Chapter 3

"Una Herida Abierta": The Border as Wound in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* has been praised as a visionary, ground-breaking work by many.[1] Literary critics, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, Ramón Saldívar and Paula Gunn Allen, have all referred to Anzaldúa's work as a seminal text in both contemporary Chicano/a literary studies and "border studies."[2] The work has likewise been hailed by scholars in other disciplines, such as Carl Gutiérrez-Jones in critical legal studies, Oscar J. Martínez in sociology, Ruth Behar in anthropology, and Ronald Takaki in history; most conclude their works with a reference to her work.[3] Why is it that scholars in the humanities and social sciences alike claim her work as exemplary? The answer lies primarily in the figure of the "border" that she uses, a figure that parallels Freud's figure of trauma as a wound.[4] As Anzaldúa shows and as I will explore, the border functions as a marker of an open wound—the marker of a collective traumatic history. Anzaldúa's work explores the literal U.S.–Mexico border as a wound, as a site of historical trauma that continues to affect the present experiences of individuals and communities. Further, Anzaldúa's work presents a vision of the figural Borderlands, sites where there arise positive possibilities for healing from the effects of traumatic events, both individual and collective, both separate and shared.

What scholars such as the ones mentioned above recognize in Anzaldúa's work is a treatment of the connections between the individual and collective aspects of experience, identity, and history. Despite the many collective catastrophes in history, scholars tend to study these events by focusing on the individuals affected by them. We do not have the language that we need to talk about how we are not only connected to each other but are, indeed, together. Maria P. P. Root criticizes theorists of trauma for continuing to

view trauma theory as "a theory of individual distress."[5] Before moving to Anzaldúa's work, then, we will take the time in the next section to examine the possibilities for defining trauma as a collective phenomenon. As Root concludes, "a feminist conceptualization of trauma moves the problem beyond an individual perspective to a larger sociopolitical, systemic framework of conceptualization."[6]

This parallel between the individual and the collective views of trauma has been repeated in our explorations thus far. In the first chapter on Sexton, we viewed trauma primarily as an individual phenomenon, when we saw how Sexton's individual trauma is connected to the collective in that it is shared by other girls and women. In chapter two, we moved between two different ways of looking at trauma; we saw how Lorde's individual trauma stemmed in part from her own individual experiences and in part from her collective identification as an African American woman with the effects of a silent history of sexual assaults upon black women in the United States. In this chapter, we move toward an exploration of the collective aspects of trauma: in what ways can trauma be said to be purely collective, bound up in the relations between us, stemming from a source beyond us as individuals both temporally and spatially, and hence out of our own individual control?

Toward a definition of collective trauma

Before we explore Anzaldúa's figure of the border as wound for what it can teach us about collective, traumatic history, we should review Freud's definition of trauma as departure and return.[7] As was mentioned earlier, trauma can be said to be constituted by a delay which is both spatial and temporal. The individual survivor survives precisely because she leaves the experience of the trauma behind. As Caruth writes, "[T]he paradoxically *indirect* structure of psychic trauma means that the traumatism is felt and suffered in the psyche due to the fact that it is precisely *not* accessible to experience."[8] Thus what characterizes a trauma is not so much its referent, or what happened, but its procedure, how it is survived. As Kai T. Erikson writes, ". . . it is *how people react to them rather than what they are* that gives events whatever traumatic quality they can be said to have."[9]

Thus, what makes an experience traumatic is the fact of survival through departure: survival by leaving, by living on, by going on after loss, by leaving behind the experience. And this comes back, returns to claim the survivor through flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitions, as we have seen with regard to Sexton and Lorde. We might call this the autobiographical level of departure and return. This autobiographical level carries within it the paradoxical structure characteristic of traumatic experience. It is, as we have seen, necessary to leave the past behind in order to survive, but it is also impossible to leave the past if this past is traumatic. The return of traumatic past comes in dreams and nightmares, which must be dealt with in order to survive. But this "dealing" with the past is characterized by its difficulty: dealing is not simply a matter of returning, but of reconstructing.

