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THE CANCIÓN CANNIBAL CABARET AND OTHER SONGS:
FEMINISTS OF A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE
REPURPOSE A PUNK PAST

A Thesis

by

AMALIA L. ORTIZ

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2016

Major Subject: Creative Writing

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FEMINISTS OF A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE
REPURPOSE A PUNK PAST

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by
AMALIA L. ORTIZ

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Emmy Pérez, M.F.A.
Chair of Committee

Marci McMahon, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Cathryn Merla-Watson, Ph.D.
Committee Member

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

Ortiz, Amalia L., The Canción Cannibal Cabaret and other Songs: Feminists of a Dystopian Future Repurpose a Punk Past. Master of Fine Arts (MFA), May, 2016, 97 pp., references, 96 titles.

This collection of poem songs is an experiment in combining poetry and theatre. Focused on the theme of revolution and inspired by current issues of social justice, the manuscript is set in a not-so-distant future. After an environmental apocalypse, a refugee raised under an oppressive state, La Madre Valiente studies secretly to become the leader of a feminist revolution. Her emissaries roam the land telling her story, educating others, and enlisting allies in revolution. My goal is to transform the text into live theatrical performances, so that the manuscript serves both as a poetry collection and as a script. Some critics have expressed a disdain for performance poetry arguing that it relies on theatrics, and have argued that overtly political poetry is too didactic and not subtle enough for some tastes. This manuscript is decidedly political and deliberately theatrical in order to build a case for the need for performance poetry. Images and links to online video from works-in-progress performances of the manuscript are also included in the documentation of the text as a three dimensional art form.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all those artists who rose from the filthy and un-loved fringes to create their own meaning by repurposing garbage, scraps, and hand-me-downs, but specifically Michele Serros, Maggie Estep, David Bowie, Lou Reed, Jim Carroll, Amiri Baraka, The Ramones, Mujeres Libres, Gil Scott-Heron, MCA, Phife Dog, Camandanta Ramona, Prince and all those others who rocked rebellion and have moved on.

I also dedicate this to my husband Kip Austin Hinton. Dr. Kip rocks hard.

To all the revolutionaries who are able to successfully articulate their struggles into art and action, and to all the young ones—those about to rock—I salute you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to my committee and the professors at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. I would especially like to thank Professor Emmy Pérez for allowing me to “do me” and also for her help guiding me through the academic system after I had been out of for over 15 years. Thank you to Dr. Marci McMahon, my theatre colleague and MAS ally. Thanks to Dr. Cathryn Merla-Watson for the last-inning guidance on speculative fiction. Thank you, Dr. Jean Braithwaite, for being one tough professor in all the best ways. And respect knuckles to UTRGV’s WAKE–UP! (Women Artistically Kollecing Experiencias–Unidas Prosperado!) performance group.

I would also like to thank City Lit Press for publishing my poem, “La Frontera te Llama” in their anthology, *Clash by Night*, Rebelené Press for accepting some of the poem songs in this collection for publication in chapbook form, and Dr. Cathryn Merla-Watson and Ben Olguín for accepting a portion of this thesis for publication in the book, *Altermundos: Latin@ Speculative Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*.

Huge tsunamis of gratitude are owed to my best reader, Kip Austin Hinton, for accompanying me on his guitar, arranging music in so many of my performances, and respecting my artistic space and vision.

Fuck the haters. They are blinded by their own pettiness and cannot see your shine.

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CHAPTER I

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

*“Performance art does not subscribe to the tradition
of High Culture. It is revolutionary art.”*

Norman Denzin

By the time I began my graduate school experience in 2012, I had already amassed a body of work and recognition as a performance poet. In order to document my personal history as a writer, the first section of this introduction will focus on my influences and experiences as a writer before I entered graduate school: this personal history before graduate school is important to include, because it contextualizes my work and shows how my writing has slowly evolved into the kind of feminist activist performance art I create with my thesis. The second section will focus more specifically on my thesis manuscript, *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret*, which is a collection of poem songs and prose poems set in a post-apocalyptic future that tell the story of the revolutionary leader “La Madre Valiente” and incite future revolutionaries to join in her intersectional feminist activism. After an environmental apocalypse, a refugee raised under an oppressive state, La Madre Valiente studies secretly to become the leader of a feminist revolution. Her emissaries, Black Bards and Red Heralds, roam the land telling her story, educating others, and enlisting allies in revolution.

In order to understand my poetics, you must understand where I come from: I am a Chicana feminist from the lower Rio Grande Valley. I grew up in a working-class home in La

Feria, Texas. My roots are planted in Mexico, and I am completely American. This duality informs my writing. While I do not reference my heritage in everything I write, the experience of growing up on the border has been so extreme that themes of borderland politics and culture are most prevalent in my work. I have found myself drawn to counter-cultural forms of expression such as spoken word, punk rock, and hip-hop. Additionally, my own hybridity compels me to mix other distinct cultural forms that may not seem connected initially. My grandmother, a Mexican immigrant, raised me and only spoke to me in Spanish. Believing that she was preparing me to be more marketable in a U.S. workforce, I was not encouraged to speak Spanish to her. Spanglish, a mixture of the two, was the language of my household.

Performance is important to me as an artist, because I am trained in theatre as an actor. My life of defiance, in rebellion to the mainstream, began when I decided to study theater in college. This was a bold move at a time when Jennifer López was still a Fly Girl, Jessica Alba was still in grade school, and Salma Hayek was doing *telenovelas* in Mexico. Latinas in leading roles in mainstream media were close to non-existent. Still, throughout high school I had been in plays such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and I was named "Best Actress" in my district and a member of the "All-Star Cast" at the regional level for my role in *Marat/Sade* by Peter Weiss. By pursuing theater, I decided that I wanted to learn what I wanted to learn. I tried to block out of my head the reality of what work was available for a Latina trained in theater.

My older brother, Benjamin, left the Valley two years before I did to attend Loyola University of Chicago. My first Christmas vacation after I began college in 1990, I travelled to Chicago for the first time to visit him. It was then that I first experienced the Chicago spoken word scene. I must have gone to a different coffee house every day of my three week stay, and every one had poetry events ranging from open mics, to featured readers to poetry slams. "A

poetry slam is a performance contest: judges are chosen from the audience and asked to rate each performer's poem from one to ten. Every poet is given three minutes to read an original poem.” (Glazner 11) The writers I saw perform there were either white or African American. I knew nothing about their backgrounds, but they all shared the characteristic of high energy performance of their work. I recall a punk poet paced back and forth among the audience yelling and embodying the anger of his poem. I was raised Southern Baptist, and the African American poets reminded me of the ministers I had grown up listening to or watching on television. This first visit to Chicago forever changed what I thought poetry could be.

What is most striking about my education is what I did not study. Throughout high school and undergraduate I was never assigned any Mexican American authors. I read *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *Borderlands, La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa on the recommendation of my brother, Benjamin. As a theater major at the University of Incarnate Word, I was not required to read any Latinx plays in any of my classes in order to graduate. My knowledge of Latinx theater history began and ended with 4 short paragraphs in *History of Theatre* by Dr. Oscar Brockett.

While an undergraduate student, I also came to read *Roosters* and *Latina* by Milcha Sanchez-Scott, *Molly's Dream* by Maria Irene Fornes, and *Johnny Tenorio* by Carlos Morton: yet I was only exposed to these plays because I created costumes for three of these plays, and was cast as an actress in the other. My university would produce one Latinx play a year, even though the school was situated in San Antonio, a city with a majority Latinx population. The only other Latinx literature I was required to read was *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. That was the extent of my formal learning about Latinx arts and letters – these titles I can count on two hands.

By my senior year, I was already becoming aware of how my studies were lacking culturally. I secured a work-study position in the university's costume shop and was repeatedly counseled by faculty that there would always be paying work for me after graduation as a costume designer. The unspoken subtext was there would not be a need for me as a performer. As a costume designer, I had begun researching garments of indigenous cultures worldwide and even designed an indigenous take on *Blood Wedding* by Federico García Lorca depicting "The Moon" character as la Virgen de Guadalupe among other deliberate anachronisms. This was one of my first acts of defiance against an educational institution which seemed to erase my culture from its curriculum.

It was in my last semester as an undergraduate that I had to complete a scholarly paper on a topic of my choice. During my research on indigenous cultures, I stumbled across information on Augusto Boal who taught theatre techniques to Peruvian indigenous communities for the purpose of empowering them to be able to comment on their own political oppression. I was moved by Boal's challenge in *Theater of the Oppressed*: "Now the oppressed people are liberated themselves and, once more, are making the theatre their own. The walls must be torn down" (119). My final paper, then, was an exploration of the idea of "theater for community development" — a theatre not meant to simply entertain or create celebrity, but a theatre aimed at empowering the audience and strengthening community. This undergraduate paper later became the theoretical inspiration for the kind of projects I have been creating and want to continue to be a part of today. Boal recommended that "the theatrical experience should begin not with something alien to the people (theatrical techniques that are taught or imposed) but with the bodies of those who agree to participate in the experiment" (127). In this way, Boal's work led me to consider the audience in terms of creating an accessible and not completely alienating

experience. His ideas also influenced how I use language in my writing to connect with a Latinx community which has been denied literacy and access to literacy. Although the above quote refers to teaching theater techniques, it can be applied to my use of language in my performances. When addressing a specifically non-academic audience, I cannot afford to alienate that audience with diction that is outside of that audience's culture. A huge concern in my writing is keeping my work accessible to those outside the academy.

My real education began in 1996, when I graduated college. My brother Benjamin was working toward his masters' degree in Chicano Studies at Stanford and he would supplement my reading with his favorite titles such as *Massacre of the Dreamers* by Ana Castillo and *Chicana Falsa* by the late Michele Serros. I especially connected with Serros. As Ulin reflects on Serros in the *Los Angeles Times* shortly after her death: "Throughout the 1990s Serros was a staple on the Los Angeles spoken word scene. She once organized a publication party in the form of a quinceañera, all the writers performing in festive gowns, and in 1994 she was chosen as one of 12 poets to tour with Lollapalooza". Her involvement with the countercultural expression of poetry slam and her connection with the grunge music scene of the 1990s Lollapalooza music tour, along with the production of her own spoken-word CD *Chicana Falsa*, illustrated alternative paths to literary production which I would emulate in my own involvement with spoken word and production of my own CD, *No Punk*.

It was also around this time that my brother introduced me (in person—not metaphorically) to David Rice, Raúl Salinas, Dr. Ben Olguin (who my brother knew from their shared time at Stanford), and Trinidad Sanchez Jr. They knew me at Benjamin's little sister for many years, and knew Benjamin as the up-and-coming poet on the verge of publishing his first collection. The collection was not ultimately published, because my brother had an issue with the

publisher who wanted him to change a line of one of his poems. In a persona piece about a young hood kid, at one point he wonders to himself about killing the President of the United States. Benjamin would not change the line, and my feeling is that the argument and not the line itself dissolved his relationship with the publisher. My brother gave up writing poetry shortly after this incident.

Also in 1996, I secured employment at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center (GCAC) two months after graduation. It was while I worked at the GCAC for three and a half years that my identity as a Chicana feminist was cemented and my Tejana aesthetic was formed. Within my first year there I was exposed to arts events such as “Hecho A Mano,” “The Tejano Conjunto Festival,” “The Inter-American Book Festival,” “Cinefestival,” Grupo Animo teen theater performances, and various other author readings, art openings, and Chicanx theatre and music events. I worked backstage as either a dresser, stage-manager, or stage crew, working closely with professional performers such as Astrid Haddad, Sergio Arau, María Elena Gaitán, and Diane Rodríguez to name a few. Equally as inspirational, I worked as a stagehand for an indigenous theatre troupe from Chiapas.

The GCAC at that time housed visual arts, music, literature, theater, film, and dance programs with classes and cultural programming in all six disciplines. I supplemented my home library with books from Latinx authors I had never been exposed to before such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Américo Paredes from the Guadalupe Bookstore. It was here that I was first exposed to the Chicanx performance poetry of Tammy Gomez, Carmen Tafolla, and Luis Alfaro. Seeing Luis Alfaro perform made a huge impression on me. He provided a path for combining poetry and performance with the release of his spoken-word CD *Downtown*, which contained much of the same writing which constituted his one-man theatrical show of the same name. It

was also at the Guadalupe that a performance poet, Robert Karimi, first encouraged me to create my own projects as a theater artist. He was emphatic about his distrust of mainstream media and warned me that only I could tell my stories.

The Director of Theatre, Jorge Piña, also directly encouraged me to write and perform my own work telling me that if I was an artist I needed to “do the art” and not remain behind the scenes. Piña also encouraged me to convert my poetry into theatre when he commissioned my one-woman show *Otra Esa* on the Public Transit for production at Talento Bilingüe de Houston in 2005. Connections I made with other working artist at the Guadalupe in the mid-90s are still very strong today.

