peter pan  
 and nancy wendy  
     kadaffi captain cook

and the usa never, neverland  
     wonder how castro  
 fits in this story  
     i personally think him  
 an eewok  
     who needs fantasy,  
 sci fi or horror when  
     the u.s. is enough?  
 ... i know! i got it! the ussr  
     anathema!

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

*Gloria Anzaldúa*  
**Borderlands**  

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*La Frontera*  
*The New Mestiza*

*aunt lute books*  
SAN FRANCISCO

# 1

## The Homeland, Aztlán

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### *El otro México*

*El otro México que acá hemos construido  
el espacio es lo que ha sido  
territorio nacional.*

*Esté 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.

*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*

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,  
*Yemaya* 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 estirá 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 migrá*. 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 migrá* 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. 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. *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.

*Tihueque, tihueque,*

*Vámonos, vámonos.*

*Un pájaro cantó.*

*Con sus ocho tribus salieron  
de la "cueva del origen."  
los aztecas siguieron al dios  
Huitzilopochtli.*

*Huitzilopochtli*, the God of War, guided them to the place (that later became Mexico City) where an eagle with a writhing serpent in its beak perched on a cactus. The eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother). Together, they symbolize the struggle between the spiritual/celestial/male and the underworld/earth/feminine. The symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the "higher" masculine powers indicates that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian America.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Spaniards and Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico and, with the help of tribes that the Aztecs had subjugated, conquered it. Before the Conquest, there were twenty-five million Indian people in Mexico and the Yucatán. Immediately after the Conquest, the Indian population had been reduced to under seven million. By 1650, only one-and-a-half-million pure-blooded Indians remained. The *mestizos* who were genetically equipped to survive small pox, measles, and typhus (Old World diseases to which the natives had no immunity), founded a new hybrid race and inherited Central and South America.<sup>5</sup> *En 1521 nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings.

Our Spanish, Indian, and *mestizo* ancestors explored and settled parts of the U.S. Southwest as early as the sixteenth century. For every gold-hungry *conquistador* and soul-hungry missionary who came north from Mexico, ten to twenty Indians and *mestizos* went along as porters or in other capacities.<sup>6</sup> For the Indians, this constituted a return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest. Indians and *mestizos* from central Mexico intermarried with North American Indians. The continual intermarriage between Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards formed an even greater *mestizaje*.

*El destierro/The Lost Land*

*Entonces corrí la sangre  
no sabe el indio que hacer,  
le van a quitar su tierra,  
la tiene que defender,  
el indio se cae muerto,  
y el afuerino de pie.  
Levántate, Manquilef.*

*Arauco tiene una pena  
más negra que su chamal,  
ya no son los españoles  
los que les hacen llorar,  
hoy son los propios chilenos  
los que les quitan su pan.  
Levántate, Pailabuan.*

—Violeta Parra, "Arauco tiene una pena"<sup>7</sup>

In the 1800s, Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, which was then part of Mexico, in greater and greater numbers and gradually drove the *tejanos* (native Texans of Mexican descent) from their lands, committing all manner of atrocities against them. Their illegal invasion forced Mexico to fight a war to keep its Texas territory. The Battle of the Alamo, in which the Mexican forces vanquished the whites, became, for the whites, the symbol for the cowardly and villainous character of the Mexicans. It became (and still is) a symbol that legitimized the white imperialist takeover. With the capture of Santa Anna later in 1836, Texas became a republic. *Tejanos* lost their land and, overnight, became the foreigners.

*Ya la mitad del terreno  
les vendió el traidor Santa Anna,  
con lo que se ha hecho muy rica  
la nación americana.*

*¿Qué acaso no se conforman  
con el oro de las minas?  
Ustedes muy elegantes  
y aquí nosotros en ruinas.*

—from the Mexican corrido,  
"Del peligro de la Intervención"<sup>8</sup>

In 1846, the U.S. incited Mexico to war. U.S. troops invaded and occupied Mexico, forcing her to give up almost half of her nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California.

With the victory of the U.S. forces over the Mexican in the U.S.-Mexican War, *los norteamericanos* pushed the Texas border down 100 miles, from *el río Nueces* to *el río Grande*. South Texas ceased to be part of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Separated from Mexico, the Native Mexican-Texan no longer looked toward Mexico as home; the Southwest became our homeland once more. The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land. The land established by the treaty as belonging to Mexicans was soon swindled away from its owners. The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, has never been made.

