



## Textual Palimpsests

### Unfolding Becoming in *Más antes en los ranchos*

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#### Abstract

This article's subject is the chapter *Más antes en los ranchos* in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Moving closely along with the lyrical speaker, this article first delivers a close analysis of the five texts of this chapter, focusing on the literary and poetic expression of the lives *en los ranchos* (the small villages). The reoccurring images of animals, manhood and womanhood are subsequently put into context with Deleuze & Guattari's key concept of *devenir* (becoming), especially *devenir-animal* (becoming-animal). Finally, this close analysis shows how *Más antes en los ranchos* delivers a textual palimpsest in which different layers of past and present tense, but also key ideas of class, gender and race shine through.

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## Textual Palimpsests

### Unfolding Becoming in *Más antes en los ranchos*

Esra Akkaya (Berlin)

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* from 1987 is a multi-layered publication of prose and poetry, moving between non-fiction and fiction, narrating life at the borderlands. These are multi-faceted, such as the borderlands between the USA and Mexico, those between men and women, and those between queerness and non-queerness. Anzaldúa's 203-page long monograph crosses these borderlands to counteract dichotomies. While the first part is mainly written in prose, depicting personal and historical experience, the second part consists of 38 poems which embody ideas and notions from the first part of the monograph. The subject of this essay is *Más antes en los ranchos*, the second part of the first chapter, a passage which gives a detailed insight to life at the borderlands, often creating contrasts and juxtapositions. This chapter is worthy of in-depth analysis not only because of its literary significance but also because of its palimpsest form. If a palimpsest is a written document from which the original text has been scraped or washed away and which has thereafter been reinscribed, then textual palimpsests reify different experiences and histories. In this context, palimpsestuous reading can be an "inventive process of creating relations where there may or should be none".<sup>1</sup> For Anzaldúa's texts, this palimpsestic form offers an intersectional and interhistorical reading of violence and exploitation.

The title *Más antes en los ranchos* can be translated as "Way before, in the small villages" and addresses life in small villages while at the same

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<sup>1</sup> DILLON, *Palimpsest*, 83

time conveying a tone of nostalgia.<sup>2</sup> Referring to a past life *en los ranchos* the reader is introduced to events from the past of a place which no longer exists. Thus, the title creates a frame of nostalgia and rural life for the chapter and draws a connection between the two elements. However, this chapter is not a celebration of nostalgia and rural life as such: the poems in *Más antes en los ranchos* are marked by various experiences of violence, loss, and sorrow, through which they interrupt the cycle of nostalgia. As Sidonie Smith points out in *Subjectivity, Identity and The Body*, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, the text challenges nostalgia and pastoral tradition and does not comply with its rules.<sup>3</sup> This break with tradition is emphasised through the display of different layers of violence, which is enabled by the palimpsestic form of the text.

### Juxtaposing Experiences in Poetic Texts

The chapter begins with *La Llorona*, a Mexican song, in which the lyrical subject contemplates on its visibility to others, the presence of death, sorrow and utter sadness:

Dicen que no tengo duelo, Llorona,  
Porque no me ven llorar.  
Hay Muertos que no hacen ruido, Llorona  
y es más grande su penar.  
Ay de mí, Llorona  
– “La Llorona”, a Mexican song <sup>4</sup>

In these five verses of *La Llorona*, the lyrical I is speaking to *Llorona*, saying that they are wailing, even if their cry is not heard by others. The Dead (*Muertos*), written in capital letters, are emphasised in this utterance, their grief being greater than others'. This is underlined by the fact that the subject contemplates *Llorona*, which can be translated as *weeping*

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Pablo Prado Serrano for his assistance in translating and contextualising the title *Más antes en los ranchos*.

<sup>3</sup> SMITH, *Subjectivity*, 169.

<sup>4</sup> ANZALDÚA, *Borderlands*, 102.

woman. The poem finishes with the biblical phrase “Ay de mí”, underlining this utter sadness. “Ay de mí”, or “Woe is me!”, becomes in literary code the word of the woman whose distress it expresses. In the Old Testament “Woe is me!” can be found as a proclamation or threat of something bad or ominous, but also as a lament of sorrow and pain. Through this intertextual reference, a sacred language is added to the palimpsestic text.

