

The Horror in Gloria Anzaldúa: Reclaiming the Monstrous

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I grew up hearing stories of la Llorona and el Cucuy, believing that la Mujer de Blanco was waiting outside of the bedroom window by the rosales to take me away. Today, like numerous scholars, artists and storytellers, I return to monsters of my youth. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's work, I ponder what tools we can use to understand and survive in geographies built on violence, death, and conquest. Specifically, in this essay I argue that embracing the figure of the monstrous and the horrific provide one avenue for survival by helping create new homes and new familial structures. The U.S.-Mexico border has become a place where the value of human life is constantly re-signified and contested in popular culture.

In "Del Otro Lado" Anzaldúa writes:

*On Feb. 2, 1848 a hatchet comes crashing down
Severing her body, severing the land
She bleeds. The blood becomes a river, El Rio Grande.
They build a fence across her body, Mexico,
A wall called el tratado de Guadalupe-Hidalgo.
Thousands are sacrificed to the Barbed wall. (32-3)*

The line that now divides Mexico from the U.S. was one created through violent acts. The river itself is a bloody scene of sacrifices and monsters. To delve deeper into the horrors of the border I turn to the graphic novel *Feeding Ground*. Written by Swifty Lang and illustrated by Michael Lapinski, *Feeding Ground* is a graphic novel first released in 2010 in a six-part monthly series. This work was published in its entirety as a 2011 hardcover collection, which includes a foreword by award-winning Mexican (Mexican American) author Luis Alberto Urrea. *Feeding Ground* tells the story of the Busqueda family, living in a border town in Sonora, Mexico. Diego Busqueda, a noble "coyote," supports his family by helping undocumented immigrants cross the "Devil's Highway," an unforgiving desert where many people have disappeared and or died trying to cross. While Diego is gone, his wife Bea, his teenage son Miguel and young daughter Flaca are attacked by a local narco (drug boss) who attempts to rape Bea. To stop this attack, Miguel shoots and kills the narco, forcing the family to run in fear. Flaca, before the family crosses, is bitten by a stray dog. During their border crossing Flaca becomes increasingly erratic, sickly, and violent. In the end, Flaca turns into a werewolf, killing factory owner Blackwell and her father Diego. In the end Bea and Miguel are left to pick up the pieces of their lives now in the U.S. as the Blackwell vampires start a war with the U.S. border patrol.

The border is controlled by narcos (drug gangs), factory owner Blackwell, and the border patrol. Blackwell is the owner of a multinational corporation that also serves as a front for a werewolf breeding ground. In an early scene of the graphic novel, undocumented immigrants crossing the border with the help of Busqueda are lost and without water. However, they are stopped by men in full tactical gear who offer to help them and provide water if they go with them to Blackwell's factory. Busqueda warns the immigrants against it, but the men don't see any other choice since their options limited to dying on the border or being arrested by Border Patrol. The immigrants go with the men and end up joining Blackwell's army of werewolves.

Death and Horror

The above example illustrates how the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have been represented as a static geography

of death, a death that marks not only the space but also the bodies that inhabit it. Death can be defined from different approaches, including mythology, theology, philosophy, physical, social, and political. The idea of what death is changes across time and of course across different cultures. The images of the dead and/or dying body set on the U.S.-Mexico border are influenced by layers of political, historical, social and cultural contexts. Demarcations between death and life, north and south, civilized and lawless are constantly played out in cultural productions about the U.S.-Mexico border. The equation, border = violent deaths, which constantly gets reinscribed in public discourse, affects the lives (and deaths) of the communities living in this space, marking them as disposable and destined to die violent deaths, their bodies more easily used for cheap labor.

Sharon Patricia Holland writes:

“Because these societal fears are pervasive, discussions of death, and notions of the dead, have the potential to dissolve barriers between communities. Speaking about death and the dead necessitates that critics move beyond familiar country and into liminal spaces. These liminal spaces are present whenever a scholar moves between the borders separating nations and communities, disciplines and departments” (149).

Death and writing about death addresses the liminal spaces often ignored and hidden in conversations about the nation and national identity.

My own definition of death borrows from Holland’s theory of how people of color are disposed of and dispossessed of their identity through how they die and are mourned. I understand death as both the physical (pain and absence of the body) as well as the metaphorical/symbolic (the collective death of communities along the border or rather how these communities are read as always already dead).