The justice and benevolence of God  
will forbid that . . . Texas should again  
become a howling wilderness  
trod only by savages, or . . . benighted  
by the ignorance and superstition,  
the anarchy and rapine of Mexican misrule.  
The Anglo-American race are destined  
to be forever the proprietors of  
this land of promise and fulfillment.  
Their laws will govern it,  
their learning will enlighten it,  
their enterprise will improve it.  
Their flocks range its boundless pastures,  
for them its fertile lands will yield . . .  
luxuriant harvests . . .

The wilderness of Texas has been redeemed  
by Anglo-American blood & enterprise.

—William H. Wharton<sup>9</sup>

The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it. *Con el destierro y el exilo fuimos desuñados, destroncados, destri-*

*pados*—we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history. Many, under the threat of Anglo terrorism, abandoned homes and ranches and went to Mexico. Some stayed and protested. But as the courts, law enforcement officials, and government officials not only ignored their pleas but penalized them for their efforts, *tejanos* had no other recourse but armed retaliation.

After Mexican-American resisters robbed a train in Brownsville, Texas on October 18, 1915, Anglo vigilante groups began lynching Chicanos. Texas Rangers would take them into the brush and shoot them. One hundred Chicanos were killed in a matter of months, whole families lynched. Seven thousand fled to Mexico, leaving their small ranches and farms. The Anglos, afraid that the *mexicanos*<sup>10</sup> would seek independence from the U.S., brought in 20,000 army troops to put an end to the social protest movement in South Texas. Race hatred had finally fomented into an all out war.<sup>11</sup>

My grandmother lost all her cattle,  
they stole her land.

"Drought hit South Texas," my mother tells me. "*La tierra se puso bien seca y los animales comenzaron a morir de se. Mi papá se murió de un heart attack dejando a mamá pregnant y con ocho huercos*, with eight kids and one on the way. *Yo fui la mayor, tenía diez años*. The next year the drought continued *y el ganado* got hoof and mouth. *Se calleron* in droves *en las pastas y el brushland, pansas blancas* ballooning to the skies. *El siguiente año* still no rain. *Mi pobre madre viuda* *perdió* two-thirds of her *ganado*. A smart *gabacho* lawyer took the land away *mamá* hadn't paid taxes. *No hablaba inglés*, she didn't know how to ask for time to raise the money." My father's mother, Mama Locha, also lost her *terreno*. For a while we got \$12.50 a year for the "mineral rights" of six acres of cemetery, all that was left of the ancestral lands. Mama Locha had asked that we bury her there beside her husband. *El cementerio estaba cercado*. But there was a fence around the cemetery, chained and padlocked by the ranch owners of the surrounding land. We couldn't even get in to visit the graves, much less bury her there. Today, it is still padlocked. The sign reads: "Keep out. Trespassers will be shot."

In the 1930s, after Anglo agribusiness corporations cheated the small Chicano landowners of their land, the corporations hired gangs of *mexicanos* to pull out the brush, chaparral and cactus and to irrigate the desert. The land they toiled over had once belonged to many of them, or had been used communally by them. Later the Anglos brought in huge machines and root plows and had the Mexicans scrape the land clean of natural vegetation. In my childhood I saw the end of dryland farming. I witnessed the land cleared; saw the huge pipes connected to underwater sources sticking up in the air. As children, we'd go fishing in some of those canals when they were full and hunt for snakes in them when they were dry. In the 1950s I saw the land, cut up into thousands of neat rectangles and squares, constantly being irrigated. In the 340-day growth season, the seeds of any kind of fruit or vegetable had only to be stuck in the ground in order to grow. More big land corporations came in and bought up the remaining land.

To make a living my father became a sharecropper. Rio Farms Incorporated loaned him seed money and living expenses. At harvest time, my father repaid the loan and forked over 40% of the earnings. Sometimes we earned less than we owed, but always the corporations fared well. Some had major holdings in vegetable trucking, livestock auctions and cotton gins. Altogether we lived on three successive Rio farms; the second was adjacent to the King Ranch and included a dairy farm; the third was a chicken farm. I remember the white feathers of three thousand Leghorn chickens blanketing the land for acres around. My sister, mother and I cleaned, weighed and packaged eggs. (For years afterwards I couldn't stomach the sight of an egg.) I remember my mother attending some of the meetings sponsored by well-meaning whites from Rio Farms. They talked about good nutrition, health, and held huge barbeques. The only thing salvaged for my family from those years are modern techniques of food canning and a food-stained book they printed made up of recipes from Rio Farms' Mexican women. How proud my mother was to have her recipe for *enchiladas coloradas* in a book.