By 1998, my brother, Benjamin, had completed his masters, and after years of freelancing for various Chicago publications, he was hired as the arts editor for *The San Antonio Current*. He had always been one of the strongest influences on my life as the only family member who demanded that I achieve in high school, become a critical thinker, and attend college. When he moved to San Antonio, he changed my life once more in 1999 by creating and hosting San Antonio’s first ongoing weekly poetry slam, *PuroSlam*.

I had seen poetry slams in Austin and Chicago before *PuroSlam* was created, but I had not yet competed in one. My brother chose to host a slam because he felt that the competition would force poets to develop a responsibility to their audience. Since heckling and audience participation is encouraged at poetry slams, poets receive immediate feedback— good or bad—to which they must respond. The scoring and heckling was a device to wrestle poetry away from academia and give the average person a voice on the poetry scene:

In 1986, Marc Smith started the Poetry Slam in Chicago with the idea of giving the audience a voice, letting the audience say if they liked a poem. By cultivating

their participation, poetry slams build an audience for poetry, bringing everyday workers, bus drivers, waitresses, and cops to a poetry reading and letting them cut loose. (Glazner 11)

The slam aesthetic which I immediately connected with gelled with my goal of engaging audiences outside of the academy.

My brother Ben initially invited me to help organize the event, but I felt a need to participate creatively rather than administratively. In the weeks leading up to the first San Antonio slam, I watched films of performances by poets who had won at the National Poetry Slam including *SlamNation* and *Slam*. My initial approach to writing was therefore as a performer imitating Chicago-style performance poets and National Poetry Slam participants.

Another strong early influence was music—from hip-hop lyricists to punk rock wordsmiths I had collected in books and CDs over the years such as those by Henry Rollins, Nick Cave, Michael Franti, and Jim Carroll. *Spare Ass Annie & Other Tales* by William Burroughs also taught me that even the strongest, most recognized of writers could reach new audiences by adding music and performance to the mix. The first poems I threw together in order to compete in the poetry slam were hip-hop inspired monologues and punk fueled rants. I memorized my pieces, rehearsed them in front of a mirror as I had been taught in theatre, blocked movement, and interacted with the audience as an actor does in comedy improvisation.

With the exception of two male MCs (hip-hop vocalists or rappers) who were used to delivering memorized, high energy performances, most of my fellow competitors at that first slam read nervously from their printed texts and often shied away from audience interaction. As the only female who rose to the performance level of local MCs, I distinguished myself and won the first 4 slams in a row. When I finally did place second, I lost to an MC. I immediately

realized that the only way to advance from one round to the next in a slam, and subsequently read more (each round the lowest scoring poets do not advance to the next round), was to make sure my performance energy matched that of a musician or entertainer.

Within months of that first *PuroSlam* in 1999, I had gained a name locally as one of San Antonio's most dynamic spoken word poets. It seems after years of being relegated to a "backstage" position, I had finally found a creative performance outlet in the spotlight. But with that growing popularity, I quickly felt a responsibility to my audience. For one, I was one of the only females competing who received local success. Many women complained that slam audiences were too brutal in their heckling and interaction with the poets. This was something I had to address myself often—very vocally and angrily—responding to such hecklers in an attempt to influence the rest of the audience that embraced me. It was around this time, that I wrote "Cat Calls" recently published in my first collection of poetry, *Rant. Chant. Chisme.*, as a response to misogyny I experienced at the slam and also daily on the streets surrounding the Guadalupe. The area was frequented by prostitutes, and men would often harass any women travelling on foot:

What was I thinking
actually worrying
about things that don't concern me
like education and respect?
When all I really need—
more than flowers
more than candy
more than respect—
is a hunk'a hunk'a man in a hunk'a hunk'a car,
and those drive by love notes to convince me that,
"I think I'm in love too!"

Hit me with one of those cat calls.
You've finally hit on the one thing that
drives me wild.

I just hope your daughter gets to meet
such giving men
as you. (Ortiz 90)

After I wrote it, I had a great moment of catharsis when I chased after the first man who cat-called me. I ran after the driver screaming the poem at the top of my lungs, and continued when he got stopped at a red light. I knew that man would think twice before yelling at a woman on the street again. But at the slam, the poem served another purpose. It showed potential hecklers that women at slam might verbally attack back if harassed. In realizing my place as one of such a small number of women of color competing, I felt a responsibility to represent them in content and purpose, and respond when one of them was threatened. At this time, Chicana feminist themes became more prevalent in my writing.

My art became irrevocably linked to my personal politics in 1999, when I filed date rape charges against a man. I was devastated when the charges were dropped due to lack of evidence.. After this personal tragedy, I would always try to use my writing to regain power over the issues to which make me feel powerless. I also found that when I do, it also creates dialogue with others feeling the same powerlessness. I knew I had to react to my own feelings of powerlessness through the strongest tool I had, art. Revisiting my research on Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*, I decided to create a theater piece to promote a safer community for women. I founded an all-female poetry-theater collective by handing out flyers at local poetry readings and accepting any women who took the time to show up to rehearsals. The group, Women of Ill Repute: Refute! (WOIR:R), produced and toured a two-hour play dealing with women's issues. The group of 11 women (5 writers, 4 actresses, and two women with no experience in either) wrote and staged our poetry incorporating costumes, props, music, movement and lighting. The writers helped the

non-writers write, and the actors helped the non-performers with acting. The emotional event gave me a glimpse of change I never considered possible

It was from this point on that I embraced feminism as one of the larger influences on my art. In these earlier days of my career, my feminism was rooted in Chicana feminism and third wave feminism. In my new manuscript, however, I am most interested in intersectional feminism which acknowledges classism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of oppression as connected. In the introduction to a special issue of the *National Women's Studies Association Journal* focused on feminist activist art, Mary Jo Agerstoun and Elissa Auther define feminist activist art as:

Feminist activist art is characterized here as simultaneously critical, positive, and progressive. By critical we mean work that seeks to expose underlying ideologies or existing structures that have a negative effect on women and their lives; by positive we mean work that takes a stand, expressing its maker's faith in achieving results or positing alternatives; by progressive we mean a belief in the feminist tenets of equality and inclusiveness, a better world free of sexism, racism, homophobia, economic inequality, and violence. These ideals distinguish feminist activist art from myriad other forms of activism (some of which also utilize visual or performance forms).

Agerstoun and Auther's description applies to a large amount of my work beginning with WOIR:R. All proceeds from the show were donated to the San Antonio Rape Crisis Center. Beyond its therapeutic effects on all women involved, the show had real-life impact by educating audiences and supporting rape survivors. We partnered with other women's organizations such as the Martinez Street Women's Center, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, and the San

Antonio Birth Doulas, strengthening community for women locally. Most personally satisfying, I donated my time and travel funds to perform at the first ever Take Back the Night rally in Harlingen, Texas just 8 miles from my hometown in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This was also my first performance in the Valley.

Because of my success in the poetry slam world in San Antonio and beyond (as the first three time San Antonio Slam Champion, appearing on the Nation Poetry Slam stage as the first Latinx to perform in the national finals, and being on team San Antonio which place 2nd in the nation in 2001), I was invited to appear on three seasons of *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry* on HBO. Aside from the honor of being invited back, and being picked to represent the show in a performance at the *NAACP Image Awards*, I am most proud that I received “special thanks” in the show’s credits as I was trusted to recruit other Latinx writers for the show (I did so by selecting them, which led them to bypass the general auditions and submit their audition tapes directly to the producers). Two writers I referred were invited to tape for the show.

My involvement with *Def Poetry* began shortly after the September 11th attacks in 2001. More and more poetry on the show as well as in the slam community began to address the growing xenophobia in the United States. In reaction to the post-9-11 debate on immigration, I began to focus on my own personal connection to growing up on the frontlines of the frontera. I was honored to be asked to submit writing to the publication *Deportation Nation* by Calaca Press. Through a grant from the city of San Diego, this publication was given out for free at readings and art events to bring attention to the ICE raids which were and continue to terrorize the Latinx communities of California.

Old Colossus, Resurrected

What brazen giant disturbs our Mother of Exiles?
Whose conquering limbs have freed her enlightening torch?

Is her imprisoned lightning extinguished,
Her beacon breached, her silent invitation revoked,
Replaced with tempests thrashing the trespassing masses? (Ortiz, Perez, and Vera
9)

As anti-immigrant sentiment and legislation increased in post 9-11 U.S., I chose to challenge it through my writing about immigrants and my homeland.

Since writing the poem “The Women of Juárez” (about femicides occurring in the city of Juárez, Mexico) which appeared on the *Def Poetry* show, I have twice donated performances to the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) during their annual V-Day Celebration. Proceeds went to Casa Amiga Centro de Crisis in Juárez, which works directly with families of missing women. This poem which also appears in my first book, is an example of the type of poetry which interests me most and which is a precursor to the poetry of my thesis project:

at the West tip of Texas
a line divides us from them
and they, on the other side
they all look like me
yet on my side we sit passively nearby
while the other side allows a slow genocide

500 missing women
some claim more
some less
some dismissed as runaways
against parents’ protest
hundreds found dead
hundreds still missing
the exact count is a mystery
and those disappearing daily
they all look like me (Ortiz 80)

This poem was featured in *The Line Between Us: Teaching about the Texas Mexico Border* (2006) which is used in high school classrooms and teacher training programs at universities. I

was also invited back to UTEP in 2015 to give the keynote address for their annual “Take Back the Night” event. My poetry continues to seek connection to community activism.

In retrospect, many of my experiences and choices have been steps toward forging my own alternative perspective to the mainstream. Rather than working for large newspapers and network television, I wrote for an alternative weekly paper, *The San Antonio Current* in the early 2000s. Rather than working as a public school teacher, I taught an after school program for the experimental performance theater, The Jump-Start Performance Company in San Antonio. While my college theater colleagues joined popular repertories or the Hollywood mainstream, I became disillusioned with the exclusion of Latinx perspectives, so I focused on creating original theater including: *Fear of a Brown Planet*, *Poch@*, *Otra Esa on the Public Transit*, and *Carmen de la Calle*. Performance is my passion. Original, alternative forms of theater express and shape my activism. Although I will always write poetry, performance will always be central to my work.

So far, all of my original theatre projects have incorporated original poetry. *Women of Ill Repute: Refute!* for example was comprised 100% of staged poetry. The poem “Cat Calls” for example, was split up among a poetry choir and converted into a chorus of disgruntled women. Other poems were delivered as monologues or converted into dialogue between two or more people.

In March 2005, I premiered my one-woman show, *Otra Esa on the Public Transit* at Talento Bilingüe de Houston. In this show, I depicted various characters in San Antonio that one would meet while riding the bus. Once again, my poetry was staged in the form of monologues, but this show also contained non-poetic monologues written specifically for the show, which functioned to tie the poetry together.

At the same time I was writing *Otra Esa*, I also collaborated with two San Francisco area poets, Marc Pinate and Paul Flores on writing the play, *Fear of a Brown Planet*. This show was yet another evolutionary leap in my writing: it was not just a collection of poems and scenes revolving around a theme like *Otra Esa* and *WOIR:R*. Instead, we began the script by constructing a plot and writing scenes first and adding poetry second. *Fear of a Brown Planet* was a loose adaptation of *No Exit* by Jean Paul Sartre. In it, three Chicanxs—a construction worker, a radical lawyer, and a Hispanic socialite—find themselves detained in an internment camp with no memory of how they got there and without any explanation of the charges against them. The show references the Post 9-11 political climate including those indefinitely detained in Guantanamo Bay and those tortured at the Abu Ghraib prison. The structure of the play was similar to classic Greek theatre. A scene of dialogue would be followed by a poem performed by a chorus. Thus, we weaved in and out of reality and a poetic world.

After *Brown Planet* ran in San Francisco, Houston, Denver, and Miami, I began working with the San Antonio theatre collective, MadMedia. I have collaborated and toured with the group in two stage plays, *Poch@* and *What Are You Doing Tonight*. I also performed spoken word in their variety show pilot, *Capirotada*. I continue to collaborate with them to this day, often adding my own original scenes of poems to full-length sketch shows. Most recently, I performed a spoken-word concert, “Southside Serenade”, with MadMedia in 2003 as a fundraiser for Centro para la Semilla, a service organization which addresses the consequences of poverty by creating accessible education programs in the arts and nutrition for children living on the Southside of San Antonio.

In February 2010, I was awarded a Hedgebrook residency and spent three weeks in a cabin on Whidbey Island writing *Carmen de la Calle*. Set in 1989 San Antonio and in the

present, this adaptation of Georges Bizet's classic opera dives deep into the themes of passion and envy in portraying the lives and struggles of the marginalized and working classes of South Texas. *Carmen de la Calle* highlights the hybridity of Tex-Mex culture by incorporating the melodrama of novelas (Mexican soap operas), spoken word, bilingualism, and the musical confluence of Mexican standards, modern Tejano, Hip-Hop and the music of 1989 pop culture. *Carmen* was my most complex writing yet, because it was the first full-length play which I wrote by myself. As a musical, it weaves in and out of dialogue, music, and poetry with dialogue written into song and even dialogue written in verse form.