*La Llorona* is mentioned several times in the first half of the book, as the weeping woman. Weeping, wailing, mourning – Anzaldúa describes these acts as the only means of protest for the Indian woman. These Aztec female rites of mourning stand as acts of defiance which protest and resist the inequality and imbalance between female and male caused by external forces. According to Anzaldúa, the female act of mourning would also be a kind of mourning caused by the denigration of women.<sup>5</sup>

While different mythical figures exist to serve specific purposes or elements, *La Llorona* is here to “make us long-suffering people”.<sup>6</sup> The weeping woman’s wailing reminds of the mourning performed by women who would separate from their husbands, sons, fathers, and brothers, who were leaving for the Flower War. At a time when the war was being glorified just like its warriors and victims, and women victims were seen as an object to be conquered, wailing was the only means of protest and resistance for women. The cry in *La Llorona* sets the tone for the rest of the chapter, and thus, various poems and forms continue to express this situational despair.

The first poem, *White-wing season*,<sup>7</sup> which is the actual name for the dove hunting season in the Southern states, describes a situation in which a Chicana woman, who is exploited by American men and who is forced to sell the hunting rights to the birds on her land to white hunters in order to make a living. At the same time, she reminisces over the past in which she herself was hunting birds.

In the first stanza of eight, the poem begins with *the whitemen* arriving on the woman’s property, disrupting its silence and space. While the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

woman is taking care of daily tasks, *the gringos* hand her the money to buy the right to shoot doves in the sky. An instant contrast is drawn between the men and the woman – while she is washing clothes and hanging up clean bedsheets under the clear sky, the men are shooting doves in the sky. Ultimately, the clean sheets are sailing and snapping in the wind, while dead doves fall to the ground. The poem finishes with the woman receiving two birds from the hunters, which she will cook to feed the “rumble” in her belly, while the “green flutter” she received from *the gringos* will “reshingle her roof”.

Two events intertwine in this poem, which is not only uttered through poetic expression but also through the graphic alignment of the stanzas: the stanzas are edited with different indents, just like the lyrical speaker’s perspective and emphasis changes. Therefore, the textual palimpsest is not only formed through language, but also through visible movement of textual utterance. This graphic rhythm stresses the juxtapositions narrated in the poem: on the one hand, the *gringos* arrive on the woman’s land to hunt doves, “to fill the silence and sky with buckshot”, on the other hand, the woman is taking care of her washing. While the *gringos’* behaviour is rough and inconsiderate (“the hunters drop two birds on her washboard”), the woman’s movement is elegant (“her tender arms”). The poem, which began with “the whitemen with their guns have come again”, finishes with the woman plucking the feathers of the doves, preparing them as a dish, to feed her rumbling belly, and a night rain “gentle as feathers”. Clearly, the lyrical speaker addresses the rough and invading manners of the whitemen, juxtaposing the gentle and tender manners of the woman who shows both appreciation and respect for the (dead) animals.

A similar notion can be found in this chapter’s next section, which is a miniature prose consisting of five paragraphs. In *Cervicide*<sup>8</sup> a young girl, named Prieta, unwillingly murders the family pet, a fawn, to prevent her father’s imprisonment. We learn about the loving relationship between the girl and the young animal. When the game warden is on his way – with his hounds – Prieta and her mother desperately look for a solution; if caught with an illegal animal her *papì* will have to go into jail as the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 104f.

family cannot afford paying a \$250 fine. To avoid the severely destabilizing influence of the repressive state apparatus upon their economy and social unit, the family is compelled to kill their beloved *la venadita*. Prieta decides to kill her pet fawn herself and then buries her in the shed together with the bottle she was fed with. While Prieta's mother is stalling *la guardia* with an English that "had suddenly gotten bad", Prieta is patting the ground in the shed flat with her hands, sweeping it with a dead branch, while "dust caked on her arms and face where tears had fallen". The game warden arrives with his hounds, yet, not finding anything, they leave, and the family is finally safe again thanks to Prieta's sacrifice.