#### *El cruzar del mojado/Illegal Crossing*

"*Ahora si ya tengo una tumba para llorar,*"  
*dice Conchita*, upon being reunited with

her unknown mother just before the mother dies  
—from Ismael Rodríguez' film,  
*Nosotros los pobres*<sup>12</sup>

*La crisis.* Los gringos had not stopped at the border. By the end of the nineteenth century, powerful landowners in Mexico, in partnership with U.S. colonizing companies, had dispossessed millions of Indians of their lands. Currently, Mexico and her eighty million citizens are almost completely dependent on the U.S. market. The Mexican government and wealthy growers are in partnership with such American conglomerates as American Motors, IT&T and Du Pont which own factories called *maquiladoras*. One-fourth of all Mexicans work at *maquiladoras*; most are young women. Next to oil, *maquiladoras* are Mexico's second greatest source of U.S. dollars. Working eight to twelve hours a day to wire in backup lights of U.S. autos or solder miniscule wires in TV sets is not the Mexican way. While the women are in the *maquiladoras*, the children are left on their own. Many roam the street, become part of *cholo* gangs. The infusion of the values of the white culture, coupled with the exploitation by that culture, is changing the Mexican way of life.

The devaluation of the *peso* and Mexico's dependency on the U.S. have brought on what the Mexicans call *la crisis*. *No hay trabajo*. Half of the Mexican people are unemployed. In the U.S. a man or woman can make eight times what they can in Mexico. By March, 1987, 1,088 pesos were worth one U.S. dollar. I remember when I was growing up in Texas how we'd cross the border at Reynosa or Progreso to buy sugar or medicines when the dollar was worth eight *pesos* and fifty *centavos*.

*La travesía.* For many *mexicanos del otro lado*, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live. *Dicen que cada mexicano siempre sueña de la conquista en los brazos de cuatro gringas rubias, la conquista del país poderoso del norte, los Estados Unidos. En cada Chicano y mexicano vive el mito del tesoro territorial perdido.* North Americans call this return to the homeland the silent invasion.

"A la cueva volverán"  
—El Puma en la canción "Amalia"

South of the border, called North America's rubbish dump by Chicanos, *mexicanos* congregate in the plazas to talk about the best way to cross. Smugglers, *coyotes*, *pasadores*, *enganchadores* approach these people or are sought out by them. "*¿Qué dicen muchachos a echársela de mojado?*"

"Now among the alien gods with  
weapons of magic am I."  
—Navajo protection song,  
sung when going into battle.<sup>13</sup>

We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing *la migración de los pueblos mexicanos*, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán. This time, the traffic is from south to north.

*El retorno* to the promised land first began with the Indians from the interior of Mexico and the *mestizos* that came with the *conquistadores* in the 1500s. Immigration continued in the next three centuries, and, in this century, it continued with the *braceros* who helped to build our railroads and who picked our fruit. Today thousands of Mexicans are crossing the border legally and illegally; ten million people without documents have returned to the Southwest.

Faceless, nameless, invisible, taunted with "Hey cucaracho" (cockroach). Trembling with fear, yet filled with courage, a courage born of desperation. Barefoot and uneducated, Mexicans with hands like boot soles gather at night by the river where two worlds merge creating what Reagan calls a frontline, a war zone. The convergence has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country.

Without benefit of bridges, the "*mojados*" (wetbacks) float on inflatable rafts across *el río Grande*, or wade or swim across naked, clutching their clothes over their heads. Holding onto the grass, they pull themselves along the banks with a prayer to *Virgen de Guadalupe* on their lips: *Ay virgencita morena, mi madrequita, dame tu bendición.*

The Border Patrol hides behind the local McDonalds on the outskirts of Brownsville, Texas or some other border town. They set traps around the river beds beneath the bridge.<sup>14</sup> Hunters in army-green uniforms stalk and track these economic refugees by the powerful nightvision of electronic sensing devices planted in



the ground or mounted on Border Patrol vans. Cornered by flashlights, frisked while their arms stretch over their heads, *los mojados* are handcuffed, locked in jeeps, and then kicked back across the border.

