

5-2011

## After "Borderlands" The Making of an Academic Chola: Poems

Veronica Sandoval  
*University of Texas-Pan American*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg\\_etd](https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg_etd)



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sandoval, Veronica, "After "Borderlands" The Making of an Academic Chola: Poems" (2011). *Theses and Dissertations - UTB/UTPA*. 92.

[https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg\\_etd/92](https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg_etd/92)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations - UTB/UTPA by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact [justin.white@utrgv.edu](mailto:justin.white@utrgv.edu), [william.flores01@utrgv.edu](mailto:william.flores01@utrgv.edu).

*AFTER BORDERLANDS*  
THE MAKING OF AN ACADEMIC CHOLA: POEMS

A Thesis

by

VERONICA SANDOVAL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2011

Major Subject: Creative Writing



*AFTER BORDERLANDS*

THE MAKING OF AN ACADEMIC CHOLA: POEMS

A Thesis  
by  
VERONICA SANDOVAL

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Emmy Pérez  
Chair of Committee

Dr. Steven Schneider  
Committee Member

Dr. Marci McMahon  
Committee Member

May 2011



Copyright 2011 Veronica Sandoval  
All Rights Reserved



## ABSTRACT

Sandoval, Veronica, After Borderlands: The Making of an Academic Chola. Master of Fine Arts (MFA), May, 2011, 106pp.

This poetry collection is by a Mexican American spoken word, performance poet, Lady Mariposa, from Sullivan City turned Chican@ feminist after coming to terms with her mestizaje through Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In Lady Mariposa's journey as an "Academic Chola," the term "chola" articulates her Chican@ identity and creates a new space in academia by using "chola" as a hybrid of identity and style in the formation of her poetics. Her poetry can also be called pocho, pochá, Tex-Mex and code switches. She is inspired by Chican@ literature and history, lowriders, cholo culture, cholas, jazz, hip hop, Tejano music, The Beats, pop culture, feminisms, family, love, barrio culture, and includes poetry forms such as the haiku and pantoum, and sub genres such as ecphrastic poetry.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you Emmy Pérez for always believing in my work and for all your help and input on my poems and this thesis. Thank you Dr. Steven Schneider for your support of my work, and for introducing me to form only so that I could barrio-fy it. Dr. Marci McMahon I thank you for all your help and scholarly direction, you are the most Chicana-est white girl I know. Thank you too Dr. Kamala Platt your encouragement and advice. Isaac Chavarría aka El Gran Pocho, your guidance in this process has been indispensable, you have always been my editor of choice. To “The Trinity” plus One, Erica Garza-Johnson “La Erika”, Lauren Espinoza and Priscilla Celina Suarez, thank you ladies for being my poetic partners in crime, I love you. Kimberly Snyder you are the greatest love poem that came from heartache, thank you for your work on my album, and thank you for sharing your sparkly, keytar dream with me.

Many thanks to the RGV poetry scene for always embracing me and my work; you have become my extended family. For all those who exist in my sanctuary outside of academia, thank you for believing in me, Mom, Dad, Chuy, Cindy, Lola, Rachel, Celia and Alex.

As always, thank you Dr. Marci Mitchell & STC you were the first to believe in me.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
CRITICAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	31
PRE-ACADEMIA .....	36
Señora Ignorancia .....	37
Fernando .....	41
A Man, the Solution.....	44
And I shouted Chicano.....	46
RINCONCITOS DE AMOR .....	49
Soy .....	50
Ecphrastic Love .....	51
I like you like that .....	52
Sometimes love dies .....	53
Hombres como tú.....	55
Joyas Voladoras	
<i>For Bryan Doyle</i> .....	56
am to pm .....	57

A Mexican Love Story .....	58
The House of Ramon Iglesia: A reflection for my Mother.....	60
W-E, The River.....	62
No Trovador.....	65
<b>BORDERLAND FEMINISTA.....</b>	<b>66</b>
A Smiling Brown Bear Named Juan.....	67
Lady Mariposa Intro .....	69
I Was Never Supposed.....	71
Once, My father's hands.....	72
Emplumada Girl	
<i>for Lorna Dee Cervantes</i> .....	74
Güera de Candy Cigarette.....	75
Who are you pudgy a? .....	76
The Parable .....	77
She Was: The Impotent Sun Rose .....	79
Am I a writer?.....	80
Cariñitos, A Daughter's Love Poem.....	82
I worry	
<i>after Juan Felipe Herrera</i> .....	84
My Titties.....	85
How to be La Llorona for the city of Sullivan that has no sidewalks	
<i>For Domino Renee Perez</i> .....	86
<b>BARRIO CHOLA DE LA ACADEMIA .....</b>	<b>88</b>

If .....	89
Mi cuerpo es una frontera .....	90
Mexico Who.....	92
Because Diana Garcia asked what we needed in my barrio	
The “what if the barrio told us we were artist?” poem .....	94
Barrio Haikus .....	95
El Sofa.....	96
Los Pulgeros Pantoum .....	97
Be it if I could .....	98
Contando Cuentos .....	99
East Austin Walks.....	101
Save Yourself Chola .....	102
POETRY NOTES .....	104
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	106



## CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

For me the term Chola is a modification of the concept Chicano which I identified with pop culturally between the ages of 17 and 23, but did not come to understand until my 30s. Chola is the term I use for my poetic approach; therefore in my collection Chola is a hybrid of identity and style that forms my poetics. Section 1, Pre-Academia includes early work before I began attending college and when I primarily identified as a street style spoken word artist. Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* was a major influence on my poetic approach, and it was after *Borderlands* the book that I finally began code switching in my poems and formed a mestiza consciousness. The rest of my work is constructed After *Borderlands* and is divided into sections based on the major themes found in my work such as love, feminism, and academic chola identity. I also include in this thesis all the poems in my spoken word album, *Hecha En El Valle: Spoken Word and Borderland Beats*. The section of poems in my album is the one that most closely resembles who I am as an artist; it features me in harmony in my role as a street style spoken word artist and Academic Chola.

### **Sullivan City**

In *Borderlands La Frontera*, Anzaldúa says "The U.S. Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds...two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (25).



As my little sister sends facebook status updates via her cell phone I am sitting with my mother on her couch in Sullivan watching *Caseo Ceredo*, a Latin American version of *The People's Court*. We all watch quietly and laugh as defendants and plaintiffs present claims, while the Jueza often scolds them like spoiled children. It is a hot South Texas afternoon and outside I hear Antonia, my mother's neighbor since I was 10, arrive home from what I suppose has been a day of shopping or visiting relatives since she has long since retired from her job as the cafeteria lady at my old elementary school. My father is in the master bedroom pretending to watch TV, but really sleeping; we can hear him snoring from the open door through the hallway. Phil, the family's German shepherd, runs the length of the front fence back and forth barking wildly. He usually does this when my cousin's children are playing in the street. My Tía Martha, my father's sister, lives in the lime green house in front of my parents' home, and often her place is filled with grandchildren who will not be contained by four walls, especially since Tío Ricardo died. Phil, who looks much tougher than he is, has no choice but to bark at the children in the street. The neighbors, on the opposite side of my childhood home, only reside there five months out of the year, and there is nothing interesting to sniff or bark at.

On the flat screen TV the defendant and the plaintiff have begun wrestling with each other; the Jueza's good looking court bailiff intervenes, sending each to his prospective corner. Outside, the familiar sounds of home embrace me; in the distance a truck with loud hip hop music drives by slowly, and I know that Don Pedro, usually walking his chivas and two chivos, will be shooing his herd to eat the tall grass that has gathered on the fence next to my father's old Pentecostal church down the street. When I am away from here, I long for Sullivan. There is a feeling that comes when I enter past my father's workshop under the carport, through the back door of the three bedroom home he built with his own hands. This is where I grew up-- El Rio

Bravo is five minutes from my mother's house nestled in Los Ebanos. The hand drawn ferry, "El Chalan," the only one of its kind, sits closed. This was where years ago as a teenager my family and I entered Mexico. We would wait with the engine off and our windows open on the dirt banks of the Rio Grande as a group of men would pull three cars at a time across the river into the border city of Camargo on a metal barge.

This place is where I formed quintessential me. Because I am from Sullivan all my work is constructed as the girl who used to live in Sullivan. Remembering where the purest form of the constantly constructed and reconstructed me comes from, ensures that my work retains its sounds and its images, ensures that I do not lose myself in the search for theoretical me.

### **Esos Rinconcitos**

Voy a buscar  
Un rinconcito en el cielo  
Para llevar  
A mi amor

...Para escondernos  
Tu y yo.

...Juntos unidos los dos  
Y cuando caiga la noche  
Te dare mi amor

Ramon Ayala

Entering Mexico through Los Ebanos was slow and unlike the faster solid pace of the Reynosa or Rio Grande City bridge. Because Los Ebanos and the chalan are prominent in my memory it is only fitting that it is the obvious metaphor for how I approach poetry and education in general-- slowly. In my poem, "Because Diana Garcia asked what was needed in my barrio, The what if the Barrio had told us we were artist poem," I lament over the time not spent being a

poet. How if I had known what I did in my journals was poetry, I might not have married my oppressive husband, and my neighbor Fernando might have spent his time being an artist outside correctional walls. For some, being from families where education beyond high school is never pursued, and extracurricular reading is never encouraged, coming to academia doesn't happen by bridge, it happens slowly, tugged against the current, by ferry.

In Los Ebanos at the Chalan, while we waited often 45 minutes to an hour, my father would turn off the engine of the dusty old Astro van and open the windows. The food vendors would approach us selling Mexican candies, elotes, sodas, tacos, tamarindos or tamales. With the cool morning breeze and the sound of kiskadees and kingbirds I would take in the mesquite and ebony trees that lined the border. I would watch as cars seemed to dance across the murky river, swayed softly by invisible watery fingers. This place holds the earliest memories I have of Mexico, and the dirt cut entry of the road that leads to the chalan was the closest I physically came to the river. This is the rinconcito of my memories where Mexico and I were able to innocently exist; it not demanding recognition, and I not striving for validation. It was before I claimed Mexico as my motherland and the U.S. as my birth. It was before the hyphenated American, after the dissemination of the blind fold of assimilation, when Mexico and the United States were nothing but the meeting place where two countries kissed a river. This place of innocence filled with tamarindo and sodas, with the cutoff engines of cars and the sound of the Rio Grande, is my borderlands; a peace minus the turmoil of theory. This harmony is the place I seek to return to in every poem that weaves narrative, meaning, ideology, and memories. A place that consolidates it all, who I am, what I have been, what I will become. The smell of dirt and water, the way the wind sounded through the mesquite trees, the way my mother's face would soften as she stared towards her Mexico - these are the images etched into my memory and

poetry like echoes of a distant horn weaving notes of a barely audible jazz song that keeps beat without me knowing.

My mother and father met on a rancho called “El Campesino” in Camargo, Mexico, a border area, and we would often go visit my uncle Sandungo and his family who lived in a nearby rancho:

In Camargo my uncle would make tripas in lard sizzling in the metal disco. With a few pesos he would send us to buy tortillas from the tendita a mile up the main road...When I visited my uncle’s rancho my cousin Georgina was still a girl, she hadn’t left with the man she would marry before she was 16. Her brother still helped with the chivas and cosecha, he would take us to bathe in the canal, we would play hide and seek in the broken camion with empty bed, and drink from the noria that seem to go on into the center of the world, forever.” 59

These memories of my visits to my family in Mexico are found in my poem “A Mexican Love Poem.” The mix between childhood remembrances with reflections of a physical Mexico that I still have not explored, illustrate that in my work there is a constant search for a sort of essence of an identity. I gleam at essence because I will not be contained by any one solid definition, and I understand my writing is a constant exploration of ideas that I introduce to myself in search for an ideal. Identity and the empowerment that comes in being able to select identity, makes the term important, rather than the definition of the selected. As a poet, I explore topics and theories to weave into my narrative, finding that each idea I choose to adapt in my stance helps construct a thinking individual that is valid in the world. This constructed identity is fluid and serves me; it helps to keep me accountable for myself, rather than the justification that comes with the

extended aspect of self in roles such as wife, mother, lover, daughter or academic, activist, Chican@ and so on.

### **Rebellion in Sullivan**

Sullivan City is in my poetry, in my images, and is the catalyst of many of my poems. It was logical for my father to purchase a lot here to build our family's first home; his father, uncle and brothers lived in this city. Growing up I hated how far away it was from what was considered cool, like the mall, movies, park, and the beach. Sullivan is a 45 minute drive from McAllen, a speck of a town between La Joya and Rio Grande City. As many young girls do I longed for something more than my mother's chores and my father's rules.

In order to understand my need of rebelliousness you have to understand the helplessness of having grown up in a home where religion was restrictive and channeled my decisions. Before my family moved back to Texas permanently we lived in Florida until I was eleven. It was during this time that my father was a pastor of a large congregation in Florida City, Florida, and my earliest memories of him are behind a pulpit. I grew up with feelings of inadequacies when it came to God's plans in my life. The feelings became even more pronounced when I entered puberty. By then my father was a co-pastor of a church in Sullivan. The sermons that he filled with sinful lustful women suddenly became applicable to me; I "fornicated," I was "lustful," I was driven by "the desires of the flesh." My father's perceived accountability to his congregation kept him from allowing me to participate in any extracurricular activities such as theater arts, UIL or sports. What would the congregation say about him as a pastor if his daughter were allowed to roam freely engaging in activities that kept her away from home till nightfall? This overzealous stance kept me sheltered and enraged. I was not allowed to do the simplest of things such as go to the mall on a Sunday afternoon with friends or the movies, even if we were

accompanied by parents. Every form of outside influences was affected: reading materials, films and even music. My father believed that God did not like broken sounds, because music that was broken was of the devil. These “broken sounds” were sounds such as gritos found in Mexican songs and scratching in rap and hip-hop. I was the only teenage girl I knew that could sing every doo-wop 50s song on the radio since it was not objectionable music in my father’s eyes.

When I was 17 I finally went against his rules. It was my senior year in high school, and my father was no longer able to stop me from participating in school activities. I joined the flag corps in the marching band, and participated in U.I.L. Prose and Poetry. When I was actively engaged in social activities, I started thinking about myself in relation to the world. This was when I started identifying with Chicano pop culture. When I was a teenager there were no Chicanos or cholos in Sullivan. The only cholo I knew as a teenager was my neighbor Fernando, but he was strange cut against the characters that lived there. My uncles were not cholos, my parents were not Chicano, so there was no one to emulate. I did not understand the history of Chicano or Chicano theory. The iconography of Chicano found in films such as *American Me* & *Blood in Blood Out* were influential films for a brown girl looking for a subculture to define herself with aside from her parents’ antiquated traditions. Chicano gave me an identity to strive for, beyond being the pastor’s daughter. Having come to terms with my Chicano identity plays a large part in the style shift of my work; and this is mentioned in an unpublished essay I wrote called “Soy Tomb Raider”:

Chicano you never loved me the way I loved you...Chicano you were Javier, Fred, Mario, Robert, Bilo, George, Ruben, Martin. Chicano you were Ramiro, Karla, Claudia and Abby. I left my husband...who told me I could not go to college, my husband who finally told me that he couldn’t trust me, because when

I had married him, I had not been a virgin, and he would always think I was dirty...I left my husband that day, but I really left you Chicano. I left and became one of those other kinds of women...The kind that doesn't give you Azteca babies, the kind that grows up to be hocicona, that never stands quietly and stoically anymore, Chicano you abandoned me...Chicano of ignorant children who never knew their history, who never heard of you Chicano in the 60s, who only knew you in movies, and in zoot-zuit clothing, Chicano you abandoned me.  
(Sandoval 8)

This older image of Chicano is identified in this collection as "Chicano" with an ending in "o." As I grew to understand Chicano as my own and reclaimed it from the men in my car club, it became Chican@ with an ending in "@." It was due to my discovery of feminism that I began using the term Chican@ in my written work; however, because I grew up with the term Chicano in artwork, music and rhetoric, in my spoken word I still pronounce it Chicano without the @. The term Chicano still written with the "o" and discussed as such is not offensive to me and does not diminish the importance of the theory behind the word. This is true even in my discussion of chola, as I often resort to the male cholo image such as that of Edward James Olmos. The gender of the discussed theory isn't hypersensitive in this collection, although I understand the importance of it within academia. To me, it is the theory that is important, and it is the ideas they produce within my scholarship that renders the term cholo/chola genderless.