Throughout his career, Freud himself vacillated between studying collective trauma as a collection of individual experiences and studying all trauma, including individual experiences, as aspects of a larger, collective trauma. In his earliest writings on hysteria, he attempts to grapple with the implications of the dreams and repetitions of individual women with early childhood sexual trauma.[10] Then in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Freud tries to explore the collective experiences of war veterans by focusing on the individual experiences of his patients and of the young boy of the Fort-da game.[11] Thus, during the first half of his career, he tended to view trauma as primarily an individual phenomenon. Near the end of his career and his life, he wrote *Moses and Monotheism,* in which he tries to account for the individual experiences of trauma occasioned by World War II by connecting them to a larger, collective, traumatic history.[12] As Robert M. Paul writes of *Moses and Monotheism,* "Here for the first time the analogy between obsessional neurosis and Western religious history is systematically laid out. The analogous pattern, *repeated on the individual and collective level,* is this sequence: 'early trauma—defense—latency—outbreak of the neurosis—partial return of the repressed material.' "[13] Thus, the same paradoxical structure is found in the historical level of trauma, as well.

Traumatic history at the collective level, then, has a paradoxical structure, which means it is a result of the impossibility and necessity of leaving the past behind, coupled with the impossibility and necessity of returning to it. But, in the case of collective, traumatic histories, the very identity of the group is defined in and through the trauma. This means that, for instance, the birth of a child within that group is already bound up with not only the biological, familial, cultural, and historical determinants of the individual child, but also with the trauma that defines the survival of the group. Moreover, the child's identity is tied to the traumatic history from birth, and these ties are continually reinforced by the practices and institutions of that group, which means that the child grows up and forms her identity through the continuing processes of departure and return.

This structure of departure and return functions, as we shall explore, as an address between members of the group and between groups with different identities. This means that the identity of the group is formed through the "other" of the traumatic history. Thus the relation between one's identity and the other can be characterized as a problem. We see, for example, in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism,* how the Jews are connected to the Christians in their history, just as we will see in this chapter how the border between Mexico and the United States designates not only a geographical limit, but a division which defines the very identities of those in the "pre-colonial" world and the "West." This relation to the other is not simply a problem but, as we will see, is also a possible solution. This connection of "others" through difference makes address possible, and address functions as the possible solution to the literal repetitions of the traumatic history through the processes of witnessing and mourning, which we will explore more fully in Part II.

The border as wound: departures

In Anzaldúa's text, the border functions as a sign of traumatic history. I will explore the significance of the traumatic history through an examination of the literal and figural borders in Anzaldúa's text. As we will see, both the border as literal site and the Borderlands as figure result from the paradoxical structure of the impossibility and necessity of leaving and returning. This is not only a "tradition" that can be traced through history, but it is the condition of the possibility of traumatic history itself. The border-as-wound marks the literal site of trauma, the geographical site of departure and return. Further, the border functions also as a figure of the separation between there and here, as a metaphor for the difference between the past and the present, between the before and the after. That is, the Borderlands is the figure for the spatial gap and the temporal delay that splits our ordinary notions of experience and traumatic experience, which, we might say, is the difference between knowledge and non-knowledge, being and non-being, life and death.

This mixing or multiplicity is mirrored in the structure of *Borderlands/La Frontera,* as well. The book is divided into two main sections: the first, "Atravesando Fronteras / Crossing Borders," includes seven essays; the second, "Un Agitado Viento / Ehécatl, The Wind," contains six sections of poetry. In the essays, Anzaldúa blends the forms of essay, story, history, poetry, and song (lyrics of *corridos* or folk songs), making the essays themselves a form of mestiza writing. The general movement of the chapters