One out of every three is caught. Some return to enact their rite of passage as many as three times a day. Some of those who make it across undetected fall prey to Mexican robbers such as those in Smugglers' Canyon on the American side of the border near Tijuana. As refugees in a homeland that does not want them, many find a welcome hand holding out only suffering, pain, and ignoble death.

Those who make it past the checking points of the Border Patrol find themselves in the midst of 150 years of racism in Chicano *barrios* in the Southwest and in big northern cities. Living in a no-man's-borderland, caught between being treated as criminals and being able to eat, between resistance and deportation, the illegal refugees are some of the poorest and the most exploited of any people in the U.S. It is illegal for Mexicans to work without green cards. But big farming combines, farm bosses and smugglers who bring them in make money off the "wetbacks" labor—they don't have to pay federal minimum wages, or ensure adequate housing or sanitary conditions.

The Mexican woman is especially at risk. Often the *coyote* (smuggler) doesn't feed her for days or let her go to the bathroom. Often he rapes her or sells her into prostitution. She cannot call on county or state health or economic resources because she doesn't know English and she fears deportation. American employers are quick to take advantage of her helplessness. She can't go home. She's sold her house, her furniture, borrowed from friends in order to pay the *coyote* who charges her four or five thousand dollars to smuggle her to Chicago. She may work as a live-in maid for white, Chicano or Latino households for as little as \$15 a week. Or work in the garment industry, do hotel work. Isolated and worried about her family back home, afraid of getting caught and deported, living with as many as fifteen people in one room, the *mexicana* suffers serious health problems. *Se enferma de los nervios, de alta presión.*<sup>15</sup>

*La mojada, la mujer indocumentada*, is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe

homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain.

This is her home  
this thin edge of  
barbwire.

# LOVING IN THE WAR YEARS

**Cherríe L. Moraga**

**LO QUE NUNCA PASÓ POR SUS LABIOS**

Expanded Edition  
South End Press Classics Series  
**SOUTH END PRESS**  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

## ANATOMY LESSON

A black woman and a small beige one talk about their bodies.  
About putting a piece of their anatomy in their pockets  
upon entering any given room.

When entering a room full of soldiers who fear hearts,  
you put your heart in your back pocket,  
the black woman explains. It is important, not to intimidate.  
The soldiers wear guns, *not* in their back pockets.

You let the heart fester there. You let the heart seethe.  
You let the impatience of the heart build and build  
until the power of the heart hidden begins to be felt in the room.  
Until the absence of the heart begins to take on the shape  
of a presence.  
Until the soldiers look at you and begin to beg you  
to open up your heart to them, so anxious are they to see  
what it is they fear they fear.

Do not be seduced.

Do not forget for a minute that the soldiers wear guns.  
Hang onto your heart.  
Ask them first what they'll give up to see it.  
Tell them that they can begin with their arms.

Only then will *you* begin to negotiate.

## IT GOT HER OVER

*You're lucky you look the way you do, you could get any man. Anyone says anything to you, tell them your father's white.*

—Michelle Cliff, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise*

### 1

To touch  
her skin felt thick  
like hide, not  
like flesh  
and blood  
when an arm is raised  
the blue veins shine  
rivers running under-  
ground with shadow  
depth, and tone.

No, *her* skin  
had turned on her  
in the light of things.  
In the light of Black  
women and children  
beaten/hanged/raped  
strangled  
murdered in Boston  
Atlanta  
in California where redneck  
hunters coming home  
with empty white hands  
go off to fill 'em  
with Black Man.

Her skin had turned  
in the light of these things.  
Stuck to her now  
like a flat immovable paste  
spread grey over a life.

Still,

it got her over  
in laundromats  
when machines ate her change  
swallowed whole her dollar bill  
when cops stopped to check what the problem was

*Remember*

*I could be your daughter* she used  
looking up from the place on the sand  
where two women were spread out, defiant  
where he read, *the white one*  
*must be protected* that time  
saving them both.

It got her over  
when the bill was late  
when she only wanted to browse not buy  
when hunger forced them  
off the highway and into grills  
called "Red's" and "Friendly's"  
coffee shops packed suburban  
white on white, eyes shifting  
to them and away  
to them and away  
and back again  
then shifted into safety  
lock inside their heads.

