Rooted in Gloria Anzaldúa’s experience as a Chicana, a lesbian, an activist, and a writer, the essays and poems in this volume profoundly challenged and continue to challenge how we think about identity. *Borderlands/La Frontera* remaps our understanding of what a “border” is, presenting it not as a simple divide between here and there, us and them, but as a psychic, social, and cultural terrain that we inhabit and that inhabits all of us. This 25th anniversary edition features a new introduction by scholars Norma Cantú (University of Texas at San Antonio) and Aída Hurtado (University of California at Santa Cruz), as well as a revised critical bibliography.
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THIS BOOK
is dedicated a todos mexicanos
on both sides of the border.

G.E.A.

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How to Tame a Wild Tongue

"We're going to have to control
your tongue," the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from
my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a
motherfode.

The dentist is cleaning out my
roots. I get a whiff of the stench when I gasp. "I can't cap that
tooth yet, you're still draining," he says.

"We're going to have to do
something about your tongue," I hear the anger rising in his
voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing
back the drills, the long thin needles. "I've never seen anything
as strong or as stubborn," he says. And I think, how do you tame
a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle
it? How do you make it lie down?

"Who is to say that robbing a people of
its language is less violent than war?"
—Ray Gwyn Smith

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that
was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I
remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking
back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her
how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be American, speak
'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you
belong."

"I want you to speak English. Pa'ballar buen trabajo tienes
que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si
Oye como ladra: el lenguaje de la frontera

Quien tiene boca se equivoca.
—Mexican saying

"Pochó, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language." I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción have created variants of Chicano Spanish, un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither español ni inglés, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages.

Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. Pachuco (called caló)

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word "nosotras," I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use nosotras whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.

And our tongues have become
dry... the wilderness has
dried out our tongues... and
we have forgotten speech.
—Irena Klepfisz

Even our own people, other Spanish speakers nos quieren poner candados en la boca. They would hold us back with their bag of reglas de academia.
My "home" tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends. They are the last five listed, with 6 and 7 being closest to my heart. From school, the media and job situations, I've picked up standard and working class English. From Mamagrande Locha and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I've picked up Standard Spanish and Standard Mexican Spanish. From los recién llegados, Mexican immigrants, and braceros, I learned the North Mexican dialect. With Mexicans I'll try to speak either Standard Mexican Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents and Chicanos living in the Valley, I picked up Chicano/Texas Spanish, and I speak it with my mom, younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts and older relatives.

With Chicanas from Nuevo México or Arizona I will speak Chicano Spanish a little, but often they don't understand what I'm saying. With most California Chicanas I speak entirely in English (unless I forget). When I first moved to San Francisco, I'd rattle off something in Spanish, unintentionally embarrassing them. Often it is only with another Chicana tejana that I can talk freely.

Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or pochismos. The pocho is an Anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English. Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, comes most naturally to me. I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word. With my sister and my brother Nune and with Chicana tejana contemporaries I speak in Tex-Mex.

From kids and people my own age I picked up Pachuko. Pachuco (the language of the zoot suiters) is a language of rebellion, both against Standard Spanish and Standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish. Rica means girl or woman, tato means guy or dude, chulo means no, simón means yes, churo is sure, talk is periquitar, pigione means petting, que gacho means how nerdy, ponte águila means watch out, death is called la pelona. Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I've lost most of the Pachuco tongue.

Chicano Spanish

Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization have developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak. We collapse two adjacent vowels into a single syllable and sometimes shift the stress in certain words such as maiz/maiz, cobete/cuete. We leave out certain consonants when they appear between vowels: lado/lalo, mojado/mojado. Chicanos from South Texas pronounced f as j as in juez (jue). Chicanos use "archaisms," words that are no longer in the Spanish language, words that have been evolved out. We say semos, true, balga, ansina, and naíden. We retain the "archaic" j, as in jalar, that derives from an earlier bh, (the French balar or the Germanic ballon which was lost to standard Spanish in the 16th century), but which is still found in several regional dialects such as the one spoken in South Texas. (Due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. The majority of the Spanish colonizers in Mexico and the Southwest came from Extremadura—Hernán Cortés was one of them—and Andalucía. Andalucians pronounce ll like y and, their d's tend to be absorbed by adjacent vowels: tirado becomes tira. They brought el lenguaje popular, dialectos y regionalismos.)