### **"Cultural Tyranny"**

"Cultural Tyranny" is the subheading for Anzaldúa's chapter called "Movimientos de rebeldia y las culturas que traicionan," and I find it very appropriate title when discussing the cultural realities that lead to my rejection of Chicano. My rejection of Chicano at 23 was not an

ideological rejection; rather, it was a rejection tied to my failed marriage and the alienation that came after our separation from friends my husband and I had known as a couple. I met my ex-husband when I was 17, and by the age of 20 we were married. My mother and father were still restrictive after I graduated from high school, and I carried the strain of my sexuality heavily. I married my husband hastily, consumed with the guilt I felt because I was having sex with him out of wedlock. My father and the examples of the women around me led me to believe that I had no control over my life, and that the proper sequence for a young lady was to wait for a man to deem her acceptable, and then have him cart her off from her father's house, a virgin of course. My ex-husband was a mama's boy, and a controlling, sexist machista. I accepted the role I had been given because I believed that it was sanctioned by God. My poem "Señora Ignorancia" is an early form of my feminist writing without being aware then of what it meant to be a feminist; I had written it without having read feminist theory, but knew the feeling of being oppressed by domineering men and cultural gender roles. To be a young wife and to have become one without having become pregnant out of wedlock was the most that was expected of me. I didn't want to just be a wife. My poem "Señora Ignorancia" talks about the expectations of me as a woman and daughter, and these expectations never sat well with me:

Our Daughters will grow up with the same values as our mothers,  
the good women,  
that obeyed and swallowed their tears,  
good mothers,  
good wives,  
good housekeepers,  
as it should be (38)



These themes of gender roles and cultural expectations are found throughout much of the poetry I would later read such as Sandra Cisneros's "Linoleum Roses" in *The House on Mango Street*. I was once Sally who married "young and not ready but married just the same" (124).

It was during the year of my 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday that I left my first husband, fed up with his ill treatment and lack of trust; I asked that he explain his passive aggressiveness towards me. I discovered that he could not come to terms with not having been my first. I had had two lovers before him, while to him I was his first. He said "You fucked someone before, how do I know you won't fuck someone again," and then he followed with a barrage of insults where he called me a puta and a piece of shit. Despite my own religious hang-ups I knew my worth as a person was not diminished because I had had previous lovers. Even before I understood my complex relationship with God through poetry, I knew that God would not condone the things my husband was saying. There was no way that I could be with a man for the rest of my life who believed that he had a right to mistreat me because of a past that was none of his business.

After my divorce and returning to my parents' home I knew I had crossed a cultural line. From that point on there was to be a disruption between the fluid identity of self that I had not constructed yet, and the role that was expected from my father and my car club. As Anzaldúa writes "Culture forms our beliefs" and "is made by those in power--men" (Anzaldúa 38). It was the rejection of my car club, the group of men who had up to this point defined Chicano for me, that pushed me away from my elementary understanding of culture. I no longer fit into the stereotypically dictated image of the firme hyna, or women like my mother who never divorced bad husbands. "Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children" (Anzaldúa 39), and I am both unmarried and childless. I was driven into a contemporary role and because I could not consolidate the longing for my old life and the new role I had been driven to,

I had no choice but to erase it. Anzaldúa's cultural tyrants won, and I erased the Chicano that did not like me. I started dating men weeks after my separation, and started having sex, drinking, dancing, and living without a man to tell me what to do. All of these issues are found in my early work as Lady Mariposa pre-academia. Not having the benefit of education to guide me towards topics like feminism and history in my poetry, I wrote out of primal need to validate the existence of a voice I had allowed my father, my husband, God & Chicano to mute.

### **Becoming Lady Mariposa**

The poet in me didn't claim ownership of her writing until the morning of my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. Up to that day I had kept journals and written in private, but nothing was ever constructed under the title of "poet." In Sullivan nobody becomes a poet. Most everyone becomes a parent: they become tired, waiting for el cheque to come, or la temporada to pass so they can return to their boarded up houses after the trabajos are over. Poetry wasn't easy for a girl like me whose neighborhood was proof that girls like me never grew up to do much, and even less call themselves artists. My cousin Letty told me going to school was pointless, and either way I ended up in Michigan, packing blueberries in a factory during summer alongside her who dropped out when she was a sophomore in high school. In order for me to be a poet I had to give myself permission; through Lady Mariposa I finally found my voice.

At 25 I began hosting poetry readings throughout the valley at places like Padrinos Cigar Bar, Jitterz Coffee House, City Café and Art Awakenings. I did open mics during Lunadas, Fat Man and Little Boys, Moonbeans and Millennium Café. I met a young Rene Saldaña, Xavier Garza and started reading with a group of self-published writers who printed under "No Alarms Publications." My collection was almost nonexistent, and working to find venues to read moved me to produce pieces to keep up with the readings I was booking. I did not release my first

collection of work in chapbook format until 2004 called *The Answer*. Between 2000 and 2004 I learned to be an artist. Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl," was an epiphany; I understood then the power poetry held to tell stories and ability to capture moments. I was introduced to Ginsberg and the "Beats" through my friend Christopher Carmona. Chris tried to make me understand the importance of reading. He gave me *Blues and Haikus* by Jack Kerouac, kept insisting I learn my craft, and to consider I enroll in college. I dismissed his concern about my schooling, by telling him that Jack Kerouac had not graduated from college so I didn't need to either. Chris said that it was true that Jack had only enrolled for one semester of college, but that I should be aware that Kerouac was well read. I demanded that Chris prove that I was less valid as a poet because I hadn't read all the books that he and others had.

I hated the idea of being forced to go to school so I could validate myself as a thinker and poet. I was muy chingona refusing his suggestions at every turn, confident I was dismissing the arrogance of degrees and learning. However, I did not realize I spent four years learning in a fashion I believe is reminiscent of early thinkers, organically gathered through life and experiences. Influenced by the Beat's love of jazz I became a jazz cat and started writing poems while listening to jazz. The flow of my writing and performance followed the patterns of the rhythms found in Coltrane, Miles Davis, Billy Holiday and Etta James. The rhythms lend themselves to performance, and being involved in theater during my senior year in high school, I was not a stranger to performance. Before I developed my poetic chops, before I learned what enjambments were, what iambic pentameter was, I knew rhythm and the importance of performance.

Without knowing I was teaching myself how to be an artist, I was making myself fall in love with learning and discovery. It was out of necessity at first because as an unknown poet

outside the university setting and social circles of McAllen, no one was my mentor. No one told me how to be Lady Mariposa. I learned how to host my own readings, have my events published on the radio and newspaper, and gather readers and featured artists. I created a database of over 500 emails and sent out event notifications for my readings and others in the community. Having been turned on to jazz by the Beats I started slowly opening up to reading other writers. I discovered Sandra Cisneros in a San Antonio book store when the cover of *My Wicked Wicked Ways* caught my attention. I stumbled onto Saphirre's *Black Wings & Blind Angels* in the same way.

These four years were my foundation and my beginnings. I was learning what I wanted, when I wanted. I was doing it rasquache style, from books I stole from friends, and music I confiscated from anyone that left me alone with their CDs. I went to art shows and drank free wine, watched anything that was played in the community for free. I watched films to inspire me. I listened to music; I went to concerts and danced with my eyes closed. I cruised around with my radio blaring and the windows open taking in the valley landscape, inhaling life and exhaling a jumbled mess of poems and ideas. I listened to Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, Bad Brains, Jamiroquai, Pedro Infante, José Alfredo Jiménez and the Buena Vista Social Club. I started seeking films for inspiration, and I knew immediately which films I was attracted to. They had flowing dialogue and often the films were based on books. After seeing the movie *Before Night Falls*, I read Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls* and *Singing from the Well*. I saw the film *Fight Club* and made it a point to read Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and then read *Invisible Monsters*, *Choke* and *Survivor*. I saw Martin Scorsese's film *Bringing Out the Dead*, and made it a point to read Joe Connelly's book *Bringing Out the Dead*. I saw the film *Basquiat*, so I started looking for art images online and made it a point to look at Art magazines in book stores.

These were the young voices and pop images that spoke to me when I started to officially write as Lady Mariposa. They moved me towards a modern narrative, away from the typical voices that dominated my unschooled literature perspective which was mostly dead white males. I made it a point to learn about the history of the writers I was reading, and most of the writers who interested me were dark characters. They had shady pasts, tragic lives, drug and alcohol addictions, and lived to a sad and lonely end. I was attracted to writers such as Miguel Piñero and artists like Andy Warhol & Frida Kahlo. It was because their lives were dark and painful, and their writing and work was a real reflection of tragedy, that it made it okay for me to write with more honesty.

### **The Chola Academic. After Borderlands**

I promoted my name by reading in the community. Pre-Academia I was an invited performer to several high schools and one year I was invited to Region One Education Service Center. I was doing a poetry workshop with a group of students and one of the students, who had informed me only a few hours before that we were distant cousins, was working on a writing prompt when he asked me how far I had gotten in college. I had a well-rehearsed speech I gave when I was assaulted with the demand for higher education; I gave it to my friend Chris, how art was art and there was no need for education. However, how could I say that to this young man, at Region One who was there for a day event that was designed to promote art and the ultimate goal of increasing the enrollment of high school students into college? When I told him plainly that I had no education, that I hadn't gone to college and I wasn't able to defend my choice, the look on his face was devastating. Minutes before he was involved in the writing prompt and he was happily talking and sharing with me, he withdrew. For the rest of the session he sat there with a smirk on his face and no longer participated. It was then when I began to seriously question my

stance on education. It wasn't just about winning the approval of that one student or others that felt like him; it was that despite not having an education that workshop was important, poetry was important. If I wanted to gain access to individuals like him I knew that I would need the validation that comes with a degree.

This incident happened around the same time when I felt that my writing had reached a plateau. I had known since I was 25 that I wanted to be a poet, and as a performance poet who performed outside academic circles I was always looking to fight to prove that my work mattered. Somewhere in validating my spoken word as poetry came a form of competitiveness. I knew that if I wanted to remain a valid voice in the RGV poetry scene that I needed to write about new subjects, but this was hard for someone with a limited education. When I initially came to higher education it was not because I understood the importance of it in a classic sense; it was because I needed to learn about new subjects so that I could write new poems. I was all about being a better writer.

I started attending college part-time in 2005. Due to the early stance I had taken on education I had developed a separation between myself and academia. It wasn't academia's fault but my own, since I had constructed an image of myself and my work as outside of what was considered proper and accepted. Every time there were events in the community where published authors were invited to read, I was never one of the locals that were asked to participate. Being outside of the institution's circle, I constructed misinformed images on what it meant to be an accepted poet and an academic. I and no one that sounded like me was ever a poet laureate, so how could I get my work published in places like the *New York Times* or *Reader's Digest*? It wasn't as if I read these publications but there was an image of what it meant to be a successful poet and my success depended on my ability to be "universal" and to me "universal" meant

white and acculturated, because all most of my experience with poetry up to that point in academia involved dead white guys. The rebelliousness I had against education moved me to want to be urban, like Maya Angelou, Mos Def and Langston Hughes because I did not want to be or could ever be white. So my poetry took on its jazzy tones, an urban street style. In short I was a Mexican girl trying to sound like a black girl because I did not want to sound like a white girl. And it never occurred to me that I should just sound like me. Up to this point what I knew about my culture was limited to fairy tales of Quinceañeras and piñatas. Because I still did not understand my culture and had not come to terms with my mestizaje, I referred to the images around me as stereotypes. I was uncomfortable and refused to write about field work, poverty, or la llorona. I was pushing the reality of everything around me away from my work, constructing images about what I thought it meant to be good writer, and being a good writer and a valid poet didn't involve anything that sounded like me or looked like me.

I began attending college full time in 2007 after I received my associates at South Texas College. I had completed all my basics at STC so when I arrived at UT Pan American I was able to delve into more specialized classes that focused on subjects that I had always been curious about. This was when I finally read Chicano literature and studied Chicano history. It wasn't until a year later when I read *Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldúa, that the identity that I constructed as a poet and academic changed forever. Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" gave me back the language of my mother. She was the first Chicana who I read that explored theory, and introduced subjects meaningful to me as a woman coming to terms with my feminism and identity. She shamed me into the recognition that until I read her I did not believe Chicanas could be intellectuals. I realized that I had muted my voice not only because I believed that academic voices did not sound like mine, I had also muted it because I did not want to be Chican@.

Chican@ was tied to being a Mexican American, and trying to assimilate into being an American erased the part of me that was Mexican. It was the Mexican part of me that I used to stare in the mirror for hours trying to erase. It was the part of me that was poor, that was dark skinned, that wasn't Kelly Kapowski from *Saved by the Bell*, a popular porcelain skinned girl with blue eyes who tanned a clear gold with a handsome blond boyfriend. I wasn't Elisabeth or Jessica Wakefield from *Sweet Valley High* -- I wasn't anyone I wanted to be, and I did not want to be me.

### **My India Hues**

At 13 and 14 my mother and father sent me to live with my Tía Maria during the summer. She lived in Citrus Bay, Pharr, a mobile home community with a clubhouse and pool. I lived with my aunt, four boy cousins and my Tío Lolo because my Tía needed help with cleaning and washing. I would do various chores and in return she would buy clothes and school supplies for me for the new school year. I would spend a month or two with her and then a month with my grandmother in Las Milpas, who I would help at the flea market selling clothes for the used clothing stand she ran. Every day while in Citrus Bay and only if my aunt had paid her dues, we would go swimming in one of the two community pools. It was exciting, and we would swim for hours, returning only when hunger bothered us or the sun had disappeared. The time I spent in the sun baked me past a deep gold brown, turning my skin to an almost black hue. I wouldn't notice or care until I returned to school and the other girls in my class at La Joya who I hadn't seen since the end of the previous year would laugh and say how black I was and how I looked like an Indian.

I would go home and look at myself in the mirror, a skinny girl with long winged hair I barely combed, and whose breasts hadn't grown in yet. I was the ugly girl in the mirror, and if I



took a bath long enough, maybe my skin would exhale the brown from my arms and face -- if I looked in the mirror enough maybe I could convince myself I was beautiful. When my best friend Lola, a white skinned girl whose mom was Anglo and father was Mexican would laugh at me for speaking Spanish, it wasn't a problem for me to stop and begin only speaking English. Maybe if I tore out my tongue, I would feel less ashamed. My poem "Soy" like many of the other "Soy" poems written before mine, deals with memories of language, poverty, and the shame of being brown:

Soy kissed by the sun,  
black hair and dark eyes,  
soy returning home after los trabajos  
ashamed of my india hues. (51)

There was no Trinidad Sanchez Jr. when I was a girl to answer, "Why am I so brown," and my poem "Soy" along with "Be it if I could" follow the tradition of responses that could be given to voices that ask just that.