The killing of the deer, *cervicide*, is the core of this miniature prose:

In the shed behind the corral, where they'd hidden the fawn, Prieta found the hammer. She had to grasp it with both hands. She swung it up. The weight folded her body backwards. A thud reverberated on Venadita's skull, a wave undulated down her back. Again, a blow behind the ear. Through Venadita's long lashes quivered, her eyes never left Prieta's face. Another thud, another tremor. *La guardia* and his hounds were driving up the front yard. The *venadita* looked up at her, the hammer rose and fell. Neither made a sound. The tawny, spotted fur was the most beautiful thing Prieta had ever seen. She remembered when they had found the fawn. She had been a few hours old. A hunter had shot her mother. The fawn had been shaking so hard, her long thin legs were on the edge of buckling. Prieta and her sister and brothers had bottle-fed Venadita, with a damp cloth had wiped her skin, had watched her tiny, perfectly formed hooves harden and grow."<sup>9</sup>

Prieta and Venadita are identified through colour – as we learn from the author's note, Prieta means "one who is dark skinned" and Venadita is "tawny and spotted". Her fur was "the most beautiful thing Prieta had ever seen". The little girl has to kill her pet with a hammer, therefore, in close proximity. Again, the lyrical speaker is drawing a picture of a movement through poetic expression: Prieta swings the hammer to the back, which makes her body bend too, before hitting Venadita on the head. She repeats the thud, until the pet fawn dies without making a sound. Even

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

though the lyrical speaker is narrating a tragic event, they are using very gentle and tender expression for describing a violent killing. Prieta and Venadita have a close relationship and mutual understanding of the circumstances around them, Prieta needs to sacrifice her pet fawn to gain her subjectivity. By killing her pet fawn Prieta is sacrificing her childhood, which can also be read as a resistance against the border-dweller state she is in, as a move to leave the state of ambiguity, a try to construct her own self. And even though, the weight of the hammer is both literally and figuratively too heavy for the little girl, Pietra pulls through out of necessity. The tale is marked by violence, death and sorrow, but it is also a narration of tenderness, mutual love and respect. It moves between contrasts and creates a state of ambiguity, stressing the grey-zone of life at the border, at the margins. But it also carefully narrates how Pietra becomes – has to become – an adult, because the past rural life did not allow her to live an innocent childhood.

The killing and sacrifice of a beloved animal is also subject of the next poem in *Más antes en los ranchos*. In six stanzas, the lyrical speaker in *horse*<sup>10</sup> narrates how the children of a rich white man torture and mutilate a horse. The *mexicanos*, haunted by the pain of the horse, can do nothing to punish them and instead sacrifice it. Anzaldúa frequently used the metaphor of the horse in her texts, as it was symbolising the act of writing to her.<sup>11</sup> The poem begins with a “great horse running in the fields”. The horse is thundering through corn fields towards “outstretched hands” which exhibit danger, as there are “knives in the hidden hands”. The lyrical speaker draws the image of a great horse in great danger already in the first stanza. In the next stanza it is told that some *gringo* kids cut up a horse at night and mutilated all four legs of the animal. However, the children will not be punished, because they are protected by the sheriff who will say “boys will be boys, just following their instincts”. The first line of the next stanza, however, contradicts this ignorant notion because “it’s the mind that kills the animal”. The torturing of the animal, making it incapable of running, is tormenting the *mexicanos*, who cannot find justice for their own and their animals’ suffering. To put the horse out of his pain,

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>11</sup> ANZALDÚA, *Reader*, 195-196.

his Mexican owner comes to shoot the animal, which makes the Chicanos look away. This profound, shameful situation is further heightened when a rich *gringo* father pays the horse's owner, even though this green money cannot "staunch red pools dripping from the ribbons on the horse's flanks". The *mexicanos* shake their heads, shuffle their feet, shut their faces and stare at the ground, finding it unbearable to watch what's happening. The poem finishes with the image of the dead horse haunting the *gringos* in their sleep and the *mexicanos* mumbling that "if you're Mexican you are born old".

The death of the animal is here executed by men, which separates *horse* from the previous two poems. However, it is a similar question of ownership and autonomy. Due to the American economic power, the Mexican men have no choice but accept the death of their horse. The poem is dedicated to the people of Hargill ("*para la gente de Hargill, Texas*"), which is a small village close to the border; and this dedication expresses solidarity and empathy for the injustice experienced by the *mexicanos*. The betrayal of the horse is symbolic for the betrayal of the *mexicanos* on this side of the borderlands: when they were first met by outstretched hands, they were figuratively welcomed with knives and their suffering is to be silenced with American dollars. The lyrical voice uses stark contrasts in colour, emotion and language to create a tone of ambivalence, creating the question of whether it is worthwhile to accept this violence and the imbalance of power. After all, the only compensation that can be found is in dreams where the dead horse hunts the *gringos* as they sleep. Since the horse is described by Anzaldúa herself as a metaphor for the act of writing, one cannot help but wonder whether the men are collectively complicit in 'killing' the text.