goes from the past (through narratives of the history and culture of the borderlands in chapters 1 and 2), to the present/past (through dramatizations of the psychological/spiritual myths that serve as strategies for survival, in chapters 3 and 4), to the present (through essays on language and writing in chapters 5 and 6), and finally, to the future (through a vision of the mestiza consciousness in chapter seven). The poetry sections move back and forth through time as well. The poems in the first section deal with the autobiographical past, while the poems in the second and third sections dramatize the experiences of different characters—a migrant farm worker, an Anglo rancher who rapes and lynches, and an alien among them—who populate the historical past and present of the Borderlands. In sections four and five, we move from the historical to the mythological past and present through encounters with saints, *curanderas,* goddesses and other mythological figures. In the final section, we turn to the future, as we are given examples of how mestiza consciousness provides a vision for future survival. Together, these movements through time in Anzaldúa's text demonstrate how it is necessary to deal with the past in order to advance forward into the future.

First, let us examine the many movements in Anzaldúa's text, departures and returns that are paralleled in the historiography of the "border."[14] As we will see, the pattern of cyclical departures and returns accompanies a traumatic history of catastrophe; as historian Enrique Florescano writes of pre-colonial Mexico, "Instead of a linear progressive time, these societies lived in time that had a beginning, underwent an erosion, and reached its end, generally in catastrophic fashion, in order to reinitiate the cyclical movement" (180).[15] Indeed, the history of the Chicanos (and the Aztecs from whom they descended) is a history of movement, of departures and returns.

The departures that Anzaldúa addresses in *Borderlands/La Frontera* come in the forms of deaths, losses, and leavings. The first loss is the most literal one: the loss of lives through conquest.[16] Anzaldúa cites the numerical figures to attest to the loss: she writes that before conquest, the population of the Yucatan peninsula was 25 million; directly after conquest, it was seven million (5). This parallels the losses throughout the Americas. William Denevan, a University of Wisconsin geographer, estimates that the population of the Americas before Christopher Columbus was 43–65 million. By the 1600s, the Indian population of North and South America had been reduced to less than six million people—down nearly 90 percent from its peak a few centuries earlier.[17]

The loss of lives parallels a loss that cannot be accounted for in numer-

ical terms: the loss of ancient, pre-colonial history. Interestingly, Anzaldúa does not address this loss but leaves it for the reader to fill in. Thus, Anzaldúa does not literally count the cost of this loss but refers to it indirectly by comparing the differences between the knowledge she acquires after leaving her home and the lack of knowledge of the people in her hometown. Further, these losses of knowledge result from literal departures: between 1550 and 1605, Indians were, according to historian Enrique Florescano,

> uprooted from the towns where they had formed traditions that gave them a past and an identity. . . . Seen in historical perspective, this gigantic displacement of the population is one of the most violent acts of social and cultural uprooting of which there is memory in the history of Mexico, especially from the indigenous perspective, because in the pre-Hispanic tradition, the conquest of one people by another was rarely accompanied by the destruction of their gods and traditions (113–4).

Thus, the departures in Anzaldúa's text coincide with the literal departures of a traumatic history.

This traumatic history of departure continues, or rather is repeated, in the nineteenth century, with a difference. This time, the people do not move, but the border moves. In the early nineteenth century, white settlers from the East begin to move into the Southwest. Meanwhile from 1810 to 1825, Mexico, like most of Spain's colonies in the Americas, freed itself from Spanish domination, and soon after, in 1836, Texas came under U.S. rule. And in 1848, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the border moved again; as Patricia Zavella puts it, "the border literally migrated to them—imposing on them a foreign language and sociolegal system."[18] Anzaldúa writes, "Con el destierro y el exilo fuimos desuñados, destroncados, destripados—we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history" (7–8).[19] The violent verbs that Anzaldúa uses to describe the movement of the border stem in part from the move away, or abandonment, of the U.S. government from the promises of the treaty that were never honored, as Anzaldúa reminds us (7).