The summer of my 15th birthday my mother and I went with my Tía Martha to South Carolina to work in the cherry tomato fields and warehouse to make money for my school clothes again. When I came back to Texas, my skin that had slowly lost its darkness throughout the year came home baked to my india brown. I was the color of dirt, and the india looking back at me in the mirror was poor, like the señoras in Reynosa begging for quarters from the shoppers. I was from Sullivan City and with the way we lived it might as well have been a mountain community; the farthest my family took us into town was Mission to shop for food on Conway Street. We lived on food stamps and Medicare. My father was attempting to get his disability check while still working jobs that brought him back home late at night, torn with pain from his

injured back. The india in the mirror was nothing like how America said I could be, and the india in the mirror let America shame away her Mexican.

At 31, after *Borderlands* I realized that I had kept my voice enslaved to my own self-loathing. I was the man behind the iron curtain telling myself that the universal voice was light skinned and did not sound like my mother or father. In 2007 I came to understand Chican@ was not dictated by a sub culture, that it was valid with the connection I gave to it in recognizing it as my own. I am an india, my mother and father are from México, I am an American, I was born in McAllen, Texas. Having been at war with elements of my identity kept me divided and in my poem “If” I deal with borders and the walls we build, one of them being language:

If my borders were walls

I'd never listen for the reverberating sound

The accented tones of my brown skin

I'd let the che-s and the eñe-s be drowned in concrete (90)

I deserved to speak in a voice I know, pocho, tex-mex, pachuco, cholo, because there is no such thing as incorrect language, and there is validity in my voice because my people are valid. “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity-- I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (Anzaldúa 81).

### **A Long time Coming**

“I was born by the river in a little tent

Oh and just like the river I've been running ever since

It's been a long, a long time coming

But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will”

Sam Cooke, "A Change is Gonna Come"

I came to terms with Chicano and claimed it as my own. This happened the same semester I was applying for graduate school. I enrolled in the MFA Creative writing program at the University of Texas Pan American; I had decided that I wanted to spend two years working exclusively on my craft, and I wanted to do it here in the Rio Grande Valley. The first class I took when I arrived in the MFA program was a form class on poetry. I wanted to challenge myself to write in the structured forms that I had separated from myself. At the core of me there is a tendency to see structure as restrictive and oppressive. The collection I constructed my first semester was a struggle for me because I swore I would not be able to find a voice in these demanding forms. However, I did find myself, and I constructed Vallujo-fied images on purpose to combat the form. "Pulgeros Pantoum" follows the restrictive rhyme scheme of a pantoum, but the voices and images are from the dirt covered table of la pulga.

Where before my written word separated languages, I finally began writing in the same style in which I and others around me spoke. I embraced the mix of languages, used English and Spanish, dove into my calo tongue, wrote Tex-Mex style, code switched and proudly embraced my pocho-ism. I concentrated on the images and voices of the people around me and placed them in the poems I was challenged to construct by my professors. When I discovered Chicano in high school by researching "I am Joaquin" by Rodolfo "Corkey" Gonzales for my UIL Prose and Poetry selection, I went through a phase of hyper-Chicanismo. I felt that I had been cheated from my history so I started dressing like a chola, talking like a chola, listening to chola music, wearing chola eyes and so on. I wore the Dicky pants minus the steamed crease because I never liked to iron. I wore wife beaters, white undershirt with open flannel. I flared my hair in wings, and wore white socks with my chanclas. It was a dramatic change for people around me because

I never indicated that I identified with this subculture. After Anzaldúa's *Borderlands La Frontera*, I felt like I was having the same sort of re-awakening; however, this time the concept of Chicano was evolutionized and fitted to me. Chicano was in my feminism, was in my history, literature, research projects and poetry, Chicano was now Chican@

When I was 16 and changed from just the preacher's daughter to the Chicana Lowrider Chola overnight, I was accused of being a poser, or inauthentic. I carried the burden of that title because I felt that I did not deserve to use the term to identify myself in comparison with more "authentic" individuals like the Gonzales'. The Gonzales' were the epitome of Chicano, a family of migrant workers who came and went every year from Tejas to Califas working the fields. Even before the popularization of the cholo image with films like *American Me*, *Blood In Blood Out*, and *Mi Familia*, the Gonzales' wore Dickies, wife beaters and Azteca art shirts. They had the slick back hair, wings, Stacy Adam shoes and the calo pachuco dialect.

The concept of authenticity had always haunted me, and I was not free from the burden of proof until I realized that "we oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other...there is no one...Chicano experience" (Anzaldua 80-81). The power to be able to identify with Chicanismo, Feminism, Lesbianism or any other ism is about the power of self. That you identify has no explanation to prove or give anyone outside the cohesion of yourself. Even understanding that there is no longer a burden of proof that I have to carry to justify any of the choices I make with my fluid identity, I feel that I should explain the image I have constructed as Chola Academic. Norma Mendoza-Denton in *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs* speaks about her anthropological study of the "chola" and how their identity involves practices that play on the borders of regions that I myself have adapted in my writing as

one of the many sources of identity. These images are found in my poem “Save Yourself Chola” off of my spoken word album:

And build your city in the institution  
thug it up with lingo that sounds valljo  
pimp up your poem with pocho zuit zoots  
give it a cholo lean and let it take your 64 impala out on a Sunday cruise. (103)

A common misconception about gangs is that their allegiance is derived from their geographical location. Allegiance to a gang is more complex than street signs; it expands to include language, music and even make up. In the Latina youth gangs that Denton studied at Sor Juana High in the San Francisco Bay area, language held the largest identifying factor for division among gang members. The refusal of certain groups to speak Spanish in order to move away from their indigenous roots separated Norteño from Sureño. Both native-born American citizens and Mexican citizens living and studying in this California school would refuse to speak English even if they were proficient in the language in order to solidify their allegiance with their mother land of México. Refusing to speak English or moving away from Spanish, were ways that individuals aligned themselves to the identity of a culture they preferred. These cultural allegiances even extended to music, with Norteños or more Americanized gang members choosing to listen to oldies or music from the 50s, while the Sureños or less assimilated Mexicans listened to music such as *banda*.

Denton makes clear that chola identity emerges through practice, and it is through my acquisition of chola as a symbolic form that I as a poet articulate my “Chicana identity,” which I call “Chola or Poet Chola.” I have connections to the chola identity, through my use of the caló dialect in my poetry. It is found in how I wear my eyeliner, the music I listen to, the books I read,

the subjects I pursue, the conferences I chose to be a part of. If in practice I can claim an identity, I identify with “chola” in my approach to education. By having dubbed myself “the poet chola” or the “academic chola,” I am using Denton’s Anthropological chola to create a new space for myself in academia that allows me the freedom to construct narratives that have the sounds of a primal me, a me connected to my *Méxicanidad*.

Using Chola as a theoretical approach for style was never problematic because I wasn’t born a Chola, I was made in practice. I did not call myself a Chola until I had found peace with Chicano, I did not call my style Chola until I understood my approach to writing rendered images that were reminiscent of a primal me. These primal places are approached with different poems such as “Fernando.” The piece “Fernando” is about my neighbor Fernando Rangel who lived next door to me growing up as a teenager in Sullivan. He is mentioned in several of my poems such as “The What if the barrio had told us we were artist poem,” and “Am I a Writer.” Like Edward James Olmos, Fernando Rangel and his cholo image became iconography in my concept of Chicano. In my poetry Fernando is an extension of the borderlands that I keep in *rinconcitos privados* because his character harkens to a time of my youth. When we were teenagers, our friendship was void of the complications that should have arisen in me with his cholo identity. What did it mean to be a cholo? Can I be a chola? What is an authentic chola? Every poem I create looks for peace with these theoretical questions. I want all my extensive analysis and reflection to end simply one day in a scene that repeats like the one of me and Fernando at 16, in plastic lawn chairs in my mother’s side yard talking in the dusk of day, drinking Hill Country Fair Soda.

Academia is a borderland where the street poet and the intellectual meet, and like a true borderland it is not clear where one begins and the other ends. I maneuver my assignments with

directions in hand and my old school remembrances in the other, fighting the assimilated intellectual, trying to remember who I was and why it matters that I am. My poem “Save yourself Chola” wrestles with this issue. I understand that academia is changing me, but by “scraping the earth dug from the adobe of my parents’ garden, and leaving the smudge on my cheek so the elitist still smell the hood on me,” I remind myself that there is a need for my voice to sound like this. Perhaps it won’t save my sister or my cousin’s 14 year old pregnant daughter, but it will save me.

My choice to pursue my MFA under the term chola came because I tie it closely to an image or icon of rebelliousness, and there is a need in me to be rebellious. Chola refuses to let the spoken word be pushed aside by the classic lessons of literature. I want to make clear that I felt no aggression from the MFA program and its instructors, and my professors were always open to my style of writing. They were nurturing of my voice and offered pedagogical suggestions of routes that I could take to improve it. However, in conferences and with conversations with other writers around me there was always a rift between different styles of writings. My chola identity also allowed me to come to terms with the fact that despite all my initial aggression towards education, I had fallen in love with academia. Beyond just the improvement in my poetry that came with my education I have found that chasing theories with scholarly inquiry has become a new passion for me that I hope to follow through and strengthen with a PhD.

### **Poet Chola: This is what a Poet Chola Sounds like**

“I really like this poem Lady-- it doesn’t sound like your other work. Often your other work sounds like you’re going off on someone.” This isn’t really the quote, word per word, of one of the members in my poetry workshop class, but it’s the gist, and the gist is “Lady your

‘Spoken Word’ poems sound like you’re ranting, like you’re “going off.” His gist in conclusion, with or without intention are concerns I have heard before, and I interpreted as “Lady, your poems are haphazardly thrown together without any thought as to the images, sounds or meaning. You are talking to hear yourself speak, you are the angry poet the institution warned us about, you have no poetic chops, your spoken word is the stain on the lily white face of poetry. Lady tame your images, tame your performance, lady sit down!” Well I beg your pardon that the “going off” style of my words are dismissed when you ponder the wonder that is poetry. I guess the “going off” style that is jazz should also be dismissed, like the “going off” style that was “The Beats” should also be dismissed, and the “going off” style that was Bukowski, Miguel Piñero and Tato Laveria should all be dismissed. Not because you don’t find “these going offs” entertaining, but because in comparison to poems with arrogantly abstract images, fewer stanzas, more alliteration, constricting metaphors, pristine enjambments, iambic pentameter, *ab ab cd cd* rhyme schemes, these going off poems aren’t as good as my more structured and traditional work.

My spoken word style poetry is valid as Miguel Piñero’s “Seeking the Cause.” It comes from the same places that Raul Salinas and Ricardo Sánchez wrote from. In poems “Carinitos, A Daughter’s Love Poem,” “Contando Cuentos” and “The House of Ramon Iglesia,” I, like Salinas in “A Trip Through the Mind Jail,” write about the “Neighborhood of my youth / demolished, erased forever from / the universe” (284). I write long poems that tell stories, because there is no such thing as language economy when your whole life you did not know you had a voice. No one can say that Patricia Smith with “Skin Head” was being preachy or that Talyor Mali’s lesson in “Like Lilly Like Wilson” was invalid because it did not follow classic form. My poetry has a place in poems that are constructed out of need and as long as Luis Rodriguez in *The Outlaw*



*Bible of American Poetry* still “causes little bursts of screams inside my head” (310), I know that my poems will find a place in Chicano literature and street style spoken word. Both the spoken word and the written words are equally important to me, and being able to bridge them with the themes I choose to write about and the styles I employ is an ongoing process, fluid like identity and borderlands.

At the Southwest Texas 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the SWTX PCA/ACA, Panel of Creative Writing, Experimental Literature, a graduate student from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas cements my beliefs on the written words vs. the spoken word. In her panel she says that she does not let ideas or memories lead her to poems, she lets words lead her to poems. So her page is dead but vivid: images of pink plastic tiara, of on spot orgasms, of chic contemporary things from 30ish New York chicks that live in Vegas. She is having a hard time killing the “I” in her poem. She doesn’t want to kill the “I” in her poem, but her professor, some famous language poet, keeps singing the praises of his own aesthetics and she is uncomfortable with the death of this “I” but is unimpressed with spoken word poets; she doesn’t let her students turn in whiney narratives. It was narrative that let me hear my own voice; it was the sound of my voice that made me realize I was a valid individual, and it was owning that voice that made me want to enter the sphere of literature and art. If poems were words on a dead page I would have never found a reason to sing.

Included in my collection are all the poems in my spoken word album. It is the truest form of my writing; it mixes my street style poetry and performance with pieces that I wrote guided by the professors in my MFA program. The poems are spread throughout my collection divided by themes, however the original order of the album is as follows:

Lady Mariposa Intro  
I Was Never Supposed

Am I a Writer?  
Joyas Voladoras For Brian Doyle  
I Like You Like That  
My Titties –Featuring Keytar Dreams  
Mi Cuerpo Es Una Frontera  
Mexico Who  
House of Ramon Iglesia- A Reflection for my Mother  
Be it if I could- Featuring Keytar Dreams  
The “What if the Barrio Told us We Were Artist Poem”  
Save Yourself Chola- Featuring Keytar Dreams  
If  
Barrio Couch  
East Austin Walks- Featuring Keytar Dreams

I have often been told that the aspect of my poetry in performance is what leaves an impression with those that know my work. In discussion both critics and fans have commented that my work unfortunately loses its potency as it travels from the spoken word to the written page. On the page I have begun constructing pieces that are more sensitive to the traditional elements of poetry. However free verse spoken word pieces are often the ones I enjoy creating. I am aware that in these pieces I cut up the stanzas without regard to poetic enjambment and that for some this weakens the form. I break lines based on the breath I take when I read them, and in doing this the poem carries the rhythm in which it was constructed. For me the element of rhythm is what I attempt to convey in the transfer from my spoken word piece to the written page.

I began writing and performing poetry as someone who was not well read in poetry. My early style is tied closely to the oral traditions practiced for centuries by individuals who exist outside of academia. Even without formal education on literature, I understood the power of poetry to convey messages, tell stories, educate and empower, and I sought out audiences who were most in need of empowerment. My “original audience” were those who were outside of academia as I was, women who were imprisoned by gender roles, individuals who never read the

canon as I had never, and individuals who had every right to know the power of their own voice, and the power of poetry. This audience, “my original audience,” does not have to be outside of my academic aspirations, it is to them who I hope to return to in my academic scholarship. I want to construct the kind of critical academic scholarship that can be extended to this audience in a digestible form that does not lose its theoretical validity.

My spoken word CD brings to my “original audience” an audio version of my work that is digestible by individuals who are not avid readers, as well as those who are better read. The mixture of hip hop rhythms in the tracts “Save Yourself Chola,” “My Titties,” “Be it if I could,” and “East Austin Walks” gives the spoken word CD a hip hop feel found in a modern album with interludes of poetry. It isn’t a straight through poetry album, and this was on purpose. In designing the album Chula Record Producer and Engineer, Kim Snyder and I discussed creating an album that the 16 year old me would choose for a Sunday cruise, something reminiscent of the “Old School Volume 1 – 5” albums that began in 1994 and were often heard blasting from lowriders throughout the valley in the mid 90s. I wanted listeners to be eased into *Hecha en el Valle* without realizing that they were listening to an album of poetry.

The selections of poems included in the album are academic in construction because I was prompted to write many of them during my MFA courses, but my album makes them accessible beyond the walls of academia. With it I lend attention to the oral traditions that I am sensitive to, extending my crafting beyond the page to the aspect of performance, which I believe every reader owes their audience. In under two hours during extended car drives, or at a treadmill, individuals who would have otherwise not been accessible are able to listen to an album that deals with issues of feminism, gender roles, Chicanismo, Mestizaje, the border wall,

Greek mythology & critical literary analysis on pieces by other writers such as Brian Doyle in my piece “Joyas Voladoras” and “The House of Ramon Iglesia” by the playwright Jose Rivera. Los Rinconsitos that I seek in my poetry that allow me to be at peace in the borderland of identity between the Chola and the Academic are solidified in this album. I am able to address my original audience with my academic pieces and self-validate that there is a comfortable medium where these different aspects of myself are at peace.