The themes of (male) violence and economic power are continued in the next poem. *Immaculate, Inviolate: Como Ella*<sup>12</sup> is a 12-stanza long poem in which the lyrical speaker is dedicated to speaking of their grandmother's life. Already in the first stanza the narrator is stressing their limited space and capital, their grandmother could not live with them but still also gave a few dollar bills to her granddaughter, the lyrical speaker.

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<sup>12</sup> ANZALDÚA, *Borderlands*, 108-109.



What follows is a detailed description of the grandmother rolling a cigarette and smoking it, which the granddaughter is watching in admiration. Her grandmother might be smoking, but she cannot tolerate heat due to an accident in which she burned herself. The lyrical speaker describes a domestic accident in which the grandmother suffered severe burns which were treated with sodden blanket that was wrapped around her, though it took “a long time to carry the buckets of water from the well”. After this accident, the grandmother moved in with her children, leaving her home behind. In the 6<sup>th</sup> stanza, the lyrical speaker describes how her grandmother always wore her black dress, her mourning clothes, for all the men who she had lost:

She never stopped wearing *luto*  
first for my *papagrande*  
who died before I was born  
then for her brother  
and, until she died eleven years ago,  
she wore black for my father.  
I didn't go to her funeral  
that too must have made her suffer.<sup>13</sup>

The grandmother is described as a woman who has experienced one loss after another; even after her death she suffered when her granddaughter did not go to her funeral. The weeping and mourning of *La Llorona*, which was mentioned earlier, is here echoed through the lyrical speaker's depiction of her grandmother's life.

The granddaughter continues to converse with her grandmother, asking her about the difficulties and lives *en ranchos*. The pain and sorrow of her experience has scarred the grandmother for life, which again is portrayed by the speaker through stark juxtapositions (“She'd felt numb, she told me, her voice hoarse from the fire, or the constant cigarette in her mouth as though frostbitten.”). However, this does not stop the granddaughter asking questions, thus, she asks her grandmother whether she experienced an orgasm. What follows is the description of the violence experienced by Mexican women:

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally she looked into my brown eyes,  
told me how Papagrande would flip the skirt  
of her nightgown over her head  
and in the dark take out his *palo*, his stick,  
and do *lo que hacen todos los hombres*  
while she laid back and prayed  
he would finish quickly.

She didn't like to talk about such things.  
*Mujeres no hablan de cosas cochinas.*  
Her daughters, my *tías*, never liked to talk about it –  
Their father's other women, their half-brother.<sup>14</sup>

The experience of sex is not consensual, at the same time, acknowledged as something that “all men do”, something that “women don't talk about”. The lyrical speaker is creating another layer of suffering in this stanza: Mexican women not only suffer from American suppression and exploitation, the repressive state apparatus and the lack of economic resources, they also suffer from the patriarchal hierarchy, both the American and the Mexican. These different forms of violence can only be uttered by the lyrical speaker through the use of the palimpsestic form – without sparing any memory, the women's intersectional experience is voiced in the text.

The lyrical speaker continues to observe and describe her grandmother, seeing the sorrow she has experienced. She feels empathy towards her grandmother and the pain she must have gone through, whenever she gets “too close to the fire”, just like her grandmother did. The betrayal and lack of acknowledgement *Mamagrande* has gone through is rewarded with the respect of others, who said that she had “so much dignity” and “pride”. Her granddaughter emphasises sorrow and pain instead and distances herself from what others have said while at the same time expressing solidarity and admiration for her as the title implies (*Immaculate, Inviolata: Como Ella*).