I moved back to the Rio Grande Valley in September of 2011 and began graduate school in August of 2012. While I grew up here in the Valley, I had not lived here in over 20 years. I moved back when my husband accepted a job teaching at UT Brownsville, now part of UTRGV. I immediately knew when my husband took the job that I was moving to a region where the arts are not generally considered essential, and paying jobs in the arts are almost non-existent. Moving back to the RGV was a huge leap for me since I have worked in theatre and performing arts since I graduated college in 1996.

Don't get me wrong, I was excited to be back—especially since the border is one of the biggest influences on my writing. But my biggest fear about moving back was not having venues to support or produce my work or a strong artist community to collaborate with. When I grew up here, I never saw original theatre. When I moved back to the RGV, I realized I would have to go back to school to be close to an institution that might support the development of my work and provide an artistic community. While I have definitely connected with a community during my five years here, I have not always felt the university's support for producing my work. Rehearsal spaces for student productions are disputed territories, where theatre, music and dance students

are given precedence over first choice picks of rehearsal spaces. As a creative writing student, I was constantly met confusion by university facility management when I expressed a need for a rehearsal space for my work—the default understanding being, “writers don’t rehearse the performance of their work.”

At one point, I suspended my MFA classes for a semester, and taught and after-school performance workshop through Centro para la Semilla, while I contemplated whether I would even finish my MFA. I have always favored practical application in the arts over academia. Yet, one of the advantages of being in graduate school after 16 years of working professionally in writing, theater, and performance is that my studies are not theoretical. I understand the real-life effect of performance. I also know exactly the kind of artist I am and the type of work I want to do. I came to the university to help me fulfill these concrete goals. I was never so much interested in receiving an advanced degree as I was in tapping into resources to keep me connected to an artistic community. With an MFA, I really don’t envision myself teaching. In a perfect world, I would like to be a company member of a theatre and write and produce a new play every year as a part of that theatre’s season. That is possible in a city like San Antonio, but not yet possible in the Rio Grande Valley. I would also like to continue writing poetry and hosting events which promote literacy to audiences which may not be naturally attracted to the arts.

One saving grace of my experience at UTRGV, however, has been my involvement with W.A.K.E. U.P! (Women Artistically Collecting Experiencias—Unidas Prosperando.) a female writing collective weaving bilingual spoken-word feminism into performance claiming space for community within the academy. Founded by Laura Lee Oviedo and Gladys Ornelas, “W.A.K.E. U.P! seeks to empower and celebrate the experiences of women of color—Xicanas, Latinas,

Tejanas, Mexicanas, however we choose to self-identify— through the arts for the purpose of creating solidarity, new knowledge, and safe spaces for such dialogue to occur openly in our university and greater community” as stated in the group’s mission statement. Other members I worked with are Verónica Solís, Silvita Vera, Danielle López, Eloisa Tina Moreno, Claudia Yveth “Ali” Hernandez, Nahiely “Pinky” García, Amanda Victoria Ramirez, Magaly García, and Linda Ann Gonzalez. Since I have been involved with the group, we gained status as an official student organization, and thanks to much support, financial and otherwise, from the Mexican American Studies program, we have performed at various academic conferences including the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas Foco 2014, Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) Summer Institute 2014, NACCS Tejas Foco 2015, MALCS Summer Institute 2015, El Retorno: El Valle Celebra Nuestra Gloria 2014, 2015, and 2016, and being invited to perform on the opening night stage at NACCS Tejas Foco 2016.

This group has allowed me to be as theatrical as I wanted to be, and has provided a safe environment for experimentation. When I first joined the group, I was the only member from the Creative Writing program, and most of the students in the group were also involved in Mexican American Studies (It should be noted that I am also getting my MAS graduate certificate along with my MFA). To me, the W.A.K.E. U.P.! mujeres represent everything beautiful that is possible in collaboration, sisterhood, and applied arts.

The Making of a Revolution

It is against this backdrop that I have completed my second poetry manuscript, *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret*. The desire to produce an artistic product which is loud, flashy, and obvious in meaning is my knee-jerk reaction to a literary world where performance poetry is often seen as a heavy-handed form of writing which ignores craft and hides behind theatrics. My experiment is aimed at proving that theatrics and clear meaning can reach a large audience and enlist more people into caring about important political and social issues. Focused on the theme of revolution and inspired by current issues of social justice, my goal is to transform the text into live theatrical performances, so that the manuscript serves both as a poetry collection and as a script for performance. The poetry is decidedly political and influenced by issues of social justice which I currently feel powerless to change. It is also deliberately theatrical with the hope of adding costumes, choreography, music, video images, makeup, and props during the rehearsal process.

When I began graduate school, I was aware of the criticisms of slam, and I had heard over the years of an academic disdain for performance poetry:

Slam has its critics, of course; any populist art does. Literary critic Harold Bloom published in *The Paris Review* what is probably the most popular derisive reference to Slam, calling it "the death of art." Famous poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti lobbed his own infamous quote, "Slam kills poetry," in the San Francisco Chronicle a few years back. (Woods 19)

Some critics have argued that slam relies on theatrics, and that political poetry is too didactic and not subtle enough for some tastes. Mills argues, "the didactic use of poetry went somewhat out of fashion with the Romantic movement and is still not much valued by many

readers.” Some even refer to blatantly political poetry as “propaganda” rather than poetry (Breeze 48). But extreme subtlety does not suit me because as Wickman argues, “At worst, this kind of coy pruning makes a false virtue out of forcing readers to guess at the writer’s intention rather than making that intention clear” (Wickman).

In workshops, my fellow students’ academic training has been apparent as they have labeled some of my work as “heavy-handed,” “didactic,” or “lacking subtlety.” This criticism in favor of subtlety as a distinguishing characteristic of good art is pervasive:

Most of us take for granted that subtlety, in the arts, is a virtue. You can see it in our critical language: It’s common to say that a book or movie *lacks* subtlety—the implication being that subtlety is an essential quality. Other times, we say a song or TV show is *heavy-handed*, or *hits you over the head* with its message. Even worse is the rise of the more hair-splitting phrase *on the nose*, as in “Wouldn’t you say that metaphor was a bit on the nose?” It’s become an artistic sin to ‘hit it right on the nose,’ to be right on target. We have to be more oblique, less direct, more obscure. (Wickman)

As a live performer trying to connect with people, obscuring meaning to an audience does not work. I see nothing wrong with clarity of meaning. But what I see as a strength in my work, other academics have labeled a weakness. These criticisms have not deterred me from trying to create a poetry that is above all else accessible. Therefore, this manuscript is decidedly political and deliberately theatrical in order to build a case for performance poetry. My poetics highlight the intersection of racial discrimination, poverty, and gender inequality impacting the lives and identities of people of color along with social and economic inequities.

As an activist artist, I believe art can inspire change. When I create art it is a selfish act. I feel an immediate catharsis in performing. Yet it also claims space for dialogue for other disempowered voices that do not have my luxury of an audience. For this reason, my art is desperate. It is crude and angry and bleeding. It is didactic and loud because it cannot afford to go unheard. “Your silence will not protect you” the great feminist poet Audre Lorde wrote in her rallying essay, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”:

Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid. (42)

Silence or subtlety will never be my choice, especially when my poetry can serve as a call to action.

The seed to create such a manuscript and theatrical concert was planted in my mind at the 2014 Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Conference in Seattle, Washington. I had been asked to share my poetry on a panel, and I felt myself holding back and downplaying the performative aspects of my writing, because my aesthetics were so different from others on my panel. Performing in my own style at full volume with movement would have only highlighted how very different my work was from the majority of the writing I had heard throughout the conference. The panel left me feeling ashamed that I chose to dilute what I am capable of as a performer. Yet the compromise was made, because I wanted to be accepted as a serious poet by professionals in my field.

I found myself trying to tone down my performance in order to avoid academic criticism of my performance. But slam had shaped my poetry aesthetics by teaching me that all audiences may not always be as reverent as those of the literary conference rooms. If I could walk into any random room full of people and connect with reluctant or even hostile audiences, I could communicate with practically anyone on the street. I don't think the same can be said of all academic poets who may do well in conferences or classrooms, but may have a hard time communicating with their poetry on the street level. So, although the polite audiences of the AWP conference were pleasant, the subtle, dry, or quiet delivery style of so many of the panelists made me feel out of place.

I was regretting my decision to tone down my work, when I walked into a panel titled "Stage to Page: The Challenges and Serendipities of Publishing Performative Texts." The conference panel abstract seemed promising: "This panel will showcase performers and writers who have taken the leap from Stage to Page and created innovative book projects that can be viewed as script, literary experience, artistic documentation, or poetry." Everyone on this all-Asian-American panel incorporated elements of performance which enhanced their writing, and none of them simply sat and read as the writers had done in my panel. Samantha Chanse, for example, performed an excerpt from a one-woman theatrical piece complete with costume and character changes. She later spoke about the challenge of publishing the piece, and how she developed strategies for translating her staging as a performer into the two-dimensional text. Another panelist, Denise Uyehara, identified herself as a performance artist and stood in a dramatic paper kimono which, with the help of stage-hands, turned into a straight jacket while an audio recording of her writing played aloud and video images were projected on the canvas of her costume.

I immediately realized that, had I been invited to perform on *this* panel, not only would I not have censored my performance, I definitely would have added costumes and multi-media elements to my presentation. I decided right there, that I had to give myself permission to be as dramatic as I wanted to be as an artist and stop asking myself if it was “real” poetry or “acceptable.” I really don’t care anymore. I have to do what makes me happy. It also began to make sense to me that if someone invites me to share my work, and it overshadows another artists’ work or seemed out of place, it is not my fault, but the fault of the curator of the event. I want to be invited to events where over-the-top is welcomed, so I immediately began to think about how energetic performance is never frowned upon in live music.

I use the word “poem songs” to describe my poems which are intended to be sung. I got this word from the poet Leticia Hernández-Linares who sings in many of her poems and is known for adding elements of performance to her readings. The poet-musician is a kindred spirit. In my teen years, I gravitated toward poet-musicians such as Patti Smith, Jim Carol, and Maggie Estep who all began as poets, but transformed into musicians fronting their own rock bands. The rough instrumentation, history of anti-establishment aggression, and do-it-yourself attitude connected to punk rock seem to lend itself to adoption by an artist like me with limited musical ability, but an aggressive performance style. I knew that with tenacity, my socially conscious poetry could be translated into punk rock. Also, my overtly political and heavy handed poems in sharp contrast to the more subtle and esoteric poetics coming out of the academy seem better suited to the crudeness of punk rock. The argument for subtlety also seems classist when directed at an art form aimed at subverting authority. As Forrest Wickman critiques:

But it’s when subtlety is held up as an unquestioned virtue that it does the most damage. Because bluntness is also a virtue. When artists don’t muffle themselves

in service of subtlety (or in fear of being called unsubtle), they kindle fervor and fire. When we dispense with subtlety, we're rewarded with work that resonates in every seat in the theater, not just in the orchestra section. And the more a work has something important to convey, the more it should not be subtle. Spike Lee, whose messages about race in America could hardly be more urgent, has been downgraded throughout his career for being 'heavy-handed,' 'melodramatic,' and 'not exactly subtle.' Even some contemporary reviews of *Do the Right Thing* and *Malcolm X* called them 'hardly subtle,' 'shrill,' and 'didactic.' But if Spike Lee wants to speak to the whole nation, why shouldn't he pick up a megaphone?

Wickman begins to hint at class and power as being factors in who is calling for less artistic shouting from whom. A case is also being made for why the disempowered might *need* to shout louder than others.

With *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret*, I decided to return to my spoken word roots which embrace the use of rhetorical devices as a means of persuasion. I decided to embrace my aesthetics to the extreme to prove what critics might argue as weaknesses can actually be strengths. Spoken word is also heavily influenced by the art of people of color often including elements of repetition born out of blues music, and hip-hop style word play and rhythms. Because these elements are embraced by people of color, there also exists a racial bias in addition to class bias among academics who may not consider these aesthetics or the subject matter chosen by people of color as valid. Wickman exposes the deep academic root which made Harold Bloom fear the "death of art" is actually the fear of the death of white, affluent art:

The Modernists drove meaning deeper and deeper below the surface, with some of them explicitly hoping to wall off their work from the masses: As D.H.

Lawrence wrote in one 1917 letter, “There should be again a body of esoteric doctrine, defended from the herd. The herd will destroy everything.” At the same time as cultural hierarchies of *highbrow* and *lowbrow* were constructed, it became common to criticize things for being *unsubtle* or *heavy-handed*.

As London poetry event promoter Ruth Harrison explains, “that's another thing that's thrown at performance poets, and black poets: basically, you don't fit into the canon, because you write political stuff, you have a social agenda, or you're political, and that's used as a dismissal of the work (Breeze 46).” At this year’s AWP conference, keynote speaker Claudia Rankine pointed out the disadvantage students of color encounter in MFA writing programs:

‘...to write beyond the imagination’s notion of normality is to write political poetry, sociology, identity politics poetry, protest poetry — many labels but none of them poetry. For in order for poetry to be poetry,’ Rankine continued, ‘white readers must find it relatable, and only then can it transcend its unrelatable colored writer.’ (qtd in Kachka)

Jamaican poet, Jean Binta Breeze adds “propaganda poet” to this list, arguing “... but it should not be used to dismiss all the fine work that is, in fact, happening, that may be political in nature” (Breeze 48).