### **Conclusion**

Having come full circle as a street poet to an academic chola, the journey of change that I have undertaken as a writer and as a person could not have happened without Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* set me free and as Anzaldúa states that “there are many defense strategies that the self uses to escape the agony of inadequacy...I have split from and disowned those parts of myself that others rejected...we...blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves (67). My inability to accept my mestizaje kept my work chained to a voice that was not my own, and it was only “After *Borderlands*” that I allowed myself to write in the tongue that I had kept bound. Anzaldúa also became my theoretical introduction to the concept of borderlands, a place I lived in and wrote from, but did not understand. A borderland may be defined as the meeting place between two different cultures whose lines may be set by written divides, but the discourse that happens within that region are never contained by those divides. Creating from within a region whose divide is fluid and nonexistent among the inhabitants, allow you to write without division. In calling my thesis *After Borderlands*, I sought to highlight the change that happened with my writing and academic pursuits after reading Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, however this collection is also about the importance of the concept of borderlands. Knowing and accepting that my identity is created at the meeting place between the different aspects of myself as an academic, as a poet, and as a chola allows me to write with agency, and

therefore most of the work that I have included within this collection was also constructed “After Boderlands,” or after my acquisition of theoretical borderlands.

I recently heard Chavela Vargas sing “Los Ejes de mi Caretta,” a song written by an Argentinean folk artist and the words of the song were the perfect metaphor for the way I feel in regards to my work now:

Porque no engraso los ejes me llaman abandonao,  
Si a mi me gusta que suenen, pa'que los quero engrasar.

Es demasiado aburrido seguir la huella  
Andar y andar los caminos sin nada que me entretenga.

No necesito silencio, yo no tengo en quien pensar.  
Tenia pero, hace tiempo, ahora ya no tengo más.

Los ejes de mi carreta nunca los vuelvo a engrasa

Fluidity, borderlands with undefined boundaries of identity, my reasons for writing keep changing, and so as stated by Chavela Vargas, I had someone a long time ago in whom to think of, now I no longer do. I have no problem with the sounds of my ungreased wheels, sounds that mix feminist issues, education issues, sexuality, jazz, cumbias, Tejano. It is extremely boring to follow the path without anything to entertain me. I do not want to walk a path with white and noiseless poem that kills the sounds of my neighborhood, that demands the shedding of the “I, that requires the pinche-ness of abstract images, that demands poetry tame itself so it can be rustled into the pristine walls of academic journals that sits unread in the bookshelves of intellectuals whose name sounds nothing like mine. I like it when my axels ring, as I like the songs of my axel, ungreased, wondering the road, the ringing of my axel loudly because there is no need for silence; silent poetry is dead poetry.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alcala, Kathleen. "The Woman Who Loved Water." *Hurricanes & Carnivals*. Ed. Lee Gutkind.
- Alexie, Sherman. *The Business of Fancydancing*. 1st ed. Brooklyn, New York: Hanging Loose Press, 1992. Print.
- Alurista. *Return: Poems Collected and New*. 1st ed. Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press, 1982. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 3rd. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2007. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. eds. *Making Face, Making Soul: Creative & Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, and Ana Louise Keating, eds. *This Bridge we Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002. Print
- Angelou, Maya. *The Poetry of Maya Angelou*. 1st ed. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993. Print.
- Arenas, Reinaldo. *Before Night Falls*. 1st ed. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1993. Print.
- Arenas, Reinaldo. *Singing from the Well*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1988. Print.
- Ayala, Ramon. "Rinconcito en el Cielo." *Cruzando Fronteras*. Super D Independent Distribution, 2007. CD.
- Bukowski, Charles. *The Night Torn Mad with Footsteps*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Ecco, 2003. Print.
- Bukowski, Charles. *You Get so Alone at Times That it Just Makes Sense*. 2002. New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2002. Print.
- Cantú, Norma Elia. *Canicula, Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*. 1st ed. New Mexico: New Mexico Press, 1995. Print.
- Castillo, Ana. *My Father was a Toltec and Selected Poems 1973-1988*. 1st ed. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 1995. Print.

- Cervantes, Lorna Dee. *Emplumada*. 1st ed. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981. Print.
- Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening & Selected Stories of Kate Chopin*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Pocket Books, 2004. 1-178. Print.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *Loose Women*. 1st ed. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1994. Print.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *My Wicked Wicked Ways*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1998. Print.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1994. Print.
- Connelly, Joe. *Bringing out the Dead*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Vintage Contemporaries, 1998. Print.
- Cooke, Sam. "A Change is Gonna Come." Portrait of a Legend 1951-1964. ABKCO Music & Records Inc., 2003. CD.
- Delgado, Abelardo "Lalo". "Stupid America." Ed. Dagoberto Gilb. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. 174. Print
- Doyle, Brian. "Joyas Voladoras." *The Best American Spiritual Writing 2005*. Ed. Philip Zaleski. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. 43-45. Print.
- Dylan, Bob. *Tarantula: Poems*. 1st ed. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994. Print.
- Fitzgerald, Escott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1st ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953. 1-182. Print.
- Garcia, Diana. *When Living Was a Labor Camp*. 1st ed. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2000. Print.
- Gilb, Dagoberto. eds. *Hecho en Tejas: An Anthology of Texas Mexican Literature*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Print.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Death & Fame: Last Poems 1993-1997*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1999. Print.
- Ginsberg, Allen. "Howl." *The Portable Beat Reader*. Ed. Ann Charters. New York: Penguin Books, 1992. Print.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *White Shroud: Poems 1980-1985*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Perennial Library, 1986. Print.
- Giovanni, Nikki. *Blues for all the Changes*. 1st ed. New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1999. Print.

- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Scribner, 2006. Print.
- Herrera, Juan Felipe. *187 Reasons Mexicanos Can't Cross the Border: Undocuments 1971-2007*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2007. Print.
- Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1996. Print
- Hughes, Doug. *Henrik Ibsen's: Hedda Gabler*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2001. Print.
- Hugo, Richard. *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*. 1st ed. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 1997. Print.
- Kaufman, Alan. eds. *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999. Print.
- Keizer, Garret. "And Such Small Deer." *The Best American Essays 2009*. Ed. Robert Atwan. New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2009. 53-62. Print
- Kerouac, Jack. *Book of Blues*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1995. Print.
- Laviera, Tato. *AmeRican*. 1st ed. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1985. Print.
- Laviera, Tato. *Enclave*. 1st ed. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1985. Print.
- Laviera, Tato. *La Carreta Made a U-Turn*. 1st ed. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1992. Print.
- Laviera, Tato. *Mainstream Ethis*. 1st ed. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1988. Print.
- Laviera, Tato. *Mixturao and Other Poems*. 1st ed. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2008. Print.
- Mali, Taylor. "Like Lilly Like Wilson" Ed. Kaufman. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999. 259-261. Print
- Maya, Angelou. *Poems*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Bantam Book, 1993. Print.
- Mendoza-Denton, Norma. *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs*. 1st. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. Print
- Milligan, Bryce, Mary Guerrero Milligan & Angela de Hoyos, eds. *Daughter of the Fifth Sun: A Collection of Latina Fiction and Poetry*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 1995. Print
- Moraga, Cherríe. *Heros and Saints & Other Plays*. 1st ed. Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 1994. Print.



- Moraga, Cherríe. "The Hungry Woman." *Out of the Fringe: Contemporary Latina/Latino Theater and Performance*. Ed. Caridad Svich and María Teresa Morrero. New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2000. 288-363. Print
- Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York, New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981. Print
- Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*. 1st ed. New York, New York: WW Norton & Company, 1996. Print.
- Paredes, Américo. *Folklore and Culture on the Texas Mexican Border*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Austin, Tx: CMAS Books, 1993. Print.
- Piñero, Miguel. "Seeking the Cause." Ed. Kaufman. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999. 333-335
- Prida, Dolores. *Beautiful Señoritas & Other Plays*. 1st ed. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1991. Print.
- Radical Women. *The Radical Women Manifesto*. 1st ed. Seattle, WA: Red Letter Press, 2001. Print.
- Rebolledo, Tey Diana & Eliana S. Rivero, eds. *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1993. Print
- Renee Perez, Domino. *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2008. Print.
- Rivera, José. *The House of Ramon Iglesias: A Drama in Two Acts*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Samuel French, Inc., 1993. Print.
- Rodriguez, Luis J. *Always Running La Vida Loca: gang Days in L.A.*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1993. Print.
- Rodriguez, Luis. "Someone was Breaking Windows & Don't Read that Poem." *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*. Ed. Alan Kaufman. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999. Print.
- Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger of Memory*. 1st ed. New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1982. Print.
- Salinas, Raúl. "A Trip Through the Mind Jail." Ed. Dagoberto Gilb. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. 284-289. Print
- Sánchez, Ricardo. "Soledad was a Girl's Name" & "Homing." Ed. Dagoberto Gilb. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. 156-163. Print

- Sanchez, Jr, Trinidad. *Why am I so Brown?* 5th ed. Chicago, Illinois: MARCH/Abrazo Press, 1991. Print.
- Sandoval, Veronica. "Soy Tomb Raider: The Memoir Impotent Story of a Poeta. Unpublished essay. The University of Texas Pan American 2010
- Sapphire. *Black Wings & Blind Angels*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 1999. 3-125. Print.
- Sapphire. *Push*. 1st. New York, NY: Vintage Contemporaries Edition, 1997. Print.
- Satrapi, Marjane. *Presepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2003. Print.
- Smith, Patricia. "Skinhead." Ed. Kaufman. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999. 239-240. Print
- Strand, Mark & Eavan Boland "The Pantoum at a Glance." *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 2000. Print.
- Tafolla, Carmen. "And When I Dream Dreams." Ed. Dagoberto Gilb. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. 240-243. Print
- Thomas, James, Denise Thomas & Tom Hazuka, eds. *Flash Fiction: 72 Very Short Stories*. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 1992. Print
- Thompson, Hunter S. *Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome secrets of a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century*. 1st ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. 1-351. Print.
- Urrea, Luis Alberto. *VATOS*. 1st ed. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2000. Print.
- Valdez, Luis. *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*. 1st ed. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1992. 21-94. Print.
- Vargas, Chavela. "Los Ejes de mi Carreta" written by Atahualpa Yupanqui and sung by Chavela Vargas. Date Unknown. Online video clip. You Tube. Accessed 1 May 2011.
- Whitman, Walt. "From Songs of the Open Road, part 1&2." Ed. Kaufman. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999. 194-195

## PRE-ACADEMIA

## Señora Ignorancia

*Señoras y señores*

it is I,

I am your mother,

I am your sister,

I am your *tia*,

Your *prima*,

*La vecina*,

I am *Ignorancia*,

the Sergeant at arms of this oppression.

Tonight it is a necessity rather than a treat

that I surround myself with

people like you,

*Gente sin que hacer.*

Tonight I am here braving this strange place

and missing my *telenovela* to warn you.

*Damas y Caballeros*,

there is a new threat to our way of life,

a threat that aims to strike us at the foundations and break us.

*Madres y Padres, Donde estan sus hijas?*

Where are your daughters?

As women of our *Raza*

all our lives, we have been kept in order by the laws that govern our families,

not the laws of the lands or the hopes of the state.

As kids we pick those fruits,

“What labor laws?” and

“It’s summer time anyway.”

And we attend school until we are old enough to marry

or want to make money so we can buy ourselves pretty dresses so we can go to the *bailes*,

Not go to college, who would pay for that?

Your *tortillas* have been made, your children have been bred

all by these laws that govern us as women.

As women, it is for our own good anyways,

we need things to be kept simple,

we need to preserve our virtues,

and besides we would never make it in college,

get a high *sogigate* job,



We must tell our sons that women like these are unacceptable.

We must tell our daughters

*Que esas viejas se creen la gran mierda!*

Women that go to college,

have jobs,

don't want to have children,

women that prefer to eat out rather than cook for their men,

women that fall in love with women,

women that wear tampons,

women that THINK they don't need men,

women that burn bras.

Father, brothers, husbands I call out to you now,

evolution will NOT take its toll,

machismo will hold us here with you!

You are the answer

you shall break their spirit,

    you shall keep them blind

        you must make it easy,

            for their own protection.

Our sons will be shown the art of

    domination,

        stern management and

            decision making.

And their girlfriends will be shown the way.

And their sisters will be shown the way.

And those other woman

will die out,

and they will marry outside the circle of our men,

marry the *gringos*

the other razas,

the ones where the men are weak and are taught that women are equal?

The laws of the *familia* must remain.

Our daughters will grow up with the same values as our mothers,

the good women,

that obeyed and swallowed their tears,

good mothers,

good wives,

good housekeepers,  
as it should be...

Now if you'll excuse me I've got dinner to make  
and I need to catch the last 30 minutes of my *novela*.

*Que viva la oppression y  
buenas noches.*

## **Fernando**

“Se me van las cabras, like a black out, you don’t understand you didn’t grow up like us.”  
I look at him with my eyes wide and my mind racing to reach the words for escape,

“What do you mean I didn’t grow up like you? I lived right next to you.”  
“But it’s different,” he says and I can’t fathom how?

All those times we would stay up talking across the fence.  
We were fucking kids telling each other boy and girl secrets,  
watching each other blossom into young adults,  
you even remember me before I was married.

In his deep voice like a cholo Casanova he tells me  
“No one drops philosophy like you Vero,”  
a compliment from the hashish of my critics.  
Aye if we could harbor love like we harbor hate,  
if we only knew the way to break.

And there we are 14

26

14 same thing.

Popping in your back yard,  
and we were listing to NWA,  
not even the right music,  
but we were trying to  
break!

We were trying to Pop!  
Heart throb and we wanted to  
Pop!

Pop!

Pop!

On the box!

On the floor!

Teach me to Pop,

I wanna be like you,

a man with pride.

Teach me to break,

I wanna be the same as you.

You popped!



I popped!  
You broke!  
I broke!

You move  
I move  
we moved  
my move.

Let me teach you to break,  
pop and break!  
Let me teach you to pop  
chains!  
Pop  
hate!  
Pop  
blame!

I grew up like you,  
I grew up!  
Life is good,  
you're right,  
made to enjoy,  
I agree.  
I enjoy!  
What a joy!  
There is joy  
on the street,  
or is that joy swimming in 40's to drown tears.  
But jail house tear drops  
don't dry  
won't dry.  
There is joy  
in never drying tears,  
playing patty cake with that old monkey on your back

I move  
You move  
What move  
Bad move

Who you gonna move  
with that old move  
Te van a quemar  
no vales madre  
they saw you coming a mile away!

## **A Man, The Solution**

From the people that brought you  
“A BABY WILL SAVE ME &  
I KNOW HE’LL CHANGE,  
Product of Ignorance now brings you...

Ever wondered what it’s like to live without the constant nagging questions of life?  
What will I do?

What will I be?

Where can I go?

Well wonder no longer, we have the solution!

For a limited time only you have the opportunity to finally have all these nagging questions and unpredictable situations solved and settled without lifting a finger

Why dream your own dream?

Why own your own heart?

Why figure out life, when you can have

A MAN do it for you!

Yes A MAN is the answer to everything you’ve never even known!

“I used to be a high school *caga palo*, I hated school and never really took it seriously. I was a senior when I realized, Now what? I was failing miserably and was so deep in the hole of life that I didn’t know what I would do. That was until I got A MAN. Together MAN and I figured out what I would be doing for the next 60 years. I no longer had the fear of owing my failure to myself, I let my MAN take the rap instead.”

Yes you too can be like the thousands of woman that owe their existence to their MAN!