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

The reflection on Mexican womanhood is continued in the next poem, *Nopalitos*.<sup>15</sup> The first of the eight stanzas introduce the reader to the environment of the *rancho*. The lyrical speaker mentions the “musty smell of dust” in the air, “the scent of orange blossoms”, the heat, the wind and smell of “mesquite burning”. In the next stanza, the lyrical speaker reflects on the women on the ranch who cook a soup while she is pulling out a spring of mesquite to touch the cactus and “pluck out a tiny *no-palito*”. By cutting the tender cactus leaf with a sharp blade, the lyrical speaker adds the smell of the plant to the already existing scents of the afternoon. The cactus leaves are plucked to be prepared as a dish by the lyrical speaker, who has hurt herself with slivers from the cactus. However, the pain is worth the dish. In the following stanzas, the lyrical speaker draws images of the colour, scents, sounds and animals of her surroundings in the ranch. By employing a tone of nostalgia by romanticising the events around her, the lyrical speaker depicts a state of longing for but also a state of stagnation *en los ranchos*. This reflection eventually turns inwards:

Though I’m part of their *camaradería*  
am one of them

I left and have been gone a long time.  
I keep leaving and when I am home  
they remember no one but me had ever left.  
I listen to the *grillos* more intently  
than I do their *regaños*.  
I have more language than they,  
am aware of every root of my *pueblo*;  
they, my people, are not.  
They are the living, sleeping roots.<sup>16</sup>

Even though she can observe and describe her surroundings in detail and take part in rituals such as cooking, the lyrical speaker perceives herself as different from her *pueblo*. Emphasising the fact that she is the one who

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

has left, who now returns every now and then, the lyrical speaker implies that she is not part of the “roots” of her *pueblo*, but the people who have stayed are. After having reflected on past lives *en los ranchos* in various texts before, the lyrical speaker moves to the present in this last poem as if nothing had changed. *Nopalitos* finishes with her sweeping leaves, slivers, and thorns in her flesh and “stings behind my eyes”. The sorrow and pain of *La Llorona* is echoed in these final verses; the lyrical speaker finds herself coming back, only to find herself in the same grey-zone as before.

All five texts of *Más antes en los ranchos* focus on the relationship between the people of *los ranchos*, the invading *gringos*, nature and animals. Three poems deal with the death of animals – each death is always connected to three key ideas: class, gender and race. Doves, fawns, horses are killed, out of necessity, for the sake of survival, sometimes economic survival, and sometimes literal survival. The descriptions of these violent acts move between tenderness and brutality, creating a state of ambiguity and juxtaposition, which again stresses the inbetweenness of life at the border. These juxtapositions, which often can be found within one single figure, also work as a deconstruction of non-binary ideas. Key concepts which have become normative throughout history become invalid in this grey-zone. A multi-layered experience as such is also made conceptual by the palimpsestic form of Anzaldúa’s writing. This is stressed by her demand in her text *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers* to put ‘yourself’ on the line, become naked in the next, to “put your shit on the paper”.<sup>17</sup> Through this form of writing Anzaldúa’s texts establish strong intimacies to the readership, and as AnaLouise Keating puts it, “by plunging so deeply into the depths of her own experiences, [...] she externalizes her inner struggles and opens possible connections with her readers”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> ANZALDÚA, *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*, 172-173.

<sup>18</sup> KEATING, *Introduction*, 1-2.

## Redrawing Boundaries through Involution

The strong impact created in Anzaldúa's texts are not sheer coincidence, the écriture shows a methodology, and as it was coined by Jorge Capetillo-Ponce, Gloria Anzaldúa is an "archeologist of knowledge", who "digs for ideas, symbols, and myths in her own historic and mythic past".<sup>19</sup> Instead of referring to ideas by Foucault, Marx or Freud, I shall look at another idea in the following.

The frequent use of strong imageries and narratives of animals also recalls the ideas of *becoming* established by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In their chapter on the *becoming*, Deleuze and Guattari reflect on the idea of becoming-animal.

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. [...] To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination, even when the imagination reaches the highest cosmic or dynamic level, as in Jung or Bachelard. Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here? For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not "really" become an animal any more than the animal "really" becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. [...]

Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. [...]

Accordingly, the term we would prefer for this form of evolution between heterogeneous terms is "involution", on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression. Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative. To regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated. But to involve is to form a block that runs its own line 'between' the terms in play and beneath assignable relations.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> CAPETILLO-PONCE, *On Borderlands and Bridges*, 166-167.

<sup>20</sup> DELEUZE & GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 262-263.