This idea of political poetry being “propaganda” sent my thesis into a new direction. I began researching and considering ideas surrounding propaganda art. I liked the idea of attempting to create a self-aware and media savvy production aimed at making an impact and reaching the maximum audience possible as though the performance itself were a propaganda campaign. I took this approach to try to make these issues entertaining and thus appealing to a less political and much broader audience than most page poetry attracts. The reality is that

academic poetry has a much smaller audience than rock music or pop performers. Its language and style are often alienating to those not trained in deciphering poetry. Page poetry waits for poetry fans to seek it out. My writing will do the opposite and brazenly hunt its audience with clear and unmistakable messages. The urgency of the issues I am choosing to write about such as racial injustice, femicide, environmental justice among others, demand immediate action and outrage, which subtle and obscure poetry cannot illicit en masse.

Though this project is in defense of all of these things—political, theatrical, blunt, POC poetics, it is not my desire to deepen the chasm between academic poetry and performance poetry. Rather my intent is to claim academic space and respect for my poetics alongside works framed as subtle. Just as feminism does not propose to replace the patriarchy with matriarchy and the fight for racial justice is a fight to empower POC and not a fight to completely disempower white people, I am only trying to center and defend my marginalized aesthetics. For the fact remains that as many poets as I have met in my life, performance poets have always been more exposed to and open to reading academic poetry than academics have been to attending live performance poetry events or reading /reviewing/supporting performance poetry.

Like the DIY aesthetic of punk rock, rasquachismo also informs my manuscript. I define rasquachismo as a low-fi, DIY resourcefulness of POC. Dr. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto calls rasquachismo a Chicana sensibility born of necessity. In her article, “‘Domesticana’: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquache,” Amalia Mesa-Bains further explains rasquachismo:

In rasquachismo, the irreverent and spontaneous are employed to make the most from the least. . . one has a stance that is both defiant and inventive. ... In its broadest sense, it is a combination of resistant and resilient attitudes devised to allow the Chicano to survive and persevere with a sense of dignity. The capacity

to hold life together with bits of string, old coffee cans, and broken mirrors in a dazzling gesture of aesthetic bravado is at the heart of rasquachismo... [It] is an obvious, and internally defined tool of artist activists. (157-158)

Like punk, rasquachismo thumbs its nose at the upper classes and proudly creates something from nothing. In my manuscript, the rasquachismo sensibility drives La Madre Valiente to use a white, male punk aesthetic, repurpose “folk” songs, and radically re-envision them as intersectional feminist anthems. In doing so, she gives herself permission to be as loud and irreverent as white men have been in punk historically.

The subject of my writing comes to me from the daily headlines, but the form that my poems take are coming directly from repurposing songs. In poetry, homo-linguistic translations of poems, the act of “translating” from English to English, is a common writing exercise. The majority of my poems in this collection are either homo-linguistic translations or parody. “Manor Farm” for example, is a poem after Bob Dylan’s “Maggie’s Farm.” While, the original song uses metaphor to critique capitalism, my poem removes all metaphor and directly addresses concrete issues of capitalist oppression of my time. My collection does include a few original pieces not styled after another poem or lyrics, yet I do so by referencing and borrowing from other artists. In this way, my politics, tradition, and aesthetics are even more obvious to audiences once I align myself with my (s)heroes.

Another example of aligning my politics with one of my sheroes can be seen in the title poem, “The Canción’s Cannibal” which is a poem after Gloria Anzaldúa’s “The Cannibal’s Canción.” This exercise in derangement suggested by Carmen Jiménez Smith in the book, *Wingbeats II*, takes all the words of the original poem and rearranges them to create new meaning. The message sent is this; the work of my poetic (s)heroes is feeding me and thus

experiencing a new life through my repurposing. I am, thus, a cannibal of older canciones piggybacking on not only the politics and aesthetics of my heroes, but also their popularity. If you enjoy Anzaldúa or Dylan, you might enjoy *this*.

Pedro Petri most famously used parody similarly to a comic effect in his poem song, “El Spanglish National Anthem.” Set to the tune of Puerto Rico’s national anthem, “*En Mi Viejo San Juan*,” Petri’s translation of the song transplants the lyrics to New York City and explores the social issues faced by Puerto Rican immigrants. My desire to repurpose songs and make them my own also follows a cultural history of Mexican music. I grew up hearing U.S. pop songs translated into Spanish on local Tejano radio. The zydeco song “My Toot Toot” by Sidney Simien (aka Rockin' Sidney), for example, was covered by La Sonora Dinamita and became “Mi Cucu” in Spanish. I distinctly remember hearing a Spanish version of “The Tide is High” by John Holt recorded by The Paragons in 1967 and made popular by Blondie in the early 1980s. In researching for this paper, I found various Spanish remakes of the song including versions by Polaris (“Vuelve a Mi”) and Atomic Kitten (“Ser tu pasión”) and Nydia Rojas (“La Número Uno”), all with completely different lyrics.

In Tejano music, specifically, this kind of translation can be seen happening in both directions, from English to Spanish and from Spanish to English in the song, “Open up Your Heart” written and recorded by Buck Owens in 1966. The song has translated into Tejano vernacular and recorded as “Abre El Corazón” by Flaco Jimenez, Pepe Tovar y Los Chacales and recorded in both a mariachi and banda styles by Angélica Maria among various others. The song was later translated back into English as evident in the recording by Dave Moore in 1995. Although the melody remains the same, Moore did not simply re-record Buck Owens lyrics, but instead Moore sings the Spanish lyrics and then translates those lyrics into English for one verse.

The Spanish lyrics of the song are so different from Owens' original, that once they are translated back into English, the lyrics are something completely new.

One example of my own similar "translation" in this thesis, can be seen in my poem song, "When I Was a Little Bitty Chica." The original song, "Cotton Fields" was written by Huddie Ledbetter aka Lead Belly and recorded in 1940. It has been covered numerous times, including versions by Buck Owens, The Beach Boys, and Harry Belafonte. The first time I heard the song, it was the version recorded by Creedence Clearwater Revival in 1969. This past semester, however, I heard my neighbor partying and blaring a Spanish version which I discovered to be "Cuando Apenas Era Un Jovencito" by Ramón Ayala. When I mentioned this discovery to another friend who grew up here in the Rio Grande Valley, she explained that she was only familiar with the Ramón Ayala version, and had never heard an English version.

I have been performing "Black Men" after Jim Carroll's "People Who Died" for about a year now, and I just discovered that Carroll's idea came from his peer Ted Berrigan's poem "People Who Died." This is yet another example of original histories or inspirations getting lost in time while newer variations or emulations live on. In my manuscript, I play with these ideas of linguistic change, memory, and original histories that become lost. Set in a dystopian future, my collection illustrates how "folk songs" are repurposed and passed along to generations who may hold no original knowledge of their origins. Setting the manuscript in a dystopian future also allows me to create a post-literate future where a return to didactic, heavy handed art is needed as a hegemonic tool.

The post-apocalyptic setting allows me to de-familiarize the present to give perspective to the present. Current world-wide abuse of women and people of color is apocalyptic. The post-apocalypse can be a time of rebuilding and an opening for re-envisioning how such abuse can

end. Also, for the poor and powerless in the world of my manuscript, reading and writing are severely limited by “the State,” and so rebels, fearing banishment, must communicate orally and commit illegal information to memory. As outlandish as this premise might sound, John Miles Foley explains it is the reality for multitudes on our planet today:

Even today the majority of the planet’s inhabitants use oral traditions as their primary communication medium, a fact obscured by modern Western egocentrism. Virtually every single one of the fifty-five officially recognized national minorities in the People’s Republic of China, for example, possesses a thriving oral poetry. Rich traditions of oral composition and performance are alive in all regions in Africa...notwithstanding the suffering and tragedy that has marked much of their history (indeed often in response to such crises), the Balkan peoples still embrace traditions of oral poetry in some regions. And the list could go on indefinitely: oral poetry is a major presence in today’s world, not just an antique from the past but a living part of the contemporary scene, despite what we text-consumers might unwittingly suppose. (25)

It is this very current, real world of disempowered people lacking resources and suffering political oppression and communicating that orally that I am representing in my manuscript. In my performance, the Black Bard and Red Heralds, emissaries of the revolutionary figure La Madre Valiente, are literally propaganda poets. These figures represent the best possible rebuttal to this academic criticism. These griots of their time situate performance poetry in the future in order to make obvious its roots in the past:

Performance Poetry is composed specifically for a presentation before a live audience...began in pre-literate societies dating back to Homer whose traveling

bards retold the stories that eventually became, in written form, the Iliad and Odyssey. Initially these poems were transmitted and recorded from performer to performer and were constructed using devices such as repetition and alliteration. Performance poetry continued through the Middle Ages when bards and wandering minstrels were the "pop" artists of their time. Today, performance poetry retains its legitimacy through singers such as Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen. (Black 26)

Using the same tools as Dylan and Cohen, popular music, and performing the same function as Homer, the Black Bard and Red Heralds are important educators like today's griots across Africa. They in a similar fashion "maintain genealogies, sing praises, compose songs, play instruments, narrate history, and serve as spokespersons" (Hale 78).

The post-apocalyptic setting also creates an interesting perspective from which to critique colonialism and imagine a world without colonialism. As Nalo Hopkinson writes in the introduction to the POC postcolonial science fiction and fantasy anthology *So Long Been Dreaming*, POC writers create something unique with the genre:

stories that take the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also, with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things(9).

It is my opinion that radical revolutionary changes are needed to combat the ills of capitalism, colonialism, and other oppressions such as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, etc. Those changes happen slowly because of opposition from those who cannot envision change or simply resist change. The apocalyptic genre, however, allows people to accept the premise of a world where

civilization has suffered a complete breakdown, so civilization can be rebuilt in a completely radical fashion. La Madre Valiente is an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist figure. She advocates an egalitarian anarchy-feminism. These concepts may seem extreme in this day and age and difficult to achieve, but in the world of my manuscript, the State, is still a relatively new government existing in an unstable world, where La Madre's revolution is not only plausible, but resoundingly successful. In short, the genre allows me to introduce revolution in a way which is less threatening and therefore audiences will be more receptive.

On April, 17, 2016, I staged a first reading/performance of my manuscript at the UTRGV Student Union Theatre. A video of that performance is available online for viewing at the following site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVkddox3hdE&feature=youtu.be> . I am also attaching a video file to this thesis when I upload it to Proquest.com, and I am assuming it will be viewable online through that site also. I performed the poem songs costumed as a "Black Bard" backed by Kip Austin Hinton on guitar and Robby Cruz on drums. I also enlisted the help of fellow WAKE UP! members Gladys Ornelas and Danielle Lopez to act as the narrators, or "Red Heralds." Everyone appeared in full costume. I also incorporated images in a PowerPoint slide show. It is important to me to include a video recording of this first performance with my thesis, because what I have been working towards is more than simply a flat manuscript of text, but rather words which claim three dimensional space because of their urgency to connect with others:

Performances deconstruct, or at least challenge the scholarly article as the preferred form of presentation (and representation). A performance authorizes itself, not through the citation of scholarly texts, but through its ability to evoke

and invoke shared emotional experience and understanding between performer and audience. (Denzin 192)

This questioning of authority is at the heart of my work. For me, the ultimate gage of my work's success, therefore, relied not on a grade or evaluation by my "superiors," but rather the reaction from my community of equals. The best reaction I received from the audience at that performance was from one of my professors who said after the show she felt like joining my fictional army and fighting. Creating a work where one of my "superiors" wants to stand on equal footing with me in my completely egalitarian fashion is pretty remarkable. Similarly, when I performed a 10 minute excerpt of the work in San Antonio, young women made similar remarks about wanting to join in and do something "real."

Although I have enjoyed these last few years in academia, I will never be made to feel embarrassed of my roots in poetry slam because: "It has taken poetry out of the classroom and repositioned it firmly in the hands of people, many of whom have no higher qualification or purpose than looking for something else to do on a night out other than going to yet another movie. (Woods 19)"

Other sources I looked to for inspiration include writing by poets who blur the line between music, poetry, and performance as well as other writings about punk rock music.