## 2

She had never been ashamed of her face.

Her lust, yes  
Her bad grammar, yes  
Even her unforgiving ways  
but never, her face  
recently taken to blushing  
as if the blood wanted  
to swallow  
the flesh.

Bleed through

*guilt by association*  
*complicity to the crime.*

Bleed through

*Born to lead.*  
*Born to love.*  
*Born to live.*

Bleed through

and flood the joint  
with a hatred so severe

people went white  
with shock  
and dying.

.....

No, she had *never*  
been ashamed of her face  
not like this

grabbing her own two cheeks  
her fingers pressed together  
as if to hold between them  
the thin depth of color.

*See this face?*

Wearing it like an accident  
of birth.

It was  
a scar sealing up  
a woman, now darkened  
by desire.

*See this face?*

*Where do you take this hate  
to lunch?*

How  
to get over  
this one.

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.....

## MERCEDEZ HOLTRY “MY BLOOD IS ‘6951 H: I @’

The old man from the coffee shops asks for my name  
I write Mercedes Holtry on a piece of paper – he stares at it  
Holtry, ha? If you are Chicana, how did you end up with a German last name?  
Oh, you must be a coyote a child of mixed blood  
What he means to assume is: you must be a bastard, a mutt, mongrel, vagabond, impure  
messy, complicated messed up monstrosity, you’re one of those people huh  
your parents are two opposite flavors and swirly fucked you into existence  
you are all Spanish accent and light skin, all long dark hair and freckles  
too ghetto for AP placement not brown enough to be called Mexican  
You were that kid I bet  
Always having to prove your split tongue, always having to hear whispers about the  
skin you are in  
The assumptions about where your blood comes from  
Pinchi Sangrona, the brown girls would say  
She thinks she is all that because she’s half white, talking smack in Spanish as if my  
grandmother never taught me how to cuss in our native tongue  
answering questions like: You know Spanish? Are you Spanish? What about Hispanic.  
You kinda look Latina There is no way you are Mexican You look white to me If you’re  
white why do you pretend to be brown You know Mexican is not a race right He, What’s  
your dad your mom is from Mexico  
Eventually, the questions and assumptions write themselves into a history lesson  
My story is the story of 9 Million Americans who like me check the other box on the  
census  
I am the walking definition of rape, kill and conquer I am bird from oppressed and  
oppressor I am Aztec indigenous woman and Spanish conquistador  
My ancestors were the ones mistaken for white gods and also the ones enslaved into  
patriarchy  
I am part recognize your privilege and never forget your struggle  
Mexican mother and American father; Chihuahua Mexico and grandfathers orphanage

part traceable to the root, part accepting the unknown

In the 17th century, the system of castas was based on the accepted knowledge that the character and quality of people varied according to their birth, race color and origin of ethnic types

and soon, every name they call you only places you back on the list of social stratification

Mestizo, Castizo, Spaniard, Mulatto, Albino, Morisco, Coyote, Albarazado, Chamiso , lobo

Barcino, Coyote, Torna atrás, Coyote mestizo, Ahí te estás

They all translate to mixed blood, blood that is not pure

You are not pure, the old man tells me with his face

America loves pure

And you are messy, different, disordered, brewed needed and fused together

I nod my head as to say Yeah, I am a walking history lesson

proof that we all come from the same tree but eventually outgrow roots

so yes, I am a mix of things but what I am not is a fucking identity crisis

some kind of chemistry experiment

Americas ignorant assumptions about who I am, what I feel, how I act

My character belongs to me, my identity belongs to me, my blood belongs to me

and I'll be damned if anyone calls my blood anything but beautiful.



# Raquel Valle-Sentíes

THE  
ONES  
SANTA  
ANNA  
SOLD





# THE ONES SANTA ANNA SOLD

## Raquel Valle-Sentíes

Floricanto Press

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*“Por nuestra cultura hablarán nuestros libros. Our books shall speak for our culture.”*

Roberto Cabello-Argandoña, Editor

# The Ones Santa Anna Sold

We are  
those who fled  
the land of our birth,  
those who built the great pyramids—  
mute witnesses of Cortes's destruction, those who in-  
vented the Aztec calendar, those who left our mothers,  
our wives,  
our children,  
because our country  
rich in oil can't feed us.