The tale of animals within the framework of becoming is not disturbing, as Deleuze and Guattari conclude in their writings. Frequent metaphors of animals in Anzaldúa's text, such as the horse symbolising "the act of writing", creates another understanding of subjectivity: the animals do not symbolise a human race, but help to convey an understanding of inter-human relations, experiences and procedures of becoming beyond the common binary perception of a reality. The repetitive killings (or sacrifice) of animals in *Más antes en los ranchos* is perceived as less exploitative if it's done by Mexican protagonists. While the torturing and hunting of animals by *gringos* is conveyed as something cruel and done carelessly, the killing of doves, a fawn or a horse is narrated tenderly by the lyrical speaker, as one would do in a tale. The role of the animals is not a silent one – they appear to their owners as their selves. Becoming-animal is rather a work on oneself that requires a kind of asceticism, sobriety, and creative involution. It is a work that takes place at the 'molecular' level, the becoming-animal is a becoming-molecular; to put it simply, becoming animal means becoming unperceivable. The work on oneself, asceticism, has the task not to search for oneself as a subject, not to search for the subject, as in an "I think therefore I am", but on the contrary to experience a beyond the subject. In short, becoming animal leads to decentralizing the Enlightened human. Throughout her oeuvre, Anzaldúa was concerned with moving beyond an us-against-them understanding, instead offering ideas of intersubjectivity. By employing animals Anzaldúa's texts allow us to redraw the boundaries of our perception of subjects. Hence, her texts are *involutionary* – by enabling differentiated ideas of histories, without evolving or regressing, outside of binary restraints. Through the palimpsestic form these multi-layered memories and experiences can exist within the text without negating each other. The latter allows the involution in these textual palimpsests.

For *Más antes en los ranchos* this raises the question if it is more about the truth of living at the borderlands, the daily struggle *en los ranchos*, about the sacrifices one must make to survive the state of in between or if it is also about becoming unperceivable, to decentralize the human, for the sake of survival and to runs one's "own line 'between' the terms in play and beneath assignable relations". After having created these lines of inbetweenness through animal narratives, the lyrical speaker moves

on to reflect on womanhood *en los ranchos* and therefore adds another layer to the palimpsest. While a detailed observation of power relations between the American “intruders” and repressive state apparatus have taken place in the first three poems, with an emphasis on the dimension of economic power (American dollars) and the exploitation of land and nature, the last two pieces shift the focus to the question of womanhood. Thus, the lyrical speaker portrays an image of the lives *en los ranchos* in its full extent: class, race and gender. While it is without doubt acknowledged that the Mexican communities have suffered oppression and exploitation through American intrusion, setting rules for people, land and air, the sorrow and suffering of the Mexican labouring woman, the Chicana, is not emphasised enough. The chapter begins with the *La Llorona* quote to begin a circle which is only completed with the two last verses of the very last poem: “thorns embedded in my flesh, stings behind my eyes”.

Anzaldúa’s writing is marked by a multiplicity of narration, each tale is layered upon another tale, while every past tale shines through to the present. Every speech is inscribed with the trace of past speech practices in the present act of speaking, just as this in turn will enter as a trace into future speech events. This textual palimpsest enables an understanding of history in all its forms and allows one to recognise the traces of becoming, of the *involution* of the subject. In Anzaldúa’s texts, the lyrical subject challenges the dualistic consciousness and offers an alternative “to post-modern solutions that interrogate the dualistic thinking at the root of existing power structures” without connecting “this interrogation to alternative forms of transformation”.<sup>21</sup> Starting with the ancient figure of *La Llorona*, foreshadowing death and sorrow, the lyrical speaker guides us through each layer of the tale, pointing at the strong contrasts of life at the borderlands, painting juxtapositions in the microcosmos of *los ranchos* and contradicting normative binaries by uncompromisingly depicting realities of the grey-zone at *la frontera*.

*Más antes en los ranchos* is an intersectional analysis of the microcosmic communities in the villages along the border without explicitly mentioning it. This act of speech through poetic expression offers the reader

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<sup>21</sup> CÉSPEDES, *A Call to Action*, 75-76.

a multi-faceted comprehension, which in this manner is not accessible through philosophical or essayistic discourse, which again is proven through the setup of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*: one half is a collection of essayistic reflections, and the other half is a collection of poetic and literary responses to these reflections. Not only, but especially because of the above, I consider Anzaldúa's publication a unique example of relevant writing, not only when it was published 1987, but also today. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* uses different forms of text to convey a full understanding of past and present, while at the same time foreshadowing future realities by stressing the structure of events.

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