Strange Music: Selected Poems and Songs by Leonard Cohen and *Love Dance of the Mechanical Animals* by Maggie Estep are two sources by performers whose writing originated for the stage, but eventually found their way into print. I look to these for examples of how a performance piece can find new life in its page representation. *Supernatural Strategies for making a Rock 'n' Roll Group* by Ian F. Svenonius presents itself as a tongue-in-cheek how-to guide for rock performance. Even though it is a humorous book, it has still been a guiding force in reaffirming

performance concepts driving the creation of my current work including answering simple questions such as, why even use the rock genre:

Rock ‘n’ roll, on the other hand, is an American art, brought about by the Industrial Revolution, the harnessing of electricity, and the miscegenation of various poor, exploited, and indentured cultures in the USA. Rock ‘n’ roll expresses a simultaneous celebration and condemnation of trash culture, class struggle, and imperial privilege. (Svenonius 59)

The Sound and the Fury: 40 Years of Classic Rock Journalism has also proved a useful source I have returned to in my writing process with its interviews with iconic rock and pop performers regarding their craft and construction of image. One such essay, “How to Become a Cult Figure in Only Two Years: The Making of David Bowie” by Steve Turner, breaks down the creation of the Ziggy Stardust persona including tactics used to build a larger-than-life mystique around David Bowie, a performer described earlier in his career as ‘totally introverted and colourless.’ (Hoskyns 17) This was a great inspiration as I transformed myself into a leader in La Madre Valiente’s army. Taking cues from Bowie’s control over all images released to the public of him, I took control over every aspect of the visual components which surround this show, including photo images, costumes, symbols, hair, makeup, and even performance space.

Another inspiration I look toward, came to me about a decade ago at a National Performance Network conference in Miami, when they featured a production of Jon Langford’s “The Executioner’s Last Songs.” The concert which toured theatres and museums nationally featured a turn-of-the-century-costumed band playing country-rock songs about old Western executions. In between songs, the lead singer, Jon Langford read short narrations about characters awaiting execution. The performance stayed with me, and I have adapted the structure

of the concert for my project. I decided to tie my poem songs together with short narratives in between them. Jon Langford, once a member of the punk band, The Mekons, also once worked with writer, Kathy Acker, to produce a similar narrative concert version of her novel, *Pussy King of Pirates*. Video of her performances with the band are so bad, they became an example for me of what not to do.

At the beginning of my writing process, my focus was on writing poem songs. Following the premise of a propaganda campaign, I had been contemplating the idea of creating the character of a revolutionary leader who fictionally penned and used my poem songs in the world of my story. Over the past two years, I began performing many of the poem songs live in guerilla-revolutionary-meets-glam-rock styled costumes. Last semester when working on the order of the poetry for my first book, *Rant. Chant. Chisme.*, I decided to name one chapter of those poems, “Madre Valiente y Sus Hijos.” The title came from *Madre Valiente y Sus Hijos*, an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and her Children* produced at the University of Texas Pan-American in 1991. Set during the Mexican Revolution, the character of Mother Courage became accessible to local audiences by relocating her into local history. Shortly after acceptance of *Rant. Chant. Chisme. for publication*, I began considering the title “La Madre Valiente” as a possible name for my revolutionary leader character.

In many ways, the theme of “mothering” drove the creation of this manuscript. Forced into motherhood after surviving a rape, the character La Madre Valiente births three children who all die as casualties of the State. In my manuscript, she is an orphan mother without children: “Childless, parentless—La Madre felt no connection to the past or future” until she begins to “parent” once more through teaching the youth and inciting revolution. This story comes directly from my own life, in that I have never known my own mother, who abandoned me when

I was three years old. And now that I am close to the end of my childbearing years, I am uncertain whether I will be physically able to have children. Not knowing my mother my entire life has obviously impacted me in profound ways. I have only begun to write about my complex relationship to motherhood in the last three years as my attempts to have a child have failed.

I know if I wanted to, it would be relatively easy to find my biological mother to connect with her, because I know family who know where she lives. But because she chose to disconnect with me, I have no desire to seek her out. About a decade ago, I met and became close with a son she birthed after me. He told me at one point that she wanted to meet me, “but she was afraid.” The phrase touched a nerve with me. I told him to tell her that I would meet with her. I told him to tell her that if I met her wouldn’t yell or physically hurt her. I would have difficult questions, however, but if she could deal with a difficult but civil conversation, then I would meet her I told him. He never mentioned her again and then a few months later he disappeared from my life.

Many years ago, a friend once told me that the only way that I can work through my “mother issues” is to meet her, but I argued that I can work through those issues when I have my own child. I still believe that the key to my own healing is through mothering, but like “La Madre Valiente” I am forced to redefine what mothering means. Like my character, I have felt a strong need to teach and advise younger students over the past few years of graduate school. My age has given me perspective and experience and my intuition is to be protective of the inexperience and naiveté of youth—most specifically with young women who may not understand the serious dangers of the patriarchal society they are just beginning to navigate. In working with and around young women, I find myself being the mother I wanted and deserved. One example of this is seen in the poem song, “When I Was a Little Bitty Chica,” in which I

write fictional advice that my mother gave me. This creates a new reality where I can envision a future where my voice as a mother, fictional or otherwise, is passed on.

Members of my thesis committee recommended that I speak about the connection of La Madre Valiente to other Chicanx literary archetypes such as La Malinche and La Llorona and pre-Columbian Aztec connections. While I am aware that these connections will be made by readers and critics, I have written the manuscript without consciously making those connections. Forcing any Aztec mythology in my work would feel particularly disingenuous unless it comes naturally. I have faith that my indigeneity is in my DNA and doesn't have to be forced or performed. Perhaps this is also another example of how I buck what I feel like I am forced to do by external forces.

Because I began writing the poem songs first, I struggled with creating a larger narrative to tie them together. I finally had a break though after my first assignment in my Prose Poetry and Flash Fiction Form and Theory class. The exercise in flash non-fiction required students to write their life story in 500 words or less. After completing my own life story, I decided to have a go at writing the life story of La Madre Valiente. What resulted was "The Etiology of La Madre Valiente," a story set in a dystopian future. Much of my focus in completing the manuscript has been on creating and clarify La Madre Valiente's world.

One book which has strengthened the politics driving my title character is *Rules for Radicals* by Saul D. Alinsky. I am hoping that I can use some of his advice on how to effect social change to shape the imaginary mother of a feminist revolution. His introduction to the book has set a path for La Madre to follow:

In this book we are concerned with how to create mass organizations to seize power and to give it to the people; to realize the democratic dream of equality,

justice, peace, co-operation, equal and full opportunities for education, full and useful employment, health, and the creation of those circumstances in which man can have the chance to live by values that give meaning to life. We are talking about a mass power organization which will change the world into a place where all men and women walk erect, in the spirit of that credo of the Spanish Civil War, 'Better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.' This means revolution. (Alinsky 3)

When I think of this quote in relation to the issues of social justice which prod me to write, I am aware of the real purpose of my writing. If any of my work can inspire even one person to dream of such change, or wish for even the smallest micro-revolution in their daily life, then I am achieving my true purpose as an artist by empowering others. This same line of thinking drives *La Madre Valiente*.

In my research, I have also examined women revolutionaries including the women of the EZLN and *Mujeres Libres*, an anarchist feminist movement which rose to power during the Spanish Civil War. One piece written this semester, "The Cannibal Ate Commandments and Fed Revolution," focuses on repurposing the women's revolutionary laws of the EZLN. Another piece came from the suggested assignment of selecting a book or article and choosing 20 words from it which I have not used before in my writing. I chose the 20 words from the article "‘Separate and equal’? *Mujeres Libres* and Anarchist Strategy for Women's Emancipation," and from that list, I wrote the 20 sentences of "Song of the Dawn."

Ultimately, *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret* constitutes the synthesis of so much of my past work as an artist. It combines activism, politics, writing, music, performance, costumes, visual arts, and POC aesthetics and issues. It also claims a rightful space in academia as the work

of an educated woman of color. What this thesis cannot capture on paper, I hope the video of my performance makes up for. As Denzin explains, “We should treat performances as a complementary form of research publication.”

CHAPTER II

THE CANCIÓN CANNIBAL CABARET

*“I see the poets, who will write the songs of insurrection generations
unborn will read or hear a century from now, words that make them
wonder how we could have lived or died this way...”*

Martín Espada, “How We Could Have Lived or Died or Died This Way”

“Writers are cannibals.”

Nora Ephron

A Message from Las Hijas de la Madre

Welcome, hijas y hombres. Welcome fugees and flaggers. Welcome bossholes, broadbacks, and boots on the ground. All you civilyoungs and warhorses who daily tow the line. Worm workers in low appointments and Elect allies alike.

If you have willingly broke curfew to secret meet and receive the herstory of La Madre Valiente then we salute you. But more importantly, we hope that if any notes of this testimonio ring bona fide, that you not bury these truth bones, but instead ingest them to your memory to spit up and feed others.

So suggests La Madre. So we swallowed herstory and hid it in the safest place where no law can destroy it—deep inside our own flesh where only death can pry it from us. And so we feed you the same nourishment once fed us. And you, when you are full enough to rock rebellion can continue the song.

Before the Fall

Herstory must begin before the present day milking of our fool's blood daily whipped from our exhausted brows. We must recall a time before our worth was weighed in the broadness of our backs and the resources our bodies harvest.

For we must be reminded there was a time before—something more than now. Before the State. Before the Grate State Gates kept life and order in. Before the Grate State Gates kept death and chaos out.

Before the State. Before the yards. Wandering Nomadsland—that much many a fugee can remember, but we ask you to go further back.

Before Nomadsland. Before the warlords. Before the panic. Before the greedy grabs and hungry mouths. Before the monstrous waves of weeping. Before the meltdowns. Before the reckoning.

To start at the beginning, is to start before the end of times once prophesized now past.

Before the fall. Before the salt floods and fire storms. Before the ground seizures. Before the toxins flowed. Before the droughts. Before the riots. Before.

It is easy for us to forget there even was a “time before.” There was a time when living was more than surviving. There was a time the fall could have been avoided, but the eyes were shut blissful against their own interests, while the body kept walking off the cliff.

My Destination

Where are you headin', oh my son?
Where will you be when your journey's done?
Say daughter, where are you off to?
Will you sit with me when your travelin's through?

I'm goin' where the first man sleeps—
where the second man stood diggin' six feet deep.
I'm headin' to where that second man lies,
and I pray that I'm goin' where no man cries.

Well, I don't know my destination,
but I'm in good company.
So, it's got to be good enough for me.
Yes, it's got to be good enough for me.

I'm travelin' to a solemn field—
no plow, no crop, no harvest yield.
I'm travelin' to where my grandma rests—
where grandpa waits in his Sunday best.

I'm movin' to my tribal drum,
seekin' the source of my rattle and hum.
And I'm tracin' the conch blower's breath.
So, you could say I'm dancin' to my death.

Well, I don't know my destination,
but I'm in good company.
So, it's got to be good enough for me.
Yes, it's got to be good enough for me.

Where are you headin', oh my son?
Where will you be when your journey's done?
Say daughter, where are you off to?
Will you sit with me when your travelin's through?

I'm off to where we all must go.
I can't say where for sure, 'cause I really don't know.

But goin' to where my judgment waits.
I can't say if it's Hades or them pearly gates.

'Cause, I don't know my destination,
but I'm in good company.
So, it's got to be good enough for me.
Yes, it's got to be good enough for me.
Oh, it's got to be good enough for me.
Guess, it's got to be good enough for me.

The Pocked Eclipse, the Rise of the State, and the Birth of the Mujerista Resistance

And for many years did the civilyoungs suckle at her breasts and nest in her embrace into which she had birthed them. And she, the Great Mother, prided in their growth and curiosity. And eventually, their independent spirits scattered the children to the four winds. And contented with what she created, the Great Mother closed her eyes for a spell of peaceful repose.

And she awoke from a nightmare choking on stale air. Steel rods pierced her skin to her core and concrete corseted her round. She labored to name one corner of her form which did not ache, for the entirety of her being was under attack. In her trusting slumber, she had been drugged, despoiled, violated, mutilated—and still the civilyoung ones suckled at her poisoned breasts. But now they warred against each other and hoarded more than they needed.

Heartbroken over the purity of her gift laid waste, the Great Mother released a thundering lament. Her right hand, a riotous ocean, and her left hand, colossal cliffs curled up into fists and smashed down on her children—silencing the wars against the Great Mother and against each other.

And she returned to a feverish sleep of self-preservation, weeping hot lightening tears and coughing smoke and ash.

The civilyoung ones cried out to the Great Mother in horror. Some were humbled by her awakening. Others cursed her, and like rats on a sinking ship trampled the bodies of the dead and continued to eat and shit their rat fill with no remorse for the fallen, weak, or ailing. The civilyoung resumed their war lording and hoarding, using the weak for sex and meat. And so existence in Nomadsland was and continues to be.

But one zone was least shaken by the fall, and on that land the State rose up to rebuild, beginning with the construction of the Grate State Gates. The Elect few born within its walls

might have sat content to watch as those outside the Gates rotted—had they not been struck by breeding disease. Their new order could not overcome this curse, and needing more boots on the ground to guard the Grate Gates, the Elect allowed the entrance of fugees willing to give our children and our lives to protect the State.

Milked for our fool's blood in our appointments, we toil to provide unlimited juice to the Elect while we must be content with blackout curfews, life in the tenement yards, and restricted access to the advanced device learning reserved for the Elect and scholars only. Any who threaten this order are condemned to the fubar, Nomadsland.