Chicanos and other Spanish speakers also shift ll to y and z to s. We leave out initial syllables, saying tar for estar, toy for estoy, hora for ahora (cubanos and puertorriqueños also leave out initial letters of some words.) We also leave out the final syllable such as pa for para. The intervocalic y, the ll as in tortilla, ella, botella, gets replaced by torta or tortito, ea, botea. We add an additional syllable at the beginning of certain words: atocar for tocar; agastar for gastar; Sometimes we'll say lavaste las vacías, other times lavaste (substituting the ates verb endings for the aste).

We use Anglicisms, words borrowed from English: bota from ball, carpeta from carpet, máquina de lavar (instead of lavadora) from washing machine. Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end of an English word such as cooktar for cook, watchbar for watch, parkiar for park, and rapiar for rape, is the result of the pressures on Spanish speakers to adapt to English.

We don't use the word vosotros/as or its accompanying verb form. We don't say claro (to mean yes), imaginare, or me
emociona, unless we picked up Spanish from Latinas, out of a
book, or in a classroom. Other Spanish-speaking groups are going
through the same, or similar, development in their Spanish.

Linguistic Terrorism

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficient. We are
your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your
linguistic mestizaje, the subject of your burla. Because we
speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified.
Racially, culturally and linguistically somos huérfanos—we
speak an orphan tongue.

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internal-
zized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a
bastard language. And because we internalize how our language
has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our lan-
guage differences against each other.

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspi-
cion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn’t figure it out.
Then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like
looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we’ll see there.
Pena. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told
that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native
tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue through-
out our lives.

Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas,
afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in their
countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their
native tongue; generations, centuries in which Spanish was a
first language, taught in school, heard on radio and TV, and read
in the newspaper.

If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my
native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me. Often with
mexicanas y latinass we’ll speak English as a neutral language.
Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or con-
ferences. Yet, at the same time, we’re afraid the other will think
we’re agringadas because we don’t speak Chicano Spanish. We
oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be
the “real” Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one
Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A
monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish
is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of
Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is just as
much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicano Spanish is
as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

By the end of this century, Spanish speakers will comprise
the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students
in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French class-
escourses because French is considered more “cultured.” But for a
language to remain alive it must be used. By the end of this century
English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most
Chicanos and Latinos.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my lan-
guage. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my
language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take
pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas
Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot
accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write biling-
ually and to switch codes without having always to translate,
while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather
speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the
English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my
tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will
have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s
tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I
will overcome the tradition of silence.

My fingers
move sly against your palm
Like women everywhere, we speak in code . . . .
—Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

“Vistas,” corridos, y comida: My Native Tongue

In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was City of
Night by John Rechy, a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and a
Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amaze-
ment that a Chicano could write and could get published. When
I read I Am Joaquin I was surprised to see a bilingual book by
How to Tame a Wild Tongue

a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach "American" and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to "argue" with one advisor after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.

Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in—the Thursday night special of $1.00 a carload—that gave me a sense of belonging. "Vámonos a las viñas," my mother would call out and we'd all—grandmother, brothers, sister and cousins—squeeze into the car. We'd wolf down cheese and bologna white bread sandwiches while watching Pedro Infante in melodramatic tear-jerkers like Nosotros los pobres, the first "real" Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing Cuando los hijos se van and surmising that all Mexican movies played up the love a mother has for her children and what ungrateful sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers. I remember the singing-type "westerns" of Jorge Negrete and Miguel Aceves Mejía. When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn't go to Mexican movies, or bailas or tune their radios to bolero, ranchera, and corrido music.