No other product offers you the same commitment,

while you’re not looking.

No other solution comes close to getting it right,

for himself until he rolls off of you and falls asleep

Yes ladies

A MAN is the answer!

Why be in the fleeting percentage of women that have not taken advantage of this special offer. Studies have shown that women without A MAN are 99.9% more likely to form an over achieving image of themselves. They run the high risk of having their own opinion, being self-sufficient and self-providing

Order A MAN today and receive at no additional cost this 24 karate gold wedding band from Padrinos de Anillos Jewelers. Imagine receiving your MAN and finding the added bonus of a gold wedding band. In association with Marriage Certificate Paper Co., each man is equipped with his own official certificate of authenticity that legally binds you to your MAN. We guarantee that this certificate will keep your MAN from being stolen or replaced without your written consent.

Products of Ignorance is so sure that you'll absolutely love your MAN, that they back up every MAN with a "some other idiot will marry him guarantee." Try your MAN for a year, if you are not completely satisfied, simply return the non-procreated male and we'll return your broken heart no questions asked.

So hurry and don't be fooled by imitations, unlike other self-indulgent, soul finding products A MAN is made for a woman like you, with needy needs like you to fill in the blanks for you!

Send all your hopes and aspirations along with a self addressed returned envelope to an old boyfriend at:

I've Settled, A Product of Ignorance

P.O. Box 30405060 Alone

Who would Love, ME 78595

Or call 1-800-NOT-ALONE

Hurry, Supplies are going fast!

For more information on this and other will do products of IGNORANCE email us at [my\\_biological\\_clock\\_is\\_ticking@I'm\\_not\\_a\\_lesbian\\_because\\_Im\\_not\\_married.com](mailto:my_biological_clock_is_ticking@I'm_not_a_lesbian_because_Im_not_married.com)

## **And I shouted Chicano**

And I shouted Chicano!  
But I had no megaphone  
no loud speaker  
no PA

And I spoke of Raza  
without ever reading our history,  
America's schools never told me of Aztlan.  
And I let *Bound by Honor*  
Edward J Olsmos teach me pride.  
I wore Dickies to school to show the blind that I knew,  
I understand this Chicano,  
I understand this pride.  
Brown Pride!  
This is for the Raza!  
Mi Vida Loca!  
Zoot Zuit!  
Pachuco!  
Pachuca!  
Even though I don't know what it means,  
I shouted Chicano!  
I am Chicano!

My mother and father were born in Mexico  
My grandmother was born in the United States,  
making me only 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Chicano.  
But my mother and father grew up Mexican,  
forfeiting the rules of Americanization,  
and so my American grandmother was Mexican too

So I am the first American,  
I am the promise that America whispered to my grandmother's mother.  
I am the hope that my mother always grew in secret  
behind closed doors of humbleness  
an enduring poet  
without an education  
slamming knowledge only to her offspring.

*I'm not no American  
I ain't no sell out  
I'm Chicano  
Look at the tattoo on my back  
It says brown pride  
Look at the pictures on my ride  
That's one of those Aztec guys  
And did you see how El Sunko with his magic air brush  
romanticized the virgin sacrifice*

But then  
I grew up and I became a woman.  
I realized that I no longer could drive my lowrider to work.  
That I got me an office job,  
didn't want to work the plant no more even if I enjoyed making Chuck Taylors.  
And I became friends with the white folk,  
moved beyond his maid or his employee to  
his equal.

*But I am Chicano!  
Sureño!  
Brown Pride!  
Norteros!  
Mi Raza!  
No me caen los pinche gringos!  
No me caen los pinche mayates!  
No me caen los pinche coconut sell outs,  
I have nothing to say to them,  
as long as I can cruise on Sunday and buy my lowrider magazine that's all I need.  
And I'll have chavalitos and chavalitas with my hyna!  
I'll have me mijos and mijas with my vato!*

And don't make friends with the unmarried girl  
the one with no kids  
She's just a girlfriend of one of the guys  
she'll fade out like a bad blind date  
But we'll still have each other  
The girls that gave up womanhood to be the firma hyna  
Showing their love by driving around with newborns  
In un-air conditioned car in the middle of summer in parks

But it's ok  
Stick and Stones  
Stones and Sticks  
I tell my old homies from my car club  
But it's all right  
I really don't mind  
I tell those times that I felt the most Chicano  
Sticks and Stones  
I say in my almost perfe-ct English

I'll even pretend not to notice and  
didn't even take to heart when I asked  
you if you thought I was pretty.  
You said, *No, not really,*  
*you just try too hard.*

## RINCONCITOS DE AMOR



## **Soy**

Soy la muchachita morena  
with fingers woven into the chain link fence  
outside the community pool  
that my tía hadn't paid her dues for.

Soy food stamp baby until 18,  
ropa de la pulga  
& abuela's cariños.

Soy kissed by the sun,  
black hair and dark eyes,  
soy returning home after los trabajos  
ashamed of my india hues.

Soy looking into the mirror at 16  
trying to believe myself beautiful.  
Soy the shame of knowing that once because I knew no better  
I let them rip out my tongue.  
Soy chola, found in la academia,  
soy Chicana nacida from semillas de libros,  
soy la arbolita still trying to be an arbol.

## **Ephrastic Love**

You are not a painted canvas  
You do not stand still on a back ground of white  
You are not illuminated by spot lights  
But I know every curve of your face  
I have plucked the green apple from your eyes  
stared past your lashes till time melted from my wrist

I see my people in you  
The skin of brown boys baking under the sun  
The dark hair of Mayan priestesses twirling in a pinwheel of black  
I see children in you  
I see seeds growing into tree trucks  
I see Genesis evolving into Revelations

You are not a colossal torch bearer  
You do not carry your poems in stone tables  
You do not wear a crown of sun rays  
And although your words will move them  
America will never put you on a postage stamp  
Rivera will never let you embrace his lilies nude

But you are,  
the classic landscape  
You are,  
a walking installation  
You are,  
a sculpted Mayan prince  
encapsulated Netzahualcoyotl print  
Yours is the face  
that an artist should draw.

## **I like you like that**

I like you like that  
I like you like al Jarreau with slippery tongue  
And like Miles Davis when he's calm and sweet

I like you like jazz  
Because you make me explode inside like musical stanzas that I can't translate  
Like jazz  
I like when you fill up my room with the soft glow of afternoon  
I like you  
Like that  
Like jazz

Soft and sweet  
Ideas and history written by fantasy  
Because you could be the man that was meant to be mine  
You could be  
My Love Supreme  
You could be  
My Ship

And I will scat out loud at the top of my lungs  
Outside of the shower and in

You could be the beat in life  
My rhythm  
You could be the beat in life  
My new love  
Jazz song

## **Sometimes love dies**

My mother told my father she's leaving him  
After 35 years of marriage, she wants to go to Florida and live with her sister  
She tells my brother that sometimes love dies  
I refuse to write a poem about this

The dentist pulls out 2 of my wisdom teeth  
Gives me a prescription for infection and pain  
I walk back across the gorged Rio Grande to my truck

I call Alex and tell him I wasn't killed in Mexico  
I call the heart palpitations and uncontrollable shaking with the local anesthesia a panic attack  
Alex calls it fight or flight; prodded by needles my heart is producing the needed reaction for me  
to flee  
I tell Alex that it was irresponsible to allow me to go to a Mexico racked with cartel violence by  
myself  
Alex says he was worried, but knows I'm not the kind of girl that weeps on the side of the road  
I always find my way home

The story of my mother and father was not romantic  
My father was the only young man on the rancho my mother lived in  
My father used God as an ax; my mother was the mesquite that never grew  
I refuse to write a poem about this

My sister answers the phone, I ask her to tell my mother I made it back alive  
Most of the news about border violence is over sensationalized  
Ignoring the elephant in the room  
My sister and I talk about Alex,  
we do it smoothly with only the slurring of my words an issue  
This morning over a breakfast of bacon and eggs my sister and I wiped the slate clean  
I told her to stop bitching about shit that happened 10 years ago  
And that if she wanted to be a bitch she should have done it then, this is a different me  
I get off the phone because I can't feel my lips  
I turn the driver side mirror in towards me  
I need to remember that even though I can't feel them, they are still there

My mother has decided to leave my father  
So I will have to officially visit him now  
Sit and talk, get to know him without my mother  
My brother is happy; my mother should have done this years ago  
I am not so happy, if my mother wanted to leave my father, she should have done it years ago  
My father is not the same man  
Sometimes love dies,  
it happens at 60  
I refuse to write a poem about this

I text Alex and assure him I still want to grow old with him  
I palm the wisdom teeth wrapped and bagged in my baggy jeans  
I take out the rolled gauze from the gape in my gum  
Toss out the bloody cloth and take a swig of coppery water  
I look in the mirror to remind myself not to bite my lips  
Alex replies to my text and points out that  
I've already begun to lose teeth so why not grow old together?

As I LOL and smiley face in response  
I touch my lips and remember  
Sometimes love dies  
But I refuse to write a poem about this

## **Hombres como tú**

Hombres como tú.  
of caliche and soquete,  
embrace their children on dirt roads  
shirtless

Hombres como tú.  
of long limbs and buckled mussels  
of chest learning to imprint the tiny bulk of men  
lay themselves under the wheels of Chevy pick up trucks

Hombres who close their eyes to muck of dead fathers  
& do not find refuge in the impaled Santos of their mothers' garden

Hombres exhausted still to the primal frame of Adam  
who do not smile out of shame  
who tattoo Quetzalcoatl in the holes of their chest

Hombres como tú.  
walk the barrio streets of El Valle  
& return to the vacuous homes of imperious lovers  
to sit in their jardines of hierbitas and rosales  
feet woven into the roots of dead mesquite  
arms ossified as limbs for children who will never climb them

**Joyas Voladoras**

*For Brian Doyle*

DJ fingers and relentless rock stars  
undo the buttons of my blouse and expose  
my heart under folds of muscle and fat  
that get swallowed by hungry lips  
that know I am there.

My heart is not a chamber for children to walk in.

Gypsy fingers exhaust their song,  
beat strings instead of faces,  
reverberate notes instead of dead love

You take moments of memories and swallow them with bible verse,  
dress up the sound of my name amiss in the blue house,  
with pictures of ugly bitches pinned on the green refrigerator.  
Pretty girls in short skirts who treat you like a new lover sound nothing like me,  
kiss nothing like me,  
are nothing like me.

My heart is the tortoise that wants to live 200 years,  
that carried you on its shell loving enough for the both of us.  
And your piercing, yearning tongue never learned to harmonize  
with the beat that is my heart

Sundays are always lonely  
pressed against your elephant ears you still cannot hear me  
Chamber-less, you swim away and forget  
that I am a hummingbird that will not die

## am to pm

8:25am, today I will write a prose poem. 8:26am, I am confident I can write a prose poem, I'm a performance poet; all I do is prose poetry. 9:15am, realize after assigned reading that I do not write prose poems, I write free verse. FUCK! 9:25am, recall Leif saying that a prose poem is a work in which neither the poetry nor the prose can be removed without weakening or destroying the form. 9:26, realize that I have no idea what that means. 9:45am, sit on the bar stool staring at half eaten bowl of cereal. 10:00am, Jake is awakened by the clattering of the dishes. 10:30am, I stare at a blank computer screen as Jake asks about my plans for the day. 10:45am, I tell Jake that today I will write a prose poem. 11:00am, Jake is still waiting for me to tell him that instead of writing a prose poem I will wash his clothes and spend the night at my mother's. 11:01, I say no. 11:02, Jake is outraged. 11:15am, I am accused of making decisions that are intended to tear us apart. I am accused of sabotaging his career. I am accused of abandoning him. 11:16, I tell him I am a grad student. 11:17, I tell him I will eventually be a PhD. 11:45am, Jake says he hates the city, *el es del campo*. 11:45, I laugh. I am not a city girl. I just want to write a prose poem. 11:48am, I am told that for the first time in our 6 year relationship Jake did his own dishes. 11:50, This makes him angry. 11:51, He is so angry, he cries. 11:55am, He screams, GO HOME! 11:58am, Jake demands to know *DONDE ESTA TU CASA?!* Noon, silence. 12:01, I realize that my home is no longer with him. 12:02, I realize that my home is no longer with him. 12:45pm, Jake walks out with two hampers of dirty clothes. 1pm, I sit alone in my little blue home, and still, no prose poem.



## **A Mexican Love Story**

In Mazatlan there is a birding festival in January when tourists swarm the port city at the gateway of the Sea of Cortez. Mexico has spectacular birds and the Mazatlan birding festival features tours, art exhibits, workshops and conferences attended by birding enthusiasts from all over the world in order to promote the conservation of the over 400 species found there.

In Camargo I don't remember seeing any other bird but urakas. We would shoot them at my uncle's rancho. Sandungo is what they call my uncle Manuel. I don't know what Sandungo means, but he was the person who first told me about Caguamas. Visiting my father's half brother in Camargo was the closest I got to international travel. El Campesino was off the steep road a few miles past the Rio Grande City international bridge. "Border cities aren't really Mexico," say the snooty fresas as I tell them about the weekends I spent there. When I visited my uncle's rancho my cousin Georgina was still a girl, she hadn't left with the man she would marry before she was 16. Her brother still helped with the chivas and cosecha, he would take us to bathe in the canal, we would play hide and seek in the broken camion with empty bed, and drink from the noria that seemed to go on into the center of the world, forever.

In Cancun Jake says every woman on the beach is gorgeous. Jake wrote a song about me when I was in my 20s, but after 30 when he visits Cancun the song gains an extra verse, and it is no longer mine. It has other women's limbs, another's lips, another's walk. He says all women in Cancun are beautiful because they eat healthy, fish from the ocean makes their skin glow beautifully, and they are all thin.

In Camargo my uncle would make tripas in lard sizzling in the metal disco. With a few pesos he would send us to buy tortillas from the tiendita a mile up the main road. When I visited him I still didn't drink Coca Light, I drank the real thing, the classic Coca, cold, droplets condensing off the glass leaving circular wet O's on the wooden crate I used as a table. I sat, legs crossed in the dirt, unconcerned. When I was 15 I was not afraid of salt, not afraid to eat the tamarindos high in mercury, I did not care that one day I would become the kind of woman that musicians would no longer write songs for.

In Monterey, soap opera stars grow on trees. Cosmetic surgery is very affordable. Average women can get above average pompies or remove an extra rib like Thalia to get that perfect hour glass figure. Lips can be injected, tummies tucked, fat sucked and faces lifted. In Monterey board certified English speaking doctors can help you look like the kind of women that Fernando Cononuga would love to take home to do blow with.

In Camargo, Pana fans herself with her shirt. Pana is my uncle's wife. Her skin is almost orange by the sun; her hair is straight and brown, thick and coarse. She is thin and looks like an uglier version of La Chimoltrufia from El Chavo del Ocho. Pana always wore miniskirts. She would sit un-lady like, legs open in the little stucco shack without electricity. She would wear huaraches and her legs were senesas y costrosas. After I stopped visiting El Campesino, I heard my uncle had become obese. From 300 pounds to 600 pounds. I did not understand how a family, whose American relatives always had to donate food and money to, could afford to feed anyone the amount of food that it would take for that person to gain 300 pounds. I heard Pana fed him boxes of rice, pounds and pounds of fatty beef, fried in oceans of lard. He no longer moved, confined to the bed inside their tiny home.