There are continued losses in twentieth century that Anzaldúa lists: Anglo vigilante groups lynching Chicanos, U.S. governments troops quenching protests, drought, land buy-outs, the move from dry land farming to agribusiness corporations, the economic necessity of sharecropping, *maquiladoras,* the devaluation of the peso, and rising unemployment (8–10). In her own family, both of her grandmothers lost their land when poverty

forced them to sell it (8). During World War II, many Mexican women, like women throughout the United States, began to find work in ever-increasing numbers, usually as fieldworkers or factory workers.[20] Anzaldúa's own family—her father and mother, and all of the children—became sharecroppers, living on three different farms during her childhood. She and her sister and brothers worked on the farms every day after school; she continued to do so during college (9). After college, she, too, departs by leaving her family and home-land: "I was the first in six generations to leave the Valley, the only one in my family ever to leave home" (16). In leaving, she separates from her culture, and in so doing develops the ability to critique it, but she also carries it within her: "I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back" (21).

The simultaneous leaving and carrying is addressed in a poem entitled, "Nopalitos" (112–113).[21] In this poem she describes defanging a cactus during a visit home. The work takes hours, but what keeps her going is the vision of the meal, the end result. We can read this as an allegory of her own process of picking the thorns of history, which is also difficult and arduous, and can also provide food, nourishment for her and her culture. She is able to defang the cactus, perhaps, because of the fact that she has left:

> Though I'm part of their *camaradería*
> am one of them
>
> I left and have been gone a long time.

The space between the women on the other porches and her on hers is the space between the lines, the space delineating her departure. The departures are repeated: "I keep leaving and when I am home / they remember no one but me had ever left." The repeated departures are connected to memory: they, the people she left, remember her, and she, in turn, remembers their history.

The distance enabled by her departure also enables her to be their memory. Thus she becomes like the cactus itself, as, at the end of the poem, there are "thorns embedded in my flesh." She herself becomes the cactus that needs to be dethorned, which she does by picking out the thorns of her autobiographical and collective histories. This connection of a collective history and an individual autobiography is enacted through the body. As we see throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa shows us how history, pulled painfully from the body, can provide food for the nourishment of the people.

The border as wound: returns

One of the marks of a collective, traumatic history is a heightened sense of nostalgia or idealization of the past. This manifests itself in myths of origin that valorize the past, as well as in "commemorative narratives" that stress a people's continuity and renewal.[22] The tendency to provide a heroic narrative for the past, a narrative that can not admit of ambiguity or negative aspects, is itself a mark of a traumatic history that has been left behind but which, inevitably, threatens to return. "According to Mircea Eliade's classic definition, the mythic story is an eternal return to the origins, a concentrated search for the primordial moment of creation, when everything was new, strong, and full" (Florescano 179). Thus, just as we saw how it was necessary to leave the traumatic event behind in order to survive it, we now see that it is also necessary to return to it. The return to the traumatic past happens as the survivor is confronted by the repetitive returns *of* the past as well as by the desire to go back *to* an idealized era before the traumatic event. These many returns of and to a traumatic past are enumerated in Anzaldúa's writing.

In the first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa ties the present to the past by describing a border culture as an open wound "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" (3). Then she traces the history of this culture by going back to attempt a narrative of origin, which she begins with, "During the original peopling of the America . . ." (4). The originary narrative continues as she describes the Aztec's originary mythical home-land, Aztlán, in the present-day Southwestern United States: "land of herons, land of whiteness, the Edenic place of the origin of the Azteca" (4). She further reinforces the origin with "evidence": by remarking that archeologists have found 20,000 year old campsites in the area (4), and that in precisely the year 1168 A.D., the Aztecs left the area, guided by the God of War, Huitzilpochtli, to migrate to present-day Mexico City (5).

The concern for origins also manifests itself in a double birth story. Anzaldúa writes that the mestizo was born with the Spanish conquest of Mexico: "*En 1521 nacío una nueva raza, el mestizo.* . . . Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings" (5, her italics). And later, she claims the birth of the Chicano people coincides with the establishment of the present-day border in 1848: "The border fence that divides the Mexican people *was born* on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo" (7, italics mine). As a result, Mexicans became U.S. citizens by default when approximately one-third of Mexican territory was ceded to the United States, including California, Nevada, Utah, most of Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado.[23]

In addition to the concern for a return to origins, there are other returns, as well. Anzaldúa describes the historical return to the North, which began after the Conquest when the Spanish conquistadors left Mexico to look for gold with indigenous and mestizo guides and servants; she writes that the return from Mexico to the United States in the sixteenth century "constituted a return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest" (5). Anzaldúa concludes, "the Southwest became our homeland once more" (7). These returns continue in the twentieth century through migrations. Anzaldúa puts the present-day return of Mexicans to the United States in terms of tradition: "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" (11).