We are  
the wetbacks that cross  
the Río Bravo,  
the brave ones that cross  
the desert,  
that drown,  
that die of thirst,  
that are killed by vigilantes,  
border guards or *coyotes*,  
those who passively conquer  
the most powerful nation in the world, taking back what  
once belonged to Mexico.

We are  
the traitors,



the starving Indians, the *pochos*,  
the *chicanos*.

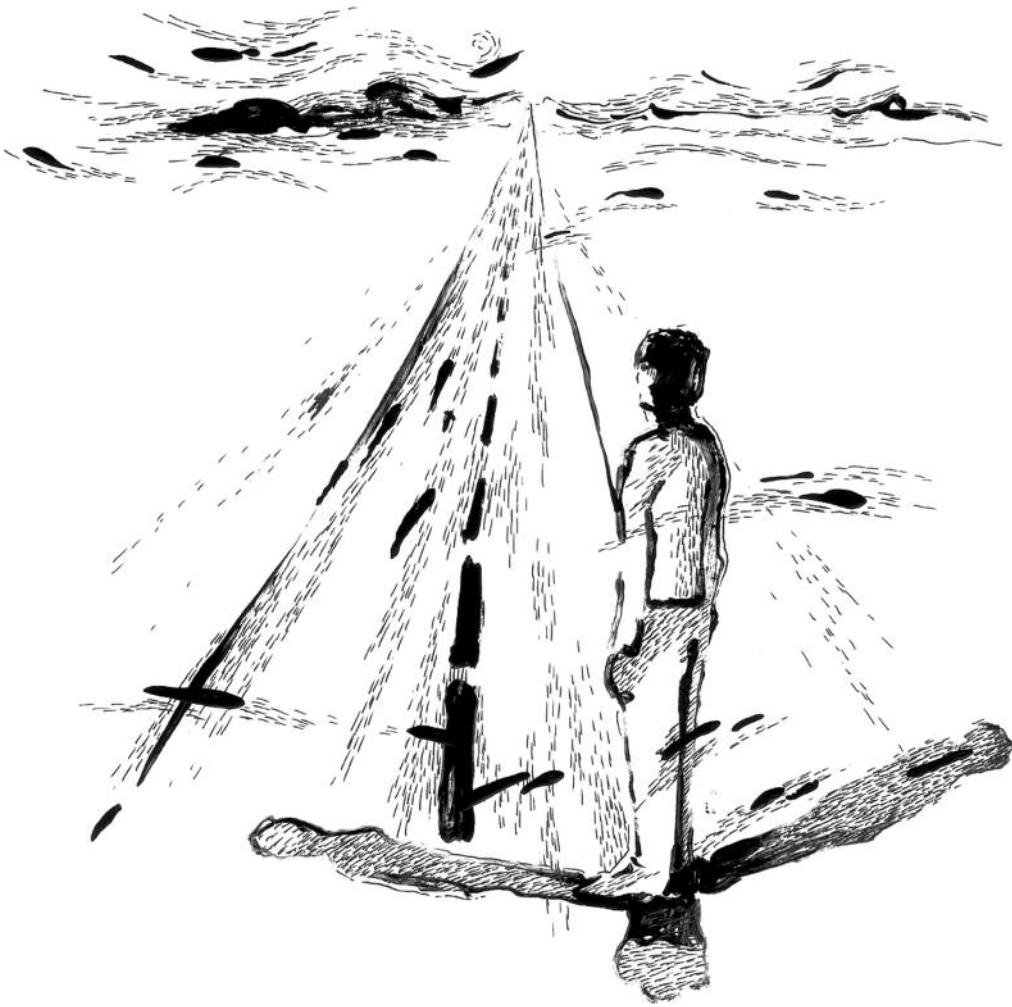
We are the ones Santa Anna sold.

*coyotes* men that smuggle people across the border  
*pochos* derogatory term for Mexican-Americans who live  
in the U.S.