And so warring began anew at a grand scale with cells from Nomadsland constantly forming and plotting to breach the Grate Gates. But this time it was only the young women—the mothers—who remembered the Great Mother's rage as their own. They alone sought remedy. For years, they and their young shed the most blood and paid the highest prices to the warring and the State.

And so, mothers gathered covertly with their young after work at their appointed posts was over. And one among them "La Madre Valiente" spoke out and said, "We will reject the curse of Eve. And we will not be cast as Lilith to birth demons to destroy us. And we will follow the Great Mother in her rage and recognize her recovery as our own. And like her, we will defend our rights to health and life. And those who threaten us will be met with *our* fists of ocean and stone."

And thus was born the Mujerista Resistance united behind a blood red flag reading "Mi mama me enseñó a luchar!"

La Frontera Te Llama

after "London Calling" by The Clash

La frontera te llama,
to the north and the south
offering Flexi Compras to those living hand to mouth

La Frontera te llama,
through the bars and barbed wire
Now they're fracking South Texas and the water's caught fire

La frontera te llama,
through the internet buzz
cause they're still ignoring Juárez, women dying just because

La frontera te llama
yeah a black man's in charge but
incarceration's imminent for black and brown at large

the ice caps are melting, the hurricanes are near
the mass shooting madmen, the terrorists live here
the children wear targets the NRA supplies
y la frontera esta quemando and I—vivo cerca del río

La frontera te llama
D.F. and D.C.
that kid shot dead in a hoodie, well he could've been me

La frontera te llama.
¿Me oyen, cartels?
Take your 8 liner leeches and go straight to hell.

La frontera te llama
Tlatelolco and Ground Zero
'Cause I'm stuck in the middle and I'm looking for a hero

La frontera te llama
you wall street occupiers
the government only bails out the grifters and liars

the ice caps are melting, the hurricanes are near
the mass shooting madmen, the terrorists live here
los niños sell drogas, the Golfo supplies
y la frontera esta quemando and I —vivo cerca del río

La frontera te llama,
 yeah, and I'm guilty too
'Cause what they're teaching in classrooms, well, some of it ain't true

La frontera te llama
 all you locas y locos
all Nortamericanos before fresa y pochos.

La frontera te llama
 Arizona and beyond
'Cause when you fuck with my gente I'm sure to respond

the ice caps are melting, the hurricanes are near
the mass shooting madmen, the terrorists live here
the children carry weapons, the Zetas supply
y la frontera esta quemando and I—vivo cerca del río

Re Membering Herstory

In her domestic appointment in a home of the Elect, La Madre Valiente would slip out of her quarters at night to study a restricted device she stole away. This was how La Madre began to recover so many herstories lost to the State. Before the pocked eclipse, the learning was web-free, but those untangled herstories were burned or flooded during the fall.

It was sometime after the death of her last son that La Madre Valiente began her recitation of the old folk songs. Words on paper or the discovery of fugee use of devices is punished with expulsion from the State Gates.

And so, La Madre began to share herstory in secret. She turned to the old folk songs and repeated them among the mothers and the colored. Her campaign spread faster than violence through the tenements. Her anger gained momentum, as the dark, olive, and poor women's children suffered more than others. Even the Yardie gangs set aside their fracasés with one another to begin to fight for something larger—perhaps true homes instead of block corners in State yards.

For the herstories La Madre loved most and spread quickest through the tenements were the songs of workers and mujeres past long before the fall—old folk songs of fugees like us long forgotten.

Rememory of Strange Fruit

with thanks to Abel Meeropol and Toni Morrison

Strange fruit not hanging, but withering in crowded trucks
Loss is expected in transport. Drivers still get paid big bucks.
Brown bodies praying for the pardon of our southern breeze
The south still produces strange fruit, just not hanging from trees

If the fruit survives delivery, it can be bought and sold.
Market prices double if fruit is ripe and not too old.
Dried and rotting in the desert, trampled falling off of trains
Bondage continues in this land, though not with chains.

Growers and traffickers supply consumer demanded yields
There's a fortune to be made from strange fruit fertilizing fields.
Rememory of blood on leaves, rememory of blood at root,
The profits from the bitter crop outweigh our losses of our strange fruit.

50 Foot Fugee

after "50ft Queenie" by P.J. Harvey

Hey!

I'm one big
Fugee.
No wall
can stop me.

Homeland
Security
La Migra
watchin'

Threat numb
-er one
Second to
no one

Checkpoint
I'm clean.
Your walls
can't touch me.

Ask me
my name?
F-U
and C-K!

Fifty foot
Fugee
Hold back
the sea.

Biggest
woman
I could birth
Ten sons.

New gods!
All queens!
Fear and
Walls rising.

I'm the scapegoat of the world.
You can't ignore my song.
Come on measure me.
I'm 60 million strong.

Choose one
Country.
Natives
run free.

ICE raids
Barbed wire
Cheap labor
For hire

Cheap food
Cheap goods
Not in
my hood

Ain't got
no ID
No wall
can stop me!

Fifty foot
fugee—
Fifty
and rising!

I'm the scapegoat of the world.
You can't ignore my song.
Dare you to measure me!
I'm 60 million strong.

I'm the scapegoat of the world.
You can't ignore my song
Dare you to measure me!
I'm 60 million strong.

I'm the scapegoat of the world.
You can't ignore my song.
Dare you to measure me!
I'm 60 million strong.

Fifty foot fugee
Fifty foot fugee
Fifty foot fugee
Fifty foot fugee

The Etiology of La Madre Valiente

After the Oil Wars and the Pocked Eclipse before the beginning of the Great Water War, La Madre Valiente came into being in a millennium which devalued her kind. Cursed thrice, she was born poor, colored, and female. A fugee of the Eclipse, just days old, she was abandoned to become a ward of the State and trained in a detention camp for her eventual appointment.

Raised without the touch of a mother or father's embrace, she was a name and a number in the days of her indoctrination. She pledged allegiance, memorized scriptures, and towed the line locked step all the way out of the camp. She began training in the armed corps in her teen years—boots on the ground being one of the only paths in those times to fugee emancipation.

La Madre Valiente became a true flagger— wrapped in the flag her naked faith and trained to fight whichever wind the State demanded. So strong was her faith— so strong, until the night before her graduation. During the celebration, a male squad of her comrades, beat and raped her, as is often the practice with men in power these days. Infantry roughs would rub her out like the cherry of a smoke beneath a combat boot before allowing a female with that much backbone into their ranks.

That violation birthed triplets — three sons— one fair skinned, one dark, and one her same olive color. The light child she signed over to be placed in the home of one of the childless Elect. La Madre Valiente retained visitation rights in exchange for her domestic appointment in the same home. Her other two sons grew up in the outer tenements where La Madre Valiente did her best to keep the Yardie wolf gangs and Yard Patrol at bay. La Madre determined that her boys would rise above the gangs and escape the cruelty the Patrol inflicted on innocent and guilty colored alike.

The fair child completed private device learning and was recruited for the leadership ranks of the armed corp. His Elect foster folk believed their resources and standing would shelter him, but the Water Wars took life from every zone — not equally, of course... But the fair child fell in the desert of a faraway region of Nomadsland.

The olive child embraced the natural arts. La Madre thought it a divine gift that flowers and fruit should bloom from his touch. He was appointed to work working the earth. But in those early days of the Water Wars, the demand for higher yields with less water led the State to conduct experiments modifying plants. By the time the mothers began to notice more and more of their children withering with the bone eating epidemic, it was too late. The olive child died among those masses.

A born scholar, the dark child excelled in his early fugee training. His instructors added his name to the scholarship lottery to join the Elect in the device learning. But the dark child faced all the same struggles of dark children. His life was ended by the trigger happy Yard Patrol one night on his return from a bodega where he had stopped to buy a treat.

Black Men

*after "People Who Died" by Jim Carroll
and after "People Who Died" by Ted Berrigan*

Alonzo Ashley was tased at the Denver Zoo.
Wendell Allen had weed, but he was unarmed too.
LA cops claim Ezell Ford provoked an attack,
But witnesses saw him comply when they shot him in the back.
He was only 25 when he died.
I didn't know him, but I still cried.

Eric Garner's last words were, "I can't breathe!"
The asthmatic dad of six died at 43
held in a chokehold by NYPD,
even though they banned that tactic back in 1993.
Man, I heard LAPD is sadistic,
but damn, Steven Eugene Washington was autistic.

These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
They were all unarmed, but they still died

They didn't have a warrant when they shot Ramarley Graham.
Amadou Diallo died with his wallet in his hand.
Dante Parker was innocent. They had the wrong man.
And the Trayvon Martin verdict, I will never understand.
Trayvon, you remind me of my youngest brother.
Now you're resting in peace with all the others.

Oscar Grant was killed on New Year's Day,
handcuffed face down when they blew him away.
They're still waiting for justice in the San Francisco Bay,
but there will never be justice for Kimani Gray.
Kimani, you were a boy. You weren't even a man.
I swear, I'll never fucking understand.

why
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
They were all unarmed, but they still died

They only found a cell phone on Kendrec McDade
left to die in the street without receiving first aid.
Timothy Stansbury Jr.'s last breath was in terror,
but NYPD admitted it was their "error."
Michael Brown had his hands up in the air,
but they still gunned him down. They didn't fucking care.

Patrick Dorismond, Victor Steen, Ervin Jefferson,
Sean Bell, James Brissette, Ronald Madison—
Jordan Baker, John Crawford, Aaron Campbell, Ousmane Zongo,
Sgt. Manuel Loggins Jr., and Orlando Barlow—
MLK and Malcom X are standing at your side.
I never met none of them, but I still cried.

'cause
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
They were all unarmed, but they still died.

These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
These are black men who died, died
I never met none of them, but I still cried.

The Self-Stimulation of La Madre

Childless, parentless—La Madre felt no connection to the past or future. Under cover of night, she searched her stolen device for meaning. Restricted learning, she discovered was like Eve's apple, just another boot at her throat.

Restricted word, restricted thought, restricted action.

As she delighted in the deviance of secret schooling, she wondered what other delights had been restricted in order to control. Childless, parentless, and with no faith in the State remaining—La Madre finally belonged to herself.

With nothing to lose, La Madre gave herself permission to explore. Deviant word, deviant thought, deviant action, deviant touch...

The Canción's Cannibal

after "The Cannibal's Canción" by Gloria Anzaldúa

Put rest to your relics,
as I have to communion
and Mass. There. Sunday
grins toothless. Your
teeth on my sharp skull,
you cradle sleeping nights

with your hair. Locked
with a fibula, I'll wear
my heart out over

what embraces waste
my rigorous round
and finger your strings.
My wrist bone rapping
bone— your vertebrae
listening to my round
neck and jaw bones
you wear better than I—

Blessed is cannibalism.

best tasting liver and heart
the hand, the palms, the
feet, the soles, the
vulva, the scrotum, the
nipples genitalia
swollen flesh : taboo love

We take it
personally
and consume
our customs.

Lo Juro

*after "Oath" by Patti Smith
and after "Gloria" by Van Morrison*

Men make war for somebody's freedom but not mine.

Oya de igualdad stewing
marked cards on the table
corazones sangrando
our fight our own.

Sisters are doin' it for themselves.

Valientes,
we carve placas
over cicatrices.

Adán no me embrujó.

*

I'd like to tell you 'bout *me* baby.
You don't have to come around.
Just 'cause you think I'm lost,
don't mean I need to be found.

Don't you come around here.
'Cause, at just about midnight,
I make myself feel so good. Lord!
I make me feel all right.

All I need is my own X-O-X-A!
'Cause, I— love my own
Xoxa!
X-O-X-A!

I'm gonna shout it all night!
Xoxa!
I'm gonna shout it every day!
Xoxa!

Van Morrison knew a girl.
Hendrix and Iggy claim they did her too.
Gloria got passed around.
Even Patti Smith knew what to do.

But Gloria don't come around here.
'Cause, at just about midnight,
I make myself feel so good. Lord!
I make me feel all right.

All I need is my own X-O-X-A!
Cause I— love my own
Xoxa!
X-O-X-A!

I'm gonna shout it all night.
Xoxa!
I'm gonna shout it every day.
Xoxa!

*

So, I take full responsibility
 for every culture I shock
 every cock block
for that Cindy Lauper song I Jill off to—
 ordained or accepted,
 me vale padre.

*

Don't come a-walkin' down my street.
Don't come up to my house.
Don't you knock upon my door.
'Cause, I don't want you in my room.
I make myself feel all right.

All I need is my X-O-X-A!
'Cause, I— love my own
Xoxa!
X-O-X-A!

I'm gonna shout it all night.
Xoxa!
I'm gonna shout it every day.
Xoxa!

*

So guys,
te doy mi despedida.
I'm giving you the night off.
I can rub my own nub,
or just fall asleep in my own embrace.
You can get sprung for some other, baby,
but me,
I'll get off just fine.

You make war for somebody's freedom, honey,
but not mine.

The Positive Space of La Madre Valiente

Her cis gendered but gender nonconforming body is the opposite of what it is not.

She loves men and women equally even though they are not treated equally. Having been a parent and a child, she cares for both. She arrived in her body as we all do, through the collision of dogma and action.