The dead or undead in this case, become less than human, expendable products to be consumed in the service of capitalism. What we do see in representations of the U.S.-Mexico border is the use of the dead (or dying) bodies of people along the border as cheap and free labor. The bodies on the border have been used as cheap labor in maquiladoras, or foreign owned factories.

For instance, through trade agreements such as Border Industrialization Program (BIP) (1964) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (1994), the U.S. expanded the reach of multinational corporations into Mexico. Low production costs in Mexico helped the maquiladoras extract labor and goods while at the same time keeping Mexicans out of the U.S. Mexican labor benefited the U.S. and other nations while Mexicans were forced to live in shanty towns without the necessary infrastructure to survive. The necrolization (marking of something as dead) of the borderlands in governmental accounts and cultural productions, is a reflection of the attempt to dispose of communities by exploiting their bodies for labor and resources and policing their bodies to the point of death. The NAFTA accords, along with growing neoliberal plans, caused many demographic shifts along the US-Mexico border. The rise in factories generated new migration patterns for women from Mexico and Central America. The growing population along the US-Mexico border forced people to live in undeveloped communities, many without running water or electricity. Alongside NAFTA, US governmental initiatives like Operation Gatekeeper made crossing the border harder, not just for immigrants looking for better jobs but for illicit activities such as the drug trade. The channels these different communities used to migrate from Central America to Mexico or from southern Mexico to northern Mexico soon began to overlap, causing new violence along the way. The creation of maquiladoras on the border began with the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in the 1960s (Segura and Zavella, 12). NAFTA led to a rise in the number of maquiladoras as well as a restructuring of where they were located. Because of the lack of tariffs, the United States flooded the Mexican market with cheap goods, thereby limiting the ability of Mexican farmers and producers to compete.

The discourse that labels undocumented immigrants and to a larger extent anyone who looks Latina/o as criminals and dangerous can be viewed as coding communities of color along the U.S.-Mexico border as monstrous and abject, borders must be constructed to keep them out. Most importantly, this discursive strategy facilitates and excuses the violence perpetrated against Latina/os along the border by the U.S. government and by individuals. The border monsters are complex creatures that represent

both the colonial gaze, which sees the “Other” as monsters and disposable labor. At the same time, these monsters hold unique meanings for the communities that are labeled as such. I would argue that by re-appropriating the monstrous identities we can decolonize these monsters and move them away from state sponsored discourses that equate monstrousness with a need for containment and exclusion. Rather, in this essay I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of shadow beast to highlight how inhabiting the monstrous is a necessary step to move forward and gain a new mestiza consciousness. This consciousness is tied to new definitions of family and home that embrace difference and monstrousness. Thus in a site where sponsored violence is separating families new familial structures can help rebuild temporary homes.

Mestizas, Monsters and Shadows

In her article “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection” (1986) and her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (1993) Barbara Creed explores the theory of the monstrous-feminine and its applicability for an understanding of images of women in horror productions, particularly films. In the article, Creed explains “all human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (251). She adds that “the feminine is not per se a monstrous sign; rather, it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse which reveals a great deal about male desires and fears by tells nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific” (*The Monstrous-Feminine*, 70). Thus, Creed claims, women are monstrous only as constructed by patriarchy so that an exploration of their monstrousness tells us more about masculinity and the fears of patriarchy than anything else. Thus, a study of the monstrous in relation to the U.S.-Mexico border can explain how patriarchal structures, such as borders, are gendered constructs.

The concept of the monstrous-feminine is similar to Anzaldúa’s theorization of the Shadow Beast as well. In the introduction to Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands/ La Frontera; The New Mestiza*, Sonia Saldívar-Hull explains how the feminist rebel in her is the Shadow-Beast, “a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities” (Saldívar-Hull 38). The Shadow Beast emerges as the part of women that frightens men and causes discomfort. Girls in the borderland are commonly taught to fear sexuality and learn that men value women’s bodies only. The Shadow-Beast must be embraced in order to move forward and achieve a new mestiza consciousness.