En El Campesino, Pana feeds Sandungo 4-5 pounds of food and puts him to bed immobilized, as she did almost every night. Pana decides she needs to go the restroom and walks outside to the wooden outhouse. Pana decides she needs to do this every night as she escapes my obese uncle to meet her lover in secret. This time, unlike the other times, my uncle finds the strength to raise himself from the bed and look outside toward the moonlit darkness and stares at Pana as she makes her way across the field to the outhouse. "Pana! Pana!" he screams in Spanish horrified. "Be careful Pana, I see a man walking to towards you. Pana!" Pana screams in horror. "Aye donde! Aye No! No! No!" she yells as she runs back towards their stucco shack, El Sancho hidden by shadows, running the opposite way. "Aye que susto" says Pana as she retells the story to my tia Martha who collects money by selling tamales for my uncle's gastric bypass surgery. "Si no fuero por Sandundo quien sabe que uvera pasado"

In Sullivan City, an American border town, my mother and I workshop and conference el chisme nuevo of my tia Pana, sancas costrosas, pelos de elote, the whore. I tour stories of the summer spent in my Camargo en el rancho de mi tio. In the back of my mind silent and not smiling is the memory of my Tio Manuel, drinking Caguamas, an art exhibit of a Mexico as foreign to me as strange beaches where beautiful skinny women with fake nalgas walk glowing, thin and beautiful. Outside my parents' brick house, muzzled by the hum of the air-conditioning, the sparrows chirp and sing their song, unaware that somewhere in Mexico their cousins are being saved by festivals.

## **The House of Ramon Iglesia: A reflection for my Mother**

“What’s wrong with you? The first sky you saw was a Puerto Rican sky; Your first drink of water was Puerto Rican water. But you don’t remember. You were just a baby! But I remember. Son, I want to see chickens run across my yard, all year round. I want to hear my language spoken by everyone I meet, even little children. Spanish is so beautiful when children speak it. I left everything I cared about when I left Puerto Rico” (Dolores Iglesia from “The House of Ramon Iglesia” by Jose Rivera)

Ama is that you? Blind remembering Mexico? Mad when I complained my American complaints. My brother wanted a Nintendo, I wanted permission to go to the mall with my girlfriends. You would say standing next to the brown chimney “Aye si estuvieramos en el rancho ni jabon para lavarte el pelo tuvieran, se tendrian que lavar el pelo con jabon de la ropa. Anduveran con el pelo duro duro y las piernas cenizas cenizas. Anduveran en las calles llorando tengo hamber, tengo amber,” and you would laugh and it did not matter that we never thought it was funny. Why did you always use that image? Was that you, the little girl without her father after he died on the caliche road? Are you still in Mexico mother? La muchacita who never went outside because she was always sick? Did you sit and stare outside your window to the boys and girls playing. Did you long to be like them? Is that why you can never be too long in a crowd? Do the voices grow louder and louder until you can not hear your own thoughts, and is that when you make me pay attention and tell me casi llorando that you want to go home?

“Nosotros tenemos un terreno en el otro lado,” the other side, you call it this, the place of your birth. “Un dia me voy” you tell me, you have been crying, locked in your room “Voy a dejar todo y me voy para tras para el rancho. Yo no necesito nada de esto. Me voy!” You do not need anything from this place; you want to go back to the rancho. You want to be with the images of your father embracing your mother, you want to see him alive—before the owners of the land he rented decided to take back the acreage he had been working and paying them off for. You want to be the girl before the mother, that didn’t have to live with the grandmother that hid food from you, with uncles that fought a navajasos y pistolasos outside your window. You want to forget that it was you that embraced my uncles and aunts under blankets, that it was your voice that told them it would be ok.

Is it ok mother that I am not like you? That I do not long for the soap-less existence of your rancho? Is it ok that I do not dream of Mexico? That sometimes I want to kill the memories of your Mexico so you can be happy with me here, en este lado? Ama, Apa sold the land to give the money to his brother, he needed the operation. Is your Mexico gone? Will you live with me now? Do you still use the image, tell it laughing to my prima Angela who comes everyday to care for you? Does she laugh too? Does she know like I know that the little girl with dirty legs and course matte hair is you? That despite the house with the black tile floor and flat screen TV,

you are still wandering in the streets of Sullivan hungry, trying hard to recognize the sound of your voice, listening for your own thoughts

## **W-E, The River**

*Sabes donde esta Nolana*

I ask

*Nolana es la calle donde yo trabajaba*

*donde estaba la oficina*

She says yes

She knows the direction of the McAllen office where I used to work is at

She positions her body in Sullivan City 40 miles away and looks toward Nolana

That is North I say

Nolana is North

North and South are a pair,

and the river is always South

Jake walks in

She wants me to stop talking

Jake has tried to teach her North and South

and she doesn't want him to know that she is trying to learn with me

where East and West is to this North and South

Jake catches the tension in the air

asks why I'm upset

I say it's not you

I'm trying to talk to my mother

Jake exits

Do you know how to spell the word "we"?

Like we go to the movies

Like we go to the store

Like we are dying mother, but I don't say it

We

W-E

I point to the letters on the inside of the washer machine lid

The letters

W-E

Inside the cover of the washer the lids reads

How to use your **W**asher:

Read owners guide and operating instructions for complete use and car**E** information

But my mother is no longer listening to me  
Mom, the river is always South I say  
    but I feel the river in my toes  
And look North towards Nolana  
that is North, and as long as you know where North is  
the river will always be behind you

We  
is in front mom  
W-E

The word spelled out as you look at  
We  
W-E  
We are me and you mother  
trying to talk as you silence yourself in the shame of not knowing

We  
are me and you mother  
West and East

This is where I begin,  
where I remember the river  
in the conversation I try to have with my mother  
as she refuses to learn  
she says  
They think I am a *burra*  
a donkey  
another word for not smart,  
but I will show them

But she shuts out my words  
This is where I remember the river  
in my mother's deaf ears to any learning  
in my anger for her resistance  
this is the river behind us  
Behind me  
Behind we  
w-e

me and you mother  
me and  
u

## **No Trovador**

No trovador

I will not let you sing to me about love

I will not be another conquest de guitar and amores de Mexico

Yo no soy tu Amoricito Corazon

Tu Muñeca de querda

I will not wait que salga la luna

I do not need your cositias bonitos

Quiero ser como chavela vargas

Quiero ser la negra

Quiero nunca tener que egrasar las ejes de me carreta

Quiero amar a mi manera



BORDERLAND FEMINISTA

## A Smiling Brown Bear Named Juan

Lupe was never a tom boy, Lupe liked dolls. When they could, her mother and father would buy her the naked Barbies she saw at the pulga. They bought clothes for Barbie they found in Zip Lock Bags, tagged by beige packing tape with a red Sharpie that read \$1.00 or \$1.50. Lupe would take the blonde dolls home to the Migrant Housing labor facility that her father worked for, and cut off some of their hair, sit them on chairs made of unused salsa de tomato cans and tables from reading books and cans of corn. She would name them beautiful names like Violet and Jasmine and her favorite name was always Tina. Her Barbies had hunky boyfriends, one Ken doll to her seven Barbie dolls, and action figures she took from her brother; a Rambo doll, a GI Joe and Luke Skywalker. Always the boyfriend's name would be Steve, Todd or Josh. Tina her favorite Barbie and Steve her brother's Rambo were happy. Friends would come over, Jasmine and her boyfriend Ken, with flesh tone calzonsios because her parents could never find clothes for Ken. They would arrive on top of a chancla that Lupe imagined was a limousine; they drank champagne and spoke perfect English.

On a pulga Sunday, Lupe looked for another blonde haired, perfect Barbie to add to the growing soap opera that happened on the floor of her bedroom in the mobile home that looked like all the other mobile homes lived in by the seasonal workers who came and went after the fruit was picked. There next to the table of discarded tools, and in between the booths of old clothes and books Lupe's father found Juan. Juan wasn't a Barbie; Juan was a smiling brown bear wearing overalls.

"Esther," he called to his wife. "Mira le voy a comprar este osito a Lupe." Lupe liked gifts, especially toys, but Lupe was too old for a bear, she was eight. "¿Cuanto por el oso?" asked her father.

"\$5.00," said the vendor. "Es que esta grande."

\$5.00?! Two rows over Lupe had asked her father for a \$4.00 Barbie, she was in a pink box and had never been played with, and her father had told her no. But for the grinning brown bear he said yes?

"Mira, este osito se llama Juan y te quiere," her father said showing it to Lupe.

"Deja que lo cargue, Marin," said Lupe's mother and Lupe did. She carried the large brown bear to their green pickup truck and back to the labor housing facility, and to the white linoleum floor of her room. There she began to step on him, she punched him and bit him, screamed into him loudly so she could muffle the anger and not scare her mother. The following day her mother found Juan on the floor. She picked him up smiling, dusting off lint left by Barbie's clothes and then placed him back lovingly on her bed.

As the days went by the novela continued and Juan the bear watched it all happen from his spot on the bed. Ken and Tina were now married and slept under paper napkins in their shoebox house and GI Joe Todd and Jasmine came over in their chancla Trans Am. Lupe soon abandoned the idea of calling the bear Ted or Josh, she knew the name her father had given him was the perfect name, she knew it every time she looked into the dark button eyes, knew it as she pulled on his dark overalls. Before Marin and Esther imagined, their daughter Lupe no longer like playing with dolls. Barbie had bored her and she had moved on to boy crushes and Madonna songs. However, every morning no matter how big she got, Lupe awoke hugging a smiling brown bear name Juan.

## **Lady Mariposa Intro**

My reality is my poetry  
My pattern is that pattern of all women that are descendants of kings  
My pattern is loom-less  
Word-full  
Hopeful  
My landscape  
Is nothing like my mother's  
My landscape is paved by the lamentos of my own pendejadas

I drape across my breasts the memories of my youth  
Borracheras Y Cojerderos  
I drape across my breasts los tempos de conservative chola  
Lowriders and Car Clubs  
I drape across my breasts my father's religion  
Christianity and God

I weave loom-lessley  
Beyond the expectation of my family  
I weave poemas that sound like  
Barbacoba on Sunday  
After martinis on Saturday  
I weave stories of a life not hindered by my parents desire to become abuelos  
I weave loom-lessley stories of a life beyond the trabajos piscando tomates during summer to  
buy school clothes  
Loom-lessley stories of a life beyond la real estate secretaria de la gringa que  
asea y asea y no pensaba, no pensaba!  
Beyond an ex-husband that called me puta  
Beyond an ex-suegra I never punched in the face

All of this is my story  
My landscape is the landscape of many girls like me  
That married and never escaped  
And when they did they brought along babies  
Girls that never imagined that life belonged to them  
Girls that never imagined life without the choke hold that is co-dependency and that pinche  
gusano that wants to be loved and marry me, and marry me, and love me, and marry me and  
marry me  
And this is how I weave my landscape  
This is how I adorn my temple  
With American possibilities and Mexican memories  
With Mexican love songs and American Jazz  
With Education that shows me the world  
With education that gives me the words  
To weave my mother's lessons

Into the reality that is me  
Una lady  
Lady Mariposa

## **I Was Never Supposed**

I was never supposed to be a poet  
I was never supposed to be a woman  
I was always supposed to be a wife  
A God fearing preacher's kid  
I was supposed to talk softly  
Walk softly  
Tread no water  
Cut into nothing but my husband's dinner  
I was never supposed to be an holicona  
"Más allá de la tradición"  
A chola  
I was never supposed to be educated  
A feminista  
I was never supposed to stand up front and talk loudly  
Mix my English and my Spanish  
Like Jazz and Cumbias  
I was never supposed to walk like I knew who I was  
Talk like I knew what I was saying  
I was never supposed to wear a serpent skirt  
Never supposed to notice  
I had sprouted wings

## Once, My Father's Hands

Once my father's hands constructed  
homes for migrant families living on the outskirts of the Everglades  
Once Native Americans sold dream catchers  
on dusty cross roads that lead to home  
Once Christian mothers believed in ancient magic  
enough to know their children's nightmares were real

Once my father's hands turned  
the black lettered onion pages of the book that would condemn me  
never to be like him or my mother  
Once little girls  
locked doors to keep the bad from eating their secret good during sleep  
Once gliding over crystal cities,  
little girls in glass trains believed they would grow up to be princesses in cities like these

Once my father cut his palm,  
sliced till the brown skin turned white,  
busted like the plum tomatoes he and I picked in South Carolina  
Once the frog-skinned hands of a wingless butterfly  
lost the paper hearts she carried in a bag  
Once the pubescent mermaid of a cement pond  
let a blue-eyed white boy press up against her scaling skin

Once my father twisted like copper the wires that formed me,  
told me there were things men were going to make me feel  
and I must not let them.

Once the laced wine of her one night stand  
brought sober memories of sex she could not remember  
Once arms that were flesh became the mechanical limbs of an assembly line,  
and no one chased the girl past coagulated cortex and lobes

Once my father's hands,  
shoved me when I refused to let him do to me, what he did to my mother silently  
Apa say it out loud,  
say I want to wrap my fingers on your neck till I drown your voice, say  
*I never wanted a puta like you, I always wanted a son*

Once while wishing on stars,  
no one said, *Wish for more than a cabbage patch doll*  
Once when history made no sound,  
eagle-less girls let men build them cities on lakes



## **Emplumada Girl**

*for Lorna Dee Cervantes*

Dusting pebbles on the side of dexterous freeways  
Impetuous to the precedent of jaded mothers  
and proficient grandmothers  
You decipher adult texts  
Kicking like swarming ant piles  
The bookless room of fruitful girls  
Whose faces are adorn with fists  
You kiss  
With quills collected like jewels  
From roosted peacocks

You devour fistful pitted death  
To the sound of faithful mockingbirds  
Bored with metaphors the door  
To rooms where you do not sleep  
But weave your hair into trenzas  
Color urraca  
String obsidian stanzas that burrow and glow  
For grandfathers birthed father  
That birth dead babies  
Who never run away

You were born when the weather was good  
You are juniper magnolia  
Orphaned from your Spanish name  
You are, too soft  
A patchwork of un-poemed secrets  
You are the vociferous windsong  
That no country can hide

An emplumada  
who dances on rooftops

## **Güera de Candy Cigarette**

Güera de Candy Cigarette,  
your love cats stray far and un-  
wonderfully from the frozen black and white pond of a shutter snap,  
a headless body trots along on stilts as the fearless tetrapods stare.  
Your sister stands straight against the horizon  
holding up the gray grass with her chest,  
leaving you alone with your incubated thoughts of  
midnight texts that will smell of sex and cigarettes

Güera are you looking for your mother,  
are you asking her questions?  
Did she, mold your arms with long ivory limbs?  
Did she, snap two peals from your grandmother's strands and place them in your eyes?  
Did the weight of her crown keep her fingers from finding the mold of your smile  
from braiding your hair?

Güera de Candy Cigarette,  
your languid lovers will be the biped creeping in the shadows  
and scaring the deer.  
Their footsteps blurring on the vibrating street.  
Their arms terrifying features that do not exist among the other tetrapods.  
Their discarded cigarettes  
will color the corners of your sky with capitulated clouds.

**Who are you pudgy a?**

Did you grow tired of squatting and staring at your pansa?

Did **B**'s boobs grow too big and threaten to swallow you?

Did you spurn the capitals and their elongated fingers?

When did you learn to hate the curvaceous-ness of consonants?

Do you detest yourself pudgy **a**?

Will you work out and make yourself a capital **P**,

Play guitar and demand your girlfriends be putas?

Pudgy **a** I hope you never grow up and learn to lift your head.