These returns parallel her own, literal return home to Texas, which is narrated in the text in a section entitled, "El Retorno" (88–91). The return trip allows her to remember what she has missed by leaving. It allows her to "still feel the old despair" (89). And it allows her to remember her own loss, which was perhaps her greatest, in remembering her father who has died. In remembering her father, she returns to the scene of his death, after a time lag, or departure, of several years. This return is strikingly different from its earlier manifestation in an essay published several years before. In the earlier essay from 1981 Anzaldúa wrote:

> My father dying, his aorta bursting while he was driving, the truck turning over, his body thrown out, the truck falling on his face. Blood on the pavement. His death occurred just as I entered puberty. It irrevocably shattered the myth that there existed a male figure to look after me. How could my strong, good, beautiful god-like father be killed? How stupid and careless of god. What if chance and accident ruled? I lost my father, god, and my innocence all in one bloody blow.[24]

In 1981, Anzaldúa writes of her father's death as a scene in the present tense, with quick, flashing images of "dying . . . bursting . . . turning . . . falling." When she returns to this scene several years later, the return occurs *as a narration,* as a story that she tells while talking to her brother in the field during a return trip home. As she talks to and watches and listens to

her brother, she remembers her father who has "been dead for 29 years, having worked himself to death. . . . It shocks me that I am older than he" was when he died (90). This realization also allows her to see the differences between herself and her father. She knows what he did not: the "names" of the rain god and the maize goddess that they both worship. Thus, in returning, she is able not only to remember what is the same but is also able to recognize what is not: "Today I see . . . it will never be as I remember it" (90). This realization comes through not only a literal return home but also through a narrated reconstruction of this return. Thus, this return is different from the earlier, literal repetitions; this return is figural—a narrative that tells a story and attempts to provide integration.[25] The story ends with another narration of a memory from childhood: she and her family planting seeds, caring for them, watching them grow, harvesting and beginning again: "Growth, death, decay, birth" (91). These cycles of death and birth, leaving and returning, continue, she realizes. In her return, she recognizes the inevitability of final departures.

From literal to figural, from past to future

Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa refers to "bouts with death" (35), encounters that are not narrativized in the text. The lack of narrative calls attention to the effects of a traumatic history. As we have seen with regard to Sexton and Lorde, traumatic history is one in which gaps, forgettings, and competing interpretations all point to a violent past that has been skipped over, and survived, by not having been experienced. Before making a conscious return through reconstruction, a survivor is caught in an unconscious return through negative effects that are literal repetitions. As Caruth writes of trauma survivors, "they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (5).[26]

Thus, the subject as symptom embodies the effects of trauma that we have discussed previously. Anzaldúa shows these symptoms as well. She admits the "agony of inadequacy" and the "defense strategies" that she uses to "escape:"

> I have split from and disowned those parts of myself that others rejected. I have used rage to drive others away and to insulate myself against exposure. I have reciprocated with contempt for those who have roused shame in me. I have internalized rage and contempt, one part of the self (the accusatory, persecutory, judgmental) using defense strategies against another part of the self. (45)

Further, Anzaldúa shows that she is aware that these individual symptoms stem from a collective identity, a collective past, a collective problem, as is shown by the switch of pronouns in the following sentences: "As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that there is something 'wrong' with us, something fundamentally 'wrong' " (45). While these effects of a traumatic history are evident in the text, what makes *Borderlands/La Frontera* literature and not sociology is the turn from the literal to the figural. The literal description of history or autobiography is, as we have seen, a return to the site of trauma that is doomed to failure and repetition. However, it is not until the return is made consciously through figuration that positive possibilities may arise.