Where Creed and Anzaldúa differ is because the latter pushes for not just an understanding and naming of the monstrous-feminine but the possibility that this monstrous figure is a necessary step in the path to a new consciousness. “Monstrous” then, is a process of “othering” in order to establish something as different and abject. The idea of the monstrous is tied to the concept of the abject. The monstrous is something(s) that pushes boundaries and become scary and threatening by demonstrating that those boundaries exist. As Chicanas, the monstrous is the “Other”, what we have come to hate and are afraid to be. It is the thing we fear in ourselves too, it is framed as primitive, intellectually weak, “dark”. Anzaldúa writes, “If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman doesn’t renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a virgin until she marries, she is a good woman” (*Borderlands/ La Frontera* 39). Thus, for Chicanas, the monstrous identity is inherently linked to breaking of a social/cultural gender norm.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and throughout her published and unpublished works, Anzaldúa points to various stages that must be crossed in order to reach *conocimiento* (knowledge). In “Now let us shift... the path of *conocimiento*...inner work public acts” Anzaldúa lays out seven stages to *conocimiento*: *el arrebatado*, *nepantla*, *Coatlicue state*, *el compromise*, *mending Coyolxuahqui*, and *new knowledge*. (540-576) This process is never ending, cyclical, and non-linear. Anzaldúa argues that these stages appear unexpectedly and must be faced in order to move forward and grow. Living in one stage, she adds, leads to stagnation and spiritual death. Growth, in her theory, is painful and hard since so much of the work requires that we look within ourselves and face our monsters. Suzanne Bost explains “Anzaldúa’s representations of pain embrace corporeal fluctuations and displace the rhetoric of fortresses, defenses, and weapons. A theory of permeable identity-one that includes pain, death, and contact with otherness-would have no need to be so

defensive. Opening subjectivity in this way could have positive political implications” (23). The pain is not romanticized in Anzaldúa’s work, however, it is acknowledged as a real consequence of living between cultures and in sites of violence. As such, this pain allows for moments of recognition and connection.

This painful growth is something we see in Flaca. In the graphic novel *Feeding Ground Flaca*, a young girl, torn between two fathers turns into a literal monster, a werewolf, that must survive life without her family and home after she is forced to cross the border into the U.S. In *Feeding Ground Flaca*’s resignation with her transformation is reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s monstrous Chicana. Of the monstrous figure Anzaldúa writes, she “is a metaphor of displacement, the quintessential *desterrada*. She is the walking wounded, the fear and horror in our lives, the terror” (*Borderlands/ La Frontera* 20). Flaca is this *desterrada*, one without land, forced to move and leave behind family and home because of larger structures of powers and violence. But this loss of home and family that comes from transformation gives her access to new homes and the power to create new “monstrous” families.

The Border and Feeding Grounds

The graphic novel *Feeding Ground* uses the deaths caused by the US Border Patrol’s Prevention through Deterrence strategy as a launching pad from which to create a border landscape not too dissimilar from the real one, except for the addition of werewolves. The title and cover art for the graphic novel *Feeding Ground* written by Swifty Lang and illustrated by Michael Lapinski provide a helpful synopsis of the story before we even open the book. The *Dictionary of Environment and Conservation* (3ed) defines feeding ground as a “place where animals feed naturally” (npg). In the graphic novel there is a clear attempt to address the causes of deaths on the border, particularly through prevention through deterrence, border militarization, and neoliberalism. The theory behind prevention through deterrence is that if certain highly used crossing points along the border were more heavily policed, then immigrants would not try to cross. However, by cutting access to safer and more well-known paths, the US government pushed immigrants to cross using unsafe routes, leading to a rise in deaths. (De Leon 34-37).

With the title, *Feeding Ground*, the novel frames the conversation on institutional violence within one of nature and biology thereby pointing to how the geography is used as a tool of necropolitics. I argue that labeling the border, or in this case the Arizona/Sonora crossing point as a “feeding ground” the graphic novel does two things. First, it plays on the ecological definition of feeding ground to reflect the way animals, in this case werewolves, feed in the desert. Two, this title shows how state sanctioned violence washes its hands of border deaths by placing those deaths at the hands of the geography. In this case, whoever dies on the border or because of the border, is part of a natural feeding cycle, not a victim.

The cover of the first issue in the six-issue series foments this narrative and further pushes it into dangerous territory. On the cover of the first comic, Michael Lapinski illustrates a giant void with three immigrants floating over it. This cavernous void is both the landscape, the hills of the desert, and the mouth of a wolf. The jagged rocks turn into sharp teeth waiting for the immigrants to fall into its mouth. Behind the immigrants the bright yellow sun adds another element of danger, the possibility of dehydration and death. Thus, the crossing immigrants are faced with multiple threats including the supernatural werewolves that are part of the landscape. The geography is then merged with the built landscape to maximize the killing and suffering. *Feeding Ground* incorporates a *maquiladora* as a site where certain bodies are produced. Adding to the natural dangers of the border, such as the heat and lack of water, the border in the graphic novel is filled with immigrants-turned-werewolves working for Blackwell’s multinational corporation.