From beneath the bulge where you stockpile undigested accents,

**j, p, q & y** wait for you to tell them when the flowers bloom.

## The Parable

the carcass covered in carbon paper  
assures the achy aquanauts  
that the concertmaster consorts  
with concise conclusion  
the *canciones* of kooky concubines  
invested on the experimentation  
of dead love  
like letters

The foreman's finger was found  
by a finch in a field of fennel  
fondling the fireflies flaccid wings  
reminding firemen that  
fickle love is no reason for lack of fidelity  
that flocking flirtation is just a flavor  
that floorboards still creak  
and tell secrets

and expeditiously erect the tents  
of expert men who will ascend with  
scrolls that strum the ethics of exiled memories  
How haggling the host is  
habeas corpus,  
how hand picked "I remember when"  
hijack the tranquility of "could be something good"

and what do you do with a sentimental heart?  
you encase it peacefully in a peach and  
eat it  
let Pegasus toss it on the  
perched pedestal of a perishable paraphrase  
you tell yourself perilous pedagogue  
that *amor pendejo* is peevishly predictable  
*que aqui la que chinga soy yo!*

But do invade the incubation chambers  
of invalid introverts  
invoke the blessings of virgins  
that entrust in you the intended interludes  
of inclusive cognitive love  
And do articulate for inflection  
this is the inception of an infectious  
parable

## **She Was: The Impotent Sun Rose**

The impotent sun rose, and breakfast consists of tiny Twinkies and a glass of juice, and somewhere an old lady waits for son to visit. Abuela made the eggs con Pan Bimbo, and the girl with big chi-chis wore the t-shirt, but Persepolis ran away and veiled her thoughts behind a concrete wall. The flowers did not stop blooming for the girl behind the piano even after she was dead, and she made sure to put dinner in the oven to be warmed when her husband got home. Sympathetic ears are always given to voiceless women, and no one sees as cages are tossed into oceans, and life was not her own, not her own. She covered the sun with a finger, uncapped the sleeping pills and let the worm burrow its own trail home. She let them walk in the garden, thinning until she was able to slurp them up between her Venus teeth. She was the daughter of a mad man who loved flowers. She was a duchess on her way to play cricket with a queen, she was every beautiful woman's smile without eyebrows. She came from under the fifth sun with mango breath, saying beyond madrina, from under fruit hats saying beyond your cha-cha-cha.

The impotent sun rose, and she watched the wild boy become the king of things that longed for her. Daisies stood still and watched as she chased cars under the eyes of God, she was naked sapphire, black angel wings. She was busy writing poems, forming government and perfecting agriculture. She was busy freeing the fingers of men, who would undo the binding of her mother's name. She became the stone statue in a black and white photograph found by the bartender that remembered the crazy her. She was the skinny girl on the wanted poster outside the elevator at the train station, she was the Spanish girl that sold bocadillos and coka light at the internet café for 4 Euros. Unable to make international phone calls, fat girls cry at airports as Penelope does and undoes her ugly sweater, because Picasso's dead horses never come with a discount, and lovers left across oceans can always be forgotten. She was what the earth did not swallow, a curly haired girl in an orchid of fig trees, she was morning of green tomatoes, yellowed knees and tortilla soup. She was the hand that held the dead bull's ear, she was the face that a river would not devour

The impotent sun rose, and she was a story told on sleeves.

## Am I a writer?

Ask me why I gave up on love? Ask me if God is mad, if God hates women wondering from their husbands to pursue questions about feminism and literature's building blocks. Ask me if the deep voice of my cholo neighbor tells me to remember the days before all these questions, when he and I would watch movies and eat popcorn. When mom and dad were off to church, before the fear of sexuality, before marriage to save my lustful soul. Ask me if I'm a writer; ask all the poems that sprout out of me like dandelions under rotted tires in abandon lots. Ask the poems that came with wine and pase, the poems that came with beer and weed, the poems that came to justify the broken me, and broken he, I loved.

Ask me if I'm a writer. I'll tell you a story about a girl leaving behind the traditions and expectations of her family. I'll snap you a picture of the sad chola on the open tail gate of her truck, smoking a cigarette talking to God. *Really God, you made me a 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizen to your son? You made me subservient to the man that decides to keep me, and goodness should come to me only if he decides to put his vision in you? Are you a reluctant father? One that hands his daughter off to her husband and ignores the black eyes and her unhappiness saying, you were the one that wanted to get married ignoring the fact that you weren't going to let her do anything unless she left your house claimed by a man.*

Ask me if I'm a poet and I'll tell you a text poem where God attacks me thru selective argument by an angry ex-boyfriend. I'm a poet because the poem saves me. I'm a writer cause without it I'm just another jaded woman without a voice. I'm a poet cause the poem talks shit for me so the woman in me can cover with expanded fan the blush of her face at provocative suggestions and conversations. I'm a poet cause I chose to be, cause without it I'm just a fat girl that didn't want to lose weight for her ex-husband, I'm not a chola poetic revolutionary, I'm not the barrio female gorilla carrying sparkles and reflections and hopeful messages to other girls like me tied down by sexual guilt, by the guilt of the sound of their own voice. Fuck yes I'm a writer, and fuck yes I lost my husband for it! And fuck yes I find refuge in books, and fuck yes its lonely and it hurts when you make your wardrobe from experiences and learning instead of flat stomachs and chiseled legs.

But my poem makes me a queen, my poem rescues me. My poem keeps me up at night telling me that what we are doing is good, it won't be lonely where we're going, it's a land of cholos and sunshine, of art and jazz, of film and hip hop, of dancing, of wild wild things. Here God and I understand each other, where I am his daughter, equal to any man and not subservient to anyone's demands. And If I'm not a writer then I am building textual palaces for nothing, I'm the delusional cat lady minus the cats and my own home. But my poem is that quintessential homie that remembers everything and tells me what I need to hear...

fuck yes,  
you're a writer



## Cariñitos, A Daughter's Love Poem

My mother stands in the kitchen quietly,  
washing dishes. It is past midnight and the house is humming in silence. She looks out the small window to the darkend carport, only the muffled sound of soapy utensils hitting the bottom on the metal sink. I interrupt her serenity with the opening and closing of the office door. In my head I am repeating the last line of that last poem, playing it back, laying it down. In my head, I am connecting bridges, poems to concepts, concepts to social issues, social issues, to community activism, community activism to change, change to hope, hope to salvation, salvation to God, God to love. In my head, it is ALWAYS LOUD; I can hear the thud as I hit the borders and begin again.

I carry little cariñitos of my mother,  
Poemas sin música  
I, la hija del pastor  
singing the same song again.

My mother stands in the kitchen quietly,  
the same way grandma would when I stayed with her during the summers and watched HBO and ate too much junk food. Every morning I would wake to the cumbia rhythm that I was too young to comprehend, the cumbia that would eventually find its way into the swing of my hips. *Baila como Juana la cubana, el ritmo que se siente, sabroso como un jugo de manzana, Baila como Juana la cubana...* Her bedroom would be flooded in light and I would still feel her fingers running through my hair from the night before as she smoked a Morlborl Red in one hand and searched for piojos with the other. I would hop off her high bed and Laganosa-mente find my way to the kitchen where she would be washing morning dishes staring out the window with only the sound of *un paso pa'delante y un para atras pero con ganas* devouring the morning sun.

I carry little cariñitos of my grandmother,  
the tamarindo lady in Las Milpas,  
gitana pressed powder, dyed black hair  
dried roses and Buddha in her pocket book

I carry them, shaking under the strain of them.  
I carry all of them,  
afraid that I may lose one,  
leave one unattended in a university hall,  
forget one in a library book.

My mother stands in the kitchen quietly.

It is past midnight when I ask her if she wants to have a beer with me. I pop some popcorn, grab two Miller Lights, and we sit. In my head I am reaping the last line of my last poem, in my head I am repeating, repeating... We sit, my eyes looking into my mother's. I want to say something, but I only smile. We are not just sitting idly by. With the silence humming all around us, I finally stop repeating, I quiet down construction  
cease building bridges  
and I let the silence hum  
inside me.

## **I worry**

*after Juan Felipe Herrera*

I worry about poems I will never write  
I worry about falling in love and going soft  
I worry about never loving and being a dick  
I worry about writers with husbands that won't let them write me the story that will save my soul  
I worry about getting a PhD and losing poet me  
I worry about not being smart enough  
I worry about not wanting to have babies  
I worry about wanting to have but having convinced myself that I don't  
I worry about chubby boys that smoke too much and eat Cheetos for lunch  
I worry about the roñoso cats sleeping on my bed while I am away  
I worry that my mom will never be happy  
I worry that I can't tell my father I love him  
I worry that I will never be that señora in a polyester dress singing alabanzas in church on  
    Sunday  
I worry that 13 year old daughters love their daddies so much that they will hate me  
I worry that I have no idea how to raise a man  
I worry that I don't have enough time to read  
I worry that I'm too busy living and having fun to read about others living and having fun  
I worry that my poetry isn't smart enough  
I worry that I worry about the smartness of my poetry  
I worry that the thuggish spoken artist in me will one day shank the proper smart poet in me  
I worry that there are not enough cholos in gringolandia  
I worry about the authenticity of conservative cholas who haven't owned a lowrider for almost  
    12 years, go to college and live in gringolandia  
I worry that poets fall in love with families and never want to leave them  
I worry that my brother living so far away will one day become a stranger to me  
I worry that the barrio of Sullivan, being so far away from me, will one day become a stranger  
    to me  
I worry that too many brown people sport Che Guevara shirts and know nothing of Che Guevara  
I worry that my political stand points are not brown enough  
I worry about people believing that political stand points are based on color and not  
    contemplation  
I worry about the welfare of entrapped caterpillars in flimsy polyester holding pens  
I sometimes even worry about the welfare of mariposas in parks full of sparrows.

## My Titties

My titties have scrolled messages on the road  
Sent I love you texts at 4am  
Sometimes titties feed babies  
I know titties in plays that make me ache for my titties to be symbols  
To be archetypes of master pieces that kick Odysseus's ass  
while Medusa makes me a fucking sandwich

I wish my titties painted portraits,  
they'd aint the virgin Mary with a charro hat  
Drinking verongas with Chuco the cholo who only goes to church on Sunday

Sometimes titties tell all your secrets,  
They tell you that broken hearts are not poetic  
They'd tell the first strange man I'd been with in years  
to slow down my titties ain't going nowhere  
Cause sometimes titties feed babies  
Sometimes titties belong to kind of sleazy ladies  
Titties jingle ling~ling in stilettos heals  
Jingle stomp~stomp in Chuck Ts  
Wack~wack in Azteca dances we give to the sun

My titties are a road map to everywhere I've been  
Tongues, lips, fingers and foreign skin  
I know titties that play keytar  
Titties that don't talk to boys under 25  
Titties that drink too much wine and write poems  
Cause sometimes titties feed babies  
Sometimes titties belong to kind of sleazy ladies  
Cause I know titties that are 45 and single  
Titties that give chee-chee at Wal-Mart discreetly

Titties that get pierced  
Titties that get lost  
Titties that when gone  
are still  
a road map to everywhere you've been

## **How to be La Llorona for the city of Sullivan that has no sidewalks**

*For Domino Renee Perez*

Never have children.

Let your hair grow long, straddling lovers is sensual when black locks reach like fingers at necks.

Borrow children only on Sundays

Give them lots of sugar

Make a man cry out loud at least once, as if he had a heart in him

Think outside el mascarado's box

be La Virgin, La Lechera, La Chalupa, La Puta

be La Cabrona, La Abandonada, la Malinche

la que nunca tuvo hijos

lo que tuvo y los mato

be La Gacha, La Loca, La Sonsa

La que troza el rio in two, carrying red headed baby doll

Plant blue corn and make the moon your lover

Drink coffee with El Cucuy, get muy relaxed con Coronas and cacahuates

add chile to the tacos made from Cuauhtémoc's feet.

Buy every child treats

Do not coddle your firstborn he will grow up to leave you

Learn to peel serpent skin with your teeth

Never bear the chest beneath the concha she placed on your neck

Wait for your primo's wife to ask for the fiftieth time why you haven't had children

Lie and tell her you don't want any

lie to yourself and say

you don't want any

Take your birth control pill every day, same time

Buy young girls cherry lip gloss

make sure they wear blue eyeliner

teach them to flare out points that offend their mothers

Laugh when they play sad songs, never lip sync to Heart

whip the glass case of condensation

let them know that you have muted with matte colors the walls of your womb

Do not let truck drivers take you to bailes

Dancing with the devil is allowed as long as you don't fuck him

Cherubs should never bring your roses that float like water lilies

Wait for the politiqueros to call you and demand you vote for them

tell them you do not have children  
tell them you do not want them walking to school  
on Sullivan streets.

## BARRIO CHOLA DE LA ACADEMIA

## **If**

If my borders were walls  
I'd bloom my flowers inward  
I'd carry rose petals to the place without the sun  
I'd let the devil swallow all my colors

If my borders were walls  
How could I connect my mother's endings to the capitals of my beginnings  
How could history be paused without the commas  
How would memory be allowed to run on, and on

If my borders were walls  
Would I connect the girl from the barrio  
To the girl that went to Spain  
Would I want to be the girl in London  
Would I hear the music from the other side  
Would los Tigres del Norte still be singing to me

If my borders were walls  
I'd never listen for the reverberating sound  
The accented tones of my brown skin  
I'd let the che-s and the eñe-s be drowned in concrete

If my borders were walls I'd be  
Soul-less  
colorless,  
a soundless, un-accented, monotone drone

Por Eso I am borderless  
A Mexican American  
A Mexi-can and Ameri-can  
A Mexi-can and Ameri-can  
A Mexi-can and an Ameri- can  
Be  
Borderless



## **Mi cuerpo es una frontera**

Mi cuerpo es una frontera  
One where brown children climb up  
and down my arms tearing into me with Mexican and American flags  
This is the place where the ideological talking points becomes mute  
Where frontera meets frontera divided by a river that flows from El Corazon

The Chicano from L.A. whose skin is fair and beard is red,  
Calls it reckless for me to compare this to WWII

The desert seems far away from a vato whose war is urban  
The river doesn't cut through him  
His pearl skin visually blessed by the Española in him  
Is not from El Valle  
His pear skin not visually blessed by the indigenous in him  
Lives 2 ½ hours from a border  
He does not straddle two countries  
His motherland and birth land are not at war  
His motherland and birth land have not  
Raised him borderland

From his concrete metropolis he can not see that  
My motherland is at war with the cartel  
and my birth land has become concerned  
Separated by a river, the drug wars  
have cleared out the border towns of the only Mexico I know

I am from the Rio Grande Valley  
Yo soy del Valle  
I am from the Tejas of Crystal City  
Of civilian internment camps during war  
I am from a country that interments the color  
and ancestry of the people who they preserve to be at war with  
and we are at war  
at war with the brown & golden skinned zetas  
at war with the undocumented who brave deserts and river to come here  
at war with a faceless, and nameless statistic that consumes  
America's social services  
We are at war

And the war happens here  
And the war is between my breasts  
the river cuts through me

Mi cuerpo es una frontera  
One where indigenous brown children  
crawl up and down my arms with American and Mexican flags

This is America, things like this don't happen here  
This is America and things like this will not be tolerated  
And I want to believe you,  
But law enforcement officers will not be selecting suspects in Arizona  
Based on sombreros and cuisine  
Law enforcement officers will be selecting suspects in Arizona that look like me  
And I want to believe that this is America and things like this do not happen here

Pero yo soy del Valle  
I am from the Rio Grande Valley  
I am from the Tejas of Crystal City  
Of civilian internment camps during war  
I am from a country that interments the color  
and ancestry of the people who they preserve to be at war with

& how can you not make the connection that this echoes of you  
Los Angeles  
3000-4000 Mexicans sent back to Mexico  
3000-4000 Mexicans the majority U.S. born  
3000-4000 Mexican selected because they look like me  
3000-4000 Mexican repatriated

So don't patronize me because the poet in me is angry  
So don't tell werito chicanito from LA  
That comparing this to WWII is reckless  
& don't tell me things like this don't happen here  
It is 2000&10 and an American governor of my birth land passed this law  
It is 2000&10 and a thing like that,  
did happen here.