Her body is a hole—a weak spot in a defensive line. A woman is a child, is a man-who-is-not-a-man, is an enemy, is a hole, is a weak spot. Her slavery-shaped skin was born through a hole in defensive lines.

Her thoughts have no shape, but are considered deadlier than her sickle-shaped breasts.

The shape of her mother's suffering is the shape of all things martyred. The family resemblance is uncanny. Eyes the color of fresh bruises. Bodies the color of bullseyes.

Tongue tired of tasting her own blood, she fashioned it, finally, into a fist and began to fight back. She will no longer trade her femininity for favors.

Tomorrow, she will awake without fear. Tomorrow, she will be free, dead, or both.

When I Was a Little Bitty Chica

*after "Cotton Fields" by Lead Belly
and "Cuando Apenas Era Un Jovencito" by Ramón Ayala*

When I was a little bitty chica,
My momma would tell me, "Oyes Mija,
Men can treat you bad, like I was treated by your dad."

When I was a little bitty chica,
My momma would tell me, "Listen Mija,
You got to love yourself, and don't rely on anyone else."

Cuando apenas era jovencita,
mi mama me decia, "Cuidado Mija,
No aceptaras el abuso. ¡Tienes que luchar!"

"Si se encuentra con el sexismo,
matalo con amor y feminismo.
No aceptaras el abuso. ¡Tienes que luchar!"

When I got a little bit older,
Her consejos grew a little bit bolder.
She said "Who needs men? La masturbation is your friend."

"Don't you wait for no prince charming.
The patriarchy needs disarming.
You are strong, so prove the gender binary wrong."

Cuando apenas era jovencita,
mi 'Ama me decia, "Cuidado Mija,
No aceptaras el abuso. ¡Tienes que luchar!"

"Si se encuentra con el sexismo,
matalo con amor y feminismo.
No aceptaras el abuso. ¡Tienes que luchar!"

The Cannibal Ate Commandments and Fed Revolution

Like her spirit animal, el zopilote, La Madre Valiente ate the dead and got well, spitting up truth bones into the gullets of the emaciated. One of the corpse breasts she suckled was “The Law of the Sisters of the Easy Eln.” For it was legend these sisters once pointed spears to demand their commandments be sharpied on stone.

These words of the sisters of the Easy Eln are bond:

One: Thou shalt not deny sisters the right to rock rebellion.

Two: Thou shalt not deny sisters the right to work and fair pay.

Three: Thou shalt not deny sisters the right to choose the count of babes they mother.

Four: Thou shalt not deny sisters the right to engage in tribal decisions and hold positions of the free elect.

Five: Thou shalt not deny sisters and their babes the right to wellness.

Six: Thou shalt not deny sisters the right to learning.

Seven: Thou shalt not deny sisters the right to choose their mates.

Eight: Thou shalt not physically mistreat others. Rape and its attempt will be disciplined to the extreme.

Nine: Thou shalt not deny sisters the right to self-defense in the armed force or any rebelled position.

Ten: Thou shalt not deny sisters any freedoms or duties of the brothers.

In her domestic appointment, La Madre slipped out of bed late at night to meditate much on these commandments and contrive how to raise the Easy Eln flag from the dead.

Through the ages, the poor, and the colored, and the fugee—the women, and the young, and the weak—they had been cast as emaciated children crawling desperately away from the stalking hooded vulture. La Madre now channeled the zopilote to peck instead to uncover older, buried carcasses to feed a new, angry child.

Nom de Guerre

“You think because we are women we are weak, and maybe we are. But only to a certain point... We can no longer remain quiet over these acts that fill us with rage. And so, I am an instrument who will take vengeance.” Diana, Huntress of Bus Drivers

I eat the cries of the dead.
I am a hunter the huntress of men.
Some people think me a monster.
For others, fantasies of vengeance I foster.

I am Diana the huntress.
We are Diana the huntress.

I wear the moon on my head.
I am a hunter the huntress of men.
born in the barrio in a mass grave
threatening to those holding chains to enslave

I am Diana the huntress.
We are Diana the huntress.

Hello, from the gutters of Juárez
Hello, from the slums of Mumbai
Hello, from the brothels of Thailand
Hello, from sweat shops in LA

You will know my name.
You will know my name.

Hello, Malala assassins
Hello, Boko Haram
Hello, from my Pussy Riot.
Hello, from my Gulabi Gang

You will know my name.
You will know my name.

My hounds are free and unfed.
I am a hunter the huntress of men.
The Wild Hunt’s broken loose—
ghost riders crunching bones beneath their boots

I am Diana the huntress.
We are Diana the huntress.

Join me all you who have bled.
Become a hunter a huntress of men.
Fight corruption. Protect the powerless.
Left with no recourse, unleash your huntress.

You are Diana the huntress.
Become Diana the huntress,

Hello, from the classrooms of Yemen.
Hello, from Radical Monarchs.
Hello, my Congolese children.
Hello, Hijas de Violencia.

They will know your names.
They will know your names.

Hello, auto-defensas.
Hello, Nevin Yildirim.
Hello, my Xaltianguis Sisters.
Hello, to my Red Brigade.

And they will know your names.
They will know our name.
They will know my name.
They will know my name.

justice frozen in our crosshairs—

Black Bards and Red Heralds

La Madre knew the elite and many brothers would consider the resurrection of these truth bones treasonous. As our numbers grew, it became increasingly challenging to keep La Madre safe. And so we, her emissaries, her Black Bards and Red Heralds, are deployed to spread her teachings and recruit more sisters, allies, and families into the Mujerista Resistance.

Las Hijas de la Madre initially studied herstory, xeriscaping and sustainable gardening. But quickly, we recognized their need for continued education and self-defense training.

We will not trade our femininity for favors.

in the event that you are not able to run

nose ears eyes throat temple

nose ears eyes throat temple

nose ears eyes throat temple

multiple strikes multiple strikes multiple

high, low, high

low, high, low

high, low, high

high, low, high

low, high, low

high, low, high

high, low, high

low, high, low

high, low, high

multiple strikes multiple strikes multiple

nose ears eyes throat temple

nose ears eyes throat temple

nose ears eyes throat temple

multiple strikes multiple strikes multiple

Don't yell help.

Yell, "Fire!"

No, don't yell help.

Yell, "Fire!"

nose ears eyes throat temple

nose ears eyes throat temple

nose ears eyes throat temple

multiple strikes multiple strikes multiple

#YesAllWomen are under attack.

Women and children have got to prepare.

Not all men, but the numbers are stacked.

So, you gotta beware. You have to stay aware.

high, low, high

low, high, low

high, low, high

high, low, high

low, high, low

high, low, high

high, low, high

low, high, low

high, low, high

multiple strikes multiple strikes multiple

Don't yell help.

Yell, "Fire!"

No, don't yell, "Rape."

Yell,

"Fire!"

The Articles of Self-Defense

Las Hijas de la Madre Valiente learn tactics of war for self-defense—tools to counter the abuses their womanhood attracted.

La Madre also studied *history*—man’s warring—and saw a pattern of blood shed over that which many men value more than life: land, wealth, revenge, tribalism, religion, power. The claim was often made that men fought over resources, but even during the bloodiest days of the Great Water War, resources were plenty but endangered and needed protection. No, men fight over control and not always for the good of all.

La Madre was not an absolute pacifist, but could only justify fighting as a means to preserve the peace. The articles of self-defense she deemed worth living and worth fighting for are as follows:

Freedom from Slavery

Freedom from Violence

Right to Health

Right to Education

Protection of the Great Mother

Protection of the Weak and Marginalized

To live without these precepts is to live a subhuman existence. Las Hijas de la Madre train to protect these precepts and swear an oath, “Luchamos solamente por la paz.” Any directive to the contrary is a threat to humanity.

Power in a Woman

*after "There is Power in a Union" by Billy Bragg,
"There is Power in the Blood" by Lewis Jones,
and "Battle Cry of Freedom" by George F. Root*

There is power in the family, power in the home—
Power in the hands of the mother—
But we're stronger with our sisters than when we each stand alone.
There is power in a woman

All the wars of the oppressors demand innocent blood.
The mistakes of the machos, we must pay for.
From the cities and the ranchos to colonia roads of mud,
daughters divided are conquered in this man's war.

Mujeres unidas defending our rights!
Down with machismo! All women unite!
With our families and our allies, we will form a righteous clan!
There is power in a woman!

Now, I'm longing for the day when we are decolonized.
Brutality and injustice can't defeat us.
But to defend ourselves, my sisters, we must be organized,
when the patriarchy exploits and mistreats us.

Mujeres rebeldes luchando por la paz!
For every mother, we rise with our cause!
For the orphan, for the widow lasting peace will soon be won.
There is power in a woman!

Mujeres unidas defending our rights!
Down with machismo! All women unite!
With our families and our allies, we will form a righteous clan!
There is power in a woman!

Song of the Dawn

Daylight proves problematic for La Madre Valiente. Still, mujeres whisper anarcho-syndicalist lyrics in their lunchrooms. Their communitarian forks tap coded beats against their metal plates, as her infectious, melodic call for participation echoes. The hidden form of a movement is come into focus. Co-ordination of our opus follows.

Under cover of night, autonomous feet creep away from our appointed corners. Midnight frees us from our proletarian posts. In unison, we deconstruct our “domestication.” Ages relegated to subjugation for what? And what constitutes true strength? Each ally sounds a non-hierarchical note in the canción. La Madre weaves each sharp and flat into the textile of an anthem.

Synesthesiatically envisioning voice as action, we taste hints of freedom and for the first time feel hope. We can tolerate no more subordination of our discord to the other’s harmony.

But, uncontrollable, a transformative chorus now intones on its’ own. Las mujeres prepare for a new paradigm. An egalitarian dawn brakes in the distance.

Demolish

after "Demolición" by Los Saicos

Ratatatatatatata! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

Unite to destroy the oppressive state.
Unite to destroy the oppressive state.
Unite to destroy the oppressive state.
Unite to destroy the oppressive state.

Tear it down. Tear it down. Tear it down. Tear it down.
Unite to destroy the oppressive state.
Tear it down. Tear down the oppressive state.
Tear it down. Tear down the oppressive state.

Ratatatatatatata! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

We must overthrow the oppressive state.
Overthrow! Overthrow! Overthrow! Overthrow!
We must overthrow the oppressive state.
Overthrow! Overthrow! Overthrow! Overthrow!

Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!
Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!
Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!
Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

Tear it down. Tear it down. Tear it down. Tear it down. Tear it down.

Ratatatatatatata! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

La Madre Valiente Released a Guttural Howl

She attempted to match the growling guitar with her accented and hoarse voice wondering: “What does a revolution sound like? Harmony or discord? A chorus of angry angels marching as to war? A solo voice building into an army’s anthem? The grinding of teeth or waving of fists in the air? Or screams silenced behind a single whisper of truth?”

She prepares our ranks to one day leave the State and reenter Nomadsland under our own rule commanding our own agency. But to what end? To replace the patriarchy with matriarchy? To return oppression to our oppressors?

Mujeres and allies, we prepare for a new paradigm. Our egalitarian control over our individual lives now also includes control over our performance of gender. In order to decolonize gender and eradicate gender discrimination for all our children, individuals in our new society will not be reduced to gender roles, but be seen simply as humans and defined by thier actions.

We will no longer perform the cultural fiction of the binary. The best of what we currently identify as masculine and feminine actions are open to performance by anybody. Gendered traits are simply traits and will have no bearing on how people should be treated.

Identifiable difference will be equally respected. Gender will no longer be such a strong defining principle in our society. Instead, we will enable people to be as free as possible to develop their own characteristics and ways of thinking. Sexes will be able to develop in the absence of differential treatment during the socialization process and throughout their lives.

Together we work toward more varied and rounded personalities than people in gendered societies currently develop. “What does *our* revolution sound like?” Our egalitarian dawn breaks on the death rattle. Join us as we toast the last gasp of gender itself.

Gender is Dead

after "Rock is Dead" by Marilyn Manson

We're programing robots and brainwashing babies;
aggression for boys and submission for ladies.
The powers that be say, "Kings always trump queens."
Lords of the land say, "There's no in between."

To be known and be loved
To be known and be loved

Gender is deader than dead.
The construct is all in your head.
The rules of your sex are all that you're fed.
Let's fuck the divisions and put them to bed.

God is gender free.

Gender is deader than dead.
The construct is all in your head.
The rules of your sex are all that you're fed.
Let's fuck the divisions and put them to bed.

One thousand fathers are prayin' for it.
We're so full of fear, and so full of shit.
We're made in God's image, and that includes me.
Seems a sin to shrink God into just "he" or "she."

To be known and be loved
To be known and be loved

Gender is deader than dead.
The construct is all in your head.
The rules of your sex are all that you're fed.
Let's fuck the divisions and put them to bed.

God is gender free.

Gender is deader than dead.
The construct is all in your head.
The rules of your sex are all that you're fed.
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Gender is deader than dead.
The construct is all in your head.
The rules of your sex are all that you're fed.
Let's fuck the divisions and put them to bed.