Blackwell and his werewolves consume undocumented border crossers freely along the border, the border patrol does not punish them for their actions. These two entities, the werewolf *maquiladora* and the border patrol work together to control and punish those that attempt to cross the border. Most interestingly, these werewolves are all undocumented men who attempted to cross the border and intercepted by Blackwell’s army. In this way, the immigrant falls within two categories: the werewolf, a vicious animal unable to control his drive to feed on his own people or a nuisance that the border patrol labels as simply “crossers.”

Through the narrative we learn that Blackwell preys on immigrants crossing the border, particularly

those who are lost and in need of help. His security team finds these dying men and takes them to Blackwell's factory where they are either turned into werewolves or are used to feed these monsters. In her discussion of prevention through deterrence and life on the border, Roxanne Doty explains how "the raw physicality of some natural environments have an inherent power which can be put to use and can function to mask the workings of social and political power"(607). Doty's theory is illustrated in this fictional account of border violence we see the geography used by both Blackwell (a multinational corporation) and the government agents (border patrol) to control who and where people die.

In an early scene of the graphic novel, undocumented immigrants crossing the border with the help of Diego Busqueda are lost and without water. They are stopped by men in full tactical gear who offer to help them and provide water if they go with them to Blackwell's factory. Busqueda warns the immigrants against it, but the men do not see any other choice since their options are limited to either dying on the border or being arrested by Border Patrol. These immigrants are then turned into werewolves.

This encounter highlights the tension between Blackwell and Busqueda who stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. Busqueda is described as a good man who would do anything to help his family but struggles with the guilt of knowing he cannot save everyone who crosses the desert with him. On the other hand, Blackwell is a wealthy descendant of Spaniards who has set up a corporation that feeds off human life and desperation. Busqueda says Blackwell is not "digno" or worthy and Blackwell critiques Busqueda for being old fashioned and not working to leave poverty behind

From this novel, we learn that for decades Blackwell has picked up border crossers to turn them into werewolves or into food for his creations. The border patrol know that he is doing this, but make no effort to stop him because of his wealth and because they see him as aiding in the fight against undocumented immigration. One of them states "Blackwell pickin' up a couple of crossers now and then certainly didn't hurt our stats too much either" (76). Here we see a maquiladora or large corporation on the U.S. side of the border in Arizona. This machine thrives off people of color forced to relocate because of the economic conditions in Mexico, Central, and South America. The relationship between policing the border by government agents Border Patrol and the creation of forced labor by Blackwell) grows toxic as Blackwell's werewolves attack a local police station, declaring war on them. The theory behind prevention through deterrence is that if certain areas along the border, those that immigrants had commonly used, were more heavily policed then immigrants would not try to cross. (De Leon 31-32) However, by cutting off access to safer and well-known paths into the U.S., the federal government pushed immigrants to cross through unsafe routes leading to a rise in deaths. Scholars in anthropology and political science such as Wayne A. Cornelius, Madeliene J. Hinkes, and Peter Andreas have studied the complex relationship between militarization and the changing face of death among immigrants crossing the border. Andreas, for example, shows the cyclical nature of Prevention Through Deterrence which has created a "more organized" smuggling business "which has served to justify still tougher laws and tougher enforcement" (98). The increase policing and the shifts in crossing ports has created a vicious cycle that increases deaths but also increases the policing of the border. The Colibri Center for Human Rights reports that between 1998 to 2013 an estimated 6,330 people died while attempting to cross the border (npg). Again, the most interesting aspect of these werewolves is that they themselves are undocumented immigrants. The factory we see in Feeding Ground provides a nuanced representation of the border because it does not end in death or victimization exclusively. The werewolves, particularly young Flaca, are changed by the border machine but not killed by it. She is turned into a powerful monster.

The werewolves, particularly young Flaca, are changed by the border machine, but not killed by it.