## Mexico Who

My mother echoes through the hallways of our home,  
she shapes and reshapes stories that make her weep like a 12 year old girl.  
My mother carries rivers in her chest,  
rivers that she wishes to cross to find her way back to the place before here

My mother is a river,  
and in her waters I found a place I call me,  
Amerikana,  
child of opportunity,  
of uncle Sam,  
of a country that shapes and reshapes its story.

The Jazz in my heart  
drowns in the voices from speaker machines,  
conservative men with Godly ideas  
drown out my song.

It's a song that sounds nothing like stars and stripes forever.  
It's a song that needs the voices of *Los Panchos*.  
It's a song that features Pedro Infante *a la ventana de una mujer bella siempre enamorado*.  
It's a song that makes love to Jazz  
while Jazz fondles the blues.  
It's a song that  
gives me  
me

Amerikana,  
an onion in the melting pot,  
a child of the sun,  
a summer blueberry girl.

If Bob Dylan could hear me now  
with God on our side  
we do things we would never think of,  
we close up imaginary borders and un-invite the tired masses,  
ship them back on technicalities,

while slogan machines print out bumper stickers to place the heads of our political party in positions of power.

This is all echoes,  
it's political hoop la,  
this is all techno with no ecstasy.

I remember a time when my president road on horse back with Vicente Fox,  
now México has become la sancha de Los Estados Unidos

Mexico who,  
gave up its people like fruit, ripe, who built this country.  
Mexico who,  
America invites and un-invites to its parties.  
Mexico who,  
will not be kept out of me with concrete fences and barbed wire.  
Mexico who  
is my mother's eyes,  
my father's nose,  
my grandmothers breasts,  
and the fire in my stomach

**Because Diana Garcia asked what was needed in my barrio**  
**The “what if the barrio told us we were artist” poem**

If I would have read more books I might not have written a baby journal at 16 for the baby I swore I was going to have with my boyfriend Sam, because he was the love of my life. I would have kept my legs closed. I might have remembered what I learned in school more. I might have liked science, might have understood algebra, might have spent less time on the phone with Mario, because he was the love of my life, and could have spent the time writing and thinking, learning things that mattered.

If I could have discovered poetry I might have spent less time afraid of God, might have never been guilt-ed into marriage because I was having sex with Adam, the love of my life. I might have looked my parent in the eyes when I spoke to them, might have looked past their faces and antiquated positions, might have drawn metaphorical connections to how they love me.

If I understood poetry, maybe I could have understood what my family wanted, what they expected. I would have known that turning the page when the poem wasn't for me was always an option.

If I would have known what art was, I would have told my neighbor Fernando that his drawings were art work. We would have placed his pieces on canvases, would have displayed them in fancy galleries where all the people that know those sorts of thing go. Among the sounds of Ramon Ayala and horderves made of tripas, we would have had drank Tecate from champaign glasses, would have had amazing conversations with intellectuals about transference from the street into your solid representation.

If I would have know that your drawings were art, then maybe I would have believed my writing was poetry, and then maybe we wouldn't have called it jail house work as I wrote you letters, inmate #12582, I trapped en la casa de mi suegra, vieja desgradiada, llorando because my husband still didn't let me visit my mother.

## **Barrio Haikus**

### **Las Milpas**

In barrios cholas  
die lonely waiting for prince  
cholo to save them

### **Under Mesquite**

*mecánicando*  
apa tried to teach HeyZeus  
what his father knew

### **The Law**

*el chota es, Juan-*  
*el panson que casi no*  
*acabo* high school

### **Corner**

peros roñosos  
fight for discarded Pampers  
El Perico laughs

### **Pochito Papacito**

*Corazoncito*  
*con labios que saben a*  
*lenguas quebrando*

### **Amerikana**

In my borderland  
Mother and Father held close  
like America

### **Laundromat**

young girls place babies  
on top of high washers as  
they talk on cell phones

## El Sofa

I wish I was the old abandoned couch on the front porch  
surrounded by empty cans of Milwaukee's Best.

I would sit and gather stories like dust,  
I would listen to *comadres chismear* about *vecinas*  
whose husbands were seen at *cantinas* with *viejas resbalosas*.

When *Jesusito* would be sent from school because they found *piojos* in his curly locks,  
I would be the table for the comb,  
*la mesa* for el Raid.

I want to be the old couch on the porch  
as *viejitas* sit and take in the sounds of afternoon,  
fanning themselves with Sunday coupons.  
I would gather their memories like dust,  
keep them after they disappear inside to a *noche* of *novellas* and *café*.

If I could I would be the old abandoned couch on the front porch,  
the one the neighbors point to and say, "There goes the neighborhood"

## Los Pulgeros Pantoum

En la pulga they don't like cameras in hands of people like me  
Hungry poets snapping pictures are really chusmas for the state  
Vestiditos for muchachitas, zapatitos y prochetas, sell sell sell, barato is key!  
En puños piled high on plywood mesas, medicinas in piles, *cuál expiration date?*

Hungry poets snapping pictures are really chusmas for the state  
*No photos!* dice la vieja making tortas and churitos in her dirty tee  
En puños piled high on plywood mesas, medicinas in piles, *cuál expiration date?*  
El Kung Fu panda muy apenas in a bad photo copy, sold barato on illegal CD

*No photos!* dice la vieja making tortas and churitos in her dirty tee  
*¿Cuántas libras de tomates quieres?* pregunta la frutera who is slightly overweight  
El Kung Fu panda muy apenas in a bad photo copy, sold barato on illegal CD  
*Los Tigres del Norte, Bronco, y asta J-Lo*, dice el pulgero *solo five doll-ers* on the open tail gate

*¿Cuántas libras de tomates quieres?* pregunta la frutera who is slightly overweight  
*¿Cuánto por los pantalones?* pregunta la señora, her daughter will love them, torn at the knee  
*Los Tigres del Norte, Bronco, y asta J-Lo*, dice el pulgero *solo five doll-ers* on the open tail gate  
Dora la exploradora, y su changuito con mochila, *¡Apa comprame la!* is the 5 year old's plea

*¿Cuánto por los pantalones?* pregunta la señora, her daughter will love them, torn at the knee  
*Esta planta da chile dulce* says the plant lady to the viejita who will plant it and wait  
Dora la exploradora, y su changuito con mochila, *¡Apa comprame la!* is the 5 year old's plea  
*Todavía esta Buena* say brown faces in snapshot voices, valor a lo olvidado is what pulgeros  
create

*Todavía esta Buena* say brown faces in snapshot voices, valor a lo olvidado is what pulgeros  
create

*Esta planta da chile dulce* says the plant lady to the viejita who will plant it and wait  
Vestiditos for muchachitas, zapatitos y prochetas, sell sell sell, barato is key!  
En la pulga they don't like cameras in hands of people like me



## Be it if I could

Be it, if I could,  
Un-brown the color of my skin  
Erase the embedded ch's of my tongue  
Des-taconar Las *Quinceañeras* de tradiciones  
Shut the vatos down con sus periquilladas y pendejadas  
Forget the summers of trabajos and dehydration  
Dismiss the smell of tamales on Christmas madrugadas  
Abolish the corridos of my tio on repeat en su jardin  
Annul el Rancho where my mother was born  
Launder the laughter of El Chavo del Ocho and La India Maria  
Expunge the crux of Xiciano etched into me en Tejano  
Nullify to noise the songs of Pedro Infante & Jose Alfredo  
Eradicate the Guadalupe of Juan Diego on the chest of sinning cholos  
Unwind the zarape off the shoulders of breast feeding mothers  
Evict the tios & tias from the wood frame homes of el barrio  
Erect structures around motherlands that could keep brothers from coming

Be it, if I could, forget the esthetics of my culture  
Erase my poems down to spiritual mumbo jumbo  
Strike out the "I" and make it a more enlightened "we"  
Make the vatos less vato, the Cholas less chola  
Be it, if I could, forget the brown of my own skin

Then you might call me less ethnocentric  
Then you might dub me more universal  
Then "Hispanics" like you that have never  
Learned your own history or read your own literature;  
can comfortably forget that the mestizaje that is your blood  
stirred by an acculturated spoon  
has always been ashamed of the indio you

## Contando Cuentos

Contando cuentos  
las abuelas smoke cigarettes and remember  
callejones and no calzones  
of locadas and mamadas  
when girls were girls before the battery of breast  
and hips expanded to house wercos chillones  
and hombres “bien hombres” didn’t abandon  
damas en casa  
for compadres in cantinas  
when niños grew up to carry legacies and not legalities

Contando cuentos  
hombres preen the plumas of new gallos that will pesotiar their nombres  
as hijos borrow ranflas from jefitos  
para char el rol and not remember that  
outside las canciones of a 50s that is foreign,  
life is happening to open eyes  
and genetics means nothing to fathers popiando beer tops  
for 16 year olds who won’t grow up to be alcoholics  
like how papi thinks he’s not

Contando cuentos  
mamas mat the mop top of their chiquitas  
who need to grow up and remember  
that nothing good comes of las dejadas  
no one wants a divorcida  
that talking is for politekeros  
and learning conditions include the recipe for tortillas  
Y a las viejas panzonas nadien las quiere  
Y las bien cabronas are only for fun  
and a vieja sin hijos no es vieja

Contando cuentos  
de calles como callejera  
of barrios like Las Milpas  
where Prietita grew up to puff pipa  
and El Chucky made babies but was never a man  
and mamas sit by windows seeing historias of tiny them  
played and replayed to the thumping of overpriced stereos  
in trocas del año paid por debajo de la mesa  
y mamada tras mamada

Contando cuentos voy  
contando the mile markers that lead to the edge of town  
where the college kids drove off and never turned back  
contando the names of the girls that disappeared  
extraviadas y olvidadas coronas encajadas on Expressway 83  
contando the names of muchachas encadenadas  
las enmascaradas of motherhood and their vato's last name

Contando las cortdas de una lengua cabrona that won't  
let me callar me lo sico  
contando ways I am,  
and am not like you  
Gallos del barrio  
vieja alcahueta  
plancha pluma  
barriada  
contando ways  
to move away  
from lessons  
like you

## East Austin Walks

The ghetto has a library with a wall of mosaic horn players that  
at 4 am still play by landscape lighting.  
And walking from the capital building towards the soul food restaurant  
el tagger revolutionary slips paint marker in and out of his baggy jeans.  
Behind stop signs and pizza joint walls  
he tags contemporary hieroglyphics that space archeologist should dust off and study.  
Symbols and etching that could tell the story of his life by the river,  
of children and sleeveless records, of history that could reconstruct the curves of his face  
the lines of his fingers.

This use to be the ghetto but the ghetto never looked like this.  
A fancy yoga studio sits empty while two homeless men talk shit and ignore their lack of Zen.  
The white girl chola  
walks in stiletto heels opposite the night sounds.  
Walks and talks barrio, walks and loves barrio,  
in places that her family would call hood.  
In places that her pearl wearing socialites associates would never.

This use to be the ghetto but the ghetto isn't like this.  
All stories about the ghetto begin slowly to a soft wailing.  
This isn't the 7 minute introduction ghetto of Donny Hathaway  
or the ghetto of Elvis Presley, in a white polyester jump suit,  
singing to a room full of people who have lived their whole lives  
in the suburbs and own summer homes

This is East Austin  
Long gray streets that connect the café to the travel agents office, to the corner bank  
to the white frame home up the street where a father straps his son into a car seat.  
The sound of spinning spokes stops walkers, as a man in baggy blue jeans and hip hop shirt,  
pedals by on a blue bike past the tagger, white chola and poet on their way for coffee.

As the click, click, click of his gyrating feet moves him further,  
I am sure that he does not hear Donny Haithway in the morning sun.  
And as he pedals on towards the capital building, past the library,  
the mosaic horn players unaffected by their all night jam,  
have already begun to play  
a new  
barrio song

## Save yourself Chola

I proselytize concepts tell my stories to images I build out of one dimensional experiences  
I dig on political lines cut up on the back porcelain tops of restroom stalls  
I eat theory for breakfast flaked in my cheerios  
I revel in a cocktail of jazz and old hip hop  
art crushed into solid texts baked out warm like pie

and in the hood nothing changes  
while I build university classrooms from the adobe of my parents' garden  
I scraped earth from underneath my finger nails and leave the smudged on my cheek so the  
elitists still smell the hood on me  
and meanwhile nothing changes

my cousin same age as me  
has a 14 year daughter  
who is pregnant

14 year old girls in the hood still sometimes don't know what it means to be pregnant  
and when asked who the father is they say their 14 year old boyfriends  
cause it was only he who played with her like that and it was only that one time  
behind the portable building during lunch

And build your city in the institution  
thug it up with lingo that sounds vallyjo  
pimp up your poem with pocho zuit suits  
give it a cholo lean and let it take your 64 impala out on a Sunday cruise

cause your poem ain't saving a damm thing chola  
ain't changing a fucking thing  
the institution digs you intellectual chola  
digs the little you do the few times a year  
it isn't concerned with the guilt you feel because you couldn't save your cousin's daughter  
you couldn't save your sister  
Your degrees don't care that you can't get the neighbors in the hood or their children to  
understand  
that the message gets clouded in the hood  
that the pregnancy of a 14 year old girl is not a cause for celebration  
does not merit baby showers with invitations be to take home by other 14 year old girls to their  
mothers

so save yourself chola  
you can't perform miracles  
can't make the pictures flow wine  
so let yourself chola  
let your poem cry in the hood  
let your poem ach in the hood  
let your poem echo the images of the hood  
as you drive by windows shut  
with the volume of the radio up  
blaring...

## POETRY NOTES

### RINCONCITOS DE AMOR

#### **Hombres como tú**

Is an ecphrastic poem inspired by a photograph by Dorothea Lange title unknown.

#### **Joyas Voladoras**

Was constructed as critical analysis of Brian Doyle's essay *Joyas Voladoras*

#### **The House of Ramon Iglesia: A Poetic Reflection**

Was constructed as critical analysis of the play *The House of Ramon Iglesias* by Jose Rivera.

#### **No Trovador**

Includes song titles and images. "Amoricito Corazon," and "Deja que Salga la Luna," as sung by Pedro Infante. It includes images from the Uruguayan poet Romildo Risso, "Las Ejes de mi Carreta," as sung by Chavela Vargas.

### BORDERLAND FEMINISTA

#### **Emplumada Girl**

Was constructed as a critical analysis of the poetry collection *Emplumada* by Lorna Dee Cervantes.

#### **Güera de Candy Cigarette**

Is an ecphrastic poem inspired by *Candy Cigarette* by Sally Mann

#### **I worry**

Was constructed after the poem "I worry" from the collection *187 Reasons Mexicans can't cross the Border*, by Juan Felipe Herrera

#### **How to be La Llorona for the city of Sullivan that has no sidewalks**

Was constructed as a critical analysis of the book *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* by Domino Renee Perez.

BARRIO CHOLA DE LA ACADEMIA

**Mi cuerpo es una frontera**

Is an ecphrastic poem inspired by *Tu Cuerpo en una Frontera* by Celeste De Luna



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Veronica Sandoval is Lady Mariposa and received her Associates of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from South Texas College in 2007. She graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2008 with a Bachelors of English from the University of Texas Pan American. She is a Valley International Poetry Festival Slam Champion and has been reading at area high schools and public libraries as an advocate of art for over 11 years. Her writing has appeared in anthologies such as the Valley International Poetry Festival's Boundless, Houston Poetry Fest Anthology and The University of Texas Pan American Gallery, Lung: Online Journal, Border Senses, and El Tecolote Press in San Francisco. She has self published a collection of work titled "The Answer" and a spoken word album entitled "Hecha en El Valle: Spoken Word & Borderland Beats with Keytar Dreamz & Chula Records.