CHAPTER III

B-SIDES

“Lately it starts with samples because I’ve been really getting into records. I been buying a lot of 45s... Trying to get a break off that, you gotta really be hunting for that shit. What I’ll do is I’ll look for a groove or something to start it off with, but then I try to build around it. Try to make something out of it.”

J. Dilla

“[Sampling taught me] the spectrum of music. And just knowing that, ‘Ok, where did this come from?’ ‘Ok, where did that come from?’ It’s like taking a history class and you’re sitting in class and your instructor’s telling you, ‘Columbus discovered the Americas.’ Ok, but who came before Columbus? Why was he there? So you can have answers, but who’s really asking the questions? And that’s what it’s about, man. It’s about asking the questions.”

Beni B.

End Game

We catch bullets for the truth—
profetas y preachers
poetas y teachers— We speak, and
catch bullets for the truth.
Bodies planted like seeds—
movements bloom where we bleed.

We catch bullets for the truth—
profetas y preachers
poetas y teachers— We speak, and
catch bullets for the truth.
Bodies planted like seeds—
movements bloom where we bleed.

Malcolm, Martin, and Malala
43 desaparecidos de Iguala
Arizona's ethnic educators
Wendy Davis filibustering Texas legislators

Speak up. Spit truth.
Hands up. Don't shoot.
Mass silence yields violence.
Every mute moment registers as compliance.

Sharing truth should be ceremony.
Instead, there's a target on every testimony—
bullseyes on outspoken backs.
Speak your peace, then prepare for attack.

Come gather round the flames.
Our wild tongues birth change.
Come dance around the drum —
room, bread, and truth for everyone.
You are my other me. In Lak ech.
I am your other you. In Lak ech.
We heal each other with our every truth.

We catch bullets for the truth—
profetas y preachers
poetas y teachers— We speak, and
catch bullets for the truth.
Bodies planted like seeds—
movements bloom where we bleed.

Punk Zazen

a dog hopped along on a wounded limb
while I was standing in one spot
my shadow grew from short to tall and slim
while I was standing in one spot
I had a conversation with the grass
while I was standing in one spot
I tried but couldn't explain my current impasse
why I was standing in one spot

I felt so guilty taking up the space
while I was standing in one spot
all alone, I longed to find my place
while I was standing in one spot
the birds changed direction somewhere high above
while I was standing in one spot
I tried to cleared my mind of all thoughts of love
while I was standing in one spot

I watched the sun drag slow across the sky
a cop circled me twice giving me the eye
an old man tipped his hat as he shuffled on by
while I was standing in one spot

ants, flies, and moths all stopped to check me out
while I was standing in one spot
the thirsty ground begged but had to do without
while I was standing in one spot
a base drum boom drew close, then faded away
while I was standing in one spot
I tried to clear my mind but I pined anyway
while I was standing in one spot

I watched the moon float slow across the sky
a cop circled again giving me the eye
I felt a lump in my throat, but I refused to cry
while I was standing in one spot

when the sky went dark the breeze was sweet
while I was standing in one spot
the traffic slowed to nothing on my street
while I was standing in one spot
a distant train whistle made the hood hounds wail

while I was standing in one spot
I tried to clear my mind but to no avail
while I was standing in one spot

I was broken hearted and feeling resigned
I stared into the dark 'til I went half-blind
I tried to clear my mind, tried to clear my mind
while I was standing in one spot

Ni Una Mas

Ni Una Mas
Ya no soporto terrorismo macho
Amenazas no me asusten
Ni insultos pendejos

Ni una mas
We didn't make these rules
So now we're going to break em
It's a madman's world
So let's take it from them girls

hundreds of dead and missing women
along the Texas-Mexico border
but property lines enable us to turn our heads
as neighbors turn a blind eye
to the domestic terrorism
of domestic violence
ours harmed
and
somewhere on a TV set a pimp slaps a ho
and somewhere abused women have nowhere to go
somewhere college officials choose not to get involved
they'd rather squash the scandal than the rapist in their halls
and somewhere it's a woman who is really showing balls
save your catcalls for the *bimbos on your 1-900 calls*.
And somewhere in el valle they are silencing my voice
Put limits on my healthcare and they stripped me of my choice

Ni Una Mas
Ya no soporto terrorismo macho
Amenazas no me asusten
Ni insultos pendejos

Ni una mas
We didn't make these rules
So now we're going to break em
It's a madman's world
So let's take it from them girls
Ni una mas

somewhere
everywhere
ours harmed
wondering

Where is my homeland security?
What will save my self-image from
mass media's weapons of mass destruction?
And
Who will help me fight my daily war on terror?
as for those who question
warning: any woman who realizes the disadvantage of her sex
and vocalizes it
runs the risk of being labeled a bitch
or even worse
a feminist

Well, you know what I say to that?
“Hey, Kool Thing,
There's something I gotta ask you.
Are you gonna liberate us girls
From male white corporate oppression?
I just want you to know that we can still be friends”

Ni Una Mas
Ya no soporto terrorismo macho
Amenazas no me asusten
Ni insultos pendejos

Ni una mas
We didn't make these rules
So now we're going to break 'em
It's a madman's world
So let's take it from them girls

Emcees lyrics turn to violence cause their writing is whack
Can't get noticed lest you're pimpin or you're waving a gat
Well, I tell you I don't need to and my sisters got my back
They're chauvinisticizing rap but we're snatching it back

Ni Una Mas
Ya no soporto terrorismo macho
Amenazas no me asusten
Ni insultos pendejos

Ni una mas
We didn't make these rules
So now we're going to break em
It's a madman's world
So let's take it from them girls
NI UNA MAS!

Looptid

I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
One man's genius is another man's stupid.

Nauatl, then Spanish, now they're coming for our street tongue.
If we don't alert the young they won't be able to speak to no one.
I control my own words like Digital Underground dared me.
Literary critics don't scare me. Activism prepared me.
My serpent tongue licks the "English only" wounds which impaired me.
This counter narrative act of language reclamation repairs me.

They say my sampling is postmodern deconstruction.
But that analysis of hip hop ignores its primary function.
This ain't for the upper classes. It's for working class masses.
So, put away your opera glasses Drop the monocle. Move ya asses and

use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
One man's genius is another man's stupid.

This ain't iambic pentameter or counted verse,
but I had to prove I knew what all that fancy shit was first
before I could spit what ails me. I hope it don't stale me.
I'm the opposite of fresh—an emcee with a degree.

Now, I can communicate with my thesis committee!
Get myself off the rancho or out of the inner city!
No looking back on the gritty now that me talk pretty.
Attend an academic function, where I front like I'm witty.

But when I go back home folks on my block are the same.
All their stories go unheard, unless their tongues are reclaimed.
I keep my ear on the sidewalk, my eye on the real prize,
and ignore all the venididos who bought into the lies.
I do it all for all mi gente. ¡Delincuentes pa' frente!
¡Te dedico mis palabras, mi amor, y mi mente! And

I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
One man's genius is another man's stupid.

They say I'm provincial and populist? Well, they're pedantic and abstruse
I spit your own jargon back at you. I'm still "othered."
So, what's the real excuse?
I'm relegated to the margins, but by no means is this marginal abuse.
I'm invisible 'til marketable, when it's discovered that I'm a money makers to mass produce.

What? Why? How?

Who gives a fuck about an oxford comma? Whites are alright to fight it.
But brown folks gotta master the master's tongue just to prove that we ain't out to blight it.
So, many tight writers slighted. I write despite it! 'Cause, others quite trite are constantly cited.
Fuck the one percent. We're the 99 crashing the party. We're never invited.

We create the language. They steal it, and sell it back to me.
That's why a little white girl singing "Who Dat?" feels like such a personal attack to me.
'Cause my little brother answers the phone the same way that he has every day since the 3rd
grade
saying, "Yo! Who dis?" But society don't love him and that little white girl the same way.

Is it his dark skin or tattoo reading "Flaco?"
Or his afro that he rock like B-Real getting loco?
Our school systems failed him.
Now, privatized prisons loom hoping to jail him—
No clue of what ails him,
Still a big-ass doctor bill is still mailed him.

So, I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
I use a word that don't mean nothin' like "looptid."
One man's genius is another man's stupid.

The Branch of the Mesquite Tree

by Ramón Ayala

The branch of the mesquite tree,
(where you once waited for me)
well, ever since you left me
it's started to go dry.

Its leaves that once were green
have yellowed now it seems
as if in solidarity
that I'm without my life.

The branch of the mesquite tree
is dying alongside me.
So, if you ever seek me
you'll find me where I lie -

far beneath the lovers' cemetery.
If you visit where I'm buried,
oh darling, don't you cry.

My cross will be
the branch of the mesquite tree.
Then you will see
what your love meant to me.

The branch of the mesquite tree
and I will be together.
Don't make yourself feel sadder,
cuz nothing lasts forever.

Fire Talkers

“The flame of insurgency has been lit.” Felipe de la Cruz

“¿Donde estan los estudian**T**es?”

El Puebl**O** deserves more substantial
answers than charre**D** remains, mass graves, and ash offerings.
Embers of the disappeared sm**O**lder in
blood red blossom**S** against the darkness.

Finally pa**S**sed its kindling point—
the temperature at which c**O**rruption burns
and **M**artyrs self-immolate—
Mexico spells **O**ut demands in smoke signals.

“¡Vivos se los llevaron! ¡Vivos lo**S** queremos!”

Tempers rise with fl**A**mes.
“**Y**a nos cansamos.” Tired
of the narc**O** state’s boots
hard at the necks of the poor, **T**he masses
stand now with **Z**apatistas and lock step with Normalistas
crying out w**I**th tongues combusting
in the language of revolutio**N**.

Buildings, c**A**rs, and governments fuel 43 pyres.
Fingers wrap into fists of rock, pi**P**e and brick
and rise into the **A**ir with flames.

Manor Farm

after "Maggie's Farm" by Bob Dylan

I ain't gonna answer at the check point no more.
No, I'm not going to submit at the check point no more.
Well, they'll wave you right on through
half the time if you are white.
But if you're brown, they won't hesitate
to violate your rights.
When I question it, they just harass me more.
No, I ain't gonna answer at the check point no more.

I ain't gonna shop at Hobby Lobby no more.
No, I ain't gonna shop at Hobby Lobby no more.
They claim that they're religious,
but they're casting the first stone.
They say they stand for family,
but won't let you plan your own.
The courts treat them like a person, not a store.
No, I ain't gonna shop at Hobby Lobby no more.

I ain't gonna eat at Chick-Fil-A no more.
No, I ain't gonna eat at Chick-Fil-A no more.
Well, they close their doors on Sunday,
so their workers can go pray.
They donated to groups opposed to civil rights for gays.
Well, their chicken's great, but their hatred I deplore.
So, I ain't gonna eat at Chick-Fil-A no more.

I ain't gonna buy Monsanto products no more.
No, I ain't gonna eat Monsanto crops no more.
They're playing God with nature,
and they're copyrighting seeds.
They're destroying bees and butterflies
with toxins aimed to kill their weeds.
They're the devils behind DDT and agent orange.
No, I ain't gonna buy Monsanto products no more.

I ain't got no faith in red or blue no more.
No, I ain't got no faith in politicians no more.
'Cause they will not work together,
but they're owned by the same folks.
Everybody knows
most are puppets for the Kochs.

They say, "We the people," but then ignore the poor.
No, I ain't got no faith in red or blue no more.

I won't spend my dollar without thinking no more.
No, I won't spend my dollar without thinking no more.
I could pollute with every penny.
Blood could pour from every bill.
I wanna spend my dime on living.
But I don't even know when my paycheck kills.
It's my only weapon left in this class war.
No, I ain't gonna act without thinking no more.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amalia Ortiz, Tejana actor, writer, and activist, appeared on three seasons of *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry* on HBO and the NAACP Image Awards on FOX. She toured colleges and universities as a solo-artist, and with the performance-poetry troupes Diva Diction, The Chicano Messengers of Spoken Word, and the Def Poetry College Tour.

Amalia's debut book of poetry, *Rant. Chant. Chisme.*, published by Wings Press was selected by NBC Latino as one of the "10 Great Latino Books of 2015." She also was chosen to perform at TEDx McAllen in 2015.

Amalia received her bachelor in Theatre Arts from the University of the Incarnate Word. She was awarded the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation Grant from Sandra Cisneros in 2002. In August 2011, she was awarded a writing residency at the National Hispanic Cultural Center, and she was one of 10 winners of the VIA Metropolitan Transit's "Poetry on the Move" contest which displayed her poetry on public busses in San Antonio. Her poem, "The Short Skirt Speaks," won 1st place in the UTPA Women and Gender Studies Creative Arts Student Exhibit and Competition, and her poem "These Hands Which Have Never Picked Cotton" was nominated for the 2012 Pushcart Prize.

She is a CantoMundo Fellow and a Hedgebrook Writer-In-Residence alumna, where she wrote a Latino musical, *Carmen de la Calle*. She received her Master of Fine Arts degree in May 2016. otraesa@gmail.com