Shadow Beasts and Monstrous Homes

In her unpublished dissertation found at the Nettie Lee Benson Library, Gloria Anzaldúa proposes the concepts of "La Llorona Complex" and the "Monstrous Chicana." In this text, she bridges psychoanalytic theory, horror studies and Chicana studies in her construction of and calling forth of the

Monstrous Chicana. Anzaldúa provides an interesting framework of how cross-disciplinary fields such as film studies, horror studies, Chicana studies and feminist studies can be used to read and analyze cultural productions. Here I apply Anzaldúa's Monstrous Chicana theory on the character of Flaca to explore the possibilities of reaching *conocimiento* through embracing the monstrous.

Monstrousness is way to speak of dangerous feminine desires that threaten familial structures. In a patriarchal society, sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is one of the greatest and most feared taboos. Sex and death are an integral part of the horror film genre because "sexual behavior and its ultimate purpose, procreation or bearing of children, are quite clearly the antithesis of death. If one is to examine death, then one must examine sex" (Hogan xii). They are linked through the female body because women, through childbirth, are able to create life. Horror, then, is constantly concerned with a fear of women's bodies and sexuality that can "castrate" and threaten patriarchal structures. Worland writes that monsters are "a liminal figure, an uncertain amalgam or transitional form between living and dead; human and animal; male and female" (9). If we change the way the monstrous is read, we can allow change the paradigm so the monstrous can also speak to feminine desires and different definitions of home.

In *Feeding Ground* we see the border personified as it speaks, "across my spine—the soles of men kindled an ache for flesh—I have stripped sandals and broke bone from boot—smashed wagon wheels and lapped blood from the links of chains—sucked marrow from the threads of tanks and I welcome every offering—yet I am still thirsty" (49). There is no guilt or regret just an acknowledgment of a never-ending hunger, one that feeds on anyone caught there. The border takes indiscriminately.

The border equates the victims as machines, as men and women who are forced to cross the border seem to not be part of the landscape's menu. Now this can be read in multiple ways. Perhaps the authors mean "men" in a general way; a universal, all-inclusive mankind. Perhaps the authors of *Feeding Ground* did not think of the growing number of women who cross the border, or perhaps they are influenced by Luis Alberto Urrea's *Devil's Highway* and other real-life stories. I want to propose another reading.

As the graphic novel progressed we learn that only men can turn into werewolves since the transformation would kill women. Flaca is the outlier, the only woman (or young girl) that becomes a werewolf. There is something in her blood that makes her special and unique. She is a young, innocent, mestiza girl strong enough to survive the transformation and be Blackwell's future heir. At the end of the graphic novel, Diego Busqueda, Flaca's human father, finds himself battling Blackwell, Flaca's monstrous progenitor, over her soul. Diego wants her to remain "human" and his "little girl." Blackwell wants her to set him free from the werewolf curse that has kept him alive since his participation in the Spanish colonization of Mexico.

Caught between these two figures is Flaca, Busqueda's young daughter whose body is slowly changing and morphing into something monstrous. Flaca turns into a werewolf and first kills her father Diego and then her creator Blackwell. Flaca, then, becomes the key to the future of the werewolf population. Flaca's monstrousness, i.e., her werewolf condition, is painful in that she is forced not only to kill her father but to leave her family behind. This condition was placed upon her by Blackwell; however, she does not fall victim. Rather, through her new-found power, she becomes a young survivor of violence on the U.S.-Mexico border. After the bloodbath, she emerges from the Blackwell compound, reborn, a new type of mestiza.

Flaca's uniqueness in being a mother figure to the werewolf clan is interesting. by reading them through a chicana feminist lens, particularly through Anzaldúa's concept of monstrous chicana, I argue that the border/body other actually creates a new type a home and belonging. Gloria Anzaldúa writes about an encounter with a student who though homophobia meant fear of going home. Anzaldúa theorizes homophobia as "Fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged" (42). So if home is a site of fear and danger, particularly for those "atravesadas" or in between beings that don't fit in and can't/won't be accepted then how can we redefine home to include these *atravesadas*? The geography (borderlands) is reworked in *Feeding Ground* and in the end the fear of going home can be replaced by creating new homes or a strange destruction and reappropriation of these toxic homes.

There is a clear relationship between the female body and the geography. In the last page of the graphic

novel, the speech bubbles for the border (black squares) merge with Flaca's round and white speech bubble. One finishes the other's sentences merging into one voice. Once turned into werewolf, Flaca leaves behind Blackwell's home, now overrun with werewolves fighting against border patrol agents. She lets these toxic agents destroy each other while she walks away to create something new through her monstrousness. (Lang 175).