*chicanos* Mexican-Americans

## First Kiss

At sixteen, I strolled with him around Tampico's *Plaza de Armas* on a waterheavy night. Orlando, a walking cliché, tall, dark and handsome in navy whites, spoke Portuguese. I didn't. Our eyes rolled, eyebrows rose and hands flew like birds in the feathery night as we struggled to communicate. Perfect teeth shone like white mosaic tiles against skin weathered by sun and sea. Flecks of gold shimmered in his brown eyes as they clung to mine. Fireflies tied to strings sparkled on the necks of the local *señoritas*. Under the shadowy embrace of the cathedral's arches, his lips, sweet as a ripe fig, pressed mine. From the plaza came the faint sound of the harp's hummingbird rhythms. It filtered through my pores like a movie sound track and I, the heroine, waited for his arms to cradle my body. When they didn't, I asked why? "Because I want to kiss you with my heart."



# To live in the Borderlands means you

by Gloria Anzaldúa\*

are neither *hispana india negra española*  
*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 knowing  
that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,

---

\* Taken from, *Borderlands-La Frontera. The New Mestiza*  
(San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), pp. 194-195.  
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Drawing by Héctor Ponce de León.



is no longer speaking to you,  
that *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*,  
that denying the Anglo inside you  
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

*Cuando vives en la frontera*

people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,  
you're a *burra*, *buey*, scapegoat,  
forerunner of a new race,  
half and half —both woman and man, neither—  
a new gender;

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;

Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to  
resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle,  
the pull of the gun barrel,  
the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;

In the Borderlands

you are the battleground  
where the enemies are kin to each other;  
you are at home, a stranger,  
the border disputes have been settled  
the volley of shots have shattered the truce  
you are wounded, lost in action  
dead, fighting back;

To live in the Borderlands means  
the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off  
your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart  
pound you pinch you roll you out  
smelling like white bread but dead;

To survive the Borderlands  
you must live *sin fronteras*  
be a crossroads.



*gabacha*: a Chicano term for a white woman  
*rajetas*: literally "split," that is, having betrayed your word  
*burra*: donkey  
*buey*: ox  
*sin fronteras*: without borders

## AMALIA ORTIZ “XICANA POET”

I have been doing some research among Chicana writers and I discovered that I could be a Chicana poet

I can serve latino food in your window by describing my tetas as melones your pan dulce as und chilly my mothers milks is Aguas frescas my panocha es pan si pan dulce And I could squeeze out the obligatory orgasm explaining how sex with a latin lover would of course be like spicy salsa

Salsa, caliente, tomatillo, picante, Ei

I could cook mi cultura like comida as if the nuances of my experience could be digested in a XXX de flan

OH, but somehow I feel like I was talking a whole lot of masa all the same

I think I could be a Chicana poet and reveal my inner most family secrets

I could be candid enough to let all the chesse man fly as if you really deserve to know about my broken home, my unfaithful wife beating father my victimized, exploited Step Mama

My brain washed gang banger hermanitos mis Primos en la pinta

And hell, I could even tell you how my cousin Norma really made her money back in the day

I could be a Chicana poet because I can represent XXXX hanging out XXX comic liga por que

I think I can be a Chicana poet because “Ahahiiii”- I can speak only in vowel sounds

I can be a Chicana poet because I am not afraid of getting angry and exposing all the raw emotion of just how much my Raza has struggled

And I’m not afraid to say “Soy una macha” “Una Chingona” “Und fatototototodosa”

And the movimiento is so thick boiling in my XX that I’m not afraid to use un pinch

I could be a Chicana Poet because I know my history and I'd whip out allusion after allusion faster than Malinche can be Malosa faster than Cortez can conquer faster than Frida can feel

And I think I could be a Chicana Poet because . . . I have a spiritual side

yes, I could pimp my culture use all the expected tools box myself even further into a stereotype of an old archetype I can't even remember

And I could ignore other realities circling my brain with breakbeats breaking all the XX  
down

Like transdancers transcending this labeling land of illusion

But you really don't want to know about me, do you? Just see me do that Latino thing?

I am Chicana, I am a poet – some people may never put the two together

Me Vale!

## CHRISTINA MARTINEZ “MY CHICANA”

My Chicana

Sounds like mommy, sounds like girl you talk to fast you must be running from something

Is it? Is it la Migra? sounds like say lil Mama could you call mi Papi tonight?

Tastes like a bed of roses you forgot had thorns

Looks like a fashion trend

Am I Selena Quintanilla enough for you?

Is it Kim Kardashian enough for you because they're the same, right?