The whole time I was growing up, there was norteño music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicano music, or cantina (bar) music. I grew up listening to conjuntos, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, bajo sexto, drums and button accordion, which Chicanos had borrowed from the German immigrants who had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernández were popular, and Flaco Jiménez was the accor- dión king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who in turn had borrowed the polka from the Czechs and Bohemians.

I remember the hot, sultry evenings when corridos—songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands—reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local cantinas and wafted in through my bedroom window. Corridos first became widely used along the South Texas/Mexican border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The corridos are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa's song, "La cuchara," is the most famous one. Corridos of John F Kennedy and his death are still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza, one of the great border corrido singers who was called la Gloria de Tejas. Her "El tango negro," sung during the Great Depression, made her a singer of the people. The everpresent corridos narrated one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as enter- taining. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural mythmakers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and agringado Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn't stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it.

There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland. Woodsmoke curling up to an immense blue sky; woodslink perfuming my grandmother's clothes, her skin. The stench of cow manure and the yellow patches on the ground; the crack of a .22 rifle and the neck of cordite. Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded tortilla. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy menudo, chile colorado making it deep red, pieces of panza and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbecuing sañitas in the backyard. Even now and 3,000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork and venison with chile. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming tamales I would be eating if I were home.
Si le preguntas a mi mamá, “¿Qué eres?”

“Identity is the essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the self inside.”

—Kaufman

Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the borderlands. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos’ incessant clamoring so that we forget our language. Among ourselves we don’t say nosotros los americanos, o nosotros los españoles, o nosotros los hispanos. We say nosotros los mexicanos (by mexicanos we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between mexicanos del otro lado and mexicanos de este lado. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.

Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres.
(Tell me who your friends are and I’ll tell you who you are.)

—Mexican saying

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, “¿Qué eres?” te dirá, “Soy mexicana.” My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer “soy mexicana” and at others will say “soy Chicana” o “soy tejana.” But I identified as “Raza” before I ever identified as “mexicana” o “Chicana.”

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when coping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70 to 80% Indian.10 We call ourselves Hispanic11 or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when coping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American12 to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun “American” than the adjective “Mexican” (and when coping out).

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don’t totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Anglolessness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero basta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.

When not coping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; mestizo when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; Raza when referring to Chicanos; tejanos when we are Chicanos from Texas.

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers united and I Am Joaquín was published and la Raza Unida party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people. Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul—we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together—who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place. In the meantime, tenemos que batalla. ¿Quién está protegiendo los riegos de mi gente? ¿Quién está tratando de cerrar la fisura entre la India y el blanco en nuestra sangre? El Chicano, sí, el Chicano que anda como un ladron en su propia casa.

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us.13 We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we’ve kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant norteamericano culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the
ons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in
the deserts they’ve created, lie bleached. **Himildos** yet proud,
**quietos** yet wild, **nosotros los mexicanos**-Chicanos will walk by
the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. Stubborn, per-
severing, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that
renders us unbreakable, we, the **mestizos** and **mestizas**, will
remain.

---

6

**Tlli, Tlapalli**

The Path of the Red and Black Ink

"Out of poverty, poetry;
out of suffering, song."
—A Mexican saying

When I was seven, eight, nine, fifteen, sixteen years old, I
would read in bed with a flashlight under the covers, hiding
my self-imposed insomnia from my mother. I preferred the
world of the imagination to the death of sleep. My sister,
Hilda, who slept in the same bed with me, would threaten
to tell my mother unless I told her a story.

I was familiar with **cuentos**—my grandmother told stories
like the one about her getting on top of the roof while down
below rabid coyotes were ravaging the place and wanting to
get at her. My father told stories about a phantom giant dog
that appeared out of nowhere and sped along the side of the
pickup no matter how fast he was driving.

Nudge a Mexican and he will break out with a story.
So, huddling under the covers, I made up stories for my
sister night after night. After a while she wanted two stories
per night. I learned to give her installments, building up
the suspense with convoluted complications until the story
climaxed several nights later. It must have been then that
I decided to put stories on paper. It must have been then
that working with images and writing became connected
to night.