The concept of the monstrous feminine shares similarities with Anzaldúa's theorization of the Shadow Beast. Sonia Saldívar Hull explains how the feminist rebel is the Shadow-Beast, "a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities" (38). The Shadow Beast emerges as the part of women that frightens men and causes them to try to control and devalue female culture. Flaca can be read as the Shadow Beast that is "feared" by men because she has developed into a new, uncontrollable, creature. Like the border, the werewolf Flaca threatens to consume and contaminate anyone that comes in contact with them.

Of course, there is another side to the way the monstrous figure can be understood. The complexity of the monstrous figure creates a dystopic space where non-normative sexuality can exist. Women's constructed monstrosity is related to her sexuality, especially when that sexuality steps outside the borders of what is considered acceptable gender roles. Gloria Anzaldúa writes "to be monstrous is to be inhuman, not-human. A woman becomes monstrous when her lover/husband rejects her [...] If a Chicana accepts and takes up her assigned gender role she is normal and good, if she does not she is abnormal and evil, i.e. monstrous" (Borderlands/La Frontera 19). Chicanas are constructed as monstrous only when they step outside of their role as daughter, wife and/or mother.

Representations of Latinas are outside whiteness and also outside normative views of femininity for white women. In regard to representations of Latinas in U.S. popular culture, Isabel Molina Guzmán argues that they are coded both as desirable and consumable. To fall within normative standards, they must police themselves and discipline their body. Molina Guzmán adds, "Latinas embody the twenty-first-century project of discipline, productivity, and docility through the ways in which class, race, ethnicity, and gender intersect in media discourses about them" (13). Thus, the representation of Latinas must fit within a specific standard in order to be consumable by the American audience. This privileges an approach to gender and sexuality that is heteronormative and universal.

The monstrous Chicana in Anzaldúa's work and in *Feeding Ground* is one that breaks the boundaries between self and other in moments of transformation and growth. Her identity is constantly in flux as she moves towards a new mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa describes this process as one of *amasamiento* or kneading. She writes

Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward (Borderlands/ La Frontera 102).

Flaca is this new evolutionary form, a girl turned monstrous by the violence of the border but who in turn uses this new identity to create new homes and new ways of being.

Conclusion—Monstrous Mestiza Futures

To many of us, the U.S.-Mexico border is more than a space where death occurs, it is home. I grew up seeing visually grotesque and violent images of the U.S.-Mexico border that circulated on the Texas/Tamaulipas borderlands in the late 1990's and early 2000s. The border was imagined as a monolithic space of violence and death, particularly the Mexican side. As soon as you crossed the border, death was waiting for you. And not just any death, but a violent, grotesque death. Monsters lived in Mexico.

My focus on this geopolitical region or geographical region is personal and, driven by my own visceral response to representations that mark my home as dangerous, violent and dead. Through this reading of Flaca, I propose that a deeper understanding of the monstrous Chicana in Gloria Anzaldúa's work is necessary to begin a decolonization process by creating new homes and familial structures. Through the usurpation of the traditional familial structure by the monstrous chicanas (in this case Flaca) abjection becomes the norm, opening doors to dystopic homes where again the residents

are not complacent subjects waiting for violent deaths but rather active participants in this strange borderlands world where danger is present but victimhood isn't the only path. Transformation pain and monstrosity are constantly used as tools to bring about change and create new familial structures.

In the graphic novel *Feeding Ground* the burden of creating new families and new homes fall on the Latina body, Flaca through their monstrousness (werewolf identity) which brings about change (violent as it might be) to the normative familial structure. This process is one of pain. Anzaldúa describes the transformation into a new consciousness as one laden with pain, loss, and change. "At first la nueva historia resembles Shelley's Frankenstein monster—mismatched parts pieced together artificially—but soon the new rendition fuels your drive to seek alternative and emerging knowledge" ("Now let us" 561). In the end, Flaca creates new homes and makes her own story as a response to trauma and pain inflicted on border dwellers. The graphic novel ends with Flaca, covered in blood, walking towards the reader. She states, "I am still hungry...". I would like to imagine that this hunger is not just her werewolf drive to feed but one for growth and change. Perhaps, as Anzaldúa has invited us to do, Flaca floating embraces the monstrous and makes new paths for herself and others border monsters. Through the image of Flaca as monster and the personification of the border, this text reflects Anzaldúa's call to embrace the monstrous and to create a dystopic new home for border dwellers where safety is not guaranteed but violent death and victimhood aren't the only options.

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