Smells like barbacoa y carnitas domingo con la familia

And seduction at the same time

Whisper sweet nothings in my ear Chica am I just your sweet nothing Chico did you know

that speaking two languages literally makes your brain stronger

Overheard a conversation between two adult males

The question was What do you call a man who can't handle a Latina, a Chicana or anybody brown for that matter

His answer: weak.

Weak? As if I am something that needs to be dealt with

As if all I have been bred to embody is disaster.

As if all my culture can offer you

can offer you as a frozen buzz with salt, sometimes sugar and around the rims of a headache

there after brain freeze

Like your impression of my Mexico has been frozen in time

You made up your mind about not wanting us years ago and you stuck with it America

A country of its word a stagnant breed if it ain't broke don't fix it type a creature of habit

All the while my America, our America, this America is imploding, hating itself to death

I am you and you are me how is this so difficult to understand

Check Point they inspect our luggage at the border and decide what they allow across

Like the food, the liquor the language of love at a time our effort and labor our hands  
provide but quickly reject and send our seeds or in this case our people away  
For in this case fruit bearing seeds are an invasive species in the land of opportunity  
They have no natural predators and thrive solely of the love of the land  
They don't allow my Dad home  
Why buy the cow when you can milk the life out of it in color of corruption for free  
white whale  
Why pay more for the original when you can buy the photocopy of the photocopy of  
pennies to the Dollar  
Screenshot the conversation you heard I had my mother as we have a conversation about  
how we are gonna get him home in one piece  
Looks like an invasive species all you really want to do was thrive of the love of the  
land this country so often takes for granted  
Looks like an invasive species  
Welcome home, sounds like bills sounds like dethroning a king  
Smells like the blood and sweat it takes for him to blend in every single day  
Works harder than any man I've ever met so forgive me, forgive me Mami when I do not  
submit to a man who only half-ass does have to chip my father my father has proven to me  
that I am worthy of  
Prove to me that you are worthy or get the fuck out of my face

## Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between Races

In my land there are no distinctions.  
The barbed wire politics of oppression  
have been torn down long ago. The only  
reminder  
of past battles, lost or won, is a slight  
rutting in the fertile fields.  
In my land  
people write poems about love,  
full of nothing but contented childlike  
syllables.  
Everyone reads Russian short stories and  
weeps.  
There are no boundaries.  
There is no hunger, no  
complicated famine or greed.  
I am not a revolutionary.  
I don't even like political poems.  
Do you think I can believe in a war  
between races?  
I can deny it. I can forget about it  
when I'm safe,  
living on my own continent of harmony  
and home, but I am not  
there.  
I believe in revolution  
because everywhere the crosses are  
burning,  
sharp-shooting goose-steppers round  
every corner,  
there are snipers in the schools...  
(I know you don't believe this.  
You think this is nothing  
but faddish exaggeration. But they  
are not shooting at you.)  
I'm marked by the color of my skin.

The bullets are discrete and designed to  
kill slowly.  
They are aiming at my children.  
These are facts.  
Let me show you my wounds: my  
stumbling mind, my  
"excuse me" tongue, and this  
nagging preoccupation  
with the feeling of not being good  
enough.  
These bullets bury deeper than logic.  
Racism is not intellectual.  
I cannot reason these scars away.  
Outside my door  
there is a real enemy  
who hates me.  
I am a poet  
who yearns to dance on rooftops,  
to whisper delicate lines about joy  
and the blessings of human  
understanding.  
I try. I go to my land, my tower of words  
and  
bolt the door, but the typewriter doesn't  
fade out  
the sounds of blasting and muffled  
outrage.  
My own days bring me slaps on the face.  
Every day I am deluged with reminders  
that this is not  
my land  
and this is my land.  
I do not believe in the war between races  
but in this country  
there is war.

**Lorna Dee Cervantes**



# To live in the Borderlands means you

by Gloria Anzaldúa\*

are neither *hispana india negra española*  
*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 knowing  
that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,

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\* Taken from, *Borderlands-La Frontera. The New Mestiza*  
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Drawing by Héctor Ponce de León.

is no longer speaking to you,  
that *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*,  
that denying the Anglo inside you  
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

*Cuando vives en la frontera*

people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,  
you're a *burra*, *buey*, scapegoat,  
forerunner of a new race,  
half and half —both woman and man, neither—  
a new gender;

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;

Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to  
resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle,  
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