Let us explore this turn from the literal to the figural, as we examine more closely how the border as literal wound becomes the border as figural wound in Anzaldúa's text. Both the border and the Borderlands are wounds defined by "*un choque,* a cultural collision," the collision of past and present, here and there, where

> *lo pasado me estirá pa' 'trás*
> *y lo presente pa' 'delante* (3).

A translation of these lines might read, "the past draws me back/ and the present draws me forward." However, the verb "estirar" means not only to draw but also to stretch and to pull; thus there is ambiguity as to the source of the action: does it come from within or from without the subject? Further, the terms "atrás" and "adelante" connote not only spatiality but also temporality; "atrás" means back in space and also back in time (ago), while "adelante" likewise means both forward or ahead in space and also ahead in time (later).[27] Thus the Borderlands is structured, like a trauma, by a difference that is both inside and outside and both spatial and temporal at once.

In Anzaldúa's text, the border functions not only as a literal site but also as a figural reconstruction. After two quoted excerpts from other sources, the first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera* opens with a poem, which includes the following lines:

> 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* (2)

The "splitting" here is not the literal survival mechanism associated with trauma, as we saw above. Here the border as wound becomes a figure for the very bodily being of the speaker. The border as wound is not only a literal site of either history or autobiography in these lines, but rather, leaves behind the literal return in order to make way for the figurative. As Cherríe Moraga writes,

> This image holds, speaks to something more profound than the intellectual knowledge of the loss of half our territory to the U.S. with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848. It speaks of a *collective wound* we remember as a people and proffers the possibility of healing. This vision informs the whole book.[28]

The wound, even in these few lines, moves from the literal ("1,950 mile-long") through measurement, to the figural ("of my body," "in my flesh") through embodiment. By taking the wound into her body, the speaker creates the possibility that the body can also heal the wound. The embodied wound can heal in a way that an unrecognized wound can not. The healing, as we will see, lies in the recognition of the positive, creative potential of the border as wound. The wound opens itself to healing precisely because it is acknowledged and recognized as part of the body/being. The border becomes embodied not only in the flesh but in the poem with the lines,

splits me splits me
me raja *me raja*

In the switch from English to Spanish lies the border as wound, as pain, *and* as conscious acknowledgement, as positive difference. As linguist Susan Gal points out, code-switching is often a form of "subversive reworking of dominant linguistic forms by subordinate groups: in short, the forging of new forms, and identities, out of the already symbolically weighted linguistic material at hand."[29]

The switch from Spanish to English, and the positive potential they hold in their difference, occurs again in the poems, "No se raje, Chicanita," in Spanish, and "Don't give in, Chicanita," in English, which are the last two poems in the book (200–203). In these poems, the speaker addresses her niece and gives her advice on how to survive in the Borderlands. Survival

comes, the speaker tells the young woman, not in literal returns but in figural ones: through the metaphors that provide a source of origins and nurturance for the future. Throughout the two poems, the speaker uses similes that show not only what the figural origins are but how they may be used for survival. At the beginning of the poems, she compares the young woman to the surroundings: "sus raíces como las de los mesquites" / "Your roots are like those of the mesquite," and, like the mesquite, are "bien plantadas . . . a esa corrente . . . tu origen" / "firmly planted . . . toward that current . . . your origin."

But then, as in the poem discussed above that began the book, the poem switches from the literal, the surroundings of the border landscape, to the figural. This switch is, as we have seen, designated by the difference between languages. While for the most part, the translation between the two is parallel, in the middle of the poem two different terms are used, which I have emphasized in the following lines:

> Tiempos duros como *pastura* los cargamos
> Hard times like *fodder* we carry

In both versions, "pastura" and "fodder" are used to represent the "tiempos duros/hard times" of the continued effects of traumatic history. While the two terms do not have significantly different semantic meanings—"pastura" refers to "grass or other growing plants used as food by grazing animals," and "fodder" is "dry coarse food for cattle, horses, and sheep"—the significance of their difference lies in, precisely, their roots or origins.[30] The term in the Spanish version, "pastura," comes from the Late Latin, "pastura," which is the past participle of "pascere," a verb meaning to feed or to graze.[31] The term used in the English version, "fodder," comes from the Middle English word, "fodder," and before that the Anglo-Saxon "fodor," which comes from Middle Dutch and Dutch, and even earlier from Old High German and Middle High German.[32] Thus, the term used in Spanish can be traced back through its Spanish and Latinate origins, while the term used in English can be traced back through its Anglo-Saxon and Germanic roots. The source of food, of nurturance and sustenance, lies not in the present-day meanings of the similes, *but in their very histories.* It is history, then, that provides food for these people who are, like grazing animals, both moving across the earth and finding nurturance from it.

Further, it is through history that the people themselves, the "we," come to be at all. Before the line that we have been examining, "Hard times like fodder we carry," the preposition, "we," has not appeared in the poem. It is

through a recognition of this collective experience that the identity of the people moves from a collection of individuals, "you . . . your mom . . . and I," to a collective whole, "we." At the end of both poems, the speaker moves not only to the collective "we" but also to the future tense to show how "we" use this nurturance for the future.

In this poem and throughout the entire text, it is the figural return to history that provides the "pastura" / "fodder" that is necessary to move from the past to the future. Through the figures of the Borderlands, the speaker and the girl survive by becoming "like" the land and its inhabitants: "like the horned toad and the lizard . . . like serpent lightening." These figures enable a move to the future as seen in the use of future verb constructions: "vamos a paracer/we'll be [we're going to seem]"; "caerá/will fall"; "nos moveremos/we'll move"; "¡Ya verás!/You'll see." To move from the past to the future means to move from the position of an individual object of history, one who is caught in the cycles of departures and returns, to the position of a participant in the collective action of history, as the collective subject, "we," comes together to turn history into food, into the energy to propel the group forward into the future.[33] Thus, it is necessary to return to the past both literally and figurally in order to regain the sense of a collective, which itself was destroyed by the traumatic past. And, in returning to the past, a departure from the repetitions of the past is made possible, as, once the collective "we" is reestablished, it is possible to move forward into the future.

This collective move to the future comes through the text of *Borderlands/La Frontera* itself, as Anzaldúa moves from the literal return of history, which is an unconscious repetition of the trauma, to the figural return of metaphor, which opens the possibility for conscious healing. Through the figure of the Borderlands, Anzaldúa leaves behind, finally, the repetitive returns to the past in order to look ahead to the future. She thinks of this reconstruction of the history and myth of the Chicano people as a mutual process that will lead to the understanding of her own culture and others': "we need to know the history of their struggle and they need to know ours" (86).

Anzaldúa's text provides us with not only the necessary reminders of this traumatic history as she returns to the site of trauma, but also with the possibilities to deal with the trauma, paradoxically, by leaving it behind. When the reality of a literal return is given up, there arises the possibility of healing through a figural return, or reconstruction. Anzaldúa's autobiographical essays in *This Bridge Called My Back,* first published in 1981, show a concern about the literal return home: she desires, fears, and rejects it.[34]

Then, as we have seen in *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa realizes that she cannot really, literally, return to the past or go home, and she turns away from the literal to the figural: "And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my own space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture" (22). This "architecture," as we will see in chapter six, is the reconstruction of the trauma in order for healing. What she builds is a mix of theory and art, song and medicine. Thus, the return to history is a return in order to leave, in order to move from the repetitions of the past into a vision for the future.

Anzaldúa's figure of the Borderlands, then, is not only an effect of having survived a traumatic history; it is also intended for the purpose of promoting a collective, future survival. Anzaldúa thus goes beyond "border theorizing," which, as Rosa Linda Fregoso points out, is not alone sufficient to change "the actual social conditions of the vast majority of 'border crossers' [and] border inhabitants."[35] Consequently, Anzaldúa reminds us that survival necessitates collective actions, and it is through collective actions that the group not only regains a sense of the collective but also works toward ensuring its own survival.